The Shephelah according to the Amarna Letters

Nadav Naʾaman
Tel Aviv University

An examination of the Egyptian sources of the New Kingdom reveals that the Shephelah held a marginal place in the outlook of the Egyptian government and its scribes. Several Egyptian kings (Thutmose III, Amenophis II, Seti I) conducted campaigns to the Land of Canaan and left detailed lists of the toponyms they passed on their way northward. Yet, except for the city of Gezer, named in a few Egyptian inscriptions (Ahituv 1984: 101–2), no other town in the Shephelah is mentioned. The Shephelah is also absent from all other Egyptian topographical lists that enumerate cities in the Land of Canaan (Simons 1959; Helck 1971: 256–309; Edel 1980; Ahituv 1984), and from Papyrus Anastasi I, which describes various regions and towns in Canaan (Wilson 1969; Helck 1971: 314–19; Fischer-Elfert 1986; Lichtheim 2003). The list of disbursements to Canaanite envoys (*maryannu*) in Amenophis II's 18th year lists the envoy of Lachish apart from the group of envoys who were probably sent on official missions to Egypt (Helck 1963: 620 line 2; 1971: 166, 559; Epstein 1963).

The marginal position of the Shephelah in the Egyptian outlook is remarkable when it is compared with other districts in Canaan. The south-to-north route from the border of Egypt to the Plain of Jezreel (the so-called "Via Maris"), the coastal area from Acco northward, the Plains of Jezreel and Beth Shean, the area of Bashan, the eastern Mount Anti Lebanon region, and the Beqaʿ of Lebanon—all are amply attested in the Egyptian sources. The central hill country between the Plain of Jezreel and the Beersheba Valley is missing from the Egyptian topographical lists, and this is explained by its remoteness from the Egyptian routes and centers of government, its sparse settlement, and its meager economic potential. Unlike the hill country, the Shephelah was closer to the Egyptian centers of government and to the main south to north route, was more densely settled in the Late Bronze Age, and had an economic (mainly agriculture) potential. Yet it is the least mentioned region among the districts of Canaan. The omission of the Shephelah from the topographical lists of the time of the Eighteenth–Nineteenth Dynasties calls for an explanation.

To clarify the situation in the Shephelah in the Amarna period and its place in the Egyptian system of government, I will first examine the network of Canaanite city-states in this region in light of the Amarna letters. Next, I will present the archaeological evidence for the city-state centers in south Canaan and their potential for establishing the network of city-states in this area. I will then examine in detail

the documentary evidence for the Shephelah in the 14th century B.C.E. Following these discussions I will present an overall picture of the Shephelah in light of the documentary and the archaeological evidence.

The Network of City-States in the Shephelah according to the Amarna Letters

Contrary to the picture that emerges from the Egyptian sources, the number of letters sent to the pharaoh by rulers of Canaanite city-states located in the Shephelah is remarkable: 12 letters from the three rulers of Gezer (EA 268–72,[1] 292–93, 297–300, 378); 11 letters from the two rulers of Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi) (EA 278–84, 63, 65, 335, 366); 6 letters from the three rulers of Lachish (EA 329, 330–32, 311[2]); 2 or 3 letters from Yaḫzib-Hadda (EA 275–76 and possibly 277); 2 letters from Belit-labiʾat,[3] (EA 273–74); one letter from Aḫṭiruna (EA 319) and one letter from ʿAbdina? (EA 229) (Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 284–85, 286). Finally, one tablet was uncovered in the excavations at Tell el-Ḥesi and was included in the corpus of Amarna letters (EA 333).

What is the minimal number of Canaanite city-states located in the Shephelah in the Amarna period? To establish this we must first set the criteria for estimation (see Naʾaman 1997: 601–7). Only the Amarna letters are available for the investigation.[4] The Egyptian administration treated the local rulers of Canaan as Egyptian mayors and held them responsible for everything that happened in their cities. Each vassal was personally responsible to the pharaoh for the territory he held, and in his letters he reported back to Egypt that he had fulfilled all the obligations imposed on his domain. Hence, each person who wrote to the pharaoh or to his officials was a city-state ruler, regardless of the scope of his territory or his political power.

If the Amarna archive were complete, the task of making a list of city-states would have been relatively easy. Unfortunately, this is not the case. First, an unknown number of tablets were either transferred from Akhetaten (Amarna) when the royal court abandoned the place, or destroyed when the archive was discovered and before the importance of the tablets was recognized (Naʾaman 1997: 602,

1. Rainey (2003: 201–2) collated EA 272 and suggested deciphering the badly worn line 3 *umma* ^{d}IŠKUR.DI.KUD [ÌR-*ka*].

2. For the origin of tablet EA 311, see Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 289.

3. The name of the queen who sent EA 273–374 is written ^{f}NIN.UR.MAH^{meš} ("lady of the lioness"; see Bauer 1920). Formerly, on the basis of two Ugaritic texts, I suggested rendering the name as Bēlit-nešēti (Naʾaman 1979: 680 n. 32). However, recent collations of the two Ugaritic texts have shown that the reading *nešēti*/*nṯt* was mistaken (see Singer 1999: 697–98). Thus, there is no evidence for rendering the ideographic writing UR.MAH^{meš} as *nešēti*. As an alternative reading I suggest rendering it *labiʾat* ("lioness"). The name *ʿbdlbʾt* appears on arrowheads discovered at el-Ḫaḍr (near Bethlehem) and in Ugaritic texts (*ʿbdlbit*). Labiʾat ("lioness") was probably an epithet of the goddess ʿAshtartu (see Milik and Cross 1954: 6–9; Gröndahl 1967: 154; Donner and Röllig 1968: 29). See also the toponyms Lebaoth/Beth-Lebaoth mentioned in Josh 15:32; 19:6. In light of the textual evidence I suggest rendering ^{f}NIN.UR.MAH^{meš} as Bēlit-labiʾat.

4. The Hieratic inscription written on a bowl that was discovered in Lachish was recently republished by Sweeney 2004: 1601–7. She deciphered its central part "Ruler of Nentisha, Ya[. . .]." Nentisha (if this is the correct rendering of the toponym) was probably an unknown city-state located in the Shephelah in the 12th century B.C.E.

with earlier literature). Second, the seats of many rulers who corresponded with the pharaoh remain unknown, either because the names of their towns were not mentioned, or because the tablets they sent were broken and the town names are missing. The recent petrographic analysis helped to locate the region and even the place from which some tablets were sent (Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004), but the seats of some rulers are still unknown. Third, the cities of some rulers whose letters have not come down to us, but whose names are mentioned in the correspondence, are not known.

The Amarna archive covers about 25 years, from ca. the 30th year of Amenophis III to Tutankhamun's third year. How many kings might have ruled in each place in the course of that quarter of a century? The Phoenician coast is amply documented, and the number of kings in each place (with the exception of Achshaph) was two. Three successive kings are known from only Gezer and Lachish; and in theory, a single long-living ruler might have governed in some cities. An average of two, and at most three, kings may safely be assumed for the Shephelah during the archive's quarter century (Naʾaman 1997: 604–5).

With these criteria in mind let me try to establish the minimal number of city-state rulers in the Shephelah. The most important kingdoms were Gezer, Lachish, and Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi). Three mayors ruled in Gezer (Milki-Ilu, Yapaḫu, Baʿlu-dānu[5]) and Lachish (Zimredda, Shipṭi-Baʿlu, Yabni-Ilu), and two in Gath (Shuwardata and ʿAbdi-Ashtarti).[6] Shuwardata was in power in the days of Labʾayu and his sons, and ʿAbdi-Ashtarti, his heir, ruled in the late years of the archive. Thus it is unlikely that a third ruler governed the place (Naʾaman 1979: 676–84). We may conclude that other rulers known to have ruled in the Shephelah during the Amarna period should be sought in other cities in this region.

Letters EA 273–74 were sent by Bēlit-labiʾat, a queen or queen mother, who reports events that took place in Gezer's eastern territory (for a detailed discussion of the letters see below). Her seat should be located in the eastern Shephelah, near the border of the kingdom of Gezer. The best candidate is Tel Beth-Shemesh (Tell er-Rumeileh), a relatively large mound (about 4 ha) located on Gezer's southeastern border (see Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 276–77).[7]

Yaḫzib -Hadda wrote letters EA 275–76; letter EA 277, whose writer's name is broken, has an identical text. Petrographically, EA 275–76 and 277 are identical. The similarity in clay and text suggests that the three letters were written in the same place by the same writer. The clay indicates that they were sent from the eastern Shephelah, possibly the longitudinal valley that separates the Higher Shephelah from the Judean hill country. Of the ancient mounds located along this line, Tel

5. For the transcription Baʿlu-dānu (instead of Baʿlu-šipṭi), see Van Soldt 2002.

6. The petrographic analysis suggests that two letters of the rulers of Gath (EA 278 of Shuwardata and EA 64 of ʿAbdi-Ashtarti) are not made of clay from Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi's immediate environment. They may have been sent from a town in the Upper Shephelah, east of Gath, such as Qiltu (Khirbet Qîla) (Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 283–85, 286).

7. Tel Beth-Shemesh was a relatively prosperous town in the Late Bronze II (Stratum IV); see summary in Bunimovitz and Lederman 1993: 250, with earlier literature.

Beth-Shemesh is the best candidate for Yaḫzib-Hadda's city (for a detailed discussion, see Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 290–91).

Letter EA 229 is badly broken and was probably sent by ʿAbdina (Moran 1992: 290). The petrographic analysis indicates that it was sent from the Upper Shephelah and its material is identical to EA 64 (Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 286). His place might also be sought in one of the mounds located along the longitudinal valley.

Only one letter of Ṣur-Ashar, ruler of Aḫṭiruna[8] (EA 319), is known from the archive. It was written in Gaza and belongs to the group of letters that Canaanite rulers dispatched from the Egyptian center (Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 302–3). Since the script, formulae, and vocabulary of EA 319 are typical of south Canaan, Aḫṭiruna was probably a small city-state in this region. Its exact location cannot be established.

The writer of the Tell el-Ḥesi letter, who bears the Egyptian name Paʾapu and was possibly a low-ranking Egyptian official, reports to his superior, the magnate, about a conspiracy of two mayors, Shipṭi-Baʿlu and Zimredda. Zimredda is identified with the ruler of Lachish who was killed in a rebellion (EA 288:43–44; 335:10); Shipṭi-Baʿlu was probably the ruler of a neighboring place.

The murder of two other rulers, Turbazu and Yaptiḫ-Hadda, is mentioned with that of Zimredda in letters from Jerusalem (EA 288:39–47) and Gath (EA 335:8–18) (Naʾaman 1997: 607–8). That all three were mayors is indicated by ʿAbdi-Ḫeba's words (EA 288:39–40), "not a single mayor remains to the king, my lord; all are lost," followed by a reference to the slaying of the three rulers. Unlike ʿAbdi-Ḫeba, who described events that happened in places far from his city, ʿAbdi-Ashtarti (and his predecessor Shuwardata), describes only local affairs. The fact that two rulers (ʿAbdi-Ḫeba and ʿAbdi-Ashtarti), who lived in two different regions, illustrate the growing insecurity in south Canaan by the slaying of the three mayors indicates that the seats of all three should be sought in the same region. Zilû was probably a border town, where the two rulers met and were killed.

The final part of Letter EA 335 (lines 14–18) goes as follows: "May the king, my lord, be informed that the city of Lachish is hostile and the city of Muʾrashti is seized and [the city of x-x]-*ši-ki* is [host]ile."[9] It seems that the writer reports first about the slaying of the three mayors (lines 8–10), then relates the consequences of the murders in their respective cities.

Scholars have identified Muʾrashti (biblical Moresheth-gath) at sites located near Naḥal Guvrin, but its exact place remains uncertain (Jeremias 1933; Proksch 1943; Kallai 1962; Schmitt 1990, with earlier literature; Levin 2002). One key to its loca-

8. The name Aḫṭiruna is possibly derived from the verb *ʿṭr* ("to surround") plus the Semitic suffix *-ôn* (i.e., ʿAṭirôn), similar to biblical Ataroth (*ʿAṭārōt*), "crowns." Names with the verb *ʿṭr* were probably allotted to places located on top of hills/mounds.

9. Moran (1992: 358) tentatively restored it [^{uru}*ú-ru-sa*]-*lim*^{ki}, and some scholars accepted the restoration (Naʾaman 1997: 608; Liverani 1998: 88). However, the post-determinative *ki* is missing in the names of the other cities in this tablet. The accord between the number of slain rulers and cities might not be accidental; line 18 might be read [^{uru}*x-x*]-*ši-ki*. Provided that the *ki* sign is post-determinative, the town's name may be restored [^{uru}*Ne-en-ti*]-*ši*^{ki} and identified with the city mentioned on the Lachish bowl (see n. 4 above).

tion is the biblical name Moresheth-gath (i.e., Moresheth of Gath), which indicates that it had previously been a secondary city within the territory of Philistine Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi). The city is missing from the list of Judahite towns in the Shephelah (Joshua 15:33–44), which is dated to the time of King Josiah (Alt 1925; Naʾaman 1991: 5–33, with earlier literature). Like Moresheth, some other towns mentioned in Micah's dirge on the impending doom of the Kingdom of Judah (Micah 1:8–16) are missing from the town list of Joshua 15:33–44 (ʿAphrah, Shaphir, ʿEriah, and Maroth) (see Naʾaman 1995). These towns were all conquered by Sennacherib during his 701 B.C.E. campaign, their inhabitants were deported and all remained deserted during the 7th century. In light of this analysis, Moresheth must be sought at a site located near Naḥal Guvrin, not far from Gath, that was settled in the 14th and 8th centuries B.C.E. and deserted in the 7th century. Tel Zayit (Khirbet Zeitan el-Kharab), a site spread across nearly 30 dunams, located on the western side of Naḥal Guvrin, about 13 km southeast of Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi, fits well all these requirements. The site, recently excavated by Tappy (2000: 28–32; Tappy et al. 2006: 7–9), was settled in the Late Bronze II and Iron Age II and deserted in the 7th century, and may safely be identified with Amarna Muʾrashti and biblical Moresheth-gath.[10]

Tentatively I suggest that Shipṭi-Baʿlu mentioned in EA 333 and Turbazu were mayors of this city. The neighboring city [xx]shiki may have been the city of Yaptiḫ-Hadda.

The following rulers are mentioned in reference to the rebellions in the Shephelah in the late Amarna period: Milki-Ilu and Yapaḫu of Gezer; Shuwardata and ʿAbdi-Ashtarti of Gath; Zimredda and Shipṭi-Baʿlu of Lachish; Turbazu (possibly of Muʾrashti) and Yaptiḫ-Hadda (possibly of [xx]shiki). Thus, rulers of five different city-states are mentioned at one and the same time.

Summing up the discussion, it is clear that side by side with the three major centers of Gezer, Gath, and Lachish, there were several small city-states located near their borders. Tel Beth-Shemesh was probably the seat of Bēlit-labiʾat and Yaḫzib-Hadda. Muʾrashti was possibly the seat of Shipṭi-Baʿlu and Turbazu, and [xx]shiki might have been the seat of Yaptiḫ-Hadda. The seat of ʿAbdina should be sought along the longitudinal valley. The location of Aḫṭiruna, Ṣur-Ashar's seat, is unknown. It is clear that about six/seven different city-states existed in the time of the Amarna archive, and that large mounds, such as Tell ʿAiṭun and Tell Beit Mirsim, might have been the seats of city-states' rulers (for the Late Bronze in the Shephelah, see Dagan 2000: 150–71).

It is remarkable that each of the identified city-states stood near one of the main rivers of the Shephelah. Gezer is located near Naḥal Ayyalon (Wādi Kabir); Beth-Shemesh on Naḥal Sorek (Wādi eṣ-Ṣarar); Gath on Naḥal Elah (Wādi ʿAjjur and Wādi es-Sant); Muʾrashti near Naḥal Guvrin (Wādi Zeita); Lachish on Naḥal Lachish (Wādi Qubeba); Tell ʿAiṭun near Naḥal Adorayim (Wādi Umm Suweilim). It

10. Tappy (2008: 386–87) recently suggested identifying the city of Libnah with Tel Zayit. However, the latter site was not inhabited during the 7th century, and this fact is not in line with the mention of Libnah as the birthplace of Hamutal, wife of Josiah and mother of Jehoahaz (2 Kgs 23:31) and Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:18), indicating that during that time Libnah was a town of some importance in the kingdom of Judah.

seems that the territories of the city-states stretched along the main rivers and their tributaries, each dominating a number of villages and hamlets in its district.

Can Archaeology Establish the Number of City-States in South Canaan?

The analysis of the documentary evidence established the assumed number of city-states located in the Shephelah in the Amarna period. Can archaeological exploration contribute further evidence to elaborate on the picture? To answer this question we must ask, which elements should be sought in the site of a city-state? Ostensibly the answer is clear: a Canaanite ruler had a palace, a temple or temples, public buildings for his court, administration and production, and his capital may be identified by signs of economic prosperity and prestige artifacts. With these expectations in mind, scholars have suggested that the sites of city-states should be sought only in major mounds, each commanding a large territory with considerable population, whereas smaller sites, which did not produce rich archaeological findings and commanded small territories, could not have been the centers of city-states (Finkelstein 1996; Finkelstein in Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 231, 247, 265, 270, 287, 291, 320–22).

Are these expectations realistic for the Amarna period? Can archaeological research produce evidence for differentiating the centers of city-states from secondary towns in their territories? This question has not until now been discussed in detail. To clarify it, I will examine the results of the archaeological excavations conducted in three of the five major south Canaanite cities mentioned in the Amarna archive—namely, Jerusalem, Gezer, and Lachish. The two other major cities, Gath and Ashkelon, cannot supply the archaeological data necessary for the investigation.

I have already discussed in detail the overwhelming contrast between the evidence of the Amarna letters and the results of the archaeological excavations conducted in Jerusalem (Naʾaman 1996). Upon reading the seven letters sent from Jerusalem (EA 285–91), scholars would expect the excavations to reveal a medium-sized, thriving city in the Late Bronze Age, but these expectations were totally dashed. So poor is the finding from that period that some scholars doubted the identification of the *Urusalim* mentioned in the Amarna letters with the city of Jerusalem (Franken and Steiner 1992). But of course there is no doubt about it. The discrepancy between the documents and the archaeological finding can mostly be explained by the state of preservation of the settlement strata from the Amarna period. Jerusalem was inhabited continuously through thousands of years, and given that the bedrock at the site is very high and there is little accumulation of strata on top of it, every new settlement damaged the previous strata. Whereas the remains of well-built robust structures constructed in periods of prosperity, such as the Middle Bronze III, Iron II, and the late Hellenistic periods, are preserved, those that were originally skimpy and fragile, and often built on top of earlier buildings, might have disappeared completely. For this reason, only a few fragile remnants survived from the poorly-built Late Bronze Canaanite city, and the same picture

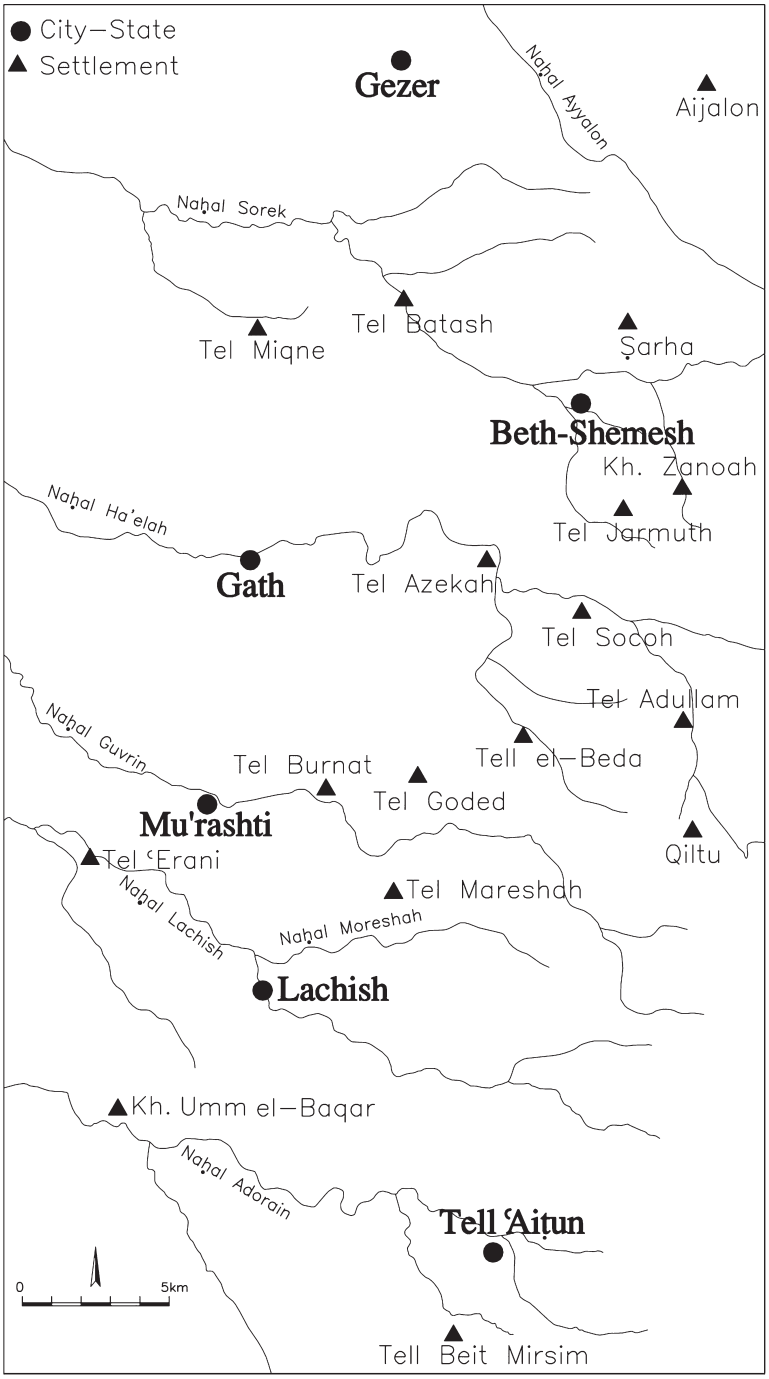


Fig. 1. The Shephelah in the Late Bronze Age: city-states and settlements.

emerges from the study of other periods of decline in the history of Jerusalem, such as the Iron Age I–IIA and the Persian and early Hellenistic periods.

The Amarna tablets show that Gezer was one of the most important kingdoms in Canaan and that its rulers played leading parts in the conflicts that took place during the Amarna period. Milki-Ilu, the most prominent ruler of Gezer, formed

alliances with rulers in the territory ranging from Piḫilu, a kingdom in the northern Gilead, to Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣāfi). Gezer's location on the country's main south-to-north route, and on the main road from the Shephelah to the highlands, and its proximity to the port of Jaffa, one of the centers of Egyptian power in the land, gave its rulers a key position in the relationships in south and central Canaan. The overall picture that emerges from the correspondence is of a strong and flourishing kingdom, which maintained connections with other centers near and far.

Gezer was excavated in the early stage of the archaeological research (1902–9), and again in 1964–73 (and limited-scale excavations in 1984 and 1990) (Dever 1993a, with earlier literature). The excavations unearthed some buildings from the Late Bronze II (Stratum XVI), but no public buildings have been found, in contrast to the large, fortified, thriving city of the Middle Bronze Age II–III (Dever 1993a: 502–503; 2003: 263–66, with earlier literature). Dever, who excavated the site, ascribed the so-called "outer wall" to the Late Bronze Age, and argued that the city was fortified at that time (Dever 1986; 1993b; 2003); but this is unlikely, and there can be no doubt that this wall was built during the Iron Age II, while in the Late Bronze Age the city was unfortified (Kempinski 1976: 212–13; Ussishkin 1990: 212–13; Finkelstein 1981; 1994, with earlier literature; Yanai 1994). Few domestic structures, some burials and pottery, including vessels imported from Egypt and Cyprus, were found in the large-scale excavations conducted at the site. If our knowledge of the place were based entirely on the archaeological finding, we would have concluded that Gezer was, at most, an unimportant city-state, and no one would have thought that it was one of the leading city-states in the array of Canaanite city-states during the Amarna period.

The letters of the three rulers of Lachish are short and do not provide many data. The city is mentioned twice by ʿAbdi-Ḫeba, king of Jerusalem. On one occasion Lachish is mentioned alongside Gezer and Ashkelon, the two most important kingdoms in south Canaan (EA 287:14–16), and on another occasion in reference to the murder of its ruler Zimredda (EA 288:43). It is commonly accepted that during the Late Bronze Age Lachish was the most important city in the southern Shephelah, so one would expect to find evidence to support this in the extensive excavations conducted at the site (for the results of the excavations, see Tufnell, Inge, and Harding 1940; Tufnell et al. 1958; Ussishkin 1993: 899–900; Barkay and Ussishkin 2004: 344–51).

Yet the excavations have shown that the city's heyday in the Late Bronze began only in the 13th century (Level VI), no doubt under the Egyptian aegis. Findings from the 14th century (Level VII) were quite meager, principally a modest-sized temple built in the moat of the Middle Bronze fortifications, containing rich offerings to the local deity (Tufnell 1940). However, modest-sized temples are known from large and small cities in Canaan and do not indicate the political status of the place. Several private structures and many tombs containing funerary objects, including vessels imported from Cyprus and the Aegean world, have also been found. The city of Lachish was unwalled throughout the Late Bronze Age, and no public buildings from the Amarna period have been found. We may state with certainty that, without the historical documentation, scholars would have assumed that Late

Bronze Lachish became an important city-state only in the 13th century, doubtless under Egyptian overlordship, and that earlier it had been either an unimportant city-state, or a provincial city in the territory of a neighboring kingdom.

There is a striking discrepancy between the evidence of the Amarna letters concerning Jerusalem, Gezer, and Lachish and that of the archaeological excavations conducted at the three sites. To illustrate it we need only ask, what kind of picture would the archaeologists have imagined if the settlement strata and the findings dated to the Amarna period were connected to a time for which we had no written documentation? In that case, the archaeologists would have concluded that sites like Gezer and Lachish were either unimportant city-states or provincial towns in the territories of the neighboring kingdoms. Jerusalem would have been thought of as a village in a sparsely inhabited highland region.

How should we explain the discrepancy between the documentary and archaeological evidence? Following the utter destruction of the prosperous Middle Bronze III urban culture, the country experienced a major decline, and this is attested in the excavations and surveys of the Late Bronze Age I–II. When the urban culture is at a low ebb, structures of lesser strength and quality are built, and these often on the foundations of solid structures from an earlier time. In multi-strata tells, these poor structures can easily be obliterated by later building operations. This is especially true of highlands sites, where the bedrock is high and late construction and leveling can remove almost all traces of the earlier buildings and their artifacts. Archaeological research can identify the fragmented remains and establish their date and function. But the erosion and obliteration of a considerable part of the evidence by later operations and the fragmented state of preservation of the structures as well as the dispersal of the artifacts on many occasions preclude the possibility of reconstructing the ancient reality.

Clearly, the archaeological excavations at Jerusalem, Gezer, and Lachish, the three major south Canaanite city-states, failed to supply criteria for defining a city-state and for differentiating city-states from secondary towns in their territory. Scholars have argued that only large sites were the centers of city-states, whereas the structures unearthed in medium-sized sites are too poor, the territory they controlled was not large enough, and the size of the population inhabiting these places was insufficient for city-states—but none of these arguments is based on concrete evidence. On the contrary, with regard to the cities' political status and strength *vis-à-vis* their neighbors, especially in periods of decline, archaeology is severely limited. We may conclude that the number of Canaanite city-states in the Shephelah should be established on the basis of the documentary evidence alone, whereas archaeology, useful as it is in many aspects of the urban and material culture, cannot supply concrete data for the investigation.

The Qiltu Affair

A prominent feature in the "Shephelah correspondence" is the large number of letters that describe rebellions, conditions of insecurity, and disruption of the internal order. Admittedly, rulers all over Canaan emphasized internal crises and asked the pharaoh to intervene on their behalf, so the stress on domestic disorder and

difficulties is known from many places. Nevertheless, the emphasis on these elements in the Shephelah correspondence requires elucidation. It seems to me that most of the *gewald* letters refer to one of two major events: the Qiltu affair, and the widespread rebellions that broke out all over the region in the late Amarna period. Let me open the discussion by reconstructing the crisis centered on Qiltu, an episode not clarified before in the research of the Amarna archive.

Qiltu (biblical Keilah, today Khirbet Qîla) is located close to the mountain plateau, near the southeastern border of Gath. Shuwardata described the situation in Qiltu as follows (for the restorations, see Moran 1992: 279; Rainey 1989–90: 71; Liverani 1998: 82; Smith 1998: 148–49):

> EA 279:9–23: May the king, my lord, know that the land of the king, my lord, is lost b[y] going fo[rt]h [t]o Qiltu [t]o the r[ebels] (LÚ^{meš} *š*[*a-ru-ti*]). May the [king] permi[t me] to wage w[ar] (*yu-uš-ši-*[*ra-ni* LUGAL *e*]-*pé-*[*ši*] *n*[*u-kur-ta*]). May the king, my lord, wr]i[te to his] mayo[rs] ([*ù li-i*]š-[*pu-ra a-na* LÚ]^{meš} *Ḫa-za-nu-*[*ti-šu*]), so that we may attack them and drive out the rebels (LÚ^{meš} *ša-ru-ta*) from the land of the king, my lord.

For the restoration of the text, see Naʾaman 1998: 52 no. 8. The reconstruction of lines 14–15 ("May the [king] permi[t me] to wage w[ar]") is based on EA 280:9–11: "The king my lord permitted me to wage war against Qiltu." Shuwardata uses the pejorative term "rebels" (*amēlūti šarūti*) in the same way that other rulers use the term ʿApiru. The identity of these "rebels" is not disclosed in the letter.

Letter EA 287 of ʿAbdi-Ḫeba, king of Jerusalem, describes in greater detail the "rebellion" at Qiltu. Unfortunately, the text is partly broken and its restoration uncertain. Here is a tentative translation of the relevant part of the letter (for restorations of the text, see Albright 1969: 488; Moran 1992: 328–29; Liverani 1998: 91–92; Rainey 1995–96: 119a):

> EA 287:4–19: [Behold a]ll the things [that they did$^{?}$ to me$^{?}$. Rebels$^{?}$ (LÚ$^{meš?}$ *ar$^{?}$-ni$^{?}$*)[11] they bro]ught against me into [Qiltu for rebelli]on$^{?}$ ([*a-na nu-*KÚR]^{meš}). [This$^{?}$ is$^{?}$] the deed that they have d[one$^{?}$] (*ša$^{?}$ e$^{?}$-*[*pu$^{?}$-šu$^{?}$*]): [bows and] arrow(s) [they . . . . . rebels$^{?}$] they brought into [Qilt]u. May the king know. All the lands are at peace, but I am at war. And may the king exercise power over his land. Behold, Gezer, Ashkelon and L[achis]h have given them (the rebels) food, oil, and any other requirement. So may the king exercise power over the archers and send the archers against the men that rebelled (*ip-pu-šu ar-na*) against the king, my lord.

ʿAbdi-Ḫeba describes a situation in which rebels and weapons were brought to Qiltu. He accuses the three major city-states of south Canaan (Gezer, Ashkelon, and Lachish) of provisioning the rebels. In lines 29–31 he accuses Milki-Ilu and Labʾayu's sons of instigating the rebellion: "Behold, this deed: it is the deed of Milki-Ilu and the deed of the sons of Labʾayu, who have given the land of the king <to> the ʿApiru."

A third letter, written by Shuwardata (EA 366), also refers to this event. Here is a translation (Albright 1969: 487; Rainey 1978: 32–35; Moran 1992: 364):

11. For the restoration of lines 4–5, see lines 18b–19 "the men that rebelled (*ip-pu-šu ar-na*) against the king"; see also EA 335:12. For *arnu* in the sense of "rebel" in the Amarna letters, see Moran 1992: 243–244 n. 3; 307 n. 1.

> EA 366:11–27: May the king, my lord, be informed that the ʿApiru (^{lú}SA.GAZ) who rose up against the lands, the god of the king, my lord, gave to me, and I smote him. And may the king, my lord, be informed that all my brothers have abandoned me. Only ʿAbdi-Ḫeba and I have been at war with the ʿApiru. Surata, the ruler of Acco, and Endaruta, the ruler of Achshaph, (these) two also have hastened to my aid with 50 chariots, and now they are on my side in the war.

There is a perfect accord between ʿAbdi-Ḫeba's accusations that Milki-Ilu and Labʾayu stand behind the "rebellion" and that Gezer, Ashkelon, and Lachish supported the rebels, and Shuwardata's statement that all his "brothers," i.e., kings of equal rank, had abandoned him, and only ʿAbdi-Ḫeba supported him in his war with the ʿApiru. He further adds that the two most important rulers in the Acco plain came to his aid with 50 chariots. The mobilization of the two rulers was probably instigated by the Egyptian authorities, as indicated by EA 280:9–15: "The king, my lord, permitted me to wage war against Qiltu. I waged war. It is now at peace with me; my city is restored to me." The importance of chariots in the struggle with bands of ʿApiru is explicitly mentioned in two letters of Mayarzana, ruler of Ḫasi (EA 185:50–59; 186:52–63). Mayarzana reports that a group of 40 ʿApiru found shelter in Tushulti, a city-state located in the Beqaʿ of Lebanon, and that he mobilized chariots to block the city and demanded the band's expulsion.[12] The suppression of the strong band that found shelter in Qiltu also required the mobilization of armed forces and chariots. The combined forces of four city-states were able to crush the band and put an end to its operations.

The threat of the band also explains the stationing of an Egyptian guard, which included Nubian (Cushite) soldiers and numbered about 50 men, in Jerusalem (EA 285:9–11, 22–25; 286:25–33; 287:32–52, 71–78). This is another indication of how serious the situation was at that time, and how the Egyptian authorities in Canaan operated to curtail the danger.

The letters of Bēlit-labiʾat (EA 273–74) also belongs in this context. The distance between Qiltu and Ayyaluna (biblical Aijalon) and Ṣarḫa (biblical Zorah), the two places mentioned in letter EA 273, is about 20 km. The letters were written in the time of Milki-Ilu, and may be dated to the time of the Qiltu affair.

The structure of the two letters is identical: (a) an introduction; (b) a general statement on the destruction of the land of the pharaoh by the ʿApiru (EA 273:8–15a; 274:10–14); (c) a description of a particular event that occurred, which illustrated the former general statement (EA 273:15b–24; 274:15–16); (d) a concluding remark (EA 273:25–26; 274:17–18). Letter EA 273 relates a raid of the ʿApiru on Ayyaluna and Ṣarḫa, in which the two sons of Milki-Ilu barely escaped being killed. EA 274 mentions the plunder of the city of Ṣab/puma. Lines 10–16 may be translated as follows: "May the king, my lord, save his land from the ʿApiru. Let it not perish. The city of Ṣab/puma is pillaged (*la-qí-ta-*⟨*at*⟩)."[13] It is evident that Ṣab/puma was

12. EA 186:52–57: "We heard that the 40 ʿApiru were with Amanhatpe, the ruler of Tushulti, and my brothers and my son . . . drove their chariots and entered the presence of Amanhatpe, the ruler of Tushulti." See also EA 185:50–54.

13. For the verbal form *la-qí-ta*, see EA 284:7 and CAD L 101a.

either a town in the territory of Gezer, or a secondary town in the territory of Bēlit-labiʾat's, but not her seat.[14]

The raids on Ayyaluna, Ṣarḫa, and Ṣab/puma should be attributed to the band of ʿApiru that seized Qiltu and used it as a base of operation for pillaging neighboring districts, similar to the band of ʿApiru that found shelter in Tushulti and raided the neighboring villages of the Beqaʿ (EA 185–86).

In sum, it seems that a strong band of ʿApiru found shelter in Qiltu under the patronage of the local authorities ("the men of Qiltu"; see EA 280:18; 289:28) and raided the neighboring areas (compare 1 Sam 23:1–13; for discussion of the biblical episode, see Naʾaman 2010). Some city-state rulers either cooperated with the band or refused to participate in the struggle. Qiltu was a border town of Gath and the band threatened its safety, as well as that of other neighboring districts. With the support of the Egyptian authorities, Shuwardata was able to organize a strong task-force of several city-states, crushed the band, and drove it out of Qiltu.

Following the successful campaign, Qiltu was restored to Shuwardata's rule (EA 280:8–15). However, peace did not last long. ʿAbdi-Ḫeba, who was involved in the struggle against the ʿApiru, took advantage of the situation and tried to gain a foothold in the Shephelah by turning Qiltu to his side (EA 280:16–36). In response, Shuwardata broke off his alliance with him and joined his adversaries, the rulers of Gezer, Shechem, and Ginti-kirmil. The Shechem–Gezer alliance was much stronger than Jerusalem, and it did not take them long to bring Qiltu back to Shuwardata's reign (EA 289:25–28; 290:10, 18). Qiltu was restored to its legitimate owner and the crisis which had begun with its seizure by the band of ʿApiru was finally over.

Rebellions in the Shephelah in the Late Amarna Period

The late stage of the Amarna archive was a period of rebellions and disturbances in southern Canaan. Several city-state rulers complained bitterly about serious difficulties in their kingdoms, and requested the pharaoh to hasten forces to rescue them (Naʾaman 1979: 676–82). Many of these letters call the offenders ʿApiru, but it is difficult to determine the role of bands in these events, because on many occasions the term ʿApiru exceeded its original connotation (i.e., a band of uprooted people), and became an epithet for all real, ostensible, or fabricated forces operating against the interests of the Egyptian authorities and the local Canaanite rulers. This bias on the part of the Canaanite scribes must be taken into account when dealing with the Amarna letters.

Let me discuss some of these letters in order to establish the identity of the social groups that operated in the related events.

Paʾapu, the writer of Letter EA 333, reports to the Egyptian magnate about a planned rebellion instigated by Shipṭi-Baʿlu in collaboration with Zimredda. Here

14. Zadok (1986: 180) suggested that Ṣab/puma may be the same as Sappho of Josephus (*Antiquities* 17:10:9–290; *Wars* 2:5:1–70), identified at the village of Ṣaffa (G.R. 155 146), in the foothills near Gezer's eastern border. He acknowledged the lack of Late Bronze remains at the site and suggested that "perhaps it is to be sought in a nearby site." The relatively large multi-period mound of el-Burj (Ḥorvat Tittora), located only three km east of Ṣaffa, may fit this identification. See also Vita 2005.

is a translation of his letter (Albright 1942; Rainey 1989–90: 72; 2006: 86; Moran 1992: 356–57; Horowitz and Oshima 2006: 92–94, with earlier literature):

> EA 333:4–26: May you know that Shipṭi-Baʿlu and Zimredda are conspiring together, and Shipṭi-Baʿlu said to Zimredda: "The 'father' (i.e., sheikh) of Yarami indeed has sent to me;[15] (so) give me [2?]+2 bows, 3 daggers and 3 swords. Verily, I am about to go forth against the land of the king, and you will be in league with me." But now he (Shipṭi-Baʿlu) responds (saying): "That is a plot! The one who is conspiring against the king is Paʾapu, so send him before me." [No]w I am sending Rab/pi-Ilu. [Let] (him) bring him ([*lu-ú*] *yu-bal-šu*) [because of] this matter.

Paʾapu, who bears an Egyptian name (Albright 1942: 36 n. 27; Hess 1993: 122–23), was probably an Egyptian official of low rank corresponding with his superior, the magnate. Shipṭi-Baʿlu (location unknown) and Zimredda (ruler of Lachish) were city-state rulers in the Shephelah. The location of Yarami is unknown. The sequence of events as reflected in the letter may be reconstructed as follows:

(1) Shipṭi-Baʿlu reported to Zimredda that the "father" (i.e., sheikh) of Yarami sent him a message, probably to approve his participation in the planned rebellion, and requested a supply of weapons, possibly for an armed unit of ten men (4? bows, 3 daggers and 3 swords). He called on Zimredda to join him in the rebellion.

(2) Rumors of the conspiracy reached Paʾapu, who must have sent the news to the magnate, his superior. In response, Shipṭi-Baʿlu accused Paʾapu of conspiring against the Egyptian government (see line 19 "But now he responds").

(3) Paʾapu sent letter EA 333 in response to the charge made by Shipṭi-Baʿlu. He accused the latter of conspiring against the pharaoh, and sent his messenger (Rab/pi-Ilu) with the tablet to the magnate at Tell el-Ḥesi, requesting that Shipṭi-Baʿlu appear before the magnate and answer the charge of "lèse-majesté."

We have already mentioned ʿAbdi-Ḫeba's accusation about the supply of weapons to the band in Qiltu (EA 287:6–7). Bands of ʿApiru and rural and nomadic groups were the major source of disorder and rebellions in the Late Bronze II. Providing them with weapons might have endangered the city-state rulers and the Egyptian authorities in Canaan, was considered an act of hostility, and efforts were made to block it. The biblical history of Saul relates an embargo on the supply of metals to highlands tribal groups (1 Sam 13:19–22). Also Sargon II accused Bel-(l)iqbi, the governor of Ṣubat, of violating his order not to sell iron to the Arabs (Parpola 1987: 140–41 No. 179; Fales 2002: 149–50). However, enforcing the prohibition in Canaan, a land divided among many political entities, each with its own interests, was almost impossible, as there was always someone who was willing to bypass the prohibition and sell weapons, thereby promoting his own interests.

Letter EA 333 probably reflects the first stage in the rebellion that later spread over the entire Shephelah. A series of letters sent to the pharaoh by south Canaanite rulers report rebellions and disturbances all over the region (for details, see Naʾaman 1979: 676–82).

15. The verbal *šapāru* is usually rendered "write." However, it is unlikely that a sheikh of a village addressed the Canaanite ruler in writing. Similarly, the verbal form *šaparu* in EA 273:18 should be translated "sent" rather than "wrote." For further examples, see Naʾaman 2000: 127–28, 252 n. 6.

Following is a translation of two letters, one from Jerusalem (EA 288), the second from Gath (EA 335), which give some concrete details of the events (Albright 1969: 488–489; Naʾaman 1979: 677–78; Moran 1992: 331–32, 357–58; Rainey 2006: 86).

> EA 288:34–47: The strong arm of the king seized the land of Naḫrima and the land of Cush; but now the ʿApiru are seizing the cities of the king. Not a single governor remains to the king, my lord; all are lost. Behold, Turbazu was slain in the gate of Zilû (but) the king kept silent. Behold, Zimredda (of) Lachish, servants who had become ʿApiru smote him (*ik-kí-ú-šu*). Yaptiḫ-Hadda was slain at the city gate of Zilû (but) the king kept silent. Why has he not called them to account?

> EA 335:8–19: [May the king], my lord, [be informed that] I am [all alo]ne. May [the ki]ng, my lord, be informed] that [. . . me]n[?] and Tur[bazu and] Yaptiḫ-Hadda have been slain and [the ruler of L]achish has been smi[tten] (*ù nu-k*[*i*[?] LÚ ^{uru}*L*]*a-ki-ši*).[16] May the king, my lord, be in[formed] that the rebels have t[aken] all my best men and women. May the king, my lord, be informed that the city of Lachish is hostile and the city of Muʾrashti is seized and [the city of x-x]shiki is [host]ile.

Who are the groups that are responsible for slaying the three rulers? ʿAbdi-Ḫeba states explicitly that Zimredda was killed by "servants"—namely, his subjects, who by the very act of rebellion became outlaws (ʿApiru). The identity of those who killed Turbazu and Yaptiḫ-Hadda remains unknown.

Other mayors complained bitterly about revolts and disturbances in their kingdoms. The late letters of Shuwardata (EA 281–84) describe in detail a state of rebellion in his kingdom. In letter EA 281 he describes his situation as follows (Moran 1992: 322; Liverani 1998: 83 and n. 67): "May the king, my lord, [be informed] that [no]w[?] my cities are hostile to me. And may the king, my lord, send archers and make their [cities[?]] like a wilderness/willow tree[?] (GIŠ *ḫa-ra-bu-y*A),[17] and may the king capture them. The soldiers[?] (LÚ^{meš} *ri-di-*ʾu_5)[18] you will guard and these [dogs] may writhe[?] before the king, my lord" (lines 8–19). A second description of the situation appears in EA 283:18–27: "May the king, my lord, be informed that 30 towns have waged war against me. I am alone! The war against me is severe." In each of his four letters (EA 281:11–15, 27–29; 282:10–14; 283:25–27; 284:16–20) Shuwardata asks the pharaoh to send an Egyptian task force to crush the rebellion and rescue him. A similar picture arises from Milki-Ilu's latest letter (EA 271:9–21): "May the king, my lord, be informed that the war against me and against Shuwardata is severe. So may the king, my lord, save his land from the power of the ʿApiru. Otherwise, may the king, my lord, send chariots to fetch us lest our servants kill us." The reference to "our servants," namely, the subjects of the two allied rulers (see EA 288:44), shows that the rebellion was internal, started by the local rural and nomadic groups, and encompassed mainly the rural districts of the kingdoms.

16. The suggested restoration of the West Semitic verb *nkh* (*nu-k*[*i*]) rests on the parallel passage in EA 288:44 (*ik-kí-ú-šu*) and the verbal form *nu-di-ni* in EA 283:23 (Moran 1992: 324 n. 6). The verb *nkh* in the sense of "smite fatally" is well known in biblical historiography, particularly in texts that refer to the slain of the kings of Israel and Judah.

17. For the transcription, see Naʾaman 1998: 52–53 no. 9. Tentatively (and with a big question mark) I suggest interpreting *Ḫa-ra-bu-y*A as the Canaanite word ʿ*arābāh*, "wilderness" or "willow."

18. For rendering the *ḫu* sign as ʾu_5, see EA 284:19 *qa-ti-*ʾu_5, "his hand."

Only the rulers of Gezer accused the ʿApiru of participation in the rebellions (EA 271:9–21; 272:10–17; 298:20–27; 299:17–26). In one of these letters (EA 298:20–27), Yapaḫu informs the king that "my younger brother, having become enemy, entered Muḫḫazu and pledged himself to the ʿApiru." I have suggested (Naʾaman 1997: 612–13) that Beya, the son of Gulatu, whose misdeeds were the subject of the bitter complaints by two neighboring rulers (EA 292:41–52; 294:16–26), was the leader of a band of ʿApiru that stayed at Muḫḫazu. If this is indeed the case, this band was responsible for the raids in the neighboring kingdoms of Gezer and Tianna.[19]

A clear indication of the gravity of these events is that during these years all the leading rulers in south Canaan were replaced (Naʾaman 1979: 681). Milki-Ilu of Gezer was replaced by Yapaḫu, whose letters reflect the same internal difficulties and who was soon replaced by Baʿlu-dānu. Zimredda of Lachish was replaced by Shipṭi-Baʿlu, who was later replaced by Yabni-ilu. Shuwardata of Gath was replaced by ʿAbdi-Ashtarti, and Shubandu of Ashkelon was replaced by Yidya.

We may conclude that widespread rebellions in the rural districts of the Shephelah broke out in the late stage of the Amarna archive. Groups of rural inhabitants must have participated in the rebellions which threatened the thrones of the local rulers. Some mayors were killed and others were soon replaced, their fate remaining unknown. The background of the rebellions and how long they continued are unknown, but they stopped when news spread about a planned Egyptian campaign to Canaan, and the fear of the arriving Egyptian troops pacified the area (see Naʾaman 1990).

Concluding Remarks

There is a marked contrast between the Egyptian inscriptions, which entirely ignore the Shephelah region (except for Gezer) and mention only toponyms located outside its area, and the Amarna letters, which show that the Shephelah played an important part in the Egyptian administration of Canaan. The many letters sent to the pharaoh by the Shephelah rulers, the frequent visits of Egyptian officials to their centers and those of the local rulers in the Egyptian center of Gaza (for the latter see Goren, Finkelstein, and Naʾaman 2004: 322–24), the tributes and gifts sent to the pharaoh, and finally the Egyptian involvement in the suppression of the rebellions—all these indicate the importance of the Shephelah to the Egyptian authorities in Canaan.

The letters reveal the weakness of the Shephelah rulers and their vulnerability to operations of the non-urban social elements. Only a coalition of city-states organized by the Egyptian authorities was able to overcome the threat of a single band of ʿApiru. Moreover, rulers of the major city-states (Gezer, Gath, and Lachish) were unable to suppress rebellions that broke out in their territories, which soon spread all over the district and led to the death of rulers and the replacement of all the major city-state rulers in this area. Only the preparation for an Egyptian campaign to Canaan and the threat of direct Egyptian intervention in the local affairs brought

19. Rainey (2003: 193*–94*) dismissed the reading Tianna in letters EA 284 and 298 and suggests that this is a "ghost town."

about the pacification of the region. The city-states of the Shephelah were sparsely populated, and the rulers had small military forces. The large number of city-states in the district further weakened the local rulers and required them to form coalitions in an effort to gain strength. It is not always clear whether the city-state rulers effectively governed the outlying lands in their territories, and the Qiltu affair is a good example of the control issue. This explains the alliance initiated by Milki-Ilu with his strong northern neighbors, as well as the formation of an ad-hoc coalition in order to crush the band of ʿApiru. The weakness of the local rulers explains the power of the bands of ʿApiru and of the rural and nomadic groups *vis-à-vis* the power of the urban centers.

The archaeological excavations and surveys supply important data that is not illuminated by the documentary evidence. They show that, compared to the Middle Bronze Age II–III, the Late Bronze Age I–II was a time of crisis and sharp decline in the population and the urban and material culture. The main cities were unwalled, scantily inhabited, contained few and unimpressive public buildings and poor private houses, and many rural areas were sparsely populated. The study of the correspondence alone does not provide a true picture of conditions in the country, and a proper evaluation of the letters can be made only when combined with the archaeological evidence.

Finally, the omission of the towns of the Shephelah from the Egyptian topographical lists of the time of the Eighteenth–Nineteenth Dynasties must be reconsidered. As clarified above, control of the Shephelah and its economic exploitation was essential for the Egyptian authorities in Canaan. Thus it is evident that the inclusion of cities in the Egyptian topographical lists was guided by other considerations. The Shephelah was in south Canaan, far away from the districts against which the Egyptians directed their military campaigns. Pacifying the area by suppressing the unstable elements operating there and supporting the local mayors was not as prestigious a task as the campaigns northwards against the strong enemies of Egypt. For this reason, even a central city like Ashkelon, located near the outlet of the main road northward, was mentioned in few topographical lists (see Ahituv 1984: 69–70). The topographical lists were engraved on walls of public buildings for prestige and propaganda purposes. Securing the stability of the Shephelah rulers did not entail sufficient prestige, and so its cities were not included in the inscriptions.

The unstable state of affairs in the Shephelah in the Amarna period must have continued in the late years of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The shift in its history took place under the Nineteenth Dynasty, and particularly under the Twentieth Dynasty, when the Egyptians intervened directly in the affairs of the local rulers and gradually incorporated the district in their domain. However, the problems associated with this new phase are beyond the scope of the present article.

I have known the honorable jubileer for nearly forty years, first as a colleague and then as a friend. Our long friendship was preserved, despite some scientific disputes, in particular when I refused to treat him as a technician and held strongly to my conviction—in spite of his loud protests—that he is a genuine biblical archae-

ologist. It gives me great pleasure to write an article in his honor on an issue connected to his first archaeological love, the Shephelah and Tel Lachish at its center.

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