

THE LATE BRONZE AGE IN THE NORTHERN JORDAN VALLEY

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Over 20 years ago, Aren Maeir completed his PhD dissertation, presenting an encompassing study of the Middle Bronze Age in the Jordan Valley, later expanded and published (Maeir 2010; see also Maeir 2016). The following paper will concentrate on the subsequent period in the region, providing an account of the nature of the Late Bronze Age in the northern Jordan valley, through the combined study of both textual and archaeological evidence.

BETH-SHEAN STELA I

During the American excavations in Beth-Shean two stelae describing certain events from Seti I's reign (1290–1279 BCE) were discovered. The first, Stela I, dated to year 1 of Seti's reign, presents an account of some troubling events in the area around Beth-Shean (translation: Davies 1997: 31–33):

Now on this day, someone came to tell His Majesty that the vile enemy who is in the town of Hammath has gathered to himself a multitude of men, and he has taken the town of Beth-Shean, and has joined up with those from Pella, and he does not let the chief of Rehob come out.

Then His Majesty sent forth the first army of Amun, "Rich in bows", to the town of Hammath, and the first army of Pre, "Great in bravery", to the town of Beth-Shean, and the first army of Sutekh, "Strong in bows", to the town of Yeno'am.

In the course of one day they fell to the might of His Majesty, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Menmaatre, Son of Re, Seti I, beloved of Ptah, given life.

Evidently the city rulers of the towns of Hammath and Pella had conquered Beth-Shean, Jenoaam and Rehob. The identification of the sites mentioned is fairly certain. Hammath can be identified with Tell el-Ḥamme (cf. Maeir 2010: 234, No. 224), about 14.5 km south of Beth-Shean (Tell el-Ḥuṣn; cf. Maeir 2010: 217, No. 154). Pella is situated east of the Jordan River at Ḥirbet Ṭabaqāt Faḥl (cf. Maeir 2010: 225, No. 186). Rehob is securely identified with Tell eṣ-Šārim/Tel Rehov (cf. Maeir 2010: 223, No. 181), 6 km south of Beth-Shean. Only the location of Jenoaam is highly disputed (cf. Clauss 1907: 34–35; Albright 1925: 12–13 and others for Tell en-Na'ame in the Huleh Valley; Saarisalo 1927: 112–118 and many others for Tell en-Na'am in Lower Galilee; Garstang 1931: 73 and few others for Tell el-Ubedīye in the Jordan Valley; Na'aman 1977 for Tell eṣ-Šihāb in Transjordan). In the current framework, the identification of Jenoaam at the site of Dabbet el-Ḥurrē'/Tel Nimrod (cf. Maeir 2010: 220, No. 166; Thompson 1979: 196), situated next to the modern bridge crossing from Israel to Jordan is accepted.¹

¹ The identification of the site of Jenoaam is beyond the scope of this paper and will be further discussed by the author in a future publication.

Beth-Shean served as an Egyptian military base in the Late Bronze Age. One of the primary reasons for the placement of an Egyptian garrison at the site was clearly to control the passageway crossing the Jordan River. On the other hand, the rulers of Hammath and Pella tried to free the area from Egyptian hegemony and therefore conquered Beth-Shean. But Seti I, as will be seen below, was very much interested in the passageway crossing the Jordan River. This may be the reason why he sent three (!) armies to free Beth-Shean, to take care of peace in the region and to re-establish Egyptian military power in the area.

BETH-SHEAN STELA II

The second stela from Beth-Shean is fragmentary because it was reused in the Byzantine period as a threshold. The stela offers the following account of events (translation: Davies 1997: 37–39):

On this day [(some)one came to tell His Majesty], l.p.h.:

“The Apiru on the mountain of Yarumtu, together with the Tiyaru [... are rising up] and penetrating the Asiatics of Ruhma”.

[His Majesty] said: “What are [they] thinking, these vile Asiatics, [to take up] their [bows] for interfering thus? The shall find out about the one who they do not know – [the brave Ruler is like] a falcon, and (like) a strong bull, long in stride, sharp of horns and opening (his) [wings], with all his limbs as strong as bronze, in order to lay waste the land of Dja[hy entirely]”.

Then His Majesty, l.p.h., commanded a number of men for his [army and his] numerous [chari]otry to turn back to the foreign land of Djahy.

When two days had passed, [they returned in peace from] the foreign land of Yarumtu, bringing the revenues [...] as captives and as plunder by (means of) the strength of his noble father, Amen-Re, who has decreed bravery and [victory] [for his son(?) ...] (namely) the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Menmaatire, Heir of Re, Lord of [Appearances], Seti I, beloved by Ptah, like Re.

Since the dating in the first line of this inscription is lost, we are not informed if this attack happened during the military campaign described in Stela I. Nevertheless, the reign of Seti I was short. Therefore, it is likely that the situation did not change very much compared to his first regnal year. If the second stela describes a subsequent event, it is likely that the area around Beth-Shean was still not completely pacified.

It is important to note that the enemies mentioned in Stela II are different from those in Stela I. Apiru, outlaws without a permanent settlement, endangered the area in the region of Beth-Shean. Unfortunately, in contrast to the first account, here the location of the three sites mentioned (the Mountain of Yarumtu, Tiyaru and Ruhma) are not convincingly identified. Only Yarumtu can be connected with the Biblical site Jarmuth/Ramoth/Remeth (Josh 21:29; 1 Chr 6:58), situated in the area of the tribe of Issachar. The most impressive hill in the area of the tribe of Issachar is Belvoir, where a Crusader castle is situated, but also Late Bronze, Iron and Persian Ages remains are attested to nearby (‘Ēn Yadid/‘Ēn el-Ġirani; cf. Gal 1991: 36* No. 61; Zwickel 2017: 71). If this identification is correct,

this Egyptian campaign was oriented to the north of Beth-Shean, where the *Apiru* must have caused havoc.

Evidently the Egyptians were not only interested in safe passage across the Jordan River, but also in the pacification of the greater area. Besides controlling a foreign country, the overseeing of trade activity was one of Egypt's main interests in foreign policy. Beth-Shean was elected as an Egyptian military station because of its important strategic position. The map with Late Bronze Age settlements in Palestine prepared by Thompson (1979) – although somewhat outdated and sometimes problematic – clearly presents a cluster of sites around Beth-Shean, demonstrating the importance of this site during the Late Bronze Age.

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE ROAD SYSTEM

By mapping the distribution of sites dating to the Late Bronze Age, it is possible to reconstruct the road system in the region (cf. Roll 2009: 5*; Zwickel 2017: 45–50; Zwickel in press). The following roads that emanate from Beth-Shean can be reconstructed for the Late Bronze Age:

1. A road leading west towards the Jezreel valley and the Mediterranean coast, bypassing Afula.
2. A road to the north following the general path of the Jordan River up to the Sea of Galilee, bypassing Tel Raqqat and Tell el-‘Orēme/Tel Kinrot, and ascending towards the Huleh valley to Hazor and further north to the Beqa‘ valley in Lebanon. This road has two subsidiaries to the northwest:
 - a. The Wādi el-Bīre/Nahal Tāvōr pass, which begins at Tell Mūsā/Tel Kittan, bypassing the important site of Tell el-Muḥarḥaš/Tel Rekeš. The mount of Belvoir overlooked and controlled this road.
 - b. The Wādi Feḡḡās/Nahal Yavne‘ēl pass, leading up to Tell en-Na‘ām/Tel Yin‘am.
3. A road to the south reaching the site of Hammath/Tell el-Ḥamme. This was a rather local road.
4. A road to the east, crossing the Jordan River at Jenam/Dabbet el-Ḥurrē‘, bypassing Pella/Ṭabaqāt Faḥl and leading up to the area of Irbid (see further discussion below).

In order to further study the region to the north of Beth-Shean, a closer look at the settlement history of the region will be undertaken here.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE REGION BETWEEN HAZOR IN THE NORTH AND BETH-SHEAN IN THE SOUTH

In contrast to the demographic picture of the Middle Bronze Age, with a very high density of sites, very few Late Bronze Age sites were discovered in the area between Hazor and Beth-Shean (cf. Zwickel 2017: 220–239). With several of the sites excavated, it is possible to provide a more certain reconstruction of settlement data than that provided by survey.

Tell el-Muḥarḥaš/Tel Rekeš: The site was continuously settled in the Late Bronze Age I and II, as well as in the Early Iron Age (Paz et al. 2010). This suggests that Road 2, segment a, mentioned above functioned throughout the Late Bronze Age.

Ḥirbet Bet Ğinn: The 1992 excavations at the site exposed layers of the Late Bronze Age II (Liebowitz 1994: 53–54). This site is most likely closely connected to Tell en-Na‘ām/Tel Yin‘am.

Tell en-Na‘ām/Tel Yin‘am: The site, which perhaps was an early iron smelting site (Liebowitz 2003), was scantily settled in the Middle Bronze Age IIB and resettled in the Late Bronze Age II (late 14th – mid/late 13th century BCE), while Late Bronze Age I is completely absent at the site. This suggests that segment b of Road 2 most likely existed during the Late Bronze Age II.

Tell el-‘Orēme/Tel Kinrot: The excavations at the site, which can be securely identified with Late Bronze Age/Biblical Chinneroth, have clearly demonstrated that it was only settled during Late Bronze Age I (Pakkala et al. 2004). Kinneret is mentioned in Papyrus Lenigradensis 1116A (Helck 21971: 166), written during the reign of Amenhotep II (1426–1400 BCE), although it is missing from the Amarna letters. Therefore, it must have been abandoned during the reign of Thutmose IV (1400–1390 BCE) or Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BCE). Unfortunately, no further historical data is available for the region during the early 14th century BCE. Kinneret must have been an important rest stop along Road 2, the primary road of the region. It is situated 20 km south of Hazor as the crow flies – a reasonable day’s journey in this steeply rising landscape. The Amarna letters mention activities of Apiru in the Hazor region (cf. EA 148: 43), as does Stela II from Beth-Shean (see above) for the area south of the Sea of Galilee. It is possible that trade activity was severely affected by these rebellious activities, and Kinneret, which was economically dependent on trade, was abandoned by its inhabitants. Along the shores of the Sea of Galilee there is no other Late Bronze Age site for merchants to stay overnight. Apparently, the primary part of Road 2 was no longer in use in the Late Bronze Age II after the abandonment of Kinneret. In the south, this main road was replaced by Road 2b, which only functioned during Late Bronze Age II. This branch was likely the northern end of Road 2 in Late Bronze Age II, and the road no longer continued further north.

Tell el-Qedah/Tel Hazor: Hazor was the most important site in Canaan during Middle and Late Bronze Age. The site was intensively settled through and including the Late Bronze Age II. A significant number of publications have been published about the end of the Late Bronze Age settlement connecting it with either a Philistine, an Israelite or an Apiru conquest of the town (cf. for an overview Zwickel 2003: 55–59), with historical concepts often influencing the archaeological interpretation. Recent excavations at the site, directed by A. Ben-Tor, have contributed valuable information in this regard. In particular, the latest Egyptian inscription found at the site mentions a high priest from Memphis, providing a terminus ante quem of 1230 BCE for the object and the destruction of the site (Allen 2001; Kitchen 2003). Therefore, the abandonment of Hazor circa 1230 BCE indicates the site ceased to exist in the final years of the reign of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE).

This assumption may be congruent with certain historical events of the period. We are rather well informed about the campaigns of Ramesses II. In his 4th regnal year (1276 BCE), he undertook a campaign to Syria along the Mediterranean coast up to Byblos. In his 5th year (1275 BCE), the famous battle of Qadesh at the Orontes occurred. As a result of this campaign, the Amurru took control of certain Hittite territories, as well as the province of Upe north of Damascus. Some time later, in the year 1268 BCE, a peace treaty was signed by both combatants. Meanwhile, Ramesses undertook further campaigns to Palestine and Syria. In 1271 BCE, he conquered Tunip and Dapur in Syria (the location of these sites has yet to be convincingly determined, although they are definitely situated in present-day Syria; cf. Helck 1986). In 1271–1270 BCE, Ramesses II undertook a campaign against Moab (Haider 1987), followed by another campaign to Dapur in the following year. Subsequent to this, another expedition to southern Syria (Tell eš-Šihāb; cf. the comment below) is attested to. Additional campaigns against Syria after his 20th regnal year are not referred to. It is possible that Ramesses II lost control over Galilee around 1260 BCE, while the regions further south were still under the hegemony of the Egyptian army (for the end of Egyptian hegemony in southern Palestine, see Zwickel 2012). However, Hazor lost its role as the dominant Palestinian trade site towards the end of the Late Bronze Age II, when Tell el-‘Orēme/Tel Kinrot was abandoned. As trade was definitely one of the main sources of in-

come for the inhabitants of Hazor, the decline of Egyptian control of the area created a situation in which Hazor was no longer able to survive. More and more inhabitants left the site until it was finally abandoned circa 1230 BCE.

THE NEW ROAD EAST OF THE JORDAN

Already during the reign of Thutmosis IV (1400–1390 BCE) or Amenhotep III (1390–1353 BCE), the most significant road from Egypt to Syria lost its importance, and Kinneret was abandoned. The reign of Amenhotep IV/Ahnaton (1353–1336 BCE) represents a period of Egyptian inactivity in Palestine. Only Haremhab (1319–1292 BCE) reinstated Egyptian foreign policy in this region. Seti I (1290–1279 BCE) and Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE) had to solve a severe problem for Egyptian trade activities. The traditional trade route had mostly lost its economic value, and military controversies in North Syria made trade nearly ineffective.

According to the Beth-Shean stelae, Seti I was very much interested in pacifying the ford passage east of Beth-Shean to the Transjordanian territory. Crossing the Jordan River at a ford between Beth-Shean and Pella was the best possibility to establish a new “international” trade road. Egyptian stelae from Northern Jordan and Southern Syria from the time of Seti I and Ramesses II clearly demarcate the course of this new road (from south to north), passing through the following points:

- a) eṭ-Ṭurra (Wimmer 2002; 2008: 190), erected by Ramesses II.
- b) Tell eš-Šiḥāb (Smith 1901: 344–349; Brand 2000: 123–124; Wimmer 2008), erected by Seti I.
- c) Nebi Ayyūb in eš-Šēḥ Sa‘ad (Schumacher 1891; Wimmer 2008: 190), erected by Ramesses II.
- d) el-Kiswe (Taraqji 1999; Yoyotte 1999; Kitchen 1999; Wimmer 2008: 190), erected by Ramesses II
- e) An additional unpublished stela found 25 km east of Damascus (Wimmer 2002: 9).

It is logically assumed that such stelae would normally be found in connection with military campaigns. Every military campaign would be in need of supplies and day to day necessities, therefore requiring a sophisticated and developed system of accommodations and nourishment. Such an infrastructure was normally established within the context of existing trade activities and routes, which were also used by soldiers in time of war. Therefore, it is safe to assume that during the reign of Seti I and more particularly of Ramesses II, a new trade route would have been established in northern Transjordan, continuing east of the Anti-Lebanese mountains.

What was the final destination of this new road? The course of this road is still rather unexplored, since our data concerning settlement history in Syria are still fragmentary. However, the final destination may have been the region of Mari. Thus, the traders bypassed the Hittite territory and secured a new route for the transport of goods from Egypt to Mesopotamia.

CONCLUSIONS

The Late Bronze Age represents a period rich in political and economic turmoil. Subsequent to the Late Bronze Age I, Egyptians lost control of the area north of Beth-Shean. Later, Seti I and Ramesses II were interested in the stability of trade routes in the region. Instead of reestablishing the dominant trade road through the Beqa’ valley, passing Hazor and Kinneret, Seti I and Ramesses II established a new road to Mesopotamia, east of the Anti-Lebanese mountains.

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