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Power and Opposition in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World

edited by Mait Kõiv and Vladimir Sazonov

Table of Contents

Power and Opposition in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World

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Egyptian Control in the Southern Levant and the Late Bronze Age Crisis

Andres Nõmmik*

Abstract. *In the Late Bronze Age, Egypt controlled the city-states of the Southern Levant, even though local rulers maintained partial autonomy. However, the period ended with a crisis that seems to have considerably changed the local power structures along with the disappearance of the Egyptian empire in the region. This paper shows how both Egyptian power and its relatively rapid disappearance worsened the crisis. Three factors are highlighted: Egyptian policy of weakening the defensive capabilities of Levantine city-states, the Egyptians' demand for different resources and how these two aspects made city-states unable to adapt successfully to the new post- Egyptian situation.*

Rezumat. *În Epoca Târzie a Bronzului, Egiptul controla orașele-stat din sudul Levantului, în ciuda faptului că liderii locali încă păstrau o oarecare autonomie. Totuși, această perioadă s-a încheiat printr-o criză care a modificat profund structurile puterilor locale, împreună cu dispariția puterii egiptene în regiune. Acest articol descrie felul în care puterea Egiptului, precum și rapida sa decădere nu au făcut decât să accentueze acea criză. Sunt evidențiați trei factori principali: politica Egiptului centrată pe slăbirea potențialului defensiv al orașelor-stat levantine, continua exploatare a resurselor de către autoritățile egiptene, respectiv modul în care aceste două fenomene au dus la incapacitatea orașelor-stat de a se adapta la situația ce a urmat retragerii forțelor egiptene din regiune.*

Keywords: Late Bronze Age, Egypt, Southern Levant, crisis.

Introduction

During the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE), the Southern Levant was controlled by Egypt for the most part.[1] The extent of Egyptian dominance at a certain point of time was dependent on the successful or unsuccessful campaigns by pharaohs, uprisings and attacks by local groups, the loyalty of the towns and the strength of Egyptian administrative and military control. Nevertheless, Egypt was powerful and the only effective regional power in Canaan up to the disputed territories of Qadesh and Central Levant.[2] By the end of the Late Bronze Age

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[1] All dates from here on are in BCE.

[2] As evidenced by the Amarna letters (see COHEN and WESTBROOK 2002 (eds.)) and Egyptian-style buildings in Levant at the end of the Late Bronze Age (MORRIS 2005, 740-773). As Ramesses II did not manage to conquer back Qadesh in the 13th century then it can be assumed that the border of Egyptian empire did not reach further north at least for a time (CLINE 2014, 80-82).

period, however, Egyptian control and the city-state system along with the complexity that had characterized the Amarna Age and the following period seems to have collapsed.[3]

The crisis in the 12th century is evidenced by the destruction in the area while Egyptian control faded, new migrant groups arrived and overall political complexity was reduced.[4] This crisis seems to be connected to the events like the collapse of the Hittite empire, Mycenaean small states and Ugarit elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.[5] Gradual worsening of the climate, famine, the political disintegration of the Hittite empire and attacks on Levantine cities by unknown assailants seem most likely among the many reasons proposed to have brought about the crisis.[6] The crisis had both natural and human-influenced reasons. At the same time collapse was not complete as Cyprus and Phoenician cities seems to have weathered the crisis at the beginning of the 12th century.[7] It is clear that in addition to the crisis encompassing the Eastern Mediterranean, local processes influenced the reduction of political system and destruction in the Southern Levant. Among these local factors is the nature of the Egyptian control and Egyptian activities in Levant. To better understand how the Egyptian control influenced the crisis locally in the Southern Levant I will analyze the way in which Egypt controlled the Southern Levant, the events that took place, and then aspects of Egyptian control that may have worsened the situation in the Southern Levant.

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[3] I will use the term „city-state" to refer to small polities, although the application of the term has some problems. For one, the term "city" may be confusing when used to describe settlements, some of which were fairly modest although more impressive ones, like Ugarit, did exist. The concept of „state" is also problematic. The polities involved were autonomous to a point but what they exactly were depends on one's definition. Neither were all these polities similar. The Egyptians viewed the rulers of these settlements officially as mayors (*hazannu*), whose task was to obey the Egyptians, protect the settlements and the Egyptian interests there (MURNANE 2002, 107; NA'AMAN 2002, 132). The local rulers saw themselves as fairly autonomous kings (*šarru*), as can be read from the Amarna letters (NA'AMAN 2002, 132). Some of the city-states were thus merely small unimpressive settlements ruled by a semi-autonomous ruler, while others were powerful polities, who nevertheless had to obey the imperial rule of either the Hittite or the Egyptian empire.

[4] See about it below. I will use the term "western migrant". That enables to view the archaeologically attested arrival of people of Aegean, Cypriot or Anatolian origin separately from the "Peleset" and the "Philistines", who are known from Egyptian and Old Testament texts, but whose connection to the former is not certain. I will use the name "Philistia" for the geographic area settled by these western migrants but only in geographic and not ethnic or political sense. Although the name originates from the later Old Testament sources, "Philistia" overlaps with the area settled by the western migrants e.g. the towns of Ekron, Gath, Ashdod and Ashkelon (BEN-SHLOMO 2006-2007, 267; BRYCE 2009, 553; DOTHAN 2000, 145).

[5] BECKMAN 2007, 111; BRYCE 2005, 344-345; CLINE 2014, 173; YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 66-71; YON 1992, 117.

[6] About the disintegration of the Hittite empire see BECKMAN 2007, 111 and BRYCE 2005, 342-346. About the climate change and famine see LANGGUT et al. 2013. About the attacks see YON 1992, 117 for Ugarit and Emar and below about the towns of Southern Levant.

[7] Some Cypriot cities show signs of destruction, but most centers were built up again (Enkomi) and towns like Kition and Palaepaphos started monumental building projects in the 12th century (IACOVOU 2014, 661-669). Archaeologically, the situation regarding Phoenicia is less clear, although there are no signs that the towns experienced a serious crisis (BIKAI 1992, 133; BOYES 2012, 50).

Sources and dating

Analysis of Egypt's control in the Southern Levant relies on archaeological and textual evidence. Archaeological evidence includes identification of the settlements mentioned in textual records, destruction layers, the settlement systems, Egyptian-style architecture and other archaeological material indicating the Egyptian presence in Levant and western-style material indicating migration to Philistia.

The most relevant textual sources relating to the nature of the Egyptian control are the 14th century Amarna letters, but there are additional written and visual sources from the 13th to the 11th century. The latter contain records about the campaigns of the Egyptian pharaohs (Seti I, Ramesses II, Merneptah, Ramesses III).[8] Although many of these campaign descriptions are full of propagandistic motifs, repeated textual and pictorial tropes or icons and Egyptian royal ideology, they also describe historical events.[9] The "Sea Peoples" reliefs of Medinet Habu present a notorious case for such a source, where ideology is mixed with hints to the historical reality. However, finding the historical kernel in these texts is problematic and interpretations vary considerably. For example, some have seen the texts as a relatively accurate reflection of the attacks of different groups of peoples in Canaan and Egypt.[10] Others see them as the Egyptians exaggerating of minor clashes into large battles or, recently, as descriptions of battles in Central Levant, which did not bring about Egypt losing control over the south.[11] These sources should be used with due care. They seem to reflect some problems the Egyptian empire faced, but not necessarily the outcome of the resulting Egyptian activity.

One problem concerning the 12th century crisis is the absolute dating of the events. The main issue is whether the destructions and the subsequent appearance of locally made Aegean style (Philistine 1 or Mycenaean LH IIIC:1) pottery should be dated to the first half of the 12th century (ca. 1175), when the Egyptian empire was still present in Levant, or to the second half (ca. 1125), when the empire seems to have collapsed.[12]

The earlier dating (Conventional Chronology) relates the new pottery and the arrival of western settlers to the "Sea Peoples" reliefs in Medinet Habu.[13] One of the attacking groups from the reliefs – the "Peleset" – is presumed to be connected to the biblical Philistines and

[8] See about the Amarna letters in COHEN and WESTBROOK (2002, eds.) and RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014 and about the later sources in Hasel (1998, 118-124, 152-157, 178-181) and O'CONNOR 2000.

[9] BEN-DOR EVIAN 2016, 151-153, 159-163; CLINE and O'CONNOR 2003, 120; O'CONNOR 2000, 93-94.

[10] DEVER 1992, 102; DEVER 2017, 97 141.

[11] BEN-DOR EVIAN 2017, 276-279; CIFOLA 1988, 302-303.

[12] See about that in FINKELSTEIN 2000, 162-165. I will use the term "locally made LH IIIC:1 pottery" or "Philistine 1 pottery", but these are just alternative names to "Philistine Monochrome pottery". I will also prefer the term "Philistine 2 pottery", which is alternatively known as "Philistine Bichrome pottery", for the later stage of "Philistine 1 pottery". "Philistine 1 pottery" and "Philistine 2 pottery" are, for example, used in the reports on Ekron (DOTHAN et al. 2016 (eds.)). The term "LH IIIC:1b" has been used in the past for "Philistine 1 pottery", but as "b" seems to be a meaningless addition to the term, it will not be used here (SHERRATT 2006, 368-370).

[13] FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI 2007, 75.

their towns in the Old Testament. A connection between the "Peleset" and the new western migrants in the towns of the "Philistines" has been proposed, because locally made Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 pottery appears in these towns.[14] Accordingly, the appearance of the new western ceramic material is contemporary with the "Sea Peoples"' attack ca. 1175. The Conventional Chronology dates the advanced stage of the Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 pottery (Philistine 2 or Philistine Bichrome) to the second half of the 12th century.[15]

An alternative – Low Chronology – has been proposed by David Ussihkin, Israel Finkelstein and others. They doubt that the locally made Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 pottery should be related to the debated events mentioned in Medinet Habu.[16] Proponents of the Low Chronology point out that there are no Egyptian items dated to the period of Ramesses III-VI alongside the western style pottery in the towns of Philistia and no Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 pottery in the Egyptian centers, although Philistia's towns were near Egyptian centers.[17] That is why supporters of the Low Chronology claim that locally made Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 pottery only appeared after the collapse of the Egyptian empire during or after the rule of Ramesses VI, when Egypt finally lost control over Megiddo (ca. 1130), a settlement further north than Philistia and standing in the way of any potential migrations.[18] Philistine 2 pottery is pushed to the 11th century.[19] However, Avraham Faust and other researchers claim that ethnic, cultural or other identity-related differences could sharply delimit the spread of the Philistine ceramics from Philistia to nearby settlements.[20]

Radiocarbon dating has failed to bring about conclusive results in this debate. Many of the C14 datings are from later periods (the 11th-10th century) or outside Philistia and are not useful for discussing the appearance of locally made Mycenaean LH IIIC:1 ceramics.[21] Some analyses have shown that several settlement destruction layers and some strata with Philistine 1 or Philistine 2 pottery should be dated differently from the Conventional Chronology.[22] However, the rare C14 dates from Philistia's settlements are not too helpful. For example, the analysis of the destruction of Stratum VIIIA in Ekron (the last stratum before the appearance of the

[14] CLINE and O'CONNOR 2003, 116; YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 180.

[15] FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI 2007, 75.

[16] FINKELSTEIN 2000, 163-165. For example, the Medinet Habu texts do not discuss a settlement process in Philistia and the slightly newer Papyrus Harris mentions that the "Sea Peoples" were settled in the Pharaoh's strongholds. These could have been located anywhere, including in Egypt (Ibid: 165).

[17] However, there seems to be a lack of cases where a stratum with well-dated Egyptian material from the time of Ramesses III-VI is followed by a Philistine 1 stratum. Finding these cases would indicate the validity of Low Chronology.

[18] FINKELSTEIN 2000, 163-165; USSISHKIN 1998, 214-217. The presumption of Egypt's control over Megiddo is based on a bronze statue base with the name of Ramesses VI found there (FINKELSTEIN 2000, 162, 175; USSISHKIN 1998, 2014).

[19] FINKELSTEIN 2000, 164.

[20] BUNIMOVITZ and FAUST 2001; FAUST and KATZ 2011, 240-242.

[21] See Finkelstein and Piasetzki 2010; FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI 2011; GILBOA et al. 2008, 173-192;

[22] FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI 2010, 380; FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI 2011.

Philistine 1 pottery) has resulted in a date range of 1205-1065.[23] This radiocarbon dating is too broad to solve the Conventional/Low Chronology problem, at least in Ekron.[24] Other C14 datings of Ekron's archaeological material have not presented more accurate information.[25] In addition, one recent analysis indicates that the period of the appearance of Philistine 2 pottery varied from settlement to settlement and the whole process took over a century.[26]

Another argument against the Low Chronology is the connection between Levantine and Cypriot ceramics. Susan Sherratt notes that using the Low Chronology requires redating the Cypriot and Aegean ceramic chronology, which is dependent on Levantine finds. However, quite an extensive C14 dating project in Cyprus places the beginning of LCIIIA pottery (and thus the similar Philistine 1 pottery) to the early 12th century, contradicting the Low Chronology. She also does not believe that the Philistine pottery would have developed after similar Cypriot pottery had died out.[27]

The solution to the problem of using the Conventional or the Low Chronology is still not clear. When discussing the destructions, the arrival of western migrants and the Egyptian empire below, I will consider events based on both the Conventional and the Low Chronology.

Egyptian control in the Southern Levant

Late Bronze Age Levant and its political system can be seen as functioning on two levels. First was the uncontested Egyptian hegemony, at least from the battle of Megiddo onwards. This brought about the free movement of the Egyptian army through the territory, obligations for the local rulers and the establishment of Egyptian garrisons, forts and other buildings.[28] The second level was the local settlements, which were often ruled by local rulers who, at least from the Egyptian perspective, were equal to mayors, although they seem to have thought of themselves as kings.[29] Even despite Egyptians designating these rulers as mayors, it seems that Egyptians acknowledged the local rulers as somewhat autonomous, although having certain duties. The city-states often controlled settlements outside their core town, waged wars with

[23] Asscher and BOARETTO 2018, 14.

[24] In addition, there are disagreements about the relative dating of the nearby areas in Ekron, which would have some effect on the C14 dating. Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin claim that the destruction in the storage building in the Summit area is contemporary with the end of the VIIIA stratum in the Area INE East Slope, but Ann Killebrew claims that the last (pre-western material) phase of Stratum VIIIA actually succeeded the destruction of the Summit building. In that case, the settlers bringing the Philistine 1 ceramics with them are unlikely to have been behind torching the Summit building (DOTHAN and GITIN 2012, 3; KILLEBREW 2013, 81-85).

[25] FINKELSTEIN and PIASETZKI (2010, 379-381) have one C14 dating of the Monochrome phase of Ekron but warn that it is dangerous to rely on a single sample.

[26] ASSCHER and BOARETTO 2018, 19-20.

[27] SHERRATT 2006, 361, 364-368.

[28] MORRIS 2005, 20-21; NA'AMAN 1997, 607-608; NA'AMAN 2002, 132; SPALINGER 2005, 83.

[29] NA'AMAN 2002, 132.

each other and sought the pharaoh's support against each other at least in the Amarna period.[30] They seem to have had a problem also with the groups of people (the Apiru, the Shasu) who were not connected to any state, the enemy they shared with the Egyptians themselves.[31] Based on the Amarna letters the local rulers had control over soldiers and possibly mercenaries (like the Apiru).[32]

The exact number of city-states in the loosely defined Southern Levant is unknown. Based on the Amarna letters we can name a few city-states from the Late Bronze Age like Megiddo, Gezer, Jerusalem, Lachish, Gath, Ashkelon, Shechem and Yurza, often along with their leaders.[33] The cities listed in the Amarna letters surely differed in their status and possibilities. For example, the large city-state of Ugarit had considerable influence in the confines of the Hittite empire, while others may have been small settlements with practically no influence.[34] Given that the information on the city-states differs, the estimations about the number of city-states in the Southern Levant vary between 13 and 25.[35] Geography seems to have affected the autonomy of the local city-states, with those closer to Egypt being more peaceful (or at least not represented so often in the Amarna letters) but those in the Highlands (Jerusalem) and Central Levant (Byblos, Amurru) engaging in notable conflicts.[36] However, these states are known because they are represented in the 14th century Amarna letters, and the following two centuries may have changed a lot. The strengthening of Egyptian control, for example, could have reduced the autonomy of the city-states considerably.[37]

There are several ways through which Egypt controlled or heavily influenced the states of the Southern Levant. Firstly, the Egyptian empire had a considerable military presence in the area, as shown by strongholds and the accounts of the pharaohs' campaigns.[38] Locations like Gaza and Jaffa seem to have been controlled directly by the Egyptians and this also goes for the

[30] JAMES 2002, 114-117; NA'AMAN 2002, 131-133.

[31] BRYCE 2009, 636; JAMES 2002, 115-116.

[32] The Apiru are mentioned as part of his forces by the king of Damascus in EA 195 (RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014: 897). The use of the Apiru by city-state rulers is, however, often mentioned in the letters, where one ruler is accusing other rulers of using the Apiru, which may be a rhetoric device (saying that the opponent conspires with Egypt's enemy) rather than a description of the real situation (JAMES 2002, 116).

[33] For example Megiddo in the Amarna letter (EA) 242, Gezer in EA 298, Jerusalem in EA 287, Lachish in EA 329, Gath in EA 278, Ashkelon in EA 320, Shechem in EA 289 and Yurza in EA 314. Translations of the letters can be found in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014. For the identification of Shuwardata as the ruler of Gath see RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1585.

[34] On Ugarit see YON 2006, 18-21.

[35] NA'AMAN 1997, 600, 619. JASMIN 2006, 172-174 indicates up to nine states for the southern part of the Southern Levant. These form only a part of about 70 city-states (or small states) mentioned in the Amarna letters.

[36] JAMES 2002, 112-119.

[37] BUNIMOVITZ 1998, 104-105; KILLEBREW 2005, 81-83, 92.

[38] On Egyptian strongholds in general see Morris 2005, on 13th century campaigns see HASEL 1998, 118-124, 152-157, 178-181.

forts along the road from Canaan to Egypt.[39] Some towns, like Sumur, which was called garrison town by the ruler of Byblos, indicate that these were the centers of the Egyptians in Levant.[40] There was a notable increase of Egyptian military architecture in the Post-Amarna Age, seen from texts and archaeology.[41] Egyptians seem to have also controlled settlements in the Jordan valley, probably to guard trade routes.[42] The best known examples of Egyptian military architecture are the fortress in Jaffa and number of fortified administrative buildings, like those known from Tel Mor, for example.[43] A type of building called "governor's residence" found in several settlements, is probably an administrative building of a slightly different type.[44] An unfinished garrison building, architecturally similar to the buildings in Egypt, has been found from Ashkelon.[45] Thus, at least in the 13th and early 12th century, Egyptian military control may have been sustained by locally placed Egyptian army units. Some of the numerous Egyptian strongholds even seem to overlap with the city-state centers.[46]

In addition to the permanent military presence, especially in the 13th century and early 12th century, the campaigning Egyptian armies could march through the Southern Levant without any powerful opposition, like in the case of the battle of Qadesh or the attacks against specific settlements.[47] References to campaigns in the Southern Levant to punish rebellious cities show that Egypt did not generally hesitate to use army to force a city-state back into submission. The Egyptians got involved in some disputes in the Amarna period and punished leaders of Amurru and Lachish for stirring up trouble.[48] In the 13th century, Seti I and Merneptah campaigned in Canaan, mostly to bring order to some regions and move against specific unruly towns.[49] It seems that sometimes the local towns rose up against Egypt, although Egyptians may have exaggerated local conflicts to give such impression. The Egyptian support was useful in the

[39] GOREN ET al. 2002, 202; HOFFMEIER and ABD EL-MAKSOUD 2003, 169-171; MORRIS 2005, 384-386.

[40] GOREN et al. 2002, 202. Rib-Hadda's letter EA 76 in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 463-465.

[41] KILLEBREW 2005, 81-83; MORRIS 2005, 382-391.

[42] BLOCH-SMITH and NAKHAI 1999, 108.

[43] BURKE et al. 2017, 86-87; KILLEBREW 2005, 60-64.

[44] HASEL 1998, 93-96; KILLEBREW 2005, 58-60. Though KILLEBREW 2005, 58-64 distinguishes between "centre-hall houses" or "residences" and "administrative buildings" sometimes called "forts", these get categorized differently by other authors. For example, HASEL 1998, 93-95 lists a building from Aphek under "governor's residences" while KILLEBREW 2005, 58, 62-63 following Carolyn Higginbotham puts it into a separate category.

[45] AJA 2009: 66.

[46] If one takes the presence of a governor's residence as a basis to indicate that the settlement was the Egyptian stronghold. Governor's residences were located in Gezer and Pella, which were both known as city-states, at least in the Amarna period HASEL 1998, 93-94; RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1571, 1581.

[47] See about the campaigns in CLINE 2014, 80-83 and HASEL 1998, 118-124, 152-157, 178-181.

[48] BRYCE 2005, 169-170; JAMES 2002, 119-122.

[49] HASEL 1998, 119-124, 178-180.

warfare between the vassal states, and numerous calls for help in the Amarna letters show that Egyptian support (even if with modest military units) on the sender's side was sought after.[50]

In addition to using its own forces, Egypt could have relied on the forces of the locals for assistance in the campaigns, as is known in the case of the Hittite empire and its vassals.[51] Egypt certainly used foreign mercenaries from territories outside of nominal Egyptian control, like the Nubians and the Sherden.[52] This may have led to the interdependence of the armies, meaning that Egypt depended on the forces of its vassals to a certain extent, while the vassals may have relied on the Egyptian forces, when they were in trouble.[53]

One last side of military control was the lack of town walls in many of the local city-states in the Late Bronze Age.[54] This is especially notable as several of them had Middle Bronze Age fortifications.[55] Although some earlier remains could have still been in use, the Late Bronze Age strata indicate that for one reason or another usually no new town walls were built. This is probably connected to the Egyptian presence. We can only speculate about the causes, but the lack of walls may have been related to the intentional Egyptian policy of keeping the city-states weak enough to keep them in check, in case some of them were thinking about rebelling, or because of the lacking resources and manpower of local settlements.[56] Another possibility is that siege warfare and perhaps warfare in general lessened due to the Egyptian control, especially in the Southern coastal areas.

The second aspect of the Egyptian control relates to political hegemony. As said, local rulers had considerable autonomy, but when Egyptian interests were threatened, the Egyptian empire got involved, as in the case of Amurru and Shechem. In both cases unchecked expansion of these states may have made them too powerful for Egypt to tolerate, especially in Amurru's instance, which was located on the Egyptian border with the Hittites.[57] It is possible and even likely that in the Amarna Age, there may have been further military actions and local uprisings in addition to the ones mentioned in the texts, because even these letters only reveal a small

[50] AVRUCH 2002, 161. See about calls for military assistance in numerous letters of Rib-Adda of Byblos (EA 69-95, 100-140) or in letters by other rulers like ʿAbdi-Ḫeba of Jerusalem (EA 288-290) and Yapaʿi of Gezer (EA 299-300). Letters are translated in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014.

[51] BRYCE 2013, 170; COLLINS 2007, 106.

[52] Seen, for example, from the Sherden supporting Ramesses II in the battle of Qadesh (ABBAS 2017, 9-10) and from a mathematical task in "Papyrus Anastasi I", which, although meant as an instruction for scribes, indicates that the presence of the Nubians and the Sherden in Canaan was feasible ALLEN 2003, 9, 11.

[53] Numerous requests for Egyptian help point to the vassals dependence on Egyptian forces either because of acute military threat or because of the symbolic associations involved, when the Pharaoh himself sends troops to one's aid (AVRUCH 2002, 161; MORRIS 2015, 340).

[54] BUNIMOVITZ 1998, 104.

[55] GONEN 1984, 62.

[56] BUNIMOVITZ 1998, 104, NA'AMAN 2005, 151-152. Although BUNIMOVITZ (1992, 226-227) highlights that not many people were needed for building large structures, especially if these were built over time and in stages.

[57] BRYCE 2005, 169-170; JAMES 2002, 119-122.

portion of the whole period's history. The autonomy of the locals was also limited as the result of the failed uprisings. Political control meant control over foreign politics, during the Late Bronze Age it meant that city-states had to stay loyal to the Egyptians and not collaborate with the Mitanni or the Hittite empire. Although it seems that for a time the pharaohs allowed some communication between Amurru and the Hittite side, possibly because they could not stop this communication, or because it was useful for the purpose of gathering intelligence.[58] This was a dangerous game though, as Amurru later joined the Hittites.[59]

Whilst Egypt mostly relied on local mayors/rulers to keep the order and keep the Egyptians' interests safe, the Amarna letters note several cases where Egyptian officials had travelled around solving problems and local conflicts.[60] They may have lived in Egypt and travelled from there, or resided in certain centers in Canaan, like Gaza, Jaffa and Sumur. At least some of these towns may have been settlements directly controlled by the Egyptians.[61] The appearance of the Egyptian-style "governor's residences" in the XIX dynasty (13th century) Canaan may indicate that Egyptian officials were permanently present or possibly even running the settlements.[62] Archaeology also shows the Egyptians' presence in other aspects of local material culture. There are Egyptian-type ceramics, scarabs and sarcophagi, which indicate that some Egyptians were more permanently residing in Canaan, although some items probably ended up there as the result of trade.[63] Egyptian pottery was present in large numbers in certain locations (like Tel Mor, Beth Shean, Tel Sera') and was sometimes locally made.[64] The coffins likely belonged to Egyptians who resided there, or to the Canaanite locals who wanted to imitate Egyptian burial practices.[65]

The third area of control was economic. Egyptian dominance and its strongholds meant that it had control over trade routes like the coastal road, the Jordan and Jezreel valleys and the ports of the Mediterranean coast.[66] The purpose of building these strongholds must have been to keep the trade routes safe, given the instances of banditry, but the Egyptian centers could have been used to levy some sort of a tax on the goods that passed.[67] While the existence of taxing remains speculative, the city-states had to provide Egyptians with different goods or even people.[68] The tribute included supplies, luxury goods and possibly food items, which must

[58] COHEN 2002, 92-98.

[59] COHEN and WESTBROOK 2002, 8.

[60] NA'AMAN 2002, 135-137.

[61] GOREN et al. 2002, 202; NA'AMAN 2002, 135.

[62] GADOT 2010, 52; HASEL 1998, 93-96; MORRIS 2005, 688-689.

[63] KILLEBREW 2005, 53-55, 64-80.

[64] MARTIN 2004, 279-280.

[65] KILLEBREW 2005, 53-55, 64-80.

[66] ARTZY 2018, 95; BURKE ET AL. 2017, 90; DIJKSTRA 2017, 76-78, 81; GRABBE 2017, 96; VAN der STEEN 2017, 162.

[67] DIJKSTRA 2017, 81 mentions Tell es-Saidiyeh as a taxation center. About the robberies in SAUVAGE 2011, 427-432.

[68] In addition to local labourers (NA'AMAN 2005, 221-224), the pharaoh also asked, for example, for cupbearers (EA 369 in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1251.

have taken a toll on the local resources.[69] There was also the obligation to feed and support the passing armies moving through Canaan, sometimes possibly accompanied by the pharaoh. This put additional economic pressure on the local cities, as food, drink and other resources had to be procured, possibly on relatively short notice.[70] It is good to bear in mind that some city-states were fairly small and this kind of effort, even temporary, may have been quite costly and exhausting for the locals.

Egypt thus had military, political and economic control over the region of the Southern Levant, as seen from the letters of the Amarna Age and the archaeological records. Although pharaohs lost some territories in the northern part of the Southern Levant during the last centuries of the Bronze Age, it seems that their control over most of the city-states of Southern Levant was not weakened.[71]

Although written sources mention city-states and rulers in the Amarna age, the situation became more complicated in the following period. When discussing the influence of the Egyptian empire on the local settlements and people during this time, one has to take into account two possibilities: that much of the territory was controlled directly by the Egyptians by the beginning of the XX dynasty, or that there were still city-states at the time of Ramesses III. The date of the disappearance of local city-centered polities is not wholly clear, and it is not impossible that the Egyptians had taken full control of most of the settlements by the end of the 13th century, at least in the southern coastal Canaan area.[72]

There were Egyptian campaigns in Canaan, some within the Egyptian controlled territories. The early 13th century pharaoh Seti I recorded capturing Hammath, Yeno'am and Pella, which had risen up against Egypt and had attacked other cities, like the Egyptian center Beth Shean.[73] Pella was a city-state with a king in the Amarna period.[74] Merneptah, ruling at the end of the 13th century, supposedly campaigned in Canaan as inscribed on the "Israel Stela" and The Karnak reliefs.[75] These list Yenoam, Ashkelon and Gezer among the conquered towns even though the main focus of the "Israel stela" was fighting against the Libyans in the west. There are questions regarding the historicity of the campaign, but mentioning the towns of Ashkelon and Gezer as the enemies indicates that they may have been independent polities at the time,

[69] COHEN 2002, 88; NA'AMAN 2002, 129-130; SPALINGER 2005, 134. However, the tribute indicated in the Amarna letters does not mention foodstuff, although the locals had to probably feed the Egyptian forces SPALINGER 2005, 135. The letters do mention cattle though NA'AMAN 2002, 130.

[70] NA'AMAN 2002, 132. See EA 324 as an example of a letter confirming a ruler's preparation for the arrival of the Egyptian forces RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1203.

[71] Amurru can be mentioned as one of the notable losses (COHEN and WESTBROOK 2002, 8)

[72] Bunimovitz (1998, 104-105) writes that many former city-states were turned into Egyptian bases. Egyptian presence seems to have in any case intensified KILLEBREW 2005, 81-83, 92.

[73] HASEL 1998, 119-125, 134.

[74] RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1571.

[75] HASEL 1998, 178-181. Here I use the dating from HASEL 1998, 178, but BURKE et al. 2017, 87, for example, dates Merneptah to the 12th century.

like they were in the Amarna period.[76] The building of "governor's residences" and military forts may point to increased Egyptian military control.[77] The network of Egyptian centers protected for example the Jordan river routes and some centers (Pella) were in the locations of former (or still existing) city-states.[78]

There are indications that in the 12th century some city-states were still having an autonomous government and leaders (in addition to the "Israel stela"), despite the increased Egyptian control. Megiddo presents a case where local autonomy may have been preserved. The last of the Bronze Age strata there, which according to Ussishkin ended ca. 1130, contained a palace complex.[79] A large collection of ivories, which was buried when the settlement was destroyed, was found in one of the rooms of the appendix of the palace. Marian Feldman has proposed that these ivory pieces represented hoarding (and possibly a symbolic attempt to deposit items ritually) by a local ruler. The palace and local collection of valuables may indicate that there was a king or a local authority even then when Egyptian power was seemingly fading.[80] The city contained a statue base of Ramesses VI (a reason for Ussishkin's late dating), which shows Egyptian influence, although not necessarily direct control.[81] It should be noted that Late Bronze Age Egyptian governor's residences do not exclude the presence of a local ruler, even if they really were the homes of governors or Egyptian officials. Palace also probably existed in Lachish in the 12th century.[82]

Given the shortage of adequate textual material about the existence or lack of city-states in Canaan at the end of the 13th and especially the 12th century, it is difficult to investigate the

[76] CLINE 2009, 193; HASEL 1998, 179-180, 261. Ashkelon was a city-state in the Amarna period (EA 320 in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1194) as was Gezer (EA 298 in RAINEY and SCHNIEDEWIND 2014, 1148).

[77] See about them above.

[78] BLOCH-SMITH and NAKHAI 1999, 107-108. The governor's residence hints at Egyptian administration (HASEL 1998: 94).

[79] USSISHKIN 1998, 214.

[80] FELDMAN 2009, 176-177, 188-192.

[81] USSISHKIN 1998, 214. The statue base is useful for dating purposes (despite not having been found in its proposed original stratum) but is a weak indicator of political control (FELDMAN 2009, 192). Although statues of rulers were often built in vassal territories, there are also indications that statues may represent diplomatic connections or trade. Text RS 88.2158 is a request by the ruler of Ugarit, who was a Hittite vassal, for the Egyptian pharaoh to send a statue to Ugarit (MORRIS 2015, 315-316). It may be an attempt to warm up relations between Ugarit and Egypt at a time when the Hittite empire was weakening (SINGER 2000, 22-24). Different possibilities, like that statue was valuable in itself, improved trade, presented some sort of military security or, indeed, showed warming of political relations, are discussed by MORRIS (2015, 320-345). Egyptian statues are present in Phoenician and Syrian cities already in the Middle Bronze Age (AUBET 2013, 252), showing that sending statues may have had economic or even aesthetic reasons, but did not indicate political domination.

[82] USSISHKIN 2004, 62-64, 69-70. There are other Late Bronze Age palaces, or at least buildings presumed to have been palaces, like the one in Hazor, but this town seems to have come to an end already some time in the middle of the 13th century (VAN DER STEEN 2017, 167, BEN-TOR and ZUCKERMAN 2008, 2; BONFIL and ZARZECKI-BELEG 2007, 40-42; VAN DER STEEN 2017, 167).

political system. This shortage of sources about the Southern Levant probably results from the fact that Pharaohs' activities (especially military campaigns) were often focused on the Central Levant (Tunip, Qadesh) and the Hittites and not on the Southern Levant.[83] The archaeological material tends to be ambivalent, when it comes to assessing whether the Egyptians controlled the towns, or whether there were local autonomous kings or mayors. When discussing Egyptian influence on Canaan below, I will consider both versions.

The Southern Levant in the crisis

The late 13th century and the 12th century brought about three processes in the Southern Levant: the destruction of several settlements, the appearance of the new settlers of western origin in Philistia, and the gradual decline of Egyptian control in the Levant.[84] Processes such as these can be seen as symptoms of a serious crisis in the region, and some (such as Egyptian decline) may have in turn amplified the crisis.[85]

Archaeological findings point to the (often not complete) destruction in several towns during the late 13th and 12th century, like in Gezer, Lachish, Ekron and Megiddo, several of which were earlier centers of city-states.[86] However, the fate of towns in a specific region varied considerably, for example in Philistia. There are possible signs of destruction in Gath and of partial destruction in Ashdod and Ekron.[87] At the same time Ashkelon has no signs of destruction, although the settlement was possibly abandoned.[88] The Conventional Chronology

[83] Especially for Ramesses II (HASEL 1998, 152-154).

[84] A much discussed aspect of this period is the development of Israelite culture in the Central Highlands. I will not touch upon these problems in detail here. The material culture of Central Highlands is similar to Bronze Age Canaanite material culture and few features, which are occasionally used to argue that distinct „Israelite" culture was arising, are all problematic. They are either adaptions to local circumstances (terracing, cisterns) or regionally more widespread (four-room house, collared-rim storage jar) (HASEL 1998, 207-215; ZEVIT 2001, 101-102).

[85] About it below.

[86] KILLEBREW 2005, 208; MORRIS 2005, 692; USSISHKIN 2004, 69-70. See above about their city-state status in the Amarna letters.

[87] In Gath, there is some doubt over the destruction. Destruction is indicated in the building in Area E, but the building does not seem to have been burned. Researchers refer to a lot of restorable pottery, which indicates that the building may have been abandoned in a hurry. Even so, the following sub-phase contains limited finds while it does not yet contain the Philistine 1 pottery, thus probably preceding the settlement process of the western migrants (MAEIR 2012, 16-19, SHAI et al. 2012, 229-230). In Ashdod, signs of destruction are limited to Areas G and A, while there are no signs of destruction in Area H (MAZAR and BEN-SHLOMO 2005, 13; DOTHAN and PORATH 1993, 53; YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 221). See also the reassessment of all layers by FINKELSTEIN and SINGER-AVITZ (2001, 233–235), which in turn is discarded in the excavation report (BEN-SHLOMO 2005, 8). About Ekron see DOTHAN and GITIN (2012, 4), KILLEBREW (2013, 85) and above about the debate on the destruction. Depending on the side in this debate, Stratum VIIIA ended peacefully or was partially destroyed. The first case would mean that the western settlers did not appear alongside the destruction, which took place some time before.

[88] YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 225-226. It is unclear how long the supposed gap lasted. The last stratum that preceded the stratum with western cultural traits had an unfinished Egyptian garrison building. Some have proposed that the

would date the destructions to the first half of 12th century and the Low Chronology to the second half of the 12th century. Depending on the dating of the destructions, these happened either despite the Egyptian control over the area or at a time after Egypt had lost dominance of the area. Philistia also illustrates another side of the crisis: that the severity of the damage was variable. In some places the whole settlement suffered while elsewhere only selected buildings were destroyed.[89]

Destructions, whether due to the local inter-city-state warfare, raids or uprisings, are not only a phenomenon of the 12th century crisis but also have taken place earlier under Egyptian domination. Hazor, for example, seems to have been destroyed in the 13th century.[90] As seen from the campaigns mentioned before, Egyptians themselves moved against Canaanite towns when necessary. However, the destruction in the 12th century Southern Levant may be connected to that of towns in Anatolia, Ugarit, the Aegean and Cyprus and the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, but the explanation of what sort of factors were at play depends on a specific destroyed site. Egyptian sources indicate a destructive wave of people coming towards Egypt, but do not mention any attacks on the specific towns in the Southern Levant.[91] They place the destruction to ca 1175, but as mentioned, the Low Chronology would date the destructions in Philistia into a later period (ca. 1125).[92]

Alongside the dating problems, the lack of written sources after Merneptah's rule and lack of adequate archaeological finds makes it generally impossible to tell who was responsible for the destruction of specific settlements or parts of them. Michael Hasel has concluded that at least based on Egyptian iconography and textual records, Egyptians did not burn towns. If so, the conflagrations in the settlements should indicate that someone else attacked these towns.[93] However, one has to take into account that Egyptian propaganda may have differed considerably from the historical reality.

Despite the dating problems and the difficulties of identifying the attackers (or whether the damage was caused by humans at all), it cannot be denied that numerous destructions happened in the 12th century. Sometimes, like in Lachish, the destruction was followed by the abandonment of the settlement.[94] It is not clear if any other city-states survived the crisis (or until the 12th century) either, even if the settlements were not destroyed. This hints at least to

Egyptians abandoned it when the "Sea Peoples" attacked, as it is not only unfinished, but the lack of more proper foundation, for example, may point to a hurried building process (AJA 2009, 66-67).

[89] Igor Kreimerman has shown that destructions in the Southern Levant can be divided into types, varying from total destruction to limited action against public buildings or fortifications (KREIMERMAN 2017).

[90] BEN-TOR and ZUCKERMAN 2008, 2.

[91] See about the „Sea Peoples" and Medinet Habu above and for example in CLINE and O'CONNOR 2003.

[92] See above.

[93] HASEL 1998, 191-192.

[94] BRYCE 2009, 402; USSISHKIN 2004, 69-72, 76.

a two-fold change in the political system: the disappearance of the Egyptian dominance and along with that the possible collapse of the vassal city-state system.

There are several signs pointing to the Egyptians' gradual loss of control over the Southern Levant in the 12th century. It seems that no new "governor's buildings" or fortresses were built there after the beginning of the 12th century: the last ones like the rebuilding Tel Mor citadel or Ashkelon garrison building took place at the end of the 13th or in the early 12th century.[95] There is one exception: based on C14 dating the gate of the fortress in Jaffa was still being repaired.[96] The main argument for attesting the Egyptian presence and dating the Egypt's loss of control over the Southern Levant is the disappearance of items bearing the names of Egyptian pharaohs after Ramesses VI.[97] Not all of these items are useful for dating the period when Egyptians still had some control or influence over the area. For example, scarabs and two finger-rings without provenance with the names of Ramesses IV and VI were obtained in Deir el-Balah.[98] Even the items found in archaeological contexts, like jewelry and scarabs, say little about political control (although can be used for dating). Somewhat more reliable findings, like a stone block of Ramesses IV in Tel Delhamiya and a bronze statue base of Ramesses VI in Megiddo, may indicate Egyptian control, although they have also been found out of their original context.[99] One indicator that Egypt may have still ruled some coastal areas at the time of Ramesses VI is the destruction of the gates of Jaffa – an Egyptian stronghold – around the time of his rule.[100] Strong Egyptian influence during the reigns of Ramesses IV to VI can be concluded from numerous small items found from Serabit el-Khadem and the Timna mines.[101]

In the middle of the 12th century there is, with few exceptions, a gap among the written sources mentioning the Southern Levant. Weinstein points out that there are three Egyptian officials connected to the time of Ramesses III from Megiddo, Timna and Beth Shean.[102] Papyrus Harris I, written during the reign of Ramesses IV, also mentions the Southern Levant.[103] It seems, then, that Ramesses III held onto the Southern Levant, and there are many items with

[95] AJA 2009, 66; MORRIS 2005, 772-773.

[96] BURKE et al. 2017, 126-127.

[97] See for example WEINSTEIN 1992 and FINKELSTEIN 2000.

[98] FINKELSTEIN 2000, 161-162. These items, or at least some of them, have been obtained from the black market and nothing ties them to any archaeological context, despite the fact that they were bought near the Deir el-Balah.

[99] The Megiddo statue base was not found in its supposed original stratum FELDMAN 2009, 192. The Tel Delhamiya block was found on the surface WEINSTEIN 1992, 146.

[100] There were at least two destruction events in the second half of the 12th century, with the latter probably bringing an end to the Egyptians' fortress. The dating is based on radiocarbon data BURKE et al. 2017, 126-127.

[101] WEINSTEIN 1992, 146.

[102] WEINSTEIN 1992, 146.

[103] It mentions a temple in Djahy HASEL 2009, 9.

his name found there.[104] The proposal by Shirly Ben-Dor Evian, that the Medinet Habu reliefs represent an Egyptian campaign to the Central Levant, is also worth considering.[105] In that case, Egypt during the reign of Ramesses III was more powerful than previously thought. However, these campaigns were not enough to save the empire. Gradually, dominance was lost, although if the statue base of Ramesses VI should indicate influence or even control over Megiddo, then this pharaoh still held onto the northern part of the Southern Levant and possibly Jaffa. Signs of Egyptian control disappeared after his time, which suggests that the empire had collapsed.[106] Written sources about the political situation in Canaan disappear until the Wenamun story from the 11th century, which implies that Egyptians had lost their influence, and respect towards them, in the Central Levant. However, the account is essentially a work of fiction.[107]

It is difficult, then, to pinpoint the time when Egyptians lost control over the Southern Levant. It seems to have disappeared at some time around the middle of the 12th century, but connecting the loss of dominance to a specific pharaoh may not be possible, or perhaps even not relevant given the short reigns of the pharaohs.[108] It is very likely that the collapse of the empire was a drawn-out process, during which the ability or interest to control some settlements and regions was lost. The reasons for this inability may have lied in Egypt's weakness at that period. Egyptians had to deal with an assassination attempt on Ramesses III, the short reigns of the succeeding pharaohs, the rise in grain prize and the workers' strike in Deir el-Medina.[109] Added to that were the fights against the Libyans to keep them away from the Delta.[110] For whatever reason the Egypt lost its dominance, the loss of control became a factor that deepened the distress in the Levant, as will be discussed below.

I will briefly discuss the issue of new people arriving in Philistia. New types of material like locally made Aegean Style ceramics (Philistine 1), hearths, loomweights and incised scapulae in Ekron, Gath, Ashkelon and Ashdod point to the arrival of a sizable number of people with western (Aegean, Cypriot) origin.[111] At the same time, local people using Canaanite material culture continued to inhabit the towns.[112] After a century of research, there are still considerable questions about the origin of these people, their connections to the "Sea Peoples", or to the Philistines, and the exact processes of their arrival. As noted above, some of these

[104] WEINSTEIN 1992, 146. Some are not directly named, like the reference on the inscription from Tel Sera that merely marks a ruler's year 22. But only Ramesses III ruled long enough in the 12th century to fit this description FINKELSTEIN 2000, 163.

[105] BEN-DOR EVIAN 2016, 163.

[106] Although, as mentioned above, the statue base may indicate other interactions than just political control.

[107] DEMAND 2012, 220-221; LICHTHEIM 2003, 89-93.

[108] See LESKO 1992, 154 and WEINSTEIN 1992, 147 for short reigns.

[109] LANGGUT et al. 2013, 165; WEINSTEIN 1992, 147.

[110] SPALINGER 2005, 235-245, 249.

[111] MAEIR et al. 2013, 1-15; YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 216-278.

[112] YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 240-241.

settlements (Ashdod, possibly Gath and Ekron) experienced destruction before the arrival of these western migrants. Although the destructions may be related to the settlement of the western migrants, who in turn may be the same people (the Peleset) mentioned among the hostile "Sea Peoples", it is also possible that the migrants arrived peacefully.[113] It is not clear how Egyptian control (or the lack of it) related to the arrival of the western migrants. The dating issue mentioned in the beginning of the article becomes important here. Not only are there debates over whether Philistine 1 pottery arrived ca. 1175 or ca. 1125, but as outlined above, the loss of the Egyptian control seems to be a drawn-out process, impossible to be dated accurately because of the ambivalence of archaeological material.[114]

Different scenarios can be and have been put forward depending on the chronological reconstructions and the ways the Egyptian sources are interpreted. One version sees the Egyptian records as accurate in principle, meaning that the western migrants were part of the "Sea Peoples" who were defeated by Ramesses III and settled in Philistia.[115] Another version supposes that the Egyptian records disguise the fact that Ramesses III had to accept the settlement of the "Sea Peoples" in Philistia and retained control only outside this region.[116] Israel Finkelstein and proponents of the Low Chronology would disconnect the "Sea Peoples" narrative from the settlement process in Philistia, dating the settlement process circa half a century later, after the end of the Egyptian empire in Levant and the collapse of strongholds like Megiddo.[117] All these reconstructions see the Egyptians as opposing the western settlers in some way or another.

However, it is possible that the Egyptians were not actively trying to stop the migration into their territory.[118] It cannot be said, who was behind the partial destructions in some towns of Philistia: besides western migrants these could have been other local raiders or other towns or

[113] See about the Philistines, the Peleset and western settlers above in the discussion about chronology.

[114] In addition, migration also can be a drawn-out process (YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 316-320), although the debates are about the first appearance of Philistine 1 pottery and not about the length of the migratory event. See about the dating above.

[115] FINKELSTEIN 2000, 159; Finkelstein and PIASETZKI 2007, 75.

[116] Trying to contain the settlers in Philistia: BARAKO 2013, 51; BLOCH-SMITH and NAKHAI 1999, 116.

[117] As mentioned above, they think that Medinet Habu refers to events taking place half a century before the western migrants settling in Philistia. The argument that relates specifically to Megiddo is that the settlement guarded the north-south route through the area and would have stopped any migration from happening. Thus, no large-scale migration could have happened before ca. 1130, when the settlement was destroyed USSISHKIN 1998, 214-217. This, of course, assumes that the migration was considerable. An additional assumption is that the migration process would have been violent and the Egyptians definitely opposed any such movement. However, migrants may have used the more difficult coastal route, travelled by sea or been peaceful and not posed a threat to the Egyptians. See about the coastal route in USSISHKIN (1998, 215-216), who is skeptical that it could have been used. For the possibility of sea-based migration see YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 102-113.

[118] The use of Low Chronology, of course, presumes that the migration happened after the collapse of the Egyptian dominance in Levant and the Egyptians would have not been in a position to oppose migrating people, whether they were peaceful or hostile.

even the Egyptians themselves.[119] If migrants arrived in smaller groups and settled the towns in the first half of the 12th century in the Egyptian controlled areas, then they would have been a threat to Egypt only if they were violent or wanted to break with the Egyptian empire.[120] If the new population was peaceful, it would not have threatened the Egyptians' authority. Although the Old Testament lists the former Egyptian center Gaza as one of the Philistine city-states, there is no proof that the people who settled Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gath took over Gaza in the 12th century.[121] Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Gaza is archaeologically largely unknown, and the first written source to refer to the Peleset and Gaza – the Onomasticon of Amenemope – lists Gaza, Askhelon and Ashdod before Peleset, but these words are not distinctly associated with each other.[122] It is therefore possible that the western settlers did not threaten Egyptians in Gaza.

In fact, both the Egyptians and the local residents may have felt the benefits of these new western settlers coming there. They would have provided additional workforce and boosted the defensive capabilities. Given that following their arrival there were developments in ceramics and extensive building work in a new style, the Egyptians or the local Canaanites may have also appreciated people with artisanal expertise,[123] especially as Mycenaean-style ceramics were appreciated in the Bronze Age Levant.[124]

What can be said with confidence about the late 13th and 12th century Canaan is limited due to the dating problems, the archaeological ambiguities and the scarcity of written sources. There were definitely at least limited destructions in some towns, even a destruction and abandonment of some former city-state centers (Lachish, Megiddo).[125] The Egyptian empire was seemingly in control of the region in the beginning of the 12th century, but the empire had collapsed by the end of the century. No archaeological or written evidence, at least, would indicate the contrary. During the 12th century new western migrants appeared in Philistia and settled there in numbers large enough to leave behind distinct material culture, but they lived in the same settlements with people who still used the Bronze Age Canaanite material culture.

[119] As Merneptah, for example, supposedly pacified Ashkelon: HASEL 1998, 178-180.

[120] Migrants may have arrived to Philistia over time and never formed a majority YASUR-LANDAU 2010, 294-295, 316-320.

[121] See about Philistine towns in the Bible in MACHINIST 2000, 57-59.

[122] BRYCE 2009, 250-251; GILBOA 2005, 47; HASEL 1998, 137-138; KILLEBREW 2005, 208. It is thought that the onomasticon originates from the period of Ramesses IX at the earliest, thus from the end of the 12th century: GILBOA 2005, 47.

[123] See about the ceramics in KILLEBREW 2005, 219-230 and the new architecture in AJA 2009.

[124] They were wide-spread in the Eastern Mediterranean, although not only as luxuries WIJNGAARDEN 2002, 275-280. See also SHERRATT 1998, 194-298.

[125] BRYCE 2009, 402; USSISHKIN 1998, 214-215; USSISHKIN 2004, 69-72, 76. See above for Lachish and Megiddo as city-states in the Amarna letters.

The influence of Egyptian control on the crisis in Levant

Given the collapse of the Egyptian empire and destruction of several towns, the processes in Levant – the crisis in a regional sense – could be connected to the general crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. There are signs that the climate changed in the 13th-12th century, which could have led to agricultural problems and famine.[126] At the same time the collapse of the Hittite empire and the palatial Mycenaean states brought about considerable political changes. These collapses may have been a result of a number of smaller problems (agricultural problems, raids, attacks by enemies, disputes over the throne in the Hittite empire) the cumulative effect of which proved fatal for the existing states.[127] Two notable city-states – Ugarit and Emar – were destroyed by the enemy raids and not settled again.[128] It seems that the change in the local climate and resulting agricultural pressure, attacks by hostile groups of people or other states, and imperial incapability to handle these crises caused considerable changes in the Eastern Mediterranean. This large-scale crisis can explain some of the events in Levant, but only when regional factors are also taken into account. It was not a crisis that brought destruction everywhere and many locations like Cyprus, Phoenicia or Carchemish, all of which either survived the crisis or even benefitted from it, were not negatively affected.[129]

The nature of the Egyptians' control over the Southern Levant can explain a part of what happened in the region: why were some settlements destroyed; why the political system seems to have collapsed; and even how did the situation favour the settling of migrants in Philistia. I will propose the main ways how the Egyptian power could have contributed to the crisis. However, the factors that will be outlined below represent preliminary suggestions, still to be further tested in the light of new finds and also further analysis of the current evidence.

Firstly, Egyptian military supremacy was important. Although the local city-states had military forces, at least in the Amarna Age, they were limited and were not a match for the organized Egyptian army.[130] In a situation where troubles in neighbouring regions and stress on the agriculture created favourable conditions for increased conflict in the Late Bronze Age, military forces would have become very important. The city-states or settlements (if the Egyptians were directly controlling these) would have depended on the Egyptian military for protection against both foreign and local elements. However, Egypt may have been overwhelmed by different conflicts (it had to guard its southern and western borders) and not

[126] LANGGUT et al. 2013. Famine or food-crisis is mentioned in Hittite, Egyptian and Ugaritic sources (ibid., 165).

[127] BRYCE 2005, 340-346; CLINE 2014, 128-132; HOFFNER JR. 1992, 49-51.

[128] YON 1992, 117.

[129] Cypriot construction projects were mentioned above. Phoenician towns could have benefitted from the destruction of potential competitors like Ugarit, although the expansion of Phoenician trade networks took centuries (see for example SHERRATT and SHERRATT 1993). Carchemish survived the crisis and became the center of an independent, although small, polity after the collapse of the Hittite empire, with the new ruler claiming the Hittite emperor's title „Great king": BRYCE 2005, 349-350; GÜTERBOCK 1992, 54-55; SINGER 2000, 28.

[130] See above.

willing or capable of sending support for small local polities or towns.[131] In this case the towns would have been more exposed to raids or attacks by enemies. This scenario seems to have taken place in Ugarit in the north, where the local military forces were weakened at the time the enemy came.[132] That is not to say that the Egyptians did not help at all. The "Sea Peoples" reliefs in Medinet Habu may at least partially reflect the historical conditions and the Egyptians' attempts to fight against some sort of enemy coming to Canaan. In that case, there seems to have been an enemy or enemies invading Canaan from elsewhere (many of the "Sea Peoples" are previously unknown in Egyptian records), who Egyptians defeated securing their Southern Levant territories.[133] However, no Egyptian campaigns into Levant were recorded after that point.

There was plenty of local competition from other towns, as indicated for the Amarna period, the people like the Apiru and the Shasu threatened and probably sometimes successfully attacked the settlements, and the western migrants or other groups moving into the region from outside could have also resorted to attacking the towns.[134] Neither can one exclude the Egyptians, who may have attacked the Canaanite cities when they acted against their interest.[135] However, neither the Medinet Habu texts nor the later Papyrus Harris reflect attempts to fight for or against the towns in South Levant, and it seems that the towns that were destroyed were destroyed by somebody else than by the Egyptians. The situation was worsened by another outcome of the Egyptian policy, or at least a factual result of the Egyptian dominance, namely the lack of city-walls.[136] This could explain how the towns could have easily fallen victim to even the smaller groups of raiders, who would have lacked resources and experience for siege-warfare.[137]

The economic policies of the Egyptians too played a role.[138] Supplying the Egyptian military and paying tribute and tax, especially if local autonomous polities still existed, was a burden for the towns. In peaceful periods the strains were not as serious because an imperial power would be interested in vassal-states being able to pay tribute and taxes or supplying the army.[139] Supplying Egypt with food and materials or luxury goods in a time of crisis may have

[131] See about the Libyans in SPALINGER 2005, 235-245, 249. See about interactions with the Nubians in MORRIS 2005, 782-788.

[132] At least the king of Ugarit informed the king of Alashiya that his forces and navy were away in a letter sent at some time before the destruction of the town: WACHSMANN 2000, 104.

[133] See above for Medinet Habu and the "Sea Peoples".

[134] BRYCE 2009, 269, 626. See about the western settlers above.

[135] As noted above, campaigns by Seti I and Merneptah are examples from an earlier period.

[136] BUNIMOVITZ 1998, 104.

[137] Of course, even large well-defended towns, like Ugarit, fell victim to enemy attacks: CLINE 2014, 149-151; YON 2006, 31-34, although it is not wholly clear, if fortifications were still in use before the destruction: YON 2006, 31.

[138] See above.

[139] Although, see DEVER 1992, 105 and the authors referred to in there for a quite a bleak reconstruction of the Egyptian policy, which was already exhausting resources in the 14th century. Spalinger 2005, 135, however, notes that the

been too much. Even famine would not be excluded from the possible scenario, although not very likely as there is no mention of famine in the Southern Levant. However, famine seems to have struck for example the Hittite empire. The Hittite king asked for food from his vassals, at least from Ugarit, and the latter had to justify why it did not send any, citing the lack of food as a reason.[140] Moreover, Pharaoh Merneptah claims to have sent food to the Hittites. It looks as though Egypt weathered this crisis, which might apply also for the nearby Southern Levant, although the price of grain in Egypt did eventually rise and it is not out of the question that Egypt demanded additional food or other resources from its vassals.[141] One has to keep the general lack of texts about Southern Levant in mind. The Egyptians nevertheless used the Canaanite food resources and human work-force, possibly even to the extent that caused towns to rise up or the local people to flee to other areas. The latter is one of the proposed reasons behind the increase of population in the Central Highlands.[142] A similar theory links the rise of Highland settlement to a collapse of the Egypt's control. This theory proposes that the Egyptians restricted people's movement, but when Egyptian dominance was fading the people were free to migrate to other regions like the Highlands, and did so.[143]

Tribute included luxury goods and metals, and to meet these requirements the vassal states must have continued to participate in the international trade not only for their own sake, but also for Egypt's.[144] However, the economic situation worsened due to disruptions to the trade routes and the loss of partners. In addition, Susan Sherratt has theorized that in the end of the Late Bronze Age there were more merchant operations outside of the rigid palace-controlled systems than before, increased access to bronze, and a spread of sub-elite products imitating elite art like decorated ceramics. This change would have disrupted the palace-controlled economy and left them out of the new networks.[145] The need to keep Egypt supplied with traditional goods may have put palaces in a position where they were unable to participate in this trade system of new goods. The Megiddo ivory hoard indicates that some trade or access to the luxury items still persisted.[146] These problems concerned the city-states. If the Egyptian

Amarna letters do not mention foodstuffs and Egyptian economic control, at least at that period, was not too exhaustive.

[140] Letter RS 18.038 in PARDEE 2003, 94-95.

[141] LANGGUT et al. 2013, 165.

[142] DEVER 1992, 105; DEVER 2017, 226; KILLEBREW 2005, 152; SPALINGER 2005, 134-135. The runaway Canaanite theory, of course, is highly debated as many other reasons for the increase in Highlands' settlement have also been proposed: the settlement of semi-nomadic, nomadic, or pastoral people and immigration from Trans-Jordan: DEVER 2017, 194-210; KILLEBREW 2005, 159, 182-185. A similar draining of workforce has been proposed as an explanation for the problems of Syrian city-states at the end of the Late Bronze Age: SADER 1992, 158.

[143] KILLEBREW 2005, 171.

[144] SPALINGER 2005, 134 and see above. The fact that both luxuries and metals were moved in international trade, is seen from many sources, although wrecks like Uluburun illustrate that trade in the best way: PULAK 1998.

[145] SHERRATT 1998, 294-301, 306-307; SHERRATT 2016, 290-298.

[146] See above.

control over the Levantine settlements was more direct, then it is possible that the settlements were not that extensively exploited, especially when long-distance trade goods were in question, as Egyptian officials would have known the capacity of local settlements intimately.

The last problem of the Egyptian hegemony has to do with the political control in general, and the inability of the city-states or settlements to adapt to the new situation. The rule of the Egyptian empire brought about a long relatively stable period for the city-states. For the southern states there were only two military threats: other local city-states and Egypt. Fear of the latter would have kept the city-states from forming alliances, especially if Egypt's presence increased during the Late Bronze Age. Along with the lack of military protection it became a serious issue when Egypt withdrew its presence, while new foreign or local enemies started to attack.[147] There was no time to build up fortifications, armies and alliances in the changing situation, while Egypt did not seem to be able or willing to help. It is not clear, if local conflicts or external forces were behind the destruction, abandonment or the settlement of western migrants, but it seems that the local settlements or polities had to increasingly fend for themselves. Some settlements (like Lachish) were abandoned, while settlements in Philistia saw the arrival of new people.[148] At the same time the Egyptian empire either lost its hold on Levant against its intentions, or because of the problems in Egypt proper it felt no need to hold onto Levant.

I would also propose that the slow collapse of the empire benefitted the settlement of the people arriving from west. However, the question how exactly this took place depends on which reconstruction of the settlement process one would accept. If the migrants from west were hostile and attacked the towns of Philistia before settling in them, then the unfortified towns, which were incapable of effectively protecting themselves, or did not even have local government anymore, were an easy target. Ashkelon is a good example. The town was attacked and pacified by Merneptah at the end of the 13th century, according to the pharaoh's account, and an Egyptian-style garrison building was subsequently built there. The Egyptians, in turn, seems to have abandoned the town before finishing their structure.[149] This indicates that the autonomous city-state had come to an end and the settlers from the west could have easily taken over the town. Other towns may have also lacked a local government to organize defence while not getting any help from the Egyptians. A different reconstruction is also possible. If the new settlers from the west were not hostile and the migration was peaceful, then Egyptians may have not seen them as a danger at all and may have let them settle there. The locals could have appreciated the benefits of the migrants arriving and settling the towns alongside them, as the newcomers provided additional workforce, defence capability and craft expertise in a period when uncertainty was rising and the political system on which the towns had relied on

[147] DEVER 2017, 104.

[148] See above.

[149] AJA 2009, 66-67; HASEL 1998, 180, 261. As mentioned, they may have also fled the settlement: AJA 2009, 66-67.

so far was collapsing. The exact circumstances and nature of this western migration into Philistia are, however, dependent on dating, which has remained ambiguous.

Conclusion

During the Late Bronze Age, the region of the Southern Levant was under the Egyptian dominance. Egypt controlled the area through military, economic and political hegemony, although local city-states could act relatively autonomously. Over time, the Egyptians' direct control may have increased, but there are signs in Megiddo and in the Egyptian written sources that city-states survived the 13th century. The events at the end of that century and at the beginning of the 12th century, during the crisis affecting the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean, also considerably affected the Southern Levant. Several settlements, including former city-state centers, were destroyed, abandoned or saw the arrival of new people from the west, while Egypt withdrew from the region. The dating of the destructions and the retreat of the Egyptians from the area in the 12th century is debated, but at least the Egyptian retreat probably took place gradually over a long period of time. Yet, the Egyptian policy and influence in the region played an important role in worsening the crisis.

Firstly, the Egyptian forces had previously attacked the area, and Egypt was not interested in having strong vassals, which may have led to a policy banning fortifications, and maybe even large armies, for the city-states. As the result, during the unstable 12th century local settlements were left without adequate defenses to oppose attacks by raiders, people of other settlements, foreigners and possibly even the Egyptians.

Secondly, in the time of crisis and possibly even famine, the Egyptian empire was probably using local supplies and goods. The vassal states and settlements had to supply these. But contributions became more difficult to give when the agricultural situation worsened and trade networks disintegrated.

Lastly, as the political system changed in a short time, the city-states had not enough time to adapt to the changing conditions, to start building fortifications, armies, trade networks and alliances. The previous long dependence on the empire for security had reduced the willingness to make changes, which could besides have angered the Egyptians.

Although the crisis in the Southern Levant was created by climate change, the economic changes and the increased regional insecurity, the Egyptian control of the area in the Late Bronze Age probably had effects which rather deepened the crisis than alleviated it.

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