

THE CITY OF SHARUHEN, THE HYKSOS, AND KING AHMOSE

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This article reconsiders the archaeological evidence for the ancient site of Sharuhen in southern Palestine, its ties to the Hyksos in Egypt, and King Ahmose's motivation for attacking Sharuhen after driving the Hyksos out of Avaris. It also reviews the evidence for destruction levels at ancient sites in Palestine, and whether or not King Ahmose's army could have been responsible for them.

Once the Hyksos city of Avaris in the Delta had fallen, King Ahmose followed the "Way of Horus" out of Egypt, from the border point at Sile into Palestine. There the Egyptian king besieged and sacked the city of Sharuhen. The soldier Ahmose son-of-Ebana gives a rather terse description of the taking of the city in the autobiographical inscription in his tomb.

Then Sharuhen was besieged for three years.
His Majesty plundered it. Then I bought plunder
from there, women-3, hand-1. ¹

Ahmose son-of-Ebana states no reason for the Egyptian king's attack on Sharuhen. It is possible that the Hyksos fleeing from Avaris holed up there. Since Ahmose son-of-Ebana says that it took three years to reduce the city, either Sharuhen was very well-fortified, or the Egyptian troops were not organized enough to carry out a sustained, and effective, military attack away from the support available in Egypt.

The ancient city of Sharuhen has been identified with the site of Tell el-Far'a South, south of Gaza in the Negev. ² In his excavation report Petrie speaks of the Egyptian conquest of the fortress of Tell el-Far'a by Ahmose, but nothing in his report indicates a destruction level, or any evidence of destruction. ³ More recently an

¹ *Urkunden IV*, p. 4, line 14f.

² w.F. Albright, "Progress in Palestinian Archaeology during the Year 1928", *BASOR*, 33, 1929, p.7.

³ W.M.F. Petrie, *Beth-pelet I*, BSAE, 1930. Also G.E. Wright, "The Archaeology of Palestine", *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, New York, 1965, chart 6, and W.G. Dever, "The Beginning of the Middle Bronze Age in Syro-Palestine", *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, New York, 1978, chart 2, list Tell el-Far'a as a site with a major destruction at the end of the Middle Bronze Age.

identification with the site of Tell el-Ajjul has been favored. Kempinski argues that Tell el-Far'a South is a small, isolated site, not strategically positioned, and has produced rather poor archaeological finds, particularly lacking in Hyksos material. Tell el-Ajjul, however, was well-fortified, aided by a major harbor, and located at the junction of important trade routes.⁴

The site of Tell el-Ajjul was excavated in the 1930's.⁵ Petrie uncovered two levels, City and Palace I, and City and Palace II, both of which were destroyed by burning which left a thick layer of ash. Because the excavation was carried out with little attention to stratigraphic control, radically different dates have been suggested for these two destruction levels. One interpretation is that the first destruction is tied to a campaign of Ahmose, while the second destruction level is placed in the fifteenth century, perhaps connected with a campaign by Tuthmosis III.⁶ The second interpretation places the first destruction of the city in the Middle Bronze Age, and then the second destruction is tied to King Ahmose.⁷ In either interpretation, Tell el-Ajjul has a destruction level at the end of the Second Intermediate Period/beginning of the New Kingdom, and so the historical evidence of the Ahmose son-of-Ebana inscription and the archaeological evidence at the site tie together.

Clearly, the nature of the relationship between the Hyksos and Sharuhén must have been the determining factor in Ahmose's attack and besiege of the city. The Egyptian king may have attacked other cities in southern Palestine, as well, and this will be discussed below. Some scholars have suggested, based on Hyksos material found at Palestinian sites, that the Hyksos may have had an empire or province there.

⁴ A. Kempinski, "Tell el-Ajjul-Beth Aglayim or Sharuhén" *JEL*, 24, 1974, pp. 145-152. Identification accepted by M. Bietak, "Egypt and Canaan During the Middle Bronze Age", *BASOR*, 281, 1991, p. 64, n. 46.

⁵ See the reports by W.M.F. Petrie, *Ancient Gaza*, BSAE, 1931-1934.

⁶ See J. R. Stewart, *Tell el-Ajjul*, Goteborg, 1974, p. 60-61. Both Wright, *loc. cit.*, and Dever, *loc. cit.*, agree with this dating. The next reference to Sharuhén is in the regnal year 22 Annals of Tuthmosis III, *Urkunden* IV, 647, line 12, to 648, line 7.

⁷ This is suggested by Stewart in his postscript, *op. cit.*, p. 62-63, and followed by Kempinski, *op. cit.*, p. 149ff.

If Palestine had been part of Hyksos territory, it would have been logical for king Ahmose to invade and destroy Palestinian cities in order to preempt any continuing Hyksos threat to Egypt. On the other hand, if the Hyksos had simply fled to Sharuhem hoping for protection because of ties between them and the population of the city, King Ahmose may have considered destruction of the city sufficient for his purposes, and not campaigned further into Palestine.

The scholars supporting the idea of a Hyksos empire in Palestine do so primarily on the basis of Hyksos pottery and scarabs found there. Giveon in particular cites the presence of Hyksos scarabs as proof of an empire.¹⁰ Weinstein, following the a priori assumption "that the underlying cause behind the campaign(s) of Ahmose was a desire to destroy the hated Hyksos cities",¹¹ decided that the find-spots of Hyksos scarabs in Palestine would indicate Hyksos power centers. Based on the distribution of these scarabs, he concluded that the cities of southern and inland Palestine south of the Plain of Esdraelon were Hyksos power centers, and the city of Sharuhem was their base of operations.¹² This is based on the fact that eighteen Hyksos royal name scarabs were found at Tell el-Ajjul, and that from one to four were found at other sites.¹³

Yet, do scarabs indicate an empire? Hundreds of Hyksos-type seal impressions, including those with royal names, as well as scarabs and Tell el-Yahudiyah ware were found at Kerma in Upper Nubia.¹⁴ In Lower Nubia, Hyksos

¹⁰ The identifying traits of Hyksos culture have been shown to be traits of the Middle bronze Period in Syro-Palestine in general, and Hyksos culture is an outgrowth of Canaanite culture. See the conclusion of W.G. Dever, "Relations Between Syro-Palestine and Egypt in the Hyksos Period", Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Age, London, 1985, p. 79.

¹¹ See R. Giveon, "Hyksos Scarabs with Names of Kings and Officials from Canaan", CdE, 49, 1974, p. 222-223, and "New Egyptian Seals with Titles and Names from Canaan", Tel Aviv, 3, 1976, p. 127ff. He is followed in this by M. Gorg, Die Beziehungen Zwischen dem alten Israel und Agypten, Darmstadt, 1997, p. 21.

¹² J. Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment", BASOR, 241, 1981, p. 7.

¹³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10 and fig. 3.

¹⁵ G. Reisner, Excavations at Kerma, Cambridge, 1920, vols. II-III, p. 75, p. 76, fig. 168, p. 81, p. 83, p. 86, pl. 40, and vol. IV-V, fig. 264, nos. 23-26.

material, predominantly Tell el-Yahudiyah ware, but also royal name scarabs, have been found at all the Second Cataract sites and farther north at Aniba.¹⁴ Yet, no scholar has supposed a Hyksos empire in Nubia based at Kerma.¹⁵

Bietak has suggested Hyksos domination over southern Palestine, and even the "formation of a Middle Bronze Age Delta province including southern Palestine", on the basis of the distribution of late Tell el-Yahudiyah ware.¹⁶ At the same time Bietak points out the presence of late Tell el-Yahudiyah ware at Aniba and Buhen, and yet relates its presence there to a trade relationship. Why can't a trade relationship also explain the presence of this same pottery in southern Palestine?

The Hyksos, although they originated from the Middle Bronze culture of contemporary Syro-Palestine, should be considered a separate group. Based on a study of burial practices, Stiebing concludes that there was no burial in Palestine that could be attributed to the Hyksos, and this "would seem to lend support to the view that the term Hyksos should be confined to Lower Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period."¹⁷ A study of Hyksos pottery supports this view, stating that culturally "the Hyksos were peculiarly Egyptian".¹⁸ Dever agrees, suggesting that Tell el-Dab'a was the seat of a "local Canaanite dynasty" and that the fortified cities of Palestine were "sister city-states".¹⁹

Why did King Ahmose go against Sharuhen? Were the Hyksos chased out of

¹⁴ The greatest amount of Hyksos material has come from burials at Buhen, Mirgissa and Aniba. Other Lower Nubian sites have produced a single scarab or sherd. This material is reviewed in F. Sabbahy, Prelude to Empire: Egyptian Military Policy and Activity in the Early New Kingdom. University of California at Berkeley, unpub. dissertation, 1986, pp. 117-125.

¹⁵ In his early Aegypten und Nubien, Lund, 1941, p. 126, T. Save Soderbergh suggested Hyksos domination in Upper Nubia, but revised his opinion in "The Nubian Kingdom of the Second Intermediate Period", Kush, 4, 1956, p. 60. Some of his work claimed Hyksos domination over Lower Nubia, but only on the basis of their taking administrative control over the area from the Middle Kingdom Egyptians, see "A Buhen Stela from the Second Intermediate period", JEA, 35, 1949, p. 56, and "The Hyksos Rule in Egypt", JEA, 37, 1951, p. 61-62 and p. 65-66.

¹⁶ M. Bietak, "Canaanites in the Eastern Nile Delta", Egypt, Israel and Sinai, Tel Aviv University, 1987, p. 55, and "Egypt and Canaan During the Middle Bronze Age", p. 60.

¹⁷ W.H. Stiebing, "Hyksos Burials in Palestine: A Review of the Evidence", JNES, 30, 1971, p. 117.

¹⁸ C. Redmount, "Ethnicity, Pottery, and the Hyksos at Tell el-Maskhuta in the Egyptian Delta", BA, 58, 1995, p. 188.

¹⁹ Dever, op. cit., p. 79-80.

the Delta and surrounded at this city? The Hyksos were ethnically related to the inhabitants of the city, and the presence of royal name scarabs seems to show that Avaris and Sharuhén had a close commercial and diplomatic relationship. There does not seem to be sufficient evidence, however, to conclude that the Hyksos had any kind of empire in southern Palestine, and so fled to Sharuhén as one of "their" cities. Furthermore, did Ahmose then attack and destroy other cities in Palestine? Unfortunately there is no more clear inscriptional evidence from his reign for attacks on specific Palestinian cities, but there is a great deal of evidence in the nature of destruction levels at Palestinian sites. In the rather broad period from Middle Bronze IIC to Late Bronze I, that is, from the Hyksos Period to the sole reign of Tuthmosis III, well more than a dozen Palestinian sites have unquestioned destruction, and several more sites were completely abandoned. The problem comes in trying to correlate a destruction level with a specific Egyptian military campaign.²⁰

Scholarly debate over these destruction levels has been renewed,²¹ and is worthy of a review here. Destruction levels or clear breaks in occupation are present at the following sites:

1. Achzib-Destruction layer at the end of Middle Bronze IIC²²
2. Askalon-Level IV layer of ash dated Middle Bronze.²³
3. Tell Beit Mirsim-Stratum D, late Middle Bronze IIC destroyed by fire.²⁴
4. Bethel-Destruction layer in both Middle Bronze IIB and IIC levels.²⁵

²⁰ Difficulty with this also pointed out by W.G. Dever, "The Chronology of Syria-Palestine in the Second Millennium B.C.", *Agypten und Levant*, III, 1992, p. 48.

²¹ See J.K. Hoffmeier, "Reconsidering Egypt's Part in the Termination of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine", *Levant*, 21, 1989, pp. 181-193 who concludes that Egyptian inscriptional evidence cannot account for this destruction, and therefore it was not caused by the Egyptians. Rebuttal pointing out the importance of the archaeological evidence is given by W.G. Dever, "Hyksos, Egyptian Destructions, and the End of the Palestinian Bronze Age", *Levant*, 22, 1990, pp. 75-81, and J. Weinstein, "Egypt and the Middle Bronze IIC/Late Bronze IA Transition in Palestine", *Levant*, 23, 1991, pp. 105-115.

²² M.W. Prausnitz, "The Planning of the MB Age Town at Achzib", *IEJ*, 25, 1975, p. 107.

²³ W.J. Phythian-Adams, "Report on the Stratification of Askalon", *PEFQS*, 1923, pp. 63, fig. 4.

²⁴ W.F. Albright, *The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim*, AASOR, 1938, p. 11.

²⁵ W.F. Albright and J.C. Kelso, *The Excavation of Bethel*, AASOR, 39, 1968, p. 25 and p. 46.

5. Beth-shemesh-Site abandoned at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty.²⁶
6. Beth-zur-Middle Bronze II city destroyed.²⁷
7. Dan-Area 4 Middle Bronze II covered with ash.²⁸
8. Gezer-Stratum 7 violently destroyed.²⁹
9. Hazor-Stratum 3 Middle Bronze II destroyed by fire.³⁰
10. Jericho-Major destruction at the end of the Middle Bronze Period.³¹
11. Tell el-Jerishe-Fortress destroyed at the end of Middle Bronze.³²
12. Lachish-Middle Bronze Level VIII destroyed by fire.³³
13. Tell Malhata-Defences destroyed in Middle Bronze IIC.³⁴
14. Tell Megadim-Site abandoned after Middle Bronze II.³⁵
15. Meggido-Possible redating of destruction to end of Middle Bronze II.³⁶
16. Tell Mevorakh-Destruction at the end of Middle Bronze IIA and again in Middle Bronze IIC, stratum XII.³⁷
17. Tell Nagila-Ash layer is evidence of destruction of the Middle Bronze II city.³⁸
18. Shechem-Two closely spaced destruction levels in casement wall E and Building 7200.³⁹
19. Shiloh-Charcoal and ash in housing on one side of the tell.⁴⁰

²⁶ K. Kenyon, Palestine in the Time of the Eighteenth Dynasty, CAH, 1971, p. 24.

²⁷ O.R. Sellers et al., The 1957 Excavations at Beth-zur, AASOR, 48, 1968, p. 4.

²⁸ A. Biran, "Tel Dan", IEJ, 26, 1976, p. 205.

²⁹ W. Dever, et al., Gezer I, Jerusalem, 1970, p. 54-55.

³⁰ Y. Yadin, et al., Hazor I, Jerusalem, 1958, p. 103, and Hazor, London, 1972, p. 125.

³¹ K. Kenyon, "Excavations at Jericho, 1954", PEQ, 86, 1954, p. 61, and Archaeology of the Holy Land, New York, 1970, p. 197.

³² EAEHL, II, p. 578.

³³ D. Ussishkin, "Excavations at Tel Lachish", Tel Aviv, 5, 1978, p. 8 and p. 91.

³⁴ M. Kokhavi, "Tel Malhata", IEJ, 17, 1967, p. 273.

³⁵ EAEHL, III, p. 823.

³⁶ R. Gonen, "Megiddo in the late Bronze Age-Another Reassessment", Levant, XIX, 1987, p. 96-97.

³⁷ E. Stern, Excavations at tell Mevorakh, Qedem, 18, 1984, p. 69.

³⁸ EAEHL, III, p. 897.

³⁹ W. Dever, "The MBIC Stratification in the Northern Gate Area at Shechem", BASOR, 216, 1979, p. 39 and p. 45.

⁴⁰ M.L. Buhl and S. Holm-Nielsen, Shiloh, Copenhagen, 1969, p. 39 and p. 60.

20. Taanach-Middle Bronze IIC structure destroyed. ⁴¹

Can King Ahmose be tied to any of these destruction levels? An alabaster jar fragment from the Theban tomb of Ahmose-Nefertary refers to King Ahmose's "relaxing" in Kedem, or southern Lebanon. ⁴² Two other inscriptions from Ahmose's reign mention Fenehu, the term generally accepted as referring to the area of Canaan. ⁴³ The Masara quarry inscription of regnal year 22 mentions cattle of Fenehu either captured or brought as tribute, ⁴⁴ while the stela of King Ahmose from Karnak claims that "his war shout was in the land of Fenehu". ⁴⁵

The soldier Ahmose-pen-Nekhbet says of his service with King Ahmose:

I followed the King of Upper and Lower Egypt,
Ahmose, justified, I captured for him in Djahy,
prisoners-1, hands-1. ⁴⁶

Ahmose-pen-Nekhbet's military service stretched from the reign of Ahmose all the way through that of Tuthmosis III, so he must have begun his career very young in the last few years of King Ahmose. The area of Asia referred to by the term Djahy is problematical, but appears to refer to Palestine, particularly the northern and coastal part, as opposed to Retenu which was up in Syria. ⁴⁷

The cities of southern Palestine, for example Tell Nagila, Lachish and Tell Beit Mirsim, could have been attacked by King Ahmose's army in conjunction with the

⁴¹ P. Lapp, "Excavations at Tell Taanach", BASOR, 195, 1969, p. 25.

⁴² H. Carter, "Report of the Tomb of Zeser-Ka-Re, Amenhotep I", JEA, 3, 1916, p. 152 and pl. 21. Kedem is also mentioned as a place the Egyptian king campaigned in the gate inscription of Amenhotep I, D.B. Redford, "A Gate Inscription from Karnak and Egyptian Involvement in Western Asia", JAOS, vol. 99, 1979, p. 271. In the texts of Tuthmosis III Kedem is always next to or before Upper Retenu, for example, Urkunden IV, 775, 16; 776, 2; 777, 13.

⁴³ C. Vandersleyen, Les Guerres D'Amosis, Brussels, 1971, p. 119, and its review by D.B. Redford, BIOr, 30, 1973, p. 224.

⁴⁴ Urkunden IV, 25, 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18, 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35, 16-17.

⁴⁷ The term has been studied extensively by Vandersleyen, op. cit., pp. 91-100. See C. Epstein, "A New Appraisal of Some Lines from a Long-Known Papyrus", JEA, 49, 1963, pp. 45-56. S. Yelvin, "The Third District in Tuthmosis III's List of Palestinian-Syrian Towns", JEA, 36, 1950, pp. 51-62, and A. Gardiner, AEO, I, 182.

siege and destruction of Sharuhén. The cities of central Palestine, such as Gezer, Megiddo and Shechem, in the area referred to by the term Fenehu, could have been destroyed while King Ahmose went north up to the area of Kedem. Coastal towns, such as Tell Megadim and Achzib, in the area called Djahy could have been attacked in the campaign referred to by the biographical inscription of Ahmose-pen-Nekhbet.

Some scholars question the ability of King Ahmose's army to have wrought all of this destruction.⁴⁸ But, as Dever points out, even at a fairly massively fortified town, all that was really necessary "was to force the wooden city gate".⁴⁹ It also has to be kept in mind that these Palestinian towns were not particularly large. Weinstein calculates that both the Middle Bronze Age towns of Tell Beit Mirsim and Jericho would have fit in the area covered by the Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Ramses II.⁵⁰ These towns were not necessarily formidable, therefore, in either size or fortifications, and perhaps not even defended by an army as well-equipped or trained as the Egyptians. Clear inscriptional evidence or not, it remains to explain the widespread destruction in Palestine coinciding with the end of the Hyksos Period/⁵⁰ beginning of the New Kingdom, and that it was caused by the army of ancient Egypt is at present the most logical answer.

⁴⁸ Particularly D. B. Redford in "A Gate Inscription from Karnak and Egyptian Involvement in Western Asia", and *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, Princeton, 1992, and Hoffmeier, *loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ Dever, "Hyksos, Egyptian Destructions, and the End of the Palestinian Middle Bronze Age", p. 78.

⁵⁰ Weinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 108-109.