AMARNA LETTERS

AMARNA LETTERS. An important corpus of cuneiform documents found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt.

A. Discovery and Publication

In the late autumn of 1887 a woman of the bedouin tribe of Beni ʿAmrān discovered a number of tablets in the ruins near the village of Hajji Qandil. The place where the tablets were found is located on the eastern bank of the Nile, ca. 300 km south of Cairo and was called by scholars el-Amarna, after the name of the bedouin tribe. The site of el-Amarna was known to be the seat of Akhetaten ("the Horizon of Aten"), the residence of the Egyptian king Akhenaten, and the tablets unearthed there were part of the royal archive of the Pharaoh.

The local bedouin excavated the site and sold the tablets to a local dealer. The tablets were then sent to Upper Egypt and sold to the representatives of European museums. The Berlin museum got the majority (201 tablets), the British Museum (82 tablets), and the local museum of Cairo (51 tablets) also obtained large collections, and other museums and private persons bought numerous tablets (*PWCJS* 9: 11–14). Overall, 336 tablets are known today from this illegal dig. A certain part of the tablets was totally destroyed at that time, though it is impossible to verify their number (Knudtzon, Weber, and Ebeling 1915: 1–15; Sayce 1917).

A few years after the discovery, in 1891–92, a systematic excavation was conducted at the site by Sir Flinders Petrie (1894). He dug where the tablets were found (House No. 19) and its neighborhood and discovered 21 additional tablet fragments. In later years, three other archaeological expeditions worked at the site of el-Amarna (in 1911–14, 1921–23, 1926–37) and a further 23 tablet fragments were discovered. The overall number of tablets published is now 380 (Moran 1987; *PWCJS* 9: 3–16).

Publication of the Amarna tablets began soon after their discovery (Winckler and Abel 1889–90; Bezold and Budge 1892; Winckler 1896). A decisive step was made by J. A. Knudtzon, who systematically collated all tablets discovered until 1907 and published a comprehensive text edition (EA Nos. 1–358), accompanied by extensive historical commentary by O. Weber and detailed indexes by E. Ebeling (Knudtzon, Weber, and Ebeling 1915). At the same time, Schroeder (1915) published a new facsimile of the largest collection of Amarna tablets, that of the Berlin museum.

Twenty-two additional tablets were uncovered and published in various publications between 1915 and 1970 and were collected and edited in one volume by A. F. Rainey (1970). A final tablet was published by Walker (1979). Recently, W. L. Moran (1987) has published a new edition of all the letters, in which were included many new readings, extensive philological discussions, and detailed indexes. Moran's edition considerably advances the understanding of the corpus and marks a new stage in the research of the archive.

B. The Archive and Its Chronology

The tablets were discovered in the "office-house of the letters of Pharaoh," which was the place where the cuneiform staff of the foreign department must have been located. Of the corpus of 380 tablets, only 32 were not letters. These tablets served for the study of the art of cuneiform writing and reading. Among them were lexical texts (EA 351 54, 373), a list of gods (EA 374), syllabaries (EA 348, 350, 379), and literary texts (EA 340–41, 356–59, 375) (*PWCJS* 9: 27–33). These texts are closely related to well-known lexical and literary ancient Near Eastern tablets. Among the literary compositions one may note the Myth of Adapa, the Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, and the text entitled "The King of the Battle." Notable also is an Egyptian-Akkadian dictionary (EA 368), in which the Egyptian words are written syllabically by cuneiform signs.

The corpus of letters can be divided into two distinct groups: a small group of 44 letters that were exchanged between Egypt and other great powers and a much larger group of over 300 tablets that were exchanged between Egypt and vassal kingdoms in Canaan and northern Syria.

Numerous tablets written by the pharaohs either to "great kings" (EA 1, 5, 14, 31) or to vassal rulers (EA 99, 162–63, 190, 367, 369–70) were discovered among the Amarna tablets and may be regarded as letters that—for unknown reasons—were not dispatched abroad (i.e., they are not copies of the original letters) (Moran 1987: 19–20).

The city of Akhetaten (el-Amarna) was founded on virgin soil by Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) (ca. 1350–1334) in his 4th year and became his residency in his 7th year. It served as the capital city until his death and was abandoned by the royal court in the 3d year of Tutankhamen (ca. 1334–1325) (Hornung 1964: 79–94; Redford 1967: 156–62). However, the earlier tablets discovered in the archive were written in the last decade of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten's father. It is thus clear that many letters were brought from the previous capital (Thebes) to the new capital when the royal court moved there. These must have been those that were necessary for future correspondence. One may further assume that certain letters were taken from Akhetaten at the time of its abandonment. The number of letters transferred in both cases is unknown nor do we know how many tablets were destroyed when the archive was discovered and before the value of the tablets was recognized (Campbell 1964: 32–35). What was left at el-Amarna is a unique collection which is different in its assemblage from all other ancient Near Eastern archives (Riedel 1939; Campbell 1964: 35–36; Naʾaman 1981a: 173–74).

The archive covers less than thirty years (from ca. the 30th year of Amenhotep III to Tutankhamen's 3d year). The exact time span depends on whether or not there was a coregency between Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, a problem still debated by scholars (e.g., Kitchen 1962; Campbell 1964; Redford 1967; Kühne 1973; Krauss 1978).

C. Script and Language

The Amarna letters were written in cuneiform signs on clay tablets. The cuneiform script was already known in northern Syria in the 2d half of the 3d millennium B.C. (at Ebla). The Canaanite cuneiform tradition is rooted in the north Mesopotamian and north Syrian traditions of the OB period (18th–17th centuries B.C.) (Anbar and Na'aman 1986–87). Almost all the letters in the Amarna archive are written in Akkadian, i.e., an East Semitic language. Thus, letters exchanged between the Egyptian pharaohs and their vassals in Canaan were written in a language that was foreign to both. Akkadian (i.e., Babylonian) had acquired in the 14th century B.C. the status of an international language (*lingua franca*), by which kings reigning all over the Near East were able to communicate.

The art of reading and writing cuneiform was known only to a relatively small group of experts who studied this craft for a period of many years. The diffusion of the Amarna letters all over Canaan and the many local variants show that expert scribes were situated in all of the important kingdoms. Since all diplomatic correspondence was in their hands, they attained a high social position and had certain influence on the direction of foreign affairs. A number of letters (EA 286:61–64; 287:64–70; 286:62–66; 289:47–51; 316:16–20) illustrate how important it was at that time to find ways to flatter and patronize the Egyptian royal scribes.

A small number of letters to "great kings" were written in their local language, i.e., Assyrian (EA 15), Hurrian (EA 24), and Hittite (EA 31–32), while the rest were written in Akkadian, although the dialect of these letters is sometimes regarded as "peripheral." That is because the language of these letters has retained certain archaic features, such as sign forms, logograms, vocabulary, and grammar, which were considered "classical" in earlier periods but have already disappeared from the cuneiform tradition of Mesopotamia and have been preserved only in the western periphery (Moran 1987: 22–24).

Two cuneiform traditions may be detected in the Canaanite and north Syrian letters. The one is Hurro-Akkadian, which is typical of tablets emanating from the north, that is, Hurrian-speaking kingdoms that were governed and influenced by Mitanni (Wilhelm 1970; Izre'el 1985; Moran 1987: 24–27). The other tradition is widespread in all areas of Canaan and was strongly influenced by the current West Semitic language. The grammar of these documents was so deeply transformed by the local language and dialects that the letters may be regarded as being "West Semitized" (Rainey 1975: 395). The Canaanite Amarna letters (with the exception of the letters from Jerusalem and Tyre: see Moran 1975a; Grave 1980: 216–18; 1982: 178–79) may be regarded as eastern in their vocabulary and as western in their grammar (Moran 1987: 27). It goes without saying that they constitute a very important source for the study of the dialects current in Canaan in the 14th century B.C. (Moran 1950; 1960; 1965; Rainey 1971; 1973; 1975; 1978; Izre'el 1978).

D. The International Correspondence

The relations between Egypt and the other great powers of the ancient Near East occupy a central place in the correspondence. The latter powers were Babylon (EA 1–14), Assyria (EA 15–16), Mitanni (EA 17, 19–30), Arzawa (EA 31–32), Alashia (EA 33–40), and Hatti (EA 41–44). Their kings called each other by proper names (Alashia is an exception) and expressed their equal political status by the addressing formula (e.g., "Say to PN, king of GN . . . thus says PN₂, king of GN₂ . . ."), by the denomination "brother" (i.e., a king of equal rank), and by employing the same words for greeting. Moreover, only they were entitled to be called "great king," that is a king who was a suzerain of vassal states and was equal in his political status to the other great powers (Moran 1987: 62).

The "great kings" exchanged messengers who traveled between the capital cities and transmitted letters, verbal messages, and gifts from one court to another. These gifts had symbolic as well as economic value (Liverani 1972; Zaccagnini 1973). Bringing a gift was an inseparable element of the international correspondence; but gifts were also supposed to be of equal value and there are many complaints in the letters about the inferior quality and the poor value of received gifts. Egypt was the source of gold for all other countries and there are many requests in the letters for Egyptian gold (Edzard 1960). The correlation between good relations and expensive gifts is illustrated by the words of a Babylonian king who described a reaction to a previous rich shipment of gold by the words (EA 11 rev. 21–23): "The gold [is abundant. Among] the kings there are brotherhood, friendliness, peace and [good] relations. [He is] rich with precious stones, rich with silver, rich with [gold]."

Exchanging gifts was sometimes regarded as a kind of indirect commerce, but there were also direct commercial relations, both by land and at sea, between the great powers, and as a rule every king was responsible for the safety of the foreign merchants who stayed in the territories under his authority. Thus, when his merchants were robbed and murdered at Ḥannathon, the king of Babylon wrote to the king of Egypt (EA 8:25–33): "Canaan is your land and its kings are your servants. It was in your land that I have been robbed. Investigate them and repay the money that they took. Execute the men who slew my servants and avenge their blood. But if you do not slay these men, they will do it again and attack either one of my caravans or even your messengers and relations will be cut off between us."

Diplomatic marriage between a "great king" and the daughter of another is well attested in the letters (Pintore 1978). It was always the Pharaoh, however, who married foreign princesses and brought them to his harem. Egyptian kings refused to marry their daughters to other kings and to send them abroad (EA 4:6–7): "From old, the daughter of an Egyptian king has not been given in marriage to anyone") (Pintore 1978: 78–79; Schulman 1979). Thus, Amenhotep III, who enjoyed a long reign of 38 years, married two Babylonian princesses, two Mitannian princesses, and one from Arzawa (Schulman 1979: 183–84). Marriages between kings were negotiated by the two courts and the marriage gifts were an important (though delicate) element within the negotiation. Indeed, the richest lists of gifts known from the Amarna archive were recorded on such occasions (EA 14, 22). The foreign princesses did not attain the position of "great wife of the

king" (i.e., queen) in the Egyptian harem but remained wives of second rank (Schulman 1979: 183).

The Amarna archive is our earliest witness for the international character of the Late Bronze Age. These relations were first established in the 15th century and lasted (though with considerable changes) until the end of the 13th century, encompassing all major civilizations of western Asia. The great powers divided among themselves the entire civilized world, each dominating its vassals, and established a set of strict rules for international correspondence (Kestemont 1974).

Impressive as it is, one should not be dazzled by the polite tone and the external gestures that find expression in the international correspondence. Much more important than all these were the *realpolitik* and the actual struggle for power and for dominion, and indeed, these struggles dominated international relations in the late stages of the Amarna period.

Since the 15th century B.C., the kingdom of Mitanni had been a strong power whose vassal's border in Syria reached the northern boundary of the land of Canaan. In the course of the Amarna period, Šuppiluliumas, the Hittite king, conducted several campaigns against Mitanni and conquered the former Mitannian vassal kingdoms in northern Syria, thus reviving the Hittite's old claims over these areas. Aššur-uballiṭ, king of Assyria, took advantage of the situation and attacked the crumbling kingdom of Mitanni in order to expand the Assyrian territories. At the same time he tried to be recognized as a "great king" by the other western Asiatic great powers and to establish with them diplomatic relations (EA 15–16) (Artzi 1978).

The immediate result of the Hittite expansion to northern Syria was the deterioration of Hittite-Egyptian relations. Both kingdoms claimed domination over Amurru and Kadesh (Qidshu) and the armed struggle between the two powers is mentioned in the latest letters of the archive and would last for several decades (Kitchen 1962; Helck 1971: 168–214; Krauss 1978; Murnane 1985).

E. The Vassal Letters

The majority of the letters in the archive were sent by the vassals in Canaan and in northern Syria. The latter's tablets were probably sent at a relatively late stage when Mitanni, their overlord, was defeated by the Hittites and they addressed Egypt for help (Redford 1967: 216–25; Naʾaman 1975: 15–17, 210–14, 229–30). There are also seven letters (EA 99, 162–63, 190, 367, 369–70) that were addressed by the Pharaoh to his vassals in Canaan (see above). One may easily compare the ways in which one side addressed the other.

The humiliated tone of the vassal letters as against the commanding words of the letters of the pharaohs is the most conspicuous formal trait of the correspondence. In spite of regional variations, the vassal letters closely resemble each other in their words. "Speak to the king, my lord . . . ; thus says PN, your servant . . ." is typical of the addresses to letters in which the lord-vassal relations are deliberately emphasized. The Pharaoh is only called by the title "king" (with the exception of the two northern letters from Qatna, EA 53:1 and 55:1). Greeting formulas are quite rare, the main exception being the letters of Byblos (e.g., "Rib-Addi speaks to his lord, king of all countries, the great king, king of the battle. May the Lady of Byblos give strength to the king, my lord."). In place of greetings in the introductions to most of the letters one finds expressions of humiliation emphasizing the inferior status of the vassal as against his lord. To illustrate the introduction of a vassal letter we shall translate a typical south Canaanite letter (EA 328:1–16):

> To the king, my lord, my god, my Sun, the Sun from heaven; thus says Yabni-ilu, the ruler of Lachish, your servant, the dust under your feet, the groom of your horses. At the feet of the king, my lord, my god, my Sun, the Sun from heaven, I have fallen seven and seven times, on the belly and on the back.

The king, on the other hand, addressed his vassals by short words: "To PN, ruler of GN, speak! Thus [says] the king." There is no greeting and the tenor of the letters is a combination of commands and threats.

However, the commanding tone of the royal letters and the humiliated expressions of the vassals should not obscure the historical reality. When examining the letters, it becomes clear that the vassals enjoyed much more freedom than one may deduce from the formal analysis of the letters and often they operated on their own behalf, contrary to the obvious Egyptian interests in the land of Canaan.

The major events occurring within the land of Canaan during the Amarna period were the foundation of the strong kingdom of Amurru in the north and the expansion of Labʾayu of Shechem and his sons in central Palestine. The first episode is directly linked with the armed struggle between Mitanni and Hatti over the domination of Syria. The rulers of Amurru took advantage of the situation and greatly expanded their territory along the coast and the middle Orontes Valley. During the last stages of the archive, ʿAziru of Amurru was still an Egyptian vassal, but soon afterward he had signed a vassal treaty with the Hittites, thus transgressing his oath to the Pharaoh and joining his enemies (Klengel 1969: 178–208, 245–99; Altman 1973).

The offensive of Labʾayu of Shechem and his sons was motivated by the desire to expand their territory and become the strongest and most influential power in the country and by their hatred of the newly established Egyptian centers of government, in particular that of Beth-shean (Campbell 1965; Naʾaman 1975: 27–46; Spalinger 1983: 96). They formed a powerful coalition that included Gezer in the south and Gath-Carmel in the north. A countercoalition, headed by the kings of Megiddo and Acco and supported by the Egyptian authorities, was formed in reaction and succeeded in bringing the Shechemite offensive to an end.

When examining the Amarna letters it is clear that the ambitions of local rulers, the power of the nonurban elements in local affairs, and the readiness of Egypt to interfere and operate in local disputes were the principal factors that influenced internal affairs in Canaan. Egypt was strong enough to quell all rebellions and to bring to an end all inner struggles, save possibly for the northernmost area, where its vassals bordered on another imperial power.

The Amarna archive is our main (and sometimes only) source for the study of many aspects of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age prior to the Israelite settlement in the land. Some of these aspects will be examined in the following paragraphs (Helck 1971: 246–55, 474–91; *CAH³* 2/2: 98–116; Frandsen 1979; Na'aman 1982: 195–241; Groll 1983).

F. Egyptian Government in Canaan

Soon after the conquest of Canaan by Thutmose III (1482 or 1457), the Egyptians tried to organize it as a province. The main source of information for the measures undertaken at that time are the Amarna tablets, written ca. 100 years after the foundation of the Egyptian province in Asia.

The Egyptians left the array of Canaanite kingdoms which they conquered and established a network of six garrison cities to administer and rule the land. Four were situated along the coast: Gaza and Joppa in the south and Ullasa and Ṣumur in the north. Two other centers of government were established on the main crossroads: Beth-shean in northern Palestine and Kumidi in the south of the Beqaᶜ Valley of Lebanon (Helck 1971: 251–52; Na'aman 1981a: 177–78). The garrison cities also controlled considerable surrounding farmlands. For example, the fields west of the city of Beth-shean were annexed by Thutmose III and administered by the Egyptians (Na'aman 1981b). The cities themselves served as centers for the Egyptian personnel in Canaan and for the garrison troops stationed in the land. They were also the gathering places for the tributes and gifts of the vassals. The latter were required to guard the cities and the special installations therein and to cultivate and harvest their territories.

The number of Egyptian troops stationed in Canaan was relatively small. They included only the garrison troops (*ṣābē maṣṣarti*) installed either in the garrison cities or in certain strategic or vulnerable city-states (e.g., Jerusalem, Megiddo, Acco, Byblos). These troops are mentioned many times in the vassal letters; their number vary from less than fifty soldiers to three hundred (Pintore 1972; 101–6). The regular troops (*ṣābē piṭāti*, "archers") were stationed in Egypt and embarked on campaigns when the situation demanded their presence. On such occasions they were accompanied by chariot troops and usually returned to Egypt after completing their mission (Pintore 1972; 1973).

The territory in Asia under Egyptian rule was apparently divided into subunits; their number, however, is debated among scholars. According to the common view, it was separated into three districts: Palestine with its seat at Gaza, the coast of Lebanon with its center at Sumur, and south Syria with its seat at Kumidi (Helck 1971: 248–52; *LBHG*, 146–53; De Vaux 1968: 25–28). According to another view, it was divided into two subunits: Palestine plus the Phoenician coast and south Syria (including the Bashan and the kingdom of Hazor). This twofold division was the outcome of the historical situation of the Middle Bronze Age (Na'aman 1975: 166–72, 227; 1981a: 183–84). The assumption that the garrison city of Beth-shean was the seat of another (fourth) district (Hachmann 1982a: 44–47) is not very likely.

At the head of the Egyptian hierarchy in Canaan were the governors, possibly one in each province. Their Egyptian title was "messenger of the king to every foreign land" (Edel 1953: 55–63; Singer 1983: 18–21). Other officials were of various Egyptian ranks and titles, but the Canaanite scribes usually employed one and the same title, *rābiṣu* ("commissary"), to denote all ranks and titles of Egyptian functionaries serving in Canaan. It is impossible therefore to be precise concerning the Egyptian titles (unless they can be identified with well-known Egyptian officials) and exact analysis of the Amarna correspondence might only reveal the relative status of the various functionaries mentioned therein. The situation is even more complicated since some of the officials arrived on special missions from Egypt and were not part of the bureaucratic apparatus in the land.

A set of prohibitions was imposed upon the vassals and the Egyptian officers were responsible for their fulfillment. Examination of the letters reveals that the Egyptian apparatus was often rather flexible in what was permissible or prohibited to the vassal, not to mention those cases in which two Egyptian commissioners supported different sides of a conflict.

The vassals were obliged to pay tribute and send gifts, though only a small part of these were recorded in the letters. They served in the Egyptian garrison cities, cultivated their territories, and secured the caravan routes traversing their kingdoms. They provided armed forces for Egyptian campaigns and served as a supply network for armies that moved in Canaan and along the coast. It is evident that the Canaanite city-states were an important support for the Egyptian government abroad, enabling her to control, with the help of only a few officials and a relatively small number of troops, its Asiatic province. The various military, strategic, and economic advantages that Egypt gained in the Amarna period from the occupation of Canaan was bought for a relatively low price (see Na'aman 1981a). It was only at a later time that conditions changed, obliging Egypt to alter its policy and to intensify its involvement in the land (Weinstein 1981: 17–23; Na'aman 1982: 241–51; Singer 1988).

G. The Network of Canaanite City-States

The land of Canaan was divided into a network of kingdoms of various sizes and strengths. Since only the rulers of these political units were allowed to correspond with the Pharaoh, the Amarna letters are our main source for composing the list of city-states. The gaps of information may be filled by the Egyptian topographical lists and particularly by the Egyptian royal inscriptions. The relative strength of the kingdoms may be deduced from analysis of these sources.

The three most important kingdoms in Palestine in the 14th century B.C. were Gezer in the northern Shephelah, Shechem in the central hill country, and Hazor in the north. Other important city-states in the south were Ashkelon, Lachish, and Gath(?) (Tell es-Ṣāfi); Jerusalem (and Debir, according to archaeological excavations) dominated the southern part of the hill country, Gath-padalla was the strongest kingdom in the Sharon region, while Rehob, Megiddo, Shimᶜon, Acco, and Akhshaph were the most important kingdoms in the northern plains. Shechem and Hazor may be regarded as the only territorial kingdoms,

the others may be characterized as city-states (Na²aman 1988).

The coast of Lebanon was divided among several kingdoms of equal strength (Tyre, Sidon, Byblos), and Amurru in the north emerged as an important territorial kingdom in the course of the Amarna period (see above). Damascus was the most influential kingdom in south Syria; its ruler enjoyed an outstanding high status and prestige and functioned as the main supporter of the Egyptian governor of Kumidi (Hachmann 1970; 1982b). Many other kingdoms were located in the area of the Beqaᶜ of Lebanon (e.g., Ḥashabu, Tushulti, Ḥasi, Ṭubiḫu, Enishazi), in the Bashan (Ashtaroth, Buṣruna, Ḥalunnu) and east of Mount Lebanon (Ruḫizzi, Lapana). Their relative strength in the Amarna period cannot be established, owing to the paucity of documentary evidence (Klengel 1970: 4–29, 56–70, 96–112; Hachmann 1970: 84–88; Ahituv 1984).

North of the land of Canaan was the strong kingdom of Kadesh (Qidshu), which dominated the land of Takhshi. It was a vassal of Mitanni, but when that kingdom fell, it tried to expand its territory and conquer parts of the land of ᶜAmqi (the Beqaᶜ of Lebanon), thus attacking the vassals of Egypt situated there (EA 140, 170, 174–76, 363) (Klengel 1969: 139–71; Krauss 1978: 63–70).

The network of Canaanite units was composed of kingdoms of higher and lesser rank. The chain of events was determined primarily by the former while the latter cooperated with them, either willingly or not. The strong kingdoms were able to dictate the policy of the lesser kingdoms and even to intervene in their inner affairs.

At the head of each kingdom stood the local ruler. In his relations with the Pharaoh he was regarded as a city ruler (ḫazannu), like any other Egyptian mayor (ḥ²ty-ᶜ). The title was intended to emphasize the fact that he occupied his position with the approval of the Egyptian overlord. However, only in exceptional cases did the Pharaoh actually intervene in matters of succession, enforcing his own candidate (always of the local dynasty) as city ruler. In internal relations within Canaan and in contacts with his subjects, the local ruler was considered a king who ascended the throne through the dynastic principle and, in turn, left his throne to his heir after him (see EA 8:25, 30:1, 70:20, 88:46, 92:32–34, 109:46, 139:14–15, 140:10–12, 147:67, 148:40–41, 197:14–15, 41–42, 227:3, 256:7–8, 306:24).

Not enough details of the internal structure of the kingdoms are reported in the letters since they mainly reflect foreign affairs, that is, relations with Egypt and with neighboring kingdoms. We do know that the capital city was the focus of each unit, and usually it was either its sole or its principal urban center. The king's palace was the center of government for the kingdom and the bureaucratic apparatus operated either in the palace or in its vicinity. Around the capital city were tracts of agricultural fields cultivated by its inhabitants and in the peripheral areas were numerous villages and hamlets with their own fields and pasture land.

The actual power of the king in his city and territory varied from place to place and from period to period. It was dependent upon external factors and upon the power of the civil instititions. Several episodes are described in the letters in which a king was deposed and removed from

his town (i.e., Rib-Addi of Byblos and Yashdata of Taanach) or even killed (Aduna of Irqata, Zimredda of Lachish, and the rulers of Ammiya and Ardata). The power in certain cases (i.e., Byblos, Taanach, Irqata, Ammiya, and also Tunip) was in the hands of the citizenry, although such an oligarchical rule in a city-state was only temporary and apparently did not last long. The only exception is that of Arwada, a small island near the coast of Lebanon, in which the power was (as far as we know) permanently in the hands of the council of elders.

H. The Nonurban Elements (ᶜApiru and Sutu)

During the 16th century B.C. the urban culture of Canaan suffered a heavy blow. Many fortified cities were destroyed and some were deserted for a long period of time. It has been estimated that the total occupied area in Palestine decreased in the Late Bronze Age I to a third of that of the Middle Bronze Age II and that the number of settlements was only ca. 30–40 percent (Gonen 1981: 63–69) of what it had been. The destruction was particularly severe in the hill country, the lower Jordan Valley, and the Negeb. The decline of urban life brought about an immediate increase of the pastoral and brigand elements and resulted in the growing insecurity of the land.

It is against this background that the frequent mention of the ᶜApiru (and the Sutu as well) in the Amarna letters should be evaluated. In the ancient Near Eastern documentation, ᶜApiru is a designation for people who were uprooted from their original political and social frameworks and forced to adapt to a new environment and way of life. The ᶜApiru are known from many western Asiatic societies in the 2d millennium B.C. Their different traits and social behavior in each area were the outcome of this adaptation to new circumstances. The Amarna tablets are the largest single group of documents in which the term ᶜApiru is mentioned. According to the letters, they were scattered all over Canaan and had an important effect on events which took place in the land (Bottéro 1954; Greenberg 1955; Loretz 1984).

However, the Amarna letters show a unique development in the meaning of the appellation ᶜApiru. On many occasions, the term became a derogatory designation for rebels against Egyptian authority (Mendenhall 1973; Na²aman 1986a: 275–78). In the letters of Byblos, for example, the term ᶜApiru was frequently applied to ᶜAbdi-Ashirta of Amurru and his son ᶜAziru. Also the expression "to become ᶜApiru," which is repeated in many letters from all areas of Canaan, implies desertion from the Pharaoh and his supporters, the city-states' rulers, and defection to the side of his opponents, who were thus regarded as outlaws (Liverani 1979). The extension of the term ᶜApiru in order to denigrate these elements that opposed the authors of the letters is the result of the political nature of the Amarna correspondence, in which every ruler tried to justify his deeds before the Pharaoh and to slander his opponents. This must be taken into consideration when trying to determine the role of the authentic bands, brigands, and mercenaries in the Amarna period.

Even after the elimination of those letters which, directly or indirectly, refer in general terms to city-states' rulers and their supporters, it is evident that the nonurban

ments played an important role in Canaan in the 14th century B.C. They appear in letters either as bands or as individuals who were recruited and served as mercenaries in the army. As bands, they operated on their own behalf or took advantage of the conflicts between rulers and cooperated with one side or another (e.g., the conflicts between Amurru and Byblos or between Shechem and its neighbors). Alongside the ʿApiru appear also the Sutu (EA 195:24–29; 246 r. 6–7; 318:10–14), which was the Akkadian appellation for the pastoral nomadic elements.

As an illustration of the historical role of the ʿApiru one may present a group of letters from south Canaan, in all of which city-states' rulers bitterly complained of distress and serious difficulties in their kingdoms, and indeed, soon afterward they all disappeared from the historical arena and were replaced by others (Naʾaman 1975: 145–53; 1979: 676–82). The reason for the short period of unrest and rebellion, of which the ʿApiru are accused, was probably the temporary strengthening of the nonurban elements in these areas. In another case, a band of ʿApiru stayed in the city of Tushulti under the patronage of its ruler, raided the neighboring cities, and set them on fire, until they were attacked by Tushulti's neighboring rulers and forced to leave their shelter in the city (EA 185–86).

The existence of large groups of nomads and refugees may well explain the power of kingdoms situated in the hill country (e.g., Shechem, Hazor, and Amurru). Located near the nomadic enclaves, they were able either to hire soldiers from their members or to cooperate with their leaders (e.g., EA 71:20–22; 87:21–24; 148:41–43; 195:24–32; 246:5–10; 254:31–37).

I. The Amarna Letters and the Bible

Numerous details that appear in biblical descriptions of pre-Israelite Canaan fit nicely into the picture constructed from the Amarna tablets. These are the division of the land into many entities, each ruled by a king; the description of certain entities as being composed of a major city and its surrounding villages (compare EA 74:19–24; 228:13–17, 238:4–8 to Josh 15:45–47; 17:11, 16: Judg 1:27); the coalition of kingdoms as a means to gain power (compare EA 366 to Joshua 10–11); and the chariots (though anachronistically described as built of iron) as the main basis of Canaanite military power.

However, other details do not fit nicely into the picture described by the Amarna letters. Many sites that appear as Canaanite in biblical descriptions are not mentioned in the Amarna archive and, according to archaeological excavations, were either small villages or entirely uninhabited in the Late Bronze Age (e.g., Jericho, Ai, Jarmuth, Hebron, Beer-sheba, Arad). Most prominent is the city of Hebron, which, according to biblical tradition, was an important center in the time of the Patriarchs and in the conquest period, whereas the city is not mentioned in any source of the Late Bronze Age and the site of ancient Hebron (Tell er-Rumeideh) was uninhabited in this period. Also, the king of Jerusalem appears at the head of a coalition of kingdoms located in the hill country and the Shephelah (Joshua 10). The territory and the political standing of the king of Jerusalem, according to the Amarna tablets, seem to have been relatively modest and one would hardly assume that its king was able to head a coalition in which

remote cities like Lachish and Eglon took part (Naʾaman 1975: 104–15; 1986b: 470–72).

There is no indication in the Amarna tablets of a diversity of ethnic groups in the land of Canaan; the inhabitants of the land were all considered to be Canaanites (De Vaux 1968). The biblical tradition, however, mentions groups of variegated ethnic origin in different parts of the land (e.g., Philistines, Hivvites, Hittites, Jebusites, Girgashites, Perizzites), which hardly fits the perceived reality of the Amarna period. It rather reflects the Iron Age, when biblical descriptions of the land and its inhabitants were first recorded (Mendenhall 1973: 142–63; Mazar 1981).

The description of the city of Shechem in the days of Abimelech (Judges 9) is closely related to that of the Canaanite cities in the Amarna tablets. The institution of the lords (baʿalê) of Shechem is the same as the bēlē āli of the Amarna letters (EA 102:22; 138:49). The role of Zebul as a magistrate (śar hāʿiyr) who administered the city for the ruler (Abimelech) is parallel to that of the ḥazannu ("mayor") in ancient Near Eastern societies. However, the general situation drastically changed: Shechem was subjugated by the tribe of Manasseh and the tribal leader, Abimelech, resided within his clan and had nominated a mayor as his representative in the city. The city council tried to regain power by hiring a band of ʿApiru under the leadership of Gaal, just as Canaanite rulers in the Amarna period would do to attain the same goal, or as the lords (baʿalê) of Keilah did when they hired David and his band to protect the city against the Philistine raids (1 Sam 21:1–13). Abimelech's immediate attack on the city of Shechem and the expulsion of the band of Gaal (Judg 9:34–41) finds an exact parallel in the above cited case of the ruler of Tushulti, who, under pressure by his neighboring rulers, was forced to drive the band of ʿApiru out of his city (EA 185–86).

The description of "the justice (mišpāṭ) of the king" in 1 Sam 8:10–18 has sometimes been compared with Canaanite and north Syrian societies of the Late Bronze Age (Mendelsohn 1956). However, the distorted outlines of the institution of kingship in Samuel's antimonarchical polemical speech hardly fit any ancient Near Eastern kingship either in the 2d or the 1st millennium B.C. Isolated kings may well have treated their subjects in such an arbitrary and vicious manner, but despotism of the kind portrayed in the speech was not typical of well-established kingdoms, including the Canaanite city-states of the 2d millennium B.C. It has been alternatively suggested that the "king's justice" was originally a disguised polemical composition written against the despotic institution of kingship established in Israel by King Solomon (Crüsemann 1978: 66–73), but the discourse was probably composed at a much later time, either in the 7th or the 6th century, when the failure of the Israelite kingdom to provide security for its subjects became historical reality.

Overall, the image of Canaanite civilization as reflected in the Bible is far from accurate. Only certain outlines are precise, whereas other details reflect the reality of the time in which they were written, that is, the 1st millennium B.C. The history of the land of Canaan and its civilization must be studied from external sources and particularly from the Amarna letters. The authenticity of biblical data should always be examined against this background.

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NADAV NAʾAMAN

AMARNA, TELL EL-

AMARNA, TELL EL- (27°38' N; 30°52' E). The site of the premier city and residence of the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenophis (Amenhotep) IV (alias Akhenaten ca. 1377–1360 b.c.); located on the east bank of the Nile in the 15th nome (township) of Upper Egypt, ca. 180 miles S of modern Cairo. The Pharaoh named his new city Akhetaten (Eg *3ḫt-itn* "the horizon of the Sun-disc").

Although the area had been frequented in earlier periods by mining expeditions to neighboring Hatnub, the decision to found a city must have been taken no later than Akhenaten's 4th year. By year 6, the king's family was in residence, and the greater city and environs (on both banks) delimited by a series of boundary stelae.

Chosen perhaps because the eastern cliffs resembled the hieroglyphic sign *3ḫt* "horizon," the city became the center of worship of the king's sole god, the Sun-disc. Two major temples to the god occupied its central area, the "Mansion of the Sun-disc" (Eg *ḥwt-itn*), and the *Gm-ʾitn* ("The Sun-disc is found") with ancilliary shrines in the N and S suburbs.

The settlement constituted a "planned" city, arranged

along a broad N–S avenue, connecting the king's residence on the N with the central city and the "Viewing Place of the Disc" on the S. The city housed a formal palace, administrative blocks and granaries, residences for the immediate members of the royal family, and well-planned villas for the state officers and courtiers. The necropolis on the E was divided into a N and S cemetery, flanking the E wadi wherein the royal tomb was located.

In the 3d year of Tutankhamen (ca. 357 B.C.), after approximately 16 years of residence, the royal family left the city for Memphis, and the court and general populace soon thereafter moved out. Under Horemheb (ca. 1347–1318 B.C.) the temples and public buildings were systematically demolished, and the masonry shipped to other sites (especially Hermopolis) for reuse. There is some evidence of very limited building activity under the Ramessides.

The site is also famous for the discovery in 1888–89 of the cache of tablets known as the "Tell el-Amarna Letters"—the "dead files" of international state correspondence from the reigns of Amenophis III, Akhenaten, and Tutankhamen. See also AMARNA LETTERS; AKHENATEN.

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DONALD B. REDFORD

AMASA (PERSON) [Heb *ʿămāśāʾ*]. 1. Kinsman of David (2 Sam 19:14—Eng 19:13) whom Absalom appointed to replace Joab as commander of the army during his rebellion against David (2 Sam 17:25), a post Amasa retained after David's return to power, only to be murdered by Joab in the early stages of the suppression of Sheba's rebellion. According to 2 Sam 17:25, his father was Ithra, the Israelite, (according to 1 Chr 2:17, Jether the Ishmaelite) and his mother Abigail the daughter of Nahash. However, this latter name may be a textual corruption from 2 Sam 17:27, because Abigail is also identified as the sister of Joab's mother Zeruiah. According to 1 Chr 1:16–17, both these women were sisters of David and presumably daughters of Jesse. It has been alternately suggested that Abigail was David's half-sister and not Jesse's daughter. The wording of 2 Sam 17:25 suggests that there was something unusual or irregular about Abigail's marital relationship with Ithra.

Although it remains a matter of dispute whether the tribe of Judah joined the northern tribes in rebellion against David or remained neutral, Amasa's support of Absalom indicates that high-ranking Judahites were active in opposing David. Although the professional troops of David commanded by Joab defeated the national militia led by Amasa, David's position was still tenuous enough to require special overtures to Judah for a quick return to the throne. The appointment of Amasa was one factor in David's successful appeal to his fellow Judahites (2 Sam 19:12–15—Eng 19:11–14). David's tilt to Judah seems to have precipitated Sheba's subsequent rebellion.

Amasa failed to carry out David's orders to muster the militia of Judah in three days to meet the Sheba crisis (2 Sam 20:4–5). Perhaps he simply did not have enough time, or perhaps he felt it would be personally inexpedient to attack Israel with the militia of Judah. David's professional troops set out alone, among them Joab (vv 6–7). Amasa encountered them at Gibeon and was treacherously stabbed by Joab, who immediately took back effective control of the army (vv 8–11). The details of this murder are obscure but imply premeditation and trickery. The sight of Amasa's body was not permitted to hinder the army's progress (vv 12–13). Amasa's murder would later help justify the liquidation of Joab upon Solomon's accession (1 Kgs 2:5, 32). From a literary standpoint, the biblical author seems to treat David's offer to Amasa as one of several errors in personal and political judgment (for other examples, see 2 Sam 13:21; 18:5; 19:2–4—Eng 19:1–3; 19:42–44—Eng 41–43; 1 Kgs 1:6).

Amasa has sometimes been identified with Amasai (Heb *ʿămāśay*), the chief of the "Thirty" (1 Chr 12:19—Eng 12:18), who pledged loyalty and peace to David when Saul was hunting for him (See DAVID'S CHAMPIONS). There is no solid evidence either for or against this proposal.

2. Son of Hadlai, one of four chiefs of Emphraim who supported the prophet Oded in opposing a proposal to take captives from Judah into Samaria, cared for them instead, and returned them south (2 Chr 28:12–15). Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan reflects this narrative (compare v 15 with Luke 10:34).

RICHARD D. NELSON

AMASAI (PERSON) [Heb *ʿămāśay*]. A name found throughout Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible.

1. A Levite from the clan of Kohath, a descendant of Elkanah and relative of Ahimoth (1 Chr 6:10—Eng 6:25). He is also mentioned as the father of Mahath and as a Levitical musician in the genealogy of Heman (1 Chr 6:20—Eng 6:35). Both contexts appear concerned to trace the lineage of Samuel the prophet, to whom the Chronicler assigns Levitical ancestry (1 Chr 6:13, 18—Eng 6:28, 33; cf. 1 Sam 1:1); this reflects the Chronicler's pervasive interest in the prophetic function of the Levitical musicians (1 Chr 25:1–8; 2 Chr 20:14; 29:25; 34:30; 35:15). Since Mahath is mentioned in 1 Chr 6:20—Eng 6:35; (cf. 2 Chr 29:12), some correct Ahimoth to *ʾăḥîw maḥat*, "his brother Mahath" (cf. *BHS*).

2. One of the priests appointed by David to blow the trumpets before the ark during its transfer from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15:24).

3. The father of Mahath, a Kohathite at the time of Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:12). Since #1 and #3 both involve an Amasai, father of Mahath, some have equated these figures, though they were presumably separated by centuries. More probably the recurrence of the names reflects the practice of papponymy (naming sons for grandfathers) or some other naming convention.

4. Chief of the "Thirty," a group of David's military