

AN INCISED HIERATIC INSCRIPTION FROM TELL EŞ-ŞÂFI, ISRAEL

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout much of antiquity, a close-knit relationship existed between the southern Levant and Egypt, a relationship that is well known and has been thoroughly researched.¹ During the Late Bronze Age/New Kingdom, when Canaan was under direct, if at times fluctuating Egyptian control, the connections between the two regions are amply attested through extensive textual and archaeological evidence.² Nonetheless, the corpus of Egyptian texts dating to this period that has been found in Canaan is surprisingly small.³

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¹ It is impossible to present here an exhaustive list of even the major studies that have dealt with this relationship. The following, however, are representative studies for selected early periods: A. ROWE, *A Catalogue of the Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* (Cairo 1936); W. HELCK, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend vor Christus* (Wiesbaden 1971²); A.F. RAINEY (ed.), *Egypt, Israel and Sinai* (Tel Aviv 1987); D.B. REDFORD, *Egypt and Canaan in the New Kingdom* (Beersheba 4, Beersheba 1990); Idem, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton 1992); M. BIETAK, *Egypt and Canaan during the Middle Bronze Age*, *BASOR* 281 (1991), 27–72; M. GÖRG, *Aegyptica-Biblica: Notizen und Beiträge zu den Beziehungen zwischen Ägypten und Israel* (ÄAT 11, Wiesbaden 1991); Idem, *Die Beziehungen zwischen dem alten Israel und Ägypten: Von den Anfängen bis zum Exil* (Darmstadt 1997); P.S. ASH, *David, Solomon and Egypt: A Reassessment* (Sheffield 1999); B.U. SCHIPPER, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (OBO 170, Fribourg 1999); E.C.M. VAN DEN BRINK and T.E. LEVY (eds.), *Egypt and the Levant: Interrelations from the 4th through the Early 3rd Millennium BCE* (London 2002); A.M. MAEIR, *The relations between Egypt and the Southern Levant during the Late Iron Age: The Material Evidence from Egypt*, *Ä&L* 12 (2003), 235–246.

² For surveys of the Egyptian control in Late Bronze Age Canaan and its vicissitudes, see, e.g., J.M. WEINSTEIN, *The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment*, *BASOR* 241 (1981), 1–28; N. NAFAMAN, *Economic Aspects of the*

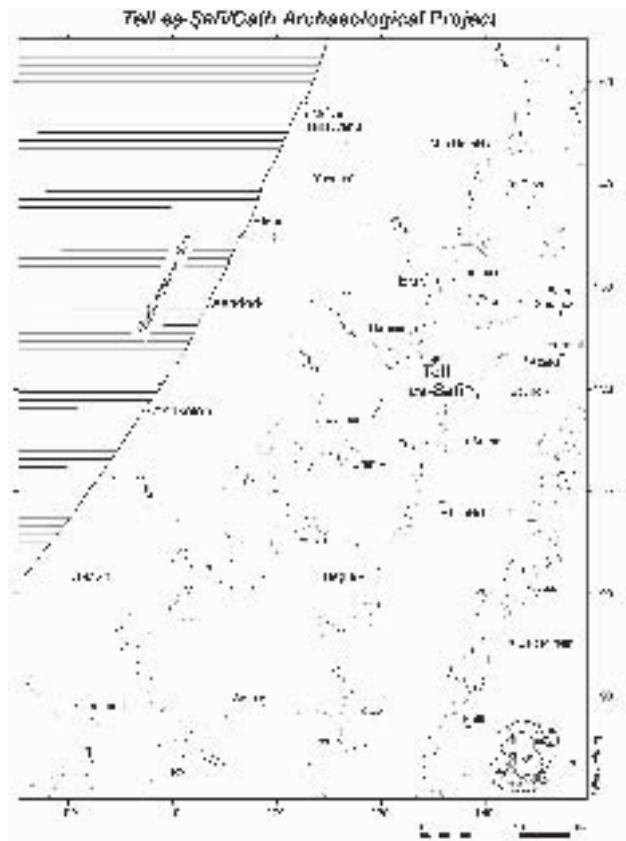


Fig. 1 Map of the southern Levantine Coastal Plain and the Judean Foothills (Shephelah), showing the location of Tell eš-šâfi/Gath and other major sites

Egyptian Occupation of Canaan, *IJ* 31 (1981), 172–185; E.D. OREN, "Governor's Residencies" in Canaan under the New Kingdom: A Case Study of Egyptian Administration, *JSSEA* 14 (1984), 37–56; REDFORD, *Egypt and Canaan*; Idem, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel*. For a somewhat different view, see C.R. HIGGINBOTHAM, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Leiden 1999).

³ No comprehensive overview of these texts is available. Two sites are of particular importance due to the disproportionately large quantity of Egyptian textual material that has been discovered at these sites over the years: Byblos in Lebanon (partially covered by M. CHÉHAB, "Noms de personnalités égyptiennes découverts au Liban, *Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth* 22, [1969], 1–47; see also R. DUNAND, *Fouilles de Byblos I–II* [Paris 1939, 1958], passim, and P. MONTET, *Byblos et l'Égypte* [Paris, 1928], passim), and Beth Shean in Israel (for a list of the texts from Beth

Thus, any addition to this all-too-limited corpus is of importance and interest, even if it is of a brief and somewhat enigmatic nature. This study presents an incised sherd that was recently found in a well-defined Late Bronze Age II context (ca. late 13th cent. BCE) in Canaan in the course of the excavations at Tell eṣ-Şâfi, Israel.

Tell eṣ-Şâfi is situated in central Israel, approximately halfway between Jerusalem and Ashkelon (Fig. 1). The site is located on the border between the southern coastal plain and the Judean foothills (Shephelah), in the northeastern corner of “Philistia.”⁴ Recognized since the

mid-19th century CE as being of archaeological importance, the site was settled virtually continuously from the Chalcolithic period (5th millennium BCE) until modern times. Although the subject of debate in the past, the identification of the site is now quite clear.⁵ The Late Bronze Age settlement is to be identified as Canaanite Gath/Gimtu, known from the el-Amarna letters, while during the Iron Age I–II (ca. 1200–586 BCE), the site is the location of Philistine Gath, well known from the biblical and Neo-Assyrian texts. In Medieval times the Crusader fort Blanche Garde/Alba Specula was built at the

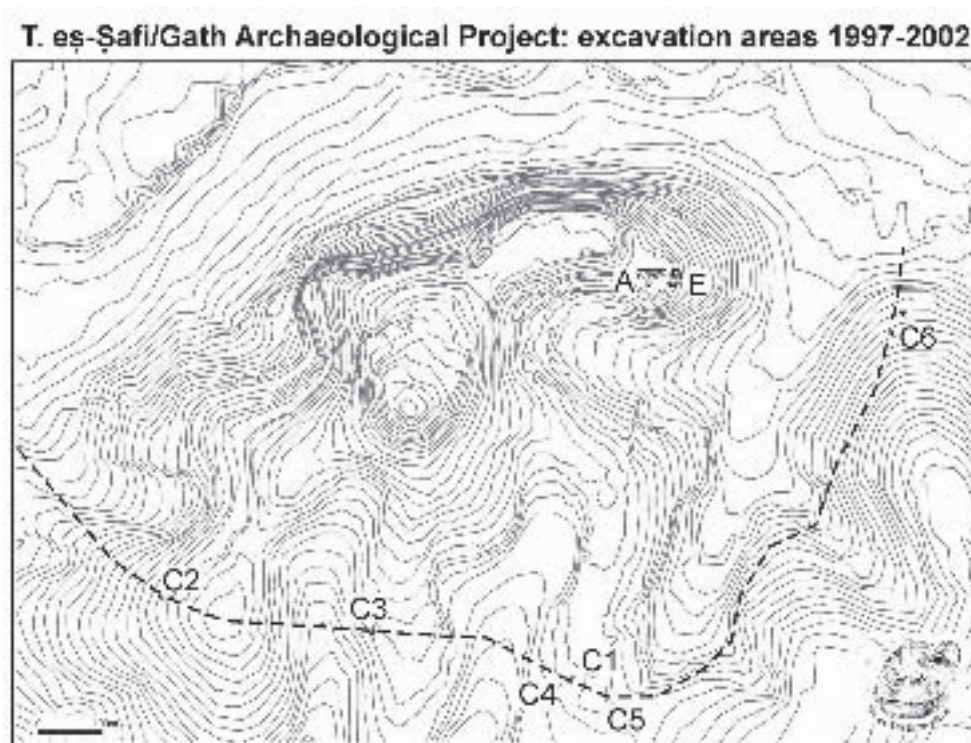


Fig. 2 General plan of the site of Tell eṣ-Şâfi/Gath, showing fields of excavation. Note the location of Area E on the eastern edge of the site

Shean, see: F.W. JAMES and P.E. MCGOVERN, *The Late Bronze Age Egyptian Garrison at Beth Shan: A Study of Levels VII and VIII* [Philadelphia 1993], 249–250, to which one can add: B. GRDSELOFF, *Une stèle scythopolitaine du roi Séthos I^{er}* [Paris, 1949], as well as the hieratic texts noted below, n. 18). For the sporadic inscribed finds from all over the region of ancient Canaan, viz. architectural fragments, stelae, and numerous small objects, consult the works quoted above in n. 1. For the royal stelae see now S. WIMMER, A New Stela of Ramesses II from Jordan in the Context of Egyptian Royal Stelae in the Levant, in: P. DEMIROSCHEJ, J.C. MARGUERON and J.-P. THALMANN (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Paris, 15–19 May 2002* (Winona Lake, IN, in press).

⁴ See, e.g., E. ORNI and E. EFRAT, *Geography of Israel* (Jerusalem 1980).

⁵ For summaries of the early research on the site and its identification, see, e.g., A.F. RAINEY, The Identification of Philistine Gath – A Problem in Source Analysis for Historical Geography, *Eretz Israel* 12 (1975), 63*–76*; E. STERN, Zafit, Tel, in: Idem (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem 1993), 1522–1524; W.M. SCHNIEDEWIND, The Geo-Political History of Philistine Gath, *BASOR* 309 (1998), 69–77; A.M. MAEIR and C.S. EHRlich, Excavating Philistine Gath: Have We Found Goliath’s Hometown?, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27/6 (2001), 22–31.

spot, while more recently it was the location of the Arab village of Tell eš-Šâfi.⁶

In 1996, the long-term Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath Archaeological Project was initiated at the site, directed by the first author of this study.⁷ To date, seven seasons of survey and excavation have been conducted. Although the entire sequence of settlement was discernible in the archaeological material collected during the surface survey of the site,⁸ the excavations themselves exposed a more limited chronological framework, focusing on the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. In Fields A and E (Fig. 2), a stratigraphic sequence spanning the latter part of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 13th cent. BCE) through the Iron Age II (ca. late 8th cent. BCE) was excavated.⁹

The inscribed sherd discussed in this paper was found in Field E in *Temporary Stratum 9*, that dates to the end of the Late Bronze Age, ca. 1200 BCE.¹⁰ Stratigraphic evidence of this well-defined stratum was found in a number of squares in Field E, including several as of yet incompletely defined architectural units (Figs. 3–4). The associated finds support a terminal Late Bronze Age II dating, including local Palestinian pottery types,¹¹ various Mycenaean and Cypriote imports, characteristic figurines, and Egyptian-style glyptics (Fig. 5). It is noteworthy that wherever this level was exposed, the evidence indicated that it had been destroyed in a conflagration, most probably in the course of the destruction of Late Bronze Age Canaanite Gath, with the arrival of

⁶ A. BOAS and A.M. MAEIR, *The Crusader Castle Blanche Garde and Later Remains at Tell eš-Šâfi in Light of Recent Discoveries*, *Crusaders* (in press).

⁷ The project is conducted under the auspices of the Institute of Archaeology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel (project website: www.dig-gath.org). During the 1996 season, the project was co-directed by A. Boas and T. Schneider; during the 1997 season, it was co-directed by A. Boas; and during the 2000–2001 seasons, it was co-directed by C. Ehrlich. The project has been funded by, among others, the Kushitzky Foundation, the Ihel Foundation and the Krautheimer Chair in Archaeology (all from Bar-Ilan University), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the L. Cotsen Foundation, and the Yoav Regional Council. This study was completed while the first author was a fellow at the Dibner Institute for the History of Science and Technology, at MIT. For preliminary reports on the excavations, see: A. BOAS and A.M. MAEIR, *The Renewed Excavations at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath*, in: O. ACKERMANN, (ed.), *The Judaeian Shephelah – Man, Nature and Landscape. Proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference of the MARTIN (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies* (Ramat Gan 1998), 31–37 (in Hebrew); A. BOAS, A.M. MAEIR and T. SCHNEIDER, *The 1996 Survey at T. e-Safi*, *Hadashot Arkheologiot* 108 (1998), 156 (in Hebrew); A.M. MAEIR and A.J. BOAS, *Archaeology in Israel: Tell eš-Šâfi*, *AJA* 102 (1998), 785–786; Idem, *Tel Zafit – 1997 Hadashot Arkheologiot* 110 (1998), 68; A.M. MAEIR, *Tel Zafit – 1998, Hadashot Arkheologiot* 112 (2000), 122–123, 97*–98*; A.M. MAEIR and C. EHRLICH, *Tel Zafit – 1999, Hadashot Arkheologiot* 112 (2000), 121–122, 96*–97*; A.M. MAEIR, *The Philistine Culture in Transformation: A Current Perspective Based on the Results of the First Seasons of Excavations at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath*, in: A.M. MAEIR and E. BARUCH, E. (eds.), *Settlement, Civilization and Culture: Proceedings of the Conference in Memory of David Alon* (Ramat Gan 2001), 111–129 (in Hebrew); Idem, *Philistia Transforming: Fresh Evidence from Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath on the Transformation Trajectory of the Philistine Culture*, in A.E. KILLEBREW, G. LEHMANN and M. ARTZY (eds.), *The*

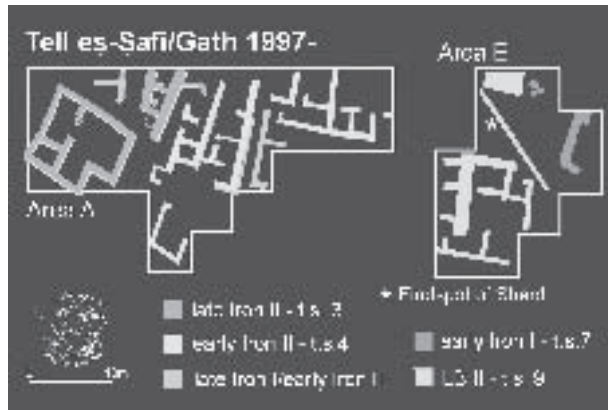
Philistines and Other Sea Peoples (Leiden, in press); Idem, *Canaanites and Philistines: Recent Excavations at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath, Israel (1996–2001)*, in: P. DE MIROSCHEJ, J.C. MARGUERON and J.P. THALMANN (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, May, Paris, 15–19 May 2002* (Winona Lake, IN, in press); Idem, *A Late Bronze Age, Syrian-style Figurine from Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath*, in R. DEUTSCH (ed.) *Festschrift S. Moussaieff* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa, in press); Idem, *Archaeology in Israel: Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath*, *AJA* (in press); MAEIR and EHRLICH, *BAR* 27 (above); C.S. EHRLICH, *Die Suche nach Gat und die neuen Ausgrabungen auf Tell eš-Šâfi*, in U. HÜBNER and E.A. KNAUF (eds.), *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebir nari für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (Fribourg 2002), 56–69; O. ACKERMANN, H.J. BRUINS, and A.M. MAEIR, *A Unique Human-Made trench at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath: Anthropogenic Impact and Landscape Response*, *Geoarchaeology* (in press); I. SHAI and A.M. MAEIR, *The Pre-LMLK Jars: A New Class of Storage Jars of the Iron Age IIA*, *Tel Aviv* 30/1 (2003), 108–123.

⁸ J. UZIEL, *The Tell es-Safi Archaeological Survey* (Unpublished MA Thesis, Bar Ilan University; Ramat Gan, 2002).

⁹ For overviews of the finds, see the studies cited in n. 7.

¹⁰ The excavation of Field E was supervised by I. Shai; the square supervisor was E. Deutsch.

¹¹ The finds are quite similar to the ceramic repertoire at other Late Bronze Age sites in the vicinity. See, e.g., D. USSISHKIN, *Level VII and VI at Tel Lachish and the End of the Late Bronze Age in Canaan*, in J.N. TUBB (ed.), *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages: Papers in Honour of Olga Tuftnell* (Occasional Publications of the Institute of Archaeology; London 1985), 213–230; A.E. KILLEBREW, *Ceramic Typology and Technology of Late Bronze II and Iron I Assemblages from Tel Miqne-Ekron: The Transition from Canaanite to Philistine Culture*, in: S. GITIN, A. MAZAR and E. STERN (eds.), *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE* (Jerusalem 1998), 379–405.



the Sea Peoples/Philistines.¹² The locus in which the object was found, L58021, contained a large quantity of restorable Late Bronze Age vessels of various types, including bowls, cooking pots, and “Canaanite” storage jars, as well as assorted fragments of imported Cypriote and Mycenaean ves-

Fig. 3 Schematic plan of the excavations in Areas A and E, showing the various stages represented in the excavation. Note the Late Bronze Age architecture and the location at which the inscribed sherd was found



Fig. 4 Aerial view (looking south) of Areas A (right) and E (left) after the 2002 season of excavations. The Late Bronze Age remains in Area E are located in the excavation squares in the upper left hand corner of this view

¹² Although stratigraphic evidence of the earliest stage of Philistine settlement at the site has not yet been exposed, material evidence of this phase (including Mycenaean IIC pottery and other objects) has been recovered. All told, the evidence appears to support the traditional interpretation of the Philistine conquest of the area of Philistia during the transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age; see, e.g., T. DOTAN, The Arrival of the Sea Peoples: Cultural Diversity in Early Iron Age Canaan, in: S. GITIN and W.G. DEVER (eds.), *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology* (Winona Lake, IN, 1989), 1–14; Idem, Reflections on the initial phase of Philistine settlement: type site – Tel Miqne-Ekron, in: E.D. OREN (ed.), *The Sea Peoples and their World: A Reassessment* (Philadelphia 2000), 145–158; A. KILLEBREW, Aegean-

style Early Philistine Pottery in Canaan during the Iron Age I: A Stylistic Analysis of Mycenaean IIC:1b Pottery and its Associated Wares, in: OREN (ed.) *Sea Peoples*, 233–253; T.J. BARAKO, The Philistine Settlement as Mercantile Phenomenon?, *AJA* 104 (2000), 513–530. This in contrast to those who view this phenomenon as a local Canaanite development, e.g., S. SHERRATT, ‘Sea Peoples’ and the Economic Structure of the Late Second Millennium in the Eastern Mediterranean, in: GITIN, MAZAR and STERN (eds.), *Mediterranean Peoples*, 292–313; R. DREWS, Canaanites and Philistines, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 81 (1998), 31–61; Idem, Medinet Habu: Oxcarts, Ships, and Migration Theories, *JNES* 59 (2000), 161–190.



Fig. 5 Representative sample of terminal Late Bronze Age pottery assemblage (including both local and imported) from Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath, Temporary Level 9

sels (e.g., Fig. 5). Interestingly, a virtually complete and articulated canine skeleton was found on a surface associated with this locus, the animal apparently killed in the collapse related to the destruction.¹³

Description of the Inscribed Sherd (Fig. 6)

Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath; Season: 2001; Field E; Grid: 224; Square: 73C; Locus: 58021; Basket: 580115

Shape: Triangular.

Dimensions: 5 × 4 × 3.5 cm.

Average Thickness: 1 cm.

Surface Color: Light Red 2.5YR 6/6.

Section Color: Light Gray 5Y 7/1.

Core: Finely levigated with very few chalky grits.

Average Depth of Inscription Incisions: 0.1 mm.

The inscription was incised before the vessel was fired.



Fig. 6 Photograph and drawing of the inscribed sherd (Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath, Temporary Level 9, Late Bronze Age II)

¹³ The preliminary identification of the skeleton was made by L. Kolska Horwitz, project archaeozoologist.

Ware Fabric

Preliminary macroscopic visual analysis of the sherd indicated that the inscribed fragment did not derive from an imported Egyptian vessel. The surface color and appearance were atypical of Egyptian clays. To further support this conclusion, the sherd fabric was microscopically analyzed. A fresh section of the sherd was viewed under a $\times 20$ magnifying stereomicroscope. The sherd has a green-gray core with yellowish-red to brownish-red oxidation zones. The clay mass is silty and quite dense in matrix. Small-sized quartz grains are abundant, while inclusions of calcite and limestone occur occasionally. The fabric does not exhibit similarities to any Egyptian Nile or Marl clays. The surface has a light brown color and protruding limestone grits, fabric characteristics that closely correspond to other local vessel types in the Late Bronze Age assemblage from Tell eš-Šâfi. This makes it very likely that the fabric derives from a local clay source.

It should be noted that although the sherd with the hieratic incision does not belong to an Egyptian vessel, several other sherds from the Late Bronze Age levels at Tell eš-Šâfi were positively identified as fragments of Egyptian imports. Two body sherds of closed vessels, probably deriving from two-handled storage jars, are of “Egyptian Marl D” (according to the “Vienna System”).¹⁴ Especially indicative are the characteristic cream

slip and burnishing. The rim of a two-handled storage jar exhibits the same surface treatment, and probably belongs to a “Mixed Nile and Marl” clay fabric.¹⁵ While these imports attest to direct or indirect trade contact with Egypt, Egyptian-style forms produced in local clays, are well-known from such sites as Beth Shean, Tel Sera, and Deir el-Balah.¹⁶ Thus far, these local imitations are absent from the Late Bronze Age assemblage at Tell eš-Šâfi.

The Inscription

At first glance, the inscription appears somewhat enigmatic – even the identification of the script itself was not immediately obvious. First, therefore, the manner in which the signs were incised in the soft clay was studied, in order to establish the direction in which the inscription was written. A close examination shows that the more complex, fully preserved sign is incised more deeply on one end – where the scribe made an energetic start with the tool – and much more deftly on the other side – where the overlapping strokes clearly mark the direction of the writing tool. As the natural way to draw a letter in most, if not all, writing systems is from top to bottom, the position of the sherd could be established, as in Fig. 6. In Late Bronze Age Palestine, Egyptian, Cuneiform, proto-Canaanite, Hittite hieroglyphic, and Aegean writing systems are known.¹⁷ Of these,

¹⁴ H.A. NORDSTRÖM and J. BOURRIAU, *Ceramic Technology: Clays and Fabrics*, in: D. ARNOLD and J. BOURRIAU (eds.), *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery* (Mainz 1993), 181–2; D. ASTON, *Qantir I. Die Keramik des Grabungsplatzes QI: I Corpus of Fabrics, Wares and Shapes* (Mainz 1998), 65–66.

¹⁵ NORDSTRÖM and BOURRIAU, 166–7; ASTON, 68. We would like to thank D. Aston for this identification.

¹⁶ See the following representative studies on the Egyptian and Egyptianizing pottery from these sites: Beth Shean: e.g., A. COHEN-WEINBERGER, *Petrographic analysis of the Egyptian forms from Stratum VI at Tel Beth Shean*, in: S. GITIN, A. MAZAR and E. STERN (eds.), *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE* (Jerusalem 1998), 406–412; M. MARTIN, *The Egyptian and Egyptian-style Pottery of Area S*, in: A. MAZAR, *Excavations at Tel Beth Shean. Volume III* (Qedem Series; Jerusalem, forthcoming); Tel Sera: M. MARTIN in: E. OREN, *The Late Bronze Age at Tel Sera* (Beersheva, in preparation); Deir el-Balah: A. KILLEBREW, *Ceramic Craft and Technology during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages: The Relationship between Pottery Technology, Style, and Cultural Diversity*

(Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1998).

¹⁷ We would like to thank the following scholars for expressing their opinions regarding the possible identity of the script on the sherd. Proto-Canaanite was ruled out by A. Demsky, E. Eshel, and P. Kyle McCarter; a connection with the various Aegean-related scripts was negated by M. Finkelberg and A. Yasur-Landau; the possibility of a Hieratic reading was first suggested by D. Sweeney. We would also like to thank R. Stieglitz for examining a photograph of the sherd. For a general overview of writing in Late Bronze Age Palestine, see, e.g., A. MILLARD, *The Knowledge of Writing in Late Bronze Age Palestine*, in: K. VAN LERBERGHE and G. VOET (eds.), *Languages and Cultures in Contact. At the Crossroads of Civilizations in the Syro-Mesopotamian Realm* (OLA 96, Leuven 1999); see also K. VAN DER TOORN, *Cuneiform Documents from Syria-Palestine. Texts, Scribes, and Schools*, *ZDPV* 116/2 (2000), 97–113. For two recently published Late Minoan inscriptions from Palestine, see E.D. OREN *et al.*, *A Minoan Graffito from Tel Haror* (Negev, Israel), *Cretan Studies* 5 (1996), 91–118; M. FINKELBERG, A. UCHITEL and D. USSISHKIN, A

only Egyptian Hieratic matches the general character of the ductus.¹⁸

On the left side are two elements that, if linked at the missing top, can easily be recognized as 𐤀 (S.29) when compared to the more cursive shapes, where the vertical stroke is often bent to the left and the left stroke ends in a little loop inwards.¹⁹ Less obvious is the right-hand part. The complex sign is vaguely similar to 𐤁 (D.1), which would fit

nicely with the following isolated stroke.²⁰ The way the lower part is drawn, however, makes this possibility less convincing, and so the possible meaning “her face” or “upon/because of her/it” is likewise improbable. The only plausible solution is the sign 𐤀 (A.51). The upper hook for the head is quite pronounced, and the lower part differs somewhat from the standard form, which would have an additional horizontal bottom line.²¹ Similar examples

Linear A Inscription from Tel Lachish (Lach ZA 1), *Tel Aviv* 23/2 (1996), 195–207. Two groups of unidentified inscriptions, for which Aegean connections have been suggested, should be mentioned. One from Deir ʿAlla in the Jordan Valley (H. FRANKEN, Clay tablets from Deir ʿAlla, Jordan, *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964), 377–379; G. VAN DER KOOIJ and M.M. IBRAHIM, *Picking Up the Threads: A continuing review of excavations at Deir Alla, Jordan* (Leiden 1989), 63; note that recently, some more tablets, with the same, undeciphered script, have been found at Deir ʿAlla; thanks to G. VAN DER KOOIJ for this information), and the other from Ashdod (R. STIEGLITZ, Inscribed seals from Tel Ashdod: The Philistine script?, *Kadmos* 16 [1977], 97).

¹⁸ The corpus of hieratic inscriptions from Israel/Palestine is quite small, numbering roughly thirty (mainly fragmentary) texts, inked on pottery. It is probable that additional inscriptions have been overlooked in earlier excavations, when faint inscriptions were not noticed, or effaced when the pottery was washed before examination. Most inscriptions, all from sites in the south, can be related to the context of harvest taxation; three of the four from Beth Shean are of religious/literary character. Following is a complete list of the known inscriptions (excluding texts from later, Iron Age contexts, when hieratic elements were incorporated in palaeo-Hebrew writing; for these see N. SACHER-FOX, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* [Cincinnati 2000], 250–268; a comprehensive study is being prepared by S. WIMMER, *Ägyptische Einflüsse in der palästinischen Epigraphik des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr.*, in prep.).

Beth Shean: A potsherd with a probable reference to an execration rite (S. WIMMER, Ein Ächtungstext aus Israel/Palästina, in: *VI Congresso Internazionale di Egittologia: Atti II* [Turin 1993], 571–578); A potsherd with a probable reference to the Canaanite myth of the “Bow of [Anat]” (S. WIMMER, ‘Der Bogen der Anat’ in Bet-Shean?, *Biblische Notizen* 73 [1994], 36–41); A potsherd with one sign, prob. *snhjj* “inspected, checked”, (Publication forthcoming by S. WIMMER in the Beth Shean excavation reports, edited by A. MAZAR); A storage jar with incised cursive hieroglyphs (not hieratic), probably denoting an offering to the Ka of a goddess (see JAMES and MCGOVERN, *The Late Bronze Egyptian Garrison*, fig. 11:4; G.M. FITZGERALD, *The Four Canaanite Temples of Beth-Shan: The Pottery* (Philadelphia 1930), pl. 42:5).

Lachish: One bowl and six sherds, probably all referring

to harvest tax deliveries (J. ČERNÝ, Egyptian Hieratic, in: O. TUFNELL, *Lachish IV* (London, 1958), 132–133; M. GILULA, An Inscription in Egyptian Hieratic from Lachish, *Tel Aviv* 3 (1976), 107–108; O. GOLDWASSER, The Lachish Hieratic Bowl Once Again, *Tel Aviv* 9 (1982), 137–138; Idem, An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms, *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991), 248–253); two additional hieratic sherds have been found in the recent excavations; all hieratic texts from Lachish are being comprehensively (re)published by D. SWEENEY, Hieratic Inscriptions from Lachish, forthcoming in the Lachish excavation reports, edited by D. USSISHKIN. In the same volume, a pot with incised cursive hieroglyphs will also be published by P. MAGRILL, R. JASNOW and P. KYLE McCARTER, A New Inscription from Lachish. We are indebted to D. Sweeney and P. Magrill for generously providing this information. (see also, below, note 33).

Tel Seraʿ: Four bowls and seven sherds, mostly referring to harvest tax collections; one (sherd no. 7) probably a fragmentary ostrakon with a letter (O. GOLDWASSER, Hieratic Inscriptions from Tel Seraʿ in Southern Canaan, *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984), 77–93);

Tell el Farʿah (South): Two potsherds, perhaps originally belonging to one bowl, referring to harvest tax deliveries (O. GOLDWASSER and S. WIMMER, Hieratic Fragments from Tell el-Farʿah (South), *BASOR* 313 [1999], 39–42);

Deir el-Balah: A potsherd with reference to harvest tax deliveries (S. WIMMER, A Hieratic Fragment, in: T. DOTAN, *Excavations in the Cemetery and Settlement at Deir el-Balah* (Qedem, Jerusalem, in press);

Tel Haror: A potsherd referring to an unpreserved toponym (Gaza?), perhaps in the context of harvest tax deliveries (O. GOLDWASSER, A Fragment of an Hieratic Ostrakon from Tel Haror, *Qadmoniot* 24 (1991), 19 [Hebrew]).

¹⁹ S. WIMMER, *Hieratische Paläographie der nicht-literarischen Ostraka der 19. und 20. Dynastie* (ÄAT 28, Wiesbaden 1995), 29, Typ ba.

²⁰ G. MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie II* (Leipzig 1927²), 80; WIMMER, *Hieratische Paläographie*, D.2 Typ b.

²¹ MÖLLER, *Hieratische Paläographie*, 26. The lower part is reminiscent of considerably earlier forms (Idem, *Hieratische Paläographie I* [Leipzig 1927²], 26 [Middle Kingdom]), while the large head becomes more common later (U. VERHOEVEN, *Untersuchungen zur späthieratischen Buchschrift* [OLA 99, Leuven 2001], 110 [Takelothis, 22nd Dynasty]).

can be found, again, in the more cursive shapes.²² The following stroke then becomes an integral part of the sign, not an ideogram stroke, and the 𓆎 (S.29) a phonetic complement. Since the space between the two signs is clearly narrower than the empty space left on both the right and left sides, it can be presumed that nothing is missing on either side. The inscription is probably complete and consists of one word: 𓆎𓆏 *šps(j)*.

Palaeographically, it is hardly possible to date a two-sign inscription with certainty,²³ but it is noteworthy that the way the head part of the sign 𓆏 (A.51) is drawn, as a curve open on the right, becomes common in the late 19th Dynasty and subsequently characteristic of the 20th Dynasty. The little loop ending of the sign 𓆎 (S.29) appears more frequently during the 20th Dynasty. These palaeographic criteria seem to match the latest possible dates that the archaeological context allows.

Egyptian single-word inscriptions on vessels are quite rare.²⁴ From Israel/Palestine, we are aware of only two precedents, both from Beth Shean. One is an 18th Dynasty jar bearing the single sign 𓆏 (A.2) in black ink, probably an abbreviation for *snhjj*, “inspected, checked.”²⁵ The second, on a storage jar from the Level VII temple, has 𓆎𓆏 (D.28, I.12) in cursive hieroglyphs, linked by a common bottom line, incised after firing in the plain slip.²⁶ This latter inscription may

denote an offering to the Ka of a goddess,²⁷ or, less probably, designate a **k3*-vessel.²⁸

šps(j), “noble, august, rich,” may designate a person or deity, may be part of a personal name (mostly in the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom), and may occasionally constitute a personal name itself.²⁹ A name on a vessel could be understood as an ownership mark. In our case, however, there is no determinative, and the name *špsj* is in any event only rarely attested. *šps(j)* can also qualify objects, meaning “excellent, precious, costly,” among them commodities such as oil, unguent and incense, as well as ritual vessels.³⁰ In such usage it often lacks a determinative. It is therefore a strong possibility that the inscription on this sherd refers to a precious commodity that the vessel was meant to contain.

Another attractive option is that the inscription denotes a vessel called a “*šps*-jar,”³¹ which may have occurred in a number of shapes, judging from its various determinatives: 𓆎 (W.14), 𓆏 (W.14a), 𓆏 (W.22), 𓆏 (W.23), 𓆏 (W.70), 𓆏 (W.65)

In our case, the vessel itself could be understood as a determinative of the inscription. In the New Kingdom, the “*šps*-jar” is mentioned together with unguent, as well as in tomb inscriptions, denoting a receptacle for fresh drinking water from the Nile, to be offered to the dead. In the latter context, it explicitly denotes a vessel made of a precious metal, manufactured or gilded by the divine craftsman Ptah.³² The Tell eš-Šāfi vessel

²² M.SH. ALI, *Hieratische Ritzinschriften aus Theben* (GOF IV.34, Wiesbaden 2002), Taf. 34: 450, 2940.

²³ WIMMER, *Hieratische Paläographie*, I, 249.

²⁴ Except, of course, for their occurrence as potter’s marks: for a recent study on (albeit earlier) Egyptian potter’s marks, see, E.-M. ENGEL, Zu den Ritzmarken der 1. Dynastie, *Lingua Aegyptia* 5 (1997), 13–27. For more or less contemporary potter’s marks in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean world, see, e.g., J. PAPADOPOULOS, Early Iron Age Potter’s Marks in the Aegean, *Hesperia* 63 (1994), 437–507; N. HIRSCHFELD, Incised Marks (Post-Firing) on Aegean Wares, in C. ZERNER, P. ZERNER and J. WINDER (eds.), *Wace and Blegen: Pottery as Evidence for Trade in the Aegean Bronze Age 1939–1989*, (Amsterdam 1993), 311–18; Idem, Cypriots to the West? The Evidence of Their Potmarks, in: L. BONFANTE and V. KARAGEORGHIS (eds.), *Italy and Cyprus in Antiquity: 1500–400 B.C.: Proceedings of an International Symposium Held at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University,*

Nov. 16–18, 2000, (Nicosia 2001), 121–29. For potter’s marks from the Levant, see, e.g., B.G. WOOD, *The Sociology of Pottery in Ancient Palestine* (JSOT Sup; Sheffield 1990).

²⁵ Publication forthcoming by S. WIMMER in the Beth Shean excavation reports, edited by A. MAZAR.

²⁶ JAMES and MCGOVERN, *The Late Bronze Egyptian Garrison*, fig. 11:4; FITZGERALD, *Four Canaanite Temples*, pl. 42:5.

²⁷ Cf. *Wb* V, 89,2.12.

²⁸ Cf. the ritual *k3-hr-k3*-vessel (*Wb* V, 93,4.5), the precious “*k3=k-mn*-vessel” (of gold, *Wb* V,93,9), and the “vulva(-shaped) strainer” *k3.t-m(t)rh.t* (of basketry or bronze, *Wb* V, 94,4; J.J. JANSSEN, *Commodity Prices from the Ramesid Period* [Leiden 1975], 431).

²⁹ H. RANKE, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen* (Glückstadt 1935), I, 326.

³⁰ *Wb* IV, 447,12–19.

³¹ Attested as *šps*, *špsj* and *šps.t* (*Wb* IV, 451,11–13).

³² DZA 30.045.830, 30.045.840 (<http://aaew.bbaw.de/dzaInfo/index.html>).

was not made of a costly material, which would suggest that the inscription applies to the qualification of its contents. On the other hand, we may speculate that it was the lack of precious (metal or stone) vessels that motivated the designation of a pottery jar as *šps*, in order to qualify it for use in some ritual function. The technique of incising a hieratic inscription on pottery before firing is unusual,³³ and would seem to indicate that the vessel was purposely manufactured either as a “*šps*-jar,” or for contents to be qualified as *šps*.

CONCLUSIONS

The relative scarcity of Egyptian inscriptions from Late Bronze Age Canaan in itself highlights the importance of any item that can be added to this limited corpus, even if it is of a brief and somewhat enigmatic character. It can be argued that besides this inherent value, the short inscription presented above is of additional significance.

The very presence of this and other Aegyptiaca at Tell eš-Šâfi conforms with the current views on the extent of Egyptian involvement in southern Canaan during the terminal phases of the Late Bronze Age. Whether this evidence supports the interpretation of a direct and pervasive Egyptian presence³⁴ or of a limited Egyptian presence and a substantial emulation of Egyptian culture by the local elites³⁵ is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the suggested reading of the inscription might argue for the former interpretation. If, in fact, the inscription alludes to very

specific contents of this vessel, highly significant from an Egyptian cultural point of view, it would seem to indicate that this would be the result of a direct and tangible Egyptian presence, either at Tell eš-Šâfi or at the yet unidentified site in Canaan at which the vessel was fabricated.

The fact that the inscription was found in relative proximity to objects of Egyptian origin and other Egyptianizing finds, in a terminal phase of the Late Bronze Age, is similarly of interest. It is well documented that at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (concomitant with the late 19th and early 20th Dynasties), there was an upsurge in the intensity of the Egyptian activity in Canaan.³⁶ The available evidence appears to indicate that, as at other sites in southern Canaan, during the final stages of the Late Bronze Age city at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath, there was a substantial Egyptian influence and/or presence at the site. Although it is too early to claim that the above serves as explicit evidence of an actual Egyptian presence at the site, this is a definite and, one might add, logical possibility. Further support for such a suggestion may possibly be culled from a little-known sphragistic find from nearby Lachish/Tell Duweir, published many years ago by Diringier.³⁷ In a rereading of this seal, Cross suggested that it should be interpreted as a bilingual Egyptian/proto-Semitic seal, on which a Proto-Semitic inscription *Il du gitti* appears (accompanying the image of Ptah), in his opinion a reference to an Egyptianized cult of the god El at Gath.³⁸ If

³³ We were unable to find additional examples of hieratic inscriptions incised before firing, although one should keep in mind the pre-firing incised inscription in cursive hieroglyphs from Lachish that was mentioned above (n. 18). It is tempting to suggest that these two pre-firing incised vessels represent a unique southern Palestinian scribal tradition, in which Egyptian scripts were written in a method that has parallels in contemporary Paleo-Canaanite inscriptions (e.g.: inscribed sherds from Tel Nagila, Gezer, Tell el-Hesi [doubtful], Khirbet Tanin [doubtful], Tel Rehov, and the numerous signs on jar handles from Gezer [doubtful]; for a discussion and catalogue, see B. SASS, *The Genesis of the Alphabet and Its Development in the Second Millennium B.C.* [ĀAT 13, Wiesbaden 1988], 54f., 55f., 69, 96f., 98, 100f.), but unknown in other Egyptian scribal traditions. Thus, it may represent yet another example of Egypto-Canaanite cross-cultural interaction and hybridism in Late Bronze Age Canaan.

³⁴ E.g., REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel*; OREN, *JSSEA* 14 (1984).

³⁵ E.g. HIGGINBOTHAM, *Egyptianization*.

³⁶ E.g. OREN, *JSSEA* 14 (1984).

³⁷ D. DIRINGER, *Inscriptions. A. Early Canaanite*, in: O. TUFNELL, *Lachish IV* (London, 1958), 128, pl. 38:295. The seal, a four-sided prism, derives from Tomb 555, that is dated to the Late Bronze Age I–III (TUFNELL, *Lachish*, 244–245). It has Amenhotep II's name inscribed on it, along with images of the deities Amun and Ptah and an unidentified third figure (TUFNELL, *Lachish IV*, 123, pl. 38:295).

³⁸ F.M. CROSS, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 19. It must be stressed, however, that this reading has been questioned (R. HESTRIN, B. SASS and A. OPEL, *The Lachish Prism Inscription: Proto-Canaanite or Egyptian?*, *IEJ* 32 [1982], 103–106). Since HESTRIN *et al.*'s reconstruction of the inscription as hieroglyphic *Pth nfr[-hr]* is quite convincing, clearly one must qualify its connection with an Egyptianized cult at Tell eš-Šâfi/Gath.

one accepts the identification of Tell eṣ-Šâfi as Canaanite Gath, the existence of a cultic center with a strong Egyptian influence would serve as an excellent scenario to explain the various Egyptian and Egyptianized objects found at the site. It would

also, perhaps, explain why a locally made vessel with a Hieratic inscription, possibly meant to contain precious liquids for cultic use, was found at the site – it may have served as a ritual offering as part of an Egyptianized cult of El at Gath.³⁹

³⁹ For the possibility of an *interpretatio aegyptiaca* of El as Ptah, see M. GÖRG, Ptah in der Bibel, *Biblische Notizen* 86 (1997), 24–28; Idem, s.v. Ptah, in: M. GÖRG and B. LANG (eds.), *Neues Bibel-Lexikon, III* (Düsseldorf-Zürich 1988–2001), 215–216; O. KEEL, Der ägyptische Gott Ptah auf Siegelamuletten aus Palästina/Israel, in: O. KEEL, H. KEEL-LEU and S. SCHROER (eds.), *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel II* (OBO 88, Fribourg 1989), 281–323; Y. LEIBOVITZ, The Cult of Ptah with Non-Egyptians, *Eretz-Israel* 4 (1956), 64–67 (Hebrew); S. WIMMER, El, Mekal and Ramses: The Statue from Beisan Again, *Journal of Palestinian Archaeology* 1/2 (2000), 32–35; Idem, Y a-t-il eu des temples

égyptiens en Israël/Palestine?, *Mélanges de Science Religieuse* 59/2 (2002), 20–21. Egyptian involvement in Canaanite cult is well attested in Beth Shean, and may perhaps also be deduced for Lachish, based on the similarity of the temple architecture at both sites – local Canaanite styles incorporating Egyptian elements. See S. WIMMER, Egyptian Temples in Canaan and Sinai, in: S. ISRAELIT-GROLL (ed.), *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim* (Jerusalem 1990), 1065–1106; Idem, (No) More Egyptian Temples in Canaan and Sinai, in: I. SHIRUN-GRUMACH (ed.), *Jerusalem Studies in Egyptology* (ÄAT 40, Wiesbaden 1990), 87–123; Idem, *MSR* 59/2 (2002).