THE REDISCOVERY OF AMIOUN, ANCIENT AMMIYA. GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS IN NORTHERN LEBANON DURING THE SECOND MILLENNIUM

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Abstract: Throughout the course of the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE the Lebanese area appears to have been politically fragmented, composed of many entities of variable size, the most powerful of which were those centred on the rich coastal cities but with many hinterland centres too. The region's physical geography and its strategic position made the area fundamental for the control of land and sea routes and therefore attractive to all foreign powers. By means of texts, especially the Amarna letters, and new archaeological data it is possible to reconstruct how this territory was organized and how the prosperous coast and the rural highland were two political and social realities that were both opposite and complementary.

Keywords: Lebanon; Byblos; Amurru; Koura; Amarna Letters.

We all know that geographical features, environmental factors and resources have a major impact on the relations between humans and their home territory. They influence settlement choices and strategies: all aspects of life are affected, starting from the most basic, such as food and clothing, then economy and trade and consequently also culture, art, and so on. Wrong choices are dangerous and can be devastating; they may literally cause the destruction of a city or the collapse of its economy.[1]

1. The Landscape

The Levantine coast, especially the Lebanese part, has a distinctive geography that has profoundly marked the history of the region. The area's conformation appears very constraining and limiting, but it also offers protection and many unique resources.[2]

The first thing we notice on a map of the area (Fig. 1) is that the region between the plain of Akko to the south and Akkar plain to the north is characterized by a thin flat coastal strip, a very narrow plain that hardly exceeds one km in width, widening slightly just in certain areas, such as near Beirut or between Sidon and Tyre, reaching 6.5 km only near Tripoli.

With the exception of some higher inland plains, such as that of Koura in the north, this coastal plain opens up only south of Ras en-Naqqura and north of Tripoli. The latter area is the plain of Akkar, a triangular shaped plain stretching along the coast for about 30 km and inwards for 25 km, forming the Homs/Akkar Gap that is the main connection between the Mediterranean Sea and inner Syria. Over the centuries it has been an important route for commerce, communication and also war.[3]

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1 On the relationship between humans and their environment see *e.g.* Grossman 1977 and Judkins – Smith – Keys 2008.

2 On the "Crucial Role of Landscape" in the region, see Edrey 2016.

3 See the brief sketch of Lebanese geography in Collelo 1987, pp. 43-44. See also Sanlaville 1977, especially pp. 243-279 for the plain of Akkar, and Thalmann 2007.
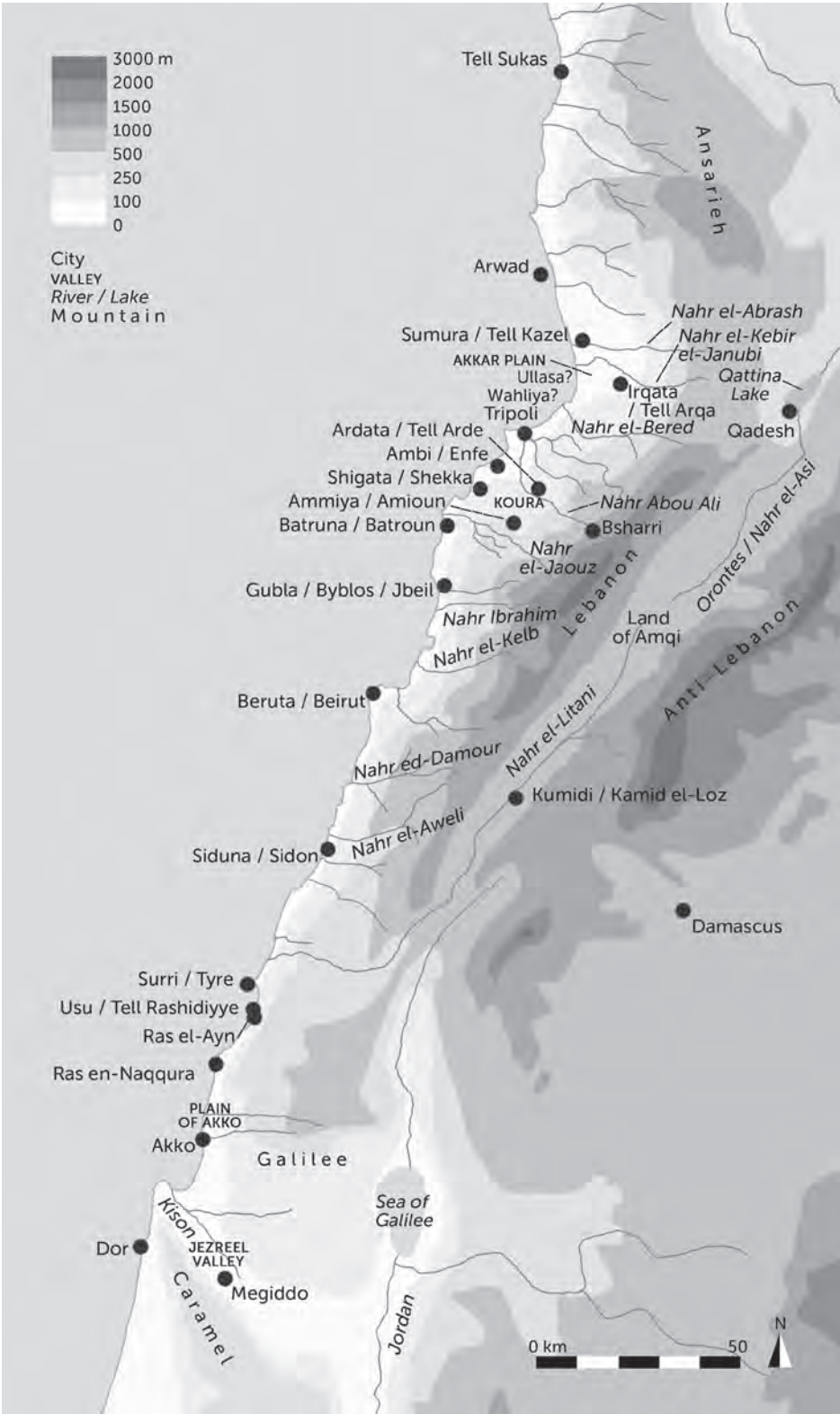
FIG. 1. Map of the places mentioned in the text (author's drawing).

The Lebanon mountains rise parallel to the coast, often directly from the sea, creating promontories, obstacles that hinder passage along the coastal plain.[4] The highest peaks exceed 3000 metres near Bsharri in the north. The average height of 1500 m gradually decreases southwards, then joining the Palestinian plateau (500-700 m). The eastern slopes are the highest and descend quite abruptly into the Beqaʿ, the narrow valley below, 120 km long and maximum 16 km wide, bordered to the east by the Anti-Lebanon mountains.

Besides the promontories, the coastal plain is further interrupted by short rivers that descend from the mountains and which can be difficult to cross, especially when they overflow.

This landscape creates a very fragmented territory, a condition that has been often reflected by political fragmentation that can be detected, *e.g.*, in the Bronze and Iron Age city-states as well as during the late Ottoman Empire, when the area was divided between the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate and Beirut Vilayet.

2. The Earliest Written Records and Relations with Egypt

Not a lot is known about the most ancient history of this region. Settlements are archaeologically well attested since prehistoric times,[5] but there is not much written evidence until the Egyptian execration texts, which date back only to the 19th and 18th centuries BCE, *i.e.* to the mid-12th and early 13th dynasties.[6] These texts have been used in the past to postulate the existence of an Egyptian empire in Asia – namely in the Levant – already during the Middle Bronze Age,[7] but considering their ritual/cultic nature, according to Redford they «reflect an act of magical annihilation of persons and things inimical to Pharaoh and Egypt. The rite involved either figuring the individual in a terra-cotta, stone, or wooden representation, inscribed or uninscribed, or writing the names on pottery vessels. […] The rite will be used against any the state is not sure of – any who are not a *foederatus* – which meant virtually all of Asia, apart from Byblos»[8] that must have been for a long time one of the main sources of cedar wood brought to Egypt by sea.[9] So the rites to which these texts refer, rites that are attested from the Old Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman period, were aimed at any potential enemy of Egypt.[10] In

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4   The situation is similar to that in Syria, beyond the plain of Akkar, north of Tartus: here the coastal strip narrows again, between the sea and the Syrian Coastal Mountain Range (Jebel Ansarie), only to widen slightly north of Tell Sukas.

5   For the Palaeolithic, see Besançon – Copeland – Hours 1972 and 1975; Bar-Yosef 1980. See Garfinkel 2004 for the Neolithic and the first evidence of urbanization at Byblos, that «yielded one of the most comprehensive stratigraphic sequences of the 9th to 6th millennia BP in the Levant» (p. 175), with previous literature.

6   For the first and sometimes controversial mentions of Byblos in the 3rd millennium, in Egyptian and Ebla texts, see Belmonte Marín 2003, pp. 61-63, with previous literature. On the reading of the Elbaite DU-LU[ki] as *gub-lu*[ki] and its identification with Byblos see *ibidem*, Bonechi 1993, pp. 111-112 and recently Biga 2021. It is important to recall that new interpretations concerning the localization of some toponyms documented in the Ebla cuneiform texts are currently transforming the historical geography of the 24th century BCE Levant.

7   See, *e.g.*, Albright 1928. More literature in Posener 1971, pp. 547, 952-955 and 959.

8   Redford 1992, pp. 87 and 89. See a brief overview of the contacts between Byblos and Egypt in Redford 1992, pp. 37-43 and a discussion of the execration texts in Redford 1992, pp. 87-93. On the possible use of the execration texts, see also Ben-Tor 2006. On archaeological evidence for contact between Byblos and Egypt, see Montet 1928; Ward 1963 and, more recently, Sowada 2009; Ahrens 2015; Bader 2015. Byblos, modern Jbeil, should more properly be called here Gubla, as it is named in the cuneiform texts (Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 95-97; the Egyptian texts use *Kpn*), but the Greek name Byblos is now commonly used for all epochs, even today for the modern city and in the widely quoted English translation of the Amarna letters by Moran (1992) used even in this article.

9   Redford 1992, p. 37 notes that on the Palermo Stone an entry relative to Khasekhemui, last pharaoh of the II Dynasty (27th century BCE) mentions "ship-building", thus a reference to a sea-going fleet, and that the Egyptian royal name of Khasekhemui is the earliest found at Byblos. Later, at the time of Sneferu in the IV Dynasty, boat-building activities and 40 ships laden with wood are mentioned; according to Wilkinson, these could be a reference to the timber trade with Byblos as a regular part of the Egyptian economy – even though the provenance is not explicitly mentioned. Text, translation, and commentary on the fragments in Wilkinson 2000, pp. 134 and 141.

10   Posener 1971, p. 548.

1939 Posener, who published part of the texts,[11] pointed out that these rites were not connected to the present: their purpose was to safeguard the future.[12] The mention of foreigners as possible rebels does not mean that they were actually under Egyptian control; the texts do not reflect «a historical reality but the dogmatic belief in universal domination by the Pharaoh. […] The testimony that this rite was practiced at a given point in history is not proof that the internal and international situation at that time was troubled, and that the Egyptian government had recourse to magic, being unable to reply with force. The wealth of evidence suggests, in fact, that this practice was a routine matter». So «the use of these documents as a source for political history is very hazardous indeed».[13]

The tendency to use static formulas, fixed through time, whose original form dated back to the past, is typical of ritual texts and is also a well-known Egyptian practice that may be seen too in the Late Bronze Age in the New Kingdom topographical lists – more or less large groups of foreign toponyms of cities supposedly conquered by the pharaoh, each one enclosed in a cartouche and often surmounted by the torso of a foreign captive, mainly carved on the external facades of temple pylons.[14] And about these lists, Simons commented in 1937: «It can indeed hardly be denied that by far the greater number of Egyptian Topographical Lists deserve little consideration as historical documents»;[15] however, those that are supported by other texts and/ or could be considered the prototypes of other lists – such as the Great List of Thutmose III, actually merit serious consideration.[16]

At the time of the execration texts the cities on the Lebanese coast had certainly had commercial relations with Egypt for centuries, in particular Byblos, where valuable Egyptian finds date back to the third millennium. The royal tombs found in Byblos are more or less contemporary with the execration texts and clearly demonstrate that Egyptian-inspired objects and motives were in vogue in the city back then,[17] but this is clearly not enough to postulate the existence of an Egyptian empire in the region during the first part of the 2nd millennium.

With regard to the area covered by the execration texts, among the toponyms mentioned are Tyre, Byblos, Arqa and Ullassa; none of the identified toponyms is located further north than Nahr el Kabir.

Despite this, it is clear that there was already a strong connection between the coast and the inner regions, and that Egypt was probably using the routes through the Beqaʿ and/or the Homs Gap to reach these areas – or at least its objects and style travelled along these paths. The MBA Egyptian influence is actually visible not only on the coast, *e.g.* in the paintings from Tell Burak near Sidon,[18] but also in sites far from the sea, such as in the paintings from Tell Sakka near Damascus,[19] and Egyptian objects have been found in inland Syria as well, *e.g.* at Qatna and Ebla.[20] Apart from this, and the likelihood that villages in the hinterland contributed to the timber supply, there is no other evidence on the status or history of the inner areas such as Koura.

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11   Posener 1940. The other large group was published by Sethe 1926.

12   Posener 1939, p. 46.

13   Posener 1971, p. 548.

14   See description and typologies in Simons 1937, pp. 5-11.

15   Simons 1937, p. 14.

16   Redford 2003, pp. 43-47; Turri 2015, pp. 161-173, with literature.

17   See n. 8 and a list of the tombs, with previous literature, in Posener 1971, pp. 545 and 952-955.

18   See chapter 11, «Preliminary Report on the Middle Bronze Age Wall Paintings» (contributions by M. Van Ess; J. Betsch and J Verhey), in Kamlah – Sader 2019, pp. 381-411.

19   Taraqji 1999.

20   See *e.g.* a sphinx of Ita, daughter of Amenemhat II (Du Mesnil du Buisson 1928, pp. 10-11; Ahrens 2010) and a vase fragment with the cartouche of Sesostris I (Roccati 2002, pp. 173-174), both from Qatna, and a mace with the name of Hotepibra from the tomb of the "Lord of the Goats" at Ebla (Scandone Matthiae 1982). On the distribution of Egyptian imports in the Levant during the Bronze Age, see Ahrens 2020.

Important data come from a recently discovered inscription from Dahshur, in the mastaba of Khnum-hotep, an official who in the first half of the 19th century (early in the reign of Senwosret II) was responsible for trade with Egypt's eastern neighbours, and who later became vizier and chief steward, and served also during Senwosret III's reign. The fragmentary text deals with cedar wood trade and a conflict between the king of Byblos and the governor of Ullassa, who was attacked by the former, and seems to mention Egypt's possible intervention on the side of the latter – or at least as mediator. From the text it is quite clear that at the beginning of the 2nd millennium Egypt had dealings not only with Bybos but also – perhaps mainly – with Ullassa, and that it was staring to exert political influence in the region, especially on Byblos, where the local king was soon substituted by a governor, attested at the time of Amenemhat III.[21]

At the beginning of the Late Bronze Age other Egyptian texts, especially relating to the time of Thut-mosis III – including his already mentioned long topographical list[22] and his Annals,[23] show an Egyptian influence in the area, this time not limited to trade but which started to extend to effective political control of the cities of the region.[24] These aspects are also clearly indicated by some texts and paintings found in tombs of the epoch, the most famous being the Tomb of Rekhmire at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna in Thebes, one of the most luxurious private monuments of the New Kingdom, where – as well as a detailed description of the function of the first vizir – there is a clear depiction of the tributes brought by the various peoples under Egyptian dominion.[25]

In the same epoch, as may be inferred from written records, some cities in the Orontes valley began to have political influence and military presence in the coastal area. The influence of Qadesh on the region led to the battle of Megiddo, during the first victorious campaign of Thutmosis III in Asia, that was the basis of his rule in Canaan;[26] from the records of the fifth campaign we know that Tunip had a garrison city in Djahy, Waret, that must have been somewhere in the Homs Gap, since it was plundered by the pharaoh just before the sack of Ardata, modern Tell Arde.[27] Sometime later, at the time of Adad-Nirari of Qatna, a legal text found in the city indicates that he had some archers (*šannān*) in a town called Tukad/t that must have been located in or near the mountains of Lebanon.[28]

3. The Region's Political Organization during the Amarna Period

More details on the political organization of the area, one century after the battle of Megiddo, come from the Amarna letters, one of the major sources of information on the history of Lebanon during the Late Bronze Age and the Egyptian presence in the region.[29] Those sent from Byblos, which constitute about one fifth of

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21   Allen 2008, especially pp. 33-34 and 37-38, with literature. Allen observes that «the events recorded by Khnumhotep may even have been the impetus for the change of rule in Byblos to a governor (*hitj-*) rather than a *malku* later in the 12th Dynasty» (p. 37).

22   Simons 1937, list 1. See literature on the list in Turri 2015, pp. 161-173.

23   Breasted 1906, § 391-540; Redford 2003, pp. 3-98.

24   See Redford 1992, pp. 192-213.

25   Text in Breasted 1906, § 663-762; paintings and architecture in Davies 1935 and 1943.

26   See Redford 1992, pp. 148-160.

27   Breasted 1906, § 456-459; Redford 2003, pp. 62-66. See here for the possibility that Waret was the same as Ullassa.

28   Text TT 6 in Richter 2012, pp. 75-76. See also Richter 2007, pp. 306-307 and Turri 2015, p. 283. On Adad-Nirari see Richter 2002, pp. 608-610 and Turri 2016, pp. 150-154.

29   We must recall that in the Late Bronze Age western Syria and the Levant were dominated for the first time in their history by foreign powers – Egypt, Mitanni, Hatti – and the region between the Homs Gap and the Beqaʿ became the area were the main confrontations occurred. The Egyptian presence is witnessed by the Amarna letters, but also the king of Mitanni is mentioned at Sumura (EA 85: 51-55) and booty or tribute was collected in Amurru for Mitanni (EA 86: 10-12), see Altman 2003 and below n. 33. On the presence of Hittite troops in the area, see Genz 2011, p. 312 and especially Genz 2019.

the total,[30] are of particular importance and inform us of the desperate attempt made by its king Rib-Adda to defend the lands of the pharaoh – or, at least, this is his version.[31] His real purpose was probably to maintain control over his own dominions against the advance of Amurru – which in turn also claimed to act in the interests of Egypt.[32] Its ruler, Abdi-Ashirta, a man of unknown origin, was the first to bring to the fore the hitherto unknown state of Amurru. The term Amurru was old and had been used with different meanings through time but was then used for the first time for a political entity, a state.[33]

The considerable amount of Rib-Adda's letters may have been due (as well as to his talkative nature, about which the pharaoh complained)[34] to the long relationship that the city maintained with Egypt[35] that could have made the king feel more confident in writing to the Great King, or to the tricky situation between Byblos and Amurru, not totally resolved at the end of the archive and which risked compromising Egyptian interests in the region. The latter may be the reason why the letters were preserved: many of the archive letters refer to particular events – whereas those relating to normal routine matters did not need to be kept and most of them were likely to have been disposed of in antiquity.[36]

With all the information contained in Rib-Adda's letters, despite their marked repetitiveness[37] and the fact that they span only a few decades, we are able to reconstruct, albeit partially, the extension of Byblos before and after the Amarna period and how a city-state on the Lebanese coast was organized.[38]

From the letters it is clear that the city of Byblos had some direct dependencies, including various towns that were on the mountains, together with others on the coast.[39]

Among Byblos' towns on the coast were Batruna, modern Batroun (16 km northwards along the coast from Byblos) and Shigata, modern Chekka (on the coast 30 km north of Byblos).[40] And it was from Shigata that Rib-Adda tried to defend against the first advance of Amurru into his territories, which seem to have included the city of Ambi, modern Enfeh, almost always mentioned together with Shigata.[41] It is mentioned

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30   More than seventy letters come from Byblos: EA 68-140; all are from Rid-Adda except EA 97-100 and EA 139-140.

31   See Liverani 1974 and Pryke 2011. On the history of Byblos in the LBA, see most recently Kilani 2019 with literature.

32   See *e.g.* EA 68 vs. EA 60-66.

33   On Amurru, the Amorites and their identity see the classic Kupper 1957, pp. 147-259, the more recent excursus by Wossink 2009, pp. 119-129, and Čech 2015. The evolution of the meaning of the term "Amurru" is briefly summarized by Singer 1991, pp. 137-138 as follows: «in its earliest usage, in the third and the early part of the second millennium», it «refers loosely to the Syrian regions west of Mesopotamia proper and to the inhabitants of these regions, often semi-nomadic tribes living by grazing. This general usage is gradually restricted in texts from Mari and from Alalakh to a certain region of central and southern Syria (see Klengel 1969, pp. l82f). Probably in the course of the 15th century the scope of the term Amurru was further reduced. when it became attached to a region which a century later became the kingdom of Amurru ruled by the dynasty of Abdi-Asirta. […] It is only during the early 18th dynasty that the region came under direct Egyptian rule». On the status of Amurru before its annexation to the Hittite kingdom at the time of Aziru and its possible prior subjection to the king of Mitanni, see Altman 2003; Miller 2007, pp. 547-549; Devecchi 2012. On the end of Amurru around 1200 BCE, see Devecchi 2010.

34   See *e.g.* EA 117 and EA 124.

35   See above n. 8.

36   On the letters' archiving see Liverani 1998, pp. 50-52.

37   Pryke 2011, p. 411.

38   Kilani 2019, especially pp. 146-175.

39   This is clearly affirmed in EA 74: 19 «All my villages that are in the mountains or along the sea...».

40   These cities are mentioned in several letters and their appurtenance to Rib-Adda is stated, *e.g.*, in EA 81: 8-10: Abdi-Asirta «has taken all my cities for himself, Gubla and Batruna remain to me» or EA 71: 25: «I may resist him in Shigata».

41   EA 71: 23-31: «So send me 50 pairs of horses and 200 infantry that I may resist him in Shigata until the coming forth of the archers. Let him not gather together all the Apiru so he can take Shigata and Ampi». The two towns are also mentioned together in EA 76: 18-19 and twice in EA 104: 11-12, 40-41 and EA 98: 11-12 and 15-16. The latter is one of the few letters from Byblos not written by Rib-Adda.

alone only once, in EA 102: 20 and here its lord is called LÚ.MEŠ, while the lord of Shigata is called EN (*bēlu*) in EA 74: 26, where he is mentioned with that of Ammiya. Since the kings are normally called EN or LUGAL (*šarru*), whereas LÚ.MEŠ is a title normally used for the Egyptian commissioners – emissaries of the Great King the Pharaoh, we may suppose that the lord of Ambi was an administrator of the city or at least a ruler of a lower rank than that of Shigata and that the town was thus not only a dependency of Byblos but also under Shigata.[42]

Another dependency of Byblos was perhaps Bit-Arha, the city mentioned as having been captured in EA 79 and from where Abdi-Ashirta set out to conquer Batruna.[43]

Bit-Arha has not yet been identified with certainty, but could correspond to El-Heri,[44] a small town on the coast with a multiperiod tell, a couple of km south of Chekka and immediately before the promontory of Ras Chekka,[45] one of the obstacles referred to above, on the way to Batruna. This promontory, Classical Theoprosopon and Byzantine Lithoprosopus, interrupts the coastal plain making passage difficult and even today can be crossed only by means of a tunnel.[46] Its importance for communication is clear in later times too, *e.g.* in Polybius we read that: «Antiochus reaching Marathus (Amrit), the people of Aradus (Arwad) came to him asking for an alliance, and he not only granted this request, but put an end to their existing civil dissensions, by reconciling those on the island with those on the mainland. After this, he advanced by the promontory called Theoprosopon and reached Berytus (Beirut), having occupied Botrys (Batroun) on his way and burnt Trieres (al-Heri) and Calamus (Qalamoun)».[47] Some later authors, describing the huge earthquake that devastated much of Lebanon in 551 CE, highlight the landslide that caused a large part of the promontory to fall into the sea, probably destroying the road that must have existed at the time of Antiochus III, passing near the sea on the west and connecting Batroun to the Akkar plain,[48] thus making it necessary to use the east road. This was used during the First Crusade and the southern part is overlooked by a rock where at least from the 17th century a castle, the Mseilha Fort, has stood.

Recent spatial analyses to reconstruct the road network in the area with least-cost paths (LCP) show that Tell el-Heri seems less important compared to neighbouring sites such as Tell Mirhan or Batroun, or at least that it has a less favourable position which would cover an area up to a maximum of 9 km inland, making it easier to reach the aforementioned places.[49] If Tell Heri was actually Bit-Arha, its importance would have been connected mainly to its position before Ras Chekka: controlling both the possible routes (western and eastern) across such an obstacle meant controlling all the region's affairs, economy, relations and politics – and maybe also the sea, if in the town (where at present there is a small port) there was a dock.[50]

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42   Kilani 2019, pp. 154-155. For the status of Ammiya, see below.

43   EA 79: 21-29: «Since Bit-Arha was seized at the urging of 'Abdi-Asirta, they have as a result been striving to take over Gubla and Batruna, and thus all lands would be joined to the 'Apiru. There are two towns that remain to me, and they want to take them from the king».

44   The site has been surveyed by the Chekka Regional Survey; see Kopetzky *et al.* 2019, pp. 110-111: «This tell is a multiperiod site of about 25,000 m² and revealed material dating from the Chalcolithic to modern times».

45   This is also suggested by Kilani 2019, pp. 155-156 but Gubel 2010, pp. 122-23 prefers to locate it in the Arqa valley – that would be a rather strange location for Abdi-Ashirta to use to conquer Batrouna after he had taken Shigata. The strategic importance of Ras Chekka was already recognized by Smith 1949, pp. 72-73.

46   On the geography and history of the promontory, see Davie – Salamé-Sarkis 1986.

47   Polybius, *Hist.* V 68,7-8 (translation Paton 1922).

48   Russel 1985, pp. 44-46; Sbeinati – Darawcheh – Mouty 2005, pp. 357-359.

49   Rom *et al.* 2020, p. 263.

50   Harbours were present also in minor towns, such as Wahliya, a centre mentioned just a couple of times in the Amarana letters (Belmonte Marín 2001, p. 335) but where it was surely possible to dock: «In Wahliya are the ships of the rulers of Tyre, Beirut, and Sidon» (EA 114: 12-13). The place, not far from Ullassa, could correspond to modern Tripoli (Redford 2003, p. 65).

The Amarna letters indicate that besides direct dependencies there were other cities which had kings of their own, such as Ammiya (modern Amioun),[51] Ardata (modern Tell Arde) and Irqata (modern Tell Arqa),[52] even though they must have been somehow connected to Byblos, perhaps via some sort of control or vassalage. Thus, autonomous entities were sited not only on the coast but also inland and, even if they are not often mentioned, must have been important centres, perhaps not at an international level, but surely locally: they were the first cities that the kings of Amurru tried to recruit during their advance southward, because they evidently needed these cities to strengthen their position in the region.[53]

So we can infer that mountain settlements might be dependences of the coastal cities but also politically independent towns, maybe with a structure more tribal than urban, secluded from the international political scenario – in fact representing its opposite, since they became centres of attraction for those who needed to escape from that international world-system, if the statue of Idrimi is to be trusted. In his autobiography, carved on the statue, Idrimi says that a lot of refugees fleeing wars in Northern Syria found shelter in Ammiya: «In Ammiya dwell people originally from Aleppo and the lands of Mukiš, Niye, and Amaʾe».[54] This particular condition could be the reason why we have little written evidence on these centres, whose existence is nevertheless becoming increasingly clear thanks to the surveys conducted in inner areas – *e.g.* the Northern Lebanon Project has shown that Amioun was a rather important centre already in the EBA, centuries before the first written reference to it.[55]

One of these mountain centres could have been Amurru, which according to the petrographic analysis of its early tablets, was «a small highland chiefdom located on both banks of Nahr el-Kebir, on the slopes of Mount Lebanon, and inhabited by farmers, pastoral groups and elements that had been uprooted from urban and rural sectors».[56] Then, from its core in the mountainous area east of Tripoli, Amurru expanded southwards – the next letters were likely sent from the Nahr al-Awdeh area (*i.e.*, a tributary of Nahr Abu Ali), maybe from Tell Arde – and then northwards – since subsequent letters come from Tell Arqa – gaining

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51   The spelling Amioun for the modern toponym was chosen here because it is that commonly used by the Northern Lebanon Project, which has been studying the area archaeologically since 2017, and also by the municipality of Amioun when it is not written in Arabic letters (*e.g.* in the official facebook page of the Municipality of Amioun). In addition to this Frenchizing spelling (French is a formally recognized language in Lebanon), which happens also to be the transliteration of the Greek name Ἀμιούν, that is used among others by Sapin 1982, p. 154, n. 260 and Gubel 2018, p. 110, fig. 1, in literature there are other commonly used spelling: ʿAmyūn, that recalls the Arabic form, used *e.g.* by the *Repertoire Geographique des Textes Cuneiformes* (Belmonte Marín 2001, p. 20 and Bagg 2007, p. 115), Amyūn (Altman 1978 and 2014), Amyun (Klengel 1965, p. 187, n. 9; Oller 1977, p. 35), Amjūn (Klengel 1969, p. 48, n. 49), ʿAmyoun (Dussaud 127, pp. 78-79 and 117) and Amiun (Naʾaman 1978, pp. 230-231). In accordance with this choice, for the region in which the city is located, the spelling Koura is used, rather than Kūra.

52   See *e.g.* EA 74: 25-27 «(Abdi-Ashirta) said to the men of Ammiya: Kill your leader»; EA 75: 25-26 «The Apiru killed Aduna, the king of Irqata»; EA 140: 10-12 «Aziru killed Aduna, the king of Irqata; he killed the king of Ammiya, the king of Ardata» (similar also in EA 139: 13-15). On these associations see Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 20 [Aduna], 31-32 [Ardata], 145-146 [Irqata]. On the archaeological likelihood of the correspondence between Ammiya and Amioun, see below. The cities of Magdalu (EA 69: 20 and EA 70: 9) and Kusbat (or Masbat, EA 69: 21) seem to have been connected to Byblos as well but they are not analysed here since they are mentioned in fragmentary and problematic contexts – and even the reading of the second one is uncertain. On these two cities see Altman 1978, pp. 99-100, Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 171 and 183 and Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 151-152. See *ibidem*, Naʾaman 1978, 230-231 and especially Gubel 2018 for the second one and its possible connection with the Neo-Assyrian Kashpuna.

53   One of the few surviving letters written by the pharaoh might actually show a direct relation between Egypt and Ammiya, since it contains the request of a «daughter for the king… and the contributions: 20 first-class slaves, silver, chariots, first-class horses» (EA 99: 10-15). But the reading of the toponym as Ammiya is currently disputed, see Knudtzon 1915, p. 448; Liverani 1998, p. 243; Rainey 2015, pp. 546-547 vs. Moran 1992, pp. 171-172.

54   Idrimi 20-23 (Transl. Lauinger 2020). See Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 197-198 [Mukish], 210-212 [Niya] and 18 [Amae]; for Amae, see also Turri 2015, pp. 220-221.

55   Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 161-162, 164-165; Iamoni – Haider 2021.

56   Goren – Finkelstein – Naʾaman 2002, p. 199.

control of the Homs Gap and moving on to the conquest of the middle Orontes area.[57] And it is with that expansion that we start to have written information on Amurru, exactly at the time it began to take part in international politics.

We may suppose that this situation – coastal and mountain possessions, subject settlements – could have been typical also of the other big cities on the coast for which we have less information, such as Sidon, whose inland possessions seem to be mentioned in the letters.[58]

Finally, there were some cities such as Sumura, seat of the Egyptian garrison,[59] and Ullassa – cities of primary economic and strategic importance, since their ports offered direct access to the Akkar valley and the Homs Gap, fundamental passageways and extensive fertile farmlands. These cities, that were first-ly at the centre of the contention between Rib-Adda of Byblos and Abdi-Ashirta of Amurru – and later Aziru of Amurru – were directly dependent on Egypt, whose intervention in the Akkar plains dates back to the time of Thutmosis I and more consistently to that of Thutmosis III. The conquest of Ullassa may have occurred as early as the latter's 5th campaign, and no later than his 7th. It was at this time that the town became the base of an Egyptian garrison: the pharaoh needed the city as a foothold in Lebanon and a starting point for military campaigns in the region and in Syria – or as a place for loading his ships with precious cedar wood or goods seized as booty: Egyptians have repeatedly taken advantage of the region's riches, its grain, fruit and wine.[60] Over the ages, Egyptian troops were stationed in other cities in the area, and in the Amarna epoch the main administrative centre of Egyptian power had certainly become Sumura, modern Tell Kazel.[61]

A local regent must have been in charge of these cities when the Egyptian commissioner was not there, if the words of Rib-Adda may be trusted: «May the king, the Sun, ask him (*i.e.* Pahanate, the commissioner) if I do not guard Sumura and Ullassa. When my commissioner is on a mission of the king, the Sun, then I am the one who guards the harvest of the grain of Sumura and all the lands for the king, my Sun, my lord».[62] The desire to be the one who had this role and gained all the associated benefits – a privileged relationship with Egypt, access to the area's riches and the routes to inner Syria – must have been one of the main causes of the long contention between Rib-Adda and the rulers of Amurru. We can also assume that Sumura was on the boundary between Byblos and Amurru, marking the northern border of the former.

Egyptian presence in other cities would also have been commonplace, and we may imagine that it was customary for Egyptian emissaries to rule and protect them during the absence of the local kings: Rib-Adda often mentions that troops were stationed in his city in the time of his ancestors or even during his reign[63] and in the letters from Tyre there are repeated requests for attendants (LÚ.GÌR) from Egypt in order that its king could go to the pharaoh.[64]

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57   On this expansion see Goren – Finkelstein – Na'aman 2002, pp. 198-202 and Goren – Finkelstein – Na'aman 2003. See also Altman 2014.

58   EA 145: 21-22, «his servants that are in the Hinterlands».

59   The other main Egyptian garrisons were in Kumidi (Kami del-Loz) and Gaza. See Redford 1993, p. 207.

60   Klengel 1992, pp. 92, 98-99 and n. 82, 164-165; Redford 2003, pp. 62-66 and 71-73.

61   Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 251-253 [Sumura] and 320-321 [Ullassa]. On the identification of Ullassa, see Gubel 2010 with previous literature.

62   EA60: 19-29.

63   See *e.g.* EA 121: 10-14 «with my ancestors there was a garrison of the king, and provisions from the king were at their disposal» (similar in EA 122:10-15) or EA 125:14-17 «Previously, there was a garrison of the king with me, and the king was accustomed to give grain for their food from the land of Yarimuta».

64   In EA 148: 13-17 and EA 149: 17-20 he requests some LÚ.GÌR (on this term, see Moran 1992, p. 235, n. 1); in EA 150: 5-7 and EA 151: 15-18 he asks for LÚ.MEŠ.

4. The Territorial Extensions of the Cities' Dominions

When trying to establish the extensions of the various local political entities,[65] we have to keep in mind that the ancient kingdoms would have relied more on a network of places connected by routes than on contiguous areas with well-defined borders, as we are used to today – and that, in the case of the Lebanese coast, connections were possible not only by land but also by sea, so it is likely that territorial continuity wasn't an essential feature.[66] The use of ships to move around is widely attested: wheat came to Byblos by sea from Yarimuta;[67] Arwad's ships were sent to Shiqata and Ambi to block Byblos's sea passage to Sumura;[68] ships went to Ugarit to collect boxwood.[69]

Moreover, some cities – namely Arwad and Tyre – were islands and thus obliged to use ships to move around: no letters are from Arwad, but the city was clearly independent (though we don't know if it had a king or was ruled by an assembly, as seems likely)[70] and its fleet was rather feared by other cities. It is likely that the city developed substantially offshore, on a very small island of 30 ha, perhaps with some possessions on the mainland. But actually there was little available land in front of the island that did not belong to Sianu northwards or Byblos southwards – or, at the end of the Amrana epoch, to Amurru, which took control of Sumura. Alternatives are that rather than possessing territories of its own Arwad had some inland enclaves given in exchange for its naval support, or that agricultural land, insufficient on the small island, was granted for the same reason – its fleet remained famous even in later times and it was a desirable ally.[71]

With regard to the areas occupied by the various kingdoms, at the beginning of the Amarna period the northern border of Byblos (as already mentioned) must have been somewhere in the Akkar plain, near Sumura, but was reduced to an area south of Batrouna after Amurru's conquests; its southern border was always with Beirut, a city with which Byblos was on good terms. We may suppose that the border between the two was along the Nahr el-Kelb, that has remained one of the most difficult passages throughout history.[72] We don't know where to draw the eastern border, but may hypothesize the occupation of the lower part of the mountains, where there would have been space for some cultivation, and where – not too differently from today – human settlements would have become more and more sparse with increasing altitude.

Beirut was clearly an independent kingdom in the LBA but likely less important than Byblos and Tyre with whom it was allied. The few letters surviving among those sent from the city[73] do not present any particular problems, if not reference to the presence in the town of Rib-Adda after he was expelled from

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65   On the territorial domains in the region see Belmonte Marín 2003.

66   Von Dassow 2008, p 67. This lack of territorial continuity appears clear from some later sources: in the 7th century, according to the list of the conquests of Esarhaddon – a text that has been much discussed – the northern territories of Sidon included Beirut and then continued – leaving off Byblos, independent but reduced to its hinterland – with Batrun, Chekka, Enfeh and beyond (Leichty 2011, p. 23[1 v 59] and p. 46 [2 vi 10]; on its interpretation see Lipiński 1993 and 2004, pp. 17-36 vs Salame-Sarkis 2005, p. 144); according to Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca historica* XVI 41,1), Tripoli – whose name means triple city – was founded by people from Arwad, Sidon and Tyre, who had their colonies there.

67   Yarimuta is mentioned only in the letters from Byblos (for a couple of possible references in other texts, see Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 342-343) and almost always as a source of grain or goods for the city. Its position has been discussed at length; suggestions range from the Nile delta to the Yezreel Valley. See recently Halpern 2011 and De Magistris 2020 with previous literature.

68   *E.g.* EA 98: 10-18; EA 105: 85-86.

69   EA 126.

70   No king is mentioned but the texts always cite the "LÚ.MEŠ URU *ar-wa-da*", see Belmonte Marín 2001, p. 39.

71   On the political status of Arwad see Briquel-Chatonnet 2000; on its hinterland see Belmonte Marín 2003, pp. 49-50.

72   On the Nahar el-Kelb, see Maila-Afeiche 2009.

73   EA 141-143.

Byblos.[74] Beirut was bordered to the south by Sidon and we can suppose a borderline along Nahr el-Damour, another historical frontier.

Only two letters come from Sidon,[75] but numerous accusations are made against the city by Tyre and Byblos[76] (Beirut seems to have been more neutral and its alliances were composed as suited the senders of the letters).[77] It is clear that the alliances between non-contiguous cities, Tyre with Byblos and Sidon with Arwad, that characterized the region's subsequent history, were already present in the Late Bronze Age.

In its letters, Tyre stresses Sidon's hostility and its huge water problem after Sidon took Usu. Usu was the continental part of Tyre, that at the time was still an island. Usu was probably modern Tell Rachidiye (Classical Palaeotyre), a little to the south of which there is Ras el-Ayn, an important source of fresh water.[78] The need for inland possessions appears clearly: after Sidon's expansion, Tyre could not obtain water, nor indeed wood, clay or straw, and couldn't bury its dead since there was insufficient space on the island.[79]

Southwards, we know that Akko and Hazor were independent cities[80] and not connected with Tyre, so we can suppose a southern border at Ras en-Naqura, that is still the southern border of Lebanon.

5. Connections with the Inner Regions

The control of the coast in front of Tyre was important not only for the water but also because it gives access to the Akko plain and the fertile Yezreel valley; it is also a rather easy entrance to the Beqaʻ – and in addition the River Litani flows just to the north of Tyre. Control of this strategic position was likely one of the main reasons for the uninterrupted contention through the ages between Sidon and Tyre, that alternated as the main power in the region, with the prominence of one city always coming at the expense of the other.

In the Beqaʻ, north of Kumidi there was the land of Amqi that appears likely to have been located along the course of the upper Litani and at the watershed with the Orontes. It seems to have been composed of about ten small independent city-states, somehow connected to each other, perhaps in a sort of confederation. But the area was firmly under Egyptian control at least from the time of Thutmose III.[81] We have very little direct information about it, and all the Amarna and Hittite references are connected with one or more attacks on Amqi, especially that of Etakama of Qadesh.

Access to the Beqaʻ meant access to a fertile valley, and connections to Damascus and the routes to Mesopotamia. Except for the passage from Tyre in the south and that through the Akkar plain in the north, the only other connection with the Beqaʻ was through the Jezzine pass that seems likely to have been con-

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74   This last story is told in EA 142, from Ammu-nira of Beirut, as well as by Rib-Adda himself in his last letters, EA 136-138.

75   EA 144-145.

76   See *e.g.* EA 149:57-63 from Tyre: «Zimredda of Sidon, the rebel against the king, and the men of Arwada have exchanged oaths among themselves, and they have assembled their ships, chariots, and infantry, to capture Tyre, the maidservant of the king»; or EA 85: 69-72 from Rib-Adda: «Moreover, since your fatherʼs return from Sidon, from that time the lands have been joined to the ʻApiru». On the confrontations between the cities on the Lebanese coast in the 14th century and the possible motivations behind the alliances, see Altman 2014.

77   See *e.g.* Rib-Adda who affirms that both «Sidon and Beirut do not belong any longer to the king» in EA 118: 31-32 but later makes an alliance with the king of Beirut in EA 136: 28-32.

78   Belmonte Marín 2001, p. 329; Doumet-Serhal 2003.

79   See EA 148: 26-34: «May the king give attention to his servant, and may he charge his commissioner to give Usu to his servant for water, for fetching wood, for straw, for clay», and EA 149: 48-53 «The king knows whether you installed me as commissioner in Tyre. Still, Zimredda seized Usu from his servant. I abandoned it, and so we have neither water nor wood. Nor is there a place where we can put the dead. So may the king, my lord, give thought to his servant».

80   EA232-235+327 are sent from Akko and a king of the city is explicitly mentioned by Rib-Adda in EA 88: 42; EA 227-228 are sent from Hazor, whose ruler calls himself king in the former.

81   On Amqi, see Turri 2015, pp. 221-224 and 310-315 with literature.

trolled by Sidon. This pass is a rather well-known route connecting the coast to Kamid el Loz where there was another Egyptian garrison, the same route used by the Egyptian army on the way back from Qadesh.[82]

A glance at a map shows that each of the big cities had access to one of these passages, that must have been important components of their power.

6. The Impact of Geography on History. The Case of Koura and Amioun

The lack of soil suitable for agriculture on the coast has always made the foothills and inland plains desirable. The above-mentioned fertile plain of Koura, rich in watercourses, with high annual precipitation (700-800 mm/year) and moderate temperatures, extends westwards from the Lebanon Mountains and northwards joins the wide plain of Akkar, where there is the main passage to inner Syria; these characteristics give it both local economic importance and regional strategic significance as a natural crossroads between the coastal area, from which it is separated by a plateau, and the mountains. Today the main centre of the area is Amioun, a modern city that has a dominant position, standing on a high mount overlooking the plain and the route between the sea and the interior, a location that has favoured the city through the ages, as may be understood from the many ancient structures still standing there.[83] In spite of this, no systematic archaeological investigations have been carried out to date in the city or the region[84] and it is only in recent years that new projects have started to investigate both the coast and the inner part of Koura, with surveys and excavation programmes, the first being the Enfeh project,[85] then the Chekka Regional Survey[86] and the Northern Lebanon Project, more concentrated on the inland plain.[87]

Because of its position and the similarity of its name, Amioun has long been identified with the ancient city of Ammiya,[88] but only recently new archaeological evidence – dating the origins of the settlement firmly in the EBA – has revealed the presence of widespread second millennium remains in the city,[89] providing substantial data to support its identification with the ancient town, whose name appears for the first time in the long inscription carved on the mentioned statue of Idrimi, king of Alalah (modern Tell Atchana) at the beginning of the LBA.[90] This supposed biography, fictionally recounted by the monarch himself, tells that the future king, forced to leave his father's house in Aleppo, found refuge in the city «that sits in the land of Canaan», i.e. in the Levantine area under Egyptian control;[91] there were in Ammiya many other runaways who escaped, as he had done, from the belligerent northern regions of Syria and the turmoil that must have followed the fall of Aleppo and the great kingdom of Yamhad.

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82   Sader 2019, p. 91.

83   See the description of the location of Amioun in Sapin 1982, p. 154, n. 260.

84   See Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 147-148 for a brief review of previous studies in the region.

85   Panayot-Harun 2005 and 2016; Charaf 2016.

86   Kopetzky *et al.* 2019; Rom *et al.* 2020.

87   Iamoni *et al.* 2019; Iamoni – Haider 2021.

88   Sometimes in the past Ammiya has been considered a variant form of Ambi, see *e.g.* Knudtzon 1915, p. 1156 and more recently Singer 1991, p. 145 n. 11, but Dussaud 1927, p. 117 n. 1 and Smith 1949, p. 73 were already doubtful and proposed a possible connection with the modern Amioun. See the complete discussion in Altman 1978, pp. 100-102 and Belmonte Marín 2001, pp. 20-21. Furthermore, Late Bronze Ammiya has been often connected with the Immiu/Immiha of Neo Assyrian texts, see Bagg 2007, pp. 114-115 and Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 151-152.

89   Iamoni *et al.* 2019, pp. 160-162; Iamoni – Haider 2021.

90   On the problems regarding the dating of the statue see Van Dassow 2008, pp. 28-31 and Turri 2015, pp. 362-363 with literature.

91   Redford 1992, pp. 198-207.

Although this is mere speculation, it is fascinating to imagine that in the same area there was the «good land called Yaa», which half a millennium before had welcomed and exalted another distinguished refugee, the Egyptian Sinuhe: «Figs were in it and grapes. It had more wine than water. Abundant was its honey, plentiful its oil. All kinds of fruit were on its trees. Barley was there and emmer, and no end of cattle of all kinds» – all goods that may still be found in the region today.[92]

Back in the LBA, Idrimi stayed in Ammiya for a while – seven years, according to the text[93] – living among the *habiru* as one of them, a social outsider – at least with regard to the society of the great powers, that known from the texts – and the rural region of Koura would have been an excellent destination, a perfect place to escape to.[94] The region was not too far from the coast and there were good timber and ship-building craftsmen, since he was able to leave it by sea on vessels he had built, carrying soldiers to reconquer his land – he couldn't get back Aleppo but became king of Alalah – and actually some local inhabitants must have followed him, since the Alalah IV tablets contain references to people from Ammiya involved in activities in Alalah.[95]

The city is mentioned again, some decades later in the letters of Rib-Adda: as seen above, Ammiya got caught in the struggle between the king of Byblos and the man from Amurru, Abdi-Ashirta. The latter was considered an outcast, a *habiru*, by Rib-Adda, who never calls him King, Lord or by any other title but rather «servant and dog»,[96] acknowledging his nonconforming status and lack of a place in the established order.

And it is these different origins of the two enemies that allow us to see how the two worlds – the international one embraced by coastal cities like Byblos, and the rural one typical of centres like Ammiya – were both opposite and complementary. Abdi-Ashirta came from the second one and was certainly in no position to compete with Byblos: probably at the beginning of his uprising he had no possessions or footholds on the coast, and he was not used to sea travel. He had to start his advance in the territory he knew best, that is through the rural regions where he could count on the support of others similar to him; at the same time, in order to compete with Byblos, he tried to gain control of cities that already knew how to deal with the sea and that could benefit from the fall of Rib-Adda. This explains his double line of attack, on one hand advancing through Koura, a region that bordered Amurru and which partly shared its characteristics, where he tried to win the support of the local population, pushing them to get rid of their rulers who were probably connected with the others affiliated to Egypt, and on the other trying to get the approval of Egypt itself and the benefits that came with this – hence the long struggle for control of Sumura and the subsequent conquest of coastal cities allied or subjected to Byblos.

This situation appears clear in EA 73, in which the king of Byblos informed the Egyptian official Amanappa that Sumura had fallen and Abdi-Ashirta had written to the men of Ammiya to persuade them to kill their lord and join the *habiru*. This frightened the other city rulers who, afraid of meeting the same fate, joined the *habiru* (EA 73: 25-33).[97] From EA 75: 26-31 we learn that the king of Irqata had been killed and that a man of Arashni had seized Ardata, confirming Adbi-Ashirta's strategy and showing that he was trying to take control of the whole inner region – and we have to consider that with the subjugation of

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92   Text translated in Lichtheim 1973, pp. 222-235. On the possible location of Yaa in Northern Lebanon, see Gubel, Lofeet 2011-2012.

93   Von Dassow 2008, p. 26 n. 61. On the number seven and other motifs present in Idrimi's biography see Liverani 1967, 1972 and 2011.

94   On the *habiru* see von Dassow 2008, pp. 105-111.

95   See list of references in Belmonte Marín 2001, p. 20.

96   Rib-Adda uses the epithet several times for Abdi-Ashirta: EA 71: 18; EA 75: 42; EA 85: 64; EA 88: 10; EA 104: 19; EA 109: 10; EA 117: 37. It is used a couple of time also for his son Aziru: EA 124: 20 and EA 133: 13 (here «the servant and evil dog»). More often the terms "dog", "runaway dog" or similar are used. See Galan 1993.

97   According to EA 81: 11-20, it seems that there was also an attempt to kill the same Rib-Adda.

Sumura and Irqata, he would also have had a privileged position for control of the Homs Gap, *i.e.* the most convenient passage to inner Syria and a link to Mesopotamia. With the fall of Sumura, Amurru's growing influence extended also to the sea and Arwad's ships begin to operate in his aid – or at least against Rib-Adda (EA 101: 11-13).

After the capture of Sumura, the next step was the conquest of the northernmost cities of Byblos, Ambi and Shigata,[98] followed by the nearby Bit-Arha, the control of which was essential for travel along the coast in the absence of ships. From here, with no resistance from the hinterland and the growing support of other seaports, Abdi-Ashirta could easily have reached Batruna and then Byblos;[99] defeating Rib-Adda would have allowed him to take his place in relations with Egypt.

The disappearance of his enemy from the scene[100] gave the king of Byblos some respite, but soon the same situation recurred with one of the sons of Abdi-Ashirta, the new leader of Amurru Aziru, who continued with his father's strategy. The attack leading to Rib-Adda's defeat and his escape to Beirut must have been the result of a two-pronged assault both by sea, through the help of allied ships, and by land, from the hinterland – the conquest of which had already deprived Byblos of its supplies, forcing it to go into debt to buy them from Yarimuta.[101] The situation appears clearly in EA 104: 40-52, where Rib-Adda writes that «the cities of Ampi, Shigata, Ullassa, Arwad are at war with me. Should they hear that I was entering Sumur, there would be these cities with ships, and the sons of Abdi-Asirta in the countryside. They would attack, and I would be unable to get out, and Gubla would be joined to the ʿApiru».

7. The End of the Bronze Age

The local situation changed slightly after the general collapse of the Ancient Near East at the end of the LBA, when the only region that seems to have been excluded and where there was substantial continuity of settlement was the Lebanese coast.[102]

At the beginning there was no longer a single foreign overlord such as Egypt that controlled and to some extent unified the whole region – at least from the perspective of the great powers – but after a couple of centuries the role that Egypt used to have there was taken on by the Assyrians.

In the meantime, the local cities seem to have continued their lives, their commerce, their local contentions;[103] the lack of written evidence is probably due in part to their having written on materials other than clay. State archives actually seem to have existed: towards the end of the 2nd millennium, Zakar-Bal, king of Byblos, «had the daybook of his forefathers brought and had it read before» Wenamun, who had come to the city to buy the timber necessary to build a boat for the god Amun.[104] And since king Zakar-Bal's father and grandfather are mentioned in the "Tale of Wenamun", it is clear that at least in Byblos there was dynastic continuity. From the same text we know that at that time Byblos was still a large city with a big fleet, but it seems to have lost to Sidon the prominence that it used to have.[105] This was probably for several reasons: the city ports were likely inferior to those of Sidon and Tyre with regard to capacity and convenience;

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98   EA 76: 18-20.

99   EA 79: 21-25.

100   On the death of Abdi-Ashirta see Altman 1977 and Liverani 1998.

101   EA 75: 10-14 and EA 81: 38-42. On Yarimuta see n. 67.

102   Sader 2019, pp. 33-44.

103   Elayi 2018, pp. 99-100.

104   Translation of the text in Lichtheim 1976, pp. 224-230. On Wenamun see Schipper 2005.

105   Zakar-Bal of Byblos asks to Wenamun: «Are there not twenty ships here in my harbor that do business with Smendes? As for Sidon, that other place you passed, are there not another fifty ships there that do business with Werekter and haul to his house?».

Byblos does not have the advantage of being an island like Tyre and Arwad; its position is less favourable than those of the other cities for the routes to the east, and the fall of the northern part to Amurru would have made it even more difficult to reach them. Byblos however remained a lively marketplace, though its importance was entirely due to the valuable wood that grows on the nearby mountains – demand for which, after decreasing with the decline of Late Bronze Age international trade, increased again during the Iron Age.

From the "Annals of Tiglathpileser I" we know that at the end of the second millennium Sidon and Arwad were also still prosperous cities (Tyre is not mentioned),[106] to the extent that the Assyrian king, who made an expedition to fell cedars on Mount Lebanon, received tribute from them. In the same text Sumura is said to be a city of Amurru.[107]

In conclusion, the situation may be summarized as follows: in the LBA (as also later during the IA) the Lebanese area was somehow united – at least from an international perspective – and included in the zone of influence of a great foreign power, but locally the bigger cities maintained a high degree of freedom and independence one from the other, and possessed domains on the coast and the mountains. The coastal cities needed these territories in order to obtain basic goods such as food, water, wood and clay, but they probably had no real ambitions of territorial expansion – which would in any case have been virtually impossible because of the mountains, which on one hand constituted a barrier and limited the available space, but on the other provided timber – for shipbuilding and trade – and were thus more a resource than a limitation.

The coastal cities were important storage places, markets and distribution centres for raw materials and worked objects, especially valuable ones. For these reasons Egypt (and subsequently the great powers that dominated the area in the first millennium: Assyria, Babylonia and Persia) controlled the area with locally placed commissioners and garrisons, but leaving the cities the freedom to continue their commerce, and contribute to the enrichment of their overlords via tributes and trade.

We may suppose that the Lebanese coastal cities survived the Late Bronze Age collapse (and subsequently the passage from the IA to the Persian and then Classical periods) in part because they never really became part of the LBA (and then the IA) global system, although they had adapted to it. This is even more true of the cities in the hinterland, for which we have scanty written documentation but growing archaeological evidence, that never really came into direct contact with international politics since they would have dealt mainly with the local cities on the coast.

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