

## RESEÑAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS / BOOK REVIEWS

IDO KOCH, *Colonial Encounters in Southwest Canaan during the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age*. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 119. Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2021. xiii + 195. ISBN 978-90-04-43282-6. €115.00/ \$138.00

As Ido Koch states in the opening part of the work, the book is the translation into English and update to his 2018 PhD thesis in Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Compared to this thesis, the research has been enriched, updated and a number of the author's recent articles on the same topic have been added to it in a discursive, geographically and chronologically ordered form. The division between the two parts of the volume is quite clear to those familiar with the author's scientific production.

Of great interest and importance are the references to the most recent archaeological theories on the Egyptian presence in the Southern Levant during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, integrated and properly used in the development of the research.

The introduction, in about ten pages, provides us with a recapitulation of the state of the art: an overview of the studies that have dealt with the Egyptian presence in the Southern Levant, enumerating and delving into articles and monographs from around 1940 until recent years. The two paragraphs which follow can be considered an apparatus for the consultation of the volume, with a short paragraph on toponyms and terminologies used and a useful paragraph on chronology. The following eight chapters are organized in chronological order (from Late Bronze I to Iron Age I) and deal with topics highlighting five main geographical zones of the south-western Levant: the Besor Region, the Coastal Plain, the Shephelah, the Ayalon Valley and the Yarkon Basin.

In the first chapter, entitled “Dawn” (12-24), a revised and updated version of the author's 2019 article,<sup>2</sup> Koch provides a historical framework for the Egyptian presence in the Southern Levant during the Late Bronze Age I. In a very concise discussion, but bibliographically detailed, the problems of chronology and local destructions at the end of the Middle Bronze Age are enumerated. The part on the settlement mechanisms of the Late Bronze I in the Southern Levant is clear, with references to numerous excavation reports. The Egyptian presence in the region is introduced and outlined thanks to the numerous Egyptian-style objects that the region has yielded, with a quick reference to the pottery findings and an extensive

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<sup>1</sup> Koch 2018a.

<sup>2</sup> Koch 2019a.

discussion on seals and scarabs, which are treated with the help of graphs that make the understanding of the situation visibly immediate. The chapter closes with a small summary of the location of infrastructure and mechanisms of Egyptian rule in the Late Bronze I; the reference to the site of Tell el-‘Ajjul as a hub for the distribution of artefacts in the region is particularly welcome.

The second chapter, entitled “The Egyptian Network” (25-44) is composed of three paragraphs, of which the second is the more substantial. The first paragraph introduces the idea of the complexity of ancient states and speaks of the Egyptian Empire of the New Kingdom in terms of a “network model” that “presents a more detailed understanding of the mechanism developed to exercise central authority together with the peculiarities of the interconnection between various parts of the system.”

A wise distinction between local and Egyptian centers in each region examined is part of the introduction to the individual regions. The choice of the word “centre” over “city-state” is relevant and has a strong basis. The regions examined, from the 18th to 20th Dynasty/Late Bronze Age II-III, namely the Besor (Tell el-‘Ajjul, Gaza and Yurza), the Coastal Plain (Ashkelon and Muhhazu), the Shephelah (Gath, Lachish), the Ayalon Valley (Gezer) and the Yarkon Basin (Jaffa) are addressed with accounts of their archaeology and mentions in the historical sources, not forgetting smaller territorial entities (or centres).

I particularly agree with this type of analysis, through division into individual environmental and territorial regions. Main cause that led the expansion of the Egyptian Empire was precisely the exploitation of local resources (to which we can certainly add the need for outlets to the interior and north of the Levant), and we must recognize that the structures set up in the territory are differentiated precisely according to the needs of Egypt and organized according to a distribution of roles (and hierarchization of settlement). The third paragraph completes the chapter with a series of short considerations. In this second chapter we appreciate the originality of the study and, in my opinion, the successful application of the theories outlined in the various introductory parts; the whole discussion is also a useful lesson in the geography of the Southwest Southern Levant.

The third chapter entitled “Goddess in Translation: The Fosse Temple at Lachish” (45-53), is, as Koch indicates, an updated version of a previously published article.<sup>3</sup> The case study of Lachish is taken as an example for the policies of interaction defined as “colonial-encounter” between southwestern Canaan and Egypt, through the “current approaches practiced in the archaeology of religion.” The theoretical framework is clear and represents an improvement on the previous

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<sup>3</sup> Koch 2017.

article.

The forth chapter (54-70) has the captivating title of “Ambivalence,” likely referring to how the “colonial experience [of the Egyptian and local population] continuously fluctuates between a range of reactions to the Others, from attraction to repulsion” (67, concluding paragraph), and is devoted to the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty presence in the territory. The chapter is composed around three case studies, already dealt with by the author elsewhere: lamp-and-bowl deposits; the consumption of goose meat;<sup>4</sup> and the figure of the so-called “equestrian goddess” represented on the famous gold plaque found in Tel Lachish.<sup>5</sup> The three examples, which may seem partial, are in fact, according to the author, mirrors of the anthropological, social and cultural spheres and of the innovations that occurred. The example of the lamp-and-bowl deposits found in some buildings is an interesting one, referred to in the main previous studies<sup>6</sup> as a local version of an Egyptian practice (despite few contra scholars mentioned by the author in foot-notes), for which some examples from the motherland would have made the idea clearer.

The analysis of the gold plaque with the female deity found at Lachish is interesting because of the author’s attempt to search for its iconographic and ideological origin in various cultures, without assuming that the motif was imported from Egypt directly, which is clearly not realistic.

The conclusion to this chapter shifts the focus away from the pure phenomenon of Egyptian colonialism as something that inserts itself “from above” into local culture, an outdated view of the subject, in favour of a focus on local participation in choice of interaction and integration.

The fifth chapter (71-80) called “Collapse,” deals with the decline and collapse of the Egyptian colonial network during the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., likely during the reign of latter Ramesside pharaohs; with the easing of Egyptian pressure on the region, there is a reconfiguration of the region, with various innovations in the socio-cultural sphere. In particular, the chapter, as a good summary of the state of art, focuses on the issue of the Philistines, whose community flourished on the coast of southwest “Canaan.”

Chapter six has the suggestive title of “Regeneration” (81-92) and addresses the period between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age coherently, along the geographical line already used in the second chapter, along destructions, reconstructions and new constructions (“founding and re-founding of local centers,” 91), relating to the end of the colonial network and the emergence of something

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<sup>4</sup> Koch 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Koch 2019b: 173-174.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Bunimovitz and Zimhoni 1993.

new, culturally and socially.

The seventh chapter called “Reorientation” (92-105) deals with a number of major changes that happened throughout the country at the end of the Late Bronze Age, namely with the collapse of the “Egyptian network.” The examples given are accurate and well explained: breeding, exploitation and consumption of animals, ceramic production relating to the consumption of community banquet assemblages and the cultic practices are the elements that are most distant from the previous cultural experience. The conclusion that the author reaches with the evidence of a simultaneous continuity and transformation is interesting. Koch questions this transformation as a unique product of migrations, which certainly played a fundamental role in the re-organization of the country, but also views it as a response to what came before, an adaptation, and a long process.

Chapter eight is entitled “In the Eye of the Beholder” (106-124) and is the revised version of a previous article by the author,<sup>7</sup> and addresses a particular type of stamp seal, called multi-faceted decorated seal-amulet. The analysis of this peculiar class of seals shows the “Egyptian connection” and the “Canaanite Innovations” working together in creating a new item. The correct final comment that the “corpus reflects no Mediterranean pictorial influence” is, in my opinion, absolutely accurate, but perhaps should have been elaborated and included a brief comment on the fact that this particular type of object seems to be known since the 13<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century BC in Cyprus.<sup>8</sup>

The discussion concludes with a summary entitled “Colonial Encounters in Southwest Canaan in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age” (125-129). According to the author, the fundamental point highlighted by the study is the interaction between the local population (the colonized) and the Egyptians (the colonizers) that drew the contours of the colonial situation in a process of bidirectional influence.

This approach, although no longer highly original, is of great interest in re-examining other situations that may have been taken for granted in the historical landscape and personally, I think that one of the greatest qualities of the proposed volume is the attempt to put the interactions between human communities back at the centre of the discourse.

The volume is accompanied by a useful cartographic apparatus, chronological reference tables and a series of high-resolution graphs and figures. A positive note, which is particularly dear to me, is the consistency and cleanliness with which the drawings of the small finds are made and presented.

Finally, the 60 or so pages of bibliography represent an up-to-date and

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<sup>7</sup> Koch 2018b.

<sup>8</sup> Reyes 2001; 2002; Webb and Weingarten 2012; Hitcock and Maeir 2013: 54.

complete reference of what has been written on the subject. The book is certainly a fundamental essay for those interested in the relations between Egypt and the Southern Levant between the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age from which some interesting insights may certainly emerge in the future.

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