Tel Zayit and the Tel Zayit Abecedary in Their Regional Context

Ron E. Tappy
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

In the Borderlands
You are the battleground
Where enemies are kin to each other;
You are at home, a stranger. . . .
To survive the Borderlands
You must live *sin fronteras*
Be a crossroads.
– Gloria Anzaldúa, "To Live in the Borderlands Means You"

The near-30-dunam site of Tel Zayit lies in the strategic Beth Guvrin Valley, roughly halfway between Lachish to the south and Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi to the north (figs. 1–2; see below for further details).[1] Although this area generally belonged to the lowlands district of ancient Judah, it lay in an often-contested zone wherein cultural and certainly political associations might shift from time to time, primarily between the highlands to the east and the coastal plain to the west. In the early Iron Age IIA period, workers placed a heavy limestone boulder in the interior face of a wall belonging to a structure that would suffer total destruction by fire sometime near the close of 10th century B.C.E. The exposed portion of the stone contained two lines of clearly incised letters that make up a 22-character, linear alphabet. The other side of the stone – the part buried within the

1. Since 1999, exploration at the site has proceeded under my direction and the sponsorship of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. This project is also affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research and the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research. Prior to our fieldwork, this unexcavated site received only meager attention in various informal and more-systematic surveys in the area (see Conder and Kitchener 1883: 258; Aharoni and Amiran 1954: 224 [Hebrew]; *Ḥadashot Archaeologiot* 1979: 31 [Hebrew]; Dagan 1992: 153). For notes on the 19th- to 20th-century C.E. Arab village at Tel Zayit, see also Khalidi 1992: 227.

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Fig. 1. Map. (J. Rosenberg, Jerusalem)

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Fig. 2. Site plan. (R. E. Tappy)

makeup of the wall — contained a large, bowl-shaped hollow ground into the central area of the rock (fig. 3a–b).[2] Based on the archaeological exploration of the site thus far, it seems clear that during the functional life

2. For the editio princeps of the Tel Zayit Abecedary, see Tappy et al. 2006. The stone weighs 17.33 kg and measures 37.5 cm × 27 cm × 15.7 cm high. The bowl-shaped hollow opposite the inscribed face of the stone measures 18.5 cm × 14.5 cm × 6.7 cm deep.

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of the building that yielded the inscription the ancient town at Tel Zayit maintained its principal affiliations with the inland, highland culture. Following the destruction of the 10th-century structure, several successive deposits sealed the debris and accumulated to a depth of over one meter. These layers include at least two distinct building levels (with the later one showing clear coastal influence and also ending in conflagration) and three related subphases, which together extend from the early 9th to the early 8th century B.C.E.

It seems clear that a scribe put the alphabet on the stone sometime prior to its use in the construction of the 10th-century wall. Thus it is possible that the scribe prepared the inscription for some reason other than the building of this feature and that the excavators, in turn, found the stone in a secondary (or perhaps even tertiary) archaeological context. But whether or not and for how long the inscription served some purpose prior to becoming part of the wall remains difficult to determine. One thing is clear, however: the secure context in which the stone emerged provides a firm terminus ante quem both for the functional life of the building and for the inscription itself. Moreover, because the incising of the stone occurred prior to the construction of the house or building that incorporated it at Tel Zayit, the time of writing likely dates no later than the mid-10th century B.C.E. In other words, the terminus ante quem for the actual engraving of the stone relates directly to the *construction* date (or terminus post quem) of the building, not to the later time of its *destruction*.

Since the early appearance of writing at this moderate-sized, borderland site offers important new evidence for understanding the history of the region during the Iron Age and, more specifically, in the 10th century B.C.E., it is important to situate the culture and politics of the site as precisely as possible within their regional context. Toward this end, I shall compare the depositional history of several key sites in the Shephelah with the deposits at Tel Zayit, outline some important aspects of the location of these sites and offer a specific model by which to interpret them in their broader physical setting, and show the aptness of this model to historical developments in southern Canaan from the 10th through the 7th centuries B.C.E.

Comparison of Deposits

Renewed excavations at Beth-shemesh (see Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001) and the recent, impressive publication of fieldwork at Lachish (Ussishkin 2004) have now yielded a wealth of information that enables us to understand this general region as never before. Because I have addressed elsewhere and in considerable detail the developing circumstances at Lachish during the 10th and 9th centuries B.C.E. (Tappy in press), I need

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Fig. 3. Stone with abecedary (above; M. Lundberg and B. Zuckerman, West Semitic Research) and bowl-shaped hollow (below; Zev Radovan, Jerusalem).

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only recall that the relative stratigraphic sequences at Lachish and Tel Zayit have refined our understanding of the settlement process in the central and southern Shephelah during a time when the highland culture of Judah claimed substantial settlement and sought to expand its political and economic influence toward its lowlands. Lachish and Tel Zayit claim a similar historical development. Both sites show significant occupations during the Late Bronze Age (with, amazingly, over six vertical meters of remains at Tel Zayit, when the highlands were sparsely settled), occupational gaps throughout most of the Iron Age I period (when hill-country settlements increased dramatically), and renewed occupations sometime during the 10th and 9th centuries B.C.E. (when the founding of hilltop villages accelerated further).

Judging from the latest publication of remains from Lachish, however, it appears that in the 10th century B.C.E. Tel Zayit actually led the way in the settlement of the southern Shephelah — I believe on behalf of the nascent Kingdom of Judah — and that it anticipated by at least half a century the burgeoning occupation of Lachish IVd–a. Admittedly, Tel Zayit appears not to have boasted the monumental architecture and grandeur that came to characterize Lachish; nevertheless, the renewed settlement at Zayit sprang to life already by the early-to-mid-10th century. If the official report from Lachish proves accurate under further scrutiny, then that larger site to the south-southeast of Tel Zayit dominated the lowlands area only in the 9th century, when numerous styles of coastal pottery make their appearance at Tel Zayit.

To the northeast of Tel Zayit, results from the fieldwork at Beth-shemesh have suggested that the process of "state formation in Judah and the organization of the United Monarchy" were well underway there by the last quarter of the 10th century B.C.E. (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 121). In fact, by that time the site boasted an impressive array of monumental features, including a massive fortification system (constructed in approximately the mid-10th century; Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 144) that enclosed a large public building in Area B, a huge subterranean water reservoir in Area C, and a so-called commercial zone in Area E (adjacent to a storehouse and large silo).[3] In short, Beth-shemesh was now a substantial, strategic, and vitally important center in the northern Shephelah, and the

3. Admittedly, this conclusion rests primarily on the dating of pottery recovered from construction fills. But the excavators' interpretation results from a painstaking analysis and serious methodological discussion of how best to interpret deposits of this sort. The mere fact that the interpretive process necessitated such detailed work does not make the conclusions wrong, or even questionable. Only the absence of this type of meticulous logic would encourage specious conclusions.

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excavators credit this impressive transformation of the city to "a central authority" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 145) farther up in the mountains, presumably based in Jerusalem.

Beth-shemesh, Tel Zayit, and Lachish, then, have each shed new light on the chronology and cultural history of this important region of the country. By the mid-10th century B.C.E., a new city arose at Beth-shemesh with symbolic architecture and a material culture that reflected an organized political structure in the mountains to the east. This development occurred precisely at the time when the town at Tel Zayit was rebuilt following a 200-year occupational gap during the Iron Age I period, although excavations at Tel Zayit have not yet uncovered the sort of monumental building witnessed at Beth-shemesh (or, later on, at Lachish). The southern and more westerly Shephelah, then, appears to have developed at a more modest pace in the 10th century B.C.E. than did the area controlled by Beth-shemesh slightly farther north. Nevertheless, the settlement at Tel Zayit proves quite significant from a geopolitical standpoint, and the presence there of a mature, 22-letter alphabet attests to this significance.

While both Tel Zayit and Beth-shemesh suffered significant upheavals sometime near the close of the 10th century B.C.E., both towns continued to exist after that time. Lachish, on the other hand, began its new ascent only in the late 10th or (according to Ussishkin) the early to mid-9th century B.C.E. This regional capital soon eclipsed Tel Zayit in both its political and economic value to Judah, but despite "the unusual strength and monumentality of the Level IV fortress city" the principal buildings constructed at Lachish consisted mostly of roughly dressed blocks (not of fine ashlar masonry), homogeneous but moderate quality mud bricks, beams made of local (olive) wood (not cedars from Lebanon), and so on (Ussishkin 2004: 81–82). This royal city, then, emerged gradually over the course of the 9th century and, although it has revealed impressive fortifications (including a city-gate complex) and a centrally located palace that undoubtedly housed a governor or commander appointed from Jerusalem, it did not display the kind of cross-cultural contact (either in materials or techniques) witnessed at other large cities (for example, Gezer, Megiddo, or Dan) or in the central capitals of Jerusalem and Samaria.

The new settlement at Lachish also reveals a "drastic reduction in commercial and cultural connections with the Coastal Plain" throughout the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.E., when the pottery assemblage displays very few coastal forms or traits (Ussishkin 2004: 93). Ussishkin believes that this decline (which contrasts with the situation during the previous occupation of the Late Bronze Age) arose out of the fact that Philistia now "dominated the coastal area, while Judaean Lachish was politically and economically oriented towards Jerusalem" (Ussishkin 2004: 93).

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Thus the planning and construction of Lachish Level IV in the 9th century B.C.E. suggest that this city arose as part of a regional project coordinated by Jerusalem and at a time when contemporary changes in the material culture at Tel Zayit indicate a significant transformation in its own political and economic affiliations. With Beth-shemesh established as an anchor of Judean political control in the Sorek Valley, two of the more southerly passageways into the hill country (namely, the Naḥal Guvrin and Naḥal Lachish) aligned themselves in different directions during the course of the 9th century B.C.E. — Lachish toward Jerusalem and Tel Zayit toward the coast. Even during its heyday, Lachish apparently made little or no attempt to broaden its economic ties beyond the boundaries of Judah.[4] At Tel Zayit, on the other hand, an influx of coastal ceramic forms is noticeable rather suddenly in levels dating to the second half of the 9th century B.C.E., the very time during which Lachish established its permanent prominence in this part of the Shephelah on behalf of Judah.

Changes in the strategy promulgated by Jerusalem during the Iron Age IIA period, then, emerge from this brief overview of these three sites. Whereas new developments at Tel Zayit in the Naḥal Guvrin complemented those at Beth-shemesh in the Vale of Sorek in the 10th century B.C.E., both sites (especially Tel Zayit) yielded to the more southerly, stronger, and less exposed site of Lachish beginning in the 9th century B.C.E. (note that virtually all Philistine efforts to penetrate the Shephelah and drive toward the hill country occurred in the more northerly valleys, particularly the Sorek system, and much less often via the Naḥal Lachish [see Tappy in press]). And although Lachish quickly became a royal center, a kind of regional capital, the fact that it did not, according to the excavator, develop fully until around the mid-9th century B.C.E. does not offer a prima facie argument that a centralized political authority could not or did not exist in Jerusalem prior to that time. In fact, excavation results from both Tel Zayit and Beth-shemesh militate against this view.

Bunimovitz and Lederman point to other nearby sites where excavators have attributed clear changes in the archaeological record to "the impact of the United Kingdom" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 146). For example, they cite Mazar's conclusion that, following the destruction of the Philistine town in Tel Batash (Timnah) Stratum V, the settlement there was only modestly rebuilt during the 10th century B.C.E. In addition, they note the observation drawn by Gitin that the major Philistine center at Tel

4. Not until Level II in the 7th century does the pottery assemblage from Lachish show an appreciable number of coastal-type vessels, but even then not enough data exist to confirm a pattern of clear trade relations between this Judahite city and the coastal region (Ussishkin 2004: 94).

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Miqne (Ekron) Stratum IV also declined about the same time as Batash V – that is, around the early-to-mid-10th century B.C.E. – and that the subsequent occupation of this city likewise occurred on a more modest scale in Strata III–II.

Yet, somewhat curiously, while Bunimovitz and Lederman claim that the "impact of the United Kingdom" represents "too general" an explanation for these events, they clearly see this very impact as the impetus behind the concurrent changes toward growth that they describe at Beth-shemesh. Yet it was ultimately, they say, due to the decline of the Philistine threat – not Judahite expansion – in this area "that the young monarchy emerging in the mountain region had to keep a close eye on its periphery. Now was the time to delineate its territory, to consolidate its hold on border communities that might slip away, and to politicise the ethnic entity that would become a nation" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 147). The increased Philistine presence and threat in the Sorek Valley during the Iron Age I period had created a cultural borderland, a tension zone of sorts, and with the decline of that presence, "the village of Beth-shemesh was turned into a border town in the Sorek Valley with all symbols of centralised political power" (Bunimovitz and Lederman 2001: 147).

The archaeological and historical conclusions of Bunimovitz and Lederman for Tel Beth-shemesh are persuasive. Yet they appear to replace one explanation for the 10th-century rise of Beth-shemesh (the emergent monarchy in the highlands) with another stimulus package (the weakening Philistine presence in the lowlands) without explaining the factors – if different from the first option itself – that led to the second scenario. One might ask why a centralized kingdom in the highlands would have felt the need to shore up its borders (to keep local sites there from "slipping away") at a time when the historical threat in that region was itself disappearing. It seems as though causation would run in the opposite direction: any inland polity would work to protect, strengthen, and even expand its border towns precisely when those places faced the "clear and present danger" of incursion by another, outside political entity. Thus the regression of Philistine pressure in the Sorek Valley (and elsewhere across the Shephelah) simply provided an opportune moment for Judah to attempt its own expansion there.

While the approach of Bunimovitz and Lederman ultimately will not sidestep the debate over the United Monarchy, it should sharpen our methodologies and the questions we ask. In the end, their wise decision to shift the academic discussion from the archaeologically ambiguous capital of Jerusalem to a more anthropological investigation of the border area works only if there existed a viable political entity on each side of that border. One way or the other, the matter returns to the reality or absence of

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some form of centralized government in the highlands. Because Tel Zayit shares a chronological development with Beth-shemesh but came, within a century of that growth, to stand in a subordinate relationship to Lachish, and because it reveals a somewhat different intrasite character from both of these larger cities, the question arises how best to understand the regional status of these and other nearby locales, both large and small (such as Timnah, Ekron, and Gath to the north of Tel Zayit, and Tell el-ʿAreini and Tell el-Ḥesi to its south), and also how to describe the interregional connections between this constellation of sites and the established political entities lying to the east and west, in Judah and Philistia proper.

A New Model of Intersite Relationships

Understanding better the intersite relationships in and around the Shephelah requires not only an examination of remains from a number of sites but also a new, refined, and more dynamic model against which to evaluate these complex ties. The appearance of a complete abecedary at Tel Zayit surely reflects developments that were occurring in or growing out of other regions in the broader area, such as Phoenicia. Nevertheless, one must interpret this discovery first and foremost within the specific context from which it emerged — in this case, southwestern Canaan, along the Judahite-Philistine border. Generally speaking, this area experienced constant and crucial developments during the Iron Age, from attempts by adjacent bureaucracies to expand their centralized rule (for example, the Philistine Pentapolis on the one hand and Jerusalem on the other) to political and judicial reforms that affected all levels of the local, kinship-based society (for example, the reforms of Jehoshaphat) to a physical destruction, political dismantling, and economic ruination at the close of the 8th century B.C.E. (resulting from Sennacherib's third military campaign, which isolated the Judean hill country through massive military maneuvers along the coast and in the Shephelah [see Tappy 2008]).

Both excavation and regional survey data have shown that Tel Zayit constitutes a borderland site in the western foothills of Judah, lying directly between the highland culture to the east and the coastal culture of the Philistine plain. Tectonic activity and the runoff of water from the eastern mountains resulted in a network of east–west wadis that descend down the seaward slopes of the hill country and through the Shephelah as they approach the inner coastal plain. These drainage systems are, from north to south, the Valley of Ayalon, the Vale of Sorek, Naḥal HaElah, the Valley of Zephatha (= Naḥal Guvrin), Naḥal Lachish, and Wadi el-Ḥesi (modern Naḥal Adorayim, which merges with Naḥal Shiqma just southeast of Tell el-Ḥesi; see fig. 8 below, p. 25).

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At least three principal north–south and three east–west roadways through the lowlands of Judah converged near Tel Zayit during various phases of the Iron Age.[5] The longitudinal roads connected Egypt and the northern Sinai Peninsula with the southernmost Philistine capital at Gaza and the lowland area of Judah. Three laterally oriented routes linked coastal centers with the interior hill country by exploiting the natural landscape provided by three of the drainage systems mentioned above: Naḥal HaElah (with a road running from Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi to Azekah and continuing, by way of various routes, to the Judahite highlands between Bethlehem and the Ramah-Mizpah area), Naḥal Guvrin (passing by Tel Zayit, Tel Goded, and Adullam to Khirbet Jedur [biblical Gedor] south of Bethlehem), and Naḥal Lachish (from Ashkelon and its southern flank through the Lachish area and on to the hill country around and south of Hebron). Tel Zayit lies at the western entrance to the central (Naḥal Guvrin) arena.

This convergence of geological and archaeological history correlates well with the outline given in Josh 15:33–44 of the districts and cities belonging to Judah (see Tappy 2000b: 8–11; 2008; in press; Tappy et al. 2006). The author(s) of the Joshua text organized the settlements of the Shephelah, or "lowlands" area, into three geographical groups that follow roughly the Elah (vv. 35–36 = District 2),[6] Lachish (vv. 37–41 = District 3), and Guvrin (vv. 42–44 = District 4) systems (see Rainey 1980; 1983). In each instance, the text appears to identify the natural regime and its political organization by naming a principal (and, in the case of District 4, the westernmost) municipality in the given area before adding a brief list of satellite sites associated with it. The writer names nine towns in the Naḥal Guvrin–District 4 area, with Libnah apparently representing the main city there. These facts are relevant for the ancient identity of Tel Zayit, which undoubtedly relates in some way to the list of sites in the Libnah district (vv. 42–44) and may, in fact, be Libnah itself. If not ancient Libnah, Tel Zayit lay so close to Libnah that it would have followed this important town (even over Lachish) in most regional matters.

In any event, the ancient town of Tel Zayit lay along a topogeographical, geological, cultural, and political interface — at the center of a communication network that connected the highland culture(s) of Judah to the Canaanite and Philistine city-states located near the hilly western

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5. See Dorsey 1991: 67–70, with 58, map no. 1; also pp. 189–92, 196 with 182, map no. 13, and 195, map no. 14.

6. From v. 33 through the first site listed in v. 35 (Jarmuth), this roster names eight sites in the Sorek and related valleys before moving to the Naḥal HaElah, for which we read seven sites, with the possible loss of the eighth town, Beth-shemesh, from the roster (Rainey 1983: 7).

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flanks, along the Mediterranean seaboard, and toward the principal gateways into Egypt. The site's physical setting raises important issues related to its regional and interregional connections and calls for greater clarification of the interrelationships between this area and those around it. Any information gleaned from a study of this sort will directly bear not only on the overall history of the site but also on the interpretation of the abecedary in particular.

The proposal by Bunimovitz and Lederman to shift the focus of discussion concerning the 10th century from Jerusalem to the Shephelah (the border) is a much welcomed one. It also seems advisable to follow their method further by directing our sights, at least initially, on culture versus politics. That is to say, archaeologists should derive their conclusions first and foremost from the material remains they recover from any number of sites, not from theoretical discussions of this or that possible political system behind the material culture — and certainly not from an a priori or personal bias for or against the political systems. It is in this spirit that I offer the following comments regarding the geographical and political landscape of the Shephelah, and of Tel Zayit in particular, during Iron Age II.

To date, many scholars have used the concepts *core* and *periphery* to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between a cultural or political center and the surrounding territory, however narrowly or broadly defined, in which the center seeks partial or absolute control or influence to promote its self-interests. The concept of periphery, however, proves an inadequate term for describing the cultural history of any one site or the complex relationships between sites in the lowlands of southern Canaan. The term seems to imply an overly specific, discernible line in the sand that marks the outer edge of the center's real or symbolic presence, commercial relations, and more. Although the core-periphery paradigm can sometimes adequately represent various social or cultural realities (such as Fox's [1977] demonstration of ways in which regal-ritual cities recreate themselves in the outlying countryside), it is, more often than not, overly centrist and delimiting. Although this model may symbolize the flow of goods and services to and from the core, it is ultimately centripetal in nature, oriented toward its own center.

Appeals to this model typically seek to show how the two entities (core and periphery) *relate to each other* (as demonstrated in fig. 4). Clearly, an approach of this sort cannot capture the complexities inherent in dealing with multiple cores whose peripheries collide, merge, or overtake one another or form their own local sense of self-identity or definition. Consequently, a more dynamic model is needed to discuss the nature of relationships in situations such as these — that is, relationships between these

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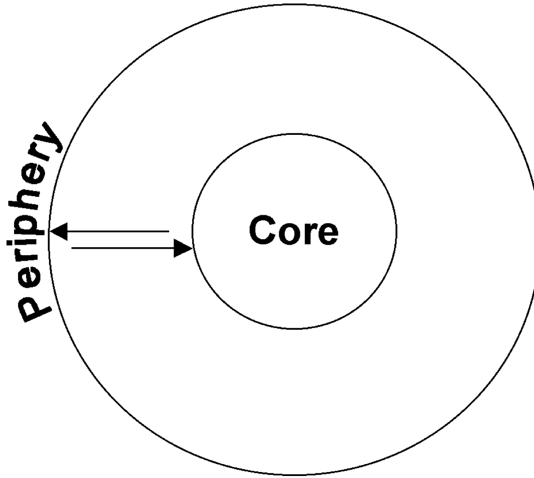

Fig. 4. Core-periphery diagram. (R. E. Tappy)

combined entities (core *and* periphery) and other similar or dissimilar component units around them.

Earlier studies in symbolic anthropology dealing with rituals and rites of passage can help provide a different lens through which to study the archaeology and history of the Shephelah. In perhaps his best-known work – on the rituals associated with transitional stages in human life (work in which he coined the now well-worn phrase "rite of passage") – Arnold van Gennep (1960: 21; originally published in 1908) outlined rite-of-passage rituals as occurring in three discernible phases: *préliminaire*, *liminaire*, and *postliminaire*. Building on van Gennep's threefold structure of separation–transition–reincorporation, Victor Turner (1964; 1967: 93–111; 1969: 94–96, 102–6; 1977) later applied this model to his studies of the Ndembu rituals in northwest Zambia. Turner used the rubrics "separation, margin (*limen*), and aggregation" (V. Turner 1967: 94; see also 1974a; 1985: 158–60) to describe rituals that attend transitions such as males passing from boyhood to manhood, and he focused most of his attention on the *liminaire,* or liminal state of transition.

The typical rite of passage, he said, begins with the separation of the neophyte from his original status and proceeds through a marginal period (*limen*) – wherein "the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous" (V. Turner 1967: 94) – before reaching aggregation, that is, the point at which the passage is consummated. Entrance into the limen en-

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tails leaving the structural conditions that apply to boys who are not going through the rite of passage and entering a period of unstructured conditions. During the marginal or transitional period, the passenger is neither boy nor man, and the social structures of neither category apply to him; he experiences a period of *interstructural liminality*, of "'structural invisibility,' ambiguity and neutrality" (V. Turner 1967: 98–99). But, according to Turner, this ambiguous state is not without its benefits. "The liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions"; that is, the neophytes who are passing through this liminal phase develop a strong sense of comradeship but not as a "brotherhood" or sibling relationship, because these structures entail inherent hierarchy (for example, older brother versus younger). Instead, "complete equality usually characterizes the relationship of neophyte to neophyte" (V. Turner 1967: 100; see also 1974b; 1974c, especially chaps. 5–6; Turner and Turner 1978). Nevertheless, it is during the liminal period and because of their uniform condition that neophytes are most malleable, most passive to their instructors (V. Turner 1967: 101).

I do not wish to apply fully the concept of *communitas* to the situation that existed between Judah and Philistia during the Iron Age.[7] Rather

7. Although Turner's work met with immediate acclaim (for sample reviews of V. Turner 1967, see Peacock 1968; Beidelman 1968; and Ben-Amos 1970; for V. Turner 1969 and 1974c, see Graham-White 1975), anthropologists more recently have questioned the degree to which his *communitas* actually constitutes a discernible part of the pilgrimage and liminal state (for example, Sallnow 1981: 177; Eade 2000a: x–xiv; Eade and Sallnow 2000: 3–5). Cohen is certainly correct that "people can participate within the 'same' ritual yet find quite different meanings for it" (1985: 37; see also pp. 55, 71–75). Similarly, neither core nor liminal zone can ever present a totally homogeneous cultural matrix. Thus the frontier residents of ancient Israel undoubtedly often interpreted their changing circumstances differently. (For a particularly strong critique of *communitas* and liminality as a medial step toward "a regenerative return to structure," at least in American culture, see Weber 1995.)

On another point, I would add that in my judgment Turner's identification of the rite of passage as liminal in nature neither neglects nor minimizes the importance of these rituals, nor does it cast them as such extraordinary events that they are outside the realm of daily life. By extension, my application of this concept to the culture and politics in the marginal zone between Judah and Philistia maintains (even highlights) the critical role played by these entities without idealizing either the benefits or hostilities that resulted in the lives of residents there. (A recent collection of essays [Coleman and Eade 2004] includes both critics [see the entries by Coleman, Coleman and Eade, and Mitchell] and proponents [for example, Rosander, Duisch, and Basu] of the Turnerian model; even the critics of

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than suggesting that the space wherein these two cultures met and competed gave rise to egalitarian structures that evoked a sense of equality among the participants involved, I describe an area that struggled to hold and manage the "co-existence of numerous oppositions" (see Eade 2000b: 52). Any sense of equality among the occupants of a liminal zone develops as much from competition and reciprocity as from conjunction (that is, *communitas*) and is as much a by-product of culture as the disparities that separate antagonistic cores (Sallnow 1981: 177). The marginal zone between ancient Judah and Philistia did not undergo a cultural leveling process at the hands of either core area. In my adaptation of Turner's model of liminality, then, the Shephelah does not represent a structureless area that, for this reason alone, set itself against the highly structured cores that surrounded it. The liminality of the lowlands did not offer the residents there a release from the sociocultural constraints of their respective homelands (see Weber 1995: 528); if anything, the practical expectations and symbolic culture imposed on them by the core areas were designed to highlight their differences.

There is, I believe, much more to gain from (and to critique in) the concepts inherent in the sociological model outlined above. Already, however, the applicability of this approach to a study of borderland towns in the Shephelah becomes apparent (keeping in mind the caveats of n. 11 below). While interstructural liminality maintains a sociological focus in Ndembu rites of passage, this same principle takes on cultural and political aspects for transfrontier towns that lie between and that must function in relation to two or more cores. As "the phenomena and processes of mid-transition" in the Ndembu ritual "paradoxically expose the basic building blocks of culture just when we pass out of and before we re-enter the structural realm" (V. Turner 1967: 110), these towns — such as Tel Zayit — likewise exist betwixt and between the cultural, political, economic, judicial, ideological, theological, and other trappings of the larger, more structured units around them, all of which seek an advantage in the balance of control over the border area.

Towns such as Tel Zayit, then, present somewhat of a paradox in that they may at once constitute some of the core's principal building blocks of political solidarity and also some of the most vulnerable elements in this solidarity. Yet despite their somewhat tenuous status, these cultural borders, with their transfrontier towns and political symbolism, often prove quite durable; they may outlast even significant changes in the official political boundaries of the cultures that surround them (compare the study

Turner acknowledge their great debt to his work [Sallnow 1981: 163–64]; for a solid overview of Turner's life and work, see Deflem 1991.)

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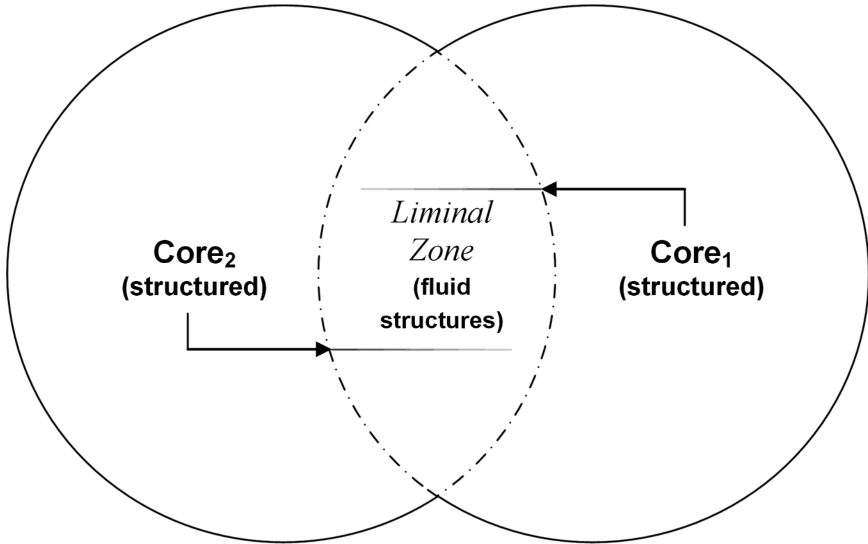

Fig. 5. Liminal zone / Venn diagram. (R. E. Tappy)

of German-speaking St. Felix and Romance-speaking Tret in an alpine valley of northern Italy in Cole and Wolf 1974).[8]

Thus the concept of a limen, or "threshold," characterizes accurately the narrow cultural zones that lie just beyond recognized political boundaries, where competing cores seek to stake their claims through the use of myriad symbols, such as architecture, language, ethnicity, cultural or religious traditions, and so on. Rather than attempting to visualize the complexities inherent in these areas by means of a binary, core-periphery model, a simple Venn diagram proves much more incisive (fig. 5). This diagram portrays situations in which cultural and/or political entities are

8. This reality finds expression in the peripheral zone of the outer Shephelah following Sennacherib's crushing defeat of the region in 701 B.C.E. and his shifting of numerous towns and villages to a new political center. This region maintained its borderland status but with a new and different political orientation; it became a frontier oriented in the opposite direction. While the political status of Tel Zayit and other nearby towns was likely reoriented following Sennacherib's restructuring of the region, it seems unlikely that the day-to-day culture changed to a very large degree. Significant losses to Sennacherib (for example, the sites that suffered massive destruction, such as Lachish) may actually have strengthened to some degree the surviving smaller sites in the region, particularly if these smaller sites were aligned with a new, Assyrian-sponsored center of gravity within the region.

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juxtaposed spatially (geographically) to similar entities with which they interact in multiple and varied ways, oftentimes including competition for goods, resources, territory, and control. The diagram works especially well in the analysis of specific sections of borderlines within regions that are naturally, that is, geographically or topographically, delimited (as seen in Sahlins's 1989 and 1998 studies of the Catalan borderlands in the Cerdanya Valley of the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain) and for smaller, regional kingdoms that are juxtaposed within a relatively restricted area (such as Judah and Philistia in southern Canaan).

The liminal zone exists along the frontier between two competing cultural or political cores (for which I shall sometimes use the mathematical term *set*). Unlike the periphery, the liminal zone embodies a truly middle and often-contested area that must, by necessity, relate in various ways and at various times to the disparate cultural sets (two or more) that surround it. Rather than representing a cultural or ethnic void, the concept *liminal zone* embodies a place where cultures — through group encounters, positive interactions, and conflict — compete vigorously for presence, meaning, and interpretation. When applied to the Shephelah, the liminal zone represents the theater in which the historical record of relations between the highland cultures to the east and those of the coastal plains to the west played itself out in spatial and temporal terms (compare Wilson and Donnan 1998: 5). In mathematical language, the equation $C_1 \cup C_2$ would represent the union of all aspects of both cores shown in fig. 5, whereas $C_1 \cap C_2$ would reflect only the intersection of their respective symbols and influence and would, therefore, represent their overlap — the liminal zone.

One fact is already apparent: the hybrid character of the liminal-zone concept involves boundaries, borders, and frontiers. Boundaries entail the areas in which the physical and literal structures (that is, cultural norms and symbols) of a particular core remain quite discernible and thereby maintain a substantial identification with this core by promoting or enforcing a range of meanings shared by the inhabitants of this boundary area.[9] The symbols of a cultural or political set are generally clear and understood within the boundaries of the set. Thus a boundary helps to define the outer limits of an established, relatively stable sphere of influence (represented by the broken lines in C_1 and C_2 in fig. 5); it encloses a primary borderland area. Towns along and within the boundary of a particular set will ordinarily display similar traits, thus presenting a coherent definition of the set. The monumental architecture witnessed at Beth-shemesh, therefore, served symbolically to demarcate the boundary of Judah in the Sorek

9. For further discussion of the concept of boundary, see Cohen 1985: 12–15, 39–69.

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Valley, and other towns or cities filling the same role in adjacent or nearby locations (such as Lachish in Naḥal Lachish) should display similar features.

A border, on the other hand, represents a relatively narrow area lying just outside the boundary of a particular set. Whereas a boundary conjures the idea of a discernible line, a border typically lies along and just outside this line.[10] It compares to the mat that frames a picture or the ornamental fringe around a rug. As such, it contains the secondary borderlands that attract and prove vital to the self-serving interests of the various cultural sets around it, but its governing influences shift. Because in certain historical periods the border can relate principally to one set or the other, or to more than one set simultaneously, it becomes a true liminal zone (represented by the area *within* the broken lines in fig. 5). The cultural influence (signifying any or all aspects of a society) wielded here by any particular set may occur evenly or sporadically; but, as the arrows in fig. 5 show, this influence is generally stronger near the actual boundaries of the set and diminishes as one moves away from the boundary and through the marginal (liminal) area.[11]

10. See Kavanagh 1994: 75 on the nuances that distinguish "the geographer's boundary" from "the anthropologist's boundary."

11. Because of the richness of meaning that underlies van Gennep's and Turner's term "liminality," I prefer to retain the rubric "liminal zone" in my explanation of the sociologically and culturally complex area squeezed between the two ancient political boundaries of Judah and Philistia. The fact that in more recent cultural research (post-1970s) scholars working in various areas have replaced "liminal" with "border" (see, for example, the feminist studies of Anzaldúa 1987 and the sociological inquiries of Rosaldo 1993) corroborates, in my judgment, the relationship between these concepts that my model seeks to develop. Admittedly, the new cultural anthropologists employ "border" as a means of highlighting the individuality of the actors involved and their resistance to conforming to any dominant culture or established power coordinates. In the term "liminal," they see the latent imperialism of mid-20th-century ethnology. The risk of encountering this pitfall only increases when one attempts to compare an ancient process that was more politically driven (the actions of ancient Judah and Philistia) with more recent ones that are ritually (the Ndembu transition from minority status to adulthood) or sociologically (understanding one's postmodern identity based on race, class, or gender) motivated. Thus, while many nuances embedded in the current (including my own) use of "border" may well apply to individuals or particular towns in the lowlands of southern Canaan, "liminal" continues to capture the needs and desires of the competing cores — the political centers that hoped to expand or at least shore up their rule, indeed, by controlling peripheral space and shaping historical outcomes therein (that is, by acting in imperialistic ways). Ultimately, then, my suggested model for studying the ancient Shephelah incorporates the concepts of

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Taken together, the boundary and border of a cultural set constitute the frontier of the unit — space that is inevitably shared with, coveted, and vied for by other, nearby sets.[12] The frontier incorporates not only the area containing a clearly organized and structured cultural or political presence but also the land holding the farthest, dissipating range of this presence. The concept *transfrontier*, then, includes not only the towns that lie along the boundary of a particular cultural or political set but also certain other sites situated beyond that limited space and across the liminal zone itself — that is, sites that in various deliberate ways extend the character of a set into the marginal areas around it. The radius from the core of one cultural area or political entity does not end at a sharp, fixed point; rather, it fades out as the radius from an adjacent core fades in.[13]

Unlike the "periphery," which is conceptually unidirectional (that is, relates primarily to its conceptual counterpart, the core), the liminal zone is bidirectional, and sites within this zone must sort out their affiliations with two or more sometimes cooperative but often opposing cores. Any core can, of course, share liminal zones with more than one adjacent cultural or political unit. Thus in addition to its western front, Judah undoubtedly had to manage similar areas heading in other compass directions, as evident in the back-and-forth maneuvers of Asa of Judah and Baasha of Israel in 1 Kgs 15:16–22. The short distance between Ramah and Mizpah belonged to a rather narrowly defined liminal zone. When compared with the marginal zone in the Shephelah, this zone seems typically to have

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both local autonomy and centralized power. Interestingly, scholars engaging in the emergent dialogue between science and theology have also found helpful applications for the concept of liminality. Note, for example, the recent work of J. W. van Huyssteen (2006: 1–43, 210), who uses this term when tracing the origin of his own model of *postfoundational rationality* back through the *transversality* of C. Schrag (1994), M. Bakhtin's (1981) idea of the *chronotope* (to express the meeting place of time and space), and, ultimately, to Jean-Paul Sartre's early essays on the transcendence of the ego (1957).

12. On the conflation of the two meanings of region and boundary, see Kopytoff 1987: 9.

13. My definitions of boundary, border, and frontier may differ slightly from the way in which some current "border anthropologists" (who examine relations between modern states) apply these terms. For the border as barrier, see Maravall 1972: 121; Kavanagh 1994; for valuable studies with additional bibliography on the symbolism of borders in establishing national identity, compare Barth 1969; Cohen 1985; 1986; Sahlins 1989; Horsman and Marshall 1994: 41–60, 137–53; Wilson and Donnan 1998. For various other types of identities (for example, household, village, religious, and more), see the essays in Cohen 1986. Note also Anderson 1991.

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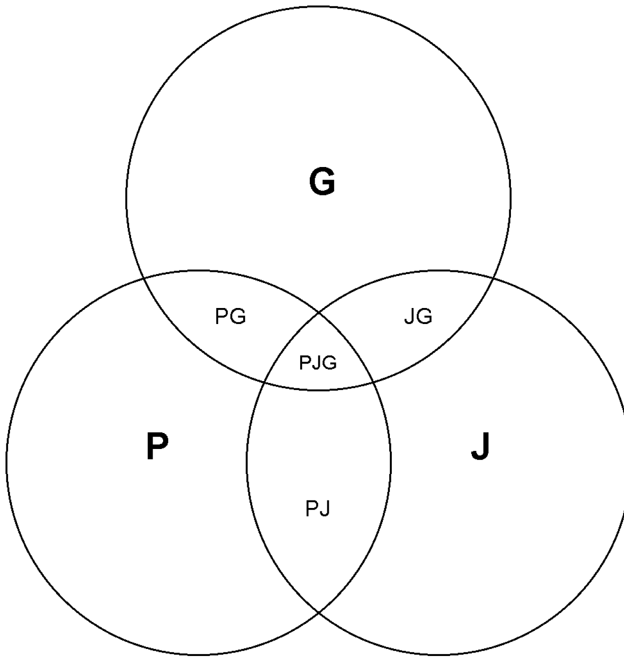

Fig. 6. Complex liminal zone diagram. (R. E. Tappy)

spanned a 3–5-km area beyond the boundaries of the respective political centers of these tightly spaced kingdoms.

For most of these local kingdoms, the complexities of interregional relationships could, and surely did, involve more than one outside set. Thus if a northern set were added to the illustration in fig. 5, regardless of whether it reflected the concerted efforts of Israel as a whole or of a single, powerful city near the borderlands of both Judah and Philistia (such as Gezer), the complexity of relationships would increase dramatically, particularly in the northern Shephelah. Figure 6 shows three hypothetical cores or single sets (J = Judah, P = Philistia, G = Gezer), three double sets (PG, JG, and PJ), and one triple set (PJG) in which all three cores might contend for control and influence. Thus J would have to defend itself and protect its interests against P along one front, against G along another, and – in the most complex intersection – against both P and G. And the same would hold true for the other two primary sets.

In this circumstance, the marginal (or "liminal") zone would experience varying degrees of cultural and political competition and would, therefore, represent a complex liminal zone, even though the groups' im-

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pact on the liminal zone may be disproportionate in scale (as indicated in fig. 6 by the somewhat smaller areas of overlapping influence for G). But the circles representing political units that compete within a zone do not function like Borromean Rings, so the withdrawal of one set or cultural core (for example, Gezer) from regional interplay (through, say, a period of internal weakness) would not necessarily imply separation of the others (in this case, Judah and Philistia). On the contrary, each one of the remaining entities would undoubtedly attempt to increase its own presence (both demographically and symbolically) in whatever vacuum might appear in the liminal zone.

In the light of this discussion, any study of borderlands must incorporate the concept of shifting margins between otherwise fairly well-defined entities (see Wilson and Donnan 1998: 8, 13). There always existed an imperfect fit between the tightly spaced, regional kingdoms in Iron Age II Canaan. Regardless of the social criteria along which any core or cultural set develops its self-definition (for example, ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, or other forms of homogeneity), "borders always give the lie to this construct" (Horsman and Marshall 1994: 45; see my comments in n. 7 regarding the inability of any core or liminal zone to homogenize fully its local culture[s]). Not only does this approach provide a more realistic model by which to present these Iron Age kingdoms, it also offers significant application to a study of city-state systems such as the one that existed in southern Canaan during the Amarna Age (when Gezer played a more significant role). The inordinate amount of attention that scholars have paid to the urban centers themselves has relegated any consideration of the rich and vital areas between these large entities to second place or, at worst, to oblivion. The question of how ancient polities, whether organized kingdoms or individual city centers, related to one another in the marginal zones between them requires much more concentrated thought in future efforts to understand fully the sociopolitical picture from ancient times.

Two additional observations require attention before we look more directly at the place of Tel Zayit within the liminal zone of the Shephelah. First, no core area or cultural set that manages to establish a presence or some degree of political control in any of the liminal zones around its boundaries can take its foothold for granted. For out of the ethnic, social, cultural, or political continuity that extends beyond the boundaries of adjacent and competing polities can arise a distinct local culture or sense of identity that accepts the maintenance of mobility, various types of interchanges, commercial connections, even kinship ties, and more. This potential can become reality either among the constituent elements within the liminal zone itself or in both (or all) directions away from the zone

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(through shared connections with surrounding cultural sets that are vying for a place of influence beyond their own boundaries). In other words, "cultures have borders" and "borders have cultures" (as recognized by Rabinowitz 1998: 142; see Barth 1969: 10), and a liminal-zone culture that senses its own autonomy will act accordingly. While the cultural hierarchies and structures of the core stand in a dialectical relationship to the less hierarchical, meshed elements in the liminal zone, the zone itself inevitably develops a cohesive system by which to use its resources, facilitate communications, organize and mobilize people, and so on (see Sallnow 1981: 163).

In certain contexts, therefore, the inhabitants of a liminal zone may well feel torn between the two competing cores that lie beyond their own imagined "borders" and may, as a result, come to feel greater social and demographic unity among themselves if either larger core attempts to impose hard political boundaries within or through their region. Depending on the origin and current status of the many variables (political and military strength, for example) within the liminal zone, locals may view any attempted change as a disruption in their own settled lifestyle or, in more extreme instances, as an overt incursion or even territorial violation by either their own native core or the home core of their neighbors. This phenomenon inherently raises consternation wherever the boundary lines between cultural sets are not rigidly fixed, tenaciously reiterated, and regionally accepted.[14] If this sort of local trend develops over the long haul, it poses a serious concern to all outside, competing cores.

It is not, then, simply the institutional structures (represented, for example, by regional governors) or symbols (embedded, for example, in monumental architecture, writing, and religious or cultic icons) of the core that control the borderland liminal zone. The local customs and will of the people who inhabit these zones play a vital role in the fates of the "outside" cores (see Wilson and Donnan 1998: 24). So while a frontier does not automatically create a new, de facto cultural set, it provides a somewhat unstructured arena (*relative to the surrounding cores*) in which social, cultural, and political processes may evolve with a palatable sense of freedom (see Kopytoff 1987: 14).

Thus, once a viable liminal zone develops, there may arise some degree of dissonance between its local, hybrid culture and the core political systems that sought originally to establish themselves or, in fact, have man-

14. Compare the development of a "local configuration" of Arabesk in the modern province of Hatay, between Turkey and Syria (in Stokes 1998: 283–84); or the independent mindset that sometimes arose in the Cerdanya Valley apart from any larger allegiance to either France or Spain (in Sahlins 1998: 51–52).

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aged to maintain some presence in the area (see Wilson 1994: 103–5). Even in the study of much larger, modern political states, "the successful processes of nation and state building may seem to be, in retrospect, a matter of top-down decision making, but in most cases, both historically and in the contemporary world, they are a matter of the dialectics between 'bottom' and 'top', as well as among diverse groups 'at the bottom' " (Donnan and Wilson 1994: 2). As a result, frontiers typically give expression to various motivating forces behind not only cultural transformation (as recognized by F. J. Turner in his 1893 thesis regarding the evolution of American political history [F. J. Turner 1961]) but also behind cultural and historical continuity and conservatism (Kopytoff 1987: 3).

Second, one must always consider the determinative role that geography plays in defining the frontier – that is, the boundaries and liminal zone – of a particular cultural set.[15] Besides helping to delimit interregional boundaries between two or more cultural sets and their shared liminal zone, the natural terrain may also promote various *intra*regional enclaves within the liminal zone itself. The Shephelah region provides a perfect example of this phenomenon, because the lateral valleys that cut down from the Judahite hill country toward the coastal plain help to organize the sites of the lowlands and inner coastal area into recognizable groups (see the discussion of Joshua 15 above).[16] These natural groupings of towns along and within the liminal zone molded to a large extent the economic exchange systems (Tappy in press) and district boundary lines (Tappy 2008) within this area. Moreover, the terrain itself sometimes dictated the field strategy for major military incursions into the liminal area of the Shephelah, as witnessed in the events of Sennacherib's third campaign (again, see Tappy 2008). Tel Zayit itself lies at the mouth of the Guvrin system, near the edge of the inner coastal plain. Unlike the terrain east of the site, the area to the west quickly flattens out and becomes less defined by topographical features (see fig. 7).

Thus, the boundary and liminal zone of a particular core or cultural set embody both the actual territorial frontier and the metaphorical frontier

15. For this aspect with regard to modern states, compare Heslinga 1971 and Wilson 1993; for the Shephelah of ancient Canaan, see Tappy 2008; in press.

16. For example, compare Beth-shemesh and Timnah in the Sorek Valley; Azekah and Gath in the Elah Valley; Tell Judeideh, Tell Bornat, and Tel Zayit in the Guvrin Valley; and Lachish and Tell el-ʿAreini along the Lachish system. Any imposition of artificial boundaries that fails to bear in mind local topography usually generates special concerns in the relationship between a core and its hinterland. Note the discussion in Efrat 1964 of the "Jerusalem Corridor" and the modern use of Beth-shemesh as a regional center.

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Fig. 7. Aerial photo of terrain west of Tel Zayit, toward the coast. (Sky View Air Photography, courtesy of R. E. Tappy, The Zeitah Excavations)

that help define, sustain, and give identity to the set (see Wilson and Donnan 1998: 9). Because the liminal zone holds within itself the extremity of a core's extended influence (whether this influence derives its primary meaning from material culture, political institutions, ideological or intellectual history, legal traditions or religious taboos, ethnic or kinship patterns, and/or more), the core can wield considerable, even if spotty, influence in this region. This possibility remains true even though the influence wanes the farther one travels through the zone and away from the sponsoring core. Yet the liminality (represented by a somewhat uneven, shifting, progressively diffuse presence) of the cultural influence, monarchical expansion, or state sovereignty that a core exerts beyond its own recognized boundary does not necessarily imply uniform weakness or evenly increasing subordination to the power of an adjacent cultural set (see Wilson and Donnan 1998: 20). Instead, the successful political exploitation of a liminal zone is designed to offset and overcome just these possibilities; thus, symbolic, fortified centers of one culture often exist very near the boundary of a rival culture.

Historically, geographically, and culturally, the area that lay between an imaginary line running north from ancient Lachish to Beth-shemesh and another that extended from Tell el-Ḥesi through Tell el-ʿAreini and Tel

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Trans-Frontier Political Systems

Latitudinal Topographical Features:

1 = Naḥal Sorek/Refaʿim
2 = Naḥal HaElah (*Shephelah District 2*)
3 = Naḥal Guvrin/Libnah (*Shephelah District 4*)
4 = Naḥal Lachish (*Shephelah District 3*)
5 = Naḥal Shiqma/Adorayim
6 = Naḥal Besor/Gerar

Fig. 8. Map of liminal zone in the Shephelah. (R. E. Tappy)

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Zayit to Tel Batash (Timnah), probably taking in at times even Philistine Gath (Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi), provides a perfect example of a limen, or liminal zone, that existed between ancient Judah and Philistia (see fig. 8). To the east of this area, larger, fortified sites such as Beth-shemesh, Azekah, and Lachish (and perhaps the unexcavated Tell Bornat) represent the western boundary of Judah. Each of these sites guards a particular valley passageway into the hill country: Beth-shemesh in the Sorek Valley, Azekah in the Vale of Elah, Tell Bornat in the Naḥal Guvrin, and Lachish in the Naḥal Lachish. At times, other sites such as Tell Judeideh and Socoh undoubtedly served as a backup to these more exposed boundary towns.

Inside (that is, east of) this frontier edge, the cultural and political core/set of the highlands would have experienced greater success at maintaining a more dominant role as arbiter of control and order, judicial organization, cultural and political affairs, kinship structures, and more — that is to say, of all the structured elements that afforded definition to the unit as a whole. In the liminal zone outside the boundary, where the penetration of some of these same elements may have been less structured but still highly symbolic in nature, the arbitration powers of the Judahite core would have grown progressively more limited and challenged, although these powers surely extended beyond the frontier line and some distance through my so-called secondary border area.

Viewed in this light, one should expect to encounter a mix of material culture at Shephelah sites lying along or within the liminal zone — a situation to which the archaeological record bears clear witness. But the mixed elements, whether serving utilitarian or symbolic functions (or both), need not occur uniformly across time and space within this area. By tracking the changes in the material record at selected key sites in the region, both the general history of the area and the specific nature of the liminal zone itself become more apparent.

Applying the Model to the Tenth through Seventh Centuries

Tenth Century B.C.E.

I have already shown that the comparative stratigraphic portraits from Beth-shemesh and Lachish reveal several important points germane to this discussion. For example, based on the current interpretations of the excavators themselves, Judah's Iron Age II interests in the lowlands to its west began in the northern Shephelah during the 10th century B.C.E., when the kingdom fortified Beth-shemesh for both practical and symbolic reasons. By the late 10th or early 9th century — certainly by the mid-9th century — Lachish also became a boundary site representing the highland kingdom and, over the late 9th and 8th centuries B.C.E., assumed its place as the pre-

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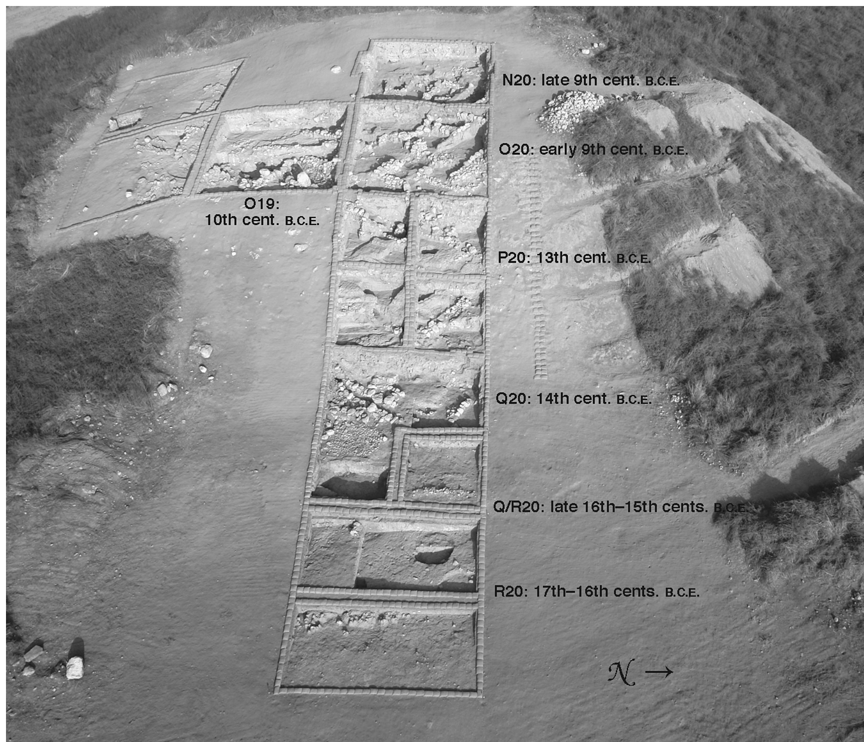

Fig. 9. Aerial photo of Late Bronze / Iron Age excavation areas at Tel Zayit. (Sky View Air Photography, courtesy of R. E. Tappy, The Zeitah Excavations)

miere royal city in the entire region. The line between these two sites represents, in my judgment, the western boundary of Judah in this period. While it is no surprise to find a few signs of coastal contacts in these towns, these elements do not dominate the overall assemblage of artifacts.

In fact, throughout its life in the Iron II period Lachish shows only minimal association with the culture to its west (see n. 4, p. 8 above). Until successive destructions of the site by the Assyrians and Babylonians, the city remained a stronghold of Judah in the southern Shephelah. On the other hand, the fact that archaeologists have assigned the principal Iron II destruction of Beth-shemesh to a variety of causes arises in large measure from the boundary location of the site, near the liminal zone of the Shephelah (suggested causes include [1] a battle between Amaziah and Joash in the early 8th century B.C.E., [2] the capture of the city by the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz in the third quarter of that century, and

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[3] the Assyrian military campaign in Philistia and Judah at the close of the period [701 B.C.E.] — the option that now appears to fit the data best).

A short distance to the west of these boundary sites, both Tel Batash and Tel Zayit exhibit marked characteristics of somewhat smaller towns that existed inside the liminal zone between Judah and Philistia. Following an Iron Age I Philistine city that included several building phases in Tel Batash Stratum V, the 10th-century town in Stratum IV appeared, in contrast, to be rather poorly constructed, with open spaces left between buildings and without a major fortification system, although excavators did find a gate area that may have been associated with two solid towers (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 153–54; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 154–56, 273–76). The level suffered destruction sometime near the end of the 10th century B.C.E., perhaps during the course of Shishak's march to Kiriath-jearim and Gibeon (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 152, 154; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 278–79).

Following the close of the Late Bronze Age at Tel Zayit (with an accumulation of over six vertical meters of occupational levels ranging from Late Bronze Age I through Late Bronze Age IIB; fig. 9), no substantial settlement of the site occurred during the Iron Age I period. Apparently, neither the Philistines nor Judah chose to establish a presence at the erstwhile Late Bronze city. In the 10th century, however, there arose a new town on the summit of the mound. The city's design now featured a series of rooms or buildings with stone walls (one of which held the Tel Zayit Abecedary) or foundations and a combination of flagstone and beaten-earth floors. These chambers incorporated a huge monolith in their design, and they undoubtedly relate to a much larger architectural complex involving at least eight other elements of this sort that are now visible around the eastern, southern, and western shoulders of the tell (see fig. 10a–b).[17]

This beltlike series of houses or small buildings seems comparable to the Stratum XII enclosure at Arad, which dates (now by general consensus) to the prefortress period in the second half of the 10th century B.C.E. As with Tel Batash, the material remains from this stratum generally appear much more modest in both materials and construction compared with the structures at Beth-shemesh. But because the material culture of

17. For a full description of these features and others, see Tappy et al. 2006: 7–22.

Fig. 10 (opposite). (a) Rooms with monolith and (b) volunteers standing on the tops of other exposed monoliths. (The arrow points to the abecedary in Wall 2307/2389.) (R. E. Tappy)

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both Tel Zayit and Tel Batash reflects the orientation of these towns toward the cultural core in the highlands to the east, we can easily interpret both places as evidence of Judah's attempt to establish its presence farther down in the lowland area just beyond its recognized boundary – that is, in its western liminal zone. Finally, Tel Zayit also suffered a massive destruction by fire late in the 10th century B.C.E. (perhaps at the hands of Shishak, though the historical cause of this destruction remains uncertain).

Ninth Century B.C.E.

At Tel Batash, a hiatus seems to have occurred between the occupations of Stratum IV in the 10th century B.C.E. and Stratum III in the 8th century (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 154, 156, 276–77). Fortunately, Tel Zayit now helps to fill this gap and, in doing so, makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the Shephelah during the 9th century, when the political organization of the area underwent significant changes. Lachish now assumed its premiere place among the Judahite sites in the region, even as Tel Zayit fostered increasing connections with the culture(s) of the coastal plain. During the second half of the 9th century B.C.E., it appears (based on preliminary analysis of the pottery assemblage) that coastal ceramic forms dominate the corpus at Tel Zayit. Interestingly, this influence seems to have resulted from peaceful contacts in that direction, contacts perhaps precipitated by Libnah's mid-9th-century revolt against Judah (2 Kgs 8:22 // 2 Chr 21:10) and friendly (economic) overtures from the Philistine cultural core to the west. Whatever lies behind this mutiny, the event reflects – from a Judahite perspective – an appreciable growth in the self-identity and autonomy of a recalcitrant town in the liminal zone. That some of the late-9th-century, coastal-style ceramic forms at Tel Zayit were manufactured locally corroborates this fact even further by perhaps suggesting that at least some coastal potters had taken up residence at the site. For the coastal culture, it meant deeper inroads into the area situated just 7.06 km north and 1.76 km west of Judah's new principal boundary city, Lachish. Thus the changes at Tel Zayit and the rise of Lachish clearly demonstrate a shift in the nature of cultural symbols and political margins in an area between two established cores.

Shortly after this realignment of cultural (and political?) affiliations, Tel Zayit suffered a second destruction by fire, this time in the late 9th-century B.C.E. That the margins in the southern Shephelah had already shifted in favor of the coastal culture strongly suggests that armies from this direction did not precipitate the disaster. Besides, Philistine attempts at eastward expansion always seem to have focused on the Elah and Sorek systems (that is, via the old Judahite District 2 in Joshua 15), not through the more southerly Guvrin or Lachish valley areas (that is, through nei-

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ther District 4 nor 3; see Tappy et al. 2006: 23 n. 41). If the conflagration does not reflect a retaliation from Judah itself, the perpetrator might well have been Ḥazaʾel of Damascus. Recent excavations at Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi, located 8.09 km to the north-northeast of Tel Zayit, have provided close stratigraphic and ceramic parallels relating to this event. The reduction in or loss of loyalty from Tel Zayit in the second half of the 9th century may also relate in some way to King Jehoshaphat's political and judicial reforms, which had brought with them a strong tendency toward increased centralization in Jerusalem (Tappy 2000a: 332–34). Jehoshaphat's program, perhaps not by accident, coincides with the building of Lachish and the ceding of at least some earlier gains in the liminal zone west of that point.

Eighth Century B.C.E.

Not until the second quarter of the 8th century B.C.E. did a Judahite king (Uzziah) seek to reestablish a stronger presence in this liminal zone (2 Chr 26:6). But the westward military maneuvers that he commissioned focused primarily on northern Philistia and on "breaking into" (not "destroying"; see Japhet 1993: 879 on the verb *prṣ*) the cities of Gath, Jabneh (probably Jabneel, near Ekron; see Josh 15:11), and Ashdod. Uzziah apparently attempted to build "cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines" (see below), while skirting the relatively weak Ekron and avoiding Gaza altogether. Although the biblical description likely embellishes the accomplishment by suggesting actual territorial gains inside Philistia's core, it seems probable that Uzziah did manage some expansion as far west as the lower Sorek Valley (see Mazar 1994: 257).

The strongly fortified settlement at Tel Batash Stratum III belongs to this period of Judahite expansion and continues down to the close of the century. But although at least a dozen LMLK jars and other epigraphic evidence suggest that "the city was ruled by Judah on the eve of Sennacherib's campaign" (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 155; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 280), the overall pottery repertoire shows a sharp increase both in the presence and in the specific types of coastal forms (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 156–58). This situation may arise from the fact that sometime after Uzziah's successes the Philistines had pushed back against Judah in the northern Shephelah both before and during the reign of King Ahaz.[18] Although the Bible places the oracle in Isa 14:28–32 at the death of Ahaz, the reference to a broken rod that had once smitten the Philistines may reflect

18. See Japhet 1993: 905–6 on the towns from the Sorek Valley and the Valley of Ayalon (Wâdī Selmān) to its north listed in 2 Chr 28:18. This text also claims that the Philistines moved into the Negev of Judah, but none of the cities listed here belong in that region.

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a memory of Uzziah (not Ahaz) and of how Philistia had reversed his territorial gains during the time of Ahaz. Once again, a mixing of culture and politics characterizes the liminal zone. But the deep penetration recalled in 2 Chronicles 28 (see n. 18) had, in fact, taken the Philistines through that zone and to or beyond the very boundary of Judah, as evidenced by their aggression east of Timnah as far as Beth-shemesh in the Sorek Valley and their offensive 4 km east of Azekah, to Socoh in the Vale of Elah.

When under Hezekiah Judah later regained enough strength to mount its own intrusion back into this area, the king seems to have concentrated the effort against southern Philistia – in the area east of Gaza. A supplementary record from Sennacherib's 701 B.C.E. campaign, however, may suggest that he also managed to conquer and strengthen Gath (or possibly Ekron; see Tappy 2008: 387–88 n. 35) – the only place-name shared with the biblical account of Uzziah's exploits (cf. Mic 1:10–16). Interestingly, the biblical record remains silent concerning the boundary cities of Beth-shemesh and, east of Azekah, Socoh. But the archaeological record suggests that liminal Timnah had once again fallen under Judahite control by the time of the Assyrian attack in 701 B.C.E. As noted earlier, most of the interplay between the two competing cultures had occurred in the northern valleys – that is, in the Vale of Sorek and Naḥal HaElah. Neither Uzziah nor Hezekiah seems to have focused directly on the area immediately around Tel Zayit in the Naḥal Guvrin (although the archaeological picture remains less clear due to the disturbance of 8th-century levels by later building activities). In any event, it appears that Judah managed to make some gains beyond its western boundary during the course of the 8th century B.C.E. and that even Philistine Gath – if not Ekron itself – suffered under the reality of lying in or near the liminal zone. The overall balance of power within this marginal area between Judah and Philistia, however, had shifted several times over the course of that century – in Judah's favor under Uzziah, toward the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz, and back again to Judah in the time of Hezekiah.

All these interregional, give-and-take affairs were stymied by the complete military domination of the area by the Assyrians during Sennacherib's third campaign. Virtually all of the aforementioned sites endured attacks and suffered either heavy destruction or capture. The topography of the lateral valleys that descend from the highlands through the Shephelah not only provided a basis for Sennacherib's field strategy but also gave shape to the final structure of the Shephelah districts in Josh 15:33–44 (see p. 36 below). Concurrent with the destruction of Lachish Level III, the Assyrians seized numerous (46, according to the Assyrian annals) walled towns or villages and reassigned many of them to rule from the

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coast. If not before this time, the 8th-century Judahite gains in the liminal zone with Philistia were lost.

Sennacherib quelled the fomenting rebellion by driving a wedge between Judah-Jerusalem and the restless rulers of the coastal plain. The Assyrian strategy focused on renewed subjection of several major cities in Philistia proper, blockading the Judahite capital of Jerusalem, destroying Judah's principal boundary cities, and politically realigning significant portions of the intermediate and strategically crucial Shephelah – the liminal zone. In the years leading up to this invasion, the Philistines had captured Timnah during the reign of Ahaz, only to have Hezekiah subsequently manage to reestablish ties there and to garrison the already fortified city in preparation for Sennacherib's arrival (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 155; Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 279–81). Perhaps as a reaction to this penetration, the Ekronite noblemen – who had long competed with Judah for control over the Shephelah (cf. Judg 1:18; 1 Sam 5–6, 7:14, 17:52) – deposed their pro-Assyrian ruler (Padi), handed him over to Hezekiah (who then imprisoned him, presumably in Jerusalem [Frahm 1997: 53–54, 59, lines 42–43a; *ARAB* 2 §§240, 311; *ANET* 287; Cogan 2000: 303]), and initiated an anti-Assyrian alliance with the Egyptians/Ethiopians.

The appearance of six LMLK seal impressions at Gath and three others at Ekron (Vaughn 1999: 192–93, nos. 18 and 23) may well reflect Hezekiah's political connections with these subversive actions and his opportunistic incursions into these areas lying a short distance outside Judah's own boundary.[19] Though the status of Gezer (recall fig. 6 above) in this period remains somewhat unclear, the discovery there of additional LMLK seal impressions and unstamped LMLK-type jars may indicate that Hezekiah had also managed to garrison that city sometime shortly before Sennacherib's arrival (see Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 280–81 n. 3).

In the years prior to 701 B.C.E., Philistine Ekron (Stratum IIA) had expanded slightly as its inhabitants began to resettle the lower city in addition to continuing their use of the elite zone (Gitin 1998: 167 n. 7). But Hezekiah had meddled not only with sites that typically vacillated between Judah and Philistia (Tel Batash [Timnah]) but also with key but more vulnerable Philistine cities that lay within the liminal zone (Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi [Gath]) and even major Philistine centers inside their core or cultural center (Tel Miqne [Ekron] and perhaps even Ashdod). This last aggression, which sought to extend Judah's influence beyond even the long-recognized liminal zone, may well have provided the stimulus for Sennacherib's swift

19. See the so-called Azekah Inscription in Naʾaman 1974: 27, line 11; for interpretive problems surrounding this text, see Tappy 2008: 387–88 n. 35.

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response. Ṣidqa, ruler of Ashkelon, also appears to have joined or at least tacitly supported the burgeoning anti-Assyrian alliance, perhaps out of loyalty to longstanding economic connections his port city had held with the lowland and highland towns of Judah (Tappy in press).

This multitiered hierarchy of exchange (which was ultimately controlled by the outlets at coastal ports such as Ashkelon) could not have existed or operated smoothly without the traders and peddlers of the highland culture and market-based middlemen stationed at the transition points in the valleys below. What I have elsewhere called the "fulcrum markets," that is, the towns that lay in the outlying frontier of the inland culture and that helped to regulate the flow of goods from mountains to coast and vice versa, would surely have existed in a state of extreme liminality as they functioned between the two cultural cores. By the late 8th century B.C.E., however, Judah seemed on the edge of upsetting the longstanding, variegated status of sites such as Timnah, Gath, and probably Tel Zayit — a circumstance that won the entire region a violent reaction from Assyria.

Seventh Century B.C.E.

Following this upheaval in the local markets, culture, and politics of the Shephelah, the 7th-century level at Tel Batash (Stratum II) reveals large houses with courtyards, oil presses with crushing basins and extraction vats, stone rollers, and weights, as well as hundreds of restorable vessels from the destruction of this stratum near the close of the 7th century B.C.E. While the pottery assemblage shows both inland and coastal styles, along with some locally made Assyrian imitations, the coastal forms clearly predominate and reveal a striking match to the pottery of Ekron and many similarities to the pottery of Ashdod. It seems clear that this site had become largely coastal in its general cultural and economic affiliations, and the excavator described the overall corpus as "a regional variant of Philistine culture at the end of the Iron Age" (Mazar and Kelm 1993: 156).

Nevertheless, several additional LMLK handles, at least five handles bearing rosette impressions, a Judean pillar figurine, and a series of stone weights point to some degree of continued ties with Judah (Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 281–82). Within a liminal zone like the lowlands of Judah, there is hardly ever an exclusive presence of one cultural set or the other, as history's pendulum swings slowly toward one core and then back again. Rather, one should expect certain elements to appear from both core areas at any given time in the life of a site, and it then becomes a question of which culture dominates the overall picture. The archaeology of most transfrontier sites in the lowlands of southern Canaan has borne out

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this general observation. For example, throughout the 9th and 8th centuries B.C.E. the remains from Lachish reveal hardly any cultural or commercial contacts with the coastal area (Ussishkin 2004: 93; see n. 4, p. 8 above). Thus it seems clear that the borderlands (or liminal-zone) town of Timnah now identified primarily with the coastal region, while the boundary city of Lachish maintained its allegiance to Judah. While Timnah's status is certain for the first half of the 7th century, it remains unclear whether King Josiah managed to reestablish Judean control over the town in the latter part of that period (see Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 282).

As the area slowly recovered from the Assyrian blow to local structures and erstwhile Judahite symbols such as Timnah now served mainly Ekron and Philistia, the biblical writers attempted another cultural ploy — the creation of a literary boundary. The well-known district list for the lowlands of Judah presented in Josh 15:33–44 is followed in vv. 45–47 by the curious inclusion of Ekron, Ashdod, Gaza, and all their towns and villages.

This inclusion raises a tactic that I have not addressed thus far but that constitutes, nonetheless, an integral part of establishing identity and ideology — namely, the use of literary traditions within a core area. As different cultures meet and compete for presence and control in the marginal, liminal zone between them, all aspects of life are brought to bear on the competition when feasible or necessary. The struggle is fought not only through the physical construction of monumental architecture in the outlying sites but also in the popular culture and literary traditions promulgated in the homeland itself.[20] Just as the liminal quality of a border area inherently makes it a tension zone, the day-to-day social interchanges, cultural cooperation, and political negotiations between the actual occupants of that zone simultaneously tend to make the "border" somewhat invisible. The more these interactions are accepted or even promoted at the local level by either side of the border, the more "invisible" the border becomes (see Donnan and Wilson 1994: 6–7; Wilson 1994: 101–3).

When extreme episodes of border disruption further threaten the interests or security of a cultural core, the literary traditions of that group naturally react.[21] A similar literary tactic seems to have unfolded in Judah following Sennacherib's crushing defeat and reorganization of the Shephelah. In the wake of this event, editors altered the old district list from this

20. Compare, for example, Stokes's (1994; 1998) discussion of the role of film, dance, performance, and tabloid reports in the cultural mix of the Hatay province between Turkey and Syria.

21. We see the modern reflex of this phenomenon in governments' use of print and broadcast media during times of war. See Stokes (1994: 41–42) on the value of popular literary representations in gaining visibility for borders.

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area (which I take to have originated sometime in the 9th century B.C.E. and to have undergone limited updates thereafter) by including the historically implausible claim that Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza now constituted official components of the lowland districts of Judah. This literary statement became a cultural symbol for an idealized border zone, a cultural artifice that served as a kind of shorthand notation which conjured up all sorts of recent political, economic, and military history (Tappy 2008).

These same three Philistine cities represent, not coincidentally, the very centers to which Sennacherib gave control over the marginal towns of Judah that he realigned toward the coastal plain (Frahm 1997: 54, 59, line 53; *ARAB* 2 §240; *ANET* 287–88; Cogan 2000: 303). His choice of these particular cities (and not, say, Ashkelon) likely grew out of the longstanding, close connections they had maintained with the Assyrian homeland via the tribute- and wine-bearing envoys they had dispatched to both Nimrud and Nineveh in the decades prior to Sennacherib's third campaign.

The apparent distinction drawn between Ashdod and all other Philistine territories in 2 Chr 26:6b (see above) has garnered significant attention. The passage outlining Uzziah's efforts at expanding Judah's territorial influence (2 Chr 26:6–8) is missing from the books of Kings, and v. 6b in particular presents both grammatical and syntactical difficulties. The notation says only that Uzziah 'built cities *in Ashdod* and among the Philistines' (ויבנה ערים באשדוד ובפלשתים), and to explain the italicized phrase, translators have added the idea that Ashdod itself controlled a certain area surrounding the city ('in *the territory of* Ashdod'). Although a similar assignment of territory to Ashdod may appear in 1 Sam 5:6 (את־אשדוד ואת־גבוליה 'Ashdod and its boundaries/borderlands'), some textual analysts dismiss 2 Chr 26:6b as reflecting only a tendentious expansion by the Chronicler.[22]

Whatever the difficulties in the biblical text, Ashdod may well have competed locally with other Philistine centers for greater sway over the space between them (that is, these cities likely shared their own liminal zones) and also may have played a unique role within the regional strategy of the Assyrians. During the reign of Sargon II, Assyria had subdued the entire Philistine coast in a series of battles spanning nearly a decade and reaching Gaza (and probably also Gibbethon and Ekron) in 720 B.C.E.; Ashdod in 716/715 B.C.E.; and finally Gath (see Younger 2003: 242–43), Ashdod again, and Ashdod's nearby port at Ashdod-yam early in 712 B.C.E.

22. Contrast Ben Zvi 1997: 145–49 with Rainey 1997: 62. Williamson views the second half of this verse as having arisen "secondarily as a confused dittograph" (1982: 334–35). Mazar and Panitz-Cohen (2001: 279–80) correctly note that, given the complex historiographic issues in 1–2 Chronicles, one must evaluate this and other texts of a similar nature against the archaeological data from excavated sites.

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At Ashdod itself, the Assyrians constructed a large administrative palace (Sudilovsky 2004), apparently as a base from which to oversee the affairs of the general vicinity. Although Sargon transformed Ashdod and its holdings into an Assyrian province in 712 B.C.E., either he (Galil 1995: 328–29) or, more likely, Sennacherib (Tadmor 1958: 84) later restored the city to its former standing as a tributary kingdom.

Thus not only was the status of towns and villages within the interregional liminal zone changing during and after Sennacherib's invasion but also the rank of certain principal cities within the Philistine core itself. Whatever the official echelon of Ashdod at the time when editors added vv. 45–47 to Joshua 15, their contention that Judah now controlled this area certainly amounted to not only a fictitious claim but also a dangerous claim. All the property touched on in these verses now constituted not just the Philistine core but strategic Assyrian real estate.

Conclusion

Let us return, finally, to Tel Zayit and the abecedary that was discovered there in 2005. This town, which clearly belonged to the liminal zone between ancient Judah and Philistia, helped to open Judah's southwestern frontier already by the mid-10th century B.C.E. Its very existence in this area made an important symbolic statement for the cultural core that lay in the highlands to the east. The presence of an alphabet at Tel Zayit, in my judgment, played a significant role in this symbolism. The contemporaneous monumental architecture at Beth-shemesh served a greater purpose than housing the residents and officials there. Later on, the governor's palace at Lachish and the *absence* of virtually any trace of coastal culture there sent clear messages to the region as a whole. And the 7th-century oil presses at Timnah served a political function that transcended the site's economic ties to Ekron. All these features stood as symbols of different cultural entities that vied for presence in and influence or total control over this area. The Tel Zayit Abecedary also represented at various levels the larger cultural group from which it originated. This situation obtains regardless of which cultural set one sees as the sponsor of the inscription — that is, whether one understands it as a Phoenician script sent from or pointing to a coastal entity, or as an emergent Hebrew script representing the cultural core to the east of Tel Zayit. At this point in the excavations, the archaeology of the level that yielded the stone strongly suggests the latter scenario.

Sometime around the mid-9th century B.C.E., when Tel Zayit — either as biblical Libnah or in connection with Libnah — realigned itself more openly with the cultural horizon from the coast, the principal symbols of Judah shifted slightly south and withdrew to the larger, boundary city of

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Lachish. Following those developments, in the first half of the 8th century, Uzziah (and later Hezekiah) focused Judah's expansionistic efforts on the more northerly valleys running down through the Shephelah — that is, on the Sorek and Elah systems where Philistine counterdrives had proven most successful. Together, these kings pushed sundry symbols of their culture as far as Timnah and, at times, even to Philistine Gath and possibly Ekron. During the course of his third campaign, however, Sennacherib disrupted everything in both the liminal zone of the Shephelah and the two cores that straddled it. The regional center at Lachish, which from its inception had displayed firm loyalty to its highland core, suffered massive destruction in 701 B.C.E., and significant tracts of land in the marginal zone immediately west of that site were reassigned from Judahite to neo-Philistine control. Recovery throughout the region proved spotty and protracted and was accomplished only a few decades before the entire area had to face the arrival of Babylon.

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