

**RIB-ADDA OF BYBLOS:
POWER AND DIPLOMACY
1360-1340 BC.**

Dr. Marc Abou-Abdallah

Outline

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

II. The Amarna correspondence

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Outline

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

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The Physical reality of the Levant and the trigger for much of its history is that it lays during the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) between three Great Powers:

Egypt in the west,
the Hittite Empire in the north,
and Mitanni in the east.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



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With the desert of Arabia forming a barrier to direct travel from the heart of Mesopotamia to the west, it was necessary to journey north up the Euphrates.

From there, traders or armies could pass north into Asia Minor or south, via the Levant, towards Egypt.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



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The physical geography of the Levant, bordered in the west by a high coastal mountain range, allowed easy access to the sea only through two narrow corridors.

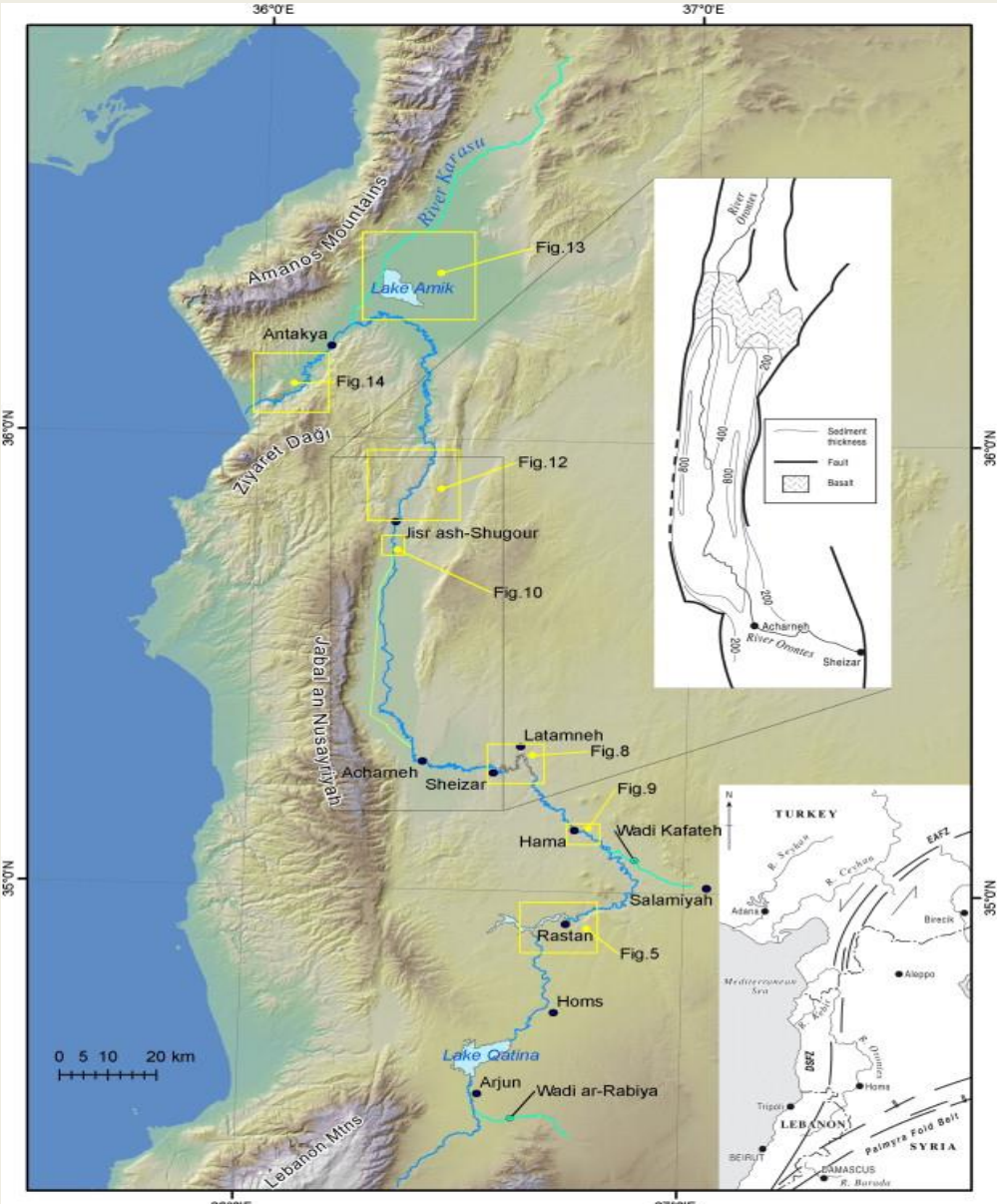
The first corridor is the so-called Homs Gap between Qadesh on the Orontes and the Akkar coastal plain.

The second one is a system of river valleys leading from the Orontes in the vicinity of modern Jisr al-Shughur to the famous port and city-state of Ugarit

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



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There was also a road, which crossed the northern Levant via the Beqaa Valley and then on into Canaan, where the coastal highway, the Via Maris (the “coast road”), provided a pathway to Egypt.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

Given its geostrategic importance, the dominion of the Levant was vital for the Great Powers at that time, since it allowed, on the one hand, to be a part of the international trade system, and, on the other hand, to repel any threat that might occur on their boundaries before it reached their land.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The Middle Eastern Great Powers were lacking in indispensable raw materials, which they needed to acquire by trade.

For them, their hegemony over the Levant meant access to world trade.

The Levantine city-states were transformed into a land that bridged the ancient Near Eastern powers.

They offered this opportunity, where their ports received and exchanged international merchandise.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

Unlike the Great Powers of that time, where a central authority ruled, be it in the Nile Valley or in Anatolia, there was little chance that a significant central power would emerge in the Levant.

It might be suggested that geographical considerations likewise played a role in this matter.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The coastal Levantine plain is discontinuous and often narrow; mountain ranges run parallel with the coast, making lateral communications difficult; and the wooded valleys are often steep.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



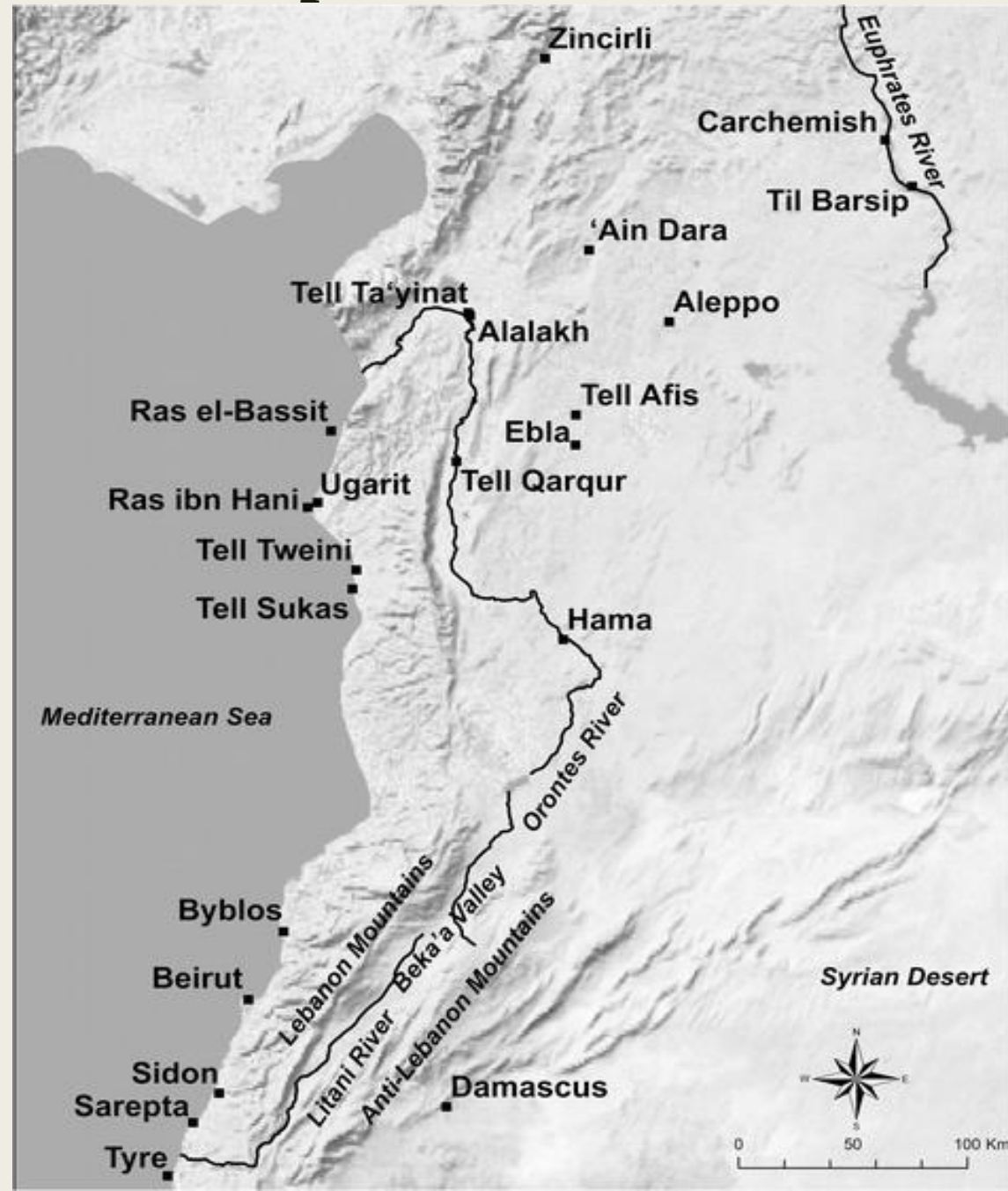
I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



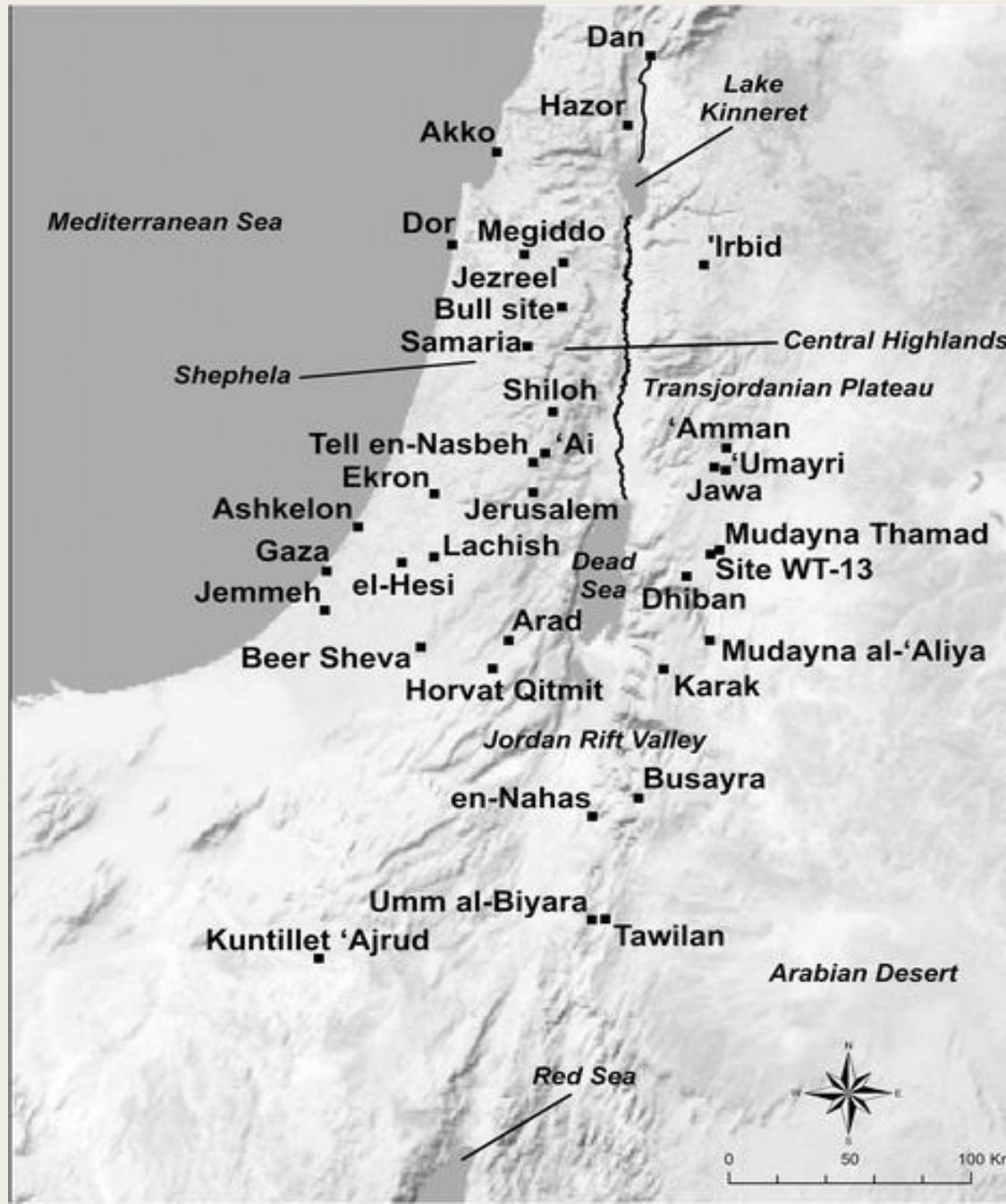
I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

This geographical factor was behind the arrangement of the Levant into small independent kingdoms and city-states, which were *de facto* subject to several foreign interventions, as they had to be easy to conquer.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The Great Powers envisioned a bridgehead that guaranteed the protection of their borders in the Levant.

Thus, they were seeking to establish, by military force if need be, a significant presence, which could be used as a platform to launch a military campaigns that aimed to curb any intervention that might put their interest at risk.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The Great Powers did not have the ability to secure a long and stable political dominance, due partly to the fact that the Levantine political entities were difficult to govern.

It might be suggested that geographical considerations and the means, which were at the disposal of the Great Powers at that time, played a key role in determining the different systems for controlling subject states.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The Great Powers were not struggling for supremacy as an ultimate goal but for the mutual juridical recognition of their standing as equal powers.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The role of Egypt

1550-1350 BC

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

Thutmose III (ca 1479-1425 BC) carried out about sixteen military expeditions to the Levant.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

Thutmose III aimed to vie with, firstly, the Mitanni Empire, and, secondly with the Hittite Empire for supremacy over the region.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

The Egyptians sought the dominion of the corridor of the so-called Homs Gap, between Qadesh on the Orontes and the Akkar coastal plain.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

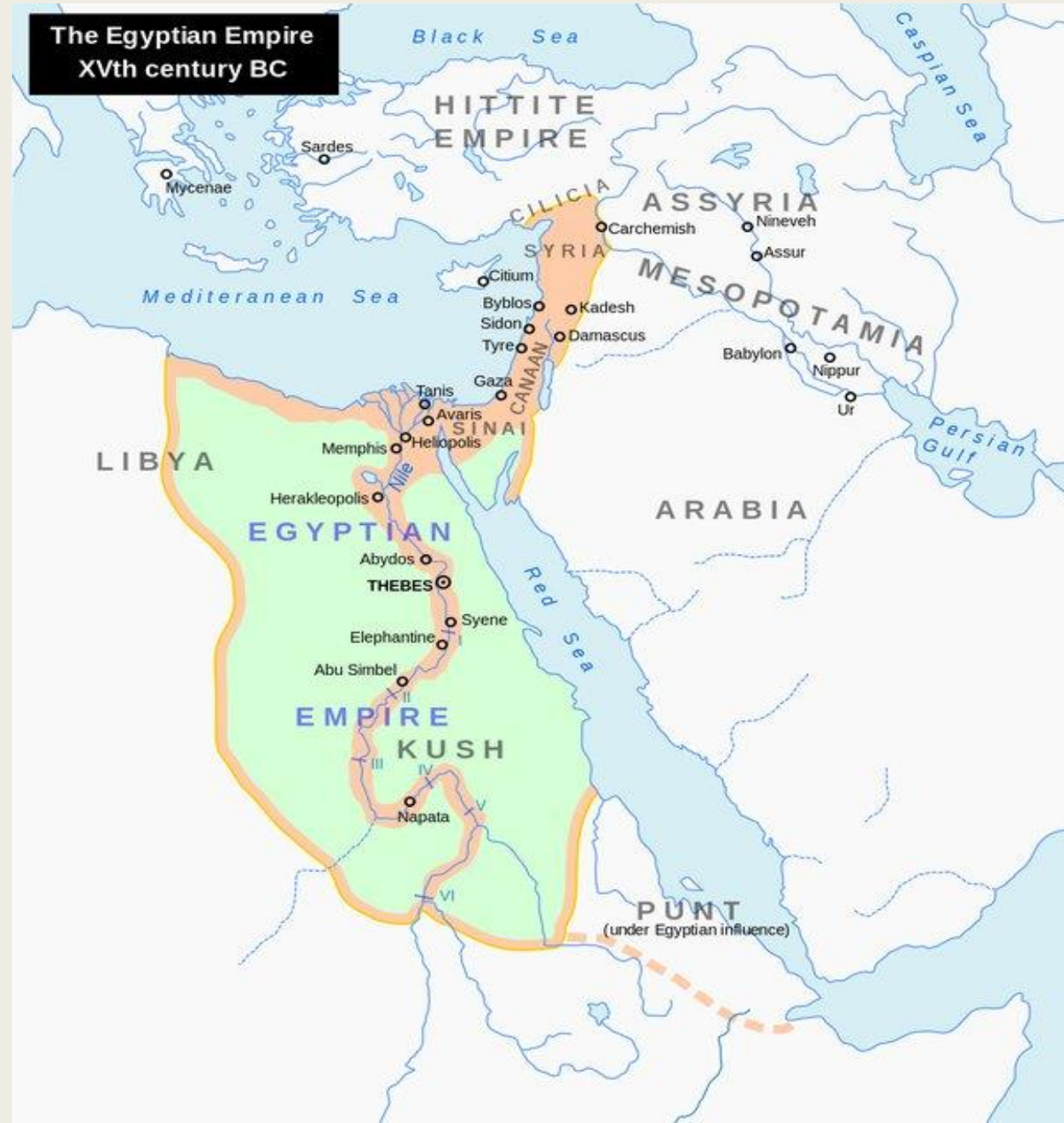
Qadesh was situated at the center of a Y-shaped crossroads: the southern stretch comes from the Beqaa valley, the northwestern branch leads to the Homs Gap, and the northeastern to distant Aleppo.

This corridor is the only easy access to the sea through the Eleutheros Valley in the mid-Levantine coast, which was bordered on the west by a high coastal mountain range.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant

Following his victory against several city-states, among them Irgata and Tunip in 1441 BC, Thutmose III established Egypt's domination over the Levant.

I. The geopolitical landscape of the Levant



Outline

II. The Amarna correspondence

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The Amarna correspondence, which consists of nearly 382 little pillow-shaped slabs of sundried clay, owe their name to the modern designation of the site of Amarna in Egypt.

II. The Amarna correspondence



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II. The Amarna correspondence

Amarna, which was known as Akhetaten, had been built *ex nihilo* around 1345 BC by Akhenaten in line with his religious reform to be his capital.

Akhenaton (1353-1335 BC)



II. The Amarna correspondence

251 letters out of 382 were discovered clandestinely by a local peasant woman searching for *sebakh* among the ancient ruins at Amarna in 1887, and the area was then rummaged by other villagers who got wind of the find.

The villagers intended to recover antiquities to be sold.

31 tablets have been unearthed by a regular archeological excavation *in situ* in the same place where the other tablets had been found.

II. The Amarna correspondence



II. The Amarna correspondence

It is most plausible that all these tablets used to constitute a part of a Foreign Office inside a Record Office next to the royal palace.

In addition, among the archeological finds made with the tablets in the record office, we also note the presence of seals in the name of Akhenaten, which may have been used to guarantee the closure of containers or parts of the building.

II. The Amarna correspondence

Indeed, the royal archive, or “place of the letters of the Pharaoh,” was left behind, and those of its contents that were not deemed worthy of relocating with the royal court seem to have been disposed of in rubbish pits.

It is worth noting that because the Amarna archive correspondence dated to earlier than the construction of Akhenaten’s city, a portion of the archive did not serve the contemporary administrative needs but was a collection of documents to consult when the need arose.

II. The Amarna correspondence

In a probable scenario, the tablets were brought to the buildings that were destined to become scribal offices before their construction was completed.

II. The Amarna correspondence

The tablets of the Amarna epistolary corpus still bring to light the most complete and balanced view of the legal and diplomatic practices in the fourteenth century BC between the client city-states and entities (such as Byblos, Amurru, Sidon, Tyre, Jerusalem, etc.) and their suzerain contenders' empires (like Egypt and the Hittite Empire).

II. The Amarna correspondence

The main part of the archive consists of thirty-two non-diplomatic texts and 350 epistles, drafts, and inventories, usually of diplomatic content, sent to the Pharaoh by his Levantine clients or by other states, such as Assyria, Mitanni, or Babylon.

II. The Amarna correspondence

The letters themselves can be grouped under five headings:

II. The Amarna correspondence

The international correspondence consists about of thirty-six diplomatic documents mostly sent to the Pharaoh by the rulers of other Great Powers and lesser independent states:

Mitanni (12)

Babylon (10)

Alašiya (8)

Ḫatti (3)

Assyria (2)

Arzawa (1).

II. The Amarna correspondence

About a dozen of cuneiform letters from the pharaoh have been preserved in
Amarna.

II. The Amarna correspondence

317 imperial documents consisting of administrative correspondence chiefly sent to the Egyptian court from Egypt's Canaanite empire (the Levant).

Many of the epistles deal with the vassal's domestic problems, quarrels between vassals, trade and tribute, and internal security.

The wider strategic question of Egypt's relations with its neighbors is also touched upon, providing a common thread between the international and imperial correspondence.

II. The Amarna correspondence

A part of the set is intended for training purposes in school.

II. The Amarna correspondence

Many letters are fragmentary and do not disclose the name of their writer, his city, or both.

Others do not record the ruler's city.

Some tablets bear the name of a city, but their location is either unknown or disputed.

II. The Amarna correspondence

A linguistic study

II. The Amarna correspondence

Whilst the tablets of the Amarna epistolary corpus were inscribed in cuneiform, the senders used mainly the Akkadian language.

This language advanced in the Levant in the third millennium BC with the scribes as its vehicle and the support of local political and administrative elites who appreciated the utility of writing for practical purposes.

II. The Amarna correspondence



II. The Amarna correspondence

In the second millennium BC, high culture was Mesopotamian culture. All civilized peoples borrowed the cuneiform system of writing and basic forms of expression from the Akkadian-language culture of Mesopotamia, which had itself taken over the greater part of its components from the Sumerian society which it succeeded.

II. The Amarna correspondence

The cuneiform spelling practices indicate that Canaanite scribes were trained in a conservative Old Babylonian writing tradition.

Where the grammar of their native Canaanite was homogenous with the grammar of Akkadian, these scribes tended to use correct Akkadian forms following the rules of standard Akkadian grammar.

II. The Amarna correspondence

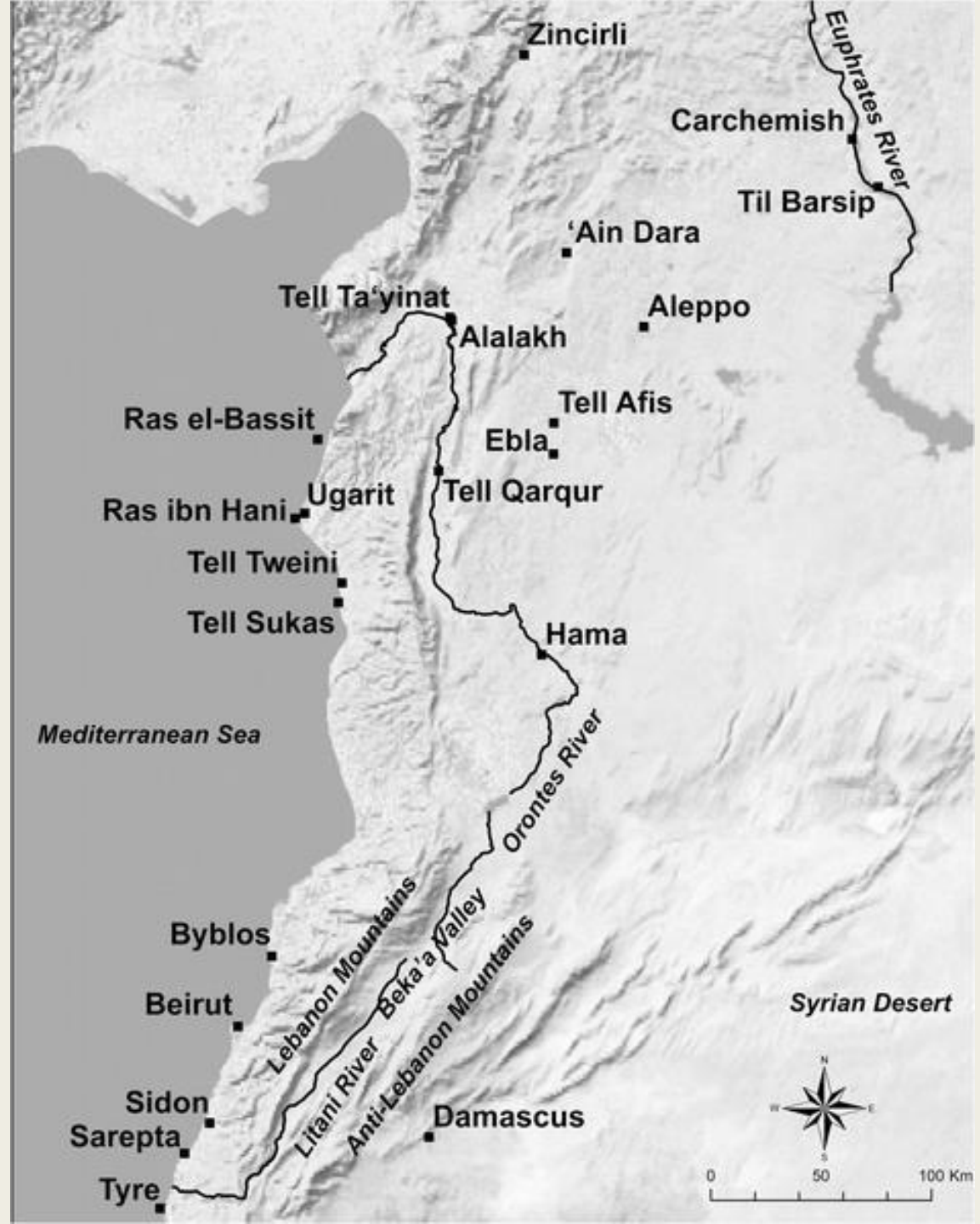
The scribes of Byblos, such as the ones from Jerusalem, Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Gezer, etc. who were actively working with Egyptian administrators, demonstrate higher levels of sophistication in their use of rhetorical persuasion.

Their epistles make use of complex political and rhetorical statements and the most skilled use of code-switching, glosses, and scribal marks.

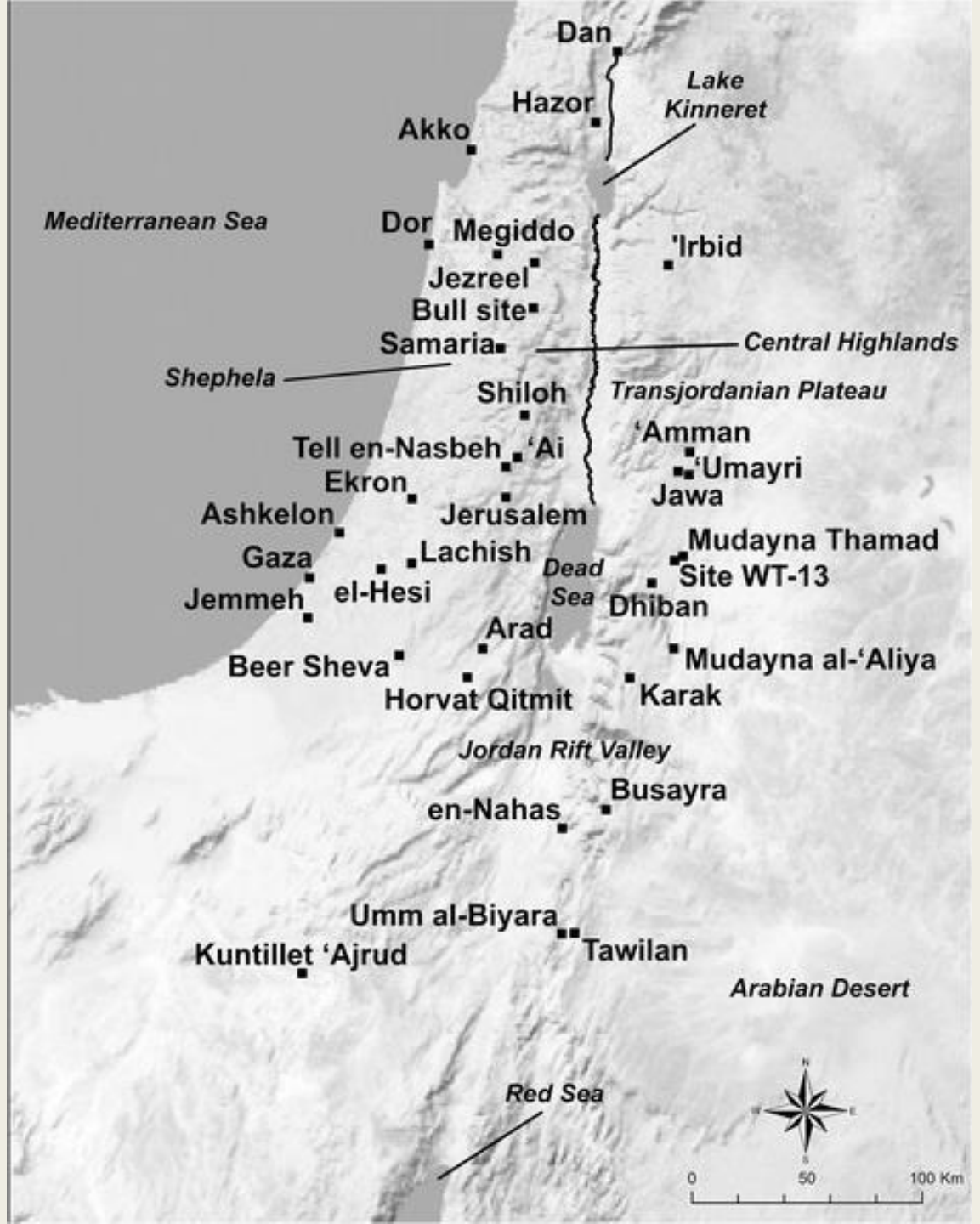
II. The Amarna correspondence

Since the verb *Šapāru*, mentioned in the letters, can be translated into “send, write”, it is apparent that the king delivered his message first to the scribe orally, in his own native tongue, and the scribe would have noted down the main content of the message.

II. The Amarna correspondence



II. The Amarna correspondence



II. The Amarna correspondence

After collecting the information, it was subsequently the responsibility of the scribe to compose and write the letter.

The wording of certain parts of the letter, especially the introduction formulae, was left to the scribe, for whom knowing the identity of the addressee would have been sufficient to decide on the appropriate phrasing.

II. The Amarna correspondence

The scribes were not only responsible for recording the messages of their masters but were also in charge of choosing and employing the expected formulae in the right order, creating a diplomatic message *par excellence*.

The Amarna diplomacy thus largely depended on the skills and experiences of the scribes.

Outline

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Byblos



Byblos



III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Since the third millennium BC, Byblos had cultivated interconnected and close relationships with Egypt.

The cordial ties immersed Byblos in a network of bonds chiefly based on the exchange of prestige goods.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

The land *ḥntj-š*, mentioned in the Egyptian sources, is identified within Lebanon or a part of its territory where trees with straight trunks grow – a “mast forest” – used in the production of strong gates, ships and much more.

The land *ḥntj-š* was rich with numerous resources, primarily ‘š-wood.

The term ‘š-wood, it is most often identified with coniferous trees: cedar, stone pine, Cilician fir, or pine in general.

The cedar in the hinterlands of Byblos



The Pheonician ships made in Byblos



Merchant Ships

Phoenician sailors developed the round boat, a ship that was very wide and had a rounded bottom. This shape created a large space for cargo.

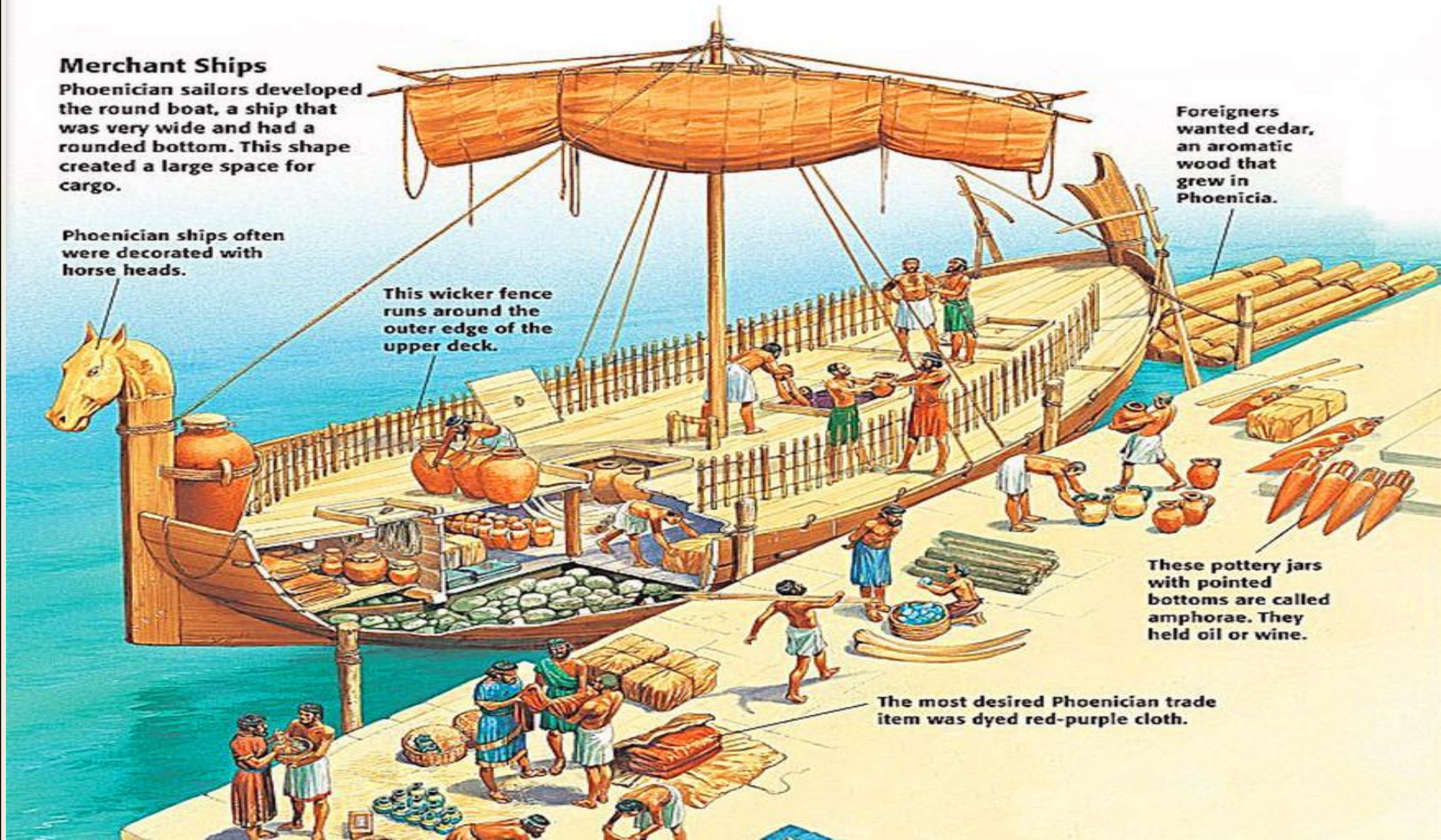
Phoenician ships often were decorated with horse heads.

This wicker fence runs around the outer edge of the upper deck.

Foreigners wanted cedar, an aromatic wood that grew in Phoenicia.

These pottery jars with pointed bottoms are called amphorae. They held oil or wine.

The most desired Phoenician trade item was dyed red-purple cloth.



III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

During the reign of Thutmose III (ca 1479-1425), Byblos was counted as a strategic stronghold by the Egyptians.

Thus the Egyptians were keen on maintaining control and influence over the region of Byblos and Amurru.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos



III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Given its prominent role in the production of cedar beams in its hinterland and shipbuilding in its port, Byblos had acted as Egypt's gateway to the cedar reserves, always friendly and always open.

That is why Byblos played a key role in the military activities of Thutmose III in the northern Levant.

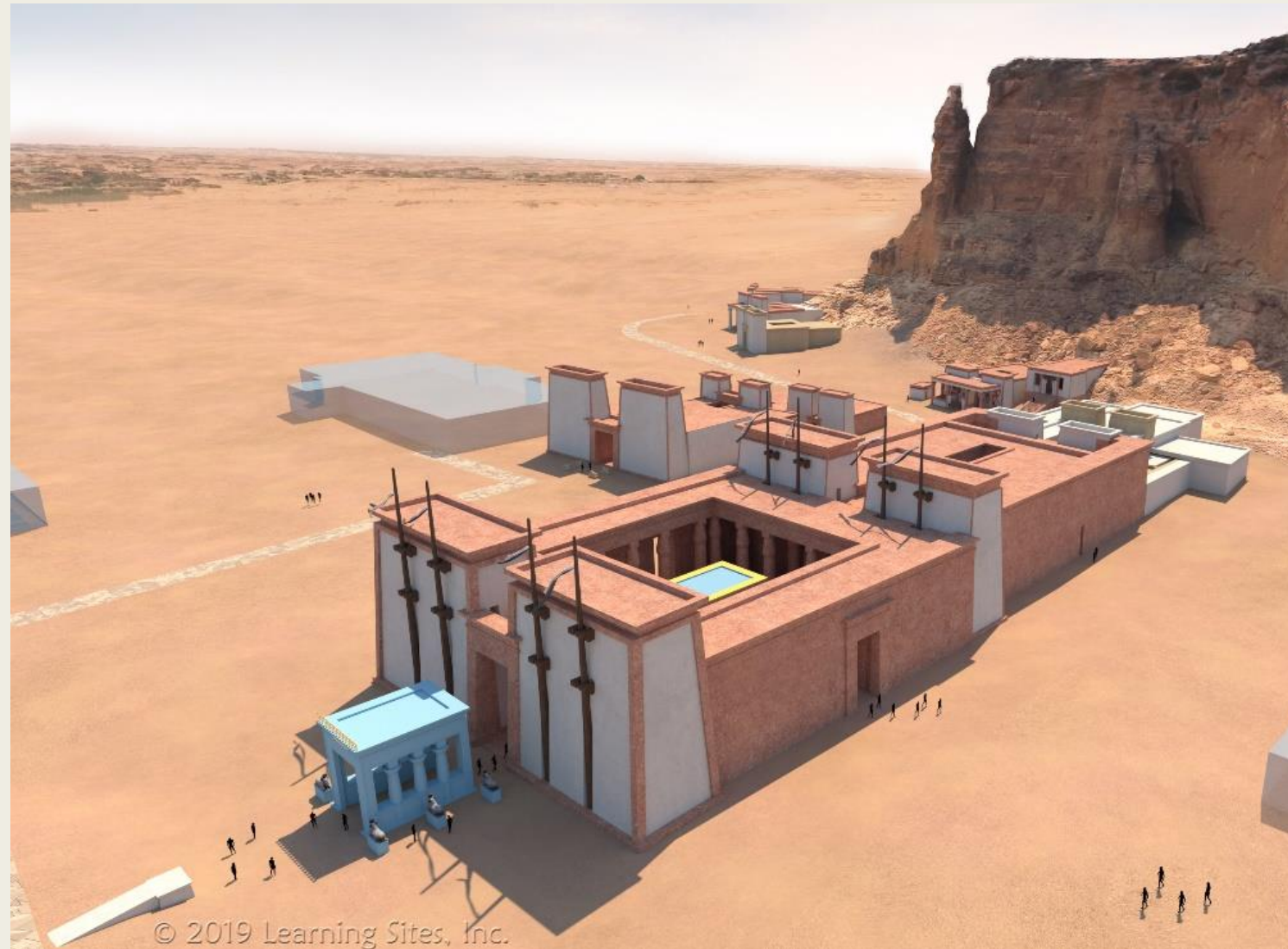
III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

The importance of Byblos is particularly salient in the Gebel Barkal stelae made during the reign of Thutmose III.

The temple of Amun in Gebal Berkal



The temple of Amun in Gebal Berkal



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III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

¹¹ Now my Majesty crossed to the ends of Asia;

I caused many ships to be built of š-wood

From the hills of God's Land

In the neighborhood of the Lady of Byblos;

They were placed on carts

And oxen pulled (them);

They sailed [before] My Majesty to cross that great river

That flows (lit. "makes") between this land and Naharin.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

The political stability, and, therefore, the economic prosperity that Byblos had enjoyed, did not last during the reign of Rib-Adda (ca 1370-1345 BC), they have been imperiled owing a priori to a severe uprising that raged on in Amurru and in the region of Byblos.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda addressed to the Egyptian court the single largest number of the Amarna epistolary corpus, 67 (or 68), or nearly 1/4 of the vassals' correspondence.

He informed the Pharaoh what was happening in Byblos, and he implored the Egyptians to send to Byblos military assistant to help Rib-Adda in suppressing the revolt.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda is undoubtedly the most prolific and diligent ruler.

Rib-Adda replied to the complaint sent to him from the pharaoh:

“*It [is true]*, you keep talking [li]ke this, “Yo<u> are the one that writes to me more tha[n a]ll the (other) mayors”. Why should the[y be the ones] to write [t]o you? Th[ey] have (their) cities, (but) my [ci]ties Aziru has taken!” (EA 124: 34-40).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda referred to all these rebels under the name of “*ḥabiru*”.

Ḥabiru did not mean an ethnicity *per se*.

The general sense of aggressiveness seems to be indicated when the term

SA.GAZ is used in these texts.

SA.GAZ seems originally to have meant “he who commits aggression”, or

“one who knocks down”, or even “killer”.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

The main reason of the revolt

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Following the Gebel Barkal stelae (*Urk.* IV 1241:11-1242:13), the Egyptian fortress related to Byblos was involved with the farmers of Byblos in procuring beam to send to the temple of Amun in Karnak:

jn mš'j sw' snwt m htjw nw š

“It is my army which cut down the flagpoles on the slopes on ‘š-wood”.

Byblos, which sent cedar and fir woods was on a regular basis, received payments and prestigious Egyptian gifts in return.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

It is highly probable that the waning of Egypt in the mid-Levantine negatively impacted the production of the cedar beams in Mount Lebanon.

Consequently, the export of cedar from the port of Byblos to Egypt might have been significantly reduced.

Thus, the *ḥupšu* were drawn into the inescapable cycle of debt and gradually lost their land and property.

This heralded the threshold of trouble broke out in the region of Byblos that would last for almost twenty years.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda repeatedly stated his fear from his *ḥupšu*:

EA 77: 36-37	“I am afraid the peasa[ntry] will strike m[e] down”.
EA 117: 89-90	“[But now], as for me, the wa[r is severe again]st me. I [have become af]raid of my peasantry”.
EA 130: 38-42	“If now there are no provisions from the king for me, my peasantry is going to fi[gh]t (against me)”.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

According to Rib-Adda's words, these farmers tried to assassinate him:

“[And so] they became trait<ors> to me. A man with a bronze dagger: ʿ*pat*¹-
[*r*]a [at]tacked m[e], but I ki[l]ed him”

(EA 81: 14-16).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Among these outlying citizenry emerged ‘Abdi-Aširta.

With ‘Abdi-Aširta, the popular uprising morphed into armed conflict.

His plan was ultimately clear, and seems to have been to put an end to the hostility between the landless *ḫabiru*, who lived on the fringe of society, and the general population, who lived in the cities.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

This problem could not be solved merely by drawing up treaties since the *ḫabiru* would persist with their raids until the problem of their landlessness was solved.

Sine qua non these new changes, Amurru was to be regarded as a rebellious country, forcibly subjugated.



III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Abdi-Aširta conquered in the beginning of his military drive in Amurru the city of Irqata (modern Tell Arqa), located on the southern flank of the Akkar plain, near Naher el-‘Arqa that drains the mountains area to the southeast of the plain.

According to ‘Abdi-Aširta:

“So I [came to] help from the city of Ir[qat]”

(EA 62: 13).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Then, nonetheless, following Rib-Adda:

“The ‘*Apiru* killed Ad[una, the king] of Irqata, *but* there was no one who <s>aid anything to Abdi-Aširta, and so they go on *tak[ing]* (territory for themselves)”

(EA 75: 25-29).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda consider the *ḫabiru* as former or alleged vassals that are now operating on their own, outside the overlord-vassal political system.

In addition, he attributes to ‘Abdi-Aširta the status of a “dog”:

“What is ‘Abdi-Aširta, the dog, that he stives to [ta]ke all the cities of the
king”

(EA 76: 12-13).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda tried to find a solution in hopes of enhancing his political position to be capable to cap the uprising in his kingdom and the military drive of Abdi-Aširta.

He sealed an alliance with Tyre by marrying his sister to the king of Tyre, who might have been, according to Na‘aman, Ba‘alu-Dāni.

Conversely, this move ended in failure.

An opposing faction, probably in league with ‘Abdi-Aširta, murdered the ruler of Tyre, his wife, (Rib-Adda’s sister), and his sons

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Given the increasing popularity of 'Abdi-Aširta, the ruler of Byblos was not capable to build a strong army, knowing that according to some scholars, in the Middle Bronze Age, the inhabitants of Byblos were 1500- 2000 people in that of the small size of the city (5-7 hectares).

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

‘Abdi-Aširta targeted the non-combatants in Byblos’ region in hopes of obtaining economic and territorial gains, and the attacking of the civilians can be seen as a drastic way of preventing the victims from opposing the plundering itself.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda was not able to management of a modicum of coexistence with the farmers of Mount Lebanon. Hence, he seems to be dazzled by means of asking for Egyptian help.

Thus, in his letters to the Egyptian court, Rib-Adda constantly begged the Pharaoh for help dealing with his archrivals' expansionist policy:

‘Abdi-Aširta, his sons, and Aziru.

But, Rib-Addi's cries for help are not answered by Akhenaten, and, one city after another went over to the *ḥabiru*.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Rib-Adda recognized too his submission to the Pharaoh:

“I fall down at the feet of my father”

(EA 82: 4);

“[Ri]b Adda says to his lord, king of all countries, Great King: May the Lady of Gubla grant power to my lord. I fall at the feet of my lord, my Sun, 7 times and 7 times”

(EA 75: 1-6).

A formula which has been repeated in all his letters.

III. The case of Rib-Adda of Byblos

Why did Rib-Adda fail to convince the Pharaoh?

Outline

Conclusion