

Wolfgang Zwickel (University of Mainz)

# Place Names as Markers for Dating a Text

## Oral History and Place Names

Stories must be informative for both the narrator and the listener. Telling a story to someone who has no prior knowledge of the topic requires the narrator to include a lot of details that become boring to the listener. The listener will at best notice the main topic of the story but only a few of the concrete details. Strange things that are not familiar to the experience of the listener will often get lost. Remembering specific details of an oral communication is always problematic. This is specifically true for unknown names of persons or sites. Retelling such information several times normally implies that much of the very specific information gets lost. This is especially true decades after the death of people who are not in everyone's memory (like Churchill, Alexander the Great, Herod the Great etc.) or the abandonment of sites (except for a few sites like Waterloo, Atlantis etc. that belong to the common cultural memory). Descriptions that do not correlate with the actual situation of a listener or a reader can easily be changed and will be "forgotten" or replaced in the group's collective memory. Historical collective memorial is only partially interested in history, but is more so interested in its relevance for the actual situation. Jan Assmann wrote: "Der Sinn des Vergangenen bestimmt sich vom Gegenwärtigen her, und nur das tritt als Ereignis hervor, was zum Werden des Gegenwärtigen beigetragen hat."<sup>1</sup>

In Gonja, a state situated in northern Ghana, a story is told that can illustrate this fact.

The state of Gonja ... is divided into a number of divisional chiefdoms, certain of which are recognized as providing in turn the rule of the whole nation. When asked to explain their system the Gonja recount how the founder of the State, Nedwura Jakpa, came down from the Niger Bend ..., enthroned himself as chief of the state and his sons as rulers of its territorial divisions. At his death the divisional chiefs succeeded to the paramountcy in turn. When the details of this story were first recorded ..., Jakpa was said to have begotten seven sons, this corresponding to the number of descendants from the founder of the particular chiefdom. But at the same time as the British had arrived, two of the seven disappeared .... Sixty years later, when the myths of state were again recorded, Jakpa was credited with only

---

1 "The meaning of the past is determined by the present, and only that emerges as an event that has contributed to the becoming of the present" (Assmann 1988, 103).

five sons and no mention was made of the founders of the two divisions which had since disappeared from the political map.<sup>2</sup>

Similar experiences can occur with geographical names. Stories told orally over decades often lose their concrete<sup>3</sup> geographical attribution if the site names are not part of the general, acquired knowledge of the listeners. If a town was abandoned or too small to be part of general knowledge, no one is interested in keeping its tradition alive. Only in the specific surroundings of these sites might people (perhaps) remember the site name and some traditions connected to it. People living further away are normally not interested in information that is not informative to them. However, this implies that sites mentioned in biblical texts still must have existed when the text was written. Otherwise, the site names most likely would not have been preserved.

We may define it more generally based on Jan Assmann's understanding: place names are only relevant for a historical collective memory if they have a basic function for people in the present. Place names are not arbitrarily exchangeable. If someone writes a town history, the name of the town has an important function. The history of the biblical site of Bethel cannot be exchanged with Shechem, because historical events are important for this specific town. When writing a town history of Bethel, the writer is not so much interested in events from others sites, and he will concretely mention another site only if it has some relevance for the specific town. If a town does not exist anymore, normally (with some exceptions) its name is no longer relevant for the normal life of the actual wider community. Therefore, the name of the town will be excluded from actual memory. Normally, such names only survive in written sources and not in oral ones. Nevertheless, for local people, the ruins of a site may still be important and remembered, even if a site no longer exists. The name may have survived as a landmark, a local venerated site, or as a part of the local history. Using the sentence of Assmann once again, a site name may have lost its contribution to the present for most people in a country, but it may still be important for the self-conception of a limited (local) group. But generally, we have to assume that the contemporary ancient readers of Hebrew Bible texts belonged to the general public and not to a specific local group.

---

<sup>2</sup> Goody and Watt 1968, 33.

<sup>3</sup> They may survive as a vague commemoration without any reliable historical significance; cf. the comments about the lists of autochthonous nations in the Hebrew Bible in the paper of C. Edenburg in this volume, pp. 85–104. Some of them changed their original attribution, some of them might be completely artificial.

In some cases, abandoned and ruined sites that were only known to a limited number of local people and which were completely forgotten in the historical collective memory may be re-vitalized in later periods by taking on new meaning. Ronald Hendel demonstrates this for dolmen fields, cyclopean walls, and megalithic structures that the Iron Age people attributed to prehistoric giants.<sup>4</sup> Another example is perhaps the conquest of the biblical site of Ai (Josh 8). Its name (“ruin”) was used because a large, Early Bronze Age ruined settlement that was resettled during the Iron Age I period existed there. In addition, some of the sites mentioned in Josh 12 became relevant again for the concept of the book of Joshua. Several sites were not settled during the Iron Age but were still remembered because of their impressive ruins. These ruins, long forgotten by most of the settlers in the country, were mentioned in the list of Josh 12 because they were used as proof for a successful military conquest of the Israelites. However, in accordance with Assmann, these sites only became remembered and named because they were important for the actual self-conception of the writers of this history of Israel. This history of a violent conquest of Israel under the leadership of Joshua is completely fictitious; there is no period from the Bronze Age to the Roman period when all these sites were simultaneously settled.<sup>5</sup>

The site of Shunem is an excellent example for proving this theory. Its identification with the Arab village of Solem (coord. NIG 23175.72372; WGS84 32.606182, 35.334204) was already proposed by Edward Robinson in 1841 and is still generally accepted today.<sup>6</sup> The change from Hebrew *n* to Arab *l* is attested in several other cases and supports the identification.<sup>7</sup> The present-day village is situated approximately 3 km east of Afule in the plain of Jezreel in a very central position within this plain. The size of the tell, which today is nearly completely covered by an Arab village, is about 2.5 hectares. This site fits all the topographical requirements mentioned in the biblical texts. It is an ideal camping ground next to the mountains of Gilboa and En-Dor (1 Sam 28:4) inside the territory of the tribe of Issachar (Josh 19:18). Eusebius and Hieronymus had already identified the name of the site as Soulem/Sulem centuries before Robinson, saying it was situated five miles south of Mount Tabor.<sup>8</sup> The distance between Solem and Mount Tabor fits the information given by these authors perfectly, but the direction is southwest rather than south— a deviation common in the site descriptions

---

4 Cf. the contribution of R. Hendel, pp. 263–88 in this book.

5 Fritz 1969.

6 Robinson 1841, 401–4; see also e. g. Abel 1967, 470–71 and Huwiler 1992.

7 Aharoni 1984, 125.

8 Klostermann 1904, 158–59.

of Eusebius. There is no reason to doubt the equation of biblical Shunem with modern day Solem.

## Archaeological Results from Solem

Despite the dense, present-day settlement activities on the tell, archaeological research has been conducted at the site. No large-scale excavation has taken place yet, but there have been several small rescue excavations. Therefore, no coherent picture can be offered from a research-driven archaeological dig, only accidental insights from a few salvage sites within the village that have been dug prior to building activities.

The Archaeological Survey of Israel collected pottery from the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200/1150 BCE), the Iron Age I–II (1250/1200–586 BCE), the Babylonian-Per-sian (586–33 BCE), Roman (37 BCE–324 CE), Byzantine (324–638 CE), Mameluke (1250–1516 CE), and Ottoman (1516–1917 CE) periods from the yards of the Arab villagers.<sup>9</sup> Excavations at the site have provided additional information. The first excavation was conducted in 1999 on the western fringes of the tell. Phases 6–4 were dated to the Late Bronze Age II and Phases 3–1 to the Early Islamic period. Additionally, this excavation found a Middle Bronze Age earthen glacis and Late Bronze Age remains.<sup>10</sup> During an excavation conducted in 2002 north of the present-day cemetery, Stratum I comprised later tombs, Stratum II represented occupation during the Byzantine period, Strata III and IV were dated to the Iron Age I period, while the building remains of Stratum V were dated to the second part of the Late Bronze Age.<sup>11</sup> In 2002, a salvage excavation was undertaken at the southern end of the tell. They discovered a building of the Early Islamic period.<sup>12</sup> An excavation in 2004 on the northeastern slope of the tell revealed a building from the Early Bronze Age I period but no other remains except Roman pits.<sup>13</sup> Another excavation in the same year took place near the center of the tell. Stratum IV could be dated to the Early Bronze Age I period, Stratum III yielded a rampart of the late Middle Bronze Age that evidently was still in use during the Late Bronze Age, and Strata II and I were from the Byzantine and Islamic periods.<sup>14</sup> In 2006, an

---

<sup>9</sup> Gal 1998, 62\*.

<sup>10</sup> Gal 2002 and Gal and Hana 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Covello-Paran and Arie 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Hanna 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Covello-Paran 2006; 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Dalali-Amos 2011.

excavation in the center of the tell revealed parts of a Mameluke settlement.<sup>15</sup> Another excavation in 2007, conducted at the southern foot of the tell, revealed remains of the Late Roman, Byzantine, and Umayyad periods.<sup>16</sup> An excavation at the center of the tell in 2008 yielded remains from the Byzantine, Umayyad, and Mameluke periods.<sup>17</sup> Another salvage excavation in the same year concentrated on the western part of the tell. Stratum I yielded remains from the Middle Bronze Age, Strata 2 and 3 were dated to the Byzantine period, and Stratum 4 was even later. In the older strata, pottery from the Middle and Early Bronze Age was also found, demonstrating that the western part of the tell was evidently settled during these periods.<sup>18</sup> In 2010, another salvage excavation was conducted 25 m north of the excavation of 2002. No Late Bronze Age remains were discovered, but this part of the tell was also settled in the Iron Age I period.<sup>19</sup> An excavation in 2013, at the southeastern slope of the tell, yielded remains that were mainly from the Umayyad period but also included Roman and Byzantine pottery.<sup>20</sup>

Although all of these excavations were only salvage operations, their high number allows some reconstruction of the settlement history of the site. The earliest remains, covering several parts of the tell, are from the Early Bronze Age I period. The site was abandoned at the end of EB I and only resettled in the (late?) Middle Bronze Age II period. A glacis surrounded the settlement as a fortification system that was likely still in use during the Late Bronze Age. The Late Bronze Age II city covered at least the western and northern part and the center of the tell. Although the material is too limited for real statistical reconstruction, the Late Bronze Age settlement seems to have been smaller than the Middle Bronze Age one – a typical feature at many sites. The Iron Age I site was concentrated in the northern part of the tell. Evidently, the Iron Age I settlement was rather small. Iron Age II and Persian sherds were only found during the survey activities but never during the several excavations covering the entire tell. It seems as though there only existed a settlement during the Iron Age II, while during the Persian period, occupation comprised a few isolated houses or some undiscovered tombs. A camping ground of nomads equally could have existed there in this era. Starting in Late Roman period, Solem again became an important settlement.

---

**15** Alexandre 2008.

**16** Cinamon 2010a.

**17** Mitler 2010.

**18** Cinamon 2010b.

**19** Covello-Paran 2011.

**20** Gosker 2014.

## Extra-Biblical Texts

Shunem is a rather unimportant town in the biblical texts, not comparable to other mythological sites like Bethel, Bethlehem, or Jerusalem. The extant archaeological excavations also attest to the limited size and relevance of the site. Nonetheless, the site is mentioned in Josh 19:18; 1 Sam 28:4; 1 Kgs 1:3, 15; 2:17, 21, 22; 2 Kgs 4:8, 12, 25, and 36. Additionally, it is mentioned in the site lists of pharaohs Thutmose III (1479–1426 BCE) and Shishak (945–924 BCE) as well as in the Amarna letters (reign of Amenhotep III [1390–1353 BCE] and Amenhotep IV/Akhetaton [1353–1336 BCE]) (EA 250:43; 365:12, 21).<sup>21</sup>

The list of Thutmose III is not a continuous description of his campaign against Palestine and Syria. A campaign took place, but the listed sites are not in chronological order; the order might reflect a supplementary strike conducted by a small contingent of troops as part of a very sophisticated and wide-reaching campaign. Sites 31–38 likely represent (perhaps in the wrong order!?) such a strike. One of the main aims of the larger campaign was the conquest of Megiddo some 15 km west of Shunem. Therefore, it is reasonable that troops headed toward Megiddo first conquered Shunem (no. 38). Then they moved northwards through Lower Galilee, bypassing Kishyon (Tell Kasyun, no. 37), Adamam (= Adami-Nekeb, Khirbet et-Tell, no. 36), Shimron (Khirbet Sammuniye, no. 35). Then they moved along the Sea of Galilee, passed Kinneret (Tell el-Oreme, no. 34), and continued northwards in the Huleh Valley to Hazor (Tell el-Qedah, no. 32; Pahal/Pella no. 33 = Khirbet Fahil is misplaced in this list) and finally to Laish/Dan (Tell el-Qadi, no. 31).

In Amarna letter EA 250, Shunem is mentioned together with the sites of Burquna (Burkin, 20 km south of Shunem), Kharabu (not identified), and Gat-Rimmon (likely Tell Jerishe near Jaffa).<sup>22</sup> This chain of sites sounds like an Egyptian campaign that came to its (preliminary) end at Shunem, having moved inland from the coast. The sequence might derive from a campaign of Thutmose IV (1388–1379 [Helck]/1400–1390 [Krauss] BCE), who reached Sidon (cf. EA 85:70). The exact course of his campaign is unknown, but topographical considerations would have enabled a trip northward along the coast to the Jezreel Valley and then a continuation along the maritime shore up to Sidon.

According to EA 365, Birdiya, the leader of Megiddo, sent workers to cultivate the fields around Shunem, but the rulers of other towns did not assist him. It seems that the town of Shunem was – likely during the reign of Amenhotep III

<sup>21</sup> For Thutmose III, see Simons 1937, list 1:38 and for Shishak, Simons, list 34:15.

<sup>22</sup> See conveniently, Moran 1992.

(1390/1379–1353/1340 BCE) – under Egyptian control in those days. The Shishak (945–924 BCE) list mentions Shunem (no 15) after Taanach (Tell Taanek, no. 14) and before Beth She’an (Besan, no. 16) and Rehob (Tell es-Sarim, no. 17). This reflects the correct order moving west to east but not south to north. Taanach is south of the Beth She’an Valley, Shunem is on its northern side, along with Beth She’an, but Tell es-Sarim lies in the Jordan Valley south of the latitude of Taanach.

The archaeological excavations in Solem, which recovered (late) Middle and Late Bronze Age remains, additionally confirm the identification of this site with Shunem in the Amarna Texts and the Egyptian topographical lists. The site must have existed until the end of the tenth century BCE since it is mentioned in the Shishak list. This pharaoh might have destroyed the town; however, this cannot be definitively confirmed. The lack of Iron Age II remains recovered during the excavations may support an argument for the destruction of the site by this pharaoh, but no destruction levels have been noted in the excavation reports. Thus, it is equally possible that the site was abandoned during a wider process that saw a concentration of population in larger cities in the tenth and ninth centuries BCE in the southern Levant (cf. the discussion of the textual evidence below).

## Biblical Texts

While the age of the Egyptian inscriptions and the Amarna letters written in Akkadian is undisputed, there is some discussion about the age of the biblical notifications concerning Shunem. Many scholars advance the theory that most biblical texts were written in the Late Iron Age or the Persian period – periods in which Shunem was unsettled. Therefore, the biblical citations must be checked if they are really written contemporaneous with the stories they present. Methodically, it is important that the *archaeological* history of Solem is not an argument in the debate about absolute chronology of the *texts* mentioning Shunem. Nevertheless, the plausibility of the dating proposals for every text based only on historical and theological arguments has to be checked carefully.

### Josh 19:18

This list definitely has its origin in some type of bureaucratic administration. The main question is how it can be dated. This is a complicated question, since the borderlines of tribes did not change very often. While the borders of a kingdom changed permanently based on political events, the borders of a tribe were rel-

atively fixed.<sup>23</sup> A conglomerate of settlements define themselves as a tribe, and as long as nobody forces them to move, their territory is constant. The political attribution of a tribe may change; in some periods the inhabitants may officially be Israelites or Aramaeans or Phoenicians, but they consistently consider themselves members of the same tribe. Nevertheless, the list of the tribe of Issachar is definitely older than 733 BCE, when the kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, because the reports of the tribal system in Josh 13–19 describe the territory of the United Kingdom during the kingship of David and Solomon. The tribal territory of Josh 19:17–23 is also mentioned as the tenth province in 1 Kgs 4:17. Therefore, Josh 19:17–23 may represent the situation of the Solomonic period. This is valid, even if the actual list was written in the ninth or early eighth century, provided that all the sites mentioned in this text were still settled in those centuries. But this can only be answered by archaeological research – an approach we explicitly want to eliminate.

## 1 Sam 28:4

The story of 1 Sam 28:3–25 about the medium from En-Dor has often been discussed. Generally, the thesis is accepted that this text is a self-contained complex within the story of the rise of David with, at best, only minor additions made in later periods.<sup>24</sup> This is not the place to present a complete history of research, but scholars have dated this chapter from the time of Saul (ca. 1000 BCE) to the early (post-)exilic period (after 587 BCE).<sup>25</sup>

The story of the Saul's consulting a medium (1 Sam 28:3–25) mentions several sites:

- Ramah as the burial place of Samuel (1 Sam 28:3),
- Shunem as camping site of the Philistine troops (1 Sam 28:4),
- the slopes of Gilboa as a camping site of the Israelite troops (1 Sam 28:4) and
- En-Dor as the hometown of the medium (1 Sam 28:7).

All these sites are mentioned in the introduction of the story. The last detailed commentator of the text, Walter Dietrich, postulates that an oral version of the text was integrated into a *Erzählkranz* (“composition of interrelated texts”) about

---

<sup>23</sup> For the borders of Aram over time, see Dušek and Manářová 2019; for Israel during a specific period, see Timm 2004.

<sup>24</sup> So e. g. Mommer 1991, 163.

<sup>25</sup> See conveniently, Dietrich 2019, 43–48.



David and the Saulides. This *Erzählkranz* is older than his *Höfischer Erzähler* (“narrator of a composition of stories connected with the royal court”), which Dietrich dates to the eighth century BCE. According to his analysis, all the sites belong to the preliminary oral tradition of the story except Ramah, which occurs in almost identical wording in 1 Sam 25:1.<sup>26</sup>

The mention of Shunem, Gilboa, and En-Dor is very important for understanding the text, because all three sites or areas are next to each other. Dietrich may be right that the original local tradition was connected with En-Dor. If Dietrich’s general analysis is correct, in the tenth century BCE an oral tradition that became a literary prototype a little bit later arose in the area where all three sites were well-known. Because they had already become part of the literary tradition, the names of the sites were kept in the later edition of the story written by the *Höfischer Erzähler*. Dating the earliest literary version of this text to the tenth century BCE is more consistent with Shunem’s limited but documented settlement in the Iron I period than the Iron II period, for which, so far, only pottery sherds have been recovered, but no building remains.

But how plausible is the dating of this text in such an early period? In later periods, it was forbidden to go to such a necromancer (Exod 22:17; Lev 19:26b, 31; Deut 18:9–22), while 1 Sam 28 uses necromancy as a usual practice in private religion.<sup>27</sup> However, necromancy is only one topic in this story. Saul’s fear of the coming fight against the Philistines is the reason he seeks the medium (vv. 5, 15). The main aim of the story is to explain why Saul would lose this battle against the Philistines and die (vv. 16, 19aβb; vv. 17–19aα is often considered a later addition). Many elements of the story are likely not historical; the two men mentioned in v. 8 were the only eyewitnesses and likely not the author(s) of the text. Even so, the story is designed to explain why the king of Israel had to die and why the battle was lost. While the military defeat most likely is historical, this text gives what is probably a nonhistorical explanation for the outcome, presenting God’s justification for it. God’s turning away from Saul (and from Israel) made events understandable for the contemporaneous people. Such an explanation makes more sense in close proximity to the historical events than several decades or centuries later. It helped those alive at the time of the defeat understand the consequences much better: God did not fail; he turned away from Saul. Yhwh is still the god of Israel, but he did not accept Saul as its leader anymore. If vv. 17–19aα are a later addition to the text, the early date of the story is reinforced. In the original story,

---

<sup>26</sup> Dietrich 2019, 49–52.

<sup>27</sup> So Schmitt 2004, 335–81. For an alternate understanding of the origin of this story, see ch. 2 by Diana Edelman in this volume.

as the successor of Saul, David is not mentioned, and evidently, the aim of the story was not to legitimate David as the new king, although the entire story is integrated into the *Aufstiegsgeschichte* (“History of the Rise”) of David. Evidently, this story in 1 Sam 28:3–25 was originally independent of David’s rise to power and only connected with the fate of Saul. Therefore, it is very plausible that the oral or written basic story is rather early and reflects the situation of the late eleventh or early tenth century BCE.

### **1 Kgs 1:3, 15**

The notice about a young girl, Abishag from Shunem, who was sent to Jerusalem in order to warm the sick king, David, is likely a relatively old story. David’s servants had to search the whole country for a final wife for the king and they found only one girl in a city about 100 km away from Jerusalem! The former womanizer obviously became unattractive to the women in Israel and Judah, and at the end of his life, David no longer was able to have sexual intercourse with Abishag (1 Kgs 1:4). This is a rather critical note concerning King David. We have to assume that this information was part of the annals noted in the royal administration. David had one scribe on his team (1 Sam 8:17; 2 Sam 20:25), whereas Solomon had two (1 Kgs 4:3). One of the duties of these royal scribes was to make note of specific events connected with the palace. In Judah it was typical to mention the name of the king’s mother in the introduction formulas of every king (cf. 1 Kgs 14:21 and others; also 1 Kgs 11:26). Even if the final composition of the story in 1 Kgs 1–2 is later, the mention of Abishag of Shunem is very likely taken from contemporary royal annals dating into the tenth century BCE and seems to be a reliable historical source.

### **1 Kgs 2:17, 21, 22**

Royal annals from the tenth century BCE likely were the source for the vv. in 1 Kgs 2 mentioning the site of Shunem as the hometown of Abishag. Even if the story itself is later, the original core – the last lady sleeping in the arms of King David called Abishag of Shunem – was found in the annals. The story in 1 Kgs 2 may or may not be accurate; however, the name and the origin of the girl seem to be an old tradition which was taken from annals.

## 2 Kgs 4:8, 12, 25, 36

The most problematic mention of Shunem appears in the Elisha stories. Elisha lived during the ninth century BCE, when – according to the archaeological results – Solem was no longer settled. Shunem appears in one segment of the larger Elisha traditions in 2 Kgs 4:8–37 that deals with a wealthy woman of Shunem who bore a child late in life. This son died but was restored to life by Elisha.

There is a problematic situation in this text with the name of the prophet. Only in 4:8, 17, 32 is he called Elisha; in 4:9, 16, 21, 22, 25, and 27 he is called “man of God.”<sup>28</sup> Another observation is that this man of god had his home at Mount Carmel (4:25), approximately 20 km from Shunem. This was obviously his permanent home, where people went on holy days like the new moon and the full moon (2 Kgs 4:23).<sup>29</sup> In the context of the Elisha cycle, Mount Carmel is only mentioned once more in the topographically strange verse, 2 Kgs 2:25: “From there [next to Bethel, cf. v. 23] he went to the Mount Carmel, and then he returned to Samaria.” Starting in Jericho, going up to Bethel, continuing to walk to Mount Carmel, and returning to Samaria is an unmotivated and odd passage. Additionally, Gilgal rather than Mount Carmel seems to be the hometown of Elisha in 2 Kgs 2:1 and 4:38, which is corroborated by the mention of the nearby site of Jericho in 2 Kgs 2:4, 5, 15, 18 and the tomb of Elisha in the vicinity of Gilgal or Jericho in 2 Kgs 13:20–21. Therefore, we have to assume that the original story of 2 Kgs 4:8–37 gave an account of an unnamed man of God who lived on Mount Carmel. Only in a later redactional process was this man of god identified with Elisha.<sup>30</sup> If there existed an older oral or written man-of-God-tradition that was later connected with the “miracle-man” Elisha, the date of the original version need no longer be limited to the ninth century BCE. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to determine the original text of this story and the two stories combined in this text; the announcement of a child for a relatively old woman, on the one hand, and the revival of a dead person, on the other hand, have parallels in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 18:10; 1 Kgs 17:17–34). Such “wandering legends” likely were common in Israel and could be attributed to any miracle worker. To summarize, if the original story of a man of God, living on the Carmel ridge, were older than the historical prophet Elisha, there is no problem dating this oral or written tradition to the tenth century BCE.

---

<sup>28</sup> Schmitt 1972, 90.

<sup>29</sup> In a pre-exilic text, when shabbat is mentioned together with the new moon, it designates the monthly full moon, not a weekly day of rest; for the data, see Robinson 1975, 29–220.

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the different proposals for the literary criticism of this text, see Schmitt 2004, 240–41.

Even more interesting for our discussion is a text that does not mention Shunem at all. 2 Kgs 8:1–6 refers to 2 Kgs 4:8–37. In 2 Kgs 8:1 (cf. 8:5) the woman is referred to as “the woman whose son he [= Elisha] had restored to life.” This appellation is in strict contrast to 2 Kgs 4:12 and 25, where she is called the Shunammite woman. 2 Kgs 8:1–6 is of a significantly later origin than the basic text of 2 Kgs 4:8–37. Shunem did not exist at the time it was written, which is why the writer no longer referred to the woman by her place of origin but instead, according to the story with which she had come to be connected. Mentioning her hometown was no longer helpful because no one was familiar with this town. As a further adaptation of this tradition, instead of the hometown, her son’s revival rather than her hometown became the most important and signifying element for this woman.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusions

All but one of the biblical texts that mention Shunem remember events connected with the Iron I period, the eleventh-tenth century BCE. This is consistent with the results of a number of smaller salvage excavations conducted around the modern Arab village that covers the ancient tell of Shunem/Solem. They have revealed that the site was settled in the Iron I period but not necessarily in the Iron II period. Some Iron II sherds were collected during survey, but no building remains have yet been uncovered. After analysis, the one exception, 2 Kgs 4:8–37, was seen originally to have involved an unnamed “man of God,” not Elisha, which then would allow the underlying story to date to the Iron I period as well.

It is my contention that the original editions of all texts mentioning Shunem were written down when the site still was inhabited. As soon as Shunem was abandoned, it fell out of the cultural memory of the writers and readers of biblical texts. As a result, it was not worth mentioning anymore, because no one would have been able to understand such a reference. Thus, the name survived until our present time only in written sources that were fixed during a time when the site existed. 2 Kgs 8:1–6 clearly demonstrates that the site name ceased to be mentioned in the Iron II period after the abandonment of the site. The writers of this text deliberately call to mind the older text in 2 Kgs 4:8–37 in which the man of God already has been secondarily been identified with Elisha, but they no longer refer to the woman whose son is revived as the Shunamite.

---

<sup>31</sup> The announcement of the son’s birth also is not mentioned in the later version of this story.

This observation allows some important conclusions to be drawn for the dating of biblical texts. Archaeology can be very helpful for dating texts mentioning place-names. Aside from very important sites like Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethel, Samaria, Sodom, and Gomorrah, which survived as symbols or as places of main historical interest, place names are only mentioned in biblical texts in contexts that took place when these sites were actually settled. Dating biblical texts on the basis of archaeology affords two main facts. First, the biblical site must be convincingly identified with an archaeological site. A lot of research has been done in this field in the last 180 years since Robinson first proposed many biblical identifications in 1841, although a study covering all biblical sites does not exist.<sup>32</sup> Second, we need some accurate excavations at the archaeological site that allow a reliable reconstruction of its settlement history. Limited rescue excavations may offer an incomplete, wrong picture of the settlement history. The core of the settlement activity may have changed in some periods on the tell, or the excavated results are insufficient in specific areas because of erosion or robbing. Therefore, only the overview of some excavated areas allows an adequate reconstruction of the settlement history. Even well excavated sites like Jerusalem encounter such problems, as is easily observed from the discussion of the Late Bronze Age city.<sup>33</sup> In cases like Jerusalem, the topographical situation of the site on a ridge with steep slopes, where ancient building remains have had to be removed before new building could be undertaken, must also be considered. In the case of Solem, only the compilation of several small rescue excavations has allowed reliable information about the history of the site to be compiled. All but one of these small excavations were undertaken after 2000 (about 15 % of all archaeological sites in Israel are at least partly excavated). Most were not published in major excavation reports but only in short summaries.<sup>34</sup> All these larger and smaller excavations have to be collected in order to present an overall picture of a site.

Commentators and exegetes of a text mentioning a site have a duty to collect all published archaeological results. The historical background of such a site – if the identification with a biblical site name can be considered virtually certain – is extremely important for the exegesis of the text and for its dating. As I have tried to show in this paper, nearly all biblical sites (besides a few sites that have a significant function as very famous traditional sites) were settled during the

---

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, 1841. There are some excellent updated studies in the *ABD*; see also studies like de Vos 2003; Gaß 2005; and Jericke 2013.

<sup>33</sup> For the recent round of debate, see Uziel et al. 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Many of them have now been published in Israel in the digital edition of *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel*, but others have appeared in small publications in other venues.

days when the biblical authors wrote their texts. Therefore, Hebrew Bible scholars also need at least nominal training in archaeology. At the very least, they should be able to read and understand longer or shorter excavation reports in order to integrate the archaeological results into their analysis of the text. The settlement history of sites mentioned in the texts is very important for dating biblical texts or traditions. Every scholar who dates a textual source or redactional phase to a period when the site mentioned no longer was settled has to present convincing arguments why this site was mentioned at such a late date. In most cases, if a site had ceased to exist, any argument for dating a text mentioning that site to a period when it was not settled becomes very weak. Such a methodological approach will definitely change some dating of biblical texts in biblical exegesis and will help to improve it.

## Reference List

- Abel, Félix-Marie. 1967. *Géographie politique: les villes*. Vol. 2 of *Géographie de la Palestine*. Paris: J. Gabalda.
- Aharoni, Yohanan. 1984. *Das Land der Bibel. Eine historische Geographie*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Alexandre, Yardenna. 2008. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 118, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=726&mag\\_id=114](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=726&mag_id=114).
- Assmann, Jan. 1998. "Stein und Zeit. Das »monumetale« Gedächtnis der altägyptischen Kultur" in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, ed. by J. Assmann and T. Hölscher. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 87–114.
- Cinamon, Gilad. 2010a. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 122, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1433&mag\\_id=117](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1433&mag_id=117).
- Cinamon, Gilad. 2010b. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 122, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1433&mag\\_id=117](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1433&mag_id=117).
- Covello-Paran, Karen. 2006. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 120, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=413&mag\\_id=111](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=413&mag_id=111).
- Covello-Paran, Karen. 2010. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 122, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1339&mag\\_id=117](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1339&mag_id=117).
- Covello-Paran, Karen. 2011. "Sulam/Tel Shunem." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 123, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1639&mag\\_id=118](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1639&mag_id=118).
- Covello-Paran, Karen and Arie, Eran 2010. "Sulam/Tel Shunem." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 122, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1471&mag\\_id=117](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1471&mag_id=117).

- Dalali-Amos, Edna 2011. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 123, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1855&mag\\_id=118](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1855&mag_id=118).
- Dietrich, Walter. 2019. *1Sam 27–2Sam 8*. Vol. 3 of *Samuel*. BKAT 8/3. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Dušek, Jan and Jana Manáfová, eds. 2019. *Aramaean Borders: Defining Aramaean Territories in the 10th–8th Centuries B.C.E.* CHANE 101. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Fritz, Volkmar. 1969. "Die sogenannte Liste der besiegten Könige in Josua 12." *ZDPV* 85:136–161.
- Gal, Zvi. 1998. *Archaeological Survey of Israel: Map of Har Tavor (41), Map of 'En Dor (45)*. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority.
- Gal, Zvi. 2002. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 114:26\*–27\*.
- Gal, Zvi and Butrus Hana. 2002. "Excavations at Kafr Sulam." Pages 83–89, 179\* in *Eretz Zafon: Studies in Galilean Archaeology*. Edited by Zvi Gal. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority.
- Gaß, Erasmus. 2005. *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuchs in historischer und redaktioneller Perspektive*. ADPV 35. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Goody, Jack and Ian Watt. 1968. "The Consequences of Literacy." Pages 27–68 in *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Edited by Jack Goody. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gosker, Joppe. 2014. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 126, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=12647&mag\\_id=121](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=12647&mag_id=121).
- Hanna, Butrus. 2008. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 120, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=623&mag\\_id=114](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=623&mag_id=114).
- Huwiler, Elizabeth F. 1992. "Shunem." *ABD* 5:1,228–29.
- Jericke, Detlef. 2013. *Die Ortsangaben im Buch Genesis: Ein historisch-topographischer und literarisch-topographischer Kommentar*. FRLANT 248. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Klostermann, Erich. 1904. *Eusebius: Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs.
- Mittler, Itamar. 2010. "Sulam." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot/Excavations and Surveys of Israel* 122, [http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report\\_detail\\_eng.aspx?id=1468&mag\\_id=117](http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=1468&mag_id=117).
- Mommer, Peter. 1991. *Samuel: Geschichte und Überlieferung*. WMANT 65. Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag.
- Moran, William L. 1992. *The Amarna Letters*. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Robinson, Edward. 1841. *Palästina und die südlich angrenzenden Länder: Tagebuch einer Reise im Jahre 1838 in Bezug auf die biblische Geographie unternommen 3/1*. Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses.
- Robinson, Gnanda. 1975. "The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath: A Comprehensive Exegetical Approach." PhD. Diss., University of Hamburg.
- Schmitt, Hans-Christoph. 1972. *Elisa: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie*. Gütersloh: Mohn.
- Schmitt, Rüdiger. 2004. *Magie im Alten Testament*. AOAT 313. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.
- Simons, Jan. 1937. *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Timm, Stefan. 2004. "Die territoriale Ausdehnung des Staates Israel zur Zeit der Omriden." Pages 1–26 in "Gott kommt von Teman ...": *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte Israels und Syrien-Palästinas*. AOAT 314. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag. Repr. from *ZDPV* 96 (1980):20–40.

Uziel, Joe, Yuval Baruch and Nahshon Szanton. 2019. "Jerusalem in the Late Bronze Age – The Glass Half Full." Pages 171–84 in *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Southern Canaan*. Edited by Aren M. Maeir, Itzhaq Shai and Chris McKinny. Archaeology of the Biblical Worlds 2. Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter.

Vos, Jacobus Cornelius de. 2003. *Das Los Judas: Über Entstehung und Ziele der Landbeschreibung in Josua 15*. VTSup 95. Leiden & Boston: Brill.