Rehoboam and His Fortified Cities*

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This paper surveys the list of Rehoboam's fortified cities from the perspective of historiography and archaeology. The list to be dated from the time of Rehoboam and after the Egyptian invasion suggests the necessity of a chain of defense in the territory. A buffer zone of Benjamites explains the absence of the defense in the northern front. Gath in the list must be Moresheth-gath. Beth-zur was undefinable while Lachish had a small palace-like fortress at the time of Rehoboam, making the main settlement "fortified" to some extent.

Key Words: Rehoboam　　Israel　　fortification　　archaeology

1. Introduction

"And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem" (1 Kings 14:25 King James Version)

"And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah.
He built even Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa,
And Bethzur, and Shoco, and Adullam,
And Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph,
And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah,
And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities.
And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine.

And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side" (2 Chronicles 11:5-12 King James Version).

"And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the LORD, With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, the Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians.　And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 12:2-4 King James Version).

After the death of Solomon who had ruled the united kingdom of ancient Israel, his son Rehoboam reigned the southern, divided kingdom of Judah from c.922~905 B.C.E.　According to the above narrative, the main affairs during his seventeen years of reign were his fortification of the fifteen cities and the invasion by the Egyptian king Shishak. In this essay, we will study this list of fortified cities from the perspective of historiography and archaeology, and will review the Shishak invasion in terms of the date of the list.

2. Date of the List of the Fortified Cities

There are three opinions about the date of the list.　One thinks that it belongs to the time of Josiah (c. 639~609 B.C.E.).　The other places it during the reign of Hezekiah (c. 727~698), but the orthodox position is to consider it to be the document from the time of Rehoboam.　We shall review these notions.

2.1 Opinion of Fritz

Of the three opinions noted, the first was raised by Fritz (1981), who doubts the orthodox position and dates the list to the time of Josiah.　He starts his argument by identifying Gath as the Philistine Gath (Tell es-Safi) since he thinks that Moresheth-gath (Tell el-Judeideh) would not fit the strategic concept of securing the access routes (Fritz 1981:47*).　However, the identification of Gath is controversial, and Fritz's identification is tentative at best as shown below.　Even if the Philistine Gath is located at Tell es-Safi, it is not certain that the Gath in the

list should be the Philistine Gath.

Fritz notes that of the towns listed only Beth-zur, Mareshah, Gath, Lachish and Azekah have been excavated. It is true that a final determination of the history on the basis of archaeological research is possible only for Beth-zur and Lachish because the results of Mareshah, Gath and Azekah must be used with limitation. From the history of Lachish and Beth-zur, Fritz insists that the list has to be dated either early in the period of the monarch or else in the time of the last kings of Judah (1981:48*).

According to Fritz, the strategic concept recognizable in the list demonstrates precisely this deployment of the defense of Judah against a conquest from the west. He believes that the Assyrian king Sennacherib's campaign (701 B.C.E.) had made clear the threat arising from an attack coming from the coastal plain. Therefore, he states that the list reflects experience which could have occurred only at the end of the eighth century. Because Manasseh could hardly take counter measures against the Assyrians in their period of power, Fritz argues that the list cannot have originated earlier than the time of Josiah (639~609 B.C.E.). During his reign, the Assyrian power was in decline and the king annexed former Assyrian provinces with his independent expansion policy. In order to protect Judah from the west, Josiah fortified the cities in the list, he concludes (1981:50*).

Fritz then attempts to explain why the Chronicler, the writer of Chronicles, set the list in the time of Rehoboam. Because of the good aspect of his cult reform, Josiah did not need to have his building activities in his accounts. Rehoboam, in contrast, needed such narrative because Rehoboam was judged favorably by the Chronicler and because the invasion of Shishak posed a negative image of Rehoboam instead. The Chronicler distinguishes good periods from bad in Rehoboam's reign; the list perfectly fitted the Chronicler's notion of Rehoboam as a competent ruler, while Shishak's campaign was interpreted as punishment for disobedience (1981:51*). This kind of explanation appears to be brilliant, but does not go beyond the realm of speculation.

2.2 Opinion of Na'aman

The second idea, advocated by Na'aman (1986), is to consider the list as the

product of the time of Hezekiah. Similar to Fritz, Na'aman denies that Moresheth-gath is the Gath of the list, for it was a conventional way to shorten the place came to Moresheth by omitting "Gath" instead of dropping Moresheth; the well-known city of the Philistines was commonly abbreviated as Gath. Assuming that the Gath in the list was the Philistine Gath, Na'aman states that Rehoboam could not annex and fortify this strong Philistine center (1986:5-7). Again, Na'aman's identification is unfounded as shown below.

According to Na'aman, it is reasonable to assume that Aijalon was included in Jeroboam's kingdom, and that the campaign of Shishak, conducted along the Aijalon and Beth-horon line, passed within the territory of the northern kingdom. In his opinion, Aijalon was located outside the confines of Rehoboam's kingdom without the possibility that Rehoboam secured Aijalon for his territory (1986:7).

Na'aman thinks it is clear that, in the light of archaeology, Beth-zur was desolate in the time of Rehoboam and that Lachish was not fortified until after Rehoboam (1986:6). However, Lachish in the time of Rehoboam did have a building with thick walls, which can easily be interpreted as fortification. The definition of fortification should not be limited to a site surrounded by city walls.

In the time of Hezekiah, Na'aman states, Lachish was the central city of the Shephelah, second in importance to Jerusalem because Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depicts its conquest. Azekah and probably Gath were also important strongholds as Assyrian tablets of Sennacherib's campaign describe. Although Libnah, which was besieged by the Assyrian army after the conquest of Lachish (2 Kings 19:8), is absent from the list, it had probably been fortified earlier and had no place in the list (1986:11).

Na'aman also doubts that Rehoboam would have been able to increase the levy and the burden and to mobilize his country to carry out an extensive building project. Only the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin were included in the kingdom of Rehoboam; he must have been in immediate necessity to secure his control over his severely reduced territory instead of launching large scale construction (1986:7). However, one must note that it was Rehoboam who inherited the wealth of the unified kingdom of David and Solomon and ruled Jerusalem, the capital of the united kingdom. Rehoboam would have had sufficient resources to

carry out his building project, which was indispensable to secure his small kingdom.

2.3 The list from the time of Rehoboam

Contrary to the above views, the majority of scholars argue historicity of the list of fortified cities: The list belongs to the time of Rehoboam as Chronicles describes (Curtis & Madsen 1976:362; Dillard 1987:94; Donner 1977:388; Herrmann 1981:197; Myers 1965:xxv; de Vaux 1965:230). Although this list is mentioned only by the Chronicler, three reasons can be recognized why we should consider it as authentic. First, provided that the list is editorial fiction, it would not require such detailed information as it does. Second, any obviously ulterior motive in the Chronicler's work will not be served by this list. Third, when we understand that Rehoboam had a motivation to secure territory which still remained under his control, the list of cities makes sense (Miller & Hayes 1986:238). As Dillard indicated, no compelling reasons demand re-dating the list to the time of Josiah or Hezekiah (1987:97).

Once we adopt the position that the list was from the time of Rehoboam, one question arises: Was it undertaken before or after the invasion of Shishak? We will consider this below.

Shishak, the founder of the 22nd Egyptian Dynasty, carried out the military expedition in the fifth year of Rehoboam. According to the Biblical narrative, Shishak came up against Jerusalem and took plunder from the Temple; the fortified cities of Judah were captured. The inscription of Shishak in the Karnak Temple gives us more detailed information. From Gezer, Shishak ascended through Aijalon and Beth-horon to Gibeon, where he might receive the tribute from Rehoboam. Then, he turned northward and invaded the kingdom of Israel. After conquering Tirzah and Penuel, the new capital of Jeroboam, Shishak followed the Jordan Valley northward until he reached Beth-Shean, the old Egyptian outpost. From there, he turned west up to Megiddo, and headed south along the Via Maris (ANET:242-243; Aharoni 1979:323-329).

Various opinions have been presented as to the timing of Rehoboam's building project. One is to simply admit the fact that whether the list dates from before or after the invasion cannot be determined (Bright 1981:233; Jagersma 1982:131;

Myers 1965:69).   Another places the list before the invasion because the fact that only Aijalon of the fortified cities is mentioned in Shishak's list testifies the success of Rehoboam's building program; Shishak attacked sites west of the defensive perimeter (Dillard 1987:100).   It is also suggested that Rehoboam may have only begun the fortification of the cities prior to the invasion, concluding his work after (Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1977:76). According to this view, Rehoboam, who lost most of his father's territory and had to use inherited financial resources and limited labor, spent the whole of his reign on his building project.   However, the majority thinks that the list should be dated after the invasion, meaning that Shishak's invasion stimulated Rehoboam to see to the defense of his territory (Aharoni 1979:330; Grant 1984:135; Herrmann 1981:197; Kitchen 1973:300; Mazar 1957:66; Montgomery 1951:270; and Wright 1957:149).   We consider this as the most reasonable choice.

## 3. Historiography of the Fortified Cities

3.1 Purpose of the fortification

The main purpose was to form a line of defense against attacks from the west or south (Na'aman 1986:8).   This chain of forts located at strategic points functioned as an effective defense line for several generations.   2 Chronicles describes two invasions during the early 9th century B.C.E., which were defeated from this line of defense: First, Zerah the Ethiopian invaded, but was repulsed at Mareshah and routed by Asa as far as Gerar (14:8-14); second, the Moabites, Ammonites and their allies came to the heart of Judea through En-gedi at the time of Jehoshaphat, but were defeated near Tekoa (20:1-18; Aharoni 1979:332).

Another purpose was to assure internal security of the kingdom.   Rehoboam placed his sons at important places throughout his territory with abundant supplies so that he could strengthen his hold on the southern hill country.   The Chronicler, in fact, connects the fortified cities with this security: "having Judah and Benjamin on his side" (2 Chronicles 11:12).   It is also suggested that the cities of defense tended to complement rather than overlap the geographical coverage of the Levitical cities, which would have remained loyal to the Davidic king (Miller & Hayes 1986:238-240).

3.2 Problem of the northern front of the fortifications

It is a surprising fact that the cities in the northern part of the kingdom, unlike the southern part, are entirely missing from the list of the fortified cities. Various scholars have attempted to explain the reason.
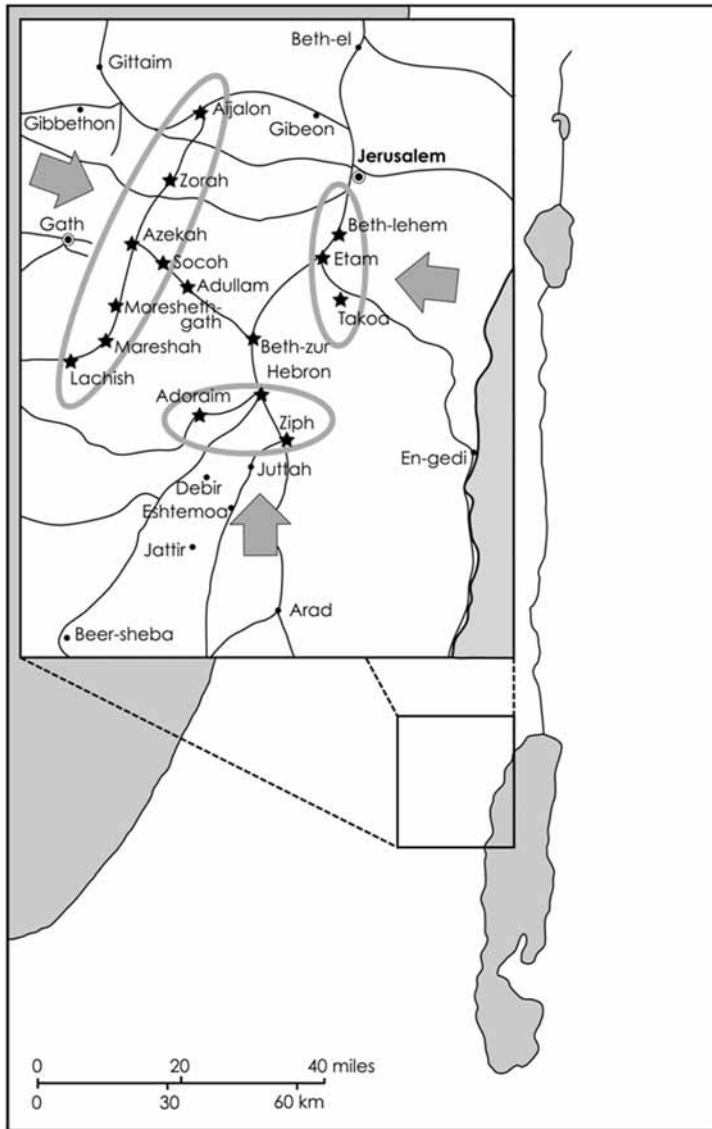
Map of Fortifications,
adapted from Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1977:119

Aharoni (1979:330) thinks that Rehoboam constantly desired to expand in that direction. De Vaux simply explained it by the statement that the boundary between the new kingdoms of Israel and Judah was at first undecided (1965:230). Myers (1965:70) suggests that Rehoboam either regarded Jerusalem as fortified enough against Israel or he did not regard defense against Israel as imperative as against foreign elements. Na'aman (1986:8) refers to Kallai's idea that the northern front was already fortified in the time of United Monarchy and that Rehoboam could have relied on these fortifications.

Na'aman proposes an etymological explanation: The reason was that the Chronicler deliberately omitted fortified towns in the northern front. To fulfill the Chronicler's concept that the northern border remained unfortified and open to movement, enabling both an uninterrupted pilgrimage to Jerusalem and military expansion, the Chronicler cut short the original list of the fortified towns which

must have included cities in the northern front.　Na'aman believes that it is important to take this idea into account when dealing with the layout of the fortified cities (1986:9-10).

Another suggestion can be raised from a different perspective:　To protect Jerusalem, Rehoboam established a buffer territory to the north, i.e., the territory of Benjamin (Herrmann 1981:198).　Benjamin, or part of it, seems to belong to Judah following the schism; possibly Rehoboam seized it by force (Soggin 1984:194; Bright 1981:233).　By annexing part of Benjamin, Rehoboam obtained a defense line for Jerusalem against the northern kingdom and thus a protection against sudden attacks (Noth 1960:234).　Therefore, it was unnecessary to fortify cities in the northern front.

3.3 Problem of Gath

Fourteen sites, except Gath, in the list of Rehoboam can be definitely located as follows (Fritz 1981:47*):

Bethlehem---Beit Lahm

Etam---Khirbet el-Khokh

Tekoa---Khirbet Tequ`

Beth-zur---Khirbet et-Tubeiqeh

Soco---Khirbet `Abbad

Adullam---Khirbet esh-Sheik Madhkur

Mareshah---Tell Sandahanna

Ziph---Tell Zif

Adoraim---Dura

Lachish---Tell ed-Duweir

Azekah---Tell Zakariyeh

Zorah---Sar`ah

Aijalon---Yalo

Hebron---Hebron (el-Khalil)

There are two opinions about the identification of Gath in the list of Rehoboam.　One is to identify it as Philistine Gath (Tell es-Safi) as Fritz and Na'aman proposed (see above).　The other considers it as Moresheth-gath.

The identification of Moresheth-gath is proposed by Aharoni, who notes that Tell es-Safi is bound to be west of Rehoboam's line of defense in the Shephelah. He also indicates that Philistine Gath was still a Philistine city during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 2:39). Neither have we any hint about its being conquered nor any evidence that this city had become an Israelite fort in the 10th century B.C.E.(Aharoni 1979:330).

Tell el-Judeideh, on the other hand, is situated at a strategic point: The location on the road between Azekah in the north and Lachish and Mareshah in the south. Aharoni identifies the Tell as Moresheth-gath; therefore, the original text would be "Adullam, Moresheth-gath, Mareshah..." (1979:330).

It is unconventional that the "Moresheth" element has been dropped in a scribal error. However, it should be noted that the scribe attempted to avoid confusion of this with Mareshah that follows it (Rainey 1975:97). Hence, we accept Aharoni's proposal. The line of fortified towns, then, suits the topography of the Shephelah.

3.4 Fortified cities at strategic points

The cities are located at places of strategic importance: They guard access to Judah, or Jerusalem from the west and south. They are not situated along the frontiers of the kingdom, but along the roads where practical resistance is possible in time of emergency (de Vaux 1965:230).

The groups of cities are as follows: Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, and Beth-zur are in the central Judean hill country. Socoh, Adullam, Gath, and Mareshah are in the central Shephelah of Judah. Ziph and Adoraim are in the southern Judean hill country. Lachish and Azekah are also in the central Shephelah. Zorah and Aijalon are in the northern Shephelah. Hebron is in the hill country between the first two groups (Na'aman 1986:5).

Each city is located close enough to offer one another mutual support. This would be facilitated through frequent communication. In fact, ostraca discovered at Lachish clearly attest close tie between Azekah and Lachish during the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylonian king, although the content was pessimistic: "...Let (my lord) know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according

to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah" (Fritz 1981:48*; ANET 322).

Map of Regions,
adapted from Aharoni & Avi-Yonah 1977:7

Aijalon is at the important road going up into the central Benjamin plateau north of Jerusalem. It was known as a strategic site from the time of Joshua. The early men of Benjamin and Ephraim raided the Philistines down past Aijalon. Saul and Jonathan beat the Philistines down Aijalon. Shishak overran Aijalon during his invasion (Smith 1966:149-150).
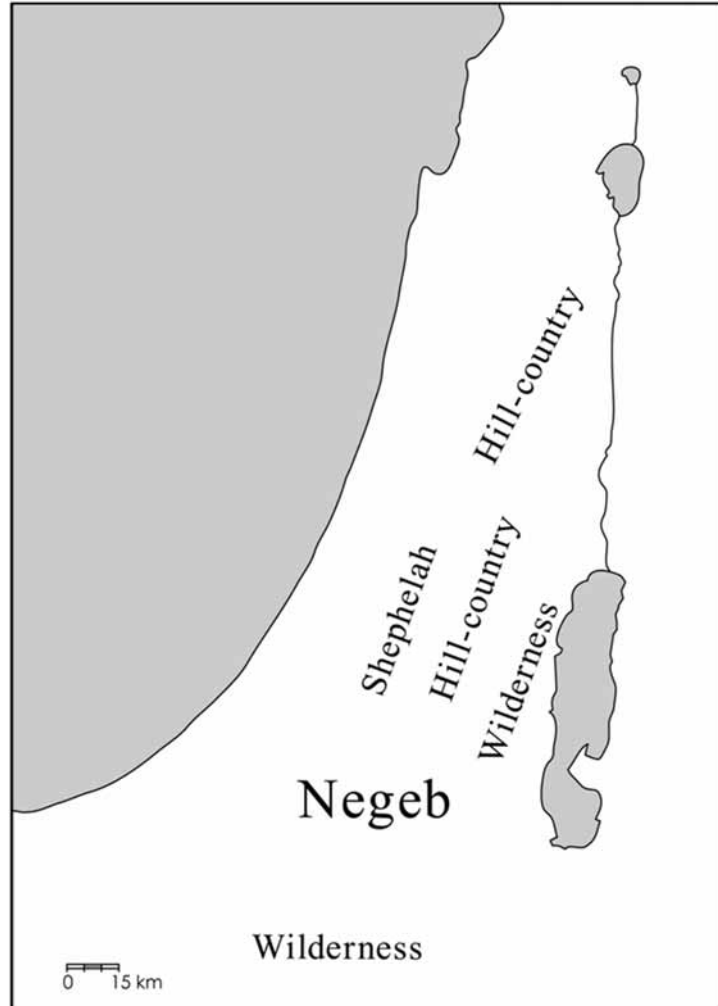
At the mouth of the Soreq valley is Zorah guarding the east-west road between it and Beth-Shemesh. This route, connecting with the coastal highway at Jabneh, reaches into the hill country at Jerusalem.

Beth-zur guards the open valley, the valley of Elah, on the higher end of which it is situated. The importance of this site has been demonstrated by the fact that the Syrians in the 2nd century B.C.E. and the Crusaders chose this entrance to Jerusalem since they had failed to take Aijalon (Smith 1966:196). The Israelites encountered with Philistines in the valley of Elah as documented in the David and Goliath tradition. Soco and Adullam provide additional protection on the road through the valley of Elah (Fritz 1981:48*).

Tekoa is an outpost which guards the road from En-gedi. The route leads to Etam and Bethlehem, the closest fortified city to Jerusalem (Fritz 1981:48*).

Lachish is situated at the junction of roads: south to Egypt, east to Adoraim and Hebron, and north to Maresha, Moresheth-gath and Azekah. Ziph protects the area south of Hebron (Dillard 1987:97).

4. Archaeology of the Sites

It is regrettable that among the excavated cities in the list, only the results of Beth-zur and Lachish have been published enough to make some interpretation. The report of Beth-zur, however, does not provide satisfactory data to make final judgment. Reports of Lachish excavations by Ussishkin, on the other hand, are available.

4.1 Beth-zur

Shortly after the close of the Hyksos period, the Middle Bronze Age city of Beth-zur was destroyed and remained unoccupied during the Late Bronze Age. In the early Iron Age, an Israelite village seemed to exist reusing the Hyksos wall as an outer defense (11th century B.C.E.). It was abandoned at the end of the century for unknown reasons. The remains of the 10th - 9th century B.C.E. are only a few sherds, and a building or city cannot be recognized. In the middle of the 7th century B.C.E., the city was reestablished and then destroyed by the Babylonians (Funk 1968:6-8).
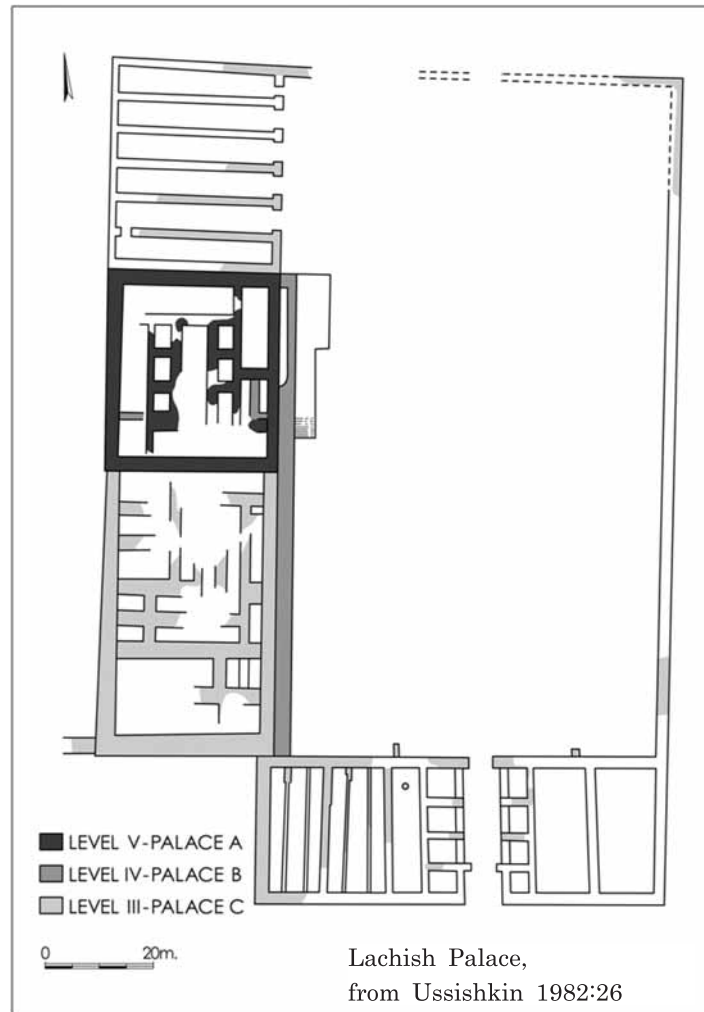
The excavator concludes that Rehoboam's Beth-zur will not be discovered since the top of the hill was cleared by a previous excavation and the outer limits of the city have been identified only on the southwest and northwest (Funk 1968:8). Hence, Beth-zur in the time of Rehoboam (late 10th century B.C.E.) cannot be clarified according to the present data available.

4.2 Lachish

Following the destruction in the 12th century B.C.E., the city was left abandoned until Level V of the late 10 century B.C.E. Then, the site was rebuilt, and numerous small houses occupied the area. This settlement was not protected by a city wall along the mound. A small fortified building called Palace A was constructed at the center of the site, serving as "a citadel" (see figure). The excavator

assigned this palace to the time of Rehoboam (Ussishkin 1978:93; 1982:26).

Palace A was designed to rise above the surrounding terrain. To achieve this purpose, the builders straightened the uneven surface. The building had a symmetrical plan; a large open court was in the center, oriented along the north-south axis. Meticulously hewn and laid limestone was used for the outer foundation walls. The superstructure of the building, presumably built of mud-brick, has not been recovered (Ussishkin 1978:28-30).

LEVEL V-PALACE A
LEVEL IV-PALACE B
LEVEL III-PALACE C

0   20m.

Lachish Palace,
from Ussishkin 1982:26

Probably, this is what the Biblical account of fortification meant, although Fritz and Na'aman tend to interpret this as evidence for their views. That is, no city wall is found at Lachish during the time of Rehoboam; therefore, the list of fortified cities in their view must have belonged to later dates, when Josiah or Hezekiah could initiate such a construction project. However, the definition of fortification does not necessarily mean that a settlement is surrounded by a city wall. Fortification can mean that a settlement has a palace-like building protected by thick walls. In fact, the excavator interprets Palace A as a fortification (Ussishkin 1982:26).

5. Conclusion

We have surveyed the list of fortified cities from the perspective of

historiography and archaeology. We also discussed whether the list should be dated before or after the Shishak invasion.

Although some scholars date the list later, we emphasized its historicity and held the position that the document was from the time of Rehoboam. The list should be dated after the Egyptian invasion, meaning that Shishak's invasion stimulated Rehoboam to see to the defense of his territory.

Various explanations have been suggested for the absence of a northern front of the fortified cities. Although no definitive answer can be reached, it seems that Rehoboam did not need to fortify the northern front because he had established a buffer territory to the north, i.e., the territory of Benjamin. We accept Aharoni's proposal that Gath in the list must be Moresheth-gath. The fortified cities, which were to defend the kingdom and to secure internal hold, were situated at important strategic locations.

According to the excavations of Beth-zur and Lachish, Beth-zur was undefinable while Lachish had only a small palace-like fortress at the time of Rehoboam, making the main settlement "fortified."

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