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Diskussion

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Is Azekah Really the Hometown of Micah the Morasthite?

Some Critical Remarks

In a recent article, Oded Lipschits and Jakob Wöhrle argue for Tel Azekah as the hometown of the biblical prophet Micah of Moresheth Gath, dismissing earlier proposals.[1] In contrast, Tell Ǧudēde (1415.1156) and the nearby site of Ḫirbet Umm el-Baṣal (1407.1143) are usually equated with biblical Moresheth Gath and its successor settlement.[2] Their main argument against this common identification of Moresheth Gath appears to be the lack of evidence for the Late Bronze Age at Tell

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[1] However, it is far from certain whether the prophet Micah really came from Moresheth Gath, since the gentilic is written with the *mater lectionis ô* only in Jer 26:18, whereas the gentilic in Mic 1:1 could alternatively refer to Mareshah. In the latter case, Micah would be a resident of Mareshah/*Tell Sandaḥanna* (1404.1112).

[2] See Joachim Jeremias, »Moresheth-Gath: Die Heimat des Propheten Micha,« *PJB* 29 (1933) 42–53: 52 f.; Karl Elliger, »Die Heimat des Propheten Micha,« *ZDPV* 52 (1934) 81–152: 118; Félix-Marie Abel, *Géographie Politique: Les Villes*, vol. 2, *Géographie de la Palestine*, Études Bibliques (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre—J. Gabalda, 1938), 392; Jan J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 446; Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, trans. and ed. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 292; Othmar Keel and Max Küchler, *Der Süden*, vol. 2, *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel: Ein Handbuch und Studien-Reiseführer zum Heiligen Land* (Zürich: Benziger, 1982), 849; Lamontte M. Luker, »Moresheth,« *ABD* 4 (1992) 904 f.: 904; Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge. Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 243; Matthew J. Suriano, »A Place in the Dust: Text, Topography and a Toponymic Note on Micah 1:10–12a,« *VT* 60 (2010) 433–446: 434; Israel Finkelstein, »Rehoboam's Fortified Cities (II Chr 11,5–12): A Hasmonean Reality?,« *ZAW* 123 (2011) 92–107: 95; Burkard M. Zapff, *Micha*, Interna-

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Ǧudēde.[3] This asserted shortage of Late Bronze material seems to be remarkable since one text from el-Amarna may refer to biblical Moresheth Gath.

In what follows, all the existing evidence for Moresheth Gath is re-examined critically, while the weak points of this new proposal are pointed out. We focus especially on seven points purporting to prove the identification of Moresheth Gath with Tel Azekah.

1 Azekah is merely the later name of Moresheth Gath given to it by Judahites[4]

Lipschits and Wöhrle think the original toponym Moresheth Gath was replaced with Azekah after the Philistine city of Gath was destroyed by the Aramean forces of Hazael of Damascus and the Judahites took over the area of Gath in the Shephelah.

However, the place names Azekah and Moresheth (Gath) are used at the same time in different documents. This suggests a differentiation between these two places. Why, for instance, would the same place be called Azekah in an Assyrian inscription and Moresheth Gath in Mic 1:14, both in the second half of the 8th century

tionaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), 59. Other identifications of Moresheth Gath are the following:

- *Tell el-Bēḍāʾ* (1456.1167); see Aapeli Saarisalo, »Topographical Researches in the Shephelah,« *JPOS* 11 (1931) 98–104: 98
- *Tell ʿĒṭūn* (1425.0999); see Zecharia Kallai, »The Kingdom of Rehoboam,« *Eretz-Israel* 10 (1971) 245–254: 249
- *Tell Sandaḥanna* (1404.1112); see Gabriel Horowitz, »Town Planning of Hellenistic Marisa: A Reappraisal of the Excavations after Eighty Years,« *PEQ* 112 (1980) 93–111: 93
- *Tell Bornāṭ* (1380.1154); see Shmuel Vargon, »A Place-Name in the Shephelah of Judah,« *VT* 42 (1992) 557–564: 562 n. 31
- *Tel Harassim* (1338.1279); see Yigal Levin, »The Search for Moresheth-Gath: A New Proposal,« *PEQ* 134 (2002) 28–36: 33–35
- *Ḥirbet Zētā* (1339.1153); see Nadav Naʾaman, »The Shephelah According to the Amarna Letters,« in *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Ussishkin*, eds. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Naʾaman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 281–299: 285
- *Ḥirbet Bēt ʿElem* (1449.1097); see Chris McKinny, »Following the Fathers: Identifying Moresheth-Gath the Hometown of Micah the Prophet,« in *Prophetic and Poetic Texts*, vol. 5, *Lexham Geographic Commentary*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel (Bellingham: Lexham, forthcoming).

3 See Oded Lipschits and Jakob Wöhrle, »Azekah—The Hometown of Micah the Moreshtite,« *ZAW* 135 (2023) 230–250: 242.

4 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 247 f.

BCE? Moreover, the name Moresheth Gath had surely lost the meaning »possession of Gath« by that time since Gath had been destroyed by Hazael earlier. This place was no longer a »possession of Gath« but a Judahite place, so there was no need to use the name Moresheth Gath any longer.[5] Furthermore, it is also debatable why the book of Micah would use the old Canaanite toponym for this city rather than the »Judahite« name Azekah. The Judahites would certainly not have wanted to dissociate this city from Judah by employing the »archaic« toponym Moresheth Gath.

Moreover, the book of Jeremiah distinguishes between Azekah and Moresheth in the early 6th century BCE. Whereas Azekah is mentioned as an important Judahite city near Lachish (Jer 34:7), the prophet Micah is nevertheless not called an inhabitant of Azekah, but a Morasthite (Jer 26:18). It is hardly conceivable that the alternative name Moresheth was still common in the 6th century BCE after nearly three centuries of using the toponym Azekah for the site. If Azekah was »the new name of Moresheth Gath given to the city by Judahite rulers after they took control of the western Shephelah, not before the end of the 9th century BCE,«[6] it is unlikely that the »alternative« name Moresheth (Gath) would have survived until the 6th century BCE (Jer 26:18: »Micah the Morasthite«).

On the Madaba Map, a place called Beth Zachar is shown north of Morasthi/Moresheth. This place name may survive in Tell Zakarīye (1440.1232), the Arabic name of Tel Azekah. At least in Byzantine times, Tel Azekah was no longer known as Moresheth and/or Azekah. Instead, Moresheth is located near Eleutheropolis on the Madaba Map. This location fits in best with the Christian tradition of Moresheth, as will be shown below.

2 The divergent Christian traditions cannot be used for identification[7]

Lipschits and Wöhrle break with the important methodological rule of considering Christian tradition when identifying biblical places. Instead they emphasize the differences between traditions handed down by Christian authors. This enables them to dismiss the strong Byzantine tradition of locating Moresheth Gath in the region of Eleutheropolis.

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5 The German town of Chemnitz was called Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1953–1990, but after the Communist era the old name was readopted. Today, few people even remember the communist name of the town, much less use it. Against this background it is highly doubtful that the old Canaanite name Moresheth would still be used by Judahites after Hazael's sack of Gath.

6 Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 248.

7 See ibid.: 236–240.

Despite this reservation, however, most if not all Christian authors agree that biblical Moresheth is to be sought near Eleutheropolis. Since Eleutheropolis was the most important place in the Darom in Byzantine times, it comes as no surprise that many biblical places are identified in relation to this central location.[8] Lipschits and Wöhrle, however, assume that the early Christians were merely trying to upgrade Eleutheropolis by identifying biblical places with Byzantine sites near Eleutheropolis.[9] However, Eusebius and Jerome were in contact with Jewish scholars in Syria Palaestina, so their ability to make up the locations of biblical places was limited. They could hardly invent place identifications without good reason. Indeed, one would have expected vehement objections to the Christian identification proposals from Jewish scholars. Such objections do not seem to have been expressed.

Contrary to what Lipschits and Wöhrle write, the Christian tradition about Morasthi is quite clear. Eusebius and Jerome agree that Morasthi is east of Eleutheropolis.[10] The direction »east of« in the *Onomasticon* also extends to the »northeast,«[11] so Morasthi might be found north-east of Eleutheropolis in the vicinity of Tell Ǧudēde. This is exactly the region where the Madaba Map locates »Moresheth Gath, home of the prophet Micah.« Moreover, the Madaba Map differentiates between the village of Morasthi and the sanctuary of the prophet Micah. Therefore, the Madaba Map attests to two places: a memorial church and a village.[12] The mosaicist usually reproduced the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius unless other factors pressed him to differ from his source. Since a column stood in the Church of St. George exactly in the area east of Eleutheropolis, one might think that the mosaicist had to move Morasthi farther north since this was apparently the only way to mark it on the map. However, it is possible that the Madaba Map was created earlier than the church building and belonged to a civic hall first.[13] If so, then the column was added later and was not the reason for the north-eastern location of Morasthi. All things considered, the north-eastern position of Morasthi might be original.

Jerome gives further details for locating Morasthi in his eulogy of Paula's pilgrimage in the vicinity of Eleutheropolis in 386 CE. After leaving Soccoth in the Shephelah, Paula stopped at Samson's spring for refreshment and then went on to Morasthi, where there was already a church at the tomb of Micah the proph-

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8 Eusebius identified 45 places in relation to Eleutheropolis.

9 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 240.

10 See Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 134.10–11: προς ανατολάς Ἐλενθεροπόλεως; Jerome, *Onomasticon* 135.14–15: *vicus contra orientem Eleutheropoleos*.

11 See Elliger, »Heimat«: 120 n. 2; Keel and Küchler, *Orte und Landschaften*, 850.

12 See Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba: An Introductory Guide*, Palaestina Antiqua 7 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 63.

13 See Beatrice Leal, »A Reconsideration of the Madaba Map,« *Gesta* 57 (2018) 123–143: 133–136.

et.[14] Afterwards she left the Horites, which refers to the people of Eleutheropolis.[15] Thus, since Paula came from northern Soccoth, Morasthi should be located on the way from Soccoth to Eleutheropolis. This means that Morasthi must be north of Eleutheropolis, near the Roman road. In the prologue to his commentary on Micah, Jerome describes Morasthi as a small hamlet near Eleutheropolis, without giving a direction or distance.[16]

According to the church historian Sozomen, the tomb of the prophet Micah was discovered by Bishop Zebennos of Eleutheropolis after a night-time vision at a place called Βηραθσάτια about ten stadia (~ 1.8 km) from »the city« in the year 393/4 CE.[17] The city mentioned by Sozomen is most probably Eleutheropolis and not Keilah. The latest critical edition of Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* refers to a κώμη, not a πόλις.[18] The critical error (πόλις instead of κώμη) only slipped in in the medieval Recension B,[19] whereas Cassiodorus still assumes a village.[20] Furthermore, Keilah (Κελὰ) is usually designated a »village« in Byzantine times,[21] and not a »city.« Thus, the city mentioned by Sozomen must be Eleutheropolis, the bishop's seat and the main city in the Darom. All in all, it is rather audacious to make a passage that is not secured by textual criticism the starting point for the entire rejection of the Christian tradition. Only if Sozomen had really looked for Micah's grave at Keilah would we have a contradiction. But this is excluded for text-critical reasons. In addition, the interpretation that the tomb of Micah is described in relation to Eleutheropolis rather than to Keilah is also preserved in the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor.[22]

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14 See Jerome, *Epistula* 108.14: *Transibo Aegyptum et in Soccoth atque apud fontem Samson, quem de molari maxillae dente produxit, subsistam parumper et arentia ora conluam, ut refocilatus videam Morasthi, sepulchrum quondam Micheae prophetae, nunc ecclesiam. Et ex latere derelinquam Chorraeos et Gethaeos, Maresa, Idumaeam et Lachis.*

15 See Jerome, *In Obadiam*, 1: *Eleutheropoleos, ubi ante habitaverunt Horraei.*

16 See Jerome, *In Micham*, prologus: *Morasthi, qui usque hodie iuxta Eleutheropolim urbem Palaestinae haud grandis est viculus.*

17 See Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.29. For this exact date, see Theophanes, *Chronographia* 114.18 (ad AM 5885); and Theodorus Lector, *Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita* III Epitome 274, who argues for the time of Theodosius.

18 See Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.29: Κελὰ ἡ πριν Κεϊλὰ ὀνομαζομένη κώμη; see also Joseph Bidez and Günther Christian Hansen, eds., *Sozomenus Kirchengeschichte*, GCS n.s. 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, ²1995), 345.

19 For the reliability of the textual witnesses, see Bidez and Hansen, *Kirchengeschichte*, xxxiii.

20 See Bidez and Hansen, *Kirchengeschichte*, 345, with reference to Cassiodorus: *in vico, qui prius vocabatur Ceila.*

21 See Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 114.16.

22 See Theophanes, *Chronographia* 115.3–5.

According to Sozomen, the locals called the tomb of Micah at Βηραθσάτια Nefsameemana—»tomb of the faithful« in their native language.[23] Based on the ten-stadia distance from Eleutheropolis, this tomb can be identified with the cave at Ḫirbet Umm el-Baṣal, where a *tabula ansata* bearing the words »Abraham the Just« was found.[24] Perhaps the locals misinterpreted the *tabula ansata* in the cave at Ḫirbet Umm el-Baṣal, identifying »Abraham the Just« with the biblical Abraham, who is lauded for his justness and faith (Gen 15:6). It is highly likely that this cave was reinterpreted by Bishop Zebennos as the tomb of Micah though the locals venerated Abraham there. In fact, the distance is in full accord with the cave at Ḫirbet Umm el-Baṣal. Thus, Bishop Zebennos brought the tomb of the prophet nearer to Eleutheropolis with his new identification.

There are further grounds for locating biblical Moresheth Gath north-east of Eleutheropolis. Peter the Deacon thought the tomb of Micah could be found at the third milestone (~ 4.5 km), in a place called Chariasati, formerly called Morastites.[25] Since Peter the Deacon described places near Eleutheropolis, it is highly probable that this milestone was on the Roman road leading from Eleutheropolis to Jerusalem.

Although the distance is different, both Chariasati (Peter the Deacon) and Βηραθσάτια (Sozomen) may be found in the same area north-east of Eleutheropolis, since they are compound names of the Aramaic *qaryā'* (»village«) and *bīretā'* (»fort«) with *sati(a)*, the last part of Moresheth. Essentially, the tomb of Micah is located in a place with a Roman fort (*bīretā'*) and a nearby village (*qaryā'*).[26]

To sum up, the tomb of Micah was initially venerated by Christian pilgrims in a church in a place called Chariasati, or »village of Sati/(More)sheth«, north-east of Eleutheropolis. Bishop Zebennos of Eleutheropolis later placed the tomb of Micah at Βηραθσάτια, closer to Eleutheropolis. In this respect, Lipschits and Wöhrle are

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23 See Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.29; Jeremias, »Moresheth-Gath«: 47 f. Joachim Jeremias (*Heiligengräber in Jesu Umwelt [Mt 23,29; Lk 11,47]: Eine Untersuchung zur Volksreligion der Zeit Jesu* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958], 85) relates the Greek name to the Aramaic *nefšā' (di)mehēmenā'.*

24 On this cave, see Boaz Zissu and Erasmus Gass, »An Archaeological Survey at Horbat Basal (Khirbet Umm el-Basal), Judean Foothills,« in *Centre and Periphery: Working with the Inscriptions of Iudaea/Palaestina*, ed. Walter Ameling, Antiquitas I/76 (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2022) 91–101.

25 See Petrus Diaconus, *Liber de locis sanctis* 5.8: *in miliario tertio in loco, qui dicitur Chariasati, quod ante dictum est Morastites, est sepulchrum sancti Micheae prophetae.*

26 See Jeremias, *Heiligengräber*, 86. Alternatively, the first element of Βηραθσάτια could be derived from Aramaic *bêrā'* »well, fountain«; for this etymology, see Götz Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas in griechisch-römischer Zeit: Ostjordanland, Negeb und (in Auswahl) Westjordanland*, B.TAVO 93 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 1995), 254. If so, Βηραθσάτια would be located at a water source.

right that »legends arose that demonstrated the significance of this city.«[27] But this insight does not absolve us of a critical evaluation of all the data indicating a location of Morasthi north-east of Eleutheropolis.

Thus, the overall disregard of the Byzantine topographical literature is problematic because it means simply ignoring a long place-name tradition which has high evidential value elsewhere. Overall, this is a step backwards in the history of scholarship, as certain data is excluded from the discussion in order to develop a new place identification.

3 The peculiar Byzantine spelling *Morasthi* cannot refer to an original tradition, so the Christian tradition has to be dismissed[28]

Lipschits and Wöhrle claim that the Byzantine spelling *Morasthi* instead of *Moresheth* cannot rest upon a reliable tradition. This Byzantine spelling most probably comes from Mic 1:1, which introduces the prophet as *Mîkāh haMoraštî*. The form *Moraštî* can be deduced from the toponym *Moræšæt*, with the gentilic *-î* referring to a person from Moresheth. The Byzantine writers, however, misunderstood the gentilic name as a toponym. This observation supports the dismissal of the Byzantine tradition.

Nevertheless, this observation does not necessarily refute the idea of an original tradition behind the Byzantine identification of the biblical place *Morasthi*, which should of course be Moresheth. Since even the Septuagint understood *Moraštî* as a place name, it is not surprising that the Church Fathers took over this misunderstanding. Thus, the tradition of *Moræšæt* as the original toponym was lost long before the Christian tradition started. However, this etymological misconception in the Greek tradition does not mean that the identification of Moresheth—now written incorrectly as *Morasthi*—is not trustworthy. The misspelling attests only to the early Greek translators' poor understanding of biblical toponymy.

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27 Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 240.
28 See ibid.: 239 f.

4 The Late Bronze Age city *Muʾraštu* should be identified with biblical Moresheth Gath[29]

It is questionable whether the Late Bronze Age city *Muʾraštu*, mentioned in the el-Amarna correspondence, should be identified with biblical Moresheth Gath.[30] This identification is needed to argue against places that were not settled in the Late Bronze Age.

The letter in question (EA 335:17) was most probably written by Abdi-Aštarti, the ruler of Gath, who complained that the city of *Muʾraštu*, formerly belonging to Gath, had been taken by the ruler of Lachish. That might suggest that *Muʾraštu* was near Gath. However, this proximity is not necessary since more distant places could also have been associated with Gath. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the king of Lachish could have approached so close to Gath. More likely, *Muʾraštu* was a safe distance from Gath and near Lachish, perhaps on the border of the two city-states. Since *Muʾraštu* seems to have been attacked from southern Lachish, we should search for it between Gath and Lachish. The toponym *Muʾraštu* might also indicate that the original place name was *Morāšāh*.

However, the etymological derivation of *Muʾraštu/Morāšāh* from the stem *YRŠ* »to inherit, to take possession of« is problematic because the short form *Muʾraštu* omits the city of Gath, the referent of possession, whereas the toponym *Môræšæt* (»possession of?«) needs a determining referent like Gath and cannot stand alone. This problem is seen by Lipschits and Wöhrle, but not solved.

Most likely, therefore, the toponym *Muʾraštu* is not derived from the root *YRŠ* »to inherit, to take possession of.«[31] Rather, *Muʾraštu* could be related to the root *ʾRŠ* »to wish, to demand.« In that case, *Muʾraštu* is a »wishful place.« Against this background, Late Bronze Age *Muʾraštu* may have been a different place, unrelated to biblical *Môræšæt* given the distinct etymology. Moreover, *Muʾraštu* cannot be linked to Gath, since there is no etymological relationship to Moresheth Gath. In contrast, the toponym *Moresheth Gath*—mentioned only once in the Bible

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29 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 240–244.

30 See also Levin, »Search«: 31; Naʾaman, »Shephelah«: 284 f.

31 Nevertheless, Lipschits and Wöhrle (»Azekah«: 242 n. 51) prefer the etymological derivation from *YRŠ*: »However, since the term מורשה ›inheritance‹ is well attested in Biblical Hebrew (Exod 6:8; Deut 33:4; Ezek 11:15; 25:4,10; 33:24; 36:2,3,5) and since the ancient versions already interpreted the name ›Moresheth‹ in Mic 1:14 in exactly this way [LXX: κληρονομία; V: hereditas], the old derivation from the root *yrš* seems much more likely.« However, both observations speak only for the fact that this toponym was understood in this way by the Greek translators and the Masoretes. Whether the original Hebrew toponym was actually derived from *YRŠ* is difficult to say.

(Mic 1:14)—is derived from either *Môrešāh* or *Môrāšāh* as *status absolutus*.[32] The first vowel *ô* indicates an etymology from the stem *YRŠ* »to inherit, to take possession of.« Thus the meaning of the biblical Moresheth Gath is most probably »possession of Gath.«[33]

However, the root *ʾRŠ* might also be linked with the biblical name form *Môrœšœt.* The initial consonant *ʾ* could have lost its consonantal value and become a long vowel *ā*, which was later changed to a long vowel *ō*.[34] But if so, *Môrœšœt* »wishful place« does not need the referent Gath, so Moresheth Gath would only be a later name form implicitly relating *Môrœšœt* to the root *YRŠ* and the city of Gath. Perhaps the biblical authors misunderstood the original etymological derivation.

All in all, it is questionable whether biblical Moresheth Gath could be the Late Bronze Age city *Muʾraštu*. The toponym *Muʾraštu* might come from the root *ʾRŠ* and not from the root *YRŠ* like *Môrœšœt*, since the latter root needs a referent such as Gath, which is missing in the case of *Muʾraštu*, since *Muʾraštu-Gat* is not documented anywhere. Only the biblical authors related *Môrœšœt* to the city of Gath and therefore established the etymology with *YRŠ*. However, the root *YRŠ* is not at all necessary since the gentilic in Mic 1:1 does not have the *ô* and thus lacks a definitive indication that the name *Morœšœt* must come from *YRŠ*.

5 The el-Amarna correspondence allegedly locates Muʾraštu in the Elah Valley[35]

On the one hand, Lipschits and Wöhrle claim that the city-state of Gath dominated the Elah Valley (and thus Tel Azekah) up to Keilah; on the other hand, they deny that the Guvrin Valley belonged to Gath. This point is necessary in order to rule out any location in the vicinity of Eleutheropolis.

However, it is also possible that Gath's sphere of influence extended south to the Guvrin Valley, with this valley being the natural boundary between Gath and Lachish. If so, *Muʾraštu* might be located north of the Guvrin Valley. *Muʾraštu*

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32 See Götz Schmitt, »Moreschet Gat und Libna mit einem Anhang zu Micha 1:10–16,« *JNSL* 16 (1990) 153–172: 158.

33 Saarisalo (»Topographical Researches«: 99) suggests an etymology from either *ḤRŠ* »to plough« or *ḤRṮ* »to enclose«, which is philologically untenable since the omission of *ḥ* has to be explained somehow (see Jeremias, »Heimat«: 43). According to Elliger (»Heimat«: 119), the toponym *Moresheth Gath* could be a malapropism.

34 See the discussion in Shmuel Vargon, »El-Amarna Muʾrašt and Biblical Moreshet,« in *Bar-Ilan Studies in Assyriology Dedicated to Pinhas Artzi*, eds. Jacob Klein and Aaron Skaist (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990) 207–212: 209–212.

35 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 243.

might be found at Tell Bornāṭ (1380.1154)—especially if *Muʾraštu* is different from Moresheth Gath—as there is clear evidence of settlement at Tell Bornāṭ in the Late Bronze Age.[36] Even if Moresheth Gath is identical with Late Bronze Age *Muʾraštu*, however, there is no reason to dismiss Tell Ǧudēde for identification with Moresheth Gath, because there is also clear evidence of settlement at Tell Ǧudēde in the Late Bronze Age.[37] In a recent survey undertaken by the second author together with Amit Dagan and Shira Kisos, sherds were dated to the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I. Interestingly, fragments of pottery from these particular periods were gathered exclusively from the upper section of the tell, whereas they were absent from the lower flanks. This observation suggests that settlement was confined to the uppermost part of the tell during this phase.

Yehuda Dagan notes the presence of a small number of pottery fragments scattered across the slopes, as well as a few pottery pieces discovered within one of the burial caves located on the eastern slope. Although these finds indicate that the site was indeed inhabited during this period, the precise nature and scope of the settlement remain uncertain.[38]

All things considered, there is no definitive evidence that Late Bronze Age *Muʾraštu* was located in the Elah Valley near Gath. That is pure speculation. In contrast, the el-Amarna letter seems to indicate that *Muʾraštu* is located between Lachish and Gath, so *Muʾraštu* may have been north of the Guvrin Valley.

6 Micah's lament (Mic 1:10–15) refers to Moresheth Gath as the fortified sister city of Lachish, to be equated with Tel Azekah[39]

Mic 1:10–15 is a difficult text because known cities (Lachish, Moresheth Gath, Achzib, Mareshah, Adullam) are juxtaposed with otherwise unknown settlements (Beth Leaphrah, Saphir, Zaanan, Beth Ezel, Maroth). Thus, Moresheth Gath may have been a strategically important place and a fortified sister city of Lachish. This

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36 See Chris McKinny, Aharon Tavger and Itzhaq Shai, »Tel Burna in the Late Bronze—Assessing the 13th Century BCE Landscape of the Shephelah,« in *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Southern Canaan*, eds. Aren M. Maeir, Itzhaq Shai and Chris McKinny, Archaeology of the Biblical Worlds 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019) 148–170: 150–155.

37 See Yehuda Dagan, *Settlement in the Judean Shephela in the Second and First Millennium B.C.: A Test-Case of Settlement Processes in a Geographic Region*, 2 volumes (Tel Aviv University: PhD diss., 2000) (Hebrew), I:161; II/2:60; II/3:14. This contradicts Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 242.

38 See Dagan, *Settlement*, I:161.

39 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 247 f.

point is needed for the identification of Moresheth Gath as a stronghold dominating the Elah Valley.

However, it is debatable whether the known sites were really all fortified cities.[40] Only Lachish, Mareshah and Adullam are mentioned on the list of fortified towns in 2Chr 11:5–12; Moresheth Gath is not. Thus, there is no convincing reason to interpret Moresheth Gath as a fortified place merely because Moresheth (Gath) is mentioned twice in the book of Micah in contrast to the otherwise unknown places. The double occurrence within the same book does not mean that Moresheth (Gath) was a fortified city. The same holds true for Achzib, which is mentioned elsewhere only in Josh 15:44.

The chronological classification of the two sections of Mic 1:1–15 does not help either. Admittedly, Mic 1:10–12 appears to be looking back at past events after the destruction has already occurred and urging the smaller settlements to mourn the devastation of the Shephelah. The decisive battle, however, is yet to come, as Lachish is being told to prepare for it (Mic 1:13). Nevertheless, one cannot deduce from this that all the places in Mic 1:13–15 are fortress cities to be attacked in a second phase of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah. Moresheth Gath and Achzib might also be smaller settlements that have not been sacked so far. The different layout of the sites cannot be inferred from the temporal differentiation of Mic 1:13–15 and Mic 1:10–12. This argument, however, is fundamental for Moresheth Gath to be a fortified city. Since Tel Azekah was a stronghold due to its strategic location, it would be a perfect match for Moresheth Gath. However, it is unclear whether Moresheth Gath needed to be fortified at all.

Furthermore, within Micah's lament the toponym *Môræšæt Gat* seems to be a pun on the similar word *mᵉʾorāšāh* »betrothed«[41]—though spelled differently. Thus, Lachish should give a dowry (*šillûḥîm*)[42] to Moresheth Gath, the betrothed (*mᵉʾorāšāh*), to get rid of it.[43] This is clearly a sarcastic comment about the conquest of the Shephelah by Sennacherib in 701 BCE.[44] If Lachish is supposed to give a dowry to Moresheth Gath, the latter place must be closer to Lachish than to Gath, so it is

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40 Contrary to ibid.: 245 f.

41 See Luker, »Moresheth«: 904 f.

42 The *šillûḥîm* could also be a dismissal gift for a divorced wife; see Exod 18:2. According to Siegfried Mittmann, (»Eine prophetische Totenklage des Jahres 701 v. Chr. [Micha 1:3–5a.8–13a.14–16],« *JNSL* 25 [1999] 31–60: 46), *šillûḥîm* is a term for a marriage custom whereby the bride was dismissed from the family.

43 Zapff (*Micha*, 51) translates it as singular »dismissal gift« followed by the causal prepositional chain »because of Moresheth Gath«. Mittmann (»Eine Prophetische Totenklage«: 35) has »beyond Moresheth Gath«. For an unnecessary conjecture regarding Mic 1:14, see Elliger, »Heimat«: 95 f.

44 See e. g. Elliger, »Heimat«: 140–145; Siegfried Mittmann, »Hiskia und die Philister,« *JNSL* 16 (1990) 91–106: 100–102; Zapff, *Micha*, 59. On the disputed meaning of Mic 1:14, see Mittmann, »Eine

questionable whether Tel Azekah, which is next to Gath, can be Moresheth Gath. Of course, Azekah does appear to be a sister city of Lachish in biblical and extrabiblical texts. But it is always called Azekah and not Moresheth Gath (see above). There is no apparent reason why Mic 1:14 would use the old Canaanite toponym Moresheth Gath instead of the more common Judahite name Azekah for this important stronghold.

7 Tel Azekah was associated with the Late Bronze polity of Gath, so the later biblical compound name Moresheth Gath is understandable[45]

It is reasonable to assume that Tel Azekah belonged to the Late Bronze polity of Gath due to its proximity, but there is no clear indication of this relationship apart from the especially grand size of Gath compared to the smaller Tel Azekah.[46] Lipschits and Wöhrle seem to rely on this observation to argue that Tel Azekah can be labelled a »possession of Gath.«

However, given the assumed dependence of Tel Azekah on Gath, we have to explain why Gath was abandoned by the end of the 13th century BCE and Tel Azekah by the end of the 12th century BCE. Whereas Gath relied on good relations with Egypt, which nevertheless could not prevent its decline, Tel Azekah flourished after the downfall of nearby Gath due to its economic and political relations with Egypt. As a true satellite of Gath, Tel Azekah may also have been affected by the overall recession. But Tel Azekah prospered in contrast to Gath. This contrary development, which is associated with Egypt in both cases, requires explanation. The question rightly arises as to how dependent Tel Azekah was on Gath. Moreover, since Tel Azekah clearly lies in the shadow of Gath, it is no wonder that Tel Azekah is not referred to as Azekah in the extant sources from the Late Bronze Age, which are meagre at best. Thus, the search for an alternative name for Tel Azekah in early sources—namely, *Mu'raštu*—is unfounded.[47]

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prophetische Totenklage«: 45 f.: Jerusalem will give dismissal gifts beyond Moresheth Gath, which is the betrothed of Gath, but will not get a bridal price in return.

45 See Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 230–235.

46 See ibid.: 232: »The estimated size of Gath (27 hectares) significantly exceeded that of Azekah (6 hectares), which clearly speaks for the assumption that Azekah belonged to the territory of Gath.«

47 But see Lipschits and Wöhrle, »Azekah«: 235: »It is therefore remarkable that extra-biblical sources do not document the name ›Azekah‹ prior to the Assyrian period, when Azekah was already part of the kingdom of Judah.«

Conclusion

All things considered, the main arguments of Lipschits and Wöhrle are not convincing and can easily be refuted. Therefore, the proposed identification of Tel Azekah with biblical Moresheth Gath encounters serious objections. It is also questionable why the Christian pilgrimage tradition is completely pushed aside by Lipschits and Wöhrle for there is no real contradiction in these sources. Furthermore this methodological approach of scepticism could be applied to the biblical texts as well, with the effect that the contradictory biblical evidence would also have to be left out of the discussion. But then many biblical narratives cannot be located any longer.

Abstract: In a recent article, Oded Lipschits and Jakob Wöhrle argue for Tel Azekah as the hometown of the biblical prophet Micah of Moresheth Gath. However, the main arguments are not convincing and can easily be refuted. Above all, the overall rejection of the patristic sources is methodologically questionable and cannot stand up to scrutiny since the alleged contradictoriness does not exist within the Christian topographical tradition. Moreover, it can be shown that geographical, epigraphical, etymological and archaeological data were used in a one-sided and erroneous way.

Keywords: Tel Azekah, Moresheth Gath, Micah, historical topography

Zusammenfassung: In einem kürzlich erschienenen Artikel argumentieren Oded Lipschits und Jakob Wöhrle für Tel Azekah als Heimatstadt des biblischen Propheten Micha von Moresheth Gath. Die Hauptargumente sind jedoch nicht überzeugend und können leicht widerlegt werden. Vor allem die pauschale Ablehnung der patristischen Quellen ist methodisch fragwürdig und hält einer Überprüfung nicht stand, da es die behauptete Widersprüchlichkeit innerhalb der christlichen topographischen Tradition nicht gibt. Außerdem kann gezeigt werden, dass die herangezogenen geographischen, epigraphischen, etymologischen und archäologischen Daten einseitig und fehlerhaft verwendet wurden.

Schlagworte: Tel Azekah, Moreschet-Gat, Micha, historische Topographie

Résumé: Dans un récent article, Oded Lipschits et Jakob Wöhrle ont soutenu que Tel Azéqa est la ville natale du prophète biblique Michée de Morèsheth-Gath. Toutefois, les principaux arguments ne sont pas convaincants et peuvent être réfutés. Avant tout, le rejet global des sources patristiques est méthodologiquement discutable et ne résiste pas à un examen approfondi. En effet, la prétendue contradiction n'existe pas dans la tradition topographique chrétienne. En outre, il est possible de démontrer que les données géographiques, épigraphiques, étymologiques et archéologiques ont été utilisées de manière unilatérale et erronée.

Mots-clés: Tel Azéqa, Morèsheth-Gath, Michée, topographie historique