

SOME ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGY OF AHAB AND DAVID (I Kings 20; II Sam. 11)

Author(s): Yigael Yadin

Source: *Biblica*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (1955), pp. 332-351

Published by: GBPress- Gregorian Biblical Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42619060>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 13:01 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



GBPress- Gregorian Biblical Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Biblica*

SOME ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGY OF AHAB AND DAVID (I Kings 20; II Sam. 11)

I. - Ben-Hadad's Campaign Against Samaria: I Kings 20, 1-21

«¹ And Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his host together: and there were thirty and two kings with him, and horses, and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it. ² And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city, and said unto him, Thus saith Ben-Hadad, ³ Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine. ⁴ And the king of Israel answered and said, My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have. ⁵ And the messengers came again, and said, Thus speaketh Ben-Hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children; ⁶ Yet I will send my servants unto thee tomorrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants; and it shall be, that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away. ⁷ Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, Mark, I pray you, and see how this man seeketh mischief; for he sent unto me for my wives, and for my children, and for my silver, and for my gold; and I denied him not. ⁸ And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Hearken not unto him, nor consent. ⁹ Wherefore he said unto the messengers of Ben-Hadad, Tell my lord the king, All that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first I will do; but this thing I may not do. And the messengers departed, and brought him word again. ¹⁰ And Ben-Hadad sent unto him and said, The Gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. ¹¹ And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off. ¹² And it came to pass, when Ben-Hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants, Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. ¹³ And, behold, there came a prophet unto Ahab king of Israel saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord. ¹⁴ And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith the Lord, Even by the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall order the battle? And he answered, Thou. ¹⁵ Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces,

and they were two hundred and thirty-two: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand. ¹⁶ And they went out at noon. But Ben-Hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. ¹⁷ And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-Hadad sent out and they told him saying, There are men come out of Samaria. ¹⁸ And he said, Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive. ¹⁹ So these young men of the princes of the provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. ²⁰ And they slew every one his man; and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them: and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. ²¹ And the king of Israel went out and smote the horses and chariots and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. »

§ 1. *Ben-Hadad Besieging Samaria*

The above narrative of the battle between Ahab and Ben-Hadad is one of the most vivid and detailed descriptions of any battle to be found in the Bible ⁽¹⁾. Owing to the fact that the text is more or less clear and no major problems arise from its fluent language, the whole description has not been subjected to a more critical analysis, at least as far as the strategical and tactical problems are concerned.

Nevertheless, when trying to reconstruct the general course of events, and compare it to the detailed tactical moves with which the description is so rich, one encounters serious difficulties:

1. While it appears from the heading of the description (v. 1) as if the ensuing narrative began at the moment Ben-Hadad had already reached the city of Samaria and invested it, the detailed description that follows, implies that several phases of negotiations took place at a time when Ben-Hadad and his main force were still at a distance from the city, and his grave intentions and great host had not been fully grasped by Ahab:

a. " And he sent messengers to Ahab king of Israel into the city " (v. 2) ⁽²⁾. To the demand of Ben-Hadad's messenger:

⁽¹⁾ I wish to thank Father North very much for his compilation of the accompanying map.

⁽²⁾ The last words " into the city " are unnecessarily omitted by Lucian's recension and Syr. Equally unnecessary is Montgomery & Gehman's

"Thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine", Ahab, taking it as a formal request for obedience, answered: "My lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine and all that I have".

b. This misunderstanding was clarified when the messengers, after receiving new instructions from Ben-Hadad, "came again" (v. 4) with a clear demand that it was not the "formal" obedience that Ben-Hadad wanted, but the actual taking away of the above mentioned things. The emphasis this time was on: *שימו בידם ולקחו לי תתן*. From Ben-Hadad's statement: "I will send my servants unto thee tomorrow about this time", one should infer that the distance between Samaria and Ben-Hadad's main camp was such as required about 8-12 hours' walk, or rather ride.

c. Ahab still had the time and possibility to call for conference "all the elders of the land" before giving Ben-Hadad's envoys the negative reply (v. 7) ⁽¹⁾.

d. Even clearer evidence that the main force of Ben-Hadad was not in the near vicinity of Samaria, is implied in Ben-Hadad's threat, delivered by the messengers when they returned to Samaria for the third time: "The gods do so unto me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls (*לשעלים*) for all the people that follow me" (v. 10)!

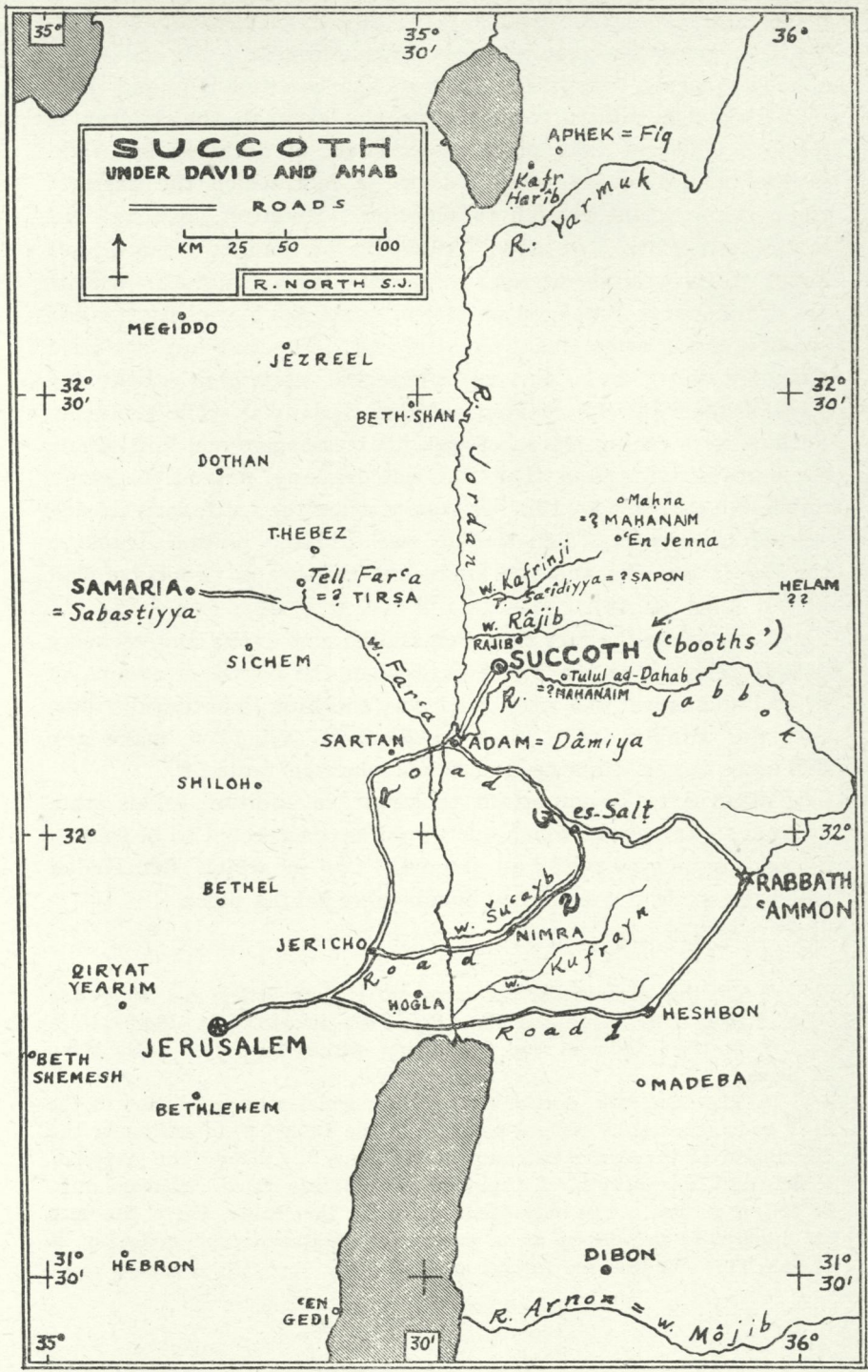
This threat, regarding the quantity of his force, would have been meaningless had his force already been within sight of the besieged. Ahab's famous reply: "Tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (v. 11) shows that he did not take Ben-Hadad's threat at its face value, apparently because the enemy's force was still out of sight.

e. Only after this reply do we for the first time hear of Ben-Hadad's order to invest the city, saying to his officers: "Set! and they set against the city" (v. 12).

2. It is, to say the least, difficult to understand the reason for Ahab's success in his bold sortie if we are to assume that it took

remark (*ICC, Kings*, 1951) in an attempt to overcome the apparent difficulty: "but the word means 'the citadel'".

⁽¹⁾ The reading "the elders" instead of "the elders of the land" in Cod. B is another attempt to overcome the apparent difficulty.



place after the city was already completely besieged and Ben-Hadad's army was set in array surrounding it.

The sortie, comprising 232 picked warriors ⁽¹⁾ and 7000 soldiers of the militia ("all the people, even all the children of Israel"), did not take place under cover of darkness but right in the middle of the day, a fact which the narrator thought important enough to mention. Moreover, although the sortie took place "at noon", Ben-Hadad had to be informed about it by special messengers ⁽²⁾. Ben-Hadad himself, despite his drunkenness, managed to escape, although the chariotry and cavalry of his army had been smashed. The last but not least difficulty arises from the twice-repeated statement about the state-of-mind and whereabouts of Ben-Hadad: *a*) while the negotiations were taking place between his messengers and king Ahab, the narrator informs us that "he was drinking, he and the kings, in the booths" (v. 12). *b*) Again, when the sortie had already started to operate, "Ben-Hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him" (v. 16).

Now, while the fact that Ben-Hadad was drunk and cocksure is very relevant to the understanding of the course of events, of what importance, one may ask, was the fact (mentioned twice) that the drinking took place in *booths*?! Would it make any difference if the drinking had taken place in tents? ⁽³⁾.

What is really important to know, in addition to his state of mind — and about which one would have expected to be told — is the topographical locality in which Ben-Hadad had been while the described events were taking place.

⁽¹⁾ On this meaning of the term נָעַר cf. my article *Let the Young Men, I Pray Thee, Arise and Play Before Us*, in *JPOS* 21 (1948) 110 ff.

⁽²⁾ So the LXX who read: "and they sent and reported to the King of Syria".

⁽³⁾ The tent, אֹהֶל, was of course the normal accommodation in the field, as is attested by several passages in the Bible (cf. in particular the description of the Aramean camp in II Kings 7, 7.9) and the Assyrian Reliefs and Inscriptions (cf. *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [Heb.] Hierosolymis, MCML, s. v. אֹהֶל). The only other place in the Bible where the סִכּוֹת are apparently mentioned as a means for military accommodation, is II Sam 11. On this see further on § 4.

§ 2. *Ben-Hadad's Headquarters at Succoth.*

All the above-mentioned difficulties would disappear, it seems to me, if we had taken the word סִכּוֹת, understood and translated "booths" or "pavilions", not as a common noun, but as the name of the famous city Succoth, situated between the rivers Jordan and Jabbok, on the very road leading to Samaria from Syria ⁽¹⁾.

The story in Genesis 33 is worth quoting, not only because it shows that that city was situated on the road leading to Samaria, but also because of its aetiological nature in explaining the origin of the name of the city: "and Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths (סִכּוֹת) for his cattle: Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram" (33, 17-18).

The suggestion that בסִכּוֹת in the Ben-Hadad story should indeed denote the city of Succoth, i. e. "in Succoth", is strengthened, too, by comparing this passage to a very similar one concerning Elah, son of Baasha, who was murdered by Zimri, while he was drinking in Tirzah:

Ben-Hadad (20, 16)	Elah (I Kings, 16,9)
וּבֶן הָדָד שָׁתָה שָׁכֹר בַּסִּכּוֹת	וְהוּא בִּתְרִצָּה שָׁתָה שָׁכֹר

Moreover, while the ambiguity of the word סִכּוֹת, together with the fact that the heading of the story ⁽²⁾ could have implied that Ben-Hadad was already besieging Samaria, led the versions and commentators to understand it as *booths*, it is interesting to note that the LXX (21, 16) understood it as proposed above, at least in verse 16 ⁽³⁾: Καὶ υἱὸς Ἀδὲρ πίνων μεθύων ἐν Σοαχῶθ (!).

⁽¹⁾ On the strategical importance of Succoth, see *infra* § 6.

⁽²⁾ The heading of the chapter should in fact be understood as the title of the *whole* description.

⁽³⁾ For similar variants, see BROOKE-McLEAN and THACKERAY, *The Old Testament in Greek*, Cambridge, 1935. 21, 12 was translated:...

§ 3. *The Course of Events*

Having translated the two passages accordingly, i. e. " he was drinking, he and the kings in Succoth " (v. 12), and " Ben-Hadad was drinking himself drunk in Succoth, he and the thirty and two kings that helped him " (v. 16), the whole narrative and course of events become clear:

a. The king of Aram organised an expeditionary force, comprising 32 vassals and a great host of chariotry and cavalry, and proceeded towards the southern provinces: either to pacify them or to reassert his authority, as was the custom of the great emperors of the ancient Near East.

Ben-Hadad established his main headquarters in the Valley of Succoth, the best strategical place for camping his large host of chariots: protected by the Jordan, the Jabbok and the range of mountains, and within tactical striking range of Samaria, Rabbath-Ammon and the other capitals of the southern provinces.

From here, he sends his several envoys and messengers to the various capitals demanding their surrender ⁽¹⁾; and while waiting for the results, which might render the difficult siege operation unnecessary, he and his vassals indulge in orgies and celebrations.

b. The messengers sent to Samaria who return with the unsatisfactory reply, are sent back with new instructions demanding complete surrender.

Ahab, as yet unaware of the vast armies, refuses to accept the humiliating conditions. Having gone and come, in about 24 hours, the time required to cover the distance between Succoth and Samaria and back ⁽²⁾, the messengers return with a clear threat. Ben-Hadad, realising that Ahab has not yet grasped that the Aramean army " meant business ", threatens to bring

πίνων ἦν αὐτὸς καὶ πάντες βασιλεῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐν σκηναῖς. Cf. also the LXX to Gen. 33, 17.

⁽¹⁾ A striking similarity to the whole procedure is found in the description of the invasion of Sennacherib. (II Kings 18). The Assyrian King remained with the bulk of his chariotry in the vicinity of Lachish in the Shephelah, while his messengers went to Jerusalem to demand its capitulation. We find here the same procedure of negotiations supported by threats.

⁽²⁾ Through Wadi Far'a about 120 km.

all his might against the city. Ahab, strengthened by the elders and the prophet, and perhaps still disbelieving that Ben-Hadad with his chariotry will in fact embark on the hazardous march through Wadi Far'a, answers Ben-Hadad's threat with a similar boast, but at the same time hurries to mobilise the militia of Israel ⁽¹⁾.

c. Ben-Hadad, drunk and enraged (and perhaps against the advice of his officers) ⁽²⁾, orders his chariotry to proceed immediately towards Samaria, while he himself continued to indulge in drinking in Succoth.

Ahab, who knows very intimately the nature of W. Far'a and the hilly terrain in the vicinity of Samaria, decides not to wait till all the force of the enemy will reach Samaria and invest it completely, but rather to strike first. The most important factor in such an attack was to time it according to the critical position of the chariots ⁽³⁾ in the pass, i. e. when the main force was still stretched in the wadi ⁽⁴⁾ and only its vanguard started to emerge. The timing of the attack according to the position of the enemy in the pass, was the main and decisive factor even if it meant an attack "at noon". If we assume that the columns of chariotry and cavalry left Succoth in the early hours of the morning, the main force must have reached the vicinity of the dangerous pass southwest of Tell Far'a about noon.

When the vanguard encountered the first soldiers of Ahab, they were taken completely by surprise and hastened to report

⁽¹⁾ Father Vogt, who was kind enough to go over the manuscript, very acutely pointed out to me — *inter alia* — that from the context of V. 13, one should conclude that when Ahab decided to counter-attack, a considerable part of the Aramean Army was already within sight of Samaria. This pertinent remark leads me to suggest that the messengers were accompanied by a heavy escort. Cf. *supra* pag. 338 note 1 and in particular II Kings 17, 18.

⁽²⁾ After the defeat, Ben-Hadad was advised by his officers not to fight any more in the hilly country. It is interesting to note that the narrator added the following words: "And he (Ben-Hadad) hearkened unto their voice and did so" (I Kings 20, 25). See also *infra* at the end of § 3.

⁽³⁾ That the main force consisted of chariotry and cavalry is evident from I Kings 20, 21.25.

⁽⁴⁾ And not while all the army was deployed and prepared for battle in the vicinity of the city.

to Ben-Hadad. The latter, "drunk in Succoth", and apparently in good mood, did not realise the dangerous situation and answered: "Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive; or whether they be come out for war, take them alive" (v. 18).

d. The outcome was very disastrous for Ben-Hadad's chariotry. Ahab "smote the horses and chariots and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter" (v. 21); but Ben-Hadad and his headquarters, protected by the Jordan, managed to escape.

That the rout of the chariotry was mainly due to the hilly terrain in W. Far'a, which disabled the surprised column from manoeuvring⁽¹⁾ and deploying, is evident from the tactical analysis made after the battle by Ben-Hadad's staff: "Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain and surely we shall be stronger than they" (v. 23).

The next campaign of Ben-Hadad — this time apparently choosing the northern approach to Samaria, through the Valleys of the Jordan, Jezreel and Dothan — was just as unsuccessful, due

(1) The following quotation from Field-Marshal (then Colonel) Wavell's description of the rout of the Turks in World War II, at the very same Wadi, seems very enlightening. (Col. A. P. WAVELL, *The Palestine Campaigns*, London, 3rd Ed. 1931, p. 213 ff.): "The small residue of the [Turkish] Eighth and the greater portions of the Seventh Army, still at large, had set out from Nablus during the night of September 20th/21st by a motor-road which the Turks had made down the Wadi Fara to Beisan and the Jordan. Soon after dawn our airmen saw a long column of artillery, transport and troops winding down this narrow hill track. Near Nablus the Wadi Fara is a precipitous gorge, into one side of which the road was cut. For four hours our aeroplanes succeeded each other in raining bombs and bullets on the mass pent helplessly in the defile. The head of the column was soon blocked, all movement ceased and the survivors dispersed in panic into the hills. Ninety guns, fifty lorries, and about 1,000 other vehicles were found deserted in the defile next day. The demoralised and disorganised survivors of the column were scattered in the hills and valleys between the Wadi Fara and Beisan. A few escaped over the Jordan, but by far the greater part were captured by the mounted troops in the following days". P. 216: "Early on Sept. 22nd a part of Chaytor's force had seized the bridge at Jisr ed Damieh and blocked escape that way... Two large bodies endeavouring to escape across the Jordan were intercepted and captured by the 4th Cavalry Division after some fighting... For all practical purposes the Turkish Seventh and Eighth Armies had been wholly annihilated".

to a similar bold move by Ahab, towards Aphek on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, thus blocking the narrow pass between Fiq and Kafr-Hârib ⁽¹⁾, before the chariotry of Ben-Hadad reached the plains.

II. - David's Campaign Against Rabbath-Ammon: II Sam. 11

§ 4. *The Ark and Israel "in booths" or "in Succoth"?*

As was noted above ⁽²⁾, the only other passage in the Bible in which the word סכות is mentioned, apparently in connection with accommodation of the forces in the field, is II Sam. 11, 11 in the famous reply of Uriah the Hittite: ויהודה וישראל ואדני יואב ועבדי אדני על פני השדה חנים.

This passage is translated in the ERV (and similarly in all translations) as follows: "The Ark and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents ⁽³⁾; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields".

According to the accepted interpretation, Uriah's pretext for not obeying David's request was that it would not be appropriate for a soldier like himself to enjoy the comforts of his home while the war was going on and the Ark and the whole army were abiding in field conditions: the Ark and the militia in booths and the regular soldiers just in the open fields.

Although there is no doubt that this was the gist of Uriah's reply, nevertheless the understanding of the word סכות as meaning "in booths" and על פני השדה חנים as "encamped in the open fields", is in my opinion bristling with difficulties and anomalies:

⁽¹⁾ This topographical feature explains the following biblical narrative: "And they pitched one over against the other seven days" (I Kings, 20, 29). Once the two armies had reached the respective sides of the pass, it required considerable courage to be first to move through it. For a detailed discussion of this situation see my article *The Military Geography of Galilee*, in *Ma'arakhoth* (Heb.) No. 60 Dec. 1949, pp. 21-22.

⁽²⁾ Supra p. 336 note 3.

⁽³⁾ Obviously an artificial attempt to solve the difficulty by translating the סכות as tents. On the various ways of translating this word in the English versions see J. HASTINGS, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, s. v. *Booth*.

a. Why was the Ark put in a booth (סכנה) while its traditional place, until the erection of the Temple, was in a tent (אהל)? ⁽¹⁾.

b. Is it logical to assume that the Commander-in-Chief and the professional soldiers would lie in the open field with literally no shelter (in a static and long siege-war) while the militia would camp in booths?

The accepted interpretation implies, further, that the Ark, and all the militia as well as Joab and the professional army, were camping in the very vicinity of the capital of Ammon. This implication raises two additional difficulties:

c. Would David dare to endanger the safety of the Ark, only recently brought to Jerusalem after it had fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and send it as far away as Rabbath-Ammon (while he himself remained in Jerusalem), where Joab's army had barely managed to avoid a fatal defeat in the previous campaign? ⁽²⁾.

d. If all the militia were near Rabbath-Ammon, how are we to explain Joab's advice to the king, when victory was near: "Now therefore gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city, and take it" (II Sam. 12, 28) and the subsequent statement by the narrator: "And David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and fought against it and took it" (v. 29)?

If, on the other hand, we understand the word בסכנה as in I Kings 20, meaning "in Succoth", and the expression על פני השדה חנים as "fighting (or camping) in the battle-field (or front)" — an expression used in that sense several times in the Bible ⁽³⁾ — Uriah's statement would receive new sense and would, I believe, answer the difficulties mentioned above.

⁽¹⁾ II Sam. 6, 17: I Chr. 1, 16.

⁽²⁾ II Sam. 11. See further on § 8.

⁽³⁾ The word שדה denotes *inter alia* the battle-field or the "front" (as in modern usage). Cf. for example Judg. 5, 18: "Zebulun was a people that jeopardized its life unto the death, and Naphthali in the high places of the field". II Sam. 18, 6: "So the people went out into the field against Israel and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim". I Sam. 14, 15: "And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled". I Sam. 4, 2: "And they slew of the army in the field about four thousand

Uriah, in a very diplomatic manner, rebukes the king for being preoccupied with personal joys, while all the people are at war and together with the Ark are camping far away in Succoth; at the same time he refuses the king's demand on pretext that his own comrades, the professional soldiers, are actually engaged in fighting in the battle-front around Rabbath-Ammon.

This explanation, naturally, raises the immediate question: If Joab and the regular army were besieging the capital of Ammon, why were the Ark and the militia in Succoth?

In order to answer this question, we have to survey and summarise the following three subjects:

a) The sequence of David's wars preceding the above mentioned siege of Rabbah.

b) The strategical, political, and economical aspects of the valley of Succoth in David's time.

c) The military roads which led from Jerusalem to Rabbath-Ammon at the time of the Monarchy.

§ 5. *The Sequence of David's Wars.*

The recording of David's wars in II Sam. and I Chr. enables us to follow, in general lines, his strategy, not only geographically but also chronologically.

Generally speaking, one can distinguish two geographical phases. The first intended mainly to protect his immediate surroundings, including Philistia ⁽¹⁾ and Ammon ⁽²⁾. The second was conducted mainly against the Aramean kingdoms in Syria ⁽³⁾, which were militarily speaking intimately connected with Ammon, their exposed southern flank. In fact it was David's penetration to Ammon which drew the Arameans into battles against him.

men". For *לחמה על* cf. for example in the same story II Sam. 12, 28: "Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city". Judg. 6, 4: "And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza". Dt. 23, 10: "When thou goest forth against (*לחמה על*) thine enemies". See also I Kings 16, 15; Josh. 10, 31; I Sam. 11, 1; II Kings 25, 1 etc.

⁽¹⁾ II Sam. 8; I Chr. 14; 18.

⁽²⁾ II Sam. 8, 12; I Chr. 18, 1. This conquest was not decisive because of the support the Ammonites had received from the Arameans.

⁽³⁾ II Sam. 8, 3 ff. I Chr. 17, 3 ff.

Chronologically too, one can distinguish two phases in David's campaign. While the first corresponds roughly to both geographical phases, the second was mainly dedicated to the pacification of Ammon and Aram, the former revolting against David at the instigation of the latter.

Only after he had suffered a setback in his battle against Ammon, because he had not realised the last-mentioned fact ⁽¹⁾, did David conduct a new campaign to smash the Arameans ⁽²⁾, before he could capture the capital of the Ammonites ⁽³⁾.

This second chronological phase, which is of direct interest to our subject, will be dealt with in § 8.

§ 6. *The Strategical Importance of the Valley of Succoth at the Time of David and Solomon*

In recent years a great deal of discussion has been dedicated to the study of the various aspects of the Valley of Succoth, including its economical importance in agriculture, commerce, and metallurgical industries ⁽⁴⁾.

For our purpose, however, it is essential to examine more closely the unique strategical position of the Valley of Succoth in the times of David and Solomon, because of the vital importance it had for the control of the vast empire expanding into the Euphrates.

The zenith of David's exploits had already been reached in the first chronological phase; undoubtedly with his penetration as far north as the Euphrates.

So long as his main campaigns were directed, in the first geographical phase, against closely-situated enemies, David had the advantage of fighting on "inner lines of communications", fanning outwards from the centre of his united kingdom. This advantage enabled him to shift his army, swiftly, in various directions, using Jerusalem as his main strategical base both operationally and logistically.

⁽¹⁾ In the battle at the plain of Medeba. See further on § 8.

⁽²⁾ The decisive battle at Helam. See further on § 8.

⁽³⁾ The battle of the Uriah Affair. See further on § 8.

⁽⁴⁾ See N. GLUECK, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, IV (*AASOR*, Vols. 25-28 for 1945-1949) 1951, p. 347 ff. and there further bibliography.

Once the centre of activities had to be shifted towards the Arameans, this advantage disappeared, and the long and insecure lines of communication did not enable him to use Jerusalem any more as the main strategical base: a "forward strategical base" (= F. S. B.) had to be created!

Any F. S. B. must have the following qualifications: *a.* Suitable and secure lines of communication both forward towards the enemy and backward to the main strategical base. *b.* Topographical features facilitating the defence of the area with minimum force. *c.* Natural resources, including water and food, which would enable supply to the army without the necessity of drawing upon the rear base during the critical phase of the battle. Similarly the F. S. B. should be able to maintain the technical aspects of the war such as repairing arms and producing ammunition. *d.* Politically stable local government.

A glance at the map and the archaeological and historical data available ⁽¹⁾ shows immediately that the Valley of Succoth, and in fact that valley only, was the ideal F. S. B. for David's purposes, since it contained all the above mentioned requirements:

1. The valley of Succoth is situated right on the shortest lines of communications between Damascus and Jerusalem, and had the most secure lines towards Samaria as well. The last-mentioned fact was very important when not only the professional army based on Jerusalem, but also the militia living chiefly in Samaria, took part in the battle.

2. Topographically the area could have been defended with minimum forces, even against chariotry, because of the Jordan on the west, the Jabbok on the south and southeast, the high ridge of mountains in the east and northeast, and Wâdis Râjib and Kafrinji in the North.

3. The valley was rich with natural resources, as is indicated by all the sources mentioned above. It had plenty of water, cattle pastures, and other agricultural elements. The archaeological survey of Glueck has shown that there are about 19 sites of the Iron Age I-II in the area between Tell-ed-Dâmiyeh in the

⁽¹⁾ Gen. 33, 17; Judges 8, 5; Josh. 13, 27; I Kings 7, 40; II Chr. 4, 17. Cf. GLUECK, *op. cit.*

south and Tell-es-Sa'idiyeh in the north. Lastly but not less importantly, the valley was the centre at that time, of metallurgical industries, as is clear from both the archaeological survey ⁽¹⁾ and the biblical narrative concerning the casting of the copper vessels for the Temple of Solomon ⁽²⁾.

The area must in fact have been so rich and important that Shishak considered it worthwhile to make a big deviation on his way from the south towards the Valley of Jesreel, in order to exploit the richness of the valley of Succoth ⁽³⁾.

4. The strong political control David and Solomon must have had over this important area and its vital vicinity, is attested by the various information in the Bible concerning Mahanaim.

David's first act after he became king was to win over Mahanaim from Ish-Boshet ⁽⁴⁾. That this area became one of the most loyal to David is attested by the fact that it is to Mahanaim that David fled for asylum during the revolt of Absalom. There

⁽¹⁾ GLUECK, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

⁽²⁾ For full discussion of the biblical passages concerning the casting of the copper vessels, Cf. GLUECK, *op. cit.*, p. 345 ff. However, there remains one point which has not been fully explained in the various discussions of the problem: Why had the copper vessels to be cast in the vicinity of Succoth (admittedly, relatively rich in iron ores) while the main copper mines were situated further to the south in Wadi 'Arabah?

It seems to me that the present conclusions concerning the Valley of Succoth, taken together with yet another biblical passage (which strangely has not been seriously considered by those who dealt with the problem) might lead to the right solution.

II Sam. 8, 7-11 and particularly I Chr. 18, 7-8 inform us very clearly about the source of copper for the vessels of the Temple: "And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. Likewise from Tibnath and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brazen Sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass".

It was only the golden shields that David brought to Jerusalem, but the "very much brass" was apparently left on the way back in the valley of Succoth, the strongly fortified area with its well-developed metallurgical industries. When Solomon built the Temple it was of course quite natural for him to cast the vessels there, and to bring to Jerusalem the finished products only.

⁽³⁾ See Mazar's article in *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Heb.), vol. 1, (1950) p. 716.

⁽⁴⁾ II Sam. 2-4. David's name is connected with the valley of Succoth also in Psalm 108, 8: אחלקה שכם ועמק סכות אשרד.

he was supplied, together with his army, with "beds and basins and earthen vessels, and wheat and barley and flour, and parched corn and beans, and lentils and parched pulse and honey and butter and sheep and cheese of kine, for David and for the people that were with him to eat" (1).

And lastly, the area was apparently of such importance that it merited a special commissioner during the time of Solomon: "Ahinadab the son of Iddo over Mahanaim" (2).

The discussion concerning the strategical importance of the valley of Succoth for David's exploits in the areas east of the Jordan, will be as complete as our subject demands only when we survey the different roads which in those days led from Jerusalem to Rabbath-Ammon.

§ 7. *Jerusalem-Rabbah Roads in David's Time*

Basing our reconstruction on the roads still in use in the Roman period (3), several indications in the Bible, the topographical characteristics of the terrain, and its suitability for the transport of infantry and light chariots, we can conclude with some certainty that already in David's time there existed three main military roads leading from Jerusalem to Rabbath-Ammon.

1. The most direct was the road passing just north of the Dead Sea, and reaching Rabbath-Ammon from the south via Heshbon.

This road, although leading directly to the plain of Medeba, had its very clear drawbacks, since not only did it climb from - 400 m. to + 874 m. along a distance of about 25 km. but it crossed (from the Jordan eastwards) all the way through easily defensible enemy territory. This road, indeed, as we shall see in § 8, must have been used by David's forces only when the time-factor was predominant, and the main force consisted of the professional army only, stationed in Jerusalem and therefore nearer to his road than the bulk of the militia drawn from the hilly country of Samaria and northern Palestine.

(1) II Sam. 17, 28-29.

(2) I Kings 4, 14.

(3) See the map attached to M. Avi-Yonah's: *The Historical Geography of Palestine* (Hebrew) Jerusalem, 1949.

2. The second road, more or less corresponding to the present highway, crossed the Jordan a little further north, and after a big detour through wâdi Nimrîn and es-Salt, reached Rabbath-Ammon from the northwest.

This road, though better in many respects than road No. 1, had on the other hand a disadvantage from the military point of view, since David's long column would have had to march for a considerable time through the serpentlike Wâdi Nimrîn, parallel and diagonal to the line of the Ammonites' fortresses, and thus would have been exposed to attack from the right flank, without being able to manoeuvre.

3. The third road also reached Rabbath-Ammon from the northwest, but instead of crossing the Jordan east of Jericho, it crossed it at famous ford of Adam (ed-Dâmiyeh) at the southern border of the valley of Succoth. From this point the road forked off both to Succoth (and from there again to Rabbath-Ammon) and to Rabbath-Ammon via es-Salt.

This road suited in particular an expeditionary force which consisted of both a professional army and a militia, as the crossing was at a convenient place for both Judah and Israel. This road should have been preferred by Judah also because though its distance from Jerusalem to Rabbath-Ammon was greater, the actual distance through enemy country was practically the same ⁽¹⁾.

Road No. 3 could have provided David with several additional advantages: *a.* It was based on the strongly fortified and well provided Valley of Succoth. *b.* It provided David with the best "indirect approach" to Rabbath-Ammon, in particular since David's approach from the northwest would *ipso facto* cut the main line of communications between Ammon and her allies the Arameans. *c.* Although "indirect" strategically, this road penetrated the land of Ammon at the best tactical sector, being less exposed to flanking attacks ⁽²⁾.

That this road was in ancient times, in fact, the best strategic approach for reaching Rabbah from the western side of the

⁽¹⁾ The distance from the Jordan to Rabbath-Ammon, in road No. 2, is about 55 km.; from ed-Dâmiyeh, about 50 km.; and from the Jordan via Succoth about 60 km.

⁽²⁾ In fact, the army proceeding from Adam would have had little worry about the right flank, since the whole area south of Adam was practically uninhabited in those days. Cf. GLUECK, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

Jordan, is clear, too, from the fact that it was the northern kingdom of Israel (in possession of ed-Dâmiyeh ford after the division of the united kingdom) and not Judah, which controlled the land of Ammon from time to time.

Having ascertained that the battle of the Uriah Affair occurred in the second chronological phase of David's battles; that the Valley of Succoth was already, in fact, the F. S. B. for the wars against the Aramaeans and Ammonites; and that the best road which led from western Palestine to Ammon was the one crossing the Jordan through the ford of Adam: we can now, I believe, reconstruct the actual course of events in the final battle for the conquest of Ammon.

§ 8. *Succoth in David's Strategy*

Immediately after Hanun's revolt ⁽¹⁾, David sent against Rabbath-Ammon, apparently quite in haste, an expeditionary force commanded by Joab and consisting mainly of the professional army: "the host of the mighty men" ⁽²⁾.

Joab's decision to move through road No. 1 via Heshbon, in order to reach Rabbah in the shortest possible time and before the city would be reinforced by the Arameans, was indeed fatal. His column must have been spotted easily from quite a distance by the super-sensitive Intelligence of the Ammonites ⁽³⁾. By a master-stroke they switched the Aramean chariotry right into the plain "before Medeba" ⁽⁴⁾ south of Rabbath-Ammon, that great plain on the right flank of Joab's route, the most suitable for manoeuvres of chariotry.

Joab, unaware of the ambush, proceeded directly towards Rabbah, only to find "that the front of the battle was against him, before and behind" ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ II Sam 10 ff; I Chr. 19 ff.

⁽²⁾ II Sam 10, 7; I Chr. 19, 8.

⁽³⁾ As narrated previously in the Bible: "And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord: Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city and to spy it out, and to overthrow it!" (II Sam. 10, 3; I Chr. 19, 3).

⁽⁴⁾ I Chr. 19, 7.

⁽⁵⁾ II Sam. 10, 9; I Chr. 19, 10.

With great effort he managed to extricate himself, and after inflicting a minor tactical defeat ⁽¹⁾ on the Arameans, had to return to Jerusalem without achieving his main strategical mission: the capture of the Ammonite capital ⁽²⁾.

David was quick in drawing the right and only strategical conclusion: The subjugation of the Ammonites could be achieved only if the Arameans were smashed before they could reach Rabbath-Ammon.

The next attempt of the Arameans to assert their authority, by mobilising all their forces under the command of Shobach, turned into a decisive victory for David, who this time aware of their move ⁽³⁾ "gathered all Israel together, and passed over the Jordan ⁽⁴⁾ and came to Helam" ⁽⁵⁾ and smashed the Arameans.

This victory was indeed a turning point in the battles of the second chronological phase ⁽⁶⁾. The important strategical result of this battle was, as the Bible stresses very emphatically, that "the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more"! ⁽⁷⁾. The road was now open for the final attack on Ammon, "after the year was expired at the time that kings go forth to battle" ⁽⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁾ II Sam 10, 13-14; I Chr. 19, 14-15.

⁽²⁾ II Sam. 10, 14; I Chr. 19, 15.

⁽³⁾ As the Bible says: "And when it was told David", II Sam. 10, 17; I Chr. 19, 17.

⁽⁴⁾ In all probability through the ford of ed-Dâmiyeh.

⁽⁵⁾ II Sam. 10, 17; somewhere northeast of Succoth; cf. F.-M. ABEL, *Géographie de la Palestine*, Tome II, Paris 1938, p. 347.

⁽⁶⁾ It is interesting to note that this victory must have been considered a long time afterwards to rank equally with David's victory over Goliath, as is indicated by the tradition preserved in the prayer of the Priest Anointed for Battle (*Mishna, Sotah*, 8, 1) where only these two events are mentioned: "The Philistines came in the strength of Goliath. What was his end? In the end he fell by the sword and they fell with him. The children of Ammon came in the strength of Shobach. What was his end? In the end he fell by the sword and they fell with him" (translation of H. DANBY, *The Mishna*, Oxford, 1933, p. 302). On the problems concerned with this prayer, see my forth-coming commentary on the Dead Sea Scroll *The Battle Between the Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness* (Commentary to p. XI).

⁽⁷⁾ II Sam. 10, 19; I Chr. 19, 19;

⁽⁸⁾ II Sam. 11, 1; I Chr. 20, 1.

David, the result of the previous debacle of the expedition via Heshbon still fresh in his memory, prepared the expedition very meticulously. The whole army was mobilised, the militia as well as the professional army ⁽¹⁾, and concentrated in the F. S. B., i. e. in the Valley of Succoth, together with the most powerful "weapon": the Ark of God.

Joab with the regular army proceeded towards Rabbath-Ammon and invested it while the bulk of the militia (and the Ark) remained in the secure base of Succoth, serving as strategic reserve both against unexpected eventualities of fresh Aramean interventions, and as reinforcements for Joab's army.

At this stage Uriah was summoned to David and gave his reply: "The Ark and Israel, and Judah, abide in Succoth(!), and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are fighting (or encamped) in the battle-field (or front); shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?"

On the verge of the capture of the capital, Joab requested David to "gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city and it be called after my name" ⁽²⁾. David, proceeding via Succoth, "gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it" ⁽³⁾.

Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

YIGAEI YADIN

⁽¹⁾ "Joab and his servants with him and all Israel", II Sam, 11, 1.

⁽²⁾ II Sam. 12, 28.

⁽³⁾ II Sam. 12, 29.