CHAPTER 6

Yarim-Lim’s Domain

Introduction

After teasing out the difference between revocable and irrevocable land tenure in the last chapter, we ended with the obvious question: Why did the second, larger exchange of settlements recorded in AIT 456 [10.02] occur at all? We may reach an answer to this question if we reformulate it and ask instead: What is the connection of the exchange in AIT 456 [10.02] to the historical narrative that follows it? For the juxtaposition of the two sections implies a logical connection between them; the historical background enlarges upon the preceding exchange, in some way justifying or explaining it.1

In this light, we should recall Abba-el’s three references to Irride’s destruction, noted already on pp. 154–55. Twice (lines obv. 28 and l.e. 4) the text mentions that Abba-el destroyed the city, and the third occasion provides the climax the historical narrative has been building to when Abba-el asks rhetorically “Will I give the destroyed city of Irride to my brother?” (Irridemi hepêm ana ahiya [a]naddin, lines obv. 31-l.e. 1). The description of Irride as destroyed is vital to the historical narrative because it explains why Abba-el gave Alalah to Yarim-Lim I. Apparently, that exchange in turn explained the preceding exchange of 17 settlements to the ancient reader: The larger exchange of settlements

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1 The relationship between the two sections of the text has not been explored as often as one might expect. Occasionally, the fact of the rebellion (not its narrative) has been invoked as explanatory. For example, Draffkorn (1959b: 94) suggests that the five settlements listed in AIT 456 [10.02] obv. 13–17 joined forces with Irride in the rebellion; cf. Gaál 1976b: 42. We will see below why this suggestion does not hold. Altman (2010: 24; see also 2012a: 11 and 2012b: 75) suggests “the only immediately apparent reason for including the apology in this written legal document [italics in original] would seem to be the fact that Yarim-Lim was supposed to acquiesce to it under oath, thereby confirming his acceptance of the apology. His acceptance, in turn, was in all probability intended to undermine in advance any allegation by Yarim-Lim to the effect that Irride had been taken from him illegally, which would have entitled him to abrogate the treaty.” But this suggestion does not elucidate why the narrative mentions only Irride, Alalah, and Murar and not the other settlements appearing in the preceding exchange, so that the exchange in AIT 456 [10.02] remains unexplained.
occurred because the exchange of Irride for Alalah had occurred. But again, we must ask: why?²

**The Historical Geography of ALT 456 [10.02]**

At this point, we need to engage directly with the location of these 17 settlements. First, a caveat: In what follows, I identify only a very few toponyms with tells, a practice that is fraught with difficulties and whose claims, in the absence of epigraphic evidence from small, unexcavated sites, can seldom be proven. Some of the toponyms discussed below can only be placed in a general area, and others cannot be located at all. However, my aim in this section is to sketch out a pattern on a large geographical scale, and for this aim, the relatively crude results I offer below seem sufficient, especially as these results are supported by additional circumstantial evidence that I discuss afterwards.

Briefly, I start this investigation into historical geography with the observation that the exchange documented in ALT 456 [10.02] obv. 1–18 offers us a before and after picture of Yarim-Lim I’s landholdings. From the settlements that he gives to Abba-el, we learn of his holdings before the exchange when he still resided at Irride. From the settlements that he receives from Abba-el, we learn of his holdings after the exchange when he resided at Alalah. Significantly, the geographical distribution of certain settlements involved in the transaction suggests a pattern.

There has been some prior recognition of a pattern in the settlements’ distribution. For instance, Na’aman (1976: 135 n. 23) noted that “the list of settlements in lines 1–8 is apparently confined to a specific geographical region,” referring to Astour’s 1970 discussion of the Hurrian alphabetic text from Ugarit RS 24.285 (= KTU³ 1.131; on which text, see pp. 173–74). Shortly after, Klengel (1979: 449) perceptively observed of the settlements, “die meisten

² Gaál (1976b: 42; cf. 1988: 102) asks this same question. His answer is as follows: The settlements Yarim-Lim I gives up were “rebel cities” in the area of Irride that joined the revolt. In order to maintain control, Abba-el needed direct oversight of the settlements after he had pacified the region. However, he could not simply seize the settlements because most likely he had taken an oath to Yarim-Lim I not to take back the settlements that was identical to the one he takes in ALT 456 [10.02] rev. 6. Therefore, he contrived to gain possession of the settlements by means of exchange, giving Yarim-Lim I settlements in the area of Alalah in return. This proposal is problematic. There is no evidence at all that the settlements Yarim-Lim I gives up had joined the revolt, and, as the following section demonstrates, Gaál’s assumption of spatial proximity between Irride and the settlements that Yarim-Lim I gives up is questionable.