

The Canaanite and Nubian Wars of Merenptah: Some Historical Notes

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MERENPTAH, the fourth king of the Nineteenth Dynasty and the successor of Ramesses II, inherited an empire from his father that was largely unplagued by threats of Hittite incursions. After Ramesses II signed the peace treaty with the Hittites in his twenty-first regnal year, the peaceful relations between Egypt and Hatti remained during the entire reign of Ramesses II.¹ Relations between the Egyptian and Hittite empires were so congenial, in fact, that Merenptah shipped grain to the Hittites in order to help stave off the country's famine, which had only worsened since his father's time.² Egypt also seems to have maintained good relations with Ugarit, a Hittite vassal, as there is evidence for commercial contact between the two nations at this time.³ Likewise, a sword bearing Merenptah's cartouche was found at Ugarit, although it is highly doubtful that the weapon indicates the participation of the Egyptian military, as some have suggested.⁴ Therefore, there was no superpower that aimed to support rebellions against the Egyptian domination in Canaan and Syria during the reign of Merenptah. At the death of Ramesses II after reigning for 67 years, the territory of Egypt comprised in the north the southern Syrian province of Upe in the Lebanese Biqa Valley, in the south till Abu Hamed and 300 km in the west of the Delta towards Libya. In the peak of Egypt's power, the empire passed to Ramesses II's heir-Merenptah.⁵ The fifth regnal year of Merenptah was a turning point in the overall ideal situation of the Egyptian empire that had been inherited from Ramesses II. A massive rebellion occurred right across the border of Egypt.⁶

¹ K.A. KITCHEN, *Pharaoh Triumphant. The Life and Times of Ramesses II King of Egypt*, Warminster, 1982, p. 75-95.

² KRI IV, 5.

³ M. ASTOUR, "Ugarit and the Great Powers", in G. Young (ed.), *Ugarit in Retrospect*, Winona Lake, 1981, p. 25.

⁴ C. SCHAEFFER, "Une épée de bronze d'Ugarit (Ras Shamra) portant le cartouche de Merneptah", *RdE* 11, 1957, p. 139-143; G. WAINWRIGHT, "Merneptah's Aid to the Hittites", *JEA* 46, 1960, p. 25.

⁵ D. KAHN, "A Geo-Political and Historical Perspective of Merneptah's Policy in Canaan", in G. Galil, A. Gilboa, A. Maeir, D. Kahn (eds.), *The Ancient Near East in the 12th-10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History. Proceedings of the International Conference held at the University of Haifa, 2-5 May, 2010*, Münster, 2012, p. 258. In the famous Papyrus Anastasi III, dating to the reign of Merenptah, the titles of an Egyptian military commander, Amenemopet, described him as "King's Envoy to the princes of the Foreign Lands of Kharu starting from Tjaru to Upe," see A.H. GARDINER, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, Bruxelles, 1937, p. 21. Kharu is the name of Palestine and its adjacent areas, see *AEO* I, p. 180-186; *GDG* IV, p. 151, the province of Upe is located near Damascus or between Damascus and Kadesh, see *AEO* I, p. 152, 181, and Tjaru is the headquarters of the Egyptian army's defensive strategy on the eastern frontier, which has been identified by a number of scholars as the site of Tell Heboua which lies in north-western Sinai, see M. ABD EL-MAKSoud, "Une nouvelle forteresse sur la route d'Horus. Tell Heboua 1986 (Nord-Sinaï)", *CRIPEL* 9, 1987, p. 13-16.

⁶ D. KAHN, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

The Canaanite War of Merenptah

Textual reference to the troubles in Canaan during the reign of Merenptah was gleaned almost solely from the Triumph-Hymn of Merenptah recorded on his Victory Stela (Israel Stela) that was primarily concerned with Merenptah's Libyan victory.⁷ In the closing two lines of the Triumph-Hymn of Merenptah recorded on Israel Stela is found the following text:⁸



The princes prostrate themselves, saying: "Peace!"; No one of the Nine Bows (dares) raise up his head; Tjehenu is plundered whilst Hatti is peaceful, Canaan is seized by every evil, Ashkelon is carried off and Gezer is seized, Yenoam is made as (though it) never existed, Israel is wasted without seed, Kharu is made a widow of Egypt. All the lands together are at peace. Everyone who travels has been subdued by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Baïenne Meriamun, Son of Re, Merenptah, Contented with Truth, Given life like Re every day.

It has been remarked on the Triumph-Hymn that Merenptah names three Canaanite city-states (Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam),⁹ and for the first time in history, Israel – a people without a

⁷ In the fifth year of Merenptah's reign, Egypt had been attacked by a coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples at the border of western Delta. This event is described in some of Merenptah's records such as the Great Libyan War Inscription of Merenptah at Karnak, the Cairo Column, Libyan War Stela from Kom el-Ahmar (Menuf), and the Triumph-Hymn (the Israel Stela at Cairo Museum). According to these records, king Merneptah, the son of Dedy of the Libyans, formed a coalition with several groups of the Sea Peoples (Sherden, Teresh, Shekelesh, Ekwesh, and Lukka), and they pushed forward into the Delta. As soon as Merenptah discovered what happening, he mounted a military campaign against the invaders and defeated them after six hours of fighting, at the border of western Delta. For the Libyan war of Merenptah, see *KRI* IV, 2-12; *KRITA* IV, 2-10; *BAR* III, p. 238-253; A.R. SCHULMAN, "The Great Historical Inscription of Merneptah at Karnak: A Partial Reappraisal", *JARCE* 24, 1987, p. 21-34; C. MANASSA, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah: Grand Strategy in the 13th Century BC*, *YES* 5, Yale, 2003; A.J. SPALINGER, *War in Ancient Egypt*, Malden, 2008, p. 235-238; Fr. SERVAJEAN, *Mérenptah et la fin de la XIX^e dynastie*, Paris, 2014, p. 37-45.

⁸ *KRI* IV, 19; *KRITA* IV, 15; B. DAVIES, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty*, Jonserved, 1997, p. 185-187.

⁹ Ashkelon is located on the Mediterranean coast about 39 miles south of Tel Aviv and 10 miles north of Gaza. The site is identified in other important textual sources including the Amarna Letters, the *Onomasticon* of Amenope (early eleventh century BC), the Hebrew Bible, Assyrian and Babylonian records, Hellenistic accounts, as well as later Roman and Byzantine records. Early excavations at Tell Jezer (Tell el-Jaziri), a 33 acres site located 5 miles south of Ramleh, established this city as the site of Gezer mentioned in Egyptian, Assyrian, and biblical texts. Site identification is confirmed by seven stones found along the ridges south and east of the tell, many containing the inscription *thm gsr*, meaning "boundary of Gezer," see M.G. HASEL, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant during the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age transition*, PhD thesis, University of Arizona, 1996, p. 255-264. Na'aman ("Yeno'am", *Tel Aviv* 4, 1977, p. 169) identified Yenoam with the site of Tell esh-Shihab, that situated west of Edrei on the Yarmuk river, controlling the main road to Ashtaroth and Damascus. He stated that this location accords well with the portrayal of the conquest of Yenoam at the relief of Sety I at Karnak, where a bush-lined river surrounds the town. Moreover, a stela of Sety I was found in this site, showing that it is one of the sites conquered by Sety I in the course of his campaign to this region. Nevertheless, the location of Yenoam is the most contentious issue, as candidates include Tell el-'Abeidiyeh (13 miles north of Beth-Shan, near the southern shore of the sea of Galilee), Tell esh-Shihab (in the Bashan, where a stela of Sety I was found), Tell en-Na'ameh in the Huleh Valley at Upper Galilee, and Tell en-Naam in the Jabneel Valley, see H. CLAUS, "Die Städte der El-Amarnabriefe und die Bibel", *ZDPV* 30, 1907, p. 34 (f.); W.F. ALBRIGHT, "The Jordan Valley in the Bronze Age", *AASOR* 6, 1926, p. 18-24; A. SAARISALO, *The Boundary between Issachar and Naphtali*, Helsinki, 1927, p. 112-118; N. NA'AMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 168-177; M.G. HASEL, *op. cit.*, p. 212-215, 264-265. For discussing the depiction and registration of Yenoam in the Ramesside war scenes and texts of Karnak temple, see M. RAAFAT ABBAS, "The Town of Yenoam in the Ramesside War Scenes and Texts of Karnak", *Karnak* 16, 2017, p. 329-341.

fixed city-state, to judge by the writing  of its determinative, contrasting with the sign ,¹⁰ used as determinative for the three other cities.¹¹ In 1978, Franck Yurco first proposed that the war scenes that found in the Karnak temple, on the south wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall and on the outer western wall of the *Cour de la Cachette* – the court between the Great Hypostyle Hall and the Seventh Pylon of Thutmose III – were not part of the same composition and that the latter had been made by Merenptah instead.¹² Yurco's findings were quickly and heartily endorsed by Kitchen,¹³ Stager,¹⁴ and with – some modifications – by Rainey.¹⁵ However, these conclusions also came under more incredulous scrutiny from a handful of scholars including Redford, Sourouzian and Iskander.¹⁶ The war scenes of Merenptah at Karnak included four battle scenes; prisoner-binding and prisoner-collecting scenes; then badly damaged scenes of prisoners being driven back to Egypt; and the presentation of the prisoners to Amun.¹⁷ Besides the originality of Merenptah's presence on this wall, Yurco also pointed out the correspondence of Ashkelon¹⁸ in the scenes and on the Triumph-Hymn, as well as the presence in the scenes of two other towns captured, and a battle people without a town, these would have corresponded to the other two towns, Gezer and Yenoam, plus the people of Israel of the Triumph-Hymn.¹⁹

¹⁰ Iskander argues that there are three divergent and contradictory interpretations in connection with the meaning of the term Israel as it appeared in the phrase; see S. ISKANDER, *The Reign of Merenptah*, PhD thesis, New York, 2002, p. 296-299. First, the view that the term Israel is unrelated to the Israelite people of the Hebrew Bible but rather to the Yezreal, the valley to the north as suggested by Margalith. This would conform to the rest of the inscription, which has local names (Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam). He concludes that the absence of the determinative of a place may have been a scribal error, which, according to him is common in Egyptian epigraphy, see O. MARGALITH, "On the Origin and Antiquity of the Name 'Israel'", *ZAW* 102, 1990, p. 229. However, the presence of the determinative of people is problematic for this argument. Hasel finds several difficulties with this interpretation based on a complex argument dealing with the vocalization and the Hebrew root of Israel, see M.G. HASEL, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela", *BASOR* 296, 1994, p. 49. Second, the view that the term Israel may be interpreted as "wearers of the sidelock". Nibbi had argued that the name, which is spelled out as *ysr'zr* in the Triumph-Hymn and identified as Israel, may well be another term related to the word *z'srit* meaning "wearer of the sidelock", although the two words are not written in the same way, see A. NIBBI, "Some Remarks on the Merenptah Stela and the So-Called Name of Israel", *DE* 36, 1996, p. 88. Nibbi's argument had received little attention in the scholarly field and is virtually ignored. Third, the view that the Israelite people mentioned in the Triumph-Hymn is related to the Israel of the Hebrew Bible. This view had been held by such scholars as Gardiner, Stager, Singer, Yurco, Kitchen, Hoffmeier, and others, see A.H. GARDINER, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, London, 1961, p. 273; L.E. STAGER, "Merenptah, Israel, and the Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief", *Eretz-Israel* 18, 1985, p. 57-59 and 62, n.2; I. SINGER, "Merneptah's Campaign to Canaan and the Egyptian Occupation of the Southern Coastal Plain of Palestine in the Ramesside Period", *BASOR* 269, 1988, p. 1-10; Fr.J. YURCO, "Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign", *JARCE* 23, 1986, p. 189-215; K.A. KITCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 215; J.K. HOFFMEIER, *Israel in Egypt*, New York, 1997.

¹¹ F.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹² P.J. BRAND, "The Date of the War Scenes at Karnak and the History of the Late Nineteenth Dynasty", in M. Collier, S. Snape (eds.), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K.A. Kitchen*, Bolton, 2011, p. 51-52; Cf. Fr.J. YURCO, "Merenptah's Palestinian Campaign", *JSSEA* 8, 1978, p. 70; *id.*, *JARCE* 23, 1986, p. 189-215.

¹³ KRITANC II, 72-78; K.A. KITCHEN, "L'Égypte ancienne et l'Ancien Testament: Aperçus nouveaux", *BSFE* 12, 1993, p. 21.

¹⁴ L.E. STAGER, *op. cit.*, p. 56-64.

¹⁵ A.F. RAINEY, "Israel in Merenptah's Inscription and Reliefs", *IEJ* 51, 2001, p. 57-75.

¹⁶ P.J. BRAND, *op. cit.*, p. 52; D.B. REDFORD, "The Ashkelon Relief at Karnak and the Israel Stela", *IEJ* 36, 1986, p. 188-200; H. SOUROUZIAN, *Les Monuments du roi Merenptah*, *SDAIK* 22, Mainz, 1989, p. 150; S. ISKANDER, *op. cit.*, p. 316-329.

¹⁷ Fr.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 190ff, fig. 1-9.

¹⁸ Of the three scenes depicting an assault upon a fortified town, Ashkelon is in fact the only one specifically named; see *KRI* II, 166, 2-3.

¹⁹ Fr.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 189-200.

As noted above, Merenptah names three city states Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam in the Triumph-Hymn. These are set within the context of two regional references: Canaan, described as plundered into every sort of woe, and Kharu, said to have become a widow because of Egypt. By the 1960s, most scholars have concluded that “Canaan” in the texts of the Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty referred to the entire area of Palestine. The identification of the geographical name “Canaan” continues to be widely debated in the scholarly literature. Cuneiform sources from Mari, Amarna, Ugarit, Aššur, and Hattusha have been discussed, as have Egyptian sources. Renewed excavations in North Sinai along the “Ways of Horus” have, along with recent scholarly reconstructions, refocused attention on the toponyms leading toward and culminating in the arrival to Canaan. This had led to two interpretations of the Egyptian name Pa-Canaan: it is either identified as the territory of Canaan or the city of Gaza. Recently, Hasel have suggested that the name Pa-Canaan in Egyptian New Kingdom sources consistently refers to the larger geographical territory occupied by Egyptians in Asia.²⁰ Furthermore, Hasel argues that Pa-Canaan and Kharu correspond to each other in the poetic hymnic structure of the Israel Stela as a major geographical region which is said to encompass much of the Egyptian territory of Asia. The clause “Kharu has become a widow because of Egypt” neatly provides a closure for the segment concerning this geographical region. Pa-Canaan/Kharu has become a widow because the listed entities within its area no longer have their previously known existence. Therefore, the Israel Stela places Pa-Canaan in parallel with Kharu, a synonymous term for the larger territory of Egyptian domination in western Asia. Within this territory are the conquered city-states of Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoam and the socioethnic entity Israel.²¹

The identification of the besieged unnamed towns scenes with Gezer and Yenoam is based primarily on the assumption that the mentions of the places on the Triumph-Hymn were arranged geographically. Indeed, Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoam lie in a south to north progression, from the coastal plain into the hill country.²² Moreover, Merenptah in his Amada stela receives the epithet “subduer of Gezer”.²³ The Ashkelon relief shows a conventional double-walled citadel upon a mound or *tell*. In that relief (as in some others of the Ramesside war scenes), the local ruler wields a brazier, while children (or their corpses) are dangled over the parapets, possibly as human sacrifices. Here, pharaoh charges forward in his chariot, firing a hail of fatal arrows against the Ashkelonites, while Egyptian soldiers slay others, hack at the gates with axes, or throw up scaling-ladders. The occupants lift their hands as if to seek mercy [fig. 1-3].²⁴ The text glossing the attack on Ashkelon reads:

²⁰ M.G. HASEL, “Pa-Canaan in the Egyptian New Kingdom: Canaan or Gaza?”, *JAES* 1/1, 2009, p. 8-17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11-13. This structure proposed by Hasel based on the parallelism of political and geographical sequences and terms which most accurately maintains the integrity of the text.

²² Fr.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

²³ *KRI IV*, 33.

²⁴ *KRITANC II*, 77; Aaron Burke argues that there is four primary motifs were used in Egyptian New Kingdom siege scenes to represent the activity of the Asiatics within their besieged towns. These include Asiatics praying with upraised arms, making offerings, defending their town with a variety of weapons, and lowering children from the city wall. Because of the enigmatic nature of this last motif, it has been the subject of some debate among scholars. Sarah Morris, for example, has suggested that it is the earliest evidence for Canaanite child sacrifice. Nevertheless, Burke stated that it would seem that the Asiatics are attempting to lower their children over the walls to aid their escape from Egyptian soldiers who had by now entered the city, fearing that their children would be sold into slavery in Egypt or a distant land. See A. BURKE, “More light on old reliefs: New Kingdom Egyptian siege tactics and Asiatic resistance”, in J. Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée : essays in honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, Eisenbrauns, 2009, p. 57-68; S. MORRIS, “The Sacrifice of Astyanax: Near

The despicable town which His Majesty carried off, it have been bad: Ashkelon. It says 'happy is he who is loyal to you and woe is he who transgresses your boundaries'.²⁵

It seems that Ashkelon rebelled during the events of the Libyan war of Merenptah's fifth regnal year. Kitchen suggested that the revolt might have taken place at Ramesses II's death,²⁶ but Morris noted that this would still seem a rather bold move for towns located so close to Egypt's borders.²⁷ Morris argues that Ashkelon may have counted upon the success of the joint attack mounted upon Egypt by the Libyans and the Sea Peoples at western Delta, which would have been of sufficient magnitude to absorb almost all of the Egyptian army's attention at that time.²⁸ On the other hand, some scholars including Waldbaum,²⁹ Wright,³⁰ Dothan,³¹ and Bietak,³² suggested the presence of the Sea Peoples in southern Canaan during the reign of Merenptah. Therefore, a possible alliance might have taken place between the Ashkelonites and the Sea Peoples in this rebellion against Egypt in Canaan during the Libyan war of Merenptah. Furthermore, Papyrus Anastasi II, dating to the time of Merenptah, refers to the Maryannu warriors who fought with the Libyans and the Sea Peoples against Egypt during the Libyan war of Merenptah.³³ The Maryannu were a class of warriors whose expertise in handling chariots and caring for horses were an ancestral tradition which made them the nobility or the aristocracy of the Canaanite societies during the Late Bronze Age.³⁴ It seemed strange to find the Maryannu fighting against the Egyptians for the first time in history in the Western Desert of Egypt and not in the Levant as they had usually occurred in the Egyptian records.³⁵ This could represent an evidence of an alliance between the Sea Peoples and the Canaanites during the rebellion of Canaan in Merenptah's reign. However, Morris stated that due to the proximity of Ashkelon to Egypt, the inhabitants of the town would have been well apprised of the events of Egypt's western border and certainly could have capitalized on the distraction of their overlord.³⁶

Geographically, Ashkelon would be the first point of resistance with which Merenptah's troops would have to deal. In the next battle scene, the name of the fort or town is either

Eastern Contributions to the Siege of Troy", in J. Carter, S. Morris (eds.), *The Ages of Homer: A Tribute to Emily Townsend Vermeule*, Austin, 1995, p. 231-232.

²⁵ KRI II, 166: 2-3.

²⁶ K.A. KITCHEN, "Review of *Les monuments du roi Merenptah*, by H. Sourouzzian", *JEA* 79, 1993, p. 305.

²⁷ E.F. MORRIS, *The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and the Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt's New Kingdom*, *ProblÄg* 22, Leiden, Boston, 2005, p. 380 (note 140).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

²⁹ J. WALDBAUM, "Philistine Tombs at Tell Fara and their Aegean Prototypes", *AJA* 70, 1966, p. 331-340.

³⁰ G. WRIGHT, "Fresh Evidence for the Philistine Story", *BA* 29, 1966, p. 73-74.

³¹ M. DOTHAN, *Ashdod II-III: The Second and Third Seasons of Excavations*, 'Atiqot 9-10, Jerusalem, 1971, p. 20; *id.*, "Ethnicity and Archaeology: Some Observations on the Sea Peoples at Ashdod", in A. Biran, J. Aviram (eds.), *Biblical Archaeology Today*, Jerusalem, 1990, p. 54.

³² M. BIETAK, "Response to T. Dothan", in J. Amitai (ed.), *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, Jerusalem, 1985, p. 216-219.

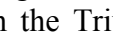

³³ A.H. GARDINER, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, Bruxelles, 1937, p. 14-15; R.A. CAMINOS, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, Oxford, 1954, p. 44-45; M. RAAFAT ABBAS, "The Maryannu in the Western Desert during the Ramesside Period", *Abgadiyat* 8, 2013, p. 128-133.

³⁴ R. O'CALLAGHAN, "New Light on the Maryannu as Chariot Warrior", *JKF* 1, 1951, p. 309-324; H. REVIV, "Some Comments on the Maryannu", *IEJ* 22, 1972, p. 219; D.B. REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, New Jersey, 1992, p. 193-195.

³⁵ M. RAAFAT ABBAS, *op. cit.*, p. 128-133.

³⁶ E.F. MORRIS, *ProblÄg* 22, 2005, p. 380.

broken away, or was not carved. Geographically, Gezer was the next place in line which Merenptah's force had to reconquer, hence it may be intended here as mentioned above. This scene is symbolic, as the king seizes the local ruler by his hair, to dispatch him with the *khepesh*-sword, while the ruler is still within his own ramparts [fig. 4-5]. Similarly, damage to the wall has removed any trace of the place-name (if engraved) in the next scene of the siege of the last Canaanite town (probably Yenoam as mentioned above). In this scene, Merenptah is depicted advancing in his chariot against the town [fig. 6-7].³⁷ It is known that at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty, King Sety I attacked the town of Yenoam during his first Asiatic campaign in his first regnal year as recorded in the Northern Wars scenes of Sety I at Karnak and the First Beth-Shan stela of Sety I.³⁸ Thus, it seems that controlling this town was essential to reassert the Egyptian influence in Canaan and to quell rebellions.

The last battle scene of Merenptah shows pharaoh's chariot in the center, his rearing horses' front hooves almost touching the left end of the scene. For that reason, no fort can be positioned on this side; rather, the king is charging a mass of enemies [fig. 8]. Thus, this scene matches the description of Israel in the Triumph-Hymn, for it is there written  *Ysrizr*, the determinative signifying a people without a specific city state, as contrasted with Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam, whose names have been written with the determinative . Consequently, the parallel between the Triumph-Hymn and the Karnak war scenes of Merenptah seems perfect: three fortified towns and one people battling in open country.³⁹ Rainey rejects the identification of the defeated people in the scene with the Israelites, arguing that the defeated people depicted are Canaanites as they had chariots and are dressed as Canaanites.⁴⁰ Yurco maintains that Israelites are dressed in the same manner as the Canaanites.⁴¹ Kitchen explains the occurrence of the chariots in the scene arguing that the early Hebrews were anyway not the sole inhabitants of Canaan near the coast, and that Merenptah's invading force doubtless caught out both the Israelites and the local Canaanites amongst whom they were endeavoring to carve out their area of settlement. So, the people in the reliefs would have been a mixture of Israelites and Canaanites; the firsts having the main impact, it's their name that has been recorded.⁴² However, Iskander argues that the arguments of both Yurco and Kitchen presume much but have little supporting evidence.⁴³ Indeed, I agree with Yurco that this scene matches the description of Israel in the Triumph-Hymn, but I think that the presence of the chariots with the defeated people leads us to think that the term Israel is unrelated to the Israelite people of the Hebrew Bible as some scholars had suggested before. It seems that the term may relate to a Canaanite tribe or to a group of people living as nomadic invaders in the Canaanite areas in the same manner as the Apiru⁴⁴ in Canaan, but

³⁷ KRITANC II, 77.

³⁸ THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak IV. The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I*, OIP 107, 1986, p. 35-36, pl. 11; KRI I, 11-13; KRITA I, 10; W.J. MURNANE, *The Road to Kadesh: A Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak*, Chicago, 1990², p. 42-43; R.O. FAULKNER, "The Wars of Sethos I", *JEA* 33, 1947, p. 35-36; A.J. SPALINGER, "The Northern Wars of Seti I: An Integrative Study", *JARCE* 16, 1979, p. 31.

³⁹ F.J. YURCO, *JARCE* 23, 1986, p. 200.

⁴⁰ A.F. RAINEY, "Can You Name the Panel with the Israelites? Rainey's Challenge", *BAR* 17/6, 1991, p. 56-60.

⁴¹ F.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁴² KRITANC II, 75-76.

⁴³ S. ISKANDER, *The Reign of Merenptah*, p. 320-322.

⁴⁴ These Apiru are variously described as nomadic or semi-nomadic, rebels, outlaws, raiders, mercenaries, and bowmen, servants, slaves, migrant laborers in the areas of the Fertile Crescent from Northeastern Mesopotamia and the borders of Egypt in Canaan during the New Kingdom. They are frequently mentioned in several

they have not been mentioned in the Egyptian records before or later.

In the war scenes of Merenptah at Karnak the pharaoh is depicted binding Shasu captives [fig. 9], in contrast to the foes in the four battle scenes, who all are Canaanites, judging by their dress.⁴⁵ Additionally, Merenptah is depicted driving Shasu captives to Egypt before and under the pharaoh's chariot [fig. 10].⁴⁶ Another procession of Shasu identified by a horizontal line of text above them stating: "*consisting of the Shasu whom his majesty plundered.*" Above this text just enough of the block remains preserved to show a file of Canaanites, readily distinguished from the Shasu by their long cloaks. Both of these files are part of a scene depicting the presentation of the spoils of the campaign to the Theban deities [fig. 11].⁴⁷

The Shasu were a predominantly seminomadic people encountered in areas ranging from Sinai⁴⁸ to Transjordan,⁴⁹ the central hill country and Syria.⁵⁰ The text of Sety I's battle relief at Karnak indicates that his Shasu foes were located in the hills of Kharu; the battle scene makes it quite clear that Shasu also frequented the northern Sinai and the environs of Gaza.⁵¹ In Merenptah's reign Shasu were found in southern Canaan and Sinai, as shown by Papyrus Anastasi VI.⁵² Throughout the New Kingdom, the Shasu were mainly attacked in order to eradicate the threat that these groups posed to the safety of caravans and travelers or to settled populations in general.⁵³

Yurco has explained the appearance of the Shasu among the prisoners of Merenptah's Canaanite campaign as indicating either a separate campaign or simply that Merenptah's foes had hired Shasu men as mercenaries.⁵⁴ I suggest that the Shasu-bedouin were not just mercenaries during the Canaanite war of Merenptah, but they were a principal enemy for the Egyptian military action in Canaan during the campaign of Merenptah in the regions surrounding the major three city-states (Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam). It seems that they were responsible for a major part of the revolts that occurred in Canaan. This suggestion is based largely upon two reasons. Firstly, they were the major hostile forces to the Egyptian military action during the first campaign of Sety I in Canaan,⁵⁵ and they occurred also as hostile forces during the events of the Battle of Kadesh and in other texts of Ramesses II some decades before.⁵⁶ Secondly, the Shasu occurred alone in the text of the triumph scene of Merenptah at Karnak in the phrase of the speech of Amun-Re to the king as follows:

(I) love your return after you have trodden the foreign countries. You have smitten the [Shasu], you have trampled down the Nubian tribesfolk.

Egyptian sources and military records of the New Kingdom. See J. WILSON, "The 'Eperu of the Egyptian inscriptions", *AJSJL* 49, 1932-1933, p. 275-280.

⁴⁵ F.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 207, fig. 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 207, fig. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207, fig. 9.

⁴⁸ THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *op. cit.*, pl. 6.

⁴⁹ R. GIVEON, *Les Bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens*, Leiden, 1971, p. 235-236.

⁵⁰ *KRI* I, 9; *KRI* II, 103.

⁵¹ *KRI* I, 6-11; *KRI* II, 6-9.

⁵² R.A. CAMINOS, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

⁵³ For the Shasu and their relations with Egypt in the New Kingdom, see: R. GIVEON, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ F.J. YURCO, *op. cit.*, p. 209-211.

⁵⁵ For the Shasu campaign of Sety I and his war scenes at Karnak, see THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *op. cit.*, p. 1-26, pl. 2-8.

⁵⁶ *KRI* II, 103, 163, 298, 404.

The recording of the names of the enemies in the text of the triumph scene of Merenptah at Karnak is an aspect that could be considered as “historically valid”. The scene is now deprived of its pure symbolic character, referring to real historical events. This may give an indication on the historical purpose of erecting the triumph scene of Merenptah at Karnak, commemorating these victories of the pharaoh over the Shasu in the East and the Nubians in the South. The triumph scenes of the warrior Ramesside pharaohs, in which the king is represented smiting ethnical groups of northern and southern enemies with his mace in the presence of Amun-Re, usually occurred in relation with narrative battle scenes, in order to glorify the victories of the warrior pharaohs.⁵⁷ According to previous Egyptologists, the triumph scenes are a generalized summary of the battle reliefs during the Ramesside Period.⁵⁸

I think that Merenptah transported his Canaanite captives to Nubia and the Shasu captives to the west after the end of his Canaanite war, according to the last phrase of the speech of Amun-Re in the text of Merenptah’s triumph scene at Karnak which reads: “(you have) seized [every land] at its South, and sealed it upon its North”.⁵⁹

This part of the text calls to mind a text from Abu Simbel that describes the resettling of different groups under Ramesses II:

The Nubian was brought to Delta, the Asiatics to Nubia, it is in the western land that he has placed the Shasu-bedouin and it was upon the mountain ridges that he has established the Tjehenu-Libyan.⁶⁰

Spalinger argues that this text states that Ramesses II transported the Nubians to the north and the Asiatics to the south, as well as the Shasu to the west and the Libyans to the hilltops, probably indicating the common practice of the New Kingdom Pharaohs of moving captives to various sites for *corvée* labour or for military service.⁶¹ Therefore, this part of the triumph scene’s text of Merenptah at Karnak may refer to the continuous practicing of resettling the war captives during Merenptah’s reign.

The question here is why did Canaan suddenly rebel after more than half a century of peace? Kitchen suggested that the death of a monarch was always viewed by the more adventurous or oppressed vassals as a time to test the mettle of the new, untried ruler, with hope of throwing off his yoke. Thus, this is what happened after Merenptah’s accession.⁶² I strongly disagree with this perspective because there is no clear reason that makes Libya, Canaan, and Nubia waiting for five years until they rebelled in the same time. On the other hand, Singer suggested that the pacification of these entities was a further planned step in Egyptian expansion and its establishment in the northern Levant. Turning the *via maris* into the main road from Gaza to Aphek was necessary to secure international routes in Canaan. Singer claimed that further annexations to the centrally governed territories was needed after the relative stagnation in Egyptian foreign policy in the last decades of Ramesses II’s rule.⁶³

⁵⁷ M. RAAFAT ABBAS, “The Triumph Scene and Text of Merenptah at Karnak”, *Karnak* 15, 2015, p. 246-247.

⁵⁸ THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ *KRI* IV, 23-24; *KRITA* IV, 20; M. RAAFAT ABBAS, *op. cit.*, p. 245-248.

⁶⁰ *KRI* II, 206.

⁶¹ A.J. SPALINGER, “Historical Observations on the Military Reliefs of Abu Simbel and other Ramesside Temples in Nubia”, *JEA* 66, 1980, p. 87.

⁶² K.A. KITCHEN, “The Victories of Merenptah, and the Nature of their Record”, *JSOT* 28, 2004, p. 265-266.

⁶³ I. SINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 1-10.

As noted above, it seems that an alliance between the Sea Peoples and the Canaanites may have taken place during the fifth year of Merenptah's reign. The Sea Peoples were a major part of the joint attack on Egypt with the Libyans at Egypt's western border. Also, they may have been settled in southern Canaan as some scholars have suggested. Similarly, it has been noted that some of the Maryannu warriors who were the aristocracy of the Canaanite societies were fighting beside the Libyans and the Sea Peoples against Egypt in the Libyan war of Merenptah. Accordingly, the alliance between the Sea Peoples and the Canaanite city states could be the main reason for the Canaanite rebellion against the Egyptian domination during the fifth year of Merenptah's reign. Furthermore, it seems that the Shasu-bedouin have seized the opportunity to rid themselves of their overlords and took a major part in the Canaanite rebellion. They fought against the Egyptian troops which moved to quell the rebellion and were defeated.

Based on texts from several sources, as well as on climatological data, it seems that the whole Ancient Near East, including Hatti, Mesopotamia, Ugarit, Libya, and possibly even Egypt and Nubia, suffered from severe drought. While, at times, Egypt was able to relieve the hunger of Hatti and Ugarit – distant allies –, it seems that it had trouble coping with its neighbours' shortages and distress. Merenptah was forced to retreat on all fronts hundreds of kilometers and defend the core of its kingdom.⁶⁴

The Nubian War of Merenptah

The four stelae of Merenptah at Amada,⁶⁵ Amarah West,⁶⁶ Wadi es-Sebua⁶⁷ and Aksha,⁶⁸ were set up ostensibly to commemorate Merenptah's crushing victory over the rebellious peoples of Wawat.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, three of these inscriptions are almost completely lost; however, the Amada text is exceptionally well preserved. The Nubian war of Merenptah is described on the Amada Stela of Merenptah as follows:

One came to inform His Majesty (that) the fallen ones of Wawat had transgressed in the South.

Now, it happened in Year 5, 3rd Month of *Shomu*, Day 1 – just when the valiant army of His Majesty came (to) overthrow the despicable chief of the Libyans (*Libu*). Never shall they leave any people for the *Libu*, any who shall bring them up in their land! They are cast to the ground (?) by hundred-thousands and ten-thousands, the remainder being impaled ('put to the stake') on the South of Memphis. All their property was plundered, being brought back to Egypt.

All the rulers made obeisance ('salaamed'), the lands were distraught at the might of His Majesty. His war-cry is in their hearts, he has over-awed them. (They say): "Where can we go? The fierce Lion is put prowling!"

The hot blast from his mouth (has gone) against the land of Wawat. They are destroyed at one blow, they have no heir, having been carried off to Egypt altogether. Their chiefs have been set

⁶⁴ D. KAHN, "Merneptah's Policy in Canaan", p. 262-263.

⁶⁵ PM VII, 67 (5); A.A. YOUSSEF, "Merenptah's Fourth Year Text at Amada", *ASAE* 58, 1964, p. 273-280, pl. 1; J. ČERNÝ, *Le Temple d' Amada V*, *CollSc* 55, Le Caire, 1967, p. 3ff, pl. 4-6, 8; *KRI* IV, 1-2, 33-37; *KRITA* IV, 1-2, 29.

⁶⁶ PM VII, 159 (6).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 57 (15).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 127 (2).

⁶⁹ *KRI* IV, 1-2, 33-37; *KRITA* IV, 1-2, 29; K.A. KITCHEN, "Historical Observations on Ramesside Nubia", in E. Endesfelder, K.H. Priese, W.F. Reineke *et al.* (eds.), *Ägypten und Kusch. Fritz Hintze zum 60. Geburtstag*, *SGKAO* 13, Berlin, 1977, p. 221-224; C. MANASSA, *YES* 5, 2003, p. 96-97, 99-100.

fire to, in the presence of their relatives (?). (As for) the remainder, the hands of (some of) them were cut off because of their crime; (as for) others, ears and eyes were removed, (and they were) taken to Kush. They were made into heaps in their settlements. Never again will Kush repeat rebellion.⁷⁰

The Nubian rebellion did not occur many hundreds of kilometers south of Egypt, in or near the kingdom of Irem⁷¹, the southernmost area where the Egyptians fought in Africa several decades earlier, but in the backyard of Egypt, between the first and the second cataracts. The newly built temples by Egyptian kings in Lower Nubia (esp. Ramesses II), as well as the immense Second Cataract fortresses with their granaries were probably targeted.⁷² It is of special interest that the Nubian war of Merenptah represents the only clear occurrence, in the Nineteenth Dynasty, of Nilotic Nubians rebelling – and, even more dramatically, of Lower Nubians rebelling.⁷³

The main course of the action is set in “year 5, the third month of summer, the first day”. This date marks the assembly of Merenptah’s forces in the western Delta in response to the threat of a Libyan incursion into the Egyptian territory. An inscription celebrating this military engagement records that Merenptah’s forces defeated the Libyan enemy in a six-hour battle two days later. News of Wawat’s rebellion reached Merenptah on the very same day as he had marshalled all his forces to fight the Libyans and the Sea Peoples. The coordination between the northern and southern attacks has been noted by Kitchen. The synchronism of the Libyan and Nubian attacks is more than mere coincidence. There is strong suspicion that these peoples had strategically planned the timing of their assaults on Egypt’s borders, principally to divide and hence weaken Egyptian resistance. Lines of communication between the lands of Libya and Nubia were, at this time, well established along the routes of the Western Desert.⁷⁴ Manassa argues that the near simultaneity of the events combined with the references to the oases earlier in the Karnak inscription provides temporal and geographical evidence for concerted action between the northern and southern thrusts. Since both the Libyans and the Nubians lived on the fringes of Egyptian-controlled territory, a successful Libyan invasion and a Nubian revolt would have served each group well; the northern Libyans would have gained fertile land in the Delta, while the southern Libo-Nubians could have achieved control over the Nubian gold-mines by cutting the region of Lower Nubia off from southern Egypt.⁷⁵ However, Merenptah responded to the news of the attack by attacking

⁷⁰ KRI IV, 1-2, 34-35; KRITA IV, 1-2.

⁷¹ A Kushite kingdom, perhaps located in the Dongola Reach of the Nile around Kerma, or, as more recently advocated, much farther south, in the Bayuda Desert or the Berber-Shendi Reach of the river. Irem is documented in the Egyptian sources from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Dynasties as a significant power and potential threat to the security of southern Nubia. See B.G. TRIGGER, *Nubia under the Pharaohs*, London, 1976, p. 112; K.A. KITCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 216-220; D.B. O’CONNOR, “The Location of Irem”, *JEA* 73, 1987, p. 99-136; R.G. MORKOT, “Nubia in the New Kingdom: The Limits of Egyptian Control”, in W. Davies (ed.), *Egypt and Africa. Nubia from Prehistory to Islam*, London, 1991, p. 298.

⁷² D. KAHN, *op. cit.*, p. 262. For a general overview of Ramesside Nubia, see K.A. KITCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 213-225; A.J. SPALINGER, *op. cit.*, p. 83-99; I. HEIN, *Die ramessidische Bautätigkeit in Nubien*, Wiesbaden, 1991, p. 97-99; R.G. MORKOT, *op. cit.*, p. 294-301.


⁷³ E.F. MORRIS, *ProblÄg* 22, 2005, p. 657.

⁷⁴ KRI IV, 1-2, 33-37; KRITA IV, 1-2, 29; C. MANASSA, *op. cit.*, p. 96-97, 99-100; K.A. KITCHEN, *op. cit.*, p. 221-224; *id.*, “The Arrival of the Libyans in Late New Kingdom Egypt”, in A. Leahy (ed.), *Libya and Egypt, c. 1300-750 B.C.*, London, 1990, p. 19-20.

⁷⁵ C. MANASSA, *op. cit.*, p. 96-97.

the land of Wawat: “*The hot blast from his mouth (has gone) against the land of Wawat*”. They were devastated at one blow without heirs and brought together to Egypt. Fire was being thrown at their great ones in the presence of their companions; the survivors had their hands cut off because of their crimes, others had their ears and eyes removed, and were taken to Kush. They were made into heaps in their towns.

It is noticeable that Merenptah chose mass deportation to Egypt as his method of staunching rebellion. He has also employed terror tactics in his war, where the leaders of the Nubian rebellion were apparently set on fire in the presence of their followers. Other Nubians were mutilated and sent earless or eyeless back to their homes in Kush. The purpose of such emphatically brutal treatment of the survivors, as stated in the texts, was to ensure that Kush would never again rebel.⁷⁶ It has been remarked that a similar fate is also met by the Libyans as reported in the Great Karnak (or Libyan war) inscription of Merenptah, when “*fire was placed in their camp, their tents were ashes*”.⁷⁷

In a graffito located at Aswan road to Philae, the Viceroy Messuy is depicted with King Merenptah who stands in his war chariot (fig. 12).⁷⁸ Moreover, Messuy held the military title , *imy-r ms' n sz nsw*, “Overseer of the Army of the Viceroy”.⁷⁹ I think that this graffito is very significant because it indicates that Messuy participated personally in the military operations against Nubia. According to Säve-Söderbergh, it would seem strange for Messuy to show himself in the graffito he carved in Aswan, on the road with military scenes before his sovereign in a war chariot without having taken part in a war in the South.⁸⁰ Spalinger suggested that Merenptah did not participate personally in his Nubian military campaign,⁸¹ hence I think that the depiction of the king in this graffito may be a symbolic representation, and that Messuy was the commander of the military activities that leads to the defeat of the Nubian rebellion by Merenptah’s army as mentioned in the Nubian stelae of the king. This may explain why Messuy held the military title of “Overseer of the Army of the Viceroy”, as noted above. Furthermore, The Amada text and its parallels do not provide any specific details concerning the date or the locality in which the Nubian conflict took place, though the campaign was probably entrusted to the command of the Viceroy of Kush Messuy.⁸²

⁷⁶ E.F. MORRIS, *op. cit.*, p. 658.

⁷⁷ KRI IV, 9; C. MANASSA, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁷⁸ PM V, 247; W.M.F. PETRIE, *A Season in Egypt*, London, 1887, pl. 2, no. 70; J. DE MORGAN, U. BOURIANT, G. LEGRAND *et al.*, *Catalogue des Monuments et inscriptions de l'Égypte Antiqué I/1. De la frontière de Nubie à Kom Ombos*, Vienne, 1894, p. 18, no. 87; G.A. REISNER, “The Viceroys of Kush”, *JEA* 6, 1920, p. 47, no. 15a; L. HABACHI, “The Graffiti and Work of the Viceroys of Kush in the Region of Aswan”, *Kush* 5, 1957, p. 33, no. 34; KRI IV, 94; KRITA IV, 74.

⁷⁹ This military title of Messuy is registered on a jamb from Aniba, now in Pennsylvania University Museum (E 11362). See PM VII, 80; G. STEINDORFF, *Aniba II*, New York, 1937, p. 58, pl. 34, no. 6; S. ISKANDER, *The Reign of Merenptah*, p. 360; KRI IV, 96; KRITA IV, 76.

⁸⁰ T. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH, *Ägypten und Nubien*, Lund, 1941, p. 172-173; Cf. L. HABACHI, *op. cit.*, p. 33-34.

⁸¹ A.J. SPALINGER, *Aspects of the Military Documents of Ancient Egyptians*, New Haven, London, 1982, p. 13-14.

⁸² M. RAAFAT ABBAS, “Historical Observations on the Military Role of Three Ramesside Viceroys of Kush”, *ENiM* 11, 2018, p. 38.



Fig. 1. Merenptah besieges Ashkelon (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: Fr.J. Yurco, *JARCE* 23, 1986, fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Ashkelon scene of Merenptah (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte* II, Leipzig, 1935, pl. 58).

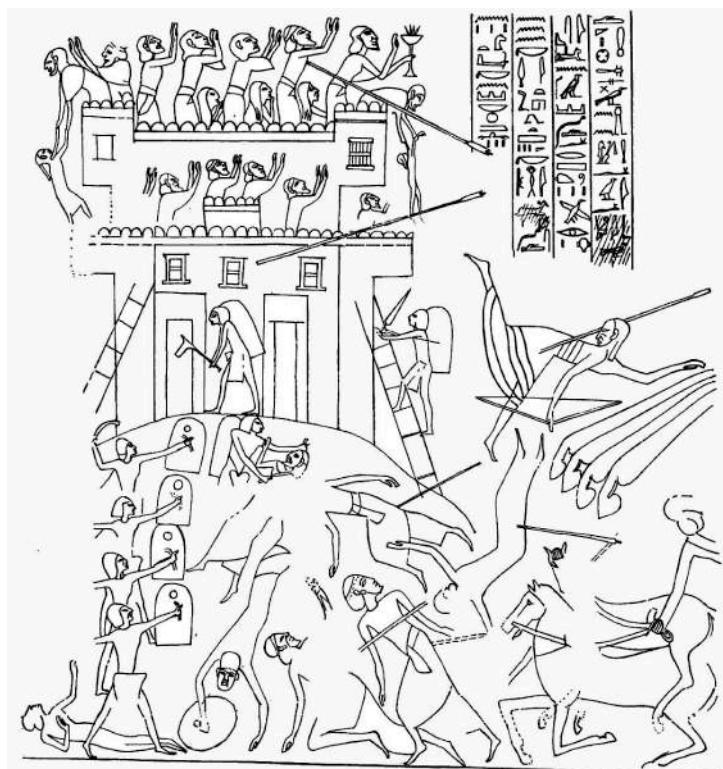


Fig. 3. Drawing of the Ashkelon scene of Merenptah (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, pl. 58).



Fig. 4. Merenptah besieges an unnamed town, probably Gezer (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: Fr.J. Yurco, *JARCE* 23, 1986, fig. 3).

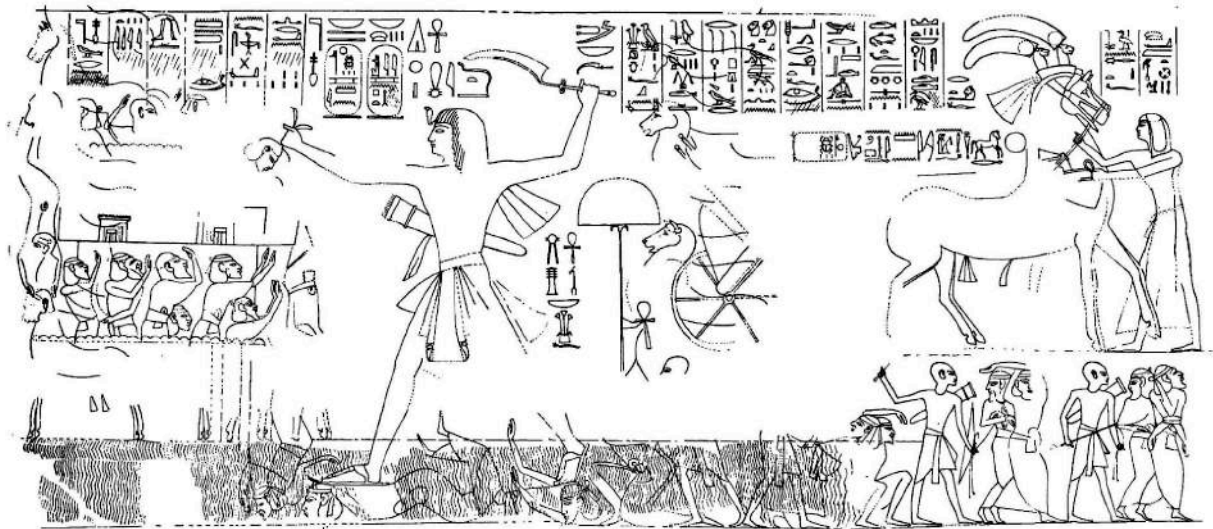


Fig. 5. Drawing of the scene depicting Merenptah besieges an unnamed town, probably Gezer (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte* II, Leipzig, 1935, pl. 57a).



Fig. 6. Merenptah besieges or attacks an unnamed town, probably Yenoam (upper register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, pl. 57).

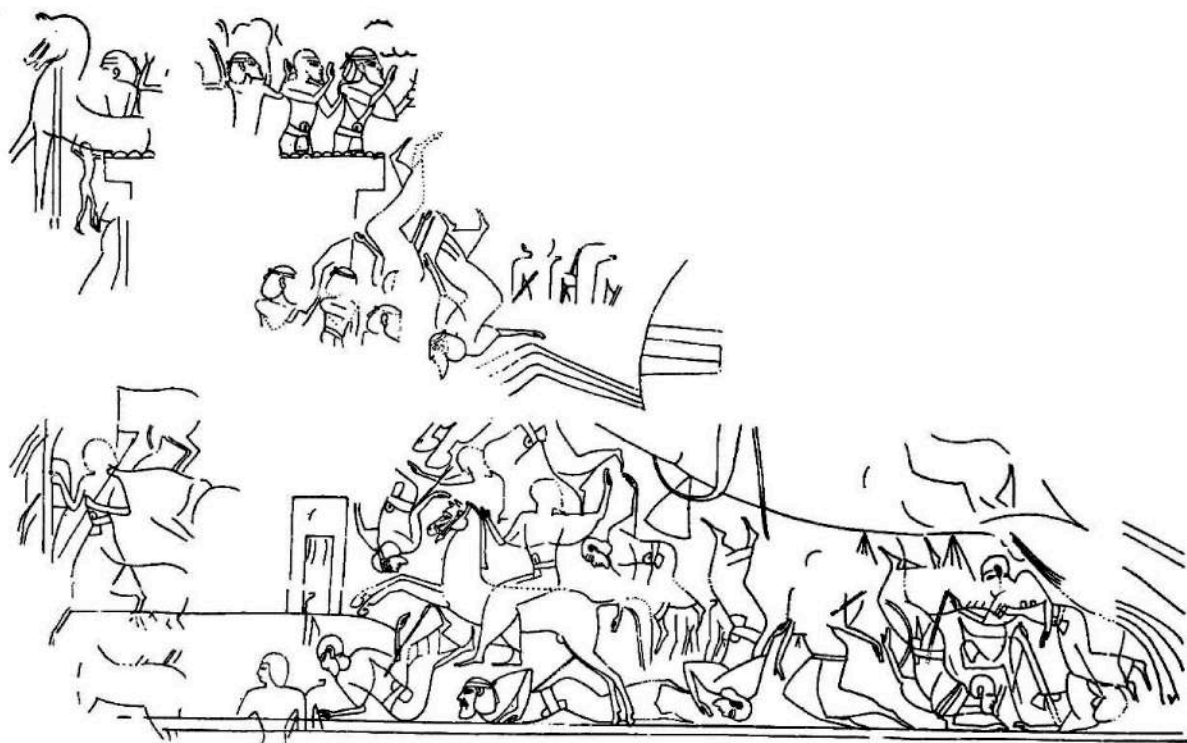


Fig. 7. Drawing of the scene depicting Merenptah besieges or attacks an unnamed town, probably Yenoam (upper register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, pl. 57).



Fig. 8. Merenptah attacks a mass of enemies, probably Israel (upper register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: Fr.J. Yurco, *JARCE* 23, 1986, fig. 5).



Fig. 9. Merenptah binds Shasu captives (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, fig. 6).



Fig. 10. Merenptah drives Shasu prisoners to Egypt (lower register of Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, fig. 8).



Fig. 11. Shasu and Canaanite prisoners of Merenptah (Merenptah's war scenes at Karnak: *ibid.*, fig. 9).



Fig. 12. The graffito of Viceroy Messuy (Aswan road to Philae: J. de Morgan, U. Bouriant, G. Legrain *et al.*, *Catalogue des Monuments et inscriptions de l'Égypte antique* I/I. *De la frontière de Nubie à Kom Ombos*, p. 18, no 87).