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Egyptian Campaigns in Jordan Revisited

Introduction

It is now a platitude to remark that archaeological field work in recent decades has changed our image of Bronze Age in Jordan. It is now clear that the Late Bronze Age witnessed the slow development of a semi-urban system which collapsed, giving way to the more numerous but smaller and more dispersed rural settlements of the early Iron Age (cf. e.g., Braemer 1992; McGovern 1987; Miller 1982). Even though it was a regional power, Egypt had virtually no role in these developments, except as one of several peripheral actors. Egyptian material has therefore provided an anecdotal background and some details for a chronological framework, but little more.

This is hardly surprising as the sources are limited, being (1) a text allegedly bearing Jordanian toponyms dating to the reign of Thutmosis III, and some potential Jordanian toponyms in a Late New Kingdom literary text; (2) the Amarna letters from Pella; (3) a stela naming Sei I found at Tall ash-Shihāb on the Yarmuk river in Jordan; (4) a text possibly mentioning a campaign in Transjordan under the reign of Ramesses II; (5) some Egyptian influenced architecture at Tall as-Sa'idiyyah and Pella; and (6) some isolated Egyptian artifacts including the box found at Pella, a broken commemorative scarab of Amenophis III of uncertain provenance; and a fragmentary vase bearing the cartouche of Tauseret from Tall Dayr 'Allā.

This seems to indicate some kind of Egyptian influence throughout the Late Bronze Age. It also seems to confirm an Egyptian presence in the region around Pella during Dynasty XVIII and Egyptian military activity in a few short decades at the beginning of Dynasty XIX, in the reigns of Sethos I and his son Ramesses II (ca. 1290 - 1265 BC). Egyptological interest in Jordan has primarily centered on the maximum exploitation of philological breakthroughs in texts possibly mentioning Transjordanian toponyms. Archaeological interest has concentrated on evidence of an Egyptian presence and/or influence in Transjordan, in terms of artifacts and architecture. The blending of the two approaches is difficult as the methods and goals are quite different. Egyptologists seek to confirm philological interpretations and archaeologists try to understand the significance of the rare Egyptian material found in Jordan.

When viewed from the historical standpoint however, this activity can be understood in terms of the overall policy of the Egyptian Empire. Egyptian material and interest in Jordan is foreign by definition, and foreign relations in the Bronze Age were either commercial or war-like. Egyptian commercial relations were primarily waterborne, following the Nile into an-Nūba and the Levantine coast to the north. This would necessarily eclipse Jordan. Egyptian military activity followed the same lines, except that it penetrated more deeply into the riparian lands along the Nile and into the hinterland of the Syrian coast. Egyptian presence in Asia beyond the Jordan and the Orontes can therefore be primarily explained in terms of its military conflict with the neighboring Mitanni and Hittite empires. This is particularly true of Egyptian material relating to Jordan, as Jordan lay well off the important trade routes of antiquity Egyptian interest in the region can thus hardly be assigned a significant commercial component, from the Egyptian standpoint.[1]

In a previous volume of this series, D. Redford discussed the character of Egyptian documentation and the possible itinerary mentioned in the lists of foreign toponyms dating to the reign of Thutmosis III (1479-1425

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[1] From an archaeological standpoint, the maximum extent of Egyptian military presence in Asia corresponds almost precisely to the distribution of Mycenean pottery in the Levant. In a previous volume of this series, Nicholaou suggested that the Myceneans were not concerned about the conflict between Egypt and Hatti (Nicholaou 1982), but the distribution of the pottery on his maps suggests a close connection between Egyptian influence and Mycenean pottery. This does not apply to Carchemish and Emar which lay on the very edge of the region reached by the Egyptians. Alalakh—and other Anatolian coastal regions—were probably never approached by an Egyptian army, but otherwise the distribution of Mycenean pottery does not reach deep into Hittite territory, which is quite curious, unless there was fundamental conflict between Hatti and the Myceneans, which matched the Egyptian conflict precisely.

BC, cf. Redford 1982a; 1982b). Redford's assumption that the lists represented trade routes rather than military itineraries can hardly de disputed.

In confirming the names of Aegean ports and political centers in the lists of toponyms from the reign of Amenophis III, Edel demonstrated that the Egyptians were familiar with trade routes well beyond their military reach (cf. Edel 1966). The general tone of the Amarna correspondence likewise confirms that the Egyptians were primarily concerned about the acquisition of goods from their "vassals" in Syria, and less with possible military advantages.

Present evidence does not indicate that the Egyptians campaigned in the region, and therefore the trade option must be preferred. It must however be conceded that extensive searching has failed to reveal any Late Bronze I pottery at several of Redford's postulated sites. This emphasizes that even if the toponyms are correctly identified, and the character of the itinerary correctly recognized, the alleged itinerary need not have been commercially active during Dynasty XVIII. The absence of Middle Bronze material at the sites suggests however that they cannot reflect earlier trade routes either since these sites cannot have lain on early second millennium trade routes either. Redford suggests that the sites without Late Bronze material may have been "camp-sites" (1982b: 73). This flies in the face of the evidence that trade was highly insecure during the Amarna period. By definition, therefore, trade routes would connect secure towns or fortifications, and thus the itineraries would have to identify secure places. It would be highly misleading and dangerous to establish itineraries which connected exposed sites.

This implies either (a) that the toponyms have not been correctly identified or (b) that the toponyms moved from one archaeological site to another. Redford suggested the latter, but either is possible and suggests that support be sought in a reexamination of the growing number of identified Late Bronze Age sites in Jordan. The arguments in favor of the identification of the individual sites and the character of the lists are familiar, and remain subject to dispute. In the absence of new field work, any argument employing this list of toponyms must remain speculative.[2]

Regardless of hypothetical reconstructions of trade routes or military outings, the Amarna letters from Pella are tangible evidence which cannot be disregarded (EA 255-256, Moran 1992: 308-310). They confirm that the city was clearly within the Egyptian zone of influence towards the end of Dynasty XVIII.

It is however improbable that the Egyptians gave much thought to Pella as it will hardly have had access to any goods which Egypt could not acquire commercially from elsewhere. The absence of a commercial motive could then suggest that military interests were decisive in this case. There is however no evidence of a campaign. It is however unnecessary to assume that either Egyptian campaigning or commercial interests in the region compelled Pella to join the empire. By the end of Dynasty XVIII, Egypt had become the dominant power in Palestine. Mitanni was being slowly eliminated by the Hittites, and during the reigns of Thutmosis IV, Amenophis III, and Akhenaten, Egyptian influence in Asia grew as vassals in the border region played the Egyptians, Mitanni and Hatti off against one another (cf. Murnane 1990; Izre'el and Singer 1990). Under these circumstances, a city such as Pella would have found itself outmaneuvered by its neighbors. Given its geographical position, Pella could hardly hope to join Amurru or Mitanni, yet its neighbors will all have been allied to the Egyptians. Unless it joined the Egyptian camp, Pella would be completely excluded from the international arena, and would thus have been obliged to seek Egyptian recognition or risk being isolated. Once within, Pella could offer security for diplomatic and communications along an alternative trade route. Mutual diplomatic interest can thus explain Pella's position without postulating an improbable campaign in the region.

The situation changed after the destruction of Mitanni however. At the end of Dynasty XVIII, the Hittites moved into the areas formerly held by Mitanni, and even established a common frontier with the Egyptians by annexing Amurru. This radical transformation is reflected in the stele put up by Seti I somewhere along the Yarmuk, and the reinforcement of the garrison at Beth Shan. The Egyptians were obliged to seriously consider establishing an armed border against a well armed foe. There had never been a clear cut border so much as a border buffer zone during the long conflict with Mitanni, Until the Hittites relieved the Egyptians of Amurru, the concept of an armed and fortified border was not familiar to them.

Seti I endeavored to establish a defensive line along easily defended boundaries, running along the upper Orontes, Litani, and Jordan rivers. The lower part of the stela found at Tall ash-Shihāb is unfortunately missing, and it is unknown exactly where the stela came from, but this is immaterial—except insofar as it furnishes infinite

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[2] The astute reader will also have noticed that Redford implicitly contradicts himself in claiming that the lists could not be a "roster of captured and destroyed towns" because the Egyptians allegedly could not have destroyed the cities in sieges (1982a: 117) while himself conceding that the Egyptians may have razed the cities after capture (1982a: 117). Archaeologically, the destruction levels remain; philologically, the names remain; and politically, the results are the same, regardless of when the destruction took place tactically, as long as it was carried out by the Egyptians. The real difficulty is being certain of assigning the results to the Egyptians, but there are not any other candidates. For a recent interpretation of the evidence and the debate concerning Middle Bronze Palestine, cf. Warburton 1997. Regardless of possible conquests in Palestine, it is unlikely that the Egyptians destroyed any cities in Late Bronze I Jordan.

material for speculation. The evidence available does however demonstrate that Seti I was refurbishing the Egyptian garrison at Beth Shan and securing northern Galilee against attacks. Whether a foray to Tall ash-Shihāb should be assigned to this period or to another could be debated.[3] Although it would be useful, it is not essential that the context of the Pharaoh's visit be known, for the campaign can be understood in terms of Seti I's foreign policy. Beth Shan lies on the Jordan and Tall ash-Shihāb lies on the Yarmuk. The motives for securing a frontier along the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers would correspond to Seti I's general policy of observing river borders, as his stelae at Kadesh on the Orontes and Tyre on the Litani demonstrate. Seti I was defining the limits of Egyptian hegemony in terms of modern geographical borders.

Ramesses II failed to appreciate the strategic vision of his father's policy, and endeavored to expand to the north of the borders so clearly defined by his father. At Kadesh, Ramesses proved unable to shove the Hittites further north, and was ultimately obliged to recognize Hittite sovereignty on the upper Orontes. Unable to move north in a strategic sense, Ramesses may have chosen the empty expanses to the south and east of Beth Shan as a less awesome alternative. His Transjordanian campaign would therefore have logically followed the defeat at Kadesh by a few years.

The campaign was directed against Moab, an entity which had not previously existed in this region.[4] While in itself interesting, the idea that unknown population groups were appearing on the borders of the empire is curious. The appearance of Moab in Transjordan adumbrated the appearance of the Arameans and the Sea Peoples on the fringes of the collapsing Bronze Age empires. Ramesses II's campaign into Transjordan can thus be understood as an operational necessity, the inevitable response to these newly emerging political entities which threatened to spill into Egyptian possessions. His measure may have been either pre-emptive, or a response to aggression

such as his father Seti I had faced at Beth Shan.

Kitchen (1964; 1982: 67-68) has suggested that a coordinated two pronged assault took the Egyptian army through Palestine and Moab simultaneously, and that the two reunited in Transjordan before heading north. Although Haider (1987) has thrown doubt on this, Desroches Noblecourt (1996) has accepted it.

Darnell and Jansow (1993) have actually strengthened the case with their reconstruction of parts of the scene not visible to Kitchen. They have suggested that the traces can be understood as confirming that Ramesses gave orders to the Crown Prince, and thus implying a separate detachment, which would form the corps of the army proceeding northwards through Transjordan. They also suggest that the motivation for the Moabite campaign would have been a Moabite alliance with the Hitties. Kitchen's reconstruction would thus appear to be largely possible, although the unification of the two corps may have taken place further north, perhaps not far from Beth Shan.

Although Darnell and Jasnow maintain that the scenes at Luxor do not provide any chronological fixpoints, this is not completely accurate. On the one hand—given the refernces to vile Hittites—the scenes must have preceded the peace treaty of 1258 BC, and on the other, it is generally agreed that they followed the battle of Kadesh in 1274. Since one of the war steeds used by Ramesses bears the same name as one at the battle of Kadesh (Kitchen 1964: 55), the scenes evidently date to a period not far removed from that famous battle.[5]

While giving the campaign a chronologically precise position is probably not possible, dating an Egyptian campaign in Transjordan against Moabite enemies allied with the Hittites to just before the peace treaty is extremely important. It should be evident that any Hittite attempt to unite with the Moabites would have been designed as a flanking maneuver exclusively intended to threaten the Egyptian empire. There could have been no other mutual interest in such a measure. This would in turn suggest

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3 It is commonly assumed that the registers of military scenes in the decorative programs of Ramesses II and Seti I at Karnak and Luxor are organized according to both geographical regions chronological years. It is however conceivable that events of several different years in one geographical region could have been incorporated into one register, and therefore that the events depicted were not all related by a single campaign.

4 Haider has suggested that the most significant detail of this campaign is the reference to the toponym Moab. Although the present writer would dispute this, the point is interesting. This is by far the earliest reference to an entity termed Moab, and is reminiscent of the reference to "Israel no longer existing" on Merneptah's Israel Stele, at a time when the familiar "Israel" had still not come into existence—let alone disappeared—according to conventional reconstructions of the Bible compatible with Egyptian sources.
   The fact that the Hebrews allegedly worked at Piramesse demonstrates that this must have followed Ramesses II's accession to the Egyptian throne, for the city can hardly predate him. Placing the exodus during or after his reign would leave precious little time for the conquest to have been so complete that a political entity

could have been familiar enough to have been allegedly extinguished by Merneptah's Year 5. Placing the exodus at the end of the reign of Merneptah would itself exclude the possibility of any entity similar to the later "Israel" having existed before then, as the Biblical account suggests a revolutionary move. Thus, the "Israel" dating to the reign of Merneptah cannot be related to the "Israel" existing several hundred years later –except by name.
   The existence of Late Bronze Age entitites bearing names later associated with Iron Age political and geographical entities (which were unknown during the earlier part of the Bronze Age) suggests that the name Moab should be associated with the Late Bronze Age population movements which eventually led to the appearance of the Aramean kingdoms.

5 Since at least one of the others named is not known (Kitchen 1964: 62), it could equally compellingly be argued that the campaign dates to the second decade of the reign, as this would provide leeway for overlap. It could also be argued that this implies that several campaigns and thus several years are integrated into the scenes.

that this campaign effectively terminated Hittite hopes of expansion, and may thus have been the counterpart to the stalemate ensuing from the failure of the Egyptians to expand northwards of Kadesh. The campaign would thus have defined the boundaries of the respective spheres of influence and led to the peace treaty.

In the short term, the Egyptian Empire was secured for another century. By the time the newly emerging peoples had consolidated their positions enough to threaten the Egyptians, the Hittite menace had been removed. In the long term however the Egyptians were unable to hold off the incursions from abroad.

This is not however the final evidence of Egyptian presence east of the Jordan. The apparently Egyptian architecture at Tall as-Sa'idiyyah is the mirror image of that at Pella. The "residence" at Pella preceded the appearance of Egyptian military activity in Transjordan, and the "residence" at Tall as-Sa'idiyyah followed the last Egyptian military intervention in the region.[6]

When the residence at Pella was built, Mitanni was effectively allied with Egypt and defending itself against the Hittites, and therefore the "residence" cannot represent a significant reflection of military threats. When the residence at Tall as-Sa'idiyyah was built, the Hittite threat had been eliminated, as (a) the campaigns of Seti I and Ramesses II held off the Hittites, (b) the peace treaty with Hatti eliminated conflict and (c) the Syrian campaigns of Tukulti-Ninurta I effectively ended Hittite activity in the region. During the Bronze Age the Egyptians never came to appreciate the significance of the Assyrian threat, and therefore an Egyptian presence at Late Bronze Tall as-Sa'idiyyah cannot be explained in terms of Egyptian military strength. There is also no evidence of Egyptian concern for the region, except for the incursions of Ramesses II. After that, the Egyptians were too concerned with securing their own borders and the coasts of Palestine to worry about irrelevant events beyond the Jordan.

It certainly cannot be contended that Egyptian architecture suggests Egyptian control, and the cases of both Pella and Tall as-Sa'idiyyah should be understood in terms of emulation or aspiration rather than reflecting Egyptian hegemony.

Egyptian military interest in the region beyond the Jordan was restricted to the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses II, when the Hittite empire was attempting to expand at the expense of the Egyptians.

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[6] Based on archaeological finds and philological sources Egyptian governors' "residencies" have been identified at a number of sites in Asia. Aside from Pella and Tall as-Sa'idiyyah, I have noted: Aphek (AKA Ras el-Ain), Tel Sera (AKA Tell esh-Sheria), Beth Shan, Tell Fara South, Ashdod-Yom (AKA Tell Mor, Tell Khedar), Deir Balah, Taanach, Gaza, Megiddo, Tel Halif (AKA Lahav, Tell Khuweilifah), Tell el-Hesi, Tel Masos (AKA Khirbet Meshash), and Tell Jemmah, Tell Batashi and Lachish (AKA Tell ed-Duweir). Certainly, Sumur (Tell Kazel?), and Kumidi (Tell Kamid el-Loz?) should be added to the list, making at least 18 sites for three governors!

Two published lists (using the Hebrew names, Oren 1984; and Arabic names, Weippert 1988: 272) are neither identical nor complete. While both lists include structures that are not convincingly Egyptian, the residency at Tell Halif is strangely missing from both, although one of the few buildings with convincingly Egyptian architecture (cf. Seger and Borowski 1993). It also dates to Late Bronze Ib, while the others are Ramesside Late Bronze II.

Some "residences" are defined by arhcitecture, and some by finds. Based on finds, rather than architecture, the buildings at Aphek, Deir el-Balah and Tel Sera would appear to have a reasonable claim to being Egyptian. Based on architecture, those at Fara South, Halif and Beth Shan would qualify. There are too many and the "typically" Egyptian architecture far from typical, yet textual finds indicate that there is a discrepancy between the three commissioners one would expect and their activities, such as the letters found at Aphek (where the architecture is not typically Egyptian) and Tanaach. It would be reasonable to suggest that Egyptian officials were lodged at Tell Fara (as Gaza, an Egyptian political center) and Beth Shan (as an Egyptian military center), and that the rabisu-commissioner at Fara was comparable to his analogues at Sumura and Kumidi, while the military official at Beth Shan will have had different local contacts and different responsibilities. The political *rabisu* will have been responsible for commercial activity, and have had the highest responsibility, being directly accountable to Pharaoh. Military officials will probably have reported to the *rabisu*, but they may have lived in houses with the same architecture, and there may have been several of them, depending upon the prevailing situation. At present, it can only be stated that there are too many residences for too few officials. It is possible that some "residences" were left vacant except when the officials appeared, and it is possible that some of the "vassals" chose to erect Egyptian-style residences for themselves, and it is possible that both Syrian and Egyptian merchants erected such buildings for themselves. As always, only further excavation can enhance understanding.

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