



An Archaic Egyptian "Serekh" from Tel Ma'ahaz

Author(s): ALAN SCHULMAN and RAM GOPHNA

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ALAN SCHULMAN

and

RAM GOPHNA

Queens College, City
University of New York

Tel Aviv University

DURING the survey at Tel Ma'aḥaz carried out by R. Gophna in 1969, some years before the excavations in 1975–1976,¹ a sherd bearing an incision made before firing was picked up on the surface (Fig. 1; Pl. 28:A). Its maximum dimensions are 7 × 4 cm., its maximum thickness is 1.2 cm. and it comes from the body of a hand-made Egyptian jar, the clay of which is well levigated and fired. The surface of the jar originally had a whitish slip and was highly burnished, but has now lost much of its lustre. The sherd, clearly the Egyptian ware characteristic of the Archaic period (Dynasties O–III), preserves the traces of what was unmistakably a *serekh*. The royal name which it would have contained, however, was lost and all that remains of the *serekh* itself is its lower right corner, consisting of the base, the right outer wall and, to the left of this just before the break, a miniscule part of one of the vertical lines which delineated the façade beneath the name compartment. Below the base is a pair of parallel horizontal lines, the right ends of which hook downwards sharply to the left.

A similar incised *serekh* was found on a sherd of Egyptian pottery from Tel 'Erany (No. D60/296/27).² Here, however, it was the lower left corner which was preserved, with no trace of the vertical façade and only a single horizontal line beneath the base. Yeivin suggested that the traces might be related to the title of an official of Wedimu,³ but this is doubtful.

We assume that the Tel Ma'aḥaz inscription, when intact, contained a *serekh*, with or without a falcon perched on its roof, and at least two long horizontal lines beneath it. Only a few possible parallels for this arrangement are attested. In the corpus of Archaic period inscriptions only two inscriptions, on a pair of cylindrical jars from Petrie's excavations at Tarkhan, have this suggested arrangement.⁴ Kaplony's infra-red

¹ Notes and News, *IEJ* 25 (1975), p. 162; Ruth Amiran: Excavations at Tel Ma'aḥaz 1975, 1976, *Israel Museum News* 12 (1977), pp. 63–64. The Department of Antiquities Inventory No. of the sherd under discussion here is 81–193.

² S. Yeivin: Further Evidence of Narmer at 'Gat', *Oriens Antiquus* 2 (1963), p. 212, Fig. 3, Pl. XXXIX.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ P. Kaplony: *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit*, III, Wiesbaden, 1963, Pls. 1–2; W.M.F. Petrie: *Tarkhan I and Memphis V*, London, 1913, Pl. XXXI:66; idem, *Tarkhan II*, London, 1914, Pl. IX:3.

photographic plates, which show much more than Petrie's facsimile line drawings where the name is not clear, assure the reading of the name as that of the ephemeral King Scorpion. Two additional inscriptions from Tarkhan, though not illustrated in Kaplony, also conform to the presumed arrangement of *serekh* plus horizontal lines beneath it.⁵ Petrie identified the first of these as 'probably of Narmer' and tentatively assigned the second, the name of which is illegible, to Narmer because the hieratic signs behind the *serekh* were similar to those behind the first *serekh*. However, while the name in the first *serekh* does look somewhat like Narmer, it may read differently, for the sign read *mr* really does not look like the *mr*-chisel, chiefly because of the horizontal line which curves to the right from its base. It does not take too much imagination to see the two signs as actually only one, that of a scorpion, with the middle portion of its body missing. If this is the case, there are three possible extant parallels which bear the name 'Scorpion', or four if the fourth inscription from Tarkhan is also accepted.

One other Tarkhan inscription⁶ should be mentioned here, for although it has only one sign beneath the *serekh* (which contains Narmer's name), this sign, the right end of which terminates in a downwards-curving hook, closely resembles the horizontal signs beneath the base of the Ma'aḥaz *serekh*. Here the sign is clearly a *mr*-hoe.

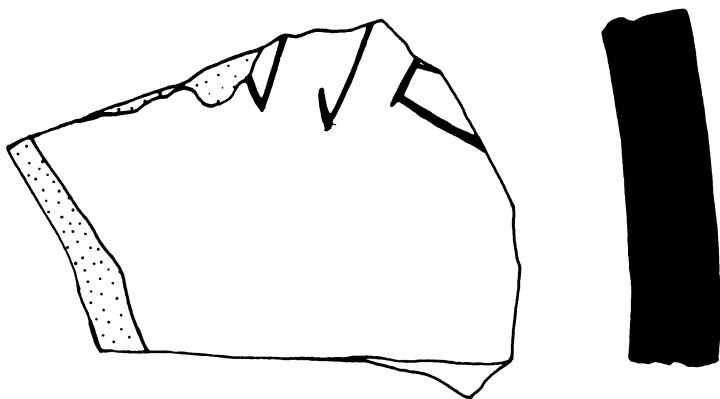


Fig. 1. The sherd, scale 1:1.

There are, of course, radical differences between the *serekhs* from Tarkhan and that on the Tel Ma'aḥaz sherd. All of the former are hieratic rather than hieroglyphic and are painted with ink, while the latter's inscription is incised. Four of the Tarkhan *serekhs* have no façade beneath the name chamber, and in three cases there are three, rather than two, horizontal lines below. Moreover, the ends of these do not terminate in the

⁵ Idem (above, n. 4), *Tarkhan I and Memphis V*, Pl. XXXI:69–70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Pl. XXXI:68.

hooks of the Ma'ahaz sherd. The lack of the façades is of no significance in the comparison of the *serekhs* and the various renderings of the ends of the horizontal lines may be due to the different media used to produce them. In fact, the Ma'ahaz sherd may have had a third horizontal line, lost when the jar was broken; only its hooked end would have been preserved on the sherd, and there is a pit on the surface at exactly that point, where we might otherwise expect to find such a trace.

In view of the foregoing, and it must be stressed that this is no more than a plausible but highly speculative guess, we may assign the *serekh* on purely stylistic, epigraphic and paleographic Egyptological grounds to the reign of Scorpion. It is beyond the scope of this note to go into the vexed problem of the identity of Scorpion, other than to point out that if he was a separate king, he immediately preceded Narmer.⁷ If, on the other hand, he actually was Narmer, the date of the Ma'ahaz sherd would still be the end of Dynasty O — beginning of Dynasty I. Furthermore, if Yeivin is correct in his identification of the name incised on a second sherd from Tel 'Erany,⁸ then at least one other *serekh* of Scorpion has been found in Israel. If Scorpion was Narmer, two more examples may be added, one from Arad⁹ and one from Tel 'Erany.¹⁰ The existence at Tel Ma'ahaz of an Egyptian jar bearing a possible *serekh* of either King Scorpion or Narmer may help to date at least part of the rich Egyptian material from this site to the very beginning of the First Dynasty, i.e. the end of EB I in Palestinian terms. This find adds Tel Ma'ahaz to the list of those EB sites in southern Canaan which have already contributed significant evidence about the intensive relations which existed between Egypt and Canaan during this early phase of Egyptian history.

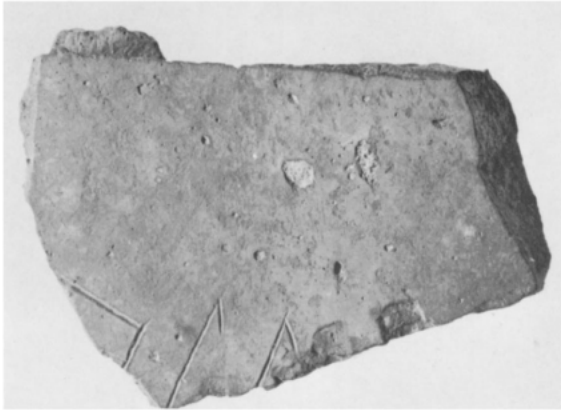
⁷ For the most recent discussions of this problem, see P. Kaplony: Eine Schminkpalette von König Skorpion aus Abu 'Umuri, *Orientalia* 34 (1965), pp. 132–157; W. Needler: A Rock-drawing on Gebel Sheikh Suliman (near Wadi Halfa) showing a Scorpion and Human Figures, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 6 (1967), pp. 87–91.

⁸ S. Yeivin: Additional Notes on the Early Relations between Canaan and Egypt, *JNES* 27 (1968), p. 41, Fig. 3, Pl. I:A–B.

⁹ Ruth Amiran: An Egyptian Jar Fragment with the Name of Narmer from Arad, *IEJ* 24 (1974), p. 5, Fig. 1:1, Pl. 1.

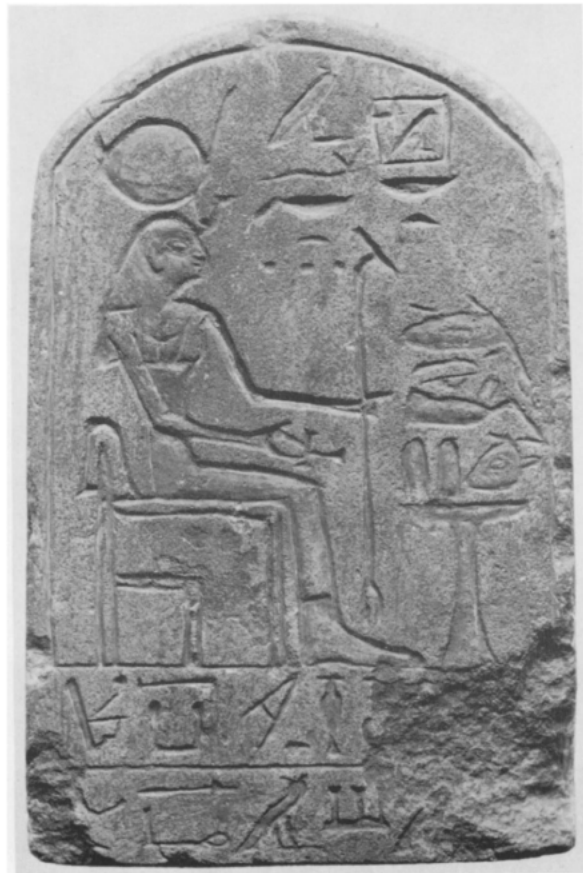
¹⁰ S. Yeivin: Early Contacts between Canaan and Egypt, *IEJ* 10 (1960), p. 195, Fig. 2, Pl. 24:A.

PLATE 28



A: The sherd with the *serekh*.

ARCHAIC *SEREKH* FROM TEL MA'AHAZ



B: The stela.

NEW KINGDOM STELA FROM SINAI