


Israel in Merenptah's Inscription and Reliefs*

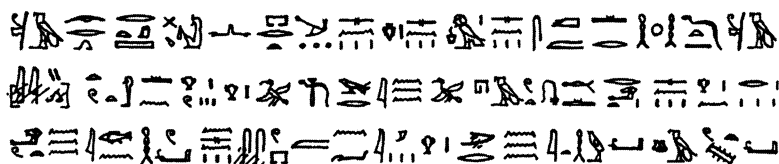
ANSON F. RAINEY
Tel Aviv University

IN the ongoing debate about the origins of ancient Israel, the victory poem of Merenptah's stele and the newly identified Merenptah reliefs at Karnak have assumed a central role. This essay deals with the crucial points in this discussion, working with the original texts and with recently presented data of an archaeological and ethnographic nature (mainly the work of Evelyn van der Steen, see below).

'HIS SEED IS NOT'

M. Hasel has recently raised anew the issue of how to interpret the reference to 'Israel' in the Merenptah Stele. His contention is that the expression there, , *Ya-sir²-l fkt, bn prt.f*, means 'Israel is laid waste, his grain is not'.¹ To bolster his contention about the meaning of *prt* 'seed', 'fruit', 'grain' in this context, Hasel has brought a number of citations from the inscriptions of Ramesses III, evidently taken from Breasted.² These citations, however, do not really support Hasel's contention that *prt* should be rendered 'grain', and not 'seed', 'fruit' (= progeny).

This is especially true with regard to the first example, which refers to the Sea People invaders being defeated by Ramesses III. An examination of the context makes this clear:



*n3 spr r t3š.ī nn prt.sn, ib.sn b3.sn skm r nhḥ dt; n3 ū twt n ḥr.w ḥr p3 w3d-wr p3
h3wt mh r ḥ3t.sn ḥr n rw ḥ3t mw inh n.sn ssw m niw ḥr mrit ḥw g3w*

* I would like to thank Frank Yurco and Larry E. Stager for permission to publish the illustrations. Figs. 1, 4, 6 and 7 are courtesy of F. Yurco; Figs. 2 and 3 are after W. Wreszinski: *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, Leipzig, I-III, 1923-1936 (reproduced in Yurco [below, n. 51, 1990]); and Fig. 5 is courtesy of L.E. Stager.

1 M.G. Hasel: *Israel in the Merenptah Stele*, *BASOR* 296 (1994), pp. 45-61, esp. p. 48, Fig. 1.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 49; *idem*, *Domination & Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, 1300-1185 BC*, Leiden — Boston — Cologne, 1998, pp. 78-80; J.H. Breasted: *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Chicago, 1906, III, p. 258.

‘The ones who reached my border, their seed is not, their heart and their soul are finished for ever more; as for the ones who came and assembled in front of them on the sea, the complete flame was before them before the harbor mouths and a stockade of spears on the shore hemmed them in’.³

It is clear that the invaders are trying to penetrate into Egypt. Ramesses III is not ravaging their territory; they are hoping to ravage his! Consequently, there can be no thought here of agricultural produce. Furthermore, the complete context shows that personal annihilation is being depicted: ‘their heart and their soul are finished’.

Another one of these passages is the enigmatic reference to the ruler of Amurru, which appears among the introductory remarks of Ramesses III’s description of his first war against the Libyans. It has nothing to do directly with the Libyan war; it is part of the preliminary paragraphs and is sandwiched between passages that exalt the prowess of the Pharaoh. Scholars have long known that this 75-line inscription contains material from the eighth regnal year, although its opening date is the fifth year.⁴ Thus, the Amurru allusion is not chronologically fixed. It only depicts a defeat of the leader of that country, and there is no mention of the destruction of lands or crops. In other words, there is no reason to expect a reference to grain.



*pnⁿA-ma-[r] m ssfy nn prt.fh³q rmt.fnb hnr da-ra-^ca spy nb m t³fiw m i³w r gmḥ
p³R^c ^c3 n Kmt hr.sn*

‘While the one of Amor (Amurru) is ashes, his seed is not, all his people are captured, the forces are scattered; every survivor from his land comes with praises to behold the great Sun of Egypt above them’.⁵

In the text above there is also a play on a West-Semitic word, *da-ra-^ca*. The determinative indicates that *zarâ^ca or zorô^ca (< ḏirâ^c) ‘arm’ is meant and used metaphorically as ‘help’ or ‘forces’. For this usage, cf., e.g., Job. 22:8; 35:9; 38:15; and Psalms 83:9; Jer. 17:5; 2 Chron. 32:8; and Arad letter No. 88:2, ⁿmṣ . zr^c =

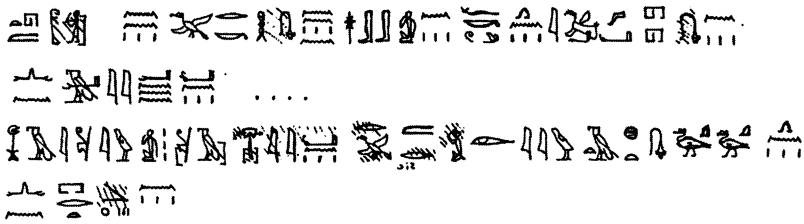
3 K.A. Kitchen: *Ramesside Inscriptions*, V, Oxford, 1989, pp. 40:15–41:1 (henceforth: *KRI V*); W.F. Edgerton and J.A. Wilson: *Historical Records of Ramses III, the Texts in Medinet Habu, Volumes I and II*, Chicago, 1936, p. 55 (henceforth: Edgerton and Wilson); J.A. Wilson: *Egyptian Historical Texts*, in *ANET*, pp. 260–264, esp. pp. 262b–263a; Breasted (above, n. 2), V, p. 39 §66.

4 Edgerton and Wilson, p. 19.

5 *KRI V*, p. 21:13–15; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 22. The emphasis in this and subsequent citations is mine — A.F.R.

'ammeš z'rôa' 'Take strength!'.⁶ The use of the verb *hnr* 'to scatter', 'disperse' could certainly apply to 'seed', but we have here a typical play on words by an Egyptian scribe who knows some West Semitic. Note the similar idiom *hnr h'w.sn r w3d wr* 'their weapons scattered on the sea'.⁷ Hoch accepted the view that *da-ra-^ca* was a stative form of a verb from the Semitic root *ŠR'. In our translation it is taken as the subject of a passive circumstantial *sdm.f*, like the preceding verb, *h3q*, and is thus parallel to *rmt.f nb* 'all his people'.⁸

The following text also favours a rendering of 'seed', 'fruit' as progeny. It has nothing to do with grain. Defeated and dismayed, Libyan enemies are crying out:

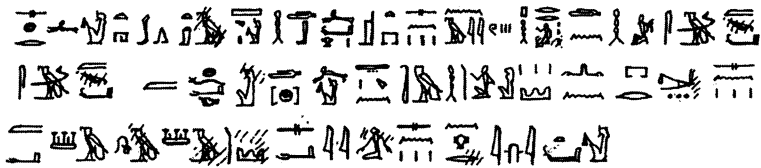


thm n.n p3 rqh nn n 3bb.n fkw.n it3 hh.n nn 3'y.n ... h3iniw n'3¹ sty.n r p3 mt(!)
iryw t3 ht 'q'q.n nn prt.n

'Our own fire of our desire attacks us, we are desolated, taken away is our fiery breath, **our strength (potency) is not** ... foolish are the hurlings of us to death(!), which make the fire that we entered, **our seed is not**'.⁹

There is no destruction of crops here. The fire which has consumed the enemies and driven them to death is of their own making. They have tried to invade Egypt. Therefore, *nn prt.n* (line 14) should mean 'our seed (progeny) is not', just like *nn 3'y.n* 'our strength is not' (line 11). Hasel has postulated a context of ravaging the enemy's agricultural supplies, but there is nothing to support this in this context.

The same holds true for the next passage, which is a speech of Ramesses III as he stands before Amon to present him the spoils of the Libyan war:



6 Y. Aharoni: *Arad Inscriptions*, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 103.

7 KRI V, p. 32:10; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 41.

8 J.E. Hoch: *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, Princeton, 1994, pp. 392-393.

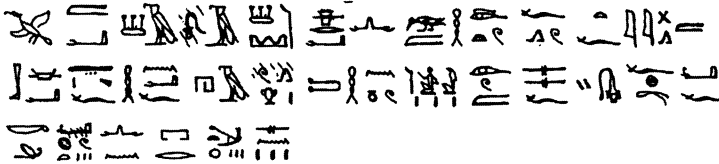
9 KRI V, p. 24:10-14; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 29. Note that Hasel has made some errors while copying the hieroglyphs.

šḫr.i th3 t3š.i ḥdb ḫr st.sn n3y.w pḫrrw dnḫ sm3 m ḥf.i d[h].i t3 n Tmḫ nn prt.sn
Ma-ša-wa-ša s'y sn n ḫryt.i

'I have thrown down the transgressors of my border, prostrate in their places, their runners pinioned and slaughtered in my grasp; I have overthrown the land of Temḫ, their seed is not; as for the Mashawasha, they are in travail in terror of me.'¹⁰

There is no mention of the ravaging of a territory or of the destruction of crops. In light of the passages discussed above, in a context such as this — where transgressors are thrown down, pinned to the ground and slaughtered and one enemy is said to be in birth travail (a not unfamiliar expression with reference to people terrified of war, Exod. 15:14 *et al.*) — the expression *nn prt.sn* obviously means that they have been reduced to a state of hopelessness regarding any future offspring.

The following passage pertains to the towns of the Teḫenu, a peaceful people who happened to be in the way of the invading Mashawasha. The latter fell upon them and destroyed them *en route* to Egypt.



p3 Ma-ša-wa-ša dr.c n gmḫ.tw.fiw tfy m-bw-wc t3.fhn.c fh3w ḫr Tḫnw irw m ssfy fh
fk niwt.w nn prt.sn

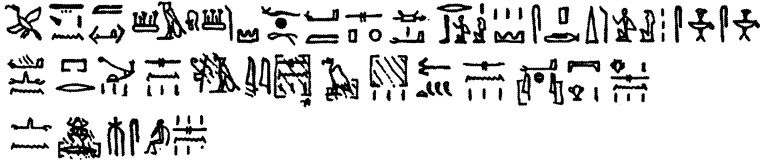
'The Mashawasha, before he was observed, had come, having moved out all at once, his land with him, and he had attacked the Teḫenu who were reduced to ashes, devastated and desolated were their towns, **their seed was not**'.¹¹

There is a reference here to the total destruction of the hapless Teḫenu who stood in the way of the oncoming Mashawasha. The picture of complete devastation is not commensurate with the plundering of crops. The Mashawasha were on their way towards the delta because of the drought and famine conditions on the North African coast. It seems unlikely, therefore, that they would have destroyed grain crops: they would have been more likely to have eaten them! So the expression *nn prt.sn* is hardly appropriate for the destruction of grain. It is more suitable for the annihilation of the human population, thus: 'Their seed (progeny) is not'. The passage is therefore in line with all those discussed above.

10 KRI V, p. 20:1-3; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 18.

11 KRI V, p. 60:6-8; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 76.

One more Medinet Habu passage was copied by Hasel from Breasted. However, when we take the whole context into consideration, it gives a perfect definition of *nn prt.sn* in these texts:

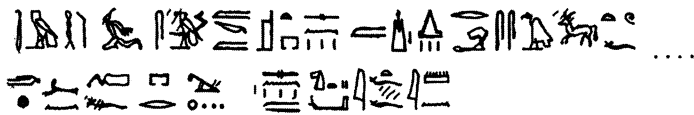


*p3 t3 n M<a>-ša-wa-ša fh m sp w^c Re-bw Spd sksk nn prt.sn n3y.[sn] 'mwt¹
hnrt.sn 'h'y¹ hr ib.sn nn hpr msw.sn ...*

'The land of M<a>shawasha is devastated at one time, the Libyans (and) the Seped are destroyed, their seed is not, their 'mothers', their harem women, being suspended in their midst **so that their children do not come into being ...**'.¹²

It should be noted that this is not a passage about the devastation of the enemies' territory: the conflict took place not in the land of the Mashawasha, but in the western delta of Egypt. The expression 'the land of' here refers back to the earlier expression in the previous passage, *t3.fhn^c.f* 'his land being with him', i.e. his entire population had accompanied him. This serves to underline the motivation for invading Egypt. These enemies wanted to find land where they could maintain their livelihood. They were obviously driven by hunger, like the Sea Peoples in the campaign of the eighth year. But the continuation of the present passage is even more telling: the expression *nn prt.sn* 'their seed is not' is elaborated on in the subsequent clause. Their women are also captured and 'hung', so that no children can come into being. In other words, the enemy will no longer produce offspring!

The word *prt* is used as an agricultural simile, but in the sense of destroying human beings, not grain:



Ta-m-ḥ sm3 m st.sn m iwni r h3^ct ssmwt.f ... dh.n hpš.f prt.sn m phty it.f²Imn

'Temeḥ are slain in their places in heaps before his (Ramesses's) horses ... his (Ramesses's) arm has laid low their seed through the strength of his father Amon'.¹³

12 KRI V, p. 65:7-8; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 84.


13 KRI V, p. 14:5-6; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 11.

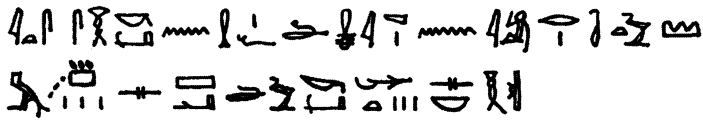
To these passages we may also add the observation that in Ramesside Egyptian, other words are used instead of *prr* to refer to ‘grain’, namely *it*, *m̄m*, *npr*, *nfr*, *sšr*.¹⁴ A fine illustration comes from the Medinet Habu texts, when the vanquished enemies of Ramesses III proclaim:



irrw.n m qnit mi ish nfr

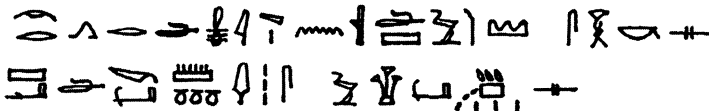
‘We are made into sheaves like the mowing down of (ripe) grain’.¹⁵

Hasel refers to two passages in the Annals of Thutmose III, but quotes only Wilson’s translation and not the original.¹⁶ Wilson uses the word ‘grain’ in both places, but if we check the hieroglyphic edition of Sethe,¹⁷ we find that the text has ,¹⁸ which is usually to be read *it* ‘barley’, *bty* ‘emmer’, or perhaps *sšr* ‘wheat’.



ist sk.n hm.f dmi n' A-ar-tá-tw m it.s š'dw ht.s nb ndm

‘Now his majesty destroyed the town of Ardatu with its **barley** after all its pleasant trees were cut down’.¹⁹



spr r dmi . Qd-šu sk.s š'd mnw.s wh3 it.s

‘Arrival at the town of Qidšu; its destruction; felling its trees; cutting down its **barley**’.²⁰

These two passages describe the ravaging of towns in Canaan: Ardata near the coast and Qedesh (not Qadesh²¹) on the Orontes. Although the contexts clearly

14 Cf. L.H. Lesko: *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, V, Berkeley, 1990, p. 42.

15 KRI V, p. 64:10; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 83.

16 Wilson (above, n. 3), p. 239a.

17 K. Sethe: *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie* (ed. G. Steindorf) (*Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums IV*), Leipzig, 1927, pp. 687, 689.

18 A.H. Gardiner: *Egyptian Grammar* (2nd ed.), London, 1950, p. 517:U10.

19 Sethe (above, n. 17), p. 687:5-7.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 689:7-10.

21 A.F. Rainey: Reflections on the Battle of Qedesh, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 5 (1971), pp. 280-282.

indicate the destruction of the towns' agricultural crops and produce, they do not refer to *pṛt*. In short, those military contexts are not at all similar to the rhetorical descriptions of the annihilation of enemy troops and civilians in the inscriptions of Ramesses III.

Now we must turn to the Merenptah inscription itself. Scholars have long since observed that the passage in the Merenptah stele pertaining to the cities in Canaan and to the people of Israel is formulated as a poem. Hasel has arrived at the same arrangement of the lines as that published by me somewhat earlier.²² That arrangement is presented here:

The Great Ones are prostrate, saying 'Peace' (*ša-la-ma*);
 Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows;
 Plundered is Theḥenu, Khatti is at Peace;
 Canaan is plundered with every evil;
 Ashkelon (𐎛𐎍) is conquered;
 Gezer (𐎁𐎍) is seized;
 Yano'am (𐎊𐎏𐎎) is made non-existent;
 Israel (𐎃𐎍) is laid waste, his seed is no more;
 Kharu has become a widow because of Egypt;
 All lands together are at peace;
 Any who roamed have been subdued;²³

Contrary to Hasel, the pair Canaan/Kharu is not 'Syria-Palestine'. Canaan and Kharu are pure synonyms in Ramesside inscriptions. The evidence for Kharu (or Khurru) is thoroughly discussed by Gardiner²⁴ and is well known to those concerned with historical geography of the Late Bronze Age. It should suffice here to mention Papyrus Anastasi III, 1:9–10, where a high official is described as the king's envoy to *ḥswt n Ḥa-rú ššꜥ m Ši-lú r 'U-pa* 'The lands of Kharu starting from Sillô to 'Ôpa'. The ambassador was accredited to the city states of the territory from the border of Egypt in western Sinai to the Damascus region ('Ôpa). When we add to this the fact that Wenamon (2:39) was in Kharu during his stay at Byblos, we get a territory that included Palestine, the Damascus region and the Phoenician coast.²⁵ This corresponds perfectly to the correct understanding of Canaan in all Late Bronze sources and all Biblical texts, as well as inscriptions from the Roman


22 Hasel (above, n. 1), p. 48, Fig. 1, pp. 50–51; A.F. Rainey: Anson F. Rainey Replies, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18 (March–April 1992), pp. 73–74.

23 Merenptah Stele, lines 26–28; *KRI IV*, p. 19:1–9.

24 A.H. Gardiner: *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, London, 1947, I, pp. 180*–187*.

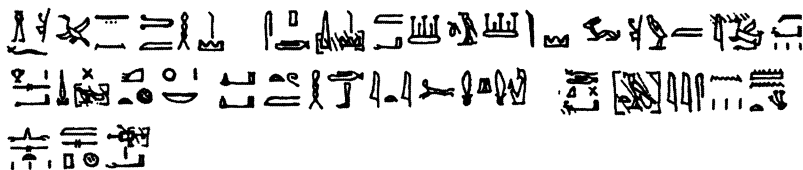
25 *Idem*, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, Brussels, 1932, pp. 70:16–71:1; Wilson, in *ANET*, p. 28a.

period,²⁶ as should be evident to anybody properly trained in the interpretation of these texts. Therefore, Canaan corresponds in the Merenptah poem to Kharu, both of them referring to the geographical entity controlled for most of the Late Bronze Age by Egypt.²⁷

As for the statement concerning Israel in the Merenptah inscription, the clause  'His seed is not'²⁸ could be a circumstantial clause explaining the stative *fk̄t* 'is desolated', like the passages with classical Egyptian *nn* in the Medinet Habu inscriptions discussed above (*nn* can introduce an independent or a circumstantial clause in Middle Egyptian). But if we follow the rules of Late Egyptian, *bn* would introduce an independent clause; in this case it would be a parallel statement to the previous clause. The verb *fk̄t* is not associated with the destruction of agricultural products; it is used in various contexts to signify complete destruction or ruin. There is nothing in the Merenptah context to suggest that the destruction of 'grain' is intended. We have noted above that *prt* is not the term used in military contexts to refer to the destruction or confiscation of grain. Therefore, it is clear that *prt.f* in the Merenptah passage signifies Pharaoh's claim that he has annihilated Israel.

Breasted demonstrates correctly that this text can have nothing to do with the slaying of the first-born in the Bible,²⁹ but does not deny that *prt* in these contexts means 'seed' in the sense of progeny. Hasel was evidently mistaken in applying these citations to the destruction of grain crops.

Another simile of the same nature should be noted:



in.f p̄3 t̄3 n Tmḥ Spd Ma-ša-wa-ša wnw m it̄3w ḥr s̄d̄3 Kmt r̄-nb didi.tw m ḥdbyt ḥr t̄bwty. i fdq [t̄3]y.sn mnyt nn st m sp w̄

'When he (Amon-Re^c) carried off the land of Temeh, Seped (and) Mashawasha, who had been as robbers ruining Egypt every day, they being forced to prostration under my sandals; **sundered is [th]eir root**, they are not, all at once'.³⁰


26 A.F. Rainey: Who is a Canaanite? A Review of the Textual Evidence, *BASOR* 304 (1996), pp. 1–15. Cf. N.P. Lemche: Greater Canaan: The Implications of a Correct Reading of EA 151:49–67, *BASOR* 310 (1998), pp. 19–24.

27 Cf. Y. Aharoni *et al.*: *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (3rd rev. ed.), New York, 1993, p. 41, Map 41, p. 47, Map 51.

28 *KRI* IV, Oxford, 1982, p. 19:7.

29 Breasted (above, n. 2), III, pp. 257–258.

30 *KRI* V, pp. 14:16–15:2; Edgerton and Wilson, p. 13.



'Their root is sundered' corresponds to 'their seed is not' in the other passages cited above. The imagery involves the comparison of humans with plants: like plants, people have roots and procreate by means of their seed. This botanical similitude may explain why in none of the instances of *prt* in these contexts does the word have the  determinative usually employed when human seed is intended. The allusion to the enemies' 'roots' confirms the literary custom of describing human destruction in terms of fatal damage to plant life. One may also note that the use of 'seed' as a metaphor of offspring is widespread in the eastern Mediterranean world. The Biblical allusions to the 'seed of Abraham', etc., are too well known to require documentation. From the many cuneiform references,³¹ a passage from the Shaddiwaza treaty will illustrate the Akkadian usage:

*šumka u zēra*ka ša sinništi šanīti ša taḥḥazzu ištu erṣeti zēraka liḥalliqa

'May (these gods) eradicate from the earth your name and the seed of a second woman that you may take'.³²

This text illustrates the typical curse by which a person's *zēru* (Sumerian *numun*) 'seed' is his progeny against which the gods are invoked. The reciprocal stipulations in the treaty between Ḫattusili and Ramesses II, whereby the gods were invoked to eradicate the 'seed' of whoever should violate the terms of the treaty, are lost in both the cuneiform and hieroglyphic copies. Otherwise, we surely would have had a correspondence between Akkadian *zēru* and Egyptian *prt*.

The passages from Ramesses III cited above utilise both *prt* 'seed', 'fruit', and *mnyt* 'root' in the metaphors of destruction. Both are combined in ancient Hebrew passages: *וְאֶשְׂמַד פְּרִי וּמַעַל וְשָׂרְשֵׁי מִתְחַת* 'And I destroyed his fruit (= branches) above and his roots below' (Amos 2:9b; cf. 2 Kings 19:30 = Isa. 37:31; also Malachi 3:19) and in Phoenician, *ʿl ykn lm šrš lmṭ w/pr lmʿl* 'May they not have a root below or fruit (branches) above' (Eshmun'azer 11–12).³³ Obviously, this metaphor is a widely used expression in the eastern Mediterranean world. There is no doubt about its usage among Egyptian scribes of the New Kingdom period.

Therefore, the victory poem at the end of the inscription on Merenptah's stele focuses on the use of force against four entities within the geographical area known as Canaan and Kharu. Three of them are marked as city states by the  determinative, while the fourth, Israel, is defined by , the determinative for a

31 CAD Z, 94–96.

32 H.H. Figulla and E.F. Weidner: *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi (Erstes Heft. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 30/I)*, Leipzig, 1916, 1.1, rev. 65–66; cf. G. Beckman: *Hittite Diplomatic Texts (Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World Series 7)*, Atlanta, 1996, p. 44.

33 H. Donner and W. Röllig: *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, Wiesbaden, 1962, p. 3 (No. 14).

socio-ethnic group. The group thus designated might be living on the level of village culture, or could be pastoralists still in the nomadic stage. The expression associated with Israel here, viz. בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *bn prt.f* ‘His seed is not’³⁴ means that Israel has been destroyed. It does not indicate whether or not they were a sedentary, agricultural people.

PASTORALISTS FROM THE STEPPE

Of course, the entire controversy regarding the expression in the Merenptah poem has to do with the ongoing controversy over Israel’s origins. While the Biblical tradition is unanimous that Israel’s ancestors were pastoralists — the patriarchs (Gen. 46:34; 47:3–4) and the later tribes (Num. 20:19; 32:1) — the modern trend is to deny the validity of that tradition. But it is doubtful if there is a single text from the Late Bronze Age that supports the ‘revolting peasant theory’. Since the historical pseudo-philological arguments have been treated elsewhere,³⁵ the following is concerned with the archaeological arguments.

Callaway was probably under the influence of Mendenhall’s theory of the ‘revolting peasant’ (but without Marxist overtones) when he concluded that the material finds from his earliest Iron Age I houses excavated at et-Tell (‘Ai) indicated that the inhabitants were ‘Hivites’ who had migrated to the hills from the western coastal areas.³⁶ Years later he argued that the occupants of all the strata from his Iron Age I settlement and of all the other sites in the hill country from that period had migrated from the north and west, and certainly not from the south and east, as formerly assumed.³⁷ ‘...the Iron I villagers at ‘Ai had their background in Canaanite culture and religion and ... this can be documented extensively with artifacts which have their parallels at lowland and coastal sites’.³⁸ In other words, the material culture from the plethora of hill country sites that sprang up at the end of the Late Bronze Age must point to a coastal or lowland origin for the settlers. Various prominent authors have espoused the same view.³⁹

34 KRI IV, p. 19:7.

35 A.F. Rainey: Unruly Elements in Late Bronze Canaanite Society, in D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman and A. Hurvitz (eds.): *Pomegranates and Golden Bells, Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, Winona Lake, IN, 1995.

36 J.A. Callaway: New Evidence on the Conquest of ‘Ai, *JBL* 87 (1968), pp. 312–320.

37 *Idem*, Ai (et-Tell): Problem Site for Biblical Archaeologists, in L.G. Perdue, L.E. Toombs and G.L. Johnson (eds.): *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretations, Essays in Memory of D. Glenn Rose*, Atlanta, 1987, pp. 87–99, esp. 95–99.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

39 Especially J.M. Miller: The Israelite Occupation of Canaan, in J.H. Hayes and J.M. Miller (eds.): *Israelite and Judaeon History*, Philadelphia, 1977, pp. 213–284, esp. p. 255; W.G. Dever: Ceramics, Ethnicity, and the Question of Israel’s Origins, *BA* 58 (1995), pp. 200–

Everybody agrees that there is an amazing multiplication of small village sites in the hill country areas during this period, and Stager is of the view that there probably were not enough people from the depleted Canaanite population to furnish occupants for the new Iron Age I sites: 'it appears unlikely that the peasantry, even if they had all "revolted", could have been large enough to account for the total Iron Age village population ...'⁴⁰

He also put his finger on the key element in the process of establishment of new sites. '...with the decline of (the) economic systems in many parts of Canaan in the late thirteenth to early twelfth centuries B.C.E. ... the "pastoralist" sector, engaged in herding and huckstering, may also have found it advantageous to shift toward different subsistence strategies, such as farming with some stock raising.'⁴¹

Finkelstein argued that the occupants of the newly established small villages were pastoralists who had been in the hill country of Cisjordan during the Late Bronze Age and had now begun settling down.⁴² However, for Finkelstein and other Israeli archaeologists of his generation, the Jordan Valley had been a closed political and military boundary. It was also a psychological boundary. As for the argument that the Iron I material culture pointed to people who had come from the Canaanite urban/agricultural society of the coastal plains, there were, nevertheless, decided differences between the Iron I artefactual repertoire and that of the preceding Late Bronze Age.⁴³

Today there is no reason to ignore Transjordan as the most probable source for the new immigrants who established the small villages on the heights of Mt. Ephraim (the Samaria hills). That their pottery and other artefacts show some continuity with Late Bronze material culture is no deterrent. The recent survey of known Late Bronze materials in Transjordan by Evelyn van der Steen shows just how extensive the spread of Late Bronze material culture is there.⁴⁴ But we can go a step further, for as a result of her ethnographic survey of the Jordan Valley⁴⁵ she has

213, esp. pp. 204–207; *idem*, Is There any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?, in E. Frerichs and L.H. Lesko (eds.): *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, Winona Lake, IN, 1997, pp. 67–86, esp. pp. 73–80.

40 L.E. Stager: Response, in *Biblical Archaeology Today, Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, Jerusalem, 1985, pp. 83–87, esp. p. 84.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

42 I. Finkelstein: *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, Jerusalem, 1988, pp. 336–349.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 312–313; cf. H.J. Franken and G. London: Why Painted Pottery Disappeared at the End of the Second Millennium BCE, *BA* 58 (1995), pp. 214–222.

44 E.J. van der Steen: The Central East Jordan Valley in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, *BASOR* 302 (1996), pp. 51–74.

45 *Idem*, Aspects of Nomadism and Settlement in the Central Jordan Valley, *PEQ* 127 (1995), pp. 141–158.

also been able to correlate the results of archaeological excavations and surveys in the Tell Deir 'Allā' area from the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I with nineteenth-century developments among the Bedouin.⁴⁶ Most instructive is the case of the Mihdawi tribe, which had been forced to migrate to the Jordan Valley due to pressure from more dominant tribes, but eventually further pressure forced it to migrate to the hills of Cisjordan.

The Egyptian records reveal that the *Shasu* pastoralists were becoming more numerous and troublesome during the thirteenth century B.C.E.⁴⁷ The archaeological surveys in the central hill country indicate that the Iron I settlements initially sprang up in marginal areas where pastoralists could graze their flocks and engage in dry farming.⁴⁸ Later they spread westward, cleared the forests and began building agricultural terraces. Nowadays there is no compelling reason to doubt the general trend of the Biblical tradition that those pastoralists were mainly immigrants from Transjordan. The climatic factors that led to the upheavals documented for the entire eastern Mediterranean basin⁴⁹ caused the Sea Peoples and the Libyans to converge on the Egyptian delta. The Dorians swooped down into southern Greece. More significant for the present discussion are the movements of the Aramaeans out of the Syrian steppe lands into Syria and into central and southern Mesopotamia.⁵⁰ The pastoralists from the steppe lands all around the fertile crescent were driven into the more settled areas. The movement of the *Shasu* into the hills of Cisjordan was the southern wing of that movement.

MERENPTAH'S WALL RELIEFS

The discovery that the reliefs on the western face of the enclosure wall of the Cour du Cachette at the Karnak temple belong to Merenptah and not to Ramesses II⁵¹ has

46 E.J. van der Steen: Migrations from the East into the Jordan Valley (unpublished paper presented on 23 November at the American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 22–25 November, 1997); *idem*, *Survival and Adaptation: Life East of the Jordan in the Transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age*, *PEQ* 131 (1999), pp. 176–192.

47 Rainey (above, n. 35), pp. 490–496.

48 Finkelstein (above, n. 42), pp. 198–204.

49 Cf. W.H. Stiebing: *Out of the Desert? Archaeology and the Exodus/Conquest Narratives*, Buffalo, 1989, pp. 168–187.

50 Cf. A.K. Grayson: Assyria: Ashur-dan II to Ashur-nirari V (934–745 B.C.), in J. Boardman *et al.* (eds.): *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., Vol. III, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 238–281, esp. pp. 247–248.

51 F. Yurco: Merenptah's Palestinian Campaign, *Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities Journal* 8 (1978), p. 70; *idem*, Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 23 (1986), pp. 189–215; *idem*, 3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16 (1990), pp. 20–38;

raised the possibility of identifying the Israelites of the stele with some graphic representation in the reliefs. Through a study of the cartouches, Yurco demonstrated that Merenptah is the Pharaoh who besieged Ashkelon, as depicted in this Karnak wall relief.

Ashkelon, as one of three cities mentioned in the poem on the Merenptah stele, along with Gezer and Yano'am, certainly provides a tantalising parallel to the three cities on the wall relief. Yurco is justified in suggesting that the other two besieged cities, whose names have not been preserved, could be identified as Gezer and Yano'am.

However, Yurco cites 'precedents' for his decision to read the sequence of the reliefs counter-clockwise, beginning with Ashkelon. Such precedents are in no way compelling and are certainly not obligatory. There is no necessary reason why we *must* start with Ashkelon (Scene 1 on his chart) and work our way around counter-clockwise to his Scene 4 (just above Ashkelon).⁵² In other words, there is no imperative that Scene 4 be identified with the 'Israel' on the Merenptah stele inscription.⁵³ On the contrary, there are compelling reasons why the figures in Yurco's Scene 4 (Fig. 1)⁵⁴ should *not* be identified with the Israelites. Not only are the figures in Scene 4 dressed as typical Canaanite soldiers, but they are also using battle chariots, as Yurco himself stresses.⁵⁵

Given what is now known about Late Bronze Age urban society and the high



Fig. 1. Merenptah reliefs, upper right scene (Yurco's Scene 4).

idem, Yurco's Response, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (1991), p. 61; *idem*, Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign and Israel's Origins, in E. Frerichs and L.H. Lesko (eds.): *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, Winona Lake, 1997, pp. 27-55.

52 Yurco (above, n. 51, 1990), p. 23.

53 J.R. Huddleston: Merenptah's Revenge: The 'Israel Stele' and its Modern Interpreters (unpublished paper presented on 23 November at the American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, Annual Meeting, Kansas City, 23-26 November, 1991).

54 Figures are from Yurco (above, n. 51, 1990). Fig. 1: pp. 32-33 (top); Fig. 2: p. 29 (bottom); Fig. 3: p. 31 (bottom); Fig. 4: p. 30 (top); Fig. 5: p. 23 (top), modified by A.F.R.; Fig. 6: p. 31 (top), modified by A.F.R.; and Fig. 7: p. 35 (bottom).

55 Also supported by L.E. Stager: Merenptah, Israel, and Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief, *EI* 18 (1985), pp. 56*-64*.

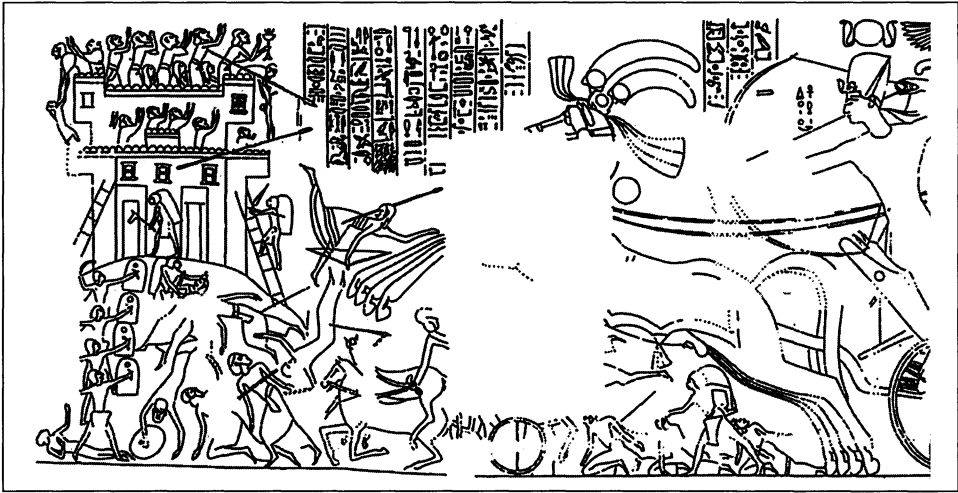


Fig. 2. Lower right scene, conquest of Ashkelon (Yurco's Scene 1).

social status of people who had the wherewithal to maintain chariots,⁵⁶ viz. the noble warriors (often called *maryannu*), it seems improbable that an Egyptian scribe would use the tribal/ethnic determinative for people, viz. and another Egyptian artist would depict them fighting in chariots. Yurco has nothing to offer by way of explanation, except to say that the Israelites had acquired some chariots somehow.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is hardly credible that Yurco's Canaanite soldiers with their chariots should be equated with the 'Israel' on the Merenptah victory stele.

However, a great deal more can be said about Yurco's Scene 4 and the wall relief as a whole. Stager already noted that there was a chariot in the Ashkelon scene, also under the rearing horses of Pharaoh.⁵⁸ Further examination shows that there were soldiers dressed in typical Canaanite array fighting in the open country below Ashkelon (Fig. 2; Yurco's Scene 1). The horses are in such disarray that the chariot is clearly that of a fleeing enemy. Stager's attempt to assign the chariots to the Egyptians is improbable.

But this is not all. The upper left scene (Fig. 3; Yurco's Scene 3) also has Canaanite soldiers fighting in the open country beneath it. The fleeing horseman and the prostrate Canaanite leave no doubt that these are vanquished enemy troops.

The lower left scene (Fig. 4; Yurco's Scene 2) is also not without Canaanite soldiers in open country.⁵⁹ This time Pharaoh is attacking the enemy city by foot

56 A.F. Rainey: *The Military Personnel of Ugarit*, *JNES* 24 (1965), pp. 17–27, esp. pp. 19–21.

57 Yurco (above, n. 51, 1991); *idem* (above, n. 51, 1997), pp. 29–30. Yurco has failed to respond to my criticism.

58 Stager (above, n. 55), p. 58b*.

59 We have reproduced the entire scene in photograph here (Wreszinski's drawing [= Yurco's illustration, bottom of p. 30] is somewhat obscure).

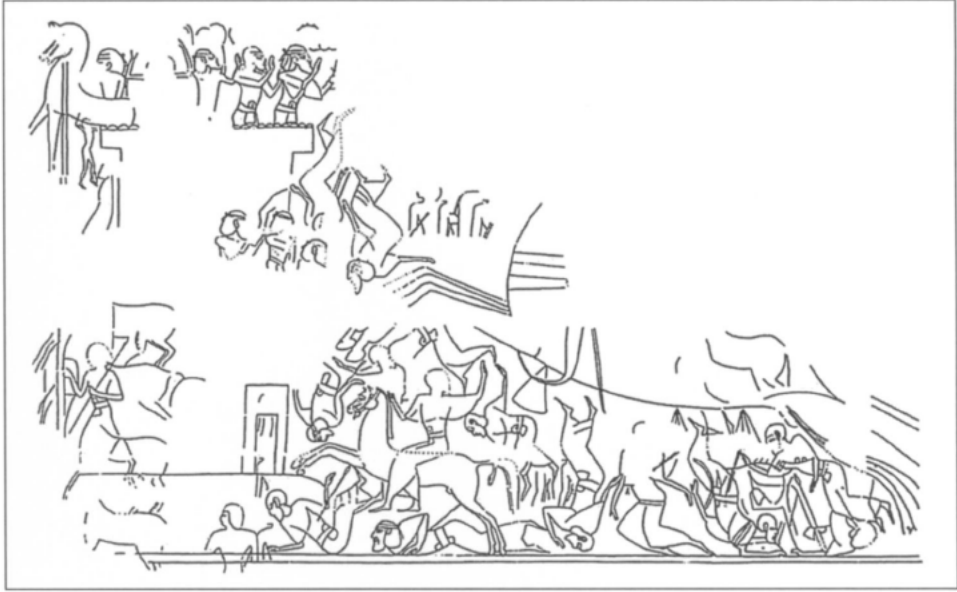


Fig. 3. Upper left scene, possibly Gezer (Yurco's Scene 3).



Fig. 4. Lower left scene, possibly Yano'am (Yurco's Scene 2).

and wielding his scimitar above his head. He is standing over fallen Canaanite soldiers. Just as Pharaoh is not using his chariot, neither do the Canaanites have horses or chariots. This is suggestive of the possible terrain in which that city is located, and is discussed below.

Not only do all four scenes show Canaanite soldiers falling, fleeing and being captured, but the disposition of those vanquished soldiers in the three city conquests has them at the bottom of the scene. The soldiers in Yurco's Scene 4 are

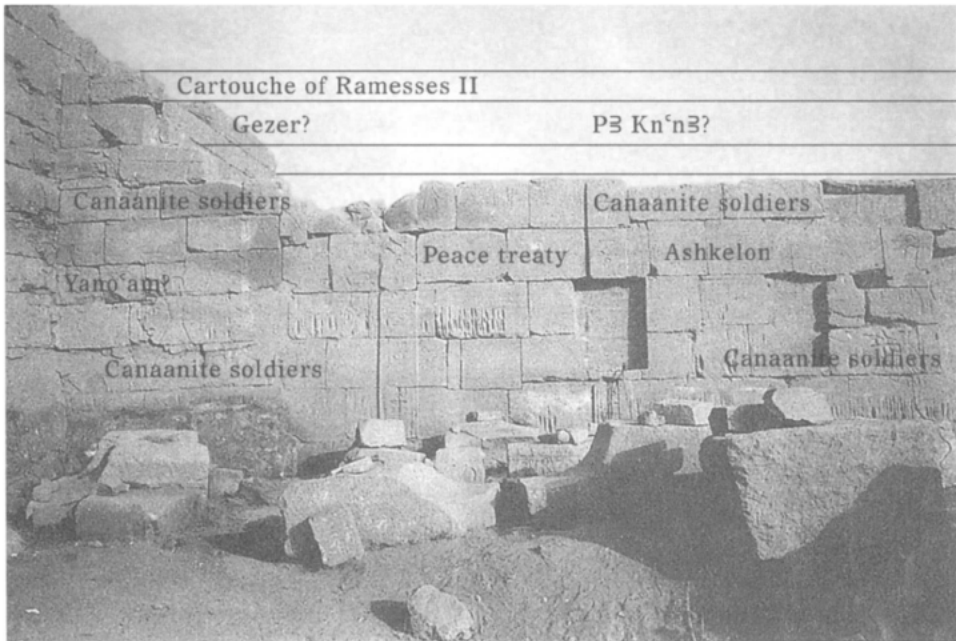


Fig. 5. Western wall of Cour de Cachette showing how a fourth city could easily fit above Yurco's Scene 4.

also at the bottom of the scene, and Yurco's argument that the conflict here is in open country (based partly on the supposed relative position of Pharaoh's horses) is unsubstantiated. On the contrary, a comparison with his Scene 3 shows that the soldiers are in approximately the fourth course below the top course (which bears the cartouche of Ramesses II; Fig. 5).

It is evident that there is enough space above Yurco's Scene 4 for another city. While that would spoil the correlation between these wall reliefs and the poem in the victory inscription, there is no compelling reason why such a correlation should exist. On the contrary, if four cities are being conquered, then the entire panorama can be seen to have artistic balance: two conquered cities on each side of the Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty. Each of the four scenes has its attacking Pharaoh, its surrendering city and its vanquished Canaanite troops.

This is a convenient point for making another suggestion. Two (or three) cities are attacked by Pharaoh in his battle chariot. The third (or fourth) city, on the lower left, is attacked by Pharaoh on foot. It makes much more sense if the scenes with Pharaoh's charging war chariot are those on the coastal plain, Ashkelon (Fig. 5, lower right; Fig. 2) and Gezer (Fig. 5, upper left; Fig. 6).

As for the hypothetical city on the upper right, above Yurco's Scene 4, we would tentatively suggest $p\bar{3} Kn'n\bar{3}$ = * $P\bar{a} Kina'na$ 'The Canaan', as in the reliefs of Seti I on the northern outer wall of the Hypostyle Hall. That city (usually taken as

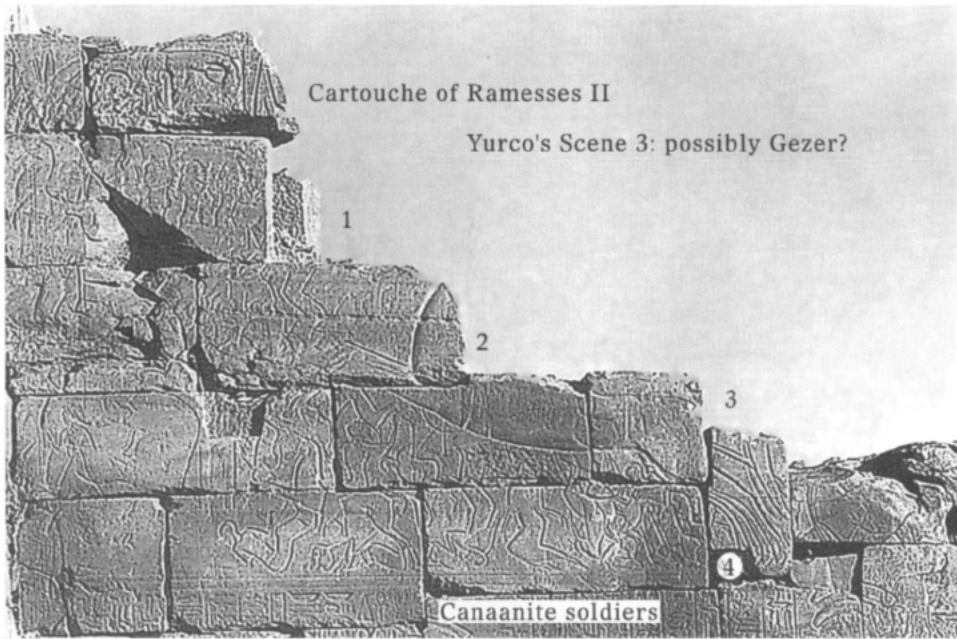


Fig. 6. Upper left scene: Gezer. 1) The city's elders pleading for mercy; 2 and 3) Pharaoh's horses; 4) Canaanite soldiers being trampled. Note four courses below top course with Ramesses II's cartouche.

representing Gaza, the administrative capital of Canaan) would then correspond to the Canaan and Kharu of the victory poem and would signify the scene of the campaign.

The city on the lower left, which Pharaoh is attacking on foot, would seem to be on different terrain than the others. Thus, it is a likely candidate for Yano'am, which, according to the el-Amarna Letters, should be located in the Bashan or the Hauran, possibly on one of the branches of the Yarmuk River.⁶⁰ It must be admitted, however, that Ramesses II is depicted at Karnak attacking the coastal town of Acco on foot. Nevertheless, within the framework of these Merenptah reliefs, the contrast with the other cities might have geographical significance.

Yurco admits that there are many *Shasu/Shosu* pastoralists being brought as captives,⁶¹ but he has no parallel for them in the poem. There is one preserved

60 N. Na'aman: Yeno'am, *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977), pp. 166–177; *idem*, Biryawaza of Damascus and the Date of the Kāmid el-Lōz 'Apiru Letters, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 20 (1988), pp. 179–193, esp. p. 183.

61 Yurco (above, n. 51, 1990), p. 35, Scenes Nos. 5–7; cf. also the remarks of D.B. Redford: The Ashkelon Relief at Karnak and the Israel Stela, *IEJ* 36 (1986), pp. 188–200, esp. pp. 199–200. A.F. Rainey: Can You Name the Panel with the Israelites? Rainey's Challenge, *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (1991), pp. 54–61, 91–92.

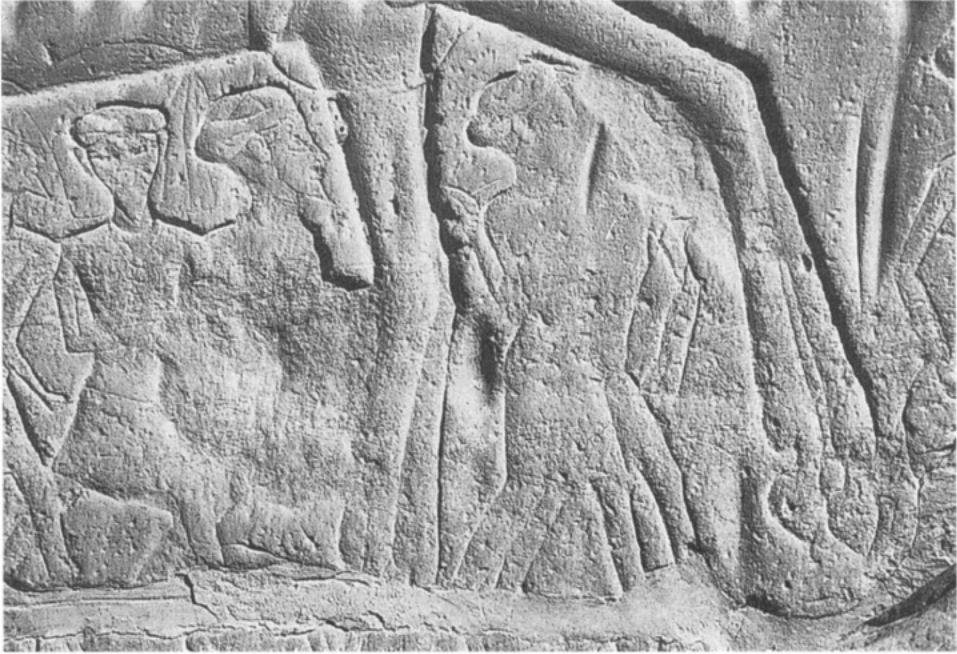


Fig. 7. Shasu prisoners.

inscription beside these reliefs which refers to them as *Shasu/Shosu* (Fig. 7). However, many other descriptive texts have been lost from these sections of the wall. Since ancient Israelite tradition is unanimous that Jacob and his sons were pastoralists and that the Israelites in the wilderness were pastoralists, is it not more reasonable to conclude that there is probably some relationship between these pastoralists on Merenptah's wall reliefs and the tribal/ethnic group called Israel in the victory poem on the stele?

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, Hasel has not proven that *bn prt.f* means 'his grain is destroyed'. We have argued that this expression is clearly meant to indicate that Israel has been annihilated like a plant whose seed/fruit has been destroyed. Likewise, Yurco has not proven that the Israel on the stele corresponds to Canaanites in the wall relief. It is much more likely that Israel of the stele corresponds to the *Shasu* in the other registers on the same wall.

Recent archaeological research also indicates that there is no reason to doubt the Biblical tradition that the ancient Israelites migrated to Cisjordan from Transjordan. That is not proof that the epic account in the Book of Joshua is literal history. Israel was evidently one group among many *Shasu* who were moving out of

the steppe lands to find their livelihood in areas that would permit them to obtain their own food. Nor is there proof here that the Israel of Merenptah's inscription was already a twelve-tribe league. For example, the tribes who settled in the heights of Upper Galilee may very well have come from the Syrian desert or from Hauran. Some 'tribes' (socio-ethnic groups), such as Asher, may have arrived much earlier and been ensconced in the hills west of the plain of Acco and adjacent steppe lands much earlier. Nevertheless, the case for a Transjordanian pastoralist origin for the bulk of the clans in the central hill country is very strong.