



“THE KING’S MESSENGER IN FRONT OF HIS ARMY”: POSSIBLE NEW EVIDENCE FOR HOREMHEB’S CONTACTS WITH THE NORTHERN LEVANT

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New finds from the site of Qatna (Tell el-Mišrife, western Syria) have recently shed new light on the relations between Egypt and the northern Levant during the Bronze Age, especially during the Amarna Period (late 18th Dynasty): a clay sealing featuring the throne name of king Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten was discovered in the western part of the royal palace of Qatna (Room DK),¹ which—apart from the few Amarna letters known to have come from the site²—additionally attests to a direct contact between Egypt and the city of Qatna.

In this regard a fragmented clay sealing featuring a scarab or bezel/signet ring impression found within the filling material of a pit in the central part of the Royal Palace (Room AL)—although already published in an article in 2004—deserves further attention in this regard (MSH02-G-i0659).³ The clay sealing may, in fact, show the lower part of a cartouche featuring Horemheb’s personal name.

Remarkable in this respect is the fact that not the throne name, which one would expect in this case, but the personal name of Horemheb seems to have been used for the seal. The use of Horemheb’s personal name, however, is not entirely to be excluded, since it is a well-known and established fact that Horemheb was actively engaged in Egypt’s affairs with the northern Levant—militarily and politically—during the late Amarna Period, i.e., prior to his accession to the throne of Egypt. This is exemplified by the reliefs found in his Memphite tomb at Saqqara, dating to the time before Horemheb became pharaoh, which depicts large numbers of captured Asiatics from the Levant.⁴ These captives were most probably taken during the time Horemheb served as Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian army under the reigns of Tutankhamun and Ay, when he was “the King’s messenger in front of his army to the foreign countries to the south and the north” and “Sole Companion, he who is by the feet of his lord on the battlefield on that day of killing Asiatics.”⁵ A granite bowl of the Royal Equerry Sennefer with a hieroglyphic

inscription featuring Horemheb’s personal name in a cartouche—although believed to be a forgery and also kept at an unknown location until today—mentions the Levantine port city of Byblos and even Karkamiš on the Euphrates in Horemheb’s 16th regnal year.⁶ Several Levantine toponyms are also given in a topographical list at Karnak that may date to the reign of Horemheb.⁷

From the northern Levant, two stone vessels carrying Horemheb’s name were found at Ras Šamra/Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast.⁸ However, while the vessels clearly date to the reign of Horemheb, the date when they were dispatched to Ugarit remains unknown, thus diminishing the chronological value of the objects considerably.

Additionally, Horemheb also seems to be attested in contemporary Hittite sources. A fragmentary text dating to the reign of the Hittite king Mursili II (main fragment *KUB 19.15* and adjoining fragments *KBo 50.24*), recently edited by Jared L. Miller, mentions a certain *Arma’a*, who is described in the text as Mursili’s opponent and can possibly be identified with Horemheb.⁹ Concerning the internal chronology of the events described in the text—according to Miller—Horemheb at that time was not yet pharaoh, but Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian army and messenger for the ruling Egyptian king, i.e., Tutankhamun or Ay. Naturally, Miller’s historical and chronological conclusions have not been received without criticism, but these diverging views cannot be repeated or dealt with in detail here.¹⁰

Clearly, this would seem to fit well with the historical evidence from Egypt (i.e., the reliefs depicting Asiatic captives in Horemheb’s Memphite tomb; see above), and it could also explain the presence of a clay sealing with Horemheb’s personal name at Qatna. Despite the chronological and historical issue of whether he was already king or not at the time when the unknown object was sealed, the “official” use of Horemheb’s personal name in Egypt proper, however, is now also supported by the

recent discovery of a further clay sealing with Horemheb’s personal name at Tell el-Borg in northern Sinai.¹¹

All in all, however scant the archaeological evidence may be, the clay sealing may thus contribute to our understanding of Egypt’s active involvement in the political situation of the northern Levant during the late 18th Dynasty.

A more detailed discussion and presentation of the clay sealing has been published in the journal *Ugarit-Forschungen* 45, *In memoriam Oswald Loretz* (2014, published 2015): Alexander Ahrens, *Pharao Horemhab und die nördliche Levante. Bemerkungen zu einem Skarabäenabdruck aus Tall Mišrife/Qatna*, 1–9.

NOTES

- ¹ Alexander Ahrens, Heike Dohmann-Pfälzner and Peter Pfälzner, “New Light on the Amarna Period from the Northern Levant. A Clay Sealing with the Throne Name of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten from the Royal Palace at Tall Mišrife/Qatna,” *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 5 (2012): 233–248.; see also: Alexander Ahrens, “New Evidence for Contacts between Egypt and the Northern Levant during the Amarna Period: A Clay Sealing with the Throne Name of Akhenaten at Tell Mišrife/Qatna (Syria),” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 4/4 (2012): 1; Alexander Ahrens and Peter Pfälzner, “Akhenaten in Syria,” *Egyptian Archaeology* 41 (2012): 34–35.
- ² From the site of Qatna apparently come letters EA 52–57; see Anson F. Rainey, William Schniedewind, and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (eds.), *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna Based on Collations of all Extant Tablets*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1, 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
- ³ The clay sealing was first published, but not recognized as being the personal name of Horemheb, in: Alexander Ahrens, “Skarabäen und Skarabäenabdrücke aus Tall Mišrife/Qatna. Einige Beobachtungen zum interkulturellen Austausch zwischen der Levante und Ägypten,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 35 (2004): 1–27, especially 8–9, fig. 13.
- ⁴ Geoffrey T. Martin, *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis: New Discoveries from the Time of Tutankhamun and Ramesses the Great* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991).
- ⁵ Jacobus van Dijk, *The New Kingdom Necropolis of Memphis: Historical and Iconographical Studies* (unpublished PhD thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1993); Marc Gabolde, *D’Akhenaton à Toutankhamon*, *Collection de l’Institut d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’Antiquité* 3 (Lyon : Université Lumière-Lyon 2, 1998); and Nozomu Kawai, “Ay versus Horemheb: The Political Situation in the Late Eighteenth Dynasty Revisited,” *Journal of Egyptian History* 3/2 (2010): 261–292.
- ⁶ Donald B. Redford, “New Light on the Asiatic Campaigning of Horemheb,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 211 (1973): 36–49.
- ⁷ Jan J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 135: XIIa.
- ⁸ Bérénice Lagarde-Othman, “Un nouveau vase inédit d’Horemheb,” in V. Matoian and M. al-Maqdissi (eds.), *Études Ougaritiques III*, Ras Shamra–Ougarit XXI (Lyon: Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée, 2013): 347–364.
- ⁹ Jared L. Miller, “Amarna Age Chronology and the Identity of Nibhururiya in the Light of a Newly Reconstructed Hittite Text,” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 34/2 (2007): 252–293; Jared L. Miller, “The Rebellion of Hatti’s Syrian Vassals and Egypt’s Meddling in Amurru,” *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 50 (2008): 533–554; Jared L. Miller and Elena Devecchi, “Hittite-Egyptian Synchronisms and their Consequences for Ancient Near Eastern Chronology,” in Jana Mynářová (ed.), *Egypt and the Near East—the Crossroads: Proceedings of an International Conference on the Relations of Egypt and the Near East in the Bronze Age, Prague, September 1–3, 2010, Charles University, Czech Institute of Egyptology* (Prague: Institute of Egyptology Press, 2011), 139–176.
- ¹⁰ See Zsolt Simon, “Kann Armā mit Horemhab gleichgesetzt werden?” *Altorientalische Forschungen* 36/2 (2009): 340–348; Gernot Wilhelm, “Muršilis II. Konflikt mit Ägypten und Horemhabs Thronbesteigung,” *Die Welt des Orients* 39/1 (2009): 108–116; Gernot Wilhelm, “Šuppiliuma I. und die Chronologie der Amarna-Zeit,” in R. Hachmann (ed.), *Kāmid el-Lōz 20: Die Keilschriftbriefe und der Horizont von El-Amarna* (Bonn: Habelt, 2012), 225–257.
- ¹¹ James K. Hoffmeier and Jacobus van Dijk, “New Light on the Amarna Period from North Sinai,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 96 (2010): 191–205.