

MERNEPTAH IN CANAAN

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Egyptologists continue to debate whether or not Merneptah actually campaigned in Canaan as he so boasts in his famous stela.¹ Petrie,² Gardiner,³ and Faulkner⁴ argue that this Pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty did invade Canaan, while Budge,⁵ Wilson,⁶ and Montet⁷ are among those who believe that he did not.⁸

One piece of evidence which has not been used in the entire debate is the appearance of Merneptah's name in the Hebrew Bible. One of the markers of the boundary between Judah and Benjamin in ancient Israel is a place called *ma'yan mē neptō^aḥ* (Josh 15:9, 18:15). Although English Bible translations unanimously render these words as "the spring of the water of Neptō^aḥ," various

scholars have correctly identified the site as "the spring of Merneptah."⁹ Hebrew *mē neptō^aḥ*, without *r*, follows the phonology of the Late Egyptian used during the New Kingdom.¹⁰ Other examples of this in the Hebrew Bible are *pītōm*, "Pithom" (Eg. *pr itm*, "house of Atum") in Exod 1:11,¹¹ and *šāpnat*, "Zaphenath" (Eg. *ḏd p3 ntr*, "the god has spoken") in Gen 41:45.¹²

That a locale in Canaan should bear the name of Merneptah is virtual proof that the Pharaoh did indeed campaign there. It would be incomprehensible that a toponym in Canaan should include the name of a foreign ruler who never visited the place or whose armies never marched there. Biblical *ma'yan mē neptō^aḥ* is usually identified with

1. For the original publication and earliest treatment see W.M.F. Petrie, *Six Temples at Thebes* (London, 1897), pls. xiii-xiv; and W. Spiegelberg, *ZAS* 34 (1896), pp. 1-25. For English translations see J.H. Breasted, *BAR* III (Chicago, 1906), 602-617; Adolf Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, trans. by A.M. Blackman (London, 1927), pp. 274-278; J.A. Wilson *apud* J.B. Pritchard, *ANET* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 376-378; and Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 73-78.

2. W.M.F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt III* (London, 1905), p. 114.

3. Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London, 1961), p. 273.

4. R.O. Faulkner, "Egypt: From the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III," in *CAH* II,2 (Cambridge, 1975), p. 234.

5. E.A.W. Budge, *A History of Egypt V* (New York, 1902), pp. 103-108.

6. J.A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago, 1951), p. 255.

7. P. Montet, *Lives of the Pharaohs* (Cleveland, 1968), pp. 198-200.

8. They draw this conclusion with or without referring to the lesser known inscription found at Amada where

Merneptah bears the epithet "reducer of Gezer." For the text see U. Bouriant, *RT* 18 (1896), p. 159; and J. Černý, *Amada: Stela of Amenophis II and Inscription of Meneptah* (Cairo, n.d.).

9. V. Calice, *OL* 6 (1903), Sp. 224; W. Wolf, *ZAS* 69 (1933), p. 42; C.H. Gordon, *The Ancient Near East* (New York, 1965), p. 149; and Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, trans. by A.F. Rainey (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 173.

10. A. Erman, *Neuägyptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1933), pp. 23-24; and J. Černý and S.I. Groll, *A Late Egyptian Grammar* (Rome, 1978), p. 6.

11. That Hebrew *par'ōh*, "Pharaoh" (Eg. *pr'3*) preserves the *r* unlike *pītōm* suggests that it was borrowed into Hebrew (or Canaanite, if you will) sometime before the advent of Late Egyptian, contra D.B. Redford, *JNES* 22 (1963), p. 119, who posits a later borrowing.

12. If *āsnat*, "Asenath," in Gen 41:45 means "Isis is god(dess)" or "the god(dess) Isis" or the like, then we have another instance of Egyptian *ntr* = Hebrew *-nat* with final *r* dropping. The identification is not certain, however, as some take *-nat* here to be the goddess Neith; cf. J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvain, 1959), pp. 148ff; and N.M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1966), p. 221.

modern Lifta, three miles from Jerusalem.¹³ Thus we may add the area near Jerusalem to those of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam where the royal army served.¹⁴ This conclusion coupled with the sword bearing Merneptah's name found at Ugarit¹⁵ gives us a clearer picture of this Pharaoh's presence in Western Asia.¹⁶

This little notice does not purport to offer any new material *per se*, either Egyptological or Biblical. Rather, it merely at-

tempts to make known to Egyptologists an identification which has not been brought forward in one of their own specific publications in almost fifty years. Moreover, it shows how Biblical evidence can and should be used to solve Egyptological cruces just as Egyptian material has so often been forwarded to elucidate particular Biblical problems.

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13. Cf. Aharoni, *op. cit.* 111, 173, 235. The shift of original *n* to present-day *l* is not without parallel in Biblical toponymy, e.g., Biblical *šūnēm* equals modern Solem and Biblical *mānaḥat* equals modern Malḥah. Similarly, the laryngeal *h* may disappear in modern equivalents, e.g., Biblical *yānō^h* equals modern Yanun and ancient Yaḥam equals modern Yemma. This last site does not appear in the Bible, rather in the account of Thutmose III's battle at Megiddo; this text is treated and/or translated by Breasted, *BAR* II, 391-443; R.O. Faulkner, *JEA* 28 (1942), pp. 2-15; Wilson *ANET* 234-238; and Lichtheim, *op. cit.* 29-35.

14. Whether this Biblical "spring of Merneptah" is to be equated with the "well of Merneptah" mentioned in Papyrus Anastasi III is another question. The text is

translated in *BAR* III, 629-635. This "well of Merneptah" appears among a number of Canaanite sites (Gaza, Tyre, etc.) and is even located in mountainous terrain as is Lifta. A "fortress of Merneptah" appears in Papyrus Anastasi VI but it is located near *tkw* (= *Suc-coth?*) and *Pithom*, not in Canaan.

15. Cf. C. F.-A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica III* (Paris, 1956), pp. 169-178 and Pl. VIII. For a general discussion of Merneptah's relations with Hatti, with mention of Ugarit, see G.A. Wainwright, *JEA* 46 (1960), pp. 24-28.

16. Additional evidence for the historical accuracy of the "Israel Stela" has been proposed by F. Yurko, *JSSEA* 7 (1978), p. 70. I thank Prof. James Hoffmeier for pointing this reference out to me.

CORRIGENDA TO "MERNEPTAH IN CANAAN"

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A number of printing errors appeared in my article, "Merneptah in Canaan," *JSSEA* XI:3 (1981), pp. 171-172, and the editor has been kind to permit me to correct them.

- Page 171, col. 1, line 14: read *ma'yan* not *ma'yan*
Page 171, col. 2, line 17: read *ma'yan* not *ma'yan*
Page 171, note 11, line 1: read *par'δh* not *par'δh*
Page 171, note 11, line 1: read '3 not '3
Page 171, note 12, line 3: insert equal sign [=] after *ntr*
Page 172, note 13, line 5: italicize *h*
Page 172, note 14, lines 8-9: delete italics in "(=Succoth?) and Pithom, not in Canaan."
Page 172, note 15, line 1: delete italics in "15. Cf. C.F.-A. Schaeffer"