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### Judg 4-5 and Ramesside Topographical Lists

The article discusses the significance of the data preserved on the Egyptian topographical lists from Karnak and Medinet Habu for the interpretation of the biblical tradition about Israelite conflict with Sisera, the warlord in service of Jabin, king of Canaan (Judg 4-5). The replacement of *q3yśr ybwn3* “Jabin’s alliance” occurring on the list of Ramesses II by the *q3wś3 tib3rwtw* “band of Deborah” on the list of Ramesses III can be interpreted as an evidence of political changes which become an inspiration for the biblical accounts about the battle at Wadi Kishon.

The topographical list of Ramesses III inscribed on the Great Pylon of the Temple of Medinet Habu contains about 120 proper names inscribed on oval name-shields, referring to Canaanite territories conquered by the pharaoh about 1172 B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> The name-shield nr 85, placed directly under the Ramesses’ right foot,<sup>2</sup> was transcribed by W.F. Edgerton and J.A. Wilson as *[qś]t-br<k>*.<sup>3</sup> A somewhat different transcription, *[q]-ś-t-b-r-n*,<sup>4</sup> was suggested by J. Simons. However, as it can be deduced from the photograph, the sign transcribed as *n*-sign

<sup>1</sup> Most of them seems to be copied from the lists of Ramses II from Karnak. See, W.F. Edgerton, J.A. Wilson, *Historical records of Ramses III: The Texts in Medinet Habu Volumes I and II Translated with Explanatory Notes*, Chicago 1936, p. 108; J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia*, Leiden 1937, p. 80. For the historical value of topographical lists of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu dealing with campaigning in Northern Syria – usually regarded as mere copies of earlier kings’ exploits – see, D. Kahn, *Who is Meddling in Egypt’s Affairs? The Identity of the Asiatics in the Elephantine Stele of Sethnakhte and the Historicity of the Medinet Habu Asiatic War Reliefs*, “Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections” 2 (2010), p. 14-23. About methodological problems connected with interpretation of Egyptian topographical lists, see C. de Vit, *Egyptian methods of writing history*, “The Evangelical Quarterly” 28 (1956), p. 163-166.

<sup>2</sup> The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu, Volume II. The Later Historical Records of Ramses III*, Chicago 1932, Plate 76 B (photography); Plate 101 (drawing). See also K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesse-side Inscriptions*, vol. 5, Oxford 1983, p. 95 (drawing).

<sup>3</sup> W.F. Edgerton, J.A. Wilson, *Historical records of Ramses III*, p. 110. The lacking initial *q*-sign is reconstructed by the analogy to the adjacent name-shields. The second hieroglyph is interpreted as *hr*-sign, carved erroneously instead the expected *ś3*-sign.

<sup>4</sup> J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical lists*, p. 165 (transcription); p. 168 (commentary).

or unfinished *k*-sign, seems to be rather a simple, deep-cut, rectangular hole. The point not always respected in the analyses of the reliefs from Medinet Habu is the usage of plaster to cover up imperfections in the masonry and to eliminate erroneous parts of inscriptions. The deep-cut holes were carved to hold the plaster covering.<sup>5</sup> The incision on the name-shield nr 85 seems to be a such secondary correction and consequently should be omitted in the transcription. The next hieroglyph, interpreted in former transcriptions as a *3*-vowel marker is rather an *tw*-sign.<sup>6</sup> The last sign on this name-shield is the “hill-country” determinative.

The name can be then read as *q-3-w-ś3 ti-b3-rw-tw*.<sup>7</sup> Its first element, occurs also on other name-shields in the inscriptions of Ramesses II and Ramesses III.<sup>8</sup> S. Yeivin suggested that this term denotes Semitic tribes of Kushites (*kwš*).<sup>9</sup> His view was criticized by B. Oded, who argues that transcription *q3wś* reflects the theophorous element referring to the Edomite god Qaus.<sup>10</sup> This interpretation has been accepted by E.A. Knauf and E. Lipiński.<sup>11</sup> However, there is no clear evidence for the cult of this deity before 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Moreover, several place names containing the element *q3wś3* seem to be in north Israel, not in Edom.<sup>12</sup> It appears to be more probable that the Egyptian *q3wś3* reflects the same root as the South Arabic *gys*<sub>2</sub>, “(military) unit”<sup>13</sup> or Aramaic *gyys*<sup>14</sup> “band (of raiders, robbers)”.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>5</sup> H.H. Nelson, U. Hoelscher, *Medinet Habu 1924-28*, Chicago, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> The *tw*-sign, depicting buzzard, is often confused with *3*-sign, depicting vulture. See, A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, Oxford 1957, p. 467; M. Collier, B. Manley, *How to read Hieroglyphs*, London 1998, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> The presented transcription reflects the so called “syllabic orthography” (also as “group writing”) used by Egyptian for rendering of foreign terms and names. For practical reasons, it was usually simplified by former publishers (W.F. Edgerton, J.A. Wilson J. Simons *et caetera*). For the useful list of phonetic values reflected by different syllabic groups at Medinet Habu see M.C. Astour, *Mesopotamian and Transjordanian Place Names in the Medinet Habu Lists of Ramses III*, “Journal of the American Oriental Society” 88 (1968), p. 751.

<sup>8</sup> J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, 157-158, p. 164-169.

<sup>9</sup> S. Yeivin, *Topographic and Ethnic Notes II. E. The Five Kushite Clans in Canaan*, “Atiqot” 3 (1961), p. 176-180. They should not be confused with Nubians (biblical “land of Kush”).

<sup>10</sup> B. Oded, *Egyptian References to the Edomite Deity Qaus*, “Andrew University Seminary Studies” 9 (1971), p. 47-50.

<sup>11</sup> E.A. Knauf, *Qaus in Agypten*, “Gottinger Miszellen” 73 (1984), p. 33-36; E. Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan in the Iron Age. Historical and Topographical Researches*, Leuven 2006, p. 364.

<sup>12</sup> For example, *q3wś3 nrwm* seems to be located in the proximity of *q-w-m-s3-p-w-ti-i*, identified by J. Simons with Jinsâfût near Shechem. See, J. Simons, *Handbook of the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, p. 158. Compare also, *q3wś t3šrw* or *q3wś3 tib3rwtw* mentioned below.

<sup>13</sup> The usage of *q* in Egyptian transcription for Semitic *g* is reflected in the name for Gezer: *qa-di-ra*. See, J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, p. 217.

<sup>14</sup> A.F.L. Beeston, M.A. Ghul, W.W. Müller, J. Ryckmans, *Sabaic Dictionary (English-French-Arabic)*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1982, p. 52; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, London 1903, p. 237-238, 240.

<sup>15</sup> It seems to be comparable to the word *ššw* ‘vagrants’ (famous Shasu), referring to the Semitic nomadic groups wandering on the skirts of Canaan.

The second part of the name, *ti-b3-rw-tw*, seems to reflect the Semitic lexeme *tbrt* or *dbrt* and can be interpreted as the reference to the settlement Daberath at the foot of Mount Tabor.<sup>16</sup> This identification seems to be suggested by the adjacent name-shields, containing place names from the same region: nr 78 – *y-n-nw-w-m* (Yeno‘am),<sup>17</sup> nr 80 – *ip3q3* (Apheq),<sup>18</sup> nr 82 – *mktyr* (Migdal),<sup>19</sup> nr 84 – *q3rym3n3* (settlement near Beth-Anath)<sup>20</sup> and nr 86 – *š3mš3n3* (probably Beth-shemesh on the territory of Issachar).<sup>21</sup>

However, it should be noted that several of names with the element *q3wś* “band of...” preserved on the Egyptian topographical lists seem to contain a personal name as its second part: *q3wś3 r3‘3* “band (of) Re‘u‘el”,<sup>22</sup> *q3wś3 nrwm* “band (of) Naram”....<sup>23</sup> In such a context it seems to be very probable that the lexeme *tbrt* / *dbrt* can be interpreted as the feminine personal name Deborah (*dbwrt* > *dbwrh*).

The name-shield nr 85 on the list of Ramses III corresponds contextually to the position of the name-shield nr 21 on the earlier list of Ramses II from Karnak (about 1275 B. C.), containing a different name, *q3yśr ybwn3*.<sup>24</sup> The lexeme *q3yśr* can reflect Semitic term *qšr* “to bind, to ally, to conspire” and *ybwn3* seems to render a Semitic personal name *yb(y)n*.<sup>25</sup> The whole expression refers probably to ‘the alliance of Jabin’.

<sup>16</sup> Compare, Josh 19,12; 21,28. It can be identified with Dabbūriyah, the large village at the foot of Mount Tabor to its west, about 175 m above sea level and 7,5 km east of Nazareth. Josephus calls it Dabaritta (*BJ*, II, 21:3).

<sup>17</sup> Here without expected ‘-sign. For the explanation see, J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, p. 145, 146, 168; Y. Aharoni (*The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, [Philadelphia 1979] 33, 53, 178) identifies it with el-‘Abeidiyeh, situated on the Jordan two miles south of the Galilean Sea.

<sup>18</sup> J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> Probably Majdal-Kurum, located 15 km north of Tel Hannaton. A.A. Burke, *Magdalūma, Migdālīm, Magdoloī, and Majādīl: The Historical Geography and Archaeology of the Magdalu (Migdāl)*, “Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research” 346 (2007), p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> Probably Khirbet Shemsin, east Tabor, 3 km north west of el-‘Abeidiyeh.

<sup>22</sup> S. Yeivin, *Topographic and Ethnic Notes II. E. The Five Kushite Clans in Canaan*, p. 177. The Semitic *l* is indicated in hieroglyphs by *3*, *r* or *nr*.

<sup>23</sup> B. Oded, *Egyptian References to the Edomite Deity Qaus*, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> J. Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists*, p. 157-158. This inconsistency is usually interpreted as an example how careless it was copied from the list of Ramses II. However, in the light of the epigraphic observations presented at the beginning of this article, it seems to be improbable that *q3wś3 tib3rwtw* is a misshaped variant of *q3yśr ybwn3*. There are simply too many differences between these two names.

<sup>25</sup> The final syllabic *-bw-n3* instead the expected *-b-y-n3* seems to reflect the corruption in the Egyptian syllabic orthography frequently attested in the time of Ramses III, and perhaps in the time of Ramses II. See, W.F. Albright, *The Vocalization of the Egyptian Syllabic Orthography*, New Haven 1934, p. 14, 20.

The data presented above can be summarized in the following way. In the times of Ramses II, certain Jabin controlled the region of the mount Tabor. However, in the times of Ramses III the name of Jabin was replaced on the topographical list by “the band from Daberath” / “the band of Deborah”. It is very risky to reconstruct historical events from such limited and ambiguous evidence, but the same political change seems to be also reflected in the biblical tradition concerning the presence of Israelite troops on the slopes of the mount Tabor (Judg 4:6,12,14) and their conflict with Sisera, a mercenary<sup>26</sup> in service of king Jabin (Judg 4:2-3).

The replacement of “Jabin’s alliance”<sup>27</sup> by the “the band from Daberath” / “the band of Deborah” on the Egyptian topographical lists seems to confirm the order of events which can be deduced from the Book of Judges. Even if the further details of biblical account about the struggle of Israelites with Sisera are fictional or highly exaggerated, the appearance of the “the band from Daberath / the band of Deborah” on the list of Ramses III seems to deliver the additional chronological frame for dating events, which finally become an inspiration for the biblical tradition concerning the battle at Wadi Kishon.

On the one hand, the opening words of the Deborah’s Song evidently presuppose the supremacy of Egypt in Canaan: *bpr’ pr’wt byśr’l* “when Pharaohs ruled in Israel” (Judg 5:2).<sup>28</sup> In such a context, the events described in Judg 4-5 cannot be dated later than the reign of Ramesses III whose rule was the “swan song” of the Egyptian supremacy in Canaan.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The name Sisera is not encountered so far in epigraphic sources, but its elements, namely *Seisa/Sisa/Ziza* and *-ara* occur in Anatolian anthroponymy. See, E. Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan in the Iron Age. Historical and Topographical Researches*, Leuven 2006, p. 62. The list of Ramesses III contains also the name *q3wś t3iśrw*, which can be interpreted as “the band of Sisera” (on Egyptian *t* = Hebrew *s*, see A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Hieratic Texts*, Leipzig 1911, p. 24, n. 7). Its localisations seems to correspond very well with the hypothetic location of biblical *hršt hgwyym*, the “garrison of mercenaries” identified by A. Zertal with El-Ahwat. The translation of *hršt* as “the defensive enclave, garrison” of mercenaries (literally, “foreigners”) is based upon the Arabic cognate *hrs*, ‘to guard’: see E.M. Badawi, M.A. Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*; Leiden 2008, p. 199. The fact that Sisera came to the Kishon instead of Tabor before battle with Barak suggests that Harosheth-Haggoyim was located south of the Kishon, in the territory of the Megiddo. A placing of Harosheth-Haggoyim south of the Kishon seems to be consistent with A. Zertal’s identification of it with Ahwat in the Arunah pass (see, G.A. Sivan, *Sisera and Harosheth Goyim*, “Jewish Biblical Quarterly” 41 [2013], p. 100-101). The presence of the toponyms *i-t-r* “Asher” (nr 101) and *r-š q-d-š* “Holy Cape, that is Mount Carmel” (nr 108) in the proximity of *q3wś t3iśrw* on the Egyptian topographical lists makes Zertal’s hypothesis quite plausible.

<sup>27</sup> This local ruler should be differentiated from “Jabin, king of Hazor” mentioned in Josh 11. The pleonastic formula “Jabin, the king of Kanaan, who ruled in in Hazor” preserved only in Judg 4,2 seems to be a secondary harmonisation made by biblical redactor, who identified enigmatic Jabin “of Canaan” with the homonymous king of Hazor. See, N. Na’aman, *Literary and Topographical Notes on the Battle of Kishon (Judges IV-V)*, “Vetus Testamentum” 40 (1990), p. 430.

<sup>28</sup> R.D. Miller II, *When Pharaohs ruled: on the translation of Judges 5:2*, “Journal of Theological Studies” 59 (2008), p. 650-654.

<sup>29</sup> I. Singer, *Egyptian, Canaanites, and Philistines in the Period of the Emergence of Israel*, in:

On the other hand, the mention of Anatolian warlord Sisera, seems to suggest the influence of Sea Peoples, mentioned at the first time in the inscriptions from the 5<sup>th</sup> year of Merneptah (1208 B.C.)<sup>30</sup> and therefore it provides us with clear *terminus post quem*.

From the death of Merneptah to the rise to power of Ramesses III, Egypt was beset with internal difficulties and power struggles<sup>31</sup> and we have at our disposal almost no secure evidence about its control over Canaan during this twenty-years' period (1203-1183 B.C.).<sup>32</sup> We can then assume, that when Egyptian hegemony in Syria-Palestine temporarily faded, several Canaanite rulers and tribal chiefs immediately snatched the opportunity and initiated local wars and revolts. This conclusion coincides with image of political and economic chaos preserved in Judg 5:6-8. The struggle between Israelites and alliance of king Jabin can be interpreted as one of such local conflicts. These rebellious actions presumably provoked the intervention of Ramesses III and his restoration of Egyptian management in this region, evidenced by the inscriptions and reliefs from Medinet Habu.<sup>33</sup>

## Sdz 4-5 i egipskie listy topograficzne z czasów Ramzesa II i Ramzesa III

### Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje zagadnienie możliwych paraleli pomiędzy zapisami z list topograficznych Ramzesa II i Ramzesa III oraz biblijnym opisem konfliktu pomiędzy Izraelitami a Sisera, dowódcą wojsk kananejskiego władcy Jabina (Sdz 4-5). Zamiana wzmianki o *q3yśr ybwn3* „sprzymierzeniu Jabina” z listy Ramzesa II na *q3wś3 tib3rwtw* „hordę (z) Daberat” (względnie „hordę Debory”) w wykazie podbojów Ramzesa III może być interpretowana jako świadectwo istotnych zmian politycznych w rejonie góry Tabor, które zaszły na przestrzeni około jednego wieku. Niewykluczone, że do tych samych wydarzeń nawiązuje biblijna tradycja zachowana w Sdz 4-5.

### Słowa kluczowe

Księga Sędziów, Debora, Ramzes II, Ramzes III, egipskie listy topograficzne

### Keywords

Book of Judges, Deborah, Ramesses II, Ramesses III, Egyptian topographical lists

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*From Nomadism to Monarchy. Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, eds. I. Finkelstein, N. Na'aman, Jerusalem 1994, p. 293.

<sup>30</sup> E. Lipiński, *On the Skirts of Canaan*, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> G. Dembitz, *The Decree of Sethos II at Karnak: Further Thoughts on the Succession Problem after Merneptah*, in: *Proceedings of the Fourth Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists 31 August-2 September 2006*, eds. K. Endreffy, A. Gulyas, Budapest 2007, p. 91-108.

<sup>32</sup> I. Singer, *Egyptian, Canaanites, and Philistines in the Period of the Emergence of Israel*, p. 290.

<sup>33</sup> I. Singer, *Egyptian, Canaanites, and Philistines in the Period of the Emergence of Israel*, p. 290-293.