

# THE FIRST WAVE OF SEA PEOPLES

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of this study is the **first migratory wave of Sea Peoples, dated to the age of Pharaoh Merneptah** (late 13th century BC). According to the Egyptian sources, this coalition consisted of five Sea Peoples, namely the **Ekwesh, Teresh, Lukka, Sherden and Shekelesh**. They joined some Libyan tribes and attacked northern Egypt, but they were defeated in a great battle that took place in year 5 of Merneptah.

However, the archaeological findings from several sites located in Cyprus and Canaan show that the first wave of Sea Peoples had managed to settle in those Mediterranean regions. Pyla-Kokkinokremos (in Cyprus) and Tel Nami (in Canaan) are the settlements that better represent this earlier migratory wave, seeing that they had a brief occupation during a period that is clearly dated before the beginning of the reign of Ramesses III.

The Great Karnak Inscription recorded that many warriors dead in battle, who belonged to the Sea Peoples' coalition, were circumcised; and this intriguing question is also analysed in this work.

According to Egyptian sources, the Sea Peoples or “the countries of the sea” attacked Egypt on several occasions between the 14th and 12th centuries BC. The main attempts of invasion occurred in **year 5 of Merneptah** and **year 8 of Ramesses III**, when two different coalitions confront the Egyptian army in the Nile Delta. Although both coalitions were defeated by the Egyptians, the archaeological evidence shows that they managed to settle in some areas of Canaan, usually controlled by the Egyptians, and therefore two waves of Sea Peoples' migrations took place in the eastern Mediterranean.

The subject of this study is the first wave of Sea Peoples, dated to the age of Pharaoh Merneptah (late 13th century BC). The following four Egyptian documents record the invasion by Libyan and Mediterranean peoples during the reign of Merneptah: the Great Karnak Inscription, the Athribis Stela, the Cairo Column, and the so-called Hymn of Victory.

From these texts, it is deduced that a ruler of Libya named Meryey, son of Ded, had invaded the African land of Tehenu with the help of a league consisting of five Sea Peoples. Later, and probably taking advantage of their numerous forces, the Libyans attacked northern Egypt from the west, together with the same allies, but were vanquished by the Egyptian army in the battle of **Perire**. According to the Egyptian reports, the army of the pharaoh killed and captured thousands of enemies.

The first lines of the Karnak Inscription names the five groups of Sea Peoples in the following text: “Ekwesh, Teresh, Lukka, Sherden, Shekelesh, Northerners coming from all lands” (KRI IV 2.12-14). **It is generally agreed that the Lukka were the inhabitants of Lycia**, in southwestern Anatolia, during the Late Bronze Age. The Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription

of Yalburt, found in Turkey, dates to the age of the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV (13th century BC) and it mentions the land of Lukka together with four towns that have undoubtedly identified as Lycian cities which survived in later times with very similar names. The Lukka were already cited in one of the El-Amarna letters (EA 38), reporting that they raided Cyprus and Egypt during the 14th century BC. This letter was sent by the king of Alasiya (Cyprus) to the Pharaoh. And we also know that the Lukka, recruited by the Hittites, fought against the Egyptian army of Ramesses II in the battle of Kadesh, together with other western Anatolian groups coming from the lands of Arzawa and Masa. Therefore, it is very likely that the five Sea Peoples named in the Great Karnak Inscription, who were “northerners coming from all lands”, had their original homelands in Anatolia and the Aegean Sea, which are precisely located in the northeastern Mediterranean. It is less plausible, however, that some of these groups came from the central Mediterranean, a hypothesis firstly expounded by E. de Rougé and F. Chabas that was mainly based on the similarities of the ethnonyms **Teresh, Sherden and Shekelesh with the names of the Tyrrhenian Sea, Sardinia and Sicily**. In fact, there are other ancient toponyms in Asia Minor, recorded during the Bronze and Iron Ages, which are **also very similar** to the names of those Sea Peoples, such as **Taruisha and Tyrrha (related to the Teresh), Sardis and Sardena (related to the Sherden) and Sagalassos, the river Shekha and the river Sagaris/Sakarya (related to the Shekelesh)**. **All these places were located in western Anatolia, not very far from Lycia**. The maritime trade during the Late Bronze Age, and the final settlement of Aegean colonists in Sicily and Italy, including the Anatolian ancestors of the Etruscans, would explain the similar toponyms found in the central and the eastern Mediterranean.

In another text concerning this conflict, it is reported that Merneptah sent grain in ships for the survival of Hatti, which suggests that the Hittites were in a critical situation at that time. Referring to the Sea Peoples, the pharaoh stated: “Their chief is like a dog [...] bringing to an end the Pedetishew, whom I caused to take grain in ships, to keep alive that land of Kheta” (Breasted III § 580). The term Pedetishew may refer to an Anatolian region called Pitassa by the Hittites. Thus it seems that the cited area had been raided by the same coalition that later joined the Libyans.

With regard to the Sherden, the letters EA 81, EA 122 and EA 123 (from El-Amarna) give information on the activities of some Sherden warriors in the Canaanite city of Byblos, dating to the 14th century BC. In year 2 of Ramesses II, the Sherden attacked northern Egypt and, after being defeated, their captive warriors were recruited in the Egyptian army and thus they fought three years later in the battle of Kadesh. In a rhetorical stela of Ramesses II from Tanis, relating the event of year 2, the Sherden are described as follows: “the unruly Sherden whom no one had ever known how to combat, they come boldly in their warships from the midst of the sea, none being able to withstand them” (KRI II 290. 1-4). In the 12th century BC, the Sherden fought as auxiliary troops of the Egyptian army. They are depicted in the wall reliefs of Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Ramesses III. In most scenes, they are of a similar appearance to that of other Sea Peoples depicted in those reliefs. They wear the same kind of skirt, and they are armed with round shields and the typical swords of triangled blade, also used by the Sea Peoples who confront the Egyptian army in year 8 of Ramesses III. The only difference is the **horned helmet with a sun-disc at the top, used by the Sherden**. The warriors of the invading Sea Peoples, including the so-called **Peleset or Philistines, usually are depicted with a helmet crowned with feathers or, more probably, with leather straps**. However, there are other warriors in this second wave of Sea Peoples that also used horned helmets, but they have not the disc at the top.

The clothes and armament used by these Sea Peoples, depicted in the wall reliefs of Medinet Habu, are most probably of Asiatic origin, as has been argued by J. Vanschoonwinkel. Their typical skirts were also used by the Syrians and the Canaanite people named Shasu, according to the reliefs of Seti I in Karnak, and even by some Egyptian warriors at the age of Ramesses III. These skirts were divided in four or six areas by crossed ribbons. The swords and daggers are classified by Vanschoonwinkel in four types (A, B, C and D) depending on the blade measure (80 cm, 70 cm, 65 cm and less than 50 cm). He relates this bronze weapons to other swords and daggers from Western Asia that were classified by R. Maxwell-Hyatt in 1946. Therefore, the sword type B of Vanschoonwinkel corresponds to the type 52 of Maxwell-Hyatt and the dagger type D to the dagger type 51. The same Levantine origin for the Sherden swords was explained by N. K. Sandars in her classic book on the Sea Peoples (chapter 5). She argued that these swords were an evolution of the typical dagger used in the Levant during the Middle Bronze Age, showing a dagger and a sword from Canaan that are exhibited in the British Museum and are dated to that period. This fact also indicates that the Sea Peoples named **Sherden and Shekelesh were Anatolian**, like the Lukka people from Lycia, and thus they did not arrive from Sardinia and Sicily. However, they may have visited or colonised some areas of these islands, during the Early Iron Age, giving their names to them. This would explain the bronze statuettes found in Sardinia, dating to the Iron Age, which show warriors with horned and “feathered” helmets, the latter very similar to that used by the Peleset or Philistines.

Now we can search for archaeological traces of this first wave of Sea Peoples in Libya, Cyprus and the Levant.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM LIBYA

The excavations carried out by D. White in the **island of Bates** have shown the contacts between the Libyans and the Mediterranean seafarers during the 14th and 13th centuries BC. This small island is located to the east of the city named Marsa Matruh, which was known in ancient times as Amunia and Paraitonion. Sailing from Crete to the southeast, the ships would reach this trading station in the African coast, where they could find water and food before progressing eastwards to the Nile Delta, 240 kms away, continuing their navigation to Canaan and Cyprus, and finally sailing westwards to the Aegean coasts. The prevailing winds in the eastern Mediterranean made possible this round trip during the sailing season. According to the archaeologist L. Hulin, the Libyans also offered ostrich eggs to the foreign visitors, which were very appreciated in that time, and they received metal items in exchange, seeing that the Libyan tribes had no metal ores of their own. In Bates Island, the archaeological findings include remains of crucibles, made of clay or stone, and metal detritus of making arrowheads on the spot, as well as fish hooks and pins. Therefore, these metal tools were locally manufactured in the maritime trading post by men who had some **metallurgic knowledge**.

The area where the crucibles and metal waste was found lay at the southern tip of the island, as well as other rooms and semi-open areas. There was also a storage area in the northern part of the island, and a cooking area. Although it has not been possible to identify the origin of the builders, basing on the architecture style, Hulin believes that they were not African (referring to Egyptians and Libyans) and thus it is possible that this maritime station was built by the Mediterranean people who used it during the sailing seasons and perhaps during longer periods as well. Its location in a little island, where the seafarers could protect

their cargo and their lives if they were attacked from the coast, also supports this idea. Many colonies founded by the Greeks and the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean lands, during the Iron Age, had their origin in some islands that were located close to the coast.

Relating the pottery findings, there is a great variety. Those that came from the geographic area of Cyprus and Anatolia, including the Cypriot type of *phitoi*, are more numerous, followed by the Canaanite, the Minoan and the Mycenaean vessels. However, Hulin suggests that a more limited group could have collected these items as they travelled around the eastern Mediterranean. The usual visitors of this trading post may well have been the Sea Peoples of Aegean-Anatolian origin, including some groups from southern Anatolia and Cyprus that also traded frequently in the Levant. The long maritime routes explains that the Shekelesh were described as the “*Shikala*-people who live on ships” in a letter found in Ras Shamra/Ugarit that was written by the Hittite king (RS 34.129). The final consequence of that association between the Sea Peoples and the Libyans, initially established for commercial purposes, was their military alliance at the age of Merneptah.

Regarding the Libyan tribes, the so-called **Tehenu** and Temehu were named by the Egyptians from earlier times, seeing that their territories were close to Egypt. However, the tribes that joined the Sea Peoples during the reign of Pharaoh Merneptah were the Meshwesh, the Libu and the Kehek, who invaded the land of the Tehenu before attacking Egypt. These Libyan tribes probably practised the pastoral nomadism in a wide area that may have included the coastal region of Marsa Matruh and Bates Island, but they tried to settle in the more fertile lands of Nile valley with the help of the Sea Peoples, who had developed the metallurgy of bronze and thus they were able to supply bronze weapons to their Libyan allies. According to L. Hulin, the remains of sheep, goat and cattle were present on Bates Island, and the booty list of Merneptah included herds taken from the Libyans (KRI IV: 38.5)

To conclude this analysis of archaeological findings in the African coast, it is also interesting to mention the Egyptian **fortress located at Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham**, some 25 kms west of Bates Island. It was established by Ramesses II, the same Pharaoh who defeated the Sherden at the beginning of his reign and who recruited them in his army and bodyguard. The cited fortress had not only a military function but it also could be used by the Egyptians to trade. One of its magazines contained Canaanite and Mycenaean storage jars alongside with Egyptian ones, and other Mycenaean and Cypriot vessels have been found at this site. It would be also possible that the Egyptian fortress was occupied by foreign auxiliary troops like the Sherden, during the reign of Ramesses II, but this is only a hypothesis. **Metallurgic activities**, similar to those produced in Bates Island, took place at Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham in post-Egyptian squatter phases.

## THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM CYPRUS

The island of Cyprus played an important role in the commercial and political network of the Late Bronze Age, due to its copper mines and its geographic position, nearly Anatolia and Syria. A Hittite document dated to the age of king Suppiluliuma II records that Alasiya (or Cyprus) was annexed to the Hittite Empire, for the first time, at the age of Tudhaliya IV (KBo XII 38). This king concluded a treaty with one of his Syrian vassals, the king Sausgamuwa of Amurru, in order to set up a mercantile embargo against the Assyrians, his main enemies. In the same document (KUB XXIII 1), Tudhaliya IV ordered Sausgamuwa to block trade between the ships of Ahhiyawa, also enemies of Hatti, and the Assyrians, seeing

that the goods could pass through his territory. Ahhiyawa was the Hittite term used to designate the Achaeans or Mycenaeans, who were also the Ekwesh included in the first wave of Sea Peoples. Their homeland was not located in Anatolia but in Europe, in the western coasts and islands of the Aegean Sea. This means that all the groups of the coalition (Ekwesh, Teresh, Lukka, Sherden and Shekelesh) were peoples of Aegean origin.

The Ekwesh warriors were not depicted by the Egyptians in the wall reliefs of Medinet Habu, because they did not participated in the second attack on Egypt by the Sea Peoples, dated to the age of Ramesses III. However, the Achaeans were depicted in several frescoes and vessels found in Greece and, therefore, we know that their weapons and clothes were generally different from that used by the Asiatic Sea Peoples. It is possible that a fragment of papyrus, found in El-Amarna, represents Mycenaean warriors, using their typical helmets made of wild-boar tusks, but the illustration is not very clear. In this papyrus, the unknown warriors appear to fight on the side of the Egyptians, perhaps as mercenaries. The age of El-Amarna (14th century BC) was probably the period in which the diplomatic relations between Egypt and Mycenaean Greece were better, and thus we cannot discard this interpretation of the Egyptian papyrus. Be that as it may, this question is not directly connected with the main subject of this study.

Turning back to the Hittite attempts to control Cyprus, the same document that recorded the conquest of the island by Tudhaliya IV (surely carried out with the help of their coastal vassals from Syria and Cilicia) tells that Suppiluliuma II had to control the island again (KBo XII 38). This means that something happened between the two historical events.

The archaeological research in Cyprus indicates that, in the late 13th century BC, two new settlements were built in the coasts of Cyprus, named Maa-Palaeokastro and Pyla-Kokkinokremos, and both had a brief but dense occupation. Their foundation can be considered contemporary to the reign of Pharaoh Merneptah, and consequently to the first wave of Sea Peoples. Therefore, it cannot be dated to the age of Ramesses III and the second migratory wave, which was more important. Maa is located in a small peninsula of the western coast, north of Paphos, and Pyla is a fortified settlement situated nearly the southeastern coast, 10 kms east of ancient Kition and 20 kms southwest of Enkomi.

The establishment of these settlements was clearly a deliberate and planned enterprise, and most cultural innovations that were introduced by its inhabitants came from Mycenaean Greece, such as loom weights, bathtubs, hearths and cyclopean walls. Aegean IIIB pottery, both Mycenaean and Minoan, have been found at these sites, including cooking pots, as well as Cypriot, Anatolian and Canaanite ceramics. The Anatolian Grey Ware, for example, which is typical of northwestern Anatolia, is also present in both settlements (but in small quantities), and we know that northwestern Anatolia was a plausible homeland for the Shekelesh and the Teresh. Among the newcomers, however, the most numerous must have been the Achaeans, who were also the most numerous warriors of the Sea Peoples at the battle of Perire, according to the Egyptian sources.

In Pyla-Kokkinokremos some Sardinian handmade pottery has been found, but this cannot be considered a proof that the homeland of the Sherden was located in the island of Sardinia. There are other samples of Sardinian ware from the Cypriot city of Hala Sultan Tekke, found in 13th century BC contexts, and Hala Sultan Tekke is located 30 kms southwest of Pyla. The report recently published in the *Journal of Archaeological Science* leads to the following conclusion, according to the authors: “The growing evidence of

Cypriot imports in Sardinia and Sardinian imports in Cyprus suggests a determined and well-organized long-distance trade between Cyprus and Sardinia. However, more studies are needed to explain the complexity of these far-reaching contacts, which were the consequence of the dynamic Late Bronze Age metal trade in the Mediterranean and beyond.” The island of Crete may have been involved in that long-distance trade, seeing that the imported Sardinian pottery was also found in Kommos, a Cretan port in the southern coast. Be that as it may, the Mycenaean pottery arrived in Sardinia for the first time during the 14th century BC, according to the archaeological findings from Nuraghe Arrubiu, but some Sherden warriors were, at that time, already established in Byblos, which is too far from Sardinia.

A fortified settlement, named Kastrokephala-Almyrou, was built in the northern coast of Crete during the second half of the 13th century BC. According to the archaeologists K. Nowicki and V. Karageorghis, this site is very similar to Pyla-Kokkinokremos in Cyprus and they were founded at more or less the same time. Nowicki remarks the military character of Kastrokephala, which is beyond doubt. Its fortification wall “could not have been built without a supervision of somebody who was familiar with similar constructions, and could fulfil its function only if defended by a substantial contingent of warriors.” Aegean people of Mycenaean and Cretan origins inhabited this stronghold, not far from Knossos, and Nowicki links them with the Sea Peoples who caused problems to the Hittites in the sea between Lycia and Cyprus. He believes that “they may have been the builders of fortified sites like Maa-Palaeokastro, and to lesser degree involved in the construction of Pyla-Kokkinokremos” and he also explains that “the sudden appearance of defensive coastal settlements in the Southern Aegean islands and their short life indicate substantial population movements within the Aegean”, referring also to other sites excavated in northeastern Crete and the islands of Paros and Astypalaia.

The foundation of fortified settlements in Crete may have provided the Sea Peoples some bridgeheads for their raids and migrations to other areas of the eastern Mediterranean, seeing that there was a general unrest in central and southern Greece during that period. The trading routes had also become insecure after the mercantile embargo imposed by the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV, and this was a plausible reason for the alliance of the Aegean Sea Peoples. Crete is well situated in the western route to the African coast and also in the eastern route to Cyprus and the Levant. We know that Pyla-Kokkinokremos had a short life (perhaps 20 years) and its final evacuation must have occurred when the Hittites and their Syrian allies gained control of Cyprus for the second time. The initial settlement of Maa-Palaeokastro was also abandoned, but this site had a second phase of reoccupation in the 12th century BC, after the general invasion of the island by the Mycenaean Greeks that took place at the age of Ramesses III. However, this historic event is more connected with the second wave of Sea Peoples and to the great crisis that finally took place in the eastern Mediterranean.

#### THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM CANAAN

The coastal site of Tel Nami, in Canaan, was occupied by Aegean settlers in the late 13th century BC. Located on the Carmel coast, this settlement flourished during some 40 years and finally was abandoned, after its possible destruction in the early 12th century BC. Like Pyla-Kokkinokremos in Cyprus, Tel Nami was undoubtedly inhabited by the Sea Peoples who belonged to the first migratory wave, but it was never reoccupied. Mycenaean IIIB pottery was found in Tel Nami, and Neutron Activation Analysis has shown that it was

locally made in the Levant and Cyprus, thus it was not imported from Greece. Other findings include *pithoi* burials of Anatolian style, which proves that some newcomers from Asia Minor also lived in Tel Nami, as well as arrowheads of Mycenaean and Trojan types, and conical cups related to Crete. The metallurgic activity in Tel Nami included metal recycling. The tombs in the eastern necropolis, dated to the same period, contained not only bronze objects but also gold, silver and ivory. According to the archaeologist M. Artzy, this fact indicates the wealth accumulated in Tel Nami by a mixed population of Sea Peoples and Canaanites.

In **Tel Zeror**, another archaeological site that is located some 20 kms to the south, **Mycenaean** IIIB pottery and *pithoi* burials were also found. The probable presence of the same kind of foreigners ended in the early 12th century, as occurred in Tel Nami, but in the case of Tel Zeror, this site was reoccupied in the 11th century BC. To the north of Tel Nami, the harbour towns of Tell Abu Hawam and Tel Akko probably received some influence of the first wave of Sea Peoples, but the settlement of Aegean newcomers in these sites is more doubtful. However, the archaeological findings in the area PH of **Tell Akko** include sherds of Mycenaean IIIB pottery, rather similar to other **Mycenaean** wares made in Cyprus.

The cultural influence caused by this early settlement of the Sea Peoples is more evident in other Canaanite sites that are not located on the coast, although they were connected with Tel Nami by the trading route to the Jordan Valley. These sites were Megiddo, some 50 kms to the east, Beth Shean and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. Furthermore, some materials similar to those of Tel Nami have been found in Tell el-Far'ah South, closer to Egypt. More surprising are the *pithoi* burials that were also used in Megiddo and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, as well as the chamber-tombs of Mycenaean type used in Tell el-Far'ah.

However, the dating of these Aegean burials is still open to debate. In Tell el-Far'ah there are two groups of chamber-tombs, and those of the cemetery 900 (the tombs 902, 905, 914, 920 and 936) are dated earlier than the others, located in the cemetery 500. The archaeologist J. C. Waldbaum ascribed the cemetery 900 tombs to an earlier wave of Sea Peoples and she suggested that some Aegean warriors, recruited by the Egyptians as mercenaries or auxiliary troops, may have been stationed and buried in **Tell el-Far'ah**. Another theory was expounded by B. G. Wood, who believes that the foreigners settled in Tell el-Far'ah as "squatters" after a probable destruction of the site, which could not have occurred before the reign of Seti II. Perhaps the first hypothesis is more plausible, seeing that the Sea Peoples' warriors who fought against the Libyans in the army of Ramesses III (according to the wall reliefs of Medinet Habu) should have been recruited by the Egyptians in Canaan. These warriors were not Mycenaean, but they probably belonged to the Anatolian peoples who also participated in the first migratory wave, including the Sherden mercenaries that undoubtedly fought on the Egyptian side at that time. However, the recruitment of Mycenaean mercenaries at the age of Seti II is also plausible, although they did not participate in the campaigns of Ramesses III. Two swords Naue II, of European origin, were found in Zagazig and Tell Firaun, which are located in the Nile Delta. The flange-hilted sword named Naue II was different to the Asiatic types of swords used by the Sea Peoples from Anatolia. It was originated in the Danubian area but its use expanded through the Balkans to the Aegean and the Adriatic lands. Therefore, this new type of sword has been found in Italy, Greece, Crete, the island of Kos and also in other areas of Cyprus and the Levant that are related to the migratory movements of the Sea Peoples. In the Cypriot city of Enkomi, for example, one of its Achaean conquerors was buried (in the early 12th century BC) with a Naue sword and a Mycenaean type of greaves. The Naue sword

from Tell Firaun has two cartouches of Seti II, engraved in its blade, thus it is more or less contemporary to the earlier chamber-tombs of Tell el Far'ah. According to Nowicki, another Naue sword has been recently found at the Cretan site of Kastrokephalla, which is also linked with the first wave of Sea Peoples.

The archaeologist M. Dothan also believed that a first wave of Sea Peoples settled in Canaan before the arrival of the Peleset or Philistines, who were included in the second migratory wave. He suggested that the stratum XIIIb in Ashdod and the stratum VII in Ekron may have been occupied by the early wave of Sea Peoples. This theory would explain the findings of Mycenaean pottery, with simple decoration, from the early strata of those cities. Although this pottery has been usually classified as Mycenaean IIC ware and, consequently, has been dated to the 12th century BC, it is rather similar to the Mycenaean IIIB pottery found in Tel Nami.

The Peleset, depicted in Medinet Habu with their typical “feathered” helmets, are undistinguishable from the so-called Tjeker, who are identifiable as the Teukrians (or Trojans) from Anatolia. Therefore, they must have been another Anatolian people who were also named Anakim in the Bible, as well as Pelishtim or Philistines. The Anakim surely came from Anaku, which was the “Tin-Land” mentioned in some Akkadian sources of the Third Millennium BC as a country located to the west, beyond the Syrian coast of the Mediterranean. This land of Anaku was surely located in southern Anatolia, seeing that there were some tin mines in the Taurus mountains dated to that time, according to the excavations carried out by K. A. Yener in the geographic area of Kestel and Bolkardag. However, the biblical denomination of “sons of Kaphtor”, also applied to the Philistines, may have been originated by the earlier settlement of the Sea Peoples in the coastal strip of Canaan, seeing that the first wave includes the Ekwesh who came from Greece and Crete, and Crete was the Aegean island named Kaphtor by the Hebrews and Kaptara by the Akkadians. The people properly named Peleset or Philistines may have mixed with the Ekwesh or Achaeans in southern Canaan and, therefore, the Hebrews indistinctly considered them “sons of Anak” and “sons of Kaphtor” in the biblical texts.

Now, there is another intriguing question on the Sea Peoples that has been eluded by most scholars, and this question is analysed in the next part of this work.

## THE AEGEAN WARRIORS WHO WERE CIRCUMCISED

In the Great Karnak Inscription we find this surprising reference to one of the Sea Peoples (according to the translation by J. H. Breasted): “Ekwesh of the countries of the sea, who had no foreskins”.

This means that the Ekwesh who fought against the Egyptians in year 5 of Merneptah were circumcised, and the circumcision was a common practice in Canaan and Egypt, but not in Anatolia and Europe. The biblical texts, for example, clearly indicate that the Philistines of foreign origin (the “sons” of Kaphtor and Anak) were “uncircumcised”. Therefore, how can we explain it? Were the Ekwesh a Semitic people, actually different to the Achaeans from Greece? Were the Egyptian records mistaken?

The Greek mythology tells us that the Hellenic city of Thebes was founded by a Phoenician hero named Kadmos, but we know that the Thebans spoke the Mycenaean language, of clear Indo-European origin, during the Late Bronze Age. Kadmos was really a Semitic



name, but this legend is more probably based on the diffusion of the religious cult to Kadmos or Kadmilos, an Asiatic god of metallurgy, to the Aegean Sea and the Greek region of Thebes, and thus the Theban citadel was named Kadmeion in its honour. Other legends referred to the mythic hero Danaos, whose name is also of Asiatic or Semitic origin, and it can be related either to the Cilician people of Danuna (neighbours of the Syrians) or the Asiatic Hyksos who had ruled Egypt. The ancient name Danaos is recorded in a Mycenaean document as Da-na-jo, and Greece was named Tanaja (or Danaja) in an Egyptian inscription from Kom el-Hetan, dated to the 14th century BC.

However, the Great Karnak Inscription is even more surprising, because in the same paragraph (KRI IV 8.16-9.2) it is said that the Egyptians cut and counted the hands of the Shekelesh warriors who died in battle (250 hands) and the hands of the Teresh (790 hands). There are some lacunas in this inscription, due to its poor state of conservation, and then we have not the same kind of information relating the other Sea Peoples of the coalition. Nevertheless, the Athribis Stela also mentions the hands that were cut to the “Ekwesh, (of the) countries of the sea” (KRI IV 22.7-10). **We know that the Egyptians usually cut the hands of those warriors who were circumcised, and the penises of their uncircumcised enemies.** In conclusion, the Egyptian records report that the Ekwesh, the Teresh and the Shekelesh were circumcised. We don't know what happened with the Lukka and Sherden warriors, due to the lacunas in the inscriptions.

The Egyptians are too precise when counting the number of hands, and thus this information cannot be a simple mistake. Some scholars consider unreliable the Egyptian records on the Sea Peoples because they are unable to interpret these texts correctly, which often leads them to reject further studies on its historical background. It is clear that the circumcision of the Ekwesh, Teresh and Shekelesh warriors (at the age of Merneptah) was due to an extraordinary circumstance, seeing that other Sea Peoples like the biblical Philistines were not circumcised.

There is a plausible hypothesis that could explain this strange fact, briefly expounded in a note included in another published study (see Moreu 2003, note 103). It is possible that **some of the Sea Peoples who attacked Egypt in year 5 of Merneptah had been previously settled on the Carmel coast and, therefore, they were circumcised as a pledge of brotherhood with Canaanite people.** According to M. Artzy, the newcomers inhabited the Levantine settlement of Tel Nami together with some autochthonous people. The foreigners may well have been Ekwesh or Achaeans, who used Mycenaean IIIB pottery in Tel Nami, as well as the Anatolian peoples named Teresh and Shekelesh, who used *pithoi* burials. The finding of some Trojan arrowheads in Tel Nami can be also explained if at least some of those settlers came from northwestern Anatolia (i.e. from Taruisha near the Troad or from the Shekha River land, most probably located in the Mysian area of Teuthrania). It is even possible that the migrant warriors married Canaanite women in Tel Nami, for the prosperity of their colony, and this may have been another reason for adopting voluntarily the Semitic practice of circumcision. It is documented, for example that, in the Iron Age, the Greek colonisers of Cyrene (all them males) decided to marry Libyan women, and something similar could have occurred in the Carmel coast during the Late Bronze Age.

If this theory is correct, the circumcision of the Ekwesh and some of their allies is not a serious problem and it provides us, instead, a better knowledge of the first wave of Sea Peoples and their wide movements in the eastern Mediterranean.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research on the Sea Peoples is usually focused on the major events that took place at the age of Ramesses III, during the so called “Crisis Years”, because the fall of the Hittite Empire occurred in the early 12th century BC, and the initial settlement of the Philistines in Canaan has been ascribed to the same period by most scholars. This is why the earlier wave of Sea Peoples, dated to the age of Merneptah, has generally attracted less attention.

However, the first coalition of Sea Peoples is well represented in two archaeological sites that were occupied during a few decades until its final destruction or abandonment, and thus their inhabitants could not mix with the second wave of Sea Peoples. These small but important settlements are Pyla-Kokkinokremos in Cyprus and Tel Nami in Canaan. The fortified settlement of Kastrokephalla-Almyrou, in Crete, is also relevant for this study, seeing that its characteristics and chronology are rather similar to those of Pyla-Kokkinokremos, and it may have been a plausible bridgehead for the raids of the Aegean Sea Peoples towards Cyprus, Canaan, Libya and Egypt.

We can be confident that the five Sea Peoples involved in the first migratory wave had their homelands in the Aegean Sea, although four of them were of western Anatolian origin and the fifth group, probably the most numerous, is identifiable as the Achaeans or Mycenaean from Greece and Crete. The archaeological findings in Tel Nami show clearly this mixture of Achaean and Anatolian newcomers.

We know from the Hittite sources that the Ahhiyawa or Achaeans were enemies of the Hittites during the 13th century BC, and the peoples who lived in western Anatolia were just in the middle of this permanent confrontation. They usually fluctuated between the rebellion against the Hittite empire, supported by the Achaeans, and the subjection to Hatti, which would lead them to fight against the Achaeans on the Hittite side. At the age of Muwatalli II and Hattusili III, the Achaeans based in Millawata or Miletos (a coastal city in Caria) were allied with the Lukka people and with an Anatolian rebel called Piyamaradu whose activities involved the land of Wilusa. However, the king of the Shekha River Land allied with the Hittites against Piyamaradu and the Ahhiyawa. At the age of Pharaoh Merneptah, or a few years earlier, the Hittite king Tudhaliya IV probably set up a mercantile embargo against the Achaeans, with the necessary collaboration of his coastal vassals in southern Anatolia, Cyprus and Syria. Some peoples who lived in western Anatolia (Teresh, Shekelesh, Sherden and Lukka) were probably allied with the Ekwesh or Achaeans in that period and, therefore, they may have been also punished by the interruption of trade in the route to Cyprus and the Levant.

In this historical context, the **annexation of Cyprus to the Hittite Empire** would cause that the **Achaeans and their allies tried to break the mercantile embargo**, seeing that the main copper mines in the eastern Mediterranean were located in Cyprus. In the Argolid, the main cities were strongly fortified but, even so, internal conflicts broke out in Greece as a probable consequence of the general crisis of their economic system. A **war between Argolid and Thebes**, recorded by the Hellenic tradition, may have occurred at that time. In any case, it is true that several Mycenaean settlements in central and southern Greece suffered destruction in this period, although the collapse of Mycenaean civilization did not take place until the late 12th century BC.

Despite these conflicts, some Achaean contingents from the Greek mainland and Crete participated in the first wave of Sea Peoples, in response to the breakdown of their commercial network, together with their allies from western Anatolia. The maritime raiders may have joined their fleet in northern Crete and sailed to Cyprus, where they could vanquish the opposition of the Hittite subjects in the island. They landed in the western and southern coasts, where they built the Aegean settlements of Maa and Pyla. Some of them also sailed to the Carmel coast in order to evade the Hittite embargo and they founded a colony in Tel Nami, mixing with the Canaanite inhabitants of this coastal region.

Once established in Cyprus and Canaan, the Sea Peoples of this migratory wave may have planned the attack on Egypt, with the help of the Libyans, in order to weaken the Egyptian resistance to their settlement on lands controlled by the pharaoh (both in Canaan and Libya). A contingent of Ekwesh, Teresh and Shekelesh warriors (who were circumcised) possibly sailed to the west and joined other contingents of Sea Peoples in Cyprus and the Aegean (belonging to the Sherden and Lukka peoples). They continued their navigation southwards to the Libyan coast, via Crete, but many of them finally were killed or captured by the Egyptians in the battle of Perire.

However, the survivors of the battle (whose number is unknown) and the remaining colonists in Cyprus and Canaan were able to prosper during a few decades because more immigrants, coming from the Aegean lands, may have joined them after their defeat in the Nile Delta.

To conclude this plausible reconstruction of the historic events, it is also interesting to mention the Hittite document called the “Madduwatta Indictment” (KUB XIV 1 + KBo XIX 38). It is a letter written by a Hittite king named Arnuwanda, successor of another king named Tudhaliya. It was initially dated to the age of Arnuwanda III, contemporary of Pharaoh Merneptah, but most scholars have accepted its redating to the age of Arnuwanda I, which is mainly based on a linguistic analysis. However, the text of this document fits better the historical context of the 12th century BC, and perhaps its dating should be reconsidered again. Like Piyamaradu, Madduwatta rebelled against the Hittite Empire with the support of the Ahhiyawa, which had been formerly his enemies. Allied with the Achaeans, whose chief was named Attarissiya, and with other people from Arzawa (western Anatolia), he caused serious problems to the Hittites in some territories controlled by them, such as Hapalla, Pitassa and the island of Alasiya (Cyprus). From the archaeological research, we know that the first wave of Sea Peoples landed in Cyprus and, from the Egyptian records, we also know that the chief of the Sea Peoples devastated the Hittite land of “Pedetishew”, which is identifiable with the frontier region of Pitassa, located to the east of Arzawa. The attack on Pitassa must have been the first campaign of the Sea Peoples’ coalition (just before their maritime raid to Cyprus), although Pitassa was not a coastal land. And with regard to Arzawa, its main territory was named Mira by the Hittites (the region later named Lydia) and this was the most probable homeland of the Sherden, seeing that the capital of Lydia was Sardis during the Iron Age.

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KBo *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy*

KUB *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy*

RS Tablets from Ras Shamra

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