THE DECLINE OF BRONZE AGE CIVILISATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: CYPRUS AND BEYOND

edited by

Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer
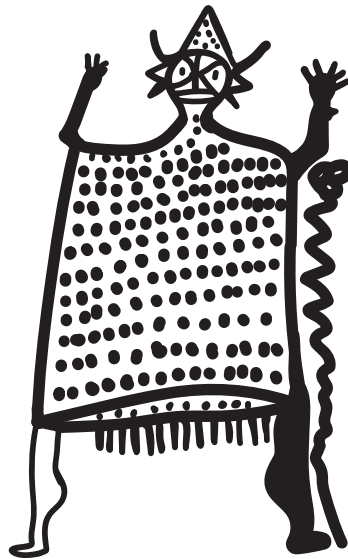
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Founded by Paul Åström

Cover image: 'Horned God' on krater N121 from Hala Sultan Tekke, CQ2, Stratum 2
(LC IIIA early; ca 1200 BC) (drawing by T. Bürge)

Contents

Preface and acknowledgements

The papers presented in this volume are the results of the conference *The Decline of Bronze Age Civilisations in the Mediterranean: Cyprus and Beyond* organised by the editors of the volume and held on January 17 and 18, 2020 at the Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg. It was supported by much appreciated funds from the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, registration number 2019-00327) and the Riksbank's Anniverary Fund (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, registration number F19-1036:1). In addition, it was the final conference of the project *The Collapse of Bronze Age Societies in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Vetenskapsrådet, registration number 2015-01192; project director Peter M. Fischer) that investigated the causes of disruption in international trade and the 'collapse' of Bronze Age civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the 13th and the 12th centuries BC, focusing on the island of Cyprus which was the centre of interregional trade in this region. The project was closely connected with our ongoing excavations at the Late Bronze Age harbour city of Hala Sultan Tekke on the island's southern coast.

The newly restored and enlarged building of the Faculty of Humanities, where the conference was hosted, thanks to the support of Henrik Jansson, the Head of the Department, provided an excellent environment for the conference. The conference dinner in the refined Jugendstil milieu of 'Ågrenska Villan', built in 1916 in the centre of Gothenburg as a private residence and since 1981 owned by the University of Gothenburg, was much appreciated by the participants. To the best of our knowledge, this conference was the last at the university of Gothenburg before the serious outbreak of COVID-19 ended physical meetings for almost two years. In retrospect, we are even more grateful that we could enjoy these very intense and stimulating two days to the full, untroubled by thoughts about physical distancing, the potential spread of infection and other issues that would start to affect our everyday life only a few weeks later.

For some of us the pandemic was a very quiet and perhaps more productive period than usual, while others had to deal with parental challenges while schools and preschools were closed. In spite of these and the many other difficulties, issues and changes that we all had to face during the last more than two and a half years, we are particularly glad that all participants were able to submit a contribution to the present volume. In addition, we have included three more chapters to round off the topic.

Gothenburg and Bern, June 2023
Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer

List of contributors

Joachim Bretschneider
Department of Archaeology, Ghent University, Belgium
Joachim.Bretschneider@UGent.be

Teresa Bürge
Institute for Archaeological Sciences (IAW), University of Bern, Switzerland
Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAI), Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)
teresa.buerge@oeaw.ac.at

Rachid Cheddadi
CNRS-UM2-IRD, ISEM, Université Montpellier II, France
cheddadi.rc@gmail.com

Jan Driessen
AEGIS, CEMA-INCAL-UCLouvain, Belgium
jan.driessen@uclouvain.be

Marina Faka
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute
faka@cyi.ac.cy

Peter M. Fischer
Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
peter@fischerarchaeology.se

Svetlana Gasanova
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute
s.gasanova@cyi.ac.cy

Florence Gaignerot-Driessen
Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati, USA
gaignefm@ucmail.uc.edu

Sorin Hermon
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute
s.hermon@cyi.ac.cy

Maria Iacovou
Archaeological Research Unit, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Cyprus
iakovou.maria.1@ucy.ac.cy

Reinhard Jung
Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAI), Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)
Reinhard.Jung@oeaw.ac.at

David Kaniewski
Département Biologie et Géosciences, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès & Université Paul Sabatier-Toulouse 3, France
david.kaniewski@univ-tlse3.fr

Athanasia Kanta
Mediterranean Archaeological Society, Centre for the Study of Cretan and Mediterranean Civilization, Greece
athanasiaka@gmail.com

Vasiliki Kassianidou
Archaeological Research Unit, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Cyprus
kassianidou.vasiliki@ucy.ac.cy

Ekin Kozal
Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey
ekozal08@gmail.com

Igor Kreimerman
Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte und Vorderasiatische Archäologie, Heidelberg University, Germany
Igor.kreimerman@gmail.com

Natalia Lodeiro Pichel
Department of Ancient History, Medieval History, Paleography and Diplomacy, Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain
natalia.lodeiro@estudiante.uam.es

Frédéric Luce
EcoLab, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, INP, France
frederic.luce@univ-tlse3.fr

Nick Marriner
CNRS, ThéMA, Université de Franche-Comté, UMR 6049, MSHE Ledoux, France
nick.marriner@gmail.com

Uroš Matić
Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAI), Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)
Uros.Matic@oeaw.ac.at

Mathias Mehofer
Vienna Institute for Archaeological Science (VIAS), Human Evolution and Archaeological Sciences (HEAS), University of Vienna, Austria
mathias.mehofer@univie.ac.at

Hans Mommsen
Helmholtz-Institut für Strahlen- und Kernphysik, Universität Bonn, Germany
mommsen@hiskp.uni-bonn.de

Thierry Otto
EcoLab, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, INP, France
thierry.otto@univ-tlse3.fr

Tatiana Pedrazzi
Institute of Heritage Sciences, National Research Council of Italy
tatiana.pedrazzi@cnr.it

Martina Polig
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute
m.polig@cyi.ac.cy

Laerke Recht
Ancient Eastern Mediterranean Studies, Institute of Classics, University of Graz, Austria
rechtl@tcd.ie

Carole Roche-Hawley
Département d'Archéologie et d'histoire de l'Antiquité, Institut français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo)
c.roche-hawley@ifporient.org

Peter Steier
Faculty of Physics, Isotope Physics, Vienna Environmental Research Accelerator, University of Vienna, Austria
peter.steier@univie.ac.at

Johannes H. Sterba
Center for Labelling and Isotope Production, TRIGA Center Atominstitut, TU Wien, Austria
johannes.sterba@tuwien.ac.at

Elise Van Campo
EcoLab, Université de Toulouse, CNRS, INP, France
evancampo@orange.fr

Valentina Vassallo
Science and Technology in Archaeology and Culture Research Center, The Cyprus Institute
v.vassallo@cyi.ac.cy

Paula Waiman-Barak
Sonia & Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, Israel
pwaimanbarak@tauex.tau.ac.il

Eva Maria Wild
Faculty of Physics, Isotope Physics, Vienna Environmental Research Accelerator, University of Vienna, Austria
eva.maria.wild@univie.ac.at

Annik Wüthrich
Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAI), Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)
Annik.Wuethrich@oeaw.ac.at

Sea Peoples in Egyptian sources during the reign of Ramesses III: context, composition and perception

Annik Wüthrich* and Uroš Matić

Abstract

The Sea Peoples are attested in written sources since the Amarna period, but gained prominence in Egyptian documents in the second half of the New Kingdom during the reigns of Ramesses II, Merenptah and Ramesses III. These textual and visual sources have been variously analysed and translated by Egyptologists and consequently variously interpreted and utilised by historians and archaeologists. More often than not, the references to the Sea Peoples have been taken out of context, gaining a kind of life of their own. However, in this chapter, in order to understand these attestations, we will pay close attention to other elements of the documents in which they are found. Furthermore, we will consider the archaeological contexts within which they appear, since they can inform us about their target audience and the intentions or strategy behind their composition. We cautiously propose two possible scenarios in which these sources could have been consumed by distinct audiences. Nevertheless, we conclude that essentially the same narrative was intended to reach as many people as possible, which casts doubt on using too literal an approach towards reports relating to the Sea Peoples conflict.

Introduction

The Sea Peoples or 'peuples de la mer' is an expression first used by the French Egyptologist Emmanuel de Rougé (1811–1872) in 1855 in his description of the reliefs on the second pylon at the Medinet Habu temple

of Ramesses III (ca 1187–1157 BC after Warburton *et al*. 2006) in Egypt (de Rougé 1855). He linked the evidence from Medinet Habu with earlier evidence from the reign of Merenptah (ca 1213–1203 BC) at Karnak temple (Kitchen 1982: 8–9) and argued that Achaeans, Danaans, Etruscans, Lycians, Sardinians, Sicilians and Dardanians attacked Egypt in the aftermath of the Trojan War (de Rougé 1867: 39). This interpretation was based on his correlation of various Sea Peoples groups from ancient Egyptian textual sources with later ethnonyms in Greek and Roman sources. For scholars of his time, Homeric accounts of the Trojan War were understood as references to an actual historical event that happened as described by Homer. Furthermore, 'tracing ethnicities backwards' by relying on similarities in ethnonyms was in line with the idea prevalent at that time, namely that ethnic identities are fixed and unchangeable, embedded in clearly delineated territories. Consequently, further information from one source is uncritically used to fill the gaps in another source (for a critical history of research and concepts see Jones 1997; Mihajlović 2014; Matić 2020). Thus, François Chabas (1817–1882), one of de Rougé's students, suggested as early as 1873 that the Peleset group of the Sea Peoples were the Pelasgians from the Aegean (Chabas 1872: 250, 289–291). Gaston Maspero (1846–1916), another French Egyptologist and successor of de Rougé at the Collège de France, greatly popularised the expression 'peuples de la mer' in his own works. He proposed a southward movement of the Indo-European Illyrians, pressuring the Dorians and the Phrygians to move out of the Balkans. The Dorians and the Phrygians then displaced the peoples on the coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, swept over Cyprus and finally attacked Egypt (Maspero 1873, 1896: 363, 461).

Since the early works of these French scholars, the Sea Peoples have become real actors in Late Bronze Age history, frequently envisioned as a mass of migrants storming into the Eastern Mediterranean in several waves. The idea that there were significant political, social and economic changes occurring during the 12th century BC all over the Mediterranean, and that these are attributed to migrations of Sea Peoples, is

often taken for granted (for example Suchowska-Ducke 2016: 74). One frequently encounters the word 'invasion' in connection to the Sea Peoples (Albright 1950: 169; Redford 1992: 250; Lehmann 1996: 7; Yasur-Landau 2010; Weinstein 2012: 161; Hoffmeier 2018: 1). Even in some of the most recent works, one can find highly contested terminology such as 'the search for *Lebensraum* (living space)' in waves (Bietak 2015: 29). Historians in Egyptology continued to approach the identification of the different Sea Peoples groups by searching for parallels in sources of other contemporary and later cultures (for an overview of suggestions see Machinist 2000: 67; Cline & O'Connor 2003: 111–116; 2012: 186–192; Haider 2012: 154; Jung 2017: 23–24; Redford 2018). At the same time, archaeologists dealing with the Eastern Mediterranean tried to use these identifications to trace the activities of the Sea Peoples in the archaeological record (for an overview see Fischer & Bürge 2017). Some have attempted to identify the northern invaders in handmade burnished pottery (for example Bankoff *et al*. 1996: 2; for criticism see Sandars 1978: 83), while others did it through the presence of Late Helladic IIIC pottery in destruction layers (for example Dothan 1995: 1267; Lehmann 1996: 2; for a more balanced view see Jung 2017: 30). Even the question of what is meant by a destruction layer or horizon and how these are formed does not have a single straightforward answer for all Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean sites (Millek 2017, see also Kreimerman in this volume; for a contrasting opinion see, *inter alia*, Hoffmeier 2018).

The approach to ethnic identity shared by de Rougé, Chabas and Maspero, and inherited by some later authors, has been criticised by anthropologists and archaeologists for decades (Jones 1997 with further references). The interpretative strategy of archaeologists who searched for Sea Peoples in the archaeological record is embedded in culture-historical archaeology and its theoretical and methodological premise, defined by Vere Gordon Childe: 'We find certain types of remains—pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall call a "cultural group" or just a "culture". We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today we would call "a people"' (Childe 1929: v–vi). Since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1980s, processual and post-processual archaeologists have pointed out the problems behind the understanding of archaeological cultures as real entities that reflect ancient norms, including those of ethnic identity (Jones 1997; Matić 2020). Ethnoarchaeological studies have demonstrated that there is no one-to-one equivalence between material culture and ethnicity. People of the same ethnic group can share some forms of material culture but do not have to (Hodder 1982). Today, ethnic identity is understood as based on shifting, situational, subjective identifications of self and others, rooted in daily practices and historical experiences, and subject

to transformations and discontinuity (Jones 1997: 13). Egyptologists researching ethnic identity have increasingly stressed the importance of paying close attention to the fact that the ethnonyms we encounter in ancient Egyptian sources do not necessarily reflect how the people they refer to saw themselves. On the contrary, these terms are to be understood as assigned by Egyptians, based on their own various criteria and for their own various purposes, including ideological and administrative (for an overview with further references see Matić 2020). Previously, Nancy K. Sandars (1978: 94) wrote that there was no whole-scale migration: instead, small, well-organised and well-equipped bands would have moved swiftly southwards, most likely taking with them their own armourers, since this was the practice not only in large armies but even for a single ship.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no scholarly consensus on many of the common questions relating to the Sea Peoples among Egyptologists or archaeologists. Whereas some Egyptologists and archaeologists continue to see Sea Peoples groups as either a cause or consequence of mass migrations and the turbulent time of the 12th century BC (Kimmig 1964; Redford 1992: 245; Dothan 1995: 1268; Kitchen 2012: 15; Hoffmeier 2018), others take a more cautious or rather minimalist view (Cifola 1988, 1991, 1994; Drews 2000; Goedicke 2001; Gilboa 2005: 66; Iskander 2010; Emanuel 2013; Ben-Dor Evian 2016; Matić & Franković 2020; Knapp 2021; Matić 2022).

Our aim in this paper is not to take sides in this debate, although one of us has been vocal against *balkanism* in some interpretations and the idea of a mass migration from the north (Matić & Franković 2020; Matić 2022). Instead, we will focus on the possible ways that ancient Egyptians understood the narratives about Sea Peoples in the texts in which they are mentioned. We pay close attention both to the context of the inscriptions and representations and how this could have influenced both the perception and reception of the Sea Peoples. Furthermore, we focus on texts in which Sea Peoples are described within complex compositions, in which the Sea Peoples are only one of several different compositional elements. Understanding these elements is of great importance for understanding the possible ways Sea Peoples were perceived and how this perception/reception could have been used for ideological purposes.

The context of the inscriptions and representations related to the conflict with Sea Peoples

One of the main problems we recognise in approaches to the Sea Peoples as attested in Egyptian sources, and in archaeological attempts to use these, is the lack of focus on the context, audience and purpose of these texts and visual representations (with notable

exceptions, for example O'Connor 2000: 86). We first need to understand these aspects before we can attempt to use the information from the sources in building our interpretations. The importance of the context of the textual and visual records of the Egyptian conflict with the Sea Peoples cannot be overstressed. This is because the context offers clues towards a better understanding of the intended audience, access and visibility of the sources in question.

The construction of the Medinet Habu temple of Ramesses III began in the fourth or fifth year of this king's reign and was completed in his year 12 (Grandet 1993: 132–134; Kitchen 2012: 14–15; O'Connor 2012: 259–260). When creating the military scenes, such as those in which we find Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu, the state would first define the necessary message. Blank walls were either available or had to be constructed. Then a design was required which had to be sent to a chief of carvers and draughtsmen. The space could also have been filled with texts, and the question of how literary or complex such texts were depended on many factors, including time, approach and individual preferences (Spalinger 2011a: 12).

The textual and visual sources relating to the Sea Peoples are numerous in the temple of Medinet Habu and are of a different kind (**Fig. 1**): they are textually attested on the interior south wall of the second court in the Great Inscription of Year 5, which describes the First Libyan War but also refers to the Sea Peoples (Nelson 1930: pls 27–28; Kitchen 1983: 20.11–27.8). If this description is related to the representation of Naval and Land battles against Sea Peoples on the

Figure 1. Medinet Habu temple with the sources discussed in the text

north exterior wall, as has been suggested by some scholars (Hoffmeier 2018: 2–3), then it is important to note that the texts and images referring presumably to the same event have not been placed together. The conflict with the Sea Peoples (Great Inscription of Year 8) and its resolution are then described in detail on the eastern side of the 2nd pylon; conflict on the northern tower and resolution on the southern tower (see further for a detailed discussion). The south rhetorical stela from Year 12 of Ramesses III mentions that he defeated different Sea Peoples and this is located on the east façade of the south tower of the 1st pylon (Nelson 1932: pl. 107; Kitchen 1983: 72.4–74). Furthermore, the conflict with the Sea Peoples is depicted on the northern exterior wall of the Medinet Habu temple between the depiction of the 1st Libyan war and the north side of the 2nd pylon. Although other conflicts, such as the 1st and 2nd Libyan and Syrian wars are also depicted inside the temple, the conflicts with the Sea Peoples are the only conflicts depicted solely on the outer wall (Nelson 1930: pls 29–42; Kitchen 1983: 27–35). This is an important factor when considering access and visibility, a point that we will discuss next.

The ancient Egyptian temple was a 'system with zones of increasingly limited access', which related to the class to which the priests belonged and the notion of purity (Quack 2013: 118). The rules of access are described in the so-called *Book of the Temple*, a large manual on the ideal Egyptian temple currently being reconstructed by Joachim F. Quack from around 40 mostly unpublished papyri and originally composed in Middle Egyptian. No one was allowed to enter the sanctuary and the central halls except the priests. The pronaos was the last of the interior rooms where space was also provided for the gatekeepers. The open outer court was marked off by a pylon and it is here that the king's purification rituals took place before he entered the temple. Another court, located farther out, was called the court of the assembly (*mš*ꜥ Erichsen 1954: 181–182), which could indicate a more general access, although it could also have been restricted to men with institutional affiliation. A third court is also mentioned, which could have been accessible by either women or non-priests (Quack 2013: 119). However, these restrictions refer to the inner and not the outer area of the temple.

Quack furthermore analyses rules of purity and temple access. These indicate that, even in the areas accessible to non-priests, there was strict control over which members of the population could enter the temple and which were only allowed to be in the temple surrounds, e.g. people with leprosy (Quack 2013: 120). We can safely assume that more people had access to the outer area of the temple and could therefore have seen the battle representations and accompanying texts. One should also not neglect oral dissemination of information, as those who had access could have communicated what they saw to those who, for various reasons, had not seen the text and
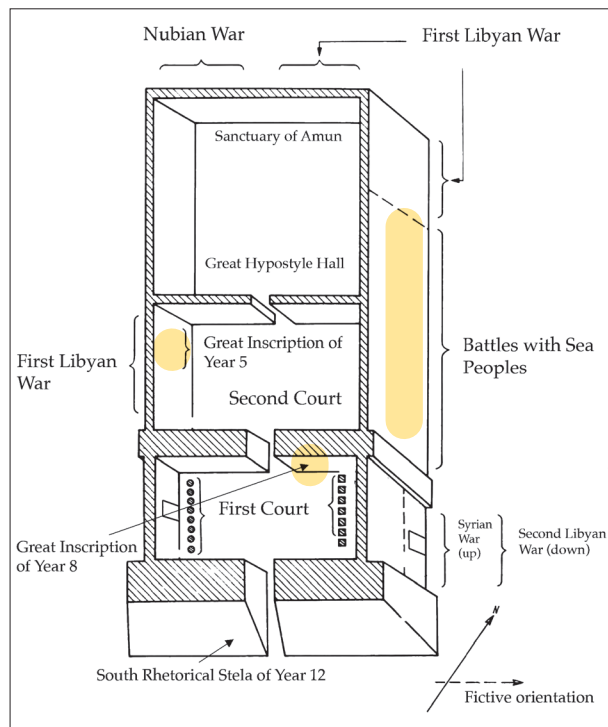
images (Matić 2019a: 192–196). On this basis, it is clear that battle representations and their accompanying texts were not a form of 'restricted knowledge' (Baines 1990). This means that they were not communicated only to the deities (Davies 2018: 13), but also to the general population of Egypt. Other texts referring to the Sea Peoples groups at Medinet Habu, such as the Great Inscription of Year 5, are positioned in the inner parts of the temple (second court interior), indicating that not everyone could have accessed them.

However, access is not the same as visibility. Some visible texts and images are not necessarily accessible to all, since some of these would have been visible but not visible enough to be read. Others could have been read but hardly understandable (Fitzenreiter 2015: 179). As stressed by Vanessa Davies, the experiences of ancient viewers would have been different to those of modern epigraphers and palaeographers. The ancient viewers lacked the aid of ladders, artificial lights, cameras and scanning technologies (Davies 2018: 11). Furthermore access to the scenes at the exterior walls was seriously hampered in ancient times by numerous administrative buildings that stood between the temple and the enclosure wall. We also have to bear in mind that over millennia the temple reliefs of Medinet Habu have weathered to the point that most of the colour is now lost and some parts are damaged to the level of not being recognisable anymore. It is logical that those who had access to the reliefs shortly after they were made could have seen their content better than those who visited the temple hundreds of years later. Therefore, these experiences were surely different. Modern Egyptologists more often than not rely on the line-drawings made by the Epigraphic Survey team of the Oriental Institute in Chicago (Nelson 1930, 1932). As well as being able to lay these illustrations on the table and view them as a whole, they are also able to view these line-drawings on computer screens, zooming into and cutting out details. We are not diminishing the importance of such research, our point is that ancient viewers did not observe these images in the same way. They had to be there in person. The only way for them to see these scenes as a whole would be to walk far enough from the temple wall. However, by doing this, although they would be able to see the reliefs as a whole, they would have been unable to see the details anymore. Moving closer they would be able to see some details, but would not be able to observe the whole. The same applies to the accompanying texts. One would have to stand at a very specific location to view the texts in their entirety and also be able to read them as a whole. Otherwise, the viewer would be able to discern individual signs, words or only parts of the sentences at best. This leads us to the question of narration. Even when able to see parts of the text, the viewers were not necessarily able to read it. We know that a small percentage of the population was fully literate. Also, even being able to read the text does not

mean that the viewer would be able to understand what the text was communicating. This would very much be dependent on the background knowledge of the reader. We should not assume that all ancient Egyptians shared the same knowledge of the world. This was an intersectional experience depending on gender, occupation and class, and maybe even ethnic identity. The narrative aspects of the texts were not something everyone could obtain from them. The same goes with the images. In order to follow the details through, a viewer would have to move from point to point, but this would still not present them with a whole image before their eyes. We reconstruct the movement in front of the Sea People conflict scenes as going from right to left or from west to east, starting with the issuing of the weapons, march to war, land battle, lion hunt, river-mouth battle, spoils of war and presentation of spoils to the gods (Spalinger 2011a: xv, fig. 33). How many visitors to the temple today read the scenes in this order? How many would have read them in the same order in ancient Egypt? The idea that Egyptian artists and scribes did not intend the reliefs and texts to be looked upon or read in isolation (Redford 2000: 8) does not take into account that the audience was heterogenous.

Therefore, as pointed out by Anthony J. Spalinger (2011a: 2) in regards to Egyptian military scenes, 'we cannot allow ourselves to believe that they tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"'. Indeed, the historicity of the texts has been questioned already from the point of view of their composition (Redford 2000: 11). The Egyptian reflection of reality within these images and texts is subject to certain laws of aspects, which we have to consider in order to properly interpret them (Spalinger 2011a: 20). As argued by Pascal Vernus (1990: 41–43), military images 'sacralise' the vision that the dominant royal ideology demanded. Military images negate history by means of the reduction of events to the repetition of 'archetypes' (Spalinger 2011a: 5). They are not 'snapshots' of actual events (van Essche-Merchez 1992a; Ben-Dor Evian 2016: 152). Therefore, although texts referring to the Sea Peoples groups could have a core of historical reality (Cline & O'Connor 2012: 197), it is very hard to define what exactly constitutes this core beyond the fact that various groups attacked Egypt during the reigns of several kings. Questions of scale, organisation, cause and effect, reality or as represented in text and imagery, cannot be answered without taking into account the filters of royal ideology. The texts in question were written as guides and points of reference for further action. Their protagonists were acting according to the principle of Maat to maintain harmony by their actions (Popko 2014: 10). To understand the filters of royal ideology and consequently the intent behind the sources in which Sea Peoples were attested, we need to analyse these sources as a whole, constituted by different, equally important, compositional elements.

The 2nd pylon of the temple of Medinet Habu

The Great Inscription of the regnal Year 8, which records the campaign against the Sea Peoples (conflict), is located on the eastern side of the northern tower of the 2nd pylon that marks the entrance to the second court of the temple (Nelson 1930: pl. 46; Kitchen 1983: 37–43; translation: Edgerton & Wilson 1936: 49–58; Peden 1994: 23–37; Junge 2005; Kitchen 2008: 32–36; Redford 2018: 33–39).

The text is written from left to right in 38 columns of hieroglyphs. These columns are placed above two lines of monumental hieroglyphs recording the names and (short) titulary of Ramesses III. The main text is almost intact, apart from partial damage to columns 27 to 38, which does not prevent the general comprehension of the text.

The Great Inscription of Year 8 should not be seen as an isolated composition: it belongs to an ensemble that also includes the southern tower of the 2nd pylon (Nelson 1930: pl. 44; Kitchen 1983: 35–37; translation: Edgerton & Wilson 1936: 46–48; Kitchen 2008: 30–32; Redford 2018: 30–31). Its decoration is, however, conceptually and visually completely different. The southern tower of the 2nd pylon holds a monumental image and several textual elements. The entire composition, i.e. the pylon as a whole, has to be read sequentially or narratively from right to left: the depiction of the southern tower, featuring the presentation of the enemies, concludes the military campaign, details of which are written on the eastern pylon tower. The two sequences are interrupted by the monumental gateway, the sacred axis of the temple. Accordingly, the iconographical narration on the enclosure wall follows a similar pattern: it ends with an identical scene of presentation of booty to the Theban triad, with Khonsu added to the scene (van Essche 1992a).

The inscriptions on the southern tower of the 2nd pylon belong to the labels of representations category: four different labels are included in the image (from right to left: enemies, the king, Amun and Mut), which is placed above two monumental lines of hieroglyphs that include the names and titulary of the king, just as on the eastern pylon tower. The text, being both the thematic and iconographic centre, records the military actions of the king against his enemies, and more precisely against the Sea Peoples. The text is oriented in the same direction as the king (on changes to orientations in war inscriptions and their meaning, see Ben-Dor Evian 2019). The decoration of the first court is dedicated entirely to the military campaigns of Ramesses III against the Libyans, the Syrians and the Sea Peoples (Cifola 1991: 13), except for the northern wall, which includes, beside the campaign against the Syrians, a representation of the Daily Ritual that was performed in the temple (O'Connor 2012: 266). However, the war depiction including the

Sea Peoples is conceived in a different way to the lively images of the campaigns against the Libyans and the Syrians: on the 2nd pylon, only the divine component, namely the king and the gods, is represented. There is no military presence, with the notable exception of the prisoners as a metaphor for restrained disorder. The king is represented alone, as in the text of the Great Inscription of the Year 8 that never mentions the actions of the army, contrary to the texts and images on the enclosure wall, but exactly like the representation of the king smiting his enemies on the temple pylons (Hall 1986: 28–42; Heinz 2001: 53–57; for the king as a leader see most recently Spalinger 2020). Charles Francis Nims suggested that the position of the Great Inscription of the Year 8 is similar to the position occupied by the poem of Qadesh in the Ramesseum (Nims 1976: 171). Furthermore, as underlined by the editors of the publication of the 'historical' inscriptions of the temple, '(…) the second pylon was regarded as the front of the temple proper, the first court having close connection with the palace' (Nelson 1930: 8). The first court has two main axes: the first is the sacred axis (east–west), the second is oriented north–south and gives access to the palace that flanks the south side of the Medinet Habu temple. Therefore, the first court was probably accessible to more people than the rest of the temple. The texts and images inside this closed space would have had the same function as the exterior walls of the temple, since the content of the decoration is also almost exclusively dedicated to the war narrative. The 2nd pylon thus marks another division between the profane and sacred spaces. The iconographical and textual ensemble linked to the Sea Peoples on the 2nd pylon begins exactly where the same narrative ends on the enclosure wall of the temple, suggesting that it constitutes a continuous and parallel system (Cifola 1991: 15 and n. 20).

The southern tower of the 2nd pylon: Ramesses III's presentation of the Sea Peoples as prisoners

The central figure in the image on the southern tower of the 2nd pylon, the king stands in front of the divine Theban couple, holding with his left hand a leash tied to three rows of prisoners of war that he presents as a booty to the Theban dyad of Amun and Mut (**Fig. 2**). His right hand is raised towards the two deities. In return, the god offers to the king the sickle-shaped sword (*ḫpš*) (Schulman 1994; Vogel 2013; Hsu 2017: 198) and the goddess 'hundreds of jubilees and millions of years'. The text-label accompanying the king's image is placed in the middle of the whole composition (Nelson 1930: pl. 44). The destruction of enemies and the giving of the sickle sword, the two main topics on the pylon tower, are put at the centre of attention through the double use of text and image. The right hand of the king cuts across
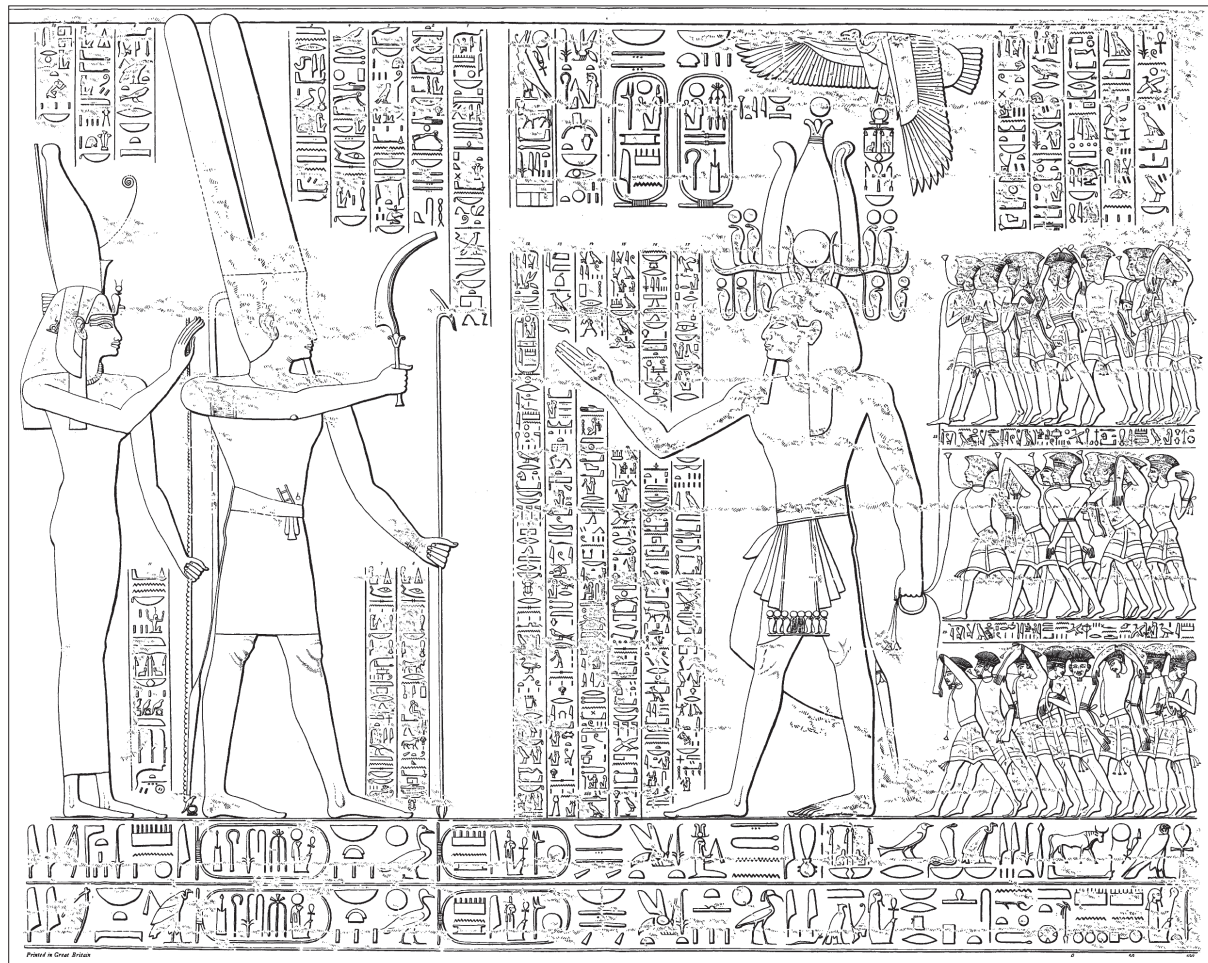
Figure 2. King in front of Amun and Mut presenting prisoners of war, eastern side of southern tower of the 2nd pylon of the Medinet Habu temple (after Nelson 1930: pl. 44)

the text. Following the principle of visual poetics, the composers played with the interaction between text and image (Kutscher 2020). This is observable in the hand of the king pointing to the cartouche to highlight it. Also, one of the principles of textual composition in the temple of Medinet Habu is to avoid the division of lexemes into two parts at the change of line or column (van Essche 1992a: 230). However, in the six columns of text that describe the deeds of Ramesses III (Nelson 1930: pl. 44, cl. 12–17; Kitchen 1983: 36.3–12), this rule is violated several times. In the second column, the determinative of the verb *smȝ* 'to kill' is displaced under the hand of the king which takes its place. The same can be noted in the five columns of text labelling the action of the god Amun (Nelson 1930: pl. 44, cl.1–5; Kitchen 1983: 35.11–14). The tip of the *ḫpš* sword that the god holds in his hand is placed at the end of the second column as a substitute for the determinative of the verb *ḥsq* 'to cut' that is written in the next column. In the label of the king, moreover, two of the ethnonyms are divided in two parts, once by the change of columns (cl. 3 *D / n~y.w*) and a second time in the fourth column by the forearm of the king (*Š~k~l / š.w*). By using visual poetics this way, the text graphically slices apart the hostile lexemes.

The four textual compositions present different linguistical characteristics: both texts labelling Mut and Amun are composed in Late Middle Egyptian (or *égyptien de tradition*: Vernus 1996 and most recently for the Medinet Habu texts Gillen 2014; Israeli 2015) and the same holds when Ramesses III speaks to them or for the eulogical part of the text (Jansen-Winkeln 1995: 92–102, esp. 96). On the other hand, the passages relating the achievements of Ramesses III against the Sea Peoples are written in Late Egyptian:

jni=w nȝy=w pḥrr.w dnḥ.w m ḫfʿ=j r mz=w n kȝ=k jt=j šps

'It is to present them to your ka, my august father, that I brought their runners pinioned in my fist.

dḫ ḫpš=j nȝ j-jj r tn.tw=w m P~l~s~t.w D~y~n~n.w Š~k~l~š.w

My strong arm destroyed those who came to aggrandize (for) themselves as a Peleset, Denen and Shekelesh,

ḫpš=k pȝ n.tj r-ḥȝ.t=j ḥr dḫ pr.w=sn

whereas your strong arm, the one which is before me, is destroying their seeds.' (Kitchen 1983: 36.6–8)

Comments on the text:
1. *dnḥ.w*: Fischer-Elfert 1999: 82, n. 59; Grandet 2005/2: 245, 252
2. *ṯnị*: Edgerton & Wilson 1936: 7, n. 8b

Likewise, the words pronounced by the war prisoners are written in Late Egyptian, even if their first description, the general label that is in connection with the action of the king, is in Late Middle Egyptian: 'the leaders of all the foreign lands (*ḫȝw.tjw n ḫȝs.wt nb(.t)*) that are in the fist of his Majesty (*n.tj m ḫfʿ ḥm=f*)'. In contrast, they are labelled in Late Egyptian, when they are ethnically identified as 'the fallen ones of the Denen' (*nȝ ḫr.w n D~j~n~j~n.w*). The lower row depicts them as 'the fallen ones of the Peleset' (*nȝ ḫr.w n P~l~s~t.w*) (Kitchen 1983: 37.1–3). The three rows of prisoners are portrayed wearing the characteristic clothes that allow them to be identified as belonging to the 'Sea-Peoples' (Cline & O'Connor 2012: 198). Notably, the use of frontal representation and the representation of disarticulated arms and legs symbolise chaos through the non-compliance with the conventions of representation of the ancient Egyptian decorum (Baines 1990; Volokhine 2000: 41–46; Heinz 2001: 165–169, 192–194).

The eastern pylon tower: the Great Inscription of Year 8

Macroscopic analysis of the Great Inscription of Year 8 shows that the text can be divided into three parts (Edgerton-Wilson 1936: 49):

1. Date of the inscription, king's titulary and royal eulogy (cl. 1–12). As remarked by Eric van Essche (1992a: 232), the narration of the first part is supported by an external voice.

2. The second part (cl. 12–26), occupying the central space of the inscription, presents in the first person the harangue of the king and the narration of the battle according to the pattern of the *Königsnovelle* (among others, Spalinger 1982, 2011b: 359–363 with the previous bibliography). The central position of the passage resembles the same position occupied by the main text on the southern tower of the 2nd pylon. Likewise, in the iconographical narration of the enclosure wall of the temple, the scene of the lion hunt (O'Connor 2000; Heinz 2001: 149–151; Ben-Dor Evian 2019: 130–132), flanked on each side by the representation of the sea and land battles against the Sea Peoples, is in the middle of the whole composition and symbolises the culmination of the royal actions. The texts and images can be read from two different perspectives: either linearly from right to left following the storyline (mandate of the king, preparation of the army, departure for the war, battles, return in triumph, presentation of the war-prisoners to the gods)—noting that in the case of the ensemble from the 2nd court, the hieroglyphs are oriented in a contraflow, what van Essche analyses as a will to repel the enemies from the central sacred axis of the temple—or by considering

the central tableau as the main element of the narration (van Essche 1992a: 230–231).

3. The third part of the Great Inscription of Year 8 is more difficult to define: it is less structured thematically and syntactically and the lacuna does not allow full understanding of its structure. It repeats some elements of the previous parts, especially the aspects connected with the description of the deeds of Ramesses III conveyed by an external narrator, but it also contains, through the voice of the king, a summary of his deeds in favour of the gods according to the principle of *do ut des* (cl. 26–38).

Schematically this analysis does not allow clear definition of a storyline (Cifola 1988, 1991; van Essche 1992a; Spalinger 2017) and, as van Essche (1992a) remarked, the segmentation of the text remains unclear, especially in its last section.

The homogenous nature of the Great Inscription counterbalances the animated aspect of the parallel pylon tower. No iconographical element is preeminent: there is no particularly detailed hieroglyph nor signs with bigger or smaller dimensions. The colours are not preserved, so it is impossible to assess the impression conveyed by the whole wall at the time of its composition. However, because they could not use visual poetics to animate the text, the scribes developed other strategies that a close analysis can highlight.

The first part of the text contains the date at which the events took place, or at least at which the king wished to connect with this inscription. Several theories have been proposed to explain the absence of a complete date (summarised by Gillen 2014: 53–54).

The royal titulary following the date is the most elaborated of the reign of Ramesses III (Leprohon 2013: 127–130). It is significant that the three first names (Horus Name, Two Ladies Name and Golden Horus Name) are uniquely composed and not attested in the other written sources relating to this king. The main thematic of these epithets unsurprisingly relates to the military capabilities of the king. The Horus Name and the Two Ladies Name refer exclusively to the bravery of the warrior Ramesses III:

Horus Name: kȝ-nḫt rw pḥ.tj nḫt-ʿ nb ḫpš ḥȝq(.w) Sṯ.tjw
'The mighty bull, the lion, powerful, with a strong arm, lord of the sternght; who plunders the Asiatics'.
Two Ladies Name: wsr pḥ.tj mj jt=f Mnṯ.w sksk(.w) pḏ.wt 9 dr(.w) m tȝ=sn
'With a mighty strength like his father Montu, who destroys the nine bows and repels (them) in their lands'. (Kitchen 1983: 37.10–11)

Whereas the Golden Horus Name summarises his predestination and his royal origin, his quality as builder king and benefactor of the gods:

Golden Horus Name: nṯr.j m pr=f m ḫ.t=f swḥ.t jqr.t sḫq.t n Ḥr.w-ȝḫ.tj jty jwʿ.w mnḫ n nṯr.w ms(.w) ssm.w=w ḥr-tp tȝ qb(.w) ʿ(ȝ)b.wt=sn

'The divine, since his coming forth from his womb, excellent and splendid egg of Horakhty, ruler and efficient heir of the gods, who shapes their images on earth, who doubles their offerings'. (Kitchen 1983: 37.11–12)

The titulary is followed by a long eulogy (cl. 2–12) divided into four parts by the five cartouches of royal names. Friedrich Junge (2005: 231, 234–238) suggests that this part of the text was composed as a hymn to the king, an aretalogy, the regular insertion of the cartouches playing the role of a refrain. Initially, like in his Horus Name, Ramesses III's martial qualities are highlighted. He is compared to Sachmet in her devastating fury (most recently Davies 2018: 47–49; Matić 2021: 45–47). The second part describes a powerful and terrifying king to his enemies, like Montu (most recently Matić 2019b), with whom the pharaoh is compared, who fights alone, adhering to a usual topos of the Ramesside royal ideology. This second part alludes to the Two Ladies Name of the king. However, the tone changes completely in the third part of the eulogy and it is his qualities as a good, just and protective ruler to his people that are emphasised. The king is compared to Horus, he is a generous ruler like Shu, intelligent like Thot, a good strategist like Ptah and fair like Ra. This whole catalogue of 'qualities equal to the god's' refers to the usual list of comparison and therefore assimilation of the royal qualities in divine qualities (Grimal 1986: 358–436; Matić 2019a: 175–179; 2019b). The last part of the eulogy repeats the topic of the builder king, whose divine birth and predestination make him a legitimate ruler, according to his Golden Horus Name.

The eulogy is mainly written in Late Middle Egyptian, with the inclusion of two direct short speeches that are pronounced by the enemies of the king and the foreign messengers to emphasise the respect he inspires in them. The first discourse interrupts stylistically the first series of royal epithets, that are mostly rendered by a string of participles and adjectival constructions that belong to the phraseology of the eulogy (Gillen 2014: 62–63; Maderna-Sieben 2018: 21–40):

bšd.w ḫm(.w) Km.t ḏt sḏm=sn pḥ.tj=f jw(.w) m jw3(.t)
'The rebels who ignored Egypt since eternity, after they heard from his (the King's) strength, came in praise,
jzdd(.w) m ʿ.wt=sn n p3 sḫ3.tw=f nyny(.w) ḥnʿ jb=sn n ḥry.t=f [s]ḏd=w 3b.wt=f ḥr=w n rmṯ.w=w
shaking in their entire body at his remembrance, greeting (with their hands) and with their hearts because of the fear of him, so that they related his appearance and say to their people:
qj=f ḥʿ.w=f ʿq(.w) ḥr mḫ3 n Bʿl sḫm.tj m ʿš3.wt nn sn.nw=f
"His appearance and his body are exactly equal to those of Baal (literally 'accurate on the balance of Baal'), being powerful over the multitude, without his equal.

sw ḥw(.w) ḥḥ wʿ(.w) tp=f ḏs=f
He strikes the millions, being completely alone (literally being alone, by himself).
t3.w nb.w fjṯ(.w) jzy.w n ḥr=f ḫʿy=f mj p3 šw ʿq(3j ḥr.tw
Every country is mocked and ruined before his face, whenever he appears exactly like the solar disc." So one says.' (Kitchen 1983: 38.2–6)

Comments on the text:
1. *bšd.w*: with a wordplay with *bdš.w* 'the weak' to characterise the enemies.
2. *nyny ḥnʿ jb*: The meaning of the expression *nyny ḥnʿ jb* (literally to greet together with heart), only attested in Medinet Habu (Edgerton & Wilson 1936: 50, n. 5a), is unclear. The verb *nyny* is often in relation with the reception of the king or a divinity in the temple and its determinative—a man with his arms stretched forward (A85 in the Gardiner list)—implied a probable hand gesture (Dominicus 1994; Grassart-Blésès 2017). In the Papyrus Ebers (837), the verb is in relation with a feminine disease with the possible meaning 'to tremble, to shake', on the basis of a later Coptic word (Westendorf 1991; *contra* Dominicus 1994: 57–58 and Popko 2020).

The style of this stanza digresses from the usual rhetoric of the eulogies, which are composed generally by a string of simple constructions mimicking divine epithets. This passage creates a disruption, marked notably by the usage of Late Egyptian features. Van Essche sees in this 'hiatus' between the formal aspect of the eulogy and the words of the enemies a desired style effect (van Essche 1992b: 176). The second discourse is introduced by the travellers and messengers speaking to the foreign lands:

jm=tn f3j tp=tn ḫpš=f wsr(.w)
'Do not raise your head, for his arm is powerful!
my=n r-ḏr.w
Let us come together!
jri=n n=f j3w n sp
May we make for him praises together!
š3rm=n n=f dbḥ.n=n ṯ3w sw m ḫfʿ=f
May we seek peace by him after we ask for breath, since it is in his fist!' (Kitchen 1983: 38.6–8).

The 'historical' part is introduced by an address that the king makes to his court, similar to what will be inscribed in the Papyrus Harris I (see below):

sḏm n=j t3 r-ḏr=f dmḏ(.w) m bw wʿ(.w) šnw.t msw.w-nswt ẖnm.w [n.w] ʿḥ.t ʿnḫ.w nb n.w t3 n T3-mr.y ḏ3m.w jḫwnw.w nb n.tj m t3 pn
'Listen to me, o entire land united on a single place, courtesans, royal children, habitants of the palace, all the living ones in the land of Egypt, recruits and every adolescent who are in this country!,
jmj ḥr=tn n tp-rʿ=j rḫ=tn n3y=j sḫr.w n sʿnḫ=tn
Pay attention to my words, so that you may know my plans to make you live,

ꜥ*m=tn m t�ꜣ pḥ.tj n jt=j šps Jmn kꜣ-mw.t=f qmꜣ(.w) nfr:w=j*

and come to know about the strength of my august father Amun, bull of his mother, who created my perfection!' (Kitchen 1983: 39.6–9; Israeli 2015: 27–28, 39)

A direct speech address by the king to his court is a constituent part of the *Königsnovelle* genre. Since at least the reign of Thutmose III, there are texts that record the king speaking or answering the enquiries of his court (Spalinger 1982: 102–103, 216; Eyre 1996: 25–27). What is unique to to the Great Inscription of the Year 8 of Ramesses III and to Papyrus Harris I is the direct speech used by the king, who urges his subjects to listen to him so that he can explain his plans, as if this were not a given. This direct speech ('Listen to me!' 'Pay attention to my words!') is reminiscent of the addresses to the visitors of the tombs in the 'Appeal to the Living' (Eyre 2018: 92). This part is redacted in Late Middle Egyptian.

The narration of the 'events' related to the Sea Peoples begins in column 15. It is introduced by the converter of the past *wn* before a first present, which marks the beginning of the description of the disastrous state of the land that will be found in the later Papyrus Harris I, according to the topos of pessimistic literature: the saviour king is annihilating the nine bows, hereditary enemies of Egypt, a classical literary theme. The text has a new tone: the style used drifts away from the constraints of classical language to adopt some Late Egyptian structures. After the use of the first present to describe the state of the land, the text is set with a sequence of historical perfective *sḏm=f* that presents the actions of the king:

jnḥ=j sw smn=j sw m ḫpš=j qn (...)
'I enclosed it [i.e. Egypt] and made it stable with my valiant arm.

mky=j sw (ḥr) dr n=s pḏ.wt-9
I protected it, destroying for it the nine bows.'
(Kitchen 1983: 39.13–14; Israeli 2015: 28–29)

A first grammatical rupture is introduced with the thematisation of the subject:

ḫꜣs.wt jri=w šdt.t m nꜣy=sn jw.w
'The foreign lands, they made a *šdt.t* from their isles.

tfy(.w) ḫꜣnr(.w) m sky.w tꜣ.w m sp wꜥ(.w)
Fleeing and dispersed on the battlefields were the lands (*tꜣ.w*) at one time.' (Kitchen 1983: 39.14–15; Israeli 2015: 21, 29)

The word *šdt.t* is a 'new' word that appears elsewhere only in the text describing the first campaign against the Libyans on the northern exterior wall ('The Libyans came and made a *šdt.t*'; Kitchen 1983: 12.2–3). It is determined by the sign of the man with his hand in his mouth (A2 Gardiner list), which implies that it is a lexeme in connection with speaking (Kammerzell 2015: 1406) that has been translated by most scholars as 'conspiracy' ('to make a conspiracy' Edgerton-Wilson 1936: 53 and 7, n. 4a for the commentary; Kitchen 2008: 34; Redford 2018: 36 and 125–126 for

the commentary). However, it is possible to connect the substantive with the semantic field of magic: the verb *šdi*, using the same determinative, means in the first place 'to read, to recite', mostly in connection with magical and religious practices, for instance to introduce a spell that the practitioner has to recite after a medical treatment (Erman & Grapow 1930: 563–564, 16; Sauneron 1989: 11, n. 8; Ogdon 1998: 140; Satzinger & Stefanović 2021: 370). The conspiratorial aspect of the Sea Peoples' action is therefore foremost a question of (over)interpretation. As already pointed out by Junge (2005: 239, n. 28), the exact meaning of the lexeme is still unclear, and drawing any conclusion on its historical implication remains questionable.

The grammar of the passage is clearly more elaborated and complex than the beginning of the text, where simple and repetitive constructions come one after another. The passage is constructed to give a faster rhythm to the narration, more unstructured, that confers a new tone and an impression of moving in phase with the described action. The first present and the historical perfective are privileged, but with the addition of complex constructions (relative sentences, subordinate etc). The description of the fights ends with a paragraph in the shape of a more general conclusion, resuming the usual topoi (fame of the king through the foreign lands, king as protector of the borders, annihilation of the enemies, etc).

A new address to the people is then introduced: they should rejoice because of the royal benefits. The style becomes more concise and unadorned, but also peremptory with a string of historical perfectives. The language of the third part is moreover more hybrid than in the other two parts. Some passages in Late Egyptian are integrated with constructions in Late Middle Egyptian. The same observation can be made for the themes, which range from extracts of war narration to the expansion of the divine offering without a real storyline. Two voices cross each other, sometimes the narration is supported by an external narrator, sometimes the king speaks, giving to the last part an impression of editorial patchwork.

The formal division of the Great Inscription of the Year 8 proposed by different scholars is of course a modern reading and was certainly not perceptible for most ancient Egyptians. The fact remains, however, that the text is edited visually and stylistically taking into account this division. In the first part, the visual aspect is assured by the presence of the royal cartouches, as van Essche has shown (1992a: 231–232; also Gillen 2014: 64–65): the longest variant including the royal titles of 'king of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the two lands' and 'son of Ra, lord of the appearances', concludes the royal eulogy (cl. 12) and is also placed at the end of the discourse of the king (cl. 38 with the addition of 'lord of the nine bows' and 'son of his body of Ra').

This analysis of the decoration of both towers of the 2nd pylon of Medinet Habu's temple shows that

those who conceived these inscriptions and images employed all the artifices of language and visual poetics. At first sight, texts and images give the impression of a hybrid composition, mixing older models from the Thutmoside era and new 'modern' actualised texts to 'be in tune' with the contemporary historical reality. The scribes would have had access to some kind of matrix (Hsu 2017: 145–146) in which they introduced actualised passages, redacted in a later stage of language, using on several occasions a vocabulary attested partially only in the temple of Medinet Habu, often with a foreign origin, sometimes identifiable as Semitic, or specific grammatical constructions. For instance, the use of the 3rd person plural suffix pronoun to express the property =*sn* which alternates with the more modern =*w* in the same sentence, without a real systematism (Gillen 2015).

Through stylistic analysis another explanation of this hybridity could be proposed: the insertion of some stylistic breaks in the narration changes the rhythm of the storyline and separates these passages from the rest of the text. It should be emphasised that we should view this inscription as a whole. Adopting this view, the different 'blocs' of text gain another dimension: the inscription is not a clumsy patchwork but a stylistically well-structured composition that focuses attention on the central elements of the narration (Eyre 1996: 429–430; Spalinger 2017: esp. 251). This same technique was in use in the southern tower of the 2nd pylon, where the artifices of the visual poetics highlight the warlike exploits of Ramesses III against the Sea Peoples. Even if the inscription, and more generally the 'historical' texts from the temple of Medinet Habu, show a high degree of singularity compared to their precursors of the 19th dynasty, they respect in their structure the formal constraints of the genre.

A third dimension should not be neglected: the recourse to the different stages of language allows separation of the divine sphere from the profane sphere. Thus, we can observe that the parts of the eulogy and royal discourse containing Late Egyptian constructions are all in connection with the worldly, mundane or profane affairs of the king. In this case, the elements relating to the Sea Peoples are never evoked in Late Middle Egyptian.

The campaign against the Sea Peoples in the Papyrus Harris I

Besides the representations and inscriptions from the mortuary temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu, the battle(s) against the Sea Peoples by Ramesses III are also known from the Papyrus Harris I (P. London BM EA 9999: Grandet 2005), a long hieratic papyrus (42m), containing a description of the deeds accomplished by the king during his entire reign. All these benefits

shall accrue to the reign of the heir of Ramesses III who seems to legitimate his right to inherit the throne of Egypt through this manuscript. Even if the first line of the first page holds the date of 'year 32, 3rd month of the season shemu, day 6' of his reign (P. Harris I, 1.1; Grandet 2005/1: 119–122), the Papyrus Harris I was indeed edited posthumously at the very beginning of the reign of his successor and son Ramesses IV.

The papyrus contains a long composition, essentially conceived in two parts: the first records the so-called 'address to the gods', a long list of all the royal accomplishments in favour of the different divinities of Egypt, and the second the 'address to the humans', a description of all the benefits realised by the king for Egypt and his people. Both parts are written in the first person singular, as if Ramesses III himself spoke directly.

According to its introduction, the address to the humans is intended for

> *sr.w ḫꜣw.tjw n.w tꜣ mšʿ n.t-ḥtr.jw Š~r~d~n.w pḏ.wt*
> *ʿšꜣ.w ʿnḫ.w nb n.w tꜣ n Tꜣ-mr.y*
> 'the officials, the leaders of the land, the army, the chariotry, the Sherden, the numerous troops of soldiers, as well as all the living ones of the land of Egypt' (P. Harris I, 75.1; Grandet 2005/1: 335)

After a short and stereotypical description of the lamentable state of the country before the appearance of its saviour, Sethnakht, Ramesses III's father and founder of the 20th dynasty, Ramses III's career during his father's reign is briefly mentioned followed by an account of his predecessor's death and burial. The text then recounts the military deeds of Ramesses III following his accession (P. Harris I, 76.6–77.6).

The whole composition is mainly written in Ramesside Late Egyptian or 'néo-égyptien adminstratif standard' (Grandet 2005/1: 144), defined as a combination of Late Egyptian with some rare Middle Egyptian turns, that Grandet justifies by some 'aesthetic criteria' or a usual type of formulation (Grandet 2005/1: 51). However, we can observe a clear preference for the Late Egyptian language, so that the language of the papyrus is very close to being contemporary.

The address to the humans can by divided into different parts (introduction, accession to power, military campaigns, foreign expeditions and 'golden age'). The section dedicated to the various military campaigns of Ramesses III (76.6–77.6) is introduced by a generic formulation:

> *jrỉ=j swsḫ nꜣ tꜣš.w n.w Km.t r-ḏr.w*
> 'I extended the borders of Egypt entirely.'
> (P. Harris I, 76.6)

With this formula, the king emphasises the universal nature of his deeds, a topos that belongs to the royal ideology since at least the time of Senusret I (Blumenthal 1979: 187–188). The introduction ends with another literary cliché of the royal ideology:

> *sḫr=j nꜣ tḫꜣ(.w) st m nꜣy=w tꜣ.wy*

'I cast down those who trespassed them (the borders) from their lands.' (P. Harris I, 76.6–7; Grimal 1986: 686–687; Galan 1995: 101–135 and most recently Langer 2018)

The depiction of Ramesses III's multiple military campaigns against the Sea Peoples, the Bedouins Sâru (who are only documented in the P. Harris I; see Grandet 2005/2: 240–245) and the Libyans are not organised chronologically—the text does not contain any mention of dates connected to the military campaigns—but 'ethnically', following their geographical distribution along the Mediterranean coast, as we understand it now. It has been established with some certainty that the troubles with the Sea Peoples date towards the beginning of Ramesses III's reign and most probably before the 8th regnal year, as shown by their (partial) mention in the first Libyan campaign of the Year 5:

jri.w ḫꜣs.wt mḥ.tjwt n~w~ṯ m hꜥ.w=sn m P~l~s~t.w Ṯ~k~k~l.w jw=w (ḥr) fdqw tꜣ=sn

'The northern lands shivered in their bodies, namely the Peleset and the Tjekeker since they were cut off <from> their land (…)

jw=w m t~h~r.w ḥr tꜣ ky m wꜣḏ-wr

They were teher-warriors on land and others from the sea.

nꜣ jj.w ḥr [tꜣ] pḫd(.w) s[mꜣ].w

Those who came by land were overthrown and killed.

[…] Jmn-Rꜥ m-sꜣ=sn ḥr sksk=sn

Amun-Ra was behind them, slaying them.

nꜣ ꜥq(.w) m rꜥ.w-ḥꜣ.t mj ꜣpd.w sḥbḥ(.w) m jri.w m ḥnq […]

Those who entered the Nile-mouths were like birds caught in a net, brought to devastation (?)' (Kitchen 1983: 12.4–8)

The comparison between the enemies' fate and the fate of captured birds is used repeatedly in the inscriptions of this temple. However, according to the current state of research, during the New Kingdom, this motif seems to be specific to this temple: It is probably connected with an ancient figurative and literary motif of the king hunting small cattle and birds (Moers 2004: 130–137; Hsu 2017: 246–247; Matić 2018: 111; 2019a: 137). The same image appears in the description of the *modus operandi* used by the king to defeat the enemies:

jst jb nṯr pn nb nṯr.w grg(.w) ḥr(.w) r mḥ=w ꜣpd.w

'Now the heart of this god, lord of the gods, is prepared and ready to catch them like birds.' (Kitchen 1983: 40.5)

Conceptualisation of enemies as birds is also attested in later temples (Alliot 1946). A more detailed textual description of the parallels between enemies and birds is to be found in one of the shorter texts on the enclosure wall of the temple, when the king addresses his court, celebrating his victory (Nelson 1930: pl. 42):

grg(.w) n=sn j(ꜣ)d.t r sḫt=w sḥbḥ ꜥq(.w) m rꜥ.w-ḥꜣ.t hꜣ=w m ḫnw=s dnḥ(=w) m s.t=sn wꜥwꜥ(=w) fdq šnb.wt=w

'A net was set for them in order to trap them, to ensnare those who entered the mouth of the Nile, to engage them inside it, to restrict (them) to their place, to cut (them) down and to slit their throats.' (Kitchen 1983: 33.5–6)

As already mentioned, the last reference to the annihilation of the Sea Peoples by Ramesses III is kept in the south rhetorical stela engraved on the eastern façade of the southern tower of the 1st pylon that bears the date of year 12 (Kitchen 1983: 73.1):

dḫ=j nꜣ Ṯ~k[~l].w tꜣ P~l~[s~t].w D~j~n~j~n.w W~š~š.w Š~k~l~š.w

'I cast down (*dḫ*) the Tjek[er], the land of Pele[set], the Denen, the Weshesh and the Shekelesh' (Kitchen 1983: 73.9–10).

That the Peleset is the only group of the Sea Peoples here which is mentioned as having a land (*tꜣ*) could be indicative of this group already being settled somewhere. Further confirmation of this hypothesis is possibly found in the reference to the 'foreign lands of (?) Peleset that his Majesty killed (*ḫꜣs.wt P~l~s~t smꜣ.n ḥm=f*)' in the text on the base of one of the northern pillars of the 1st court, next to the depiction of a Peleset bound captive (Nelson 1932: pl. 118C; Kitchen 1983: 102.8). However, the grammatical construction used here could be referring to a direct genitive (the foreign lands of Peleset) or to two distinctive entities (the foreign lands and the Peleset). Nevertheless, one wonders why on the other pillar bases the scribes consecutively used the indirect genitive construction with *n.w* to describe the other ethnonyms.

In Papyrus Harris I, the campaign against the Sea Peoples involves five groups of people (other Egyptian and non-Egyptian sources mentioning these groups have been collected by Adams & Cohen 2013). The Denen are described as insular:

smꜣ=j nꜣ D~n~n.w m nꜣy=sn jw.w

'I killed the Denen from their isles.' (P. Harris I, 76.7)

It has been proposed that the preposition *m* can be translated as a preposition of location, implying that this part of the sentence describes the place where the Denen have been killed (e.g. Maderna-Sieben 1991: 65). However, it makes more sense that the preposition indicates the origin of the people and not their location (Grandet 2005/2: 240, n. 918). The place of origin of the Tjeker and the Peleset is not mentioned:

nꜣ Ṯ~k~l.w P~l~s~t.w jri.w m ssf

'The Tjeker and the Peleset were reduced to ashes.' (P. Harris I, 76.7)

whereas the Sherden and Weshesh came 'from the *ym*-sea' (*Š~r~d~n.w W~š~š.w n pꜣ ym*). Clearly, ancient Egyptians described some of these groups in a peculiar manner (from the sea) which indicates their maritime nature (Cline & O'Connor 2012: 186; Matić 2022). The Urtenu archive from Ugarit refers to Šikila (Shekelesh?) people who live on boats (Singer

2000: 24). The expression 'islands in the middle of the sea' (*jw.w ḥr.j-jb(.j).w wꜣḏ wr* and similar) is well attested in the 18th Dynasty texts, where it refers to the islands from which Aegean emissaries depicted in Egyptian tribute scenes came (Vercoutter 1956; Wachsmann 1987; Hallmann 2006; Matić 2014). Crete (*Kft.w*) is located among these islands (Quack 1996; Matić 2014). However, during the 18th Dynasty the expression 'islands in the middle of the sea' used the native Egyptian word *wꜣḏ wr* instead of the Semitic loan word *ym* (Hoch 1994: 52–53 and most recently Cooper 2020: 392–394) which appears in texts from Medinet Habu. The choice of the Semitic loan word *ym* could be related to the intention of Egyptian scribes to be very specific, since the term *wꜣḏ wr* ('great green') in Egyptian texts can, depending on the context, refer to any large surface of water, including the delta of the Nile, the Red Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean (Vandersleyen 2008). Interestingly, when in Egyptian service, the Shereden are not referred to as those 'from the sea.' This is combined with the addition of a sun disc to the helmets of Shereden in Egyptian service in the iconography (Roberts 2012). Clearly, careful designations were made both in texts and iconography.

This leads us to the problem of the presence of the Shereden in this list, since this group was considered as allied or incorporated in the ranks of the Egyptian army. Grandet (2005/2: 243) proposed to 'correct' the text, so that it corresponds to the inscriptions from the Medinet Habu temple, as shown in the address to the members of Ramesses III's court. Grandet argues that the scribe made a mistake due to the phonetical proximity between the Sherden and the Shekelesh. In the Great Inscription of the Year 8 in Medinet Habu, the enemies are described as follows:

> *tꜣy=w jwn-mk.t m P~l~s~t.w Ṯ~k~l.w Š~k~l~š.w D~j~n~j.w W~š~š.w tꜣ.w dmḏ.w*
> 'Their *jwn-mk.t* was composed of Pelestu, Tjekelu, Shekelsh, Daniu and Weshesh; the lands were united.' (Kitchen 1983: 40.3–4)

This interpretation does not take into account the fact that Shereden are attested as both fighting for and against the Egyptians at least since the reign of Ramesses II (Roberts 2012; Emanuel 2013).

The lexeme *jwn-mk.t* is not attested elsewhere. It has been translated as 'alliance' or 'confederation', based on contextual considerations, by William Edgerton and John Wilson (1936: 53, n. 17g), or, without further explanation, as 'main strength' by Donald Redford (2018: 36). It could be a loanword borrowed from a foreign language, even if no foreign word has been related to it (compare with Hoch 1994: 23–26, nos 11–13; Breyer 2010: 326). Otherwise, it might also be connected to Egyptian lexemes, as several similar roots lean towards a similar meaning as proposed by Edgerton and Wilson. An old verb *jwn* is attested in the Pyramid Texts (i.e. Pyr § 1600c) meaning 'to unite' (Erman & Grapow 1926: 53.3–6). Jean Vercoutter

noticed that the verb is also found in a hymn dated from the 25th Dynasty and suggested it serves as a synonym of *dmḏ* 'to (re)assemble; to be (re)assembled' (Vercoutter 1948: 152, n. 5). The lexeme *mk.t* with the same determinative as in the Great Inscription of Year 8 means 'the (correct) position; the (proper) station' (Erman & Grapow 1928: 161.9–12).

In Papyrus Harris I, we can observe that the description of the battles remains very succinct and does not provide a clear picture of their conduct. The vocabulary employed to describe royal actions is at best generic or metaphoric: *smꜣ* 'to kill'; *jri m ssf* 'reduced to ashes' (Goedicke 2001); *jri m tm(.w) wn(.w)* 'annihilated' (literally made as never existed); *ḥꜣq* 'captured'; *jni.w m ḥꜣq(.w) r Km.t* 'brought as booty/spoils to Egypt' (for this expression see Lorton 1974: 67) and does not offer any information regarding the place or the unfolding of the campaign. The names of the enemies, to the contrary, are clearly identified, even if their origins remain imprecise, at least from our modern perspective. The last part of the sentence uses the same metaphorical expression as in the bulletin of Ramesses II's battle of Qadesh to describe the large number of prisoners:

> *jni.w m ḥꜣq(.w) r Km.t <ꜥšꜣ> mj šꜥy n wḏb*
> 'brought to Egypt as booty, <as numerous> as the sand on the beach.' (P. Harris I, 76.8)

In the text of Ramesses II, the expression concerns the numerous soldiers of the Hittite enemy:

> *st ꜥpr ḥr mšꜥ.w=w ḥnꜥ n.t-[ḥ]tr.w=w ḥr nꜣy=sn [ḫꜥ.w-n.w-rꜥ]-ꜥḥt.w ꜥšꜣ st r šꜥj n.w wḏb.w*
> 'they are equipped with their soldiers, their chariots, and their weapons: they are more numerous than the sand on the beach.' (§49–50) (Kitchen 1979: 112.1–8; Hsu 2017: 259–260)

What is emphasised throughout the military 'reports' of Papyrus Harris I is the multiplicity of the ethnic groups that Ramesses III defeated and not the precise way or the circumstances in which he defeated them. This brings us to the question of the size of different Sea Peoples groups. Unfortunately, the sources from the reign of Ramesses III are silent on that matter. In comparison, in the lists of spoils of war under Merenptah, the Sea Peoples prisoners of war are less numerous than the Libyan prisoners of war. In contrast to the numbers of different enemy groups in the New Kingdom lists of spoils of war, the Sea People groups are indeed not as numerous. Furthermore, unlike in the case of the Libyans in the same lists, women and children of the Sea Peoples are not listed as prisoners of war, which has recently been taken as an indication of the pirate-like organisation of these groups (Matić 2022).

The text of Papyrus Harris I seems to be an elaborated and descriptive version of the long geographical lists found in the lower register of several war inscriptions from the times of Thutmosis III to Seshonq I and beyond, where the enemies of Egypt are represented as tied prisoners over the wall-enclosed

name of their ethnic groups (Kitchen 2009 and most recently Peirce 2019). In this way the king shows the extent of the royal power beyond the Egyptian borders and the sheer amount of hostile yet subdued forces simply serves to express the king's prowess. However, the parallel with the topographical lists is to be treated with caution, since they usually include the heraldic names of the enemies, even if the latter were not the target of military campaigns.

The fate of the prisoners of war is then briefly summarised:

snṯi=j st m nḫt.w wʿf(.w) ḥr rn=j

'I settled them into fortresses, being bent to my name.

ʿš3 n3y=sn ḏ3m.w mj ḥfn.w

Numerous were their young recruits, as (almost) countless.

ḥtr=j sn r-ḏr m ḥbs.w dj.w m rʿ-ḥḏ.w šnw.wt r ṯnw rnp.t

To all of them, I allocated subventions and provisions coming from the treasury and the storerooms yearly.'

Comments on the text:
1. *ḥtr*, on the meaning of the verb in this context see Grandet 2005/2: 62–66.
2. See Kahn 2011 and Ben-Dor Evian 2019 for the implications of this description for the so-called Philistine paradigm.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind that the documentation related to the Sea Peoples is found in contexts with different accessibility and visibility, we would like to cautiously propose two possible scenarios in which these sources could have been communicated to distinctive human audiences.

The first scenario implies that the Sea People narrative begins at the western part of the northern exterior wall of the temple, continuing until the door in the northern wall of the 1st court. From here, the north–south axis leads toward the door in the south wall of the 1st court and then further, towards the royal palace. This scenario includes the largest possible audience since, in this case, people do not have access to the more restricted area of the temple but to the palace. If the narrative starts with the depictions on the northern exterior wall, then the audience would have been able to see the preparation for war, the army's movement to the battlefield, the land and naval battles against the Sea Peoples and their resolution (scene of victory and tribute), continuing with the depictions of the Syrian and 2nd Libyan war. Upon entering the 1st court, the texts related to the Sea People conflict would have been visible on the right side (Great Inscription of Year 8). The audience would have been able to read—or hear—about the date of the inscription, the king's titulary and royal eulogy, the harangue of

the king and the narration of the battle according to the pattern of the *Königsnovelle*, a description of the exploits of Ramesses III and a summary of his other deeds in favour of the gods. The narrative ends with the depiction of the king presenting his prisoners to the divine Theban couple, Amun and Mut, with some short inscriptions, which report on his actions against the Sea Peoples. In this way, the extended storyline about the Sea Peoples is complete.

The second scenario considers that the narrative begins at the main temple entrance following the east–west axis through the 1st and 2nd courts, with the south rhetorical stela of Year 12 providing a general overview on the military achievements of Ramesses III, including against the Sea Peoples. Due to the strict rules concerning access to different temple spaces, the audience would become increasingly smaller as it progressed towards the end of the 2nd court and the great hypostyle hall. This means that a different audience could witness the sources in the 2nd court than in our first scenario. In this 2nd scenario, the narrative starts with a general review of the annihilation of the Sea Peoples on the south rhetorical stela of year 12 and continues with the detailed contents of the Great Inscription of Year 8 and the conflict resolution. Entering the 2nd court, the selected audience would have been able to read—or hear—about the content of the Great Inscription of Year 5, which primarily deals with the Libyan conflict and secondarily with the Sea Peoples. Contrary to the Great Inscription of the Year 8, this one is shorter and does not provide other information regarding the conflict. This means that the audience, although different, would not acquire more knowledge about the Sea Peoples' conflict than the other.

The fact that different scenarios offer more or less the same narrative to different audiences indicates that the story of the conflict of Ramesses III with the Sea Peoples was intended to reach as many people as possible (through images and texts), and not only the literate elite which could have read Papyrus Harris I or similar sources. One should also not disregard the divine audience, that certainly had great expectations which had to be met by the rhetorical elements.

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