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

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

In this regard a fragmented clay sealing featuring a scarab or bezel/signet ring impression found within the filling material of a pit in the central part of the Royal Palace (Room AL)—although already published in an article in 2004—deserves further attention in this regard (MSH02-G-10659).3 The clay sealing may, in fact, show the lower part of a cartouche featuring Horemheb’s personal name.

Remarkable in this respect is the fact that not the throne name, which one would expect in this case, but the personal name of Horemheb seems to have been used for the seal. The use of Horemheb’s personal name, however, is not entirely to be excluded, since it is a well-known and established fact that Horemheb was actively engaged in Egypt’s affairs with the northern Levant—militarily and politically—during the late Amarna Period, i.e., prior to his accession to the throne of Egypt. This is exemplified by the reliefs found in his Memphite tomb at Saqqara, dating to the time before Horemheb became pharaoh, which depicts large numbers of captured Asiatics from the Levant.4 These captives were most probably taken during the time Horemheb served as Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian army under the reigns of Tutankhamun and Ay, when he was “the King’s messenger in front of his army to the foreign countries to the south and the north” and “Sole Companion, he who is by the feet of his lord on the battlefield on that day of killing Asiatics.”5 A granite bowl of the Royal Equerry Sennefer with a hieroglyphic inscription featuring Horemheb’s personal name in a cartouche—although believed to be a forgery and also kept at an unknown location until today—mentions the Levantine port city of Byblos and even Karkamiš on the Euphrates in Horemheb’s 16th regnal year.6 Several Levantine toponyms are also given in a topographical list at Karnak that may date to the reign of Horemheb.7

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

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

Clearly, this would seem to fit well with the historical evidence from Egypt (i.e., the reliefs depicting Asiatic captives in Horemheb’s Memphite tomb; see above), and it could also explain the presence of a clay sealing with Horemheb’s personal name at Qatna. Despite the chronological and historical issue of whether he was already king or not at the time when the unknown object was sealed, the “official” use of Horemheb’s personal name in Egypt proper, however, is now also supported by the
recent discovery of a further clay sealing with Horemheb’s personal name at Tell el-Borg in northern Sinai.\(^1\)

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


**Notes**


