ISRAEL IN CANAAN (LONG) BEFORE PHARAOH MERENPTAH?
A FRESH LOOK AT BERLIN STATUE PEDESTAL RELIEF 21687

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, Manfred Görg published a new reading of a fragmentary name ring on a topographical relief in the Berlin Museum (no. 21687). Although the inscription had previously been listed in topographical studies, the reading of the fragmentary third name ring had not received adequate attention. Görg suggested reading the broken name as an archaic form for “Israel” and argued that it could have been copied during the Nineteenth Dynasty from an earlier list. As his publication was in German, his proposal has so far been unavailable to a wider English-speaking readership. Two scholars, Bryant Wood and James Hoffmeier, have briefly discussed Görg’s proposal; while the former welcomed it, the latter rejected it on linguistic grounds. The present authors republish the relief fragment here in English and include new evidence that appears to support Görg’s original reading.

STATUE PEDESTAL RELIEF 21687: GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The topographical relief that is the subject of this article is found on a grey granite slab measuring 46 cm in height and 39.5 cm in width (Figure 1). According to the Egyptian Museum’s warehouse archival notes, the fragment, most likely part of a statue pedestal, was acquired in 1913 by Ludwig Borchardt from a merchant named M. Nachman, along with several other objects. One of these is an additional pedal relief of about the same size (50 × 38 cm) that is likewise made of grey granite (no. 21688; Figure 2). Although its presentation of prisoners and name rings is not exactly the same as on no. 21687, its overall size and layout does suggest it could have had a similar provenance. While no. 21687 in its present state of preservation contains three name rings superimposed on Western Asiatic prisoners, no. 21688 has three name rings superimposed on two Western Asiatic prisoners (outer left and right) and one Nubian prisoner in the center. While the two outer name rings on no. 21688 are only fragmentarily preserved (of the outer left, only traces of a single hieroglyph [D 21], r, can be detected at the top right), the central name ring is complete, and reads ḫt b w ḫt r t n w + [hr.]t, or as ḫt b w ḫt ḫt r t n w + [hr.]t—i.e., (Upper) Retenu.

Slab no. 21687 has been tentatively dated by Manfred Görg to the Nineteenth Dynasty—possibly to the reign of Ramesses II—primarily because the mention of the three names (see below) resembles that of Merenptah’s “Israel Stele” rather closely. The date may be further supported by additional iconographic features from the same reign at the temple of Karnak (Ashkelon Wall) and a possible vorlage from the reign of Ramesses II. Alternatively, the relief may be older (as originally suggested by Görg and Raphael Givon, who dated it to the Eighteenth Dynasty).

There is also a band of hieroglyphs carved above the heads of the prisoners depicted on slab no. 21687 that reads: ḫt b w ḫt r t n w + [hr.]t, or as ḫt b w ḫt r t n w + [hr.]t—i.e., (Upper) Retenu.

The Name Rings

As for the name rings on slab no. 21687, three names can be discerned. The first on the left reads ẖt b w ḫt r t n w + [hr.]t, or “Ashkelon.” A similar writing (but with a vowel marker) is
attested on Merenptah’s Israel Stele. Although the short non-vocalized rendering on the Berlin slab is unique, a parallel can be found in pLen i 116 A vs 76 and 186 as آ .<i>, i-š-q-].<i>, from the time of Amenhotep II.17

The name in the central ring reads <i>Šš, k-y-n-<i>]-<i>-nw, or “Canaan.” This form of the name is well attested during the Eighteenth Dynasty, and finds close parallels under Amenhotep II as <i>Šš, k-y-n-[-<i>-nw, in Memphis and as <i>Šš, k-y-n-[-<i>-nw, in Karnak (also note the use of the final '-').18 While the name is normally written as <i>Šš, P<sub>i</sub>-Kn<sub>n</sub>‘, as in KRI I 89 during the Ramesside period (some believe this to be a reference to Gaza; others take it as a term to describe Canaan proper19), there also exist forms without P<sub>i</sub> whose spelling is longer and clearly deviant from the shorter Berlin and Eighteenth Dynasty references (especially so under Amenhotep II).20

These first two toponymic names are written largely consonantally (i.e., virtually devoid of any group-writings) and hence may be compared with earlier Eighteenth Dynasty references (as under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II), though they deviate from Nineteenth Dynasty renderings.21 Görg derives the name “Canaan” from Kn<sub>n</sub>‘ (“to flatten”), translating it as “low land”; he has compared the ethnic renderings of the name Kn<sub>n</sub>‘nw (“Canaanites”) on the Karnak and Memphis steles of Amenhotep II with that of the Berlin relief and suggests that the -nw (<i>-</i>n) ending reflects an Amorite name pattern. This too would underscore the antiquity of the name.22

The rightmost name, <i>šš, i-[?]-<i>-šš-i-r, is only partly preserved due to substantial hacking, probably done in modern times. Indeed, the right edge is so badly worn that the remains—especially of the hieroglyph at the top right (i.e., to the right of the flowering reed <i>Y</i>[M17], i)—can only be detected with difficulty. In his 2001 article, Görg interpreted the upper horizontal stroke as the beak of a vulture <i>šš, G1, i</i>. Subsequent examinations of the original slab by Peter van der Veen and Christoffer Theis indeed support this view (Figures 3 and 4). Although the single stroke might also be interpreted alternatively as the top of a š-w-plant <i>šš, M23</i>, or else as <i>šš, U33</i>, šš, most recent re-examinations of the visible remains on the original slab in Berlin (through photography under special lighting and with the use of aluminium foil to capture any remaining detectable depressions in the stone) have revealed evidence of what appears to be the left leg and claw of the vulture hieroglyph <i>šš, G1</i> (see reconstruction in Figure 5).23 If justified (which we believe it is), this reconstruction would settle the reading of this hieroglyph once and for all. Based on the measurements of the name ring and the size of the individual hieroglyphs, it was also possible to establish with certainty that there is not enough space for any other hieroglyphs to the right of <i>šš, SA, ô</i>, and <i>šš, r</i> (<i>r</i>, Hebrew language did not possess a separate sign for <i>r</i>) with vowel sign D<sub>21</sub>24. This element most likely represents the short version of the divine name ‘Il/’El as it is found during the earlier Eighteenth Dynasty. Elmar Edel argues that the (later) plene form became common practice near the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty: “Although the transition from the spelling <i>šš, i</i>-<i>-šš-i-r</i> for ‘il first occurred under Amenhotep III, the more fully developed rendering is already attested in another place name under Thutmose III, namely in <i>šš</i>, Y′qb-‘il (= הָּקַעַב) in List I, 102.”25 As discussed above, evidence of early orthography is evident also...
from the other two names on the Berlin pedestal relief, Ashkelon and Canaan, which both reveal archaic elements that suggest this section of the topographical list had been copied from an earlier source that could have had its origin during the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty, or perhaps earlier still (Second Intermediate Period?). Thus, the name can now safely be reconstructed as: $ëXèë', i-\text{-}A-\text{-}i-\text{-}r$.

Unfortunately, no such name has hitherto been found in any extant topographical list, let alone on those dealing with the more restricted area of Canaan. Although Görg originally sought to connect the broken name with $ëë è$, $Y-SA-p-i-l$ (Yašap-El), attested in the Thutmoside List I, 78a (a reading that does not match the remaining signs on the relief), he proposed the alternative reading $I-A-S(A)-i-l$ in his 2001 article (a reading the other two authors of this article were able to confirm through their independent study of the original slab). Moreover, this name is not attested in the Palestinian topographical onomasticon. Görg therefore suggested reading the $i$-vowel marker in $ëë$, $3l$, as $r$ (hence as $\dot{r}$), as in many Middle Egyptian topographical and personal names (e.g., the Middle Kingdom Execration Texts, “The Story of Sinuhe”): $M8$, $H-w-\dot{r}-\dot{m}$, $Rw-\dot{r}-m$, for Jeru-

Figure 3. Close-up of the upper section of no. 21687, with the remains of the flowering reed [M17], vulture [G1], and lotus pool [M8] signs. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung.

Can It Read “Israel”?

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Figure 4. Close-up of the lower section of the claw and leg of the G1 vulture. Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung.
“Kurigalzu”—i.e., King Kurigalzu I (early contemporary of the name is written with Hebrew name is written with name "Israel" (Hebrew śin).47 The name is also attested in Egyptian topographical and personal names from New Kingdom Egyptian documents (e.g., in the names BA-DA-n-A, ÊOnt-kAmr, Imi-r wr n.(i), Singr, “Great Leader of Sangar”44 on an inscribed carnelian cylinder seal from the Armenian Iron Age gravesite of Metsamor.45 This name is also attested in Egyptian topographic lists from the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hetan as GN Dwr-kî-r’k-n-[?] and Dwr-kî-r’k-n-[?] kî-r’k-n-tû = Dur Kurigalzu (modern ‘Aqar Quf).46

If the reading of r for >(' in the third Berlin name ring is accepted, then the name may be read as $\text{Yr-sr-i-r} = \text{Yr-sr-il}$ or 11 $\text{Yr-sr-il}$, a name that undoubtably resembles the biblical name "Israel" (Hebrew yirš), with the exception that the Hebrew name is written with śin (š) instead of with śin (š).48 Indeed, the only mention of Israel in any extant Egyptian text is that of the Israel Stele of Merenptah, where the name is written with š: "IŠ→ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ša ş
Nineteenth Dynasty (Görg tentatively suggested the reign of Ramesses II for the Berlin relief) and that their geographical nearness suggests the identification with the same topographical entity within central Palestine. For what other name in the same general region would be so strikingly reminiscent of that of biblical Israel? As a matter of fact, no linguistically feasible name is attested in any of the extant texts, so “Israel” remains the most logical candidate.

1. Israel in Biblical Tradition and Beyond

Hoffmeier’s understanding of the name “Israel” is based solely on a single (folk-)etiological explanation in Genesis 32:29 (cf. Hosea 12:4) that interprets the name in the light of Jacob’s wrestling with the Lord’s angel and translates “he wrestled (with) EL.” Quite frankly, the connotation of the verbal (phrase) name “Israel” is more complex than Hoffmeier admits, and its etymology and orthography have been a repeated source of disagreement among scholars. Although Martin Noth argued in 1928 that “Every alteration of the preserved pronunciation must be rejected”—as it was founded “on ancient Tradition” and had been “preserved through a living use [of the name]”—his warning did not terminate the discussion. This is not surprising, as the Old Testament books appear to allow a variety of verbal roots to be associated with the name “Israel” (one of which is even written with šin): šīr/b (“to fight, struggle,” Genesis 32:29), šīr (“to rule, to be strong”); Numbers 16:13, Isaiah 32:1) or yār (“to be upright, righteous”): Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5; 26; Micah 2:7). We note that the punctuation of the sibilant w was only finalized by the medieval Masoretic, and hence both šīn and šīr are theoretically possible (the meaning of the name “Israel” was still debated by classical authors and church fathers, who variably derived the name from verbs and nouns written with š and š— for the latter position, see, e.g., Philo of Alexandria and Jerome [Ad Marcum]). Even though the first biblical appearance of the name in Genesis 32:13 is written with šin (due to the etiological explanation of Jacob’s wrestling), it deserves attention that another name for Israel/Jacob, Yešurūn (name with single noun: “the righteous one”), is written with šīn and relates to the verbal yār. While the name Yešurūn may be a mere poetic or honorary name for Israel (and hence may not be etymologically related to the “real” name), the possibility remains that it may be related, as some exegetes have indeed argued (e.g., Eugen Sachsse, Edmond Jacob, Othniel Margalith and Manfred Görg). Co-author Manfred Görg suggests that the name “Israel” could have derived from an original Canaanite name *Eššar-II/ *Yashar-II, “Perfect is El.” Similar names (with and without divine elements) and derived from the verb *yār/yār (“be upright”) are attested in the Amorite onomasticon of the early second millennium BCE (cf. Ya-ša-rem, I-šar-li-im, Ha-mu-šaš). If the name on the Berlin block reflects the correct (original) orthography of the name “Israel,” such an etymological connection becomes a true possibility, especially since the name appears to have derived from an early topographical list (ca. mid-second millennium). Since, according to biblical tradition, the Israelite patriarchs originated from the Amorite Harran-Balih region, an Amorite origin for this name is feasible (Genesis 11:31–32 and 28:5–7, 10; Deuteronomy 26:5; Joshua 24:2–3, etc.). According to Görg (see above), the orthography of the name “Canaan” on the Berlin relief also reveals Amorite elements.

2. Israel in Written and Oral Transmission

Even if one prefers to defend šin as the original sibilant (as Hoffmeier and many others do), that does not necessarily mean the name “Israel” could not have been rendered with š some centuries before Merenptah! It surely is impossible to know how the name had originally been introduced to the Egyptian scribes. Was it introduced to them through written sources (i.e., through early proto-Canaanite and/or cuneiform documents) or merely through oral communication (perhaps based on travel diaries, oral communication with merchants, etc.)—in which case the transmission could have suffered from an irregular pronunciation? The following possibilities must therefore be considered:

1. The name “Israel” (as a personal name unrelated to the biblical people of Israel) is attested in ancient Near Eastern documents from the Bronze Age, where it is written with š: š-šar-il and perhaps š-šar-il, as well as šar-il (at Early Bronze Age Ebla and Late Bronze Age Ugarit, respectively). Some scholars have therefore assumed that the original name was written with š. According to Josef Tropper, however, at least at Ugarit the issue is more complicated, as Ugaritic š can also represent ʾ (= Hebrew šīn).

2. It cannot be ruled out that Egyptian scribes’ primary knowledge of foreign names came via cuneiform documents, such that the scribes never actually learned how the names were properly pronounced in their original languages. As Akkadian was the lingua franca of ancient Near Eastern Middle and Late Bronze Age societies, and was also used by Egyptian scribes, it is possible that the name “Israel” had originally reached the Egyptian bureaucracy through cuneiform writing.

3. The transmission of foreign names into another language is a complicated matter that does not consistently follow a strict set of rules (even if the opposite is frequently argued). Perhaps the source of confusion lies in now-lost foreign documents, once available to the Egyptian scribe, in which the orthography of the name “Israel” was already inconsistent or even corrupted. While discussing a series of Mesopotamian topographical names attested in the Medinet Habu Lists (possibly drawing upon earlier sources from the time of Thutmose III or Amenhotep II), Michael Astour was probably correct when he argued that the inconsistency of sibilants in some of the names was not necessarily due “to the carelessness of the Egyptian scribe but to an actual confusion of sibilants in the Northern
Mesopotamian usage itself—a phenomenon well attested in the cuneiform writing of the Mari texts and other contemporaneous documents, caused by the interplay of dialects within both Akkadian and West Semitic.  

(4) Nonetheless, the shift of sibilants could also have occurred in Egypt itself, as the scribe may have either been uninformed about the correct pronunciation or simply mistaken about the orthography of the West Semitic name. Although Egyptian scribes usually wrote ś or š in order to represent West Semitic s or š, there are several exceptions to the rule. Sometimes names with an original s or š are represented by ś. Sometimes one document has s or š while another one has ś, yet both seek to represent the same geographical/personal names. For instance, the toponymical name “Ashur” is referred to as Sr/ Swr (with several variants) and as šSr/ šr (with several variants). The same is true for the Canaanite/Israelite town Sr/ Swr. List XXXIV, 38.  

(5) James E. Hoch has argued that Egyptian ś sometimes does represent Semitic š, in which case the sibilant in Ti-sr-Il could well represent the original š in Israel.  

We do not wish to downplay the complexity of the linguistic issues involved, which go beyond the scope of this article. But it is important to stress that the rendering of foreign names—in Egypt as well as beyond—does not necessarily always agree with our linguistic expectations and is not ultimately set in stone. Consequently, we would like to emphasize that the reading of “Israel” on the Berlin pedestal relief is at least possible for two main reasons. First, since there exists linguistic evidence that the original name “Israel” could have been written with š (for instance, based on the verb yšr), the Egyptian use of ś (instead of š as on Merenptah’s Israel Stele) does not preclude the possibility that the name was originally written with š in West Semitic. Second, and more significantly, the geographical proximity of Ti-sr-Il/Yi-sr-Il to Ashkelon and Canaan makes the identification with Israel likely. No known location (especially so near to those two familiar geographical entities) has a name so reminiscent of the biblical name “Israel.”  

As stated above, we tentatively ascribe the Berlin pedestal relief to the reign of Ramesses II. Although the reference to “Israel” in association with Ashkelon and Canaan recalls the reference from the reign of Merenptah, a Ramesside date is by no means certain. Görg originally ascribed the block to the reign of Amenhotep II due to the archaic renderings of the names “Ashkelon” and “Canaan.” Giveon preferred a date during the reign of Amenhotep III, which was tentatively accepted by Shmuel Ahituv. A date later than Ramesses II (for instance, during the reigns of Merenptah or Ramesses III) seems unlikely, however, as suggested by the short renderings (i.e., largely void of group writings) and the earlier form of the theophoric element ‘El. These clearly deviate from the longer versions during the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties.

1. Ti-sr-Il/Yi-sr-Il and the Study of Israel’s Origins

1.1. Proto-Israelite Migrations Before Merenptah?

It is to be expected that many scholars will find it hard to accept that the name Ti-sr-Il/Yi-sr-Il on the Berlin pedestal relief could refer to biblical Israel in Canaan prior to the reign of Merenptah. The question indeed needs to be asked whether it is at all possible that biblical Israel arrived in Canaan during either the mid–Eighteenth Dynasty or the even earlier Second Intermediate Period. Most scholars today—regardless of whether they accept the biblical Exodus and Conquest traditions as historical—suggest that the ethnogenesis of the tribes of Israel occurred no earlier than the end of the Late Bronze Age or the beginning of the Iron Age. A number of scholars, however, have questioned this view by arguing that “Israel” could have been in Canaan well before 1200 BCE. Sir Alan Gardiner, Hermann Schögl, Donald Redford, and (most recently) Israel Finkelstein have suggested that the biblical tradition likely contains vague memories of the expulsion of the (West Semitic) Hyksos from Egypt at the start of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

This is not surprising, as the classical Jewish historian Flavius Josephus equated the biblical Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt. Some scholars wish to go beyond the stage of vague memories at this point and argue in favor of a complex sociopolitical situation at the end of the Hyksos period that could have included ethnic and social groups, such as the Proto-Israelites, who migrated from Egypt and brought many of the well-fortified Canaanite Bronze Age cities to their knees. Yohanan Aharoni and (recently) Aaron Burke have argued that the political and military situation at the end of the Middle Bronze Age was reminiscent of the descriptions of Canaan found in the biblical stories, as they portray a country that was strongly fortified by impressive urban defenses. This situation is completely different from that during the subsequent Late Bronze Age (especially so during Late Bronze Age IIIB), when, according to Rivka Gonen, the Canaanite towns were frequently unfortified and therefore did not fit the biblical descriptions well. John Bimson and Bryant Wood have shown that the biblical story of the capture of Jericho (Tell es-Sultan) so closely resembles the archaeological circumstances regarding the destruction of Jericho’s impressive Middle Bronze Age fortifications that one is inclined to believe the two must be related one way or another. Barbara Sivertsen has recently revived an old German view that the biblical stories are based on multiple “Exodis.” She dates one Exodus to the Hyksos period (and suggests that this is reflected by archaeological evidence from the Eastern Delta) and the other to the early Eighteenth Dynasty—to which scholars such as Hans Goedicke, Bryant Wood, and (originally) John Bimson have also assigned the biblical event.
Ashkelon and Canaan), and if the names had been copied from an earlier source (supported by the archaic orthography of all three names on the slab), this would indeed suggest that Proto-Israelites had migrated to Canaan sometime nearer the middle of the second millennium BCE. Naturally, this proposition will need to be supported by additional archaeological and epigraphic evidence.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Dr. John Bimson, Prof. Dr. Gershon Galil, Viktor Golintes, Dr. Martin Heide, Robert Porter, and Dr. Bryant Wood for their helpful advice on various aspects of this paper and for correcting the English.

2. Manfred Görg, "Israel in Hieroglyphen," Biblische Notizen 106 (2001), 21–27. The article deals with the name "Israel" on the Merenptah Stele, its possible etymology and in closing with the name ring found on the pedestal fragment discussed more fully within this article. Also see: Elmar Edel and Manfred Görg, Die Ornamentlisten im nördlichen Säulenhof des Totentempels Amenophis' III., Ägypten und Altes Testament 50 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 86 and 118.


7. Its thickness (7.5 cm) is not relevant, as it was cut out of a large block, probably in modern times.

8. Also see Günther Roeder, Ägyptische Inschriften aus den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin II (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1929), 597.

9. Roeder, 596.

10. While the size of the name rings is approximately identical on both slabs (on no. 21687 the name rings measure 18 × 9 cm, while on no. 21688 they are 20.5 × 9 cm) the execution of the prisoners is slightly different. While the prisoners on no. 21687 are bound by horizontal fetters tied to their necks, the fetters on no. 21688 are bent upwards and terminate in what resembles a flower-de-lis and a papyrus symbol.

11. See: Karola Zibelius, Afrikanische Orts- und Völkernamen in hieroglyphischen und hieratischen Texten, Beihafte Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orientes—Reihe B Nr. 1. (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1972), 71–72. Zibelius argues that the name is a misspelling for trk or bk (especially 176–178, 82 and n. 70) and that the G1 variety was a copyist error for the ?w-bird 52>. This would represent a region located to the west of modern Darfur, inhabited by the Turky tribe. However, the reading remains tentative.


13. Görg, ibid, 26 with further references in n. 37.

14. For more details see ns. 76 and 77 below.

15. Traces of a name ring on the left can be made out but no remains of any hieroglyphs could be seen by van der Veen and Theis during their examination of the relief.


17. Ahituv, 69. A shorter but vocalized rendering (and with 47 for l) is attested on Merenptah’s Israel Stele from Karnak. Cf. Golénscheff, Pl. 6 and 16.

18. Ahituv, 83.

19. Most recently, see Michael Hasel, "Pa-Canaan in the Egyptian New Kingdom: Canaan or Gaza?" Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections 1:1 (2009), 8–17. For a list of all the renderings see Ahituv, 83–84.

20. Ahituv, 84. Especially those in Papyrus Anastasi III and IV are markedly different.


22. Manfred Görg, "Kanaan" in Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang (eds.), Neues Bibellexikon Vol. II (Zürich/Düsseldorf: Benzinger,
For flat, long beaks on this type of vulture, see Edel and Görg, 24.

On the same level with the bottom of the flowering reed, a downward-sloping line which intersecting with the "claw." Very faint remains of what may also be the continuation of the same "claw" can be seen to the right of the "claw," but the downward-sloping edge of the block at this point does not allow for certainty. As on slab no. 21688, the legs of the bird have not been carved as deeply as the rest of the animal or certain other hieroglyphs. The close-up photographs and aluminium foil "cast" were taken on December 9, 2009 by Peter van der Veen and Christoffer Theis with the help of the trustees of the Berlin Museum Warehouse, Frank Marohn; we wish to thank him for his kind assistance. As may be seen in Figure 3, the right edge of the stone reveals remains of a modern vertical cutting of which the vulture's beak seems to be the extension. But this is not the case: the cuts clearly are of different width and depth, and do not actually join up.

Also see Hoffmeier, “What is the Biblical Date,” 241.

Edel and Görg, 55.

A Second Intermediate Period Date was suggested for the latest 3 = r reading by Thomas Schneider in personal correspondence to Peter van der Veen, October 10, 2009. At the same time, Schneider argues that "in high register texts/milieus (royal sphere) the older/traditional orthography was maintained longer than in administrative documents." Thus an early Eighteenth Dynasty date is also possible.

Although it shows some similarities with the name "Asher" in the Bible, there is no straightforward resemblance, as the latter lacks the theophoric element. Also see the discussion in Hasel, 49. Hoffmeier's guesses at a readable form of the name on the Berlin Museum warehouse, Frank Marohn; we wish to thank him for his kind assistance. As may be seen in Figure 3, the right edge of the stone reveals remains of a modern vertical cutting of which the vulture's beak seems to be the extension. But this is not the case: the cuts clearly are of different width and depth, and do not actually join up.

Again, see Görg, Untersuchungen, 47f.


Simons, 132:15; 136: 12; Elmar Edel in Edel and Görg, 63–64; Helck, Beziehungen, 103.


Edel and Görg, 63, read the inscription from Tell Farah South as mn-hr-t-r nbk h3km: Menkhpherê, Lord of h-k3-m. See also Alan Rowe, A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (Cairo: Imprimerie de L’Institut Français, 1936), 11.

Alternatively written with “m.”

List B3: Edel and Görg, 63.

Zibelius, 125 and 132.

It seems clear from our general search for examples of the 3 = r phenomenon that a systematic search would yield several more examples. Other names that may be added, for instance, are 3 and 3[i in Zibelius, 72. Görg’s original reading of Pr-[i]-w-l-ḥ-k for “Man of Uruk” may be revived (alternatively, the third 3[i could represent r, rather than the second as originally suggested), especially since an 3[r = Uruk is also attested, eg., at Amarah-West no. 88 (Rameses II) followed by no. 89 = Babylon (Bbr). On this, see Kitchen, Rameside Inscriptions,
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From Metsamor grave no. XI, excavated in 1981. See Khanzadian and Piotrovskii, 67–74. Although the ceramic remains from this grave date to the eleventh to ninth centuries BCE, an agate weight in the form of a frog (from chamber VIII) bears the cuneiform inscription of the Kasite monarch Ulam-Buriash (I), a close contemporary of Kurigalzu (I) during the fifteenth century BCE or Late Bronze Age I. How these items came to Iron Age Metsamor remains unknown.

Edel and Görg, 131, 135, 157–158; DN li.1 and DN li.10. Also see Edel and Görg, “Amenophis III. und das Zentrum der Kassiten,” in Manfred Görg (ed.), Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte der Anfänge Israels: Dokumenten—Materialien—Notizen, Ägypten und Altes Testament 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harroswitz, 1989), 74–79. Although the reading of the prefixed word m-di-r was originally interpreted by Edel as medelu = “bolt” (which finds no parallel in relation to Dur-Kurigalzu), he later accepted Görg’s suggestion that md- was an Egyptian attempt to represent the initial foreign voiced dental. A similar situation is found with the late Egyptian rendering of the Persian name Darius (with initial n before d). Again Görg, “Amenophis III. und das Zentrum der Kasiten,” 74–79 and fig. 2.

Görg suggests that the initial i + s can read as ‘i/’e or y, and hence either as the initial letter in “Israel” or, when derived from yasir, in “Yasir el (original name of Israel?). The ‘i or ‘e reading for the two initional hieroglyphs is supported by Thomas Schneider, 364f. On the interchange of an initial yod with ‘i/e in the name “Israel,” see also André Lemaire, “Asriel, Šr’il, Israel et l’origine de la confédération Israélite,” Vetus Testamentum 23:2 (1973), 239–243.

The name also appears to be written with $ in Neo-Assyrian on the Kurkh Stela of Shalmaneser III (sir-‘i-la-a-a) where it is used for King Ahab “the Israelite” at Qarqar in 853 BCE. See James Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 279; K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Kurkh Monolith (2.113 A),” in William W. Hallo (ed.), The Context of Scripture 2: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 261–264. Yet some doubts are expressed concerning the reading of the correct sibilant by Margalith, 230, with further references. The exact reading of Israel on the Mesha and Tel Dan stelae is harder to establish, as w is not punctuated and can be read either way. On this also see Lemaire, 240; Margalith, 226.


Hoffmeier, 241.

See especially Schneider, 164. As for the interchange of a possible initial West Semitic ‘aleph (if this is indeed what the hieroglyphic rendering ‘ or ‘ implies) and y in Israel, see the possibly related names $ar-‘elah and yar-‘elah in 1 Chronicles 25:2 and 14. See Lemaire, 241 n. 1 for additional examples of the same alteration.

Also both $ and $ are clearly interchangeably and are even used interchangeably with the name “Ashkelon” (D21 is used at Soleb, on Merenptah’s Israel Stele, on the Megiddo Ivories, on BM588 of Ramesses III), see Ahituv, 69–70.

See, e.g., Ahituv, 46–47 (Ab’El), 86 (Dagal-Ill), 91 (El-Hillé), 92 (El-Mattan and ‘El-roi), or 107 (Har-‘El), 168 (Sab’il), 189 (Tira’illu), 201 (Yashup-Ill), etc. The same is true in personal Semitic names in New Kingdom inscriptions, e.g., š-š-š-š s ‘r-l-r; see Schneider, 66–69, N 118, N 126.

Benedict G. Davies, Egyptian Historical Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty (Jonsrød: Paul Astrøm Verlag, 1997), 186–187.

In a similar vein, some scholars have questioned the identification of Israel on the Merenptah stele with biblical Israel, and have suggested some erroneous equations that have all proved to be linguistically impossible. For a list of possibilities, see Michael G. Hasel, “Merenptah’s Reference to Israel: Critical Issues for the Origin of Israel,” in Richard S. Hess, et al. (eds.), Critical Issues in Early Israelite History, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 48–49. The same surely applies to the name Ti-sr-Il on the Berlin slab. Also on this, see James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt—The Evidence of the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 50.

In the light of similar names from the Middle Bronze Age (e.g., in the Amorite and Mari onomastica), El would be the subject rather than the object (unlike in Genesis 3:21&39;): “El fights/struggles.” See also Volkmar Fritz, Die Entstehung Israels im 12. und 11. Jahrhundert v.Chr, Biblische Enzyklopädie 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 75. Thomas Wagner, “Israel” at www.wibixel.de. Also Mart-Jan Paul, et al., Genesis-Exodus—Bibelcommenzaar, Studiebijbel Oude Testament 1 (Venendaal: Centrum voor Bijbelonderzoek, 2004), 345. Note also that popular etiologies do not necessarily reflect the
original meaning of the name involved. Two examples of where the etiology clearly does not reflect the original meaning of the names will suffice: Samuel (= “Name/Posterity of El,” reinterpreted etiologically as “asked of El”—1 Samuel 1:20, i.e. the meaning of another important name in the Book of Samuel, namely that of King Saul/Shaul); Moab (reinterpreted etiologically as me-ah, “from the father,” to underline the incestuous relationship—LXX Genesis 19:37). See also Robert P. Gordon, I & II Samuel—A Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency/Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 76; Gordon Wenham, Genesis 16–50, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1994), 62.


58. Noth, 207.

59. See Gordon J. Wenham, 296ff. The Greek translators (Septuagint, Aquila and Symmachus) and the Vulgate link the name “Israel” to this particular root.


61. Agam Sachsse, Margalith, ibid.

62. Moshe Garsiel takes yešurin either as a midrashic development “upon the common ‘Israel,’” or as a pun on Israel attested in Micah 3:9 where the rulers of Israel abhor “justice” and pervert all “equity” (h-yšrh). See Moshe Garsiel, Biblical Names—A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 114.


64. Görg, ibid.

65. Readings of similar names with š can also be found in the Amorite onomasticon—for instance, names based on the verb “to protect” (as per Kogan above). Compare ˩-a-d-ś-ra-Á-da-gan (ARM 21, 337:4) or ˩-a-d-ś-ra’ (ARM 21, 401 xii 5).

66. Görg, 26, with literature. Note that the Eblaite names may either be related to the verb šry (”to struggle/contend with,” as in Genesis 32) or šry (”to protect”). Personal correspondence with Viktor Golinters, June 1, 2010.


68. On the ambivalence of the use of š in Ugaritic, see Josef Tropper, Ugaritische Grammatik, Altes Orient und Altes Testament 273 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2000), esp. 91–92 and 107–108. Note also that Ugaritic šry, “to fight, struggle” = Hebrew šbh, which is precisely the verb associated with the name “Israel” in Genesis 32:19. See Tropper, 92 (32.122, I–4).

69. Similarly, Thomas Schneider argued that the Egyptian scribes were familiar with West Semitic personal names as found in cuneiform writing, which influenced their transmission of these names; see Schneider, 31–32. Notably, geographic names written with š in cuneiform documents are indeed sometimes rendered with š in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, the name (matati) š-ar-Š in Amarna Letter 288 (from Jerusalem) is believed by most scholars to refer to the biblical land of Seir (ירש) or Edom, which is written with šin in Hebrew and with š in Egyptian texts from the Nineteenth Dynasty: i.e. “Iš [Šš] šbr.” Another example would be the name “Damascus,” i.e., Dimašq/u (Amarna Letter 53, 107, 197), which is written with šin in Hebrew (筀 máiš) and with š in Egyptian as t-mš-(š)-q (with variants).


72. Edel and Görg, 128. Written (1) with the M8 š sign and (2) with single/double š29 š (Š), M3 šw š (šw) and Aa 18 š signs. The name can, for instance, be found in multiple topographical lists from the time of Thutmose III and Amenhotep III.

73. Edel in Edel and Görg, 128.

74. Hoch, table on p. 433.

75. See also Hoch, 431 and 433.

76. Manfred Görg, Untersuchungen, 47f.

77. Raphael Givon, 1137; 199; Shmuel Ahituv, 69, 83.

78. The traditional interpretation combined with the thirteenth century date is, for instance, adhered to by Kenneth A. Kitchen, On the Reliability of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003, 241ff) and James K. Hoffmeier, Israel


85. David Hansen has argued that Canaanite cities were partly fortified during the Late Bronze Age I period; see his “The Cities are Great and Walled Up to Heaven: Canaanite Fortifications in the Late Bronze I Period,” in Glenn A. Carnagey Sr. (ed.), *Beyond the Jordan: Studies in Honor of W. Harold Mare* (Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2005), 79–92.


