Prisoners Of War at Medinet Habu: Synchronism between Battle-Narrative Texts and Iconography in the New Kingdom
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Abstract
Prisoners of war depictions contain a lot of information that of an importance for many aspects; historical and understanding the Egyptian concept about other people. Egyptologists have given a special attention to inscriptions and epigraphic studies which is no doubt of great importance at this point, the depictions of prisoners of war can inform us with so much information about the space they devoted to enemy figures.

In the New Kingdom (NK) iconography shows several interesting details regarding the bindings of prisoners of war which demonstrate the creativity ability of the ancient Egyptians. Information about the prisoners of war and their fates are subject of many royal monuments and inscriptions, steleae of officials and military leaders, tomb biographies. The textual record must be examined to determine the nature of those foreign captives.

Although many of the royal inscriptions use highly symbolic, rhetorical language to refer to the extraordinary power and praise of the pharaoh, its purpose is to glorify the king as the sole performer, these inscriptions and its phrasing are for the many aspects informative regarding the fate of the prisoners. These texts reported the number of prisoners or captives that brought to Egypt, but it is often difficult to accept it as real. However, biographical texts are generally clearer and sometimes note that the king rewarded a particular official, for being loyal to the king, with prisoners to work on his private estate. Stelae of high officials, erected to commemorate a their building achievements, specifically note that prisoners were used in the building’s project, while administrative papyri gave unique details regarding the integration of the prisoners into the ancient Egyptian society.

This study will examine the status prisoners of war as they refer to them in the texts of autobiographies, military officers’ texts in their tombs or steleae and other texts that deal with prisoners of war from the New Kingdom, then the depictions of the prisoners on the walls of temple Medinet Habu as one of the most important temples in which the depictions of wars of the king and the most important is the depiction of the prisoners of war which the king brought them with him. This iconography on the temple of Medinet Habu is a synchronism of these texts on the walls of the temple. The study will also deal with the differences in treatments of the prisoners on texts and their parallel on the wall, including their fate and the fate of their families.

Before discussing this topic, it is helpful to examine the Egyptian terms which were used to refer to “prisoners of war” or “captive”.

Egyptian Terms for “prisoners of war”
The term which the ancient Egyptian used for “prisoner of war” is skr-’nh, it is always written with the bound captive determinative in singular, in plural it was written with the a seated man and woman determinatives with three plural strokes. The verb skr means literally "to strike" and “living smote one.” The verb skr was written with various determinatives:

123 Urk. IV: 4.4; 780.11; 809.5; 895.5.
124 For various writing of the term see Wb. IV , 306-7 The term is dated back to the Old Kingdom, where it appears in Weni’s report, see D. Lorton, “Terminology Related to the Laws of Warfare in Dynasty XVIII,” JARCE 11 (1974): 55; R.O. Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian (Oxford: Griffith Institute,
It has a wide range of meanings; “strike the head, strike down foes” in military contexts, other meanings of the verb “to work metal, clap hands, knead dough”. When written as a noun with the knife determinative, *skr* means an “injury” “wound.” Thus the verb *skr* and its variations provide the meaning of striking or smiting with something like a weapon or a tool. The term *sqr*-anx implies this concept metaphorically; prisoners of war are those who have been “struck” but they are still alive. The term could also include other captured, who even had not participated in the battle. The precise status of *sqr*-anx is problematic, the question is, does it indicate the status of the prisoners? Grapow highlighted the meaning; the “living one to be killed.” Other scholar defines the *sqr*-anx as “sacrificed living,” Helck suggested that they were “gebundene zu erschlagende,” Lorton argued that the *sqr*-anx is a soldier who took a blow (*skr*) he was wounded but survived (*snh*) alive, became a prisoner of war.

Egyptian texts refer generally to them as enemies; who are captured with the wives and children, probably the wives and children were sent to work and not executed. In Buhen Stela, the Nubians who were classified as *skrw*-snh were subject to impale as it was recorded. Thus, *skrw*-snh were prisoners of war who could be executed, impaling, or even work in the society. Another term which was also used for “captive” or prisoner of war was *h3k.w/h3k.t*, and which means variously “plunder, spoils, things carried off.” It is always written with pound captive in its singular form, it plural written only with a handcuffed and three strokes. It seems that this word was used more likely to refer to results of the war; spoils of war. Mostly *h3k.w/h3k*, extended to refer to human captives, but it refers also to other spoils like metal objects or properties of the enemy, an interesting example from the reign of Ramses III, which refers to a storage room filled with *h3k.w*. The verb, *h3k* has many meanings like “to plunder, carry off captives, make prisoner, capture towns.” It can be used to refer to capture specific people, like the Asians, Shasu or Meshwesh, or generally foreign lands. However, the term extents to imply the sense of taking money and properties from the enemy, as it


125 Faulkner, *Dictionary*, 250.

126 Ibid., 250.


128 Fazekas, “Amenhotep II. und die Kriegsgefangenen,” 59-64.


130 W. Helck in *LÄ* III, 786-788., means “bound to be slain.”


132 *Urk* IV: 1307.


136 *Urk* IV: 4:10-13

137 *KRI* IV: 9.7.


140 *KRI* I: 7.2: *KRI* II: 300.2

141 *KRI* II: 289.11,16.
was in the interests of the ancient Egyptians to take goods and prisoners back to Egypt to distribute them to palace and temples.\textsuperscript{142} Verb \textit{ini(\textcircled{\textdegree})}, which generally means “to bring, bring back, return, carry off, fetch, obtain.”\textsuperscript{143} It was used to express the act of bringing back prisoner, the most common using of the verb in this context were in military records to refer to ‘carry off of prisoners’ (\textit{tp-\textdegree} or \textit{skr-\textdegree}),\textsuperscript{144} it includes the prisoners of war and their family members.\textsuperscript{145} As a verb the using of the verb in military context, expand to cover the meaning of bringing parts of the body, hands, ears, and so on.\textsuperscript{146} As a noun the verb \textit{inw} was translated as “tribute, produce, gifts, and deliveries.”\textsuperscript{147} This broad range of meanings reflects the simple fact that the precise meaning of \textit{inw} is widely debated.\textsuperscript{148} Some scholars suggest that inw is a sign of returning to normal relations by the end of war and not a result of war,\textsuperscript{149} different from the other terms which directly mean captives like \textit{h3kw} which refer to bring of prisoners of war or their possessions as a result of warfare.

Those prisoners of war were taken to the Egyptian society and they were forced to work as \textit{skr.\textdegree} “prisoners of war”.\textsuperscript{150} Because the Egyptians themselves did not discuss the status of slavery in any official context it is difficult to determine which terms refer to slavery. Unfortunately there is no existing texts explain the legal status of those people in the society thorough its written documentation, especially compared to other ancient societies.\textsuperscript{151} One can only assume their status from some texts in which they accidentally refer to these people, but nothing directly refers to them as a specific, thus caution is required in this respects. Interestingly, foreign prisoners could eventually earn wages and pay taxes, they may had some judicial rights, could marry and have families, and even keep their original names.\textsuperscript{152} Two Egyptian terms: \textit{hm} (masculine; \textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}, feminine \textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}) and \textit{b3k} (masculine; \textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}, feminine: \textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}),\textsuperscript{153} were translated as “slave, servant”, again their condition and status are never defined in the textual record, even though they were identified with the work they did.\textsuperscript{154}

In a text from the Middle Kingdom,\textsuperscript{155} defines the dangers and misfortunes that accompany every work except that of the scribe, there is no reference about slaves; the role

\textsuperscript{142} Hasel, \textit{Domination and Resistance}, 72-73.
\textsuperscript{143} Faulkner, \textit{Dictionary}, 22.
\textsuperscript{145} Hasel, \textit{Domination and Resistance}, 66
\textsuperscript{146} KRI IV: 8.12.
\textsuperscript{147} Faulkner, \textit{Dictionary}, 22.
\textsuperscript{149} Bleiberg, “The King’s Privy Purse During the New Kingdom,” 160; Hasel, \textit{Domination and Resistance}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 185.
\textsuperscript{152} B. Menu, “Captives de guerre et dépendance rurale dans l’Égypte du Nouvel Empire,” in \textit{La dépendance rurale dans l’Antiquité égyptienne et proche-orientale} (B. Menu, ed. IFAO, 2005), 187-204.
\textsuperscript{153} Faulkner, \textit{Dictionary}, 169 (\textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}) and 79 (\textit{\textcircled{\textdegree}}).
\textsuperscript{155} W.K. Simpson, “The Satire on the Trades: The Instruction of Dua-Khety,” in \textit{The Literature of Ancient Egypt} (3rd
of slaves is absent, which made Loprieno believes that it was not a clearly defined social group during this time. But only various phrases referring to b3kw was found: nhm.w hr b3k.f (“drawn/made to work”), nhm.w hr b3k.f mni.ti (“made to work in the fields”), and hwi.tw.f m ssm 50 (“beaten with 50 lashes for a day’s absence), it is significant that it appears that the Egyptians who gave up their legal freedoms (due to debt, etc.) were usually referred to (b3k.w) as servants not slaves (hm.w). The word hm is found in another Middle Kingdom text to describe two individuals in the Westcar Papyrus: “It was lying down on a mat at the threshold of his house that he found him, a servant (slave) at his head massaging him and another wiping his feet.” It seems that working as a slave was restricted to foreigners. By the reign of Thutmose III, a less common term for prisoners of war is used following his campaign at Year 33. The king states to that he had captured three princes and their wives, eighty rmT.w kf”, male and female slaves (hm.w/hm.w.t) and their children. The verb kf” means “to make captures, plunder, take booty,” or even simply to “grasp” and is also used in one term referring to soldier, kf”w. In this case, a warrior is “one who captures,” emphasizing the importance of seizing captives as defining manner of warfare.

It is important here to examine examples that deal with the prisoners of war in the texts, in order to better define their fate after captivity.

Prisoners of war in texts of the NK

The reign of Ahmose I, Amenhotep I, and Thutmose I

The autobiographical text of Ahmose son of Ibana presents a detailed image of the emergence of the Eighteenth Dynasty and gives a reference to the appearance of foreign slavery. Ahmose, Son of Ibana: An Ancient military marine officer referred in his text to the importance of prisoners of war as laborers during the beginning New Kingdom. Ahmose served under three successive kings: Ahmose I, Amenhotep I, and Thutmose I. His autobiography along with the biography of Ahmose-Pen-Nekhbet considers as the most important sources for the wars of the early Eighteenth Dynasty, especially the expulsion of Hyksos.


160 Urk. IV: 698.4-7
161 Wb. V, 121
162 Urk. IV: 898.17, 899.9; Faulkner, Dictionary, 285.
165 ARE 2: 3-4

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Ahmose firstly talk about his rewards in his autobiography; he rewarded with gold and was given male and female servants, referring to servants as \((\text{hmw})\). During King Ahmose’s war against the Hyksos, a clear textual reference to slaying an enemy and cutting off his hand and bring it to the palace, he said to have “bring a hand which was reported to the Royal Herald,”\(^\text{166}\) This action is a text parallel to Medinet Habu reliefs, in which the Egyptian soldiers and scribes counting the hands and other parts of the slain enemies. Then he captured a prisoner of war \((\text{skr-\text{nh}})\) in the fighting.\(^\text{168}\) After the Egyptians defeated the Hyksos at Avaris, he brought four persons and “his majesty gave them to me as servants.”\(^\text{169}\) During a campaign against Nubia, Ahmose once again demonstrated his courage by capturing two men and cutting off three hands. As before, he was given gold and two maid-servants.\(^\text{170}\) Ahmose claims that the king captured the chief of the enemy, while Ahmose brought to his majesty two other Nubian warriors from their ruler’s boat.\(^\text{171}\) After the successful campaign, each solider was given five “heads” and a field of five \(\text{stt}\).\(^\text{172}\) The idiomatic use of “heads” \((\text{tp})\) to refer to the living prisoners of war,\(^\text{173}\) they are different from cut off heads. Moreover he got another five \(\text{stt}\) and three prisoners of war \((\text{tp})\) and after they defeated the rebellions.\(^\text{174}\) Ahmose, son of Ihaba continued his extraordinary military service under Amenhotep I. following their victory over the Nubian tribes; he claims that, “they were carried off in neck constraints, without losing one of them.”\(^\text{175}\) The Egyptian term for “neck constraints” is \(\text{gw3w3}(\text{gwt, wnt})\), translated by Faulkner as “strangle- hold.”\(^\text{176}\) Breasted’s translation of the terms is simply “prisoners.”\(^\text{177}\)

The verb \(\text{gw3}\), \(\text{gwt, wnt}\) means to “be choked”; “pull tight” idiomatically used as to “besiege a city.”\(^\text{178}\) The description which Ahmose made, recalls to mind the depiction of prisoner of war in many temples of the New Kingdom, while they were bound together (Fig.1, 5, 6) and attached to each other by neck constraints.\(^\text{179}\) During the same campaign, Ahmose brought two hands as a gift and a prisoner of war \((\text{skr-\text{nh}})\),\(^\text{180}\) all of which he presented to the king. Ahmose also states that he “brought two maid servants as spoil of war, besides these which I had presented to him (the king).”\(^\text{181}\) After Thutmose I, Ahmose, son Ihaba served under king Amenhotep I, he transported the king to Nubia. Unsurprisingly, he shows off his naval expertise as he guided the ships through the river. His report of the results of this campaign is typical ancient Egyptian style, after he described the king’s anger like a panther, and the enemies are running scared, etc. he stated

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\(^{166}\) ARE 2: 7; Hoffmeier, “Ahmose,” in CoS II: 5.
\(^{167}\) Urk. IV: 3.13-14
\(^{168}\) Urk. IV: 4.12.
\(^{170}\) Hoffmeier, “Ahmose,” in CoS II: 6; ARE 2: 8; Urk. IV: 5.8-11.
\(^{172}\) Hoffmeier calculate 5 \(\text{stt}\) are 3.3 acres, see Hoffmeier, “Ahmose,” in CoS II: 6, n. 24; Urk. IV: 6.7-8; ARE 2: 8-9.
\(^{174}\) Urk. IV: 6.15
\(^{176}\) Faulkner, Dictionary, 288.
\(^{177}\) ARE 2:17.
\(^{178}\) Faulkner, Dictionary, 288
that “their subjects were carried off as prisoners of war”, interesting is his mention that the enemy ruler “was hung upside down at the bow of his majesty’s boat.”

The autobiography of Ahmose son of Ibana demonstrates important information about the prisoners of war who were redistributed as rewards for high-ranking military officials. Several times Ahmose clarifies that he was promoted and encouraged by giving him gold and servants from captives as rewards for his courage and service as high-ranked official. That may explain why other soldiers who were given various pieces of jewelry and weapons but never captives, even though they captured living prisoners the same like Ahmose son of Ibana. However, the autobiography of Ahmose provides textual parallels to Egyptian iconography, particularly the cutting off hands (Fig.2) and the use of neck restraints for captives. It implies that the prisoners of war were working as forced labor or they presumably were. It shows that the first three kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty were concerned with establishing their power in Nubia, prisoners of war who attested from the reign of Thutmose II were all then brought in before the king and “placed under the feet of the Good God.”

The reign of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II
By the reign of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II many wars have been conducted that led to a great number of prisoners of war who were mentioned as spoil of war. The most famous and important corpus of texts from this period, the Annals of Thutmose III, refers to captives in several context as booty, using various terms, specific ethnic terms like “Asiatics,” “Syrians”. Following the triumph of Megiddo, prisoners of war (skrw-rnw) are presented to the king with other booty: horses, chariots of gold and silver, hands etc. The defeated people were described as fish in a net and as his majesty’s army counted their properties. This description of defeated enemies as fish lay in a net provoked these ruminations of the depiction of Sea People on the walls of Medinet Habu.

The reign of Ramses III
One of the most fascinating and informative text is that of Papyrus Harris I contains several indication to the treatment of prisoners of war after one of the campaigns and return back to Egypt, long texts explain the Egyptian practices concerning the treatment of foreign prisoners of war, mentioning that:

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182 Ibid., 7; Urk. IV: 8.4-9.6.
183 Like Ahmose Pen Nekhbet ARE 2: 10-12, 35.
186 ARE 2:50; Urk. IV: 137-141.
189 Urk IV: 659.3-5: ARE II: 184-185.
“I have brought back in great numbers those that my sword has spared, with their hands tied behind their backs before my horses, and their wives and children in tens of thousands, and their livestock in hundreds of thousands. I have imprisoned their leaders in fortresses bearing my name, and I have added to them chief archers and tribal chiefs, branded and enslaved, tattooed with my name, and their wives and children have been treated the same way’” (Papyrus Harris I, 77.4-6).  

This passage is of a great importance, it implies many aspects concerning the prisoners of war:

- The text recalls to mind the depictions of prisoners of war in the temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu (Fig.3), marching beside or in front of Egyptian chariots; their hands behind them, returning back from a campaign. This text is a textual parallel to the iconographies on the temples.
- It undoubtedly clarify that not all the prisoners of war were worriers or soldiers, there are women and children as well, as it mentioned above in the texts of the Eighteenth Dynasty which recorded the booty that kings brought back to Egypt after their battle.
- The leaders of the prisoners of war received a special treatments, although their families are also treated the same way, the passage refers to one the functions of the fortresses in this time; it was serving as prison for the leaders of prisoners of war.
- Branding, stamping, and tattooing the name of the king on the bodies of prisoners of war and their families implies that they belonged to the king, who decides their fate.

Another interesting passage in Papyrus Harris I contains another significant reference to prisoners of war as the property of the king. At the temple of Medinet Habu, Ramses III mentioned also branding after describing the king’s triumph over the Libyans, the text records that their leaders were branded with the great name of his majesty. Prisoners of war were often worked as manual labor: in the temple estates involved in plowing fields, planting and harvesting crops, nursing cattle, washing textiles and manufacturing it. They served also as butlers, beer-makers, fan-bearers, shield-bearers, mercenaries, warriors, temple constructions.

Among the booty of war were 340 prisoners, eighty-three hands, thirty-eight Maryannu, 1796 male and female servants (hm.wlhm.w.t) and their children, etc. The reliability of the totals is not main purpose here; the more important is the simple fact that prisoners of war are noted using different terms to distinguish their social status. The Annals make it clear that the children of the chieftains of enemy were taken to Egypt as hostages and

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196 Bakir, Slavery, 114-115.
198 Bakir, Slavery, 114-115.
199 Caminos, *Late-Egyptian*, 200; Lopreino, “Slaves,” 205
198 Bakir, Slavery, 114-115.
199 Caminos, *Late-Egyptian*, 200; Lopreino, “Slaves,” 205
198 Bakir, Slavery, 114-115.
eventually returned to their homelands as to substitute their fathers, lists of the children and their numbers are mentioned. The Annals also make specific mention of the integration of the prisoners of war into the Egyptian labor force as part of temple estates where they worked as farmers, weavers and other tasks. By the time of Amenhotep II, the majority of these labors were sent to the temple estates. This was common practice, as a text from mortuary temple of Amenhotep II refers to male and female slaves (hm.wx/hm.w.t) the children of all foreign lands, as spoils of his majesty. A stela from the reign of Amenhotep III related to the constructions activities of the king, mentioned also the same expression; male and females slaves (hm/hmt) and the children of foreign rulers.

**The fate of prisoners of war a textual image**

As Ahmose son of Ibana claimed in his autobiography that the king reward them as loyal officers with prisoners of war to work for them. The prisoners are possessions to the king, and he can give them as a reward to the officers who have captured them. After those prisoners being slaves, there are various paths through which they could be freed; 1-marriage; an officer who accompanied Thutmose III asserts that his slave who called Ameniu, whom he himself captured, was an excellent servant; he never imprisoned or did anything wrong, as a result, he exempted him from slavery as he married one of his relative.

2-adoption, the slave girl Dienihatiri, her owner adopted her children. One of her children is a girl called Taimennut, she married the “overseer of the stables”, and if she gives birth to any children they would be free from slavery.

3- Purified “swtb” by the king himself, leading to the individual entering into temple service as a free person. The clear example of this performance is Tutankhamun’s Stela, where the king purifies slaves in return to what they have done in the royal palace; he declares them as free citizen and reserves them to serve the “father of all gods.”

In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties: Branding, tattooing and constructing temples; kings of the Nineteenth Dynasties continued the practices of their predecessors concerning the use of prisoners of war to serve at temples, like the texts of Ramses II and Seti I ascertain this the same practice of devote the prisoners to the god. One difference; they do not give prisoners as a reward for loyal officers, although this is not evidence that this practice vanished, it could be still practicing but they did not mention it any more in their autobiographical records. The state took responsibility for these prisoners and assigned them to various tasks.

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200 *Urk.* IV: 690.2-10; Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (Supplement aux ASE. Cairo: L’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1952), 111.


202 Loprieno, “Slaves,” 203


204 Menu, “Captifs du guerre,” 190.


208 *RITA* II: 24.


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There is no reason to believe that other kings whose texts did not mention one or more of these actions, did not practicing these standard actions against the prisoners. Though New Kingdom text provides many interesting details regarding the prisoners of war and their fate after capturing them, it must be taken into considerations the rhetoric language and the exaggerations in expressing the might of the kings, and to refer to the incredible courage and creativity of the high official, to whom the texts were written. One must consult the iconographical record to determine the ultimate character of prisoners of war. Details of the treatment of those prisoners are mainly found in: royal monuments, primarily the temples, the royal inscriptions show highly rhetorical, figurative language in heaping overenthusiastic praise on the triumphed king, the accompanied intriguing details of the scenes dealing with battles and the safe return of the victorious king while he drew the prisoners of war, who sometimes carried the chariot of the king, these details must be studied in accordance to the biographical texts to settle on the treatment of these prisoners of war, after capturing them, as it was depicted in royal scene.

During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, prisoners of war adorn the walls of great temples as part of the sequential presentation of the king’s victories. This period is distinguished with its rhetorical statements; captives are generally identified by heading texts describing them with various terms, sometimes by their ethnicity. These descriptions serve to harmonize the iconography but it provides some details as to the fate of the prisoners. Thus these scenes are synchrony of the texts on the walls of the temples. Three actions concerning the prisoners are to be mentioned in texts of autobiography and iconography of Medinet Habu:

- officials are bringing prisoners before the king (Fig. 4) (text and celebrations scenes)
- The king leads off prisoners while he is on his chariot (Fig. 3) (text and return scenes)
- The king brings the prisoners before the gods (Fig. 1) (text and presentation scenes)

Table 1: actions taken against prisoners of war according to the texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Eighteenth Dynasty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of the kings</td>
<td>action taken against prisoners of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thutmose I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thutmose III</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<sup>212</sup> Cut off their hands or ears or their eyes plucked out.

<sup>213</sup> Urk. 4: 1-11, lines 35-36.


<sup>215</sup> Urk. IV, 795: 7-12; similar to 795:15-796:3; 796: 5-8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the kings</th>
<th>Action taken against prisoners of war</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seti I</td>
<td>Burning, Hung upside down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramses II</td>
<td>Impaled, mutilated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merenptah</td>
<td>Cut off the head, Strangulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramses III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

222 Ibid.
224 Hasel, *Domination and Resistance*, 84.
228 Muhlestein, *Violence in the Service of Order*, 54.
229 Ibid.
Synchronism between text and iconography
Iconography of prisoners of war at the temple of Medinet Habu

The mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu contains an extraordinary mixture of detailed battles and unique treatments of prisoners of war; simply the temple has extravagant scenes full of details.\(^{232}\)

All traditional foes of Egypt were depicted and their prisoners of war are on display; the Nubians,\(^{233}\) Libyans,\(^{234}\) Asiatic\(^ {235}\) and the depiction for the first time of Sea People.\(^ {236}\)

As a beginning, it is important to understand the structure of the temple and its highly organized reliefs, the layout of the temple is the natural starting point. In brief, the core of the temple is: the temple itself, the forecourt, the attached palace with its 1\(^{st}\) courtyard, and the outer walls for the entire structure. Interestingly, in the more public locations, as exterior walls and courtyards, war reliefs were carved.

Campaigns depicted on both the outer faces and on the walls of the courts, as to emphasize the symbolic and ceremonial presentation of prisoners of war to Amun-Re,\(^ {237}\) the repetition of these scenes was a necessary to the triumphed king. Each war must terminate to scenes of celebration and presentation in gratitude to the gods for victories. These scenes should be seen by the public

Significantly the depictions on the outer walls correspond with geographical location of the enemies. Thus, Nubians are on the southern portion of the west wall, Libyans on the northern portion of the same wall, the reliefs of the 1\(^{st}\) Libyan war flow faultlessly into the battle with the Sea Peoples, and they also share a presentation scene next to the pylon of the 2\(^{nd}\) Court, moving from events to the other in an accurate sequence, led to the suggestion that they concern with historical accuracy.\(^ {238}\) This relationship between real and the depiction of the events could help in examining the scenes to determine the actual treatment of the prisoners of war; meanwhile, these scenes cannot be viewed as an alteration of the textual record of the events; Instead, a careful reading of the material that include both the iconographical and textual complexities, and allows to combine historical details and textual records.\(^ {239}\) These scenes must be understood mainly as relating to the protection of the land, and thus the entire cosmos, from chaotic forces. Those prisoners of war represent the dangers that trouble the sun god on his journey through the netherworld. Thus, these scenes are to establish stability and defeat the chaotic forces that attempt to disturb the solar cycle. One cannot lessen the historical value of these depictions giving historical specifics in showing, in this study, the different way of handling the prisoners of war just as the Egyptians presented it. Generally, the reliefs of Medinet Habu show an


\(^{234}\) Gaballa, Narrative Art, 120-122, figs. 10b & 11a; Edgerton and Wilson, Historical Records, 4-17.

\(^{235}\) Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pls. 12-26; Heinz, Die Feldzugsdarstellungen, 301-305, I.4-13; Gaballa, Narrative Art, 120-122, figs. 10b & 11a; Edgerton and Wilson, Historical Records, 4-17.

\(^{236}\) Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu Volume II: Later Historical Records of Ramses III (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), 87-100; Gaballa, Narrative Art, 122-123, figs. 11c; Heinz, Die Feldzugsdarstellungen, 313-317, 1.31-40; Edgerton and Wilson, Historical Records, 95-105.

\(^{237}\) Gaballa, Narrative Art, 122-123, figs. 10c; Heinz, Die Feldzugsdarstellungen, 305-309, 1.14-21, Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pls. 29-44; Edgerton and Wilson, Historical Records, 35-48.


\(^{239}\) Ibid., 88.

\(^{239}\) O’Connor, Sea People, 94.
amazing amount of geographical names, historical detailing alongside important events and religious functions, all of which must be kept in mind when analyzing the reliefs. Basically, the captives depicted in the return and celebration scenes, in the Nubian campaign, it display the usual mixture of poses, their bindings are like a sacrificial bird. The harmony in depicting these scenes; in each register, a single captive looks back, one of them bound with an animal-shaped handcuffs (manacle). Finally, the presentation scene of several Nubians bow in presence of the king. Four scenes representing prisoners of war from the Libyan campaign depict almost all types of binding captives, bound in painful, torturous positions, manacle types x-shaped pose, painful arms below and above. Two celebration scenes describing the king’s successful war: one on the exterior of the north wall the other adjacent the return and presentation scenes in the 2nd Courtyard. Both celebration scenes show Egyptian soldiers and scribes interacting with prisoners of war as they count the hands of the slain enemies. Most of the interactions between soldier and prisoners of war are that the soldier pushing or striking the captive in the head or back. In one example on the upper register of the celebration scene a solider clearly turns around and punches a prisoner in the face. Their dress, hairstyle, and even tattooing and scarring are all highlighted and excitingly provided. Noteworthy, the exterior north wall depictions are fully detailed and extremely well organized; it is covered the battle with the Sea Peoples; a long text, and depiction of the sea peoples with their distinguished headdresses as prisoners of war, in fact these scenes is very important for understanding many aspects of the Sea Peoples and information about how the Egyptians perceived these people. However, once again the iconography presents a useful historical event and details. In the celebration scene, at the centre is a prisoner of war represented while he is bound with an oval-shaped manacle, distinguishing him from the other prisoners, presumably, he is a leader of the warrior. The depictions of the captives and their bindings, clearly made the Egyptian iconography, with its incredible detailed scenes and ideology in representing the enemies, indicate a historical harvest. Another depiction shows row of captive is forced to kneel and an Egyptian soldier raises high his curved weapon while another standing prisoner is controlled by another soldier. An interesting representation at the end of the upper row is counting of the hands scene, while on the bottom row another interesting depiction of a group of suppressed prisoners, other unrestrained prisoners are branded and counted by Egyptians scribes, as texts discussed above mentioned. Then the king presented the prisoners of war to different deities. The usual group of poses is on display in both scenes, including a single captive “showing the face” in each scene, it seems that is to

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240 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pl. 10
241 Ibid., pl. 11.
242 Gaballa, Narrative Art, 20
243 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pls. 21-22.
244 Ibid., pls. 23-26.
245 This scene is the same like that of Horemhab.
246 These scene provoked to mind what textual records mentioned that the king branding and tattooing the prisoners of war with his name.
247 Edgerton and Wilson, Historical Records, 49-58; Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pl. 46; ARE 3, §403.
248 Different types of their headdresses like horned helmets, and feathered or reed helmet, see Ibid., 85.
249 O’Connor, Sea People, 85-86.
250 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pls. 36-41
251 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pl. 42
252 Ibid., pl. 43-44, the same consequences like that of the textual records which mention that the king branded the prisoners and then sent them to the temple to serve there as forced labors.
distinguish him as a particularly important prisoner, the leader who singled out for further treatment.

On the north wall, the scenes of victory covering two campaigns, Ramses III brought each of the enemy groups in presentation before the gods. Libyans are included as well, their hapless status is visible in the depictions of their ribs as that captive which is depicted on the scene of the 2nd Pylon on the top row, the prisoner were represented in common pose of prisoners; the upper arms are straight behind his back, while his elbow is bent severely, his wrists at shoulder height. These scenes are adjacent to the king’s palace where the public celebrations and royal appearances took place. On both the exterior north wall between the 1st and 2nd pylons, the usual scene of the king upon his departure the field of battle he grab the heads of two prisoners, seemingly their leaders. From the scenes of the north wall, several observations can be defined:

A greater percentage of Libyans are represented in painful poses than other prisoners groups.

Interestingly, in each scene there is one captive “shows his face”, such repetition perhaps to indicate that he is a chieftain, or leader. In both scenes, that of the celebration and return the Egyptian soldiers were busy with the prisoners, particularly the scene on the bottom where a soldier with an axe threatening one of the prisoners. Great variety can be found in the bindings of enemy prisoners, and Egyptian soldiers leading the prisoners by a rope or striking them in the back and hitting them in their head.

The Asiatics scenes are represented on the north wall and 1st Pylon, but Libyans and Sea Peoples are added in the return and presentation scenes. The composite representation of three enemies in one scene indicates the desire of Ramses III to celebrate and show his mighty over his enemies by conquering their different groups. In a representation in Medinet Habu that had also its parallel in the text such as the depiction of the king while he is piercing one of his prisoners with a long lance; he is holding a lance in one hand in the other either a bow or a shield. He is not fighting against a single enemy, but an entire castle, this kind of representations is depicted twice in Karnak under Ramses II. All are so similar, that they are probably copied from an original. The similarity is shown for instance in the shape of the wig, cut like stairs, or a strike in the back.

253 O’Connor, Sea People, 87, fig. 5.1.
254 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I, pl. 73.
255 This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper in the International congress of Egyptology-Florence, Italy.
Table 2: Actions taken against prisoners of war according to iconography in the temple of Medinet Habu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of the campaign</th>
<th>Binding</th>
<th>x-shaped pose</th>
<th>Painful arms&lt;sup&gt;256&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Painful arms&lt;sup&gt;257&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Looks back or up</th>
<th>Manacle</th>
<th>Total numbers</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>119</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>342&lt;sup&gt;260&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</table>

<sup>256</sup> below level of the head
<sup>257</sup> above level of the head
<sup>258</sup> 5 prisoners were not included because only their legs are to be shown
<sup>260</sup>The same number of prisoners that mentioned in the annals, (see above p. 7); Urk. IV: 663-664; ARE 2:187-188.
Diagram. 1: shows the location of representations of prisoners on the wall

Diagram. 2: shows ratio of actions taken against Prisoners in iconography

Conclusion
Obviously the fate of prisoners of war in New Kingdom Egypt varied significantly. Initially, all prisoners of war and their properties were king’s possessions. The majority of them were subsequently given to the temple precinct to serve as forced labor, participating in construction projects and agricultural. Some of them can be distributed as rewards to loyal soldiers and officials to work in their private estates. Others can gain high positions like fan-bearer which indicate that they were close to Pharaoh himself. Sometimes, they were able to gain their freedom by marriage, adoption, or legal methods.

Indeed, an examination of the iconographical evidence at Medinet Habu at this time period suggests that they fit admirably into texts from the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The majority of the representations of prisoners of war occur in three major scenes that of celebration, return, and presentation to the god, mostly on the Northern Wall (Diagram. 1).

Cruel treatments particularly like burning, mutilation, and impaling, and humiliating treatment like striking in the back, beating with an axe, or could be hung from the prow of the king’s ship as well as on the walls of towns or fortresses. Other examples of executions

261 Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu II, pl. 74
262 Ibid., pl. 77.
263 Ibid., pl. 78.
of prisoner’s leaders, branding, binding and tattooing are attested in texts and iconography as well. King Amenhotep II together with king Mreyenptah occupied the first place as harshest treatments to prisoners throughout the New Kingdom, but, in fact all of these actions were traditional and standard and most of other Pharaohs implemented it with their prisoners of war. It seems that only the leaders of the enemies were subjected to these actions and such fates, their families i.e. children and wives are not subject to such treatments; most probably they face the fate of slavery. They played an important role in the Egyptian temples’ economy, as they integrated into the Egyptian society.

Texts shows that the most common practice of kings of the 18th dynasty against their prisoners was hanging their prisoner upside down mostly on prow of the ships after cutting off their heads, in the nineteenth dynasty these treatments are still practicing but with different implementations concerning using fire to burn the prisoners of war, the execution of prisoners were more than that of the 18th dynasty. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the Egyptian were somehow abide with the geographical significance in depicting their prisoners, thus we found the prisoners from Nubia would have been represented to the south and those who captured from Asian campaign were to the north, revealing their intention to such a symbolic implication in dealing with the depiction of prisoners of war.

Obviously the Egyptians paid great attention to the depictions of their prisoners of war, especially on sacred space like temples and tombs of high officials. Generally they represent them with distinctions between different ethnic groups, as with the Sea Peoples. Usually, the treatment received by Libyans and Nubians seems harsher.

This synchronism between texts and iconography could help in examining the actual treatment of the prisoners of war; meanwhile, scenes cannot be viewed as an alteration of the textual record of the events; moreover, a textual record cannot be seen as an alternative of the scenes, instead a careful reading of the material that include both the iconographical and textual complexities will allow us to draw the actual picture about the status of prisoners of war.
Figures

Fig. 1: Ramses III presenting Prisoners to Amun and Mut.

Fig. 2: A pile of lifeless hands severed from the enemy
Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu I*: pl. 54
Fig. 3: The Egyptian leading away prisoners from the sea people
Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I: pl. 40

Fig. 4: Egyptian officers bringing Libyan Prisoners before the King
Epigraphic Survey, Medinet Habu I: pl. 48
Fig. 5: Libyan prisoners, 2nd court- east Wall
Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu I*: pl. 1

Fig. 6: Sea People Prisoners
Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu I*: details of pl. 44