

The History of Shasu Bedouins: A New Vision

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The New Kingdom had been refounded by military power, and the King recrowned Lord of the North and South amid the crash of arms resounding throughout the land.

The army was therefore organized and maintained on a footing, which had never previously been attempted.

The expulsion of the Hyksos by Aahmes had been followed by pursuit into Syria.

The impulse and the temptation were all-sufficient, and the army of Thothmes the first penetrated, as it seems, to Aleppo.

The tomb Biography of Ahmose son of Ebana presented a campaign under taken by the personal valor of Ahmose son of Ebana during the reign of Thutmos II.¹

In p. Anastasi I, 23, 6, a prince named *kdrdy* was attacked by a wild animal (htmt) in a narrow pass infested by

Shasu here refers to Syrian Bedouins² (people), The determinative indicates that they were a nomadic, pastoral people in southern Palestine.

In p. Anastasi, 19, 1-2, “ you have not gone to the region (where) the Shasu (are)? With the host of the army”.³

During the reign of Hatshepsut, there were no military activities in western Asia because she received the tribute and presents which brought for Syria a short tranquillity.

This hiatus might be expanded to include the preceding reign of Thutmose II, who sent merely a punitive expedition against the Shasu in the Negeb.⁴

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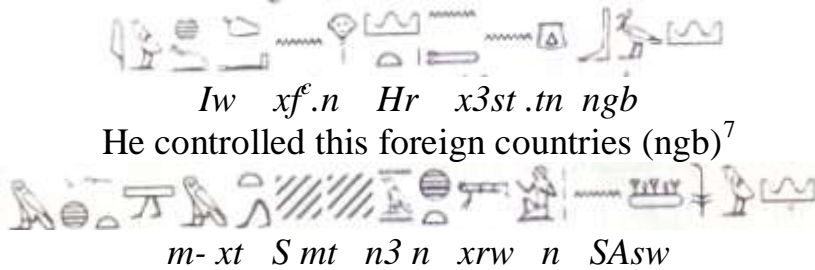
1 Spalinger, A.J., *Aspects of the Military Documents of the Ancient Egyptians*, New Haven and London, 1982, 129-133; Givon, R., *LÄ*, V, 533; URK, IV, 36:13; Qauthier, H., *Dictionnaire des Noms Geographiques*, Tome V, 106.

2 Gardiner, A.H., *AEO*, I, 193.

3 Schulman, A.R., *Military Rank, Title, and organization in the Egyptian New Kingdom*, New York, 99.

Redford thought that all things have conspired to involve Pharaoh even more deeply in the affairs of western Asia; and if in fact Egypt did withdraw, the reason lies in its own internal condition.⁵

During the reign of Thoutmosis III, he led a campaign against the Shasu Bedouins.⁶ Fig (1)



Then he went to his enemy in Shasu

Thoutmosis III led his troops through the sea to save efforts, accordingly he destroyed the Shasu by using the military supports which were stored in the Asian shores during previous year.⁸

Encouraged by this victory, the kings of the 18th Dynasty pursued policy of conquest in Asia, a kind of holy war which ended, under Thotmosis III, in Egypt possessing an empire that extended from the Euphrates to beyond the fourth cataract.

In the topographical list of Amenhotep III in Soleb temple of Amon Shasu appear:


4 Giveon, R., *Les Bedouins des Shasu des Documents Egyptiens*, Leiden, 1971, 9-10.

5 Redford, D., *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, AUC, Cairo, 1993,153.

6 Urk, IV, 721:11.

7 Gardiner, A., *op.cit.*, I, 155-166; URK, IV, 890,14-15; Wilson, J., ANET, 241.


8 Redford, D., JSSEA, 12, 1982, 60-61; Bill, J., TARCE, 9, 1971, 147-184.

In the reign of Thutmes IV, Shasu appear in a chariot from a tomb in Cairo museum:⁹ 

Under Amenhotep III, son and successor of Thutmes IV, the Egyptian Empire was at the zenith of its power and glory. Especially in the countries of western Asia, the Egyptian domination was firmly established and the new Pharaoh did not even think it necessary to go in person at the head of his army to suppress the already appearing symptoms of rebellion. Amenhotep's interest was absorbed in the display of wealth and magnificence of colonial empire had procured him. Although these lists mainly enumerate African places, some of them refer to northern countries.¹⁰

In the Great Temple of Amon, in front (north) of the doorway in pylon x, there are two colossi with inscriptions, which mention the name of Ramesses II, although their style and execution are rather different from those of the period of Ramesses II. It seems at least very probable that were erected by Haremheb, together with the pylon itself, and first inscribed by the same king.

On the socles of both colossi topographical lists have been carved in the form of name-rings with figures of foreign captives. Horizontal band of text above these name-rings celebrates the victories of pharaoh, whose name has every where been cut out and replaced by the Ramesses II.¹¹

Shasu was written as the sixth name before the name of "Nine Bows":¹² 

In the eastern group of the central doorway into the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, we find the campaign against the Shasu, dated to Seti's first regnal year (bottom register, pls.2.8). The

9 Simons, J., *Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia*, Leiden, 1973, 46-47; 131.

10 Ibid., 132-133; 47.

11 Ibid., 52; Legrain, *ASAE*, 14, 1914, 41-43.

12 Simons, J., *op.cit.*, 135-136.

Karnak relief are the most important source of the Egyptian policy in western Asia at the start of the Nineteenth Dynasty.¹³

List of Seti I at Karnak, great temple of Amon, Shasu was mentioned among 67 names of foreign countries: Fig (2)



On the exterior of the northern (northeastern) outside wall of the great by postyle at Karnak from part of a double series of war - scenes distributed over three registers - of the highest register only a fragment on the extreme right against pylon It has been preserved. It has represented the usual scene of slaying prisoners by the king before Amon and the topographical lists have the ordinary form of rows of the name – rings behind the figure of the god with a single row below and along the entire breath of the register.¹⁴

“A messenger came to tell his Majesty: The Shasu enemies are plotting rebellion! Their tribal leaders are gathered in one place, standing on the foothills of Khor, and they are engaged in turmoil and uproar. Each one of them is killing his fellow. They do not consider the laws of the place” (pl.6.3-9).

Murnane¹⁵ thought that both the circumstances and placement of these troubles are worth nothing because “ Khor” is a general term for Palestine and Syria: beginning at the Egyptian border, Khor can extend as far north as Upe, near Damascus.¹⁶ But reading the text improves that the battle must have been taken place between Tcharu and Raphia.¹⁷

It is noted that the second battle is located at “ a town of *p3 - kn^cn*” which was suggested to be Gaza.¹⁸

13 Murnane, W.J., *The Road to Kadish*, SAOC, Chicago, 1990, 54; Giaballa, G.A., *Narrative in Egyptian Art*, Mainz, 1976, 103-104.

14 Simons, J., *op.cit.*, 141;53.

15 Murnane, W.J., *op.cit.*, 55.

16 Gardiner, A.H., *EAO*, I, 181-183; Hulck, W., *Beziehungen*, 269-270.

17 Gardiner, A.H., *The Ancient Military Road between Egypt and Balastine*, *JEA*, 6, 1920, 113.

18 Faulkner, *JEA*, 33, 1947, 35-36; Spalinger, *JAREC*, 1979, 44, n.9.

The foothills would be those bordering the road between Egypt and Palestine, lying south of this road as far as Raphia and following the coastal plain northeast into Palestine.¹⁹

Despite the presence of tribal leaders “gathered in one place”, they were powerless to control the ”turmoil and uproar”, it is suggested that the violence was not directed against the Egyptians, but one another (pl.6: 7-8).

But sometimes these troubles threatened the commercial and military operations of Egypt.

“ (As for) the hills of the rebels, they could not be passed on account of Shasu enemies who were attacking [him], “ i.e., the king (pl.5: 11-14).²⁰

While the original version of the prisoners (pl.8) showed settled Asiatic and Shasu, the former were all recarved into Shasu for the final version of the scene. This sequence of relief convey that the Shasu, and the Shasu alone, were Egypt’s enemies on this occasion. Prisoners being described only as “[the booty which his majesty brought away, consisting of Shasu whom his majesty] himself [destroyed] in regnal year one of the Repeater of Births” i.e., Seti I himself (pl. 8:21).

The nature of the trouble of the Shasu, might not the tribute of the Asiatic chiefs, be regarded as some kinds of payment presented to the king once he had restored peace to the area. So the products which brought back from Shasu war would be incongruous as tribute of these people.²¹

Kitchen thought that the Shasu had picked unwittingly, a bad moment to rebel, with such a king just spoiling for showdown and itching for the fray.

It is clear that they “ignore the laws of palace” and “each killing his fellow”, but these were the causes which made Seti I thought that they needed a sharp lesson that would not quickly be

19 Murnane, W.J., *op.cit.*, 56-57.

20 *Ibid.*, 57-58. Pls., 5:37*=17:42*

21 *Ibid.*, 59; Spalinger, *JARCE*, *op.cit.*, 16,1997, 36.


forgotten. It was clear also that his program, in style openly based on the greatest kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, was to be the renewed of Egypt, not least by deeds of arms.²²

If Seti I had succeeded to get red of the danger Shasu, they would have disappeared from the Egyptian records in the reign of Ramesses II. Why did Kitchen try to involve the story of the Exodus of the Hebrews depending on the biblical story and ignoring the Egyptian texts which did not mention any thing about the Shasu or Hebrews because Seti I had accomplished his mission towards them.²³

In Rock-Temple of Wadi Abbad (Redesiyeh):

On the interior of the walls of its forecourt representing the slaying of prisoners by the king Seti I.

On the east wall the prisoners are Africans, on the west wall Asiatics. The slaying of African captives (“chiefs of the wretched Kush”, as the text under left arm of the king says) takes places before Amon, the slaying of Asiatics before Horus of Edfu. The topographical lists of both reliefs are in the form of name-rings surmounted by figures of captives. The African list on the east wall has 10 name-rings, the Asiatic list on the west wall 8 name-rings.

Shasu is the second name:²⁴ 

List of Seti I, Temple of Amenhotep IV, the third name is Sesebi on the western bank of the Nile, somewhere to the south than Soleb, preserves the ruins of the temple built by Amenhotep IV but later usurped by Seti I. The original relief and inscriptions in this temple are the work of Amenhotep IV, but many of them have in the time of Seti I been replaced by new ones.²⁵

22 Kitchen, K.A., *Pharaoh Triumphant, Ramesses II*, warminster, 1982, 20-21.

23 *Ibid.*, 70-71.

24 Kitchen, K.A., *op.cit.*, 61-63, 147.

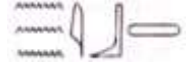
25 Simon, J., *op.cit.*, 63, 147.

Ramesses II, Temple of Luxor (colossi and statues)



Among the numerous statues and colossi erected by Ramesses II in front and in the forecourt of the temple of Luxor, four have topographical lists engraved on the socles in the form of series of name-rings with captive figures. The only remaining standing statue before the northern pylon, namely that on the extreme right standing statue next to the left only the socle remains, but it has only topographical list.

The lists are partly African, partly Asiatic; some contain only names of “people of the Nine Bows”. The more remarkable that such an interesting name as that of “Moab” should have been preserved only in these lists.²⁶ Fig (5)



Ramesses II, Karnak, Great Temple of Amon:

Shasu is written among 41 names of cities. It was the 34th name:




The whole of the exterior of the southern (southwestern) outside wall of the great hypostyle at Karnak was covered by Ramesses II with double series of relief-scenes and inscriptions containing important topographical material. On both sides of the entrance represented relief of topographical lists.

The relief on the left (west) of the entrance has the usual scene of the slaying of prisoners by the king before *Amon-r^c*. The topographical list consists of seven rows of name-rings surmounted by bearded Semitic figures. The main value of this list in its similarity with the Karnak-lists of Seti I, which it helps to restore. Although the order of the names is different, there is a correspondence of groups.²⁷

26 Ibid., 70, 155.

27 Simon, J., op.cit., 71-75, 160.

List of Ramesses III, at Medinet Habu, his Great Temple, the place Sir showed as the tenth name:  between 125 places²⁸ Fig (4),(7)

In the temple he built in honor of Amon at El Hibeh, there is an extract from the great Karnak list. It should notice that many names of the Shoshenq I list are lost and that Jerusalem may be one of them.²⁹

During the reign of Mernptah, Egypt hosted the Bedouins of Sinai. Shasu trekked into the eastern Delta from across the Sinai, they were making the seasonal migration to the Nile Delta when their own wells and water holes ran dry. We can read this idea in a model letter, which had been written by a scribe of a border fortress in the Wadi Tumilat in the eight-year of Merenptah:

*“The scribe Eina greets his master, the Treasury-scribe Kaga [b...]. This is a dispatch for [my master’s] information... to wit: we have finished admitting the Shasu-tribes of Edom (through) the fortress of Mernptah-hotpe-hi-ma’at which is (in) Tjekku to the water holes of the House of Atum –of- Mernpetah-hotpe-hi-ma’at which (are in) Tjekku, for their own subsistence and that of their flocks, by the great Ku of Pharaoh L.P.H., the good sun of every land ! In the year 8, epagomenal days, [birth of] Seth. I have had sent a columned document to the [place where] my master in with the other specified days on which the fortress may be passed”.*³⁰

Again the text of Mernptah shed the light on the place that Shasu came from was Edom.³¹

The fortress of Tjekku was turned into a major police head quarters and checkpoint to monitor tribes bent on entry into the Delta for pasturage. It was in the middle of Wady Tumilat, which had long since provided an access corridor for Asiatic from central Sinai.

28 Ibid., 63,147.

29 Ibid., 102, 187.

30 P. Anast., VI, 4:11-5:5;Goedicke, H., SÄK, 14, 1987, 83-98; Redford, D., op.cit., 228.

31 Giveon, R., LÄ, 534.

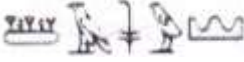
So Tjekku was one of “way stations” on the way from Delta border to Gaza (160 kilometers). It was centered upon wells or pools of fresh water and was generally called “basins” (*hnmt*).


Texts describe them as being administrated by bailiffs or occasionally, if they were strategically important, by ballalion commanders.³²

Shasu were regarded as dirty and unkempt in their carriage and uncivilized ways of living.

A father scolds his wayward son in a Ramesside text:

“I provided your needs in all things, which others (only) hope for; I did not let you say ‘O would that I had...’ in the night, when you were lying down tossing and turning. (Yet) you are (now) on the journey of a swallow with her young, you have reached the Delta on a long circuit, and have consorted with the Asiatics, having eaten bread (mixed) with your own blood! You have lost your wits” Bedouins society harbored criminal elements and the down and out; nice people simply did not fraternize with them.” *The (band of thieves) was come into the camp and the horses were loosed...in the night, and your clothes were stolen. Your groom was awakened (and when) he realized what he had done, he took the rest. (Now) he has wholly gone over to a life of evil: he mixes with the tribes of the Shasu, having adopted the guise of an Asiatic”.*³³

š3s  desert of Egypt

š3s  tr^ctel³⁴

The verb meant to move on foot, and it is often used of journeys or of the daily motion of the sun. But very early it took on a nuance of speed and furtiveness:

32 Redford, D., op.cit., 207-206.

33 P. Anast, I, op.cit., 20:2-4; Gardiner, A.H., op.cit., and Černy, J., Hieratic Ostraca, oxford, 1957, I:pl.78; Černy, J., JNES, 14, 1955, 161-163; Redford, D., op.cit., 229.

34 Faulkner, R.O., CD., 261;URK, IV, 36, 13; 721, 12.

Messengers speed foot to for-off places, and malcontents flee punishment. The Shasu came to be used of wandering groups whom we would call Bedouins.

Their lawlessness and their proclivity to make raids gave rise in Canaanite to the denominative verb *šasa (h)* “ to plunder”.³⁵



Giveon presents six places to identify the land of Shasu:

1. *Se^cir* (Edom)
2. *Laban* (probably Libona, south of Amman)
3. *Sam'ath* (the shim'ethites, a clan of the Kenies. Ichron 2:55).
4. *Wrbr* (probably the Wady Hasa)
It appears in “Thutmose III list: “*ybr*”
5. Shasu *Se^cir* (Edom):
In P., Harris I, 76:9 Shasu joined with *Se^cir*.
6. *Arabh* (Timna)
7. Shasu in *Khkh* (Timna) in the texts of 20th Dynasty.³⁶

Lists suggest that an original concentration of Shasu settlements lay in southern Trans-Jordan in plains of Moab and northern Edom.

Giveon thought that Shasu was mentioned in Soleb list linking with “*yhw*”: “*yhw* (in) the land of the Shasu”, he joined it with the name of Israelite god and said that it is the most precious indication of an enclave revering this god in the late fifteenth century BC.

So, Giveon and Redford and others found that the Egyptian text agreed with the Biblical tradition that the early monarchy was already in existence in Edom and coming forth from *Se^cir*.³⁷

35 Redford, D., op.cit., 271-272; Wb, IV, 412:5; Newberry, Bni Hasan, London, 1891,I:pl. 41 (A); Finkelstein, JNES, 47,1988, 246- 247; Redford, S., JARCE, 26, 1989, 6, n.28; URK, IV, 36:13;721:12.

36 Giveon, R., op. Cit., 76; Id., JARCE, 8, (1969-1979), 51-53; Redford, D., op.cit., 272.

It is known that Israel was known during the Judges period in the tenth century BC. And it is a dangerous jump to find this conclusion.

Giveon gives the Shasu a big frame as he thought that Shasu were always a thorn in Pharaoh's side till the beginning of the 19th Dynasty.

If we followed the cities names, which Giveon mentioned like Shmash-Edom during the reign of Amenophis II, the Egyptian text would describe the Syrian Campaigns of Amenophis II according to the two stelae found in Memphis and Karnak.

In Memphis stela:

"His majesty reached Shamash-Edom. He hacked it up in a brief moment like a savage lion ranging the desert, his majesty being in his chariot the name of which is, "Amen, is valiant..."³⁸

In Karnak stela:

"His majesty reached the city of Shamash-Edom where his majesty himself performed a successful dead, his majesty himself seizing booty.."³⁹

We notice here the Egyptian text mentioned Shamash and Edom without linking it with Shasu.

If the Shasu were a thorn in pharaoh's side, Why did Seti I treated them violently during his campaign in his first year?

"He has extended the boundaries of Egypt to the limits of heaven on every side. (As for) the hil [ls of the] rebels-none could [get pas] t them, because of the fallen ones of Shasu who attacked [him]. His majesty cap [tured th] em totally, so that none escaped"⁴⁰

Kitchen thought that Moab beyond the Dead Sea and Edom-Seir south of it had refused to recognize Egyptian rule, while the smi-nomads from Sier (the Shasu) went raiding into Canaan.

37 Giveon, R., op.cit., 9-13; Redford, D., op.cit., 273; Giveon, R., LÄ, V, 533-535.

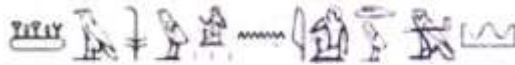
38 URK, IV, 1302; Cumming, B., Egyptian Historical Records of the Later Eighteenth Dynsty, werminster, 1982, 30.

39 URK, IV, 1310, Cumming, B., op.cit., 33.

40 KRI, I, 6, 9; Kitchen, K.A., RITA, 1993,6:1.

Ramesses took things in hand in the year 7/8 (summer of 1272 BC.) by sending prince Amen-hir-khophef through the Negeb hills across the rift valley south of the Dead Sea and up into Edom-Sier conquering their settlements. Fig (3)

Then the prince's forces swung north across the deep ravine of the Zered into the heartland of Moab and along the traditional "King's high way" to conquer Butartu (Raba Batora). At the same time Ramesses himself swept round in a clockwise arc to complete the prince movement-across the hilly central ridge of Canaan past Jerusalem, over the Jordan, past Jericho and the north end of the Dead Sea, and south into Moab, striking Dibon. Then he came on south across the Arnon valley and stream, to link up with prince Amen-hir-khopshef.⁴¹



š3sw n idwm

It is clear-that Shasu Bedouins connected with the site of Edom. It was mentioned in pap. Anastasi VI pl.5, 1.14.

Redford presented "Israel" with the character of a Shasu during the reign of Merneptah.⁴²

The intelligence-crops had sent out scouts on security-patrol and one of their squads stumbled on two Hittite counter-spies from Shasu, overcame them:

"I heard from these two Shasu spies that the Hittite ruler has (already) come with his allies, with innumerable troops. Even now they are poised hidden behind old Qadish-and my generals and officers in charge of my territories here could not tell us they had come",⁴³

41 Kitchen, K.A., Ramesses II, 67.

42 Redford, D., op.cit., 275.

43 Kitchen, K.A., op.cit., 56.

It is noticed that Kitchen mentioned “Hittite Spies” although the Egyptian text said “Shasu”⁴⁴ also Kitchen said that the spies had said the truth although Muwatallis had quietly sent the Shasu to fool and decoy Ramesses II. Fig (5)

Giveon said the Shasu played two parts during the battle of Kadesh: as spies and soldiers defending the city side by side with Ramesses without presenting the evidence of the later point.⁴⁵

Shasu also mentioned during the reign of Ramesses II on an obelisk found in Tanis from Pi-Ramesses:

*“King, son of Ptah, who delights in valor, making great slaughter in the land of Shasu”*⁴⁶

Giveon alleged that Shasu were presented in the temple at Medinet Habu showing them as prisoners of war and as soldiers in the Egyptian army.⁴⁷ There is no evidence of this point except for the representation of the sea people.

Foreign peoples who are attested in Egyptian service, both as augmentations to Egyptian units and as auxiliaries: the Sherden, the Nehesi, the Kehek, and the Meshwesh, the Tjuk, “south Palestinians”, Philistines and Syrians. Fig (4)

This mentioned clearly in Amarna III.

The foreign troops include in each file one representative of three different groups, the Syrians, the Libyans and the Nubians. The Syrians carry spears and Khepesh-swords, the Nubians either bows or clubs, and occasionally wear feathers in their hair. The Libyans carry bows of a type different from those of the Nubians, but also wear feathers in their hair.⁴⁸

In Medinet Habu, on the march against the Libyans: marching with, but separate from the Egyptians contingent is a

44 Spalinger, A.J., op.cit., 160-162; Goedicke, H., *Perspectives on the Battle of Kadesh*, Baltimore, 1985, 23-206; LÄ, III, 774.

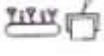

45 Giveon, R., LÄ, V, 533-534.

46 Kitchen, K.A., RITA, II, 240; Giveon, R., LÄ, V, 533-534.

47 Giveon, R., *The Shasu of the Late 20th Dynasty*, JARC, VIII, 1969-1970, 51; Id., LÄ, V, 533-535.

48 Schulman, A.R., op.cit., 23, 273.

mixed force of Sherden and Philistines, a contingent of “south Palestinians” and a troop of Nubians.⁴⁹ Fig (6)

In Ashmolean Museum in oxford, there is a stela mentioned Shasu in the form  which Spiegelberg joined it with the word  Ssw which means troupes of army and he considered the Shasu Bedouins as a troop in the Egyptian army.⁵⁰

This point is very imaginable as we discussed the foreign people in the Egyptian army before.

In papyrus Amherst (papyrus Harris A [VI]) which concerns tomb-robberies, a female slave “the Shasu” is mentioned, who belonged to the temple of Amon in Thebes and was under the jurisdiction of the high priest (the reign may be Ramesses IX).⁵¹

Giveon tried to avoid the crime of tomb robbery from the Shasu by saying that it was just a name of a woman, which could have given to anyone and no proof of origin.⁵²

Then he tried to get a testimony to the existence of members of the Shasu setting in Upper Egypt.

49 Ibid., 131.

50 Gauthier, H., op.cit., 107; Spiegelberg, Rec. de trav., xxv, p. 194.

51 Peet, T.E., The Great Tomb Robberiers of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty, oxford, 1930, 45-51.

52 Giveon, R., JARC, VIII, 1969-1970, 51.

There is a letter belonged to the reign of Ramesses IX. The High Priest of the temple of Amon sent the letter to some Nubian soldiers, praising them for their efficiency in protecting a group of workers sent out on behalf of the temple administration. The document mentions the Shasu three times as enemies of the expedition.⁵³

This letter emphasis the idea that Shasu were thieves taking the opportunity to attack the Egyptian properties from time to time.

While Giveon admired the idea of Helck when he said that the term Shasu became the explanation of Bedouins as general at the end of xxth Dynasty not the Shasu group especially.⁵⁴

53 Helck, W., Eine Briefsammlung aus der Verwaltung des Amuntemples, JARCE, VII, 1967, 141-152.

54 Giveon, R., JARCE, VIII, 1969, 51.

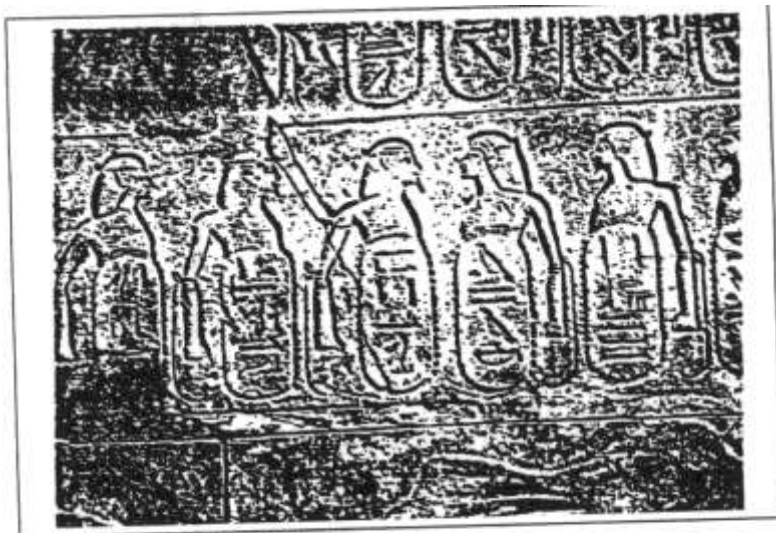


Fig (1)
Palastine-list of Thutmosis III

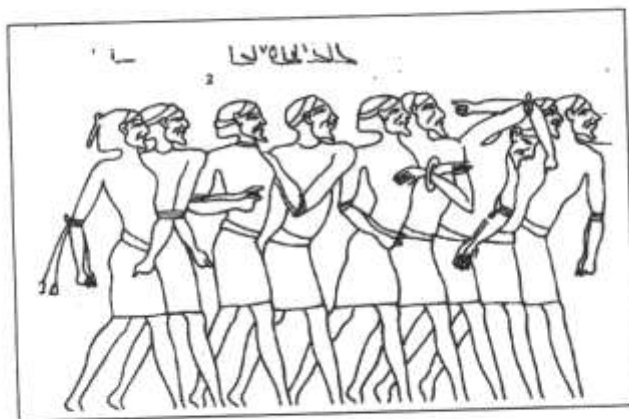


Fig (2)
Reliefs of Seti I at Karnak

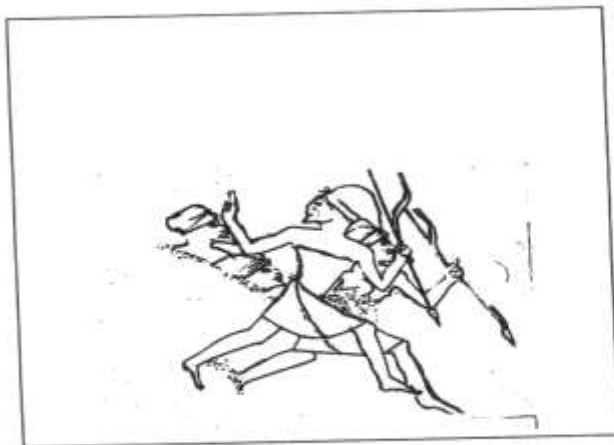


Fig (3)
Costume of Shasu in Beit el- Wali



Fig (4)
Medinet Habou: Representation of Shasu

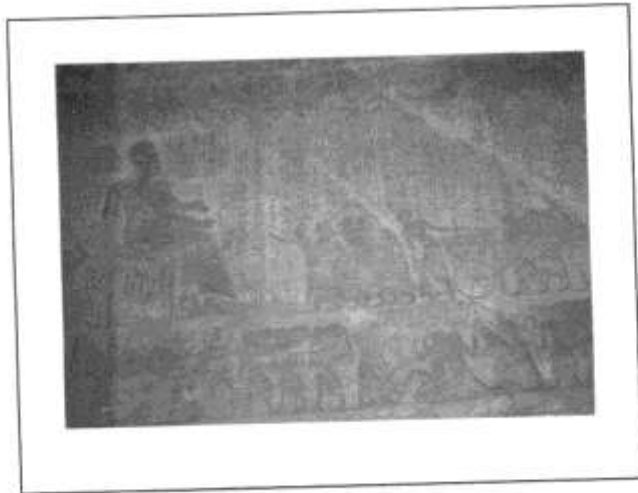


Fig (5)
Shasu in Battle of Kadesh

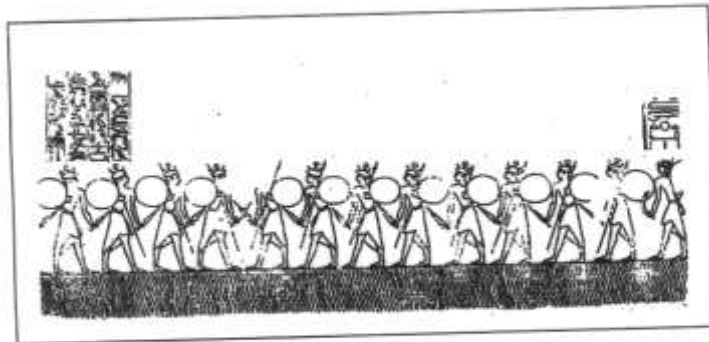


Fig (6)
Shardan Troops in Madenet Habou



Fig (7)
Madenet Habu: Representations of Shasu