

The team of Cairo University Faculty of Archaeology has been working on the New Kingdom site to the south of king Unas causeway since 2005². During the last season (2017-2018), the excavations yielded a very important discovery: a tomb – which has not yet been fully excavated – belonging to a very well known high official from the time of king Ramesses II (XIXth dynasty), the *imy-r mš'-wr, imy-r pr wr, imy-r pr n hwt Imn, imy-r pr m hwt Wsr-m3'.t-r'-stp-n-r' m pr-Imn*, “Generalissimo, and High steward, High steward of the Estate of Amun, High steward of the estate of Weser-Maat-re-Setep-n-Re in the Estate of Amun (the Ramesseum)”³ Urkhya. His name appears on the tomb together with those of his son’s Yupa⁴ and his grandson’s Hatiay. The latter occupies a very significant place in the inscriptions on the blocks found in the tomb and on the walls still *in situ*.

Urkhya, a high official of Hurrian origins, was among the many foreigners who settled in Egypt and succeeded to reach prominent positions in the Egyptian court during the New Kingdom⁵. His name, written in hieroglyphics, is *Iw-r3-hy*. It could be spelled Irkhy according to the ancient Egyptian rendering of the syllabic writing of the foreign names or Urhija⁶. According to K.A. Kitchen, “in the alien Hurrian language of North Syria, his name signified ‘True’, short for Urhi-Teshub ‘True is the Storm-god’”⁷. He began his military career during the reign of king Sethos I (1290-1279 BC) and reached the position of High Steward of the Ramesseum during the reign of Ramesses II.

1 I wish to express here my thanks and gratefulness to Dominique Valbelle, Mohamed Abdel Maksoud and Said Abdel Alim for their help in providing me with their remarks and some of the most important references on the topic.

2 Late Professor Said Tawfik began the excavation of this site, which I have been heading since its resumption in 2005. Between 1982 and 1986, he discovered around 35 tombs, mostly dated to the XIXth dynasty and mainly from the reign of Ramesses II. See S. TAWFIK, “Recently excavated Ramesside tombs at Saqqara, 1 Architecture”, *MDAIK* 47, 1991, p. 403-409.

3 *KRI* III, 191-193.

4 For the Semitic name Yupa (y-w-p³), see Th. SCHNEIDER, *Asiatische Personennamen in aegyptischen Quellen des Neuen Reiches*, *OBO* 114, 1992, p. 52, n°91.

5 Many architectural elements belonging to this tomb are kept in museums abroad (Lyon Museum, Musée Calvet in Avignon, Birmingham Museum). For Urkhya and his family see: J. RUFFLE & K.A. KITCHEN, “The family of Urhiya and Yupa High Stewards of the Ramesseum”, in J. Ruffle, G.A. Gaballa & K.A. Kitchen (eds.), *Glimpses of Ancient Egypt, Studies in Honour of H.W. Fairman*, Warminster, 1979, p. 58.

6 Th. Schneider gives the spelling j-w-r-x-j₂-y or j-w₂-r-x-j₂-y (Th. SCHNEIDER, *op. cit.*, p. 37, n°57).

7 K.A. KITCHEN, *Pharaoh Triumphant, The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt*, Warminster, 1982, p. 30.

It is clear from what remains on the north wall of his tomb that the scenes depict daily life activities. One of them seems to be related to events taking place in some sort of maritime or river harbor⁸, as we can see sailors on boats taking down their load of oil jars (probably Canaanite⁹) and people busy storing these jars. The boats appear to be built with wooden logs. Other scenes on the same wall show livestock and daily life activities, which seem to be taking place in the same area.

As for the scene that forms the subject of this article, it is carved on a block 82 cm x 54 cm and 13 cm thick, which was found buried in the sand, beside the north wall and close to the above-mentioned harbor scene, at a depth of around 1 m from the remaining mud brick walls. It represents a military event in two registers (**fig. 1 a-b**):

On the upper register, a pair of horses – driven by two men in a chariot¹⁰ – is leading the way going out of a portal. One of the men in this front chariot holds a bow, while the bow case is fixed on the chariot, which has a six-spoke wheel. The other man holds the reins of the horses, hurrying them with a whip. Behind the chariot a waterway can be seen, filled with crocodiles, with some traces of angular blue lines representing the water. To the right of the waterway men riding another chariot guide a pair of horses, going in the same direction, but only the whip and the reins guiding the horses can be seen, while the rest of the scene is missing. The chariot seems to be coming out of a gate probably decorated with a cavetto-cornice. It seems that there is a caption, which must have been written on the upper left corner of the scene where the element *sw* is engraved.

The lower register shows, on the left, a group of walking soldiers, going in the same direction as the charioteers. The first three are armed with swords, the second of them has his arm bent on his chest. The fourth holds a stick in one hand and a *hps*-sword in the other. The last one holds a stick and has a shield on his back (?). These two last men to the right have different hairstyles from the three others: the wig of the first is divided horizontally between the upper part and the braids, while the one of the second soldier is rounded and follows the curls of his hair. These are in the style of conventional Egyptian wigs. The three first soldiers of the group, on the contrary, seem to be wearing what looks like a ‘head cover’ and might be of a different ethnicity – maybe Nubians. This group is followed by two donkeys with a child seated on the back of one of them. He looks backwards, and extends his arm towards another child crouching on the back of a third donkey. They seem to be exchanging words. A man wearing an Egyptian-style wig with a straight separation walks beside the rear donkey; he holds a long stick in his right hand and the handle of another tool (probably also a *hps*-sword) in his left, close to his body. The lower half of the waterway is blank, probably portraying the bridge the donkeys are crossing to reach the other side. Part of the body of the man walking beside the donkey is hidden behind the doorjamb of a gate adorned with a cavetto-cornice, showing that he is on his way out of the

8 Compare with the scene in the tomb of Kenamun in Thebes (TT 162), under Amenhotep III, where Syrian boats are unloaded in a Nile harbour, maybe in Thebes (N. de G. DAVIES & R.O. FAULKNER, “A Syrian Trading Venture to Egypt”, *JEA* 33, 1947, p. 40-46).

9 L. BAVAY, “Canaanite jars and jar sealings from Deir-el-Medina: scattered evidence of Egypt’s economic relations with the Levant during the New Kingdom”, in E. Brigitta & R. Pruzsinsky (eds.), *Policies of Exchange: Political Systems and Modes of Interaction in the Aegean and the Near East in the 2nd Millennium B.C.E., Proceedings of the International Symposium at the University of Freiburg Institute for Archaeological Studies*, Vienna, 2012, p. 134-135.

10 For the iconography of chariots in all its details, see A. VELDMEIJER & S. IKRAM (eds.), *Chariots in Ancient Egypt, The Tano Chariot, A Case study*, Leiden, 2018.



Fig.1a. The scene from Iwrkhy's tomb in Saqqara.

Fig. 1b. Facsimile of the scene [drawing by Nader el-Hassanein]

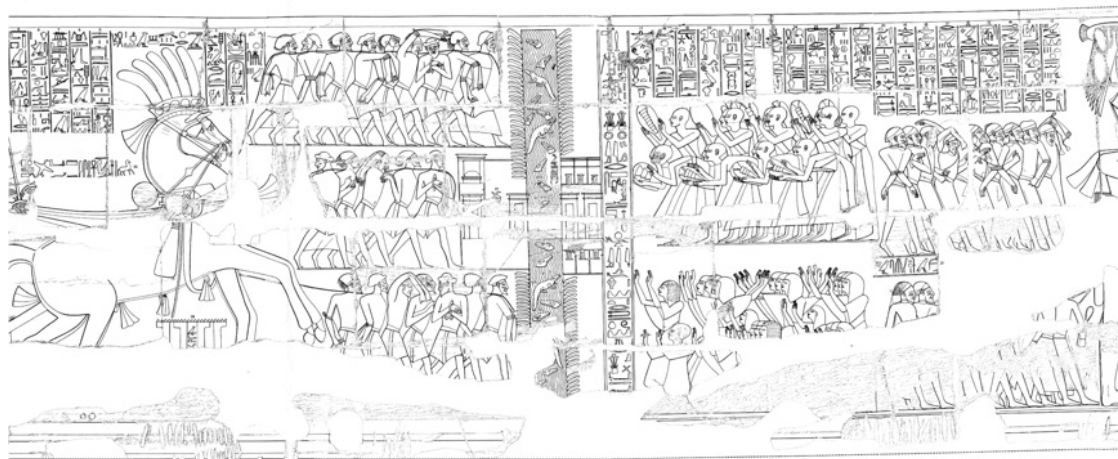


gate. This last gate looks smaller than the one in the upper register. The arm of a man, holding what seems to be a whip, can also be seen on the right edge of the block. It might belong to the man leading the donkeys.

This scene strongly evokes the reliefs of the Shasu campaign of Sethos I on the outer north wall of the great Hypostyle hall in Karnak temple (**fig. 2**), which features the only other known representation of a waterway filled with crocodiles. In Karnak, the waterway is termed *t3 dni.t*, “the one which divides/separates” i.e. a division between Egypt and outer territories. Previous studies of the Karnak relief and the geographical area it covers showed that this scene represents the *khetem* of Tjaru (*htm n T3rw*), as clearly stated by the caption written inside the buildings featured on the left side of the canal¹¹. In Karnak the scene features the king coming back from his victorious campaign with his booty of prisoners and crossing the border at the *khetem* of Tjaru. This waterway seems to symbolize a separator between two regions and thus to depict the northeastern border of Egypt that the Egyptian army used to cross at the beginning or the end of military expeditions to the Syro-Palestinian region. This is established in Karnak thanks to the column of hieroglyphs in front of the Egyptian officials coming from Upper and Lower Egypt: they are gathered to greet the king, according to the text, *hft iy.f hr h3s.t Rtnw*, “after he arrived from the country of Retenu”. The crocodiles represented in the Karnak relief of Sethos I and in the present scene indicate that the water in which they live must have been that of a lake or canal and not salted seawater. They also seem to be symbolically guarding the border¹².

This *khetem* has been proved – according to the latest excavations undertaken by Mohamed Abdel Maksoud in Eastern Qantara¹³ – to be the area now known as Tell Hebua I and II (**fig. 3**).

Fig. 2. Facsimile of Sethos I’s relief in Karnak [after EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *OIP* 107, pl. 6]



11 A.H. GARDINER, “The Ancient Military Road between Egypt and Palestine”, *JEA* 6, 1920, p. 100-101, pl. xi; THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak IV, The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I*, *OIP* 107, 1986, p. 16-22, pl. 6-7; Cl. SOMAGLINO, *Du magasin au poste-frontière dans l’Égypte ancienne : étude lexicographique du vocable khetem*, unpublished thesis, University Paris-Sorbonne, 2010, p. 638-642.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 503.

13 M. ABDEL-MAKSoud, “Tjarou, porte de l’Orient”, in D. Valbelle & Ch. Bonnet (eds.), *Le Sinaï durant l’Antiquité et le Moyen Âge, 4000 ans d’histoire pour un désert*, Paris, 1998, p. 63-64. For the excavations of Tell Hebua I, see ID., “Une nouvelle forteresse sur la route d’Horus, Tell Heboua 1986 (Nord-Sinaï)”, *CRIPPEL* 9, 1987, p. 13-16; ID., *Tell Heboua (1981-1991), Enquête archéologique sur la Deuxième Période Intermédiaire et le Nouvel Empire à l’extrémité orientale du Delta*, Paris, 1998.



Fig. 3. The north-eastern Delta and North Sinai map showing the location of Tell Hebua I and II sites [A. MINAULT-GOUT, N. FAVRY, & N. LICITRA, *Une résidence royale, Tell Abyad à l'époque ramesside*, Paris, 2012 p. 12, fig. 3]

These sites were, during the New Kingdom, located at the mouth of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile and built to control the circulation of people and goods going out of or coming into Egypt – maybe taxes were also levied there on imported or exported goods. Moreover, the Egyptian armies used to gather there on their way to battle – Ramses II and his troops also passed the *khetem* of Tjaru on their way to Qadesh¹⁴. Thus, this *khetem* had important military and economic functions.

¹⁴ KRI II, 12, 16.

The representation of the buildings close to the waterway on the Karnak relief and on the present block can also be compared more thoroughly. In Karnak, the crocodile-filled waterway is surrounded by various architectural elements. In front of the middle row of prisoners that precede the king, a door directly flanks the waterway on its left side. It opens onto a blank space that crosses the water, representing a sort of bridge on which the king and his booty will cross¹⁵. This particular element was only known on the Karnak relief until the discovery of our block, which features a similar “bridge”. This same door opens on the left onto a space encompassed by a wall on three sides, and delineated by the canal on its fourth side. On the left of this area a building is featured, which consists of another door decorated with a cavetto cornice and topped by what seems to be a window with a rounded form in its center. This last element is a thick pillow that resembles the pillow usually depicted on the “window of appearance” since the Amarna Period¹⁶.

To the right of the waterway, another group of buildings is enclosed in a wall. It includes two doors: one on the left, which seems to lead to the bridge: another one on the right, which opens onto the Egyptian Delta. Two rows of three buildings, probably serving as storehouses, leaned against the enclosure wall. On the Saqqara block, two buildings, very similar to the doors and storehouses featured in Karnak, are represented on the right side of the canal.

From this first analysis a series of conclusions can be drawn:

- The two scenes of Karnak and Saqqara seem to represent the same geographical area: the *khetem* of Tjaru with its waterway filled with crocodiles. The scene in the Saqqara tomb is – to this day – the only other example depicting this waterway. It has probably fallen from the northern wall of the ‘statue room’, which is quite logical since all scenes on this side of the wall are related to daily life activities happening – probably – inside the *h̄tm*.
- The Karnak scene represents the return of king Sethos I from a victorious campaign against the Šꜣsw-Bedouins. While what remains of the block discovered in Iwrkhya’s tomb shows the army crossing the boundary, and maybe going out on a campaign.
- The architectural elements in the Karnak relief are more elaborate on both sides of the waterway, while the Saqqara block only shows two gates on each register from the right side. They might represent an abridged copy of the two gateways previously mentioned in the Karnak relief: one leading out to the waterway, the other towards inland Egypt.
- The donkeys and the children are actually crossing the waterway, on the bridge (?) that is depicted on the Karnak relief.
- The presence of children with donkeys might suggest that the inhabitants of the garrison are coming out to bid farewell to the leaving army members. Or may they be Asiatic immigrants or prisoners of war?

Although several differences exist between the two scenes, the presence on both of them of two otherwise unknown elements, namely the waterway full of crocodiles and the bridge,

15 According to Cl. Somaglino, this crossing device may not be a real bridge, but a passage formed by moored boats, which could help the king and his army to cross the border (Cl. SOMAGLINO, *op. cit.*, p. 639).

16 *Ibid.*

makes it clear that the topic is the same: the khetem of Tjaru where the army used to gather on its way to a military campaign. Moreover, Iwrkhya, the owner of this tomb, began his military career under Sethos I, and might have been one of the army leaders of any of the campaigns of this king or of his successor Ramesses II.

The excavations are not yet over and the tomb has still not been fully cleared. Some more blocks associated to this one may thus be found in the near future.

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