

The Captives of Amenhotep II

R. W. Dalman

As Moses hid from Pharaoh, Thutmose III formed an empire in the Levant that would survive for over 200 years. Thutmose III launched the first true Egyptian empire beyond the borders of the nation (Weinstein 1981:7). While his army dominated the Levant, Thutmose III made exaggerated claims about his success. These claims were intended for self-aggrandizement. On a poetic stela found at Karnak, Thutmose III claimed:

I fettered Nubia's Bowmen by ten thousand thousands, the northerners a hundred thousand captives (Lichtheim 1976:36).

In this text, Thutmose III claimed to have seized a million Nubians and a hundred thousand captives from the Levant. Such exaggerated claims were not uncommon in Egyptian literature. Amenhotep III would claim to have surrounded Egypt's temples with settlements of Syrian slaves and millions of cattle (Lichtheim 1976:44). In the 19th Dynasty, Ramesses II would claim to have given millions of cattle to a temple in Memphis (Breasted 1955, 3:181). In the 20th Dynasty, Ramesses III would claim to have captured hundreds of thousands of the Sea People, and just as many cattle (Breasted 1955, 3:201–202). These claims were not very accurate. The actual number of captives seized by Thutmose III was significantly lower than a hundred thousand. Between his 23rd and 42nd years, he only seized approximately 5,000 Semitic captives from the Levant.

These captives were described in the tomb inscription of his vizier Rekhmire. He noted that the Semitic captives were forced to make bricks for the temple of Amun at Karnak. The tomb included a depiction of these Semitic brick builders at their task with the following inscriptions:

Men-kheper-Re [Tutmoses III] may build a sanctuary (to the gods) in order that they may give him its equivalent return in millions of years... The supervisor says to the builder, "The blocks are good in my hands, and thou canst not upbraid (?)"...The captives which His Majesty brought away for the works of the temple of [Amun].... Making bricks to build anew the workshops [of Amun] in Karnak (Davies 1943:55).

This was the same lifestyle that was being forced on the Israelites in the northeast delta at that time.

If Israel left Egypt shortly after the death of Thutmose III, the pharaoh of the Exodus would have been Amenhotep II. He ruled approximately from 1452 BC to 1425 BC. In the second year of his reign, he campaigned in Syria to put down a revolt against Egyptian rule. This northern campaign would have occurred only a very few years before an 18th Dynasty date for the Exodus. Amenhotep II carried 800 captives back to Egypt as slaves. Northern campaigns typically brought south less than 1,000 captives...

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