

# The Maryannu in the Western Desert during the Ramesside Period

## الماريانو في الصحراء الغربية خلال عصر الرعامسة

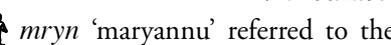
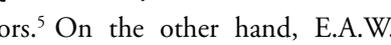
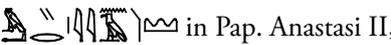
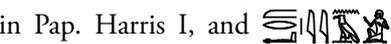
Mohamed Raafat Abbas\*

### ملخص:

دأبت النصوص الحربية المصرية خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة على ذكر الماريانو كأعداء للجيش المصري. وكان الحديث عن وقوعهم كأسرى في أيدي المصريين يُعد نوعاً من التباهي والتفاخر بتكبيد أعداء مصر من الآسيويين خسائر فادحة بسقوط أمراء العدو وقادته وأبرز محاربيه في أيدي المصريين في القتال، خلال تلك الحقبة التي شهدت قمة التوسع العسكري المصري في منطقة الشرق الأدنى القديم. وقد تجلّى ذلك بوضوح في نصوص الأسرة الثامنة عشرة من خلال حوليات الملك تحتمس الثالث أشهر ملوك مصر المحاربين في حديثه عن حملته الحربية الأولى الشهيرة في مجدو، وكذلك من خلال النصوص المتعلقة بحملات خليفته الملك المحارب أمنحتب الثاني. ولقد أجمعت آراء المؤرخين والباحثين على أن الماريانو هم طبقة من المحاربين الذين تخصصوا وبرعوا في القتال بواسطة العربات الحربية، والذين كونوا طبقة من النبلاء في المدن الكنعانية خلال العصر البرونزي المتأخر أي في النصف الثاني من الألف الثاني قبل الميلاد. وتشير غالبية الآراء التاريخية إلى أنهم كانوا ينحدرون من أصول هندو أوروبية.

ويناقش هذا البحث قضية تاريخية هامة تتعلق بظهور الماريانو كأعداء لمصر في الصحراء الغربية خلال عصر الرعامسة، وعلى وجه التحديد خلال أحداث الحرب الليبية في العام الخامس من حكم الملك مرنبتاح (حوالي ١٢٠٧ ق.م.). رابع ملوك الأسرة التاسعة عشرة، والتي واجهت مصر فيها هجوماً خطيراً من الليبيين وشعوب البحر من ناحية الصحراء الغربية، وذلك من خلال أحد المصادر التاريخية الهامة المتعلقة بحروب الملك مرنبتاح ضد الليبيين وشعوب البحر، وهي بردية أنستاسي الثانية؛ حيث ذكر الماريانو من ضمن أعداء مصر الذين اشتركوا في هذه الحرب. لكن الأمر المثير للاهتمام والتساؤل هذه المرة هو تواجدهم كأعداء لمصر في الصحراء الغربية للمرة الأولى والأخيرة في تاريخهم، وليس في مناطق سوريا وفلسطين كما اعتادت المصادر المصرية الحديث عنهم دائماً طوال عصر الدولة الحديثة. ومن ثم فالباحث يناقش من خلال الأدلة النصية المتمثلة في بردية أنستاسي الثانية ومن خلال الآراء التاريخية المختلفة كيفية ظهور الماريانو كأعداء لمصر في الصحراء الغربية خلال عصر الرعامسة للمرة الأولى والأخيرة في تاريخهم.

The Egyptian military texts of the New Kingdom often highlight the capture of some numbers of *mryn* 'maryannu', which was equivalent to the capture of a high-level military official, whose loss would be greatly felt by the opposing force. For example, we find such historical phenomena in the Annals of King Thutmose III, where we read that after the fall of Megiddo in the first campaign of Thutmose III, the elite Asiatic Maryannu warriors were held prisoners to Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, we find in the biography of the Egyptian officer 'Amenemhab' important information about the capture of *mryn* 'maryannu' as living prisoners in the campaigns of Thutmose III, during his sixth campaign in Year 30 of his reign,<sup>2</sup> and during his last campaign in Year 42 of his reign.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the military texts of King Amenhotep II refer to the capturing of a great number of *mryn* 'maryannu' in his Syrian expeditions.<sup>4</sup>

In *Wb.* II term ,  or  *mryn* 'maryannu' referred to the elite Syrian warriors.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, E.A.W. Budge considered that *mryn* 'maryannu' are the captive chiefs.<sup>6</sup> Both A. Badawi and H. Kees agree that *mryn* 'maryannu' are Asiatic princes warriors.<sup>7</sup> R.O. Faulkner, in his *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, agrees that *mryn* 'maryannu' means Syrian warrior,<sup>8</sup> and A.H. Gardiner mentioned that the term *mryn* 'maryannu' used to refer to the Asiatic chariot-warrior.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in his *Dictionary of Late-Egyptian*, L.H. Lesko noted that *mryn* 'maryannu', which was mentioned in some Ramesside texts as  in Pap. Anastasi II,  in Pap. Harris I, and  in the Great Inscription of Sea Peoples campaign of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu, means warrior or knight.<sup>10</sup> E.F. Wente noted from the 'story of the capture of Joppa', which registered on Pap. Harris 500 that the Maryannu warriors, which was mentioned in the story are elite Indo-Aryan chariot warriors associated with the Hurrian movement into Syro-Palestine.<sup>11</sup>

The term Maryannu probably derives from a Sanskrit term for 'young man; hero', and appears to have designated in the Hurrian world an important class of 'knights', paid for their services and given authority over a particular territory, after the feudal fashion.<sup>12</sup> R.T. O'Callaghan published a survey of what was then known about the Maryannu and of the various opinions regarding this social class. He agreed with the conclusions of previous scholars that this class was of Indo-Aryan origin. He mentioned that the term Maryannu (Egyptian *mryn*) is to be understood primarily as 'a noble man; a chariot warrior of a high status', according to sources from the second half of the second millennium BCE relating to the Syro-Palestinian region. O'Callaghan maintains that the Maryannu had lived in an area from the Kingdom of Mitanni in north to south Palestine, in the cities of Lachish and Ascalon, from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-twelfth centuries BCE. He also points out the connection between the Maryannu and the use of harnessed horses with warfare chariots, which first became widespread in the Syro-Palestinian region in the third century of the second millennium.<sup>13</sup>

According to the accepted view, the Maryannu were a class of warriors whose expertise in handling chariots and caring for horses were an ancestral tradition which made them the nobility or the aristocracy of the Canaanite societies during the Late Bronze Age. They owned estates on the countryside and dominated the society of the rural towns. Membership in this nobility could be secured through inheritance, although the king could also promote favored lackeys to the Maryannu rank. The privileges and advantages enjoyed by this class and their role were rewards for their ability to use chariots in battles, which had been previously unknown in this area. The military heritage and social distinction of this class are strongly emphasized in Egyptian and Hittite sources.<sup>14</sup>

In the fifth year of Merenptah's reign (about 1207 BCE), Egypt was faced with threats from the Western Desert<sup>15</sup>, and was attacked by a coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples at the border of the western Delta. These events are described in four texts: The Great Karnak Inscription of Merenptah, the Cairo Column, the Athribis Stela, and the Hymn of Victory, otherwise known as the Victory Stela of Merenptah (or Israel stela) at Cairo Museum. According to these texts, King Meryey, the son of Dedy of the Libyans, formed a coalition with several groups of the Sea Peoples (Sherden, Teresh, Shekelesh, Ekweh and Lukka), and they pushed forward into the Delta. As soon as Merenptah discovered what was happening, he mounted a military campaign against the invaders and defeated them after six hours of fighting, at the border of the western Delta.<sup>16</sup>

Pap. Anastasi II, dating to the reign of Merenptah, is one of the important historical sources of Merenptah's war against the coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. The Maryannu were mentioned in a section of this papyrus as:



*ms<sup>c</sup> nht iw hbnw.f m nht hr wsr h3<sup>c</sup>.sn ht r Isdrktyw d3f.sn mryn n3 šrdn ini.k hr hpš.k h3kw.sn mhwt h3swt*

*The victorious army came after he has triumphed, in victory and power. It has set fire to Isderektiu and burnt the Meryna (maryannu). The Sherden whom thou hast taken by your strong arm have plundered the tribes of foreign lands.<sup>17</sup>*

It is noticeable in the text that the Sherden have plundered the tribes of foreign lands. Sherden are one

of the Sea Peoples whose name has probably survived in the name 'Sardinia'. They were first mentioned in the Amarna letters, where Sherden are mentioned as belonging to an Egyptian garrison at Byblos.<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, the Sherden here were fighting as part in the Egyptian Army. A.H. Gardiner mentioned that the Sherden was a contingent of the Egyptian Army in this section of Pap. Anastasi II.<sup>19</sup> Sherden raiders had attacked the Nile Delta some time before Ramesses II's northern campaign. A very fragmentary inscription on a stela from Tanis describes 'Sherden, rebellious of heart ... [and their] battleships in the midst of the sea'. Ramesses 'destroyed warriors of the Great Green [the Mediterranean], and Lower Egypt spends the night sleeping peacefully'. After the attack of Sherden on Egypt, they were captured and were enforced into the Egyptian Army and became one of the best troops employed by the Egyptians.<sup>20</sup> In Pap. Anastasi I, at the beginning of Ramesses II's poetical account of his campaign against the Hittites, he recounts how 'he made ready his army, his chariotry and the Sherden whom his Majesty had captured'; here the exclusive mention of these foreign people shows the important part they already played in the Egyptian army.<sup>21</sup> In another section of Pap. Anastasi II, the Sherden were mentioned as captives of Merenptah as the following:



*šrdn hr w3d-wr nty m h3kw hm.f nḥ wd3 snb 'Sherden of the Great green (i.e. the Mediterranean) who are captives of his majesty, l.p.h.'<sup>22</sup>*

F.J. Yurco assumed that Merenptah may have impressed Sea Peoples captures in his Libyan war of Year 5 against the Libyans and the Sea Peoples.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, J.H. Breasted thinks that the Sherden have been sent as Egyptian mercenaries against the tribes of the Desert.<sup>24</sup> It is not surprising to find the Sherden in Merenptah's war fighting both for and against Egypt.

The mercenary and adventurer acts as a spy for his free relatives.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, the Maryannu was one of the enemies of Egypt during the invasion of Libyan tribes, dominated by the Libu, allied with groups of the Sea Peoples, in the Fifth Year of Merenptah's reign (about 1207 BCE). This provides us with an indication of the presence of the Maryannu in the Western Desert during the Ramesside Period, for the only time in their history. They appeared as enemies of Egypt, as usual as we found them in the Egyptian military texts of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

Furthermore, we have another textual evidence from the Hymn of Victory of Merenptah. We read that 'the wretched, fallen chief of Libya, fled by favor of night alone, with no plume upon his head, his two feet [failed]. His women were taken before his face, the grain of his supplies was plundered, and he had no water in the skin to keep him alive. The face of his brothers was hostile to slay him, one fought another among his leaders. Their camp was burned and made a roast, all his possessions were food for the troops'.<sup>26</sup> I think that what is mentioned in the previous text about the burning of the Libyan camp is in concurrence with what is mentioned in Pap. Anastasi II as 'The victorious army has come after he has triumphed, in victory and power. It has set fire to Isderektiu,<sup>27</sup> and burnt the Meryna (maryannu)'. This gives us another indication that both of Isderektiu and Maryannu were enemies to Egypt in the Libyan war of Merenptah, and emphasizes the presence of the Maryannu in the Western Desert during the Ramesside Period.

The question here is: How did the *mryn* 'maryannu' fight against Egypt for the first time of their history in the Western Desert of Egypt, and not in Asia as usual when we found them in the Egyptian military texts of the New Kingdom? Additionally, we

have to enquire, how did the *mryn* 'maryannu' travel from Asia to the Western Desert?

The groups of the Sea Peoples involved in the Libyan war of Merenptah were the Sherden, Teresh, Shekelesh, Ekwesh and Lukka. The majority of the force were, however, Libyans; and the Sea Peoples were less than one third of the total number. In this instance, it seems most likely that the Libyans were the prime movers, accompanied by the other groups as mercenaries.<sup>28</sup> Some scholars observed from the records of the Libyan war of Merenptah that the casualties of the Sea Peoples groups are relatively small, compared with the Libyan casualties. This suggests that the Sea Peoples are, in this case, mercenary troops.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, I think that the Maryannu warriors, who fought with the Libyans against the Egyptians in the Western Desert during the Libyan war of Merenptah, were mercenaries like the Sea Peoples groups. N.K. Sandars thinks that the Maryannu were superior to the usual type of mercenary.<sup>30</sup> The term 'mercenary' is a vague one, since in the later second millennium BCE it can cover a variety of classes from the aristocratic Maryannu, barely distinguishable from feudal vassals, down to unruly groups of nomads.<sup>31</sup> This is the answer to the first question.

On the other hand, it is known historically that the Sea Peoples groups started a migration around and across the Mediterranean Sea over a period of at least fifty years in the later twelfth and early eleventh centuries BCE. This was accompanied by widespread destruction of individual settlements and the collapse of wider political entities from Greece to the Levant.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, I think that there is a great probability that some of the Maryannu warriors emigrated with some groups of the Sea Peoples from the Levant to North Africa throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Afterwards, all of these groups were mercenaries for the Libyans in their invasion on Egypt, in the fifth year of Merenptah's reign.

## Conclusion

Pap. Anastasi II proved the existence of the Maryannu in the Western Desert during the Ramesside Period, for the only time in their history. The Maryannu was one of the enemies of Egypt during the invasion of the Libyan tribes, dominated by the Libu, allied with groups of the Sea Peoples. It seems that the Maryannu warriors who fought with the Libyans against the Egyptians in the Western Desert during the Libyan war of Merenptah were mercenaries like the Sea Peoples groups, and there is a great probability that some of the Maryannu warriors emigrated with some groups of the Sea Peoples from the Levant to North Africa across the Mediterranean Sea. Afterwards all of these groups were mercenaries for the Libyans in their invasion on Egypt, in the fifth year of Merenptah's reign.

## Notes

- \* PhD of Egyptology, the Ministry of State for Antiquities.
- 1 *Urk.* IV, 665, 9; *BAR*, II, §. 436; Cf., A.J. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2005), 95.
- 2 *Urk.* IV, 892; *BAR*, II, §. 585.
- 3 *Urk.* IV, 894-895; *BAR*, II, §. 590.
- 4 *Urk.* IV, 1303-1311; Cf. A.M. Badawi, 'Die Neue Historische Stele - Amenophis II', *ASAE* 42 (1943), 123.
- 5 *Wb.* II, 110.
- 6 E.A.W. Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, vol. I (London, 1920), 315.
- 7 A. Badawi, H. Kees, *Handwoerterbuch Der Agyptischen Sprache* (Cairo and Staatsdruckerei, 1958), 102.
- 8 R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1988), 112.
- 9 A. H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I (Oxford, 1947), 190.
- 10 L.H. Lesko, *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*, vol. I (Providence, 2002), 194; Cf., A.H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (Brussels, 1937), 15; W. Erichsen,

*Papyrus Harris I, Hieroglyphische Transkription* (Brussels, 1933), 31, 8; *KRI*, V, 40, 7.

- 11 E. F. Wente, 'The Capture of Joppa', in W.K. Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2003), 73; Cf., A.H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Brussels, 1932), 82-85.
- 12 A.F. Rainey, 'The Military Personnel of Ugarit', *JNES* 24 (1965), 19-21; P. Raulwing, 'Horses, Chariots and Indo-Europeans', *Budapest: Archaeolingua* (2000), 35-36, 117-118.
- 13 R.T. O'Callaghan, 'New Light on the Maryannu as Chariot Warrior', *JKF* 1 (1951), 309-324.
- 14 H. Reviv, 'Some Comments on the Maryannu', *IEJ* 22 (1972), 219; D.B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* (New Jersey, 1992), 193-195.
- 15 Western Desert: At the eastern end of the great Sahara is the dry region called the Western Desert by the ancient Egyptians. With an area of some 680,000 kilometers, the Western Desert covered about two-thirds of Egypt's land mass. It extended from the Nile Valley's agricultural strip west to the frontier between Egypt and Libya, and from just south of the Mediterranean littoral southward to the Sudan-Egypt frontier.  
  
See: A.J. Mills, 'Western Desert', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 2001), 497.
- 16 *BAR*, III, §§. 569-617; *KRI*, IV, 2-23; Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt*, 235-237; A.R. Schulman, 'The Great Historical Inscription of Merenptah at Karnak: A Partial Reappraisal', *JARCE* 24 (1987), 27-34; N.K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.* (London, 1985), 105 f.
- 17 Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 14-15; R.A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (London, 1954), 44-45.
- 18 Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I, 194.
- 19 Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I, 194.
- 20 F.J. Yurco, 'Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign', *JARCE* 23 (1986), 215; K.A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant, The Life and times of Ramesses II King of Egypt* (Warminster, 1982), 40-41; Sandars, *The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 BC*, 50.

- 21 Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I, 194-195.
- 22 Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 20; Cf. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. I, 194.
- 23 Yurco, *JARCE* 23, 215, n. 71.
- 24 *BAR*, III, 210, n. c.
- 25 Sandars, *The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.*, 106.
- 26 *BAR*, III, §. 610.
- 27 Caminos mentioned that Isderektiu probably mentioned only here in the Egyptian texts. Despite the lack of a human determinative, he thought that Meryna (maryannu) is like Sherden which follows, not a place name but an ethnical name. Hence, I think despite the lack of a human determinative, that Isderektiu is also an ethnical name for a group of people which attacked Egypt with the coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples at the border of the western Delta, in the fifth year of Merenptah's reign. See: Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 46.
- 28 R.G. Morkot, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, (Oxford, 2003), 205.
- 29 Morkot, *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian Warfare*, 127, 142.
- 30 Sandars, *The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.*, 38.
- 31 Sandars, *The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250-1150 B.C.*, 50.
- 32 A. Leahy, 'Sea Peoples', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 2001), 257.