

OUT OF THE MISTS OF THE ALPHABET – REDRAWING THE “BROTHER OF THE RULER OF RETENU”

By Orly Goldwasser

Few Canaanites of the Middle Bronze Age can be aptly termed “individuals”. A notable exception is “(the) brother of the ruler of Retenu, Khebeded[em]”, who appears both pictorially and textually in Egyptian Sinai stelae. This article offers a new rendering of the famous scene of him riding a donkey in Stela 112, as well as a summary of all textual references to him in Serabit el-Khadem. A discussion of the “donkey rider” scene as cultural signifier follows, and a link to the “Levantine Warrior” class, familiar from the earliest tombs in Tell el-Dab^a, is proposed. The possible role of the group in the dissemination of the alphabet is also addressed.



Fig. 1 Original photo with the representation of Khebeded on the West Face of Stela 112, after VALBELLE & BONNET 1996: 34, Fig. 45



Fig. 2 New drawing of the representation of Khebeded on Sinai Stela 112 without background, © Goldwasser

Introduction

In their exquisite book *Le sanctuaire d'Hathor maîtresse de la turquoise*, Dominique Valbelle and Charles Bonnet published a new photograph of the lower part of Sinai Stela 112, featuring the most celebrated Canaanite dignitary in Sinai, “(the) brother of the ruler of Retenu, Khebedede[m]”¹ (Fig. 1).

This stela and scene, already published by GARDINER, PEET and ČERNÝ, in *SINAI I*, are well known, but no photograph was ever published – only a hand drawing (Fig. 3).

Khebeded is closely connected to the history of the early alphabet. As I have argued in detail recently,² a short hieroglyphic inscription of his, on Stela 92 in Sinai, shows close paleographical resemblance to some of the newly invented letters of the Canaanite alphabet. My hypothesis was that Khebeded and his entourage were in close contact with the inventors of the alphabet, probably Canaanite mining experts working in mines L and M in Serabit el-Khadem.³

Looking closely at the picture published by Valbelle and Bonnet, I came to realize that the pioneer-



Fig. 3 Drawing of the same representation as on Fig. 1 from Stela 112, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXXVII

ing drawing in *SINAI I* does not do full justice to the original. It seems that many additional and sometimes divergent details are discernible in the more recent photograph. A careful assessment of the picture resulted in the new rendition presented below (Fig. 2).⁴

1. Redrawing Khebeded(em) – A New Image

1.1. Khebeded riding donkey with entourage – Stela 112 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XXXVII, W. Face, Figs. 1–2)

Khebeded[em]

The identity of Khebeded is confirmed by the sentence that appears above the pictorial scene and reads *sn n ḥk3 n Rtnw ḥbdddm šmsw (?)f⁵ kḳbi* “Brother of the ruler of Retenu Khebededem, his acolyte? (son?), Qeqbi.”⁶ Another equally possible translation would be “a ruler of Retenu.” It is very feasible that there was not only a single ruler of Retenu in this period and the title “Ruler of Retenu” could have been assigned to different local rulers in the Levant.⁷ The quality of the hieroglyphs is good and probably executed by the same professional hand that wrote all sides of the stela (see discussion 2.3 below). The scene appears on the West Face of the stela.

The most conspicuous result of the new drawing of Khebeded is the clear view of the two weapons that he holds. An axe with a curved handle rests casually on his shoulder. The elongated blade clearly identifies the weapon as a duckbill axe. The original may have resembled the axe that was carried by the Canaanite from the famous Beni Hassan representation of the Asiatic caravan. The two “eyes” of the axe are clearly seen in the old photo-

¹ This individual has attracted the attention of many scholars since the publication of *SINAI I, II*. However, a photograph had never been published until the publication of Bonnet and Valbelle. I am grateful to Dominique Valbelle for the permission to reproduce this picture here. The name is written in Sinai as Khebeded or Khebeded[em]. The *m* is construed as a mimmat by most scholars; see, SCHNEIDER 2003, 156–157, 165 with bibliography.

² GOLDWASSER 2006, 135–146; GOLDWASSER 2012, 15–17.

³ GOEDICKE 1984 has posited that the famous Beni Hassan caravan of Canaanites was made up of mining experts coming to work in Egypt; for bibliography and also other suggestions, see KAMRIN 1999, 94–96.

⁴ I would like to thank Halely Harel and Marian Negrete-Martinez for producing the computer-generated image. Any mistakes are mine alone.

⁵ The reading *s3,f* “his son” is also possible, as the *šmsw* sign is very unclear.

⁶ The name is written in Sinai as Khebeded or Khebeded(m).

⁷ Grammatically, the two readings are possible here. The fragmented rule in Canaan during this period is evident from literary sources (Sinuhe) as well as from the execration texts; see POSENER 1940 and Recently RAINEY 2006 with bibliography.



Fig. 4 A Canaanite type scimitar, after BIETAK, HEIN et al. 1994: Kat. Nr. 64

graph of the caravan in WRESZINSKI’s Atlas (1923–1935).⁸ Bietak claimed in 1992 that Canaanites are depicted with duckbill axes also in all other scenes from Serabit el-Khadem. Chronologically these axes are typical of the first half of the Middle Bronze Age IIA, equivalent to the second half of the 12th dynasty.⁹

It seems that Khebeded also holds a scimitar – a prestigious Canaanite weapon in this period (Fig. 4). This scimitar is a well-known ruling symbol in the Levant, and was excavated from the royal tombs at Byblos.¹⁰ The date of these scimitars ranges between the second part of the Twelfth Dynasty to the Middle of the Thirteenth (c. 1900–1700 BC).¹¹ Khebeded is seated on the donkey in sidesaddle position, typical of representations of Canaanites. His legs seem to hang down, however, on the other side of the donkey.¹² He has a very prominent Canaanite hairstyle. A close parallel could well be the hairstyle of the Asiatic dignitary from Tell el-Dab^a (Fig. 5). Another interesting parallel comes from the classifier of the “friendly Asiatic” i.e. not bounded Asiatic from the inscription of Khnumhotep at Dahshur.¹⁴ However, due to the state of the relief, a somewhat different hairstyle cannot be

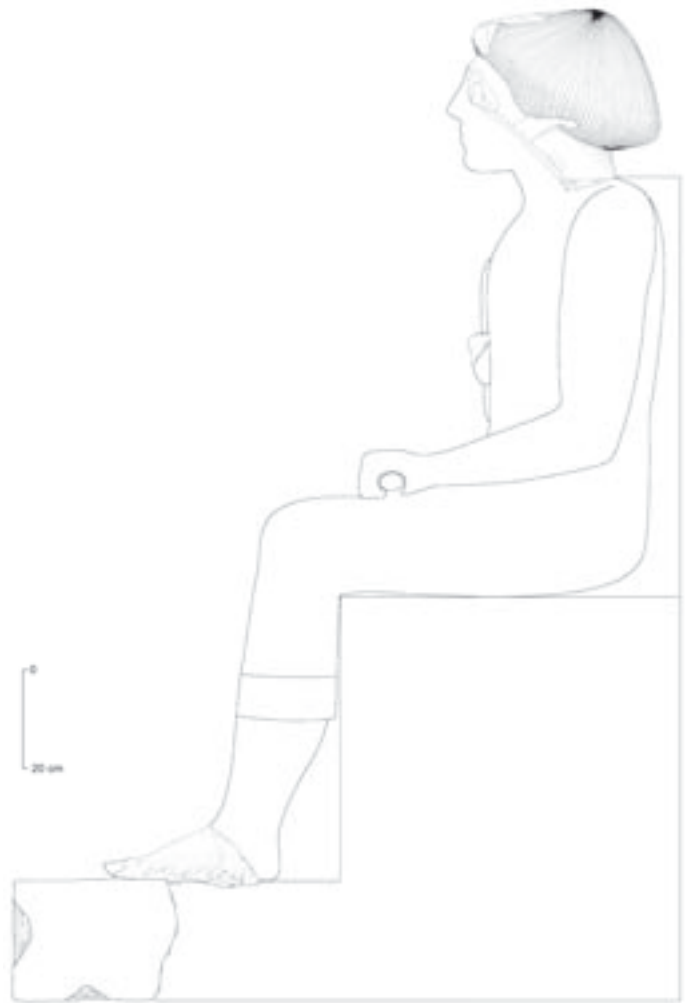


Fig. 5 Statue of an Asiatic dignitary with Canaanite hairstyle from Phase H-G/4 at Tell el-Dab^a (after SCHIESTL 2006, Fig. 3)

⁸ Reproduced in BIETAK 2002, 40, with discussion.

⁹ BIETAK 1992; PHILIP 1989, 49–53. The date and context of the Canaanite duckbill axes are continuously confirmed by new publications, e.g. GARFINKEL and COHEN 2007, 101–08. (Gesher). The duckbill axes appear in these graves together with spearheads and toggle-pins (for toggle-pins in Tell el-Dab^a, BIETAK 1968, 106, 109/Fig. 9, pl. 33/d). The spearheads are also typical of representations of Canaanites in this period, from the Beni Hassan caravan (here Figs. 5–8) as well as in Sinai. The toggle-pins may have served as prototypes for the alphabetic letter *waw*; see RAINEY 2009, 85 and GOLDWASSER 2011, 269–270.

¹⁰ MONTET 1928, 177, no. 654, Pl. CI.

¹¹ See ARNOLD 2010, 204, with discussion and bibliography, and also SCHOSKE 1980, 819. For an example from Shechem, see MÜLLER & KÜHN 1987, 37–49, Abb.7; BIETAK & HEIN et al. 1994, 129 (cat. No. 75). Such a scimitar was also found in a later context in Tell el-Dab^a; see PHILIP 2006, 151 with Fig. 60a.

¹² On the Asiatic sidesaddle see STAUBLI 1991, 101–107, esp. Abb. 22 with this sitting position represented on a Middle Bronze Age scarab.

¹³ BIETAK 2010a, 148, Fig. 6.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Phyllis Saretta for calling my attention to these parallels. This inscription from Dahshur conspicuously distinguishes between the classifiers of the prototypical ‘Non-belligerent Canaanite’ of the period – a peacefully seated Canaanite holding a Canaanite “eye” axe typical of the period of the early 12th Dynasty. For this axe, compare the representation of the Asiatic soldiers in Beni Hassan in the tombs of Khnumhotep I. (no. 14, time of Amenemhat I) and the nomarch Amenemhat (no. 2, time of Senwosret I, NEWBERRY 1893, pl. 47, pl. 16). The “Unfriendly Canaanite” is represented in the script system by the “Kneeling Captive” position; for this position, see HILL 1999. The local ruler from Byblos, identified as *mlk* by Allen, takes the “Unfriendly Canaanite” classifier, which seems to fit his role in the text. Allen suggests that local pro-Egyptian rulers carrying the



Fig. 6 A Hairdo from Beni Hassan after WRZINSKI 1923-35: Part II, Pl.6



Fig. 7 The classifier for the word ‘Amw in the inscription of the tomb of Khnumhotep III at Dahshur after ALLEN 2008, pl. 3b (Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art)

ruled out (e.g. Fig. 6, the warrior).¹⁵ It seems that Khebeded has a prominent beard that would fit all representations of Asiatics in this period – soldiers or otherwise.

The Follower

Behind the donkey, holding a rope in his right hand and what seems to be a spear in the other, walks an acolyte. He must be the “follower Qeqbi,” while the

boy in front is not mentioned by name. A reading *s3.f* “his son” seems also possible.¹⁶ The new picture hardly solves the problem. The hieroglyph of *šmsw* (“follower”) is hardly discernible, if at all.

In the old drawing (Fig. 3), Qeqbi is shown with a sort of round, undefined haircut. However, we were able to clearly identify a different hairstyle and clear fillet. It is not a mushroom hairstyle, which lacks the tuft on the forehead and is very clear in the representation of Khebeded.¹⁷ A most intriguing detail is the fillet which is clearly visible in the new picture. Its line does not fully reach the back of the head and even seems to droop at the edges. This pictorial feature fits perfectly the description of some golden headbands that were found in a warrior tomb in Tell el-Dab^a. The warrior in the tomb was armed with dagger and battle-axe. On his head were found *in situ* remains of three headbands of gold with perforations at their ends. Philip¹⁸ remarks that “most of the examples are approximately 30–33 cm in length and would therefore not have stretched all the way around an adult’s skull. Presumably they were worn on the forehead

title *h3ty-^c* and acting as “Egyptian governors” were imposed on the local population shortly after the episode described in the Dahshur text.

¹⁵ See ARNOLD 2010, 202–203, with Fig. 4.

¹⁶ The old drawing in the first edition may allow for such a reading. The hieroglyphs are, however, very unclear here.

¹⁷ For a discussion of this hairstyle see SARETTA 1997, 93–95, and SARETTA, forthcoming. Asiatics wearing a fillet are still known in the 11th dynasty from the decoration of the tomb of Antef; see BIETAK 2010a, 146. An in-depth investigation of this topic is still necessary, as noted by ARNOLD 2010, 196, note 119.

¹⁸ PHILIP 2006, 88.



Fig. 8 A Beni Hassan pottery workshop, after NEWBERRY 1893, Pl. XXIX



Fig. 10 Sinai Stela 87, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXIV



Fig. 9 Child's haircut from a Beni Hassan Scene, after WRESZINSKI 1923-35: Part II, Pl.6

and continued to the rear by a string made of organic materials and which was knotted at the back of the head in the manner of a ‘fillet.’” Interestingly, it seems that Qeqbi does not hold the jar that appears over his left hand, as suggested by the drawing of *SINAI I*. Rather, the jar “floats” above the scene. This artistic convention is not foreign to

Egyptian art in the Middle Kingdom. A somewhat similar representation can be found in different workshop representations in the Middle Kingdom, for instance in a description of a pottery workshop from a tomb in Beni Hassan (Fig. 8). The only word written above the workshop scene is *šdt* “dough.” However, the objects that make the result of the “dough making,” i.e. different prototypical vessels, are all “floating” above the potters, including an imitation of a Canaanite juglet. Each vessel type is represented only once, but it is clear to the viewer that they stand for prototypes of a large number of vessels created in the workshop. The topic of the text of this side of Stela 112 where the scene of Khebeded appears on the bottom, is *inw* - “tributes”. The stela’s owner offers different tributes, probably to the king or the gods.¹⁹ The list contains various products including live animals, among them also 200 donkeys. Some other officials may be mentioned in the hieroglyphic inscription along with their tributes. Khebeded on his donkey appears at the end of the list of *inw*, on the bottom of the stela, but in a large space devoted for him alone. However, he is the only one accorded pictorial representation. Taken within the context of Egyptian rules of representation, the “hovering” jar may be a *prototypical specimen* of the *inw* presented in this occasion by Khebeded.²⁰ The jar picture seems

¹⁹ On *inw* see BLEIBERG 1984.

²⁰ Tine Bagh writes about this scene: “... his follower is lifting one hand ... holding an amphora typical of the Middle Bronze Age ... In this way the picture shows us some of the participants of the expedition illustrating the inscription,

and at the same time it is a general depiction of the kind of foreigners whose leaders are riding donkeys and who are the ones bringing goods, probably wine, in amphorae. These vessels are to be found by the thousands or even millions at Tell el-Dab’a, becoming common from the same time at the

to imitate a typical Canaanite jar known from Middle Bronze Age excavations in the Levant, and in Tell el-Dab^a.²¹ As in the case of the pottery workshop, the single jar surely stands for many more.²²

The Boy

An armed boy is a repetitive motif among the “identity signifiers”²³ of the Canaanite universe, as represented in the Egyptian decorum. He appears in the Beni Hassan caravan and in all other representations of the donkey riders in Sinai. This part of the scene in stela 112 is now in a very poor state of conservation. However, he may exhibit a hairstyle resembling that of the children sitting in the basket on the donkey in the Beni Hassan scene (Fig. 9). He appears to carry a spear. He leads the donkey with a rope tied to the donkey’s nose by a ring.²⁴ A donkey tethered by two ropes held by two acolytes in front and behind, was until a few years ago a prestige symbol in Egyptian villages reserved for dignitaries.²⁵

1.2. A Pictorial Representation of Khebeded Standing, Stela 87 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XXIV, W. Face, Fig. 10)

Khebeded is most probably represented again in the pictorial on Stela 87. Here he stands last in the row of officials at the bottom of the stela. Remains of another row of officials above this row are clearly discernible. The stela dates from year 5, probably of Amenemhet III. The text reads “Brother of the ruler of Retenu ...” but the name is missing. However, there is no other person in Sinai that is known to bear this very specific and otherwise unknown title (see also discussion below). He has no beard but wears a clearly different Canaanite hairstyle that is somewhat similar to his hairdo in the donkey representation (see discussion above). The artist also gives him different attire, a clear skirt with a pronounced belt and no knot.

2. Textual References to Khebeded(em)

The list below collects all occurrences of Khebeded in the Sinai inscriptions,²⁶ with a discussion of their context. It seems that the standing of Khebeded moves upwards within the hierarchy of Egyptian administration along the decade of his recorded activity in Sinai.

2.1. Stela 85 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XXIII, N. Edge, Fig. 11)

In this stela, which is dated in *SINAI I* to year 4 of Amenemhet III we find the earliest textual mention



Fig. 11 Sinai Stela 85, North Edge, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXIII

very end of the 12th Dynasty.” BAGH 2006, 17–18. These pottery types are known at Tell el-Dab^a as early as the second half of the 12th Dynasty; see ASTON 2002, 58–73, Figs 1–10; KOPETZKY 2010, 254–265.

²¹ ASTON 2004, 40–41 and passim. In Canaan, e.g. KOCHAVI and YADIN 2002, 204, no.10 (Aphék).

²² Most pottery in Sinai was produced from local clay after Egyptian (Lisht) models, whilst some are imitations of Eastern Delta models; see BOURRIAU 1996, 30–32. VALBELLE and BONNET 1996, 57, suggest that some “jarres à résine proviennent de Palestine.”

²³ For “identity signifiers” manifested in “iconographical signifiers,” see ARNOLD 2010, 190, and passim.

²⁴ Such a ‘nose ring’ of a donkey was found in phase F at Tell el-Dab^a; see BIETAK 1991, 59, Abb.29. I am grateful to Bettina Bader for this reference.

²⁵ The *Omda of Didamun* (near Tell el-Dab^a) used to ride until recent decades with two acolytes holding the donkey back and front of the saddle. This sort of riding would have been safer and prevented undignified falls and injuries (I am grateful to Manfred Bietak for this information).

²⁶ See HIKADE 2007.

of Khebeded. His name is written on the North Edge of the stela as a member in a list together with the highest officials in the site – the *imy-r t3 mḥw* “Overseer of Lower Egypt”²⁷ and the *sš n pr ḥd* “Scribe of the Treasury.” However, he is only the tenth person mentioned in the list. The stela shows the same style and quality of hieroglyphs on all sides and was probably executed by the same scribe.



Khebeded’s name and title are written in two lines *sn n ḥkꜣ Rt(n)w ḥbdd* [FOREIGNER?] “Brother of a ruler (of) Retenu.” It is the only occurrence where the





noun phrase “ruler of Retenu” appears in *direct genitive* without an *n*. Although there is ample space in the second line, the name is written without the final *m*.²⁸ In this stela we find the only known occurrence of the name *ḥbdd* with a classifier. The name shows an unusual classifier .²⁹ It is a rare hieroglyph of a seated, bearded man, which is reminiscent of the very early examples of classifiers of foreigners.³⁰ This classifier is conspicuous in the micro-context of the stela. The second name that acquires a classifier on the same North Edge side of this stela seems to present the conventional  [HUMAN-MALE] classifier. On the West Face of the same stela (Fig. 12) appears a long list in two columns of members of the expedition on which almost every single name receives the conventional . Most names on this double-column list on the West Face are typically Egyptian and many are theophorical in nature. 17 names include the name of the god *nmty* (*ḥnty*). Others include Sobek and Hathor. One person is called Seth... (*stš*). The names do not show a tendency to monoconsonantal spelling. The scribe creates on the West Face a special visual impact as he repetitively gives all names the same classifier-. He also separates



Fig. 12 Sinai Stela 85, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXIII

²⁷ In a monograph on this title STEFANOVIĆ 2003, 48–51, suggests that the carriers of this title are specifically connected to expedition activity. For earlier works see SEYFRIED 1981, 204, note 621. Most of the people bearing this title appear in the days of Amemhet III, the hay days of the expeditions to Sinai.

²⁸ See above note 1.

²⁹ If the reading of the sign is indeed correct.

³⁰ See SHALOMI-HEN 2007, especially Fig. 4. Compare here the classifier of the *ḥmw Twšni* in inscription 24 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XI) .

the classifier from the name, space permitting, enhancing its semantic role as a category marker which stands outside the phonetic representation of the word and, as result of which, the unusual classifier of Khebeded in the context of this stela is telling. When facing the choice of a classifier for Khebeded, the Egyptian scribe stresses his “otherness” by choosing a [FOREIGNER] classifier.

The content of the inscription on the North Edge of the stela, where Khebeded’s name appears, provides us with the administrative environment of his activities. Five officials carrying the rather obscure title *iry-ᶜt* appear before him. The first is called *nmty*, the second is named $\text{ʕ}mw$ = the Asiatic. Of the next three, one carries the name *kms*, written in monoconsonants. The other two names are not fully readable. Following now are two officials titled *hry-pr* a rare combination, however very common in Sinai and otherwise known in ‘Ezbet Rushdi in the Delta.³¹ It seems that the two are named *i-r*. Both names are already written in a partially “syllabic” fashion and thus one may carefully suggest that they may have been an early attempt of transcribing into Egyptian a foreign name containing the stem *ilu*.³² Next, just before Khebeded appear now two $\text{ʕ}w$ - “dragomans.”³³ Both names, are written using only monoconsonantal hieroglyphs.

Khebeded appears next, and unlike his predecessors his title and name occupy two lines in the inscription. It seems that citing his full title was important enough to be specified in two inscriptional lines. Khebeded is followed by two people who use the title *s n wib* ʕ “man of the big ship.” The first person’s name is now lost. The second one is again also called *kms*. The stela continues with the giving of an Egyptian name to a physician (and also a regular $\text{ʕ}w$ classifier). At the very end of the list, at the bottom, ten nameless $\text{ʕ}mw$ are mentioned.

To sum up, Khebeded appears here in proximity to minor officials *iry-ᶜt*, *hry pr* ʕ , two dragomans and two sailors. Some of these people may not have been of Egyptian origin, as their names include no Egyptian theophoric or royal elements and are written with monoconsonantal signs.

2.2. Stela 87 (see above, 1.2. and Fig. 10)



Unlike the version of stela 85, here the title of the striding man with the mushroom-shaped hairdo is written *sn n hk3 n Rtnw*..... by an indirect genitive.³⁴ The proper name is missing. The penmanship and overall quality of the hieroglyphs is comparable to the rest of the inscriptions on the stela.³⁵ If indeed year 5 of

Amenemhet III is mentioned, it is very close in time to the previous mention of stela 85. Khebeded ranks here amongst the same low administrative echelon – after three *hry pr* ʕ . The first two names suffered greatly and it is hard to say if they were also written by monoconsonants alone.

2.3. Stela 112 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XXXVII, S. Edge, Fig. 13)

The name and title of Khebeded appears twice on stela 112: above the donkey rider scene discussed previously (1.1), and in a list of officials. The date of this stela is not preserved, but it seems that Sanofret, the *imy-r t3 mh*w “overseer of Lower Egypt,” was active in Sinai as the expedition leader during years 9–10 of Amenemhet III.³⁶

Khebeded appears once in the second horizontal line on the South Edge (Fig. 13). He is now the second (!) official mentioned in the list, below Sanofret, after a “dragoman” that carries an Egyptian name. Five lines below him appears a certain *imy-r ms* ʕ *i-i-w-k-i* “overseer of the expedition

³¹ For a recent discussion of this hieroglyph see GOLDWASSER 2006, 137–138 and 2012, 19 note 22. For these titles in general in the Middle Kingdom see, WARD 1982, 116, no.977, 117, no.988; QUIRKE 1990, 35 note 48.

³² In this period the spelling ʕ could stand for the Semitic phoneme *l*; see SASS 1991, 16 with example. However, it should be noted that the stroke appears in our examples above the *r* (see Fig. 10, lines 3–4). It may be due to the still “experimental” nature of syllabic writing in this period. Is it a shortened version of names that include the Canaanite theophoric “*el*” such as $\text{ʕ}abda-el$? For such West Semitic names in this period see O’CONNOR 2004, 450. GARDINER,

PEET and ČERNÝ translate in *SINAI II*, 94 “Oker(?)” for a reason I could not follow.

³³ GOEDICKE 1966 suggested “foreigner”; See also BELL 1976 and the DZA sign code S25 for spelling variants: also MORENZ 2011, 99–102.

³⁴ Compare here the discussion in MORENZ 2011, 225.

³⁵ Note here the “open” cursive version of the hieroglyph *pr* – “house.”

³⁶ VALBELLE and BONNET 1996, 24–25, date Sanofret in years 9–10 of Amenemhet III. See also SEYFRIED 1981, 176–177.



Iwky.” We shall come back to this individual later. From the West Face of this stela comes the famous scene of Khebeded riding the donkey (Fig. 1-3).

a. Name and title of Khebeded[em] as part of the inscription, South Edge:



b. Name and title of Khebeded[em] above the donkey scene, West Face:



The texts are very similar in handwriting and orthography.³⁷ In both cases the name appears as *hbddm*. In both cases Retenu shows the  [FOREIGN LAND] classifier. However, the hieroglyph  *w* appears in the word *Rtnw* only in version a. Most conspicuous is the identical size relation in the writing of the name. The *m* owl is, in both examples, much bigger than the two *d* (hand-palm) signs.

The owner of this stela, Sanofret, left another unique inscription near mine D.³⁸ He announced the opening of what was probably a new tunnel or a new part of the mine named *ptrt nfrw hwthr* “The One who Sees the Beauties of Hathor.”³⁹ Only one other person is mentioned on this small rock inscription: the same official mentioned together with Khebeded on Stela 112, the overseer of the expedition Iwky.

2.4. Stela 92 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XXVII, S. Edge, Fig. 14a)

In this stela appears the last textual mention of Khebeded in Sinai. The stela dates to year 13, probably of Amenemhet III (Fig. 14c). The upper part of West Face of this stela, the less prestigious side, is destroyed. The remainder contains today only a list of names of some of the members of the expedition. Such lists usually appear below the name and title of the beneficiary. A good possible com-

³⁷ However, the *w* sign is missing in the word *Rtnw* in the inscription above the donkey scene.

³⁸ For an excellent picture see VALBELLE and BONNET 1996, 61, Fig. 74.

³⁹ *SINAI II*, 80–81. The Wb translates *ptrt* as a participle “Quarry (called) ‘Beholder of the beauty of Hathor’.” The word *hwt* “mine” is feminine, DZA 26.463.130. For the practice of giving a name to newly opened sites (e.g. canal in Sehel) during the Middle Kingdom (Sesotris III), see GRAJETZKI 2009, 58 Fig. 23.



Fig. 13 Sinai Stela 112, South Edge, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXXVII



Fig. 14a Sinai Stela 92, South Edge, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXVII




Fig. 14b Sinai Stela 92, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXVII





Fig. 14c Sinai Stela 92, East Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXVII

parison to this side in Stela 92 is Sinai Stela 115, which features a similar text. In Stela 115 (see below 3.2.), on the upper part (which is destroyed in our stela), before the listing of the “staff” (*d3d3t*) appear the name and titles of the stela’s owner.⁴⁰ In Stela 92, the sentence *imy rn.f n d3d3t.f iy.t hn.c.f* “The list of **his** staff that came with **him**,” the pronoun *f* probably refers back to the destroyed upper part, i.e. to the lost name of the beneficiary.⁴¹

The South Edge of Stela 92 (Fig. 14a) opens with the title and name of *sn n hk3 n Rtnw hbdd* “(The) brother of the ruler of Retenu, Khebeded.” No classifiers are present, the name being written without the *m*. Khebeded is followed by the titles and names of two minor officials and then what seems to be a list of four non-titular names.

Line 9 resumes what may be another two-line title that ends on line 11 with a proper name followed by the  classifier⁴² and the phrase *m3c-hrw* – “true of voice.” The next line contains again what seems to be a two-line title and a name that ends with a [SOLDIER] classifier on line 13. The rest is lost. It is difficult to say whether Khebeded is mentioned here as a party and successor of the group of the West Face which is under the direct control of the beneficiary of the stela, or whether he appears as a party unto himself. It is hard to know why these parts of Stela 92 were left to a much less professional writer. However, these two sides show paleographic affinities and were possibly produced by the same “school,” if not by the same hand.⁴³ It seems that, in Sinai, there were a few Canaanites who could read and write basic Egyptian⁴⁴ and it is possible that the West Face and the North Edge inscriptions of stela 92 ended up penned by such writers. My postulate, as I have detailed elsewhere, is that the person who wrote stela 92, probably a Canaanite in the entourage of Khebeded, knew not only how to write basic Egyptian, but had also already learned the newly invented Canaanite alpha-



betic script. This made him *mix up* the two systems—he misuses the icon of the letter  *b* of the Canaanite script (which represents in its name and in its early pictorial form a house, בית), instead of the correct Egyptian hieroglyph for “house”  with the opening below (see Figs. 14a,b).⁴⁵ However, this man was not the inventor. From my reconstruction of the alphabet invention process through Egyptian hieroglyphs in Sinai, the necessary condition for the emergence of the new script is that the inventor(s) did not know how to read and write Egyptian. It is this prerequisite that actually spurred on the inventors and made the pioneering invention possible in the first place.⁴⁶ It seems that the alphabet was invented by miners or “desert experts” that could neither read nor write, as most of the new alphabetic inscriptions were found around and inside the mines. It seems that early alphabetic writing was concentrated around the remote mines, especially mines L and M. There is no way to explain the location of these inscriptions without drawing a direct link between the miners and the invention of the script.⁴⁷ Only a handful of alphabetic inscriptions are known from the temple precinct itself, all on small votive, movable artifacts. One of these artifacts mentions “*Ncm*, chief miner,” thus unmistakably connecting these small ex-votos to the circles of the Canaanite miners on the site.⁴⁸ However, it is highly likely that the donkey-rider elite was in contact with the Canaanite miners – as the organizers of the Canaanite


⁴⁰ *SINAI I*, Pl. XXXIX, Stela 115, *imy rn.f d3d3t wn m bi3 pn*
SINAI I, Pl. XXXV, Stela 106, ...*d3d3t iy r bi3 pn*
SINAI I, Pl. LII, Stela 141, (*imy*) *rn.f n d3d3t* continues with an enumeration of names and pictures.

⁴¹ See VALBELLE and BONNET 1996, 25.

⁴² Only the back hand of the A1 [MAN] classifier can be seen.

⁴³ Written by the same writer but not at the same time?

⁴⁴ For the tracing of their possible works in Sinai and their links to the Canaanite cultural environment which developed an independent secondary use of hieroglyphs on scarabs, see GOLDWASSER 2006.

⁴⁵ For my first detailed discussion of the paleography of this stela and the “house” hieroglyphs in Egyptian inscriptions, see GOLDWASSER 2006, 143–146 with bibliography, and later Goldwasser 2010, GOLDWASSER 2012, 14–15. Compare the discussion in MORENZ 2011, 236–237 with footnote 55, where my article of 2006 is wrongly cited as 2007. SASS 1988, 111, has already remarked on the similarity of the house hieroglyph in this stela and the protosinaïtic .

⁴⁶ See GOLDWASSER 2011.

⁴⁷ See lately in detail the discussion in GOLDWASSER 2012.

⁴⁸ Block statuette – SINAI 346, SASS 1988, 14–15.

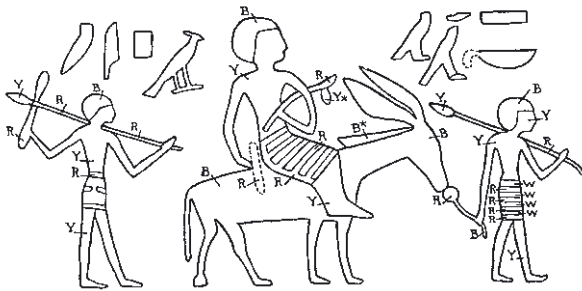


Fig. 15 Sinai Stela 405, South-East Face, after *SINAI II*, 206

group of experts or otherwise. In any case, the independent “Canaanite script” fits in well with the Canaanite spirit of the time, and the donkey riders in Sinai and their circles most probably had some access to it.

3. Other “Donkey Rider” Scenes in Sinai

Three similar scenes depicting donkey riders are known from Middle Kingdom Sinai stelae. All three feature the same “identity signifier” – a sidesaddle rider with a boy or smaller figure in front, and another armed follower behind. All scenes are located on the bottom part of the stelae. Only Khebeded is shown with a follower that holds the donkey with a rope also from behind (see above). The name Khebeded is not found in the additional pictorial scenes that may record other Asiatic dignitaries.⁴⁹



Fig. 16 Sinai Stela 115, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XXXIX

3.1. Stela 405 (*SINAI II*, p.206, Fig. 15)

Valbelle and Bonnet date the owner of the stela, the chancellor Sobekhotep, in years 9–10 of Amenemhet III.⁵⁰ Two words are inscribed above the acolyte and above the boy in this scene. Above the acolyte appears the word *ʒpim*⁵¹ and above the boy the word *škʒm* or *škmm* all in monoconsonantal signs.⁵² Both words (names?) are unknown in Egyptian and should be foreign words. It is hard to know if one of the words or both refer to the donkey rider himself. It would have been unusual if his name had not been recorded, whilst the names or titles of his followers are. If the two words refer to the rider, we might very tentatively suggest an interpretation like “The one from Shechem,⁵³ Apim (Rpim?).”

This scene was the best preserved of all donkey rider scenes as the stela was later built into a wall. Due to these circumstances the colors of the scene survived, giving Černý a rare chance to describe and redefine the color palette typical of representations of Canaanites in Egyptian art of the Middle Kingdom.⁵⁴ The men’s skin is painted dark yellow, their

⁴⁹ ČERNÝ 1935, 388–389 has suggested that all pictorial representations refer to Khebeded. This hypothesis has been repeated by several scholars since, also *SINAI II*, 206, a.

⁵⁰ VALBELLE and BONNET 1996, 24. The last specific mention of Khebeded is year 13 of Amenemhet III; see below.

⁵¹ The *ʒ* shows here a cursive hieroglyphic version.

⁵² On the phenomenon of name writing by monoconsonantal signs in the Middle Kingdom, see already SASS 1991.

⁵³ In this case the word would be a *nisbe*. For a different interpretation, see SCHNEIDER 2003, 162, 123. Schneider reads the hieroglyphs of the name above the boy as *škʒm* (following Černý) and thus looks for another reconstruction. However, the hieroglyphs of these words are not high quality and the

first bird in the first word from the right could easily be *m* and not *ʒ*. The *ʒ* bird is written very differently in the micro-context – the second word – *ʒpim*; it shows the cursive hieroglyphic version of the period with the head-feather (?). See in this context the remarks of Benjamin Sass on the problem of Egyptian representation of this phoneme, SASS 1991, 19–20. SARETTA 1997, 188 suggested a comparison to *skmm* in the execration texts. The Canaanite site Shechem in the Judean Mountains was inhabited during the Middle Bronze Age and yielded finds of different weapons; see MÜLLER and KUHN 1987.

⁵⁴ ČERNÝ 1935, 387–389. There is no need to repeat here his detailed description of the colors.



Fig. 17a/b A photo of Sinai Stela 115, unknown source

hair is black, and their kilts are white with red stripes. Nevertheless, their hairdo is Egyptian in style.

The scene presents the topos of “riding dignitary,” with a boy in the front and a somewhat taller (older?) person walking behind the donkey. The dignitary is sitting sidesaddle, like Khebeded, but his legs are presented to the right side of the donkey and are thus visible to the viewer. He holds a duckbill axe in his left hand, under his arm. The artist painted the wooden part of the axe in red – the typical color of Canaanite wooden weapons – which is also the case in the scene of Beni Hassan.⁵⁵ In

order to differentiate the metal part, it was painted yellow. Like Khebeded, the dignitary on the donkey carries two weapons. Besides the axe, he holds a kind of stick, hardly visible now, in his right hand.

The acolyte walking behind him carries two weapons. A javelin⁵⁶ – another typical Canaanite weapon – on his left shoulder. Here again, the wood and metal parts are differentiated by the red and yellow colors, respectively. In his left hand he holds a red wooden baton.

The boy walking in front holds a similar javelin in his left hand, while gripping the donkey’s rope in his right hand. The donkey has the same nose-ring as found on Stela 112 above.

The scene appears at the bottom of the stela, as in Stela 112 (described above), below a text recounting the achievements of the stela’s owner.

3.2. Stela 115 (*SINAI I*, Pl.XXXIX, W. Face, Fig. 16, 17a, b)

This stela is dated to year 18, probably of Amemhet III. The drawing in *SINAI I* (Fig. 16) shows a similar scene to Stelae 112 and 87. Here the boy seems to be walking behind the donkey and the acolyte strides in front. The boy holds a stick, but the acolyte in front appears to be unarmed. The dignitary sits on the donkey in sidesaddle fashion, his legs, as in the case of Khebeded, resting on the other side of the donkey – invisible to the viewer.⁵⁷ He carries a weapon that was identified by Bietak as a duckbill axe.⁵⁸ *SINAI I* reads the inscription above as: *Rtnw 6* and on the side *Ipw s3 irw(?)* “Six people of Retenu. *Ipw* son of *Irw*”⁵⁹ The hieroglyphs are of low quality.⁶⁰ A new picture of the stela shows that this part is already badly weathered and the boy that walks behind is hardly discernible (Fig. 17a/b). The right side of the hieroglyphic inscription also suffered. Yet the duckbill axe remains very clear. The dignitary’s body and what is left of his hairdo look different from the drawing in the original publication. He has a slender body, and the part of his head that survived shows a different hairdo, probably of the “mushroom” variety. The long hairdo illustrated in the drawing could not be traced to the new picture. The Canaanites appear here at the end of a list of *d3d3t*, “staff” in a similar context as

⁵⁵ In Beni Hassan the wood is reddish-brown; see SHEDID 1994, 97, Fig. 96; 60, Figs 101, 102; 69, Fig.116.

⁵⁶ See Beni Hassan and in Middle Bronze Age graves, e.g. GARFINKEL and COHEN 2007, 105.

⁵⁷ Is a leg peeping out behind the donkey?

⁵⁸ BIETAK 1992, 34.

⁵⁹ See here MORENZ 2011, 229

⁶⁰ See also ČERNÝ 1935, 387, Fig. 4.

the hieroglyphic inscription of Khebeded in stela 92.⁶¹ The quality of the hieroglyphs on all sides of this stela is rather mediocre.

3.3. Stela 103 (*SINAI I*, Pl. XLIV, W. Face, Fig. 18)

This stela dates to year 25 of Amenemhet III. A donkey scene must have been present at the bottom of the West Face of the stela. The scene may well be a secondary addition. However, the stone is badly weathered and no inscription to the pictorial scene has survived. Only two people are visible in the drawing. The first is a dignitary, riding sidesaddle, this time with his legs facing the observer, and holding a spear or another weapon. A boy walks in front of him, with a short, thick weapon. The most visible detail in this scene is the donkey's large nose-ring. Due to the poor state of preservation, the scene's context cannot be established with any certainty.⁶²

4. The Donkey Rider Scene as Cultural “Identity Signifier”

In her elaborate article “Image and Identity”, Dorothea Arnold uses the term “identity signifier” to refer to specific repetitive pictorial representations of Asiatics in Egypt. In her discussion, she is careful to differentiate between the negative Canaanite identity signifier “foe” and the positive signifier “friend” in the Middle Kingdom.

Using this approach, the donkey rider scene in Sinai is a repetitive “pictorial idiom,” specific to this site, yet using signifiers of Egyptian decorum. It was probably produced by Egyptians, preserving a representation of Canaanites which formulates an emphatic “otherness.” It sharply differentiates the represented cultural behavior of this specific group from their Egyptian superiors and partners.⁶³

The “otherness” is emphasized as the Canaanite dignitaries are represented as donkey riders, a posture and status symbol foreign to the Egyptian culture.⁶⁴ Through the choice of this particular mes-

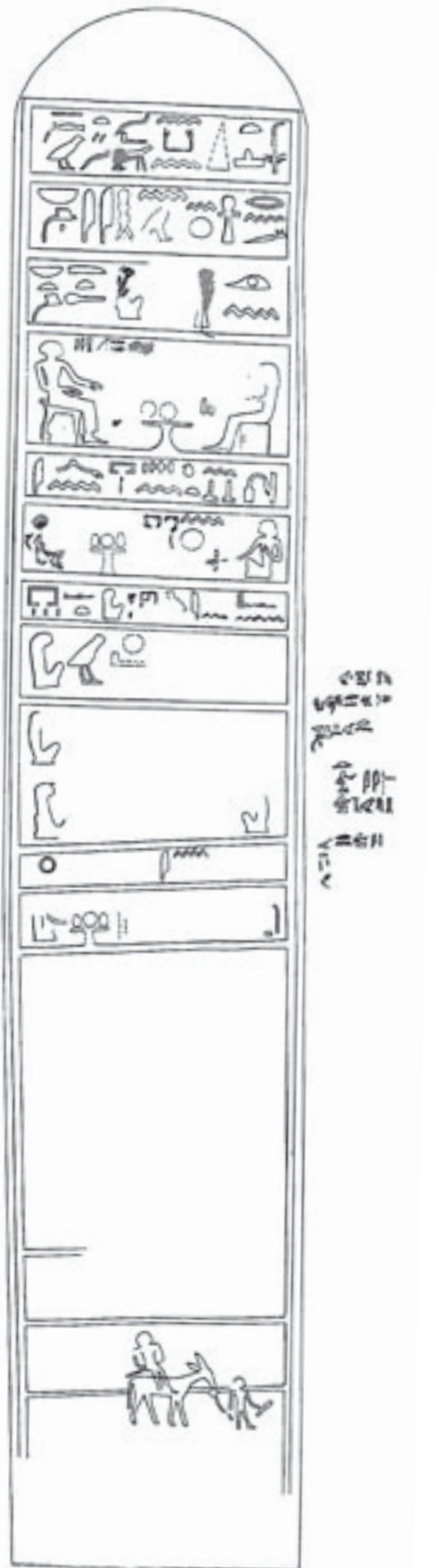



Fig. 18 Sinai Stela 103, West Face, after *SINAI I*, Pl. XLIV

⁶¹ See GOLDWASSER 2012, 15.

⁶² A reading of Khebeded's name and title on this stela was recently proposed by MORENZ 2011, 232. I could not follow his reading.

⁶³ Compare here the discussion of these scenes by MORENZ 2011, 225–234.

⁶⁴ The donkey relief exhibits a high level of “Egyptianness”. Egyptian dignitaries do not normally allow themselves to be pictured riding donkeys.

sage, the Canaanite dignitaries are referred to by their position and role in *their* own culture.⁶⁵ The “foreignness” message is further intensified by the different hairstyle and the Canaanite weapons. The weapons of all involved add to this “pictorial idiom” the powerful adjective [warring abilities], although nowhere are Khebeded or the other donkey riders specifically identified as “soldiers.” The donkey riders are clearly differentiated from professional Canaanite soldiers in Sinai. Three Canaanites in Sinai are represented on a small obelisk as soldiers. They use an enlarged variation of the Egyptian hieroglyph  as a classifier for their names, yet they carry Canaanite duckbill axes and clearly wear a Canaanite mushroom hairstyle (Fig. 19).⁶⁶ Here the classifier (the signifier) gives a strong impression of Egyptianness, but the different details added to the weapons draw the viewer toward the more specific referent of “Canaanite soldier.”⁶⁷ This highly Egyptianized representation, and the fact that the obelisk was discovered in the temple precinct itself, point to the fact that these Canaanite soldiers were members of Egyptian officialdom.

Within the ambit of implicit assumptions and ambitions of the Sinai expeditions, the recipients, if Egyptian or Canaanite, must have seen in the repetitive pictorial idiom of the donkey rider an image suggestive of familiar cultural associations.⁶⁸ Yet the picture is also imbued with clear universal information. Any beholder, even if uninitiated in Canaanite culture, would identify the “important man” not necessarily by the cultural convention, but by the universal translation of the pictorial composition. It candidly suggests the importance of the armed central figure comfortably positioned on the animal, while two followers engaged in his service and protection march in front and behind.

The repetitive donkey rider scene clearly belongs to motifs within Egyptian decorum, designated by Arnold as “identity signifiers.” In this case the Canaanite signifier carries the meaning “friend,” as opposed to the hieroglyphic common Canaanite identity signifier “foe.”⁶⁹ *Yet the donkey riders carry another additional signifier, that of “power” or “authority.”* In this sense they differ sharply from the Beni Hassan scene of friendly incoming Canaanites, which is devoid of any message of authority, even if the male participants are carrying weapons. The pictorial representations of the donkey riders are the only instances in Egyptian art of the Middle Kingdom in which Asiatics were represented within the Egyptian decorum as *positive* images with *attributes of authority*. A comparable message might have been sent by the exquisite life size statue of a Canaanite dignitary, perhaps a local ruler at Tell el-Dab^a. However, this fine piece of sculpture is rooted more in a hybrid tradition of advanced mixed Canaanite-Egyptian decorum. Its social and cultural role as well as its identity as a “friendly” signifier are less certain.⁷⁰ It should be noted that the signifier of the donkey rider emerges on the fringes of the Egyptian culture—in Sinai. This fringe area shows (like other fringe areas in Egypt) different cultural innovations. We will return to this topic later.

5. In Search of the *Signified* – the Eastern Delta “Levantine Warrior”?

The pictorial signifier of the donkey rider in Sinai is built on a choice of prototypical culturemes from a wide repertoire of options that was available to the producer of the image. A similar repertoire, if found elsewhere, may point to the definition of the social and ethnic background of the donkey riders.

⁶⁵ For donkey burials in elite graves in the Levant see, WAPNISH 1997; BIETAK 1991. For donkey riding in Canaan see STADELMANN 2006. The importance of the donkey in the Canaanite and Hebrew culture is widely reflected in the Bible; see WAY 2011, and also GREENFIELD, H. J., I. SHAI and A. M. MAEIR 2012.

⁶⁶ Compare BIETAK 1992, 34.

⁶⁷ On the process of “referent tracking” by Egyptian classifiers, see GOLDWASSER & GRINEVALD 2012, 25–28.

⁶⁸ To a Canaanite beholder, the image may evoke religious and maybe even literary connotations attached to donkeys in the Levant. For the role of the donkey in Canaanite religion and literature, see WAY 2011 with earlier bibliography.

⁶⁹ ARNOLD 2010, 194–196. The topos representation of the Canaanite is best seen in the detailed classifier for the word *šmw* which appears above the Beni Hassan representation of the Canaanite caravan. There is a genuflecting Canaanite, identical in details to the carvaneers, his hands tied behind his back, see also n.14. Topos and mimesis are sharply contrasted in this micro-context. On Topos and Mimesis, see LOPRIENO 1988, and on Topos and Mimesis in Sinai during the Middle Kingdom, HIKADE 2007.

⁷⁰ For an elaborate discussion of the statue and his role, see SCHIESTL 2006, and Arnold 2010, 192–194.

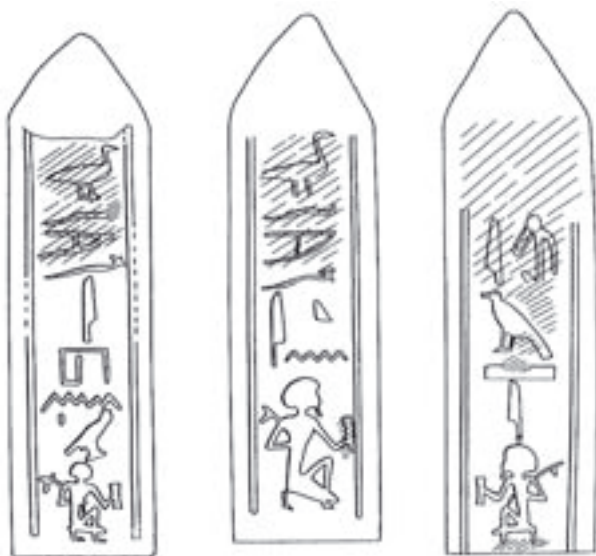


Fig. 19 Sinai Obelisk 163, after *SINAI I*, Pl. LI

5.1. The “Levantine Warrior” Tombs in the Early Middle Bronze Age in Tell el-Dab^a

The earliest tombs identified in Tell el-Dab^a until now (end of 12th Dynasty) were identified by Robert Schiestl as belonging to the type of “Levantine Warrior” burials.⁷¹ Their typical features are a standardized repertoire of weapons, consisting of javelin heads, a duck bill axe and daggers (Fig. 20). Some tombs also contain donkey burials, and one tomb still contains a silver nose ring at the region of the nose of the donkey (Fig. 21). Also known are bronze belts and, somewhat later, golden fillets (Fig. 21).

5.2. The Title *ḥkꜣ n Rtnw* in Tell el-Dab^a

The title *ḥkꜣ n Rtnw* was found twice in the Tell el-Dab^a excavations. Once on an amethyst scarab found in an early 13th dynasty context, and the other, on a cylinder seal stamp. The seal seems to originate from a “green jasper” workshop in the Levant.⁷² The cylinder impression was found under the early Hyksos palace (attributed to Khayan).⁷³ Did Asiatic rulers who migrated into the Eastern

Delta keep the title “Ruler of Retenu”? Bietak has suggested that the statue of the famous ruler found at the site represents the *ḥkꜣ n Rtnw* who used to reside at Tell el-Dab^a during the late 12th early 13th Dynasty. It has been suggested that Asiatics settled in the Delta already since Old Kingdom, and that the Delta culture shows Asiatic features also before the Hyksos rule.⁷⁴ If there had already been a *ḥkꜣ n Rtnw* in the Delta by the end of the 12th Dynasty, the title of Khebeded would become far clearer and meaningful also within the context of the Egyptian administration. It may well be that the title refers to rural rulers in the Levant during this period, as clearly reflected in the Sinuhe tale. The Canaanite host of Sinuhe is described as *ḥkꜣ n Rtnw ḥrt* “Ruler of Upper Retenu.”⁷⁵ He is not a town-dweller, but a rich landowner.⁷⁶ By marrying the latter’s daughter, Sinuhe becomes part of the same echelon. He is also involved in local hostilities which are sometimes resolved by a dual confrontation, i.e. a lone warrior campaign. Sinuhe’s success seems to be related to intelligence, self-confidence and entrepreneurship. No interceding central power is mentioned. The text gives particular priority to the specification of the different weapons in Sinuhe’s struggle, including the axe of the local warrior who is identified as *nḥt n Rtnw*⁷⁷ – “warrior of Retenu” – by Sinuhe. This textual narrative fits well with the self-representation that emerges from the repertoire of the Delta “warrior tombs.” Both representations of the Levantine warriors of the Middle Kingdom – the literary and the material – are devoid of religious and magical connotation.⁷⁸

6. Khebeded as a Representation in the Pictorial of an Eastern Delta “Levantine Warrior”?

Khebeded appears to belong to the “warrior class” so well defined in the early tombs of Tell el-Dab^a. He is represented with a similar repertoire to those of the warrior tombs (Fig. 20). His followers carry javelins, while he carries a duckbill axe and scimitar. The type of jar associated with him is typical

⁷¹ SCHIESTL 2002.

⁷² For a discussion of the scarab, see MARTIN 1998. On the seal, see BIETAK 2010b, 989–990, Fig. 17.

⁷³ BIETAK 2010b; 2010c. See also BIETAK et al. in this volume.

⁷⁴ BIETAK 2010a, 142, ARNOLD 2010, SCHIESTL 2002, 330, with note 10.

⁷⁵ BLACKMAN 1972, B31–32

⁷⁶ Described somewhat anachronistically as a “Bedouin Sheikh” by REDFORD 1992, 84.

⁷⁷ BLACKMAN 1972, B109. Was this the term used in Egyptian to describe the class of “Levantine warriors”? The axe of the warrior is defined as *minb* (B134) that could refer in this period to a Canaanite axe? See DZA 23.907.780, and EDEL 1986, 32.

⁷⁸ For this important characteristic, see ARNOLD 2010, 198.

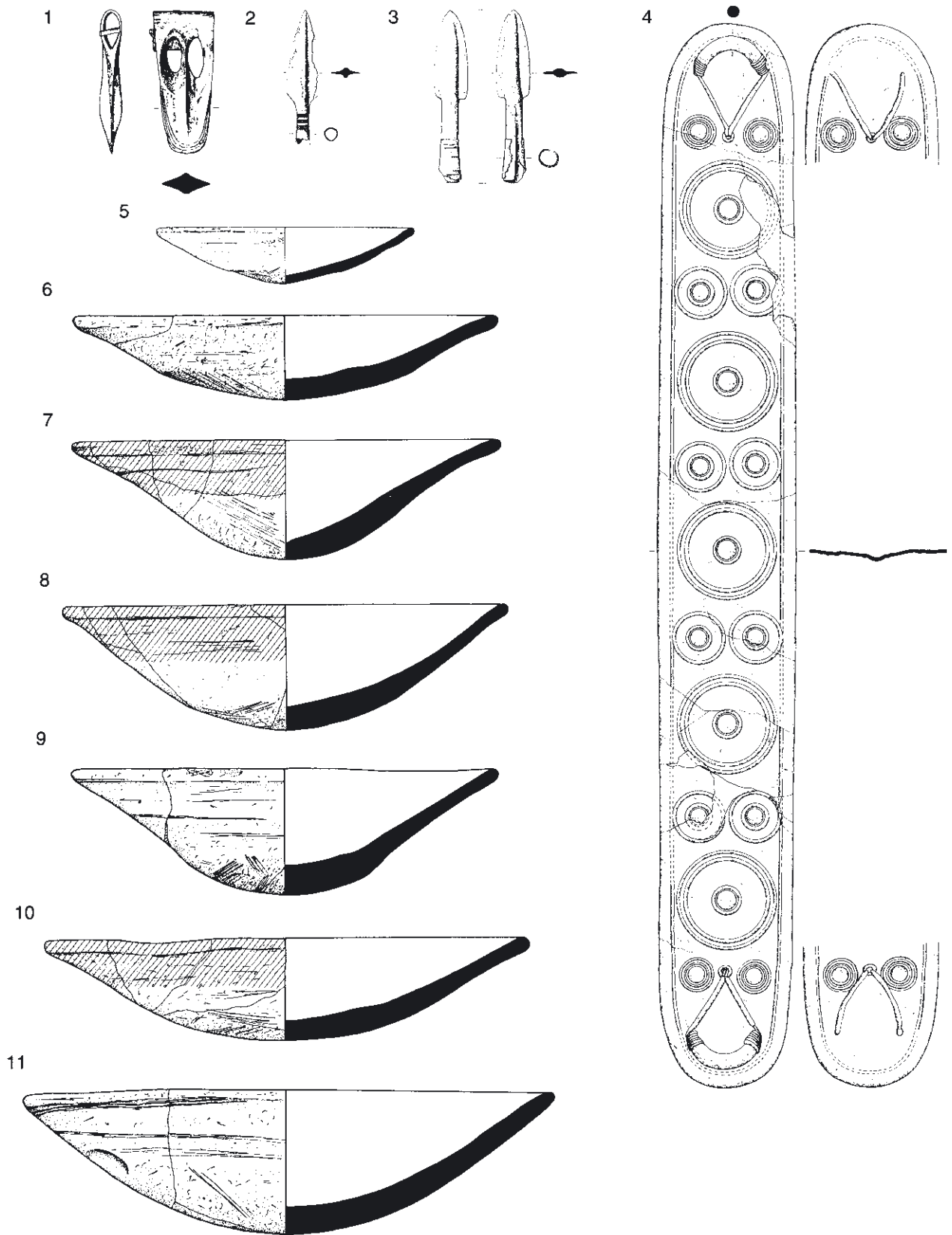


Fig. 20 Contents of a warrior tomb in Tell el Dab'a, after SCHIESTL 2002: 334, Fig. 3

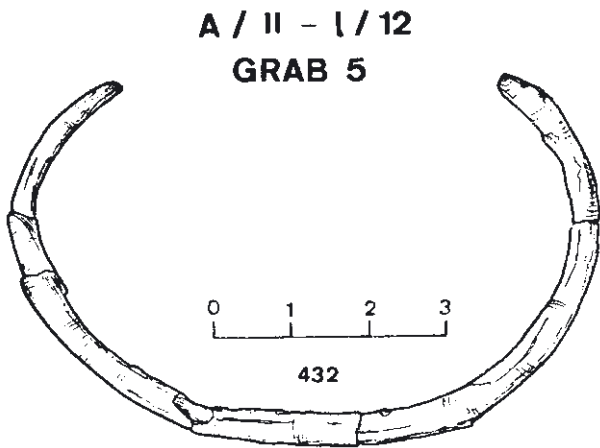


Fig. 21 Donkey's nose ring from a warrior grave from Tell el Dab'a, after BIETAK 1991: 59, Abb. 29

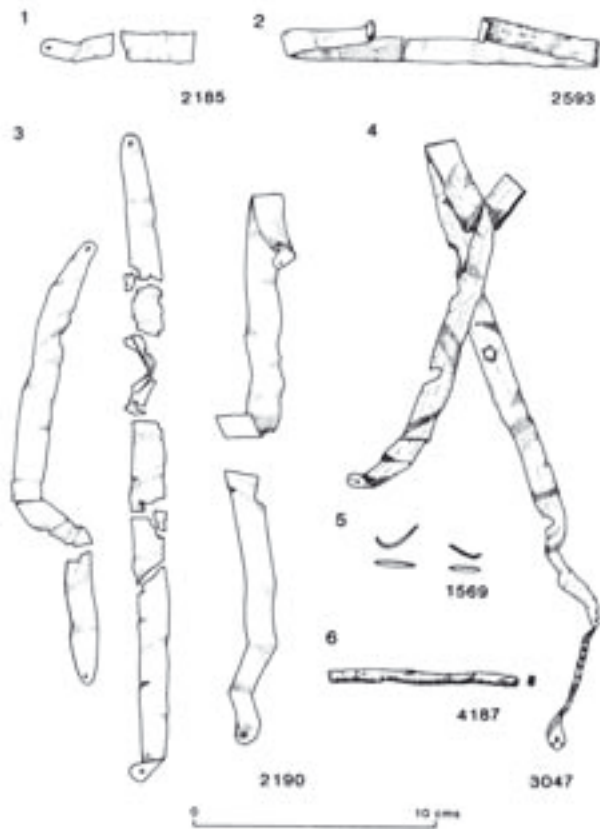


Fig. 22 Gold headbands from warrior tombs, after PHILIP 2006: 87, Fig. 40

of jar-forms from the warrior tombs (Fig. 23). His donkey has a nose ring like the one found, *in situ*, at a donkey muzzle in one of the warrior graves.⁷⁹ His follower, probably his son, wears a fillet, another well-known find from the graves (Fig. 22).

⁷⁹ See note 24 above.

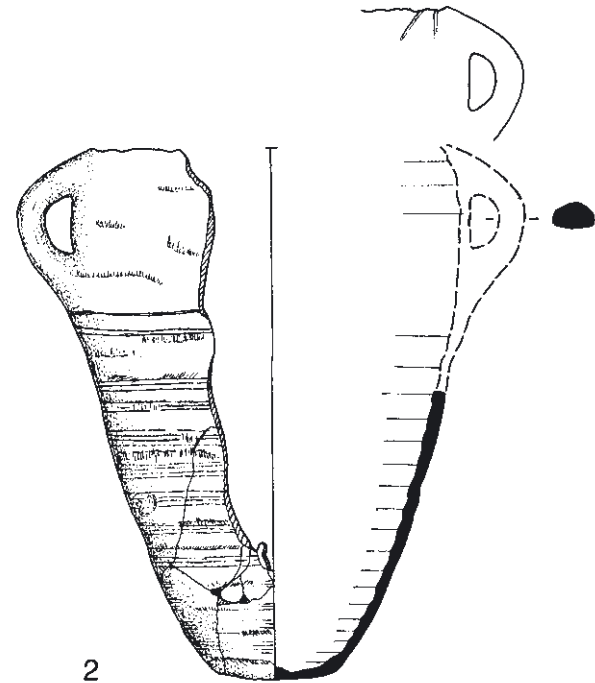
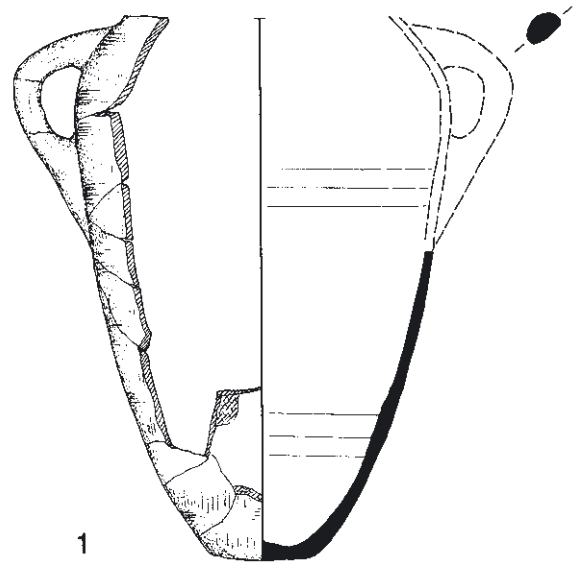


Fig. 23 Canaanite jars from a warrior tomb, after SCHIESTL 2002: 336, Fig 5

It seems that the donkey riders of Sinai may well be a *pictorial representation* of the group of the eastern Delta Levantine warriors who enjoyed a brief period of success in the early days of Tell el-Dab'a.⁸⁰ These people were not warriors in the nar-

⁸⁰ See BIETAK 1997, 103, also WAY 2011, 107.

row sense of the word, but desert experts, caravaneers and entrepreneurs “on the move.” Some of them might have settled at Tell el-Dab^a by the end of the Middle Kingdom, integrating into eastern Delta identity, as suggested by Arnold. In the landscape of the Ancient Near East, all such groups must, to a certain extent, have been armed groups. It seems that monumental Ancient Near Eastern type of architecture in Tell el-Dab^a is not related to this early phase of the warrior tombs, a fact which fits in well with the background of this social group. The large palaces and temples of Ancient Near Eastern monumental architecture appear later at the site, with the ascendancy of the 14th dynasty. As postulated by Bietak and Arnold, this later phase may represent a group of new rulers and plenipotentiaries, originating in the sprawling urban centers of the Levant. Their approach to self-representative images also seems to differ greatly. The new rulers strive to be represented as Egyptian pharaohs, setting in motion the process known in Egyptology as “appropriation” of earlier monuments.

However, the main message inherent in all representations of the “Levantine warrior” highlights *individual, secular, dignitaries and plenipotentiaries*, not dependent on – or beholden to – any complex system of royal power or royal favors. Their possible fall from power in Tell el-Dab^a, *may provide the answer for the absence of the new alphabetic script at the Canaanite-Egyptian center.*⁸¹ The new alphabet stayed with them, and their fellow


“desert experts” moved along with their caravans to Egypt (e.g. Wadi el-Ḥôl), to Canaan and to the Lebanon, far from any institutional intervention until the beginning of the Iron Age.⁸² During the Late Bronze Age the alphabet maintains its original function: written names and very short prayers. The devotions recorded in the early alphabetic script in Sinai bear witness to a direct, independent approach to the divine in the Canaanite culture. This god-man relationship, without a king as a necessary intermediate, is rarely found in Egypt until the end of the Second Intermediate Period, but is known in the Levant.⁸³ On a scarab from Sidon, dated by late Jean Yoyotte to the end of the Middle Kingdom,⁸⁴ a private individual bearing a non-Egyptian name risked to describe himself as “beloved (*mry*) of Ba^{al} (=Seth), the Lord of the (land) of *Bii*.” The favor of being “beloved of the god” was reserved in Middle Kingdom Egypt for the king. The scarab is carved with great care with some of the best Egyptian hieroglyphs of the period.⁸⁵ A similar direct attitude to the god is represented in a graffito from Rod el-^cAir in Sinai, where the king is not mentioned and a minor official calls himself “beloved of Hathor.”⁸⁶ It is a short step from this to the Canaanite phrase so prevalent in the alphabetic inscriptions of Sinai: *m’hb b^{al}l* “beloved of Ba^{al}.”⁸⁷ This same phrase, together with its Egyptian rendition, *mry ḥwth^r nbt mfk^{3t}* “beloved of Hathor, lady of turquoise,” appears on the small sphinx – the nascent Canaanite script’s “Rosetta Stone.”⁸⁸

⁸¹ On this topic, see SASS 2005, 153.

⁸² For a full reconstruction of this process, see GOLDWASSER 2011.

⁸³ See VERNUS 1996. For cases of turning directly to god in Egypt before the New Kingdom, see BLUMENTHAL 1998, 218–223, and LUISELLI 2011, 90–107 and passim. KEEL 1989, 276–277, suggested looking for the roots of Egyptian ‘persönliche Frömmigkeit’ in Canaanite religious attitudes.

⁸⁴ Personal communication.

⁸⁵ For the scarab see, LOFFET 2006. On this scarab, and a discussion on the possible syncretism Seth-Ba^{al} as early as the Middle Kingdom, GOLDWASSER 2006, 123. The name of the god is written logographically with the  animal, yet the signified is probably Ba^{al}. The hieroglyphs are executed

in a masterful, confident hand, and show close affinities to semi-cursive Egyptian scripts of the period, see FISCHER 1976, 40–44.

⁸⁶ *SINAI I*, Pl. XCIII, no. 507, GOLDWASSER 2006, 127, Fig.7b. Egyptian inscriptions in Wadi Magharah which may have been written by Canaanites, show similar uses of the phrase *mry ḥwth^r*, *SINAI I*, e.g. Pl. XII, 28; see Goldwasser 2006, 126–130.

⁸⁷ “The same combination [“beloved of Ba^{al}” O.G.] recurs about ten times in the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions with slight variations,” SASS 1988, 12–13, and note 8.

⁸⁸ For the decipherment of the script, see GARDINER 1916, 1961.

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