

Merneptah Stele (circa 1230 B.C.)



This victory stele belongs to Merneptah, though it may be his taking credit for what was accomplished by his predecessor Ramesses II. It is certain that Ramesses II held a level of control over the region, so if this stele truly pertains to Merneptah it would have him having to reestablish what had existed just before him. This is not out of the question if a revolt had taken place. The alternative, having Merneptah ascribe earlier events to him, is also quite probable, as this is something that was commonly done by Pharaohs, especially when their predecessor was a stronger ruler and they needed to try and claim equal authority. Merneptah's historic control of the region was precarious at best.

The stele includes just one line in regards to Israel. It makes clear that Israel at this stage, refers to a people since the hieroglyphic determinative for "country" is absent for Israel.



The line pertaining to Israel from the stele: “Israel is wasted, its seed is no longer” or “Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more”. Immediately before this line is a reference to Canaan, Ashkelon, and Gezer – all in the region as well. “Canaan is captive with all woe. Ashkelon is conquered, Gezer seized, Yanoam made nonexistent; Israel is wasted, his seed is not.”

"Israel is laid waste; its seed is not."



ysr̄t

Israel

fk.t

waste

bn

[negative]

pr.t

seed/grain

=f

his/its

The other defeated enemies of Egypt, besides Israel, were given the determinative for a city-state—"a throw stick plus three mountains designating a foreign country". The hieroglyphs referring to Israel instead use the determinative sign for foreign peoples: a throw stick plus a man and a woman over three vertical plural lines. This sign is typically used to signify nomadic groups or peoples without a fixed city-state, thus implying Israel to be semi-nomadic or having a rural spread out status.