Praise of the Scribe’s Profession: Egyptian Letter

A scribe was typically a royal or temple official, one of the few literate, and so ranked higher than the illiterate masses. This document is a letter of advice from a high-level government official to his son, exhorting him to learn the skills of a scribe. This document gives us insight into the demanding and perilous existence of the majority of the ancient Egyptian population, as well as the attitude of Egyptian elites toward various types of work.


Focus Questions:
1. What sorts of class distinctions are described in this document?
2. What daily pleasures and activities are described?
3. Why describe the life of the peasant and the soldier so bleakly?

PAPYRUS LANSING
Title
[Beginning of the instruction in letter-writing made by the royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods, Nebmare-nakht] For his apprentice, the scribe Wenemdiamun.

Praise of the Scribe's Profession
[The royal scribe] and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods. Nebmare-nakht speaks to the scribe Wenemdiamun. [Apply yourself to this] noble profession.... You will find it useful.... You will be advanced by your superiors. You will be sent on a mission.... Love writing, shun dancing; then you become a worthy official. Do not long for the marsh thicket. Turn your back on throw stick and chase. By day write with your fingers; recite by night. Befriend the scroll, the palette. It pleases more than wine. Writing for him who knows it is better than all other professions. It pleases more than bread and beer, more than clothing and ointment. It is worth more than an inheritance in Egypt, than a tomb in the west.

Advice to the Unwilling Pupil
Young fellow, how conceited you are! You do not listen when I speak. Your heart is denser than a great obelisk, a hundred cubits high, ten cubits thick. When it is finished and ready for loading, many work gangs draw it. It hears the words of men; it is loaded on a barge. Departing from Yebu it is conveyed, until it comes to rest on its place in Thebes.

So also a cow is bought this year, and it plows the following year. It learns to listen to the herdsman; it only lacks words. Horses brought from the fields, they forget their mothers. Yoked they go up and down in all his majesty's errand. They become like those that bore them, that stand in the stable. They do their utmost for fear of a beating.

But although I beat you with every kind of stick, you do not listen. If I knew another way of doing it, I would do it for you, that you might listen. You are a person fit for writing, through you have not yet known a woman. Your heart discerns. Your fingers are skilled, your mouth is apt for reciting.

Writing is more enjoyable than enjoying a basket of...and beans; more enjoyable than a mother's giving birth, when her heart knows no distaste. She is constant in nursing her son; her breast is in his mouth every day. Happy is the heart [of] him who writes; he is young each day.

All Occupations Are Bad Except That of the Scribe
See for yourself with your own eye. The occupations lie before you. The washer man's day is going up, going down. All his limbs are weak, [from] whitening his neighbors' clothes every day, from washing their linen.
The maker of pots is smeared with soil, like one whose relations have died. His hands, his feet are full of clay, he is like one who lives in the bog.

The cobbler mingles with vats. His odor is penetrating. His hands are red with madder, like one who is smeared with blood. He looks behind him for the kite, like one whose flesh is exposed.

The watchman prepares garlands and polishes vase-stands. He spends a night of toil just as one on whom the sun shines.

The merchants travel downstream and upstream. They are as busy as can be, carrying goods from one town to another. They supply him who has wants. But the tax collectors carry off the gold, that most precious of metals.

The ships' crews from every house (of commerce), they receive their loads. They depart from Egypt for Syria, and each man's god is with him. (But) not one of them says: "We shall see Egypt again!"

The carpenter who is in the shipyard carries the timber and stacks it. If he gives today the Output of yesterday, woe to his limbs! The shipwright stands behind him to tell him evil things.

His outworker who is in the fields, his is the toughest of all the jobs. He spends the day loaded with his tools, tied to his tool box. When he returns home at night, he is loaded with the tool box and the timbers, his drinking mug, and his whet-stones.

The scribe, he alone, records the output of all of them. Take note of it!

The Misfortunes of the Peasant
Let me also expound to you the situation of the peasant, that other tough occupation. [Comes] the inundation and soaks him...he attends to his equipment. By day he cuts his farming tools; by night he twists rope. Even his midday hour he spends on farm labor. He equips himself to go to the field as if he were a warrior. The dried field lies before him; he goes out to get his team. When he has been after the herdsman for many days, he gets his team and comes back with it. He makes for it a place in the field. Comes dawn, he goes to make a start and does not find it in its place. He spends three days searching for it; he finds it in the bog. He finds no hides on them; the jackals have chewed them. He comes out, his garment in his hand, to beg for himself a team.

When he reaches his field he finds [it] broken up. He spends time cultivating, and the snake is after him. It finishes off the seed as it is cast to the ground. He does not see a green blade. He does three plowings with borrowed grain. His wife has gone down to the merchants and found nothing for barter. Now the scribe lands on the shore. He surveys the harvest. Attendants are behind him with staffs, Nubians with clubs. One says (to him): "Give grain." "There is none." He is beaten savagely. He is bound, thrown in the well, submerged head down. His wife is bound in his presence. His children are in fetters. His neighbors abandon them and flee. When it's over, there is no grain.

If you have any sense, be a scribe. If you have learned about the peasant, you will not be able to be one. Take note of it!...

The Scribe Does Not Suffer Like the Soldier
Furthermore, look, I instruct you to make you sound; to make you hold the palette freely. To make you become one whom the king trusts; to make you gain entrance to treasury and granary. To make you receive the ship-load at the gate of the granary. To make you issue the offerings on feast days. You are dressed in fine clothes; you own horses. Your boat is on the river; you are supplied with attendants. You stride about inspecting. A mansion is built in your town. You have a powerful office, given you by the king. Male and female slaves are about you. Those who are in the fields grasp your hand, on plots that you have made. Look, I make you into a staff of life! Put the writings in your heart, and you will be protected from all kinds of toil. You will become a worthy official.
Do you not recall the (fate of) the unskilled man? His name is not known. He is ever burdened [like an ass carrying] in front of the scribe who knows what he is about.

Come, [let me tell] you the woes of the soldier, and how many are his supervisors; the general, the troop-commander, the officer who leads, the standard-bearer, the lieutenant, the scribe, the commander of fifty, and the garrison captain. They go in and out in the halls of the palace, saying: "Get laborers!" He is awakened at any hour. One is after his as (after) a donkey. He toils until the Aten (sun) sets in his darkness of night. He is hungry, his belly hurts; he is dead while yet alive. When he receives the grain-ration, having been released from duty, it is not good for grinding.

He is called up for Syria. He may not rest. There are no clothes, no sandals. The weapons of war are assembled at the fortress of Sile. His march is uphill through mountains. He drinks water every third day: it is smelly and tastes of salt. His body is ravaged by illness. The enemy comes, surrounds him with missiles, and life recedes from him. He is told: "Quick, forward, valiant soldier! Win for yourself a good name!" He does not know what he is about. His body is weak, his legs fail him. When victory is won, the captives are handed over to his majesty, to be taken to Egypt. The foreign woman faints on the march; she hangs herself [on] the soldier's neck. His knapsack drops, another grabs it while he is burdened with the woman. His wife and children are in their village; he dies and does not reach it. If he comes out alive, he is worn out from marching. Be he at large, be he detained, the soldier suffers. If he leaps and joins the deserters, all his people are imprisoned. He dies on the edge of the desert, and there is none to perpetuate his name. He suffers in death as in life. A big sack is brought for him; he does not know his resting place.

Be a scribe, and be spared from soldiering! You call and one says: "Here I am." You are safe from torments. Every man seeks to raise himself up. Take note of it!
Egyptian Diplomatic Correspondence: excerpts from *The Amarna Letters*

The 250 or so tablets now called *The Amarna Letters*, were discovered by Egyptian farmers in 1887. The tablets consist of diplomatic correspondence between the pharaohs and their representatives in Canaan, Mesopotamia, and elsewhere. Most of the tablets belong to the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhnaten (the monotheist) between the years 1386 and 1321 BCE. Written in cuneiform, the language of diplomacy, the letters help us understand the relationships amongst the various kingdoms of the area, including Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, the Hittites, and a number of smaller vassal kingdoms.


Focus Questions:
1. What is the relationship between local governors or rulers and the king (pharaoh)?
2. What are the relationships of local rulers with one another? How do they relate their disputes to the king?
3. How would you describe the political situation in the Levant in the fourteenth century BCE?

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**EA, No. 234**

To the king, my lord, the Sun-god from heaven: Thus Zatatna, prince of Accho, thy servant, the servant of the king, and (5) the dirt (under) his two feet, the ground which he treads. At the two feet of the king, my lord, the Sun-god from heaven, seven times, seven times I fall, both prone and supine. (10) Let the king, my lord, hear the word of his servant! [Zir]damyashda has withdrawn from Biryawaza. [He was] with Shuta, the servant of the (15) king in the city of […] He did not say anything to him. The army of the king, my lord, has departed. He was with it in Megiddo. (20) I said nothing to him, but he deserted to me, and now Shuta has written to me: "Give (25) Zirdamyashda to Biryawaza!" But I did not consent to give him up. Behold, Accho is (as Egyptian) as Magdal (30) in, Egypt, but the king, my lord, has not heard that [Shut]a has turned against me. Now let the king, my lord, send (35) his commissioner and fetch him.

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1This letter comes from the time of Akh-en-Aton. Shuta (pronounce Suta) was an Egyptian officer, probably the great-grandfather of Ramses II; Biryawaza (whose name was formerly read erroneously Namayawaza) was prince of Damascus under Egyptian suzerainty. All personal names (except Shuta) are Indo-Aryan.

**EA, No. 244**

To the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, say: Thus Biridiya, the faithful servant of the (5) king. At the two feet of the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, seven and seven times I fall. Let the king know that (10) ever since the archers returned (to Egypt?), Lab'ayu has carried on hostilities against me, and we are not able to pluck the wool, and we are not able to go outside the gate in the presence of Lab'ayu, since he learned that thou hast not given (20) archers; and now his face is set to' take Megiddo, (25) but let the king protect his city, lest Lab'ayu seize it. (30) Verily, the city is destroyed by death from pestilence and disease. Let the king give (35) one hundred garrison troops to guard the city lest Lab'ayu seize it. Verily, there is no other purpose in (41) Lab'ayu. He seeks to destroy Megiddo.

Further, I said to my brethren, "If the gods, of the king, our lord, grant (5) that we capture Lab'ayu, then we will bring him alive to the king, our lord"; but my mare was felled by an arrow, and I alighted (io) afterwards and rode with Yashdata, but before my arrival, they had slain him. (i5) Verily, Yashdata is thy servant, and he entered the battle with me. And verily, […] (20) the life of the king, m[y lord] [and] […] all in […] of the king, [my] lord, […] , and Zurata (25) removed Lab'ayu from Megiddo, saying to me: "I will send him by ship (30) to the king," and Zurata took him and sent him home from Hannathon, for Zurata had received his ransom money (35) in his hand.

Further, what have I done to the king, my lord, that he should despise me and honor (40) my younger brothers? Zurata has sent Lab'ayu, and Zurata has sent Balu-mihir to their homes, and let the king, my lord, be informed!
Footnote
1 Biridiya was prince of Megiddo at the end of the reign of Amen-hotep III and the beginning of the reign of Akh-en-Aton; his name is Indo-Aryan like most other princely names of northern Palestine at that time. Lab'ayu (whose name meant approximately "lion-like" in Canaanite) was prince of Shechem in the central hill-country and was constantly raiding. The territory and caravans of his neighbors on all sides.
2 This is the latter part (all that is preserved) of a continued letter from Biridiya of Megiddo. Zurata, whom Biridiya accuses of treachery, was prince of Acre (biblical Accho).

RA, xix, p. 971
To the king, my lord, and my Sun-god say: Thus Biridiya, the true servant of the king. (5) At the feet of the king, my lord, and my Sun-god, seven times and seven times. I fall. Let the king be informed concerning his servant and concerning his city. (10) Behold, I am working in the town of Shunama, and I bring men of (?Gen. 49:15) the corvée, (15) but behold, the governors who are with me do not as I (do): they do not (20) work in the town of Shunama, and they do not bring men for the corvée, but I alone (25) bring men for the corvée from the town of Yqpu. They come from Shu[namaj], and likewise from the town of Nuribda. (30) So let the king be informed concerning his city!

EA, No. 250
[To] the king, my lord, say: Thus Ba’lu-UR.SAG, thy servant. At the feet of the king, my lord, seven times, seven times, I fall. Let the king, my lad, know that (5) the two sons of a rebel against the king my lord, the two sons of Lab'ayu, have determined to destroy the land of the king, my lord, after their father's death. And let the king, my lord, know that (m) many days the two sons of Lab'ayu have accused me (saying): "Why hast thou given the town of Gitipadalla into the hand of the king, thy lord—the city which Lab'ayu, our father, captured? (15) So thus the two sons of Lab'ayu spoke to me: "Declare war against the people of the land of Qena, because they swel our father; and if you do not declare war, then we are hostile to you."

But I answered them: (20) "May the god of the king, my lord, preserve me from making war against the people of the land of Qena, the servants of the king, my lord!" Now may it be agreeable to the king, my lord, to send one of his officers to Biryawaza (25) and let him say to him: "Wilt thou march against the two sons of Lab'ayu, or art thou a rebel against the king?" And after him, let the king, my lord, send to me [ ] the deed (30) of the king,' thy [lord], against the two sons of Lab'ayu [...] Milkilu has gone in to them[? ...] (35) ... [land of the king, my lord, with them after Milkilu and Lab'ayu died.] (40) And thus the two sons of Lab'ayu spoke: "Be hostile to the king, thy lord, like our father, when he' attacked Shunama and Burquna and Harabu, and (45) destroyed them/smote them. And he took Giti-rimuni, and he betrayed the helpers of the king, thy lord."

But I answered them: "The god of the king, my lord, preserve me from making (50) war against the king, my lord. The king, my lord, I serve,. and my brothers who hearken to me." But the courier of Milkilu does not move from the two sons of Lab'ayu (55) a (single) day. Behold, Milkilu seeks to destroy the land of the king, my lord. But there is no other intention with me—I serve the king, my lord, and the word which the king, my lord, speaks do I hear.

Footnotes:
1 This letter from the prince of Megiddo is very instructive because of the light it throws on forced labor for the king in the Plain of Esdraelon, several of whose towns and villages are mentioned. The word for "corvée" is the Hebrew mas, which is employed a little later of the tribe of Issachar in this very region.
2 The prince from whom this letter comes was in control of a district in the northern coastal plain of Palestine, south of Carmel. Here Lab'ayu's sons are described as continuing their father's activities. Biryawaza, whose help is wanted to subdue the recalcitrants, was prince of Damascus. Milkilu was prince of Gezer, whose territory adjoined the territory of Ba'lu-ur.sag ("Baal is a warrior") on the south.
EA, No. 252
To the king, my lord, say: Thus Lab'ayu, thy servant. At the feet of my lord I fall. (5) As for what thou hast written, "Are the people strong who have captured the town? How can the men be arrested?" (I reply) "By fighting was the town captured, (10) in spite of the fact that I had taken an oath of conciliation and that, when I took the oath, an (Egyptian) officer took the oath with me! The city as well as my god are captured. I am slandered/blamed (15) before the king, my lord."

Footnote:
1 This letter is written in almost pure Canaanite and was not understood until very recently. Lab'ayu virtuously protests that he was only repelling aggressors who had attacked his native town (not Shechem, which was his capital) in spite of a previous treaty sworn in the presence of an Egyptian official.

Further, when (even) ants are smitten, they do not accept it (passively), but they bite the hand of the man who smites them. (20) How could I hesitate this day when two of my towns are taken?
Further, even if thou shouldst say; "(25) Fall beneath them, and let them smite thee," I should still repel my foe, the men who seized the town and (30) my god, the despoilers of my father, (yea) I would repel them.

EA, No. 254
To the king, my lord and my Sun-god: Thus Lab'ayu, thy servant, and the dirt on which thou dost tread. At the feet of the king, my lord, (5) and my Sun-god, seven times and seven times I fall.
I have heard the words which the king wrote to me, and who am I that the king should lose his land (10) because of me? Behold, I am a faithful servant of the king, and I have not rebelled and I have not sinned, and I do not withhold my tribute, and I do not refuse (is) the requests of my commissioner. Now they wickedly slander me, but let the king, my lord, not impute rebellion to me!
Further, (20) my crime is namely that I entered Gezer and said publicly: (25) "Shall the king take my property, and not likewise the property of Miliklu?" I know the deeds which. Miliklu has done against me.
(30) Further, the king wrote concerning my son. I did not know that my son 'associates with the 'Apiru (36), and I have verily delivered him into the hand of Addaya.
Further, if the king should write for my wife, (40) how could I withhold her? If the king should write to me, "Plunge a bronze dagger into thy heart and (45) die!", how could I refuse to carry out the command of the king?

EA, No. 256
To Yanhamu, my lord say: Thus Mut-ba'lu, thy servant. At the two feet of my lord I fall. How is it said (5) before thee, "Mut-ba'lu has fled, Ayab has hidden himself?" How can the prince of Pella flee from the face of the commissioner (10) of the king, his lord? As the king my lord lives, as the king my lord lives, Ayab is not in Pella. Behold, he has not been (here) for two months( ?). (is) Indeed, ask Ben-ilima, ask Taduwa, ask Yashuya.
Again, at the instance of (20) the house of Shulum-Marduk, the city of Ashtartu came to (my) help, when all the cities of the land of Garu were hostile, (namely) Udumu, Aduru, (25) Araru, Meshqu, Magdalu, Eni-anabu and Zarqu, and when Hayanu and Yabilima were captured.
Further, behold—after (30) thy writing a tablet to me, I wrote to him. Before thou dost arrive with thy caravan, behold, he will have reached Pella, and he will hear (thy) words.

Footnotes:
1 In this letter Lab'ayu protests his innocence of all charges against him and assures the king (Amen-hotp III) that he is more loyal than the neighbors who complain against him.
2 Mut-ba'lu (literally "Man of Baal") was prince of Pella in the northern Jordan Valley, opposite Beth-Shan; Ayab (Ayyab, Hebrew Job) was prince of Ashtartu (biblical Ashtaroth) in. Bashan. The land of Garu lay in southern Golan between Pella and Ashtartu. Yanhamu, to whom the letter is addressed, was 'a high Egyptian official of Canaanite (possibly of Hebrew) origin, who seems to have been the Egyptian governor of Palestine at the beginning of the reign of Akh-en-Aton.

EA, No. 270
To the king, my lord, my pantheon, my Sun-god, say: Thus Milkilu, thy servant, (5) the dirt (under) thy feet. At the feet of the king, my lord, my pantheon, my Sun-god, seven times, seven times I fall. Let the king, my lord; know (10) the deed which Yanhamu did to me after I left the presence of the king, my lord. Now he seeks (is) two thousand (shekels) of silver from my hand, saying to me: "Give me thy wife and (20) thy children, or I will smite!" Let the king know this deed, and let my lord send to me (26) chariots, and let him take me to himself lest I perish!

EA, No. 271²

To the king, my lord, my pantheon, my Sun-god, say: Thus Milkilu, thy servant, (5) the dirt (under) thy feet. At the feet of the king, my lord, my pantheon, my Sun-god, seven times, seven times, I fall. Let the king know (10) that powerful is the hostility against me and against Shuwardata. Let the king, my lord, protect his land (is) from the hand of the `Apiru. If not, (then) let the king, my lord, send chariots (20) to fetch us, lest our servants smite us.

Footnotes:
1 Milkilu (Heb. Malchiel) was prince of Gezer. For Yanhamu see the previous letter.
2 For Milkilu see the previous letter. Shuwardata (with an Indo-Aryan name) was prince of the Hebron region in the southern hill-country, and frequently appears in association with Milkilu. The `Apiru (formerly called Habiru) were a strong semi-nomadic people, or rather class of population in Syria and Palestine. While there is much reason to identify them with the Hebrews of the Patriarchal Age, the combination still remains uncertain and cannot be made the basis for any historical inferences.
Ancient Egyptian and Hittite Voices: (a) letter from the Pharoah to Harkhuf the explorer; (b) Ramses III, “The War Against the Sea Peoples;” (c) Hittite Soldiers’ Oath

These Egyptian and Hittite sources all reflect on aspects of power in the ancient world. Around 2200 BCE Harkhuf was sent by the Pharaoh on several diplomatic trips to Nubia, Egypt’s powerful southern neighbor. Centuries later, Ramses III (1187-1156 BCE) claimed a great victory over the invading tribes who would however soon overrun Egypt and Mesopotamia. Finally, The Hittite soldiers’ oath from about 1400 BCE describes the ritual and oaths sworn by the king’s army before battle.

Focus Questions:
1. In what terms are rulers portrayed? How about their followers?
2. In what manner are rewards and punishment described?
3. How would you describe the morale and quality of Hittite and Egyptian soldiers?

Letter from the Pharoah to Harkhuf the explorer

Harkhuf the explorer reads a letter from the king Old Kingdom (c 2575-2150 BC)

King’s personal seal, year 2, third month of inundation, day 15. Royal decree to the Sole Companion, lector-priest and chief of desert rangers, Harkhuf.

The matter of your letter has been noted, which you sent to the king at the Palace, to the effect that you have returned safely from lyam together with the army that was with you.

You said in this letter of yours that you have brought all sorts of great and beautiful gifts, which Hathor, the mistress of Nubia, has granted to the spirit of my throne name, who lives for ever.

You said in this letter of yours that you have brought a pygmy, of divine dances, from the land of the horizon-dwellers, like the one that the seal-bearer Bawerdjed brought from Punt in the time of king Isesi, and you said the like of him has never been brought back by any one who did lyam in the past.

It is true that you know how to do what your lord loves and praises, and it is true that you spend day and night planning to do what your lord loves and praises and commands. His Majesty will provide many splendid rewards, so as to benefit your son's sons for all time, so that people will say when they hear what my Majesty has done for you, "Can anything equal what was done for Harkhuf when he returned from lyam?"

Come north to the Palace at once! Drop everything - hurry and bring that pygmy you have brought, alive, happy and well, for the divine dances, to gladden the heart, to delight the heart of the king who lives for ever! When he goes down with you the boat, get trusty men to stand around him on the gangplank - don't let him fall in the water! When he goes to bed at night, get trusty men to lie all round him in his hammock. Inspect ten times a night! My Majesty longs to see this pygmy more than all the treasures of Sinai and Punt! If you arrive at the Palace and that pygmy is with you, alive, happy and well, my Majesty will do greater things for you than was done for the seal-bearer Bawerdjed in the time of Isesi, because my Majesty so wishes to see that pygmy. Orders have been given to the chiefs of the New Towns and the overseer of priests to furnish supplies from every depot and every temple under their charge. No exception has been made for this.

“The War Against the Peoples of the Sea”

In the latter half of the second millennium B.C. there were extensive movements in the eastern Mediterranean area. Masses of homeless peoples moved, slowly across the sea and its coast-lands, displacing or merging with the older populations. These migrations ended the Minoan civilization in Crete, contributed to the historical populations of Greece and Italy, wiped out the Hittite Empire, thrust the Philistines into Canaan, and washed up on the shores of Egypt. In Ramses III's eighth year (about 1188 B.C.) the pharaoh met and checked their attempt to push into the rich lands of the Nile. The victory was only a check, because the Egyptian Empire in Asia ended shortly after. The following accounts of this war come from Ramses III's temple of Medinet Habu at Thebes.

(1) Year 8 under the majesty of (Ramses III)...

(16)... The foreign countries made a *conspiracy* in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on,' being cut off *at one time*. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amor. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their congregation was the Philistines, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denye(n), and Weshesh, 8* lands united. They laid their hands upon the lands as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: "Our plans will succeed!"

1 Hatti was the Hittite Empire, Kode the coast of Cilicia and northern Syria, Carchemish the city on the Euphrates, Arzawa somewhere in or near Cilicia, and Alashiya probably Cypius.
2 Perhaps in the north Syrian plain or in Code-Syria.
3 Except for the Philistines (Peleset), these names are rendered close to the Egyptian writings. For the Tjeker, cf. the Wen-Amon story. The Shekelesh might be the Siculi, the Denyen (cuneiform Danuna) might be the Danaoi. The Weshesh cannot easily be related to any later people.

Now the heart of this god, the Lord of the Gods, was prepared and ready to ensnare them like birds... I organized my frontier in Djahi, I prepared before them:—princes, commanders of garrisons, (20) and *maryanu*. I have the river-mouths prepared like a strong wall, with warships, galleys and coasters, *(fully) equipped*, for they were manned completely from bow to stern with valiant warriors carrying their weapons. The troops consisted of every picked man of Egypt. They were like lions roaring upon the mountain tops. The chariotry consisted of runners, of *picked men*, of every good and capable chariot-warrior. The horses were quivering in every part of their bodies, prepared to crush the foreign countries under their hoofs. I was the valiant Montu, standing fast at their head, so that they might gaze upon the capturing of my hands...

Those who reached my frontier, their seed is not, their heart and their soul are finished forever and ever. Those who came forward together on the sea, the full flame was in front of them *at* the river-mouths, while a stockade of lances surrounded them on the shore. They were dragged in, enclosed, and prostrated on the beach, killed, and made into heaps from tail to head. Their ships and their goods were as if fallen into the water.

I have made the lands turn back from (even) mentioning Egypt; for when they pronounce my name in their land, then (25) they are burned up. Since I sat upon the throne of Har-akhti and the Great-of-Magic was fixed upon my head like Re, I have not let foreign countries behold the frontier of Egypt, to boast thereof to the Nine Bows' I have taken away their land, their frontiers being added to mine. Their princes and their tribes people are mine with praise, for I am on the ways of the plans of the All-Lord, my august, divine father, the Lord of the Gods.

1 The Phoenician coast, running down into Palestine. From what little we know of Ramses III's his defensive frontier was not north of Palestine. It is possible that the land battle against the Peoples of the Sea was in Asia, whereas the sea battle was on the coast of Egypt.
2 Normally used for the mouths of the branches of the Nile in the Delta. Hence probably the line of defense in Egypt. Just possibly, the word might have *been* extended to harborage on the Asiatic coast. 3 The god of war.
4 One body had to be met on land (in Djahi?), whereas another body had to be met on sea (in the Delta?). The scenes show the boats of the Peoples of the Sea and also a movement by land in oxcarts, with women, children, and goods.
5 The uraeus-serpent, symbol of kingship. 6 Traditional enemies of Egypt.
Hittites Soldiers’ Oath


Text: KBo, vi, 34 and its duplicate KUB, 59. Literature: J. Friedrich, ZA, NF ¹ (1924), 161-192, reprinted with additions in the same author's Hethitische Studien (1924). Excerpts are also found in Zimmer's contribution to Lehmann-Haas, Textbuch zur Religionsgeschichte, 2nd ed. (1922), 335 f. and in J. Friedrich, Aus dem hethitischen Schrifttum, 2 (AO, xxv/2 [1925]), 16 ff. The tablet in question is marked as the second of a series entitled "When they lead the troops to the (ceremony of taking the) oath." At the beginning about 17 lines are missing.

[He¹ ...]s and says: "[Just as this... cou]ld [see] and was able to find [(its) food], and (as) they have now blinded it at the place of the oath,—(15) whoever breaks these oaths, betrays the king of the Hatti land, and turns his eyes in hostile fashion upon the Hatti land, let these oaths seize him! Let them blind this man's army (20) and make it deaf! Let them not see each other, let them not hear each other! Let them make a cruel fate their lot! Below let them paralyze their feet, and above let them bind their hands! (25) Just as the gods of the oath bound the hands and feet of the army of the Arzawa country' and made them unable to move, even so let them bind that man's army and make them unable to move!"

He places yeast in their hands, they squeeze it (30) and he says: "Is not this that you have here yeast? Just as they take this little piece of yeast, mix it (into the dough) in the kneading bowl and let the bowl stand for a day (so that) it can ferment—whoever breaks these oaths, (35) shows disrespect to the king of the Hatti land, and turns his eyes in hostile fashion upon the Hatti land, let these oaths seize him! Let him be ridden with disease! Make a cruel fate their lot!" The men (40) declare: "So be it!"

Then he places wax and mutton fat in their hands. He throws them on a pan and says: "Just as this wax melts, and just as the mutton fat dissolves,—(45) whoever breaks these oaths, (ii) [shows disrespect to the king] of the Hatti [land], let [him] melt like wax, let him dissolve like[mutton fat] !" [The men]n declare: "So be it!"

(5) He places sinews (and) salt in their hands. He throws them on a pan and speaks as follows: "Just as these sinews split into fragments on the hearth, and just as the salt (10) is scattered on the hearth—whoever breaks these oaths, shows disrespect to the king of the Hatti land, and turns his eyes in hostile fashion upon the Hatti land, let these oaths seize him! (15) Let him split into fragments like the sinews, let him be scattered like the salt! Just as salt has no seed, even so let that man's name, seed, house, cattle (and) sheep perish!"

He places malt (and) malt loaf in their hands, (20) they crush them and he speaks as follows: "Just as they grind this malt loaf between mill stones, mix it with water, bake it and break it up—whoever breaks these oaths and does evil to the king (and) the queen, (25) the princes (and) to the Hatti land, let these oaths seize him! Let them grind their bones in the same way! Let him soak in the same way! Let him be broken up in the same way! Let a cruel fate be his lot!" The men declare: "So be it!"

"Just as this malt no (longer) has the power of growth, (as) one cannot take it to a field and use it as seed, (as) one cannot use it as bread or store it in the storehouse— whoever (35) breaks these oaths and does evil to the king (and) the queen and the princes, even so let the gods of the oath also destroy that man's future! Let not his wife bear, sons and daughters! Let his land (and) his fields have no crop, (40) and his pastures no grass! Let not his cattle (and) sheep bear calves (and) lambs!"

¹ The officiating priest. ² The most important group of countries in the southern part of Anatolia bordering on the Mediterranean Sea.
They bring the garments of a woman, a distaff and a mirror, they break an arrow and you speak as follows: "Is not this that you see here (45) garments of a woman? We have them here for (the ceremony of taking) the oath. Whoever breaks these oaths and does evil to the king (and) the queen (and) the princes, let these oaths change him from a man into a woman! Let them change his troops into women, (50) let them dress them in the fashion of women and cover their heads with a length of cloth! Let them break the bows, arrows (and) clubs in their hands and (iii) [let them put] in their hands distaff and mirror!"

They parade in front of them a [blind woman] and a deaf man and you speak] as follows: "See! here is a blind woman (5) and a deaf man. Whoever does evil to the king (and) the queen, let the oaths seize him! Let them make him blind! Let them [make him] deaf! Let them [blind] him like a blind man! Let them [deafen] him like a deaf man! Let them [annihilate him], the man (himself) (10) together with his wife, [his children] (and) his kin!"

He places an old stone image [of a man] in their hands and speaks as follows: "Did not this man whom you see here take the oath? (15) [At some other time] he was sworn in before the gods and then broke his oath. The oaths seized him and his inner parts are sagging out in front, he has to hold his entrails in his hands. Whoever (20) breaks these oaths, let these oaths seize him! Let his inner parts sag out in front! Let 'Ishara sons' [live] in his inner parts and eat him up!" He presents to them [a ...]. Before their eyes (25) he [throws] it on the ground; they trample it under foot and he speaks as follows: "Whoever breaks these oaths, even so let the Hatti people come and trample that man's town under foot! Let them make it bare of people!"

(30) They light [a fire] brand and trample it under foot so that it scatters here and there and he says: "Just as this one flies apart—whoever breaks these oaths, even so let this man's house be robbed of men, (35) cattle (and) sheep!"

You will place' before them an oven. Also a plow, a cart (and) a chariot you will place before the congregation. These things they break and he speaks as follows: "Whoever breaks these oaths, let the Storm-god break his plow! Just as grass does not come rout of] the oven, let not spelt (and) barley (45) [come out] of his field, let sahlu' come forth!"

(iv) He pours water on the fire (5) and speaks to them as follows: "Just as this burning fire is snuffed out— whoever breaks these oaths, even so let these oaths seize him! Let this man's vitality, vigor (10) and future happiness be snuffed out together with (that of) his wife and his children! Let the oaths put an evil curse upon him! Let no offspring thrive in his corral, his fold (15) (and) his barnyard! From his field let grass not come forth, not even from (one) furrow!"

3 Apparently some kind of worms.
4 A weed commonly found on ruins.