

The Stele of Merneptah—assessment of the final ‘Israel’ strophe and its implications for chronology

Patrick Clarke

The text of the final poetic strophe of the famous stele of the pharaoh Merneptah (item JE 31408, the Cairo Museum) appears to mention Israel. With few exceptions, the majority of archeologists date this text and Merneptah's reign to the 1200s BC in the Conventional Egyptian Chronology. This would place both this pharaoh and his stele in the biblical time of the Judges. An analysis of this Egyptian text indicates that Merneptah's reign should instead be dated to 913–903 BC; a movement of three centuries. Furthermore, the stele offers tantalizing clues to the identity of the biblical Shishak. All this has huge ramifications for biblical chronology, bringing us closer to a satisfying correlation of established secular history with the inerrant biblical timeline.

The black granite ‘Victory Stele’ of Merneptah was discovered by W.F. Petrie in 1896. This stele (3.18 m high x 1.63 m wide) is the only known Egyptian document generally accepted as mentioning *ysry3l*—Israel. The text itself is dated by most analysts as c. 1209/1208 BC in the Conventional Egyptian Chronology (CEC). Merneptah's reign itself is assigned to the period 1213–1203 BC, which would place both this pharaoh and his stele in the biblical time of the Judges. As I will demonstrate, however, there have been significant misunderstandings and mistranslations of this text, which, when addressed, indicate instead that Merneptah's reign should be dated to 913–903 BC, the time of the Divided Monarchy. Such a downwards revision of the CEC starts to have exciting implications for resolving the standoffs between it and the actual chronology of the Bible's text.

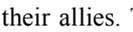
The pharaoh and his stele

By the time that the long-lived Ramesses II died, he had outlived no fewer than twelve of his sons, and it fell to his 13th son, Merneptah, to take the throne of Egypt. By Ramesses II's regnal year 40, Prince Merneptah had been promoted Overseer of the Army. In Ramesses II's 55th regnal year, when celebrating his 80th birthday, Merneptah, at 48, officially become the heir to the throne. During the last decade of Ramesses II's life, Merneptah was the real power in Egypt, though there is no evidence of co-regency. He is attested to by three inscriptions, one of 80 lines on a wall in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, a large stele containing 35 legible lines of text from Athribis in the Delta, and the

world-famous 28-line ‘Victory Stele’ discussed here, from his mortuary temple on the West Bank at modern Luxor. All refer to military campaigns.

Like his post-Amarna predecessors, Merneptah faced political/military issues in the Egyptian sphere of influence during his reign. This included crushing a revolt in northern Retenu.¹ In his regnal year four, there were problems on Egypt's western borders which involved the Libyans.² By responding rapidly to this particular threat, Merneptah's army inflicted an emphatic defeat on the Libyans.

The mention of Israel

The general consensus is that this stele's main text commemorates victory in a campaign against the Libu  made up of the Meshwesh Libyans , and their allies. This is so; the primary reason for Merneptah commissioning this stele was to boast of an emphatic victory over the Libyans, who tried to invade the eastern Delta. The final lines (26 and 27—the 28th is merely the ‘signing off’ line) refer to an earlier military campaign in Egypt's northern empire resulting in the defeat of Canaan, Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam, and Israel among others. Here, however, the general consensus, in line with its reliance on the CEC, believes that this refers to an earlier campaign by Merneptah. But this is suspect on the basis of translation terms, chronological synchronisms, and also because of its fundamental misunderstandings of how the 19th Dynasty pharaohs recorded their history. When translation of the final poetic strophe is corrected to account for these on the basis of more recent knowledge, it becomes clear from this, and supporting

evidence at the temple of Amun in Karnak, that the text is not describing Merneptah's past conquests but events that took place during his predecessors' reigns.

The standard translation of lines 26 and 27, often quoted by Christian and secular sources (archeologists, historians, or general interest writers), follows this general pattern:

“The princes are prostrate, saying ‘Peace!’ Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows. Desolation is for Tjehenu; Hatti is pacified; Plundered is Pa-Canaan with every evil; carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer; Yanoam is made non-existent; Israel is laid waste—its seed is no more; Kharru has become a widow because of Egypt. All lands together are pacified. Everyone who was restless has been bound.”³³

There are translations offered by Christian sources that are almost word-for-word copies of late 19th and early 20th century AD sources. These copyists seem unaware that some of these interpretations by earlier specialists have long since been superseded as Egyptological understanding of the Egyptian language and culture improves. Below is a comparison of similarities between Breasted's original 1906 translation and a recent copy, showing how little has changed.

“The great ones are in prostration, saying: ‘Salaam!’ There is not one who lifts up his head among the Nine Bows. Since the Libyans are daunted, the land of the Hittites is in peace. Canaan is purged from every bad thing. Ascalon is conquered, Gezer is held, Yenoam is as good as no longer existing. Israel is destroyed, they have no (longer) corn. Khor is like a widow in respect to Egypt. All the countries are peacefully minded. Whosoever robs, he is repressed.”³⁴ (Original)

“The princes are prostrate, saying: ‘Salaam!’ There is not one who holds up his head among the Nine Bows; Since the Libyans are defeated, the land of the Hittites is in peace; Canaan is purged from every evil; Askalon is conquered; Gezer is held; Yenoam is made as a thing not existing; Israel is destroyed: it has no corn; Khor is as a widow with regard to Egypt; All lands are united in peace; Every brigand is subdued.”³⁵ (Copy)

This reliance in Christian works on blind copying of old, outdated translations, which probably reflects the dearth of competent archeology and history specialists in the Christian community, is fraught with problems, as will be seen.



Figure 1. Merneptah Stele.

Knowledge of the Egyptian language and syllabic orthography is essential when assessing any Egyptian text, otherwise mistakes are inevitable. The majority of Egyptologists are in agreement regarding the entity *ysry3l* as Israel based on the syllabic orthography of the name and the context of the final poetic unit of the Merneptah stele. It is the chronological placement of Israel where scholars of the CEC and revisionist positions come into conflict.

Below is my translation of the *Israel* text, and this forms the basis of why I believe Merneptah can be securely placed in the dates proposed (913–903 BC), rather than the overextended CEC dates of 1213–1203 BC.

Understanding what the text really says

The majority of the final strophe translations accepted in academia and elsewhere vary little in detail, being influenced by the CEC paradigm and its insistence on a longer history timeline than allowed for in the Bible. The CEC paradigm has as its foundational principles some odd bedfellows. Reliance upon the fragmentary works of Manetho has led to the current Dynastic timeframe, and the evolutionary Three-Age system (Iron, Bronze, and Stone) creates archeological interpretations completely at odds with the Bible. Sadly many writers (including some who are creationists) rely on this CEC paradigm and regularly regurgitate their preferred translation and subsequent interpretation of this section of the stele.

So read contextually, what does the text really say?

In the generally accepted view, Line 26 begins, “*The princes are prostrate, saying ‘Peace!’*”³⁶ But there is a major objection to this. The term ‘*are prostrate*’ is in the *specific present* and creates the idea that the princes are laying on the ground before Pharaoh. Many Egyptian officials and vassal rulers in this manner routinely prostrated themselves before Pharaoh as part of Court protocol as these extracts from Amarna letters EA 287 and 298 show:

“Say to the king, my lord [Pharaoh]: Message of Abdi-Heba,¹² your servant. I fall at the feet of my lord 7 times and 7 times ...” EA 287

“To the king, my lord, my god, my sun, the sun in the sky [Pharaoh]. Thus says Yapahu, the Amelu¹³ of Gazru,¹⁴ ... seven times and seven times¹⁵ I prostrate myself both upon the belly and back.” EA 298

However, the Egyptian text has used the verb *phd*  here, which although it has the meaning of *to be prostrate*, is in the context of *to be cast down*, *to be overthrown*. I

Merneptah stele lines 26 and 27

Line 26



n.pl. v. adv. v neg.⁶ adj. v. n. n. v.prep. n. n.loc. n. v. p.m.⁷ n. neg. adj.
 srw phd hrfd šrm bn w'ty hr f3 tpy m psdt | hfy n Thmw | Ht3 htp | h3k p3w k3n'n' bint nb|

The princes made prostrate beg for peace not one raises head his of the Nine Bows. Captured is Tjehenu. Hatti at peace. Plundered Canaan evil all.

The overthrown princes grovel, begging for peace; not one of them lifts his head among the Nine Bows. Tjehenu is seized; Hatti is at peace; Canaan along with all its evil has been plundered;

Line 27



v. n.loc. v. adv. n.loc. n.loc. det.p.p. neg.v.⁸ aux.v.
 | ini ask3ln |mh m K3d3r⁹ | ynw'm m33 tm dmđ wn |
 carried off [is] Ashkelon captured namely Gezer Yanoam [is] seen to not totally exist

Carried off is Ashkelon; Gezer is seized (i.e. captured); Yanoam is seen no more / no longer exists;

Line 27 cont.



n.loc. det. v. neg. n.pl. det. n.loc. v.int. n. adj. n.
 ysry3l f.k.(t) bn prt f | h3rw hpr h3rt wš di ini
 Israel desolate¹⁰ not seed¹¹ its Hurru became [a] widow many times [by] Egypt

Israel has been stripped bare and prospers no more; widowhood has befallen Hurru because of Egypt.

therefore believe that Merneptah's text is alluding not to prostration before a superior, as was the widespread custom of royal courts, but to something else. We can get closer to the intended meaning by relating the verb *phd* to the verb *šrm*—to beg for peace.¹⁶ The mistaken assumption has been to translate *šrm* as the interjection *šlm*—*Shalom*.¹⁷ (a friendly greeting). (Since the Egyptians, as already discussed, lacked the 'l' sound, it was customary to use one of the two 'r' sounds—*ro* or *rew* as a substitute phoneme.)

There is also a historical/cultural reason why it is the verb *phd* (not the interjection *šlm* favoured by many scholars) which is valid here, as the photo below using Egyptian symbolism shows. The pharaoh (Thutmose III) and his captives are players in a familiar scene that was used throughout Egyptian history. The captives are at the mercy of the victorious pharaoh. They are not offering a 'shalom' (peace be upon you) greeting—they are literally begging for their lives! Contextually, the opening sentence must read along the lines of "The princes grovel, begging for peace"

Second, the statement at the end of line 26 is often translated as *plundered is Pa-Canaan*: the 18th and 19th Dynasty scribes rendered many Ancient Near East (ANE) locations almost identically to the native names as evidenced in the Amarna letters, and here Canaan is accurately rendered *k3n'n'*—Canaan. The Egyptian hieroglyph attached to Canaan is *p3*; there are two possible ways of interpreting the role *p3* plays here. The sign could be interpreted as being used in conjunction with the noun, Canaan, as the definite article (i.e. demonstrative + definite article: *this/the Canaan*); however, other regions mentioned in this strophe (Libya, Hatti, and Hurru) do not carry the definite article; nor do they need to.

Alternatively, and I believe the right interpretation, is that *p3* was used at that point in the text as a past tense marker (an attested use of the sign *p3*) and renders the preceding verb *h3k* as *was plundered*—action taken in the perfect past. This makes sense with what the rest of Merneptah's text is saying when read as a synoptic account of his dynasty's achievements.



Figure 2. Captives beg for their live before the victorious Pharaoh.

Finally, there is the much debated section commonly translated as, *Israel is laid waste—its seed is no more . . .* There are three points of contention: (1) the noun *ysry3l*, (2) the verb *fk¹⁸* 𓂏𓂐 and (3) the plural noun *pri* 𓂏𓂐𓂏𓂐.

Much has been written about the word *ysry3l*; its meaning and also its chronological placement in the ANE chronology. As stated earlier, despite the attempts of French secularist Davidovits discussed in the box 2 below, the majority of Egyptologists are in agreement regarding *ysry3l* as Israel.

Michael G. Hasel (Institute of Archaeology, Southern Adventist University), writing in 1994, reviewed the various interpretations concerning the reference to Israel in the stele. He eventually concluded:

“Israel, identified by the determinative for people, is a socioethnic unity powerful enough to be mentioned along with major city-states that were also neutralized.”¹⁹

Hasel further noted:

“We may perceive Israel within the context and information of the Merneptah stela to be a rural sedentary group of agriculturalists without its own urban city-state support system.”²⁰

What effect did these two conclusions have on Christian apologetics?

“This is exactly the picture we have of Israel from the Old Testament. Gideon lived close to the time of the Merneptah Stela, and he was a farmer living in a small village (Judges 6). Archaeological evidence supports the fact that the Israelites were agriculturalists in the late 13th century BC. Grain storage pits were a common feature of hill country sites of this period.”²¹

The author of the above quote, Bryant G. Wood, has allowed the secular chronology of the CEC to influence his correlation of Bible events to Pharaonic dates. He quotes Hasel in his conclusion:

“Hasel’s study of the Merneptah Stela is extremely important. It clears up a number of misconceptions and focuses attention on the true significance of the stela. It indicates that Israel was well established in Canaan in the late 13th century BC and was a significant political force to be reckoned with. [Quoting Hasel:] ‘Israel functioned as an agriculturally-based/sedentary socioethnic entity in the late 13th century BC, one that is significant enough to be included in the military campaign against political powers

in Canaan. . . . While the Merneptah stela does not give any indication of the actual social structure of the people of Israel, it does indicate that Israel was a significant socioethnic entity that needed to be reckoned with.”²¹

Wood then issues his clarion call to biblical scholars:

“Scholars need to come to grips with these facts, which are entirely consistent with the Bible’s description of Israel’s origins.”²²

Really? Hasel’s and Wood’s assertions that the Merneptah stele is recounting events in the 13th century are wrong, as the next section of this paper shows. Reliance on the blatantly evolutionistic Three-Age dating system and flawed Manetho dynastic chronology to make their case highlights one of the major problems which cripple ANE chronological research.

The main reason many researchers accept the 13th century BC date is the way they perceive Merneptah’s writing of the name Israel—*ysry3l* 𓂏𓂐𓂏𓂐. The most typical interpretation of this Egyptian word is summed up thus:

“The stela does make clear that ‘Israel’ at this stage refers to a people or tribal confederation, the Ancient Israelites, and not a kingdom or city state, since the determinative used is that for ‘foreign people’, not that for ‘country’.”²³

A deeply flawed understanding of how the Egyptian language worked has led to the erroneous conclusion that 𓂏 indicates some nationless confederation of people. Consider how the Egyptians referred to themselves 𓂏𓂐 and compare it to how they wrote Israel 𓂏𓂐𓂏𓂐. The *only difference* between the two is the additional determinative to Israel, the throw stick determinative 𓂏 denoting something foreign:

Egyptians would hardly term themselves as foreign. If the promoters of Israel as a 13th century BC nationless tribal confederacy are to be consistent in their interpretation, Egypt, on the basis of the ‘people’ determinative, must also be regarded in the same light; this of course is nonsense. Merneptah intended readers of his stele to understand that Israel was a significant *national* entity; maybe not of Egypt’s elite status, but significant nonetheless. This fits well with the United and Divided Monarchy Periods of Israel.

The translation of the verb *fk* has suffered from being forced to comply with the ruling paradigm, which tries to explain how a 13th-century BC Merneptah would have behaved. Translating this verb as *laid waste* (in a military sense) fails contextually, for the real intended meaning was *completely laid waste* or *utterly devastated* (politically and economically). There is nothing in the biblical record that speaks of military devastation to that kind of extent until the arrival of the Assyrians (721 BC). The Egyptians had a specific verb for *devastate* and this was *hnk* ; had Merneptah meant *hnk*, he would certainly have used it. He chose *fk* because it described the condition of Israel at the time of inscription perfectly. This verb describes the action or activity of Israel in terms of being empty, wasted (through oppression), or lying idle—the true sense of a people stripped of the Davidic and Solomonic potency and glory of the United Monarchy period.

Finally, there is the need to establish the right understanding of *prt* in this passage. The majority view translation of *prt* is that of seed grains: some translations view *prt* as non-specific seed and others render this word as corn. The problem created by translators is the same as that by Davidovits earlier. The Egyptians had many names for plant seeds, and some examples are included here for comparison in this discussion: *b3b3t*  seed, grain; *try*  seed (gen.); ‘*m*’  corn; *šrit*  barley. These examples, and scores more, do not look or sound anything like *prt*, and neither do they have the same meaning. *Prt* exclusively refers to *offspring*, *descendants*, *prosperity*—that kind of seed—despite claims to the contrary. The difference is that stark, yet many Christian/creationist writers continue to pass on the idea that Israel had no seed, grain, or corn, and were therefore starving, conquered pastoralists living in the days of Judges. They are unwisely using a modernist interpretation of history which always inappropriately discredits the history of the Bible. To

place *prt* in context, we must seek evidence that shows a synchronism between Merneptah’s text and the concurrent life-and-times of Israel as a nation, albeit much reduced in status.

Let the walls speak

To confirm Merneptah’s political worldview and place him in the correct part of the Bible timeline, we need to travel to the precincts of the temple of Amun in Karnak. That Merneptah’s stele is a dynastic résumé that can be traced on the outer walls of the famous hypostyle hall and the adjacent ‘Hittite Treaty Wall’ at Karnak.

The final strophe of the stele mentions *thnw* (the Libyans); *ht3* (the land of the Hittites); *k3n’n’* (Canaan); *ask3ln* (Ashkelon); *k3d3r* (Gezer); *ynw’m* (Yanoam); *ysry3l* (Israel); and *h3rw* (Hurru): every one of these places and peoples is traceable to Seti I and Ramesses II (Merneptah’s immediate predecessors) on the walls at Karnak.

For reader comprehension, I offer a much simplified dynastic conquest synopsis, which begins on the outer wall of the north-west corner of the hypostyle hall. High up on the wall we find the campaign of Seti I against *thnw* (the Libyans). Beneath this battle relief is the campaign he waged against *ht3* (the land of the Hittites). Continuing eastward along the northern wall we come to the record of Seti’s campaign against the ever-troublesome Shasu in southern *k3n’n’* (Canaan). Leaving the northern wall’s record of Seti’s victories and travelling round to the southern side of the hypostyle hall we come to the so-called ‘Hittite Treaty wall’. At the northern end of this wall there once stood the Egyptian copy of the Hittite Treaty concluded by Ramesses II



Figure 3. ‘Hittite Treaty Wall’ at Karnak.

A secularist attempt to deny Israel is even mentioned on the stele

To illustrate the lengths some modernists will go to in order to create doubts regarding the truth of Bible history, Davidovits³⁴ wrote:

“... biblical historians of any obedience have tried to demonstrate the validity of the destruction of Israel by the armies of Pharaoh. *However this interpretation is false and the polemical discussions around it have no grounds* [emphasis in original].”³⁵

He defends his interpretation thus:

“I have demonstrated that «*iisii-r-iar*» is in fact an Egyptian [sic] sentence meaning: *those exiled because of their sin*.³⁶ Pharaohs Ramsès II and Merneptah used this sentence when talking about the exiled Akhenaton's followers, forced to quit Egypt. The name of this people *iisii-r-iar* changed into Israël, through the alteration of the letter *r* into *l* [emphasis in original].”³⁷

iisii-r-iar is not justified on several counts.

Firstly, the transliteration is incorrect for orthographic reasons. The name Israel 𐤀𐤏𐤃𐤀𐤋 is transliterated as *ysryʕl*. The sign 𐤏 (Z4) is often written before the 𐤋 *ro* sign but is pronounced after it; this is amply demonstrated in the name of a major Libyan tribe called the Libu 𐤋𐤏𐤃𐤀𐤋𐤏 *emf* (the fifth sign in *libu*, 𐤋 (Z7) is a weak sound, and often not even written). The name without the determinative sign therefore reads *lybiʕ* (Libya); with the determinative for *tribe* 𐤏 , the name reads *Libu* (the Libyan people). Therefore, the Z4 sign in *ysryʕl* serves to complement the *i* phoneme (there is no *ii* phoneme here) since the *ro* phoneme, which in this part of the word is vocalized as *r*, not *l*.

Secondly, Davidovits breaks the rules of grammar by taking a noun, and morphing it into six new elements (pronoun, verb, conjunction, preposition, pronominal adjective, and plural noun); without any justification. This is a classic example of forcing the evidence to fit the modernist anti-biblical paradigm, rather than allowing the evidence to speak for itself.

Further, the Egyptians had five different words; *rwi* 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 , *dd* 𐤃𐤃 , *dr* 𐤃𐤏 , *sʕr* 𐤏𐤏𐤏 , and *hsrw*³⁸ 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 to describe exile—and six words to express the concept of sin: *btʕ* 𐤁𐤏𐤏 , *tw* 𐤏𐤏 , *iwyʕ* 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 , *hww* 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 , *hʕbt* 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 , and *thʕ* 𐤏𐤏𐤏𐤏 . None of these words is found in Davidovits' 'sentence'. Simply put, there is no possibility of extracting *exiled* and *sin* from Davidovits' *iisii-r-iar*.

Changing the *r* into an *l* is known as a consonant shift³⁹ and occurs between the phonemes when a particular phoneme (in this case *l*) is being recorded in the Egyptian script, where that phoneme is either not prominent or entirely absent. Even in modern languages the same problem occurs where scripts are devised for specific languages and produce inevitable compromises when dealing with unfamiliar sounds; a good example of this occurs in the English transcription of Arabic names. Davidovits appears unaware of this important point.

and Hattusilis III. To the lower right of the treaty is the depiction of the defeat of Ashkelon; to the lower left is the seizing of Gezer. Immediately above the Gezer register is the sacking of Yanoam and to the left of this, running the remaining length of the hypostyle hall wall, is the extensive campaign waged against Hurru.

The reader will at this point be wondering where Israel is in all of this. The answer is to be found immediately above the scene of the defeat of Ashkelon where surviving blocks form a new and entirely different scene. To the left-hand side of the scene, Pharaoh's chariot team advances towards an enemy chariot and a group of Asiatics. There is no city visible, just a battle in open country (the kind preferred for chariot warfare). The scene is consistent with what we know about the Merneptah stele, and placing this scene in context with the others, it depicts Ramesses II's assault against chariot-driving Israelites of Rehoboam; this was probably the prelude to Ramesses' year 8 plundering of Jerusalem. The Bible makes it clear that Shishak “took the fortified cities of Judah . . .” before moving on to capture Jerusalem (2 Chr. 12:4). This explanation is in accord with the context of Merneptah's account of events.

There are many Egyptologists who indeed do regard this scene as a record of conflict between Egyptians and Israelites, although there is a dispute as to whether it involves Ramesses II or Merneptah. This therefore raises a very important question, for if, as the CEC claims, Ramesses II and Merneptah ruled in the thirteenth century BC (the period of the Judges), ‘Why do these Israelites in this scene have chariots?’ Yurco, for example, believes that there are good grounds for believing that Merneptah was the pharaoh involved,²⁴ and his evidence is based mainly on claims of usurpation by Ramesses II's successors.

Kitchen initially disagreed with Yurco due to the name Kha-em-Wast appearing on the relief;²⁵ this was the name of Ramesses' then eldest son who led part of the year 8 assaults on Edom and Jerusalem. Yurco, with some legitimacy, claimed that Merneptah also had a son of the same name and that the relief indicates, therefore, that Merneptah and his

son were the real attackers of the Israelites.²⁶ Later Kitchen changed his mind and agreed with Yurco.²⁷

Rohl disagreed with this idea, citing not only the name Kha-em-Wast, but also the Ramesses II chariot team name Meryamun, and remains unconvinced by Yurco's assessment:

"I am not convinced by Yurco's arguments that Ramesses II's nomen and prenomen were never carved on this wall—especially considering it once carried a scene from the Battle of Kadesh ... Meryamun is well-established as the name of one of Ramesses II's favourite chariot pairs ... I personally believe that it is too much of a coincidence that Merneptah should [not only] have an identically named (but unattested) son but also an identically named (but unattested) chariot team."²⁸

Like Rohl, I am not convinced by Yurco's case because, in my view, the final poetic strophe of Merneptah's stele carries all the hallmarks of a military and political synopsis of the Ramesside Dynasty. Yurco does not appear to have taken into account the Bible events of either the Judges period (where there is no mention of Israelites owning chariots) or the schism of Solomon's once United Kingdom. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that Rehoboam inherited most, if not all, of his father's 1,400-strong chariot corps: the Bible makes it clear that Israel's first acquisition of chariots occurred during the reign of David after the defeat of Hadadezer.

"David took from him one thousand chariots ... David hamstringed all the chariot horses, except that he spared enough of them for one hundred chariots" (2 Samuel 8:4).²⁹

Something is clearly wrong here, since this was some two centuries after the much-advocated Judges period and these 19th Dynasty pharaohs (according to the CEC).

In further confirmation of the nature of Merneptah's synoptic text, Ramesses II attacked Hurru in an extensive and prolonged campaign that goes a long way in explaining Merneptah's '*widowhood has befallen Hurru because of Egypt*'. The five vertical strokes beneath the hieroglyph for widow (see the chart above) signify '*repeatedly*' or '*many times over*'.

The 19th Dynasty political policy model was virtually the same as in the days of Thutmose III, 250 years earlier; rebellious vassal kings were removed from power, and administrators sympathetic to Egypt installed in their place. We should not be surprised to find that during Jehoshaphat's reign Egyptian political policy continued to be upheld by Merneptah.

What are we to make of 1 Kings 22:47 where it states: "only a deputy of the king"? Egyptian policy of allowing a degree of autonomy to loyal vassals meant that Jehosaphat

could easily install his own deputy (the equivalent of the Egyptian administrator) in Edom without needing to refer this back to Pharaoh's policy enforcers. What does emerge from this apparently out-of-place verse is that Edom, a historical enemy of the Israelites, had been, I believe, neutralized from both Egyptian and Divided Monarchy spheres by Ramesses II in 971 BC. There is no reason to suppose that Jehosaphat was any less a subject of Egypt than Rehoboam, as 2 Chronicles 12:8 makes clear:

"Nevertheless they [Judah] will be his [Egypt's]³⁰ servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations."

There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that Judah, or Israel for that matter, had shaken off the Egyptian yoke by the days of Jehoshaphat.

Implications for other creationist 'synchronisms'

It is clear that the Merneptah stele can be interpreted in line with the United and Divided Monarchy Periods of Israelite history. Furthermore, if it can be demonstrated that Merneptah's father, Ramesses II, was in fact Shishak, many synchronisms previously held by both supporters of the CEC and revisionists between the people of Israel and their neighbours collapse, and a whole new series of compelling synchronisms emerges. The reigns of Ramesses II and Merneptah are contemporaneous with the last few years of the United Monarchy and the first 75 years of the Divided Monarchy. A detailed analysis of the 'Israel' text indicates that far from being placed in the 1200s BC, Merneptah's reign should be dated to 913–903 BC; a movement of three centuries. Consequently, Ramesses II would have reigned from 979–913 BC, in the Divided Monarchy Period. In my proposed revised chronology all the political, military, and economic factors detailed on the stele coincide with conditions in Israel. This was not the case three centuries earlier in the time of the Judges.

Once this historical re-alignment takes place, a number of synchronisms previously held to be true by some revisionists, albeit well-intentioned, are refuted. Some of these erroneous synchronisms are: Thutmose III/Shishak;³¹ Hatshepsut/Queen of Sheba;³² Amenhotep II/Zerah the Cushite; Israel's King Ahab/Battle of Qarqar; Israel's King Jehu/Shalmaneser III—the final two failed synchronisms in this list have serious implications for the less than reliable Assyrian chronology.³³

We are therefore, I believe, another step closer to confirming not only the identity of the biblical Shishak as Ramesses II, but also a significant step closer to a much better chronology for the ANE and its relationship with the inerrant biblical timeline.

References

1. Retenu was the Egyptian name for Canaan and Syria, encompassing the region from the Negev north to the Orontes River.
2. Crushing defeat or not, the Libyans and the Peoples of the Sea would return to attack Ramesses III's Egypt just three decades later. Under the revised chronology proposed here, this places Ramesses III's famous eight-year battle against this confederacy firmly in 876 BC. Compare this date to the now obviously untenable 380 BC advocated by Down, D., *Unwrapping the Pharaohs*, Master Books, p. 210, 2006.
3. Rohl, D., *A Test of Time, Volume One, The Bible—From Myth to History*, Century, chap. 7, p. 168, 1995.
4. Breasted, J.H., *Ancient records of Egypt, vol. III*, University of Chicago Press, §617, 1906.
5. diggingonline.com/pages/rese/books/comment/exodus01.htm; accessed 18 March 2012.
6. The negative particle.
7. The *p3* is used here to denote something done in the past and is often used as a past tense marker (i.e. an auxiliary verb with a past meaning—in this specific case *plundered*, Egv. *h3k* to take as plunder, to capture—as in plunder goods, capture towns, and/or carry off captives).
8. *tm* indicates the negation of the clause, hence *non-existent*.
9. This is a different spelling of Gezer from that of Thutmose III in his year 23 campaign list (i.e. *Kdr*) as opposed to Merneptah's *K3d3r* although they were probably pronounced the same.
10. The verb *desolate* is used here to convey the sense of desolation through conquest and being stripped of everything.
11. Taken in proper context the seed *pri* used here referred expressly to prosperity as related to the idea of descendants; it does not refer to plant seed.
12. *Abdi-Heba* was king of Urusalim (Jebus) during the Amarna Period (c. 1050–1030 BC under my proposed revised chronology).
13. *Amelu* = ruler.
14. *Gazru* = Gezer.
15. *Seven times* is a common Semitic expression for *repeatedly*. Note the following biblical examples: Psalm 12:6; Psalm 119:164; Proverbs 24:16; Matthew 18:21–22; Luke 17:4.
16. See *Vygyusdictionary*, April 2012 edn, p. 855.
17. The word 'Shalom', used as a greeting and blessing, was common to both the Egyptian and Hebrew languages, being pronounced and used in the same manner.
18. *fk* = be empty, be wasted (through oppression), lie idle—*Vygyusdictionary*, April 2012 edn, p. 709.
19. Hasel, M.G., *Israel in the Merneptah Stele*, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296:51, 1994.
20. Hasel, ref. 19, p. 54.
21. christiananswers.net/q-abr/abr-a015.html.
22. Hasel, ref. 19, pp. 54; 56 note 12.
23. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merneptah_stele.
24. Yurco, F.J., *3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites found in Egypt*, *BAR* (Biblical Archaeological Society) 16, 5 Sept/Oct 1910.
25. Kitchen, K.A., *Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II*, *J. Egyptian Archaeology* 50:68, 1964; note 9.
26. Cruz-Uribe, E., *On the Wife of Merneptah* [sic], *Göttinger Miszellen* 24:24–25, 1977. Merneptah's chief wife, Isisnofret II, was a granddaughter of Ramesses II. In the Ramesside royal family, it was common practice to name grandchildren after their grandparents, and this is precisely what Yurco claims in the case of Kha-em-Wast II.
27. Kitchen, K.A., *Pharaoh Triumphant: the Life and Times of Ramesses II*, Canada, Benben Publications, pp. 215–216 and figure 17 on p. 220, 1982.
28. Rohl, ref. 3, pp. 167–168.
29. No chariots are mentioned for the Israelites in the Exodus, in Sinai or the subsequent invasion. It is clear that Israel's army was infantry only until this momentous occasion. That David kept so few indicates that he and his commanders had either no use for them, or had no idea how to use them.
30. Although the verse refers to the action of Shishak, the role of Pharaoh was that of Head of State; thus Egypt.
31. Clarke, P., *Was Thutmose III the biblical Shishak?—Claims for the 'Jerusalem' bas-relief at Karnak investigated*, *J. Creation* 25(1):48–56, 2011; and Clarke, P., *Was Jerusalem the Kadesh of Thutmose III's 1st Asiatic campaign?—topographic and petrographic evidence*, *J. Creation* 25(3):48–55, 2011.
32. Clarke, P., *Why Pharaoh Hatshepsut is not to be equated to the Queen of Sheba*, *J. Creation* 24(2):62–68, 2010.
33. Pierce, L., *Evidentialism—The Bible and Assyrian chronology*, *J. Creation* (formerly *TJ*) 15(1):62–68, 2001.
34. Davidovits is a materials scientist who claimed that the Great Pyramid was built using a form of limestone concrete to fabricate the blocks. See: Davidovits, J., *Why the Pharaohs Built the Pyramids with Fake Stones*, Geopolymer Institute, Saint Quentin, France. See also creation.com/focus-133.
35. Davidovits, J., *Error or forgery on the Stele of Merneptah, known as Israel Stele*, davidovits.info/496/error-or-forgery-on-the-stele-of-merneptah-known-as-israel-stele; accessed 25 April 2012.
36. Davidovits, J., *The Lost Fresco and the Bible (De cette fresque naquit la Bible)*, Editions Jean-Cyrille Godefroy, Paris, 2009.
37. This quote is presented exactly as it appears on Davidovits' website.
38. Wallis Budge, E.A., *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, vol. I, John Murray, London, p. 574, 1920.
39. For further explanation see: Loprieno, A., *Ancient Egyptian a linguistic introduction*. Cambridge, pp. 11–16, 1995.

Patrick Clarke has developed a deep interest in ancient Egypt since early childhood. His speciality is the pharaonic tombs in the Valley of the Kings; their architecture, artwork and afterlife texts. He presently resides with his family in France.