POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND HYKSOS AT THE END OF THE 17TH DYNASTY

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The Hyksos ruled Egypt approximately from 1650 to 1550 BC.¹ Their name derives from the Egyptian ḫk3.w-ḥ3s.wt which means 'rulers of foreign countries'. The Egyptian word ḥ3s.wt stands for everything beyond the borders of Egypt. Thus, it is not appropriate to expect any hint at an ethnic designation.² At the beginning of 12th Dynasty the inhabitants of the Syro-Palestine region were called ḫk3.w-ḥ3s.wt. Evidence for this is found in Sinuhe B-98³ and in the tomb of Khnumhotep II4 in Beni Hasan. But we have no reason to regard these ḫk3.w-ḥ3s.wt mentioned in the 12th Dynasty – i.e. two or three centuries before the Hyksos – as identical to the later Hyksos. Not until later, when the Hyksos rulers use the term as a royal title, does it acquire a more concrete meaning as 'the group of Asiatics who ruled Egypt'.⁵

Their invasion coincides with the end of the 13th Egyptian Dynasty. The only literary source that describes the fall of Egypt under Hyksos rule is written by Manetho about 1500 years after the actual events take place. The idea Manetho gives sounds rather like a change of political leaders than mass invasion of foreign people.⁶

Hyksos rulers belong to 15th and 16th Dynasties and their capital city is Avaris (ḥwt wꜣr) situated in the Eastern Delta. A great number of objects found in situ in Upper Egypt and Nubia bear the names of 15th Dynasty rulers, which shows that the Hyksos ruled over entire Egypt at the time. The preserved trade routes with Kerma attest that the Hyksos have retained the Egyptian administration and trade

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¹ Beckerath 1999
² Ігнатов 2004 103-104
³ Grapow 1952 46
⁴ Newberry 1893 Plate 31
⁵ Säve-Söderbergh 1951 56
⁶ Waddell 1964 79-80
system. It is proved by the existence of scribes with Egyptian names among the Hyksos personnel. This fact suggests that the Hyksos used Egyptian officials.¹

At the time of the 16th dynasty the situation begins to change. There are no names of Hyksos kings found in Nubia and the southern part of Upper Egypt from this period. The influence of local governors is growing stronger. In Thebes the kings of 17th Dynasty acquire greater power. Conflicts between Egypt and the Hyksos characterize this period. Pap. Sallier 1 (British Museum EA 10185)² gives the first records of this serious conflict. The document contains the tale about the struggle between Sekenenre Tao II and the Hyksos king Apophis. The preserved part of the text reads that the king of Egypt receives a letter from the Hyksos ruler in which the former complains that the hippopotami of Thebes interrupt his sleep and demands that measures be taken to prevent this. After receiving the letter Sekenenre summons his council seeking advice. Unfortunately, the preserved part of the text end without making it clear what happened afterwards. The only certain thing is the hostility of Apophis who had probably presumed that military actions were to be undertaken against him. Maybe this is indeed what the lost part of the text tells about.

The theory that the deadly wounds on the skull of Sekenenre are received in a battle against the Hyksos raises controversial views among scholars. On the one hand, according to B. Gunn and A. Gardiner, this theory 'is certainly tempting but belong wholly to the realm of conjecture'.³ On the other hand, most recent examinations of the wounds show that they are most probably inflicted by a Syro-Palestinian axe.⁴ The Hyksos used such axes at the time. Nevertheless, it is not certain whether real military actions took place in the time of Sekenenre. However, his son Kamose led two military campaigns against the Hyksos. Two main documents give record about these.

The first of them is a wooden tablet found in 1908 in a tomb located near Dra Abu el-Naga, dating back to 17th Dynasty. It is discovered by Lord Carnarvon and H. Carter and is known as Carnarvon Tablet N1 (Cairo Museum JE 41790).⁵ The discovery raises different opinions among scholars. R. Weill, supported by G. Maspero, considers the text a fictitious tale.⁶ P. Newberry and A. Gardiner are convinced that the document tells about actual events.⁷ By this time the evidence

¹ Säve-Söderbergh 1951 65
² Pritchard 1955 231
³ Gardiner and Gunn 1917 241-251
⁴ Trigger 1983 173
⁵ Carnarvon and Carter 1912 36-37
⁶ Weill 1910-13 535-580
⁷ Gardiner 1916 108-109
on the rule of Kamose is exceptionally scarce and the historical credibility of the
text cannot be ascertained. Things remain this way until 1932 when during the
reconstruction of the Third Pylon in Karnak H. Chevrier discovers two fragments
of a stela that contain the first fifteen rows of the tablet. The rest of the text is
destroyed as only separate words which are identical to those from the tablet
remain. There is no place for doubt anymore since in Egypt royal stelae are official
documents and describe actual events.

The text begins with the 3rd year of the reign of Kamose. Some scholars
suggest that this is the last year of his rule as no source is found that mentions
a later date. However, it is more probable that he has ruled for one or two years
more because, as we will later see, he led another campaign after the one the tablet
describes. After the indication of the date and announcing the king's titulary there
follows a speech expressing his dissatisfaction with the situation at the time. It says:

\[ sibi.j sw r ih pgl.j nḥt \]
\[ wr m hwt-wr't kj m K3i \]
\[ hms.kwj sm3.kwj m^3m nḥsj \]
\[ s nb hfr fdk.f m Kmt ps8 t3 ḫn^5.j \]

'To what end am I cognizant of it, this power of mine, when a chieftain is in
Avaris and another in Kush, and I sit in league with an Aamu and a Negro,
every man holding his slice of this Egypt.'

This fragment depicts the political situation at the time very clearly. Vast
territories where pharaohs ruled before were then under foreign domination.
Besides, the pharaoh's authority in his own realm is weakened by local governors'
aspirations to power. The grandees have acquired enough confidence to defend
their own interests instead of those of the state. They are not encouraging the king
to undertake military actions, either. According to A. de Buck, gathering the council
before making difficult decisions is a conventional theme that describes how the
grandees expose all the difficulties of the plan proposed by the king advising him
not to try this difficult enterprise. This, however, does not mean that their speech
in the particular case does not provide evidence on the actual political situation.
The speech says:

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1 Lacau 1939 245-271
2 Habachi 1972 48
3 de Buck 1929 16-17
Behold the Asiatics have advanced as far as Cusae, they have pulled out their tongues all together. We are at ease holding our part of Egypt. Elephantine is strong, and the middle land is with us as far as Cusae. Men till for us the finest of their land; our cattle are in the papyrus marshes. Spelt is trodden out for our swine. Our cattle are not taken away.¹

This part of the text casts new light on the idea of the Hyksos rule over Egypt at that time. Previously, some Hyksos rulers had dominated over entire Egypt but at the time of Kamose their policy conforms to Egypt. This becomes clear from the fact that Egyptian cattle grazes freely in the Delta. This shows that there has probably been some agreement between the two sides that allowed Egypt to use the Hyksos’ resources. What is unclear, however, is what was demanded from Egyptians in exchange of the resources and whether these agreements were not a result of previous successful military campaigns against the Hyksos. It may also be only a matter of trade relations. However, one thing is certain - the grandees feel comfortable with the current situation of peace and do not want to risk their own authority in an eventual war. Moreover, it is in their interest that the positions of the king remain weaker, so that they would be able to dispose of more influence. However, not only does the king strongly believe in his own power and the support of the military, but he has also received orders from Amun himself.² He sets off with his army and dispatches a unit of Mejai to investigate. The Mejai are of Nubian origin and are hired as auxiliary troops. The attack is against Teti, a local governor in Neferusi near Ashmunein, who is most probably a supporter of the Hyksos. The preserved part of the text ends with the fall of Teti’s stronghold. This, however, is not the end of Kamose’s military actions against the Hyksos.

According to P. Lacau, the Stela has contained twenty to forty rows more³, which means the document contained one or two times more text than the preserved.

¹ Habachi 1972 48
² This motif appears frequently in texts of the New Kingdom but it had not been encountered by that moment.
³ Lacau 1939 249
The evidence for another campaign of the kind comes from the other document we are about to discuss, i.e. the Second Stela of Kamose\(^1\) discovered in 1954 during reconstruction works on the Second Pylon in Karnak. As L. Habachi points out, the difficulty in dealing with the text is rooted in both the considerable amount of rare and unknown words and, at some places, the impossibility to determine whether it describes events that have already taken place or Kamose's intentions\(^2\) What is more, the beginning of the Stela is rather unusual as it does not start with the date and royal titulary. This gives us reason to presume that this stela is continuation to the first one and that the texts of the two stelae actually represent one unified text describing the rule of Kamose. Unfortunately, the destroyed part is considerable, which does not allow complete certainty that it is indeed one text.

The tale begins directly with the panic that took over the capital city of the Hyksos at the war-cry of Egypt's armies. The Pharaoh tells how his fleet landed near the unknown territory of Per-Djet-Kens. Before reaching the residence of Apophis, Kamose captures a messenger, the frightened Hyksos king has sent to the ruler of Kush; here is a part of the message he carried:

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in iw gmn ir.t.n kmt r.j
hk3 ntj m hnw.s kims dj cnh
hr thm.j hr ln.j n ph.j sw
mi-ki n ir.t.n f nb.t r.k
stp.f p3 t3 snw r i3d.s
pji.j t3 hn pji.k
hb.n.f st mj hd m 3e
m.k sw 3 m 3e.j
nn ntj cnc n.k hr t3 kmt
m.k nn rdj.j n.f w3t r spr.t.k
k3.pss.n n3 n dmiw n.t kmt
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'Have you seen what Egypt has done against me? The ruler who is in it, Kamose, the Valiant, given life, is attacking me on my soil, but I am not attacking him in the way he had done also against you. He chose the two lands to persecute them, my land and yours, and he has ravaged them. Come, navigate down streams, do not be afraid. Behold he is here with me, there is no one who will be waiting for you in this Egypt, for I will not let him go until

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\(^1\) Habachi 1972

\(^2\) Habachi 1972 53
you have arrived. Then we shall divide the towns of this Egypt.'
This fragment makes it clear that Kamose had already undertaken a military campaign against Nubia and Apophis relies on the fact that the ruler of Kush is aware of the threat coming from Egypt's growing military power and, will take part in an alliance against it. His plan, however, fell through.

Kamose and his armies plunder the city and take the chariotry of Apophis. This is the first time that the chariotry is mentioned in Egyptian history. However, the loot acquired from plundering 'thousands of ships' with goods from Rechenu. Rechenu spreads on the territories of Syria and Palestine. Probably the Hyksos ruler collected taxes from these lands.

Despite that he does not take control of the capital city of the Hyksos, Kamose achieves great success through his campaigns. He causes serious material damage to the Hyksos, moreover, some hostile local governors also fall victim to his army.

Although the Hyksos still hold their positions, their influence in the region is getting more and more unstable, which is a precondition for their complete expulsion under the reign of Ahmose.

After the discovery of the two stelae certain facts of the Kamose's reign come to light that are totally unknown to scholars by that moment. But apart from the answers the two texts provide, they also raise important questions regarding the relations between Egypt and the Hyksos at that time. Of what kind these relations actually were? What were the moods of the people under Hyksos rule? Can it be assumed that there was real Hyksos domination to the south of Avaris or it is rather a matter of protection the Hyksos king had granted to local rulers, who, were paying taxes and were loyal to him in return? We can expect to find the answers to these and other questions as soon as some new evidence on the matter is discovered.

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1 Habachi 1972 49
2 Habachi 1972 37
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