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### THE *TJEKER*

In recent studies on the Sea Peoples, a consensus seems to be emerging that the ethnonym known as the *Si - k3 - r* is to be identified with the Σικελοί (Albright 1934: 65; Rainey 1982: 134; Edel 1984: 7; Görg 1985: 7–8; Singer 1988: 2000, to name but a few). There are, however, counter-arguments yet to be heard. First, to introduce *Sicels* in the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE is to invoke an ethnic term which in fact was not to appear for six centuries. While this is not, of itself, a difficulty, and in spite of the Mycenaean remains on the island which show that it was within the penumbra of the Aegean (Boardman 1980: 189; Mountjoy 1993: 173), there is no evidence that *Sicels* were then in residence. The strongest tradition would bring them from Italy, not the east (Hellanicus *FgrH I F* 79b; Thucydides vi.25; Cornell [1995: 38]; Lehman [1979: 493–494] and Schachermeyer [1982: 39–40] favor the northern Adriatic as the place of origin). In the one region known to have been settled by *Tjeker*, viz. the coastal plain north of Philistia, there is nothing remotely “*Sicel*”, if this term is taken in its classical connotation: all the foundation legends and cultural connections point elsewhere.

While the above argument, ingenious though it may be, is undoubtedly spurious, a second objection must be considered. The standard spelling in the Egyptian transcription employing the group *-r3-* suggests an /r/ in the original word, not an /l/ (Hoch 1994: 509). Egyptian scribes from the earliest times faced a problem in rendering liquids in foreign tongues, often employing *alif* in the Old Kingdom for the lateral, “dark” /l/. In the imperial chancery of the New Kingdom, *n + r* came increasingly to be used to render an emphatic Semitic (or Egyptian dialectic) /l/ (Schneider 1992: 380; Hoch 1994: 407, 432). But from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the New Kingdom, scribal tradition faced a new challenge in rendering *Aegean* or *Anatolian* words from non-Semitic roots. One tradition suggests an attempt to reserve *-ru* for a strong /l/ (cf. the transcriptions of Lukka and Shekelesh), but there are plenty of exceptions. In fact, the regular elision of *r* and *l* in word- or syllable-final position in Linear B (Hooker 1980: 49; Chadwick 1987: 26) suggests that the Egyptian scribes were faced with two weak sounds which they had difficulty in distinguishing. That being the case, the consistent spelling with *-r3-* in the Medinet Habu texts (Gauthier 1929: VI, 69; Wenamun follows a different orthographic tradition) could as easily, and arguably more cogently, represent an original *r* than an *l*.

Finally, there is the rendering of the initial syllable by *sì*. In Late Egyptian syllabic orthography, the scribal tradition employed the unvoiced palatal plosive /č/ (< *t'*: Vergote 1972: 99; Hoch 1994: 407), most often in the group *sì* (Helck, 1971: 563–64),<sup>1</sup> to render West

<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that because of internal phonetic developments, /t'/ is frequently written for /l/ in Late Egyptian (Junge 1996: 35).

Semitic /s/ (Burchardt 1909–10: sec. 138, 142; Edel 1966: 82–3; Hoch 1994: 436; Loprieno 1995: 29). While this mechanism is well attested in Egyptian group writing (in fact, as late as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE; see Edwards 1960: 3, n. 21; Grimal 1981: 60, n. 133), this is not the whole story. The Egyptian graphemes V 14 / G 47 (Gardiner 1957: 523, 473) share, along with I 10 (Gardiner 1957: 476), the task of rendering Semitic /d/ and occasionally /t/ and /d/ (Garr 1985: 27–28). It has been suggested that the sound conveyed by *samekh* was an affricative *ts* (Bromhard 1988: 123–25). However, it could as easily have been a frictionless continuant in which sibilance had been lessened, rather like the occasional pronunciation of intervocalic and word-final *s* in modern Greek. By the Iron Age, when *samekh* renders *s/š* in Egyptian, this was no longer true (Bing 1985: 118, n. 54).

At this juncture, some might find it tempting to cite an entry in Thutmose III's great Syrian list of place names (*Urk.* IV, 788, no. 136; see Jirku 1937: 19, n. 3) as another attestation of the Tjeker, and one which militates in favor of a Near Eastern locale and derivation. However, while the spelling is similar (*T3-k3-rw* or *šì-ka-ru*), the argument suffers from an *embarras de richesse*, for the form appears not once, but no less than three times under slightly different spellings: *t3-gr-rw* (*šì-g-r-ru*: *Urk.* IV, 789, no. 161), *iw t3-k-r3* (*iyē - šì-k-ra/l*: *Urk.* IV, 790, no. 197) and *d3 t3-k3-r3* (*zu šì-ku-rall*: *Urk.* IV, 792, no. 271). The repetition makes it virtually certain that we are not dealing with a toponym, much less an ethnic term, but rather a generic noun for a *land formation*. Thutmose III's lists, and perhaps some of the lists of Ramesses II and III, are itineraries, in which landmarks such as springs (Thutmose III, nos. 5, 46, 86, 95, and 113), water courses (Thutmose III nos. 43, 90, 99, and 151), mountains or heights (Thutmose III, nos. 77, 85, and 272) are as necessary as settlement names (Redford 1982). *T3-k3-r* in the great Syrian list thus very probably has nothing to do with the Tjeker of the Sea Peoples coalition, but is a common noun derived from the Semitic SKR/SGR, "to block up, dam (a canal or water course)" (Murtonen 1988: 300; *CAD* 15: 210ff), and probably should be translated "dam," or "dyke." Significantly, all four examples are to be found in contexts suggesting the presence of water: no. 136 is followed by *T3-nr-t* (Akk. *Silittu*), "branching off of a canal" (*CAD* 15: 263), no. 161 is preceded by *š3-wi-r3-n-t*, (E)shawa-rnt, "far side of the Orontes" (*CAD* 4: 352), no. 197 (read "the island/bank of s'-) is followed by *Abattu(m)*, the city at the crossing of the Euphrates between Emar and Tuttul (Heimpel 2003: 605), and no. 271 (read *zu sekēri*, "the spoil heap of the dam") is immediately followed by Carchemish.

There is no existing textual evidence, therefore, to seek the origins of the Tjeker in the Near East, and the likelihood remains that, in concert with most if not all of the members of the Sea Peoples coalition, they hailed from Western Anatolia or the Aegean. For terms in Hittite, Hurrian and Luwian, the *t3-* group was used by Egyptian scribes to convey the affricative double sound *t + s* (written with *z* in cuneiform), not *š / s* (see Albright 1934: 33, 64; Friedrich 1960: 32; Helck 1971: 280; Edel 1973: 63–64, 66–67; Laroche 1966: no. 1583; Held et al. 1987: 7–8; Ruijgh 1998: 664, 666). Since some Anatolian dialects

(e.g. Lydian) were “intolerant of double palatal clusters” (Kearns 1994: 55), and - *ts* - was rendered in Greek by /*t*/ (Kearns 1994: 44), we ought to look for an equivalent *T* (< *ts*) - *k* - *r* in our search for an eponym, ethnic group or region. Any connection between the *Tjeker* and the *Sicels*, therefore, appears to be unlikely, and the *Šikalayu* of Ugarit might more convincingly be equated with the *Shekelesh*.

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