

The Land of the šꜥꜣꜣꜣ (Nomads) of yḥwꜣ at Soleb

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Introduction

The temple of Amun-Ra at Soleb, constructed in Kush (Nubia) during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep III in the 18th Dynasty and “rediscovered” in 1813 by Burckhardt, is famous for its status as the southernmost temple and its scenes of the Heb-Sed Festival of Amenhotep III.¹ Located about 185 kilometers southwest of Wadi Halfa, the partially preserved Soleb temple of Amenhotep III on the west bank of the Nile, just south of the Third Cataract, can be difficult to access.² According to the building inscription of Amenhotep III from Thebes, the Soleb temple was named *Khaemmaat* and was dedicated to Amun-Ra and to Amenhotep III as a deity.³ A New Kingdom cemetery was nearby to the west, and subsequent rulers Akhenaten, Ay, and Tutankhamun also had modifications made to the temple. Even as early as 1829, the expedition of Major Felix which visited the site recognized that the prisoner inscriptions on visible columns were commemorating the victories of Amenhotep III, but after the centuries, Sector IV of the hypostyle hall was in ruins, toppled, and partly covered by sand.⁴ However, following the 1957–1963 excavation expedition led by Michela Schiff Giorgini, the uncovered remains were analyzed and reconstructed with the available pieces which had been discovered and identified. The columns of the hypostyle hall, decorated with bound prisoner reliefs and the names of peoples or places rendered in Egyptian hieroglyphs, are of significant geographical and historical importance. One inscribed

1 BURCKHARDT, *Travels in Nubia*, pp. 74–75; FRANCIGNY et al., *Soleb and Sedeinga*, pp. 4–13; SCHIFF GIORGINI, ROBICHON & LECLANT, *Soleb I. Ta-seti*, meaning “land of the bow,” was another ancient Egyptian designation for Nubia.

2 GPS coordinates 20°26'11.04"N, 30°20'02.36"E.

3 BREASTED, “Second Preliminary Report of the Egyptian Expedition,” p. 84; cf. HELCK, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, pp. 1750–1752; cf. Stele of Amenhotep III CG 34025 recto.

4 LECLANT, *Les Fouilles de Soleb*, p. 208.

Fig. 1. The Temple of Amun-Ra at Soleb. Photo by the author.



column in particular has peaked the attention of scholars in numerous fields of archaeology, history, language, and religion, since it mentions a *ššsw* group associated with the name *i-h-w3-z*. Although this inscription and a fragmentary wall inscription were discovered during excavations and noted in the official excavation reports, no photographs were provided, no physical details of the inscription were given, no discussion of the name or possible identification was included in the reports, and there was an error in transcription of one of the hieroglyphs. Neither have other publications sufficiently photographed, analyzed, interpreted, and placed these *ššsw* of *yhw3* inscriptions from Soleb in context. Because of the lack of documentation and discussion about this inscription which has been of interest to a variety of scholars, the author led a research project and expedition to obtain high resolution photographs, document, correct, translate, discuss, and publish the findings and conclusions for the academic community to access.⁵

The inscriptions mentioning the “land of the *ššsw* of *yhw3*” are known from two New Kingdom Egyptian temples in Sudan, and reference to or discussion of have appeared in several publications.⁶ The first of these *ššsw* of *yhw3* inscriptions to be rediscovered in modern times was located in a list of 104 names on a wall at the Amara West temple, and seems to date to the early 13th century BCE.⁷ Most publications discussing the phrase refer to or use the Amara West inscription, since it was discovered first, is more widely known, and has been more thoroughly published.⁸ Among the list of 104 names were *ššsw* groups that have been linked to people and places in the Edom, Moab, Transjordan, and Canaan areas.⁹ One of the entries in the list is a toponym phrase containing the name *yhw3*.¹⁰ Specifically, the line in transliteration reads *t3 ššsw yhw3* and has been translated as “land of the nomads of *yhw3*.”¹¹ Exactly what the name *yhw3* refers to has been a matter of debate. However, this hieroglyphic phrase or toponym, and therefore the path to understanding its original context and meaning, comes not from the Amara West list, but from two

5 Photography was done with the Nikon D850 45.7 megapixel DSLR camera in both RAW and JPEG formats, resulting in 5.5k resolution photographs.

6 GIVEON, “Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb”; LECLANT, “Le tétragramme à l’époque d’Amenophis III”; GOEDICKE, “The Tetragram in Egyptian?”; ALING & BILLINGTON, “The Name Yahweh in Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts”; REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*; ASTOUR, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists”; AHITUV, *Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents*; ADROM & MULLER, “The Tetragrammaton in Egyptian Sources.”

7 SPENCER, *Amara West I*; FAIRMAN, “Preliminary Report on the Excavations at ‘Amarah West,” pp. 139–144.

8 Amara West was the seat of the Egyptian administration of Upper Nubia or Kush from the reign of Seti I onwards.

9 HORN, “Jericho in a Topographical List of Ramesses II,” pp. 201–203.

10 Ibid., p. 201; GIVEON, “Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb,” p. 244.

11 HORN, “Jericho in a Topographical List of Ramesses II,” p. 201; GIVEON, “Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb,” p. 244; ASTOUR, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists,” p. 17.

Fig. 2. Bound prisoner reliefs at the Soleb temple. Photo by the author.



separate lists at Soleb – one cut into a wall and the other inscribed on a pillar, found at the famous temple dedicated to Amun-Ra and commissioned for building by Pharaoh Amenhotep III.¹² The earlier Soleb list, from which a portion of the Amara West list may have been copied, was uncovered during the Schiff Giorgini excavations at Soleb, beginning in 1957. These even earlier inscriptions from the reign of Amenhotep III also referred to the “land of the nomads of *yhwz*.” Publications in the past have generally only referred to the pillar, but in addition to the pillar relief in the hypostyle hall, a fragmentary wall list also contains a similar inscription mentioning the “land of the nomads of *yhwz*.”¹³

The pillars at Soleb

At this 18th-dynasty temple, famous for its scenes of the First Jubilee of Pharaoh Amenhotep III from the year 30 Heb-Sed Festival, and iconography of the royal ceremony depicted in the First Courtyard, pillars in the hypostyle hall and portions of a wall were decorated

¹² LECLANT, “Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1960–1961,” p. 328.

¹³ SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb III*, p. 179–180; SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*, pl. 206–207; LECLANT, *Les Fouilles de Soleb*, pp. 205–216.

with the images and names of various people supposedly conquered or subjugated by the Pharaoh.¹⁴ Of the known inscriptions from the Soleb temple, two claimed defeat or subjugation of a nomadic group associated with the name *yhwz* in the context of many other cities, lands, and peoples which were also identified in association with a geographic location or a name. The pillar inscription, preserved throughout antiquity, is still present at the archaeological site.

The pillar focused on in this study, with four named *ššsw* groups preserved, including the *ššsw* associated with the name *yhwz*, is located in Sector IV, Hypostyle Hall, and identified as Column IV N4.¹⁵ In the official excavation report, there is one black and white photo of Column IV N4, but the “*ššsw* of *yhwz*” section is not visible.¹⁶ Therefore, one of the goals of this project was to examine the column in detail and to photograph the inscription and its context. Column IV, similar to the other columns in this area, contains reliefs of four bound prisoners, each of which has a cartouche designating their group as *ššsw* nomads and then a specific designation associated with the group. These four names, transliterated from hieroglyphs, are *twr byl*, *yhwz*, *smt*, and *bt n*[...].¹⁷ Indeed, many of the phrases in the lists on the columns of the hypostyle hall read as the “land of the *ššsw* of X,” with X being a name associated with those particular *ššsw*, and often a geographical locale. However, this geographic interpretation is by no means the only option. The four names on Column IV in particular are not easily identifiable as geographic locations, and although proposals have been made to link the names to cities or regions, for four primary reasons at least three of the names are probably personal names or deity names rather than geographic names. First, it may be argued that the names *twr byl*, *smt*, *pys-pys*, and certainly *yhwz* are unknown from any other New Kingdom text or inscription besides the nearby Amara West list, which was probably partially copied from the Soleb list. Second, the names cannot be linguistically connected to any known geographic names without speculation and even modification. Third, the names themselves are not associated with a determinative of anything geographical, such as city or foreign land, and the *t3* (land) hieroglyph at the beginning of the phrases is only a general reference to the area in which those nomads live. Fourth, there are two, but probably three names identifiable with the names of deities worshipped in the Levant. Column N4 a1, *twr byl*, perhaps rendered “Tor Ba’al,” appears to be a refer-

14 BREASTED, “Second Preliminary Report of the Egyptian Expedition,” pp. 83–96; GALAN, “The Ancient Egyptian Sed-Festival and the Exemption from Corvée,” pp. 255–264; VAN SICLEN, “The Accession Date of Amenhotep III and the Jubilee,” pp. 290–300; JOHNSON, “Amenhotep III and Amarna,” p. 67.

15 SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb III*, p. 95; SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb IV*, fig. 76.

16 SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*, pl. 221.

17 LECLANT, *Les Fouilles de Soleb*, p. 214.

Fig. 3. Cartouches of *twr hyl* and *bt ʕnt*.



ence to the West Semitic deity Ba'al Hadad, who was considered king of the gods in Ugaritic and Canaanite texts and identified with the bull (Semitic *twr*) in both iconography and texts. This name has also been given a suggested geographical link east of Egypt but in northern Canaan, with the name Terbol or Turbul, located either in the Beqa Valley of Lebanon or slightly farther north.¹⁸ There is a town named Terbol (or Turbul) nearby Jebel Turbul in the Beqa Valley east of Beirut, but connecting this geographic name with the Egyptian topographic list rather than the ancient Semitic name relating to the deity is a hypothesis which cannot be supported archaeologically.

Column N4 a2, *yhwʕ*, is even more unique and therefore obvious as the Semitic name and a reference to the deity Yahweh, known from the 9th century BCE Mesha Stele and many ancient Hebrew inscriptions and texts.¹⁹ "The Land of the ʕʕsw of Yahweh" is generally not identified with any specific geographical place, nor should it be, since there is no topographical site in the entire region with the name *yhwʕ* or anything similar. Column N4 a3, *smt*, is a perplex-

18 ASTOUR, "Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists," pp. 20–29; GRIMAL, "Les listes de peuples dans l'Égypte du II^e millénaire av. J.-C. et la géopolitique du Proche-Orient," pp. 112–118; GRIMAL, "Civilisation pharaonique," pp. 722–727. Grimal argues that the arrangement of the columns is both geographic and political, with the columns on the edges containing the least important names and each column bearing N-S-E-W sections. While the political importance hypothesis appears plausible, the alleged compass orientations, which are different for each column, do not appear to fully match the known locations. Grimal acknowledges that N4 is generally east of Egypt and only specifies northern Canaan because of the alleged identification of *twr hyl* with the location Turbul.

19 DAHOOD, "The Moabite Stone and Northwest Semitic Philology," pp. 429–441; DEARMAN, *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*.



Fig. 4. Cartouche of *smt*. Photo by the author.

ing name with many possible options. Could this refer to Setem, a god of healing, altered through metathesis? Or a shortened form of Shemat-Khu, a goddess of the underworld? Or perhaps a lesser Semitic deity that is not currently known from ancient inscriptions? The name *smt* has been suggested as a location called Samat, a site on the Phoenician coast about 7 miles south of Batrun.²⁰ However, there is also an unexcavated site called Khirbet Deir Samat in southern Canaan between Gaza and the Dead Sea, west of Hebron.²¹ Yet, against the identification of *smt* as a geographic location, and particularly against a settlement since this is a nomad group, is that *smt* appears to be followed by either a “throwstick” (T14) or “peasant’s crook” (S39) determinative, which indicates that this particular name is a foreign tribe – perhaps named after a leader or ancestor.²²

20 ASTOUR, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists,” pp. 20–29.

21 IAWB Survey Site #5381

22 GIVEON, “Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb” and GRDSELOFF, “Edom” note the similarity of *smt* to a tribal group spelled *smy* (*smt* plus *y* ending designation for a people group) mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:55. The Gardiner hieroglyphic sign list is used in this article. The final sign, identified as T14, also appears similar to S39 “peasant’s crook” and could have an association with peasants or shepherding, although in the context T14 is a more logical interpretation. Regardless of the choice between T14 and S39, both signs indicate a foreign nomadic group rather than a geographic location.

It is plausible that the name of a deity or of a famous ancestor came to be attached to particular groups of $\$3SW$ nomads, as appears to be the association for *twr b'l* and *yhw3*. In the case of *smt*, this could have the personal name of a leader, ancestor, or possibly even a deity that became the name of the tribe, and perhaps later the name might have been attached to a geographical area and then a settlement.²³

Column N4 b1 *bt n[...]* (*bt n[t]*?) could be a geographical location, but it is also probably a reference to the Canaanite goddess Anat.²⁴ Because “house of Anat” could be a town centered around worship of Anat, a temple or shrine to Anat, or simply followers of Anat, it is difficult to determine. Several sites have been proposed as possible locations for the toponym Bet-Anat, but none to date have any convincing linguistic links or matching archaeological data.²⁵ However, since the people associated with this “house of Anat” were presumably $\$3SW$ nomads due to their inclusion on a $\$3SW$ pillar and in a $\$3SW$ section at Soleb, and no visible city or land determinative follows, a specific town is an unlikely identification. It might be significant that this “house of Anat” toponym or phrase is not present on the 13th-century-BCE Amara West list, suggesting that this particular $\$3SW$ group was no longer present in the area instead of the town having disappeared.²⁶ Rather, these $\$3SW$ may have been part of the “house of Anat,” meaning worshippers or followers of the deity. Yet, assuming that *smt* and *bt n[t]* are referring to specific geographic places, their locations suggest that the $\$3SW$ groups on this column were spread throughout the greater Canaan region, and probably also what the Egyptians referred to as Edom due to the way in which $\$3SW$ were identified in ancient Egyptian texts. Although none of the names are followed by *ntr* (Egyptian “god”) or the god or goddess determinatives, the names *yhw3* and Ba'al Hadad or *twr b'l* were not used for deities that were worshipped in Egypt during the 18th dynasty. Unlike the Semitic deities Reshef, Astarte, or Qetesh, Yahweh was not adopted by the Egyptians, and a manifestation of Seth was worshipped instead of the Semitic god Ba'al Hadad. Certainly, even in the times when the Hyksos ruled the Delta region, the Asiatics did not worship many of the major Egyptian deities, even excluding the prominent sun-god Ra, nor did the Egyptians import all of

23 E.g., the Asher tribe mentioned in Papyrus Anastasi I. E.g., Israel, which initially was the name of the eponymous ancestor, but later it became the name of a tribe, and eventually a region and nation.

24 GIVEON, “Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb,” pp. 244–245.

25 The proposed identifications for a town or location called Bet-Anat have primarily been associated with various Egyptian lists (Thutmose III Karnak List I: 97; Seti Karnak Lists; Seti El-Qurne List (northern sphinx): 23; Seti I Abydos list: A3; Ramesses II Karnak List: 39) and Biblical references (Joshua 15:59, 19:38; Judges 1:33, 5:6).

26 It is also possible that the Amara West list excluded *bt-n* due to space restrictions, deeming other names more important.



Fig. 5. Cartouche of "land of the nomads of *yhwz*." Photo by the author.

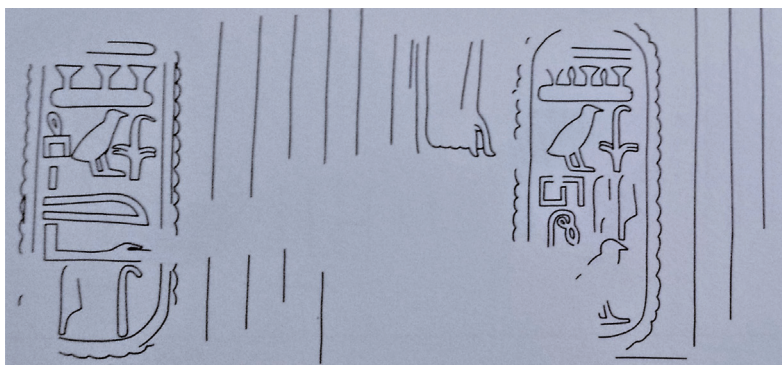
the Semitic gods and goddesses.²⁷ Although Anat was worshipped in Egypt during the New Kingdom, because of the *bt* (house of) modifier, and the association with a *ššw* group outside of Egypt, perhaps a deity determinative should not be expected. Yet, due to the damage on this section of the pillar, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a *ntr* or goddess sign was originally present following the name. Overall, the case for references to deities and personal names rather than cities or towns on this particular pillar is compelling.

The cartouche containing the phrase "land of the *ššw* of *yhwz*" is 42 cm long by 15 cm wide, carved in relief on Column IV N4.²⁸ The

²⁷ ALLEN, "The Speos Artemidos Inscription of Hatshepsut," pp. 1–17.

²⁸ The cartouche was measured on site by the author, and the signs were carefully observed and photographed leading to the conclusion that an error had been made in previous transcriptions.

Fig. 6a. Drawings of Column IV cartouches, from SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*.



bound prisoner on the column faces right, and the hieroglyphs in the cartouche are read from top to bottom and right to left. The signs included in the cartouche are as follows:

N16 *t3* (“land”)

M8 *š3* M23 *sw* G43 *w* (“nomads”)

M17 *i* O4 *h* V4 *w3* G1 *3* (“*yhw3*”)²⁹

In the excavation report and all other publications following this initial reading, the final sign is classed as G43 bird (*w*), but this was a mistake, and the sign is clearly the G1 falcon representing *aleph*.³⁰ The same final sign, G1 falcon, is also found in the Amara West list. Therefore, the correct transcription of this hieroglyphic phrase on Column IV at the Soleb temple is *t3 š3sw yhw3*. Since the word order infers that the construct is being used, the phrase translates as the “land of the nomads of *yhw3*.” This appears to be equivalent to the deity name *Yhwh* known from West Semitic texts.³¹ The bound prisoner motif also implies that these *š3sw* nomads of *yhw3* were an alleged “conquered” or “subdued” people. As discussed previously, there is no land determinative, and therefore *yhw3* is probably a personal name, not a place name, nor is there a *ntr* “god” sign or honorific transposition, indicating that *yhw3* was not a deity worshipped in Egypt. The above criteria demonstrate that the translation should be the “land of the nomads of Yahweh,” not “Yahweh in the land of the nomads,” which does not follow grammatically or in the context of the other *š3sw* groups associated with names in the Soleb inscriptions.

29 Double M17, or Z4 = y, which is rare as initial consonant except in use as equivalent of Semitic yod (GARDINER, *Egyptian Grammar*, pp. 481, 556).

30 SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb III*, pp. 122–123. The mistake has continued even into the most recent writings due to lack of on-site documentation, analysis, and photography, including the 2017 publication by ADROM & MULLER, “The Tetragrammaton in Egyptian Sources,” pp. 96–97.

31 AHITUV, *Canaanite Toponyms*, p. 122.

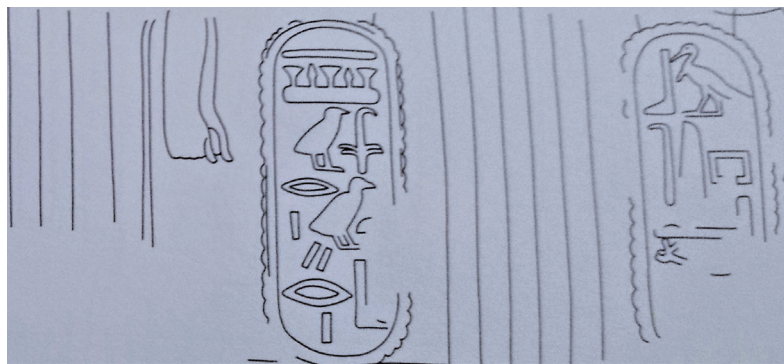


Fig. 6b. Drawings of Column IV cartouches, from SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*.

Depicted on the columns of the hall in relief, the bound prisoners are rendered differently according to region or ethnic group. On the various pillars, some are depicted as Nubian, some as Canaanite, some as Syrian, and some as *ššw*. Although many columns are broken and the heads are missing from several of the bound prisoner reliefs at Soleb, including Column IV N4, the *ššw* associated with *yhw* appear to have been depicted as Semitic *ššw* according to the immediate context at Soleb and the preserved prisoner reliefs listing the same *ššw* groups on the Amara West list. Due to the geographical context of the nearby inscriptions, and the general area in which the Egyptians placed the *ššw* according to New Kingdom texts, these *yhw*-associated nomads would have roamed somewhere in the southern Levant, and in particular the area of either Sinai, Edom, Moab, Transjordan, or Canaan. For example, texts of Ramesses II, Merneptah, and Rameses III refer to *ššw* in the Edom area.³² Based upon known geography, the Egyptians seem to have regarded the *ššw* as a prominent part of the population of the areas referred to as Edom, Moab, and southern Transjordan.³³ Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom often mention nomadic people living east of Egypt, even specifying that some were tent dwellers – the *ššw* are specifically referred to as tent dwellers in Papyrus Harris I, 76: 9–10, which further suggests the mobile lifestyle of a nomad.³⁴ Beginning slightly earlier, in the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1550 BCE), documents describe the existence of “extrarurban” people, or a nomadic segment of society in Canaan and the nearby regions.³⁵ The Amarna Letters and 18th- and 19th-dynasty Egyptian texts repeatedly mention nomadic people such as *ššw*, *sutu*, and in some cases possibly ‘*apiru*,

32 Papyrus Anastasi VI, 51–57; GIVEON, *Les bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens*, pp. 130–134.

33 ASTOUR, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists”; REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, pp. 269–273.

34 REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, p. 278; GIVEON, *Les bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens*, p. 135.

35 ROSEN, “Nomads in Archaeology,” p. 81; BROSHI & GOPHNA, “Middle Bronze Age II Palestine,” p. 74.

living in Canaan and the adjacent wilderness areas during the period in which the *ššsw* cartouches were inscribed at Soleb.³⁶ The term *ššsw*, known from Egyptian sources of the 18th Dynasty through the Third Intermediate Period, is typically interpreted as referring to a social group of nomads in the southern Levant region, and Egyptian records imply significant numbers of *ššsw* in this area.³⁷ It is acknowledged that archaeologically these groups are difficult to trace, as most “evidence for enclosed nomadism in the southern Levant is textual. References to groups such as [...] the *ššsw*, either a class designation or an ethnic attribution,” are viewed as belonging to the nomadic population east of Egypt in the Late Bronze Age, but the ancient texts clearly place the *ššsw* nomads of Egyptian texts in the southern Levant, including the regions of Sinai, Edom, and Moab.³⁸ Because nomads are mentioned often in texts from the period, especially in 18th- and 19th-dynasty military texts, they likely made up a noticeable portion of the regional population, and therefore the naming of several *ššsw* groups on the Soleb pillars represents the idea that multiple nomadic groups or tribes lived around the Levant and east of Egypt in the New Kingdom period.

Wall block

In addition to the reliefs and accompanying text on the hypostyle hall columns, fragmentary inscriptions on an interior wall of the temple, following the Egyptian practice of showcasing a list identifying conquered places and people, specify numerous *ššsw* nomad groups outside of Egypt. The wall had originally contained an extensive list, probably very similar to the list at the Amara West temple, but it fell into ruins and only fragments of sections were recovered during excavations. Two of the recovered wall block fragments, SB 69 and SB 79, have reliefs with bound prisoners and were part of a large list occupying a major interior wall of the temple. In the original context, the bound prisoners were facing left, and the hieroglyphs were meant to be read top to bottom then left to right, and in a different cartouche arrangement than the inscribed columns of the hypostyle hall. This wall relief was situated along the north aisle of the east portico in the 2nd court, which measured approximately 24 meters east–west by 30 meters north–south. Two *ššsw* groups were identi-

36 LEVY, “Pastoral Nomads and Iron Age Metal Production in Ancient Edom,” p. 157; NA’AMAN, *Canaan in the 2nd Millennium B.C.E.*, 91. While *ʾapiru* is normally viewed as a socioeconomic class term rather than an ethnic term, *ššsw* and *sutu* are best understood as referring to a nomad. Specifically, *ššsw* is interpreted as a general term for nomadic groups on the peripheral areas of Canaan, while *sutu* is the equivalent generic Akkadian term for nomad.

37 LEVY, ADAMS & MUNIZ, “Archaeology and the Shasu Nomads,” pp. 65–66; HOPKINS, “Pastoralists in Late Bronze Age Palestine,” p. 210.

38 ROSEN, “History Does Not Repeat Itself,” p. 64; e.g., BREASTED, *Ancient Records of Egypt Volume 2*, p. 211; Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt Volume 3*, pp. 46, 53, 144.

fied from fragmentary wall blocks from the interior of the temple found during excavations – the *š3sw* of *yhw3* and the *š3sw* of *pt ys*.³⁹ Both of these blocks were from the wall of the temple Sector III, 2nd court. On block II 79 of Soleb is the phrase *t3 š3sw pt ys*.⁴⁰ Block SB 69, Sector III, 2nd court, is a fragmentary wall block which was part of a larger relief showing subdued or conquered people and places.⁴¹ The location, R38, is in the north aisle of the east portico. The fragmentary inscription of SB 69 was found during excavations of the temple, then along with several other architectural fragments it was placed in storage off-site, but kept in Sudan rather than added to the Egyptological collection at the University of Pisa.⁴² Now it seems to be in the possession of the department of antiquities in Sudan. On block II 69 of Soleb is the same phrase *t3 š3sw yhw3*. Although this phrase is identical in word order and meaning to the relief on Column IV N4, the facing of the hieroglyphs is opposite. While a drawing was made of the inscription on SB 69, unfortunately no high-resolution photograph is known to exist.



Fig. 7. Drawings of SB 69, from SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*.

Date of the inscription

The temple, dedicated to Amun-Ra and commissioned by Amenhotep III, would have been finished no later than his year 29 (c. 1385 BCE), since scenes for the 30-year Heb-Sed festival were inscribed on some of the walls and the temple had been prepared for his first Heb-Sed festival in year 30.⁴³ If the Heb-Sed festival of Amenhotep

39 Because the exact context and relative positioning of block II 79 in comparison with block SB 69 is not known, it will not be used in the argument for a specific location for the *š3sw yhw3*. The meaning of *pt ys* is also unknown and might be yet another proper name.

40 This *pt ys* had been suggested as equivalent with *pys-pys* due to correlations with the Amara West list, but the identification is based purely on list comparison and appears tenuous on linguistic grounds. LECLANT, *Les Fouilles de Soleb*, pp. 205–216.

41 SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb III*, pp. 179–180; SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb V*, plate 206–207.

42 Personal email communications.

43 MORKOT, “Nb-M’t-R’-United-with-Ptah,” p. 335. The high chronology of the 18th dynasty is used in this article due to recent radiocarbon studies. Astronomical and C14 data appear to place the reign of Thutmose III from c. 1504–1450 BCE, although varying chronologies are held by scholars. Amenhotep II, whose highest attested year is 26, apparently had no Heb-Sed festival, and whose mummy indicates a death in his 40s, probably reigned approximately 1450–1424 BCE, with the possibility of up to 3 more years. The reign of Thutmose IV is typically thought to be 9 years, and therefore ending about 1414 BCE, when Amenhotep III took the throne.

III was celebrated in c. 1384 BCE, it follows that the scenes on the temple would have been commissioned before this occurred. However, an archaeological analysis of the Soleb site suggests that this temple to Amun-Ra was not constructed immediately prior to the 30-year celebration of Amenhotep III, but probably at least partially built years prior to this, with mention of year 26 on the temple decoration and the pillars relating to the year 5 Kush campaign implying that it was constructed earlier in his reign.⁴⁴ Since the only known military campaign of Amenhotep III was a year 5 suppression of a rebellion in Kush, which is recorded on three known stelae from Sai Island and near Aswan and reports that all the chiefs of Kush were trampled, the claims of the conquest of many of these places and peoples east of Egypt were probably propaganda and reflect Egyptian actions or influence from earlier in the 18th dynasty.⁴⁵ However, the inscriptions do reflect knowledge of these people and places during the time of Amenhotep III. Therefore, a logical time-frame for the carving of the subjugated lands and peoples recorded at the Soleb temple, which include those in Kush, would be after this campaign of year 5, placing the date of the conquest lists from about 1409–1385 BCE.⁴⁶ The earlier range, closer to the campaign, is more probable because the lists function as a commemorative monument for the subjugation of Kush, and this would also allow ample time to construct and decorate the temple before the Heb-Sed festival of c. 1384 BCE. Alternatively, the other groups and locations outside of Nubia could have been known and considered under the control of the pharaoh around that period early in his reign, but nothing was inscribed until soon before the Heb-Sed festival. Regardless, the inscriptions claiming conquest must have been carved no later than c. 1384 BCE while reflecting a slightly earlier time.

Significance

Although it has been claimed that *yhw* occurs as a place name in an earlier Egyptian text from the 11th dynasty, this assertion is obviously incorrect when critically analyzed.⁴⁷ The word in question, claimed to be *yhw* by Giveon, Gardiner transliterated as *ihuii*, and identified it as a place name. The spelling of *ihuii* in the 11th-dynasty text is nowhere near equivalent to the Soleb or Amara West inscriptions, nor is it equivalent to Semitic Yahweh. Rather, it was spelled M17,

44 SCHIFF GIORGINI et al., *Soleb III*, p. 40; cf. also *Soleb IV* and *Soleb V*. For the view that the temple was built just in time for year 30, cf. DORMAN, "The Temple of Soleb: A Final Word on the Coregency."

45 HELCK, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, pp. 1665–1666.

46 VAN SICLEN, "The Accession Date of Amenhotep III and the Jubilee," pp. 290–291.

47 GIVEON, "Toponymes Ouest-Asiatiques à Soleb," p. 244.

A2, O4, G43, M17, G43 and the determinative for foreign land N25.⁴⁸ Conversely, it has also been suggested that the earliest inscription in which the name *yhw* appears is from a Moabite text called the Mesha Stele in the 9th century BCE. This may be true if referring to alphabetic inscriptions. However, both Column IV N4 a2 and Block 69 from the Soleb temple contain, in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the earliest reference to the name *yhw* around 1400 BCE. The uniqueness of this name, its association with a nomadic group east of Egypt, and the contextual and linguistic implications that the name refers to a deity rather than a specific geographic location, suggests that this is an Egyptian rendering of the deity Yahweh, known from other ancient texts as the monotheistic god worshipped by the ancient Israelites.⁴⁹ Since the only ancient people known to have worshipped a deity named *yhw* (Yahweh) in ancient times were the Hebrews or Israelites, it also logically follows that these particular *ššw* nomads associated with *yhw* could be identified with the early Israelites before they became a sedentary population in Canaan, and that the Egyptians had familiarity with this group and this deity during the 18th dynasty and the end of the 15th century BCE.

48 GARDINER, "The Tomb of a Much-Travelled Theban Official," p. 36 and pl. ix.

49 REDFORD, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, pp. 269–273; AHITUV, *Canaanite Toponyms*, pp. 121–122.

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