

THE COUNTING OF THE DEAD ENEMY'S HANDS

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*Be a scribe that you may be
saved from being a soldier
pLansing (10, 9)**

The subject of this article is the New Kingdom military practice of cutting off a dead enemy's hands. The severed enemy's hand was proof of a soldier's bravery, a kind of trophy especially in the time of 18th Dynasty. The reason for cutting off the hands, from the time of 19th Dynasty, and their counting was a practical one. If it was necessary to know how many living was captured, it was also necessary to know how many dead there were.

Key words: New Kingdom, military practice, the cutting of a dead enemy's hands.

The *mr mšc* Imenemhab relates in his biography¹ that while Tutmosis III was hunting a herd of 120 elephants in Niu, he snared 'the largest among them and cut off its *drt* (hand) while alive'; for this brave deed he was rewarded by his sovereign with a gift of "gold and clothing."²

Imenemheb's hunting exploit points to the custom applied in the New Kingdom military campaigns – the cutting off a dead enemy's hands.³

* R. A. CAMINOS, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, London 1954, 402.

¹ K. SETHE – W. HELCK, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, Berlin 1927-1958 (= *Urk.* IV) 893-894; cf. J. H. BREASTED, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 5Bde, Chicago 1964 (= *BAR*), II §588.

² P. E. NEWBERRY, The Elephant's Trunk called its *drt* (*drt*) 'Hand', *JEA* 30 (1944) 75.

³ We should separate two occasions in which 'hand might be cute'. One is related with criminal law and should be treated as a punishment (cf. J. ČERNÝ, Papyrus Salt 124, *JEA* 15 (1929) 245, line 7; 247, n.8; W. BOOSCH, in *LA* VI, s.v. Strafen, 68-72). The second one belongs to the war practice, characteristic for the time of New Kingdom.

According to the iconography, and written sources, we can trace three phases of the above mentioned military practice: very cutting, 'carrying' of hands and counting.

The very cutting

Iconography



Fig. 1. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos.
Shardana of Rameses's II troops is severing the hand of a fallen enemy in a land robe.
(W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte* II, Leipzig 1935, 20).

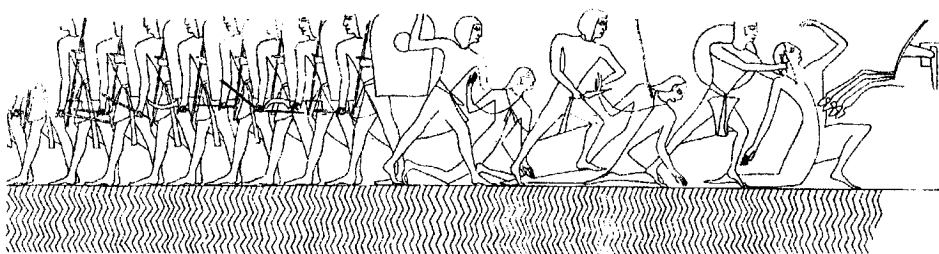


Fig. 2. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos.
Egyptian soldier is severing a hand of the enemy who was captured and probably killed
(Wreszinski II 70).



Fig. 3. Reign of Ramses III / Libyan war – Relief at Medinet Habu.
A Shardana of Rameses's III troops is severing the hand of a Libyan soldier
(Wreszinski II 137).

Written sources

For the very cutting, there are no direct references in the written sources. However, in cases of biographic inscriptions, the mentioning of the taking and bringing away of hands, in context of the actual battle, might be treated as a written addition of iconography. It is worthy of notice that in almost all such cases the number of 'captured' hands was low.

– Reign of Ahmose I / Biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana⁴

Second Battle of Avaris

One fought on the water in the canal: Pezedku (ḏd-kw) of Avaris. Then I fought hand to hand, I brought away (in.n.i) a hand. It was reported to the royal herald. One gave me the gold of valor.

Third Battle of Avaris⁵

Then there was again fighting in this place; I again fought hand to hand there; I brought away (in.n.i) hand. One gave me the gold of bravery in the second place.

Siege of Sharuhen⁶

One besieged Sharuhen (Š^c-r-ḥ^c-n^c) for. Then I took (ḥ^c.n in.n.i) captive there, two women and one hand. One gave me the gold of bravery, [besides] giving me the captive for slaves.

Campaign against Nubians⁷

... his majesty made a great slaughter among them. Then I took (ḥ^c.n in.n.i) captive there, two living men, and three hands. One presented me with gold in double measure, [besides] giving to me two female slaves.

– Reign of Ahomose I / Biography of Ahmose-pen-nekhet

Campaign in Syria⁸

Ahmose, called Pen-Nekhbet, (pn-nḥb.t) triumphant; he says: "I followed King Nebpehtire (nb-pḥty-r^c) triumphant. I captured for him (kf^c.n.i n.f) in Zahi Zahi (ḏ^c-hy) a living prisoner and a hand."

– Reign of Amenhotep I / Biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana

Amenhotep's campaign against Nubia⁹

I fought incredibly; his majesty beheld my bravery. I brought off (in.n.i) two hands, and took (them) to his majesty.

⁴ *Urk.* IV 3, 12-15; *BAR* II §9.

⁵ *Urk.* IV 3, 17; *BAR* II §10.

⁶ *Urk.* IV 4, 17; *BAR* II §13.

⁷ *Urk.* IV 5, 9; *BAR* II §14.

⁸ *Urk.* IV 36, 1; *BAR* II §20.

⁹ *Urk.* IV 7, 9-11; *BAR* II §38.

– Reign of Amenhotep I / Biography of Ahmose-pen-nekhbet

Campaign in Libya¹⁰

Again I served for King Zeserkere (Dšr-k^c-R^c) triumphant; I captured for him (kf^c.n.i n.f) on the north of Imukehek (Y^cmw-hkk) three hands.

– Reign of Thutmose I / Biography of Ahmose-pen-nekhbet

Campaign in Naharin¹¹

I captured for him (kf^c.n.i n.f) (i.e. for king) in the country of Naharin 21 hands, one horse, and one chariot.

– Reign of Thutmose III / Biography of Amenemheb

Year 33; eight campaign / Battle in Senzar¹²

I fought hand to hand before the king; I brought off a hand there (in.n[i] drt im). He gave to me the gold of honor...

The 'carrying' of hands

Iconography

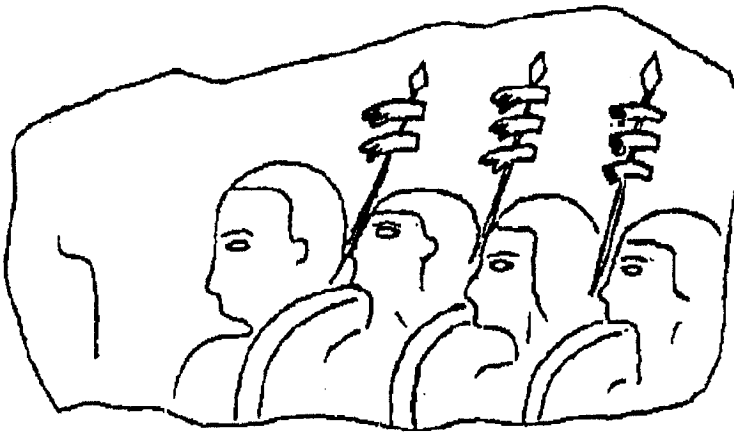


Fig. 4. Reign of Amenhotep IV / Relief at his temple in Karnak.
Egyptian soldiers bear spears on which are marshaling hands.
(W. Helck, *GM* 18 (1975) 23-24).

¹⁰ *Urk.* IV 36, 4; *BAR* II §42.

¹¹ *Urk.* IV 36, 10-11; *BAR* II §85.

¹² *Urk.* IV 892, 4; *BAR* II §584.

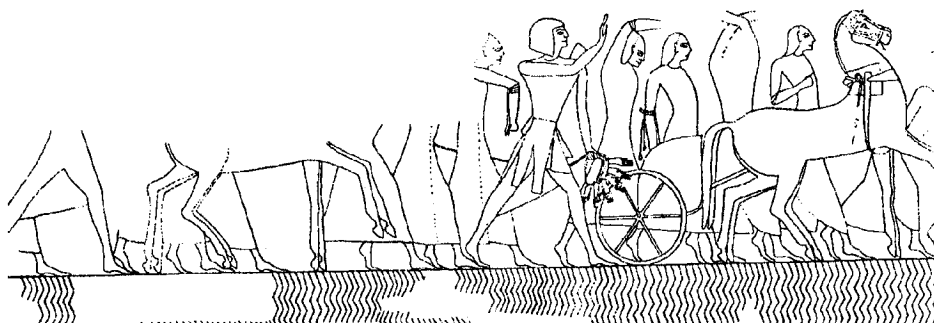


Fig. 5. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos.
Egyptian soldier wears hands stringed on a rope (Wreszinski II 70).



Fig. 6. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos.
Soldiers wear hands stringed on a rope (Wreszinski II 70).

Written sources

– Reign of Amenhotep II / The Syrian Campaign – The Memphis stela¹³

The Capture of Hashabu

*He fetched 16 living warriors of the Hurrian elite at the beck of his Chariot, 20 hands on the foreheads of his horses and 60 bulls, which were lead before him.*¹⁴

¹³ *Urk.* IV 1304, 13; B.CUMMING, *Egyptian Historical Records of the Latter 18th Dynasty I*, Warminster 1982, 31.

¹⁴ In amount of capture given in next section, which describes return in Memphis, there are no hands.

– **Reign of Amenhotep II / Amada Stela**

The action after an Nubian revolt¹⁵

*There upon six men from among the foe was hung in front of the rampart of Thebes and the hands likewise.*¹⁶

– **Reign of Merenptah / Libyan War, from Karnak,**

Triumphal Return¹⁷

[Then returned] the captains of archers, the infantry and chariotry; every contingent of the army, whether recruits, or heavy armed troops [carried of the Plunder driving] asses before them, laden with the uncircumcised phalli of the country of Libya, together with the hands of every country that was with them..

Libyan War, List of Slains, from Karnak¹⁸

... Ekwesh [of] the countries of the sea, whom had brought the wretched [fallen chief of Libya, whose] hands [were carried off].

pAnastasi II¹⁹

(5.3)... How delightful is thy going to Thebes, thy war chariot bowed down with hands (5.4) and chiefs pinioned before thee! Thou will present them to thy august father.

¹⁵ Urk. IV 1297, 11; B. Comming, *Egyptian Historical Records*, 27.

¹⁶ It means that the captured persons, or some of them, were executed and hanged, and along them were hanged hands of enemies taken in a battle.

¹⁷ K. A. KITCHEN, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Historical and Biographical*, vol. IV, Oxford 1982 (= *KRI IV*), 7-8 / 40-54; *BAR III* §587.

¹⁸ *KRI IV*, 13-14; *BAR III* §601.

¹⁹ R. CAMINOS, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 45, 47.

The scenes of the counting of the hands
Iconography

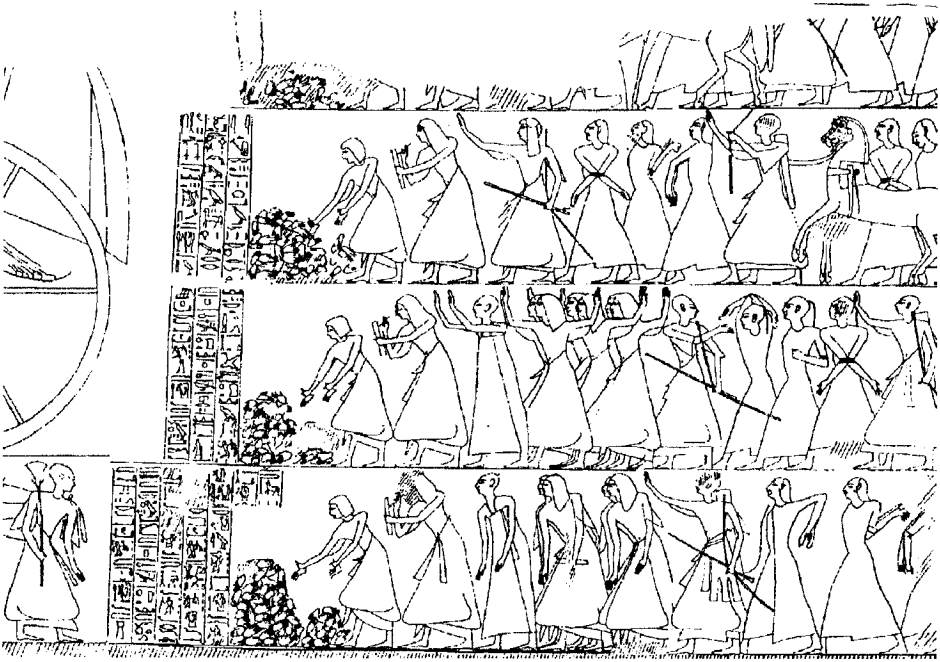


Fig. 7. Reign of Ramses II / Sirian War – Relief at Seti's I Temple in Abydos.
The [king seats on] his chariot as hands of the slains are counted by scribes
(Wreszinski II 25b; 25; 1979. K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions II*,
Oxford 1979, 187-188; K. A Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions, Translated and Annotated*,
Translations Vol. II: Ramesses II, Royal Inscriptions, Oxford, 1996 54-55).

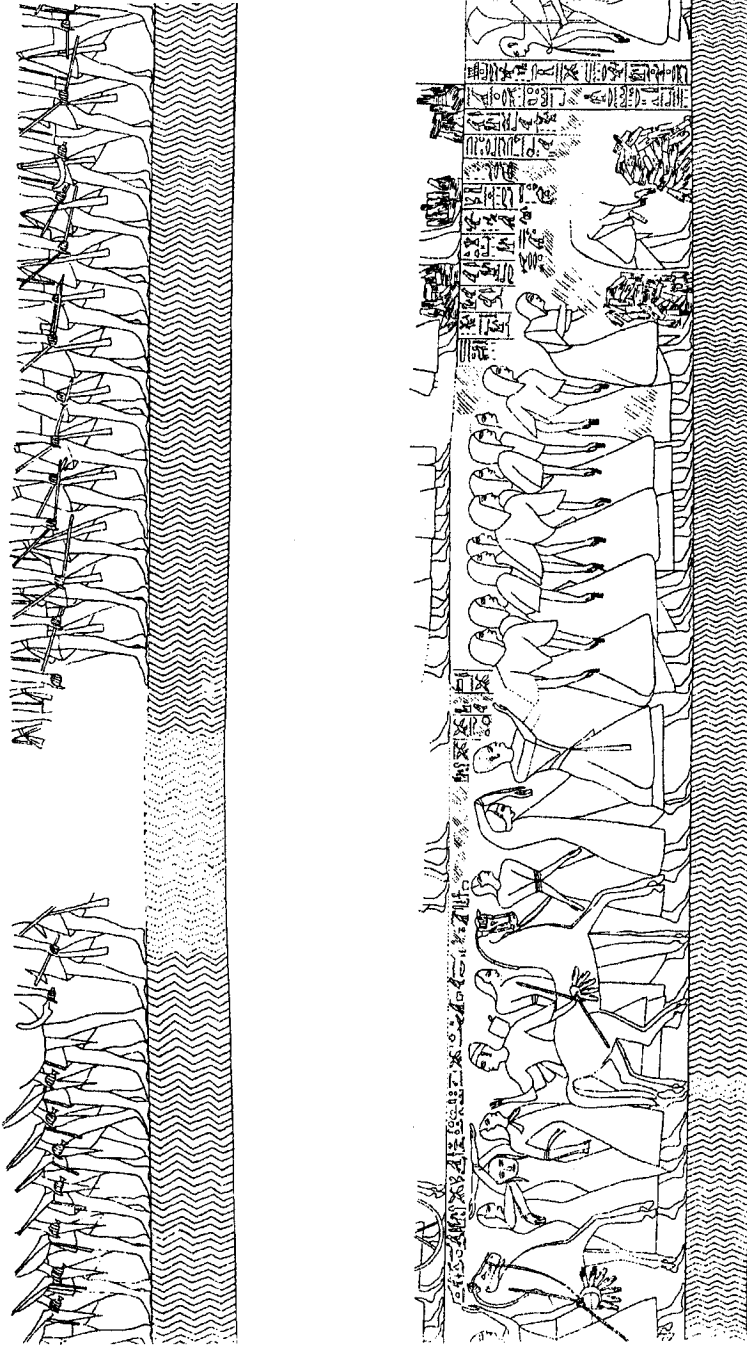


Fig. 8. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos (Wreszinski II 70).

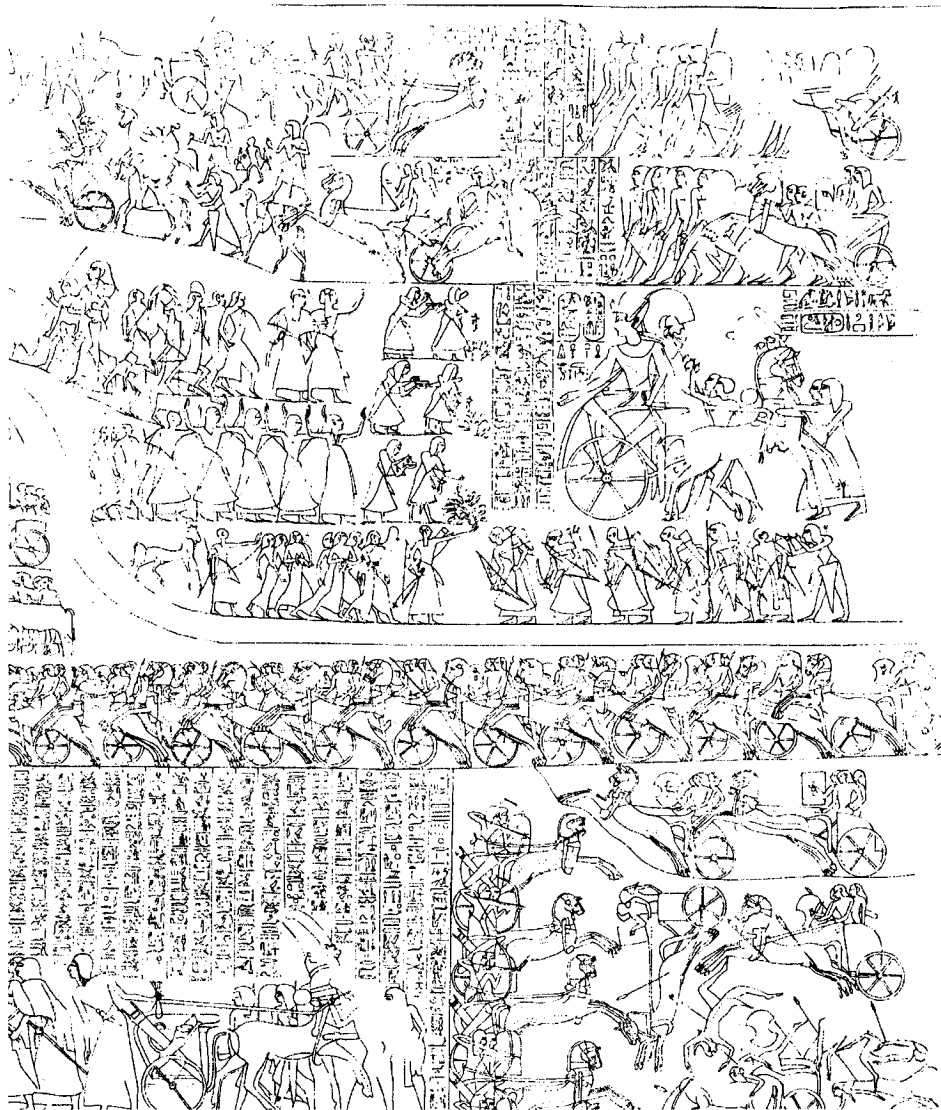


Fig. 9. Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abu Simbel.
The relief shows the king after the battle is over. As he seats in his chariot, his officers
throw down before him the hands of the slain (Wreszinski II 170).

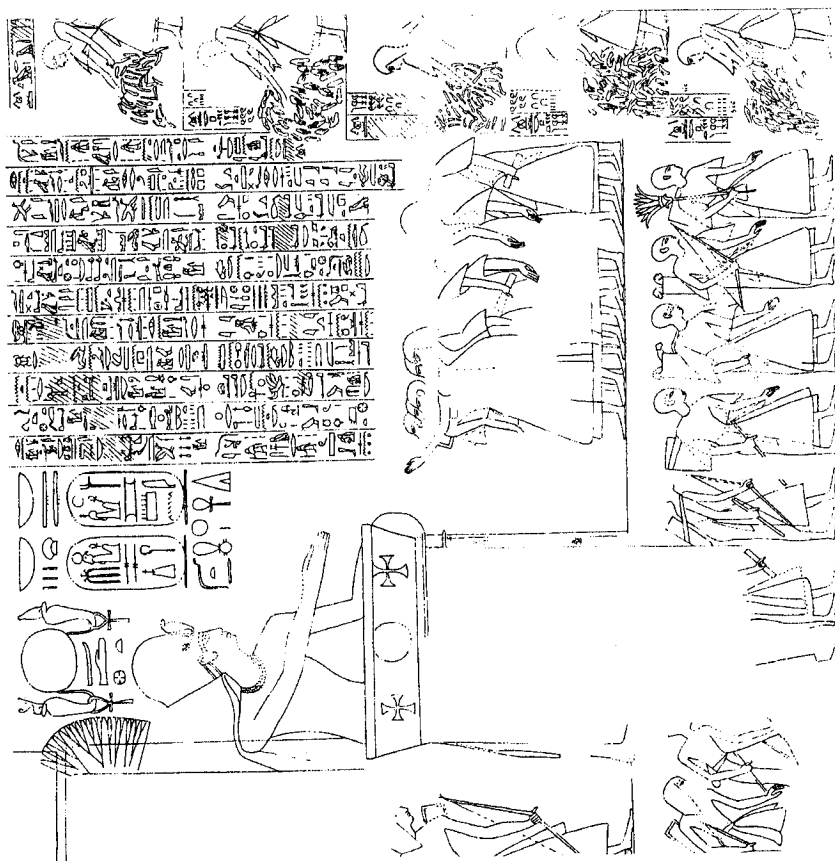


Fig. 10. Reign of Ramses III / First Libyan War - Relief at Medinet Habu. The king stands in a balcony with his waiting chariot behind him. In front of him Egyptian officers and scribes throw down in five heaps severed hands and phalli (Wreszinski II 133).

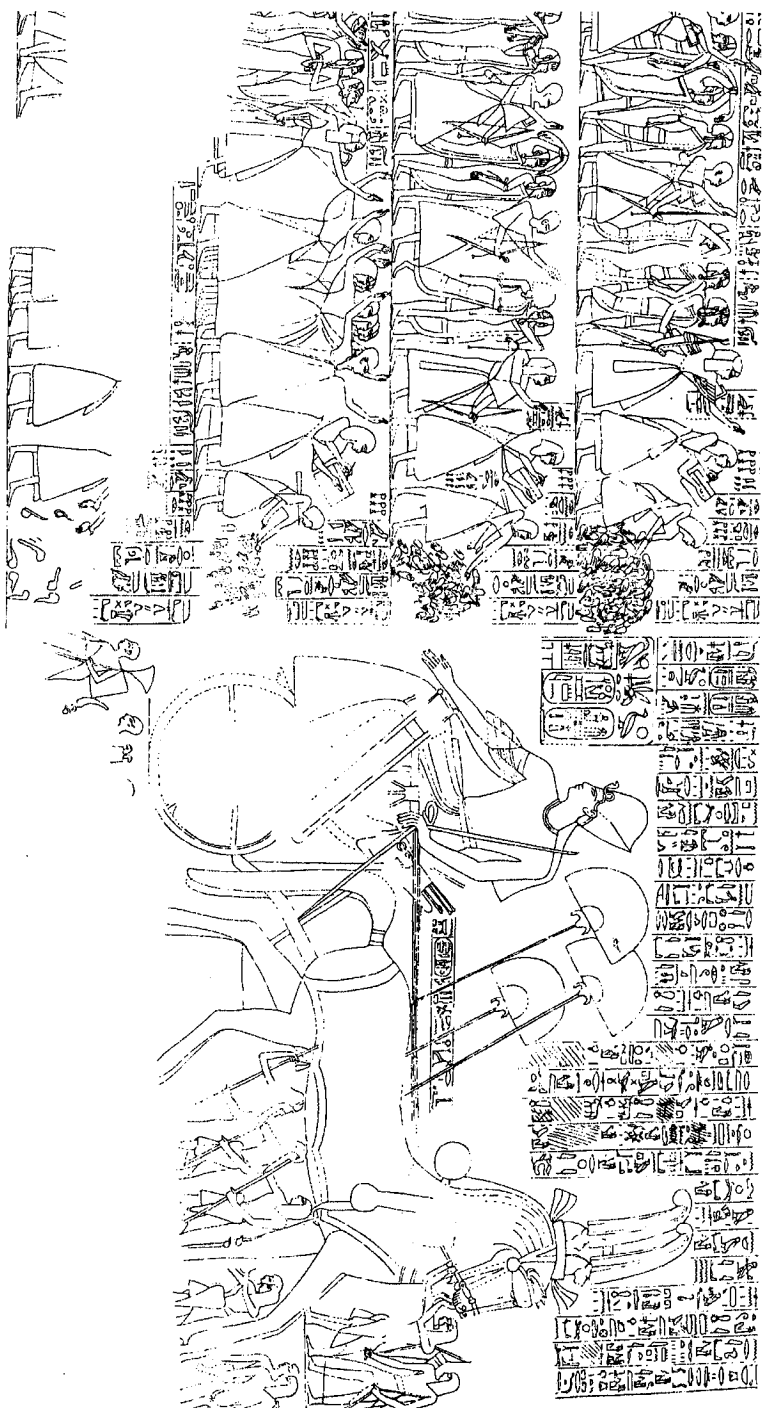


Fig. 11. Reign of Ramses III / First Libyan War – Relief at Medinet Habu.
 The king seats in his chariot. Before him, his sons and the highest officials of the kingdom bring up the four lines of captured Libyans.
 At the head of the first three, the scribes throw down and count the hands cut off from the dead enemies, while at the head of the fourth line they are doing the same with the phalli severed from the slain (Wreszinski II 124).

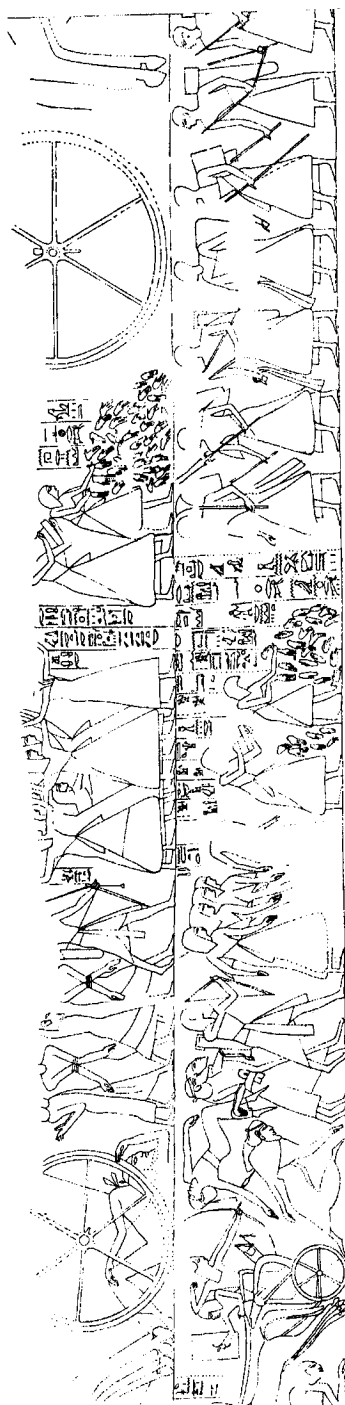


Fig. 12. Reign of Ramses III / Northern War – Relief at Medinet Habu.
 The king attended by sunshade and fan-bearers, stands in a balcony. Before the king, the two viziers and other officers of high rank present to him prisoners. Other officials superintend the counting of the hands severed from the enemies; four scribes record the numbers (Wreszinski II, 119).



Fig. 13. Reign of Ramses III / Second Libyan War – Relief at Medinet Habu (Wreszinski II 62a).

Written sources

In most cases, the scene of counting is accompanied by inscription, i.e. list of booty, which bears the number of 'captured' hands.

– Reign of Amenhotep II / Syrian Campaigns²⁰

The March upon Samaria

He captured 34 of their chieftains, 57 warriors of the Hurrian elite, 231 living Asiatic, 372 hands, 54 horses, 54 chariots etc.

The Conquest of Anaharath and the Expedition to Giboa-Saman²¹

Amount of booty of his Majesty alone of that day: 17 warriors of the Hurrian elite, 6 children of chieftains, 68 living Asiatic, 123 hands etc.

²⁰ *Urk.* IV 1307, 8.

²¹ *Urk.* IV 1308, 8.

– Reign of Thutmose III/ The Annals

Year 22/23; Battle of Megiddo²²

*Then were captured their horses, their chariots of gold and silver were made spoil... They brought up the booty which they had taken, **consisting of hands**, of living prisoners, of horses, chariots of gold and silver, of —.*

Spoil of Megiddo²³

_____ 340 living prisoners; **83 hands**; 191 foals; 6 stallions; — young...

Booty of Kadesh District²⁴

*List of the booty brought from there — _____ of the wretched Naharin who were as auxiliaries among them, together with their horses; 691 people; **29 hands**, 44 horses...*

– Reign of Amenhotep III/ Semneh stela

List of Prisoners and Killed²⁵

*Living Nubians 150; archers 110; Nubian women 250; their servants 55; their children 175; in total 740 heads; **their hands 312**; total of living heads 1052 (or: united with the living heads).*

– Reign of Merenptah, Libyan War – Karnak inscription

List of Captives and Slain²⁶

Who had no foreskins

Shekelash (š^c-k^c-rw-š^c)

222 men

Making

250 hands

Teresh (tw-rw-š^c)

742 men

Making

790 hands

[Ek] wesh (- -š^c-y-w^c-š^c) who had no foreskin, slain, whose hands were carried off (for) they had no [foreskins]

²² *Urk.* IV 659/15; *BAR* II §430-431.

²³ *Urk.* IV 663, 7; *BAR* II §435.

²⁴ *Urk.* IV 731, 2; II §532.

²⁵ *Urk.* IV 1660, 18; II §854.

²⁶ *KRI* IV, 7-8 / 40-54; *BAR* II §588.

– **Reign of Ramses III / First Libyan War – Medinet Habu**List of booty²⁷

<i>Total of foreskins</i>	[1] 2535
<i>Total of hands</i>	12535
<i>Total of [phalli]</i>	12758
<i>Total of hands</i>	12520 (+x)
<i>Total of hands</i>	12635 (+x)

Inscription over the heaps of hands and phalli²⁸

Bringing up the captured before his majesty, from the vanquished of Libya; making 1000 men; making 3000 hands, making 3000 foreskins.

Second Libyan War – Medinet Habu; Inscription over the hands²⁹

Total, 2175 hands

Tracing the written sources and iconography, we may see that the hand of defeated enemy was cut off on two occasions: in the actual battle or in the plunder.³⁰ In both cases, the enemy soldier was already dead.

As our first mentioned record tells us, Kamose's younger brother Ahmose, who for this is honored as the founder of the 18th Dynasty and the New Kingdom, completed the expulsion of the Hyksos. The forces of Ahmose were able to sack Avaris. Soldiers, who proved they had killed enemies by bringing back their hands, were rewarded with gold, land, and captives as personal slaves.

Why such kind of proof was necessary for the Egyptians? What did they do with all these hands? How did such a practice come about?

The severed enemy's hand was proof of a soldier's bravery, a kind of trophy, and this might be the only reason for this practice.³¹ This possibility seems to be acceptable for the 18th Dynasty. As we read in records from this period, the number of hands was low and treated as real trophies.

From the time of 19th Dynasty, the cutting off of hands might have a few more reasons. We may still think that it was proof of a soldier's bravery. Nevertheless, it was not anymore so exclusive a deed. To my knowledge, there is not one soldier from the time of 19th Dynasty who was rewarded for the hands, he cut off. In addition, it seems very clear that the hand was cut off in cases

²⁷ BAR IV §52.

²⁸ BAR IV §53. This inscription occurs four times – over each of the four heaps, three of hands and one of phalli.

²⁹ BAR IV §110-111.

³⁰ D. LORTON, Terminology Related to the Laws of Warfare in Dyn. XVIII, *JARCE XI* (1974) 57; cf. W. Helck, Abgeschlagene Hände als Siegeszeichen, *GM* 18 (1975) 23.

³¹ This explanation was pointed out by H. Bruner (Die Hieroglyphen für "räuchen", "bedecken", "handfläche" und ihren Entsprechenden Wörtern, *NAWG* 3 (1965) 90 sq.

when the dead enemy was not circumcised. To the circumcised, the phalli were cut off.³²

In addition, it is not hard to imagine the impression, perhaps is better to say fear, which the horses and spears of the Egyptian army, adorned with hands, might inspire among the enemies or those who aspired to become an enemy.

The reason might be even more practical. In booty lists, we read about living enemies and hands. It is obvious that the hands represent dead enemies. As it was necessary to notify how many living persons were captured it was necessary to make a record of dead persons also. Of course, it was not easy to bring the dead bodies to Egypt, but the hands were not problematic for transport. It seems that during the 18th Dynasty the hands were not transported to Egypt; they were counted after the actual battle. As to the amount of captures given in the inscription's section, which describe the return to Egypt, the hands are not recorded. From 19th Dynasty, as the reliefs show us, the hands were brought away to Egypt.

Egyptian soldier could perform also a ritual of cutting off the right hand of the enemy he had slain in order to prevent revenge by his spirit. It might be logical because the right hand is this one, which holds the weapon. If this was the reason for cutting off of the hands, how then can we explain the cutting off of the phalli? Why then weren't the hands cut off after the ritual killing of enemies in front of the gods.³³ According to our records, there is no evidence for the deliberate mutilation and dishonoring of the dead. In this respect, we may be in doubt just for the Amada stela of Amenhotep II.

In my opinion, the reason for cutting off the hands and their counting was a practical one. If it was necessary to know how many living you capture it was also necessary to know how many dead there were.

It is important to notify that this war code was characteristic only for the period of New Kingdom. Is this practice something, which Hyksos brought with them and left for the Egyptians? Perhaps, but at this moment, it is not possible to say anything more.

UDK: 932.355.48 : 392.27(32)(093.5)

³² See W. HÖSCHER, *Libyen und Ägypten*, Hamburg – New York 1937, 43-47; for the question of circumcision see: C. de WIT, La circoncision chez les anciens égyptiens, *ZAS* 99 (1973) 41-48.

³³ Cf. E. SWANN HALL, *The Pharaoh Smiles his Enemies. A Comparative Study*, Berlin, 1986; A. R. SCHULMAN, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards. Some Historical Scenes on New Kingdom Private Stelae*, Fribourg, 1988; D. WILDUNG, in: *LÄ* II, s.v. Erschlagen der Feinde, 14-17.

ДАНИЈЕЛА СТЕФАНОВИЋ

БРОЈАЊЕ ОДСЕЧЕНИХ ШАКА МРТВИХ НЕПРИЈАТЕЉА

Резиме

Mr ms^c Именемхаб наводи у својој биографији да је, док је Тутмес III ловио крдо од 120 слонова у Ниу, он уловио “највећег међу њима и одсекао му *дт* (шаку) док је још био жив”; због храбрости владар га је наградио златом и одећом.

Именемхабов подвиг у лову указује на праксу карактеристичну за војне походе Новог царства – одсецање шака мртвим непријатељима.

На основу иконографије и писаних извора XVIII, XIX и XX династије, могу се пратити три етапе поменутог ратног обичаја: само одсецање шака, ношење шака и бројање шака.

Запажа се да је пораженом непријатељу шака одсецана у два случаја: током саме битке или при заробљавању. У оба случаја непријатељски војник је већ био мртав.

Одсечена шака непријатеља била је доказ војничке храбрости, нека врста трофеја и то би могао да буде и узрок практиковања овог обичаја. Поменуто објашњење прихватљиво је за период XVIII династије, јер је број одсечених шака, бележених у изворима, мали и третиране су као прави трофеји.

Од времена XIX династије одсецање шака могло би да има још неколико разлога. Још увек се може говорити о доказу војничке храбрости. Међутим, одсецање шаке погинулом непријатељу више није било тако ексклузиван подвиг. Колико је познато, не постоји ни један војник, из времена XVIII династије, награђен само зато што је одсекао шаку. Такође, чини се сасвим извесним да су шаке одсецане у случајевима када непријатељски војници нису били обрзани. Војницима који су били обрзани одсецани су фалуси.

Такође није тешко замислити утисак, или је можда боље рећи страх, који су могли да изазову коњи и копља египатских војника окићени одсеченим шакама међу непријатељима, или онима који су могли да постану непријатељи.

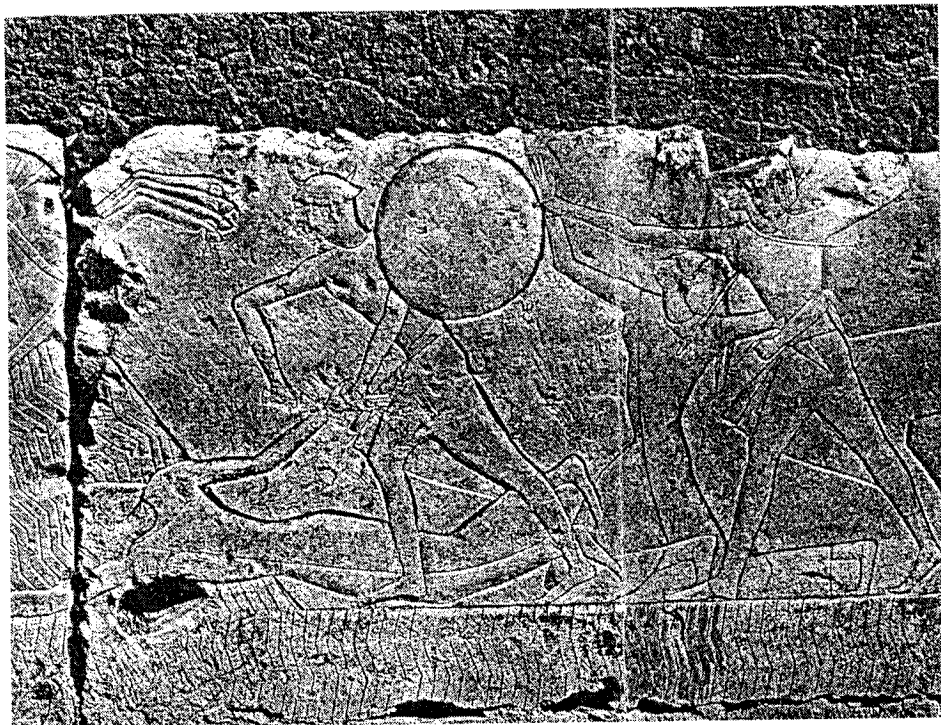
Разлог постојања овог обичаја могао би да буде још практичнији. У списковима плена забележени су живи непријатељи и шаке. Очито је да су шаке представљале мртве непријатеље. Пошто је било неопходно забележити колико је живих непријатеља заробљено, било је неопходно забележити и колико је мртвих остало на бојном пољу. Наравно, није било једноставно и могуће доносити у Египат мртва тела, али саме шаке није било тешко транспортовати. Чини се да током XVIII династије шаке нису биле преношене у Египат већ су бројане после саме битке. У крајњем збиру плена, у деловима натписа из времена XVIII династије који описују повратак у Египат након похода, број шака није забележен. Од времена XIX династије, као што нам рељефи и натписи казују, шаке су доношене и бројане у Египту.

Можда би се могло мислити и о некаквој врсти ритуала. Да би се заштитио од умрлог, египатски војник је могао да одсече десну шаку непријатељу кога

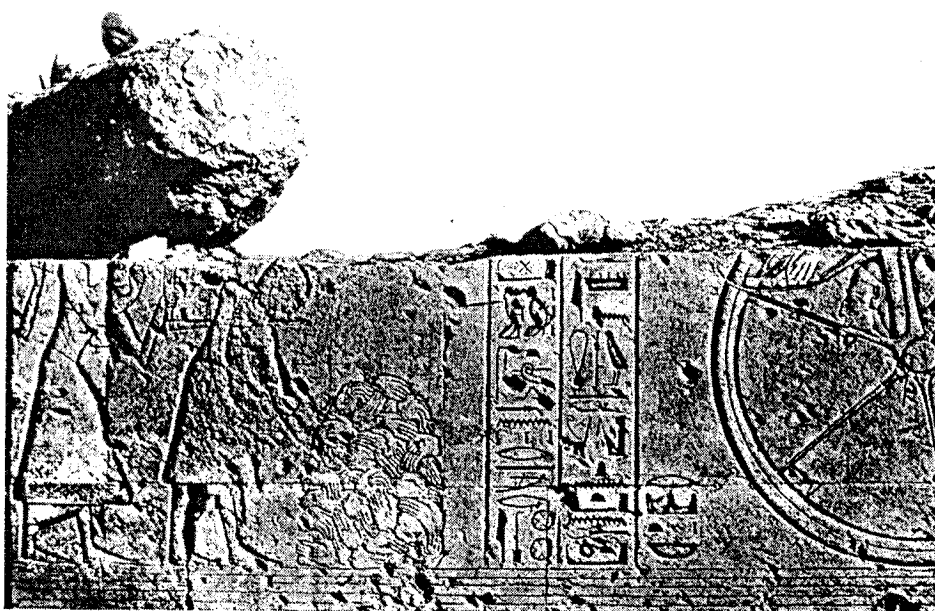
је убио, не би ли онемогућио његов дух да му се освети. Поступак би могао бити логичан јер је десна шака та која држи оружје. Ако је поменуто био разлог за одсецање шаке, како би се онда могло објаснити одсецање фалуса? Зашто, у том случ ају, шаке нису биле одсецане и после ритуалног убијања непријатеља пред божанством. Према нашим изворима не постоје потврде за намерно сакаћење и обешћававање мртвих. У том контексту једино би спорна могла бити Амада стела из времена Аменхотепа II.

Чини се да је одсецање шака, њихово ношење и бројање било практичне природе. Ако је било неопходно да се зна колико је живих заробљено, било је неопходно знати и број “мртвих заробљеника”.

Важно је нагласити да је ова ратна пракса била карактеристика само Новог царства. Да ли су Хикси донели овај обичај и оставили га Египћанима? Можда, али у овом тренутку се не може рећи ништа више.



Reign of Ramses II / Battle of Kadesh – Relief at Abydos (and fig. 1).



Reign of Ramses II / Sirian War – Relief at Seti's I Temple in Abydos (and fig. 7).