

# On the Date of Seth from Qubeibeh

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IN 1957 Joseph Leibovitch published a small limestone slab inscribed with a few hieroglyphic signs<sup>1</sup> (Figs. 1, 2). It was found in secondary use at the Arab village of Qubeibeh (map ref. 128 144), situated on the northern fringes of Tel Shalaf,

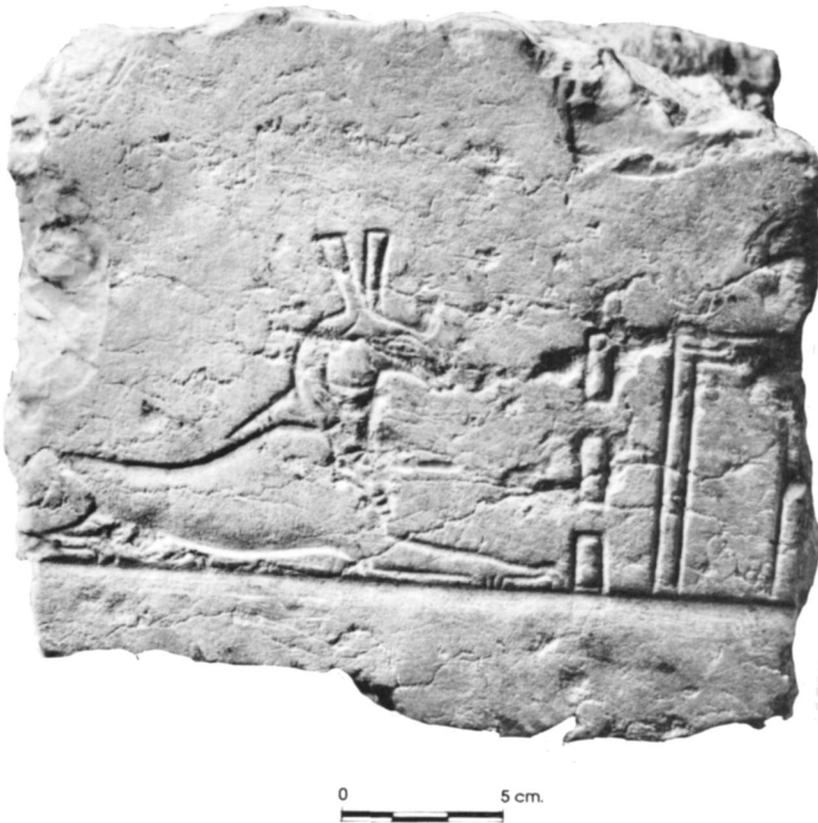


Fig. 1. The slab from Qubeibeh.

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1 J. Leibovitch: A Hieroglyphic Inscription from Qubeibeh, *Yediot* 21 (1957), pp. 208–210, Pl. 20:1 (Hebrew). Leibovitch called the find both ‘stele’ (as does Kaplan, see below, n. 2) and ‘lintel’ (following Rowe, see below, n. 9).

Figs. 1 and 4 are courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority; Fig. 2. was photographed by the Israel Museum.



Fig. 2. A side view of the Qubeibeh slab.

and it probably originated from a building lintel.<sup>2</sup> This small inscription contains the word *ntr.w*, 'gods', and a portrayal of the god Seth in a commanding posture, crouching and wearing an Ureus.

Leibovitch reconstructed the title *nsw-ntr.w*, 'king of the gods', leading to the reading of the whole inscription as: 'the king of the gods, Seth'. He dated the relief to the Hyksos period on the grounds of the importance of Seth at that time. The find is the sole architectural remnant assigned to the Hyksos in Canaan, and thus provides unique data to the study of the interconnections between Canaan and Egypt during the Hyksos period. It is, therefore, mentioned in discussions and evaluations of this important and obscure period.<sup>3</sup>

Not only during the Hyksos period, however, was Seth worshipped in Egypt. In the Nineteenth Dynasty we witness the revival of the Seth cult in Egypt and Asia,

2 J. Kaplan: Archaeological Survey of the Jibne District, *Yediot* 21 (1957), p. 203, Pl. 20:1 (Hebrew).

3 For example, see A. Kempinski: *Syrien und Palästina (Kanaan) in der letzten Phase der Mittelbronze IIB-Zeit (1650–1570 v. Chr.)*, Wiesbaden, 1983, pp. 58–59.



Fig. 3. Seth on the stele of Ramesses II (after Vandier, n. 5).

before this god fell into disfavour during the Late Period.<sup>4</sup> During the Nineteenth Dynasty he was the state god, and kings were named after him.

In 1969 Vandier published a detailed discussion of the various Seth representations.<sup>5</sup> The most prominent subject in the publication is a unique stele

4 H. te Velde: *Seth, God of Confusion, A Study of his Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion*, Leiden, 1967, pp. 109–134 and *passim*; for another rather obscure Seth monument from Jerusalem, see Fr.V. Scheil: *Archéologie, Varia, RB 1* (1892), pp. 116–117.

5 J. Vandier: *Le dieu Seth au Nouvel Empire — À propos d'une récente acquisition du Louvre, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo 25* (1969), 193–197, Pl. VIIb.

We would like to thank Prof. B. von Bothmer for this reference. We are also grateful to Ms. Harlé from the Louvre for her help.

in the Louvre (Fig. 3), dedicated by Ramesses II to the goddess Astarte. Seth is depicted as a royal sphinx in a register above the king and the goddess. There is a striking resemblance between the Seth from Qubeibeh and the one on the Louvre stele. In the latter, the combination 'Seth-King' is created by uniting the body of the Seth animal with the lion's tail, the lion representing the king. In our inscription the now missing tail was probably the genuine Seth one (see Fig. 1); the kingship is alluded to by the Ureus on the god's forehead, and probably by his headdress as well.

If, as Leibovitch suggested, *nsw-ntr.w*, 'king of the gods', is reconstructed before the Seth hieroglyph, then the Seth animal thus represented is an ideogram for the god and a determinative to the preceding phrase. Both the Louvre and the Qubeibeh inscriptions create the same combination — 'the king and the god, Seth' — befitting this god's position during the Nineteenth Dynasty.<sup>6</sup>

On stylistic and historical grounds, therefore, and taking into account the scarcity of representations of Seth during the Hyksos period even in Egypt itself, we should most probably date the small inscription from Qubeibeh to the Nineteenth Dynasty, and not to the Hyksos period. This find should be added to a number of architectural remains from the Shephelah and Megiddo, all dating to the New Kingdom. During this period these areas were subject to Egyptian domination, which intensified during the end of the Nineteenth and the first half of the Twentieth Dynasties.<sup>7</sup>

Tel Shalaf was a Late Bronze settlement, situated very close to the *via maris*, which was extremely important to the Egyptian administration network in Canaan. The existence of some official Egyptian post in Tel Shalaf is, therefore, very plausible; the mound probably also incorporated a sanctuary to Seth, who was the 'lord of the foreign countries'.<sup>8</sup>

To conclude this discussion, mention should be made of another relief, which may be of relevance: a small broken stone with the hieroglyphs 'nh dt nhh', '(given) life for eternity', following the border of a cartouche (Fig. 4). This stone was found in 1934 at the neighbouring Kh. ed-Duheisheh (map ref. 128 143), and, like the Qubeibeh slab, was in secondary use. It was published by Rowe and assigned by him to the Hyksos period, probably because Duheisheh had no occupation level of the Late

6 For a special discussion of the combination 'le dieu et le roi', see Vandier (above, n. 5), pp. 196–197.

7 O. Goldwasser: Hieratic Inscriptions from Tel Sera' in Southern Canaan, *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984), pp. 77–93; D. Ussishkin: Levels VII and VI at Tel Lachish and the End of the Late Bronze Age in Canaan, in J.N. Tubb: *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages, Papers in Honour of Olga Tufnell*, London, 1985, pp. 220–222; J.M. Weinstein: The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment, *BASOR* 241 (1981), pp. 22–23; I. Singer: Merneptah's Campaign to Canaan and the Egyptian Occupation of the Southern Coastal Plain of Palestine in the Ramesside Period, *BASOR* 269 (1988), pp. 1–10.

8 Cf. M. Bietak: *Avaris and Piramesse, Archaeological Exploration in the Eastern Nile Delta*, Oxford, 1979, Pl. XXXVIIIa. Many of the Seth (Ba'al) monuments mentioned by Vandier came from an Asiatic context or show Asiatic influence, as was clearly noted by Vandier himself (above, n. 5), p. 189.



Fig. 4. The relief from Kh. ed-Duheisheh (after Rowe, n. 9).

Bronze Age, but only of the Middle Bronze Age, and the Roman-Byzantine and Arabic periods. Leibovitch accepted this date, and suggested that the two slabs belonged to the same architectural element dating from the Hyksos period.<sup>9</sup>

As we have demonstrated, the Seth relic should probably be dated to the Nineteenth Dynasty, and if the Duheisheh fragment indeed comes from the same slab, it should also be dated to that period. The fact that no Late Bronze Age material was uncovered in Duheisheh should not preclude this possibility, since the stone might have been moved there for secondary use in some later period.

<sup>9</sup> A. Rowe: *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum*, Cairo, 1936, Pl. XXXVI:2. The stone is registered IAA 34.2767. Leibovitch's suggestion that the two slabs belonged to the same architectural element was based on the similarities in the stone material and the similar underlying line (Kaplan [above, n. 2], p. 203). (For an attempted reconstruction, see Kempinski [above, n. 3], illustration A). Prof. Jürgen Osing, Berlin, called my attention to the fact that the hieroglyphs on the stone published by Leibovitch (Figs. 1, 2) begin directly above the base line, whereas on the one published by Rowe (Fig. 4) they are separated from the line by a small space.