

**“The Sherden in His Majesty’s Captivity”: A Comparative Look at the Mercenaries  
of New Kingdom Egypt**

**Jordan Snowden**

**Rhodes College Honors History**

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## Introduction

Mercenary troops have been used by numerous states throughout history to supplement their native armies with skilled foreign soldiers – Nepali Gurkhas have served with distinction in the armies of India and the United Kingdom for well over a century, Hessians fought for Great Britain during the American Revolution, and even the Roman Empire supplemented its legions with foreign “auxiliary” units. Perhaps the oldest known use of mercenaries dates to the New Kingdom of ancient Egypt (1550-1069 BCE). New Kingdom Egypt was a powerful military empire that had conquered large parts of Syria, all of Palestine, and most of Nubia (today northern Sudan). Egyptian pharaohs of this period were truly imperial masters: they hunted elephants in Syria, crossed the Euphrates with their armies, sent commercial naval expeditions to the southern Red Sea and fought legendary battles against the kings of foreign nations. This empire was created and maintained for centuries with Egypt’s first professional army. Like many later empires, Egypt also utilized the special skills of foreign peoples such as Libyans, Nubians, and the Sherden, one of the enigmatic “Sea Peoples.” For example, at the Battle of Kadesh, widely considered the best-documented battle in all ancient history, pharaoh Ramesses II “the Great” employed Sherden mercenaries alongside his native Egyptian soldiers when fighting the Hittites under Muwatalli II.<sup>1</sup>

Seven centuries later, Egypt would once again use foreign mercenaries on a large scale. The Macedonian Alexander the Great had conquered much of the known world, including Egypt in 332 BCE. After his sudden death in 323, his massive empire fractured and was divided up

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “The Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Rameses II,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 63.

between his former generals. These Hellenistic states would proceed to fight each other almost constantly for centuries, their armies and navies balanced enough to prevent any dominant power from quickly emerging. Ptolemy I, one of Alexander's former generals, soon came to power in Egypt and began a period of Greek rule that would last for three centuries – Ptolemaic Egypt. Like the New Kingdom, Ptolemaic Egypt used foreign mercenaries, but it did so on an even greater scale and under a very different situation. While the New Kingdom was a state run by native Egyptians that supplemented its own native forces with foreign mercenaries, Ptolemaic Egypt was ruled by foreign, Greek kings who possessed a military that was predominately composed of foreign soldiers, with native Egyptians being the minority.

The mercenaries of Ptolemaic Egypt are far better known than their New Kingdom counterparts, for there survive hundreds of papyri, ostraca, and other primary sources from this later period. Yet, that is not to say that no New Kingdom primary sources survive. The Battle of Kadesh, for example, has survived in 15 different temple inscriptions and two hieratic papyri, and we even have an account from the Hittite perspective. However, these official accounts are obviously biased. They are written not to inform the public but to exalt the heroic role of the pharaoh in action. The Egyptian king is a super-human one: he is never afraid, he never makes mistakes, and he can never lose. We know that, at Kadesh, both sides suffered considerable casualties. Yet, both the Egyptian and Hittite rulers claimed victory in their own accounts of the battle. Records from individual soldiers do exist, but they are not common. Low-ranking Egyptian soldiers or mercenaries fighting for Egypt often left behind little written or archaeological evidence, as most of them were illiterate. Furthermore, mercenaries would often assimilate into Egyptian culture within a few generations, making it very difficult to tell the difference between them and the natives.

It is as a result of such difficulties that I have decided to make this a comparative study by using the better-documented Ptolemaic period as a base from which to ask questions about the earlier New Kingdom, as both states employed mercenaries in similar ways. I will compare the foreign mercenaries of the Ptolemaic Kingdom to those of the New Kingdom to better determine how each functioned on a military, economic, and social level. In doing so, I will fill in the gaps of some of the New Kingdom sources and determine how the foreign mercenaries of this period functioned in relation to the Egyptian society of their own time. To name but a few of the questions about the New Kingdom mercenaries that will be pertinent: How were they recruited (chapter 1)? How did they fight (chapter 2)? How were they settled, where were they settled, and how were they paid (chapter 3)? Settlement and payment for military service are addressed in a single chapter due to, as we shall see, the two being intertwined in both the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic period. My method is as follows: I first discuss the issue in the New Kingdom, then Ptolemaic Egypt, and finally I conclude with a section that brings the two together and makes an argument about the New Kingdom mercenaries in light of the Ptolemaic Kingdom.

In chapter 1, I compare the immense need for skilled soldiers in the early Ptolemaic Kingdom to the same need in the New Kingdom. In light of Ptolemaic Egypt's state-sponsored efforts to encourage foreign soldiers to immigrate to Egypt, I propose that the New Kingdom also supported the immigration of foreign soldiers, albeit to a lesser extent. In chapter 2, I argue that although the mercenaries of the New Kingdom were commonly used to perform special battlefield roles, it may be that they could adopt Egyptian tactics if needed, just as Ptolemaic mercenaries often fought in the Greco-Macedonian fashion of the ruling Greeks. In chapter 3, I argue that the New Kingdom pharaohs settled the bulk of their mercenaries in Middle Egypt for

practical and economic reasons, especially in light of the significant number of Ptolemaic sources that attest to the same practice.

However, the previous three questions all relate in some way to a final, fourth question: to what degree and in what ways did the New Kingdom's foreign mercenaries integrate into the Egyptian societies they served? This question will be answered in my fourth and final chapter. In it, I argue that despite the diverse origins of the many foreign peoples who served both Kingdoms, they were eventually integrated into Egyptian society with great success, becoming loyal soldiers and Egyptian subjects, thanks in no small part to their military service. When I use the term "integration," I use the definition provided by the Cambridge English Dictionary, that is "the action or process of successfully joining or mixing with a different group of people." I will sometimes use the term "assimilation" as well, primarily to stress that the integration undergone by specific groups of foreign peoples into Egyptian society was total or near-total. Finally, in my conclusion, I will discuss how lessons about an ancient military serving as a vehicle of integration are applicable even to the modern day.

While this is a comparative study, the ultimate goal of this work is to learn more about the mercenaries of the New Kingdom, a topic on which there is currently little to no scholarship. Mercenaries are mentioned in books covering ancient Egyptian warfare and there are even scholarly articles that focus on one particular group of mercenaries, but none that address them as a whole. One of my goals, therefore, is to provide here an account of everything we currently know about mercenaries in New Kingdom Egypt. All the while, I will propose possible answers

to what we do *not* know based on my interpretations of the primary sources and on comparisons to other similar states, principally the Ptolemaic Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, I must admit that there are several subjects which the constraints of length and time prevented me from addressing in any great detail, such as the Egyptian Late Period, the last period of native Egyptian rule that followed the New Kingdom and preceded the Ptolemaic Kingdom. Other, more specific topics include other, lesser-known Egyptian neighbors such as the land of Punt, as well as any number of other foreign peoples who served as New Kingdom mercenaries but upon whom there is often little documentation. Perhaps in the future I will have time to return to these subjects.

## **1. How They Were Recruited**

### **a. The New Kingdom**

Before an army can even exist, soldiers needed to be recruited. The recruitment of foreign mercenaries instead of native soldiers raises a whole new series of problems and questions. Principally, why recruit foreigners at all?

Before going any further, it is important to first establish what a mercenary is in the historical context of the New Kingdom. For the New Kingdom, scholars usually use the term “mercenary” when discussing non-Egyptians serving in the Egyptian military, but this designation can be very misleading. A modern reader expects mercenaries to sell themselves and their abilities to whatever state can afford them and to have no national loyalty. Were the

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<sup>2</sup> For readers seeking to learn more about the Ptolemaic military, see Christelle Fischer-Bovet’s *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, a work that proved indispensable for understanding the mercenaries of Ptolemaic Egypt and its army in general.

mercenaries of the New Kingdom like this, able to leave if their pay was in arrears or simply switch sides if the other army offered higher pay? There is no evidence of this ever having occurred.<sup>3</sup> Most mercenaries usually owned plots of land, indicating that they became settled in Egypt, only leaving to fight when called. Though they were professional, foreign soldiers, they lived in the land they served and were economically and socially connected to it. Although they served in divisions separate from the native Egyptians, they did so on a permanent basis, and foreign and Egyptian divisions fought alongside each other. Despite their different clothing, social conventions, and, language, these foreigners would eventually integrate and effectively become native Egyptians.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, calling them “mercenaries” in the modern sense of the word can be misleading, and must be taken with a grain of salt.

If New Kingdom mercenaries lived in Egypt on a permanent basis and were loyal to the state, why did the Egyptians recruit them in the first place? It is not enough to simply claim it was because they were capable soldiers, because native Egyptians could be capable soldiers as well. Perhaps their military preparedness was higher than that of native Egyptians, but this point remains moot, as we simply do not know how native Egyptian soldiers were viewed in comparison to foreign ones.<sup>5</sup> We do know that these foreign auxiliaries were able to perform specific roles on that battlefield that they were uniquely skilled in – Nubians were often referred to as “Nubian bowmen” in Egyptian texts<sup>6</sup> on account of their great skill as archers and the Sherden are always portrayed with their horned helmets, round shields, and armor (armor was a

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony J. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “The Autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 13-14; Miriam Lichtheim, “The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 36.

luxury most Egyptians fought without), as this equipment and the knowledge and training necessary to use it made them excellent infantry.<sup>7</sup>

It is also possible that the cost of the military administration in Egypt's imperial holdings in the Levant eventually began to exhaust Egypt's ability to churn out larger and larger divisions, making foreign mercenaries a necessity to alleviate the drain on the state's manpower. Even more soldiers were needed not only in the imperial holdings, but on Egypt's own western border, for incursions from Libya would become more and more common in the later New Kingdom. Once the Libyans began to succeed in circumventing the western border fortresses near the end of Dynasty XIX (1292-1189 BCE), more and more Sherden mercenaries began seeing service in the Egyptian war machine. This suggests that the army needed to be expanded in response to the Libyan threat but recruiting only native Egyptians would have put too much strain on the state. Recruiting foreign soldiers meant that Egyptian farmers did not have to be conscripted, which would force them to abandon land that the state needed to remain in production.

A final reason for the use of foreign mercenaries is that Egypt did not value the soldier's profession as highly as other societies, even in the militaristic New Kingdom. The Pharaoh was idolized as a peerless warrior, but other than that being a scribe was the dream profession of most Egyptians, as literacy was a valuable skill that almost always led to a comfortable life. There are plenty of instances in which scribes mock the soldier's profession for its hardships and danger, such as the *Papyrus Lansing*, a scribal schoolbook that tells its readers "Come, let me tell thee of the woes of the soldier..." and proceeds to explain a soldier's many miseries, even going so far

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<sup>7</sup> Mohamed Raafat Abbas, "A Survey of the Military Role of the Sherden Warriors in the Egyptian Army During the Ramesside Period," *Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne* 10 (2017): 14-23; The University of Chicago Library.



as to say “He is hungry, his body is exhausted, he is dead while yet alive.”<sup>8</sup> This account is obviously biased, as scribes and career soldiers often rivaled each other, since the military offered an alternative avenue to power besides scribal school. Yet, it is clear that Egyptian society was not a society pervaded by martial values. One only has to look at Egyptian art to see this. There are countless statues of Egyptian scribes, but not one sculpture of a soldier. There are virtually no battle scenes in private tombs. Accordingly, foreign mercenaries would have proved invaluable to supplement the native army, which was certainly not overflowing with willing recruits.

One of the most common ways for the New Kingdom to bring foreign soldiers to Egypt was by force, a practice which may seem shocking to modern readers. Numerous sources report defeated foreign soldiers being captured and brought back to Egypt. For example, in his famous report on the Battle of Kadesh, Rameses II mentions readying the Sherden mercenaries in his personal bodyguard for battle: “now his Majesty made ready his infantry and his chariotry, and the Sherden in his Majesty’s captivity whom he had brought back in the victories of his strong arm.”<sup>9</sup> It is remarkable that the pharaoh chooses to mention his foreign bodyguards here, given that his Kadesh Inscriptions are a propagandistic text. Even more remarkable is the method by which the Sherden mercenaries were said to have been recruited. They were “brought back in the victories” of the Pharaoh, clearly indicating that they were taken as prisoners in some previous battle but were now serving as Rameses’ bodyguard. In another source, Papyrus Harris I, Rameses III states that, after capturing enemy soldiers:

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<sup>8</sup> Aylward M. Blackman and T. Eric Peet, “Papyrus Lansing: A Translation with Notes,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 11, no. 3 (October 1925): 292.

<sup>9</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “The Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Rameses II,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 63.

*“I established their leaders in strongholds bearing my name. I appointed among them chiefs of bowmen, leaders of the tribes, they being branded – made as slaves – with the cartouche of my name; their wives and children were treated similarly.”<sup>10</sup>*

The enemy “chiefs of bowmen, leaders of the tribes” are clearly being made “slaves” in the service of the pharaoh. This wording continues even in sources rife with propaganda, such as Rameses II’s accounts of the Battle of Kadesh, where foreign mercenaries are still described as being in captivity: “Now his Majesty made ready his infantry and his chariotry, and the Sherden in his Majesty’s captivity whom he had brought back in the victories of his strong arm.”<sup>11</sup> The Sherden were famously talented heavy infantry who fought with horned helmets, round shields, and swords and served as Rameses II’s personal bodyguard. How could the Egyptian state trust foreign captives to defend Egypt and the pharaoh himself? The answer is that this was a very special kind of “slavery.” As we shall see in the following chapters of this essay, these foreign soldiers were well-remunerated and granted land in Egypt, and eventually integrated into Egyptian society. Furthermore, the preference among rulers for foreign bodyguards is a very common phenomenon in world history. Foreign soldiers like the Sherden were totally at the pharaoh’s mercy and could not threaten him. They were isolated from the court-society and its intrigues. In contrast, trying to protect the pharaoh with decorated native Egyptian soldiers would do nothing but place him in close proximity to a group of well-trained, well-connected men who would almost certainly become involved in dynastic and political intrigue.

Their privileged position notwithstanding, the precise status of the captive “mercenaries” taken by the Egyptian state is difficult to determine. Indeed, should we call them “mercenaries”

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<sup>10</sup> William F. Egerton and John A. Wilson, trans., *Historical Records of Ramses III: The Texts in Medinet Habu Volumes I and II Translated with Explanatory Notes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 27-28.

<sup>11</sup> Lichtheim, “The Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Rameses II,” 63.

when they were technically owned by the state as slaves? Should we consider them “slaves” when they were no more slaves to the pharaoh than the average Egyptian and yet received great benefits for their service, such as land and booty? To think of them solely by either one of these definitions is problematic and does not reflect the complicated nature of their position in Egyptian society. When I refer to them as “mercenaries,” meaning “foreigner serving the Egyptian state,” it is nonetheless important to keep in mind their complex status as privileged slaves.

Many Egyptian sources mention foreign “slave” soldiers in their reports on the loot collected after battle. Thutmose III (r. 1479-1425 BCE), sometimes referred to as the Napoleon of Egypt, stands alongside Rameses II (1279-1213) as one of the greatest warrior pharaohs of Egyptian history. Undeclared in the field, he established Egypt’s Asiatic Empire through no less than 16 campaigns in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>12</sup> The most famous of these campaigns was Thutmose’s first military campaign as pharaoh. Many of the normally divisive cities of the Levant, previously under Egyptian domination, had banded together under the leadership of the key Syrian city of Kadesh and broken away from Egypt. At the time, the prince of Kadesh was located at the city of Megiddo in central Palestine, and it was outside this city that Thutmose’s army faced the rebellious coalition.<sup>13</sup> Thutmose abstained from using the established, and certainly well-guarded, roads to the city, and chose instead to take a narrow route through the mountains, the Aruna Pass. Thutmose gambled that the enemy forces would not expect him to come through such a narrow path, the perfect spot to ambush and destroy the strung-out Egyptian army, and that it would be unguarded. His gamble payed off. His forces exited the pass safely,

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<sup>12</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “From the Annals of Thutmose III,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Spalinger, 83-84.

taking the enemy Canaanites by surprise, and he annihilated the enemy army, leading to the lengthy but nonetheless successful siege of Megiddo.

After the battle came the usual practice of collecting the booty that the enemy left behind, the contents of which are recorded in the “Annals of Thutmose III” at the Temple of Karnak.<sup>14</sup> The list includes livestock such as cows, goats, and sheep, armor (a luxury for Egyptians), chariots, horses, and hands. The number of hands or genitals collected from enemy soldiers is often listed in post-battle records, as it was a gruesome yet common practice for Egyptian soldiers to cut off the hands or genitals of slain enemy soldiers to turn in for rewards – some battle records reports thousands of hands and phalli being stacked in piles after a battle’s conclusion.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the enemy’s booty and severed appendages, the account also mentions “340 living prisoners,” from the city itself, as well as 38 “*Maryan*-warriors” belonging to the households of the enemy princes.<sup>16</sup> The exact identity of these *Maryan* warriors is difficult to define. Toward the middle of the second millennium BCE, foreign invaders had established their rule over Near Eastern societies with unusual frequency.<sup>17</sup> Even the Egyptian Middle Kingdom saw its end to such an invasion by the Hyksos, a heterogenous people from the Levant with predominately Amorite origins, although some Hyksos names seem to be Hurrian and Aryan (Aryan meaning the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family).<sup>18</sup> Foreign takeovers also occurred in the petty kingdoms of the Levant, and the New Kingdom Amarna letters (mid-14<sup>th</sup> century) show that many of these intruders also bore Hurrian and Aryan names. About 90% of the names found in documentary sources are Semitic, and the 10% that

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<sup>14</sup> Lichtheim, “From the Annals of Thutmose III,” 29.

<sup>15</sup> Egerton and Wilson, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Lichtheim, “From the Annals of Thutmose III,” 34-35.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Drews, *The Coming of the Greeks: Indo-European Conquests in the Aegean and the Near East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 57.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

bear Aryan and Hurrian names rarely serve outside of the palace or the army.<sup>19</sup> Historian Robert Drews argues that the foreign princes ruling over the Levant either relied upon or themselves belonged to a prestigious military class in the Levant and Mitanni, a class called *maryannu* in Akkadian texts.<sup>20</sup> “The plural ‘*maryannu*’ attaches a Hurrian suffix to the singular *marya*, identical to Sanskrit *marya*, which meant ‘young warrior.’”<sup>21</sup>

The 38 “*Maryan-warriors*” captured by Thutmose III at Megiddo are listed alongside the household goods of several of prince of Megiddo’s rebel allies. The report also lists 892 chariots being captured from the “wretched army” of the prince of Megiddo, as well as 30 more chariots from the allied princes.<sup>22</sup> Chariots were the expensive, prestigious equipment of the Near East’s military elite, and the number of chariots captured from the allied princes compared to the number of *Maryan* warriors captured by the Egyptians is surprisingly similar: 38 captured *Maryan*, 30 captured chariots. Given this information, I agree with Drews that the *Maryan* were members of a Levantine military elite with mixed Hurrian/Indo-Aryan origins. The report lists them with the goods that were “carried off” after the battle, so it is doubtless that the prisoners were sent back to Egypt. Capturing large numbers of enemies and bringing them back to Egypt was a standard practice of Pharaonic warfare.

Whether they were used as mercenaries is likely but cannot be proven definitively. The *Maryan* warriors were members of a military elite in a time when professional soldiers were hard to come by, not to mention soldiers who knew how to operate a chariot and horses (a difficult skill to master). The Egyptians were always looking for foreign soldiers with special

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lichtheim, “From the Annals of Thutmose III,” 33.

military skills, so it is possible that the captive *Maryan* would later be incorporated into their own chariot squadron. This would make them a New Kingdom equivalent to the later Ptolemaic cavalry cleruchs. However, no sources survive to confirm this. Even if the *Maryan* did become Egyptian charioteers, they would have been expected to Egyptianize. We would never know from Egyptian art whether they were originally *Maryan*, for an Egyptian artist would never depict a non-Egyptianized foreigner in an occupation so prestigious as the chariotry. It is also possible that the *Maryan* were taken back to Egypt as personal slaves or advisors of the pharaoh, while their children, who are also listed as captives,<sup>23</sup> were Egyptianized and sent back to the Levant as puppets once reaching adulthood. Egyptianized defeated enemies' children and installing them as Egypt-friendly puppets was also a standard practice of Pharaonic warfare and was routinely practiced against the Nubians and the Levantine city-states. Nonetheless, the sources cannot definitively confirm what fate befell the *Maryan* upon their return to Egypt.

Luckily, other sources more clearly indicate the fate of foreign troops captured by Egypt. The "Poetical Stela of Thutmose III," also located at the Temple of Karnak, shows the same practice of capture and return being applied to the Nubians. The god Amun-Re, the supreme state-god of New Kingdom Egypt, speaks to the pharaoh:

*"The princes of all lands are gathered in your grasp,*

*I stretched my own hands out and bound them for you.*

*I fettered Nubia's bowmen by tenthousand [sic] thousands,*

*The northerners a hundred thousand captives.*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,34.

*I made your enemies succumb beneath your soles,*

*So that you crushed the rebels and the traitors.”<sup>24</sup>*

The numbers of captives may be exaggerated and indeed ridiculous. Nonetheless, the language here is telling. The prisoners are not killed or released after the battle, they are “bound” and “fettered” and brought back to Egypt. This method of restraining prisoners of war can be seen even in Egyptian art, such as the relief from the Tomb of Horemheb, shown in Figure 1,<sup>25</sup> which depicts captured Nubians being threatened with a beating while an Egyptian military scribe records the proceedings.

We also have two autobiographies of soldiers from the early New Kingdom that describe how individual soldiers brought captive enemies back to Egypt. In the autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana, one of the few primary sources we have of a New Kingdom soldier, Ahmose, an Egyptian naval officer, recounts his prestigious military career and the campaigns in which he fought. He makes multiple references to “Nubian bowmen” being “carried off in fetters” and



“carried off as living captives.”<sup>26</sup>

However, Ahmose did not only fight against the Nubians, for among the campaigns in which he saw combat were those to expel the Hyksos. The campaigns to liberate Egypt from the Hyksos occupation marked the dawn

**Figure 1**

<sup>24</sup> Lichtheim, “The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III,” 36.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Elliot, *Warfare in New Kingdom Egypt* (Stroud, UK: Fonthill Media Limited, 2017), 96.

<sup>26</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “The Autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 13-14.

of the New Kingdom, and the fact that foreign soldiers were being brought back to Egypt shows that this practice was used even at the New Kingdom's foundation. Furthermore, it hints at a practical reason why the Egyptians would do such a thing – they needed soldiers. They were fighting against foreigners who had occupied their country for a century. They did not have the resources of all of Egypt at their disposal, as the Hyksos occupied all of “lower” (northern) Egypt. With such a shortage of manpower and resources, as well as the relatively low regard with which the soldier's profession was viewed by many Egyptians, it is no surprise that the New Kingdom pharaohs would make every effort to supplement their armies with foreign soldiers even after the Hyksos had been defeated.

It is important to keep in mind that the foreign enemies captured and used as mercenaries were probably a small minority within a much larger group of captives with no military background or destination. Some enemy soldiers, especially officers, might be accompanied by their families, as seen by the children and female slaves listed in Thutmose III's Megiddo report.<sup>27</sup> Not to mention the army unto itself of support personnel that accompanied an ancient army on the march to keep it fed, equipped, organized, etc. However, the autobiography of another soldier, Ahmose Pen-Nekhet, clearly indicates that different fates befell military and non-military captives. Ahmose Pen-Nekhet began his career under the pharaoh Ahmose I and continued to serve during the reigns of Amenhotep I, Thutmose I, Thutmose II, and finally Thutmose III. Although he served in several of the same campaigns as Ahmose Son of Abana, he lived to an older age and served for longer.<sup>28</sup> During the last campaign in which he saw

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<sup>27</sup> Lichtheim, “From the Annals of Thutmose III,” 34.

<sup>28</sup> James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: From the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest, Collected, Edited, and Translated with Commentary*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Dynasty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 9.



action, one under Thutmose II against the Shashu people in Syria, he claims he took numerous prisoners, so many in fact that he does not count them: “I followed King Okheperneb (Thutmose II), triumphant; there were brought off for me in Shasu very many living prisoners; I did not count them.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, Ahmose Pen-Nekhet’s wording here is important. He claims that his enemies were brought off “for me,” which does not insinuate that they belong to the state as mercenaries, but rather that they have been given to him as slaves in reward for his distinguished service.

The New Kingdom did indeed practice slavery, but it was no “slave society” such as Rome or ancient Greece. Slaves were not essential to the society continuing to function effectively. Slaves in the latter states formed a significant percentage of the population and owning a slave was a fairly common practice. In New Kingdom Egypt, on the other hand, it was only the elite who could afford them, such as decorated military officers like Ahmose Son of Abana and Ahmose Pen-Nekhet, and the existence of *corvée* labor made widespread slavery unnecessary.<sup>30</sup> To tell whether foreign captives are being brought to Egypt as mercenaries or as slaves for the elite, close attention to the wording of the sources is crucial. Ahmose Pen-Nekhet mentions the slaves being carried off for him, insinuating they are *his* slaves. Ahmose Son of Abana makes a clear distinction between foreign captives being taken by the state and foreign captives being given to him as his own slaves.

After describing the captives taken by “his Majesty” in a campaign against Nubia, Ahmose Son of Abana then describes the captives that he himself was rewarded with as personal slaves:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>30</sup> Morris Bierbrier, *The Tomb Builders of the Pharaohs* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 12.

*“I brought two young warriors as captives from the ship of Aata. Then I was given five persons and portions of land accounting to five aroua in my town. The same was done for the whole crew. Then came that foe named Tetian. He had gathered the malcontents to himself. His majesty slew him; his troop was wiped out. Then I was given three persons and five aroua of land in my town.”*<sup>31</sup>

Ahmose does not get to keep the “warriors” he captures. However, he is given “five persons,” clearly slaves, in addition to “five aroua,” or about 3.5 acres worth of land in his hometown. Later, while fighting with Thutmose I in Syria, Ahmose defeats and captures an enemy charioteer. When he presents the captured soldier and his valuable equipment to the pharaoh, he rewards Ahmose with gold but keeps the experienced enemy soldier for himself.<sup>32</sup> It was clearly the norm for captured foreign soldiers to be taken by the state, often to put their valuable skills to good use as mercenaries, while captured non-combatants could sometimes be given to distinguished Egyptian soldiers as slaves.

Given the evidence from both Pharaonic and non-Pharaonic sources, I argue that the New Kingdom Egyptians commonly employed a system of “slave soldiers,” in which foreigners were captured after a battle, returned to Egypt, and then employed in the Egyptian army as mercenaries to take advantage of their special combat skills. Furthermore, the loyalty of these “slaves” was ensured through extensive benefits, such as land (discussed in detail in chapter 3) and booty.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14.

## b. The Ptolemaic Period

Ptolemaic Egypt also used mercenaries, but to an even greater degree than the New Kingdom, with much of the military being composed of foreign soldiers – Ptolemaic Egypt was, after all a foreign, Greek regime ruling over a native Egyptian population. Yet having a large, primarily mercenary army came with some serious problems. One, it was extremely expensive to maintain. The most common Greek term for “mercenary” at the time, *misthophoros* (literally “one who draws regular pay”), did not imply that the individual in question was a foreigner, but rather that one was simply a salaried soldier.<sup>33</sup> A large amount of salaried mercenaries needing to be paid in coin was a tremendous drain on the treasury, especially considering that some of them insisted on being paid with coinage they were familiar with, as seen by the discovery of silver tetradrachms that were Athenian in type but minted in Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Extremely dangerous situations could develop if a state allowed its mercenaries to go unpaid. At best, the soldiers would desert.<sup>35</sup> At worst, they might even mutiny against their employers.<sup>36</sup> Second, once a mercenary’s term of service, which was normally a very short period, was finished, how could the state ensure they renewed their contract and continued to fight for them? For much of the third and fourth centuries BCE, mercenaries primarily, although by no means exclusively, came to Egypt from the Greek-speaking world,<sup>37</sup> but by the final decades of the third century BCE, fewer soldiers were immigrating to Egypt. Without a constant stream of mercenaries, the state would begin to run low on soldiers.

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<sup>33</sup> Christelle Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: University Printing House, 2014), 119.

<sup>34</sup> Naphtali Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 21.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey F. Miller, “The Practical and Economic Background to the Greek Mercenary Explosion.” *Greece & Rome* 31, no. 2 (October 1984), 157-158.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Christelle Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 42.

The Ptolemies never dispensed entirely with paid mercenaries, but they nevertheless developed a system very reminiscent of that of the New Kingdom to incentivize mercenaries to settle permanently in Egypt. Mercenaries were given the option of taking a *kleros*, or a parcel of land, and becoming a military settler or *klerouchos*, anglicized as “cleruch.” Cleruchs were military reservists, able to be quickly mobilized in times of conflict but otherwise expected to cultivate their land. The basic unit of land measurement was the *aroura*, the equivalent of 0.68 acres, and military rank and sometimes even political connections played a role in the size of the land allotment given.<sup>38</sup> Members of the royal guard or cavalry were classified as holders of 50, 70, 80, or 100 auroras, and the men of the infantry as holders of 20, 25, 30, and 40 auroras.<sup>39</sup> Obviously, large plots of land could not be worked by the owner alone, and cleruchs with many auroras normally rented their plots out to Egyptian farmers or paid for manual labor directly. No significant numbers of native Egyptians were admitted to cleruchic status until after the Battle of Raphia in 217 BCE, when a hastily-assembled group of 20,000 native Egyptians were trained to fight in a Greek phalanx formation, and did so quite well alongside units of Greco-Macedonians, successfully repelling an invading Seleucid army.<sup>40</sup> Thereafter, especially with the increasing drain of foreign mercenaries on the treasury, as well as a drying up of immigration, increasing numbers of native Egyptian soldiers, often called *machimoi*, were enrolled into the Ptolemaic military.<sup>41</sup>

The usual definition of *machimoi* as “Egyptian warrior” is a problematic one, for although *machimoi* often were Egyptian, not all Egyptian soldiers were *machimoi* and not all

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Sherman LeRoy Wallace, “Census and Poll-Tax in Ptolemaic Egypt,” *The American Journal of Philology* 59, no. 4 (1938), 427.

<sup>41</sup> Christelle Fischer-Bovet, “Egyptian Warriors: The ‘Machimoi’ of Herodotus and the Ptolemaic Army,” *The Classical Quarterly, New Series* 63, no. 1 (May 2013), 209.

*machimoi* were Egyptian.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Egyptian soldiers began to serve far more frequently after the Battle of Raphia. As foreign immigration dried up, the natives became a cheaper alternative who came with the added benefit of broadening the support for the Ptolemaic regime. Yet, their status as “cheaper” soldiers does not mean that Egyptian soldiers were all of low economic status. On the contrary, serving as a Ptolemaic soldier gave native Egyptians an enviable social position compared to more traditional occupations such as those of farmers and craftsmen.<sup>43</sup> However, the Ptolemies took care to ensure that the new Egyptian soldiers were not made completely equal to the rest of the Greco-Macedonian military. The number of Egyptians admitted to officer rank or to the cavalry, which was more prestigious than the infantry, was severely restricted. Furthermore, Egyptian cleruchs were given far fewer auroras of land than their foreign counterparts – normally only 5-30.<sup>44</sup>

When discussing the Ptolemaic Period, a mercenary could technically be anything from a salaried foreign soldier to a cleruch, effectively a military reservist. As such, I will use the term broadly to discuss both professional foreign soldiers and members of the cleruchy, some of which might be native Egyptians. Furthermore, the differences in recruitment methods before and after the Battle of Raphia are a clear example that the Ptolemaic military was far from static throughout its three centuries of existence. As such, it may be easier to subdivide it into three periods: A, B, and C. Period A (330-220 BCE) was the period of the Ptolemies’ greatest strength. During this period, Egypt formed a thalassocracy and dominated the eastern Mediterranean, conquering southwestern Anatolia, a Greek-speaking region at the time, Cyprus, and many of the smaller islands of the Aegean Sea. The various Hellenistic states at this time

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<sup>42</sup> Christelle Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 162.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 24.

were constantly competing against one another to become the dominant power, giving the Ptolemies even more encouragement to field a larger and larger army and navy.<sup>45</sup> Mercenaries were used more extensively during this time than at any other period, and the Ptolemaic military mostly composed of foreign troops.

However, the age of great Ptolemaic power came to an end in period B (220-160 BCE), a time of crisis. The Ptolemies managed to defeat the Seleucids at the enormous battle of Raphia in 217, but the victory was pyrrhic in many ways. It was extremely dangerous to not pay a soldier in the ancient world, particularly a mercenary, or not pay them as much as they thought they deserved. Demobilization after a lengthy or costly campaign would often trigger a chain of revolts.<sup>46</sup> After a battle like Raphia, one of the largest in ancient history, the Ptolemies simply could not provide their soldiers with as much booty as the latter wanted, and the revolts become almost incessant. These revolts led to the loss of most of Egypt's foreign possessions and the fragmentation of Egypt itself: for 20 years southern Egypt became independent.<sup>47</sup> The military effort needed to subdue half of the country aside, it was also 20 years in which taxes could not be collected in southern Egypt – a disastrous scenario. The Ptolemaic state did survive, but after this crisis, the military was used primarily as an internal police force rather than one of foreign conquest.<sup>48</sup> Finally, in period C (160-30 BCE), the Seleucids launched another huge invasion and the Ptolemies were unable to stop them. Ptolemaic Egypt was essentially conquered when Rome, already ascending in power and seeking to prevent any other great power from forming, intervened, telling the Seleucid king to leave Egypt or face the wrath of Rome. The Seleucids

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<sup>45</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 10.

promptly retreated from Egypt. From then on until the conquest of Egypt by Caesar Augustus, Egypt would essentially be a Roman protectorate whose independence was debatable. The military would continue to serve merely as an internal police force, although Roman troops would eventually be stationed in Egypt to “help” them in this task.

When discussing how mercenaries were recruited in Ptolemaic Egypt, the methods of recruitment used in period A and those used in periods B-C should be discussed separately. In period A (the third century BC), when the Ptolemies were still actively conducting campaigns outside Egypt, prisoners of war were occasionally settled in Egypt as mercenaries, as in the New Kingdom, though this practice was not common.<sup>49</sup> Ptolemy V (r. 204-180) actually forced oarsmen into the navy at very low wages, although this was because he was under great financial stress and fighting a multi-front war.<sup>50</sup> Under normal circumstances, the Ptolemies recruited soldiers by offering them good pay, land, and other benefits. There was a serious possibility that unsatisfied soldiers could switch to the enemy side before a crucial battle, such as when some Ptolemaic officers and soldiers defected to the Seleucids before Raphia.<sup>51</sup> When disloyalty was a real possibility, the Ptolemies were eager to inform soldiers of the many benefits available to them should they choose to serve Egypt loyally. Mercenaries usually received high wages or large amounts of material goods, a practice Polybius refers to when the guardians of the young king Ptolemy V paid his mercenaries extra to remain loyal to him during his transition regime.<sup>52</sup> Payment came in other forms too, such as large allotments of land or even the privileged social status gained by being a Greek in Egypt.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>52</sup> Wendy Cheshire, “Cleopatra ‘the Syrian’ and a Couple of Rebels: Their Images, Iconography, and Propaganda,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 45 (2009): 356.

Another recruiting strategy used by the Ptolemies was their cultivation abroad of the image of Egypt as a “land of opportunity.” Spreading this image was a necessity because the Ptolemies were not the only kings looking for soldiers and rival powers competed for a limited pool of talent. In order to spread the idea that Egypt was a prosperous land of opportunity, the Ptolemies dispatched recruiting agents, or *xenelogoi*, to foreign countries to convince foreigners to immigrate to Egypt to serve as soldiers or in other occupations such as the bureaucracy.<sup>53</sup> I refer to these recruiters as “agents” to draw attention to that fact that Ptolemaic Egypt was by no means the only Hellenistic state engaging in this practice. If recruiters from states hostile to the Ptolemies, like the Seleucid Empire, were also present in the same area, then the Ptolemaic recruiters would have had to be somewhat secretive in their doings to avoid an altercation with the other recruiting agents, not to mention to ensure that their immigration pitch was better than the Seleucids’. Polybius describes how the Ptolemies dispatched these recruiters in the desperate ramp-up of military activity preceding the battle of Raphia in 217:

*But meanwhile they were calling up and collecting at Alexandria the mercenaries whom they had on service in towns outside Egypt; were dispatching men to recruit foreign soldiers; and were collecting provisions both for the troops they already possessed, and for those that were coming in. No less active were they in every other department of the military preparations. They took turns in going on rapid and frequent visits to Alexandria, to see that that the supplies should in no point be inadequate to the undertaking before them. The manufacture of arms, the selection of men, and their*

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<sup>53</sup>Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 169.



*division into companies, they committed to the care of Echebrates of Thessaly and Phoxidas of Melita.*<sup>54</sup>

Not only does this passage mention the Ptolemies' recruiting agents, it also makes clear how important mercenaries were to the Ptolemaic war machine. Mercenaries evidently saw service in the imperial holdings outside of Egypt proper, and here were being called back in preparation for Raphia. However, even this influx of fresh mercenaries from the empire was not enough, and the recruiting agents were dispatching "to recruit foreign soldiers." Unsurprisingly, the two military leaders put in charge of organizing the war preparations were not Egyptians, they were Greeks: Echebrates of Thessaly and Phoxidas of Melita.

The early Ptolemies were constantly in need of fresh foreign mercenaries, and they appealed to Greeks in particular by selling the image of Egypt as a *Greek* land of opportunity. Such imagery even found its way into the pens of Hellenistic poets. The *Mimes* of the poet Herondas, a series of vignettes of everyday life, are one such example. In the first of the series, composed around 270, a young woman sits in a Greek city, brooding over the absence of her "man" (whether he is her lover or husband is not stated), who has traveled to Ptolemaic Egypt. The young woman, a procuress, is then given an account of Egypt by a customer of hers:

*It's ten months since Mandris went off to Egypt, and you haven't heard a single word from him. He's drunk from a new cup of love, and he's forgotten you. Aphrodite's headquarters are down there. In Egypt they have everything that exists or is made anywhere in the wide world: wealth, sports, power, excellent climate, fame, sights, philosophers, gold, young men, a shrine of the sibling gods, an enlightened king, the*

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<sup>54</sup> Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, "Book Five," in *The Histories of Polybius* (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2002), 316.

*Museum, wine – in short, every good thing he might desire. And women! More women, by Hades' Persephone, than the sky boasts stars. And looks! Like the goddesses who once incited Paris to judge their beauty.*<sup>55</sup>

Although literary, this passage is a gold mine of information. Everything the customer claims awaits a Greek immigrant to Egypt is an aspect of the “Greek” Egypt that the Ptolemies’ recruiting agents were trying to sell. They want foreigners, particularly Greeks, to come to Egypt. Even more specifically, they want young, Greek men to come to serve as mercenaries. How do you convince young, Greek men to come to Egypt? Make Egypt look like Greece, but better, regardless of what Egypt is in reality. Athletics was very important to the Greeks, so the Ptolemies stressed that Egypt had sports, athletic competitions, gymnasiums, etc. Of course, the stream of immigrants would stop if the Ptolemies lied and the Greeks learned that Egypt didn’t really have these things – gymnasiums really were constructed in Ptolemaic Egypt just to make the immigrating Greeks, particularly the soldiers, happy. The poem also mentions other things that young men seeking to make their way in the world usually look for: wealth, gold, power, and women. The customer makes sure to stress the latter point, describing both an abundance of women and their incredible beauty. Although intermarriage between Greeks and Egyptian would eventually occur, first generation Greek immigrants usually wanted to marry other Greeks. Perhaps this is why Herondas relates the beauty of the women in Egypt with “Hades’ Persephone” – many Greeks were probably told by the recruiting agents that plenty of beautiful *Greek* women were already living in Egypt. Even at the peak of Greek presence in Ptolemaic

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<sup>55</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “*Mimes of Herondas*,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 10.

Egypt, the Greeks were nevertheless only a small minority, but the Ptolemies would have made every effort to hide this information from potential immigrants.

Evidently, word had also spread that many essential Greek cultural institutions were now present in Egypt too. The text mentions “a shrine of the sibling gods” in Egypt, which refers to the new cult of Ptolemy II and his famous sister-wife Arsinoe II. Although the Ptolemies and other Greeks who came to Egypt quickly began to worship Egyptian gods, they usually continued to worship their old Greek gods, meaning Greek temples were not uncommon in Egypt – a further incentive for perspective Greek immigrants. Wine, an extremely important part of Greek culture, is also said to be in Egypt. This is something the recruiting agents would have made sure was common knowledge, as the drink of choice in Egypt was beer and some Greeks might have refused to come to Egypt simply over the prospect of having no access to wine. The “Museum” is also mentioned, referring to the Museum (or *Mouseion*) in Alexandria, which, alongside the more famous Great Library of Alexandria, was inside the Ptolemies’ royal palace.<sup>56</sup> The Museum itself was a community of scholars that was both academic and religious, as it was centered on a shrine of the Muses, the Greek deities of artistic and intellectual pursuits.<sup>57</sup> Hence the name, the Museum. These scholars studied the sciences such as medicine, mathematics, and astronomy in addition to literature, and major Greek texts such as Homer were edited here. Finally, the scholars of the Museum also acted as teachers. The presence of two great centers for Hellenistic learning, the Museum and the Great Library, was surely a great incentive for educated, wealthy, or powerful Greeks to immigrate to Egypt. Included among these upper-class Greeks would be potential officers and generals. Their immigration to

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Erskine, “Culture and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Museum and Library of Alexandria,” *Greece & Rome* 42, no. 1 (April 1995), 38.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Alexandria was crucial to the Ptolemaic war machine, as the Ptolemies almost exclusively employed Greeks in their high command, as seen by two Greeks leading the army preparations before Raphia.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, two characteristics of Egypt are mentioned that are pure propaganda. The idea of an “enlightened king” ruling in Egypt is undoubtedly the result of propaganda efforts by Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II, the latter of whom would have been king of Egypt in 270 BCE when this work was published. While these two kings were some of Ptolemaic Egypt’s greatest, they still would have made certain that prospective immigrants to Egypt thought of the king of their new country as “enlightened,” particularly if they were mercenaries who would be fighting under that king. Finally, Egypt is said to have an “excellent climate,” as assertion that is almost laughable when considering what a Greek would likely consider an “excellent climate.” At the coast of the Egyptian Delta, in a city like Alexandria, the climate is that of the Mediterranean and close enough to that of Greece. Yet, the farther south you travel up the Nile the hotter and drier it becomes. Almost all mercenaries would have been garrisoned in the same handful of places: the border fortresses, the fortresses at the base of the Nile Delta and in Middle Egypt, or the southern forts on the Nubian border. The border fortresses on the northeastern and northwestern borders of Egypt would have had climates that were at least tolerable to native Greeks. However, important cities at the base of the Nile Delta like Thebes and Memphis, as well as the Fayum (the area around Lake Moeris in Middle Egypt, where many *cleruchs* were settled), are much hotter and drier than Greece. Finally, the southernmost border fortress of Elephantine is almost as far

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<sup>58</sup> Shuckburgh, 316.

from a Greek climate as you can get, as going any further south takes you to the dry, arid land of Nubia.

Most of the information the Ptolemies spread about Egypt was true, as immigrants would quickly have stopped coming if Egypt was nothing like the recruiters said. Nevertheless, they made sure to exaggerate to at least some degree to ensure that Egypt was seen by foreign Greeks as a prosperous miniature Greece in the south. In this, they were bolstered by the efforts of Greeks who had already immigrated to Egypt and prospered. These immigrants would often form migrant chains, writing home about the wonders of Egypt and encouraging friends to come, and then, by extension, the friends of those friends, the friends of those friends, etc. Another Greek poet, Theokritos, originally a native of Syracuse (ancient Sicily), left his provincial hometown seeking fame, fortune, and a more “cultured” atmosphere.<sup>59</sup> He found all of these in Alexandria and settled there around 270 BCE. In the fourteenth of his thirty-one *Idylls*, he describes a young man, Aischines, fuming because his mistress had run off with a rival. As Aischines considers taking a sea voyage to “unlove her,” a friend offers him the following counsel:

*“If you really mean to emigrate, Ptolemy is the freeman’s paymaster, the best there is. What sort of man is he otherwise? The best there is – considerate, a man of wit and taste, partial to the ladies, the height of courtesy, knows who his friends are (and even better, who are not), bestower of much upon many, no denier of favors, as befits a king... Well, if you are ready to clasp the military cloak on your right shoulder, if you*

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<sup>59</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Excerpt from Theokritos’ *Idylls*,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 11.

*have the courage to plan your legs firmly to withstand the attack of a bold warrior, get you quickly to Egypt.*”<sup>60</sup>

We see again the recurring theme of Egypt as a land where a man can earn great wealth, with Ptolemy as the “freeman’s paymaster.” Furthermore, the text suggests the man be “ready to clasp the military cloak” on his shoulder and “withstand the attack of a bold warrior,” revealing the Ptolemies’ desire for capable soldiers to immigrate. Theokritos was a poet, not a soldier, meaning he had little reason to include a passage about Ptolemaic Egypt wanting courageous soldiers unless it was actually true.

We are ill-informed about the details of the agreements made between these immigrating mercenaries and their employers, but we do know that the Ptolemies at least provided them their equipment, and it is assumed that there was a contract in which wage, land grants, and other service-related rewards were agreed upon.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, an oath of allegiance was likely made. The clearest example of this is from outside Egypt in the mid third century, when the mercenaries of the Attalid king Eumenes swore to fight for him and his interests.<sup>62</sup> In Ptolemaic Egypt, oaths of allegiance to the king were taken by the troops upon his accession to the throne and new cleruchs took oaths when they received their lots of land,<sup>63</sup> so it is probable that the salaried mercenaries took similar oaths upon commencement of their contracts.<sup>64</sup>

Unfortunately for the Ptolemies, their great military power was not to last. In periods B-C (the second and first centuries BCE), the army did little else besides fight against rebels or the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 168.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Papyri.info, “Letter from Phantias to Zenon in 252 BCE,” accessed October 17, 2019, <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.cair.zen;2;59254>.

<sup>64</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 168.

forces of pretenders to the throne.<sup>65</sup> The soldiers in this period were recruited almost entirely from within Egypt proper, meaning the Ptolemaic army was now predominately composed of Greeks born within Egypt, Egyptians, and Greco-Egyptians.<sup>66</sup> Mercenaries were still employed at this time, at least in the sense that there were still salaried soldiers, or *misthophoroi*, but they did not possess their predecessors' experience of fighting on the international battlefield.<sup>67</sup> They were not expected to have done so, and they were not even trained like their predecessors to fight in a Greek phalanx with a Macedonian pike.<sup>68</sup> Such a lack of true combat experience gave these "professional" soldiers much less bargaining power to use against the Ptolemaic state., whose revolts ravaged the country post-Raphia. Although many of the great privileges to landed soldiers disappeared as well, as seen in an overall reduction in plot size, cleruchic status was extended to a much broader group, as native Egyptians were increasingly recruited as cleruchs and even policemen were given a cleruchic status similar to the Greek cavalry settlers of the previous period – a hint at how important policing the country had become for the Ptolemies.<sup>69</sup>

With Egypt rife with internal struggles and possessed of an overall weak military, it is not surprising that the flow of mercenaries into the country slowed to a trickle during this time. What competent mercenary would want to serve one of the weakest Hellenistic states? Yet internal strife and external weakness were not the only reasons the Ptolemies recruited fewer and fewer foreign mercenaries. In period C, after Rome halted the Seleucid invasion of Egypt, Egypt became a Roman protectorate. Why would the Ptolemies spend enormous amounts of money to recruit more foreign mercenaries when the strongest power in the known world was protecting

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 118.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

them? In short, Ptolemaic Egypt during the third century BCE was extremely powerful and often waged international campaigns. Consequently, experienced soldiers were always needed, and the state possessed both the wealth and the military success to encourage foreigners to immigrate as mercenaries. These mercenaries were allured with the promise of success. However, in the second and first centuries, Ptolemaic Egypt faced a combination of rebellions and dynastic struggles that crippled the state's military, shifting it from being a force of foreign conquest to one of internal control. Immigration stopped almost entirely, forcing the Ptolemies to recruit soldiers from within Egypt. Finally, after an almost successful Seleucid invasion, Egypt became a Roman protectorate, providing even less incentive to recruit from abroad.

What can Ptolemaic mercenary recruitment tell us about how mercenaries were recruited in the New Kingdom? The recruitment methods used by the Ptolemies and the New Kingdom pharaohs seem to be totally different. The Greek kings tried as hard as possible to please their prospective soldiers by promising success of all kinds. The pharaohs simply asserted their power and captured, branded, and settled their defeated enemies in the garrisons of Egypt. Yet, I wonder if the difference is more apparent than real. What if many of the "captives" of the pharaoh had never been captured at all? What if many of them were simply foreign soldiers recruited by agents who promised them land, women and success in Egypt? How then could the pharaoh justify to his own people and army the presence of a privileged group of foreign soldiers in the heart of Egypt and indeed in the royal palace itself? Perhaps, the official status of "slaves" was simply a face-saving mechanism that allowed the king to hide what everyone knew: that Egypt needed foreign help. There is no evidence that this is indeed what the pharaohs of the New Kingdom were doing, but this possibility suggested by the later Ptolemaic period needs to be kept in mind. After all, the Egyptian state was not the only kingdom "hiring" foreign



mercenaries in the New Kingdom. Just like in the Ptolemaic period, foreign states were also in the market for foreign mercenaries, and at the battle of Kadesh, groups of so-called Sea Peoples fought both on the Egyptian and Hittite sides. Furthermore, how could a militaristic state like the New Kingdom rely purely on battlefield success to ensure that captured enemy soldiers be brought to Egypt as “slave” soldiers, especially in the later New Kingdom when foreign wars became increasingly less common? While we cannot know for sure, I think that the pharaohs likely engaged in at least some recruiting abroad, dispatching agents to recruit skilled foreign soldiers with promises of great rewards for their service.

One foreign region that Egyptians almost certainly recruited from was Nubia. During the New Kingdom, Nubia up to the fourth cataract was an imperial possession held in firm control by Egypt. Nubia was required to send tribute to Egypt and was governed by an Egyptian civilian administrator called the “Viceroy of Nubia.”<sup>70</sup> When “campaigns” in Nubia did occur, they were essentially just the Egyptian army cracking down on a revolt. Without constant campaigns against the Nubians to bring in more and more soldiers, Egypt would very likely have recruited from occupied Nubia, a claim reinforced by the title of the Viceroy of Nubia’s military deputy – the “Chief of the Archers of Kush.”<sup>71</sup> Nubia was also under far tighter Egyptian control than any of its other holdings like those in Palestine and Syria. Given this far more direct control exerted over Nubia, as well as the Nubians’ long history as Egyptian mercenaries, it seems likely that the imperial administration in Nubia continued to recruit Nubians into the Egyptian army.

Questioning whether the New Kingdom pharaohs actively recruited mercenaries from foreign lands begs a second question. Did they, also like the Ptolemies, support at least some

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<sup>70</sup> Robert Steven Bianchi, *Daily Life of the Nubians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 110.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

foreign immigration to Egypt, particularly if the immigrants were potential soldiers? The answer is complicated. The New Kingdom was for the most part far from supportive of large-scale immigration. A prime example is its opposition to the waves of Libyan immigrants that began to arrive by the time of Seti I (1323-1279), most likely due to climatic issues and overcrowding.<sup>72</sup> Libya was always one of “the Nine Bows,” or Egypt’s traditional enemies, and the state often employed Libyans as mercenaries. However, during Dynasty XIX (1292-1189), the Libyan tribes became particularly troublesome for the Egyptians, as waves of armed migrants attempted to settle the western Delta with women, children, and cattle in tow.<sup>73</sup> To deal with this new threat, Egypt needed significantly more soldiers – enough to station a permanent army on the northwestern border. As one can imagine, this was no easy task for a state that always needed more troops. Perhaps this is why we hear of more and more Sherden serving as mercenaries both within Egypt proper and in the imperial holdings, as well as the capital being moved north from Memphis to Avaris in the eastern Delta.<sup>74</sup>

Even more precautions were taken to prevent Libyan immigration, and a series of border fortresses, completed under Seti’s son, Rameses II, was constructed to house soldiers garrisoned on the western border. Yet, fortresses can only delay infiltration, not stop it completely, and Libyan migrants succeeded in circumventing them by the end of Dynasty XIX.<sup>75</sup> In Dynasty XX (1189-1077), the New Kingdom began to lose its Asiatic Empire, meaning more and more soldiers were being stationed within Egypt with the express purpose of controlling any disturbances in the Nubian territories and ensuring internal peace within Egypt proper – a

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<sup>72</sup> Spalinger, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 197-198.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

situation strikingly similar to Ptolemaic Egypt during its period of crisis. Yet there existed a far greater problem. Egypt had reached a limit in the native population it could support at around three million Egyptians in dynasty XVIII, and a slight decline to 2.9 million had occurred by dynasty XX, the same time that many Libyans began to reside in Egypt.<sup>76</sup> Despite Egypt's slight population decline, the settlements in the Delta actually grew, hinting at sizable Libyan immigration from the western Delta.<sup>77</sup> With military men still in high demand, the Libyan migrants, who continued to circumvent the western border fortress, began to be put to use. Sources are scarce on this subject, but given Egypt's need for soldiers, its frequent use of foreign mercenaries, and a longstanding practice of employing Libyan mercenaries, it is likely that these some Libyan immigrants were recruited into the military. Military service could even prove to be an avenue for success, as Hrihor, an army officer and High Priest of Amun (an extremely prestigious position) during dynasty XXI (1069-945), has long been suspected to be of Libyan descent.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the New Kingdom's opposition to any initial waves of migration into Egypt, it seems to have had few qualms about employing foreign peoples in military service once they had actually settled in Egypt. It may be that the perceived Egyptian aversion to immigration was actually directed merely at largescale waves of armed migrants, such as the Sea Peoples or the Libyans. If individual foreigners with valuable skills, particularly military ones, desired to come to Egypt, it is unlikely that the Pharaonic state would have been opposed to their immigration. That immigration occurred in Egypt may seem obvious, but it is a phenomenon that is rarely attested to directly in Egyptian sources. When discussing immigration, sources are far more

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

likely to discuss waves of migrants that required military action to halt rather than mention a trickle of foreigners coming to Egypt, let alone go into any detail on where they came from, where they settled, how they were treated, or if they saw military service. Just as it is possible that the New Kingdom pharaohs actively sent out their own agents to recruit foreign mercenaries abroad, it may be that the pharaohs specifically targeted foreign immigrants within Egypt for recruitment. Even if the pharaohs did this, they would likely have continued to call these foreign mercenaries their “slaves” as a face-saving mechanism to the Egyptian people. While we cannot know for certain, Egypt’s constant need for soldiers combined with the unique combat skills possessed by certain foreign peoples makes it a real possibility that the pharaohs engaged in a policy of clandestine foreign recruitment and supported military immigration.

## **2. How They Fought**

### **a. The New Kingdom**

Once mercenaries had been recruited, there came the issue of how to organize them and use them in battle. Foreign soldiers may have been skilled, but rarely did they speak the native language or fight in the same way as the natives. The New Kingdom and Ptolemaic Egypt were, of course, separated by centuries and used completely different weaponry. However, on a rudimentary level, their tactics are similar enough for comparison. New Kingdom infantry companies fought with a variety of hand-to-hand weapons, including spears, axes, swords, and clubs alongside their shields, and they were assisted by archers firing stave or, if possible, composite bows. Highly mobile chariot squadrons harassed enemy forces, served as shock troops, and, in the event of a rout, slaughtered them as they retreated. As for Ptolemaic Egypt, their heavy infantry (hoplites) fought as a Macedonian phalanx, wielding long pikes (*sarissa*)

and shields while they were assisted by lighter-armored, javelin-wielding skirmishers (peltasts). The Ptolemaic cavalry, though not armed with ranged weapons like the New Kingdom charioteers, still served a similar purpose by serving as shock troops, harassing enemy forces, or slaughtering them in the event of a rout.

Surface-level similarities aside, there is another, deeper connection between the two Kingdoms – the manner in which they employed their mercenaries. Though the mercenaries of both the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic Kingdom were organized into their own separate units in combat, they nonetheless featured both native and foreign units fighting together in the same battles. Through their service to a foreign state, the mercenaries of both Kingdoms were integrated far quicker than they would have outside of military service due to their near-constant exposure to their states' culture on and off duty, as well as a sense of comradery found in shared suffering that is a constant to military service throughout history. On the latter point, I do not insinuate that the mercenaries of either period felt a sense of nationalism for the state they served, as the modern concept of a nation state would not develop until many, many centuries later. Instead, I simply argue that their military service to a foreign state increased their exposure to its culture and (of course to varying degrees depending on the individual soldier) deepened their bonds with the culture and people of that foreign state.

In the New Kingdom, mercenaries were rarely integrated completely into the standard Egyptian military hierarchy.<sup>79</sup> Instead, they were organized into companies separate from their Egyptian comrades, wore their traditional garb, and fought using their own fighting styles, allowing their unique skills to be put to use. Before discussing how mercenary companies fit

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<sup>79</sup> Elliot, 35-36.

into the larger Egyptian war machine, one needs a basic understanding of how native Egyptian soldiers were organized and how they fought in order to understand the contributions of foreign mercenaries. Egypt was originally defended by two “divisions,” one garrisoned in the north and the other in the south.<sup>80</sup> Under Thutmose III (r.1479-1425 BCE), a third division was created, and he brought all three of these divisions with him when he fought at Megiddo. Each division was named after the patron god from which each division was based: Amun at Thebes, Re at Heliopolis, and Ptah at Memphis.<sup>81</sup> Later, under Rameses II (r. 1279-1213), a fourth division was created to garrison his new capital of Pi-Ramesses and was named Set.<sup>82</sup>

Each division was commanded by a senior officer who was also responsible for recruiting fresh troops and for supplying and provisioning his men. The complex logistics of maintaining such a sizable force was supervised by multiple officials bearing the title “Chief Scribe of the Army,”<sup>83</sup> and recruiting efforts were directed by the “King’s Scribe of Recruits.” The inscription of Amenhotep son of Hapi, who bore this title during the reign of the pharaoh Amenhotep III, states that:

*“My lord again showed favor to me...he put all the people subject to me, and the listing of their number under my control, as superior king’s scribe over recruits. I levied the military classes of my lord, my pen reckoned millions...I placed troops at the heads of the ways to turn back the foreigners in their places. The Two Lands [Egypt] were surrounded with a watch, scouting for the Sand-dwellers. I did likewise at the heads of*

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

*river mouths, which we closed under my troops, except to the troops of the royal marines.*"<sup>84</sup>

Underneath senior officials such as Amenhotep son of Hapi worked an army unto itself of military scribes, who helped each division maintain exhaustive and up-to-date records. A full-strength infantry division likely numbered around 5000 combat troops, a figure implied in multiple sources.<sup>85</sup> For example, in the satirical *Papyrus Anastasi I*, the scribe authoring the text proposes to another scribe the hypothetical problem of provisioning 5000 men for a military expedition, implying that such a number is the norm for a division.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the Hammamat Stela reports 5000 soldiers accompanying a mining expedition to Wadi Hammamat (a common task for soldiers during peacetime).<sup>87</sup> As such, 5000 men was likely the ideal number for a full-strength Egyptian division, although it was probably only a benchmark, as divisions would not always be at full-strength. The division was further subdivided into twenty 250-man companies, or *sa*. The Hammamat Stelae also lists a division as having 20 military scribes, which suggests that each company was assigned its own military scribe who maintained its records.<sup>88</sup> The standard bearer of each company, or *tjai-seryt*, was the officer who commanded it, though he was aided by three other officers: his company's scribe, a deputy, and a quartermaster. The company itself was divided into five 50-man platoons, and the officer commanding each of these platoons was referred to as a "Greatest of Fifty," with each of them reporting directly to the company commander.<sup>89</sup> Finally, each platoon contained five 10-man

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>86</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, trans., *Egyptian Hieratic Texts Series I: Literary Texts of the New Kingdom*, Part I (J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung: Leipzig, 1911), 19

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hikade, "Expeditions to the Wadi Hammamat During the New Kingdom," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 92 (2006): 160.

<sup>88</sup> Elliot, 32.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

squads, each of which was commanded by a “Greatest of Ten,” a position similar to that of a modern NCO. Multiple companies often fought on the battlefield at the same, and these formations were known as a host, or *pedjet*, and were headed by their own commander, who in turn was assisted by an assault and transport officer.<sup>90</sup> To facilitate swift communication from the different companies of a host during the heat of battle, war trumpets were often used to give orders.

The Egyptian word for “infantry” actually referred to both archers, known as *megau*, which literally means “shooters,” and infantry in a more modern sense of the word, meaning soldiers who fought hand-to-hand, known as *nakhtu-aa*, or “strong-arm fighters.”<sup>91</sup> Archers originally wielded stave bows, but as the New Kingdom progressed they began using the far superior composite bow. They would often soften up a target before the infantry rushed in to engage in melee combat. The infantrymen themselves were trained to fight in several different styles as the situation dictated: they could fight one-on-one with a shield and either a spear, axe, club, or sword, but they could also lock their shields together in a battle line. Each infantryman carried a spear, but he was almost always equipped with a secondary weapon like an axe, club, or a *khopesh*, a curved Egyptian sword. As a result, if the infantry was not using their spears in tandem with a shield wall tactic, they often threw them at the enemy upon commencing a battle before promptly switching to their secondary weapon.<sup>92</sup> Although an “infantry” division contained both archers and “strong-arm fighters,” the two units were not mixed within the same company, but were instead organized into their own companies. The savage wounds that Egyptian melee weapons could inflict are illustrated perfectly on the mummy of pharaoh

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.



Sequenre Tao II (1560/1558-1555 BCE) who fought to expel Egypt's foreign occupiers at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. While conducting a two-front war against the Hyksos in the north and the Nubians in the south, Sequenre Tao II, like most great pharaohs of his time, personally fought alongside his soldiers. An autopsy performed on his mummy, shown in figure 2,<sup>93</sup> reveals that he received fatal blows to the head from several weapons, although it is uncertain whether these wounds were actually received in battle or if the pharaoh was executed by a Hyksos commander or king.<sup>94</sup>

Outside of a traditional infantry division was the chariotry, which was organized into its own separate companies. Ten chariots formed a single "troop," and five troops were organized into a fifty-chariot squadron led by a "Standard Bearer of the Chariot Warriors."<sup>95</sup> Just like their counterparts in the infantry, each chariot squadron had multiple officers attached to it to ensure that it was always well-maintained and combat ready, such as a stablemaster, an adjutant, and numerous, grooms, scribes, and craftsmen. Keeping the valuable and expensive chariots in working order in the field was no easy task, and these support personnel enabled a chariot squadron to become its own base of operations wherever it was deployed. The difficulties of maintaining a chariot are attested to in one Dynasty XIX papyrus that



*Figure 2*

<sup>93</sup> Elliot, 96.

<sup>94</sup> Bianchi, 101.

<sup>95</sup> Elliot, 34.

describes a charioteer's adventures in Canaan. In this particular scene, he visits a chariot repair shop in Joppa:

*"You are brought into the armory and workshops surround you – you do all that you have wished. They take care of your chariot so that it is no longer loose. Your pole is freshly trimmed, and its attachments are fitted on. They put bindings on your collar piece...and they fix up your yoke. They apply your ensign, engraved with a chisel, and they put a handle on your whip and attach a lash to it. You sally forth quickly to fight at the pass and accomplish glorious deeds."*<sup>96</sup>

A position as a charioteer was a respectable one. Most charioteers were men of at least some social status, and they even had the privilege of wearing armor, as opposed to the infantrymen, who were lightly armored if at all.<sup>97</sup> The charioteer was assisted by his chariot driver, who doubled as his shield bearer. However, it was the charioteer who actually did most of the fighting, and his chariot was stocked with a composite bow, multiple quivers of arrows, several bronze javelins, and a *khopesh* or mace.<sup>98</sup> Though the charioteer carried a melee weapon, the chariot was used primarily as a type of mobile weapons platform, relying on speed to outmaneuver enemy troops and annihilate them with arrow fire. Finally, a chariot crew had a third member, who did not usually ride in the chariot. This third crewman, the runner, would sometimes hitch a lift, but during battle would dismount to mop up the enemy after a chariot charge. These runners were, understandably, required to be extremely quick on their feet, and were lightly armored and wielded nothing more than a light shield and javelins.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ian Shaw, *Egyptian Warfare and Weapons* (Princes Risborough, UK: Shire Publications Ltd., 1991), 41-42.

<sup>97</sup> Elliot, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

The New Kingdom army was well-organized, well-equipped, and permanently established, as opposed to the army of the earlier Middle Kingdom, which consisted of a very small number of standing troops who were assisted by provincial militias that could be called up as needed.<sup>100</sup> Although the New Kingdom had a standing army, most of its soldiers served only part time, training or fighting when necessary, and returning home to tend to their land when not needed.<sup>101</sup> Considering that each Egyptian division was garrisoned around a major city, it may have been possible for the soldiers to stay well-trained while simultaneously maintaining their households, at least during peacetime. Nevertheless, supplementing a majority part-time military with professional, foreign soldiers was an excellent way to increase the combat-effectiveness of the Egyptian army. Because mercenaries existed in companies outside the established Egyptian military hierarchy, they could perform unique roles on the battlefield that the native Egyptians were unaccustomed to.

Perhaps the best-documented of all Egyptian mercenaries were the Nubians, who had been serving Egypt as mercenaries as far back as the Old Kingdom. Some of the sources discussed previously reference the “Nubian bowmen,” and it was in this capacity as elite archers that many Nubians often served. Because archers were considered “infantry” in the New Kingdom, it is likely that Nubian mercenaries often saw combat alongside Egyptian infantry divisions. However, there was almost a total assimilation of Nubians into Egyptian culture during the New Kingdom.<sup>102</sup> Much of Nubia was conquered by Egypt and effectively colonized, with Nubian campaigns beginning as early as Kamose’s (r. 1555-1550) wars to expel the Hyksos. New Kingdom campaigns into Nubia were in part due to the Nubians being one of the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>101</sup> Spalinger, 150.

<sup>102</sup> Bianchi, 99.

Nine Bows, as well as the precedence of earlier Middle Kingdom pharaohs having already occupied parts of the country. Compounded with active Egyptian efforts to integrate the region into the empire (to a far greater degree than any of the colonial holdings in the Levant), almost total assimilation eventually occurred. Nubian revolts broke out occasionally and Nubians were still depicted as stereotypes by Egyptian artists, but many of the Nubians themselves became almost indistinguishable from the Egyptians in the archeological record. How then do we determine the Nubians' military role in Egypt given their assimilation? Given their traditional role in Egypt as the "Nubian bowmen," I see no reason why they would have been recruited as anything besides archers or skirmishers. With Nubia under direct Egyptian rule, not to mention the presence there of Egyptian officials such as the "Chief of the Archers of Kush," that the Egyptians continued to recruit the Nubians as archers seems almost certain.

Nevertheless, due to the level of assimilation that the Nubians experienced in the New Kingdom, many of our best sources for the subject of how Nubian bowmen actually fought come from earlier records of their service to Egypt: the Old and particularly Middle Kingdoms. One of the best examples of how Nubian archers fought is found not in a written source, but rather in archaeological evidence. In 1923, Egyptologist Herbert Winlock discovered a rock-cut tomb within Deir el-Bahri, near the Valley of the Kings.<sup>103</sup> What they found inside was not the body

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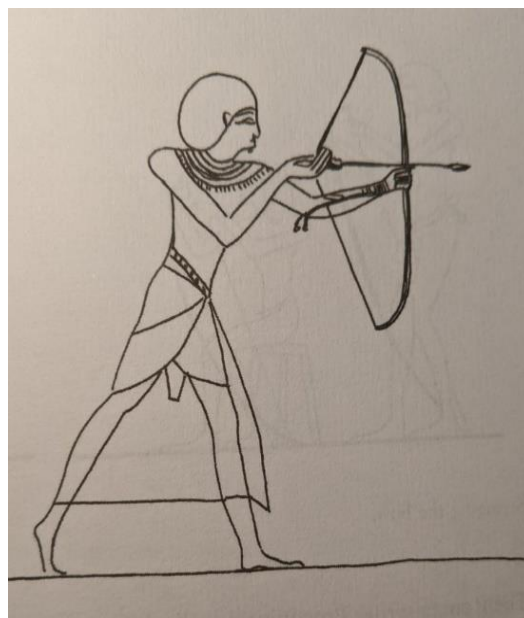
<sup>103</sup> Elliot, 11.



**Figure 3**

guard was a piece of equipment used by archers to protect their wrist from the slap of the bowstring against their arm, and can be seen in many Egyptian reliefs, such as that of an Egyptian archer in figure 4.<sup>105</sup> These sixty archers were identified as Nubians on account of their hairstyles, and their bodies were dated to the reign of Montuhotep II (2061-2010 BCE) during the Middle Kingdom.<sup>106</sup>

The bodies also show evidence of scarring and healing from old wounds, indicating that these men were veteran warriors. Their length of service is reinforced by their ages, as dental examinations have revealed that the warriors were all aged between thirty and forty, and three of them even had greying hair.<sup>107</sup>



**Figure 4**

<sup>104</sup> The Met Collection, "Archer's Wrist Guard, ca. 1961-1917 BCE," accessed August 15, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544274>.

<sup>105</sup> Elliot, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Ironically, the fallen Nubians' bodies show evidence of being hit by arrow fire, with some still having the arrowheads inside them. While archers usually fired at enemy infantry to soften them up for the friendly infantry's advance, here is evidence that these Nubian archers were either fighting other archers in a conventional battle or were being fired at from the walls of a besieged city. Regardless of the arrows' origin, it seems that not all of the wounds were fatal, as some of the Nubians have stab and blunt-force trauma wounds on the sides of their heads, suggesting that they were wounded, left for dead, and finished off by victorious enemy soldiers. This kind of *coup de grace* is featured prominently in Egyptian art, with pharaohs finishing off defeated enemies with a well-placed blow to the side of the head. It even appears in Egyptian literature like *The Story of Sinuhe*, a tale about an Egyptian official and warrior. While fighting a champion of the Retennu people in Syria, Sinuhe states that "When he charged me, I shot him, my arrow fixed into his neck. He screamed and fell on his nose. I dispatched him with his own battle-axe."<sup>108</sup> The final blow delivered to the wounded Nubian archers would have been the same blow to the side of the head that was given by Sinuhe to the enemy champion. There are even isolated fractures in a number of the victims' forearms, which indicate that they attempted to defend themselves from their opponents who arrived to finish them off.<sup>109</sup>

Other corpses have flesh removed or eyes pecked out by carrion birds, meaning their bodies had lain on the battlefield for some time before being collected. However, some of the Nubians had been bandaged during rigor mortis, which begins about one hour after death, finishes after five or six hours, and disappears after around two days, although it lasts even

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>109</sup> Carola Vogel, "Fallen Heroes? Winlock's 'Slain Soldiers' Reconsidered," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 89 (2003): 244.

shorter in a warm climate.<sup>110</sup> Given that information, it seems that the bodies were not collected immediately, but neither were they left out in the open for some time. Keeping that information in mind, it is unlikely that the Nubians died in fighting at a distant battle like Montuhotep II's siege of Herakleopolis, a hypothesis argued by some scholars on account of Montuhotep's tomb being near the Nubians' own gravesite and their arrow wounds suggesting that they died deaths during a siege. However, more recent studies suggest that the archers likely died in an unknown battle close to Deir el-Bahri. This hypothesis is strengthened by the limited cleaning that the bodies received, as they are still covered in sand beneath their linen bandages.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, why would anyone go through the trouble of transporting sixty bodies from Herakleopolis, a city located hundreds of kilometers away, only to bury them in a mass grave? It would seem that the empty tomb in Deir el-Bahri was chosen on account of its availability more than anything else, although it is interesting to note that two of the Nubians, likely their platoon commanders, were privileged enough to be buried in their own coffins.<sup>112</sup>



*Figure 5*

Although gruesome, these mummies show the intensity and brutality of combat in ancient Egypt. More importantly, they provide primary evidence of Nubian mercenaries

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

actively taking part in that combat. Although the bodies are dated to the Middle Kingdom, the fact that Nubians were used as mercenaries before Egypt even had a professional army indicates a long tradition of using Nubian archery skills to supplement the native Egyptians. We can even see what these Nubian mercenaries may have looked like, due to the survival of a set of 40 wooden models of Nubian archers. These models, shown in Figure 5,<sup>113</sup> were found in the tomb of a nomarch, or regional governor, called Mesehti, in Asyut. Although, like the wrist guard, they date to the Middle Kingdom (XI dynasty, approximately 2055-1985), they are a remarkable source for seeing what Nubian mercenaries look like, especially considering the excellent condition the models are – even the paint still survives. By now it should come as no surprise that the Nubians here are depicted carrying a self-bow in one hand and a clutch of arrows in the other, and they all have the trademark Nubian hairstyle. They all have one foot forward, as if they are marching or at parade, suggesting their status as professional soldiers in Egypt. Their wrist guards are markedly absent, though it is possible that this is imply due to them being on the march rather than in actual battle. This set of models is actually one of two that were found in Mesehti's tomb, with the second depicting a group of Egyptian spearmen. It may be that these two model sets represented a part of Mesehti's personal army.<sup>114</sup> Whatever the case, the fact that models of Egyptian spearmen were included with models of Nubian archers is a prime example of foreign mercenaries serving alongside their native Egyptian counterparts in the conventional army.

Another group related to the Nubians, the Medjay, also served prominently as Egyptian scouts, skirmishers, and policemen. The precise origins of the Medjay are unclear, although they

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<sup>113</sup> UNESCO Museums for Intercultural Dialogue, "Model of Nubian Soldiers," accessed August 17, 2019, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/museum-for-dialogue/item/en/70/model-of-nubian-soldiers>.

<sup>114</sup> Elliot, 15.



hailed from Egypt's eastern deserts and Lower Nubia and seem to possess at least distant relation to the Nubian tribes. Their exact origins aside, Medjay had been fighting in the Egyptian army as early as Pharaoh Kamose's campaigns to expel the Hyksos,<sup>115</sup> where they were usually employed as scouts and light infantry,<sup>116</sup> but they also accompanied peacetime mining expeditions. In just one example, the personnel roster for an expedition to Wadi Hammamat during the reign of Ramesses IV reports the presence of 50 Medjay.<sup>117</sup> Egyptian sources also attest to the Medjay serving as police officers.<sup>118</sup> *The Wilbour Papyrus*, a huge census document from the late Ramesside period (13<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE), reports many foreign mercenaries living in the Fayum, three of which are Medjay.<sup>119</sup> Two of the Medjay are listed as owning fields and their occupation is listed as "policemen," while a third is designated as a "companies the Medjay," who formerly had land registered to him.<sup>120</sup> The Medjay were organized into companies just like Egyptian soldiers, but they were led by an officer called a *hery-Medjay*, meaning "Chief of Medjay," who was assisted by a deputy (*idnu*).<sup>121</sup> Interpreting the *Wilbour Papyrus* is difficult here, as by the later New Kingdom, when it was written, not every person described as a "Medjay," was really a "proper" Medjay. Serving as police put the Medjay in frequent contact with the Egyptians, and, during the last centuries of the New Kingdom, many of the unique cultural traits of the Medjay were no longer found in their burial practices, and they soon became almost entirely Egyptianized.<sup>122</sup> Yet their prominence as police was not forgotten, and the necropolis police who guarded tombs from robbers became known as Medjay, even if

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 35.

<sup>116</sup> Shaw, 30.

<sup>117</sup> Bianchi, 103.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>119</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, vol. 2, *Commentary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1948), 81.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Elliot, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Elliot., 36.

they were often native Egyptians. Though it is likely that the Medjay police listed in the *Wilbour Papyrus* were in fact native Egyptians, the mere fact that the police were named after the Medjay reveals how prominent they must have been in the early New Kingdom.

Another source, the *Papyrus Lansing*, written in the later New Kingdom (Dynasty XX: 1189 – 1077 BCE) also discusses “Nubians” (perhaps Medjay) serving as law enforcement. While I have already discussed this papyrus’ section on the “woes of the soldier,” it also contains a lengthy section titled “The Misfortunes of the Peasant.”<sup>123</sup> In it, we see an unfortunate peasant pass through many trials and tribulations just to obtain the necessary tools to work his field. When he tries to plant his crops, more misfortune follows:

*“When he reaches his field, he finds it broken up. He spends time cultivating, and the snake is after him. It finishes off the seed as it is cast to the ground. He does not see a green blade. He does three plowings with bartered grain...Now the scribe lands on the shore. He surveys the harvest...Attendants are behind him with staffs, Nubians with clubs. One says to him: “Give grain.” “There is none.” He is beaten savagely.”*<sup>124</sup>

While this text is biased, pro-scribe literature, it nevertheless mentions Nubians assisting the scribe when he comes to collect the peasant’s grain. Their exact occupation is not mentioned, but they seem to be serving the Egyptian scribe as hired muscle, backing up his demands for payment with force. Considering that they are armed with clubs, it may be that they are actually local police who are assisting the scribe in collecting his grain. Given that this text is literary and that it was written in the later New Kingdom, it may be that this is just a stereotype

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<sup>123</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, “Papyrus Lansing: A Schoolbook,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 168-175.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

of many police being Medjay or Nubians, a fact that nonetheless reinforces the idea that these people often served Egypt as police officers.

Yet, another group of foreign mercenaries, the Sherden, served a very different role as elite infantry, a task for which they were perfectly suited. An entire book could be written on the possible origins of the Sea Peoples, an enigmatic and diverse group of migratory sea raiders who began ravaging the Eastern Mediterranean around 1200 BCE. The Sherden are just one of many Sea Peoples, but to discuss them all is an undertaking far beyond the constraints of this work. Instead, I will focus primarily on the Sherden, as they are by far the best-documented of any of the Sea People who saw service in the Egyptian military (though they are by no means the only ones).

The Sherden appear in many Egyptian sources, as they fought in great numbers both for and against Egypt during the later New Kingdom,<sup>125</sup> but their service can be divided into two distinct phases.<sup>126</sup> The first covers the reign of Rameses II (1279-1213), who the Sherden served as an elite section of the royal bodyguard,<sup>127</sup> as their foreign ancestry isolated them from court intrigue and dynastic struggles.<sup>128</sup> The second phase lasted from the reign of Merentptah until the end of dynasty XX, and during this time the Sherden appear, like most other foreign mercenaries, fighting alongside the native Egyptian army, though they nevertheless retain their status as elite infantry.<sup>129</sup> Texts from this time explicitly mention the Sherden serving with the

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<sup>125</sup> G.A. Wainwright, "Some Sea-Peoples and Others in the Hittite Archives," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (December 1939): 150.

<sup>126</sup> Giacomo Cavillier, "Shardana Project: Perspectives and Researches on the Sherden in Egypt and Mediterranean," *Syria* 87 (2010): 340.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Elliot, 37.

<sup>129</sup> *Shardana* 340.

Egyptian army alongside other foreign mercenaries, such as the *Anastasi Papyrus I*, a satirical letter where a scribe is given the problem of supplying a division-size Egyptian force:

*“The troops [Egyptian] that are before you number 1900: 520 Shardana [Sherden], 1600 Qehac [Libyans], 100 Meshwesh [Libyans], 880 Nubians – 5000 in all, not counting their officers.”*<sup>130</sup>

Although they would eventually be incorporated into the Egyptian army in the same manner as most foreign mercenaries, the Sherden originally served in Ramesses II’s bodyguard. In fact, the Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Rameses II explicitly mention the Sherden’s presence alongside their pharaoh during his famous battle.”<sup>131</sup> These inscriptions are supplemented with pictorial reliefs, and survive on the walls of many prominent Egyptian temples: Abydos, Luxor, Karnak, Abu Simbel, and the Ramesseum.<sup>132</sup> These reliefs allow us to see what the Sherden looked like when arrayed for war. Figure 6,<sup>133</sup> a relief from Ramesses II’s Temple at Abydos, depicts some of the Sherden who served in the pharaoh’s bodyguard. Their equipment offers a stark contrast to that of native Egyptians. They wield short swords and round shields, and they wear a “scalloped” kilt, a garb that sometimes features tassels, though it does not here.<sup>134</sup> On

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<sup>130</sup> Elliot, 76.

<sup>131</sup> Lichtheim, “The Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Rameses II,” 63.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>133</sup> Abbas, 14.

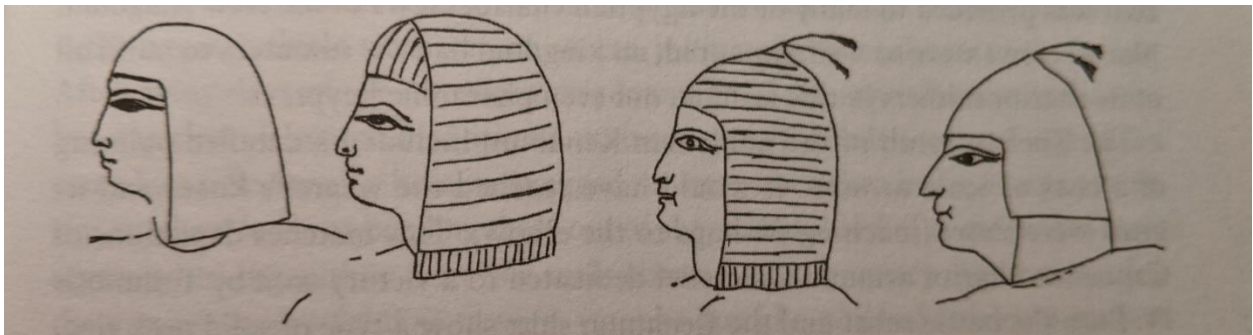
<sup>134</sup> Stephen Bertman, “Tasseled Garments in the Ancient East Mediterranean,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 24, no. 4 (December 1961): 126.



**Figure 6**

their heads, they wear characteristic horned helmets. The helmets of these Sherden also feature a spike topped with a sphere or disc between each helmet's horns. This "sun disc" often appears on the helmets of Sherden who serve Egypt, perhaps to represent one of the aspects of the Egyptian sun god Ra, while the helmets of the Sherden who fight against Egypt retain their horns but omit the disc.<sup>135</sup>

Their helmets and round shields set them apart from the standard Egyptian infantryman, who usually wore no armor. During the Ramesside period, Egyptian soldiers are often depicted wearing striped headcloths, a piece of headgear that is almost an exact copy of the *nemes*



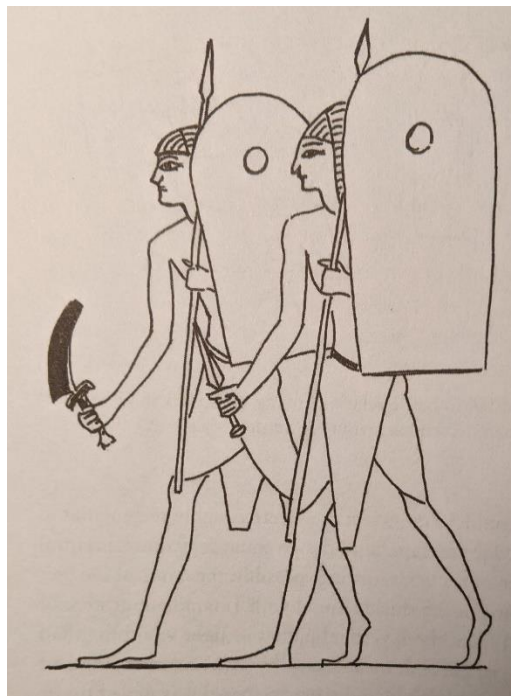
**Figure 7**

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<sup>135</sup> Elliot, 87.

headdress worn by pharaohs since the Old Kingdom.<sup>136</sup>

Several examples of headcloths worn by Egyptian soldiers during the Nineteenth Dynasty are shown in Figure 7.<sup>137</sup> It may be that Egyptian soldiers were sometimes honored by being allowed to wear these headcloths, which in the past had been reserved for the pharaoh, as a gesture of solidarity between the warrior pharaohs of the New Kingdom and their soldiers during a time of frequent warfare.<sup>138</sup> Regardless of their purpose, these headcloths would not have



*Figure 8*

provided much actual protection during combat, whereas the bronze, horned helmets of the Sherden would. Furthermore, their round shields were far better suited to the fierce, hand-to-hand fighting that they engaged in than the shields of the native Egyptians, which were rectangular with curved upper edges and made of ox hide stretched over a wooden frame.<sup>139</sup> Inscriptions of Sherden round shields depict them as smaller than the rectangular Egyptian ones, and this smaller size would have made them more maneuverable in the fury of close-quarters combat. Maneuverability would have allowed a Sherden mercenary to not only deflect an individual enemy's attacks and hinder his movement with the shield, but also bash him with it if the situation demanded. In contrast, the uniform, rectangular shapes of the Egyptian shields were more defense-oriented and would have allowed infantrymen to easily lock their shields into

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Elliot, 97.

a shield wall while fighting with their companies. Some examples of these Egyptian shields are shown in Figure 8.<sup>140</sup>

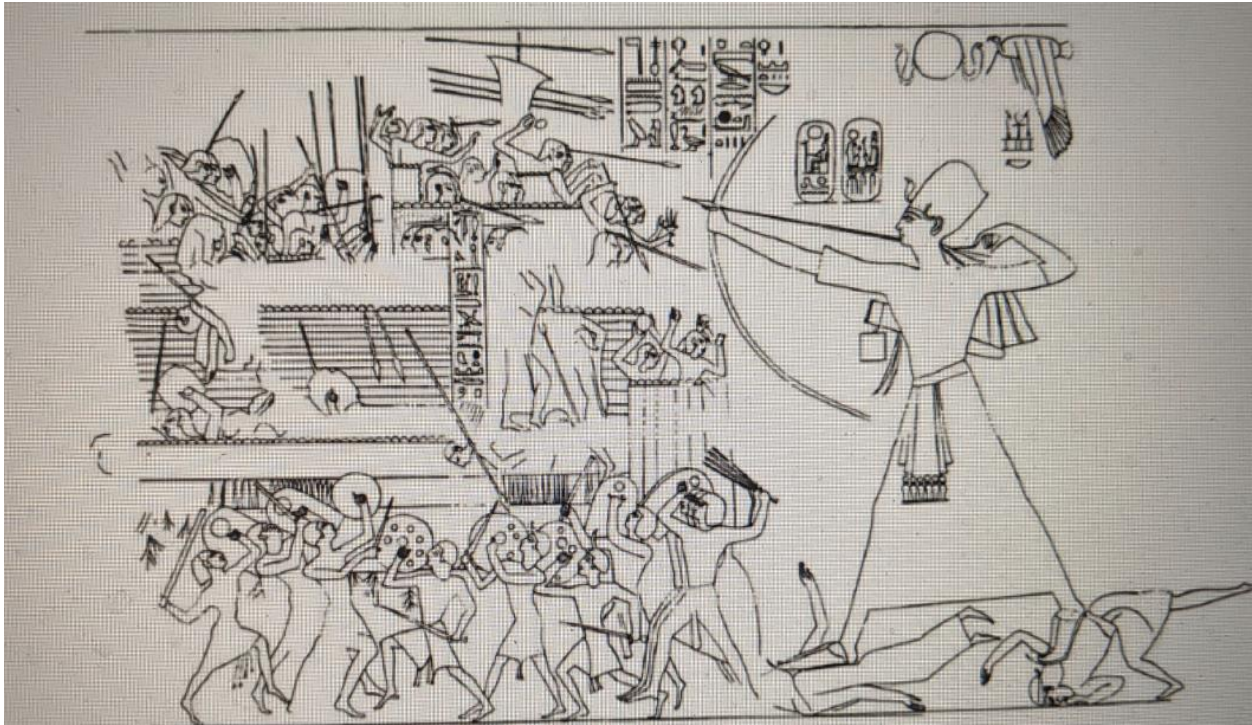
Although the Sherden were part of Ramesses II's royal guard, inscriptions nevertheless portray them fighting during his campaigns in the Levant. It would seem that though they were not yet incorporated into the Egyptian army in the same way as other foreign mercenaries, they often saw combat whenever they took the field with their pharaoh. In a relief from the Luxor temple, shown in Figure 9,<sup>141</sup> Ramesses II and his army besiege the Hittite fortress of Dapur. This relief clearly shows the differences between Egyptian and Sherden infantry, who nevertheless fight side by side at the base of the fortress. The Egyptians wield swords in addition to their usual rectangular shields, and they wear their *nemes* headdresses. The Sherden wear their scalloped kilts, this time with tassels, and their horned helmets, shown here in profile, and they wield their short swords and round shields. Here, the sun disc is conspicuously absent from

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>141</sup> Abbas, 16.





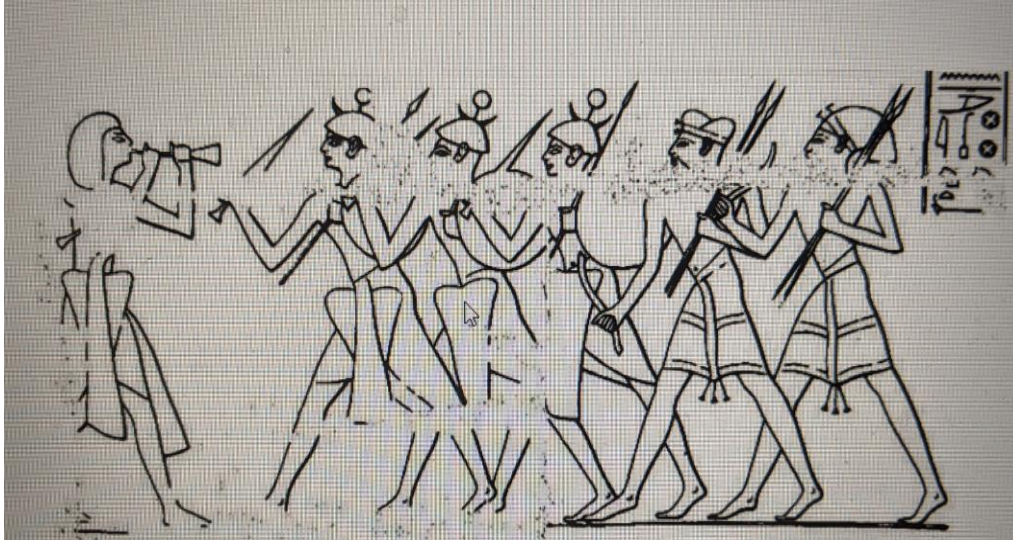
*Figure 9*

the Sherdens' helmets, although this may simply be caused by the artist's unusual decision to depict them in profile. Note the presence of Ramesses II in this battle scene, as his presence at the battle is the only reason for the Sherden being there in a time when they served purely as his bodyguards. New Kingdom pharaohs are easy to identify in Egyptian art, for they are almost always depicted as monumental in height, trampling enemies underneath them, and either firing a bow on foot or in a chariot.

By the reign of Ramesses III, the Sherden had begun the process of Egyptianization, and were serving in more traditional mercenary companies alongside other foreign auxiliaries. In a relief from the Temple of Medinet Habu, shown in Figure 10,<sup>142</sup> three Sherden march in front of

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 18.





**Figure 10**

but their origins are murky at best – though the Egyptians often identified Shasu as a people from southern Canaan, the term could also be used to designate a social class of mercenaries and brigands,<sup>143</sup> and most of the identifying features of the Shasu, such as a medallion attached to a chain around their necks or their weaponry, are identifiers also given to other foreign peoples.<sup>144</sup> Even the “Shasu” headdress with which they are often associated is often given to other foreigners in Egyptian art, making it difficult to identify Shasu in Egyptian art unless they are named explicitly by the text.<sup>145</sup> Here, the mercenaries behind the Sherden, Shasu or not, are depicted wearing tasseled kilts in addition to their headdresses, and each carries a clutch of javelins in one hand and a short *khopesh* in the other, hinting that their role in the upcoming battle would be as skirmishers. The Sherden are depicted with their usual weapons and armor.

In another relief from the Temple of Medinet Habu, shown in Figure 11,<sup>146</sup> Ramesses III, accompanied by his army, storms an enemy fortress in Amurru. In the bottom right corner, the

<sup>143</sup> William A. Ward, “The Shasu ‘Bedouin’: Notes on A Recent Publication,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 15, no. ½ (June 1972): 59-60.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

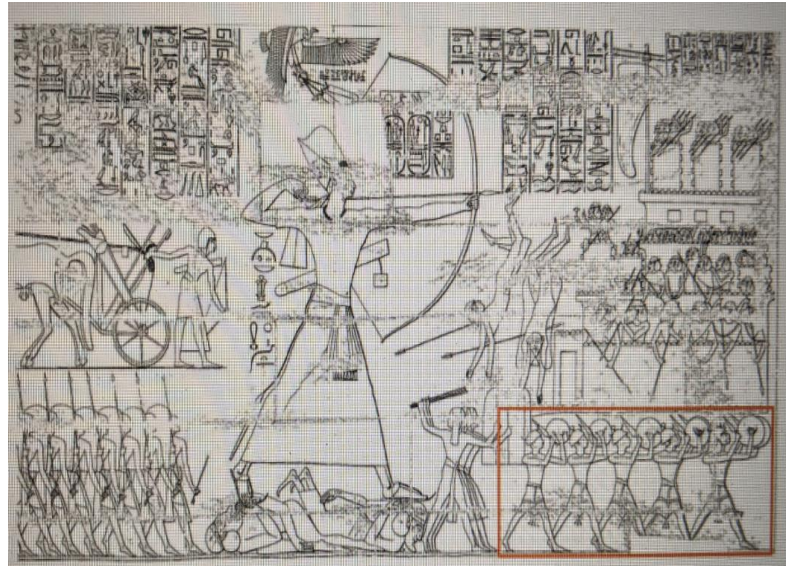
<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>146</sup> Abbas, 23.

what appear to  
be two Shasu.  
The Shasu were  
another one of  
many peoples  
who served  
Egypt as  
mercenaries,

Sherden can be seen organized into their own company as they assault the fortress, shields raised overhead to protect themselves from enemy projectiles. Their role as elite infantry is clear, as they stand at the forefront of the assault, ahead of even the Egyptian infantrymen. In Figure 12,<sup>147</sup> a Sherden warrior fights Libyans during the Libyan War of Ramesses III.

The brutal, hand-to-hand fighting for which the Sherden were known for is illustrated perfectly in this relief. The Sherden stands in the center of a bitter melee between the Egyptians and Libyans, and little semblance of order remains as each side's infantry crash together. They



*Figure 11*



*Figure 12*

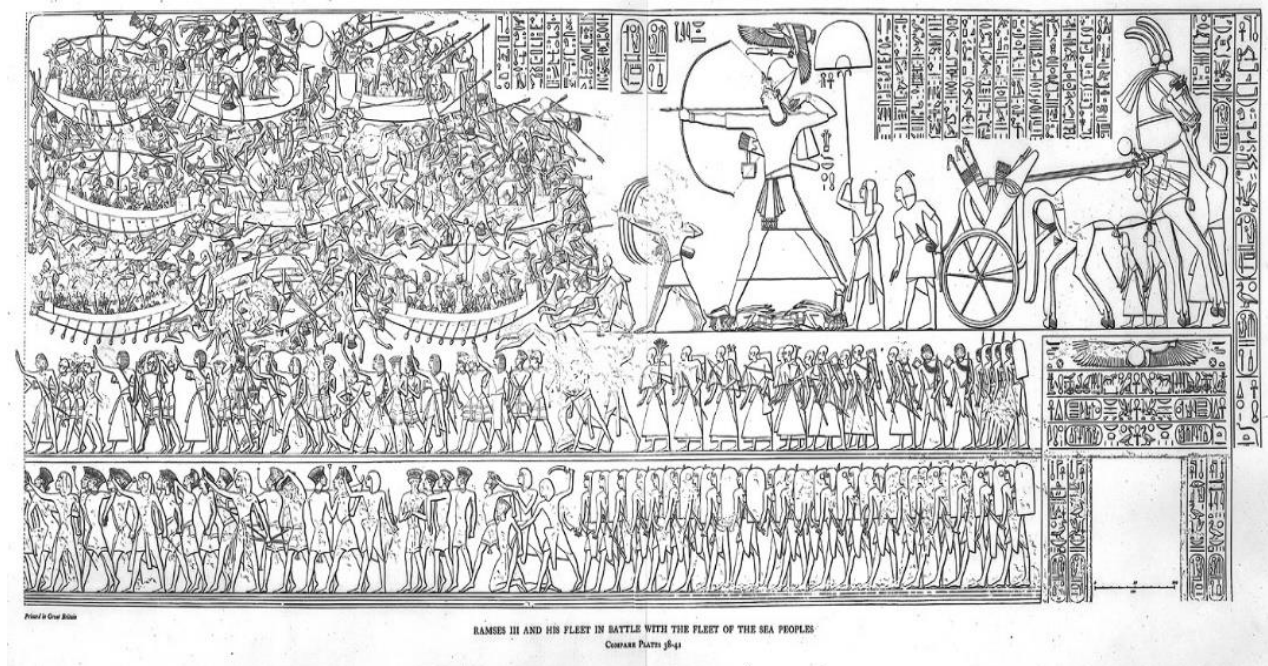
fight one-on-one, a task for which the Sherden is well-suited. He holds his weapon overhead with both hands, having sheathed his shield and short sword, ready to deliver the killing blow to a crumpled Libyan soldier.

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<sup>147</sup> Abbas, 19.



Finally, another relief from Medinet Habu, shown in Figure 13,<sup>148</sup> depicts the Battle of the Delta during Ramesses III's "Northern War," in which an invading force of Sea Peoples attempted to land and settle in the Eastern Nile Delta.<sup>149</sup> This great battle was fought on the shore of the Mediterranean, with the Sea Peoples' ships so close that the Egyptian archers, depicted in this relief at the foot of the pharaoh, could stand on the shore and fire at them. Meanwhile, Egyptian ships and marines battle the invaders at sea. Some of the many Sea Peoples included in the invasion force were the Peleset, who may have been ancestors to the Philistines, the Shekelesh, the Denyen, Tjekker, the Weshesh, and, most importantly, the Sherden.<sup>150</sup> It should be clear by now that Sherden mercenaries played an important role in the army of Rameses III, and it should come as no surprise that they were with his army during this



**Figure 13**

<sup>148</sup> The University of Chicago Library, "Rameses III and His Fleet in Battle with the Fleet of the Sea Peoples," University of Chicago, December 29, 2010, accessed August 15, 2019, <http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/historical-perspectives/empires-to-nation-states/before-islam/image-resource-bank/image-09.html>.

<sup>149</sup> Breasted, vol. 4, 33.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 33-34; Elliot, 89.

war. All the Sherden depicted in this particular relief appear hostile to Egypt, for there is no sun disc between their helmets' horns. However, other reliefs from Medinet Habu depict Sherden auxiliaries accompanying Ramesses III during this same war,<sup>151</sup> so it is very likely that Sherden loyal to Egypt were also present during the Battle of the Delta, fighting not only against other Sea Peoples, but other Sherden. This displays a high level of trust between the Egyptians and their Sherden auxiliaries that they would remain loyal even when faced with fighting their own people. Also worthy of note is the fact that the Sherden were evidently capable of fighting hand-to-hand against enemies at sea, just like the Egyptian marines. Furthermore, they are even more heavily armored than earlier reliefs – their helmets and weaponry are still present, but they also wear segmented bronze body armor. This armor was very advanced for its time and featured round shoulder plates and half a dozen metal bands that wrapped around the wearer's torso, creating the distinctive “V” shape seen in the relief.<sup>152</sup> Some of the enemy Sherdens' allies in the invasion, such as the Peleset, Tjekker, and Denyen, all three of whom are identifiable by their feathered headdresses, also wear this segmented armor.<sup>153</sup>

The Nubians and Sherden are certainly the best-documented mercenaries of the New Kingdom, but they were by no means the only ones. Mention has already been made of the Libyans, against whom the Egyptians waged frequent wars. Given the knowledge that captured foreign soldiers were usually brought back to Egypt as mercenaries, it should come as no surprise that many defeated Libyans were made mercenaries as well. Yet the Libyans should not be seen merely as poor, wandering nomads who periodically attempted to invade Egypt, for their

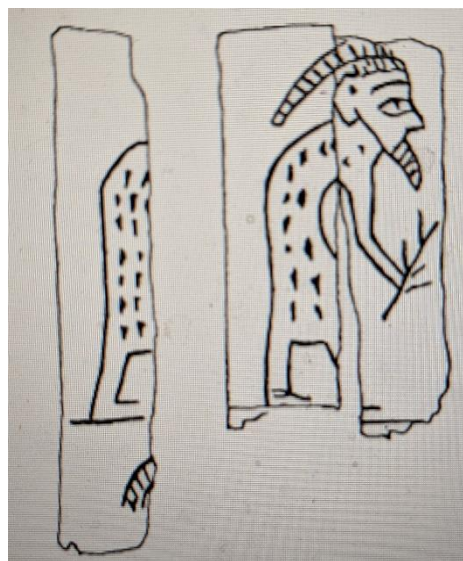
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<sup>151</sup> Breasted, vol. 4, 42.

<sup>152</sup> Elliot, 89.

<sup>153</sup> Albert Leonard, Jr., “Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: The Late Bronze Age,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 52, no. 1 (March 1989): 29; Elliot, 89.

way of life and their relationship to the pharaonic state was far more complicated than such a generalization.<sup>154</sup> In short, though there were cases of Libyan invasions and incursions through the western border forts, some conflicts developed simply over competing interests with the Egyptian state over local resources, exchange networks, and flows of wealth.<sup>155</sup>



**Figure 14**

Egyptian sources mention multiple Libyan tribes serving Egypt as mercenaries – the Anastasi Papyrus that was discussed earlier mentions members of two different Libyan tribes being present alongside the Egyptian troops, the Qehaq and the Meshwesh.<sup>156</sup> The *Wilbour Papyrus* also reports Libyans living in the Fayum with many of the other mercenaries settled there, and it even mentions a Libyan standard bearer living there.<sup>157</sup> This indicates that Libyan auxiliaries were organized into their own companies led by a standard bearer just as the native Egyptians and the Medjay Nubians. As for the Libyans' physical appearance, Egyptian reliefs often depict them as being almost naked, wearing nothing but a sash of fabric attached to a waist belt that covers the groin.<sup>158</sup> Other warriors are depicted wearing a cloak of animal hide, such as the Libyan depicted on an ivory plaque from the Old Kingdom, shown in figure 14,<sup>159</sup> which perhaps served as a form of light armor, especially since the Libyans are never shown to be using shields. As seen here, their hair and beards are shown

<sup>154</sup> Juan Carlos Moreno Garcia, "The Administration of the Western Delta and the 'Libyan Question' in the Third Millennium BC," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 101 (2015): 69.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Elliot, 76.

<sup>157</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 81.

<sup>158</sup> Elliot, 56.

<sup>159</sup> William Stevenson Smith, "Two Archaic Egyptian Sculptures," *Boston Museum Bulletin* 65, no. 340 (1967): 76.

braided, and Libyan chiefs often appear with ostrich feathers in their hair.<sup>160</sup> As for their style of combat, the Libyans usually fought as skirmishers, using javelins, throw-sticks, and stave bows to ambush, harass, or tie up enemy forces without engaging them head-on.<sup>161</sup>

Before moving on to Ptolemaic Egypt, one last group of New Kingdom mercenaries should be discussed in detail, especially given the point of comparison they provide to the Ptolemaic navy – naval mercenaries. Although the New Kingdom was never the naval power that Ptolemaic Egypt was, the Nile's role as the lifeline of Egypt meant that transport ships had played an important role in Egypt since the papyrus rafts of the Predynastic period.<sup>162</sup> Although ships served a primarily commercial role for much of Egyptian history, they were sometimes used as mobile platforms from which archers could fire upon enemy forces upon the banks of the Nile, a tactic seen during the wars against the Hyksos at the end of the Second Intermediate Period. However, it is not until the Nineteenth Dynasty that we see the emergence of true Egyptian warships.<sup>163</sup> Until that time, ships had indeed been used in a military setting, but mostly as transport craft or in support of amphibious operations, such as the Hyksos wars or when Thutmose III constructed a fleet of transport and cargo ships at Peru-nefer in preparation of his Syrian campaigns.<sup>164</sup> From the Nineteenth dynasty onward, Egyptian sources begin to describe proper warships, which can be seen in reliefs such as those depicting Ramesses III's Battle of the Delta against the Sea People, where warships clash, marines attack enemies aboard other ships, and archers fire from the shore. Inscriptions describing this battle have Ramesses III declare:

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<sup>160</sup> Elliot, 56.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>162</sup> Shaw, 59.

<sup>163</sup> Elliot, 134.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

*“I caused the river to be prepared like a strong bull with warships, transports, and merchantmen, they were manned entirely from bow to stern with brave fighting men and their weapons.”<sup>165</sup>*



**Figure 15**

The principal site of New Kingdom shipbuilding was the harbor of Peru-nefer, the same harbor where Thutmose III built his fleet. During his reign and the reign of his successor, Amenhotep II, Peru-nefer was made into a royal harbor that featured palaces of royal size, garrisoned troops, and a huge harbor basin.<sup>166</sup> After the excavation of the site, one of the palaces amazingly contained hundreds of fragments of Minoan (modern-day Crete) wall paintings that once embellished its walls. One fresco, shown in Figure 15,<sup>167</sup> bears an incredible similarity to the famous “bull-leaping fresco” found in Knossos. Furthermore, the style of the fresco is so different from that of Egyptian reliefs that archaeologist Manfred Bietak writes that “all the

It is interesting to note that these “brave fighting men” that the pharaoh mentioned included foreign mercenaries, such as the Sherden, who fought with him at that battle. Yet mercenaries did more than just fight alongside the Egyptians during their naval battles – some of them even aided in the construction of Egyptian vessels.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>166</sup> Manfred Bietak, “Minoan Presence in the Pharaonic Naval Base of Peru-nefer,” *British School of Athens Studies* 18 (2010): 21.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 16.



emblematic features are purely Minoan. There is nothing Egyptian about them.”<sup>168</sup> Evidently there were indeed Minoans living at New Kingdom Egypt’s greatest harbor, in great luxury no less, a fact made all the more interesting given that the Minoan civilization was a thalassocracy.

Another source from Peru-nefer, *British Museum Papyrus 10056*, dates to the reign of Thutmose III and lists both cargo and ships coming into the port. It specifically mentions “Kieftiu” ships, a term used only rarely and only during the height of contact between Egypt and the Minoan world.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, it is very likely that these Kieftiu ships came from Crete and that Egypt under Thutmose III was employing the Minoan thalassocracy’s expertise in seamanship and ship-construction during the pharaoh’s construction of his fleet at Peru-nefer. This would explain not only the presence of Minoan ships at an Egyptian naval base, but the existence of palaces decorated with Minoan art, as the Minoan naval advisors would likely have been treated very well and would have lived at Per-nefer for extended periods of time, if not full-time.

The New Kingdom mercenaries I have discussed here are by no means the only ones, for the Egyptian state supplemented its native army with an incredibly diverse range of foreign peoples who served in a wide variety of military roles. The peoples I have discussed are simply the ones that feature most prominently in Egyptian sources, though others appear as well, such as the Danuna Sea Peoples<sup>170</sup> and numerous other Libyan tribes. Finally, I should note that this chapter covered primarily how the New Kingdom’s foreign mercenaries fought or, in the case of the Minoan shipbuilders, how they served Egypt. The subject of mercenaries serving as

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>170</sup> Amihai Mazar, “The Egyptian Garrison Town at Beth-Shean,” in *Egypt Canaan, and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology, and Literature*, edited by S. Bar, D. Khan, and J.J. Shirley, 151-185 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2011), 173-174.



garrisons for Egyptian fortresses, of which there is significant primary evidence, will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3 on mercenary settlement, as garrisons were effectively places of residence for their soldiers, many of whom were foreign mercenaries.

## **b. The Ptolemaic Period**

Many centuries later, the Ptolemies faced a much different situation, for they were foreign Greeks ruling over native Egyptians. I will focus here on the third century BCE, when the use of mercenaries by the Ptolemies was at its peak. In this period, the primarily Greek mercenaries that composed the Ptolemaic army naturally fought in a Greek fashion – they wielded a long pike, called a *sarissa*, and usually fought as a Macedonian phalanx.<sup>171</sup> While the army of the New Kingdom was composed primarily of Egyptians, albeit supplemented heavily by foreign mercenaries, the Ptolemaic Army in period A was almost entirely composed of soldiers foreign to Egypt. Furthermore, while the New Kingdom organized its foreign troops differently than its native ones, the foreign soldiers of the Ptolemaic Kingdom were instead incorporated into the regular army. As always, the term “mercenary” must be used lightly here. The foreign Greeks serving in Egypt were mercenaries in the modern sense of the word, in that they were soldiers hired to serve a foreign army, but the true “mercenaries” of the Ptolemaic period were specifically those professional soldiers who were drawing regular pay.<sup>172</sup> These “proper” mercenaries often served in garrisons, but also saw battle outside of the traditional phalanx as light infantry, missile units, and other specialist troops.<sup>173</sup> The Macedonian phalanx

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<sup>171</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 118.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

itself was the main tactical unit of the Ptolemaic infantry, and the men were usually organized into ranks 16 deep, although at Raphia the phalanx may have been as deep as 24 ranks.<sup>174</sup> The phalanx was then divided into two different types of infantry – the heavy infantry, or hoplites, and the peltasts.



*Figure 16*

The hoplites, regardless of their origin, fought in a Macedonian style with Macedonian equipment, wielding a *sarissa* (a pike more than seven meters long) and a short, curved sword as a secondary weapon, although the close combat situations that would require such a weapon happened only rarely.<sup>175</sup> They wore conical helmets called Phrygian helmets, sometimes featuring cheek guards, with officer helmets bearing plumes. An example of a fourth-century bronze Phrygian helmet without a cheek guard is shown in Figure 16.<sup>176</sup> Although these helmets provided less protection than the Corinthian-style helmets of traditional hoplites, they offered far better visibility. As body armor, hoplites would wear a cuirass over their tunics – either the famous muscle cuirass, called a bronze thorax, an iron cuirass, or the lighter *linothroax*, which was made of linen and leather. As opposed to the sandals of classical hoplites, the Ptolemaic hoplites protected their legs with greaves and boots.<sup>177</sup> Finally, they carried a shield, the size of which is a subject of much scholarly debate. Some scholars claim that all the infantry of the phalanx fought with a single type of shield, the

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 137.

*pelte*, a small, round, bronze shield. Other scholars argue that two different types of shields were used by the hoplites and the peltasts, as evidenced by archaeological evidence from Macedonia for both the *pelte* and a larger shield. In the latter case, the heavy infantry hoplites would have used the larger shield and the peltasts the smaller.

The peltasts themselves formed the second part of the phalanx. As opposed to their heavily-armed counterparts, they usually wore a hat rather than a helmet and wielded a sword, javelins, and either a *pelte* or a still-lighter wicker shield.<sup>178</sup> While classical peltasts were considered light infantry, those of the Hellenistic period once again differed from their forbears and were classified as heavy infantry. They served as a halfway point between hoplites and missile troops, and as such there was often considerable variation in their arms, armor, and equipment. Nevertheless, while hoplites were often mobilized on a temporary basis, as before the battle of Raphia, Hellenistic kings usually employed peltasts continuously, meaning they were better trained and more experienced than the hoplites.<sup>179</sup>

Although the phalanx was the primary tactical unit for Ptolemaic infantry on the battlefield, it technically was not a unit of organization. Instead, infantry were organized into a 1024-man *Chiliarchia*, which was led by commanders called *chilarchoi*.<sup>180</sup> The *Chiliarchia* was then further subdivided into two units of 500 men, each led by a *pentakoisarchoi*, and these units were divided into four 250-man regiments called *syntagmata* that were led by a *syntagmatarches*. Finally, each *syntagmata* was divided into two *taxeis* and led by officers called *taxiarchoi*. Despite the premier role played by the phalanx on the Hellenistic battlefield, the Ptolemaic army was by no means entirely infantry. Cavalry had composed an extraordinary

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 134.

16% of Alexander's army (Ptolemaic armies were usually around 10% cavalry, which was already a significant number of cavalrymen).<sup>181</sup>

Just as the New Kingdom charioteers were organized into smaller divisions separate from the larger infantry divisions, so too were the Ptolemaic cavalry organized into separate, smaller companies. The largest unit of organization was the *hipparchia*, a force of 400-500 men led by a *hipparchoi*, that was then divided into two *ilai* of 200-250 men. Past this point, the cavalry's organization becomes more complicated. The first of the two *ilai* leaders, called the *epilarches*, was in fact the senior of the two, with his lower-ranking colleague, called the *ilarches*, leading the other *ile* (singular). This same system carried over to the subdivision of each *ile* – they were divided into two *lochoi*, with the first being led by a senior *epilochagos* and the second being led by the junior *lochagos*. As for the tactical organization of the cavalry on the battlefield, a general of Ptolemy XI, Philostephanus, describes the cavalry being organized into “a troop of fifty horsemen in a square formation,” i.e. into formations ten wide and five deep.<sup>182</sup> The Ptolemies themselves provided the equipment of their soldiers,<sup>183</sup> infantry and cavalry alike, but they were assisted in the enormous logistical challenge of distributing that equipment by their generals.<sup>184</sup> Such a system is similar to that of the New Kingdom, where the pharaoh's Chief Scribes of Recruits and the division commanders were largely responsible for the provision and supply of the Egyptian soldiers, as well as the recruitment of fresh ones.

One cannot discuss the Ptolemaic military without mentioning its navy, one of the chief sources for the early Ptolemies' power. During the Hellenistic period, the smaller trireme

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>182</sup> Plutarch, *The Life of Lycurgus* 23.1, [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Lycurgus\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Lycurgus*.html).

<sup>183</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 135.

<sup>184</sup> Shuckburgh, “Book Five,” in *The Histories of Polybius*, 317.

assumed more of a scouting role due to the advent of the larger and more powerful quadriremes and quinqueremes.<sup>185</sup> The decks of these larger ships were able to house more marines, and during boarding actions numbers were often the decisive factor. Furthermore, their size made them more effective at ramming and sinking enemy ships,<sup>186</sup> a common tactic in ancient naval warfare. Nevertheless, smaller ships such as the trireme continued to be in use even in battle, as their smaller size gave them far greater maneuverability than their larger counterparts.<sup>187</sup>

Fischer-Bovet estimates the Ptolemies to have had a fleet of approximately 100 warships at the battle of Raphia, and by that time the navy was actually past its prime.<sup>188</sup> Fischer-Bovet asserts that if one speaks of a Ptolemaic thalassocracy, meaning “a strong network of garrisons in the Aegean with a large fleet freely navigating between them, its peak can be situated in the 270s and its decline in the 250s, as is traditionally assumed, or even later.”<sup>189</sup> However, if thalassocracy is also meant to imply “the ability to defeat rival fleets in naval battle,” the term is grossly misleading, as Ptolemaic Egypt was unable to decisively win many actual naval battles against its rivals even at the height of their naval power.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, Ptolemaic naval power during the first half of the third century was truly impressive, a fact not lost upon ancient writers. The Alexandrian historian Appian, born in 95 CE in Roman Egypt, reminisced on the age of great Ptolemaic power under Ptolemy II, writing that the Ptolemaic navy during the time possessed at least 1500 warships and fittings for twice that many.<sup>191</sup> Of course, as an Alexandrian, Appian was clearly biased in favor of his home’s past glories, for such a number is

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<sup>185</sup> Pennsylvania State University, “Warfare in the Hellenistic Age: Military Advancements That Reshaped the Face of War,” accessed February 2, 2019, <https://sites.psu.edu/hellenisticwarfare/navy/>.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 54.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Kostas Buraselis, Mary Stefanou, and Dorothy J. Thompson, ed., *The Ptolemies, the Sea, and the Nile: Studies in Waterborne Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.

ridiculously high. More cautious modern estimates place Ptolemy II's naval capacity at approximately 400 ships – still the largest fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>192</sup> Nevertheless, Appian's exaggeration illustrates the almost legendary status achieved by the early Ptolemaic navy.

As for the ethnic composition of the fleet, the only evidence we have concerns the fleet of Patroclus, an admiral under Ptolemy II, during the Chremonidean War (267-261), and suggests that the crewmen were Egyptians.<sup>193</sup> Some scholars such as Van't Dack and Hauben have proposed that the Ptolemies imitated the Persian system of attaching a small number of non-Egyptian (in this case Greek) marines to each ship,<sup>194</sup> but they also suggest that the Ptolemaic navy's failures stemmed from a large number of its sailors and marines being Egyptian.<sup>195</sup> There is little evidence to suggest this. The only case in which we can thoroughly assess the quality of Ptolemaic naval crewmen is Ptolemy I's loss of 40 warships at Salamis, where the ships were either too damaged to escape or defeated quickly and subsequently captured.<sup>196</sup> Yet this significant defeat cannot be attributed to the ethnicity of the crews, for the deciding factor in the battle seems to have been the enemy having far larger ships,<sup>197</sup> which, as I discussed earlier, meant they carried more marines with which to easily board enemy ships. A more likely cause for the failure of the Ptolemaic navy is either luck (a significant factor in ancient naval warfare, such as a storm suddenly destroying part of a fleet) or the inferior quality of the Ptolemaic helmsmen, captains, and admirals, as the almost total lack of communications in ancient naval warfare meant that success in battle often relied on the skill of these officers. In the early

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 63.

<sup>194</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.96, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0126>.

<sup>195</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 63.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

Ptolemaic Kingdom, almost all of these men would have been Greeks.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of detailed sources prevents us from truly knowing whether or not the Ptolemaic naval officers were any better or worse than those of the other Hellenistic states, but what they do show us is that, even during the first century of Ptolemaic rule, Greeks and Egyptians were both seeing service in the navy.

Although most Ptolemaic mercenaries served within the established military hierarchy of the army and navy, others did indeed serve in special capacities, such as the professional mercenaries stationed in garrisons. When on campaign, the mercenaries would fight within the phalanx as either heavy infantry or more often in an intermediate function between heavy and light, a role that has led historians such as Foulon and Bar-Kochva to deem them “semi-heavy infantry.”<sup>199</sup> Young Macedonian, Boeotian, and Athenian soldiers were even trained to use both javelins and heavy-infantry equipment, suggesting that professional soldiers would have needed to be skilled with both. Other groups of mercenaries were referred to as light infantrymen or even given more specific names related to either their equipment or their origin, two elements that were often directly correlated. Three groups of these soldiers saw frequent service in the Ptolemaic army and all of them were represented at Raphia: the Cretans, Thracians, and Galatians.

The Cretans were hired as archers by all the Hellenistic states,<sup>200</sup> forming an interesting parallel to the New Kingdom Nubians, and they sometimes fought on both sides of a battle, forming an interesting parallel to the Sherden. Their role as professional soldiers employed by all of the Hellenistic states has even led some scholars to compare them to the Swiss mercenaries

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 138.

many centuries later.<sup>201</sup> The Hellenistic states came to see the Cretans as a universally talented group of soldiers, and the legendary status of their valor and martial spirit can be seen in a poem about a proud Cretan soldier by Hybrias:

*“But your wights that take no pride to wield*

*A massy spear and a well-made shield,*

*Nor joy to draw the sword,*

*O I send those heartless, hapless drones*

*Down in a trice on their marrow bones*

*To call me king and lord.”<sup>202</sup>*

Some texts also mention “Neo-Cretans,” a designation that has been the subject of much debate, although it likely that the “ordinary” Cretans were simply the members of the dominant oligarchy of Crete, while the Neo-Cretans were newly-enfranchised citizens who had been drawn from the island’s servile groups.<sup>203</sup> Despite being given separate designations, Cretans and Neo-Cretans are often mentioned together, indicating that they fought side by side.

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<sup>201</sup> Stylianos Spyridakis “Cretans and Neocretans,” *The Classical Journal* 72, no. 4 (April-May 1977), 299.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-307.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.



Thracians served in a number of diverse roles, but they were most often employed as light cavalry, riding unarmored and serving as scouts.<sup>204</sup> Polybius even correlates Thracians with lightly-armed troops in general when he mentions “the Thracians and light-armed troops” marching parallel to the Ptolemaic army column.<sup>205</sup> Some Thracians even attained cleruchic status, receiving plots of land in return for their service, and there were enough of them



*Figure 17*

serving as cavalry that the Ptolemies even had an entire hipparchy of ethnic Thracians.<sup>206</sup> Finally, the Galatians served in special units of light infantry, and were commonly equipped with a tall, oval shield, and a *romphaia*, a long lance or missile.<sup>207</sup> They were also equipped with a secondary weapon – a Galatian-style sword featuring a multi-lobate pommel, an example of which is shown in Figure 17,<sup>208</sup> an illustration of the tombstone of Dioscourides of Balboursa from 4<sup>th</sup> century Sidon.<sup>209</sup>

Although there certainly were foreign soldiers who served the Ptolemaic army in unique battlefield roles, the mercenaries of Ptolemaic Egypt were very often trained to fight in a Macedonian fashion – either within a Macedonian phalanx or in a cavalry hipparchy supporting

<sup>204</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 142.

<sup>205</sup> Shuckburgh, “Book Five,” in *The Histories of Polybius*, 278.

<sup>206</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 138.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

that phalanx. Perhaps the best example of this is before the Battle of Raphia, where Polybius explicitly names various different peoples present within the Ptolemaic army and in what capacity they served, as the Ptolemaic army gathers and trains for the upcoming battle:

*“They [the commanders] took command of the assembled troops and made the best of them by giving them the training of soldiers.*

*Their first measure was to divide them according to their country and age, and to assign to each division its appropriate arms, taking no account of what they had borne before. Next, they broke up their battalions and muster rolls...and formed them into companies adapted to their immediate purpose. Having affected this, they began to drill the men...*

*All these officers, too, had commands in the army suited to their particular accomplishments. Eurylochos of Magnesia commanded about three thousand men of what were called in the royal armies the Agema, or Guard; Socrates of Boeotia had two thousand light-armed troops under him; while the Achaean Phoxidas, and Ptolemy the son of Thrasesas, and Andromachus of Aspendus were associated in the duty and drilling of the phalanx and mercenary Greek soldiers on the same ground.”<sup>210</sup>*

Before proceeding further, let us unpack the text so far. It starts with the Ptolemaic generals beginning to train the soldiers – few of them would have been true professionals, many of them would have been cleruchs (reservists), and still others, as we shall see, had only just been called to service. They are given “the training of soldiers,” which, given that these soldiers are serving the Ptolemies, means the training of a Macedonian/Greek soldier. This is made expressly clear in the next sentence, as they are assigned their arms with “no account of what

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<sup>210</sup> Shuckburgh, “Book Five,” in *The Histories of Polybius*, 317.

they had borne before.” Although the soldiers are all clearly being trained to fight as a phalanx or in support of one, they are nevertheless divided up based on their age and their place of origin, likely due to the purely practical necessities of soldiers needing to speak the same language to each other in battle and a 25 year-old man being more physically capable than a 40 year-old one. Finally, the text explains that the generals led the type of soldiers they were most skilled with, which of course means it explicitly states what types of soldiers composed the Ptolemaic army before Raphia. The Agema, sometimes translated as the Ptolemaic “royal guard,”<sup>211</sup> are present here, and although one might assume them to be predominately Macedonian, they were, in reality, a fairly diverse group of elite soldiers – the term “Macedonian” is often ambiguous, especially with ancient authors such as Polybius, and the Guard included ethnic Macedonians, Greeks of diverse origins, and even Egyptians and other men bearing Semitic names.<sup>212</sup> There are also around three thousand light infantry mentioned here, likely including members from some of the prominent mercenary groups mentioned earlier, who would have fought outside of the phalanx.

Finally, while the Guard and the light infantry only need a single commander each to train them, the phalanx and mercenary soldiers have three, due to both the larger size of the phalanx and the fact that many of the hoplites within the phalanx would have had little to no training at this point. Polybius goes on to state that the phalanx and the mercenaries numbered 25000 and 8000, respectively.<sup>213</sup> He also lists the number of cavalry as about 5000 men, but explains that only 700 of those cavalymen were from the Ptolemaic court, with the rest of them being mercenaries from Libya, professional Greek mercenary cavalry, or, once again,

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<sup>211</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 148.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>213</sup> Shuckburgh, “Book Five,” in *The Histories of Polybius*, 317.

inexperienced soldiers only recently enlisted from the surrounding country.<sup>214</sup> Polybius goes on to list many of the different people who composed the Ptolemaic army:

*Cnopias of Allaria...commanded all the Cretans, who numbered three thousand, and among them a thousand Neo-Cretans...they also armed three thousand Libyans in the Macedonian fashion, who were commanded by Ammonius of Barce. The Egyptians themselves supplied twenty thousand soldiers to the phalanx and were under the command of Sosibius. A body of Thracians and Gauls were also enrolled, four thousand being taken from settlers in the country and their descendants, while two thousand had been recently enlisted and brought over: and these were under the command of Dionysius of Thrace. Such in its numbers, and in the variety of elements of which it was composed was the force which was being got ready for Ptolemy.”<sup>215</sup>*

Here, Polybius differentiates between the foreign peoples who fought in the Macedonian fashion, and those who did not, i.e. performed special battlefield roles, such as the Cretans, Neo-Cretans, Thracians, and Gauls. Polybius even notes that part of the contingent of the Thracians and Gauls was drawn “from settlers in the country [Egypt] and their descendants,” hinting that enough immigrants of those ethnicities had arrived in Egypt to develop a considerable minority population. While Polybius mentioned earlier that there were already 32000 total Greeks and mercenaries who would be fighting in the phalanx, that was still clearly not enough to defeat the Seleucids’ phalanx, for he here states that the Ptolemies complemented them with an additional 20000 native Egyptians – the first time the natives had fought for Ptolemaic Egypt on such a scale, and in a proper Macedonian phalanx no less. These Egyptian soldiers were most likely

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 318.

cleruchs, given that they were mobilized *en masse* right before a major battle,<sup>216</sup> meaning they could have been *machimoi*. While these Egyptian cleruchs were by no means second-rate soldiers, their status as cleruchic footsoldiers would have placed them low in the military hierarchy, albeit with some variations in their social status depending on the size of their plots.<sup>217</sup> While the *machimoi* were not exclusively Egyptian and Greco-Egyptian, the majority of them were, although the reverse was also true, as Egyptians and Greco-Egyptians were not enrolled exclusively as *machimoi*. Egyptians were used continuously throughout Ptolemaic history as soldiers and even as police officers,<sup>218</sup> as seen in sources such as a tax list from the Fayum in the mid third century that lists a large number of policemen with Egyptian names.<sup>219</sup> However, it was not until after Raphia, in the second century, that Egyptian soldiers began to become predominant in the Ptolemaic military. Their presence at Raphia points to the slow but noticeable process of Egyptian integration into the Ptolemaic army, a process which would eventually lead more and more Egyptians to become true professional soldiers (*misthophoroi*).<sup>220</sup> Although they would perform admirably in the coming battle, at this time they were still faced with the unfortunate stereotype of Greeks making for far better soldiers, a view held even by Polybius, a young man at the time of the battle:

*“The Macedonians...are in fact the most gallant soldiers on the field of battle, the promptest to undertake service at sea if need be, and the most laborious workers at*

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<sup>216</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 118.

<sup>217</sup> Fischer-Bovet, “Egyptian Warriors: The ‘Machimoi’ of Herodotus and the Ptolemaic Army,” 228.

<sup>218</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 166.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>220</sup> Fischer-Bovet, “Egyptian Warriors: The ‘Machimoi’ of Herodotus and the Ptolemaic Army,” 228.

*digging trenches, making palisades, and all such engineering work, in the world: just as Hesiod describes the Aeacidae to be 'Joying in war as in a feast.'*"<sup>221</sup>

In short, some of the mercenaries of the Ptolemaic period performed special battlefield roles, but most of them, even the cleruchs, were taught to fight with traditionally Greco-Macedonian tactics.

What then, can the Ptolemaic Kingdom teach us about the New Kingdom? We know that some mercenaries were used for their special combat skills in both periods, such as Nubian archers in the New Kingdom and Cretan archers in the Ptolemaic period. Yet, many of the foreign mercenaries in the Ptolemaic period were not utilized for their special skills, and instead were trained to fight in the Macedonian phalanx of the Ptolemies, "taking no account of what they had borne before."<sup>222</sup> Did the New Kingdom Egyptians engage in a similar practice, incorporating at least some mercenary soldiers into divisions to fight with traditionally "Egyptian" tactics? We cannot know for sure, but there is some evidence to support such a policy. It is important to remember the frequency of combat during the New Kingdom. Thutmose III spent over half a century on the throne, but during that time he conducted no less than 16 campaigns. Thutmose III was never defeated in battle, but even 16 victorious campaigns would have taken a toll on Egypt's divisions. Although the special combat skills of foreign mercenaries provided the Egyptian army with serious battlefield advantages, the cornerstone of the army remained the conventional Egyptian division. Numbers were key to winning ancient battles. As such, if a fielded Egyptian division wanted to consistently see battlefield victories, it would have been essential for it to have enough operational infantry and archer companies.

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<sup>221</sup> Shuckburgh, "Book Five," in *The Histories of Polybius*, 274.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

Therefore, it could be that the pharaohs used some of their foreign mercenary companies in the stead of Egyptian infantry/archer companies to keep understrength divisions in fighting trim.

Of course, we know that Egyptian soldiers and foreign mercenaries fought alongside each other from numerous sources. We also know that they were organized into separate companies, although this was likely done for purely tactical reasons, as the soldiers of a company-sized unit would have needed to speak the same language and perform similar battlefield roles. While Egyptians and foreign mercenaries certainly would have fought in separate companies, it may be that they regularly served together within the same divisional structure. One source in particular, the *Anastasi Papyrus I*, explicitly mentions foreign mercenaries alongside Egyptians within a division-sized unit. Although it is a literary source that proposes the hypothetical problem of provisioning 5000 men, the fact that it mentions the presence of multiple mercenary groups suggests that their presence in a division was not uncommon. The text mentions only 1900 Egyptians, and the remaining 3100 men come from four different groups of foreign mercenaries: Sherden, Nubians, and two different Libyan tribes.<sup>223</sup>

While we know that the foreign mercenaries mentioned here would have been organized into their own companies, we do not know for certain what their exact battlefield role would have been. Perhaps they would have utilized their unique combat roles in support of the native Egyptians as per usual. However, 1900 Egyptians would not have been enough men for even eight full-strength companies. It may be that a division's mercenary companies did not always fight in special roles, but rather substituted for absent Egyptian companies, performing traditional Egyptian tactics such as an infantry shield wall. Of the foreign peoples mentioned in

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<sup>223</sup> Elliot, 76.

the text, the Sherden could certainly have functioned in a similar method to an Egyptian infantry company, and the Nubians could easily have replaced a company of Egyptian archers.

Admittedly, it is unlikely that the Libyans could have taken over the role of Egyptian infantrymen, as they were skirmishers who fought without shields. It may be that mercenaries who could easily adopt Egyptian tactics did so when needed, while those that could not, such as the Libyans, were confined to their special battlefield roles. While we cannot know for certain, parallels to the Ptolemaic period suggest that, given the New Kingdom's need to keep the backbone of its army, its divisions, at full-strength, some mercenary groups subsumed the tactics of Egyptian companies in their absence.

### **How they Were Paid and Settled**

#### **a. The New Kingdom**

Every army needs to a reliable system for paying its soldiers, particularly if those soldiers are foreign mercenaries with little connection to the land they serve. Land grants were some of the New Kingdom's principal methods for paying its mercenaries, as there was no real system of currency in Egypt until Alexander's conquests.<sup>224</sup> Although there was no currency, land was not the only thing mercenaries were paid with. Precious metals were still given to soldiers as bullion, meaning the value was based on the metal's weight. New Kingdom Egypt established gold mines in the eastern deserts of occupied Nubia,<sup>225</sup> but gold bullion is also listed among the booty collected after successful battles. For example, Thutmose III reports taking 966 *deben* and

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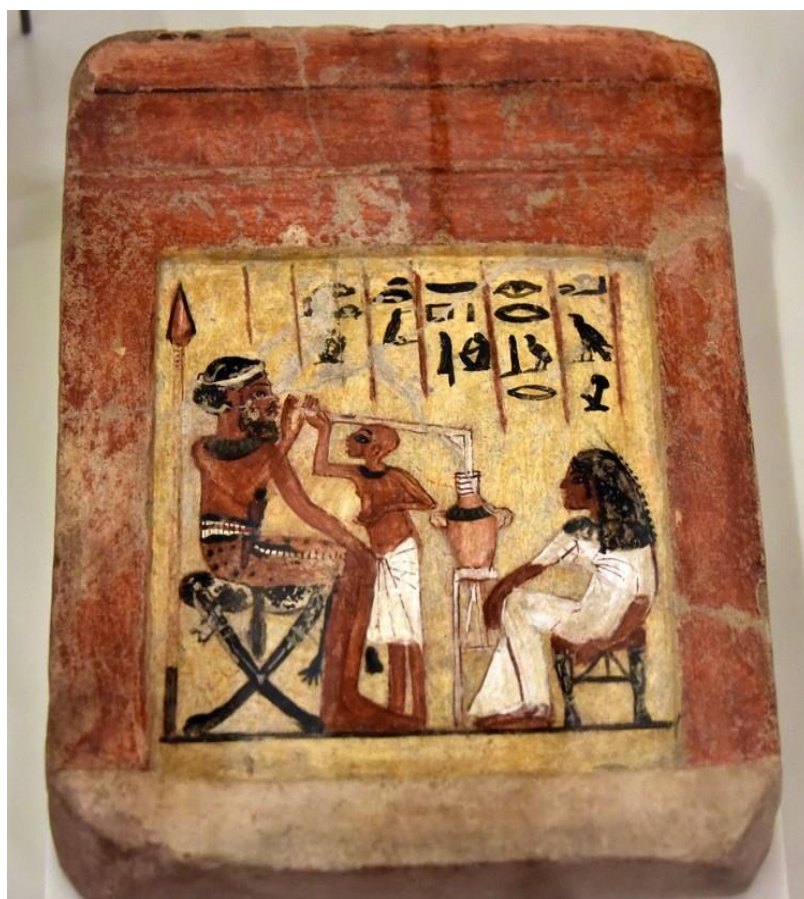
<sup>224</sup> J.G. Milne, "Ptolemaic Coinage in Egypt," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 15, no. 3 (November 1929): 150-151.

<sup>225</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, "New Light on the History of Lower Nubia," *Anthropologica: New Series* 10, no. 1 (1968): 94.



1 *kidet* of gold and silver after Megiddo.<sup>226</sup> A *deben* was an Egyptian unit for measuring the weight of precious metals and weighed approximately 93.3 grams.<sup>227</sup> The *kidet* was a subdivision of the *deben*, and each weighed approximately 9-10 grams.<sup>228</sup> Therefore, Thutmose III collected almost 200 lbs. worth of gold and silver bullion after the battle, some of which might have been used to pay his soldiers.

Although we do not have sources from mercenary explicitly mentioning their payment in bullion, this method of payment would surely have occurred frequently. The Egyptian Ahmose



Son of Abana records in his autobiography that he was rewarded with gold for his battlefield valor multiple times,<sup>229</sup> and it stands to reason that skilled foreign mercenaries would have received similar compensation. In fact, sources from foreign mercenaries that do survive show them as wealthy and privileged, such as the stele of the Syrian mercenary Terura,

**Figure 18**

<sup>226</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "From the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 35.

<sup>227</sup> Bianchi, 270.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "The Autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 13-14.

shown in figure 18.<sup>230</sup> Terura's Stele is dated to approximately 1351-1334, meaning he must have served during the reign of either Amenhotep IV or Akhenaten.<sup>231</sup> Terura, easily distinguishable by his haircut and beard (most Egyptian men were beardless), relaxes with his wife, Arbura.<sup>232</sup> Terura clearly wanted to make his profession obvious, as he keeps a dagger in his belt and a lance sits behind him. The mere fact that he owned such a stele indicates that he and his family were well-off, but an even greater display of his wealth is the stele's depiction of a family slave or servant, an Egyptian no less (beardless with a shaved head), who helps him drink from an amphora. Although beer was the alcohol of choice for most Egyptians, a wealthy Syrian mercenary like Terura may have been drinking wine, the alcohol of choice in his homeland.<sup>233</sup> Given Terura's financial standing, it is likely that he, and likewise other mercenaries, could be rewarded with bullion, which itself could include other luxury items such as drinking vessels, clothing, pottery, small weapons, etc.<sup>234</sup>

Terura's stele illustrates something else mercenaries were paid in – slaves. Both Ahmose Son of Abana<sup>235</sup> and Ahmose Pen-Nekhet<sup>236</sup> report receiving numerous slaves for their military service, and it may be that Terura received his slave for the same reason. If this was the case, one wonders why Terura's slave is an Egyptian. It could be that the slave was a captured rebel given to Terura as a slave, or perhaps he was simply enslaved for a non-combat reason and given to Terura as a reward for battlefield success. In any case, the mere fact that a Syrian mercenary

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<sup>230</sup> Osama S. M. Amin, "Egyptian Stele of a Syrian Mercenary," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, last modified September 7, 2019, accessed October 7, 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/image/11155/>.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "From the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 35.

<sup>235</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "The Autobiography of Ahmose Son of Abana," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 13-14.

<sup>236</sup> Breasted, vol. 2, 79

serving Egypt owned a slave suggests that foreign mercenaries could also receive slaves as payment.

Although the sources are not clear, it is likely that mercenaries were paid in food as well. A mercenary unable to work his land while on campaign would surely have been provided for, not to mention any family he might have back home. Furthermore, in the absence of currency, issuing soldiers' food in both war and peace would have been an easy way for the pharaohs to pay them. However, the autobiographical stele of Egyptian soldiers and mercenaries were incredibly expensive and, accordingly, short. Soldiers would only have recorded the parts of their life they were most proud of, such as slaying an enemy or receiving gold from the pharaoh, not getting issued an allowance of wheat. Nonetheless, battle records indicate that victorious Egyptian armies would often collect a defeated enemy army or city's rations, livestock, and crops. After Megiddo, Thutmose III's account states that "the army of his Majesty," not his Majesty himself, carried off cattle, goats, and sheep.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, the soldiers were clearly allowed to forage for their own food from the enemies stores, for Thutmose III also listed the amount of sacks of crops he carried off "apart from what was cut as forage by his Majesty's army."<sup>238</sup> Of course, pharaonic battle records do not differentiate between Egyptian soldiers and foreign mercenaries when describing food being issued or foraged for. Nonetheless, an Egyptian army's mercenaries, some of its best troops, would surely have been included in the doling out of captured enemy food stores.

Bullion, slaves, and food were all important ways the pharaohs could pay their mercenaries, but perhaps the most important of all was land. When mercenaries were not off

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<sup>237</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, "From the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2, *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 35.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

fighting, they of course needed somewhere to live. Some mercenaries received their own personal land, but others were garrisoned in some of Egypt's many fortresses, where they lived in the fortress itself and defended the surrounding area. The New Kingdom's empire abroad meant that soldiers could be stationed at fortresses within Egypt proper or in the imperial holdings in Canaan and Nubia. Because fortresses needed permanent garrisons, they were mostly garrisoned by full-time, professional soldiers, which, in the New Kingdom, often meant foreign mercenaries. One of the best examples of such a garrison is found at Tel Beth-Shean in Egyptian-occupied Canaan. Tel Beth-Shean is the most extensively excavated New Kingdom garrison town in Canaan, located in modern-day northern Israel, and its existence is recorded as early as the campaigns of Thutmose III.<sup>239</sup> Excavations have unearthed a wealth of archaeological sources, including several "grotesque style" clay coffins that stand apart from those of the native Egyptians and are indicative of the Danuna Sea Peoples.<sup>240</sup> Nor were the Danuna the only mercenaries present at the fortress, as there is archeological evidence of both Egyptian and Canaanite pottery. Petrographic analysis reveals that very little of the Egyptian pottery is imported, and instead was made at the local pottery workshop by Egyptian potters.<sup>241</sup> The presence of Canaanite pottery and other artifacts shows that the native Egyptians lived alongside numerous Canaanites who were likely at their service, maintaining trade connections with nearby Canaanite cities like Rehob, the largest city in the Beth-Shean valley.<sup>242</sup>

While the mercenaries discussed so far were used almost exclusively in combat roles, here is evidence that some of them were also assigned garrison duties, although "garrison duty"

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<sup>239</sup> Mazar, 153.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-174.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

by no means meant that combat was impossible, especially if one was stationed at a fortress in Egypt's Asiatic empire. Some Canaanites served Egypt, but not all of them were so willing to tolerate Egyptian rule over their homeland, and rebellion was a real possibility. After all, Thutmose III's legendary victory at Megiddo was against a coalition of rebelling Levantine city-states. Excavations at Tel Beth-Shean have even found a stele of Seti I (r. 1290-1279) that reports an episode of rebellion at the fortress that required military intervention to put down.<sup>243</sup> Further archaeological evidence shows that the town was violently destroyed and then subsequently rebuilt two times before its final destruction by fire in the late 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty, which could indicate occasions in which the Canaanite rebellions were not so easily suppressed.<sup>244</sup> Other Egyptian fortresses in Canaan also faced similar resistance, such as the fortress in Jaffa, which was twice destroyed during rebellions.<sup>245</sup> Therefore, the mercenaries stationed at these fortresses would often be engaged in active combat.

Other mercenaries were stationed at forts within Egypt proper. Sources such as the Stele of Sethermheb and the inscription of general Men-Maat-Nekhtw describe the presence of "five strongholds of the Sherden" and the "great strongholds of the Sherden" in Middle Egypt,<sup>246</sup> which could indicate fortresses garrisoned predominately by Sherden. Unfortunately, no definitive archaeological evidence of the Sherden in these areas has been found, due in no small part to the lack of specific cultural elements attributable to the Sherden in the archaeological record. There is also the possibility that "Sherden" in this case was simply intended to mean "foreigner" or "mercenary," especially given that the term was indeed used in the Fayum (in

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<sup>243</sup> Aaron A. Burke et al., "Excavations of the New Kingdom Fortress in Jaffa, 2011-2014: Traces of Resistance to Egyptian Rule in Canaan," *American Journal of Archaeology* 121, no. 1 (January 2017): 120.

<sup>244</sup> Mazar, 162, 167, 179.

<sup>245</sup> Burke, 85.

<sup>246</sup> Cavillier, 340.

Middle Egypt) to broadly describe all foreigners.<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless, these textual sources do show that there were mercenaries, whether they were Sherden or some other foreign people, in garrisons throughout Middle Egypt.

While some mercenaries were needed to garrison forts, some eventually received their own personal land in Egypt. While some landowning mercenaries may have retired from service, others could still have been serving in the Egyptian army and simply working their land until called to arms. That mercenaries could return to their Egyptian homes in peacetime is mentioned in sources such as Papyrus Harris I. The papyrus, composed during the reign of Ramesses IV, mentions Sherden domestic life during the reign of the pharaoh's father and predecessor, Ramses III:

*"I made the infantry and the chariotry to dwell at home in my time; the Sherden and Kehek [a Libyan tribe] were in their towns, lying the length of their backs; they had no fear, for there was no enemy from Kush nor foe from Syria. Their bows and their weapons were laid up in their magazines, while they were satisfied and drunk with joy. Their wives were with them, their children at their side, for I was with them as the defense and protection of their limbs."*<sup>248</sup>

With no wars to fight, the Sherden and the Libyans were allowed to go home to "their towns." Explicitly calling their homes "their" towns insinuates that these many foreign mercenaries of the same background were settled together in central locations areas. Settling the mercenaries together would have been a strategically sound decision, as it would have hastened

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<sup>247</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 80.

<sup>248</sup> Jeffrey P. Emanuel, *Black Ships and Sea Raiders: The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Context of Odysseus' Second Cretan Lie* (Washington D.C.: Lexington Books, 2017), 155.

the mobilization process when they were needed once more. Other sources reveal the existence of similar “military colonies” that consisted of mercenaries and their families.<sup>249</sup> The Amiens Papyrus, dated to the reign of Ramesses III himself, indicates that the pharaoh established estates for his Sherden mercenaries in the Wadjet (later Aphroditopolite) nome in Upper Egypt.<sup>250</sup> Multiple sources, the Wilbour Papyrus chief among them, make it clear that significant numbers of mercenaries were settled in the Fayum as well. The Papyrus records the existence of 109 Sherden living in the area,<sup>251</sup> which includes 17 “retainers of the Sherden” and 9 “standard bearers of the Sherden,” titles that indicate the officers who led the Sherden.<sup>252</sup> Some Sherden bear other titles such as a “herdsman of the Sherden” and even a “tender of the crocodiles of the Sherden.”<sup>253</sup>

Exactly how big were the plots of the foreign mercenaries in the Fayum? The primary unit the Wilbour Papyrus uses for measuring area was translated by Gardiner as *sōte*, which equals approximately 2735 sq. meters, or about 0.676 acres.<sup>254</sup> This means that the *sōte* is, rather conveniently, equal to the Ptolemaic aroura. While many mercenaries owned their own plots, some of the Sherden mentioned in the Wilbour Papyrus did not, but rather helped work the plots of larger landowners. For example: “His Majesty’s charioteer Merenptah, (cultivated) by the hand of the Sherden Siptah arouras 20.”<sup>255</sup> If 20 arouras were allotted to a charioteer (an upper-class soldier) how much did the average mercenary receive? Once again, the best data we have is on the Sherden. Of the 59 plots assigned to Sherden in the Wilbour papyrus, 42 of them are

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<sup>249</sup> Cavillier, 342.

<sup>250</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 80.

<sup>251</sup> Emanuel, 156.

<sup>252</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 80.

<sup>253</sup> Emanuel, 156.

<sup>254</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 60.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

five arouras – a little less than four acres.<sup>256</sup> Of the native Egyptian soldiers living in the area, 87% of their plots measured only three arouras and most were frequently located near temples and royal buildings.<sup>257</sup> Their consistent size and their proximity to royal buildings suggests that three arouras was a common land allotment for the average Egyptian infantryman. The fact that many Sherden owned larger plots of land than native Egyptian infantrymen reinforces their status as elite soldiers. Furthermore, it seems that most of the Sherdens' plots were hereditary. For example, the Papyrus lists one plot as that of “the standard-bearer of Sherden Pthemhab, who is dead, cultivated by the hand of his children,” and another as belonging to “the retainer of the Sherden Mesman, cultivated by the hand of his children.”<sup>258</sup> Land that could be passed down through the generations was a significant reward, but it had its benefits for the state as well – more land remained under cultivation and there was a possibility that a mercenary's sons might take up their father's profession. In any case, the land allotments for every group of foreign peoples were surely not exactly the same as Sherden, but the Sherdens' plot sizes at least give us an approximation.

All of the “Sherden” mentioned here actually bear proper Egyptian names, although genuine Sherden bearing Egyptian names is unsurprising. It could be that the Egyptian army assigned the Sherden new Egyptian names when they enrolled as auxiliaries, a practice that was later used in the Roman Empire, not to mention modern military units like the French Foreign Legion. Because “Sherden” in the Fayum could mean foreigners in general, it could be that some of the “Sherden” were actually a different group of foreign people, although the mere fact

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>257</sup> Jean-Christophe Antoine, “Social Position and the Organization of Landholding in Ramesside Egypt: An Analysis of the Wilbour Papyrus,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 43 (2014): 25.

<sup>258</sup> Emanuel, 156.



that the word was synonymous with foreigner in the region clearly indicates that there was a significant number of them living there. Nevertheless, soldiers of other ethnicities also settled in the Fayum. For example, we find a “standard-bearer of the Tjuk-people Nebwa,” a title which suggests the bearer is a Libyan.<sup>259</sup> Another title, “chief of thr-warriors,” is known from the Herakleopolite (nearby the Fayum) Stele of Shoshenk to indicate Hittite or Syrian origin, and is given to several owners of land in the Fayum.<sup>260</sup> These *thr* “chiefs” (officers) were evidently men of considerable rank, as two of them were given authority over some of the Fayum land that was donated to the “gods” (the temples and their priests) and the pharaoh.<sup>261</sup> These prominent landowners also possess Egyptian names, such as Ra’mesempire, meaning “Ramesses is in the House of Re,” which, paired with their clearly foreign titles, further supports the idea that mercenaries took on Egyptian names when they began their service.<sup>262</sup> In fact, it is easy to tell who is a native Egyptian and who is not simply by looking at their titles – there is a “lieutenant-commander of the chariotry,” multiple “shield-bearers of Pharaoh,” and even two “scribes of the army,” just to name some of the most interesting.<sup>263</sup> Of course, other non-military residents are also reported, such as a builder, a potter, a carpenter, and a coppersmith, not to mention no less than 109 “cultivators” of the soil.<sup>264</sup>

Mercenaries were often settled or garrisoned in concentrated areas for strategic reasons, yet the Wilbour Papyrus reveals that they were usually surrounded by native Egyptians, nonetheless. The so-called “Adoption Papyrus” also supports the idea of daily interaction between foreign soldiers and Egyptians, for it mentions two Sherden named Pakamen and

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<sup>259</sup> Gardiner, 81.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

Satameniwi, the latter of whom is accompanied by his wife, serving as witnesses in an Egyptian adoption case.<sup>265</sup> In some cases, the Egyptian state actually made active efforts to surround foreigners, such as the children of foreign princes, with native Egyptians. It was common practice for the pharaoh to capture the children of local rulers whom he defeated in battle, bring them to Egypt, and Egyptianize them until they were of age so that they could be sent back to their homelands more amiable to Egyptian interests.<sup>266</sup> These princes were often accompanied by their own personal retinues, meaning some concentrations of foreigners were sometimes simply the entourages of foreign princes.<sup>267</sup> This practice provides yet another example of foreigners being settled near native Egyptians, and intentionally no less.

In short, awarding land was one of the most important methods of payment for mercenaries in the New Kingdom, as a lack of true currency meant that land, bullion, slaves, and titles were the most effective way to pay soldiers. The system of mercenary settlement was fairly flexible, as mercenaries could be settled under a variety of different conditions and in numerous locations. Some mercenaries could be garrisoned in fortresses, while others might be concentrated in ethnic “colonies” where they could live with their families on a part-time basis and easily be called to service if needed. Even in these colonies, most sources indicate that contact, whether they resided in the imperial holdings, at the border fortresses, or in the lush lands of the Fayum, contact with native Egyptians was frequent. Furthermore, the plot sizes of many foreign mercenaries in the Fayum reveal that they could be rewarded with more land than even low-ranking Egyptian soldiers.

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<sup>265</sup> Cavillier, 342; Eugene Cruz-Urbe, “A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (1988): 222.

<sup>266</sup> Ward, 42.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

## b. The Ptolemaic Period

Payment in land remained an important role in Ptolemaic Egypt, but the state now had the added benefit of currency to simplify the payment of mercenaries. Some mercenaries were true professionals who earned regular pay for their work in the form of cash and food, while others were cleruchs who received their payment in land.<sup>268</sup> The standing army was composed of a combination of these two, with the professional soldiers serving in garrisons year-round and the cleruchs doing so only on a part-time basis.<sup>269</sup> If war broke out, all cleruchs were mobilized simultaneously. There was, however, a mixed group, the *misthophoroi klerouchoi*, or “mercenary cleruchs.”<sup>270</sup> The exact nature of this group, which featured professional mercenaries receiving both wages and a land allotment, is difficult to define. It likely developed as a result of the Ptolemies permanently hiring some cleruchs to serve in garrisons, as well as certain professional soldiers receiving land as a special reward for wartime service.<sup>271</sup> In wartime, pay was indeed far higher than during peace, and soldiers could often look forward to massive premiums in addition to opportunities to plunder.<sup>272</sup>

In her fundamental study of the Ptolemaic army, Fischer-Bovet has attempted to calculate just how much such a massive military costed the Ptolemies during their peak in the third century based on reports on the daily wages of soldiers and the immense costs of building and maintaining the fleet. She estimates that an average of 34% of Ptolemaic Egypt’s peacetime

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<sup>268</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 118.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120.

budget was spent on military expenditures, while in wartime the number rose as high as 78%.<sup>273</sup> Such a number is truly staggering, especially when one makes modern comparisons: the United States spends only 3.5% of its GDP on defense. Paying this many troops so well would have been a monumental task, and it was never a good idea for an employer to come up short on payments, as seen in the multitude of revolts after Raphia. However, paying everyone exclusively with coins would have been impossible. Alexander may have brought coinage to Egypt, but it was difficult to establish a stable system of currency to an ancient land that had not used it for millennia. The problems of introducing a stable currency can be seen in this letter from 258:

*“To Apollonius greeting from Demetrius...I am attending to the work as you wrote me to do, and I have received in gold 57000 pieces, which I minted and returned. We might have received many times as much, but...the strangers who come here by sea and the merchants and middlemen and others bring both their local money of unalloyed metal and the gold petradrachms, to be made into new money for them...and the men grumble because their gold is not accepted either by the banks or by us for...nor are they able to send it into the country to buy goods, but their gold, they say, is lying idle and they are suffering no little loss, having sent for it from abroad and being unable to dispose of its easily...even at a reduced price...I take it to be an advantage if as much gold as possible be imported from abroad and the king’s coinage be always good and new without any expense falling on him...”*<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>274</sup> A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, trans., “About the Gold Coinage of Ptolemy Philadelphus,” in *Select Papyri in Five Volumes*, vol. 2, *Non-Literary Papyri and Public Documents*, 549-551 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 549-551.

Demetrius makes exceptionally clear the coinage problems faced by the early Ptolemies. His letter was written during a high point of Ptolemaic power under Ptolemy II “Philadelphus,” a time when the state was actively recruiting foreign mercenaries in great numbers. Unfortunately for many of these new mercenaries, it was almost impossible to use the coins from their homelands once in Egypt. Many people, rich and poor alike, were not accustomed to currency and often did not accept it, not to mention that so many different foreign mercenaries only naturally brought with them so many different kinds of coins. As such, Demetrius reports minting 57000 new gold coins and informs Apollonius that he thinks it best if as many coins as possible be brought into Egypt so that a better-functioning system of currency can be established. Such difficulties led the Ptolemies to, like the New Kingdom pharaohs, pay their soldiers in a variety of ways. In a series of letters (63 BCE) between Ptolemaic officials and notables, arrangements are made for the payment of 408 five-aurora Egyptian cleruchs from Thebes, who by this time were seeing regular military service:

*“Athenaeus to Dionysus greeting. To the 408 men of the five-arurae Thebans...deliver the wages due to them for Mesore as computed, to each man 3000 drachmae of copper and 2 artabae of wheat on the dispensing standard, being altogether 204 talents of copper and 816 artabae of wheat...and from the beginning of year 10 let their wages be paid to them for 10 months. Year 18, Mesore 5.”*<sup>275</sup>

These Egyptian cleruchs receive immediate payment in copper coins and are granted regular wages starting at the beginning of the next year, but their entire payment is not given to them in coin. They are also given an additional payment in wheat, listed in artabae, the

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<sup>275</sup> A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, trans., “Order for Payment of Soldiers’ Wages,” in *Select Papyri in Five Volumes*, vol. 2, *Non-Literary Papyri and Public Documents*, 499-501 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 499-501.

Ptolemaic measurement for grains, with each artabae equal to 38.78 liters.<sup>276</sup> Yet, these men are also cleruchs, meaning they have already been paid with plots of land. As Egyptians, it is likely that they it was difficult for them to receive as large a land allotment as other Greek mercenaries. In this case, they do indeed possess rather small plots – five arouras was a plot size awarded to mercenaries centuries before in the New Kingdom. Nonetheless, the variety of methods used to pay these cleruchs reveals that, as in the New Kingdom, the Ptolemaic system for paying mercenaries was a flexible one and was often intertwined with the process of settling them.

When they Ptolemaic mercenaries received payment in land, where were they most often settled? Like the New Kingdom pharaohs, the Ptolemies established a system of garrisons around Egypt, all of which were predominately staffed by professional mercenaries.<sup>277</sup> As in the New Kingdom, being stationed in a garrison was a military assignment, not a personal grant of land. Cleruchs also served in garrisons part-time, although the true extent of their use in them remains unclear. It seems that in peacetime cleruchs only served in garrisons for a few weeks or months out of the year, but could be expected to serve longer in times of internal unrest or war – there is even an account of a group of *machimoi* complaining about being stationed in Alexandria for an extended period of time during the period of crisis in the 160s.<sup>278</sup> As for the professional mercenaries, they were primarily immigrants or the descendants of immigrants, at least during the third century, and their stationing in garrisons often put them in immediate contact with the native Egyptians. The main third century garrisons in the Delta were Alexandria and Pelusium, along with smaller ones throughout the Delta. In the Nile Valley they were

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<sup>276</sup> R.P. Duncan-Jones, "The Choenix, the Artaba, and the Modius," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 21 (1976): 44.

<sup>277</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 262.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

Memphis, Thebes, Hieraconpolis, and Edfu, and at Egypt's southern border they were Assuan and Elephantine.<sup>279</sup> The existence of these garrisons all throughout Egypt contributed significantly to the integration process for these foreign mercenaries. Indeed, by the time of the Great Revolt in the second century BCE, most of the Ptolemies' professional mercenaries were not really foreigners at all and were instead a combination of Greco-Egyptians and Egyptians.<sup>280</sup> However, it should be noted that the lack of many foreign Greeks in the Ptolemaic military at this time was partly due to foreign immigration drying up during the period of crisis, with Jewish and Idumean military immigrants serving as two primary exceptions.<sup>281</sup>

While the professional mercenaries spent most of their peacetime stationed in garrisons, cleruchs spent most of their time tending to the plots that they had been awarded for their service. Many of these plots were located in the underpopulated Fayum, the home of many New Kingdom mercenaries, but cleruchic land was by no means confined to Middle Egypt, and instead could be found across the entire Ptolemaic state. Cleruchs were effectively reservists – part time soldiers who were primarily occupied with work other than soldiering, such as working in their fields if their plots were small or, if their plot was large enough, as was often the case, managing their land or engaging in other work while hired labor tended to it.<sup>282</sup> A sizable *kleros* could make a cleruch very rich, and wealthy or powerful Ptolemaic officials sometimes used their prestige to ensure a family member or friend received a good plot.<sup>283</sup> However, the cleruchic system did have its drawbacks – decentralizing much of the Ptolemaic army made it

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 32.

<sup>283</sup> Naphtali Lewis, "Letter from Asklepiades to Zenon," in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 25; A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, trans., "Petition of Ptolemaeus the Recluse on Behalf of His Brother," in *Select Papyri in Five Volumes*, vol. 2, *Non-Literary Papyri and Public Documents*, 243-245 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 243-245.

take longer to mobilize it if war broke out, and during war the cleruchs were nowhere near the standard of the professional soldiers, as they spent much of their time involved with their land.<sup>284</sup> Yet, the system had its benefits for the state as well – it strengthened the loyalty of what were initially mostly foreign soldiers, it was a cheap way to keep soldiers available for mobilization, the decentralization of much of the army at least meant it was harder for soldiers to organize in revolt against the Ptolemies,<sup>285</sup> and it came with the economic benefit of putting previously unused land under cultivation.<sup>286</sup> The economic benefits of making a large portion of the state's military self-sustaining were great, as the state did not have to bear the massive burden of feeding and paying them consistently. In one letter from 251, an officer overseeing a group of new cavalry cleruchs receives instructions from his own superior officer to ensure that the new cleruchs can quickly support themselves:

*“...look after all the cavalrymen who have been allotted land capable of being sown for the 35<sup>th</sup> year and see that it is all sown and that the cadets under your superintendence are enabled to provide for themselves out of the produce.”*<sup>287</sup>

It is unlikely that the Ptolemies even considered using the cleruchy to increase the speed of integration between foreign soldiers and the native Egyptians, for they would have had little desire to diminish the privileged social position of Greeks in Egypt. Nonetheless, increased integration was a major side effect of the cleruchic system. Part-time service gave the cleruchs ample opportunity to interact with the native Egyptians, an interaction reinforced by the presence

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<sup>284</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 199.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 39.

<sup>287</sup> A.S. Hunt and C.C. Edgar, trans., “Correspondence About Military Settlers,” in *Select Papyri in Five Volumes*, vol. 2, *Non-Literary Papyri and Public Documents*, 557-559 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 559.



of cleruchs throughout most of Egypt.<sup>288</sup> Although cleruchs were settled in Egyptian villages, towns, cities, and in the countryside, the portion of land given over to cleruchs varied from location to location, as economic and military needs dictated. One of the only places for which we possess comprehensive data on is Kerkeosiris, a 4700-aroura village in the “Arsinoite” nome, the Ptolemaic name for the Fayum. While sources do indicate the presence of cleruchs in other Fayum villages, such as Hephaistias (245 BCE)<sup>289</sup> or Tholthis (220-210 BCE),<sup>290</sup> Kerkeosiris is simply one of the best documented. In the year 118, Kerkeosiris’ land was divided into 52% royal land, 33% cleruchic land, 6% temple land, and 9% miscellaneous.<sup>291</sup> A full one third of the land in Kerkeosiris was devoted to cleruchs, a number all the more impressive when one considers that cleruchs were usually settled gradually, with some villages only seeing a few new cleruchs settle per decade.<sup>292</sup> Although this land register dates to 118, when most cleruchs would be Greco-Egyptians and Egyptians rather than Greek immigrants, the sheer amount of cleruchs living there proves that the Ptolemies had been settling them in the Fayum for a considerable length of time, perhaps even as far back as the days of Greek immigration.

The land given to Ptolemaic cleruchs was far greater than that given to New Kingdom mercenaries. Officers and cavalrymen, a predominately Greek group for most of Ptolemaic history, commonly received plots of 100 arouras, although 80 or 70 arouras were also possible.<sup>293</sup> 60, 50, and 40 arouras were awarded only rarely, and likely date to the early stages of the cleruchy under Ptolemy I, when categories of land allotments had yet to be

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<sup>288</sup>Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 201.

<sup>289</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Private Contract for Irrigation Repairs,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 40-41.

<sup>290</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 251.

<sup>291</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Papyrus of Land Registers from Kerkeosiris,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 25-26.

<sup>292</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 201.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

standardized.<sup>294</sup> Such large land allotments placed most cavalry cleruchs in the upper strata of Ptolemaic society. Egyptians and Greco-Egyptians called *machimoi hippeis* were finally included in the cleruchic cavalry in period C (160-30 BCE), but they received only 20 arouras.<sup>295</sup> Infantry cleruchs received much less than cavalrymen, and they usually received 20, 25, 30, or 40 arouras.<sup>296</sup> There is little evidence for infantry cleruchs in the third century BCE, which indicates either there were less of them than is usually thought or many of them were settled in the Delta, where the wet climate prevents papyri from preserving.<sup>297</sup> However, the village of Ibion, near Kerkeosiris in the Fayum, was known as “Ibion of the 25-aroura men,” which suggests that many infantry cleruchs were actually settled in the Fayum.<sup>298</sup> Once Egyptian infantrymen were allowed into the cleruchy during the period of crisis, they usually received even smaller plots – normally 5, 7, or 10 arouras,<sup>299</sup> although sometimes as many as 30.<sup>300</sup>

Professional soldiers and cleruchs could also be billeted in private homes if needed, an issue that has been the cause of friction between soldiers and civilians across many cultures throughout most of history. This kind of interaction was of course not entirely a positive one, although it should not be viewed simply as Greek occupier versus Egyptian subject. While billeting soldiers in private homes only naturally created tensions between them and the civilians, these tensions were not centered on ethnicity, and the Ptolemaic administrators could even side with Egyptian homeowners against Greek soldiers if conflict arose.<sup>301</sup> In a letter dated to approximately 250 BC, “King Ptolemy” (although this was likely a high official writing in

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>296</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 24.

<sup>297</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 121.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 24.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 244.

Ptolemy's name) writes to Antiochus, a military officer, and instructs him to prevent soldiers from abusing the billet system:

*“King Ptolemy to Antiochus, greeting. About the billeting of soldiers we hear of some instances of undue violence have occurred when, instead of waiting to be assigned their lodgings by the finance officer of the nome, they simply march into houses, eject the people, and occupy the premises by force. Give orders, therefore, that this may not occur again: if they erect their own shelters, well and good, but if they need to be assigned billets the finance officers are to give them what is necessary. And when they give up their billets, they are to restore and release them, and are not to reserve them till they come back, as we hear they now do, renting them out to others or locking the rooms before they go off...”*<sup>302</sup>

Clearly King Ptolemy (likely Ptolemy II here) or at least his high officials were concerned with civilians being exploited by soldiers in such a way. Many of these civilians would have been Egyptians simply due to them composing the majority of Egypt's population even during the height of Greek immigration. That the Ptolemaic government saw fit to intervene in the case of forced billeting indicates that not all billeting disputes were arbitrarily decided in favor of Greeks. Greek civilians themselves were not spared from billeting soldiers, as seen in letters from Greeks protesting the presence of soldiers in their homes and upper-class Greeks even requesting exemptions from billeting (a request that was often granted, although once again rarely on the basis of ethnicity).<sup>303</sup> Even the soldiers themselves could have conflict

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<sup>302</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Letter from King Ptolemy to Antiochus,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 22-23.

<sup>303</sup> Letters from the Zenon Archive, “From Zenon to Apollonios (247/6 BCE),” accessed February 9, 2020, [http://www.attalus.org/docs/zenon\\_2.html](http://www.attalus.org/docs/zenon_2.html).

over preferred billets, as seen in a letter from one Greek soldier who complains that another Greek soldier beat him and threw him out of his assigned billet:

*“To King Ptolemy greeting from Areus, rower serving on the corvette...of Polemon. I am wronged by Kephalon. After I was assigned by lodgings...Kephalon...forced his way into my billet, threw my furnishings into the street, and beat me in an attempt to force me out too. But as I refused to budge and called the neighbors to witness, and as a number of them ran up and rebuked him, he cleared off and I brought back my things that he had thrown out into the street...”*<sup>304</sup>

Negative interactions between soldiers and civilians did indeed develop due to billeting – some people would block their doors, some would remove their roofs, and some would build altars in front of the doors to make their homes look like sanctuaries in the hopes of deterring potential billetters.<sup>305</sup> However, these disputes were not purely ethnic ones, as seen in Areus’ letter where the neighbors living around his billet, many of whom would likely have been Egyptians, rose to his defense. Other sources also attest to frequent, and not entirely negative, interaction between the Greek mercenaries and the native Egyptians. In a letter to the *strategos* dated to 221, an Egyptian farmer who was thrown out of his home by a wealthy Greek cleruch calls for justice, and he received a response that if the local law enforcement could not resolve the issue, the two parties were report to a “mixed,” or Greek-Egyptian court for justice.<sup>306</sup> In another letter, an Egyptian woman files a lawsuit against a Greek, and one of her witnesses is a

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<sup>304</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Letter from Areus to King Ptolemy,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 22.

<sup>305</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Letter from a Ptolemaic Officer to His Superior Officer,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 23.

<sup>306</sup> Naphtali Lewis, “Letter from An Egyptian Farmer to the Strategos,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 60.

100-aroura Greek cleruch.<sup>307</sup> Although examples such as these offer a glimpse of the day-to-day interaction between Ptolemaic mercenaries and the natives, they also reveal that, though integration was occurring, the process was neither a quick nor an easy one. Nevertheless, each method of settling Ptolemaic mercenaries, whether it be in garrisons, on their own land as cleruchs, or in billets, added yet another point of contact between the foreign mercenaries and the native Egyptians and contributed to an effective and relatively swift integration process.

What can the Ptolemaic Period tell us about New Kingdom payment and settlement? There are, of course, many surface-level similarities. Mercenaries in both periods served in garrisons, but this is only natural. Fortress garrisons protected the most strategic parts of Egypt, like the borders, and provided a simple, temporary place for professional soldiers to be housed during peacetime. Both the pharaohs and the Ptolemies also faced similar difficulties with paying their mercenaries exclusively in bullion or coins. Instead of struggling to pay mercenaries with precious metals exclusively, they provided them with supplementary payments as well, the most important of which was land grants. Unlike garrison housing or billets, mercenaries personally owned the land the state paid them in. What is noteworthy is the location of those land grants. In both the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic period, most mercenaries were given land in Middle Egypt, particularly in the Fayum. This was not a coincidence. As usual, we do not have many sources about where New Kingdom mercenaries were settled. However, the sources we do have reveal that mercenaries were settled overwhelmingly in Middle Egypt. We have far more sources for the Ptolemaic period, when mercenaries were settled across all of Egypt, but even these sources confirm that a disproportionate number of

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<sup>307</sup> Naphtali Lewis, "Lawsuit of an Egyptian Woman Against a Greek," in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oakville, CT, USA: The David Brown Book Company, 1986), 60-61.

mercenaries continued to be settled in Middle Egypt. Why would both the pharaohs and the Ptolemies have settled most of their foreign soldiers in in the same place?

Middle Egypt was not a strategically valuable region. The most strategically important places in Egypt were the eastern and western ends of the Delta, the delta's apex at Memphis, the southern border at Elephantine, and any other major cities like Thebes. In contrast, Middle Egypt is the widest area of the Nile valley, making it an ineffective bottleneck for controlling Egypt, and it also had the lowest density of settlement until late antiquity. However, the lack of people in Middle Egypt likely played a significant role in both the pharaohs' and the Ptolemies' decisions to settle foreign mercenaries there. Mercenaries could settle there without contesting the limited amount of land in other parts of Egypt, most of which was covered in desert. Middle Egypt was effectively wilderness, but once put under cultivation it was lush and arable. Sources from neither period explicitly state that mercenaries were settled in Middle Egypt, but because of its low population and potential as arable land, it is likely that this was indeed the case.

Another comparison we can make between the Ptolemaic period and the New Kingdom is with plot size. Naturally, as centuries passed, technology advanced, and the population grew, larger plots of land were able to be cultivated and soldiers' plot sizes grew accordingly. The largest plot sizes listed by the Wilbour Papyrus are 70 and 80, and each of these occur only once in the registry – the most common plot sizes are 5, 10, and 20 arouras.<sup>308</sup> I have already discussed that low-ranking Egyptian infantrymen commonly received only 3 arouras, while the Sherden often received 5. By the Saite Period (664-332), the last period of pharaonic rule in Egypt, Herodotus claims that many Egyptian soldiers received 12 arouras.<sup>309</sup> Later, Greek

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<sup>308</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 72.

<sup>309</sup> Fischer-Bovet, *Army and Society in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 31, 38; Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 12.

officers and cavalrymen were frequently awarded 100-aroura plots under the Ptolemies, but even low-ranking Greek infantrymen would commonly receive 25 arouras. While an overall growth in plot size over the course of history unsurprising, it is interesting that foreign soldiers in both periods could be awarded with more land than native Egyptians. This is less surprising during the Ptolemaic period, when a Greek dynasty ruled Egypt and only naturally favored Greeks, but this phenomenon occurred even in the Egyptian-ruled New Kingdom. The *thr* chiefs (either Hittites or Syrians) discussed earlier possessed so much land that they were tasked with administering nearby royal and temple lands.<sup>310</sup> A mercenary with sizable land holdings in Egypt had everything to lose if he acted disloyally. It may be that, just as in the Ptolemaic period, the pharaohs awarded their foreign mercenaries with sizable plots of land to ensure their loyal, continuous service to Egypt. Furthermore, the pharaohs' decision to settle most mercenaries in underpopulated Middle Egypt would have meant less conflict between prosperous foreign landowners and embittered native Egyptians, although it is difficult to know whether this decision was intentional or not.

### **Conclusion: How They Were Integrated**

As I stated in my introduction, no small part of my work here has been simply to provide an account of the mercenaries of the New Kingdom as a whole, as there is currently no secondary literature that does so. However, another important aspect of my work has been to show that the foreign mercenaries of the New Kingdom and, by way of comparison, the

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<sup>310</sup> Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, 86.

mercenaries of the Ptolemaic Kingdom as well, were successfully integrated into the native societies of the states they served. Topics such as how these mercenaries were recruited, how they fought, how they were paid, and how they were settled are important for anyone who simply wishes to know learn more about these ancient warriors. However, investigating each of them reveals that the New Kingdom's answer to each question contributed in some way to a successful integration process. New Kingdom Egyptians were, more or less, supportive of foreign soldiers serving Egypt, and maybe even of military immigrants. They allowed mercenary companies to fight alongside native Egyptian companies, possibly even using Egyptian tactics, and this service at each other's sides built a sense of comradeship between the two. Finally, they settled mercenaries in a sparsely populated area for practical and economic reasons, which had the unintentional side effects of reducing tensions between foreigners and Egyptians and increasing daily interaction between the two. Yet this begs another question: why were the ancient Egyptians so comparatively tolerant to foreigners?

The "tolerance" of foreigners is based in Egyptian religious belief. In short, the Egyptians believed all of creation, including foreign peoples, to be related to the creator deity, a distinction most often given to the sun god Re or Amun Re (a particular form of Re). Because all things relate to the divine in some way, they all have inherently positive value to them.<sup>311</sup> Nevertheless, Egyptian religion, like Egyptian society, was hierarchical. The gods were situated at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the pharaoh, who himself was usually called a god but in actuality was thought of more as the gods' human representative. Then came the land of Egypt and its people, and finally, at the very bottom, the peoples of foreign lands.<sup>312</sup> Egyptian religion

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<sup>311</sup> David O. Connor, "Egypt's View of Others," in *'Never Had the Like Occurred': Egypt's View of its Past*, edited by John Tait, (London: UCL Press, 2003), 174-175.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 176.



also held that these foreigners could rise in the hierarchy and become part of Egypt. The Egyptians believed that, in primordial times, humanity had rebelled against the gods, disrupting Maat (order) and embracing chaos. The gods soon departed for their own divine realm, but they forgave humanity and instituted human kingship in the form of the pharaoh to maintain order for both Egyptians and foreigners alike.<sup>313</sup> Any people who resisted this divinely-ordained order, such as the losing side in a civil war or resistant foreigners, were punished severely for their transgressions.<sup>314</sup> However, for those foreigners who were willing to accept order (Egyptian culture, society, etc.), they could be expected to be treated effectively the same as any Egyptian. Of course, there eventually came a point when “foreigner” became a difficult term to apply to some of these peoples, as they often underwent a strong degree of Egyptianization and many eventually assimilated completely. The total assimilation of foreigners into Egyptian society was a real possibility, for Egypt was free of racial prejudice, at least in the way we understand the term today.<sup>315</sup>

Why then was Egypt so “tolerant?” I use this term with some reserve because though the Egyptians were not racist in the way we understand that term today, they were by no means tolerant of foreign cultures. The culture of their neighbors, such as the Libyans and the Nubians, was indeed seen as inferior, but if they were to fully shed off their “foreignness” and Egyptianize, Egyptians rarely had any problem accepting them.<sup>316</sup> Foreigners are very often depicted as being executed before the almighty Egyptian pharaoh and his armies, but this attitude

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 170.

was directed more so at the idea of the ignorant foreigner who is resistant to Egyptian superiority than to the repentant foreigner who rejects his old customs and becomes an Egyptian.<sup>317</sup>

This belief in shedding off one's "foreignness" and becoming a true Egyptian can even be found in Egyptian literature, such as the famous *Tale of Sinhue*, in which an Egyptian expatriate, wrongly fearing punishment by the pharaoh, lives in a self-imposed exile in the Levant. During his time away from home, Sinhue constantly extols Egypt and its culture to the Levantine ruler he serves, a man who eventually comes to see the superiority of Egypt.<sup>318</sup> "Good" and "bad" attributes of foreigners are both depicted: anonymous tribesmen take care of Sinhue when he almost dies of thirst after fleeing Egypt and many of the Levantine leaders encountered by Sinhue proclaim their loyalty to Egypt, while the only "bad" foreigners are simply those who stand against the Levantines who support the Egyptian pharaoh.<sup>319</sup> When Sinhue finally returns to Egypt, he is welcomed by the pharaoh's court. Upon seeing his foreign appearance, the pharaoh and his family mock him, and yet they proceed to extoll the Egyptian values to which he is about to return.<sup>320</sup> The symbolism is clear here – the "foreignness" that Sinhue picked up in the Levant is no problem at all, so long as he is willing to shed off that life and become a true Egyptian again. Non-Egyptians living in Egypt were encouraged to adopt Egyptian language, beliefs, and behaviors, but, in practice, that "encouragement" was often far from voluntary.<sup>321</sup> In just one example, Ramesses III forced the Libyan mercenaries under his command to learn Egyptian and forbade the use of their native tongue:

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>321</sup> Caroline Hubschmann, "Searching for the 'Archaeologically Invisible': Libyans in Dakhleh Oasis in the Third Intermediate Period," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 46 (2010), 185.

*“...The Rebu and Meshwesh; he conveyed them across the river, brought into Egypt. They were made into strongholds of the mighty King, where they might hear the speech of the people following the King. He banned their own speech; he turned their tongues upside down, so that they had to go on the way which they had never trodden.”*<sup>322</sup>

The Libyans here are settled in “strongholds” like the “strongholds of the Sherden” discussed in chapter 3, yet the text establishes immediately afterward that, despite the Libyans being settled in a concentrated area, they have been settled near native Egyptians too, so that “they might hear the speech of the people.” “Egyptian” is not a word that is used here, but rather “the people following the King,” i.e. the “civilized” people who, unlike the foreigners, embrace Egyptian culture.

Ramesses III’s treatment of the Libyans was not an isolated incident, although the greatest example of “involuntary integration” may be the Nubians, perhaps the best-integrated of any of the foreign peoples who served in Egypt’s military. The Egyptian state’s presence in Nubia during the New Kingdom was exhaustive: it built Egyptian temples throughout Nubia, dispatched Egyptian settlers there,<sup>323</sup> reoccupied most of the deserted Middle Kingdom fortresses there, and built new ones.<sup>324</sup> This extensive pharaonic presence contributed to a Nubian assimilation into Egyptian society so complete that almost all Nubian culture vanished from the archaeological record in Egyptian-occupied Nubia.<sup>325</sup> For example, in a XX dynasty burial of a high official named Penne I in the Nubian city of Amarna, the inscriptions describing his burial

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<sup>322</sup> John A. Wilson, “The Libyans and the End of the Egyptian Empire,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 51, no. 2 (January 1935): 81.

<sup>323</sup> Jödis Vieth, “New Kingdom Temple Towns in Nubia: Transformation of an Urban Landscape,” in *Tradition and Transformation in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress for Young Egyptologists 15-19 September, 2015, Vienna*, 73-84 (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2018), 81.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>325</sup> Bianchi, 99.

mention his family and his Nubian background.<sup>326</sup> Other than these brief references to Penne's Nubian origins, no Nubian cultural elements are to be found and his burial is an entirely Egyptian one.<sup>327</sup> Even in the Kushite period (approximately 750-655), when a Nubian dynasty ruled over Egypt, the dynasty was far more Egyptian than Nubian.<sup>328</sup> Although many Nubians successfully integrated into Egyptian society, one should not forget that this was largely a result of Egypt's immense military presence in Nubia. It was customary for any great warrior pharaoh to campaign against the Nubians, if not to suppress a revolt than simply to raid and show them Egyptian military might. In a stele of Amenhotep II, the pharaoh, who had previously campaigned in Asia, transports a captured Asiatic prince all the way to the Nubian city of Napata to show the Nubians what would happen if they resisted Egypt:

*"Then the other fallen one was taken upriver to Nubia and hanged on the walls of Napata in order to cause to be manifest the victories of his Majesty, forever and ever in all lands and countries of the Nubians; since he had taken the Southerners...that he might make his boundary as far as he desired, none opposing his hands..."*<sup>329</sup>

As stated here, the pharaoh "made his boundary as far as he desired," and any foreigners caught within that boundary after its extension would be expected to become proper Egyptians. Pharaoh Amenhotep III also campaigned in Nubia, and one of his stele from Konosso uses the same language: "...his Majesty returned, having triumphed on his first victorious campaign in the land of wretched Kush; having made his boundary as far as he desired."<sup>330</sup> The Egyptian practice of capturing the children of foreign princes to Egyptianize them provides yet another

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<sup>326</sup> Vieth, 81.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Bianchi, 99.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

example of Egyptian forced assimilation, one that was used often against the Nubians, as in Amenhotep III's victory stele in Thebes: "...mightily in dragging them [Nubians] in his chariot, annihilating the heir of wretched Kush, bringing their princes as living prisoners."<sup>331</sup> In the autobiography of Ineni, who served under Thutmose II, Ineni also recounts that

*"they did not let anyone live among their males...except one of the children of the chief of wretched Kush, who was taken away alive as a living prisoner with their people to his Majesty...this land was made subject to his majesty as formerly."*<sup>332</sup>

Nubia is very often described as wretched, with un-subjugated Nubians being described by their un-Egyptian appearance as "pigtail wearers" and "fuzzy-haired" because of the Nubians' distinct hairstyles, as "animal-skin -wearers" because of their un-Egyptian garments, as "scar bearers," due to the Nubian practice of scarification, and even "burnt faces."<sup>333</sup> However, the wording found in the excerpt of Ineni's autobiography epitomizes the Egyptian attitude toward foreigners – if they resist Egypt, they must be dealt with swiftly and violently, but once they submit they may be brought into the fold and made "a subject of his Majesty."

In short, the Egyptians were indeed tolerant compared to many cultures throughout history, but one should always keep in mind that their tolerance extended to foreigners only so much as those foreigners were willing to adopt Egyptian culture. Foreigners yet to submit to Egypt are described as vile, chaotic, or literally as "not-knowing Egypt," such as in the Battle Reliefs of Seti I.<sup>334</sup> Recently conquered foreigners are depicted as chaotic and volatile, often

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>334</sup> Vanessa Davies, "The Treatment of Foreigners in Seti's Battle Reliefs," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 98 (2012): 83.

depicted artistically as struggling, bound captives. However, these foreigners eventually come to “know Egypt” after living there and working for the state, as in the Tomb of Rekhmire, an 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty vizier, where foreigners labeled as “plunder that his Majesty brought for the works of the temple of Amun” are depicted as hard-working and orderly, with some of them even working with smiles on their faces.<sup>335</sup> This inscription clearly demonstrates that foreign captives who gave up their foreignness, Egyptianized, and loyally serve the state would eventually be happily accepted as part of Egypt.

Of course, the speed with which a people integrated was not constant, although it is doubtful that such a process is even measurable in any definite way, and instead must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, some foreign peoples, such as the Nubians and the Libyans, appear to have been more receptive to Egyptian culture and integrated relatively quickly and successfully, likely because of both groups’ long history of contact with Egypt, their homelands’ geographical proximity to Egypt, and the consequent lack of as large a cultural gap to be crossed, as opposed to other groups from Asia or elsewhere. Another group, the Sherden, took a comparatively longer time to integrate, both because of their distinctively non-Egyptian background and the Egyptian state’s own efforts to cultivate their distinctive identity in an effort to preserve their expertise in close-quarters combat.<sup>336</sup> Despite these efforts, the Sherden’s integration into their own companies within the Egyptian military and their status as landowners in Middle and Upper Egypt made their assimilation almost inevitable.<sup>337</sup>

Yet integration in the case of the Nubians, Libyans, or the Sherden was not instantaneous, and there surely was a kind of “halfway point” for integration when immigrants to Egypt or their

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Cavillier, 340.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

descendants exhibited cultural elements of both Egypt and their native homes. For these people, their “Egyptianness” and “foreignness” would have been difficult to gauge, as issues of identity are complicated and multi-faceted. Would a second-generation Sherden mercenary identify more as an Egyptian or more as a Sherden? Perhaps as a Sherden regarding certain subjects but as an Egyptian regarding others? The answers to such questions lie in the deeply personal details of individual mercenaries that the sources simply do not show us. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that most foreign mercenaries would continue to feel some kind of non-Egyptian identity for at least several generations. The persistence of this identity notwithstanding, mercenaries often had little reason to leave Egypt – they owned land, lived prosperously, had Egyptian friends, and often had Egyptian wives. Subsequent generations would eventually integrate into Egyptian society, sometimes maintaining elements of their native past such as their fighting styles, but effectively becoming native Egyptians. Furthermore, the settlement of many mercenaries in the underpopulated, but not unpopulated lands in Middle Egypt had the unintentional side effect of putting foreign mercenaries in daily contact with native Egyptians, increasing the speed of their integration still further. However, the tendency for foreigners residing in Egypt to integrate relatively quickly, paired with numerous positive and negative incentives to at least appear Egyptian, means that the “halfway point” in their integration is



**Figure 19**

Egyptian, a person who would inevitably have introduced at least some Egyptian customs to their everyday life.

Perhaps an even more striking example is the stele of the Nubian mercenary named Nenu, shown in figure 19.<sup>339</sup> Nenu's stele comes from the Geblein region of Upper Egypt (close to Nubia), and is dated to the First Intermediate Period. Although this period was centuries before the New Kingdom, Egypt was still employing Nubian mercenaries. Nenu may have lived in an earlier period, but his stele still provides a glimpse at what integration may have looked like for mercenaries in the New Kingdom. Nenu is identified as Nubian not only by the text, but also by his characteristic Nubian wig and the wide leather sash around his waist.<sup>340</sup> Interestingly, he

difficult to locate in any sources, either textual or archaeological. One possible example is the family of the Syrian mercenary Terura, discussed in chapter 3, whose Syrian wife dresses in an Egyptian fashion and wears an Egyptian-style wig.<sup>338</sup> The couple also owns a slave or servant who appears to be

<sup>338</sup> Osama S. M. Amin, "Egyptian Stele of a Syrian Mercenary," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, last modified September 7, 2019, accessed October 7, 2019, <https://www.ancient.eu/image/11155/>.

<sup>339</sup> Boston Museum of Fine Arts, "Stele of the Nubian Soldier Nenu," accessed January 30, 2020, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/130332>.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.



has married an Egyptian, and his wife features a characteristically Egyptian dress and hairstyle. Despite his wife being an Egyptian, his children are depicted as Nubians in both dress and physical appearance. Finally, his servant offers him a drink – though seemingly unimportant, this depiction of a servant offering the tomb owner libation is distinctive of Egyptians in the First Intermediate Period.<sup>341</sup> There is a remarkable confluence of Nubian and Egyptian cultural elements in this stele alone, and one wonders how Nenu would have identified himself. In any case, his stele provides an important example of what a mercenary at his “halfway point” in integration may have looked like.

Yet, whether voluntary or involuntary, the military often served as the primary vehicle of integration. Although it was a deeply held Egyptian belief to welcome foreigners who were willing to integrate, the process of their integration was hastened and made more successful in general by the military. The military was often a desirable choice for foreigners in Egypt, even if they were there of their own accord, for many Egyptians saw it as an undesirable profession, meaning the state was always willing to hire more soldiers. The military was also the easiest way for most foreigners to earn a respectable living in Egypt, especially if they had past military experience. Once in the military, foreign mercenaries would only naturally learn at least some of the Egyptian language if not master it, and it would not have been uncommon that they fought alongside native Egyptians in battles, even if they were organized into separate companies. Besides the material goods they received as payment, such as bullion, slaves, and battlefield booty, mercenaries received land in Egypt itself, making them tied to the state they served on both an economic and social level. If they earned their freedom and decided to put an end to their soldiering days, they often had little incentive to leave Egypt – they were prosperous

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

landowners (which many of them surely would not have been in their homelands), they had likely developed at least some level of comradery with the Egyptian soldiers they fought with, and many of them would have had Egyptian wives and friends. Perhaps it is no wonder that Egypt's foreign mercenaries disappeared from the archaeological record so quickly, for they were faced with ample positive and negative incentives for assimilating.

The military's role as a machine of integration is not confined to the New Kingdom. The clearest comparison is to Ptolemaic Egypt. The military was initially composed almost entirely of foreign mercenaries who served an uncompromisingly Greek state. However, military service meant that the state's predominately Greek mercenaries were often in contact with Egyptians whenever they were garrisoned or settled in Egypt, and as more and more Egyptians began to serve over time, the Greek mercenaries found themselves in almost constant contact with Egyptians who they would eventually fight and suffer alongside. Despite the anti-Egyptian barriers erected by the Greco-Macedonian regime, everyday interaction combined with the passage of time inevitably led to some degree of integration between the ruling Greeks and the native Egyptians. It seems that the further a settlement was from the Hellenizing influence of Alexandria, the more quickly it surrendered to the native Egyptians who were eager to gain access to the privilege that Greek ancestry offered.<sup>342</sup> Intermarriage became increasingly more common and had a two-way effect: Egyptian women obtained Greek status for their children (Greek women marrying Egyptian men was far less common, as children acquired the legal status of the father) and Greeks began to find it more and more comfortable to adapt themselves to the Egyptian way of life. The personal documents of Greek soldiers and their families eventually began to be written in Demotic, the Egyptian language during the Ptolemaic

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<sup>342</sup> Lewis, *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 28.

Kingdom, some Greeks began using an Egyptian name in addition to their Greek one, and personal documents like marriage and divorce papers began being written in the local Egyptian format. The distinct Greek minority that existed at the beginning of the Ptolemaic Kingdom disappeared after little over a century and was subsequently replaced by a society best described as a mix of Egyptians and Greco-Egyptians. The military's prominent role in this swift and extraordinarily successful integration is undeniable, especially during the later Ptolemaic period, when the military spent most of its time within Egypt.

Furthermore, from the period of crisis onward, the Ptolemaic army's presence within Egypt and the frequent contact with civilians that followed had a twofold effect – not only did the Egyptians themselves adopt some aspects of Greek culture, it also led the Greeks to adopt some aspects of Egyptian culture. For example, a papyrus from the mid second century describes a man and woman who both belong to the Greco-Macedonian cleruchic milieu adopting the Egyptian practice of trial cohabitation before marriage.<sup>343</sup> Another collection of documents, dating from 150-99, belong to the “Greek” cavalryman Dryton and his family, and highlight how, after several generations in Egypt, his family has already begun to Egyptianize. For example, the collection includes the divorce papers of three of Dryton's daughters, all of whom married Greek soldiers. All of the papers are written in Demotic instead of Greek, and both the wives and husbands use their Egyptian names instead of their Greek ones.<sup>344</sup> These are but two of many examples of Greeks integrating into Egyptian society, but the reverse was also true, seen most clearly in the enormous amount of Egyptians fighting at Raphia in a

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<sup>343</sup> Lewis, “Papyrus of Trial Cohabitation Before Marriage,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 28.

<sup>344</sup> Lewis, “Papyri of Cavalry Officer Dryton and His Family,” in *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, 97.

Macedonian phalanx, led by Macedonian commanders, and fighting alongside Greco-Macedonian soldiers.

Despite the Ptolemaic Kingdom's particular suitability as a comparison, the military's role as integrator is no mere relic of ancient history, but rather has a far more recent parallel – the United States. In 2018, 42% of enlisted men and 56% of enlisted women in the US were Hispanic or a racial minority, making the US military disproportionately composed of racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>345</sup> Is this intentional? As a matter of fact, it is. In recent years, the US military has begun a controversial campaign to target people of Hispanic backgrounds for recruitment:

*“While the military emphasizes that it works to enlist all qualified people, not just Hispanics, military experts say that bringing in more Latinos is overdue. Hispanics have long been underrepresented in the Army and in the military as a whole. While Latinos make up 10.8 percent of the Army's active-duty force, they account for 14 percent of the population... That many Latinos in the military are immigrants, or the children of immigrants, typically engenders a sense of gratitude for the United States and its opportunities, something recruiters stress in their pitch.”<sup>346</sup>*

The morality or lack thereof of targeting Hispanic citizens of the United States for recruitment aside, it is clear the United States sees military service as a means of consolidating national loyalty in recent immigrants, as well as easing possible tensions between those

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<sup>345</sup> George M. Reynolds and Amanda Shendruk, “Demographics of the US Military,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 24, 2018, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military>

<sup>346</sup> Lizette Alvarez, “Army Effort to Enlist Hispanics Draws Recruits, and Criticism,” The New York Times, last modified April 7, 2006, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/09/us/army-effort-to-enlist-hispanics-draws-recruits-and-criticism.html>.

immigrants and other Americans, as in the Ptolemaic Period. Of course, the principal difference with the Ptolemaic Period and the New Kingdom is that the Hispanic citizens targeted by US recruiters are already in the US – the US does not send out recruiting agents to Mexico and Central America to bring back potential soldiers. Nonetheless, many similarities persist. Military service in the modern US does come with economic advantages, just as service in the New Kingdom and Ptolemaic Period would often earn one pay and land. After enough years of service, members of the US military can have their higher education or occupational training paid for by the government, not to mention the many benefits such as insurance and housing that can also come with service. Immigration is far from an easy process, and many fresh immigrants to the US arrive with little in the means of economic support. In 2000, while 46% of the US' civilian population had at least some college education, only 6.5% of the 18-24 year-olds in the US military had any college education whatsoever.<sup>347</sup> It is safe to say that while pay and benefits are likely not the only reason these recruits joined the military, they likely were serious incentives, particularly for fresh US immigrants who may not have had much in the way of financial support.

While the US military certainly utilizes such economic incentives to encourage Hispanics and other minority peoples to enlist, the intention behind that targeting mostly comes from the knowledge that military service usually engenders a sense of national loyalty to one's new home and creates a sense of comradery with one's "native" American brothers and sisters. Some immigrants may even enlist voluntarily out of a desire to prove their loyalty to their new home, or even out of a sense of gratitude. Edgar Santana, a 17-year old from Harrison High School in

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<sup>347</sup> David M. Kennedy, "The Wages of a Mercenary Army: Uses of Civil-Military Relations," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 59, no.3 (Spring 2006): 16.

Colorado Springs, said that he was drawn to the military because “I get the freedoms, and I can enjoy them, so I believe I have to pay back that debt.”<sup>348</sup> In fact, the percentage of Hispanic soldiers who re-enlist after their first enlistment is the highest out of any other group of US soldiers, and Lt. Col. Jeffrey Brodeur, the officer in charge of recruitment across Colorado, Wyoming, and parts of Montana and Nebraska, commented on the extreme patriotism of Hispanic recruits.<sup>349</sup> A sense of patriotism and gratitude in US immigrants is actually a common theme in US history, such as the disproportionate amount of Irish-Americans who fought for the Union in the Civil War<sup>350</sup> or the German-Americans who served in World War I.<sup>351</sup> Perhaps it is unsurprising that Irish-Americans and German-Americans form the US’ two largest ancestry groups, and both are widely considered to have assimilated almost entirely into US society, despite their initial status as “other.” While the military is by no means solely the cause of this, it definitely played an important role.

Why do soldiers of foreign ancestry usually integrate faster than civilians of foreign ancestry? Once again, we find parallels as far back as New Kingdom. Integration for the New Kingdom’s mercenaries remained far from instantaneous, but a foreign soldier serving Egypt still integrated faster than a civilian living in Egypt. A mercenary would have fought for the land in which he lived, oftentimes alongside native Egyptians, and would have received significant materials benefits from the Egyptian state, making him far more receptive to Egyptian culture. In fact, the foreign peoples who proved the most receptive to Egyptian culture, the Nubians and

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<sup>348</sup> Alvarez, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/09/us/army-effort-to-enlist-hispanics-draws-recruits-and-criticism.html>.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Susannah Ural Bruce, “‘Remember Your Country and Keep Up Its Credit’: Irish Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865,” *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (April 2005): 359.

<sup>351</sup> Benjamin Paul Hegi, “‘Old Time Good Germans’: German-Americans in Cooke County, Texas, during World War I,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 109, no. 2 (October 2005): 256.

the Libyans, themselves featured as two of the most prominent mercenary groups in the New Kingdom. In later years, after pharaonic Egypt's fall from power, Libyan and Nubian dynasties would rule Egypt and yet be barely distinguishable from their Egyptian predecessors. Furthermore, the native Egyptians who fought alongside foreign mercenaries would begin to accept them far quicker than they would a non-combatant, for the shared suffering and comradery of military life has been a universal means of bringing people together throughout history.

One must not forget that, though combat has changed drastically over the millennia, its destructive effect on the human mind has not. The earliest documented case of post-traumatic stress disorder is often attributed to Herodotus' description of Epizelus, an Athenian spear carrier who fought at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE:

*"Epizelus...was fighting bravely when he suddenly lost sight of both eyes, though nothing had touched him anywhere – neither sword, spear, nor missile. From that moment he continued blinded as long as he lived. I am told that in speaking about what happened to him he used to say that he fancied he was opposed by a man of great stature in heavy armor, whose beard overshadowed his shield but the phantom passed him by and killed the man at his side."*<sup>352</sup>

Epizelus clearly shows signs of PTSD: in the heat of battle (and likely not his first one), he suddenly lost his vision and was plagued the rest of his life by visions of a towering enemy soldier slaying the comrade at his side, a tragedy he remained powerless to stop. Yet, recent research suggests that cases of PTSD can be found even earlier, such as in the Assyrian Empire

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<sup>352</sup> Walid Khalid Abdul-Hamid and Jamie Hacker Hughes, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders in the Ancient World," *Early Science and Medicine* 19, no. 6 (2014): 551.

(1300-609), a contemporary of the New Kingdom. The Assyrians left detailed accounts of their campaigns, which even include medical texts for tending to injuries both physical and spiritual.<sup>353</sup> There are multiple accounts of soldiers seeing ghosts after battles, which the Assyrian doctors assumed to be the ghosts of enemies whom the soldiers had slain in battle,<sup>354</sup> although it is also possible that some of these ghosts could have been fallen comrades, as in the case of Epizelus. Despite a gap of thousands of years, the soldiers of these ancient societies could still be faced with serious mental trauma due to the brutality of the fighting they experienced or the devastating loss of a beloved comrade. I am certain that New Kingdom soldiers would have faced similar trauma. Think of the case of the fallen Nubian archers. The men were hit by arrow fire, and though many died, some survived. Yet, they survived only to experience the terror of being unable to escape as the enemy forces advanced and slaughtered them, as seen by the fracture marks in their arms where they desperately tried to defend themselves. This was no isolated incident, but rather occurred frequently in ancient Egyptian warfare. Would not seeing and surviving such an experience change a soldier forever? Or, think of pharaoh Seqenenre Tao II, who received an axe blow that severed part of his left cheek, exposed his teeth, and fractured his jaw. After falling to the ground, he received another blow to the skull and a gash above his right eye. Any soldier would balk at the sight of one of their comrades meeting such a fate.

Bonds forged in the rigors and horrors of combat are not unique to the modern world. In part, these bonds are forged by necessity, as soldiers possess a far greater chance of survival if they learn to work well together. However, such bonds run far deeper. Sebastian Junger, an

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 556.



acclaimed journalist who was often attached to American combat units, experienced combat frequently. In his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*, he writes about how hardship, particularly for soldiers who experience combat with each other, brings people together:

*“Robert Frost famously wrote that home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. The word ‘tribe’ is far harder to define, but a start might be the people you feel compelled to share the last of your food with...This book is about why that sentiment is such a rare and precious thing in modern society...It’s about what we can learn from tribal societies about loyalty and belonging and the eternal human quest for meaning. It’s about why – for many people – war feels better than peace and hardship can turn out to be a great blessing and disasters are sometimes remembered more fondly than weddings or tropical vacations. Humans don’t mind hardship, in fact they thrive on it; what they mind is not feeling necessary.”*<sup>355</sup>

Soldiers, regardless of what point in history they come from, develop a unique bond through their service. This bond often develops regardless of what culture they come from as well. To name a contemporary example, American Sergeant Paul Brown of the Minnesota Army National Guard served a tour near Basra, Iraq in 2009, and his company was assigned an Iraqi interpreter, who he and his fellow Americans nicknamed Philip. Upon meeting, Brown remarked “If you try to mess with my soldiers, I will kill you.”<sup>356</sup> “Philip” smiled and retorted “Someday, we will be able to laugh about this conversation while we are drinking tea.”<sup>357</sup> In a meeting between the two men, now close friends, in 2014, Philip said that “We started to trust

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<sup>355</sup> Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging* (New York: Twelve, 2016), 3.

<sup>356</sup> StoryCorps, “An American Soldier and Iraqi Interpreter Talk About Becoming Close Friends,” recorded October, 2014, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJaoeyikVPM>.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

you, and since you fought with us and you bled with us and you lived with us you became us...and my Iraqi interpreter became my American brother.” Philip responded that “my American soldier became my Iraqi brother.”<sup>358</sup> Philip had emigrated to the US in 2013, and in 2016 his wife and children arrived safely as well, with his family joining Paul’s family in Minnesota. These two men seemed, arguably, as different as they could be from one another, and yet, after fighting alongside each other, they developed an unbreakable bond, with “Philip” adopting his American nickname and moving his family to the US. Similarly, though Egyptian soldiers and the foreign mercenaries they fought alongside may have come from very different cultures and even have met each other with initial hostility, their service would very often have brought them together in a special way.

Soldiers experience rigors and sufferings that most people can scarcely imagine. But, as Junger says, they are given meaning in life in the form of a new family, one formed not by the blood of birth but by the blood of battle. This family gives them purpose, it makes them feel necessary, makes them feel valuable, and assures them that, whatever struggles may come, there are comrades at their side who will always be there for them. With native Egyptian soldiers seeing service alongside foreign mercenaries, such bonds, though their precise nature cannot be accurately determined, would certainly have developed. Foreign mercenaries would eventually have been seen by the Egyptians as not so “foreign” at all, and vice versa. Some mercenaries, once their service was finished, would have willingly settled in Egypt, having made bonds with Egyptians during their service that would have greatly increased the speed and successfulness of their integration.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

A potential problem for the concept of the modern US military as a machine of integration is a statistic I mentioned earlier: as of 2000, minorities composed 42% of US Army (the largest military branch) enlistments. Will the same measure of comradery between natural-born Americans and immigrants and the descendants of immigrants still exist when a disproportionate percentage of the military is composed of the latter? I would argue that it would not. Today the “citizen-army” of several generations past is almost gone, an almost classless institution that historian David M. Kennedy described as having “its members drawn from all ranks of society, without respect to background or privilege or education.”<sup>359</sup> This 21<sup>st</sup> century issue can still be compared to ancient history: the New Kingdom army, despite its extensive use of mercenaries, was majority Egyptian, and, in Ptolemaic Egypt, the introduction of far more native Egyptians into a previously foreigner-dominated military vastly improved the speed and effectiveness of the latter’s integration. A significant amount of interaction between the native and the foreign soldier is crucial to integration, which, after all, is a two-way process. Think of the immense effect that Irish, German, or African culture has had on US culture as a whole. Once again, parallels to this can be found even in ancient history. Earrings were introduced to the New Kingdom by the Medjay, who, given their occupation as policemen, not to mention their military service, saw frequent contact with the native Egyptians.<sup>360</sup> The practice of wearing earrings was quickly adopted by the Egyptians, and the practice of wearing large, hooped earrings became a unisex ornamentation.<sup>361</sup> The Medjay would eventually undergo complete assimilation during the last centuries of the New Kingdom, becoming almost indistinguishable from the Egyptians in the archaeological record, and yet their custom of wearing earrings lived

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<sup>359</sup> Kennedy, 16.

<sup>360</sup> Bianchi, 128.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

on in Egyptian society.<sup>362</sup> Given integration's two-way nature, it is essential that, if the US military is to serve as a means of bringing "native" Americans and minority groups together, then a higher proportion of the former must see military service.

The question of how to bring foreign peoples into the fold of their new home is not and never has been an easy one to answer. It is a problem that has plagued civilizations throughout history. However, even the mercenaries of ancient Egypt have something to teach to the people of the present day. Although the process is a slow and gradual one, the shared burdens of military life, as well as the military's innate ability to bring diverse groups of people together and unite them with unbreakable bonds, make it one of the foremost tools any nation has for integrating foreign peoples into its own society. Through the unique and unbreakable bond of brother and sisterhood that is forged through shared suffering, both the native and the foreigner so often realize that the other is in fact not so "other" at all.

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<sup>362</sup> Elliot, 36.

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