

The Military Importance of the Medjay, Under Kamose

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The Seventeenth Dynasty Theban ruler Kamose, son and successor to Seqenenre Tao, carried on a military offensive against the Hyksos, even to the point of reaching the walls of Avaris, the Hyksos capital in the Delta. Kamose had also gone south in order to secure his southern border once again against the Prince of Kush based at Kerma. Three sources from the reign of Kamose give an almost complete narrative of his military activities, the Carnarvon Tablet No. 1, the First Stela of Kamose from Karnak, and the Second Stela of Kamose from Karnak.

When Kamose moved north against Hyksos held territory he used Medjay, 'Medjay' troops in his army. In the account given in the Carnarvon Tablet, the Medjay seem to have been sent separately from the main body of Kamose's army, both to serve as scouts and to protect the army's flank. Kamose states in the text on the Carnarvon Tablet

I sailed upstream in order to repel the
Asiatics. My valiant army was before me like
the flame of a fire. The troops of the Medjay
were upland of our camp. I, in order to seek
out the Asiatics and to attack their places.

When Kamose reached Netrus in Middle Egypt, an Egyptian
stronghold loyal to the Hyksos, the Medjay were sent ahead to
engage the enemy. Kamose says, again in the Carnarvon Tablet
text:

I sent forth my valiant troops of Medjay, while
I spent my time waiting in order to confront
Tety, son of Pepy, in the midst of Netrusi?

In his Second Stela Kamose does not name the Medjay
specifically, but only refers to them as his gdt.knt, "valiant troops
who are located [bry, up and] . . ."

Kamose then sends the Medjay into the Western Desert, to hack

up Bahriya Oasis while he remains in Sako, a location in the river valley.⁴ This action was undoubtedly taken to destroy the route of communication between the Hyksos and the Kushites, as well as to insure that no Kushite troops would travel north through the oases route. This shows that Kamose was well aware of a close connection between the Hyksos and the Kushites, and part of his strategy was to break this alliance.

Redford suggests that control over the route through the Western Desert "explains one of the major policies of the struggling 17th Dynasty viz. the recruitment of Medjay tribesmen as auxiliaries. The Medjay, coming as they did from the Nubian wastes, would have been much more willing and able to roam the deserts and fight than the timorous, river-locked Egyptians." Kamose used his Medjay troops, then, whenever he ordered military action away from the river, or in the case of Nefrusi, an assault by land rather than from the water. When Kamose attacked Avaris, he approached the city with ships and used Egyptian soldiers assigned to the ships to attack.

⁴For a full discussion of Sako, see A. Gardner, *AEO*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 98ff.

Kamose did not actually take the fortified city of Avaris; this was done by the next king, Ahmose. It is not clear why Kamose did not do this, although the siege of a fairly large city was perhaps beyond his military capabilities. He did, however, seize the produce of the fields around it, the ships in its harbor, and apparently a palace of the Hyksos king which lay outside the city walls.

Medjay warriors had been used earlier by the Egyptians. The Sixth Dynasty autobiography of Weni says that he headed an army composed of Medjay among other Nubian groups, against the Asiatic sand-dwellers.⁵ A letter from a Sixth Dynasty official stationed at Elephantine refers to troops of Medjay.⁶ Medjay troops were also recruited by Egyptian nomarchs to fight during the civil strife of the First Intermediate Period.⁸

During the Middle Kingdom when Egypt had a strong hold over Lower Nubia, the Medjay were one of the people watched carefully by the Egyptians. Even groups of just a few Medjay

⁵W. G. Brugsch, *op. cit.*

⁶J. P. O. Smith, "An Old Kingdom Letter Concerning the Game of Court," *Saqqara* 23 (1922), p. 16.

⁸Sauv. Antiqu. *De Felseninschriften von Hierak.* Leipzig, 1928, #16, line 6 and #25, line 14. Also refer to H. G. Fischer, "The Nubian Mercenaries of

were worthy of attention. One of the dispatches from the fortress at Semna reads:

Be informed, if you please, of the fact that two Medjay men, three Medjay women, came down from the desert.

Another dispatch reported that two soldiers returned to the fortress with three Medjay men, saying,

We found them on the south of the desert edge.

The Egyptians seemed to fear that the Medjay would threaten riverine trade. The fortress of Semna, located to the north of the Second Cataract, was situated in order to protect river traffic from possible attack from the eastern shoreline.¹¹ The ancient name of Semna was Hsf Mo3w—Helping the Medjay.¹²

The Medjay have been identified with the Red Grave

¹¹ P. O. Beutner, "The Semna Dispatches", *J. A. S.* 1946, p. 5, #5.
¹² ibid., p. 8, #3.

culture, a culture recognized only by burial remains. 14 Pan-Grave culture remains are partly related to the G Group, the Md3yw or "Nubians" as Pan-Grave pottery is a distinctive manifestation 14 of the cultural horizon of the G Group. In complete contrast to the G Group, however, Pan-Grave burials are accompanied by Egyptian-made weapons – axes, daggers and archery equipment – clearly indicating that the Pan-Grave people were a warrior race and suggest the conclusion that they were imported into Upper Egypt as professional soldiers. 15 In the Semna dispatches the Egyptians always make a distinction between the Md3yw and the fsh3yw, the Medjay and the Nubians. The Nubians inhabited the river valley, while the Medjay came from the desert hill country flanking the river. 16

Pan-Grave burials dating to the Seventeenth Dynasty have been found throughout Upper Egypt. The northernmost Pan-Grave sites are Rifet and Mostagedda, 17 just south of the

14 See T. Savitsky, Through Egypt and Nubia, Lund, 1941, p. 139.

15 Trigger, op. cit., p. 135.

16 W. Hayes, After the Death of Amenemhat I to Sesostris I, CAH, vol. 2, 1957, p. 107.

18 See the discussion by G. Posener, "M3yw et Md3yw", ZAS, 83, 1953, pp. 38-43, particularly pp. 40-41.

17 A detailed list of Pan-Grave sites is given in M. Batai, Gräberfelder in Sayā'a Nubien 1861-1955, Jerna, 1955, p. 64-70, particularly fig. 6.

Pan-Grave burial sites are also concentrated in the Theban Area and just to the south at El Kab and Edfu.¹⁹ Pan-Grave pottery was found inside the fortress at El Kab, suggesting that Medjay soldiers had been stationed there.²⁰

Before going against the Hyksos Kamose had already campaigned in Nubia. The Second Stele of Kamose gives the contents of a letter sent by the Hyksos Apophis to the ruler of Kush. It had been captured by Kamose's troops in the oases. In part of it Apophis says to the ruler of Kush:

Do you see what Egypt has done
against me? I have not attacked
him like all that he has done against
you. He has chosen the two lands
to afflict them, my land and yours!²¹

How far south did this military campaign of Kamose's go, and

¹⁹ See P. Tassin, "Recherches préliminaires sur les Résultats de l'Etude de Objets en Céramique du Soudan Kamose", *Khartoum*, VII, 1977, pp. 3-16; 30. For Theban material, there is a small unexcavated Pan-Grave cemetery at East Karnak, see D. Redford, "The Akhenaten Temple Project in Egypt", *Bulletin Canadian Mediterranean Institute*, IV, 3, 1984, p. 4.

²⁰ Tregler, *op.cit.*, pp. 105-106.

²¹ Heick, *op. cit.*, Second Stele, line 22.

what was its purpose?

It appears that the Egyptians went as far south as Buhen, for a stela found at Buhen preserves the name of Kamose, along with mention of his third regnal year, and a reference to wall building.²¹ Buhen had been the administrative and economic center of the Second Cataract region in the Middle Kingdom, and at the end of this period had been attacked and partially burned by the Kushites. It would have been logical for Kamose to reoccupy Buhen and reestablish Egyptian control over the area.

Two inscriptions in the vicinity of Arminna East near Toshka name the King's Son Tety along with the name of Kamose.²² We may have in this graffiti the earliest use of the title s3-nsw applied to the official who had charge of Lower Nubia. Kamose certainly would have wanted to leave a trusted official behind to oversee the newly reconquered territory. The official who held the title King's Son in the New Kingdom was military commander of Nubia, and directly responsible to the king.

²¹ J. B. Seaton, "The Stela from Buhen: The Inscriptions," *EES*, 1976, pl. 1, fig. 12 (line A, reverse). Descriptions of the Antiquities of Lower Nubia (Oxford, 1907), pl. 65, fig. 4, and W. K. Simons, "Hekahefer and the Dynastic Material,"

Pan Grave sites dating to the Second Intermediate Period have been found throughout Lower Nubia. "It seems possible that most, if not all, of the Pan-Grave sites in Lower Nubia date from the period of restoration of Egyptian control in this region"²³ The sites cluster on both sides of the river in the region of the mouth of the Wadi Allaqi, and from the area of Aniba down to Toshka.²⁴ The areas of Pan-Grave burials are generally those where C-Group or Nhsyw remains have also been found, although at the sites in Lower Nubia Pan-Grave burials are almost always located back on the desert, while C-Group tombs are usually found at the edge of cultivation.²⁵ Perhaps, then, the Medjay were stationed here by Kamose to "keep watch on the indigenous inhabitants" of the river valley,²⁶ and remained nearby, but separate from, the C-Group. Pan-Grave pottery has been found in the Egyptian forts of Kuban and Serra East, so Medjay soldiers may have been garrisoned there.²⁷

It would appear that Kamose first recovered Egyptian

²³ *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 7, *Final Report on Excavations in Lower Nubia, 1961-1965*, for the Excavations, 19-198, p. 199.

²⁴ *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 7, p. 199.

²⁵ *Excavations*, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁶ *Excavations*, p. 116.

²⁷ *Excavations*, p. 116.

territory in Nubia to secure his southern border before he moved north against the Hyksos. He also made sure to cut the Hyksos off from communication with the Kushites so that they could not crush him between their two armies. After all, in the letter from the Hyksos king Apophis quoted in the Second Stela, Apophis urges the Kushite ruler to "Come northward! . . . Then we will share the towns of Egypt."²⁵ Kamose left Pan-Grave warriors behind in Lower Nubia to guard the local inhabitants, and stationed a trusted official there to oversee his newly reconquered territory. Kamose then took other Pan-Grave soldiers with him to establish control over the oases of the Western Desert, and to move north along the river banks in the Nile valley. It appears from this that the Medjay served as scouts and light infantry in Egypt and were recruited into the Egyptian army by Kamose for these two specific purposes.