

**Who are the Sherden: Reassessing the Identity of the Ancient Sherden ‘Sea Peoples’, 1300-
900 BCE**

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INTRODUCTION

The Late Bronze Age collapse (1225-1175 BCE) was a period of chaotic violence, erupting rather suddenly and unexpectedly, with an irreversible impact on the ancient world. Three major geopolitical developments in the century leading up to the collapse exacerbated this unprecedented disaster. First, many devastating earthquakes and volcanoes rocked the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifty years before the collapse, likely obliterating economic stability in the region and leading to the abandonment of countless settlements; these seismic events coincided with a three hundred year long drought that undoubtedly contributed to an abject famine. Second, the security of the vital yet delicate Eastern Mediterranean trade routes depended on the two millennia of Cretan Minoan naval hegemony—with the thalassocracy's disappearance, sea vessels lost a critical risk-mitigating component to their already hazardous voyages. Even minor disruptions to this trade threatened existential disaster for ancient Bronze Age civilizations because the key technological achievement of the era—bronze—is an alloy that necessitates combining copper with imported tin. While copper is abundant in the Eastern Mediterranean, tin is a relatively scarce resource on the European continent; in fact, sufficient quantities of tin are found only in present-day Afghanistan and Cornwall. Third, the land-based Egyptian New Kingdom and the Hittite Empire of Asia Minor—both of which dominated the Eastern Mediterranean for centuries—integrated the western territories of the disintegrating Mittani polity situated between them. These dual annexations forced the two powers into a direct rivalry that substantially intensified conflict in the region. Just as the 7th century Byzantine-Sassanid wars resulted in protracted military exhaustion, so did these far earlier conflicts between the Egyptian and Hittite polities result in periods of debilitation; and, just as the Byzantines and Sassanids were further weakened by plagues wreaking havoc upon their societies, so were the Egyptians and Hittites hindered by the economic instability, insecure supply chains, natural disasters, and widespread famines that often reduced their power projection to mediocrity. Despite these existential challenges, the

Egyptian and Hittite polities seemed undeterred from continuing their imperial ascensions. Imagine the confusion and horror the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean suffered when alien marauders with long beards, horned helmets, and terrifying battle cries burst from the sea to violently dismantle what little stability remained of civilization. Within less than fifty years, the Egyptian and Hittite polities were either permanently fractured and reduced to minimal influence or dismantled altogether. This was the arrival of the Sea Peoples.

The title ‘Sea Peoples’ refers to a comprehensive theoretical narrative concerning an alleged seafaring confederation of nine distinct groups that together devastated the Eastern Mediterranean polities through a series of raids and invasions at the end of the Late Bronze Age. The Sea Peoples are often blamed, in part or in whole, for the collapse of the palace culture of the Late Bronze Age, which started a Dark Age in ancient history lasting three centuries. They are also considered ancestors of many groups that appear in first millennium BCE sources—such as the Philistines, the Israelite tribe of Dan, the Nuragic people of Sardinia, and others. Additionally, the destabilizing influence of the Sea Peoples on Egyptian and Hittite authority allowed Phoenician cities to flourish without needing to appease the demands of imperial extraction; this flexibility, while relatively short-lived, granted these same Phoenicians the institutional power to sail west and colonize key areas of the Mediterranean, establishing more reliable routes for trade and communication.ⁱ The invasion of the Sea Peoples remains one of the most notorious and controversial periods in Egyptian history due to its narrative emphasis on an unprecedented mass migration and coordination of ancient nations.ⁱⁱ

The Sea Peoples theoretical narrative was first articulated in 1855 by Emmanuel de Rougé—then curator of the Louvre—when he published his interpretative translations of battles recorded on the walls of the Medinet Habu archeological site in Egypt.ⁱⁱⁱ Many of the conquered peoples depicted at Medinet Habu were referred to as ‘peoples of the sea’^{iv} by de Rougé and, in 1867, he published a manuscript that postulated geographic locations for them, as well.^v De Rougé was appointed as the

Chair of Egyptian Philology and Archeology at the Collège de France where he was ultimately succeeded by Gaston Maspero in 1874; about twenty years later, Maspero expanded the work of de Rogué by proposing a detailed theory of maritime migrations in which he coined the term ‘Sea Peoples.’^{vi} At a time when the competition for territory and economic advantage among European Powers was sweltering, Maspero’s idea of population migrations would have felt comfortably familiar to its general audience. Thus, after its endorsement by additional scholars such as Eduard Meyer,^{vii} Maspero’s Sea Peoples narrative became accepted as the predominant theory amongst ancient historians and Egyptologists for the next two centuries.

Starting in the late 20th century, the Sea Peoples theory received an influx of criticism by scholars such as Robert Drews, Ann Killebrew, Neil Silberman, Marc Van de Mieroop, and Claude Vandersleyen. Although later connecting the Sea Peoples invasions to the Aegean, Drews initially claims that there are no references to migrations in the Egyptian sources. He ultimately concludes the Sea Peoples narrative is a conjecture based on an interpretation of the inscriptions rather than on the inscriptions themselves.^{viii} Killebrew adds that the Sea Peoples narrative is too broad and should not encompass the entirety of peoples mentioned in Egyptian sources because references to the sea are only made to three of the nine groups.^{ix} Silberman furthers a criticism of speculative interpretation by suggesting that the predominant Sea Peoples theory is fundamentally reliant on a ‘Victorian narrative’, one whose political and social ideologies have influenced the interpretation of Egyptian evidence to reflect modern conceptual frameworks.^x Van de Mieroop highlights inconsistencies in the narrative, including chronological and evidential contradictions. For example, identical attacks on the Nile Delta are described as sudden and sequential events in Egyptian accounts despite chroniclers dating them thirty years apart and mentioning some of these aggressors as mercenaries or prisoners in the Egyptian army fighting against the Hittites in northern Syria around that very time.^{xi} As an example of more direct lingual interpretation, Vandersleyen rejects the translation of ‘w3d-wr’ and ‘p3 ym’^{xii} as referring

to a salt water sea; instead, he proposes that the terms reference sweet water while the phrase ‘iww hryw-ib w3d-wr’^{xiii} does not necessarily refer to islands.^{xiv} Although these issues with the inherent conjecture of the Sea Peoples theory are extensive, they are not sufficient for completely disregarding the potential of its theoretical framework.

The Sea Peoples theory ties otherwise independent peoples together and, consequently, creates a framework that forces a foreign and maritime national identity on to each of the associated groups. As noted by Silberman, this narrative was influenced by the ideologies of the time in which the theory was first postulated. In addition to the issue of presentism, Van de Mieroop extends the problematic uncertainty of speculative interpretation to the primary sources themselves by suggesting the Egyptians were simply comprehending events through their own limited framework. It is entirely possible that the Egyptians “could envision threats to their territory only in terms of major armies attacking them,”^{xv} as Van de Mieroop contends, and that this bias in Egyptian records was reaffirmed by similarities in the major power rivalries within Europe at the time of the theory’s inception. Nevertheless, the Egyptians clearly name and depict multiple distinct groups in various inscriptions and visual representations. Despite the clear challenges in utilizing the Sea Peoples theory to set the narrative structure that contextualizes the Late Bronze Age, named groups of so-called ‘Sea Peoples’ such as the Sherden did exist in some capacity. This treatment would not be unlike utilizing the term ‘Indians’ to refer to the diverse native populations of the American continents. The examination of Sherden identity—as a people, nation, ethnicity, culture, or label—thus remains an important object of historical consideration.

The Sherden—or Shardana, as an alternative translation—were one of the nine groups associated with the Sea Peoples’ invasions of the Egyptian New Kingdom. The history of the Sherden is reliant upon various Egyptian inscriptions and visual representations, as opposed to a robust and objective historical narrative. The reconstruction of the Sherden timeline is therefore heavily

dependent on scholarly interpretation. Nevertheless, historians and scholars largely agree on a Sherden presence in Egypt at the middle of the 13th century BCE that persists continually until at least the mid-12th century BCE. The Sherden are often perceived as foreign invaders of Egypt alongside the Libyans and other alleged Sea Peoples during the reign of Pharaoh Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE). They are then recorded as allies to Ramesses II in his conflict against the Hittites; and they appear again as aggressors during yet another invasion of Egypt, likely under the reign of Merenptah (1213-1203 BCE). Ultimately, the Sherden are depicted as supporters of both Egypt and her many enemies at the time of Ramesses III (1186-1155 BC). The frequency of references to the Sherden decreases during the subsequent reigns of Ramesses III's successors.

The primary objective of my research is to reassess the identity and origins of the Sherden. As opposed to other origin theories, I will argue that the Sherden likely emerged from the northern Egyptian Delta region because much of the evidence suggests that the name is a typecast categorization, ultimately turned classification, rather than a cultural or national identity. The evidence also contextualizes peripheral unrest in the Delta and supports the postulation that Egyptian authority in the region was, at the very least, partially insecure. I support my contention with direct examinations of every relevant source associated with the Sherden—such as wall reliefs, stela inscriptions, clay tablets, and papyri.

In such an extensive reassessment, it is imperative to deconstruct the major labels attached to the Sherden—such as Sardinian, Aegean, Syrian, or Asiatic—in order to comprehend the implications that various interpretations have on the development of these diverse Sherden identity theories. I will also seek to dispel any notion of a Sherden cultural association with the broader Sea Peoples narrative by demonstrating that the Sherden were likely supporters or exploiters of the invasions of other alleged Sea Peoples rather than an integrated member of an alleged confederacy. Lastly, I will conclude that the Sherden eventually integrated into Egyptian society through a centralized assimilation policy

initiated by Ramesses III and perpetuated by his successors. It is important to note that one scholar, Alessandra Nibbi, argued the Sea Peoples at large originated from the Delta region primarily due to her assertion that the Egyptians did not have a word to describe a sea or the Mediterranean. I must be clear that I disagree with Nibbi's key premise as well as her broad conclusion, and that my argument is mostly independent from her analyses; a discussion of our divergent perspectives will follow later in this paper.

The following paper will be divided into two sections: first, I will review Sherden historiography by discussing the proposed origin theories; and second, I will outline my interpretation of the Sherden narrative, including my theory on their origination in the northern Egyptian Delta region and eventual assimilation into Egyptian society. The conclusion of this paper will provide potential avenues for further research and representation of a distinct Sherden identity within a comprehensive examination of Mediterranean historiography. Revealing the identity of the Sherden indirectly provides context for the broader ancient Mediterranean world: if the Sherden sailed from Sardinia while maintaining the capacity to militarily challenge dominant empires in the Eastern Mediterranean, then their level of institutional centralization, technological prowess, and intersocial communication would prove lightyears beyond any expectations of their hypothesized geographical origins. The determination of Sherden identity will ultimately reveal either a sense of unprecedented interconnectedness amongst the civilizations of the Bronze Age, or a world of isolation and individuality interrupted by a sudden mass migration of peoples all around the same time. Either way, examining these various interactions with the Sherden helps to establish a less ambiguous picture of an often overlooked subject in antiquity.

SHERDEN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The following section is an in-depth analysis of the contentions proposed by the many historians, archeologists, and scholars who have dedicated significant portions of their research to revealing the identity of the Sherden or the Sea Peoples at large. Although there are numerous theories relating the Sherden to countless different locations and cultures, many of them are no more than claims often devoid of substantial evidence or any semblance of explanation. Some of these authors have connected the Sherden to ancient cultures in Iberia or the Balkans, while others have constructed elaborate schemes in an effort to form textual, archaeological, and visual evidence into a coherent whole; but such postulations often depend on hasty generalizations and appeals to ignorance as well as unsubstantiated premises. Since the academic community has paid little attention to such unsupported assertions, no discussion of such claims will follow in this paper.

This section's analysis concentrates on deconstructing the postulations regarding Sherden identity, many of which have helped to shape the course of Sherden historiography. Four theories warrant considerable attention due to their impact on this Sherden historiographic identity: Sardinia, the Aegean, northern Syria, and western Asia Minor. By pointing out flaws in each hypothesis while utilizing their acceptable premises, this paper will support the proposal that the term Sherden is a label that refers to natives of the northern Delta region who were forcibly assimilated into Egyptian society.^{xvi}

Sardinian Origin Theory

The first correlation between the Sherden and a home territory was presented by the Egyptologist Emmanuel de Rougé in the mid-19th century. Relying on the etymology of their name, de Rougé proposed that the Sherden originally sailed from their homeland of Sardinia to join forces with sea marauders and Libyan contingents before challenging Egyptian forces.^{xvii} The use of

etymology in de Rougé's Sardinia-Sherden thesis is the primary form of evidence for the connection; however, the theory itself is based on a fallacious argument.

A large part of de Rougé's contention relies on an assumption concerning the Nora Stone. Discovered in the late 18th century on the southern coast of Sardinia, the Nora Stone was inscribed by the Phoenicians in the 9th century BCE and is the first written reference to the island as "Sardinia."^{xviii} The third line of the Nora Stone follows as: "bšrdn š"—translations by epigraphic specialists in Semitic languages agree that it refers to the inhabitants of Sardinia.^{xix} The similarity between the Nora Stone transliteration and the Egyptian inscriptions referring to Sherden as "šrdn" strongly suggests that the Phoenicians deliberately connected the inhabitants of Sardinia to the Sherden. Falsely assuming this correlation as a causal relationship, de Rougé concludes that the Phoenicians named Sardinia after the Sherden due to these weak etymological similarities.

Despite the near certain intent of the Phoenicians to connect the Sardinians to the Sherden, de Rougé's argument does not consider the possibility that the Sherden settled in Sardinia following their involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean at the time of the Sea Peoples narrative. It also does not address the possibility that the Phoenicians provided Sardinia with its name simply because the native Nuragic cultures visually resembled the depictions of Sherden on Egyptian wall reliefs. De Rougé's conclusion identifying Sardinia as the origin of the Sherden therefore remains dependent on fallacious etymological assumptions.

Notwithstanding the questionable foundations on which the Sardinian origin thesis developed, many scholars have continued to present additional evidence in the hopes of strengthening a correlation between the two peoples. Robert Drews, renowned scholar of Bronze Age Greece, supported de Rougé's etymological interpretation by contending the word "Sherden" itself to mean "a man from Sardinia."^{xx} As additional support for a Western Mediterranean origin theory, Drews claims that round shields did not exist in the Eastern Mediterranean until the late thirteenth century

BCE; since the Sea Peoples narrative coincides with the first appearance of round shields in warfare, Drews concludes that the technology must derive from foreign westerns, particularly with the migration of Sherden from Sardinia since only they were depicted in Egyptian sources as utilizing such unprecedented technology.

By concluding that the utilization of round shields in the Eastern Mediterranean is evidence of direct *foreign* influence, Drews is forced to interpret Sherden appearances in the Battle of Qadesh as entirely of ethnic typification. The wall reliefs of the Qadesh stelae (Figure 1), as well as those at the Sun Temple of Abu Simbel constructed shortly after the battle (Figure 2), contain the alleged first depictions of Sherden. This claim is based on unique visual characteristics that resurface in later wall reliefs, one of which is labeled as “Sherden.”^{xxi} The rendering in both wall reliefs include three to four soldiers utilizing identical rounded shields with circular embossments or painted designs lining the borders and center of the shields in a cyclical fashion. The figures are depicted wielding uniform spears while wearing the same short kilts with fabric dangling downward from the middle end. It is also important to note that two of the three soldiers in the Qadesh stela are wearing dissimilar horned helmets, with the third portrayed as using the same headgear but without horns.

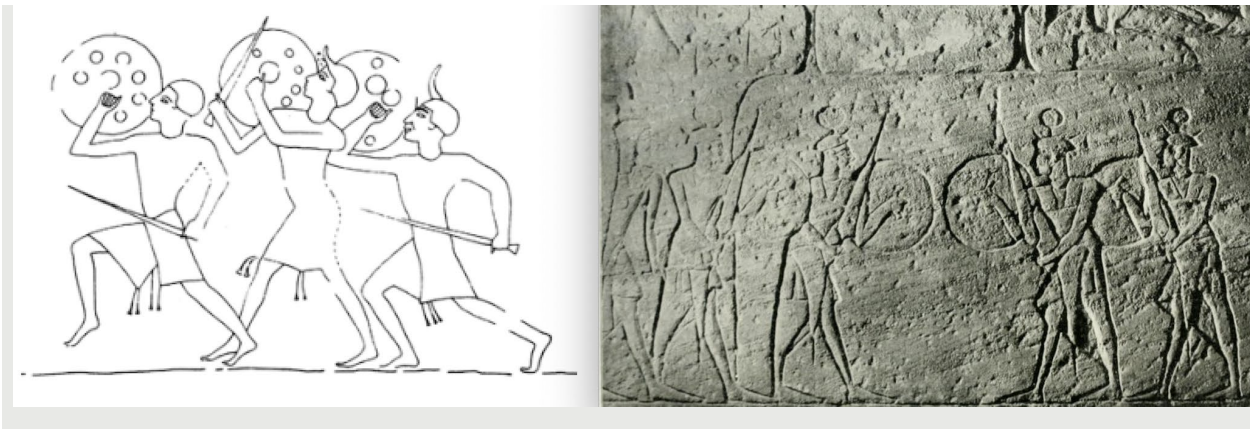


Figure 1 (left): Wall relief from the Qadesh stela at the Ramesseum, Thebes. This likely represents a storming of an Amurru fortress while on campaign.

Image and interpretation are from [Nancy K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250-1150 BC* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978) 30].

Figure 2 (right): Wall relief in the Sun Temple of Abu Simbel in the south of Upper Egypt. This likely represents personal guards of Ramesses II. These individuals are often interpreted as Sherden.

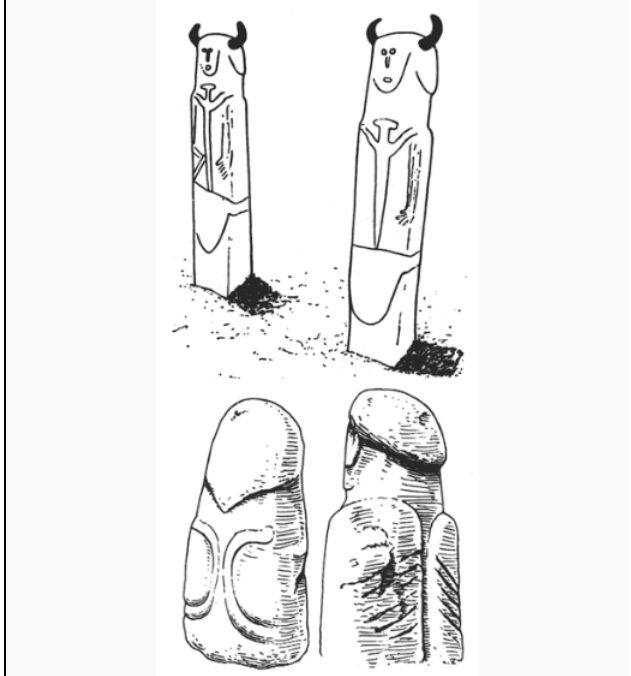
Image and interpretation are from [Henry Breasted, *The Temples of Lower Nubia: Report of the Work of the Egyptian Expedition, Season of 1905-'06* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906)c 2].

Considering the close timing of a Sherden defeat and subsequent imprisonment at the hands of Ramesses II,^{xxiii} it is likely that the captured Sherden soldiers present at the Battle of Qadesh are the same Sherden captives who were hauled off to Egypt after losing to the Pharaoh two years earlier. However, due to the irregular characteristics previously identified, not all of the visual depictions in these wall reliefs should be assumed as sufficiently linked to the Sherden. Even if all of the individuals depicted in the visual representations are Sherden, and even if they are sufficiently connected to Sardinia, the argument would still depend on the assumption that the technology was developed in Sardinia and only later transferred to the Eastern Mediterranean. While this hypothesis remains a possibility, the antithesis is equally as plausible. The presence of rounded shields in the Eastern Mediterranean at this time is therefore insufficient to justify assertions of Sherden as foreign influencers.

Aside from etymological and visual interpretations, physical evidence has also served to strengthen the resolve of Sardinia-Sherden proponents. The archeologist Roger Grosjean uncovered statue menhirs on the island of Corsica depicting individuals that closely resemble the representations of the alleged Sherden in Ramesses III's Medinet Habu wall reliefs.^{xxiii}

Two archaeological sites, Cauria and Scalsa Murta, were excavated in Corsica where archaeologists uncovered statue-menhirs that look eerily similar to the Sherden in the Medinet Habu depictions; they date to between 1400 and 1000 BCE and are clearly militaristic.

The top image is from [Grosjean, 47]. The bottom image is from [Nancy K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250-1150 BC* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 103].



The existence of a network between Sardinia and the Eastern Mediterranean was suggested by the archeologist Birgitta Hallager with her discovery of Mycenaean pottery—in the traditional style of the Late Bronze Age—on the island of Sardinia.^{xxiv} A few years later, the academic Joseph Shaw uncovered Sardinian pottery in southern Crete, indicating a reciprocal relationship between the two regions.^{xxv} The archeologist Margaret Guido corroborated these hypotheses with her discovery of oxhide ingots inscribed with Cypro-Minoan markings found inside native Nuraghe establishments in Sardinia. She then connected her findings to similar oxhide ingots previously discovered in Crete.^{xxvi} Guido also suggested similarities between Egyptian visual representations of the Sherden and the Nuragic self-depictions.



Above are three statue ingots created by the Nuragic peoples of Sardinia. The statue ingots show the Nuraghe with full combat-readiness in a similar fashion to the Sherden. Note the similarities in horned helmets, short kilts, rounded shields, and swords to the Egyptian representations.
 [National Archeological Museum, Cagliari]—they are representative of depictions by Guido.

Furthermore, the archeologist Adam Zertal suggests that the El-Ahwat settlement in Canaan may be evidence of a Sherden community in the region, in part due to architectural similarities to native Nuraghe structures in Sardinia.^{xxvii}

With regard to the Corsican statue menhirs, they lack sufficient similarities to the Medinet Habu wall reliefs for a conclusive assertion that they depict the same individuals; there are major differences between the two representations—such as the obvious size disparity in horn length and the utilization of non-leather heavy armor. The existence of Mycenaean pottery in Sardinia and the potentially Sardinian oxhide ingots in Crete certainly suggests some sort of connection between the two regions. The absence of substantial quantities of Mycenaean pottery in Sardinia, however, indicates a minor trade relationship at best, and surely not a mass migration or transfusion of peoples.^{xxviii} In addition, the very origin of these oxhide ingots is disputed,^{xxix} and even if identified as Sardinian, the small quantity does not prove an ongoing relationship between Crete and Sardinia—

their presence may simply indicate the fascination of a few traders or adventurers with some rare artifacts.^{xxx} Lastly, as the archeologist Alfonso Stiglitz points out, the Nuragic features of the El-Ahwat settlement are associated with Nuraghe culture centuries prior to the construction; the Sardinian population responsible for its establishment would therefore have wandered for centuries before settling.^{xxxi}

The Sardinian-Sherden theories receive considerable attention in the academic community due to the exciting and profound implications they would infer, if true. This paper has thus directed the largest portion of this section to a discussion of these hypotheses. The analysis above has demonstrated fundamental flaws in the hypotheses' contentions that will hopefully free future perceptions of the Sherden from the etymological, visual, and archeological interpretations that first bound them to Sardinia.

Aegean Origin Theory

The Minoans of Crete were, perhaps, the first major seafaring Mediterranean civilization. Lasting for over a millennium, the Minoan navy effectively controlled the Eastern Mediterranean and secured peaceful trade throughout the region.^{xxxii} In the middle of the 15th century BCE, however, Minoan naval supremacy met its end as their home island of Crete likely succumbed to a series of devastating natural disasters.^{xxxiii} The historian Michael Wood argues that the Mycenaeans were free to terrorize the Eastern Mediterranean with coastal raids after the collapse of Minoan stability. Wood claims these Mycenaeans as the true identity of the Sea Peoples, including the Sherden.^{xxxiv}

In support of his postulations, Wood makes references to specific passages in the Tanis II and Aswan stelae. Located about a thousand kilometers from one another, the Tanis II and Aswan stelae were both constructed during the reign of Ramesses II to honor the many victories in his first two years as Egyptian Pharaoh. The Sherden appear alongside other aggressors in these inscriptions; for

instance, the inscription on Face A of the Tanis II stela, which largely recounts military victories over the Nubians and Libyans,^{xxxv} contains a narrative description of Sherden as follows:

Whose might has crossed the Great Green Sea, so that the Isles-in-the-Midst are in fear of him. They come to him, bearing the tribute of their chiefs, his renown has seized their minds. As for the Sherden of the rebellious mind, whom none could ever fight against, who came bold-hearted, they sailed in, in warships from the midst of the Sea, those whom none could withstand; but he plundered them by the victories of his valiant arm, they being carried off to Egypt.^{xxxvi}

Near the end of the stela, the inscription describes a brief engagement between Ramesses II and the “Sherden of the rebellious mind,” the latter of which were described as “bold-hearted” as well as relatively invincible in their naval aptitude. The stanza, “warships from the midst of the Sea,” references an earlier description of invaders who “crossed the Great Green Sea” and threatened the northern territories of Egypt. The Aswan stela, as opposed to the Tanis II stela, does not explicitly reference the Sherden by name:

I cause Egypt to go on campaigns, their minds filled with his plans. They sit in the shade of his strong arm, and they fear no foreign country. He has destroyed the warriors of the Great Green, the Delta slumbers and can sleep.^{xxxvii}

Nevertheless, the similarities between the two stelae strongly suggests that the Sherden are the “warriors of the Great Green.” Since many scholars—including Wood—have interpreted the “Great Green Sea” as a reference to the Mediterranean, it is often concluded that the “Sherden” in the Tanis stela and the “warriors of the Great Green” in the Aswan stela are invaders of Egypt and the Delta regions. The origins of the “Sherden” are foreign to the territory of Ramesses II and, as such, should be associated with the broader Sea Peoples narrative. In addition to the aforementioned interpretations, Wood considers the “Isles-in-the-Midst” analogous to the Aegean and its countless islands.^{xxxviii}

The proposed association between the Great Green Sea and the Sherden is not substantial evidence of an origin theory beyond lands closely associated with Egypt. The interpretation of the “Great Green Sea” as referring to the Mediterranean has been disputed by the archaeologist

Alessandra Nibbi, who argues the reference is an allusion to the Nile Delta region.^{xxxix} However, the widespread panning of Nibbi's premises has led most scholars to disregard her theory as misinformed; it is simply too outrageous to accept that the Egyptians lacked a word for the Mediterranean or for sea. While in agreement with the scholarly community that *ym*^{xl} certainly refers to the Mediterranean or to sea, it is nevertheless necessary to append their determination. Given the qualifiers Nibbi points out in the Wenamun text^{xli} used to refer directly to specific geographic locations, the descriptor of "Great Green" preceding *ym* modifies or, at the very least, specifies an association with a broader sea.

The absence of *ym* from the stanza in the Aswan stela further suggests the "Great Green" as referencing a region separate from the waters of the Mediterranean. If the origins of the Sherden were, in fact, from the Aegean and if the "Great Green Sea" references a region distinct from the Mediterranean, then the depiction of the Sherden sailing "in warships from the midst of the Sea" seems to allude to the Mediterranean. That is, the Sherden sailed from the Mediterranean into the region known as the "Great Green Sea." While this interpretation is likely accurate, this paper will also hypothesize that the Sherden were not foreign invaders and instead simply utilized, or allied with, these foreign "warships from the midst of the Sea" in a resistance against Ramesses II.

Ultimately, the Aegean-Sherden theory relies on too little evidence to present a compelling correlation. Nonetheless, this research is not sufficient to dismiss the entirety of the Aegean origin theory in relation to other groups associated with the Sea Peoples narrative.

Northern Syrian Origin Theory

The term Syria, when used in ancient dialogue, refers to the whole of the modern Levantine coast—from the southern tip of modern Israel to just north of the modern city of Antakya. Most of the region was considered an integrated province of the Egyptian empire at its zenith in the 15th

century BCE; the archeologist Nancy Sandars claims that the Sherden homeland exists at the northernmost extent of Egyptian influence in Syria.^{xliii}

Sandars centers her argument on interpreting Egyptian depictions of Sherden at Medinet Habu. The temple at Medinet Habu in Thebes uses visual renderings on wall reliefs often accompanied by detailed inscriptions to honor the many victories of Ramesses III (1186-1155 BCE) against the Sea Peoples and other engagements with the Libyans, as well as with the Hittites and their allies. A relief on the outer side of the east wall of Medinet Habu describes a battle in the eighth year of Ramesses III's reign against "the northern countries," and many of the aggressors were imprisoned once the Egyptians achieved victory.^{xliii} Many Hittite and Mitanni chiefs as well as four groups commonly associated with the Sea Peoples, including the Sherden, were among the captives.^{xliv} This relief offers Sherden historiography its only definitive visual representation—one figure is explicitly labeled as "Sherden of the sea."^{xlv}

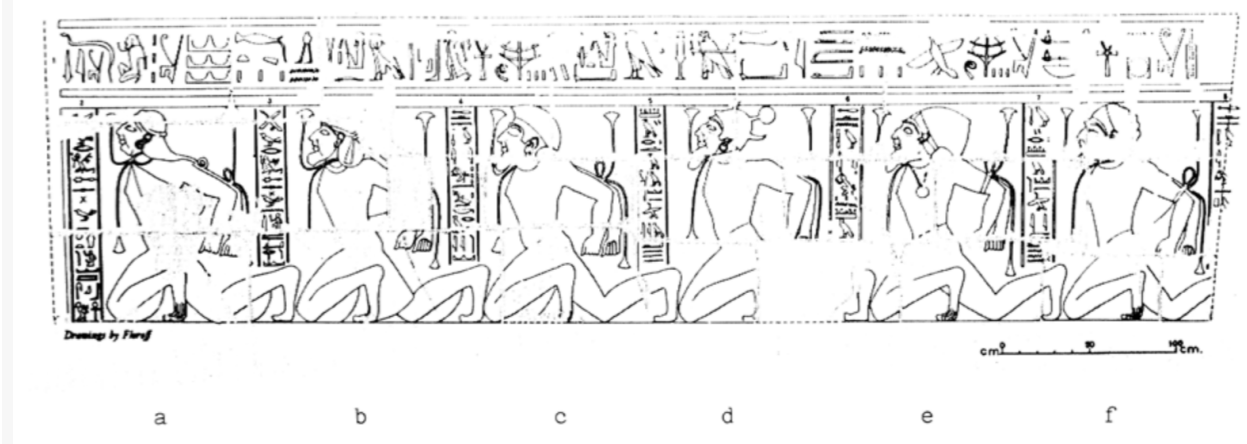
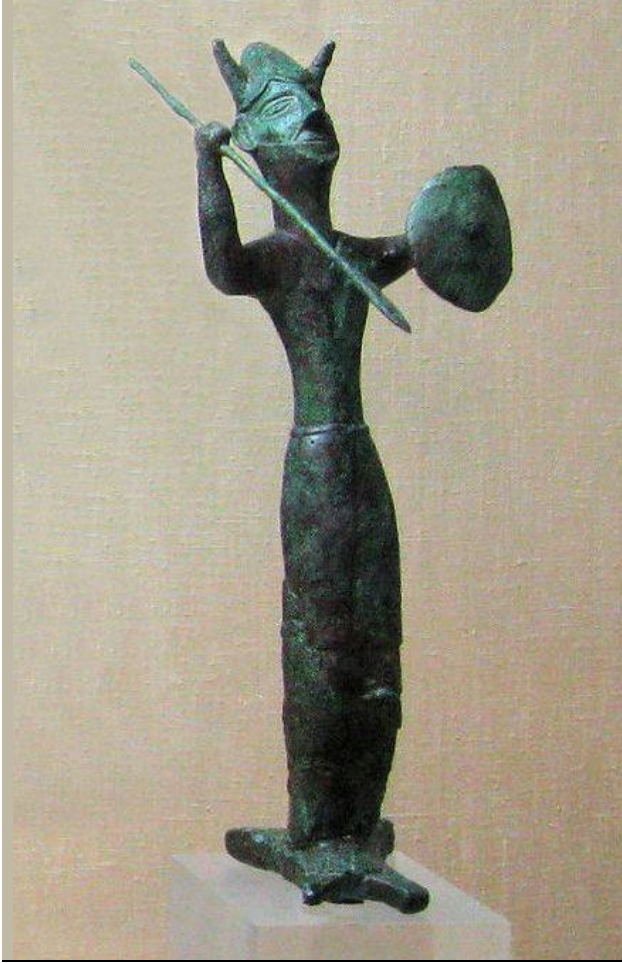


Figure d is labeled as "Sherden of the Sea"

The image is from [Alessandra Nibbi, *The Sea Peoples and Egypt* (Oxford: Noyes Publications, 1975) plate 1].

This depiction includes a horned helmet with a raised sun-disk in the center as well as earrings and a long beard to characterize the Sherden individual. This single captioned image of the Sherden influenced subsequent evaluations and interpretations, all of which search for similar characteristics in other visual representations.

Sandars rejects any Mycenaean association with the utilization of horned helmets in warfare—claiming such attire as “alien to the Aegean.”^{xlvi} Instead, she contends that the horned helmet is an iconological mark of divinity native to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and northern Syria; horns were worn, according to Sandars, as an indication of the strength and greatness of an individual god. The discovery of a Ugarit stela depicting the deity Baal wearing the short kilt of the Sherden as well as their iconic helmet further suggests a Syrian cultural influence; Sandars also presents further archeological evidence of “characteristic dress and accouterments” discovered in northern Syria, particularly in Ugarit. In addition, Sandars points out that the weaponry utilized by the Sherden should not be considered a recent development in Eastern Mediterranean warfare; rather, the long sword with a tapering blade often associated with the Sherden is simply an altered version of a Canaanite dagger from earlier centuries. Lastly, Sandars introduces a small bronze figure into Sherden historiography: discovered within Enkomi valley in Cyprus, the ‘ingot god’ has familiar characteristics to Egyptian representations of Sherden—such as the long spear, horned helmet, short kilt, and rounded shield.



Enkomi statue: [Cyprus Archaeological Museum, Nicosia].



Actual Ugarit stela depicting Baal: [Musée Du Louvre, Paris].

Sandars thereby proposes that the Sherden are indigenous to the northern Syria region; she also theorizes that the Sherden left Ugarit following the city's devastation in the 12th century BCE, took refuge in Cyprus, and then migrated to Sardinia where they provided the island with its name.^{xlvii}

Sandars' northern Syrian hypothesis certainly highlights an array of previously ignored evidence with regard to the identity of the Sherden. The apparent utilization of characteristics often uniquely associated with the Sherden—horned helmets, long spears, and short kilts—by the peoples of northern Syria indicates that the introduction of such technologies into the mainstream warfare of the Eastern Mediterranean did not require a foreign cultural influence, as proponents of the Sardinian-Sherden origin hypothesis frequently suggest. Nevertheless, the appearance of such characteristic attire

in Syria is not sufficient to conclude the existence of Sherden warriors; rather, horned helmets, long spears, and short kilts are simply necessary for confirming a Sherden presence in any region.

Even if the Sherden did originate in Syria, the suggestion that they migrated from Ugarit to Cyprus, then to Sardinia, and then again back to Egypt, is no more than an attempt to correlate the ingot god and the Ugarit stela to Sherden visual historiography. Sandars does not explain how a mass migration of the Sherden then returned to terrorize the Eastern Mediterranean in coordination with other raiding groups and polities. Sandars' argument thus relies on implausible assumptions.

Asia Minor Origin Theory

Situated in a sprawling western Asia Minor valley known as the Sardanion plain is Mount Sardena and the city of Sardis. This location is best known as the geographic home of the Lydians described in Herodotus's *Histories* on early Achaemenid conquests. It is in this location that the historian Gaston Maspero claimed the origin of the Sherden.^{xlviii} Maspero hypothesized that the Sherden were in the process of migrating to Sardinia at the time of the Sea Peoples narrative, thereby explaining their association with the groups.^{xlix}

The interpretation of the Sardanion plain as the original homeland of the Sherden, however, remains an exclusively etymological argument, and such logic is no better used in this context than it is in the original Sardinian-Sherden hypothesis. In fact, it demands a greater explanation due to the inherent lack of literary or archeological evidence referring to Sherden stemming from the region and its surrounding cultures. To resolve such a dilemma, Maspero proposes the possibility that such peoples may have had different words for referring to the Sherden. However, such an argument contradicts the foundations on which the etymological association proceeds. The attempt to link the Sherden with the Sardanion plain, and therefore potentially with the Lydians, remains reliant on contradictory premises.

Despite the immediate faults in Maspero's contention, the archeologist Margaret Guido fervently advocated for a hypothesis linking the Sherden to western Asia Minor. Guido suggested that the region of Hermos, located on the western coast of Asia Minor, is the most likely location of Sherden origin. She did so for two reasons: first, she cites the etymological argument proposed by Maspero that links Sardis and the Sardanian plain to the Sherden; and second, Guido claims Hermos is a region of Asia Minor beyond the direct influences of both Hittite and Mycenaean cultural circles, thus explaining the lack of literary evidence for the existence of the Sherden in the area.¹ Although Guido remedies the basic contradictions present in Maspero's contention, she fails to provide any further evidence in support of a western Asia Minor origin hypothesis aside from extending the etymological argument to another region. Even if the Sherden were associated with the city of Sardis, it would require historians to accept the unlikely assumption that Lydian records intentionally neglect distinctive Sherden characteristics, especially depictions of armor and weaponry in visual representations. Theories linking the Sherden to Asia Minor thus rely on unreasonable interpretations of scarce evidence.

THE IDENTITY THEORY REASSESSED

This section will demonstrate that the totality of evidence suggests the term Sherden is an appellative for the natives of the northern Egyptian Delta region; following their clashes with the Pharaoh, these Delta natives integrated into Egyptian society through both military conscription and forced resettlement. This section will explore key evidence for supporting its Northern Delta-Sherden origin thesis—such as the Amarna letters, Tanis II stela, Aswan stela, material from Battle of Qadesh, the Great Karnak Inscription, the Athribis stela, material from Medinet Habu, the Great Harris Papyrus, the Wilbour Papyrus, the Adoption Papyrus, the Papyrus Amiens, and the Anastasi I Papyrus.

These sources will be presented in chronological order to illustrate the known history of the Sherden with respect to the evolution of their social identity.

In Sherden historiography, much attention is focused on three Amarna letters addressed to the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten (1353–1336 BCE) by King Rib-Hadda of Byblos. The first posited mention of the Sherden appears in these letters, but with the name “sirdanu.” These letters were found in the company of roughly three hundred and eighty clay tablet sources written in Akkadian and discovered at el-Amarna by Egyptian peasants.^{li} About fifty of these letters were composed by Rib-Hadda himself, and they outline his pleas for increased military aid while often referencing the encroaching Hittite and Mitanni polities. For example, in the first letter, Rib-Hadda recounts a plot to overthrow him—including an attempt on his life:

May the king, my lord, know that the war of ‘Abdi-Ashirta is severe, and he has taken all my cities for himself. Gubla and Batruna remain to me, and he strives to take the two towns. He said to the men of Gubla, “Kill your lord and be joined to the ‘Apiru like Ammiya.” And so they became traitors to me. A man with a bronze dagger: patra attacked me, but I killed him. A Sirdanu whom I know got away to ‘Abdi-Ashirta. At his order was this deed done! I have stayed like this in my city and done nothing. I am unable to go out into the countryside, and I have written to the palace, but you do not reply to me. I was struck 9 times.^{lii}

According to Rib-Hadda, the failed assassination was orchestrated and supported by Abdi-Asirta of Amurru^{liii} south of Byblos; furthermore, “a sirdanu” is referenced in the letter as an individual defecting to Rib-Hadda’s enemies. It is likely that Rib-Hadda and the Pharaoh must ascribe some level of significance to a “sirdanu” individual. Otherwise, there would be no practical benefit for Rib-Hadda to reference a “sirdanu” in his dramatized letter that aims to persuade the policy of the Pharaoh.

After a considerable length of time, Rib-Hadda once again speaks of the “sirdanu” in two additional letters that both recount the same events:

Pahura has committed an enormity against me. He sent Suteans and they killed sirdanu-people. And he brought 3 men into Egypt. How long has the city been enraged at me! And indeed the city keeps saying, ‘A deed that has not been done since the time immemorial has been done to us!’ So may the king heed the words of his servant and send back the men, lest the city revolt.^{liv}

Pihura sent Suteans; they killed Sirdanu-people, took 3 men, and brought them into Egypt. If the king, my lord, does not send them [back], there is surely going to be a revolt against me. If the king, my lord, loves his loyal servant, then send [back] the 3 men that I may live and guard the city for the king. And as to the king's writing, "Guard yourself," with what am I to guard? Send the 3 men whom Pihura brought in and then I will survive: 'Abdi-Ashirta, Yattin-Hadda, 'Abdi-Milki. What are the sons of 'Abdi-Ashirta that they have taken the land of the king for themselves? May the king send archers to take them.^{lv}

This time, however, Rib-Hadda complains about a mercenary contingent of "Suteans" whom, he claims, have slaughtered "sirdanu-people"^{lvi} and abducted three men while in Byblos. The "Suteans" are noted several times throughout the Amarna letters, often grouped with other social classes such as the 'Apiru.^{lvii} The continual references to the threatening "Suteans" are likely no more than an attempt by Rib-Hadda to invoke them as an enemy known to the Egyptians while simultaneously incriminating Pihura—the Egyptian commissioner accused of the alleged crimes against Byblos. Rib-Hadda warns of an impending revolt against Egyptian overlordship if the three seized men remain unreturned. The three men are not detailed to the same extent as the "sirdanu-people" nor the "Suteans" despite the negative impact of their forceful capture; it is therefore likely that the term "sirdanu-people" further attests to their role as significant members of a societal administration recognizable to the Pharaoh. The inclusion of murdered "sirdanu-people," to stress the affronts committed by these "Suteans," indicates that the former class occupies a particularly significant and symbolic role in the administration of Byblos's local enforcement. It does not seem likely, given this context, that "sirdanu" suggests a unique nationality foreign to the Pharaoh's recognition.

With respect to the conclusions drawn from the Amarna letters, the term "sirdanu" likely refers to a class of exceptional^{lviii} warriors often responsible for enforcing the codes of Byblos. Moreover, as "sirdanu" is directly referenced by name in these letters sent to persuade Egyptian policy, the crucial role that this class executes in supporting the kings of Byblos should be recognizable and

understandable to the Pharaohs. Unfortunately, there is no further literary record directly discussing any “sirdanu.”

The connection between “sirdanu” and Sherden is primarily linguistic; more specifically, they sound the same: “sirdanu” is likely pronounced as Sherdanu^{lx} (sher-dahn-oo) whereas Sherden (sher-dehn) has an additional translation as Shardana (shar-dahn-ah). This linguistic similarity explains why the Sherden of the century following the Amarna letters are often attributed with the warrior prowess of the “sirdanu-people.”

These three Amarna letters, if representative of the Sherden of later literary records, demonstrate that the word is not linked to ethnicity. In the context of rampant assassinations and unchecked violence described within the letters, the direct invocation of a Sherden suggests the term refers to an elite class of soldier or another relevant high-ranking member of society. An etymological association between “sirdanu” and “Sherden,” however, is not conclusive evidence of the terms’ interconnection.

This paper reinterprets the Tanis II and Aswan stelae as key sources in support of a northern Delta identity. The stelae were both constructed during the reign of Ramesses II to honor the many victories in his first two years as Egyptian Pharaoh. It is therefore not surprising that the inscriptions on the Tanis II stela largely recount military victories over the Nubians and Libyans, with both peoples ultimately absorbed into the Egyptian army. As suggested previously, other scholars have interpreted the “Great Green Sea” and the “Isles-in-the-Midst” as the Mediterranean and Aegean, respectively; in actuality, they reference a distinct region.^{lx} While the term *ym* refers to the Mediterranean or to sea, any preceding qualifier modifies this broad association. In this case, the inclusion of “Great Green” as an antecedent descriptor modifies the *ym* reference.

Following the same line of logic, the inclusion of the “Great Green” in the Aswan stela alongside a reference to the Delta must strengthen their association, especially since there is an absence

of *ym* from the very same stanza. The natural flooding and great expanse of the Delta—with its visual resemblance to a green swamp—suggests that it is separate from, or an extension of, the Mediterranean in Egyptian linguistics. “Great Green” would be superior at describing the swampy foliage of the Delta than the clear waters of the Mediterranean. Even the Egyptians themselves confirmed the association of “Great Green” with the Delta. According to Egyptologists Ian Shaw and Richard H. Wilkinson, the Egyptian god of fertility Wadj-wer—whose name ‘w3d-wr’ is analogous with the “Great Green”—exists as a personification of the northernmost Nile Delta region.^{lxi} Thus, the use of “Great Green” as a geographic descriptor likely alludes to the Nile Delta region.

When the Sherden are recorded as sailing “in warships from the midst of the Sea”, they are not entering the Nile from the Mediterranean. Instead, it is likely that the Sherden simply utilized or allied with foreign warships in resistance against Ramesses II. The suggestion that the Sherden were under the tutelage of Egyptian power is supported by a reference to the Sherden in the Tanis stela as “of the rebellious mind.” It would be unclear how such a group may rebel against an overlord they do not have. Furthermore, since the Tanis stela illustrates that “they sailed in, in warships from the midst of the Sea,” the Sherden likely “sailed in” from this northern Nile Delta region and into Lower Egypt using these foreign warships. This interpretation also explains why they would need to be “carried off to Egypt” after their defeat. It was not the first time the Sherden raided Egypt, given that “none could ever fight against them,” which would indicate the stelae are recording the first time a Pharaoh was successfully able to defeat them. The word Sherden may therefore refer to an excellent fighter of some sort—a word that should likely be attached to the natives of the Delta and, perhaps at an earlier date, the exceptional warrior “sirdanu” of Rib-Hadda’s letters.^{lxii}

If not foreigners themselves, the Sherden may have been loosely integrated Egyptian subjects on the fringe of central authority—namely, the northern Delta region. In both stelae, the story of the “Great Green” is preceded by an incorporation of defeated peoples into Egyptian forces and followed

by a migration of peoples into Egyptian territory. Given the surrounding context of the narrative, as well as the description of the Sherden as “of the rebellious mind” and the interpretation of the “Great Green” as referring to the Nile Delta region, the Sherden warriors of the Great Green were likely peripheral Egyptian subjects who revolted at the instigation of a foreign invasion or migration. The Amarna letters had already expressed the decline of Egyptian power over northern Syria nearly a century prior to the reign of Ramesses II, and the weakening of centralized authority may have prompted these revolts.

Unrest in the Delta likely contributed in preventing Ramesses II from challenging his competitors’ continual expansions into the Levant early in his reign. Nevertheless, once these challenges to proximal Egyptian authority were subdued, Ramesses II turned his attention north and initiated the Battle of Qadesh. This engagement between Ramesses II and Hittite king Muwatalli was decisive in determining which ruler would achieve supremacy in the region. The Battle of Qadesh is also of considerable interest due to the comprehensive Egyptian documentation of the encounter. These excellent records—which include inscriptions as well as wall reliefs—allow scholars to explore various dimensions of the conflict, including stated motivations and the immense scale of participating militaries.

The visual representations of the Battle of Qadesh help to gain insight into the early role of Sherden in Egyptian military and society. It is, however, more astute to focus on Sherden appearances within the official Egyptian record of victory over the Hittites, including any potential implications. This record is known as the Poem of Pentaur—a short inscription found on the walls of the Karnak Temple. The Sherden appear in the Poem among the list of allied peoples supporting the Egyptian cause:

Now then, his majesty had prepared his infantry, his chariotry, and the Sherden of his majesty’s capturing,...in the Year 5, 2nd month of the third season, day 9, his majesty passed the fortress of Sile.^{lxiii}

These Sherden are described as captured soldiers fighting alongside regular troops and chariot units. It is also important to note that the word Sherden deliberately appears between tactical units with no established connection to ethnicity, which suggests that the term Sherden is a reference to an additional tactical unit.

The overall context of Egyptian military genius should also inform any interpretation of the Sherden in the Poem. The Egyptians recorded that their victory at Qadesh was due to the innovation and bravery of Ramesses II. Despite the dubious credibility of such claims,^{lxiv} it is clear that the lightweight chariots utilized by the Egyptian forces were quite advantageous in securing leverage during the conflict. That is, the innovative tactics and technologies of the Egyptian military likely ensured the success of any victory, draw, or ordered retreat.^{lxv} With respect to the structural location of Sherden in the Poem of Pentaur, the inclusion of Sherden in the Battle of Qadesh therefore suggests a classist categorization instead of an ethnic one.

Although the records concerning the Battle of Qadesh do not help to identify the origins of the Sherden directly, their inclusion in Sherden historiography is crucial in understanding the activities of the Sherden. The records assert that the Sherden, at this time, should be considered closely associated with military engagements as both enemies and captive allies of the Egyptians. Consequently, Ramesses II's use of Sherden warriors during the Battle of Qadesh should be analyzed as a mechanism for labeling a new class of warriors.

More than half a century after the Battle of Qadesh, the Sherden once again make an appearance in Egyptian literary records; this time, however, they are categorized alongside confirmed ancient peoples. The Great Karnak Inscription and the Athribis stela both recount an invasion of Egyptian-claimed territory by the Libyan king Meryey. In the following excerpt from the Great Karnak Inscription, the Sherden appear as allies to the Libyans and alleged Sea Peoples:

The wretched, fallen chief of Libya, Meryey, son of Ded has fallen upon the country of Tehenu with his bowmen—Sherden, Shekelesh, Ekwesh, Luka, Teresh, taking the best of every warrior and every man of war of his country.^{lxvi}

Since the Great Karnak Inscription is heavily dedicated to the campaigns of Merenptah against many groups connected to the Sea Peoples narrative, the appearance of the Sherden alongside these groups suggests their direct association—at least in the perceptions of Egyptian sources.

The wording of the Athribis stela, however, suggests an alternative interpretation of the Sherden. While the Great Karnak Inscription lists the Sherden alongside other so-called Sea Peoples and Libyans, the Athribis stela separates them by recording their defeat in the inscription's closing words.^{lxvii} The deliberate separation between the Sherden and other peoples in the structure of the stela suggests that the Sherden were a distinct group from the Libyans and Sea Peoples. The Great Karnak Inscription nevertheless treats these entities as relatively homogeneous while proclaiming victory over the invading Libyans and their allies, the latter of which are identified as “northerners coming from all lands.” Importantly, the descriptor “northerners” identifies a point of origin as north of Lower Egypt, particularly the Delta region and beyond because Lower Egypt (Memphis) was where the Pharaoh and his bureaucracy projected their authority. The Great Karnak Inscription likely groups the Sherden with Libyan allies through the use of the term “northerners” as a vehicle for establishing their foreignness. Furthermore, the stanza, “of the countries of the sea, whom had brought the wretched fallen chief of Libya,”^{lxviii} reiterates the narrative asserted previously in the Tanis II stela by once again noting naval support provided by these same Libyan allies to the Libyans and Sherden. While the Libyan allies may include other peoples indigenous to the North African region, they most certainly include the groups commonly associated with the so-called Sea Peoples. As a result of these narrative interpretations, there are two scenarios that may explain the events recorded in the Great Karnak Inscription and the Athribis stela.

First, it is possible that Merenptah embarked on a quest to annex the entire Delta region of Egypt during his reign. The invasions recounted by both of these sources are, in fact, a Libyan attempt to aid the “northerners”^{lxix} “of the countries”^{lxx} from indefinitely falling to Egyptian authority. The choice to detail the campaign as a foreign invasion legitimizes the Pharaoh’s imperialist war effort.

Second, Merenptah faced a Libyan invasion—supported by foreigners already at odds with the Pharaoh—that instigated, or was instigated by, a Sherden revolt in one of the northern peripheries of Egyptian influence. The result of the conflict was the defeat of the Libyan invasion and the slaughter of Sherden.

In either scenario, the Sherden were northern Delta natives. In the events recounted by the Great Karnak Inscription and the Athribis stela, however, the Sherden either faced an invasion or they rose up in revolt against Egyptian hegemony. Even if the Sea Peoples narrative maintains some level of credence, the Sherden should not be considered Sea Peoples themselves.

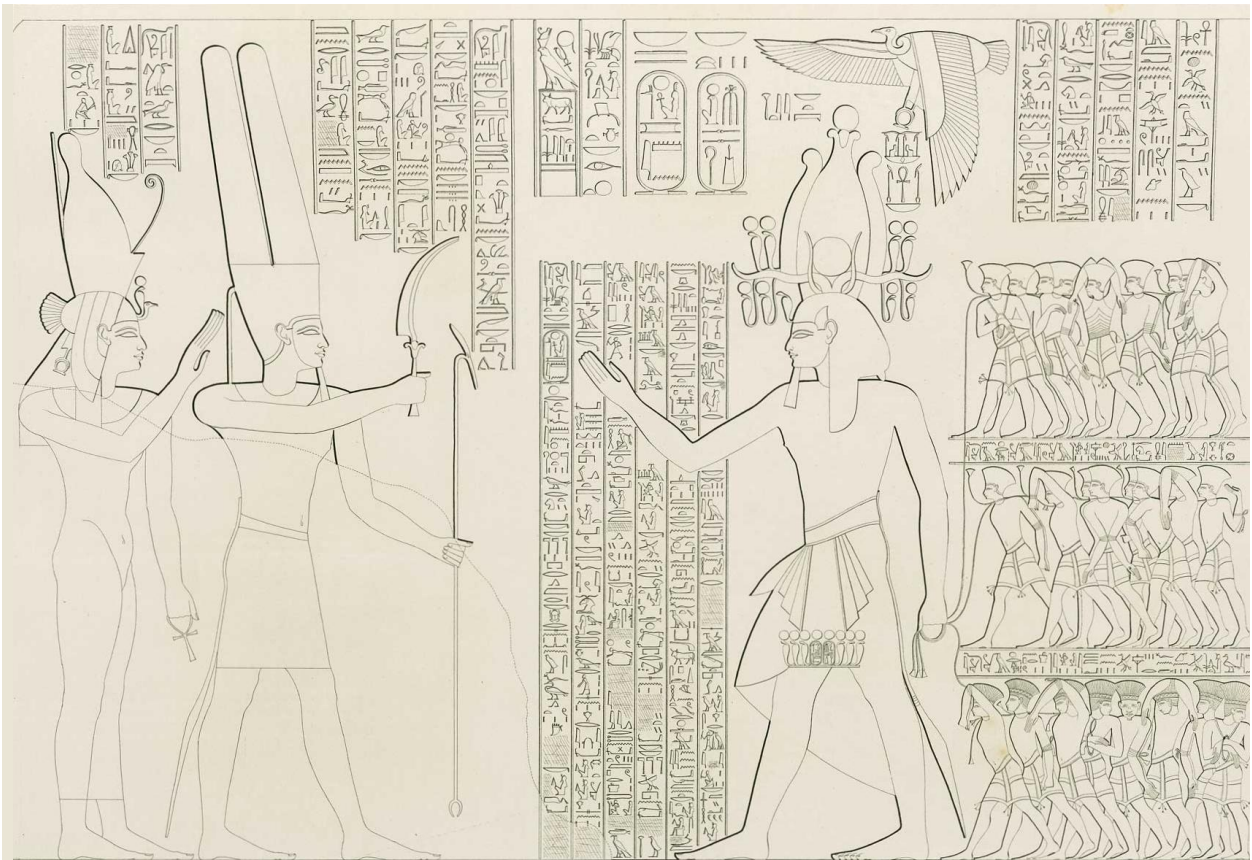
The presence of the Sherden in all source material disappears for the twenty years between the reigns of Merenptah and Ramesses III (1186-1155 BCE). The Sherden then rapidly resurfaced within inscriptions and reliefs at the Medinet Habu temple in Thebes. The Medinet Habu records contain the only captioned depiction of Sherden—with horned helmets, long spears, and short kilts—that subsequently provide Sherden historiography with a primary outline of how Sherden are visually illustrated.

Aside from these visual markers, Medinet Habu contains additional reliefs and inscriptions critical to the analysis of Sherden identity. One is a 75-line inscription on the inner west wall of the second court that recounts an attack in the Nile Delta during the eighth year of Ramesses III’s reign:

The foreign countries made a conspiracy in their islands, All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms: from Hatti, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alashiya on, being cut off [i.e. destroyed] at one time. A camp was set up in Amurru. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation was the Peleset, Tjeker,

Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh, lands united. They laid their hands upon the land as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: ‘Our plans will succeed!’^{lxxi}

The aggressors are described as “foreign countries” whose “confederation was the Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen, and Weshesh.” They obliterated Hittite forces and traditional local allies. While two of the invaders explicitly named are associated with the Sea Peoples narrative, the Sherden are not mentioned throughout the inscription. Nevertheless, an additional inscription on the interior of the first court’s west wall describes a similar invasion of Egypt at this time and also serves as the basis for the Sea Peoples narrative.

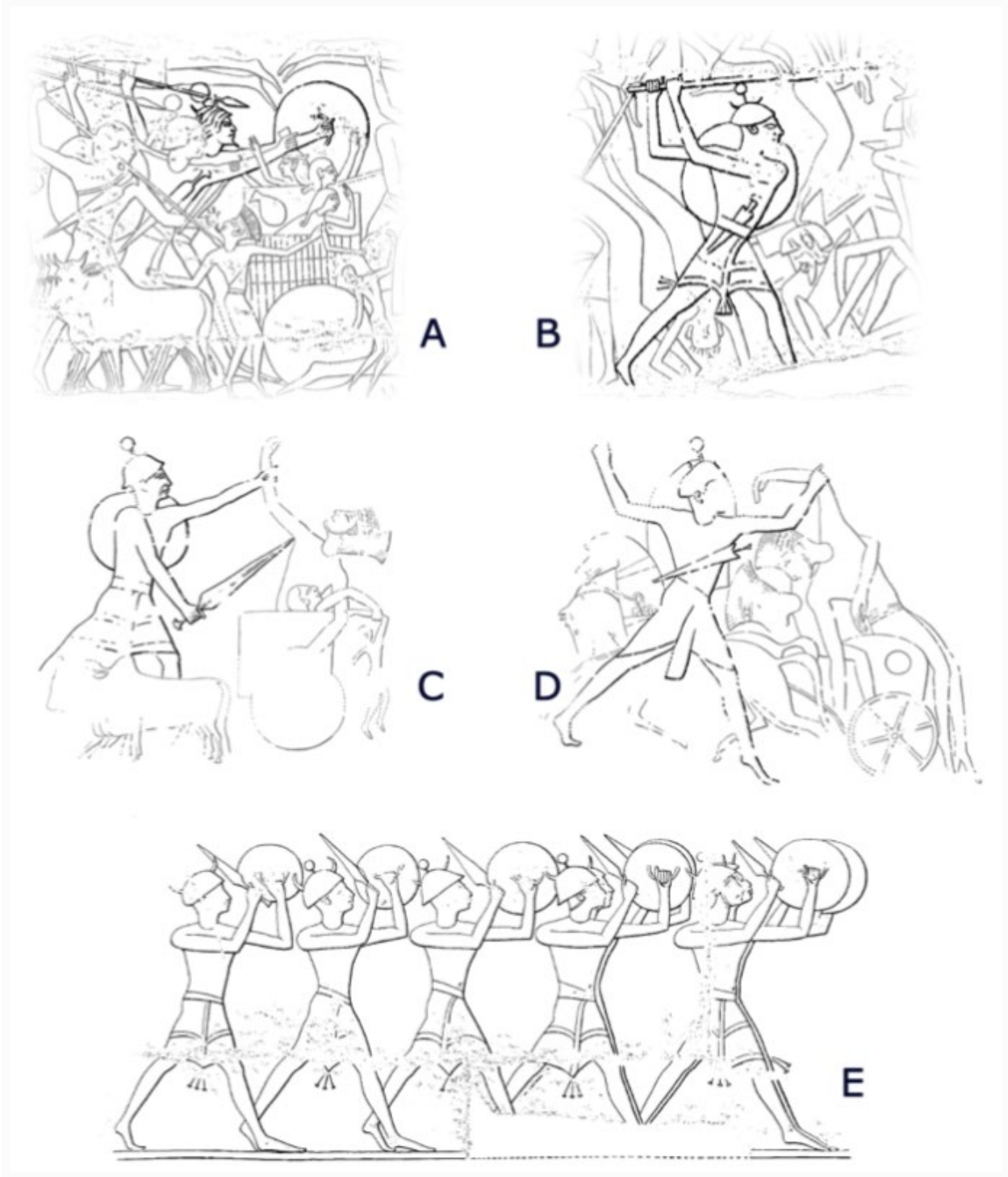


Inscription (excerpt): Thou puttest great terror of me in the hearts of their chiefs; the fear and dread of me before them; that I may carry off their warriors (phrr), bound in my grasp, to lead them to thy ka, O my august father, ----- Come, to [take] them, being: Peleset (Pw-r'-s'-t), Denyen (D'-y-n-yw-n'), Shekelesh (S'-k-rw-s). Thy strength it was which was before me, overthrowing their seed, – thy might, O lord of gods.

Inscription is from [Breasted(a), 48] and image is from [Epigraphic Survey(a), plate 44].

The visual representation accompanying the inscription depicts Ramesses III leading three lines of captives to confront two Egyptian deities—Amon and Mut. The relief is accompanied by a caption in the voice of Ramesses III where he pleads to Amon to “take them, being: Peleset, Denyen, [and] Shekelesh.”^{lxxii} It is probable that Ramesses III’s three lines of prisoners in the visual representation are analogous to the groups mentioned in its inscription. There are no key differences between these three groups, except the bottom one displays hair darker than the other two. The kilts worn by all of the prisoners, however, have a symmetrical cross-shape as well as three pieces of fabric dangling from each. These kilts will appear once more in a later victory procession.

Visual representations of the Sherden also seem to appear in Medinet Habu wall reliefs. A land army accompanying the invasion of the Delta was defeated by Ramesses III in the same year and, aside from these engagements with the groups associated with the Sea Peoples, the Medinet Habu reliefs recount conflicts with Libya and the Hittite sphere of influence. Within the visual depictions of these battles, the iconic horned helmet with a raised sun-disk in between is clearly worn by numerous supporters of the Egyptian cause. This visualization suggests that Egyptian sources deliberately sought to convey the presence and support of Sherden warriors in these conflicts.



Gathered from multiple sites throughout Medinet Habu, the series of representations above depicts the Sherden as allies of the Egyptians. A) The Sherden, one of whom is illustrated with a short beard, are shown in battle with the Sea Peoples; B) The Sherden are depicted in conflict with the Libyan forces at odds with Egypt during the fifth and eleventh years of Ramesses III; C and D) Sherden are shown fighting the Sea Peoples during the eighth year of Ramesses III; E) A large Sherden force is depicted storming a Hittite fortress in Syria.

Image A is from [Epigraphic Survey(a), plate 34], B from [Ibid., plate 18], C from [Ibid., plate 34], D from [Ibid., plate 94], and E from [Ibid., plate 39].

On the east wall of the first court, the Sherden are depicted in conflict with Libyan forces hostile to Egypt during the fifth and eleventh years of Ramesses III.^{lxxiii} The Sherden are also represented in a relief on the north wall of the first court as storming a Hittite fortress in Syria. The Great Harris Papyrus, discovered behind Medinet Habu near its northwest wall and composed during the reign of Ramesses IV (1155-1149 BCE), documented the final victories of Ramesses III over the invasions of the groups associated with the Sea Peoples—including the Denyen, Tjekker, Peleset, Sherden, and Weshesh. It recounts the same campaign depicted at Medinet Habu.

I extended all the boundaries of Egypt; I overthrew those who invaded them from their lands. I slew the Denyen in their isles, the Thekel and the Peleset were made ashes. The Sherden and the Weshesh of the sea, they were made as those that exist not, taken captive at one time, brought as captives to Egypt, like the sand of the shore. I settled them in strongholds, bound in my name. Numerous were their classes like hundred-thousands. I taxed them all, in clothing and grain from the storehouses and granaries each year.^{lxxiv}

I planted the whole land with trees and verdure, and I made the people dwell in their shade. I made the woman of Egypt to go to the place she desired, for no stranger nor any one upon the road molested her. I made the infantry and chariotry to dwell at home loin my time; the Sherden and Kehek 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 reposed in their magazines, while they were satisfied and drunk with joy. Their wives were with them, their children at their side; they looked not behind them, but their hearts were confident, for I was with them as the defense and protection of their limbs. I sustained alive the whole land, whether foreigners, common folk, citizens, or people, male or female.^{lxxv}

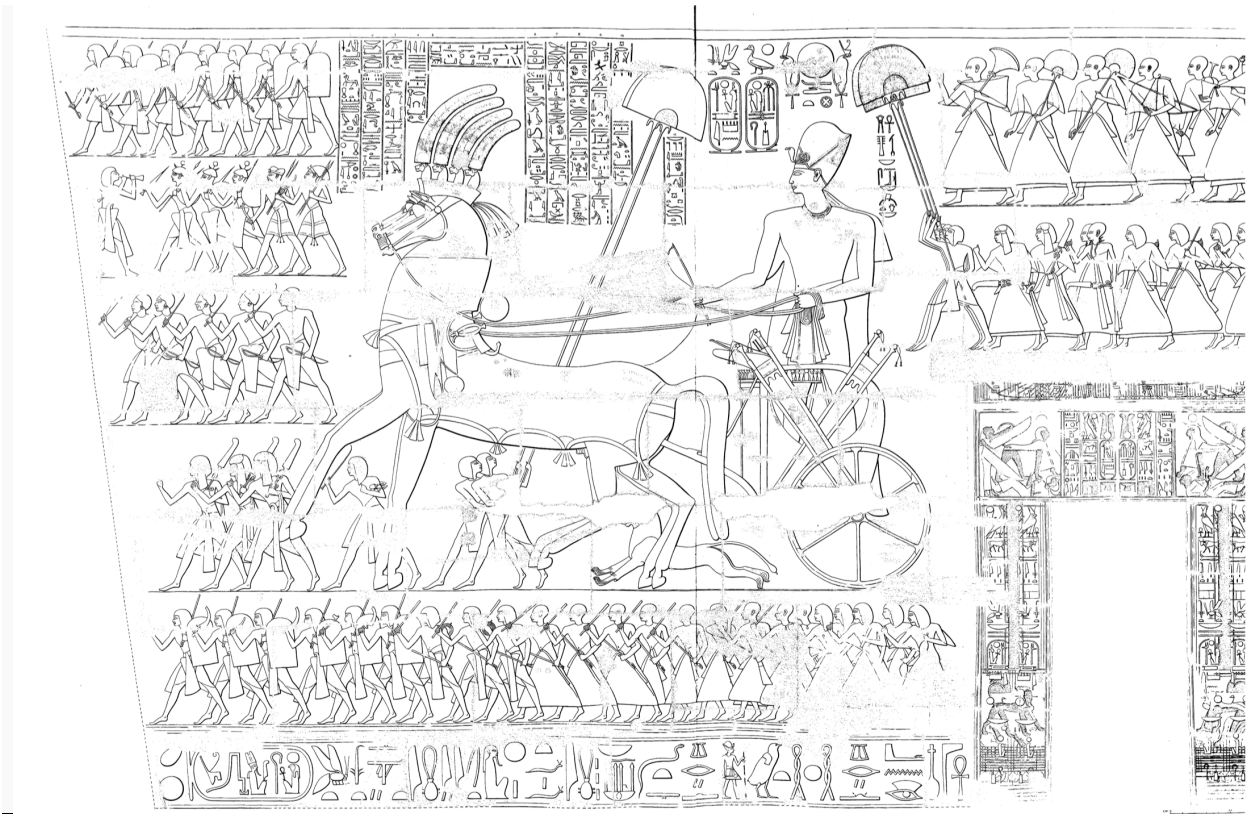
I made Egypt into many classes, consisting of: butlers of the palace, great princes, numerous infantry, and chariotry, by the hundred-thousand; Sherden, and Kehek, without number; attendants by the ten-thousand; and serf-laborers of Egypt.^{lxxvi}

These three excerpts reveal a major shift in the Sherden narrative. The Sherden are integrated into multiple dimensions of Egyptian society, making them “as those that exist not,” which permanently changes the meaning of the word. While previous sources may arguably treat the Sherden as a loose ethnic group, the coupling of the terms “Sherden and Kehek” between distinct “classes” suggests a deliberate class status. This transition is similar to the evolution of the term ‘Latin’ from describing an ethnicity to referencing a class status during the Roman Republic.

Evidence for a policy of assimilation into Egyptian society also arises around this time. The Great Harris Papyrus states that the Sherden and Weshesh “were made as those that exist not,” seeming to recount their obliteration. Instead of a physical destruction of the Sherden, the phrasing of this line likely indicates a forced integration of Sherden into Egyptian society, not simply a cultural destruction. Corroborating this hypothesis, the Papyrus later attests to a massive assimilation campaign: “brought as captives to Egypt, like the sand of the shore. I settled them in strongholds, bound in my name. Numerous were their classes like hundred-thousands. I taxed them all, in clothing and grain from the storehouses and granaries each year.” Successfully achieving such an extensive and organized resettlement agreement would have required a detailed assimilation—or *Egyptianization*—strategy.

The Onomasticon of Amenope,^{lxxvii} a collection of papyri compiled together over various Egyptian dynasties, contains evidence of such an organized strategy. The giant papyrus provides insight into the Egyptian politics of 11th century BCE, documenting numerous lists that group items, places, and peoples together into different categories. The Sherden are listed as individuals within the papyrus, but remain scattered across distinct classifications; this deliberate organization indicates a calculated effort by the Egyptian bureaucracy to assimilate the Sherden into the diverse facets of Egyptian society.

Another wall relief at Medinet Habu provides a visualization of Egyptianization in action. The interior of the first court’s south wall illustrates the diverse army of Ramesses III on a parade.^{lxxviii}



Note the group of individuals second from the top left.
The image is from [Epigraphic Survey(b), plate 62].

Of considerable interest is the second to top left representation of six soldiers—three of which are shown in an identical fashion with matching spears, kilts, and horned helmets with raised sun-disks in between. The other three figures—the two at the back of the line and the one leading the march—are represented quite differently; they have short patterned kilts with dangling fabric, mismatching headgear, and varying weaponry all dissimilar to the identical three. The former three soldiers are Sherden infantry, allied^{lxxix} to the Egyptians and marching in procession with the rest of Ramesses III's court. The wall relief's visual representation of the Sherden is a unique depiction. First, it includes an Egyptian blowing a horn toward the line—likely a drill instructor. Second, it renders a group that is nonuniform in their individual characteristics: the latter two soldiers behind the Sherden support the potential drill instructor, with one wielding a whip. These two visualizations point to a narrative of

Egyptianization—a cultural conditioning exercise teaching the Sherden how to march in an Egyptian procession.

Following the reign of Ramesses IV, the Sherden are further assimilated into Egyptian society under Ramesses V (1149-1145 BCE). The Wilbour Papyrus contains a great deal of data on land allotments, agriculture, and taxation.^{lxxx} One hundred and nine Sherden are listed by the Wilbour Papyrus as either owners or workers of land along with “standard-bearers of the Sherden” and “retainers of the Sherden.” Since standard-bearers and retainers are typically represented alongside soldiers, this linguistic association uses the term Sherden to evoke a form of warrior class.

The Wilbour Papyrus also contains records of fifty-nine land allotments to the Sherden, forty-two of which are defined as five arouras—significantly greater than the average. The legitimacy accompanying the ability to hold land presupposes the Sherden’s near full integration into Egyptian society. It is likely that the Sherden occupied a higher status in Egyptian society at this time. The Sherden begin to disappear from record after the Wilbour Papyrus, perhaps because the word mostly fell out of use due to the success of Egyptianization policies.

A short proclamation known as the Adoption Papyrus, dated to the reign of Ramesses XI (1107-1078 BCE), mentions two Sherden serving as legal witnesses to several adoptions, including the adoption of an Egyptian woman by her husband as his daughter.^{lxxxi} Witnesses were required by Egyptian legal code to legitimize this sort of agreement, and the deliberate inclusion of the term Sherden necessitates at least a local understanding and recognition of the term’s significance to the participants. It is likely that the terms of the agreement would need to be interpreted at some point, since the document extensively outlines potential methods of possession distribution in the process of freeing multiple slaves of the aforementioned couple. These freed slaves may require a witness to testify to their legal freedom. In the event of a disagreement, the arrangement may demand interpretation; any uncertainty could void its terms. It is therefore likely that these individuals are

deliberately described as Sherden to aid in their identification and, more importantly, due to a traditional respect for their positions in society.

It is also possible that the term Sherden is intended as a label for a specific region in Egypt at this time. The last mention of a Sherden individual is in the Papyrus Amiens during the 20th dynasty. Although the papyrus is merely a record of trade income in the form of grain, the document lists locations of territory within Upper and Middle Egypt associated with Sherden landowners—specifically the Wadkhet region not far from Thebes. Alongside the mention of the “houses...founded for the people of the Sherden” is an area designated exclusively for those “who were brought on account of their crimes.”^{lxxxiii} This reference may indicate the resettlement of Sherden during the reign of Ramesses III. Considering the past tense of the passage, it appears that the Sherden have fully assimilated into Egyptian society by this point. Therefore, while this construction is remembered for its foundational purposes and not for its current occupiers, it may nevertheless explain the reference to Sherden in the Adoption Papyrus.

The last identified use of the word Sherden in any literary records is found in the Anastasi I Papyrus, which was written to train Egyptian scribes. The document largely concerns itself with the reign of Egyptian Pharaoh Amenemope (1001-984 BCE), offering methods in which communications and announcements may be drafted. These examples are presented in a satirical manner and much of the text proposes ridiculous provisions and events. In one passage, the Anastasi I Papyrus recounts an Egyptian campaign to Phoenicia (or Canaan) with the intention of suppressing local uprisings. Of the nineteen hundred soldiers sent to repress the rebellions, five hundred and twenty are identified as Sherden.^{lxxxiii} It is unclear whether this expedition actually took place and if so, whether the Sherden were actually involved. Nevertheless, it is evident that the use of the word Sherden corroborates an awareness of their association to military tradition—even if it was included for satirical purposes.

Regardless of whether the Sherden of the Delta possessed the capabilities to traverse the distance of the Mediterranean and settle in Sardinia, the uninterrupted evolution of Nuragic culture does not prove that a significant population transfusion transpired during the era in question.^{lxxxiv} The island of Sardinia and the Nuragic peoples are entirely unrelated to the Sherden. The Phoenicians likely named the native islanders ‘Sardinians’ because the individuals resembled the Sherden depicted by Egyptians when assembled in full battle-gear. The uncanny resemblance of bronze Nuragic statues to the visual representations of Sherden at Medinet Habu likely serves as the erroneous connection the Phoenicians assumed when inscribing the Nora Stone and naming the island of Sardinia.^{lxxxv} The title of Sardinian would fit the peoples of the island, given that the word should delineate a warrior of unique fighting quality and act under the assumption that the Phoenicians intended the word ‘Sardinian’ to be related to the Egyptian term ‘Sherden.’ Mycenaean pottery, oxhide ingots, and little bronze statues are explained by preexisting Mediterranean trade networks. The conclusion that the Sherden originated from Sardinia is therefore unfounded.

It is likely that the Sherden were initially a native peoples occupying remote regions within the northern Delta territory, one that was thereafter integrated and Egyptianized by Pharaohs. During the height of Sherden appearances, the official capital of the Egyptian New Kingdom was at Pi-Ramesses in the northwest of the Delta. Following its decommission, the capital moved several kilometers westward to Tanis. Although Pi-Ramesses was one of the largest cities in ancient Egypt, its prominence does not indicate undisputed Egyptian authority within the Delta region. Rather, Pi-Ramesses attests to an Egyptian interest in stabilizing this crucial strategic territory. As for the frequent appearances of Sherden in Egyptian sources shortly following the transition to Pi-Ramesses during the reign of Ramesses II, they most likely reflect the rapid extension of Egyptian authority into hostile territories.

Since the late New Kingdom focused on its northeastern frontier, the establishment of Pi-Ramesses may have served to solidify control over Egyptian vassals in the Levantine region. The city's geographic location also aimed to secure its immediate surroundings, especially once the capital moved several kilometers westward from Pi-Ramesses to Tanis. An interest in solidifying control over the Delta appears plausible because the region remained relatively undeveloped in comparison to the south, at least in areas distant from branches of the Nile. These disparities likely complicated the Pharaohs' centralization efforts.^{lxxxvi} The Delta's natives, which the Egyptian sources grouped together as Sherden, resisted the centralizing authority in Pi-Ramesses and were supported^{lxxxvii} by other Egyptian enemies. These Sherden displayed unique fighting abilities that led the Egyptian military to adopt similar techniques by establishing a 'Sherden-unit' in their army. While all the members of the unit fought in the style of the Sherden, they themselves were not necessarily Delta Nile natives. The term eventually became synonymous with the elite fighting unit and, as the Sherden of the Delta were integrated into Egyptian society, the word 'Sherden' entirely lost its broad, semi-ethnic identifier. Instead, the term became a marker of status and class before falling into disuse after some centuries. The Phoenicians' association of the Sherden with Sardinia on the Nora Stone extends the use of the word to describe the fighting prowess of the Nuragic peoples. The name Sardinia was never meant to suggest that the natives were related to an ethnic group from the East, and especially not to a group responsible for joining the raids of the so-called Sea Peoples on Egypt. The Sherden of the Sea are, in fact, of the Delta—and, later, of Egypt herself.

CONCLUSION

My research has identified the term Sherden as a label used by Egyptian sources to refer to natives of the northern Delta region. I argued that these Sherden were ultimately forced to assimilate into the Egyptian polity. Nevertheless, I recognize that certain elements of my argument are open to

criticism, particularly as more research is conducted on the late Egyptian New Kingdom. For instance, if it is determined that the Egyptian Pharaohs of the Late Bronze Age maintained centralized authority over the entirety of the Delta—including the peripheral swampy regions—then it is less likely that the natives would be depicted so differently from their southern neighbors. Other projects could examine the technological capabilities of the Egyptian fleet and focus upon its ability to traverse the open waters of the Eastern Mediterranean. I would be specifically interested in looking for the existence of trade missions between Minoans, northern Syrians, and the Egyptians; such a route would prove a level of interconnectedness sufficient to support a more distant Sherden origin theory. In the meantime, practical evidence does not allow for a migratory transfusion at the scale of the Sherden invasion narrative.

As I stated in the introduction of this paper, it is of great importance that the origins of the so-called Sea Peoples are thoroughly studied so as to better comprehend the degree to which they influenced regions critical to the history of civilization. The Sherden did not sail from Sardinia, nor did they maintain the capacity to challenge dominant empires in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is therefore not necessary to postulate how they would have traversed such a considerable distance. The Sherden did not need to possess an advanced and unprecedented knowledge of the surrounding world. Instead, when prompted, the groups that the Egyptians referred to as the Sherden likely coordinated their efforts with their immediate neighbors and those neighbors' allies.

This examination of Sherden identity supports the idea that the Eastern Mediterranean remained in a state of communicative isolation vis-à-vis other regions, despite the existence of trade relations between various polities scattered across the Mediterranean. This study into the origin and identity of the Sherden hopefully will influence the perspective from which future scholars approach this challenging topic. In the end, piecing together history—such as the Sea Peoples narrative—often invites a reflection on current ideologies. It is therefore imperative that historians of each generation

re-examine this paper's narrative, and that of the Sea Peoples, so that these interpretations do not remain in "the Victorian ages."^{lxxxviii}

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- ⁱ Some Phoenician colonies were partly responsible for ending the Greek Dark Ages by encouraging poleis synoecism; other Phoenician colonies were so successful that their institutional expansions far outpaced the relative influence of their respective metropolises—Carthage, initially founded by the Phoenician city of Tyre, was one such colony.
- ⁱⁱ Wilhelm Max Müller, “Notes on the ‘peoples of the sea’ of Merenptah.” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 10 (January 1888): 147-154. Also see Henry R. Hall, “The Peoples of the Sea. A chapter of the history of Egyptology.” *Recueil d'Études égyptologiques Dédiées à la Mémoire de Jean-François Champollion*, 5 (September 1922): 297–329.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Emmanuel de Rougé, *Notice de Quelques Textes Hiéroglyphiques Récemment Publiés par M. Greene* (Paris: Thunot, 1885).
- ^{iv} Ibid. De Rougé translates hieroglyphic inscriptions as “peuples de la mer” or, in English, ‘peoples of the sea’. Utilizing his translation, he concludes it likely that the individuals in the inscription belong to nations from islands or coasts of the archipelago.
- ^v Emmanuel de Rougé, “Extraits d'un mémoire sur les attaques dirigées contre l'Égypte par les peuples de la Méditerranée vers le quatorzième siècle avant notre ère” *Revue Archéologique*, 16 (December 1867): 35-45.
- ^{vi} Gaston Maspero, *The Struggle of the Nations* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1896).
- ^{vii} Robert Drews, “Herodotus 1.94, the Drought ca. 1200 B.C., and the Origin of the Etruscans” *Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 41 (January 1992): 14-39 at 22: “Adopted by Eduard Meyer for the second edition of his *Geschichte des Altertums*, the theory won general acceptance among Egyptologists and orientalist.”
- ^{viii} Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 48-61.
- ^{ix} Ann E. Killebrew, *The Philistines and Other ‘Sea Peoples’ in Text and Archaeology* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013) 2-32.
- ^x Neil A. Silberman, “The Sea Peoples, the Victorians, and Us,” *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Essays in Honor of Trude Dothan* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998) 268–75 at 272.
- ^{xi} Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 250-5.
- ^{xii} James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906)a 44: “of the sea.”
- ^{xiii} Ibid., 201: “islands situated in the middle of the sea.”
- ^{xiv} Claude Vandersleyen, *The Land of Israel: Cross-Roads of Civilizations* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1985) 53.
- ^{xv} Van de Mieroop, 253.
- ^{xvi} Much of the literature related to Sherden historiography is written in French, German, and Italian—the latter of which has largely contributed to recent theorizing in the Sardinian Origin Theory. While I must acknowledge my inability to directly interpret and interact with all of these texts, I am confident that I mitigate this language obstacle by enlisting multiple colleagues to translate the most crucial references. For other texts, I cite scholars who have clearly addressed and summarized their arguments.
- ^{xvii} For further reading on the origins of the Sardinian-Sherden thesis, see Frederik C. Woudhuizen, *The Ethnicity of the Sea Peoples* (Rotterdam: 2006) 112. Woudhuizen cites Emmanuel de Rougé, *Oeuvres Diverses IV* (Paris: Lausanne Rencontre, 1867) 39.

- ^{xviii} Robin Lane Fox, *Traveling Heroes in the Epic Age of Homer* (New York: Vintage, 2008) 382: likely inscribed between 825 and 780 BCE.
- ^{xix} Brian Peckham, "The Nora Inscription" *Orientalia* 41 (October 1972): 457-68. Also see Frank M. Cross, "An Interpretation of the Nora Stone," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 208 (December 1972): 13-9.
- ^{xx} Drews (1993), 152: the use of the qualifier "from" solidifies the notion that the Sherden came "from" Sardinia and did not travel there afterwards; thus, resolving the fallacy in de Rouge's correlation.
- ^{xxi} See the discussion on Medinet Habu on page 23 in the *Syrian Origin Theory* section.
- ^{xxii} The defeat is recorded in the Tanis II and Aswan stelae, a discussion of which follows later.
- ^{xxiii} Woudhuizen, 113: a full archeological survey of the statue-menhirs is found in the citation of Roger Grosjean, *La Corse avant l'histoire* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996) 35-194. A discussion of the Medinet Habu site follows later in this paper.
- ^{xxiv} For the full archaeological survey of Mycenaean pottery in the Nuraghe Antigori on the southern Sardinian coast, see Birgitta Pålsson Hallager, "Crete and Italy in the Late Bronze Age III Period" *American Journal of Archaeology*, 89 (April 1985): 293-305 at 304. Also see Moshe Dothan and Trude Dothan, *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Scribner, 1992) 214.
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- ^{xxvi} For further analysis of the oxhide ingots discovered in Sardinia, see Margaret Guido, *Sardinia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963) 110-111.
- ^{xxvii} For the full archaeological survey of El-Ahwat, see Adam Zertal, *El-Ahwat: A Fortified Site from the Early Iron Age Near Nahal 'Iron, Israel* (Haifa: Brill, 2011).
- ^{xxviii} For further reading on Mycenaean pottery and trade relations with the Mediterranean, see V.R. d'A Desborough, *The Last Mycenaeans and Their Successors* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1966).
- ^{xxix} J.D. Muhly, "The Role of Cyprus in the Economy of the Eastern Mediterranean During the Second Millenium B.C.," *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium 'Cyprus Between the Orient and Occident,'* 5 (1986): 45-60 at 55-6. Also see Fulvia Lo Schiavo, et al., *Oxhide Ingots in the Mediterranean and Central Europe* (Rome: CNR, 2009) 307.
- ^{xxx} Nancy K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean 1250-1150 BC* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978) 101.
- ^{xxxi} For further discussion on the unlikelihood of Sardinians at El-Ahwat, see Alfonso Stiglitz, "La Sardegna e l'Egitto: il progetto Shardana" *AEgyptica*, 1 (September 2010): 59-68.
- ^{xxxii} Lionel Casson, *The Ancient Mariners*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 30-44, specifically at 33: the influence of a Minoan naval presence on the ancient Mediterranean including the impact of the civilization's eventual demise. In contrast to the Minoans, the Egyptian fleet largely consisted of ships unfit for Mediterranean transportation and were rarely found outside the Nile.
- ^{xxxiii} J.A. MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000): evidence for potential volcanic and tsunami natural disasters.
- ^{xxxiv} Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War* (London: University of California Press, 1985) 190-8.
- ^{xxxv} The Nubians and Libyans were later absorbed into the Egyptian army. The incorporation of foreigners into military institutions is often an indicator of aggressive expansionism. The Romans

are famous for honing this assimilation technique by reducing enemies to allied client states before imposing annexation.

^{xxxvi} Tanis Stela II. K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, 2 (Oxford: B.H. Blackwell LTD, 1996) 120.

^{xxxvii} Aswan stela. Kitchen, 181-3.

^{xxxviii} Wood, 193-5. “Isles-in-the-Midst” refers to a location from which the invaders of Egypt in the early 13th century BCE sailed.

^{xxxix} Alessandra Nibbi, *The Sea–Peoples: a Re-examination of the Egyptian Sources* (Oxford: Nibbi, 1972).

^{xl} Egyptian word for ‘Mediterranean’ or ‘Sea’ or ‘Mediterranean Sea’.

^{xli} Alessandra Nibbi, “Wenamun without Cyprus,” *Discussions in Egyptology* 53 (2002): 71-74. Also see Alessandra Nibbi, “The City of Dor and Wenamun,” *Discussions in Egyptology* 35 (1996): 76-95. Nibbi suggests internal bodies of water, instead of the Mediterranean, as the location of Wenamun routes. Her hypothesis is due to the deliberate inclusion of qualifying words immediately before *ym*.

^{xlii} For further analysis of northern Syrians and their connection to the Sherden, see Sandars, 50, 105-106, 160-161, and 199: while visual self-depictions of northern Syrians are strikingly similar to that of the Sherden, their creation does not match with the historical timeline according to the Egyptians.

^{xliii} Breasted(a), 44.

^{xliv} Although the Great Karnak Inscription is dated as year five of Ramesses III’s reign, Breasted credits F. Chabas, *Etudes sur l’antiquite historique* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1873) 253 for pointing out that the text includes events dated to the eighth year. As a result, it is erroneous to definitively distinguish events in year five from events in year eight.

^{xlv} Breasted(a), 76.

^{xlvi} Sandars, 106.

^{xlvii} Sandars, 160-161: the horned helmet, short kilt, round shield, and spear or sword are all characteristics Sandars identifies with the Sherden.

^{xlviii} For a detailed summary of Maspero’s stance, see Drews (1993) 56-60: he cites Gaston Maspero, “Review of F. Chabas’ Etudes.” *Revue Critique d’Histoire et de Littérature* (1873): 81-86 at 83.

^{xlix} Maspero (1896). Maspero’s hypothesis contrasts with Sandars’ similar migration theory because, unlike Maspero, Sandars proposes that the Sherden migrated long before the arrival of any so-called Sea Peoples.

^l Guido, 187-191.

^{li} William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) xv: these same peasants sold many of their findings on the black market because they were secretly digging into the archive. It is unknown how many countless letters were ultimately lost.

^{lii} EA 81; Moran, 150-1. If “sirdanu” is to be associated with Sherden, it would appear to be in relation to the patron of an assassin of sorts. It is not conclusive evidence of anything besides a word—difficult to translate—used to describe a man.

^{liii} The title ‘of’ is used instead of ‘ruler’ or ‘king’ because, according to recent research, Abdi-Asirta was likely not king nor ruler of Amurru. The land itself was deeply decentralized and Abdi-Asirta appeared to be working to consolidate his influence over the mostly independent polities. Brendon Benz, *The Land Before the Kingdom of Israel: A History of the Southern Levant and the People who Populated It* (New York: Eisenbrauns, 2016) 141-166.

^{liv} EA 122; Moran, 201-2.

^{lv} EA 123; Ibid.

^{lvi} Sirdanu is likely singular; sirdanu-people is likely plural.

^{lvii} EA 195; Moran, 190. Also see Colleen Manassa, *Imagining the Past: Historical Fiction in New Kingdom Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 5, 75, and 107: “the biblical word ‘Hebrew,’ like Habiru, denotes a social category, not an ethnic group.” Also see M. Moore and B. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel’s Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (New York: Eerdmans, 2011) 125: “most modern scholars see the ‘Apiru/Habiru as potentially one element in an early Israel composed of many different peoples, including nomadic Shasu, the biblical Midianites, Kenites, and Amalekites, runaway slaves from Egypt, and displaced peasants and pastoralists.”

^{lviii} The fighting prowess of the sirdanu-people is further illustrated by vague references detailing them as “hand-to-hand fighters or skirmishers” as well as “chariot fighters” and “guardians.” Drews (1993), 154-155. Also see Michael Heltzer, *The Internal Organization of the Kingdom of Ugarit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1982) 127.

^{lix} Anson F. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence (2 vol. set): A New Edition of the Cuneiform* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 1298.

^{lx} While the “Great Green” and “Isles-in-the-Midst” both refer to the Delta, as this paper argues later, perhaps the terms are distinguished by weather patterns that alter water levels. That is, “Great Green” refers to the Delta when dry and traversable by foot, whereas “Isles-in-the-Midst” refers to the Delta when only some pockets of land are visible while surrounded by the swampy (perhaps misty) waters of a flooded Delta. It is also possible that these terms indicate distinct biomes within the Delta persistent with the above description.

^{lxi} Certain texts, such as Papyrus Ramessesum VI, may refer to travel across the “Great Green” by foot and between edges of lakes, suggesting the region as a landmass rather than as a body of water. See Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003) 130–131; also see Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson. *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*. (The American University in Cairo Press: 1995) 115; also see Claude Vandersleyen, “Les sens de Oudj-Our (W’d-Wr)”, *Akten München* (Hamburg: 1991) 345-52.

^{lxii} The Sherden may have improved the Egyptian military by demonstrating infantry innovations sufficient to counter the relatively invincible chariotry. See Drews (1993), 178 and 184. Also see Sandars, 29.

^{lxiii} Poem of Pentaur. James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) 255-56.

^{lxiv} The outcome at Qadesh is ambiguous, with interpretations ranging from an Egyptian victory to defeat. See Michael Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, 1300–1185 B.C.* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 155.

^{lxv} Aaron Ralby, “Battle of Kadesh, c. 1274 BCE: Clash of Empires” *Atlas of Military History* (New York: Parragon, 2013) 54–55.

^{lxvi} Great Karnak Inscription. James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906)b 243. The Sherden are grouped with Libyans and other “northern peoples.”

^{lxvii} Athribis stela. Ibid., 597-602.

^{lxviii} Ibid.

^{lxix} Great Karnak Inscription. Ibid., 243.

^{lxx} Athribis stela. *Ibid.*, 597-602.

^{lxxi} Great Karnak Inscription. Breasted(a), 37-38. See footnotes 44 & 66.

^{lxxii} Breasted(a), 48. Also see Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu I: Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1930)a, plate 44.

^{lxxiii} Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu II: Later Historical Records of Ramses III* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1930)b, plate 72.

^{lxxiv} Great Harris Papyrus. Breasted(a), 201.

^{lxxv} *Ibid.*, 204-5.

^{lxxvi} *Ibid.*, 200.

^{lxxvii} Onomasticon of Amenope. Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947) 171-209. For further analysis of the insight provided by the Onomasticon on Egyptian society, see Dothan 214.

^{lxxviii} Epigraphic Survey(b), plate 62.

^{lxxix} Because the Sherden maintain their arms, it is highly unlikely that they are captives. In addition, an inscription on *Ibid.*, plate 29 translates to: “Issuing Equipment to His Troops for the Campaign against the Sea Peoples.” This notes Sherden as allies to Ramesses III alongside Nubians. Both Sherden and Nubians therefore occupy equal standing within Egyptian society, at least from the perspective of the sources.

^{lxxx} Wilbour Papyrus. Alan H. Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).

^{lxxxii} The adoption circumvented the 1/3rd inheritance limitation Egyptian legal codes placed on wives regarding their husband’s estate. See *The Adoption Papyrus* (Papyrus Ashmolean Museum 1945.96), translated by Janet H. Johnson, in *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt*, edited by Anne K. Capel and Glenn E. Markoe (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996), 183. Also see Eugene Cruz-Urbe, “A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (August 1988) 220-223. Also see C. J. Eyre, “The Adoption Papyrus in Social Context,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 78 (1992): 207-221.

^{lxxxiii} Papyrus Amiens. Alan H. Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948) 7, 40-41, 53, and 80.

^{lxxxiv} Anastasi I Papyrus. Kitchen, 255.

^{lxxxv} Guido, 20-21: the transition from Early Nuragic to Full Nuragic culture takes place with the arrival of the Phoenicians; if the Sherden arrived in Sardinia earlier, they would no doubt impact the development of native culture in a similar fashion as did the Phoenicians.

^{lxxxvi} The Enkomi statue, as the only one of its kind, is likely a depiction of warriors familiar to the Mycenaeans because the statue uniquely wears notably Greek greaves.

^{lxxxvii} Carl Roebuck, *The World of Ancient Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966) 51-53.

^{lxxxviii} Supported: i) the Sherden received coordinated foreign aid from Egyptian enemies; or ii) Egypt faced territorial challenges from several decentralized peoples, and the Egyptians could only envision these destabilizing threats through a self-imposed fictitious framework that relies on the existence of relatively organized external invasion. Van de Mieroop, 255.

^{lxxxix} Silberman, 272. “Victorian ages” alludes to the modern frameworks and ideologies that bias the interpretation and creation of historical narratives, as the Sea Peoples theory was developed in the 1800s.

^{lxxxix} The images of museum artifacts are licensed as Wikimedia Commons.