

ANNOTATIONS TO TABLE XXII THE EGYPTIAN RECORD OF JOSEPH'S FAMINE

The significance has not hitherto been appreciated of two notable records that date and monumentalize the famine conditions of the period preceding the 50th year of Tahutmes III. We can best follow the facts of this by knowing the history of the famine records from the date of their being inscribed to the present time.

In the year following the 7 years' famine, that is, in the 50th year of Tahutmes III, this great king sailed up the Nile to the First Cataract to inspect the river-jam that had withheld from Egypt the necessary volume of water and alluvial deposits of the inundation period, during the years of famine. He punished those responsible and he cut a new canal through the silted barrage, and set up a record of this achievement on the adjacent Island of Sehel.

The record states :—

“ Year 50, Day 22, Month IX, under the majesty of king Men-kepher-Ra (Tahutmes III), his majesty commanded to cut this canal, after he had found it choked with stones so that no vessel crossed over itThe fishers of Elephantine are to dredge this canal every year.”

The date of the record is the 24th of April (Greg.) in B.C. 1696.

The king also, at this time, revived the worship of the local gods of the First Cataract, and raised statues to them and rebuilt their temples and shrines. The object of these activities was to give the priests of the First Cataract gods an interest in keeping the canal clear of obstructions.

Now the record quoted was set up by Tahutmes III on the Island of Sehel. On the same island the king set up a longer record containing all the facts concerning the famine, its causes—as he wished the inhabitants of the locality to believe them—and its duration. The record gives us a wonderful insight into the methods of the great king. It is a record of a remarkable piece of statecraft. The narrative was obviously written to impress the local inhabitants of the period and during succeeding generations. It was dated in the same 50th year of the king. It states that in the 7 preceding years Egypt had experienced a disastrous famine; that the famine was due to the obstruction at the First Cataract ; and that this occurred and the Nile's waters were withheld when the local inhabitants failed to worship the local Nile gods of the cataract. The famine, then, was represented as resulting from the anger of the local gods.

The narrative continued by stating that the king restored the worship of the local Nile gods, rebuilt their shrines and temples, and gave gifts of land and produce to the local priests. All this was obviously to give the priesthood power to render, and interest in making, effective the decree of Tahutmes' separate inscription that *“ The fishers of Elephantine are to dredge this canal every year.”*

This great famine record of Tahutmes III was carved upon wood. The record referred to Tahutmes III in terms of his Golden Horus name, Zoser-kha-u-sekhem-pehti. This is analogous to the Christian name of modern times. In the course of many centuries, rot and abrasion in the wood of the plaque rendered parts of the inscription illegible. All that remained legible of the Golden Horus name of Tahutmes III were the initial hieroglyphs reading ZOSER.

This famine record again was dated in the 50th year of Tahutmes III, when this king visited and restored the river improvement works and the temples to the local deities at the First Cataract—that is, at Sehel and Elephantine.

The 50th year was written on the wood plaque of the famine inscription thus:



The vertical legs of the five inverted U's were cut across the hard figuring of the wood. Rot and abrasion in the softer material running along the grain parallel to the natural alignment of the figuring of the wood rotted out and removed four of the five heads joining the vertical legs of the inverted U's. So that the inscription read as:



Now at the time of the Ptolemies, in the 3rd century B.C., another famine devastated Egypt. The temples and shrines at the First Cataract had fallen into ruin. Its priests were poor and of little account in Egypt. Seeing their , opportunity in the circumstances of the famine, and seizing it, the priests of the Cataract brought forth the dilapidated wooden plaque of Tahutmes III. Finding it too decayed to confirm the moral of the tale they had to tell the Pharaoh of their day, they carved a copy of it upon stone. To give this copy the appearance of antiquity, they included in this copy a reference to the wooden plaque, and the statement that the stone copy was ordered additional to perpetuate the record. By artificial processes of abrasion, weathering, and coloring, they gave the late copy the appearance of great age. This stone copy, however, merely states that the record is of a king whose Golden Horus name was Zoser, and that it was set up in his 18th year. They presented the record, and its dilapidated wooden original to the Pharaoh of the period. Their tale and its confirming forgery were successful, as witness the magnificent Ptolemaic temples in the locality of the First Cataract, extant to the present time.

Egyptological authorities admit that the style of hieroglyph on the stone inscription, and other matters of style, belong to the Ptolemaic period, around the 3rd century B.C. They assert, however, that the Zoser referred to was a king of the 3rd Dynasty, No other king, however, prior to Tahutmes III, of Dynasty XVIII, had a Golden Horus name including or commencing with Zoser, or consisting of Zoser. At the same time authorities admit that the customs and institutions and other facts of the Ptolemaic record belong to the times of the XVIIIth Dynasty, and to no earlier period of Egyptian history. We have felt justified therefore in presenting the history of the record in the manner and sequence given. Without doubt the Ptolemaic record is what it claims to be, a copy of an earlier record upon wood, describing the 7 years' famine under Tahutmes III, Joseph's pharaoh, and in his 50th year, the year when Tahutmes visited the First Cataract, cleared it, and set up the buildings and restored the legislation referred to in the record, which year was the year following the 7 years' famine of Joseph.

The reign of Tahutmes III is therefore identified with the coming of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. These were not the only Semites in Egypt at this time. The records of the military campaigns of Tahutmes III tell us of vast numbers of kindred Semitic peoples led as captives, hostages and tribute — as Joseph was led — into Egypt. Such captives were selected for their beauty and comeliness, and for their princely and aristocratic lineage and bearing. They were married into the princely and aristocratic families of Egypt, even as Joseph married the daughter of Potiphar, priest and prince of Heliopolis. The elevation of Joseph to his princely office marked the beginning of other Israelites and kindred Semites in Egypt attaining high official appointments under Tahutmes III and his immediate successors.