

The Land of Ramesses

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It is with a sense of great personal loss that I dedicate this short piece to the memory of one who was more than a colleague—a friend with whom I shared so many interests, not least the love of opera. May his soul find eternal rest.

The appearance of the name “Raamses” in the Biblical account of the Sojourn and Exodus presents us with a conundrum.¹ The original pronunciation, *Ri-a-ma-se-sa*, betrays an N(1) + N(2) syntactic pattern, viz. Re-it-is-that-has-fashioned-him.² The active participle in N(2) position bears a stressed long *-a-* between the first and second radicle, thus CVCCe.³ In the 19th Dynasty the *ayin* is strong and was reinforced by a *pathah furtive*, as well as, in one case, a preformative *-alif*.⁴ But Greek transcriptions, such as Ραμεσσῆ, Ραμῆσσης, Ραμεσῆς and Ραμεσσής⁵ show that by the mid-First Millennium B.C. the accent had shifted from the participial form to word-final position with the resultant reduction of the *-a-* to a *shewa*, “ֿ”.⁶ Moreover the gravitation of the stress has reduced the secondary stress on the first syllable, and has occasionally introduced a euphonic *-p-*.⁷ This is the distorted vocalization which the Hebrew reflects, not that of the original Bronze Age pronunciation. In the Bronze Age the equivalence of Egyptian *š/s* with West Semitic *ś* is standard, as one would expect; and the entry of loanwords into the dialects of the latter can be virtually dated by the adherence to this standard.⁸ The rendering of Egyptian *ś* (*sin*) by *ś* (*samekh*), however, demonstrates that the form of the name *R^c-ms-sw* entered Hebrew and other West Semitic languages no earlier than the end of the 8th

¹ The commentaries are legion. Most take it for granted that the name, whether applied to a city or a “land,” derives ultimately from Pi-Ramesses. See in particular J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1959), pp. 183-87; C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1982), pp. 190-92; M. Bietak, “Comments on the ‘Exodus,’” in *Egypt, Israel, Sinai*, ed. A.F. Rainey (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1987), pp. 163-71; C. Houtman, *Exodus I* (Kampen: Kok Publishing House, 1993), pp. 126-27; J.K. Hofmeier, *Israel in Egypt. The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 117-19; J. D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), pp. 125-29; R. Krauss, *Moïse le Pharaon* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2005), pp. 196-99.

² H. Ranke, *Die altägyptische Personennamen I* (Gluckstadt: Verlag J. J. Augustin, 1939), p. 218:6.

³ A. Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian. A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 87.

⁴ E. Edel, *Der Vertrag zwischen Ramses II von Ägypten und Hattusili III von Hatti* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1997), p. 18 and n. 4.

⁵ See W. G. Waddell, *Manetho* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 108, 112, 148, 236.

⁶ K. Sethe, “Die Vokalisation des Ägyptischen,” *ZDMG* 77 (1923), p. 190.

⁷ Cf. Ραμψῆς: Waddell, *Manetho*, pp. 150, 244; Ραμψίνιτος in Herod. ii.121, on which see A.B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II, a Commentary II* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 52.

⁸ Cf. *K3š* > כוש; *zššn* > שושן; *Thsy* > תחש (Gen. 22:24); *skiwt* > שכיות (Isa. 2:16); *Su-si-in-qu* > שישין; *Sheshy* (?) > ששי (Num. 13:22); *šsr* > שש; *Š-Hr* > שחר cf. From the root *NḥS* > נחשת; if the PN *שה* does derive from the Egyptian root *msi*, the choice of the sibilant is an interesting criterion of date of entry.

Cent. B.C.,⁹ as no certain examples of the equivalence *s/š* with Hebrew *samekh* occur before this time.¹⁰

In Exod. 1:11 the name is applied to a city; in Gen. 47:11 to a land. While there is nothing inherently impossible in a royal name occurring in the designation of a settlement – in fact it is extremely common – the result is a name compounded with another element in a bound construction, e.g. *hnw*, “residence,” *pr*, “house,” *hwt*, “mansion, plantation,” *inbw*, “walled fort,” and so on. In the case of *Pr-R^c-ms-sw* *ḥ3-nḥtw*, “The House of Ramesses, Great of Victories,” with which the city of Exod. 1:11 is often identified,¹¹ one would expect *pr*, “house,” to survive in the pronunciation, and in the vast majority of cases in which the town is cited this is indeed the case. It used to be maintained¹² in defense of the identification with *Pi-R^c-ms-sw* that the latter dropped out of usage after the Ramesside era; and that therefore its presence in the Exodus tradition must prove historical authenticity. But that is not strictly true: “Ramesses” does appear sporadically in the 22nd Dynasty and later.

Occurrences fall under three heads: (a) in the expression “King’s-son of Ramesses,” (b) in the compound *Pr-R^c-ms-sw*, “House of Ramesses,” and (c) in the expression “God X of Ramesses.” In the first it is not immediately apparent, nor necessary to conclude, that the allusion is to a (*Pr*)-*R^c-ms-sw*. The dozen or so examples of this title occur in the epithets of military officers,¹³ but they are too few and isolated to permit us to see in their bearers the literal descendants of Ramesses the Great. Might it be that the Ramesside war reliefs which give prominence to royal sons on the battlefield,¹⁴ has given birth to an honorific military title?¹⁵ “God X of Ramesses”¹⁶ occurs with Re, Amun¹⁷ Ptah,¹⁸ and

⁹ The interchange of Egyptian *č* and West Semitic *s* (*samekh*) survives into the 25th Dynasty (J. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period*, [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], p. 368 no. 548); but thereafter *samekh* is used to render Egyptian *š* (R. Zadok, *BiOr.* 48 [1991], 38): cf. C.R. Krahl Malkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), pp. 65, 67 (𐤎𐤏= Isis; 𐤎𐤏𐤓=Osiris); J.B. Segal, *Aramaic Texts from North Saqqara* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1983), no. 6, 61a, (𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏=Hr-s3-Ist; 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓=Pr-di-B3st); H. Ranke, *Die altägyptische Personennamen*, 272:4 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓=ḥ3-nḥtw; the appearance of the equivalence Egyptian *s* = Hebrew *ס* in the second quarter of the First Millennium helps date the fixing of the following forms: 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏 (P3-nḥsy, “the Southerner”), 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏𐤓 (Jer. 43:7-9 etc; T3-ḥwt-p3-nḥsy, “the Mansion of the southerner”), 𐤎𐤏𐤓 (2 Ki. 17:14; S3w, “Sais”), 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏 (1 Ki. 11:19-20; T3-ḥwt-p3 nsw, “the king’s mansion,” [but perhaps a garbling of T3 ḥmt-nsw, “king’s-wife”]), 𐤎𐤏𐤓 (Isa. 30:4; Hwt-nn-nsw, “Mansion of the king’s child”), 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏 (Gen. 10:14, Isa. 11:11 etc.; p3 B rsy, “the Southland”), 𐤎𐤏 (Ezek. 30:15, Sin, “Syene [Pelusium]”), 𐤎𐤏𐤓𐤏 (Ezek. 30:17, Pr-B3st, “House of Bast”). The continued vacillation between the two sibilants in Biblical Aramaic (cf. J.D. Bing, *American Journal of Ancient History* 10 [1985], 118 n. 54) shows that the distinction had been lost.

¹⁰ J. Hoch, *Semitic Words*, p. 270; cf. pp. 432-33.

¹¹ See Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, pp. 116-19 and *passim*.

¹² H.H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 33, n. 1.

¹³ P-M. Chevereau, *Prosopographie des cadres militaires égyptiennes de la Basse Époque* (Paris: n.p., 1985), pp. 258-59.

¹⁴ S.C. Heinz, *Die Feldzugsdarstellungen des neuen Reiches* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001); cf. E. Feucht, *Das Kind im alten Ägypten* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1995), pp. 446-47.

¹⁵ See the extended discussion with references in P. Collombert, “Les ‘fils royaux de Rameses’: une nouvelle hypothèse,” *GM* 151 (1996), pp. 23-36.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Moret, *Annales du Musée Guimet* XXXII (1909), p. 142, pl. 64.

Arsaphes.¹⁹ A text of the early 4th Century BC locates temples of Re of Ramesses and Ptah of Ramesses on the eastern river, i.e. the Pelusiac branch of the Nile.²⁰ One inscription of the same period significantly links “Amun of Ramesses” with *Pr-R^c-ms-sw*.²¹ Archaeologically it is impossible that the reference here is to the 19th Dyn. Residence; but the god’s qualification “... of Ramesses” shows a surviving cult form, of royal patronage which may well go back to the city of Ramesses the Great, and the specific divine forms honored within it.

The presence of “Ramesses” in a compound indicating a place is of some importance. In the Late Period *Pr-R^c-ms-sw* does indeed occur with the variant *Hwt (nsw) R^c-ms-sw* “the Mansion (i.e. temple) of King Ramesses.”²² It is uncertain whether a specific cult seat dedicated to the memory and worship of the king existed somewhere in Egypt in the Late Period, or whether the king enjoyed a “guest cult” in several temples. The fact is that *T3 hwt R^c-ms-sw*, “the Mansion of Ramesses,” was a known form in the six centuries from the 24th Dynasty to Ptolemaic times. Now during this span of time *t3 hwt* yielded a pronunciation *θω*,²³ while “land,” *t3* in Egyptian was pronounced *to* in Sahidic, *θo* or *θω* in Old Coptic and Bohairic.²⁴ What has happened is clear: an original *T3 hwt R^c-ms-sw*, “The Mansion of Ramesses,” has given rise in the Delta to a false back-formation through *Hörfehler*, viz. *t3 R^c-ms-sw*, “the Land of Ramesses,” both pronounced *T(h)o-Ramesses*. The alleged “Land of Ramesses” in Genesis has no more historicity than the “Land of Oz.”

¹⁷ Berlin 6764 (Günther Roeder, *Aegyptische Inschriften aus dem Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*, [Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1924], p. 307).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ P. Tresson, “L’inscription de Chechanq I^{er} au Musée du Caire : un frappant exemple d’impôt progressif en matière religieuse,” *Mélanges Maspero I* (Cairo: IFAO, 1934), p. 820, line 28.

²⁰ E. Naville, *Bubastis* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891), pl. 46B.

²¹ Chevereau, *Prosopographie des cadres militaires égyptiennes de la Basse Époque*, 166f, no. 239; C. Zivie-Coche, *Tanis. Statues et autobiographies de dignitaires* (Paris, 2004), pp. 114-16 (n).

²² Cairo 22054 (= A. Kamal, *Stèles ptolémaïques et romaines*, [Cairo: IFAO, 1904-05], pl. 17). For *Hwt R^c-ms-sw* alone, see E. Brugsch, *Dictionnaire géographique de l’Égypte ancienne* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1879), p. 1135; M.-L. Buhl, *The Late Egyptian Anthropoid Stone Sarcophagi* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet Skrifter, 1959), pl. V and Fa 16 (from Abydos and Saqqara), and the “Athens” stela of Tefnakhte: J. Yoyotte, “Les principautés du Delta au temps de l’anarchie libyenne (Études d’histoire politique),” *Mélanges Maspero IV* (Cairo: IFAO, 1961), end plate.

²³ Cf. *Wb.* III, 1; W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1954), p. 284; W. Westendorf, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), p. 352; A. Calderini, *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell’Egitto Greco Romano* Suppl. 2 (Bonn: Habelt, 1996), p. 74: Θῶλθις (< *Hwt-3-dwy*), Θῶσβις (< *t3 Hwt-isbt*): P. Wilson, *Ptolemaic Lexikon*, [Louvain: Peeters, 1993], p. 627).

²⁴ Westendorf, *ibid.*, 219.