

A Theory about the First Amphibious Battle between Canaan and Egypt at Abydos in the Prehistoric Period (about 3500 BC)

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Abstract—Early Egyptian records proved the critical role played by Canaan in antiquity. There were early relationships between Egypt and Canaan, and the maritime trade in Canaan was already present in the Chalcolithic age (4500 – 3500 BC). The interaction between Egypt and Canaan took many forms; the Egyptian foreign policy with the Canaanites may have begun at first as a targeted commercial and then sometimes as military interest. Evidence to prove the amphibious battle between Egyptians and Canaanites: 1) Gebel El-Arak Knife preserved in the Louvre Museum. This knife was found in Abydos and dates back to 3450 BC during the Naqada II period. 2) The Gebelein mummies. At Gebelein's tomb, there were six naturally mummified bodies, dating to approximately 3400 BC, they are considered the first complete pre-dynastic bodies to be discovered. 3) Buried pottery along with the Gebelein mummies from the same Naqada II period (3500 - 3200 BC) which are similar to Canaanite pottery. 4) Drawings on Painted Linen from Gebelein tomb from Naqada II (circa 3600 BC). 5) "Abydos boats", a group of 14 solar boats discovered in Abydos, in the "Shonat al-Zabib" area, dates back to the beginning or before the dynastic era.

Index Terms—Abydos, amphibious, Canaan, Egypt, Gebel el-Arak Knife, Gebelein, Naqada.

I. INTRODUCTION

Against the geographical orientation, the Nile river is not like any other rivers as it flows from the south into the north. However, it has also been a different river in its interaction with civilizations; as the Nile river was not only a part of civilizations, specifically the Pharaonic civilization but it was the creator and also the incubator of civilizations along its 6,650 Km length.

The Nile river acts as a natural link between the cities and towns of Egypt and as a channel of communications between the areas adjacent to the Upper Nile, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Through it, goods, people and ideas entered Egypt from Nubia, Sudan and even from Central Africa along the Nubian Nile and through the first cataract in Aswan.

The tributaries of the Nile river spread out in a V shape and poured their waters into the Mediterranean Sea through Lower Egypt as shown in Fig. 1 [1].

The Nile Delta [2] was formed in Lower Egypt in the shape of Lotus flower by the division of the Nile river into the old seven branches. The Nile Delta is about a 160 Km in length

Manuscript received March 4, 2022; revised June 1, 2022; accepted October 20, 2022.

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doi: 10.18178/ijssh.2023.13.1.1112

from north to south and 240 Km wide at its widest point. Over time, the inhabitants have been settling around the fertile delta for thousands of years due to its rich agricultural soil deposits.

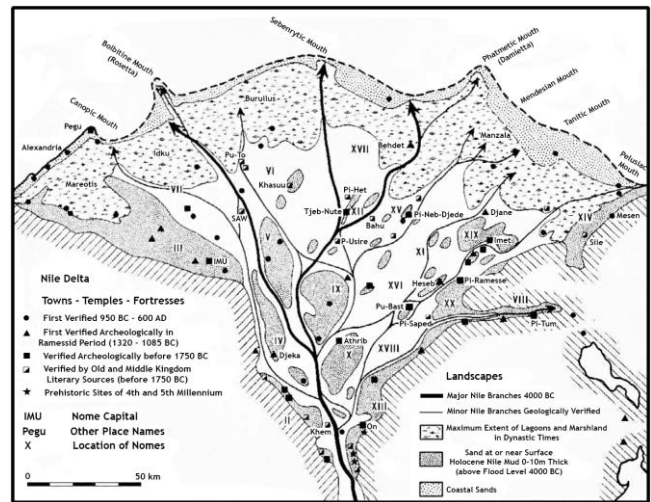


Fig. 1. Landscape and settlement map of the Nile delta. Locations of some archaeological sites that predate 3750 BC are shown by solid black or black-and-white squares. Also depicted are several early Nile distributaries that migrated across the delta plain [1].

From Upper Egypt to Lower Egypt, boats travelled down along the seven branches of the Nile at that time to the eastern Mediterranean, which were natural links of contact with the Canaanite civilization in (Syria and Palestine).

The Egyptian civilization was not only predicated on the existence of the Nile river but also on the development of Egyptian maritime forces and the utilization of an early form of sea power which is represented by large ceremonial boats and war boats.

Papyrus boat building is considered as an indicative of the tradition of maritime exploration during the Egyptian pre-dynastic period.

II. THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AMPHIBIOUS BATTLE

The front face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife, divided into five registers describing an amphibious battle. Therefore, this whole scene of Fig. 2 is considered to be the first archaeological record of an amphibious battle in which Egyptian boats participated not only in the Egyptian history but also in the history of the Near East and the whole world.

Like any other amphibious battle, this battle included land and naval forces.

A. The Land Forces

Land forces are involved in hand-to-hand combat and with weapons represented by knives and sticks, as shown in the battle described in the first and the second register of the front face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife.

The events of the battle on the ground began as they appear on the left of the first upper register as shown in Fig. 3, where we see the Egyptian raising his sceptre with his right hand and with his left hand he holds the arm of a Canaanite to strike him. From the look of the Canaanite face it appears that he was surprised by the attack of the Egyptian.



Fig. 2. Gebel El-Arak knife (Front face) - Louvre Museum, ROOM 633, Main number: E 11517, Paris.



Fig. 3. First Register of the Front face of Gebel El-Arak knife.

On the right of the upper first register, there is an Egyptian and a Canaanite who are wrestling with each other and the Egyptian is trying to stab the Canaanite with a knife that appears to be the same type as the Gebel El-Arak knife while the Canaanite is grabbing the arm of the Egyptian in an attempt to avoid the strike and all warriors wear penis sheaths.

Fig. 4 shows that the fight continues and there are some Egyptians and Canaanites are fighting each other and although the Canaanites are unarmed, they repelled the attack of the Egyptians as there is an Egyptian man is grabbing the long hair of a Canaanite man while the Canaanite is blocking with his hands a kick from the Egyptian. In addition, there are two Egyptian men are hitting one Canaanite man with sticks.

Apparently, the battle events started to change; although the fight began with a sudden attack by the Egyptians but the Canaanites repelled the attack and inflicted losses on the Egyptians as in Fig. 5. In other words, the Canaanites are starting to win the battle.



Fig. 4. Second Register of the Front face of Gebel El-Arak knife.



Fig. 5. Third Register of the Front face of Gebel El-Arak knife.

B. The Naval Forces

There are two types of boats in naval battle, one of which is “the sacred Egyptian boats” [3] or “funerary boats” like Fig. 6 which is in the third register in Fig. 5 and “the Canaanite ships” in the fifth register in Fig. 7 and both type of boats were used during the Naqada II period.



Fig. 6. A small funerary boat, acquired by Museum trustee Ernest Wunderlich at the Australian Museum, it belongs to the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE) of Egyptian history. At that time, funerary boats were popular and frequently placed in tombs, presumably to assist the soul of the departed person in their journey to the afterlife.

It is difficult to distinguish between ancient Egyptian papyrus boats used for war or hunt or transportation as the boats had no fundamental difference in their construction.

The earliest Egyptian boats were made of papyrus stalks tied together with rope and the boats were curved-shaped and

light and easy to carry over land.

Papyrus boats were used by groups of hunter/gatherers to travel across and along the Nile river during bird hunting season and also the boats were used by fishermen as described in many scenes in ancient Egyptian tombs.

Papyrus boats were used also to transport troops up and down the Nile river during early internal conflicts.



Fig. 7. Fourth and Fifth Register of the Front face of Gebel El-Arak knife.

Wooden boats used by the Egyptians and their Canaanite neighbors in the Naqada II period were relatively simple, were consisted of a rectangular sail and usually they used one or two oars. The construction of wooden boat developed after that, as the Palermo stone recorded the construction of a fifty-two-meter-long ship during the reign of Sneferu.

The naval battle inscribed on the front face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife showing boats which had high and straight bow and stern and these boats are usually interpreted as foreign ships.

As in that period, most of the Egyptian ships were not suitable for sailing in the Mediterranean Sea or the Red Sea and the idea of sea-going ships was probably imported from the eastern coast, most likely from Byblos in Canaan and new word enter the ancient Egyptian minds which is the Egyptian naval vessel as pronounced as “kbnt”, which means “Byblos Boat” as mentioned in Fig. 8.

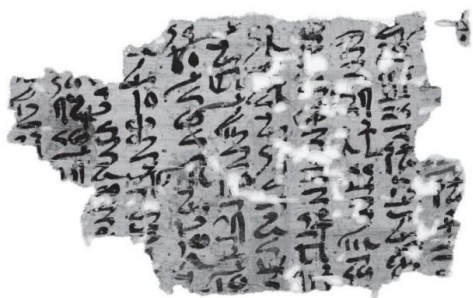


Fig. 8. Papyrus Lythgoe found by the Egyptian expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1906 and 1909 mentioning a Byblos boat which is proof about the continued relations with Byblos during the Middle Kingdom as they had during the Old Kingdom [4]

The maritime trade with Canaan already existed in the Chalcolithic period (4500-3500 BC) [5] and around the second millennium BC the naval trade routes were even more abundant. Many primary sources attested to the exploits and conquests of the ruling powers over Canaan.

Byblos exported cedar wood for building Egyptian ships and temples and cedar resin for religious rituals, especially for mummification. The vessels returned to Byblos laden with products, gold ornaments, alabaster, papyrus rolls, and linen textiles.

The geographical location of the Canaanite’s cities which were at the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea brought ships as an effective means of transport and export goods and establishing ports and manufacturing of vessels on the shores of the Mediterranean sometime during the third millennium BC and this was clear from ancient Egyptian manuscripts as in Fig. 9.

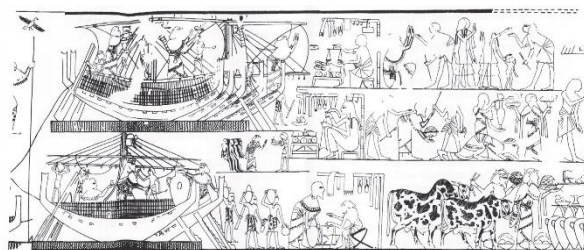


Fig. 9. Early photos of the tableau of Syro-Canaanite ships in the tomb of Kenamun (TT. 162; Amenhotep III).

There are many highly schematic ships’ representations such as the Egyptian Fifth Dynasty relief fragments from the Temple of Sahure at Abusir of the twelve ships returning probably from Byblos full with shipment of Canaanite Jugs and huge cedar wood as demonstrated in Fig. 10.

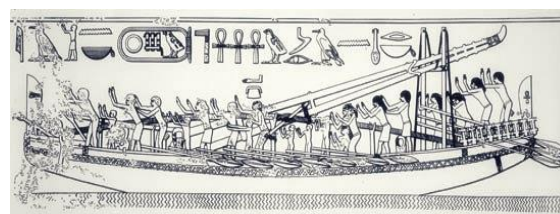


Fig. 10. Drawing of an Egyptian seagoing ship based on vessels depicted in the bas-relief discovered in the pyramid of King Sahure at Abusir, Cairo. Courtesy of the Science Museum, London

There is also in the funeral temple of the Pharaoh Sahure different reliefs of Egyptian ships that return after an expedition for Canaanite Lands loaded with slaves and prisoners. There are reliefs about the earliest attested naval expedition to Punt, which brought back large quantities of myrrh, malachite and electrum under the order of the Pharaoh Sahure.

Also during the sixth Dynasty, the ‘autobiography’ of the court official (Weni) who used seagoing ships in naval battles waged along the southern Canaanite coast.

III. SUPPOSED AMPHIBIOUS BATTLEFIELD (ABYDOS)

Abydos (“Abdjou” in Ancient Egyptian as shown in Fig. 11) is one of the oldest cities of ancient Egypt and is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Egypt.



Fig. 11. The ancient name for Abydos – “Abdjou” – as carved on the temple built by Seti I (c. 1294-1279 BC).

The site of Abydos covers an area approximately 10 square kilometers on the edge of the western desert in southern Egypt near the modern Egyptian towns of El Araba El Madfuna and El Balyana.

The sacred city of Abydos was the site of many ancient temples, including Umm el-Qa'ab, a royal necropolis where early pharaohs of the 1st and 2nd dynasties were entombed [6] and later a pilgrimage center for the worship of Osiris and the site includes settlement areas, tombs with occupants ranging from kings to commoners, and temples.

Abydos has royal tombs which were full of intact pottery, royal emblems, ivory labels, and the names of several predynastic kings.

Around and between the various temples of Abydos is a vast complex of cemeteries used in every period of early Egyptian history, from the prehistoric age to Roman times.

The temple of Seti I is one of the most important sites in Abydos and in this temple there is a list of seventy-six Egyptian kings. This list is known as the Abydos King List and it has served as an important tool in piecing together ancient Egyptian history, and in identifying the rulers from that time starting from Menes of the first dynasty until Seti I and his father Ramesses I of the nineteenth dynasty [7]. Also on the walls of the temple of Seti I there is Canaanite graffiti as shown in Fig. 12 which probably written by Canaanites lived in Egypt or Canaanites merchants passed by this place and put their mark.



Fig. 12. Canaanite graffiti at the Temple of Seti I.

During Naqada Culture, Abydos was one of the most important cities. Naqada culture is an archaeological culture of Chalcolithic Predynastic Egypt, named after the city of Naqada at Qena Governorate in Upper Egypt because cultures were named after their sites of origin.

However, in 2013, a study at the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, University of Oxford about the Predynastic period suggests a beginning date sometime between 3800 and 3700 BC [8].

Naqada's culture is divided into three periods [9]:

- Naqada I (3900 - 3650 BC) extends over Upper Egypt. It is represented in many tomb sites located from the north of Abydos to Luxor in the south and their main cities were Abydos, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis. Possibly, the inhabitants of these cities were the first to take advantage of the possibilities provided by the Nile such as flooding

and irrigation. This period is noted for its black-topped (red burnished pottery with black tops) and polished red pottery.

- Naqada II (3650 - 3300 BC) marked a turning point in the development of pre-dynastic Egypt, as it seems to have spread all across Egypt, apparently by conquest or the establishment of military and trade strongholds. It is the first culture that created relations with other countries, especially with the cities of Canaan so there were some artistic decorations and some technical processes were developed. In addition to that some new artistic activities appeared with the addition of highly specialized craftsmanship and religious beliefs and practices. Those artistic activities created new products which are pear-shaped mace head and painted pottery with lively images of people, animals, boats, and plants.

During Naqada II, River ships were being constructed bigger and more practical and the trade along the Nile flourished and Egyptian boat-building changed from constructing them with reed bundles to wooden-planked vessels imported from Canaan.

Egyptian archaeological records indicate that the foundations of the early Egyptian dynasty were during the Naqada II period (about 3350 - 3150 BC) and the formation of Dynasty 0 (about 3150 - 3000 BC). Naqada I and II temples and graves was discovered in the Theban area at the site of Tarif.

- Naqada III (3300 – 2900 BC): The process of state formation had begun during Naqada II and became highly visible with named kings headed strong policies and the barter trade became active and included the entire Nile Valley. This culture spread when the settlers followed the merchants and established their settlements along the Nile. During this period, a political unification continued and the formation of a single state culminated to begin the Early Dynastic Period and the Egyptian language was first recorded in hieroglyphs. In southern Canaan, there is strong archaeological evidence of Egyptian during Dynasty 0 which are regarded as colonies or trading ports and it is likely that most kings of Upper Egypt Were fighting the people of the Delta for control and protection of trade routes with the Levant that are the source of timber, wine, and other valuable goods. Centuries of conquest then reduced Upper Egypt to three major states: Thinis, Naqada, and Nekhen [10].

Fig. 13 is showing the difference between the pottery made during each period of Naqada.

During the Naqada III period (3200 - 2900 BC) and under rulers from Abydos most of the cities of Upper Egypt became unified at the expense of rival cities such as Hierakonpolis.

Abydos gained sovereignty after these conflicts and this may appear on numerous reliefs of the Naqada II period, such as the Gebel el-Arak Knife, or the famous Painted Tomb (Tomb 100) at Hierakonpolis.

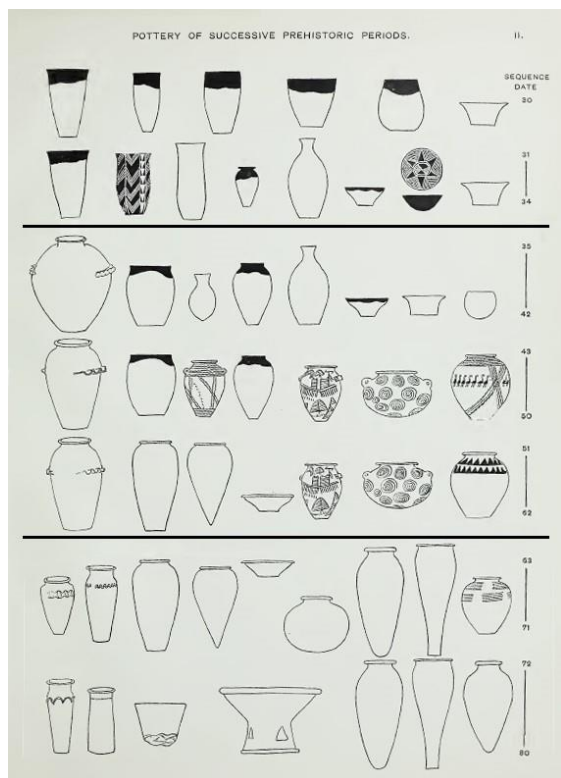


Fig. 13. Development of Egyptian pottery styles in prehistoric times, from Naqada I to Naqada II and Naqada III [11].

As for the people who caused conflicts in the city of Abydos during the period of Naqada I and II, they are the Canaanites, whom the Egyptologist Flinders Petrie describes them in his book "Naqada and Ballas" [12] as a new race due to the finds of pottery and manner of burial and that they were immigrants from the East with connections to the Red Sea and Mediterranean and settled in Upper Egypt.

Flinders Petrie mentioned that there is a large cemetery of the New Race as located in Fig. 14 has long been known at Abydos, and there was flint knives in it.

This was a result of report written by Flinders Petrie and his field assistant James Quibell after opening the first graves at Naqada and how the position of the bodies were obviously not like the Egyptians and the pottery and objects found were also different from any belonging to dated periods in Egypt.

The bodies were not mummified nor buried flat, as was typical ancient Egyptian tradition and instead they were placed in a flexed position on their side. Petrie didn't find the Egyptian canopic jars, the pottery, the amulets, the scarabs, the coffins in the tombs but the discovered pottery was very characteristic and the fine stone jars, the brilliantly worked flints, the slate palettes were yet apart from all that of the Egyptians.

Flinders Petrie said in his book "Six Temples at Thebes, Naqada and Ballas": Thus it is plain that these classes of foreign things are no isolated matter, but belong to a large population spread over the whole of Upper Egypt.

Even if the single example at Tehneh be a casual importation, yet the instances are so many between Sohag and Kom Ombo, 160 miles apart, that there must have been a continuous occupation. That there is a complete break between the Egyptian civilization and that of the New Race is best shewn by comparing the two in parallel order.

Moreover, throughout the whole of the Egyptian town and

temple site of Nubt not a single piece of New Race pottery was noticed among tens of thousands of pieces from the IVth to the XIXth dynasty. Conversely in the New Race town no Egyptian pottery of the Old or Middle Kingdom was seen, and only some of the XVIIIth dynasty at one end of it with different brickwork.

We conclude, therefore, that this New Race possessed an entirely different culture to that of the Egyptians, and had no apparent connection with them [13].

So Petrie realized the great difference between the two people.

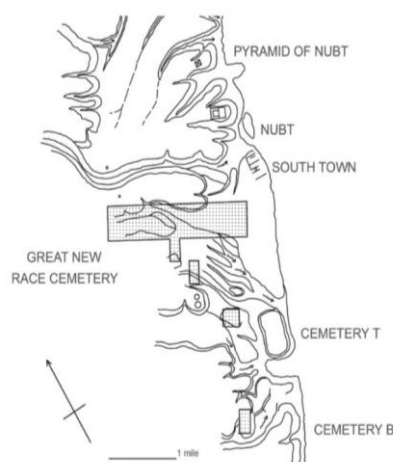


Fig. 14. Sketch map of Naqada with indication of the main sites explored by Petrie [14].

IV. THE VICTOR IN THE AMPHIBIOUS BATTLE

First, according to the third register on the front face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife Fig. 5, it seems that the fight ended with the defeat of the Egyptians, and they are preparing to leave. As there is an Egyptian warrior holding an oar in front of the sacred barks. The barks have two ibex heads, symbolizing the Egyptians' passage into the afterlife since ibex figureheads often adorn Egyptian funerary boats.



Fig. 15. Gebel El-Arak knife (Back face) – Louvre Museum, ROOM 633, Main number: E 11517, Paris.

Second, according to the back face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife as shown in Fig. 15 which depicting a man with the beard who is the god El (The Master of Animals) holding two lions and the scene of a hero holding two opposing wild animals, usually lions; this scene was widely spread in the art of the ancient Near East and ancient Egypt, especially in the Prehistoric Egypt period. The first appearance of the master of animals [15] in Tomb 100 in Hierakonpolis, Naqada II culture (c. 3500 – 3200 BC) [16].

There is a reason to think that the Canaanites won the fight after observing the man between the two lions on the knife and by reviewing the tales of Canaan mentioned in Ras Shamra's discoveries, such as the legend of Crete that describes God "El" as an old man with a white beard. He represents the Creator God, the chief of the Canaanite gods, the god of heaven and the head of the pantheon of gods [17]. The Canaanites in the Levant believed that God El resides in the seventh heaven on a great throne.

Also, other discoveries in Ras Shamra date back to approximately 1350 BC, such as the Epic of Aqhat Fig. 16, the Legend of Keret and the Baal Cycles, which describe God El with a complete description in terms of worship, children, place of worship, rituals, and others.



Fig. 16. Epic of Aqhat from Ugarit – Number: AO 17324 – Louvre Museum, Department of Oriental Antiquities.

Canaanite deities were mentioned in ancient Egyptian inscriptions, especially during the Twelfth Dynasty (1991 – 1959 BC) and the Thirteenth Dynasty (1786 – 1670 BC). Their strong neighbors strongly influenced the Canaanite religion, and on the other side, the Egyptian religion accepted other people's deities.

After comparing, studying and analyzing similar engravings to the two faces of the knife handle with other ancient artefacts dating back to prehistoric cultures either in Upper or Lower Egypt; we conclude that this knife documented an Amphibious battle between the Canaanites and the Egyptians because there is no image glorifying the Egyptian king or god who won the battle as is known or any animals devouring the enemies, it is evident that the Canaanites were victorious and with the defeat of the Egyptians it became clear that this is an Egyptian knife with Canaanite relief.

V. THE GEBELEIN MUMMY



Fig. 17. Bearded man figurine and it is preserved in Confluence Museum at Lyon, France.

The man with beard and wear a cloak who is the Master of Animals engraved on the back face of the handle of Gebel Al-Arak knife resembles the stone figurine of a bearded man Fig. 17 which was found in Gebelin tomb in Abydos and it dates back to Naqada I.

Gebelein town as located in Fig. 18 is known for its cemetery because its archeological finds covered many historical period starting from the Predynastic Period to the Middle Kingdom.



Fig. 18. Location of Gebelein where the discovered mummies were found. They lived between 3351 and 3017 BC, not long before the region was unified by the first pharaoh in 3100 BC [18].

At Gebelein tomb, there were six naturally mummified bodies, dating to approximately 3400 BC from the Late Presynaptic period of Ancient Egypt and they considered as the first complete predynastic bodies to be discovered.

One of these bodies, there is Gebelin Man as Fig. 20 and his mysterious death, which revealed at 2012 after a scan, showed a puncture to the body and precisely under his left shoulder caused by a blade penetrated with force and it believed that the murder weapon, which caused this injury, is a copper blade or flint knife. It believed also that Gebelein Man was surprised by the attack without defending himself.



Fig. 19. Painted linen (detail) from a grave in Gebelein, Naqada IIa-b (circa 3600 BC). Museo Egizio, Turin.



Fig. 20. A mummy of a young man shown one of the world's oldest figurative tattoos. It appears as a dark smudge at the top of his arm. He is believed to have died a violent death between the ages of around 18 to 21, from a stab wound to his back

Using Swedish technology, visitors of the British Museum are able to use an interactive touch screen to examine the body of Gebelein Man, one of the museum's oldest mummies which was buried in around 3500 BC in Egypt and was discovered in 1896.

Evidence suggests he was stabbed in the back, said curator of physical anthropology Daniel Antoine. "There's a wound on the surface of his skin which people have been seeing for the last 100 years, but after looking inside his body we found that his shoulder blade and the rib under the shoulder blade are damaged," he said [19].

Gebelein man is believed to be between 18 and 21 years old when he died, the mummy was wrapped in linen and matting and placed in a shallow grave. Direct contact with the hot, dry sand in which Gebelein Man was buried, naturally dried and mummified his remains.

In Gebelein tomb, with the mummies there were also discovered a piece of linen with detailed drawing of bearded Canaanite sailors with long hair in a boat as shown in Fig. 19 seems that the drawing describes the amphibious battle as well.

VI. "ABYDOS BOATS", A GROUP OF 14 SOLAR BOATS DISCOVERED IN ABYDOS

In Abydos, in the "Shonat al-Zabib" area, it dates back to the beginning or before the dynastic era. They are not reed boats, but real rowing ships with oars. Each boat can accommodate about 30 oars.

The quality of wood used in the manufacture of these 14 boats illustrates the nature of trade, politics and international

relations in Egypt with Canaan.

The area of "Shona al-Zabib" is the private cemetery of the King of the Second Dynasty 2700 BC, "Khasekhem Wei", which prompted the research team at first to believe that these ships belonged to the king.

Still, they soon discovered that they were buried in that area centuries before the era of this king for the ruler. It may be one of the first dynasties that ever ruled Egypt, around 2920 BC, to help him sail to the other world.

These boats shown in Fig. 21 precede the sun boats that were found near the pyramid of Khufu in Giza by about 300 years; according to the ancient-origins website, which makes them the oldest boats discovered in history so far,



Fig. 21. 14 boats in Abydos.

According to boat expert "Sheryl Ward." It was 18-24 meters (59-78.7 feet) long, 2-3 meters (6.6-9.8 feet) wide, and about 60 centimeters (23.6 inches) deep, or only about two feet, with boats narrow at the ends. Of yellow paint, according to Egypt origins.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study proved a theory about the first amphibious battle between Canaan and Egypt at Abydos in the prehistoric period (about 3500 BC). It ends with the victory of the Canaanites over the ancient Egyptians, this being the first archaeological evidence of the defeat of the ancient Egyptians in a war battle this is based on the following evidence:

- The inscriptions on the Gebel El-Arak knife's front face relate to a Nile battle between the Egyptians and the Canaanites during the Naqada I, II and III culture periods and how the engravings of the knife record the first defeat recorded in the archaeological records of the Egyptians, with evidence of the presence of the Canaanite deity on the other side of the handle knife and not the Egyptian god as is customary in ancient Egypt and also discussed how is the man with the white beard on the back of the knife is the Canaanite God "El" (the father of the gods) and finally this study refuted the theory that there was no influence of Sumer culture on the Gebel El-Arak knife.
- At Gebelein's tomb, there were six naturally mummified bodies dating to approximately 3400

BC from the Late Presynaptic period of Ancient Egypt, and they are considered the first complete predynastic bodies to be discovered. One of these bodies, there is Gebelin Man and his mysterious death, which was revealed in 2012 after a scan, showed a puncture to the body and precisely under his left shoulder caused by a blade penetrated with force. It is believed that the murder weapon, which caused this injury, was a copper blade or flint knife. It is also thought that Gebelein Man was surprised by the attack without defending himself. Buried pottery with the Gebelein mummies from the Naqada II period (3500 – 3200 BC) is similar to Canaanite pottery.

- Painted Linen found in Gebelein's tomb has a drawing of men with beards rowing boats similar to the boats engraved on the knife of Gebel Al-Arak and identical to the drawings of boats drawn on buried jars with the mummies of Gebelein.
- In Abydos, the "Shonot al-Zabib" area dates back to the beginning or before the dynastic era. They are not reed boats but accurate rowing ships with oars. The quality of wood used in the manufacture of these 14 boats illustrates the nature of trade, politics and international relations in Egypt with Canaan.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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