

THE BATTLE OF MEGIDDO (THUTMOSE III):  
A BATTLE ANALYSIS

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Eighteenth Dynasty pharaoh Thutmose III conquered the ancient city-state of Megiddo in the late fifteenth-century BC as a part of his first campaign into Syria-Palestine. This victory, part of the first campaign in history for which there is an extant detailed account, ensured that Thutmose III would be remembered as one of Egypt's greatest warrior pharaohs. He began to reverse the military decline that occurred during the reigns of Thutmose II and Hatshepsut by crushing a strengthening rebellion, reclaiming Egyptian military dominance over northern Palestine, gaining substantial booty and tribute for Egypt, and exerting control over communications routes between Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia. While the exact date of the battle is uncertain, what is certain is that the conquest of Megiddo highlighted Thutmose's skill as a military commander. He analyzed the available intelligence to devise a daring plan to take the enemy coalition off guard. He took advantage of the terrain, his numerical superiority, and used deception to exploit the tactical weakness of his opponent. The Battle of Megiddo was an impressive victory for Thutmose III, and it set Egypt on a path of military dominance in the region that lasted nearly two hundred years.

Our sources for this battle are completely one-sided, tilted toward the perspective of the victorious Egyptians. The details are uncertain, leading to speculation and scholarly debate. Egypt's chief royal scribe recorded the events of the campaign, inscribing them on the walls of the temple of Amen-Re at Karnak in Thebes. These "Annals" are a commemoration of Amen-Re's gift of victory to Thutmose.<sup>1</sup> The inscription covers Thutmose's numerous campaigns in Syria-Palestine, spanning a period of approximately twenty years. It is the longest extant inscription in Egypt, including detailed descriptions of the battles and the booty acquired. The first campaign in regnal years 22 and 23, which includes the Battle of Megiddo, occupies the

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East, Volume I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 175.

lion's share of the inscription. A large portion of the account is a list of the booty, which helps historians understand the magnitude of Thutmose's achievements. According to archaeologist and historian James Breasted, however, the scribe cared more about listing the booty than listing the details of the military campaign. Perhaps the reason for this is that much of the booty found its way into his temple treasury.<sup>2</sup> The scribe's lack of attention to the actual battle leaves historians with some confusion and unanswered questions. Other than the Annals, two additional sources provide evidence of the Battle of Megiddo. These are the Gebel Barkal stele and the Armant stele, both of which provide corroboration and depth to the inscribed Annals.

Despite the scribe's focus on plunder, the Annals contain enough detail about the conflict that some historians look to the Battle of Megiddo as the starting point of the field of military history.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, while historians have the Egyptian perspective in the Annals and the two commemorative stelae, there are no extant enemy sources. In addition, the Karnak inscription fails to report the number of Egyptian dead, making it look as though Thutmose won an uncontested victory. Even more problematic, the scribe failed to record any details of the actual battle. Numerous lines of the Annals describe the events leading up to the battle and the spoils collected afterward, but a description of the battle itself is absent. Because the inscription's pre- and post-battle accounts indicate that a battle did indeed take place, Harold Nelson speculates that the small number of enemy hands collected with the booty, only eighty-three, indicate that there may not have been much of a battle at all. Thus, whether the battle was too short to be worth recording, or whether the scribe ignored the details of the battle to focus on an extensive account of the booty, historians must guess about what happened during the battle of

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<sup>2</sup> James Henry Breasted, trans. and ed., *Ancient Records of Egypt, Volume 2: The Eighteenth Dynasty* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1906. Reprint, 2001), 166.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Hayden Nelson, "The Battle of Megiddo," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1913. Reprint, Miami: HardPress Publishing, 2014), 63.

Megiddo. Fortunately, detailed accounts of other battles, specifically the Battle of Kadesh between Ramses II and the Hittites in the early thirteenth-century BC, as well as topographic analysis of Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley, help historians take an educated guess about the Battle of Megiddo.

One unknown about the battle is the exact date. Thutmose's Karnak inscription states that the battle occurred in "[regal] year 23, first (month) of the third season (ninth month), on the twenty-first day, the day of the feast of the new moon, corresponding to the royal coronation."<sup>4</sup> Breasted champions a date of May 15 in his 1906 catalog of ancient Egyptian records.<sup>5</sup> Nelson, who wrote the first extensive analysis of the Battle of Megiddo in 1913, places the battle at May 15, 1479 BC.<sup>6</sup> Raymond Faulkner deviates from Breasted and Nelson's acceptance of the May 15 date in his 1942 analysis, preferring instead to assign the date to May 14, 1479 BC. Faulkner cites the possibility that the scribe erroneously recorded the date as the 21<sup>st</sup> instead of the 20<sup>th</sup>, based on the timeline of events described in the inscription. Why, Faulkner argues, would Thutmose's army have arrived at Megiddo on the 19<sup>th</sup> day, as the inscription states, only to delay the battle until the 21<sup>st</sup> day?<sup>7</sup> Glenn Lello recommends that there be no emendation of the battle date from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> day. His claim is that the scribe may have simply failed to label the date of the 20<sup>th</sup> day, and that the numerous events attributed to the 19<sup>th</sup> day may have also included events taking place on the 20<sup>th</sup> day.<sup>8</sup> Reaching a very different date altogether, James Pritchard, who translated and published numerous Near Eastern works in the 1950s, follows the

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<sup>4</sup> Breasted, 184.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond O. Faulkner, "The Battle of Megiddo," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 28 (December 1942): 11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3855517> (accessed November 13, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Glenn Lello, "Thutmose III's First Lunar Date," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37, no. 4 (October 1978): 329-330, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/544046> (accessed November 11, 2014).

Egyptian middle chronology and places the date at April 16, 1468 BC.<sup>9</sup> A much more recent historian, Richard Gabriel, assigns a date of May 20, 1481 BC in his 2009 biography of Thutmose III.<sup>10</sup> The problem of the exact date, while less important than the details of the battle itself, highlights the scholarly controversy about many aspects of this important battle.

One detail historians know for certain is the location. Known in Arabic today as Tell al-Mutesellim, Megiddo is a World Heritage Site located along the Carmel Ridge overlooking the Jezreel Valley (Plain of Esdraelon) in the valley of the Kina brook. Megiddo was mentioned in the Old Testament as a Canaanite city.<sup>11</sup> Later, after the Israelites gained control of the city, it became the site of a devastating encounter between Egyptian pharaoh Necho II and Josiah, the king of Judah.<sup>12</sup> Megiddo is named in the New Testament as the site of the apocalyptic battle between the forces of good and evil. In Revelation, John uses the Greek name Ἀρμαγεδών *Armageddon*, derived from the Hebrew *Har Megiddo* “mount of Megiddo.”<sup>13</sup> At the time of Thutmose III, Megiddo was an important city-state near the Via Maris and the King’s Highway, routes that connected the Egyptians to the Mitanni of Syria, the Hittites of Anatolia, and the Kassites of Babylonia. Megiddo was probably a key communication point between the Jezreel Valley and the Mediterranean coast. It may also have been an important military command center. Ample farmland nearby likely produced a rich enough harvest to support a large army, making Megiddo an ideal staging ground for a major rebellion against a weakening Egyptian empire.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pritchard, 175.

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, *Thutmose III: The Military Biography of Egypt’s Greatest Warrior King* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009), 81; see also 106.

<sup>11</sup> Josh. 12:21 and Josh. 17:11.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Kings 23:29 and 2 Chron. 35:22.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. 16:16; see also Eric H. Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel, *Thutmose III*, 82.

A substantial reason for Megiddo's importance is that the Egyptians, unlike the Greeks and Romans, did not establish colonies. As a result, pharaohs regularly led campaigns into Syria-Palestine to exact tribute. One reason for the lack of colonies could be the religious belief that eternal life required burial on Egyptian soil. Other reasons could be a lack of communication between Egyptians and their subject states or a lack of an effective bureaucracy in place to collect tribute. During the reign of Thutmose I, the pharaoh could march his army all the way to the Euphrates with little opposition, easily collecting tribute along the way.<sup>15</sup> Thutmose I placed Egypt in relatively firm control of the region, continuing the work of Ahmose I and Amenhotep I. However, Thutmose II failed to maintain the extensive sphere of control Thutmose I established. After his death, his wife Hatshepsut ruled as regent and eventually as pharaoh. Hatshepsut, perhaps unwilling to lead the army in person because she was a woman, focused on other projects and failed to send out the customary tribute collection campaigns. Egypt lost control over Syria-Palestine. The remnants of the Hyksos, expelled by Ahmose I at the start of the New Kingdom Period, took advantage of Hatshepsut's military inactivity.<sup>16</sup> Various dynasts in Syria-Palestine seized the opportunity to unite under the king of Kadesh to take a stand against Egypt. According to the Karnak Annals, "every chief of every country that has revolted" met at Megiddo to take a stand against Thutmose III.<sup>17</sup> Shortly after inheriting the throne upon the death of his aunt/step-mother Hatshepsut, Thutmose III led the Egyptian army into Syria-Palestine to reestablish Egyptian control.

Thutmose led his army through Gaza, along the Philistine Plain, and up to the Carmel Ridge. According to the Karnak inscription, on the 16<sup>th</sup> day (perhaps May 10, based on the

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<sup>15</sup> Breasted, 166.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Breasted, 185.

chronology proposed by Breasted, Nelson, and Faulkner) the army made camp at the village of Yehem.<sup>18</sup> There, the Egyptian intelligence network reported that the rebellious kingdoms gathered a coalition force at Megiddo. Intelligence also identified a limited number of paths through the hills leading to Megiddo, each path with its advantages and disadvantages. The southern path was a road to the town of Taanach (Ta'anach), about four miles southeast of Megiddo. Because of Egypt's location to the south of Megiddo, Thutmose likely feared a buildup of enemy forces at the mouth of this Taanach route. Taking this route would have forced Thutmose to fight his way to Megiddo against the full force of the coalition on their chosen ground.<sup>19</sup>

A second path led north from Yehem to the village of Djefiti (Zefti). Like the Taanach route, this path also intersected the Megiddo road perpendicularly, but to the northwest of Megiddo. To reach Megiddo, the Egyptian force would then need to turn southeast about six miles. Because the Djefiti path required the Egyptians to overshoot Megiddo and then backtrack, the enemy coalition would have ample warning and plenty of time to redeploy its forces to meet Thutmose, again with full force on the ground of their choosing.<sup>20</sup>

A third option to reach Megiddo was a path between the Taanach and Djefiti paths. It led through the town of Aruna ('Aruna) along the Wadi 'Ara, intersecting the Megiddo road along the Kina brook valley at Megiddo itself. It was the shortest and most direct of the routes, but it was also the most difficult. The Aruna path (later named the Musmus Pass after Thutmose) was only 30 ft. wide and 9 miles long, requiring the soldiers to march in a narrow column that would stretch nearly the entire length of the path. A mule track split off from this Aruna path and

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<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the modern village of Yemma, see Nelson, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Faulkner, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

intersected the Megiddo road just northwest of Megiddo, essentially providing a fourth option.<sup>21</sup> While the Aruna path was narrow, hilly, and difficult to traverse, it offered an element of surprise that the other options did not offer. In addition, that mule track offshoot could place Thutmose's forces on the right flank of any force stationed at Megiddo. Certainly, the Aruna path had much to offer, yet it carried enormous risks if the enemy coalition launched a strike before the Egyptian army successfully exited the pass.

Upon hearing the intelligence about the multiple paths to Megiddo, Thutmose's officers responded that the Aruna road was too narrow and that "horse [would] come behind [horse and man behind] man."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the advance guard could face attack with the rear guard still in the pass. For these reasons, the chieftains recommended one of the other two roads. Thutmose, however, was not averse to taking risks or using deception, so the Aruna route was certainly a tempting option for him despite the advice of his war council. For example, several years after Megiddo, he hid some of his armed soldiers in 200 large baskets during an attack on Joppa. A force of 300 additional soldiers carried the baskets into the city, claiming they were gifts for the governor. Like the Trojan Horse of Homer's *Odyssey* (a more detailed account exists in Virgil's *Aeneid*) or the jars of oil that hid the forty thieves in *One Thousand and One Nights*, the deception worked and Joppa fell to Thutmose.<sup>23</sup> His willingness to take risks and deceive his opponents undoubtedly led to his decision about which path to choose to Megiddo. Pharaoh responded that he would take the Aruna route, and that his chieftains could choose to follow if they wished. In addition, he shamed them by stating, "Shall they think among those enemies

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>22</sup> Breasted, 180.

<sup>23</sup> Jacob L. Wright, "Warfare and Wanton Destruction: A Reexamination of Deuteronomy 20: 19-20 in Relation to Ancient Siegecraft," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 432, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25610132> (accessed November 11, 2014).



whom Re detests: ‘Does his majesty proceed upon another road? He begins to be fearful of us,’ so will they think.’<sup>24</sup> Because the pharaoh led his army as a representative of the gods and as a god himself, the chieftains had little choice but to capitulate to their pharaoh’s will.

The army made preparations and left Yehem for the Aruna path. The Thutmose led the army, “showing [the way] by his (own) footsteps; horse behind [horse],” as foretold by the wary officers at the Yehem war council.<sup>25</sup> Thutmose’s army safely reached Aruna by the 19<sup>th</sup> day and made camp. It appears from Breasted’s translation of the Annals that a skirmish occurred at or near Aruna. According to Breasted’s notes, this enemy encounter frightened the officers, causing them to call in the straggling rear as quickly as possible. The numerous lacunae in the inscription make it unclear what actually happened, but the text states, “His majesty cried out to them before \_\_\_\_\_ they fell; behold, that wretched foe.”<sup>26</sup> It is unclear from the inscription, but the skirmish may have occurred near the mouth of the Aruna path, less than a mile from Megiddo. The Annals states that the enemy placed its southern wing at Taanach. The disposition of the northern wing is uncertain due to a lacuna, but the wing may have been positioned either at the mouth of the Djefthi route or the city of Megiddo.<sup>27</sup> Anthony Spalinger contends that it would have been foolhardy for the enemy to ignore the Aruna route altogether, although the enemy certainly expected Thutmose to send his army by either the Djefthi or Taanach routes.<sup>28</sup> Because the inscription states that pharaoh’s army stretched from Aruna to the mouth of the path near Megiddo, it is probably impossible to know with certainty where the skirmish occurred and

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<sup>24</sup> Breasted, 181.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.; see note “e.”

<sup>28</sup> Anthony J. Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt: The New Kingdom* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 92.

whether the skirmish was against a small contingent or against an entire wing of the enemy army, a prelude of the Battle of Megiddo.

The skirmish, if one indeed occurred, appears to have been a small one. This may indicate that the enemy had only a small force at the mouth of the Aruna path, with the bulk of the army guarding the other two paths. Faulkner suggests that the enemy coalition was either incompetent or cowardly to allow Thutmose's army to travel the narrow Aruna road without major opposition.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps incompetence is the most likely possibility. The enemy's commanders may have failed to consider the possibility that the massive Egyptian army would risk the Aruna route. Another possibility is that coalition intelligence gatherers were the victims of misinformation spread by Thutmose's spies. Whatever the reason for the lack of a major challenge to the Egyptian army on the narrow Aruna path, it appears clear that the main body of coalition troops was somewhere other than Megiddo when the Egyptian army spilled into the valley of the Kina brook at Megiddo. The inscription states that Thutmose halted at the mouth of the Aruna route, "protecting" the column as it filed out. His bold plan was a success.

Having taken the enemy by surprise with an unexpected march, one might expect that Thutmose began an immediate attack on the city while the enemy army was away. This is not the case. Thutmose told his troops to equip themselves, prepare their weapons, and be ready to fight the enemy "in the morning."<sup>30</sup> Because the inscription fails to mention the 20<sup>th</sup> day, Faulkner and other scholars (as noted above) claim that "in the morning" meant that the battle would be fought on the 20<sup>th</sup> day (the next day), not the 21<sup>st</sup> day (two days later) as inscribed. If the battle took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> day, it is almost inconceivable to believe that Thutmose chose to idle away an

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<sup>29</sup> Faulkner, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Breasted, 183.

entire day when the bulk of the enemy forces were away guarding the Djefiti and Taanach routes several miles away. Megiddo appeared to be ripe for the taking.

Thutmose may have had specific reasons to delay his attack until the next day (day 20) or the day after that (day 21). Perhaps he feared that a siege against the stronghold of Megiddo would leave his men exhausted and unprepared to fight the coalition army once it arrived at Megiddo from the Taanach and Djefiti routes. He had to have known that the enemy army would engage him eventually, and Thutmose wanted to be ready. According to Spalinger, both sides of this battle knew each other's capabilities and motives. There were no surprises.<sup>31</sup> Thutmose's bold choice of the Aruna route allowed him to position his army favorably to face the inevitable battle against the enemy force. He could not risk trying to take the city of Megiddo while the enemy army loomed just a few miles away. Faulkner's belief that Thutmose would not have waited until the 21<sup>st</sup> day to attack makes sense in the context of modern warfare. However, Thutmose may have waited an adequate amount of time for the enemy army to arrive due to a chivalric code of respect for cultural rituals or rules of engagement that are unknown to us today and make little sense in the modern understanding of warfare. Like dueling gentlemen walking ten paces before turning to shoot, Thutmose may simply have offered his opponent a fair fight.<sup>32</sup> The Egyptians were a warlike people, but they also respected honor and tradition.

Early in the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> day, Thutmose commanded his army to move into position. He positioned his southern wing on a hill south of the Kina brook. His northern wing was northwest of Megiddo. Thutmose, in his dazzling chariot of electrum, commanded a force in the center.<sup>33</sup> Because the pharaoh led this center force from his chariot, the center was likely

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<sup>31</sup> Spalinger, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Breasted, 184.

comprised of the chariot corps. Infantry soldiers could not keep up with a chariot-riding pharaoh, leaving him unprotected in front of his soldiers. Therefore, he probably surrounded himself with chariots and placed the slower infantry soldiers in the northern and southern wings. He may have positioned his chariots in the center (southwest of Megiddo) due to uneven terrain northwest and southeast of the city, where infantry soldiers were better suited.<sup>34</sup>

Because the Karnak Annals fail to provide an account of soldiers on either side of the battle, scholars have used the record of recovered booty and comparisons with other battles to estimate the Egyptian and enemy coalition force strength. Breasted and Nelson estimate not more than 15,000 to 20,000 Egyptian soldiers, possibly as few as 10,000. The enemy had no more than 10,000-15,000 soldiers, clearly outnumbered by the Egyptians.<sup>35</sup> Based on troop numbers along the Aruna path during English general Edmund Allenby's World War I march, Gabriel estimates 12,000 Egyptian soldiers, perhaps forming two corps of 5,000 infantry and 500 chariots each (10,000 infantry and 1,000 chariots total).<sup>36</sup>

Based on the inscription's extensive record of booty from this battle, Spalinger estimates that the Egyptians had as few as 5,000 troops and the enemy coalition had as few as 2,000 troops.<sup>37</sup> Because the Egyptians captured 924 chariots and 2041 horses, Spalinger contends that the Egyptians captured nearly the entire chariot force. Because two horses pulled each chariot, the number of chariots and horses in the list of booty appear to support his contention. Furthermore, the troops likely traveled along the Aruna path four men abreast at most, with horses single file as the inscription states. Because the Annals state that the rear of the Egyptian

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<sup>34</sup> Gabriel, *Thutmose III*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Gabriel, *Thutmose III*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> Spalinger, 36.

army was at Aruna when the front exited the path into the Kina Valley, Spalinger asserts that the Egyptian force was small.<sup>38</sup> The booty list states that the Egyptians captured only eighty-three enemy hands and 340 enemy captives, making it likely that the coalition force was made up primarily of chariots and that no major infantry battle occurred. This may be another indication that the enemy force was quite small.

Facing a smaller enemy comprised mostly of chariots, Thutmose's battle array gave him the advantage. If the battle turned against him, the center chariots under his personal command could retreat to the Aruna path behind him. The three components of his army could form a semi-circle, occupying a tactical box that would minimize the possibility of a flank attack. The enemy, according to Nelson, had its own camp at its back, limiting its mobility and blocking access to Megiddo if retreat became necessary.<sup>39</sup> The disposition of Thutmose's forces concentrated Egypt's striking power and reduced the coalition's ability to deploy its chariots effectively.

Because the Annals do not contain a record of the battle itself, historians can only speculate what happened. Richard Gabriel provides the following scenario. The opposing chariot lines charged at each other at full speed. As Thutmose pushed his chariots into the enemy center, the infantry wings on either side filled in behind, harassing with spears the enemy charioteers that passed through the Egyptian line and cutting down the enemy infantrymen who were no doubt reeling from the arrow fire of the Egyptian chariot charge. The Egyptian numerical advantage limited the maneuverability of the enemy force, essentially creating a trap.<sup>40</sup> The Gebel Barkal stele states, "Now [the enemy] were in the valley of Kina encamped indeed in a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>39</sup> Nelson, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriel, *Thutmose III*, 110-111.

trap.”<sup>41</sup> According to Robert Drews, the coalition chariots may not have completed their initial charge, turning before the opposing lines met and fleeing toward Megiddo.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the enemy infantry may not have engaged during the conflict, as the low number of hands and captives indicates. The enemy infantry may have been stationed at Megiddo, perhaps as bowmen atop the city walls.<sup>43</sup> If true, the increased defense at Megiddo explains why Thutmose did not attack the city immediately upon exiting the Aruna path.

Some historians question whether a battle of any significance actually took place. In one sentence of the Annals, it states that the Egyptians troops took their positions prior to battle. In the very next sentence, the Annals continue, “His majesty prevailed against them at the head of his army, and when they saw his majesty prevailing against them they fled headlong to Megiddo in fear, abandoning their horses and their chariots of gold and silver.”<sup>44</sup> Was there a real battle? Perhaps the enemy coalition broke ranks without a fight as Drews’ analysis contends. The Gebel Barkal stele states, “My Majesty attacked them and they fled at once, falling down in heaps of slain.”<sup>45</sup> Eighty-three hands recorded as booty hardly accounts for any “heaps of slain.” Perhaps there was not much of a battle to describe, so the scribe who wrote the Karnak inscription simply omitted its mention.

Having won his victory, Thutmose’s army could have cut down the retreating enemy and destroyed the coalition immediately. However, in an odd twist of events, the Egyptian army stopped to loot the battlefield and the enemy camp, buying time for the enemy to flee to the safety of Megiddo’s walls. While the Egyptians wasted time looting, residents of Megiddo

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<sup>41</sup> Faulkner, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe ca. 1200 B.C.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 130.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

<sup>44</sup> Breasted, 184.

<sup>45</sup> Faulkner, 14.

“hailed up in haste...into the city” the fleeing enemy soldiers.<sup>46</sup> Thutmose, perhaps unable to control his own troops due to their victorious euphoria and their lust for battlefield spoils, lamented the missed opportunity. The pharaoh rebuked his men stating, “Had ye captured [this city] afterward, behold, I would have given \_\_\_\_\_ Re this day; because every chief of every country that has revolted is within it; and because it is the capture of a thousand cities, this capture of Megiddo.”<sup>47</sup> His statement is rather telling. One would expect an annalistic inscription on a temple wall to state only positives, as illustrated by the failure to acknowledge any Egyptian battle deaths and the apparent battle-free Egyptian victory. However, the pharaoh’s rebuke of his men over their looting shows something negative, perhaps adding credibility to other aspects of the account.

The greed of the Egyptian soldiers allowed the enemy to escape to the safety of Megiddo, requiring a lengthy siege. The Annals do not report the length of the siege, but the Gebel Barkal stele states that it took seven months.<sup>48</sup> The Karnak Annals provides few details of the siege, but it does state, “[Pharaoh’s officers] measured this city, [surrounding it] with an inclosure [*sic*], walled about with green timber of all their pleasant trees. His majesty himself was upon the fortification east of the city, inspecting.” Breasted offers an alternate translation of “their pleasant trees” as “sweet trees,” indicating that the trees may have been fruit trees.<sup>49</sup> If so, Thutmose may have intentionally used Megiddo’s fruit-bearing trees to make the enclosure, trapping the residents inside the city and depriving them of a potential source of food at the same time.

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<sup>46</sup> Breasted, 184.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>48</sup> Faulkner, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Breasted, 185.

The siege was a success. It is interesting that Thutmose did not take the city by storm.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the fortifications were too strong; or, perhaps Thutmose knew that the city was not prepared to wait out a lengthy siege. After all, the enemy surely expected to defeat Thutmose in battle. Eric Cline's analysis of the tell (tel) at Megiddo shows no evidence of destruction at the layer corresponding to Thutmose's time.<sup>51</sup> If Thutmose did not assault the city but instead waited for the residents to starve, it seems odd that the siege lasted as long as seven months. Perhaps the residents expected a siege and provisioned the city's storehouses prior to the battle. Perhaps, in addition, the city was heavily fortified and well defended. If neither is true, it is possible that the siege was of short duration, and the Gebel Barkal stele exaggerated or misstated the siege's length as seven months.

Despite some questionable details of the siege, what is clear is that Thutmose crushed the coalition and the rebellion was over. The rebellious princes exited their city "on their bellies to kiss the ground to the glory of [Thutmose] and to be breath for their nostrils."<sup>52</sup> The defeat was complete and the spoils were bountiful. The plunder included the aforementioned eighty-three hands, 340 prisoners, 924 chariots, over 2,000 horses, numerous suits of armor, 502 bows, and thousands of cattle.<sup>53</sup> The Egyptians also gained possession of the area's harvests, damaging the local population's chances for survival and adding to Egypt's prosperity during the following year. The entire campaign through Syria-Palestine, of which Megiddo was a major component,

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<sup>50</sup> Nelson, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Cline, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Pritchard, 180; see also Breasted, 186, who translates the passage as, "Behold, the chiefs of this country came to render their portions, to do obeisance to the fame of his majesty." Breasted notes that "obeisance" literally means, "to smell the earth."

<sup>53</sup> Breasted, 187.



caused an immense economic reorganization and placed Egypt in control of the region as it had been decades earlier under Thutmose I.<sup>54</sup>

As this was Thutmose III's first campaign into Syria-Palestine, the victory at Megiddo was of great significance. According to Cline, whoever controlled Megiddo could dominate the international route of the Via Maris.<sup>55</sup> The victory helped reestablish Egyptian hegemony in the region. Thutmose was unable to push far enough north on this first campaign to punish Kadesh for its king's leadership in the enemy coalition at Megiddo, but Thutmose did establish a fortress in southern Lebanon to prevent future southward expansion from Kadesh.<sup>56</sup> The Battle of Megiddo was Thutmose's first major step in rebuilding Egypt's empire and expanding it. Having recently acquired the throne from Hatshepsut, Thutmose may have felt he had something to prove. He also wanted to restart the flow of tribute from Syria-Palestine into Egypt, tribute that decreased or perhaps stopped flowing under Thutmose II and Hatshepsut.

Thutmose demonstrated bold leadership by taking the unexpected Aruna route. Pharaoh Necho II followed the same Aruna path in c. 609 BC to attack Megiddo, then controlled by King Josiah of Judah. Like Thutmose nearly 800 years earlier, Necho prevailed. Josiah was killed in the battle, the kingdom of Judah was weakened, and Nebuchadnezzar II of Chaldean Babylon seized the opportunity to take Judah shortly thereafter.<sup>57</sup> During World War I, English general Edmund Allenby led an attack on Ottoman-controlled Megiddo. Again, as Thutmose and Necho had done centuries earlier, Allenby led his forces along the Aruna path to victory.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Spalinger, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Cline, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Breasted, 167.

<sup>57</sup> Cline, 91.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

Thutmose's cleverness in choosing the Aruna route shows that he understood his enemy and understood the capabilities of his troops. Sun Tzu would probably have appreciated Thutmose's tactical initiative and use of deception. After all, Sun Tzu famously wrote, "All warfare is based on deception."<sup>59</sup> Thutmose's choice of the Aruna path took the enemy coalition off guard and provided favorable field position for the Egyptian army. Thutmose also took advantage of the terrain, not only along the Aruna path, but also of the layout of the battlefield and the positions of the camps in relation to the city of Megiddo. Knowing that the enemy force was comprised mostly of chariots, Thutmose minimized the enemy advantage by positioning his own chariots at the Egyptian center with infantry troops on the flanks to condense the battle zone and limit the mobility of the enemy chariots.

Thutmose's great mistake was failing to control his own men after the battle, allowing them to waste time looting the enemy camp rather than slaughtering the retreating foe as they fled to safety in Megiddo. This error forced him to lay siege to the city, taking valuable time and resources away from his larger campaign in Syria-Palestine. If indeed the siege lasted seven months, as the Gebel Barkal stele states, his army likely devoured many of the area's resources, leaving substantially less remaining to ship back to Egypt as spoils and/or to fuel the remainder of the campaign. Despite the blunder, Thutmose eventually succeeded in crushing his enemy and ending the coalition's revolt.

In the end, the Battle of Megiddo and the larger campaign through the Levant was a great success for Thutmose III and a great success for Egypt, providing substantial plunder and reestablishing control over a large portion Syria-Palestine.<sup>60</sup> While scholars debate the details of

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<sup>59</sup> Sun Tzu 1.18.

<sup>60</sup> Richard A. Gabriel, "What We Learned... from the Battle of Megiddo," *Military History* 24, no. 8 (November 2007): 21, *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/212673953?accountid=8289> (accessed November 13, 2014).

the Battle of Megiddo, the Annals inscribed on the walls of the Karnak temple and the Gebel Barkal stele paint a clear picture of one of military history's great logistic triumphs. Thutmose triumphed at Megiddo because of his understanding of the terrain, his understanding of his own army and the capabilities of the enemy, successful execution of the logistical problems caused by the Aruna road, and effective command and control of his forces during the march and the battle. He used his numerical advantage to overwhelm his enemy and force them into a hasty retreat to Megiddo. Despite a missed opportunity to eliminate his enemy on the field before they could reach safety inside the city, he executed a successful siege that left the enemy chiefs crawling on their bellies for mercy. The Battle of Megiddo secured Thutmose III's fame as one of Egypt's greatest warrior pharaohs and set the tone for Egyptian hegemony in Syria-Palestine that lasted until the fall of the New Kingdom over 200 years later.

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