

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,
CAPT. FRANCIS W. H. PETRIE, F.R.S.L., &c.

VOL. XVIII.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute)

INDIA: W. THACKER & Co. UNITED STATES: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, N.Y.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: G. ROBERTSON & Co., LIM.

CANADA: WILLARD Co., LIM., Toronto.

S. AFRICA: JUTA & Co., Cape Town.

PARIS: GALIGNANI.

1885.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

THE EXCAVATIONS AT PITHOM.

M. NAVILLE'S excavations at Tell El-Maskhûtah, which he identified with the Biblical Pithom, are referred to in a letter from Mr. Stanley Lane Poole, to the *Athenæum* last year, from which the following quotations are made: It appears that a small corner of the present excavation had already yielded a sculptured group, representing Ramses II. between two gods, and four other sculptures, all of which had been removed to Ismailia. "These M. Naville noticed were dedicated to the god Tum, the setting sun, and that Rameses II. was described as the friend of Tum. The conclusion was, that they must have come from one of the several cities which bore the sacred or temple name of Pe-tum, and M. Naville conjectured that the Petum in question, associated as it was with Ramses II., might turn out to be none other than the treasure-city of Pithom which the children of Israel "built for Pharaoh" (Exodus i. 11). This finally decided him to begin his exploration at Tell El-Maskhûtah, whence these monuments dedicated to Tum had been brought. He found the site marked out by extensive but not lofty mounds, and at the corner where the previous diggings had been made a red granite group representing Ramses II. between two gods (the fellow-group to that at Ismailia) was still standing *in situ*, and some unworked blocks of stone lay near by.

"This was all that had been done when M. Naville began his work of excavation in the beginning of February, 1883. When I visited the spot M. Naville had been at work for six weeks, and had carried the excavations almost as far as he meant to go. He had employed about a hundred men daily, and had cleared away 18,000 cubic metres of soil. He had laid bare the entire enclosure, and excavated a great part of the interior chambers and the whole of the remains of the temple. He had identified this walled city with Pithom, the strong city of Exodus, and had established its Greek and Roman name. He had ascertained that the builder of the city was Ramses II., traced its existence through several kings of the twenty-second dynasty to Ptolemaic and Roman times, and arrived at other important historical and geographical conclusions. No more triumphant success in the first trial of our exploration society could have been desired, and M. Naville may well be congratulated on having added to his distinction as an Egyptologist the laurels of a discoverer of the first rank. His method of work, his deductions, and his brilliant conjectures, which afterwards proved uniformly correct, evince the rarest of gifts—the instinct for discovery.

"The excavations are only a few hundred yards from the railway and canal. Standing on the high mounds on the south side of the canal, a comprehensive view is obtained of the whole position. Immediately in front we see a cluster of mounds and brick walls, clearly of the Roman period. These represent the Roman town of Hero or Heroöpolis, which adjoined the fortified camp. Beyond the town, looking southwards, is a slight valley, and on the other side of this is the square enclosure where the monuments were found which identified this enclosure with the Biblical Pithom and with the Greek fortress and Roman camp of Hero. At the south-east corner of the enclosure are the minaret and other vestiges of the ruined and (save by one Greek) abandoned Arab village of Tel El-Maskhûtah, and not far from the south-west corner is a deserted building formerly used by the engineers of the freshwater canal. Near the corner where the mosque stands, the dry bed of the old Pharaonic canal is seen, as it curves round towards the line

of the present canal. The fort or store-city was thus well supplied with water.

"Crossing the valley to the square enclosure, we are able to realise its peculiar character. The enclosing walls are about two hundred mètres long on each of the four sides, and are exceedingly massive. They are built of crude brick, made without straw, of an unusually large and solid kind, and the average thickness is no less than seven mètres. Within the enclosing walls the whole area is seen to be full of large excavated pits, which on closer examination prove to be solidly-built square chambers of various sizes, but all of the same general appearance. Almost the whole space within the walls, except the corner devoted to the temple, is honeycombed with these chambers, which are divided from one another by partition walls of from two and a half to three mètres thick. There is nothing resembling these curious chambers in Egypt; they are unique, and I think they are in some respects the most interesting part of M. Naville's discovery. The walls are not only unusually thick, but unusually well built. The bricks are very large, well squared, and laid with mortar with great care and regularity, while the perpendicular of the wall seems faultless. But the strange thing about these strong rooms is that they have no doors. M. Naville has cleared them down to the foundations, but not a door or gate could he find! The explanation of this is, however, easy and satisfactory. About ten or twelve feet from the foundation there is a sort of ledge, of the depth of a brick or two, running all round the walls, as though the floor of an upper story had rested there; and a little below the ledge there are square holes in the walls, with the remains of wood in them, as though the ends of beams had been inserted in them in connexion with the support of the upper floor. Below the ledge the wall is of plain brick, but above it is often covered with a coating of white plaster. All this seems to point to one conclusion—the doorless chambers below were entered by trap-doors from the upper stories, which were possibly dwelling-rooms; and the lower chambers, entered by trap-doors from above, must have been storehouses or granaries. When it is remembered that the Pithom with which M. Naville has identified this site is described in Exodus i. 11 as a "store-city," or treasure-city, the unique importance of these singular doorless chambers will be fully appreciated. No more remarkable confirmation of the accuracy of this particular statement in Exodus could well be demanded. It should be added that the bricks are made both with and without straw, that they are set with mortar as a rule, and that M. Naville has turned over thousands of them without finding a single cartouche like the one in the Berlin Museum, which Lepsius states came from this very site. The chambers near the old canal are in a much less perfect state than those in other parts of the enclosure; and the reason is seen in the fact that the more ruined parts were nearest to the water, and were, therefore, longest lived in and built over.

"The Temple of Tum, at the southern side of the enclosure, had its own enclosing wall, of which M. Naville has uncovered a good deal. Within this space were found all the monuments, with the exception of a black granite statue, which was evidently thrown over into the adjoining store-chamber. The temple was a small one, as might be expected in a place which was a fortress rather than a city—a place to take refuge in, not to live in. There were two sphinxes, now at Ismaïlia, before the entrance, and also the two groups of Raumes II. between gods already described; but no traces can be found of an avenue, or, indeed, of any extensive outworks. Of the temple itself almost nothing remains. The limestone used in its construction was very soft, and its natural decay was hastened by the action of later builders. The red baked brick of the Roman camp is seen over part of the

temple's site, and the materials of successive cities had to be supplemented from the remains of the Abode of Tum.

"The monuments found in the temple enclosure by M. Naville are these:—

"1. The oldest is a hawk with the name of Ramses II., nineteenth dynasty.

"2. Twenty-second dynasty. Small inscription of Sheshonk (Shishak); granite statue of Osorkhon II.; another of Takeloth. Probably the great black granite statue which lies broken in the storehouse next the temple belongs also to Osorkhon II.

"3. Ptolemaic. A great (hieroglyphic) *stela* of Ptolemy Philadelphus and his sister and wife Arsinoë. (Arsinoë is placed, in double, among the gods and goddesses, with a new and unknown cartouche in addition to her usual cartouche. The *stela* relates to the construction or restoration of the canal to the Heroöpolite gulf by Ptolemy Philadelphus.) Also a statue with the same new cartouche of Arsinoë.

"4. Roman. A milestone, with the names of Galerius Maximian and Severus (306 or 307 A.D.) and the distance, AB ERO IN CLVSM A MI VIII [≡] (the MI in monogram), and another stone describing the place as ERO CASTRA; and some *nomos* coins, mostly of Hadrian and Trajan.

"From these monuments the following facts have been deduced:—

"I. *The Identification of Tell El-Mashkâtah with the Biblical Pithom.*—This is proved by the juxtaposition of the names of Petum and Thuku (the latter previously identified with Succoth by Heinrich Brugsch Pasha) on the back of the Ptolemaic statue of a priest. The same name Petum occurs three times on a magistrate's statue of the reign of Osorkhon II., and both names are found on a third statue. "Petum [the abode of Tum] in the city or region of Thuku," *i.e.*, Pithom in the city of Succoth, fixes the site beyond a doubt; and its position in the Wady et-Tumilât, the valley that divides the desert and offers a direct and practicable road from the eastern border to Memphis, corresponds exactly to the description of "Thuku at the entrance of the east." Thus the excavations at Tell El-Mashkâtah have not only identified the strange brick enclosure with the strong store-city which is said in Exodus to have been actually built by the Israelites, but, by also establishing the connexion between Pithom, the sacred name, and Thuku, the ordinary name, they have fixed the position of the first encampment on the route of the Exodus (Exodus xii. 37). Not only do we see the actual storehouses which the children of Israel are related to have built, but we now know the first station on their journey from Egypt into Palestine. The position is certainly by no means where Brugsch placed it. At present it is enough to say that one point in the Exodus is definitely fixed, without entering into the question how to square this point with other points which at present rest upon conjecture. When more sites have been explored—such as San (Tanis) and Daphnæ—we may be able to lay down the route with more precision.

"II. *The Identification of the Builder of the City and Temple with Ramses II.*—M. Naville is convinced that Ramses II. built the temple, and that he was not able to complete his design. The oldest monuments bear his name, and hard by lie blocks of unworked granite and other stone, with sculptors' marks, evidently intended to be used in the decoration or enlargement of the temple. The identification of Ramses II. with Pharaoh the Oppressor is thus confirmed. The temple was afterwards restored or added to by several sovereigns of the twenty-second dynasty.

"III. *The Identification of Tell El-Mashkâtah and Pithom with Hero or Heroöpolis.*—This follows from the two Roman inscriptions, and another stone bearing the ΗΡΟΥ shows that the name went back to Greek times. Further, M. Naville traces the name Hero or Ero to Ara, the Egyptian word for storehouse, which occurs in the title of the priest on the statue which first

settled the identity of Pithom : "chief of the *storehouse* of the temple of Tum or Thuku." Other points are the appellation *castra*, and the distance from Clysmā, which is clearly nine Roman miles. There is no trace of an L before VIII, unless the monogram of M with a perpendicular line through it stands for M L instead of MI, which is improbable. If Hero or Pithom was only nine miles from Clysmā, the site of the latter must be looked for near Lake Timsāh, or more probably towards the ancient head of the Bitter Lakes.

"We still wait the decipherment of the great *stela* of Ptolemy Philadelphus and Arsinoë ; but meanwhile to have traced the history of Pithom-Succoth-Heroópolis from the foundation by Ramses II. in the fourteenth century B.C., through the twenty-second dynasty and the Ptolemies, under its Egyptian name, and then in its Greek and Roman name till 306 A.D., is no slight feat.

"I should add that, though I am indebted to M. Naville for the details above recorded, he must not be held responsible for any errors, either in description or inference, which may have crept into my notes."
