

BUILDING THE HYKSOS' VASSALS: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DEFINITION OF THE HYKSOS SUBORDINATION PRACTICES

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"It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word"
-Lucien Febvre

Abstract

In Egyptology, the subordinates of the Hyksos are commonly defined as *vassals*, often without giving a definition of the concept and as a consequence, the complexity that subordination practices might acquire is overlooked. In this paper, I present a revision of the origin and meaning of the concept of vassal, the underlying paradigms that sustain it, and discuss the scarce evidence as to reconstruct the subordination practices carried out by the Hyksos in Egypt.

Introduction

When describing certain societal practices of different nature referred to in texts or expressed through material culture, concepts are the tools which come to hand to give an explicit logical explanation to that otherwise unarranged information. Thus, academic considerations of the evidence lie in the use of concepts; concepts with their own history and composed of layers of meanings that have become reshaped, redefined and sometimes useless and outdated through time.² During most of the 20th century, scholars were concerned about the nature of concepts. They debated on their origin, changes and meanings, and raised issues that are still under discussion. However, it is not my intention to open a debate on such matters here, but to point out the relevance of concepts to describe and define evidence in accordance with the use that scholars make of them. One of the most relevant researchers devoted to the analyses of these matters, historical theorist Reinhart Koselleck, held that the 19th century marked a turning point in the notion of history

because at that time *History* "achieved conceptualization as a fundamental mode of human existence"³ becoming a collective singular in which all the past and future *histories* would have a place.⁴ It was the time when the western world – and even more restrictively Europe – inaugurated a new paradigm: *Modernity (Neuzeit)*, a paradigm that provided a new way of understanding mankind and time.

This new paradigm was rooted in the Enlightenment belief that the progressive expansion of human reason through scientific knowledge was a way of understanding mankind along with its history and controlling culture and nature.⁵ It was also influenced by the new nation-states that had emerged as places where people could find a way of identification and develop a sense of belonging. *Modernity* changed religious beliefs about the future as it was now seen by a new "progress unfolded to the degree that the state and its prognostics were never able to satisfy soteriological demands which persisted within a state whose existence depended on the elimination of millenarian expectations."⁶ Thus, the new paradigm emerged in Europe enabling subjects to *make* History and not only to describe it. Men were able to establish objectives without expecting the fulfilment of prophecies.

Koselleck stated that the idea of *Modernity* as something completely new was coined in a strong relationship with the previously conceived concept of *Middle Ages*.⁷ The related concept of *feudalism* as a concept of universal history enhanced the previous thousand years and "coincided to a large degree with the concept of the *dark* Middle Ages."⁸ But in fact, *feudalism* does not have a

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² On the "polysemy of concepts," cf. MOTZKIN 1996, 44 ff.

³ WHITE 2002; cf. also KOSELLECK 2002, 5.

⁴ KOSELLECK 2004a, 44.

⁵ WHITE 2002, xiv.

⁶ KOSELLECK 2004b, 17.

⁷ KOSELLECK (2002, 162) sustained that until the 17th century the experience of the world was *static*, but the concept of *Modernity (Neuzeit)* from the 19th century onwards, revealed an *additive* experience of time.

⁸ KOSELLECK 2002, 164. My emphasis.

unique and clear meaning, thus it is important to be aware of what it meant for those who applied it.⁹

Unlike *feudalism*, the concept of *vassal* was not coined in modern times, but in the Middle Ages and ever since it has suffered changes. As a matter of fact, it explained socio-political subordination practices, but its meaning varied through time: from describing practices performed by people belonging to “lower social strata/serfs” during the 7th century AD to depicting those practices performed by people belonging to “high social strata/free men” during the 9th century AD.¹⁰ At that time, practices were bounded by rituality (homage and loyalty oath) and concluded with a “gift.” This last benefit became the most relevant part of the bond, entering men into vassalage just to obtain land (the *fief*).

The new paradigm of *Modernity* that settled in Europe in the 19th century made way for an increase in the number of disciplines dedicated to explaining the past of mankind. Among them was Egyptology, a discipline born in parallel with the archaeological findings of the Napoleonic campaigns in Northern Africa. By the end of the century Egyptology “possessed a firm body of grammatical works, a number of exemplary text editions, a sound technique of excavation, and vast amounts of material stored in museums” as M. Lichtheim stated long ago.¹¹ She also laid emphasis on the fact that specialization, as well as the ceaseless reinterpretation of the Egyptian history, had to become a rule – and a need.

Nevertheless, Egyptological studies were not an exception to the common ways of describing ancient societies from the 19th century onwards. Between 1850 and 1950 many Egyptological works were published, coming from the major

centres in Egyptology located in Europe (mainly in Germany, England and France) and from those in the United States (i.e. the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago) which described the ancient Egypt as a *feudal* state. To illustrate this feature, I shall refer to the definition given by one of the most relevant French Egyptologists, Gaston Maspero, in his *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l’Orient* which was published in thirteen volumes from 1875 onwards. In explaining the role of the royal children, Maspero linked their position to the possession of land: “The most favoured of the princes married an heiress rich in *fiefs*, settled on her domain, and founded a race of *feudal lords*.”¹² In the same vein, when describing the societal bonds, he stated that:

“Every Egyptian, the King excepted, was obliged, in order to get on in life, to depend on one more powerful than himself, whom he called his master. *The feudal lord was proud to recognize Pharaoh as his master, and he himself was master of the soldiers and priests in his own petty state.* From the top to the bottom of the social scale every free man acknowledged a master, who secured him justice and protection in exchange for his obedience and fealty. The moment an Egyptian tried to withdraw himself from this subjection, the peace of his life was at an end; he became a man without a master, and therefore without a recognized protector.”¹³

The argument which lies behind this description is related to the fact that the Egyptian *Weltanschauung* held that the king was the owner of the land and that people received it from him. As *feudalism* was a concept of universal history, it allowed describing similar historical situations in different cultures. In Maspero’s view, *feudalism* pervaded all the Egyptian society, from gods to

⁹ KÓTHAY (2011, 121) clearly summarized this relevant feature: “Feudalism has been defined in many different ways, in narrow and broad senses with many variants. In its perhaps most widespread narrow definition, the term ‘feudal’ refers to the fief and vassalage, most often implying military service, and focuses on relationships within the upper classes of medieval Western European society. In its wider uses, it describes a political organisation or the whole socio-economic structure of a society; in Marxist terms, it is perceived as a mode of production or social formation and represents a pre-capitalist stage of historical development. There also exists a comparative use of the concept of feudalism in a non-European study. In all its uses, the concept of feudalism has been the subject of much controver-

sy, especially from the 1960s.” Cf. also bibliography cited there. In this regard, it is relevant to mention the discussion on feudalism in Ancient Egypt sustained by K. JANSEN-WINKELN (1999). He considered the Third Intermediate Period, and explicitly the Libyan domination as “feudal” based on the characteristics of feudalism defined by O. HINZE and C. CAHEN (JANSEN-WINKELN 1999, 15–20) but cf. SCHNEIDER 2010, 156.

¹⁰ A summary on the evolution of the concept in PÉCOUT 1997, 1570–1571.

¹¹ LICHTHEIM 1963, 31.

¹² MASPERO, n.d., vol II, 43. My emphasis.

¹³ MASPERO, n.d., vol II, 94–95. My emphasis.

men and even “preceded the royal sovereignty on the banks of the Nile.”¹⁴ Then the “feudal lords” (nomarchs) became the *vassals* of the king, the ultimate landowner, who gave them land in exchange for goods and services.¹⁵ The struggles, disputes and tension among nomarchs and their “master” (king) were explained as conflicts generated by the nomarchs’ search for independence, which was sometimes reached. Like the French school of Egyptology, the German school considered nomes as *fiefdoms* and nomarchs as *independent lords* or *feudal princes*.¹⁶ In this regard, Eduard Meyer’s ideas were decisive to consolidate the description of Egypt as a *feudal state*, expressed in his *Geschichte des Altertums* (1884–1902). The other European schools and the American one also shared this theoretical point of view, which was still used during the first part of the 20th century.¹⁷

As mentioned above, Egyptology as a specialized field of research is immersed in scholarly paradigms and does not escape from the use of concepts. For some time, scholars began to think about concepts and, in consequence, efforts were devoted to exploring their application and different meanings through time.¹⁸ With regard to “feudalism” and its related concepts, I would like to go back to a secondary topic which D. Schloen analysed in depth in his study on (Weberian) *patrimonialism* in the Ancient Near East in general and in Ugarit in particular. He recognized that *feudalism* was a theoretical frame used to explain the evidence coming from the Bronze Age Near East until the 60s,¹⁹ while the related concept of *vassal* was used to explain the position of the political subordinates, drawing attention to the fact that Near Eastern specialists often failed to define the concepts they used, or adopted automatically certain terms to describe evidence without taking into account their

different meanings. In this regard, he established a distinction between the “*economic structures* usually associated with medieval feudalism” and “the ideology of feudalism as a *political system*.”²⁰ By distinguishing these two key features, he disclosed the different conceptions which lie behind the use of feudalism and its related concepts in Ancient Near Eastern studies. On the one hand, it was applied to describe socio-economic structures, such as the European *manorial system* of dependent agriculture where a “lord” granted land in return for goods and services from their “vassals;” on the other hand, it was employed in its legal and political dimension, where a “contract” between free men had to be established.²¹ Homage and the imposition of tribute were also practices linked to *vassalage*.

With regard to Egyptology, K. Kóthay has recently described the historiographical development and variations in the use of the concept of *feudalism* in the discipline. Some strong points in her analysis encompass the recognition of the employment of analogies in Egyptological historiography, and the fact that although concepts like *capitalist* and *capitalism* are not frequently used, *feudal* periods are followed by others described through *capitalist* features.²² As a matter of fact, the idea of progress from one stage to another is embedded in a clear analogy with the Western social “evolution” – the *Modernity* paradigm – in the Egyptological historiography of the last two centuries. In short, the European historical evolutionary models have not set analogies aside.²³

In this paper, I would like to place special emphasis on the *natural usage* the concept of *vassal* acquired in current Egyptological approaches to define the status of the Hyksos socio-political subordinates, despite its explicit different meanings. Then, I shall discuss the evidence that can be

¹⁴ MASPERO, n.d., vol. II, 252.

¹⁵ MASPERO, n.d., vol II, 56.

¹⁶ Cf. also BRUGSCH 1877 and WIEDEMANN 1884.

¹⁷ PETRIE 1894–1905; BREASTED 1937 [1st edition 1909]; KEES 1932; PIRENNE 1938; STOCK 1949; SCHENKEL 1964. For a summary, cf. DANERI DE RODRIGO 1992. Anyway, this approach was not the only one. Other theories were applied to explain the evidence. For instance, it is worth mentioning the introduction of Marxist studies by Soviet scholars I. DIAKONOFF (1980, on Mesopotamian society) and O. BERLEV (1971, on the Egyptian Middle Kingdom). Anyway, the impact of this theory in Egyptological approaches is relative. Other approaches like those of W. HELCK (1968), B. KEMP (1972) and more recently the col-

lection of studies edited by MORENO GARCÍA (2013a) gave different explanations to the constitution of the Egyptian state and its nature.

¹⁸ I.e. on “myths,” cf. BAINES 1991; on “cultural appropriation,” cf. SCHNEIDER 2003.

¹⁹ SCHLOEN 2001, 187.

²⁰ SCHLOEN 2001, 189. My emphasis.

²¹ SCHLOEN 2001, 189.

²² KÓTHAY 2011, 127. On the evolution of many premises originated in the 19th century, on the myth of the “eternal Egypt,” and in particular on the academic approaches to the economy of ancient Egypt, cf. MORENO GARCÍA 2009.

²³ DANERI DE RODRIGO 1992, 24.

considered to delineate the Hyksos subordination practices.

Building the Hyksos' *vassals*

At present, many different and unresolved topics surrounding the Hyksos have captured the interest of scholars: their provenance, ethnicity, identity, religious beliefs, the extent and administration of their political entity, and the absolute and relative chronological order of the rulers.²⁴ At the same time, other topics lost their centrality, such as the possible connection of the Hyksos to Biblical narratives like Exodus or the origin of the Israelites.²⁵ As in all those topics, in the analysis of the subordination practices held by the Hyksos, many layers of interpretation converge even though during most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the subordination practices did not occupy a relevant place in the academic field. At that time, scholars were interested in other features, many of them mentioned above, such as determining the ethnic origin of the Hyksos. In fact, during World War II, many scholars were involved in hard discussions, proposing a Semitic or Hurrian origin (at that time the latter was considered to be Aryan) or a mix of them.²⁶ Other relevant topics were the origin and meaning of the term "Hyksos," the extent of their "empire" and the relationship with Biblical narratives.²⁷ In fact, the subordination practices held by the Hyksos were subsumed in the conviction of the existence of a Hyksos "empire" which encompassed the Levant and the whole of Egypt,²⁸ controlling also the trade with Kerma.²⁹ Unsurprisingly,

ly, when the need to qualify the situation arose, *feudalism* and its related concepts were the chosen theoretical tools to describe it.³⁰ As mentioned above, in a *feudal* organization the *vassals* were related to the *lord* through the possession of land, and the lord was rewarded in goods or services (tribute). This is a first definition of *vassal*, but as previously stated, it is not the only one.

In fact, topics and their explanations were and are closely related to the evidence. Until the finding and later publication of the texts related to the Kamose's saga,³¹ description of Hyksos subordination practices was based mainly on later sources, such as the *Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre* (19th Dynasty) and the epitomes of Josephus, Africanus and Eusebius based on Manetho's lost *Aegyptiaca*. The impressive number of scarabs found in Egypt, Nubia and the Levant with names and titles linked to the Hyksos also contributed to the description of the subordination practices as *vassalage*. Other sources helped to reinforce the negative view on the Hyksos, like *The Speos Artemidos Inscription* of Hatshepsut (18th Dynasty) or the Turin King-List, where clear differences between the Hyksos and the Egyptian kings are registered.

The *Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre* (Pap. Sallier I, EA 10185) was a literary composition dated to the reign of Merenptah (19th Dynasty) which deserved multiple analyses.³² Recent approaches focus on the impact that the "received tradition" or "collective memory" on the Hyksos and Amarna "traumas" – in Assmann's terminology – could have had on its making.³³

²⁴ There are countless approaches to these topics. I shall mention a few as a general guide: OREN 1997; RYHOLT 1997; SCHNEIDER 2010, ARNOLD 2010; BIETAK 2010a; SHIRLEY 2013.

²⁵ PETRIE 1906, 70.

²⁶ Cf. MEYER 1884, 3, I, 304; GUNN and GARDINER 1918, 37; ENGBERG 1939, 46–47; ALT 1954; for a summary, cf. BERNAL 1991.

²⁷ LUCKENBILL 1910, 134–139; WATERMAN 1916, 228–229.

²⁸ SAYCE 1903.

²⁹ SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1951, 55.



³⁰ For instance, in describing the socio-political situation in Palestine during the early 2nd millennium BC, W.F. Albright asserted that: "It is becoming more and more evident, as a result of a comparison of the data from different sites in Palestine, that there was a great barbarian irruption from the north during the eighteenth century B.C., in the course of which many of the cities of Palestine were destroyed. This invasion must be connected with the

movements which ultimately brought the Hyksos into Egypt. *The extraordinary strength of the fortifications erected by the new conquerors is to be explained by the feudal organization of the Hyksos Empire in Asia, independently recognized by Professor Alt and the writer.*" Cf. ALBRIGHT 1926, 10. My emphasis.

³¹ The Carnarvon Tablet was found in 1908 and published by A. GARDINER (1916); the fragments of the First Stela of Kamose were found in 1932 and 1935, cf. LACAU 1939, 245–271; the Second Stela of Kamose was found in 1954 and published by L. HABACHI in 1972; and finally the recently re-identified fragments of the Third Stela of Kamose originally found in 1901, were published in 2005. Cf. GABOLDE 2005, VAN SICLEN III 2005, 2010.

³² Among the relevant literature on this source, cf. the *editio princeps* GARDINER 1932; also REDFORD 1970; GOEDICKE 1986; SPALINGER 2010.

³³ SPALINGER 2010, 130–131.

In the *Quarrel*, Apophis is recognized as “king” (*nsw*) while his name is encircled in the cartouche, and Avaris is not classified with  (N25) as in the Second Stela of Kamose (K2 onwards), but with the usual classifier for Egyptian towns  (O49). King (*nsw*) Seqenenre is addressed as “ruler” (*heqa*) and “chief” (*wr*) of the Southern City (Thebes). Nevertheless, a strong feature in the source is the portrait of the Hyksos king as a worshipper of Seth, considered a unique god.³⁴ The source parallels the actions of Apophis addressed to Seth antithetically to those made by the Egyptians for Re.³⁵

The *Speos Artemidos Inscription* of Hatshepsut (18th Dynasty) reinforced the negative view of the Hyksos by means of declaring that “they ruled without the Sun,”³⁶ with the aim of stressing the positive actions of the female king supported by the sun-god Re.

The *Turin King-List*, dated to the reign of Ramesses II (19th Dynasty), includes the Hyksos. The fragment preserves the *nomen* (“Son of Re” name) of just one foreign ruler, Khamudi. The correspondent entry following the name states: “six foreign [rulers] ruling for 108 years,”³⁷ the number of kings also mentioned by Manetho.³⁸

The preserved information given by Manetho delineates a violent assault of the Egyptian territory from peoples of the East, “invaders of obscure race” who subdued Egypt, founded Avaris and were defeated by the Thebans.³⁹

Based on these sources the conclusion that the Hyksos were the “lords” of an extended territory was reached, and the concept of *vassal* started to be of common use. J. Breasted sustained that “many of the numerous kings of this period (between the fall of the 12th Dynasty and the end of the Hyksos rule), enumerated in the Turin King-List, may have ruled in the South as *vassals* of the Hyksos, such as Sekenenre, whom the folk-tale makes the Theban *vassal* of one of the Apophis-

es.”⁴⁰ The common picture at those times was that of a suffering and weakened Egypt under the Hyksos control, as indicated in Manetho’s description of the arrival of the Hyksos into Egypt.⁴¹

The findings made during the 20th century, mainly the Kamose’s texts, support that classical view. In this regard, D. Polz sustained that two different ideological levels can be discerned about the ancient approaches to the “Hyksos problem.” He made a distinction between an “Egyptian ideology” expressed by Kamose fighting a foreigner who dominated part of the country – and in this way the war against the Hyksos was understood as a “war of liberation” – and an “Egyptological ideology” where the arguments and consequent war against the Hyksos led to the establishment of the New Kingdom and was the basis of its existence.⁴² With slight and subtle differences, both types of sources reinforced the negative image of the Hyksos dominating a weakened Egypt.⁴³

In the same year in which the location of Avaris at Tell el-Dab^a was announced, a new study on the Hyksos was published by J. Van Seters, *The Hyksos. A New Investigation* (1966). In a new approach to the subject, he dedicated a complete chapter “The Nature of the Hyksos Rule” to explain the Hyksos subordination practices. The author connected the Hyksos political tradition with that of the Old Babylonian world, as documented in the Royal Archive of Mari, whose basic characteristics were outlined by J. Munn-Rankin in a paper published in 1956.⁴⁴ Munn-Rankin had recognized the existence of a confederation of small states in a region that included most of western Asia. These independent states were allied by parity treaties which at the same time possessed “small *vassal* kingdoms” whose leaders acknowledged the “leading king as *suzerain*.” She distinguished between symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships among rulers expressed in the sources through kinship vocabulary. While symmetrical

³⁴ On this particular aspect, cf. GOLDWASSER 2006.

³⁵ SPALINGER 2010, 122–123.

³⁶ ALLEN 2002, 5.

³⁷ RYHOLT 1997, 118; MÁLEK 1982, 101.

³⁸ WADDELL 1964, 83.

³⁹ WADDELL 1964, 77–93.

⁴⁰ BREASTED 1937, 221. My emphasis. By the early 20th century the existence of three kings with the name Apophis was sustained.

⁴¹ SAYCE 1903, 349. Sayce has also sustained that “Manetho tells us that the Hyksos or Shepherd kings invaded Egypt from the east, overrunning the land, burning the cities, and destroying their temples. At last one of them, named Sala-

tis, was made king. He established his capital at Memphis, whence he governed the whole country, both Upper and Lower Egypt, exacting taxes from its inhabitants and setting up garrisons to overawe them. He also fortified the eastern frontier of his kingdom, through fear of the Assyrians who were then growing in power.” (SAYCE 1903, 349) in his book *The Burden of Egypt*, published in 1951, J.A. WILSON named the chapter on the Second Intermediate Period “The Great Humiliation.”

⁴² POLZ 1998, 221.

⁴³ Cf. also SPALINGER 2010.

⁴⁴ VAN SETERS 1966, 162–163.

relationships took place among rulers of similar status who called each other “brothers”, asymmetrical relationships were maintained by rulers of different status addressed as “lord” or “father” and “son.” Thus, what follows here is a *political* definition of the concept of *vassal*, emphasizing the asymmetrical relationships established behind the terminology related to kinship.

Munn-Rankin followed V. Korošec’s proposal on the Hittites to define the concept and supported the notion that the “vassal-suzerain” bond was sustained on *contracts*; in the case of the Hittites they took the form of treaties.⁴⁵ The same argument, used to explain the relationship between the Israelite god and men, was proposed by G. Mendenhall in the field of Biblical Studies, through the concept of *covenant*.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Munn-Rankin encountered several problems when applying the concept of “vassal-suzerain:” the correlation between “brotherhood” and symmetrical status and between “fatherhood” and asymmetrical bonds was not uniform.⁴⁷ There were also changes in the status of the bonds between rulers, from asymmetrical to symmetrical relationships.⁴⁸ She pointed out that in certain cases an ancient ruler wrote to a younger one as his “son” without any kind of political connotation, considering it as the addressing of an older ruler to a younger one.⁴⁹ Finally, she also explicitly admitted that no treaty texts were found in the archive dated to the 18th century BC.⁵⁰

Probably, these “exceptions” reveal both the diversity and complexity that the subordination practices acquired in that specific socio-political scenario.

As mentioned above, Van Seters adopted the explanation and standpoint held by Munn-Rankin and applied them to the Hyksos, in view of the

continuum of the Amorite world into Egypt under the foreign dynasty. He also considered that there were strong commercial and cultural bonds between the Levant and Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1800–1530),⁵¹ and applied the concept of “vassal-suzerain” – following Munn-Rankin’s definition of this kind of bond as asymmetrical – to explain the relationships among the rulers of Avaris, Thebes and Kerma. Thus, he took into account the hypothesis which referred to the existence of a treaty between the Hyksos and the Egyptians during the Second Intermediate Period.⁵² He also suggested that the Hyksos controlled the south – considering Seqenenre as an Apophis’ *vassal*⁵³ – and that there were minor *vassals* under Apophis’ reign in Asia and Egypt, recognizing the existence of a Hyksos confederacy, in line with the “Amurrite politics of the Mari age.”⁵⁴

The letter sent by Apophis to the ruler of Kush, mentioned in K2, where the Hyksos ruler called the Kerman one “my son” was defined as “a letter of an older ruler to a younger one” without any kind of political bias, following the example given by Munn-Rankin with regard to the Royal Archive of Mari.⁵⁵ In fact, Van Seters considered that the Hyksos shared the same political and diplomatic structure as Munn-Rankin described for the Mari Archive: “vassal-suzerain” relationships based on treaties or covenants (“contracts”).⁵⁶ Even though the Hyksos were related to northern-Levantine traditions, the socio-historical situation reflected in the Archive of Mari could hardly be paralleled with that of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period. Here, the collapse of the strong unified state of the Middle Kingdom left a scenario characterized by political fragmentation and cultural diversity,⁵⁷ framed by the emergence of a dynasty of foreign origin which controlled part of the

⁴⁵ KOROŠEC 1931.

⁴⁶ MENDENHALL 1954.

⁴⁷ MUNN-RANKIN 1956, 79.

⁴⁸ MUNN-RANKIN (1956, 76–77) referred to the relationship between Shamshi-Adad and the ruler of Eshnunna to illustrate this feature.

⁴⁹ MUNN-RANKIN 1956, 81–82.

⁵⁰ MUNN-RANKIN 1956, 89, 92. M. LIVERANI (2001) has also followed these descriptions in his explanation of “The Ideology of Brotherhood.”

⁵¹ With regard to the chronology of the Second Intermediate Period, I follow the proposal of RYHOLT (1997, 42–43) of considering its beginning at ca. 1800 BC. For the end of the period, I follow the date given by BIETAK (2010a, 139), ca. 1530 BC.

⁵² VAN SETERS (1966, 167) sustained that “The nobles, in their speech to Kamose (CT 5–7), emphasize that they have the right to pasture cattle in the Delta and hold land in agricultural states. These generous rights *must have been guaranteed by treaty arrangements.*” My emphasis.

⁵³ VAN SETERS 1966, 167.

⁵⁴ VAN SETERS 1966, 170.

⁵⁵ VAN SETERS 1966, 168–169. Hieroglyphic text of K2 in HELCK 1983, 91–97, no. 119; cf. also HABACHI 1972.

⁵⁶ I basically agree with the fact that several socio-political practices held by the Hyksos can be related to Levantine traditional practices (FLAMMINI 2011–12).

⁵⁷ Cf. BOURRIAU 2010.

territory, and pretended to extend its control to the rest.

A recent discussion on the Hyksos *vassals* was approached by Kim Ryholt, but his arguments were directed to dismiss the existence of Hyksos subordinates and not to discuss the concept of *vassal*.⁵⁸ He stated that the existence of three groups of *vassals* (the Semitic vassal kings ruling in the Delta, the 17th Dynasty and the Kushite ruler) was conceived due to a “reminiscence of the earlier belief that the Fifteenth Dynasty was a “*Weltreich*” while qualifying it as a “baseless assumption.”⁵⁹

As D. Schloen had distinguished in the field of Assyriology, a difference between an *economic* definition of the concept of *vassal* and a *political* one can also be detected in Egyptological studies. In the same vein, it is also worth mentioning that the first definition precedes the latter. In the former, the *vassal* was a free man linked to his “master” through a bond of fidelity, in exchange for land (the *fief*, cf. MASPERO above). In the latter, the *vassal* was a lower status ruler linked to a higher status one by a treaty or covenant; thus, it was a legal bond usually signed by both parties (cf. VAN SETERS above).

Nowadays, although *feudalism*-related concepts have been dismissed as useful tools for describing the Hyksos rule in Egypt, the concept of *vassal* to name their political subordinates has survived, adopting a natural usage.

Re-evaluating the Evidence: Can the Hyksos subordinates be considered (exclusively) *vassals*?

As stated above, even though the authors of the ancient narratives, both Egyptian and Classical, were far from our idea of “History,” and their goals were completely different from ours, the information they provided shaped the first academic approaches to the subject. The idea that the Hyksos created an extended empire and entered Egypt through a violent invasion was strong in the Egyptological studies produced between the 19th and mid-20th centuries. Written sources helped to reinforce such view: violence, subordination attempts and religious differences were common denominators in contemporary and later narratives.

Nowadays, and compared to the situation in the early 60s, the amount of information regarding the Hyksos has increased a lot. In fact, material evidence coming from Tell el Dab^ca/Avaris and from other sites in Egypt is being continuously incorporated into the discussion, such as the recent findings made at Edfu.⁶⁰ The information on the Hyksos is provided by longer pieces of text (narratives, royal inscriptions), short inscriptions on different formats (i.e. seals, sealings, amulets, weapons, parts of buildings), royal king-lists (The Turin King-List) and material remains. Nevertheless, not all this evidence allows us to explain their subordination practices, and none of it gives a definition or explicit explanation of those practices. It is the researcher’s task to describe and give a plausible explanation by means of analysing the discourse and the findings.

As a matter of fact, contemporary sources reveal that the Hyksos effectively controlled part of Egypt. The First Stela of Kamose (K1 onwards) and the Carnarvon Tablet (CT onwards) stated that the northern frontier under Theban control was possibly located at Cusae, while K2 referred to Hermopolis as the southern limit of the territory under Hyksos control. J. Allen sustained that the area between both locations could have been a buffer zone.⁶¹ In this regard, J. Bourriau has suggested that the Pan-Grave cemeteries located somewhere to the south, at Deir Rifeh and Mostagedda, revealed material remains that represented two groups “which formed garrisons to control passage down the Nile” during the Second Intermediate Period. Deir Rifeh, located on the west bank of the Nile, was linked to the Hyksos while Mostagedda, located on the east bank, served to the Thebans.⁶² Thus, this fact is a point of departure – a premise – to propose possible explanations about the *way* those rulers attempted practices of subordination.

As mentioned above, late Egyptian and Classical sources were considered as proof of the establishment of vassalage relationships under the Hyksos rule during most part of the 20th century. Nevertheless, late Egyptian sources reveal an increasingly negative view of the Hyksos through time, focusing on their religious differences and probably exposing long-term traumas, while Clas-

⁵⁸ RYHOLT 1997, 323–327.

⁵⁹ RYHOLT 1997, 323.

⁶⁰ MOELLER and MAROUARD 2012.

⁶¹ ALLEN 2002, 17.

⁶² BOURRIAU 2010, 23.

sical authors received and expressed such a tradition. Even so, these sources should not be completely discarded because some information on socio-political practices can still be obtained.

On the contrary, the Egyptian contemporary evidence was biased by the situation of the moment, expressing the impact that a foreign rulership had on the traditional Egyptian worldview; and although the information it provides is scarce, it can give some clues on the way the subordination practices could have been carried out.

A point to be highlighted is that possibly the Hyksos rulers had built their control over the Egyptian territory – beyond the Eastern Delta – not through a military conquest over the land, but through personal relationships with the local people. These personal relationships could have also adopted different patterns depending on factors that are not possible to be reconstructed completely. It was also probable that some sort of economic taxation could have been imposed, as referred in K1 and in later narratives (i.e. *The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre* and *Manetho*).

The situation of Neferusi as described in K1 (line 14) and CT (line 13) can be useful to attempt an explanation. The toponym Neferusi appears classified by ⊗ (O49), a classifier for Egyptian towns. It reveals that it was considered as part of the Egyptian territory. An Egyptian named Teti, “the son of Pepi”, deserved the rage of Kamose because he turned the town into “*a nest of Asiatics*.”⁶³ No more personal information on Teti is given by the source. Thus, Teti’s attitude can be explained if he was a Hyksos’ subordinate. If so, it reveals that Egyptians could have been co-opted by the Hyksos as loyal subordinates.⁶⁴ Finally, the source states that Neferusi was attacked and recovered by Kamose.

The attitude of the Hyksos Apophis preserved and described in K2 reinforces the idea of the establishment of personal relationships of subordination as a way of expanding the Hyksos sphere of influence. It also provides evidence of the socio-

political changes that resulted from the disputes among the rulers of the three political entities (Apophis, Kamose and the Nubian ruler whose name is never given) by the late Second Intermediate Period, a feature also presented in K1 and CT. The stelae had been probably on display in the temple of Amun in Karnak, where they were found. In K2, the disputes among the rulers were over the possession of the title *Heqa* class. ⸎ “*ruler (of Upper Egypt)*”.⁶⁵ In fact, a way of measuring the impact that the Hyksos rule had on the Egyptian tradition is through the importance that the title *heqa* received from the Second Intermediate Period onwards.⁶⁶ Although the title *heqa khasut* (“*ruler of the foreign lands*”) had been in use since earlier times (attested from the Old Kingdom onwards, and during the Middle Kingdom to name foreign rulers mainly from Nubia and the Levant, i.e. the Execration Texts), it was only during the Second Intermediate Period that the title was adopted by a particular line of rulers to name themselves. In fact, these rulers included the title in their titulary, among other traditional Egyptian titles, as it appeared on a door-jamb of the Hyksos Seqer-Her found in Avaris.⁶⁷ At that time, the title *heqa* acquired a completely new significance when used by both the foreign independent rulers located in Avaris and the Egyptian rulers located at Thebes.

The mention of this title in the source indicates the non-existence of political and territorial unity: the three rulers are mentioned as *heqa of Avaris*, *heqa of Kush* and *Heqa (of Upper Egypt)*.⁶⁸ These rulers did not argue about Egyptian royalty but about who was the legitimate *Heqa (of Upper Egypt)*; in other words, who was the legitimate authority in Upper Egypt.

Indeed, the texts reveal the Egyptian point of view when the advance of the feared chaos (*isfet*) effectively took place in Egypt, the land which deserved to be ruled under *maat*. They also sustain a negative view of the Hyksos ruler, describing him as someone who tried to subordinate first

⁶³ SMITH and SMITH 1976, 60; REDFORD 1997, 14. Text in HELCK 1983, no. 119, 89.

⁶⁴ Cf. VAN SETERS (1966, 169) proposed that Teti probably was “the commander of a garrison near the border of Upper Egypt.”

⁶⁵ For an analysis of the title *Heqa* in K2, cf. FLAMMINI 2011–12.

⁶⁶ HARVEY 2007, 347–348.

⁶⁷ BIETAK 1996, 65 and pl. 52.

⁶⁸ It is relevant to mention that the word *heqa* received different classifiers in the source. When it is addressed to the rulers of Avaris and Kush it receives the “papyrus roll” Y1 classifier, probably denoting illegitimacy, while when referring to Upper Egypt receives the “King of Upper Egypt” A43 classifier. Cf. FLAMMINI 2011–12.

and challenge later the Upper Egyptian ruler, established in Thebes, Kamose.⁶⁹ Then, the source shows Apophis' intention of making subordinates, in this case, the attempt to subordinate Kamose, considering him a lower status ruler. Naturally, Kamose rejected the proposal.⁷⁰ The entire text maintains the idea of Apophis claiming the rulership of Upper Egypt, but he is pictured as a usurper, an enemy, considered a "chief of Retjenu" (*wr n Rtnw*, K2, line 4), a "ruler of Avaris" (*ḥq3 n Hwt-W^crt*, K2, line 19) or a "chief (who) is in Avaris" (*wr m Hwt-W^crt*, K1, line 3). It is relevant to mention that in all these examples the classifier of the locations (Retjenu and Avaris) is the one for "foreign land" (𓏏, N25). Thus, despite the fact that Apophis *claimed* his right to rule over Upper Egypt, he was the ruler of a "foreign" land, the domain of *chaos*. The second passage refers to the relationship between Apophis and the ruler of Kush, a relationship that has received different renderings. The discussion was centred in determining whether Apophis addressed the letter to "the son of the ruler of Kush" or if he called the ruler of Kush "my son." A closer look at the classifiers of the word "ruler" in the passage can shed light on this matter, showing a subtle difference in the meaning of the whole paragraph. Apophis' claim was directed to the *position* the ruler of Kush granted himself.⁷¹ Following these statements, Apophis proposed a sort of alliance to the ruler of Kush to defeat Kamose and divide his territory between them, by saying

"I have not attacked him in the same way he has done to you; he has cut up these two lands to their affliction, my land and yours. He has destroyed them. Come northwards! Do not be afraid! (?) Behold! He is here in my hand; there will be no one who will rise up to you in this Egypt. Behold! I shall not let him go until you have arrived. Then we shall divide those towns of this Egypt and Khenet-henty-nefer (or "both our lands")⁷² shall be in joy."⁷³

After reproaching the attitude of the ruler of Kush, he changed his attitude trying to convince him through persuasion, asking for his help to defeat Kamose and promising to share the towns under Egyptian control after reaching that goal.

There are further indications that Apophis considered himself a ruler of superior rank who deserved to rule not only over Lower Egypt but over Upper Egypt as well. This aspect seems to be recognized by Kamose, who in line 16 of K2 states that Apophis was a "(...) vile Asiatic, who used to say: "I am a lord (*nb*) without equal (...)."⁷⁴

Apophis' self-flattery was recognized by the Egyptian ruler.

This particular way of depicting the relationships between all the rulers involved in the actions described in K2 were conceptualized as reflecting *vassalage* bonds.

Nevertheless, the given definitions of *vassal* – the one, related to the possession of land and the other expressed through the signing of a treaty – do not seem to be supported by the information provided by the evidence. Even though in K2 Apophis called for an alliance with the ruler of Kush with the promise of dividing the towns which were under Kamose's control, there is no mention to any kind of formal procedure and at present no formal agreement of any kind has been reported to be found.

The information provided by other sources also suggests a similar situation. The administrative organization of the Hyksos seemed to be rather different from that of the Egyptians. S. Quirke and more recently J.J. Shirley reached similar conclusions with regard to this specific topic. Quirke's study on the seal-amulets from the Second Intermediate Period revealed that the only titles attested in the Hyksos administration were "overseer of what is sealed (treasurer)" and "king's son." Moreover, Quirke asked himself if "the recurrence of the title "king's son" indicates use of kinship structure to cover areas of authority, notably military control."⁷⁵ As for Shirley, despite recognizing

⁶⁹ Another contemporary source is the inscription of Ahmose, the son of Abana, found at Elkab. Ahmose probably served under kings Ahmose I, Amenhotep I and Tuthmose I while his father served under Kamose and Ahmose's predecessor, Seqenenre. LICHTHEIM 1976, 12–15.

⁷⁰ When he states "your mouth is narrowed when you make me a chief and yourself a ruler (of Upper Egypt)" (FLAMMINI 2011–12, 58).

⁷¹ The text reads "by (the hand of) the ruler of Avaris: Auserre, son of Re, Apophis, greets my son, the ruler of Kush.

Why did you raise yourself as ruler [of Upper Egypt] without letting me know? Have you seen what Egypt has done against me? The Ruler [of Upper Egypt] who is there, <Kamose, the victorious> given life, is attacking me in my territory (...)" (FLAMMINI 2011–12, 59).

⁷² Alternative translation proposed by SMITH and SMITH 1976, 61.

⁷³ My translation.

⁷⁴ My translation and emphasis, FLAMMINI 2011–12, 74.

⁷⁵ QUIRKE 2007, 133.

that a comprehensive understanding of the 14th and 15th Dynasty administration (she considers both dynasties together) is not yet possible, she gives an explanation that coincides with Quirke's proposal that the two dominant areas were those related to the "treasurer" and the "king's sons."⁷⁶ She concludes that the Hyksos adopted certain aspects of the Egyptian administration which they recognized as familiar, while at the same time they set aside others. In fact, the Hyksos rulers adopted certain features of the Egyptian culture, such as the script, language, gods and titles. But they also preserved their own customs and features of Levantine origin that led them to build an identity as rulers of their own, which differed itself from the traditional Egyptian kingship.⁷⁷

The possible existence of a circuit of gifts among the Hyksos rulers and other local chiefs can be elucidated. In this regard, the dagger (Saqqarah, Cairo JE 32735 [CG 52768]) found inside the coffin of Abed, undoubtedly a prestige good, can also be understood as a gift in exchange for certain services or loyalty.⁷⁸ Abed was not the primary owner, but a certain Nehemen, as the inscription on one of its sides reveals: "*Good god, Lord of the Two Lands, Nebkhepshre, Son of Re, Apophis, given life.*" On the other side, there is a hunting scene and another inscription which identifies the owner of the weapon as "*the follower of his lord, Nehemen.*" A scribal palette given by Apophis to a man called Atju also points to the probable existence of a personal circuit of gifts which was established at that time. In her analysis of the imagery of these objects, Do. Arnold remarked that

"judging from the deposition of Nehemen's dagger – surely a gift from the Hyksos ruler named upon it – in the coffin of another Hyksos follower, called Abed, and from the gift of a scribal palette by the same king to a man called Atju, a picture of mutual loyalty emerges that bound members of the Hyksos ruling class together."⁷⁹

Thus, the language related to kinship bonds (my "son"), to the "household" ("lord") and to

"followers" in the sources, and the probable circulation of gifts reinforce the description of the possible existence of subordinates through personal bonds. The existence of an administration different from the Egyptian one, also points out to a different conception of the socio-political relationships. In this regard, not only had the letter sent by Apophis to the ruler of Kush through a messenger (K2) revealed the possible way the relationships were maintained, but also *The Quarrel between Apophis and Seqenenre* mentions the dispatch of messengers from Avaris. The recent finding of a fragmentary letter in cuneiform at Tell el Dab'a points to the possible existence of relationships with Mesopotamia.⁸⁰

Thus, the evidence reveals that by the late Hyksos period (Apophis' reign) an extensive network of personal relationships bounded by messages and gifts, and expressed through kinship and "household"-related terms, can be proposed as a way of organizing the Hyksos subordination practices.⁸¹ It seemed to be the way the Hyksos rulers found to maintain and develop their socio-political bonds in the Egyptian territory.

Even though the evidence is scarce, to make the concept *vassal* just a synonym for *socio-political subordinate* does not allow the different strategies employed by the Hyksos to expand their control over the territory to be perceived. Several practices can be enumerated: co-option of local people; imposition of some sort of taxation; establishment of hierarchies; dispatch of messengers; arrangement of allies into networks; and recognition to loyal subordinates. The contemporary written sources reveal through a defiant, admonishing or persuasive speech, the ways such a goal was attempted to be achieved.

Of course, a *vassal* is a *socio-political subordinate*, but it is a restricted concept that defines a particular way of establishing subordination relationships. Its natural usage shades the possibility of considering not only other coexistent practices of subordination but also the complexity that they could have acquired.⁸²

In short, Egyptology was embedded in the proper paradigms and concepts of the 19th century,

⁷⁶ SHIRLEY 2013, 531, 546.

⁷⁷ FLAMMINI 2013, 174.

⁷⁸ DARESSY 1906, 115–120.

⁷⁹ ARNOLD 2010, 213. My emphasis.

⁸⁰ BIETAK 2010b, pl. 14.

⁸¹ FLAMMINI 2011–12, 71–72.

⁸² I.e. *patronage*, usually defined as a personal and dyadic (a relationship established between two individuals) bond, without pursuing the establishment of specific legal tools to bind the relationship. I have referred to these aspects in FLAMMINI 2011–12, 74. On patronage in the ancient Near East, cf. WESTBROOK 2005; for an approach to patronage practices in the Egyptian society, cf. MORENO GARCÍA 2013b.

when it emerged as a scientific discipline. Following the common statements of the time, ancient Egypt was defined as a feudal state and the subordinates of the Egyptian king were described as his vassals, who received land in exchange for their services. In this way, the local socio-political subordinates of the Hyksos rulers were also considered their *vassals*. By the mid-sixties of the 20th century, the definition of the vassals of the Hyksos acquired a new meaning to describe asymmetrical relationships that were determined by social status, and formally framed by a contract. Nowadays, the Hyksos subordinates are qualified as vassals without describing the content of the concept (nat-

ural usage). I consider that this particular application of the concept “*vassal*,” downplays the possibility of considering diverse ways of exerting control.

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