The Hand of God in the Military Sources in the New Kingdom.

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Abstract

The paper focuses on roles of the hands of the ancient Egyptian deities to provide the kings with support and victory in the wars of the New Kingdom.

Keywords: Roles, Hands, Deities, Kings, Wars, New Kingdom

Introduction:

The New Kingdom witnessed launching numerous military campaigns which had been inscribed in the autobiographies of the leaders and recorded on the walls of the temples.¹ The military sources of this era mentioned the support of various deities who provided the Egyptian kings with support and gave them victory against their enemies².

The aim of this paper is to display certain aspect from the divine support represented in hand of the god as mentioned and illustrated in wars texts and scenes respectively. This intends to fulfill the followings points:-

(a) To display the used expressions to show the role of the god’s hands in wars.

(b) To indicate the deities who used their hands to support the kings.

Role of the god’s hands would be presented in the coming part chronologically from the 18th dynasty to the 20th dynasty.

I. Hand of God in the Wars of the 18th Dynasty:

I.A. Reign of king Ahmose:

A text from the autobiography of great military Ahmose son of Abana referred to role of the gods of Upper Egypt to support king Ahmose against his enemies represented in rebels of Aala and Tetian who made rebels. The god of Upper Egypt used their hands to seize the enemies.³

\[ ntrw \, šm'w \, hr \, šm.f \]

¹ Spalinger A.J., War in Ancient Egypt, the New Kingdom, Courtesy of Stephen P. Harvey, 2005, p.1.

² ﻋﺒﺪ اﻟﻤﻨﻌﻢ ﷴ ﻣﺠﺎھﺪ، اﻟﯿﺪ ﻓﻲ اﻟﻠﻐﺔ اﻟﻤﺼﺮﯾﺔ اﻟﻘﺪﯾﻤﺔ، ﻣﺠﺎھﺪ، ﻣﺠﺎھﺪ، 2008، ص.86.

³ The east wall of the tomb of Ahmose son of Abana in El Kab- Aswan; Al Ayedi A. The Liberation War: The Expulsion of The Hyksos from Egypt, Ismailia, 2008, p. 89.

⁴ URK, I. line 20; Kandil, H.A., “The Function and Symbolism of the Clenched Hand in Ancient Egypt”, in: UAA 8, Menofia University, 2011, p.82.
“the gods of Upper Egypt are upon grasping him”\(^1\).

I.B. Reign of king Thutmose III:

There are texts which referred to the divine support to king Thutmose III. This is considered normal because king Thutmose III had made seventeen successful campaigns; sixteen in Asia and one in Nubia.

Firstly in the Karnak Victory Stela\(^2\) god Amun-Re played an important role to cause the two arms of god Amun and Seth provide the king with victory:

\[ \text{dmd.n.i } \text{wy.sn } n.k m nht \]

"I have united their two arms (Hours-Seth) for yours in victory"\(^4\)

The previous text refers to an important idea that all powers of Egypt even the two rivals Horus and Seth were joined and united together to confront the enemies.

Secondly in the Karnak Victory Stela, god Amun-Re used his two arms in order to prevent evil powers from reaching king Thutmose III:

\[ \text{wy } \text{hm.i } \text{hr hry hr shr dwt} \]

"The arms of my majesty (Amon-Re) are above, warding off evil"\(^6\)

Thirdly god Amun caused the arm of the king which was identified with god Horus to obtain mighty while riding his chariot to strike the enemies with his arrows\(^7\):

\[ \text{mi Hr tm\textsuperscript{3} nb irt it Imn hr.s nht } \text{wy.f} \]

"like Horus mighty of arm, lord of action, his father Amon upon it (the chariot) to strengthen his two arm.\(^9\)"

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\(^1\) The text was also transited by Lichtheim M., *Ancient Egyptian Literature, The New Kingdom*, II, University of California Press, 1976, p.13.

\(^2\) Black granite tablet discovered by Mariette in a chamber northwest of the main sanctuary room of Karnak temple; Breasted J.H., *Ancient record of Egypt*, II, Chicago, 1906, p.266.

\(^3\) *Urk*, IV, p.618, L.22.

\(^4\) *BAR*, II, p.266.

\(^5\) *Urk*, IV, p.618, L. 23.

\(^6\) *BAR*, II, p.266.

\(^7\) The wall inclosing the corridor surrounding the granite holy of holies of the great Karnak temple of Amon, inscription of Battle of Megiddo; After: *BAR*,II, p. 184.

\(^8\) *Urk*, IV, p.657, L.7-9.

\(^9\) *BAR*, II, p.184.
II. Hand of God in the Wars of the 19th Dynasty:

The military sources of the 19th dynasty are associated with the mighty kings Sety I, Ramesses II and Merenptah.

II.A. Reign of Sety I:

A text related to war of Seti I against the Shasu Bedouins mentioned the divine support of god Re to protect the king:

\[ \text{ir.n Re tšw .k ‘wy.f m s3 tp.k} \]

“Re made your frontiers, his two arms are the protection behind you”.

In the scene that show Seti I triumphing over foreign enemies in the presence of Amon-Re and the god Dedwen the text referred to role of god (Horus) of Behdet to protect the king from the hot weather and make him to have feelings of refreshment during the long period of the campaign:

\[ Bhdyt hr irt n.k ‘wy.f mn kbh pr \]

“the Behdetite makes for you his two arms into a cool place for you”.

II.B. Reign of Ramesses II:

The poem of the famous battle of Kadesh stated the divine support represented in god Amun to king Ramesses II in many texts. Firstly king Ramesses II proudly mentioned that god Amun had answered his call and provided him with protection through his hand to confront his enemies in the battlefield:

\[ gm.n.i Tmn iwi dr ‘š.i n.f diw.f n.i drt.f hn’.i h‘i kwi \]
“I found Amun came when I call to him, he gives me his hand and I become happy”\(^1\).

Secondly god Amun assured his support to his king Ramesses II through using his hand:

\[
\text{ink it.k drt.i m.t.k} \]

“I, your father, my hand is with you”\(^3\).

Thirdly king Ramesses II admitted the support of god Amun:

\[
iw \text{Imn n byw.i iw drt.f hn.t.i} \]

“Amon is my helper, his hand is with me”\(^5\).

In the following text, it was the war goddess Sekhemt who accompanied the king in his chariot and she gave him her protection and support:

\[
\text{mk Slm.t wrt nty hn.t.f sw m ssmtw drtw.s hn.t.f} \]

“Sakhmet the Great is she who is with him, She is with him on his horses, her \text{hand} is with him”\(^7\).

\section*{II.C. Reign of Merneptah:
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The victory text of king Merenptah from the Karnak temple stated god Amun using his power to bind the enemies before presenting them to the king:

\[
m \text{Imn w'f swm drt.f} \]

"For Amon shall bind him \text{in his hand} and shall deliver him to his ka”\(^9\)

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^1\) Lichtheim M., \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, vol. II,p.66.
\item \(^2\) \textit{KRI}, II, p.43, L.126.
\item \(^3\) Lichtheim M., \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, vol. II,p.66.
\item \(^4\) \textit{KRI}, II, p.56, L.171.
\item \(^5\) Lichtheim M., \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, vol. II, p.67.
\item \(^6\) \textit{KRI}, II, p.87, L.287.
\item \(^7\) Lichtheim M., \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature}, vol. II, p.70.
\item \(^8\) \textit{KRI}, IV, p.17, L.20.
\item \(^9\) Breasted J. H., \textit{Ancient Records of Egypt}, Chicago, III, 1907, p.262.
\end{itemize}
Another text stated the support of the god which accompanied the Egyptian soldiers against the invasion of the Libyan tribe.

\[ wdw.sn \ g\rt\ ntr \ hn^m.w.sn \]  

"they campaigns, the hand of the god was with them" \(^2\)

No doubt the god in the previous texts was god Amun. In another text god Amun-Re escorted the Egyptian soldiers and god Seth provided them with his hand:

\[ Imn-R^e \ hn^i.sn \ Nubty \ sr \ rdit \ n.sn \ g\rt \]  

“Amon-Re being with them, and the Ombite (Set) giving to them the hand." \(^4\)

### III. Hand of God in the Wars of the 20\(^{th}\) Dynasty (Reign of Ramesses III):

The text\(^5\) described the divine support of god Amun who used his hand to overthrow the enemies and put them under the power of the king:

\[ Imn-R^e \ hr \ dr \ hfty.i \ di \ n.i \ t3 \ nb\.t \ m \ 3m.i \]  

"Amon-Re drives back my enemy and gives to me every land in my grasp." \(^7\)

In another texts\(^8\) god Amun captured the foreign lands:

\[ t\i w \ nbw \ hjswt \ nbw \ m \ hft \ 3m \ n \ Imn-R^e \ ntr \ ntrw \]  

"all plains and all hill-countries are in the grasp of Amon-Re, king of gods." \(^10\)

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1. KRI, IV, p.5, L.27.  
2. BAR, III, p.245.  
3. KRI, IV, p.6, L.32.  
4. BAR, III, p.245.  
In a text god Amun promised victory for the king and announced the duty of his hand to expel all the enemies:\(^1\)

\[\text{drt.i r hn'.k r dr psdt psdw}t\]

"**my hand is with you to repel the nine bow**"\(^3\).

In a remarkable text\(^4\), god Amun announced his hand would never leave the king in any fight battlefields.

\[\text{'nh s' d f m Ntrw nbw 'wy.sn hr httw f r'-nb}t\]

"**I set upon his throne in victory, for his hand remains with me in every fight**"\(^6\)

Arms of the god covered the king every day\(^7\):

"**Protection and life are behind him from all gods, their arms shelter him every day.**"\(^9\)

The hands of god Amun and the gods were identified with shield to protect the king from the attacks of the enemies and their weapons as mentioned in the coming two texts\(^10\) respectively:\(-

\[\text{" my hand is a shield for the breast averting evil."}^1\]

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\(^1\) In Medinet Habu temple, exterior, north wall, lower register, scene just east of second pylon; After: Breasted, J.H. and Allen, T.G., Medinet Habu II, *OIP* 9, pl.78.


\(^4\) In Medinet Habu temple, interior, first court, north wall, lower register, east end; Breasted, J.H. and Allen, T.G., Medinet Habu II, *OIP* 9, pl.96.


\(^7\) In Medinet Habu temple, exterior, north wall, second scene from west end, Libyan battle; Breasted, J.H., *Madinet Habu I*, OIP 8, pl.26.


"Their hands are a shield for me, for my breast."

The hand of god Amun destroyed the land of Temeh and prevent them from penetrating into the land of Egypt:

\[\text{drt} \text{ } f \text{ } \text{hn'} \text{ } f \text{ } r \text{ } \text{sksk} \text{ } b \text{ } \text{tmhw}\]

"his hand is with him to destroy the land of temeh."

IV. The Hand of God in the Military Scenes:

The scene which displays the divine support occurred in the 19\textsuperscript{th} dynasty reigns of kings Sety I, Ramesses II and Merenptah as well as the 20\textsuperscript{th} dynast reign of king Ramesses III.

IV.A- God Amun-Re

In a scenes from the reign of king Sety I in the Karnak temple from the 19\textsuperscript{th} dynasty, the king while presenting prisoners and spoil of the Shasu campaign to Amon-Re, the god holds the ‘\textit{nh}’ sign of life in his left hand and the \textit{wꜣs} scepter symbol of power in his right hand. Holding the ‘\textit{nh}’ means that god Amun-Re had control of life and holding it by his left hand side of th heart means that he gave life to the king and the Egyptians because he loved them. with love from his heart and the His right hand holds \textit{wꜣs} scepter to provide the king with power and domination especially over his enemies.

The same image of god Amun is almost identical with his scene in the temple of Madinet Habu when he grasped the ‘\textit{nh}’ sign of life and was symbol of power and before him stands king Ramesses III from the 20\textsuperscript{th} dynasty.

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4 In Medinet Habu temple, exterior, west wall, northern end, Libyan campaign; After: Breasted, J.H., \textit{Madinet Habu I, OIP 8}, pl.16.
9 Breasted, J.H., \textit{Madinet Habu I, OIP 8}, Pl.11.
In another scene god Amon-Re extends his right arm grasping the sickle sward towards king Sety I to symbolize divine support and power to the king in order to cut heads of the enemies. His left hand grasps the ‘nh sign and ropes to symbolize that the god possessed control over the lives of the enemies and to guarantee victory for the king.

In a scene for king Ramesses II from temple of Abu Simbel, the king smites his enemy before god Amun who extends the right arm that grasps a sickle-sward towards the king to symbolize presenting support and victory in war through cutting heads of the enemies. Holding the w3s scepter by his left hand was to symbolize role of the god to strengthen rule of the king.

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1 The Epigraphic Survey, *OIP 107*, pl. 17; E.S.Hall, 1986, pl. 45.

2 Dosroches-Noblecourt& Kuentz, *le Petit Temple d'Abou Simbel II*, Cairo, 1968, pl. 32.
Fig. 3: Ramsses II smites a Nubian captive before Amon-Re, Small temple at Abu Simbel, south wall. After, Dosroches-Noblecourt& Kuentz, le Petit Temple d’ Abou Simbel II, Cairo, 1968, pl. 32.

The scene of god Amun while holding the sickle sword is almost repeated in scene of king Ramesses III from the 20th dynasty while smiting chiefs of all countries before the god Amon.

Fig. 4: after, Breasted J. H., *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, University of Chicago Press, pl. 5; Breasted, J.H. and Allen, T.G., *Medinet Habu II*, OIP 9, pl.101.

In the Victory stela of king Merenptah in the Egyptian Museum, hand of the god Amon-Re that holds the sickle sword symbolizes providing divine order to cut heads of the enemies with full support. Hands of goddess Mut who stands on the left side behind the king is open towards the king’s shoulder as if to back him with her magical power. The other hand is holding sign of millions of years ad is to provide the king with eternal protection. Khonsu on the right side behind the king has the same position of his mother goddess Mut.
IV.B- Goddess Mut

Goddess Mut used to stand behind her husband god Amun. In a scene of receiving tributes from king Sety I\(^1\), she is shown while holding ‘\(n\hbar\) sign in her right hand as if she has the power of giving life to the king. She upraises her left arm with open hand towards the king as if to provide him with her magical power and in the same time to show her acceptance to recive tributes of war from the king\(^1\).

IV.C- God Khonsu

God Khonsu the third member in Thebes used to stand behind his mother Mut. Khonsu holds the crook and flail\(^2\) as a symbol of his responsibility of presenting authority and energetic power to king Sety I.

Fig. 5: The triumph hymn stela of Merenptah, Egyptian museum JE31408, CG34025, section 3.17.1. After, Iskander S., the Reign of Merenptah, 2002, p.434, fig.13.

Fig. 6: Sety I presenting Asiatic prisoners and spoils to the theban triad, Karnak temple, north wall, east wing, second register. After, The Epigraphic Survey, *OIP* 107, pl. 14.

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IV.D- Amun, Mut and Khonsu

A remarkable scene illustrated the triad of Thebes according to the following order; Amun, Khonsu and Mut from the reign of king Ramesses II.

God Amon grasps ‘nh sign and w3s scepter in his right hand to symbolize life's control and domination. Khonsu's hand is on the shoulder of his father as if he was following his father to provide king Ramesses II with support. The hand of goddess Mut is on the shoulder of her son. The position of the hands of the deities might refer to the idea that the powers of the Theban triad are united to provide the king with support, protection and victory over his enemies.

Fig.7: Ramses II presenting Negro captives to Theban Triad, Abu Simbel temple. After, Schoske S., *Das Erschlagen Der Feinde, Ikonographie und Stilistic der Feindvernichtung im Alten Ägypten*, Heidelberg, 1982, p.273, g17.

IV.E- God Dedwen

God Dedwen (fig.2) holds scepter in his right hand while grasping rope of other rows of prisoners' rings1 to symbolize that the foreign god presents divine power, support and domination to the king of Egypt Sety I.

IV.F- Goddess Sekhmet

In this scene the goddess Mut take the form of war goddess Sekhmet who holds ‘nh sign of life and upraised her right open hand towards king Sety I to symbolize support, giving life and accept of victory's spoils.

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1 The Epigraphic Survey, *OIP 107*, pl. 17, p.60.
Fig. 8: Sety I is presenting Hittite prisoners and spoil to Theban triad and the goddess Maat, Karnak temple, north wall, west wing, bottom register. After, The Epigraphic Survey, Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, The Battle Reliefs of Sety I, pl. 36

IV.G- God Re-hor-akhty

The god extended right arm grasps a sickle-sward towards the king to cut heads of the Libyan enemies. He holds the ‘nh sign in his left hand as a symbol of providing long life to the king.

The same image of god Re-Hor-Akhty is almost identical with his scene in the temple of Madinet Habu of Ramsses III but instead of the ‘nh sign, he holds wꜣs scepter and ropes of groups of foreign districts refer to idea giving divine power and control.

Fig. 9: Ramses II smites his Libyan enemy before the god Re-Horakhty, Abu Simbel temple, great columns hall, east wall, northern side. After, Dosroches-Noblecourt & Kuentz, le Petit Temple, pl.35.

IV.H- God Thoth

Thoth the god of wisdom appeared standing behind king Ramesses III who was worshipping god Amun. Thoth extends his arm with open right hand towards the back of the king and he is holding the wꜣs sign of power in the left one. This might expresses idea of god Thoth who provided the king with the power of knowledge and wisdom in battle.

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1 Dosroches-Noblecourt & Kuentz, le Petit Temple, pl.35.
Fig.10: Ramses III being commissioned by the god Amon for undertaking the Libyan war, Great temple, exterior, west wall. After, Breasted, J.H., Madinet Habu I, OIP 8, pl. 13.

IV.I- God Montu

In the scene of king Ramesses III while going to war behind him was god Montu the war god of Armant while extending his right open hand towards the king to provide him with protection and support. The left hand holds the 'nh sign of life to preserve the king’s health power.

Fig.11: Ramses III was leaving the temple with the god Montu after taking the commission, Great temple, exterior, west wall. After, The Epigraphic Survey, Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III, Breasted, J.H., Madinet Habu I, OIP 8, pl. 14.

Conclusion:

The following points can be concluded from the previous texts and scenes:-

(A) The hands of the deities represented the main method of providing the kings with support and victory over the enemies.
(B) It is clearly indicated that god Amun represented the lion share in using his hand to provide the Egyptian kings with support and power over their enemies.

(C) The ancient Egyptians under the direction of the priests believed in the power of faith in idea of the hands of the various deities that would provide the kings with victory and the safety of their country Egypt.

(D) The ancient Egyptians believed in the female power represented in goddess Mut and Sekhmet.

(E) God Amun Re holds the ‘nh sign of life in his left hand and the wṣs scepter as if he possessed the power of giving life to the king of Egypt who acted as representative of Egypt.

(F) God Amun holds the sickle sword to present it to the king as if he grantee victory for the king who would cut heads of the enemies,

(G) Goddess Mut opened her hand towards the king as if giving him blessings and magical protection.

(H) God Khonsu provided the king with power of rule and authority.

(I) God Thoth provided the power of knowledge in wars.

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الملخص العربي

يد الإله في المصادر العسكرية خلال الدولة الحديثة

ملخص:

يتناول البحث دور يد الألله، الملك الذي تعد مصدر تلك الحرب بداية من عهد الملك أحمس في الأسرة الثامنة عشرة حتى الملك رمسيس الثالث في الأسرة العشرين. تلك الألله مثل آمون وثالوث طيبة وموت وآلهةφ، الذين قدوا القوة والدعم والحماية لملوك تلك الفترة وذلك من خلال النصوص والمناظر الحربية في الدولة الحديثة. الأسرة الثامنة عشرة أحتوت على بعض النصوص الحربية الخاصة بالملك أحمس والملك تحمس الثالث التي ترمز للدعم الإلهي والحماية بالإضافة إلىمنح القوة اللازمة للنصر. أما الأسرة التاسعة عشرة فقد تعددت بها النصوص الدالة على الحماية والدعم وتكرار مصطلح "يدي معك" كرمز لمنح القوى الإلهية أو أن الملك يضرب بيد الإله وذلك خلال نصوص الملك سيتي الأول ورمسيس الثاني ورمسيس الثالث. الآسرة العشرون تناولت العديد من النصوص الحربية الخاصة بالملك رمسيس الثالث التي ترمز لمنح السيطرة والقوة الإلهية للملك بالإضافة إلى الحماية. وهناك العديد من المناظر الحربية خلال الدولة الحديثة التي تؤكد نفس الإيماءات بمنح القوة والدعم والحماية الإلهية للملك.