

WHO WERE THE HABIRU

Dating the Exodus to the Amenhotep II period implies that the el-Amarna period overlaps with the period of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. In the literature on Canaan it is common practice to identify the Hebrews or the sons of Israel with an infiltrating horde called the Ḥabiru, mentioned in the el-Amarna tablets. The inevitable question then arises: Who are the Habiru?

In the el-Amarna tablets the name "Ḥabiru" appears in the letters of Abdi-ḥiba of Jerusalem, either as Ḥabiru or in the third person genitive and accusative plural Ḥabiri, as well as in gentilic or adjectival form Ḥabira. When the letters were made public, attention was drawn to this name. Some scholars regarded it as an appellation from the West Semitic (Hebrew) root ḥbr meaning confederate, ally, companion, i. e. people from different races who were allied, together to fight the Egyptians (Sayce, Kraeling, D'horme)¹. Other scholars (Hommel, Jastrow) derived it from the clan name Ḥeber (Hebrew – Hever – חֶבֶר), in the tribe of Asher. Halevi, Hillbrecht and others took them to be Elamites. In contrast to this, Conder, Knudtson and others² identified the Habiru with the Hebrews, firstly on the basis of the assonance of the two names, and secondly on the grounds of similarity between the description of the Habiru wars in the el-Amarna letters and that of the Israelite conquest as depicted in the Bible. This conjecture first raised by Conder was contested by other scholars because the Ḥabiru wars were mentioned only in the letters from Jerusalem, while the conquest depicted in the Bible referred to the whole of Canaan. Attention was therefore turned to another group mentioned in the letters as having invaded large areas of Canaan: the Sa Gaz group. On grounds of identical activity, Winckler equated the Sa Gaz with the Habiru and by doing so forged another link in the chain connecting the Habiru with the Hebrews. For if the Habiru are equated with the Sa Gaz this implies that they fought not only in the region of Jerusalem but throughout the country.

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- 1 See: D'horme, *Les Nouvelles Tablettes D'El Amarna*, RB, 1924, (33), p. 15. *Les Habiru et Les Hebreux*, JPOS, 1924, p. 166. Kraeling, *Aram and Israel*, 1966, p. 34. elsewhere: (*Light From Ugarit On The Habiru*, BASOR, 77, 1940, pp. 32–33) kraeling rejects the etymology from br Ḥbr ḥhr (notes).
 - 2 Conder, *Monumental Notice of Hebrew Victories*, PEF, 1890, 326 – 329; TEAT, p. 141; Notes, PEF, 1891, p. 72 Knudtson, TEAT, p. 48; Mercer, TEAT, 1939. *Excursus VII*, p. 84

Sayce derived the name Sa Gaz from the Assyrian Sagāsu and explained this as meaning "murderers", "executioners". Delitzche in 1896 explained it as meaning "plunderers". According to him the name derives from the Akkadian Habbātu, and although he himself expressed doubts on the matter and refrained from ruling upon it, his explanation won wide acceptance.³ Today Sa Gaz is Regarded as a pseudo-ideogram for Sagāssu – Habbātu.⁴

Granted that the name Sa Gaz is an appellative for murderers, plunderers, etc. the fact that the Sa Gaz is equated with Habiru and the Hebrews implies that another connotation must also be given to the definitions of Hebrew and Habiru. Scholars have thus begun to regard the terms Hebrew and Habiru also as appellatives instead of as proper names. Spiegelberg was the first to see in these names an appellative for wanderers which had originally been applied to all wanderers in the area as a whole, and only later came to be restricted in reference solely to the Israelites (Ibri). Landesberger derived the name Habiru from Haver (Hebrew for ally, friend), and explained Haver as meaning – "going in one group" i. e. plunderers living in groups (or gangs). Hence this name has no ethnic root, but denotes people without family living outside the tribe (outcasts)⁵. Winckler⁶ believed the Sa Gaz meant robbers, and according to him, the Habiru, whom he believes to be the invading Hebrews, were beduins, and "beduines are notorious for their robbery and pillage". He therefore concluded that so long as the Hebrews lived a nomadic life they were called Habiru which corresponds to the appellative plunderer (Sa Gaz – Habbātu). This view of Winckler's became widely accepted even though the Sa Gaz are not depicted at all as plunderers in the el-Amarna tablets, and in spite of the inaccuracies caused by such a conjecture (already referred to by Knudtzon)⁷.

The deeper scholars delved into the Habiru question the more they searched for and pointed out the name occurring in texts from different places such as Nuzi, Boghazköi, Alalah, Ras Shamra (Ugarit), Mari etc. With the interpretation of these new texts a change took place in the approach to the Habiru and Sa Gaz in general, and to the meaning of their appellatives in

3 In his book the Hab/piru Greenberg notes: "However there would seem to be a difficulty in the fact that Akkadian Šaggāšu ('destroyer murderer') is far too strong for the normal character of the group. It ill accords with such legitimate and recognized social classes as the Sa. Gaz were at Larsa, Boghazköi, Alalah or Ugarit". (ibid. p. 89).

4 See for example: D'homme, *Les Pays Bibliques Au Temps D'el Amarna*, RB, 1909, Greenberg, *The Hab/Piru*, p. 88; De-Vaud, *Les Patriarches Hebreux et Les Documents Modernes*, RB, 1948, p. 340. Albright, *The Amarna Letters From Palestine*, CAH, Vol II, Chap. 20, p. 16.

5 Bottero, *Le Problem des Habiru – a' la rencontre assyriologique internationale*, pp. XIII; XVII.

6 Knudtzon, *TEAT*, pp. 45 – 51.

7 See Greenberg, *ibid.* p. 4.

particular. Some regarded them as an ethnically heterogenous group composed of different races, Semites and others, and not a distinct tribal unit⁸ "aliens who were willing to place their services at the disposal of the country into which they immigrated". strangers in their places (Lewy), slaves, refugees (Bottero), fugitives without families or a tribe (Landesberger), persons of dependent status (Alt), nomads and villagers (D'horme), etc. Chierra, in the light of data from Nuzi, interpreted the term Habiru as "foreign enemies"– war prisoners. According to him, the name Ḥabiru was a term of contempt which the people of the land called these enemies until in time the name was finally accepted by the invaders themselves. According to Chierra "thus we probably have the first historical instance of a name originally used in contempt later coming to be accepted as an official designation"⁹. Alt regards the Ḥabiru–Ibri as a legal term denoting persons who depend on others, namely people who had sold themselves into slavery (self enslaved). Parzen and De Vaux think along the same lines as Chierra, but go one step further in claiming that the term "Hebrews" is also a term of contempt. Parzen¹⁰ claims that the biblical name Ivrim – עִבְרִים = Hebrews means barbarians with an overtone of contempt, and that the Hebrews themselves became labelled in time by this appellation (the same argument being used here as Chierra did with the Ḥabiru and since Ḥabiru and Hebrews are identified with each other hence their arguments). De Vaux¹¹ defines the Hebrews as "a people who do not enjoy the liberty of a free citizen in his own free country" (p. 338) and the term IBRIM "Is an ancient name that the foreigners were familiar with, and employed it in a sense of contempt, but the Israelites did not apply it voluntarily to themselves. The name could have originated outside Israel (ibid p. 338). He bases these conclusions on certain biblical verses such as: "Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews" (1Sam. 4: 9); "...See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us" (Gen. 43: 32), and many other verses.¹² I have looked up all the verses he cites in support of his conjecture but have not succeeded in finding a hint of contempt in any one of them. I have quoted the most salient of these verses in full above as examples, but even in these can find no support for his conclusions which seem to have been based rather on preconceived notions.

8 See: Speiser, Ethnic Movements In The Near East etc. AASOR, XIII, 1931–32, p. 34.

9 See: Chierra, Habiru and Hebrews, AJSL, (XLIX), 1932–33, pp. 118; 123–124.

10 See: Parzen, The Problem of The Ibrim (Hebrews) In The Bible, AJSL, 1932–33, PP. 254–261.

11 See: De Vaux, ibid, pp. 321– 347.

12 Gen. 39: 17; 40: 15; 43: 32; 1 Sam, 16: 19; 2: 6, 7, 11, 13; 3: 18; 5, 3; 7: 16; 9: 1. 1Sam 4: 6; 13: 3, 19; 14: 11, 21; Deut . 15: 12 (ibid. 338).

Having confirmed himself in whatever views he might hold regarding the term Hebrews, De Vaux goes on to discuss the Ḥabiru, trying to prove that the Habiru and the Hebrews were both treated in the same manner. As he puts it: "Everywhere the Habiru appear as strangers; the environment is inimical to them, does not accept them unless on special terms. They cannot form a nation (Jirku's view). Hence we are dealing either with a very large nation which inhabits an extensive area in the Middle East, or with a small nation wandering very curiously" (ibid. p. 340). According to him it is improbable that we are dealing with a large nation, He therefore concludes that we must be dealing with an ethnic term,¹³ "and if the Ḥabiru is not an ethnic term – than the name must be an adjective which describes a way of life or a social term" (ibid p. 340).

From a multitude of ideas concerning the Ḥabiru, there crystallised a more or less unified view, which is the current one today, that the Habiru is not an ethnic term but an appellative for a way of life or a term which denotes a low social status, riffraff from different nations and lands.

On the other hand, Egyptian texts from the period of Queen Hatsepsut (c. 1486–1468 B. C.), Thutmose III and Raamses II and IV refer to names such as 'pr, 'pr. w,' prjw.¹⁴ These 'pr were slaves that laboured in quarries, built temples etc. Some scholars tried to see in them some analogy with the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. This conjecture was first made by Chabas in 1862 and was accepted now and again, although many scholars opposed it. But matters changed in 1930 when Rowe made public the finding of the stele of Seti I (c. 1318–1301) found in Beit-Shan in Israel. In this stele 'pr. w is mentioned in the land of Israel. For reasons of similarity between the Habiru and the 'pr. w and the proximity of place, scholars inclined towards equating the Ḥabiru with the 'pr. w. But since the Ḥabiru were identified with the Hebrews, the result of this equation was inevitably the establishment of the first consonant) ח Heb. kheth) of Ḥabiru as א (Ain) namely Abiru (עבירו). This was regarded as proof that that the name Habiru is derived from Ever (עבר) and the view that that it derives from Ḥeber (חבר) was therefore rejected. In the word 'pr. w the ' was taken to represent the letter Ain (א) and the pr as br, namely Eber (עבר) The change from P to B was accounted for on the basis of dialectal changes in Egyptian, Akkadian or Hebrew.¹⁵

In 1939 Virolleaud publicised a equation he found in the Ugarit tablets in which a list of cities was given in the Akkadian and Ugarit alphabets.

13 This is also Parzen's approach. Parzen, *ibid*, p. 258

14 See Gunn in Speiser, *ibid*, p. 38

15 See: Speiser, *ibid*, p. 39

Rowley, Ras Shamra and The Habiru Question, PEQ, 1940, p. 92

Jack, New Light on The Habiru – Hebrew Question, PEQ, 1940, p. 98

De Vaux, Les Patriarches Hebreux etc., RB, 1948, p. 342

Cazelles, Hebrew – Ubrū et Ḥabiru, SY. 35, 1958, P. 211

In this list there appears five times the name of the city Ḥalb (Aleppo); Akkadian–: "alu Ḥalbi lu mes SAG GAZ". Ugarit– "Halb 'prm". As Jack¹⁶ notes in connection with this, "it is not clear whether we have five different towns all named Ḥalbi in the above references, or only one under different forms".

Virolleaud identified the 'prm with the 'pr. w from the Egyptian texts, and since he believed that there is a complete and clear identity between the Ḥabiru and Sa Gaz mentioned in the el-Amarna tablets and the Sa Gaz and 'prm in the Ugarit tablets, he equates the 'prm with the Ḥabiru. He thereupon concludes that 'prm must be rendered Iprim or Apirim which in his view is the plural form of Heber. Hence the name is not Ḥabiru but Ḥapiru, and Iprim has nothing to do with Ibrim (= Hebrews).¹⁷

His view was widely accepted and most scholars today refer to Ḥapiru and not Ḥabiru.¹⁸ Langhe and others adjusted themselves to this supposition referring to the name Ḥapiru with a P and even deriving it from Apar (not Heber) which they link with the Hebrew word Afar – עפר = sand. and explained that the Habiru are "sand people" namely desert people. D'home who first derives Ḥabiru from Ḥaver, changed his view to Ḥapiru – Apar with the additional connotation of "human dust" ("poussiereux"). It should be noted here that sand is pronounced in Hebrew Afar and not Apar, and rendering it so is merely an artificial means of reconciling the pronunciation with that of the Ḥapiru. Albright¹⁹ believes the name is Ḥabiru – Ḥapiru denoting Apiru and this last derives from the biblical name of Epher (עפר) which according to him is a corrupt form of the name Eber (עבר) "The most probable explanation of the relationship between Apiru and Ibri is that 'Apiru had the by form ipru >Epher like middle Canaanite Milku 'king' beside proto hebrew Malku later Melekh. the change from ipr to ibr is the simplest kind of partial assimilation of the voiceless b to the following voicedr."²⁰ In citing the Amarna letters Albright already permits himself to alter the original texts and writes Apiru instead of Ḥabiru,²¹ and by doing so regards the Habiru Problem as solved.

Reviewing the various ideas about the Ḥabiru, one cannot ignore

16 See for example: Jack, *ibid*, p. 97

17 Virolleaud, *Comptes Rendus* (mai – juin), 1939, p. 329, see: Jack, *ibid*, p. 98; De Vaux, *ibid*, p. 341

18 Greenberg, *The Hab/Piru*, p. 11.

19 See: Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, p. 11

Albright, *The Smaller Beth – Shan Stele of Sethos I*, BASOR. (125), 1952, p. 24–32.

20 See: Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, p. 11

Albright, *The Smaller Beth – Shan Stele of Sethos I*, BASOR. (125), 1952, p. 24–32.

21 See: Albright, *The Amarna Letters From Palestine*, CAH, II, Chap. 20, pp. 17–20

D'horme's words that²²: "the correspondence between Habiru and עבר (Ever) can only persuade those influenced by the transcription of the word עברי (ivri) into our occidental languages in the forms Hebreux, Hebrews, Hebraes etc." When scholars point out the similarity between Habiru – Apiru and עבריִם (Ivrim) they refer to the name as it appears in the latin languages: Ibrī, Ibrim, Eber etc.²³ with a hard-voiced consonant (The Hebrew letter – בּ beth with a point = dagesh) which is pronounced like the English letter B. Yet the name in the Bible (Gen. 10: 25) never once appears with a hard-voiced consonant (בּ ב) – but only with a voiceless one – ב (The letter beth without a point – dagesh) which is pronounced as the English letter V. The name in Hebrew is phonetically pronounced Ever, Ivrim and any attempt to change its pronunciation to Eber and Ibrim is artificial with the intention of producing phonetic similarity between the name Habiru (with a guttural letter ח=ח) and Ivrim (with the letter ain – ע) which is transcribed in occidental languages as Hebrews, Hebreux etc.²⁴

Guillaume²⁵ remarks that: "the genealogical tables in Genesis make it plain that the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews was 'Eber' which it would be less confusing to write Heber". These names are written in a foreign language and the Hebrew name – עבר Ever easily changes into "Eber", and then he quite simply decides that "it would be less confusing to write Heber", the result being a name resembling the name Habiru. This is as far as Guillaume goes in dealing with the similarity between the Habiru and the Hebrews. But when he makes another assumption, that the Arabs are descendants of the Habiru, Guillaume then turns the tables upside down and writes: "Thus if we are right in believing that the Habiru were nomad Arabs, we have ground for conjecturing that the older name Abiru was slowly changed to Aribu and lastly to Arabu, the name which the Arabs have borne ever since". (ibid. p. 85) The name Habiru he already varies as Abiru, since such variation in the pronunciation of H and A in latin languages is nearly indistinguishable, whereas these letters here represent the guttural consonants ח (Kheth ח) and

22 See: D'horme, *Les Habiru et Les Hebreux*, JPOS, 1924, p. 167.

23 For example: Jack, *The Date of The Exodus In The Light of External Evidence*, p. 130; pp. 97–102.

Cazelles, *ibid*, p. 211

De Vaux, *Le Problem des Hapiru Apres Quinze Annees*, JNES, 1968, p. 225.

Lods, *Israel*, pp. 58, 59.

Meek, *ibid*, pp. 7, 11; *The Israelite Conquest of Ephraim*, BASOR, 61, 1936, pp. 17–19.

Speiser, *ibid*, p. 40.

Albright, *The Smaller Beth – Shan Stele*, BASOR. (125), 1952, pp. 24–32.

24 Indeed in the biblical translations into foreign occidental languages, we read the transcription "Eber" for the name "Ever" עבר. But it is a translator's error in an attempt to reconcile it with the Greek – Latin name Ebraios. However this is not the original pronunciation of the name.

25 See: Guillaume, *The Habiru, Hebrews and The Arabs*, PEQ, 1946, p. 64.

'a (Ayin \aleph) which are pronounced quite differently in Semitic languages. Guillaume's approach is one example of how scholars shift from $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{b}\bar{\text{i}}\text{r}\bar{\text{u}}$ to Arabu, as well as from Habiru to Hapiru, Apiru, Abiru, Ibrim.

As mentioned earlier, Virolleaud claims that Habiru equals Iprim or Apirim, yet such an assumption is unfounded. Having tried at all costs to prove that Iprim – apirim – Apiru – $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{p}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{r}}\bar{\text{u}}$ – $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{b}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{r}}\bar{\text{u}}$ are one and the same, he thereupon chooses to read it as Iprim.

Since 'prm is known as denoting consonants only, it might well be pronounced Iprim, Oprim, Oparim, Apirim etc. with a strong P, (P) or with a voiceless P–($\text{P}=\text{f}$) Afrim, Ifrim, Ofarim, Efrim and even Efrim, as in the tribal name Ephraim (the name in Hebrew is written with the letter Aleph– A which interchanges with the letter Ayin – \aleph).²⁶

The same is true of the names 'prw, 'pr, etc. in the Egyptian texts. Egyptian writing, as with Ancient Hebrew, records only consonants without any vowel notation, so that 'prw, 'pr, may be pronounced in a variety of ways, e. g. Apriu, Aperu, Eperu, Apuri, Apuriu etc.²⁷ and indeed each scholar refers to the name as best suits him²⁸.

Virolleaud claims that $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{b}\bar{\text{i}}\bar{\text{r}}\bar{\text{u}}$ equals 'prm based on the equation $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{b}$ Sa Gaz– $\text{H}\bar{\text{a}}\text{b}$ 'Prm which he considers interchangeable. Since the Amarna letters show the Sa Gaz and the Habiru to be interchangeable he considers them identical. It is true that such interchangeability can be found in the Amarna tablets: in several letters the writer opens with the term Sa Gaz and concludes with the Habiru and vice versa. Yet in many other letters the writer likewise begins with Sa Gaz and ends up with Abd Ashera or Aziru and vice versa.²⁹ Are the names 'prm and Aziru therefore identical, or 'prm and Abd Ashera? The sole conclusion we may draw is that a certain connection exists between them, nothing more. The names Israelites, Hebrews and Jews may indicate, for example, the same people, yet this does not mean that these

26 About the interchange of letters Aleph and Ayin see: Gesenius, Hebrew Grammar, 2nd English edit., § 6r, p. 35. Wright, Lectures on The Comparative Grammar of The Semite Languages. Cambridge university press, 1890, p. 48f. Harris, A Grammar of The Phoenician Language, 1936, p. 18.

27 Yeivin, Toldot Haktav Haivri, (The History of the Jewish Script). Library of Palestinology, 1938, pp. 11–12 (Hebrew). Gunn by Speiser, Speiser, Ethnic Movements In The Near East, AASOR. (13), 1931–1932, p. 38; note 93.

28 For example: Speiser, *ibid*, p. 38 – Apuru; Petrie, Palestine And Israel, p. 41(21) –Apuru Rowley, Israel Sojourn In Egypt, p. 22, – Aperu; Ras Shamra And The Habiru Question, PEQ 1940, p. 90; – Aperu; Wilson, The Eperu of The Egyptian Inscriptions, AJSL, 1932– 33, p. 275; Mercer. TEAT, Excursus, VII, p. 839.
– Eperu. Hall, PEQ, 1923, p. 131. Aperiu; Brugsch, Egypt Under The Pharaohs, 1891, p. 318, Apura, Aperiu, Aper.

29 See examples in next pages.

three names are synonymous. Gunn³⁰ vehemently rejects the identification of Habiru with Apiru because: "no instance is known of transliterating ḥor ḥby'." Poesner makes similar claims: "in the transcription of Semitic words to Egyptian, the Egyptian is used solely to render the Semitic Ayin."³¹ For unexplained reasons these arguments are shunted aside and disregarded, perhaps because of the embarrassment they create. Jack who refers to the views of Meek, Chierra and Others justifiably asks: "...Thus, heterogenous diversified horde, belonging to various nationalities, coalesced by and by, probably in a short time into one united harmonious whole: From being a mixed lot of different races, they speedily became one and the same race. This is surely the most extraordinary transformation in history. Besides, how could these invaders, with their methods of violence and subjugation possibly be 'foreign servants'."³² Such questions receive greater amplification once we realise that the period of the Exodus and the conquest of Israel is the same period as that of the el-Amarna tablets.

In addition to Jack's questions, other problems arise as indicated by Reuveni in his book KADMUT HAIVRIM (in Hebrew):³³ "If the name Habiru is an appellative for a special sort of people how could such an appellation persist so many generations later and in different countries" (p. 159). "One must take notice of this revealing fact that none of the scholars who held conjectures about 'social status' or 'profession' were able either to explain or to clarify what the Habiru status or profession might finally be." (ibid. p. 172). We may add to such questions by asking: If we are dealing with an appellative, how is it that in different countries and in different languages an identical appellative was formed in order to denote the same status, often in the very same period? Why should the name Apiru – Abiru – Ibrim be written as Ḥabiru in a region where phonetically there is no impediment or difficulty whatsoever in pronouncing guttural consonants such as Ayin (ʕ) There is no reason for changing the letter Ayin into Ḥ–Kheth. We might perhaps accept such a change by the Egyptians, But not in Canaan or Syria or Mesopotamia where the Hebrews were integrated even before the Ḥabiru invasion in the Amarna period.

Greenberg summarizes the Ḥabiru–Apiru question as follows:³⁴ "The proposed equation of 'Apiru with the Biblical Hebrews' involves problems of a philological, ethnic–social, and historical nature.... The philological side of the equation may be summed up thus: On the face of it 'apiru and 'ibri

30 Gunn by Speiser, Ibid, p. 38. See also Mercer, Excursus VII, TEAT p. 839.

31 See: Poesner, Textes Egyptiennes, p. 165. in booklet: Le Problem De Habiru, Cahiers de la Societe' Assiatique, par J. Bottero.

32 See: Jack, New Light on The Ḥabiru – Hebrew Question, PEQ. 1940, pp. 114–115.

33 Reuveni, Kadmut Haivrim (Hebrew).

34 Greenberg, The Hab/Piru, pp. 91–92.

differ both in derivation as well as morphology. 'Apiru is a verbal adjective from 'pr; 'ibri is gentilic of the substantive base 'eber from 'br. But eber < 'br may possibly go back to 'abir, so that the gentilic and the verbal adjective may ultimately be derived from the same base,"³⁵

To sum up, the tendency to equate the Ḥabiru with the Hebrews raises philological and historical problems, and is confronted by a series of objections. Or, as Bottero put it in 1954: "Thus after sixty five years of findings, research, discussion and hypotheses on the problem of the Ḥabiru, it seems that the only evidence that still remains outstanding today is that quote capita tot sententiae or nearly so"³⁶.

Having realised that the el-Amarna period overlaps with the period of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, let us now try and see whether we can find any allusion to the Ḥabiru in the Bible.³⁷

In the book of Numbers³⁸ we read that Balaam the son of Beor is sent to curse the Israelites: "And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable and said...". Who were these Kenites? . In Num. 10: 29–32 we read: "And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel (in Hebrew–Reuel) the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel And he said (Hobab – N. G) unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my kindred. And he said (Moses –N. G.), leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes". This dialogue between Moses and Hobab is abruptly cut, and the subsequent verses do not inform us if Hobab agreed or not to travel with the Israelites. But the answer to this can be found in Judges,³⁹ in the story of Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, and Yael "the wife of Heber the Kenite" which goes as follows: "Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh ". From this statement it is evident that Heber is a son of Ken (Hebrew Kayin– קַיִן) and that Ken is a son of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law. But since the text

35 Let us note here that this argument is based on the analogy with the words Melekh and Malik (=king). (See Speiser, *ibid*, p. 40; Greenberg, *ibid*, p. 91). Perhaps the morphology of Melekh–Malik differs, but semantically they are identical, Whereas Ever (Eber) and Avir (Abir) are completely different in meaning.

36 As many heads so many opinions. (Bottero, *ibid*, p. XXVIII).

37 The following section about Heber the Kenite which continues till the end of the chapter has already been published in booklet form under the title "who were the phoenicians?", first appearing in Geneva, 1952 and then in Israel, 1962.

38 Num. 24, 21.

39 Judges, 4, 11.

informs us that Balaam sees the Kenite we can infer that Hobab did not go with the Israelites to show them their way in the desert. For had they done so, the text would have referred to them under the name of Hobab and not 'Kenite' according to the name Kayin (Ken), Hobab's son. This inference is corroborated by the verse in the book of Samuel⁴⁰: "And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley, and Saul said unto the Kenites, go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: FOR YE SHEWED KINDNESS TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, WHEN THEY CAME UP OUT OF EGYPT" (My emphasis – N. G.). The Hebrew text reads "Asita khesed עשית חסד" which is really: "You have done a favour–benevolence" instead of merely showing kindness.

From the above we understand that the favour they did "TO ALL" the children of Israel was in showing them the way through the desert after they left Egypt. Josephus also states: "They gave also the descendants of Jethro, the Midianite, the father–in–law of Moses, territory for habitation; for quitting their native country they had followed the Hebrews and companied with them in the wilderness."⁴¹

On the other hand we read that: "...the children of the Kenite, Moses' father–in–law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people."⁴²

From the above verses we see that the Kenites are actually the "children of the kenite" Although Hobab did not agree to join the sons of Israel, a large clan (Balaam speaks of them as a group apart) from among the sons of the Kenite (Ken – Kayin), but not Kayin himself, left their tribe and joined the Israelites to show them their way through the desert. The name of this clan is not mentioned in the Bible, but from the verses in Judges that: "...Heber the Kenite had severed himself from the Kenites..." it is quite clear that the name of this clan is "Heber the Kenite".⁴³

Most scholars see the name "Heber the Kenite" as a proper name because of the reference to "Yael the wife of Heber the Kenite" (יעל אשת חבר הקניזי) They assume that Yael was the wife of a man with such a name.⁴⁴ Yet in the Bible we often come across phrases such as "Ish Yehuda" "Ish Levy", "Ish

40 1Sam. 15, 5–6.

41 Ant. V–127.

42 Ju. 1, 16.

43 The verse in Hebrew informs us that Heber the Kenite separated from Kayin and not from the sons of Kayin; "...וּחְבֵר הַקִּינִי נִפְרָד מִקַּיִן מִבְּנֵי חֲבֵב חֲתָן מֹשֶׁה..." –"and Heber the Kenite separated from Kayin of the sons of Hobab, Moses' father–in–law". (Ju. 4: 11).

44 See for example: "Heber" in The Jewish Encyclopedia; Garstang, Joshua – Judges, p. 301.

Israel" etc.⁴⁵ which gives the word "man" (Hebrew – Ish) in conjunction with the tribal or the nation's name. The meaning of such verses is: "a man from the tribe of Judah" or "a man from the tribe of Levy" etc. The same principle applies when we refer to a woman from a certain tribe. In such cases we would have to use the conjunctive of "Isha" (=woman) i. e. Eshet (= אשה wife of). Thus, in verses such as the above, we would have the combination "Eshet Yehuda" (the wife of Judah" ,"(Eshet Levy" (the wife of Levy) etc. really meaning a woman from the tribe of Judah, Levy etc., and not to be explained as referring to the wife of a certain man named Judah, nor the wife of a certain man called Levy, etc. This also applies in the verse referring to "Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite" (Hebrew – "Yael Eshet Heber Hakeni), i. e. Yael is a woman of the tribe of Heber the Kenite. Josephus (Ant. V; 207) also refers to "one kenite woman named Yael."

Scholars thought that Heber was not a clan name, since the Bible mentions only twelve tribes, and Heber the Kenite was not included as a tribe amongst the twelve. In spite of their coexistence with the Israelites, they were not considered as part of them, and they acquired their share of the land together with that of the tribe of Judah. The Bible mentions this in connection with the lots assigned to each tribe, as quoted above: "...the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which lieth in the south of Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people" (Ju. 1, 16). Hence their lot was included with that of Judah, and their conquests were made together with that tribe.

The conquests of the Ḥabiru mentioned in the el-Amarna tablets refer to a region of Jerusalem which, according to the Bible, was, part of the lot of the tribe of Judah. This fact confirms the assumption that the Ḥabiru are simply the clan of Heber the Kenite which had followed the Israelites to show them their way in the desert.

In many of the el-Amarna tablets there is mention of attacks by Sa-Gaz people. Sometimes they are termed Sabe Gaz and at other times as Sa Gaz or just Gaz. D'horme states that: "it therefore implies that the essential element is represented by Gaz".⁴⁶

We have previously examined, among other things, the accepted view about the connection and identification between the Sa Gaz and the Ḥabiru, and the explanation given to this name. We have seen that the period of the wars mentioned in the el-Amarna letters is identical with the period of the Israelite entry and conquest of Canaan. We noted that Aziru mentioned in the Tablets can be equated with the tribe of Asher, and have now learned

45 Ju., 19, 1; 2Sam 20, 1; 1Sam, 17, 24 and others. We refer to the Hebrew text and not to the translations.

46 See: D'horme, La Question des Ḥabiri, RHR, 1938, p. 173.

that the Habiru is to be identified with the tribe of Heber the Kenite. Who, therefore, are the Sa Gaz?

As already indicated, the Sa Gaz is regarded as a pseudo-ideogram for Sagassu (Habbātu–destroyers–plunderers) etc. Some regard them as a group connected with the Habiru without being identical with them, (Knudtzon)⁴⁷, Whereas others (Winckler, Weber, Mercer, Cook, Virolleaud et al) believe them to be identical with the Habiru, and this later view holds today.⁴⁸ It is also widely accepted that Abd–Ashera (Ashirta) and Aziru were connected with them.

If we turn to the el–Amarna tablets we realise that in many letters "Aziru" is mentioned concurrently with Sa Gaz. For example, in letter 117⁴⁹ (sent by Rib Adi, king of Gubla) Rib Adi asks the Egyptian king for help against Aziru (ibid ff. 32– 40). By the end of the letter (ff. 54–59) the subject suddenly changes into Sa Gaz: "If in this year there are no archers than all lands will belong to the Gaz people." One gets the impression that according to the writer of the letter, Aziru is the same as the Gaz people. On the other hand, in letter 116⁵⁰, Rib Adi announces the fall of the city of Sumura: "...for the sons of Abdi–Asirta have conquered it...all my cities have united with the Gaz people." In contrast to the former letter cited, the subject of this letter is the "sons of Abdi Ashirta" which changes at the end into "the Gaz people". One may therefore assert that the writer of the letter regarded the sons of Abdi Ashirta and the Gaz people as identical.

In another tablet⁵¹ Rib Adi informs the king that "All my cities, that are in the mountains and on the sea shore have united with the Gaz people. Gubla with two cities is left to me, and behold now Abdi Asirta has taken Sigata to himself."

Here, too, the letter starts with the "Gaz people" and ends with Abdi Ashirta, showing once again that the letter writer identified Abdi Ashirta (Abdi Ashera) with the Sa Gaz.

Similar instances occur in a great number of tablets⁵² where the writer opens with Sa Gaz and closes with Aziru or Abdi Asirta or sons of Abdi Asirta and vice versa. Greenberg points out that:⁵³ "The analysis of the relation of the Gaz to Abdi–Ashirta is complicated by the evidently free interchange of

47 See: Preface, Knudtzon, TEAT, pp. 45–52.

48 See: De–Vaux, *Le Problème des Habiru Après Quinze Années*, JNES, 1968, p. 22; D'homme, *ibid*, pp. 170–187

49 Mercer, Knudtzon, TEAT.

50 Mercer, Knudtzon, TEAT.

51 Mercer, TEAT, no. 74, L. 19–24.

52 See for example: letter 79 (Mercer), compare lines 19–21, 25–26, to lines 38–47. Letter 81 (Mercer); compare line 12 to the beginning of the letter and its end. Letter 104 (Mercer) compare it to its ending. See letters 41, 69, 88 and more.

53 See: Greenberg, *The Hab/Piru*, p. 71.

the two. We note, in the first place, that the conquests of each are identical: Sumur has gone over to the Gaz (71: 34ff), or to Abdi–Ashirta (84: 11ff); ...all the lands are joining the Gaz (72: 26ff), or Abdi–Ashirta (73: 39ff). The solution to Rib Addi's troubles is the despatch of archers to drive out the Gaz (72: 22ff), or Abdi–Ashirta (77: 79ff) etc."

It may therefore be assumed that Aziru, Abdi–Ashirta (Abd Ashera), Gaz people and sons of Abd Ashera are synonymous. Mercer actually believed that there were three invasions of Rib Addi's cities – one by the Gaz people, a second by Abd Ashera and a third by Aziru.⁵⁴ Adopting such a supposition inevitably forces us to assume that these three invasions took place in the same cities during the same period of time. Such a coincidence of events is extremely unlikely

As with the name of Aziru, the name Gaz appears in the singular form: "this Gaz man".⁵⁵ We have already noted that Abd–Ashera (Abdi Ashirta) and "sons of Abd Ashera" are surnames of Aziru. And in speaking of Aziru we also mentioned the fact that the Amorite letter Z transcribes to Sh (Hebrew letter Shin). This principle might also be applied to the name "Gaz" from which we get the name Gash, phonetically resembling the Hebrew name Goshen. I therefore suggest taking the name Gash–Gaz as a form of Goshen, which makes the "Gaz people" – Goshen people, i. e. a surname given the Israelites who came from Goshen. Occasionally we read about Sabe Gaz or Sa Gaz: perhaps the word Sabe stands for the semitic word "Zava" which means Army – soldiers, i. e. the army or soldiers of Goshen, with "Sa" being the abbreviated form. The author of a certain booklet⁵⁶ I chanced to find, links the name Goshen with the Arabic word "Gish"⁵⁷ meaning grass that grows by rain water only, i. e. pasture–land. It may be that Goshen was at first a name which meant a type of soil, namely pasture–land, which is why we have a recurrence of this name in the southern part of Israel (Jos. 10: 41): "And Joshua smote them from Kadesh Barnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen".

Rabbi Saadia translated Land of Goshen as "Balad el Sedir" meaning land of grass or "grass soil". In Arabic "Sider" and "Gish" are synonymous, both meaning grass, the difference being that the first means ordinary grass, while the second means grass whose growth is conditioned by rain water, namely, "pasture land" grass. The word Gez is found in the book of Psalms signifying grass⁵⁸: "He shall come down like rain upon mown grass" (in Hebrew – "Yered kamatar al Gez" – יִרֵד כְּמַטֵּר עַל גֹּז).

54 See: Mercer, TEAT, p. 836.

55 See: Knudtzon, TEAT, 71/L. 24; 91/L. 3–5; 112.

56 Moyal. D., Or Mimizrah (Hebrew).

57 غبيش

58 Ps. 72, 6.

It is reasonable to suppose that the name Gaz is synonymous with Goshen and probably the name Gaz originally meant an appellative not for people of a certain specific geographical region but for herdsmen in general.

To summarise: The Israelites are surnamed "Gaz people" and sometimes Sabe Gaz = Gaz soldiers. It is interesting to note that near the city of On Heliopolis mentioned in the previous chapter, with Goshen located in its suburbs, there is a place called Gizeh where the famous pyramids are to be found. The name Gizeh resembles Gaz phonetically, and Josephus attributes the building of Pyramids to the Israelites when he says⁵⁹ "and with the rearing of pyramid after pyramid they exhausted our race".

If we accept this conjecture that Gaz equals Goshen, then the difficulties mentioned throughout the discussion are thereby resolved. The Habiru is the tribe of Heber the Kenite, but at the same time they are linked to the soldiers of Goshen (the sons of Israel). They are a part of the Israelites but also have their own name. Aziru is the tribe of Asher, but they are also one of the tribes of Goshen. Abd-Ashera is an appellative for the Israelites (Ashera worshippers) who are also called Sabe-Gaz = army of Goshen. It is therefore obvious that there were not three invasions of Rib Addi's land during the same period, but only one invasion by the tribe of Asher (Aziru) whose people were sometimes called "Aziru" (Ashiru), sometimes Abd Ashera (Asirta-Asratu) or sons of Abdi-Asirta, and sometimes people of Goshen or army of Goshen.

59 Ant. II -203.