



Battle of Kadesh

In this episode of Ancient Egyptian Literature, we are delving into the Battle of *kdš*, a monumental military action between Rameses the Great and the Hittites. Two versions of this story appear in ancient Egypt. The first, the official report, also called the bulletin, with seven copies found, and the second, dubbed the Poem of *pntꜣwrt*, with 8 copies, are found inscribed, sometimes side by side, at the Ramesseum, Rameses' funerary temple, the temple of Amun at Karnak, Abydos, and Abu Simbel. After the recitation of both works, we will provide discussion and analysis of the battle. First, sponsor advertisement.

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Battle of *kdš* Official Report c. 1275 B.C.E. As inscribed on temple walls of the House of Millions of Years of *wsr-mꜣꜥt-rꜥ stp-n-rꜥ*, at *ꜣbdw*, *ipt-ꜣswt*, *wꜣst*, and the Great Temple of *rꜥ-ms-sw* in the South. Year 5, third month of *šmw*, day 9; under the majesty of *ḥr*: Mighty Bull, Beloved of *mꜣꜥt*; Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt; *wsr-mꜣꜥt-rꜥ stp-n-rꜥ*; Son of *rꜥ*, *rꜥ-ms-sw mry-ꜣmn*, given live forever. See, his majesty was in Djahi on his second campaign of victory.

The good awakening in life, prosperity, and health, in the tent of his majesty, was on the highland south of *ḳdš*. When his majesty appeared like the rising of ra he assumed the armor of his father, *mntw*. When the Pharaoh proceeded northward, and his majesty had arrived at the locality south of the town of Shabtuna in Canaan, there came two *šzsw* nomads, to speak to his majesty as follows: "Our brethren, who belong to the greatest of the families with the vanquished chief of Hatti, have made us come to his majesty, to say: 'We will be subjects of Pharaoh and we will flee from the vanquished chief of Hatti; for the vanquished chief of Hatti sits in the land of *ḥlb*, on the north of Tunip. He fears because of Pharaoh to come southward. Now, these *šzsw* spoke these words, which they spoke to his majesty, falsely, for the vanquished chief of Hatti made them come to spy where his majesty was, in order to cause the army of his majesty not to draw up for fighting him, to battle with the vanquished chief of Hatti. See, the vanquished chief of Hatti came with every chief of every country, their infantry and their chariotry, which he had brought with him by force, and stood, equipped, drawn up in the line of battle behind *ḳdš* the Deceitful, while his majesty knew it not. Then his majesty proceeded northward and arrived on the northwest of *ḳdš*; and the army of his majesty made camp there. Then, as his majesty sat upon a throne of gold, there arrived a scout who was in the following of his majesty, and he brought two scouts of the vanquished chief of Hatti. They were conducted into presence, and his majesty said to them: "What are you?" They said: "As for us, the vanquished chief of the Hatti has caused that we should come to spy out where his majesty is." Said his majesty to them: "Him! Where is he, the vanquished chief of Hatti? See, I have heard, saying: 'He is in the land of *ḥlb*' Said they: "See, the vanquished chief of Hatti is stationed, together with many countries, which he has brought with him by force, being every

country, which is in the districts of the land of Hatti, the land of *nhrn* – Mitanni, and the kingdom of *ḳd*. They are equipped with infantry and chariotry, bearing their weapons; more numerous are they than the sand of the shore. See, they are standing, drawing up for battle, behind *ḳdš* the Deceitful." Then his majesty had the princes called into the presence and had them hear every word which the two scouts of the vanquished chief of Hatti, who were in the presence, had spoken. Said his majesty to them: "See you the manner by reason of which the chiefs of the peasantry and the officials under whom is the land of Pharaoh have stood, daily, saying to the Pharaoh: 'The vanquished chief of Hatti is in the land of *ḥlb*; he has fled before his majesty, since hearing that, see, he came.' So spoke they to his majesty daily. But see, I have held a hearing in this very hour, with the two scouts of the vanquished chief of Hatti, to the effect that the vanquished chief of Hatti is coming, together with the numerous countries that are with him, being people and horses, like the multitudes of the sand. They are stationed behind *ḳdš* the Deceitful. But the governors of the countries and the officials under whose authority is the land of Pharaoh were not able to tell it to us." Said the princes who were in the presence of his majesty: "It is a great fault, which the governors of the countries and the officials of Pharaoh have committed in not informing that the vanquished chief of Hatti was near the Pharaoh; and in that they told his report to his majesty daily." Then the vizier was ordered to hasten the army of his majesty, while they were marching on the south of Shabtuna, in order to bring them to the place where his majesty was. See, while his majesty sat talking with the princes, the vanquished chief of Hatti came, and the numerous countries, which were with him. They crossed over the channel on the south of *ḳdš* and charged into the army of his majesty while they were marching, and not expecting it. Then the infantry and chariotry of his

majesty retreated before them, northward to the place where his majesty was. See, the foes of the vanquished chief of Hatti surrounded the bodyguard of his majesty, who were by his side. When his majesty saw them, he was enraged against them, like his father, *mntw*, Lord of *w3st*. He seized the adornments of battle and arrayed himself in his coat of mail. He was like *blw* in his hour. Then he went to his horses, and led quickly on, being alone by himself. He charged into the foes of the vanquished chief of Hatti, and the numerous countries which were with him. His majesty was Like stS the great in strength, smiting and slaying among them; his majesty hurled them headlong, one upon another into the water of the Orontes. "I charged all countries, while I was alone, my infantry and my chariotry having forsaken me. Not one among them stood to turn about. I swear, as ra loves me, as my father, itmw favors me, that as for every matter which his majesty has stated, I did it in *m3't*, in the presence of my infantry and my chariotry."

The Poem of *pnt3wrt*. Beginning of the victory of Pharaoh *wsr-m3't-r'c stp-n-r'c r'-ms-sw*, who is given life, forever, which he achieved in the land of Hatti and *nhrn*, in the land of *irtw*, in *pds*, in the *drdny*, in the land of *ins*, in the land of *krkš*, *krkmš*, *kd*, the land of *kdš*, in the land of *'krt*, and *mwš3nt*. See, his majesty prepared his infantry and his chariotry, the *šrdn* of the captivity of his majesty from the victories of his word -- they gave the plan of battle. His majesty proceeded northward, his infantry and his chariotry being with him. He began the goodly way to march. Year 5, the second month of the third season tenth month, on the ninth day, his majesty passed the fortress of *t3rw*, like *mntw* when he goes forth. Every country trembled before him, fear was in their hearts; all the rebels came bowing down for fear of the fame of his majesty, when his army came upon the narrow road, being like one who is upon the highway. Now, after many

days after this, behold, his majesty was in *wsr-m3^ct-r^c mry-*imn**, the city of cedar. His majesty proceeded northward, and he then arrived at the highland of *kdš*. Then his majesty marched before, like his father, *mntw* lord of *w3st*, and crossed over the channel of the Orontes, there being with him the first division of *imn* - Amun named: *nht^t-n-wsr-m3^ct-r^c-stp-n-r^c* – victory of *wsr-m3^ct-r^c stp-n-r^c*. When his majesty reached the city, behold, the wretched, vanquished chief of Hatti had come, having gathered together all countries from the ends of the sea to the land of Hatti, which came entire: the *nhrn* likewise, and *itrw*, *ms*, *kškš*, *lk*, *kdwdn*, *krkmš*, *kr^t*, *kd*, the entire land of *nwgs*, *mwš3nt*, and *kdš*. He left not a country which was not brought together with their chiefs who were with him, every man bringing his chariotry, an exceeding great multitude, without its like. They covered the mountains and the valleys; they were like locusts with their multitudes. He left not silver nor gold in his land, but he plundered it of all its possessions and gave to every country, in order to bring them with him to battle. See, the wretched, vanquished chief of Hatti, together with numerous allied countries, were stationed in battle array, concealed on the Northwest city of *kdš*, while his majesty was alone by himself, with his bodyguard, and the division of Amun was marching behind him. The division of ra crossed over the riverbed on the south side of the town of Shabtuna, at the distance of an *itrw* from the division of *imn*; the division of *pth* was on the south of the city of *rnm*; and the division of *stš* was marching upon the road. His majesty had formed the first rank of all the leaders of his army., while they were on the shore in the land of the *3mr*. Behold, the wretched vanquished chief of Hatti was stationed in the midst of the infantry which was with him, and he came not out to fight, for fear of his majesty. Then he made to go the people of the chariotry, exceedingly numerous multitudes like the sand, being three people to each span. Now, they had made their

combinations thus: among every three youths was one man of the vanquished of Hatti, equipped with all the weapons of battle. See, they had stationed them in battle array, concealed on the northwest the city of *ḳdš*. They came forth from the southern side of *ḳdš*, and they cut through the division of *rꜥ* in its middle, while they were marching without knowing and without being drawn up for battle. The infantry and chariotry of his majesty retreated before them. Now, his majesty had halted on the north of the city of *ḳdš*, on the western side of the Orontes. Then came one to tell it to his majesty. His majesty shone like his father *mntw*, when he took the adornments of war; as he seized his coat of mail, he was like *blw* in his hour. The great span which bore his majesty called: "*nḥt-m-wꜣst* – strength in Thebes, from the great stables of *rꜥ-ms-sw*, was in the midst of the leaders. His majesty halted in the rout; then he charged into the foe, the vanquished of Hatti, being alone by himself and none other with him. When his majesty went to look behind him, he found 2,500 chariotry surrounding him, in his way out, being all the youth of the wretched Hatti, together with its numerous allied countries: from *itrw*, from *ms*, from *pds*, from *kškš*, from Erwenet, from *ḳdwdn*, from *ḥlb*, *ꜥkrt*, *ḳdš*, and *lk*, being three men to a span, acting in unison.

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The battle of *ḳdš* marks a significant point in the combat career of *nswt-bity wsr-mꜣt-rꜥ stp-n-rꜥ mry-ḥmn rꜥ-ms-sw*, a name meaning strength of the rightness of *rꜥ*, chosen by *rꜥ*, beloved of Amun, born of *rꜥ*, better known as Rameses II or Rameses the Great. One of the greatest pharaohs of the New Kingdom. *ra-ms-sw* ascended the throne after his father Seti I passed to the west in 1304 B.C.E., when *rꜥ-ms-sw* was 25 years old. The newly established pharaoh had

great ambition to expand territories in the north including the lands Syria, which were once under Egypt's rule under the great *ḥꜣ-hꜣpr-rꜣ ḏḥwty-ms*, or Thutmose I. *rꜣ-ms-sw* spent the first four years of his reign building up the security of the nation. He expanded the standing army with the addition of a fourth Division named for the war god *stš* or Seth at *pr rꜣ-ms-sw* – house of Rameses, his capitol city founded by his grandfather of the same son of Ra name. *rꜣ-ms-sw* greatly expanded his capitol to serve as a forward supply base for operations in the Levant. At the time of his reign, the lands that were once ruled by Egypt were absorbed by the growing Hatti Empire. Hatti was a bronze age empire founded at Hattusa in north-western Syria. During the reign of *rꜣ-ms-sw*, Hatti was led by Šuppiluliuma I, and later Mutawallis. The Hittites began taking over territory formerly under Egypt's control during the latter part of the 18th dynasty, beginning with the reign of Amenhatap IV Akhenaten, and continuing to encroach on ancient Egyptian territory and threaten invasion into Egypt until the treaty signed with Hatti by the father of *rꜣ-ms-sw*, Seti I. Egypt had been under a tenuous peace with Hatti, Rameses knew that to take back the lands that were once ruled by Egypt during the time of *ḏḥwty-ms* I, he must wage war with Hatti. During the season of prt, or growing, *rꜣ-ms-sw* set out with his armies out to the Levant. They marched along the Phoenician coast, passing through the ports of Tyre and Byblos, where they left inscriptions of their journey. Reaching as far as Simyra, The Pharaoh's armies turned inland and attacked the kingdom of Amurru, which was a Hittite vassal. With the Hittite army too far away to offer support, the ruler of Amurru, Benteshina, swore loyalty to Egypt and formed a vassal treaty. By occupying Amurru, Rameses opened the way for attack on qdS in the following year. One way from the South through the Bekaa Valley and the other from Amurru itself. Following the attack on Amurru the Egyptian armies returned to Egypt to

prepare for the Hittite response. Mutawallis, the Hittite King (called the vanquished chief of Hatti by *r^c-ms-sw*), must have known that Amurru was just a precursor to Rameses wanting to reclaim territory in Syrian plain formerly claimed by Egypt. He decided upon a strategy that would put a stop to any more Egyptian encroachment upon their territory, as well as return Amurru under Hittite control. It was decided that *ḳdš* would become the battlefield for this conflict, as well as the time for the battle, In the third month of *šmw* – Low Water, 1300 B.C.E. *ḳdš* had been contested by and Egypt both Hatti and Mitanni since the days of *dhwti-ms III*, . 1504 B.C.E. because of its valuable strategic position. *ḳdš* was the key to the Eleutheros plain and was also the opening to the Syrian plain. *ḳdš* under Egyptian control was necessary for *r^c-ms-sw*'s aspirations into Syrian expansion. *ḳdš* itself is located in Northern Syria on the River Orontes. It was heavily fortified, having been surrounded by a moat as well as the river itself. Mutawallis organized the largest army ever assembled by the Hatti. It is unfortunate that to date there are no detailed records left by the Hittites, but the numerous accounts left by *r^c-ms-sw* show that there were 18 vassal and ally states, up to 3,700 chariots and depending on the translation, 17,000 or 37,000 infantry foot soldiers. *r^c-ms-sw* began massing his troops in *pr r^c-ms-sw* during the months of 1st & 2nd *šmw*. Employing large numbers of foreign troops and mercenaries, including Nubian, Sherden, Libyan, and Canaanite, which not only increases his army, but also diversifies its ethnicity. The Egyptian army numbered 20,000 men, equally divided into the 4 Divisions. The chariot count was never documented, but probably about 4,000 chariots were employed in *r^c-ms-sw*'s army, each with two horses, a driver and an archer. *ra-ms-sw* began his march to *ḳdš* in 2nd *šmw*. Following road to Gaza, the Pharaoh split his forces. Taking the bulk of the army, *r^c-ms-sw* took the route through Canaan, then taking the

east side of Galilee and through the south end of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, He entered the Bekaa Valley to reach Kumidi. The smaller force, an elite unit known as *nfrw*, which means young men in ancient Egyptian, was possibly a Canaanite unit serving directly under the pharaoh. *ra-ms-sw* sent the *nfrw* north from Gaza along the coastal road to Phoenicia. The purpose was to ensure the loyalty of Phoenician vassals with a show of force, so that none would attempt insurrection while *ra-ms-sw* was campaigning in *ḳdš*. *ra-ms-sw* with his royal attachment of noble officers and the Division of Amun made their way to cross the Shabtuna ford, south of *ḳdš*. The Divisions of Ra, Ptah, and Seth followed behind at a distance of one *itr*, 10 and a half kilometers, or about 6 and a half miles apart. South of Shabtuna village, two *ššsw* nomads said Shabtuna is now loyal to *ra-ms-sw* and no longer to Mutawallis. The *ššsw* then told the pharaoh that the Hittite army was some 120 miles distant in Aleppo, known as *ḥlb*. Hearing this, *ra-ms-sw* crossed the Shabtuna Ford and made camp with Amun northwest of *ḳdš*, though he knew not the Hittite forces were camped behind *ḳdš*. As *ra-ms-sw* and the division of Amun were camped that a scout of the Egyptian army came upon scouts sent by the Hittite army. Beaten and thrown to the feet of Rameses, who upon his throne of gold demanded to know what they were. Broken and desperate not to incur the Pharaoh's wrath, they informed Him they were spies sent by Mutawallis to gather intelligence on Egypt's forces. Angered, *ra-ms-sw* demanded to know where the Hittites were, for He had heard they were in Aleppo. The spies informed the Pharaoh that Mutawallis was indeed behind Qadesh, and with him his armies as well as loyal vassals of Naharin, and all of Kode. Infuriated, he called a counsel of his Officers, and demanded to know why he was told daily that the Hittites were in Aleppo while they were behind Qadesh all the time. The texts at Karnak allude to the fact that Rameses' officers failed

to send out scouts to confirm the location of the Hittite army. The Vizier then sent messengers to order the Divisions of Ra, Ptah, and Set to hasten their arrival. It was as *ra-ms-sw* was meeting with his officers that Mutawallis sent out a force of chariots to attack. They crossed the Shabtuna River and slammed sidelong into the Division of Ra, who was marching northward toward Amun. The force of the Hittite attack as well as the surprise caused the chariot arm flanking the infantry of the Division of Ra to be crushed by Hatti forces. The Division of Ra, being unprepared for attack, disbanded, and began fleeing northward toward the Division of Amun and *r^c-ms-sw*. The Hittite force continued its attack upon Ra, following the Division all the way to Amun and Rameses' camp, trampling countless infantry under the wheels of its chariots and picking off the fleeing soldiers. The sight of the Division of Ra fleeing from the force of Hittite chariots was enough to degenerate the Division of Amun into complete chaos, with Amun's soldiers fleeing in all directions or killed by Hittite archers. Though the official report credits *ra-ms-sw* being the sole warrior fighting off the Hittite army, it is highly unlikely that the pharaoh was able to crush the enemy forces single handed, He was probably aided by his officers and elite chariotry. However, despite overwhelming odds, *ra-ms-sw* and his chariotry were able to turn the tide of battle, and quickly pick off the Hittite chariotry with their own lighter and more efficient chariots and superior archers. Mutawallis, watching the battle from *qdS*, saw that *ra-ms-sw* was beginning to win the battle, and sent a second wave of forces across the river to attack the Egyptians. They instead went to *r^c-ms-sw*'s camp, hoping to plunder the riches of the Pharaoh. As the Hittite forces were attempting to pillage the Pharaoh's camp, the *nfrw* arrived from the north and waged war upon the Hittites. The *nfrw* were later joined by the pharaoh, and together they crushed the Hittites, allowing very few to escape back

across the River Orontes to Mutawallis. Many of the Hittite second wave that were slain were of high rank among the Hittite and allied states serving the Hittite King. *r^c-ms-sw* was able to regroup the Divisions of Amun and Ra, and messengers were dispatched to send the remaining Divisions of Ptah and Seth post haste. Then in full view of Mutawallis across the river, the pharaoh proceeded to deliver swift punishment to those who had abandoned Him at the battle. Mutawallis then sent word to the pharaoh for armistice when seeing him rallying his troops for an assault on the Hittites across the river. *r^c-ms-sw*, not knowing whether he would survive a frontal assault on Hittite forces, agreed and returned to Egypt with his army. However, as soon as the armies of Pharaoh were home in their respective cities and *r^c-ms-sw* returned with the division of Seth to *pr r^c-ms-sw*, Mutawallis laid siege to Amurru, evicted Benteshina and retook the city.