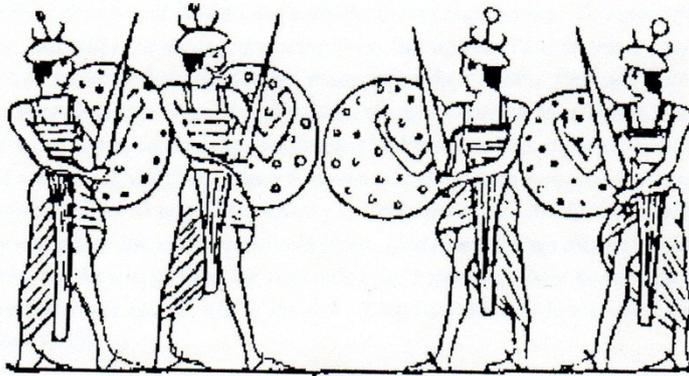


NOTE:
NOT YET AVAILABLE
Draft MSS
(MSS still in process of revising –
so there are errors.

Extract follows)

Scroll Two

Kadesh — Morning (The crossing at Shabtuna 6.15 a.m.)



The admirable volume by Sir Alan Gardiner entitled “The Kadesh Inscriptions of Ramesses II” carries the translation of the so-called 'Pictorial Record' regarding the Shoshu — “The Lord proceeded northward and reached the vicinity south of the town of Shabtuna. Then came two Shosu of the Shosu tribes to say to His Majesty: ‘Our brothers who are headmen of tribes with the Fallen one of Khatti have sent us to His Majesty to say that we will be servants of Pharaoh and will separate ourselves from the Chief of Khatti.’ No evidence has come down to us about their fate.

Abu was sick with terror. His mouth was dry. His mouth was dry, not for want of water, the sweating youth who appeared to be in charge had given him water, his mouth was dry because of his fear.

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He had seen squadrons of chariotry beyond number. Then followed host after host of infantry. There were spearmen, archers, slingers; brown, black, fair skinned soldiers marching in good order, mostly in files of ten. Few of the passing troops took notice of the two heavily robed Bedu with their long black hair streaked back from their heads – you could smell the camel fat which kept the strands in place. Three young soldiers came towards them, inquisitive rather than menacing, but for a moment causing anxiety; the anxiety felt by those who were doing something other than just sitting. They were spying.

“Check that lot out!” Safi’s commander had said.

Safi, young Commander of Ten had been given by a duple of nods two other Peherers to assist him. All three guards quickly relaxed when it became clear that the two strange men had no intention of trying to escape and presented no threat. Abu shrugged at their approach — they were clearly peasants of no education and could only speak their own tongue, and Abu could not speak Egyptian. Abu sat cross—legged in the dust, with more dust settling in his clothing from the continuous passage of an Army. Abu began to wonder why he was there at all, and so he fell to worrying, worrying — which was his nature.

Bensaif at his side knew precisely why he was there. Gold! Five camels and gold worth five more, merely to take a message to a Great King. This reward was to be shared with Fat Abu who was there to protect him, Bensaif the Speaker. For ten years he had served as a slave in Egypt in the docks at the Delta mouth. In his early teens he had been caught with his entire family together with Hebrew shepherds by an Egyptian party of slave raiders. The shepherds were crossing his land when out of the morning mists the Egyptians came. Egyptians in five chariots with others running alongside, half naked in the dawn.

His family gave up without a fight. His old father died on the forced march to the Delta. Within two years Bensaif had lost contact with the rest of his family and the shepherds. He saw none of them ever again. He laboured, building new docks, many dying round him of rare fevers. But Bensaif was young and bright, he survived and learned the sacred language of the Nile. He caught the eye of the Chief Scribe of the Dock Development and was made an overseer. Eventually those works came to an end. Later, Bensaif managed to escape whilst, in turn, trusted, he had been sent on a slave buying expedition to the coast of Amurru. That had been ten years ago. Yet the Egyptian tongue had not been lost, and he had secured an appointment of prestige in the Great Tent of his master, Lord of

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Shoshu Brethren. Here he had come to the attention of Hattusil himself and been chosen as the carrier of the message.

“Where is Pharaoh?” Bensaif asked the youth again — a good looking boy — but not very forthcoming.

“He comes,” said the youth.

“What is your name?”

Safi looked coldly at the Bedu, whom he could smell, and said: “Safi.”

“What god do you serve?”

“Pharaoh — Life!...”

“Prosperity! Health to Pharaoh!” interrupted Bensaif with a smile, the honour words spoken clumsily.

“You speak the tongue of Misr as a man from the Delta.” Safi was amused at his attempt at the honour words to Pharaoh.

“I lived...”

A great cheer swept up from the ford. Safi jumped into the air at once, and the other two Peherers dusted themselves down. Crashing across the river came a dozen chariots, all other troops now scattered, waved, cheered, and fell about with delight in the waters ignoring the screams of their officers. In seconds the King Himself was beyond the waters, His horses pulling easily up the embankment.

Safi ran forward waving his arms. Pharaoh saw him. The Vizier saw him too. Paser immediately directed his driver towards the youth. Pharaoh slowed, and the following chariots fell into a trot to the command yells of their drivers. Escorting Peherers used the moment to catch up with the appropriate vehicle, to gather in more breath, and all felt a surge of relief when the Vizier's chariot, followed by that of his Majesty, finally stopped by Matu's Peherer.

Ramesses, Great King of Egypt, was but a spear throw from Fat Abu, normally a brave man, but overcome by the spectacle of power beyond his appreciation, a manifestation of the divine. Previously he was been looked upon and spoken to by the brother of a Great King, Hattusil, Lord of the Northern Marches — that had been impressive, and Abu had found himself dry mouthed in the presence of the black bearded one who never seemed to stop scratching at his chin — but now Bensaif's mouth was like sun—baked rock. This was the Egyptian god — the Pharaoh.

Abu saw that the youth who had been speaking with Bensaif had thrown himself to the dust, lying totally flat on the ground, his fine curved back glistening with sweat anew in the hot sun. Abu did the same at once. Bensaif followed, dropped first to his knees, then buried his face in the dust, crouched and waiting.

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Bensaif could hear the youth Safi speaking from the dust, addressing the official or courtier, or whatever the important person was in the first chariot, perhaps he was a General or even the the Vizier.

“Rise!” came a young man's voice. Safi the Peherer did not move. Meanwhile Abu had begun a decent into a state of shock and was breathing in short and rapid gasps, his panic growing. “You — Shoshu warrior — rise.”

Bensaif, looking up from the dust, became fully aware of the glory of the chariot, unsteady with the movements of its fresh but sweating horses. He felt a tightening in his throat as he realised that it had been Pharaoh Himself who had spoken to him. Even Bensaif began an uncontrolled tremble, his tongue went into a knot and seemed to fill his mouth.

“Get up!” commanded the young man, clad in white hunting uniform except for the brilliant blue helmet which made him look tall. The impressive figure was young and handsome, his face and arms tanned to honey. Bensaif realised that Abu was still in the dust.

“Get up,” hissed Bensaif.

“Is he ill?” asked Pharaoh.

“He does not understand, Majesty.”

“Foolish is he?”

“Yes, Sire.....Abu, get up! Get up or we'll both be lashed!”

Abu rose, ashen beneath his swarthy face so that his skin took on an aspect of drawn leather. He continued trembling.

“Thou hast news?” questioned Pharaoh in court language which Bensaif missed.

“I'll have them beaten,” offered Paser with a smile.

Bensaif heard that. “No, Great Masters — I bring messages from my Master — good news — do not beat me.....”

“His command of Egyptian is miserable,” observed Pharaoh. “What small king has sent such a messenger?”

“I come from the Lord of the Shoshu,” and the words were clear, so that Pharaoh nodded in encouragement. Bensaif was looking into Ramesses' eyes and saw that they were soft and brown and almost calf—like — warm.....

“What news?” snapped the Vizier.

Bensaif, with growing courage, carefully watched by Abu, drew himself fully upright as should befit an Ambassador, “Great Majesty, Oh Wonder of the World, Great Living God, Mighty Pharaoh, Great....”

“Beat him!” snapped Pharaoh. Safi moved forward his spear turned into a beating rod with a deft flick of his wrist.

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“Sire, sire!” burst out Bensaif, even as Abu, sensing horrid danger and certain death all around, defecated with the sound of thunder.

“Animals!” snapped Pharaoh.

“Speak!” shrieked the Vizier.

The spear came down with a whistle, and such was the power that his snapped across the Bedu's shoulders. Bensaif staggered forward. “Sire, my Master would join Pharaoh against the hated of Hatti, miserable Hatti, despised....” the words came rushing out before the second blow fell from the broken shaft. The upraised hand of the Vizier stopped the beating.

“What are you saying?” demanded the Vizier — but nothing more could be heard as a further group of chariots arrived on the scene. The Vizier waved them by, most of them being his staff squadron. But the chariot of the Supreme Shemsu, breaking from the staff group, came to a halt, skidding in its characteristic sideways fashion.

“What's this, my Lord?” bellowed Iuny.

“That's what we are trying to find out and all that happens is that they shit themselves,” laughed Ramesses.

At a nod from the Vizier the broken shaft of Safi's spear howled through the warming morning air, catching Bensaif across his shoulders again. “No!” he screamed, “I come with royal news!”

“Stop!” snapped Pharaoh. Safi bent his shoulder parallel to the ground with a deep obeisance. Abu dropped in sheer terror, trembling now like a trapped fox awaiting death from a shepherd's club, smelling his own fear, without shame.

“Speak! In the name of whatever god is foolish enough to concern himself with you.... SPEAK!” Ramesses was getting very impatient.

“Great Pharaoh.... my master.... Chief of the Shoshu tribes... would join you. He would leave the Great King Muwatallis.... and join you.”

“Where is he?” snapped the Vizier.

“North Kadesh.”

“Muwatallis is at Kadesh?” gasped the Vizier — had they lied the night before? They had warned Paser that the army of the Hittites were far to the north, intelligence kept from the King.

The horror of what Bensaif had said, the deadly misunderstanding, seized Bensaif's soul and he blurted out: “No, no, no.... he dwells with his women in Aleppo.”

“What? Who dwells? The Shoshu?” the Pharaoh, Shemsu, Vizier — all threw out a different question at the same moment.

“My master is.... “

“Bats arses to your master!” roared the Supreme Shemsu. “Muwatallis — the Hatti — is he is in Aleppo?” delight beginning to

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burst across Iuny's sun reddened face — if Muwatallis is in Aleppo... Kadesh will fall!

“My master is.... “

“Bedu!” came the voice of Pharaoh, “Your master, your seven times cursed master is of little interest to Pharaoh, so first — tell me... have my sacred ears heard your words in truth — Muwatallis is in Aleppo... with his women.... and..... his Army? Is that what you mean, Bedu?”

“Sire, the Hittites, the Hatti, all the Federation are forming a great Army to destroy you.....I mean to challenge you.....at Aleppo. My master waits to the north of Kadesh with his regiments to join you — it is you he loves and not Muwatallis, the Fallen One of Khatti, the evil.... Even Kadesh might join you!”

“Kadesh with us!” Pharaoh, Vizier, Shemsu and Safi from the dust gasped the word.

“Peherer — what is your name?” asked Pharaoh.

“Safi,” whispered Safi from the dust.

“Get up — guard these Bedu with your life.”

“Sire!”

“Iuny — how far is Aleppo.”

“A month's easy march,” suggested the Vizier brightly, with speed and a smile at Iuny which was returned with a grimace of yellow teeth.

“Not much less,” agreed the Shemsu, allowing a forced smile to replace the bared teeth.

“Halt all the Armies, except the First of Amun!” commanded Pharaoh.

Incredulous, both Vizier and Shemsu said: “What?”

“Do it — it is time for a halt!”

Chariots fled in all directions, messages fluttered throughout the Armies of Egypt by wheels and on excited lips. They carried the announcement that there was not to be a battle that day. That an easy march was to begin, except for Amun which would drive fast to the plain close by Kadesh.

The Bedu, feeling uncertain as to their fate, watched with forced smiles as the youth guarding the Bedu was beckoned onto the Vizier's chariot. No bows were pointed at them. There seemed no threat. One by one and all the chariots of the great ones moved away. The Bedu were left, unharmed. Abu fell to the dust, toppling over in a deep faint. Bensaif just stood and stared, within him was a vague yearning after the majesty he had just seen — a god had spoken to him. A feeling of guilt ran through him.

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Iuny looked back at the Bedu, flopped on the dust, as he trotted to take up position close to the van of Amun. He found them an unpleasant people, weavers of tales. He looked ahead, conscious of the severe ache in his injured knee. Iuny, unlike the rest, stayed alert.



(9.30 a.m.)

The road to Kadesh from the Great Green Sea through the Orontes Valley crossed the river at the ford of Shabtuna leaving the river on the east, or on the right hand side of the traveller bound for the north. The ground on the east bank was uneven, broken with boulders and forest. The river in its approach to Shabtuna from the mountains ran through a gorge which was not passable until Shabtuna ford. The river then broadened as it passed through its ancient bed leaving a deep cutting right up to Kadesh.

Even so there were several crossing points for two miles south of Kadesh, and it was here that the Prince of Aleppo stood — tall, in a magnificent bronze suit of armour, constructed from hundred of scales of bronze, carefully interlocked and sewn onto fine triple—layered linen, making the suit soft to the skin, and cool in the heat. His helmet was picked out with lines of gold and lapis lazuli. His proud features were made the stronger by his great hook of a nose. His horses had been specially selected that morning, steeds from Dardany, brave and fast, and he now waited to see if his choice of horses would be noticed as the two hundred fine battle chariots of Troy came up to make the crossing.

Troy of the high walls, a city state in Dardany known for its fine horses, had its contingent led by its King Elexandris himself. With him in flanking chariots, each driven by the best and protected by an experienced Shield-bearer rode his sons: the First Prince Priam, and Priam's youth—sons in turn — Hector and young Elexandris. Such a show of loyalty to the Great King Muwatallis was unprecedented, even suspicious. Now the squadrons of Troy hove into view. It was King Elexandris who noticed the Trojan horses at once.

“You have chosen well this day!” shouted the King as his three man chariot churned down the embankment and into the stirred muddy waters.

“Only the finest steeds for this day!” shouted the Prince of Aleppo in reply.

As the warriors of Dardany rumbled by almost all saluted the Prince, for he looked a warrior king, and was known for his courage.

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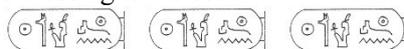
Aleppo was pleased with himself, yet wondered that the salutes were not cloaks to shield the hungry traitorousy of the Royals of Troy, known for their looting and raping in every war and above all in their deadly sea raids against the islands. They were the bane of the Lord of the Islands, Great King Agamemnon. Those of Dardany could not be trusted. They were present for the gold of the Federation, but were brave enough, enjoying a fight.

The daylight was now four hours old and already Aleppo had moved a thousand chariots across the river. A scout had brought word that elements of the Egyptian Army were across the ford at Shabtuna. At least part of that great host have to cross the line of advance of the Hittite massed chariots as they marched on Kadesh. Aleppo's chariots were out of sight of the Egyptians on the broad inner slope of the river embankment. The reserves must also cross and then wait on the west bank, at the edges of the river itself. Aleppo gave the orders, excitement growing inside him.

The mighty combined phalanxes of infantry under the Black Beard Hattusil would be behind, on the other bank, hiding in the young forests. All infantry had been ordered to strip and place weapons and armour on the earth and to lie or sit and individually make himself invisible to the approaching enemy. This infantry, at two miles distance on the flank of the line of approach of the Egyptian army could arm itself, rise up and cross the river and be in action in the space of an hour — yet if the day went bad any counter attack across the river would be met by this solid mass of veterans, heavily armed and holding firm on the high ground, protected by the river itself.

Muwatallis had been very satisfied with the tactical arrangements his two commanders had made to trap the Egyptians. With luck the Hittite chariotry would smash their way into a tired Army and win a most famous victory this day. They were confident that Pharaoh had no idea where they were — and if the smelly Bedu, it was the smearing on of camel fat that did it, were successful in persuading Pharaoh that the Hittite hosts were three hundred miles to the north — what a moment it would be!

The world would remember this day until the death of the gods. There would be a great slaughtering of the youth of Egypt. Another surge of excitement ran through the Prince of Aleppo as if insects were running wild in his gut. His mouth was dry. He stepped down from his chariot and scooped up water from the Orontes. The water was clear, for he was upstream from where it had been disturbed by the massed chariots crossing to the south.



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(9.45 a.m.)

(Kadesh, at that distant time, was twice surrounded by protective water. To the north of the city flowed a brook known as Mukad. The Mukad joined the Orontes which ran from south to north east of the city so that Kadesh could rightly be said to be on the confluence of these water roads. Within that confluence a great moat had been dug round the city, being fed water from the outside flow of the two rivers. Thus was the city given a double moat. The outer moat was completed by the digging of a deep canal to the south of the city so that the Mukad and Orontes were joined for a second time. Further, the Mukad was deepened beyond the height of a camel where it passed the city. These great defences had existed for over a century. Seti alone had succeeded in taking the famed guardian of the gateway to the north in Year 6 of his glorious reign. Illustrations of this city with its double moat and fortress towers are found throughout Egypt to this very day on the great monuments built by Asha for his Pharaoh — the city is carved in elegant detail, but always in the shadow of a huge representation of Ramesses Mighty of Bow, in his war chariot, with rearing steeds, the Hittite hordes falling beneath his rage.)

Muwatallis sat on a high chair and gazed down on the flow of troops from the south tower. His old eyes watered in the sun—light, from strain rather than passion, but he could still see the distant troops sharply. He thrilled to the sight of the blocks of soldiers moving position, a slow seething mass in columns and swirling groups. The spring grass grass leaping from the fine soil of the flood plain was killing the prospect of rising dust. This was very good. He would see everything.

Above his head the breeze began to stiffen and the great flag of the city thumped in the air. He could make out the contingent from Troy crossing the river. The Dardany were a proud lot — too proud — dreams of conquest — trouble as pirates. They would have to be watched. Aleppo intended to keep them in the centre. Wise. Muwatallis half wished that he could personally lead the death blow of the chariots — a charge a mile wide with two lines of vehicles juxtaposed behind each other.

First the flanks would move off, and then the centre, then the flanks would trot, so that they would lead the way and begin a deadly embrace, then the centre would increase its speed, and finally on the sound of trumpets, all would move into the gallop.

The wings had trained to discharge javelins at the flanks of the enemy, then wheel right and left to let the centre punch home. The wings

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running in two circles swinging back and away would then regroup into the centre would then follow in as a second wave. From each chariot a spearman would leap to cut and thrust into the enemy, by then being trampled by horses and broken by wheels. Ah — the joy of it all. The distance was great but he would be able to see it all from the battlements, his chariots like columns of harvester ants raiding a cornfield. Muwatallis heart began to beat with an excitement, and his mouth ran dry. He called for wine.



(10. a.m.)

(Scholars have pondered the meaning of the Poem of Pentaur, wise military men have considered the description of the run of the battle, its explanation of events. Why, oh why did Ramesses let his Armies get so wide spread?. Iuny, from the beginning, had a cold feeling, deep in his blood, he did not like it at all, even though the Bedu had said the animals of Hatti were far away to the north.)

Ramesses sat with his son at his side, they looked like brothers. The great fans were held more to keep off the sun than provide a cooling breeze. His staff sat or knelt in a great egg—shaped ellipse, Ramesses at the narrow tip. Only Ramesses was entirely happy with his plan.

“Your Majesty, it can be done,” smiled Paser. The Vizier had sensed the doubts but deciding to back Ramesses to the full. The Hittites were to the north. It was safe. Two separate reports made it safe. The prospect of a permanent camp that night was appealing so that, having spoken his words of encouragement to the King, he attempted to catch the eye of Safi, succeeded, and drew a flashing smile from the youth who at least understood his place in the moods of the Vizier. Paser winked, and drew a grin.

“Then do it,” Pharaoh interrupted Paser's hunger, and the Vizier found that he had forgotten what he had first said — fortunately the Shemsu spoke. Paser concentrated his mind quickly.

“You are set on this thing, Sire?” began Iuny for the last time. “Although it breaks all the rules I have taught you. If I were you.....”

“And if I were you, Shemsu, I would do whatever your would do — but I am me — and you will do as I will have done,” Ramesses voice purred, and Iuny felt a rise of irritation in his bowels.

“The enemy.....” began Iuny again.

“Is in Aleppo,” whispered Paser.

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“Sire, we have lost many spies — there must be some Hittites near, Shoshu assassins,” growled Iuny, failing to hide his rising irritation.

“Bandits more like!” offered the Vizier. “The Shoshu are on our side now!”

“The whole enterprise is dangerous — there are enemy in Kadesh!”

“They are to side with us too — we have heard....”

“They could come sweeping out,” said Iuny.

Paser shook his head, and smiled at his Majesty, his face carrying an impression of understanding of the pain his Master must feel having this old war horse go on and on in this manner..

Iuny turned to Pharaoh, “You just wish to impress the Nubian — the childish wager! You want to get there first!” the Shemsu's voice had an edge of desperation.

“Enough!” commanded Pharaoh. “Carry out my wish. Thus, I have spoken. And I'll beat the Nubian too.” Ramesses had finished with a disarming giggle, which even brought a smile to Iuny's face.

Ramesses now required that the Army of Amun stand firm, and all the following Armies halt on their line of march. The forty special baggage chariots and a hundred assorted beasts of burden carrying and drawing the materials for Pharaoh's camp were to move to the head of the Army of Amun. They were to march at their fastest speed, driving the animals to the limit, for permanent camp lay ahead, and peace would come even for Ramesses' pet lion.

They would be escorted by the Phoenix Squadrons, together with the escorts for the young princes. As soon as the great caravan was gone the Army of Amun would follow at battle pace to join the King to the north west of Kadesh where the royal camp would be set up early that afternoon, behind its protective square of Shield-bearers, who would dig in shields and stakes until a better barricade could be created in the coming days.

By the time the shields were in place the following First Army of Re would be clear of the woods of Riblai and moving towards their area of camp to the north of the woods of Riblai, thus protecting Amun's rear. The Army of Ptah would camp in the woods of Riblai. The Army of Sutekh would bring up the rear and camp on the northern side of the ford, perhaps by the following morning, for the line of march had grown as the heat of the day threw up dust in the drier southern valley. All Armies would have access to the waters of the river in their new positions, and Kadesh would be threatened by twenty five thousand warriors — they would not dare come out to challenge the King of All Egypt.... even if he slept.

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“There is no danger,” said Ramesses reassuringly. “We have seen nothing of the Hittite hordes — and the Bedu have given us good news on why that is — Muwatallis is a month to the north.”

The brief conference broke up, Iuny stumbled grumpily to his battle chariot, Paser had a quiet word with Matu, and Pharaoh ordered that the beautiful twins be prepared for him that night — if luck would have it Asha would reach the camp that day too. Asha would find His Majesty in full splendour, in more than a warrior's makeshift tent, and Asha would lose the wager that Pharaoh would reach Kadesh first and be holding a parade before Asha's Sherden were even in sight.



(10.30 a.m.)

(The Valley of Kehir broadens and flattens, as it reaches towards Kadesh. Its floor is totally obscured, by the surrounding hills, from the view of any on the battlements of Kadesh. In that late spring the whole of the floor of the valley was a mass of good grazing, billions of flowers. No dust for tramping feet to send tell—tale message high on the air, but there were many bees.)

Asha found the sun an irritation under the horned Sherden helmet. He had removed it, together with his armour. He stood by his chariot. He had decided to abandon it for the ground was strewn with small boulders. One wheel had already had to be replaced. He could make easier progress on foot. He stood watching a Sa of Sherden infantry pass by. A man suddenly leapt out of line, and the whole Sa was thrown into confusion. Its commander called it to a halt, and at once other men began to leap about.

“Bees!” screamed the men.

Asha jumped away from the chariot and pushed into the panic, laying about him with the flat of his iron blade. Bees were everywhere. None stung Asha, several landed on him, but the film of Nubian sweat had a repellent effect on the disturbed insects. Asha stabbed his blade into the earth, in a flash he captured a bee on the wing with his right hand. It stung his hand at once.

“Look!” he screamed, and they were silent and they looked because Asha the Iron Warrior had called. Asha held the bee between his fingers and put it to his lips. He was seen to grimace in pain, but was otherwise unmoved. His men moaned in admiration. Then he pressed the bee to his tongue. A great sigh rose from all who saw.

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“It is a bee!” bellowed the Iron Warrior. “It hurts — but it is only a bee. It is not an arrow. It is not my blade!” With a sweep of his arm his sword was in his hand as if drawn there by a spirit and whistling through the air sent a chip of wood flying from the nearest soldier's shield. “Bees! Bees are nothing!”

Wary, but impressed, the soldiers reformed, and began to march — cheering Asha's name, still leaping at bees' stings — but holding their column of march. Asha watched them with a smile. He rested his sword and examined his hand. He saw the sting, and with his teeth extracted it with ease. The bee had been dead before it had touched his lips.

Scroll Three

Tales of Mud and Glitter

(Kadesh Midday)

At Luxor there is an examples of the fabulous reliefs which depict the battle of Kadesh. There is a scene which details the happenings in the camp of Ramesses. Ramesses hears his advisers speak and chastises them. Outside, his great war chariot waits with Menna in full armour. Noli is nowhere to be seen. Tiny figures beneath Ramesses' throne, in another place, beat two protesting prisoners. Like the messengers from the Bedu, we do not know their fate. But we know they suffered, for they told all.... namely that the unspeakable ones who followed Muwatallis had scored a great triumph over Ramesses. They told in their blood that Muwatallis was at Kadesh, not Aleppo, and that their chariot power was ready to strike. They did not know, in their agony, that the hooves were already beating out of the river's mud, already crossing the river's bank, ready for death dealing. The Prince of Aleppo had released his force — and now they were like arrows, already on the wing, their journies to be short, swift and savage.

Ramesses had ordered that all Peherers were to ride on the chariots. Several of the light—weight battle chariots had broken under the strain when they hit uneven ground, especially when passing through the wooded terrain. The baggage train carrying Pharaoh's royal camping equipment was stretched out for five miles behind his leading chariots. Had the Peherers been slowing down the chariots the distance would have been greater.

Noli was pleased to be easing his legs, but as Ramesses pushed his horses on, determined to be at the very pin—point head of the combined Armies, Noli began to feel sick. Two miles short of the rise of ground that Ramesses had personally spied out to be the site of his camp the tall slim Nubian had, without orders, dropped from the chariot and began to lope alongside. A handful of runners seeing this, and not willing to be regarded as anything but Noli's equal had also taken to their familiar station. Ramesses, under a cloudless sky in the heat of late spring, a little after the mid—point of the day, approached

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the rise of land which commanded the valley but which was, in turn, dominated by the towers of Kadesh.

From the highest tower Muwatallis himself squinted as he saw the flow of the Egyptian might running like spilt wine across a table top. He bit his lip and looked along the river marvelling at the positioning of his own columns. He could tell exactly when his chariots had crossed, although they were out of his direct sight because of a gentle bend. Beyond the bend the river glittered blue in the sunshine, below the bend the river ran a dark saffron, product of the stirring of twenty four thousand hooves. Muwatallis felt pleased that Pharaoh did not have such an eagle's spot to catch a view of this battle flow. Unbeknown to Muwatallis, Pharaoh was obliged to keep a mere human eye on His own striving horses and the valley ahead, steering round boulders and fleeing goats.

Rarely could Ramesses see the great river of Orontes, which was well below its banks' escarpment. As he drove on up the valley the dust grew less as the fertile land gave birth to lush grass and an astonishing blanket of colour as wild flowers waved in full bloom. The carpet of colour flowed with passing breezes, filling the air with perfume and the hum of uncountable nations of insects on the wing, also flashing in the bright light.

Ramesses could see the towers of Kadesh, clearly, and in the jerking of the chariot sometimes thought he saw the flash of metal from the battlements. Certainly He could see a huge flag billowing in the hot afternoon breeze, and the multi—coloured pennants flying from each of several equal towers. Once, He saw movement to His right and thought He saw soldiers. Menna the Shield-bearer had seen something too. A small flock of goats with great curved horns dappled with nodules, brown and huge, came bouncing towards the sprinting chariots, suddenly felt fear and swerved away in unison like a squadron of dancing cavalry. Menna and his king looked at each other and laughed.

"Hittite chariots!" Ramesses had shouted, pointing at the sprinting goats and he and his Shield-bearer loved each other in the mirth of that moment.

"Majesty," said Menna.

"Yes, Menna."

"Today is a good day is it not?"

Ramesses smiled and nodded.

Menna also nodded, agreeing with himself, and said, "Yes, it is a good day!"

Then Ramesses caught full view of the river itself as his chariot began to mount the rise of land where he would pitch his camp. The river

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was as gold, and He thought how beautiful it was against the background of green shrubs and small trees which ran right down to its banks on the far side. When they crossed at Shabtuna the river had been blue. This was a land of many contrasts. This was a good land, and would soon be Egypt's once more.



(12.10. p.m.)

The Prince of Aleppo and Priam, First Prince of Troy, lay with helmets removed, eyes looking through the reeds and grass at the astonishing sight.

An endless stream of galloping beasts passed before them. Asses, horses and chariots with archers thundered by; chariots with baggage, half naked runners alongside; dogs; further squadrons of chariots with three soldiers in each — which confused Aleppo, until he saw one soldiers jump down and run alongside from time to time. This was the Egyptian Army that he must destroy that day — they were a rabble, and obviously mad. He would take them easily. Priam had pulled at his shoulder and pointed out a particularly garish vehicle which must be a Prince or a General in the lead, completely ahead of the others. The man at the reins looked their way, as he rode by.

They pulled their heads down as the driver, dressed in white, with a blue helmet, seemed to notice them. At the same moment a herd of goats galloped across their front between the river and the speeding Egyptians. It was the goats which had caught the Egyptian's attention. Aleppo realised that the Egyptians could be distracted by the goats. They were mad enough to drive over to hunt them. Then they would see the two thousand Hittite chariots massed on this side of the river, waiting the order to move up the embankment, burst into the eyes of the Egyptians and strike them dead with a fatal charge.

For a moment his heart sank at this thought that the squadrons of chariots might wheel towards the river. He turned to raise his arm to alert the five hundred steady chariots immediately behind and below him. The danger passed. He relaxed. The trap had not been seen. Gradually the crazed rush of Egyptians grew less.

Aleppo raised himself and looked to the south—west from whence the rabble had come, towards the woods of Rablai and saw, with racing heart, a large body of foot soldiers marching in fast order. Ahead were larger groups of chariots, also travelling at speed. Aleppo estimated that soon there would be three, perhaps four thousand men crossing his front of two thousand chariots. His squadrons were in

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double extended order, behind him, along the foot of the slope. A further thousand lay at the water's edge, also on this side of the river, awaiting orders to move across in support. All was ready. Was this the moment?

“There will be more in the woods,” whispered Priam, catching Aleppo's doubts.

The Commander of the Chariots of the Federation of Hatti slithered downwards a little on the soft slope of the embankment, then stood up, out of sight of the passing Egyptians. A quiet had dropped about the chariot host which stood looking his way for almost a mile on either side of him, for they had heard that the Egyptians were passing their front, even as they had planned — so that only the chuntering of their own horses, and the running of the river could be heard. Aleppo drew a young aid to his side.

“Go to the north flank! Go very quickly! Have scouts move on the Egyptians! Report back to me what the Egyptians do! This mad chase may be obscuring a movement. The Egyptians are not fools. “

The aid scurried down the embankment and joined a chariot which immediately splattered north along the river's muddy edge. As further precaution Aleppo sent scouts south and even east in case by some magic the Egyptians had forces coming from impossible directions. Aleppo was a cautious general before a clash, but a madman in a charge. If the Egyptians were not fools, then this foolishness must be a trap. Yet he had a spirit on his shoulder screaming: “Charge!” For he already knew where the Egyptians were.

Scouts and spies had already told of forty perhaps fifty thousand Egyptians, six Armies, great fleets at sea, exaggerations for certain — but half of that would be a great danger to the Federation. Even the evil Sherden, traitors, given to caressing the passages of stench — even they were said to be arming and on the move against the Federation and the might of the Hittite Empire. Three thousand Egyptians had already passed before Aleppo's own eyes, together with great quantities of baggage, and supplies. Supplies at the front of an Army! The Egyptians were up to some deadly trick. If not — then they were fools — stupid beyond belief, and soon to pay for it. He looked at the First Prince of Troy, Valiant—in—Battle.

“This is not the main force!” announced Aleppo and was pleased when the younger man nodded in agreement.

“But what an opportunity!”

Another nod and a toothy grin.

Without further discussion they began to scramble back up the embankment which was now drier in the heat of the day — to continue to observe the enemy's passage. The moment was close.

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(12.15. p.m.)

Nu—cef was the first of the Egyptians to catch a good view of the citadel of Kadesh that morning. He sat quite still on the warm back of the mare looking into the distance, taking the shape of the walls deep into his memory.

He had left the two Bedu by the crossing at Shabtuna and had trotted Wonder—of—Horus through the woods with his bow charged all the time, guiding the beautiful mare with his naked legs only. Clearing the woods he had seen a broad expanse of grassy plain ahead which rose gradually to the left of the city as he viewed it. On his right was the river, the blue of lapis lazuli. He looked towards rise in the land ahead of him. He supposed the rise in the terrain would make a good place for the Army to concentrate. Ramesses would be pleased. There was nothing in sight from the woods to the city. The way for the Armies was clear. Not even a peasant.

His keen eyes spied ahead, and he could see the pennants above the city, and a great flag. He felt an excitement run through his body — a kind of hunter's thrill when the quarry is first seen and does not know, and the hunter feels his own full power and his imminent conquest of nature. It was that very thrill which set off hidden forces of awareness in the body of the youth, forces which gathered in his mind. And at that moment the youth's blood ran icy cold. In the heat of the day, with the body heat borrowed from the mare, he had been sweating, a warm and sensual sweat which caused a swollen ache in his loins. That ache and firmness disappeared, even as the warm sweat lost its heat. A question rushed through his being — where were the local people?



(12.25 p.m., West Bank, 2 miles north of Prince Aleppo)

Hardiq the Archer had had enough. For weeks he had tolerated the impudence of the pair of Upi archers. Given the task of holding the extreme right flank of the chariot force with his hundred archers, all supposedly champions, and knowing that there was going to be a battle, he was initially delighted when the Aide of the Prince of

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Aleppo came up and said that the Prince had ordered scouts to move up to see what the Egyptians were doing.

Through the shrubs and reeds Hardiq had seen the advancing Egyptians with their light—weight chariots making for the high ground. Everyone had been told to stay low. The two Upi had promptly stood up! Hardiq hit the biggest one on the back of his head with his composite bow, and knocked him to the ground — Dubule was his stupid name, and the other they called Rago — or at least that was what it sounded like, also stupid. They were a useless pair. Sending them forward could get them killed or caught by the Egyptian creatures — a most satisfying prospect for Hardiq. He was a seasoned Commander of One Hundred of the Archers of the City of Aleppo. The Upi had been added on the march. Ten of them. Only five left, and only three of those any good.

“You and you!” bellowed Hardiq, which brought a warning glance from the Aide, who feared that the Egyptians would hear. Hardiq glared at the Aide: still wet behind the ears, was Hardiq's opinion — how could they hear in the middle of all that rabble running and galloping about out there? The two ugly little Upi scowled at the big archer.

“Come 'ere!” snapped Hardiq.

And they just sat glowering at him. Hardiq raised his fist and gave out a curse, foul enough to shock a god. They reluctantly got to their feet.

Hardiq nodded to the Aide, who wore a purple helmet showing him to be a messenger of the Great King. This one was one of those true lickens of the arses of royalty. Purple for piles! But Hardiq still bowed to the colour, known throughout the Federation, with a nervousness tinged with insolence.

“You men push though the reeds and observe the Egyptians for this gentleman!” growled Hardiq.

“Come back when the sun in there!” the Aide pointed to the blue ahead of the sun's path.

The Upi squinted at the sun, and grumbled.

“Fail — and you'll eat your eyes,” said the Aide with an accomplished certainty which impressed Hardiq. The Aide had a quiet voice and the face of one used to the softness of the palace combined with the studied ease of a junior royal judge ordering an execution. The Upi sensed the real power of one close to the gods on earth, and nodded, sullen, but obedient. “Bring good information and you will be greeted with the thanks of Aleppo himself in the name of the Lord of War, Great Muwatallis.” The Aide removed a thin gold bracelet from his wrist — worth a chariot at least. He threw it to the

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Commander of One Hundred who caught it deftly. “A true reward for their work if they return.”

“You're honoured, you are!” Hardiq snarled at the two. “They don't deserve it, sir!”

“If they fail to bring knowledge of what you think they should see, Hardiq, arrange it so that they see nothing more.”

“With pleasure, sir!” grinned Hardiq.

Without further orders the chariot moved back down the line to check that scouts sent out at intervals were indeed on their dangerous way.

“Now listen — you heard what the purple man said,” snapped the commander. “You've been a worry to me for four weeks — I'll give you this,” he threw the bracelet in the air, “or this!” The Commander tapped the bronze dagger on his hip. “Its your luck!”

“We go now?” asked Rago, incredulous, the sun was high, the marshes stank, there were snakes and great spiders, and slithering things he had never seen before.

“Now!” smiled Hardiq.

“You know that one? He called you by name!” asked Dubule nodding towards the distant chariot sputtering through the river.

“Commanded the Aleppo Palace Archers — didn't I? Of course I know — Aleppo's his uncle — get going!”

“What do we do?” they asked together.

“Do? You are truly useless!” snarled Hardiq.

“We've never done..... “

“Listen — you saw the Egyptians — they're going to make camp — sure of it. Keep to the reeds and the long grass. Keep your worthless heads down. Get close. Watch. Come back, like he said, and tell us what you see. And I'll tell you something — I'll tell you this — he'll watch me pick your eyes out if you don't get back with good information — and don't think that the Egyptians will treat you better — they'll have your love—bits off as trophies — and there's nothing to the north except us — so don't even think about going home the long way!”

A soft footed fear ran through both men. Both looked at the reed beds. Both wished they had behaved better on the march. But both nodded. Both moved off, already bending low.



(12.30.p.m.)

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Nu—cef had turned the mare west, riding a mile out from the woods and headed for the mountains. Rising up he found no trace of life. Gradually the view of the Orontes Valley to the north improved and he could see the line of the river beyond the city. He could see the river below too, with the ripples on the surface, yet they seemed strange. The distance was perhaps three miles. He squinted against the sun's searing light, capping his eyes with his hands, ignoring the pulling of the mare's head as she tried to forage at some tufts of succulent grass, he could feel the mutterings of her hunger through his thighs. He sensed movement around the river. Troops. Was it possible? He was not certain. The mare was reluctant to move but Nu—cef's thighs insisted that she go down the mountain—side once more and head for the river.

When he reached level ground the young scout forced the horse into a canter and adjusted his body to take the movement. He was startled when a group of chariots with shouts and cheers burst out of the trees. He immediately recognised Pharaoh and was about to throw himself off Wonder—of—Horus and scrape the earth in homage, but Pharaoh was gone. Hundreds of animals and chariots were now pouring out of the woods and his mare broke into a gallop in pursuit. Nu—cef almost lost his hold on the leaping animal and was forced to hang onto her neck, somehow grasping the reigns he managed to haul on them and using them and all the strength of his legs and waist he twisted the excited beast away from the wild chase of men and animals and pulled her back on a course for the river. He began to walk her parallel to the river, a mile short of the river bank. As the mare moved forward Nu—cef noticed saw that the infantry of the First Army of Amun was also clear of the woods and moving at battle trot, eager to follow their King despite the heat of the early afternoon sun. Ahead of him were the towers of Kadesh, with yellowing water flowing round. Strange that the water was so different as it came close to the city. He kicked Hori back into an easy canter, on a line which would take him closer to the reed beds, the river and despicable Kadesh.



(2.00.p.m. The mound on the West Bank to the West of Kadesh)

Two hours after the sun reached its mid—point Ramesses already stood naked in His private tent. Sabiti the youth and Junini the girl, the twins of His loins, had poured cool water from the earthenware jugs over their Lord. They stood on gold inlaid stools and began to

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sweep the water from His shoulders with their fingers. He held up His arms, and rivulets ran to His armpits. New hairs were already showing despite the torture He had endured the week before as every one had been plucked out. Now their fingers ran across His chest, and His sides and His back.

Sabiti, who was not His favourite of the two, but had irresistible talents playfully cleared the water from the Pharaoh's impossible erection. Ramesses looked down on him and growled with pleasure:

“Lie down on your belly!” His Majesty commanded.



(2.45.p.m.)

Outside, despite the heat, despite the forced march, the dust, the tired legs and dry mouths, frantic efforts were being made to raise, secure, and adjust the Court Tent. The throne had been unpacked and placed on the cedar wood dais. The Shield-bearers had already erected a perimeter of stakes and shields. The scribes had arrived. Even a group of cows were present. They were gasping with exhaustion, but had given up a little milk. The sacred lion, bad—tempered with the leaping about of his special transporter chariot had been placated with half a goat which had earlier gone down beneath the hooves of a racing chariot. Now he dozed, head dropping, and had allowed his front paws to be tethered against his wakening.

Menna sat, naked but for his loin cloth, on the King's chariot. He had cleared it of the day's dust. Tethering the two stallions close by, he had fed them, and watered them. He was chewing on eating onions with a skin of warm beer at his side. Suddenly the six weeks of march were over. Life would ease. Tomorrow messages would go to Kadesh demanding its surrender. Ramesses had said to Menna that He would promise them freedom under His rule. Things would be much the same for them except that all of them would be taxed at one tenth, twice over, which was the Egyptian way. Ramesses had said that they would join Him. His Majesty was confident they would. The Bedu had said they would. This, thought Menna, would be a good thing. With Kadesh secured, half of Sutekh could be left behind to ensure no traitorous behaviour, then Ramesses could drive north — further than any Pharaoh had ever gone, to crush the power of Muwatallis, or at least bring out a mighty peace. Ah! Life Health and Prosperity to Ramesses.

A squeal came from his right, and looking across the ever increasing lines of troops and chariots, tents, and baggage he saw a

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scribe beating a boy. He shrugged. They had already set up the school area, for this was a good training ground for the future military scribes. There were fifty cadet—scribes attached to the First Army of Amun — forty five now, five had died on the march.

All around there began to evolve a tented palace, and Menna felt proud that he belonged to it all and that he had finished his duties first. In an hour he would sleep. Later he would gamble with the others, and then sleep again, for tomorrow would bring much work. There was to be an inspecting of the following armies, and many problems for his Master and the other great ones.

Menna took a huge bite of his onion and stared across the grassy plain. There he saw a wonderful sight. The entire majesty of the First Army of Re was stretched from the woods to within a mile of the camp of Amun. They were shimmering in the sun as their glitter crossed the green. On their right, as Menna looked, lay the craggy red of the mountains, on their left the line of the river, shimmering either blue or yellow. It was very beautiful, and Menna's heart swelled. He munched, and munched, and then stopped when he saw something else. He leapt to his feet.



(2.0.p.m.)

Dubule and Rago edged forward on their bellies, complaining at each other.

“Shut up!” ordered Dubule.

“You shut up!”

“You're making most noise!” hissed Dubule.

“So what?”

“They'll hear us!”

“Who?”

“The Egyptians!” Dubule pointed through the gap in the reeds they had formed. The ground rose quite sharply so that they were lying on the upper flood plain of the river, well supplied with moisture rising up. The line of the reeds ended abruptly and gave way to an expanse of open grassland, wasted by swarms of goats, but now covered with a seasonal bed of flowers. Bees and allied insects were humming everywhere on the hot midday air. The Egyptians were making camp. Far away on their left a fresh force of Egyptians could be seen as a great glittering line ranged against the green woods. No Egyptian was close to their position.

“What are they up to?” muttered Dubule.

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“Making camp,” observed Rago.

“Let’s go back and report!”

“What? Report what?”

“That they’re making camp. We’ve done our bit. Get that bangle!”

“I don’t know. We’d better watch a bit longer!” grumbled Rago

“There’s no danger — they’re not marching on the city — the fools are making camp! They’re not going anywhere. We just go back and say...ugh!”

The arrow went between them. It passed through Dubule’s hand. He looked at it, stupidity written on his face. The ‘hiss’ of the flight seemed to follow the impact. Then he began to yelp with the pain of it.

“What’s that?” gasped Rago, his mind full of insects and moving armies. But with an archer’s senses he followed back from the angle of this sudden arrow and saw a horse. A man on a horse. A man on a horse with a bow pulled full, armed with a fresh arrow. Dubule was attempting to free his hand, and had not seen the horseman.

“Help me!” said Dubule in fury as Rago began to struggle to his feet. Rago was aware that Dubule had dropped his bow, then he realised with horror that he had left his own on the reed floor as he stood up. He looked at the Egyptian but saw only the tip of the arrow, and knew that it was pointed at his chest, and that, if released, would take out his heart.