

OTHNIEL, CUSHAN-RISHATHAIM, AND THE DATE OF THE EXODUS

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INTRODUCTION

Judges 3:7-11 report that the Israelite Judge Othniel defeated a ruler by the name of Cushan-Rishathaim who was the “king of Aram-Naharaim.” While King Cushan is not mentioned in other extant historical sources, his people the Rishathaim are referred to in a number of ancient texts. As will be seen below, the Rishathaim are to be identified with an ancient people better known to historians today as the Mitanni. If the Rishathaim are to be identified with the Mitanni, or more properly with the Indo-European ethnic group that ruled the multi-ethnic Kingdom of Mitanni, then there are highly significant conclusions to be drawn on the dating of both the Exodus and the period of the Judges.

Identifying the Rishathaim and the area that they ruled is important not only because it supports the historical accuracy of the Bible but also because it provides a time frame for the period of the Judges, and consequently also for dating the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. As will be seen below, this time frame strongly supports the Early Date Theory for the Exodus – 1446 BC – and destroys any possibility that the Late Date Theory –ca. 1270 BC – is correct.

CUSHAN-RISHATHAIM AND HIS KINGDOM

The story of Othniel’s defeat of King Cushan-Rishathaim is found in Judges 3:7-11 which reads as follows:

7. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh; they forgot Yahweh their Elohim and served the Baals and the Asherahs. 8. The anger of Yahweh burned against them so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram-Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. 9. But when they cried out to Yahweh, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, who saved them. 10. The Spirit of Yahweh came upon him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. Yahweh gave Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. 11. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

The name translated above as “Cushan-Rishathaim” is better translated as “Cushan of the Rishathaim.” In other words, Cushan was king of a people known as

the Rishathaim. As will be seen, the Rishathaim were a well-known people in the ancient world and are mentioned in a number of ancient texts. Incidentally, the name Rish in Hebrew could also be rendered as Ris/ Ras/ Rosh.

Judges 3:8 states that Cushan was “king of Aram-Naharaim.” Aram-Naharaim is better translated as “Aram between the Two Rivers,” the two rivers being the Tigris and Euphrates. In other words, “Naharaim,” which means “between the two rivers,” is a Semitic equivalent of the later Greek term “Mesopotamia.” The Greek term Mesopotamia also translates as “between the two rivers.” In some English translations of the Bible, Naharaim is even translated by the Greek term “Mesopotamia.” However, Naharaim was a term only used for northern Mesopotamia and not for Sumer/ Babylonia in the south.

The “Aram” part of Aram-Naharaim is the name of an ancient people known as the Arameans. The Arameans were a Semitic people originally from the northern area of Mesopotamia, an area where Abraham and his family once lived. Haran, the city where Abraham lived until his father died, was located in Aram-Naharaim. It is possible but not likely that the city of Haran itself was named after Haran, the brother of Abraham and the father of Lot.¹

According to Genesis 23-24, the Arameans were relatives of the Israelites. Abraham, when he sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, sent this servant to the family of another one of his – Abraham’s – brothers named Nahor who is said to have lived in “Aram-Naharaim,” see Genesis 24:10 (O’Callaghan 1948, pp. 25-6).

Judges 3:7-11 does not say that Cushan was an Aramean. What it is says is that Cushan ruled the area where the Arameans then lived.² Cushan himself is said to have been a member of a people named the Rishathaim. As will be seen in this study, the Rishathaim were a military minority that invaded Aram-Naharaim from the north. As will also be seen, Rishathaim peoples were a strong military people who had horses and chariots, and other groups of them also invaded into northern India at about the same time that they invaded Aram-Naharaim.

It will be argued in this study that the Rishathaim people of Aram-Naharaim are to be identified with an Indo-European people who once ruled the ancient Kingdom of Mitanni/ Mittani/ Mitani, whose name is spelled three different ways in the Amarna Letters. The ancient Kingdom of Mitanni is known--from a variety of ancient sources--to have ruled the area of Aram-Naharaim from about 1550-1350 BC.³ Included in the territory ruled by the Rishathaim were the Hurrians, Arameans, and the Assyrians.

The Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni seem to have first invaded Mesopotamia in large numbers after 1700 BC and then eventually merged with the Hurrians (O’Callaghan 1948, p. 146). While large numbers of Indo-Europeans seem to have first invaded northern Mesopotamia sometime after 1700

BC, there is evidence that smaller groups of Indo-Europeans were in Mesopotamia even earlier.

As was noted above, besides the Hurrians, some of the other peoples in northern Mesopotamia who were ruled or dominated by the Mitanni during this period were the Arameans and the Assyrians. The Hurrians seem to have been the largest ethnic group in the multi-ethnic Kingdom of Mitanni. It was the merger of the Rishathaim with the Hurrians which produced the Kingdom of Mitanni. It should be noted that it was after their contact with the Rishathaim, the Assyrians became the highly militaristic people found in the later books of the Old Testament.

The Kingdom of Mitanni was at various times the mortal enemy of both the Hittites and the Egyptians. Ancient Egyptian records clearly demonstrate that the Mitanni tried repeatedly and at times succeeded in to expanding south into the areas that are today southern Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. Incidentally, it was the Rishathaim who introduced the true war chariot into the Middle East. They were a famous horse people.

Early 18th Dynasty pharaohs felt so threatened by Mitanni incursions into Palestine that Pharaoh Thutmosis III and his son Amenhotep II undertook a series of military campaigns against them, especially Pharaoh Thutmosis III. Nearly all of the 17 military campaigns of Thutmosis III were against the Kingdom of Mitanni and its allied city-states in Syria, Lebanon, and Canaan. Mitanni attempts to expand south into Palestine in the late 15th Century BC fit very well with what is reported about Cushan and the Rishathaim in Judges 3:7-11. As will be seen, there is clear evidence that there were bands of Indo-Aryan Rish/ Rosh/ Ras and Hurrians peoples in Palestine at least as early as the 18th Century BC. In the Amarna Letters of the 14th Century BC, about 1/3 of the names of city kings are either Hurrian or Indo-European.

THE RISHATHAIM IN ANCIENT TEXTS

The Rishathaim are mentioned in a variety of ancient sources. There is an inscription from the reign of Hatshepsut [ruled ca. 1518-1482 BC] that mentions the "Country of Reshet." The inhabitants of the "Country of Reshet" are almost certainly to be identified with the Rishathaim mentioned in Judges 3:7-11. The "-im" ending on the name Rishathaim is the Hebrew plural and in this instance indicates an ethnic group of people. Removing the "-im" ending leaves "Rishatha" which even in English transliteration looks much like the Reshet mentioned by the Egyptians.

The similarity between these two names is even more striking when the Hebrew text is used.⁴ The un-pointed Hebrew version of the name Rishathaim can be transliterated into English as "Rishatim." (Breasted II 1906, p. 135, listing no.

321). Again, removing the Hebrew “-im” ending leaves “Rishat” which is nearly identical to the Egyptian “Reshet.” The -t at the end of Reshet is almost certainly an Egyptian version of the Hurrian plural ending –tha (Bush, p. 115). Incidentally, it appears that the name Rishathaim in Judges 3 is Rish + the Hurrian plural –tha + the Hebrew plural –im.

The context of Hatshepsut’s inscription suggests that the Land of Reshet was located somewhere to the far north of Egypt. This same inscription mentions the land of Punt to the south. It was a rather common Egyptian convention during the New Kingdom period for a pharaoh to claim to rule from north to south, and two nations, one north and one south, would be named.

The “Land of Reshet” should also probably be identified with the “Land of Reshu” which is also mentioned in Egyptian inscriptions. Another inscription by Hatshepsut states:

My fame makes the great ones of the countries to bow down while the uraeus [cobra] is upon my forehead...(lacunae)...all lands. The Land of Reshu and the Land Yu, they cannot hide from my majesty: Punt is mine...(Breasted II 1906, pp. 123-24, listing no. 299).⁵

Variations of the name Reshu also appear in the writings of other ancient peoples. Ugaritic texts dating before ca. 1200 BC mention a people called the “Rishim” and a city called “Rish.” (Virolleaud, C. in ed. Schaffer C.F.A. 1965 and Gondahls, F. 1967). The exact location of the city of Rish is not known. Both the Rishim and the city of Rish were also located not far from, but to the north of, the ancient city of Ugarit in northwestern Syria (O’Callaghan 1948, p. 23 and Bryce, T. 1999, p. 77).⁶ It is also likely that the city of Rish in the Ugaritic texts is to be identified with the city of Ursu-Urshu in Assyrian texts, and also with the city of “Warsuwa” in some other Akkadian texts.⁷

Ancient tablets from the city of Ebla also refer to a city named “Urshu” which was also located somewhere in northern Mesopotamia (Wess 1985). It is likely that the city of Urshu in the Eblaite texts is also to be identified with the city of Rish mentioned in the Ugaritic texts.

The city of Urshu is also mentioned in Hittite texts which say that it was attacked and conquered by the Indo-European Hittite kings Hattushili I and Mutsili I in the 17th century BC (Gurney 1966, p. 191).⁸ The fact that the mysterious and as-of-yet, undiscovered city of “Urshu” was attacked by the Hittites is particularly interesting since the Hittites later were the mortal enemies of the Kingdom of Mitanni. Hittite sources seem to locate Rish/Ursu/Warsuwa in the area near Carchemish. The city of Carchemish for a long period of time was a part of the

Mitanni Empire. While there is no certain proof, it seems highly likely that the city of Rish was a Mitanni city, and likely a capital city.

INDIA AND THE MITANNI PEOPLE

The Rishim people can be connected to the Kingdom of Mitanni in a rather strange way. There were an ancient people called the “Rsi” who conquered northern India sometime before ca. 1300 BC. The exact date for the invasion of the Rsi people into India is not known. However, it is known that the great Indus Civilization (mainly located in Pakistan) began to disappear in the 17th Century BC, and it is also known that a northern “Indo-Aryan” race eventually invaded and partially displaced the native peoples of the Indus Civilization in the Indus Valley. Indo-Aryans are a branch of the Indo-European peoples.

The Rsi of India were clearly an “Indo-Aryan” people and were related to, if not identical to, the people who came to control the Indus Valley where the Indus Civilization was once located.⁹ It therefore appears that the Rsi began to invade toward India from the north and west through the Indus Valley at about the same time as the Indo-Aryan rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni began to invade Aram-Naharaim from the north, in other words in the 17th Century BC

The modern Indian historian and ethnologist Ramaprasad Chanda in his book *The Indo-Aryan Races* (Chandra, 1969, p. 180) writes that the Rsi people were a: “Fair-haired” people who invaded India “from the far north.”¹⁰ The Rsi people who invaded northern India can be closely linked to Indo-Europeans who were the ruling military class of the ancient Kingdom of Mitanni. Ramaprasad Chanda writes of the connection between the Rsi of India and Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni:

Among the gods invoked by the Mitannian king occur the well-known Vedic names Mitra, Varuna, Indra and Nasatyas (Chandra, 1969, p. 17).

Besides worshipping many of the same deities, the Rsi invaders of India and the Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni shared many of the same personal names. Chester Starr in his *A History of the Ancient World* writes:

...the rulers of the Mitanni had names akin to those of the Indo-European invaders of India, as did such of their major gods such as Indra and Varuna (Starr 1965, p. 86).

Horowitz, Oshima, and Sanders report in their book *Cuneiform in Canaan* that the name Biryamashda, which is found in a list of names (15th Century BC) discovered at Taanach in Israel: “is an older form of an Indo-Aryan name attested in the Rig-Veda” (Horowitz, p. 151). The Rig-Veda is, of course, the holy book of the Hindus in India, and it is written in ancient Sanskrit, an Indo-Aryan language.

While the official language of the Kingdom of Mitanni was Hurrian, the ruling Rishim military class originally spoke a language closely related to Indian Sanskrit. Sanskrit is an Indo-European language that is related to Greek, Latin, German, English, etc. However, the Indo-European language of the Rishim was not used as the official language of the Kingdom of Mitanni, Hurrian was. But, the Indo-European language of the Rishathaim does occur as one of the languages used in the Hittite archives found at Hattusa (Gurney 1966, pp. 103-4). However, as was noted above, Hurrian, was clearly the official language of the Mitanni Empire.

The Hurrians seem to have been the largest group of people in the multi-ethnic Kingdom of Mitanni, but their language is an isolate and was not an Indo-European language. It is nearly certain that the Rishim people used the Hurrian language as their official language because, when they conquered the northern Mesopotamia, they were an illiterate, military minority ruling over the larger, more sophisticated, and literate Hurrians.

The Rishim needed a written language for the administration of their kingdom, and the Hurrian language and Hurrian scribes were available. As will be argued below, it is nearly certain that the Rishim of the Kingdom of Mitanni in time stopped speaking their own native Indo-European language and adopted Hurrian as their spoken language. It is also very likely that other nations and peoples came in time to see the Rishim Mitanni as Hurrians.

At present it is not known from the very rare Mitanni inscriptions what ethnic name the military rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni used for themselves in their own language. However, a variety of other ancient sources strongly suggest that they originally called themselves something like the Teresh or Tiras. The name Rish/Rosh/Ras is almost certainly the Hurrian version of their name. Reshet (probably Hurrian plural) and Rishu (probably Akkadian plural) are other variants of their Hurrian name. It is nearly certain that these Rish/Rosh/Ras people did not originally call themselves Mitannians. The name Mitanni is almost certainly not Indo-European, and it almost certainly comes from the Hurrian language. Roger O’Callaghan in his *Aram Naharaim* states that the name Mitanni was:

“...primarily a political term, for the state covered not only the land Mitanni of northern Mesopotamia, ...but also extended eastward to embrace the kingdom of Arraphkha, and in the west, that of Mukish in northern Syria as vassal states (O’Callaghan 1948, pp. 78-9).

ARAM-NAHARAIM AND THE KINGDOM OF MITANNI

Ancient Egyptian sources further strengthen the connection between King Cushan of the Rishataim mentioned in Judges 3:7-11 and the Kingdom of Mitanni. As was stated above, in Judges 3:7-11 Cushan of the Rishathaim people is called “king of Aram-Naharaim.”

In early New Kingdom sources in Egypt, the Kingdom of Mitanni is almost always called simply “Naharin.” Naharin is an Egyptian version of the Semitic/Hebrew “Naharaim.” In time, as can be seen in the Amarna Letters, “Naharin” gave way in official Egyptian texts to the name Mitanni/ Mittani/ Mitani.

Naharaim appears to have been the Semitic name for the Kingdom of Mitanni, while Mitanni was almost certainly the Hurrian name for the Kingdom of Mitanni. The Egyptians at first called the Kingdom of Mitanni “Naharin,” but after ca. 1370 BC, the name “Naharin” was nearly always replaced by “Mitanni” in Egyptian sources.

In the 14th Century BC, Naharin had mostly been replaced by the name Mitanni as can be seen in the Amarna Letters. Occasionally in the Amarna Letters the name Hanigalbat is also used for the Kingdom of the Mitanni. Hanigalbat, which was located just to the northeast of Assyria, appears to have been an early center/ homeland of the Hurrians (Horites in Old Testament) where they appear to have merged with the Rish/ Rosh/ Ras/ Teresh. It was from Hanigalbat that the Rish/ Ras/ Teresh and the Hurrians (Horites of the Old Testament) invaded south into Aram Naharaim.

Amenhotep II (1453-1415 BC) in his “Memphis Stela” boasts that: “His mace has struck Naharin, and his bow has trampled the Nubians (Der Manuelian 1987, p. 229).” It should be noted that Naharin is here being contrasted with the Nubians/ Kushites. The Nubians/ Kushites lived south of Egypt, and Naharin was located north of Egypt. Amenhotep II is here stating that he dominated all peoples in both directions. This is very similar to the way that Hatshepsut earlier used the name Rishet in contrast to Punt.

By the way, Punt seems to have been located further south than Nubia, apparently along the central coastal area of East Africa. The Egyptians generally had little contact with the people of Punt, but Hatshepsut herself had earlier led a trading expedition to this distant land, and this may be why she used Punt and not Nubia in contrast to Rishet.

In another inscription named the Karnak Stela [ca. 1450 BC], Amenhotep II, the grand-nephew of Hatshepsut, makes it clear that the Kingdom of Naharin is to be

identified with the Kingdom of Mitanni. While campaigning on the Plain of Sharon in Palestine, Amenhotep II states that he captured an envoy of an unnamed king of Naharin.

Now his Majesty went southwards in the plain of Sharon. He found a messenger of the chief of Naharin (who was) carrying a letter of clay about his neck. He brought him back as a prisoner at the side of his chariot (Der Manuelian 1987, p. 229).

Peter Der Manuelian in his *Studies in the Reign of Amenophis II* writes of this incident:

At this point Amenophis captured an envoy of the chief of Naharin with correspondence tied around his neck. Was the envoy en route to various Palestinian chiefs who were conspiring with the Mitannian king to eliminate the Egyptian presence in Retenu? If so, this capture would significantly indicate how far south the anti-Egyptian “alliance” or “conspiracy” had penetrated. The Plain of Sharon, the coastal area of Palestine between Joppa and Caesarea, was far removed from the Mitanni kingdom in the north (Der Manuelian 1987, pp. 67-68.).

The Karnak Stela is therefore highly significant for studying Judges 3:7-11 for three reasons. First it proves that the term Naharin/Naharaim was used by the Egyptians as an early name for the Kingdom of Mitanni, and since Cushan is called the “king of Aram-Naharaim” in the Bible, it strongly suggests that Cushan was a Mitanni king. Second, the Karnak Stela indicates that the Kingdom of Mitanni was trying to control Palestine just prior to the time that Cushan came to control Palestine for eight years during the period of the Judges. This fact argues strongly for dating Othniel’s defeat of Cushan of the Rishathaim to the early part of the 14th century BC, probably in ca. 1375 BC. And third, it shows that the story of Othniel in the Book of Judges fits the historical period in which the Bible places it.

There is even textual support in the Amarna Letters for a Mitanni invasion into Canaan at about the same time that Judges 3:7-11 states that King Cushan conquered and ruled the Israelites for 8 years. Amarna Letter EA 58 has a local, Canaanite, city-king named Tehu-Tessup (Hurrian name) warning an unknown Pharaoh (almost certainly Amenhotep III who ruled ca. 1391-1354 BC) and saying: “Moreover, be informed that the king of Mittani (sic.) came forth together with chariots and together with an expeditionary force” (Moran 1992: 129).

Unfortunately, only the top half of this clay tablet has been found, but it must date before ca. 1370 BC, and it is highly likely that the un-named “king of Mittani”

mentioned in Amarna Letter EA 58 was Cushan. Incidentally, in ca. 1370 BC, Pharaoh Amenhotep III signed a peace treaty with the Kingdom of Mitanni which was sealed by his royal marriage to a Mitanni princess, and hostilities between Egypt and the Kingdom of Mitanni ceased. An invasion into Canaan by the Kingdom of Mitanni was not possible after 1370 BC.

Therefore, the historical evidence provides strong support for the identification of “Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram-Naharaim” as a Mitannian king. If this identification is true, as it almost certainly is, then there are some very important ramifications for dating both the Exodus and the Period of the Judges. Incidentally, in Egyptian texts the name “Naharin” was almost always used until ca. 1370 BC when the name Mitanni became dominant in Egyptian texts.

Before leaving this discussion, it must be noted that the Kingdom of Mitanni was at times called by another name, besides the names of Mitanni and Naharin. Egyptian, Hittite, Babylonian, and Assyrian sources sometimes refer to the Kingdom of Mitanni as “Hanigalbat.” The name Hanigalbat was used for an area of Mesopotamia to the north of Aram Naharaim (O’Callaghan 1948, p. 79).

The name of Hanigalbat did not at first include the area of Aram Naharaim, but during the period of time that the Kingdom of Mitanni existed, the name Hanigalbat was used occasionally as a synonym for the Kingdom of Mitanni. It is likely that the area of Hanigalbat was seen in the ancient world as the original homeland of the Hurrians and/or the Indo-Europeans who ruled the Kingdom of Mitanni.

After the demise of the Kingdom of Mitanni, the name Hanigalbat once again assumed its original geographical meaning and was not used for the area of Aram Naharaim (O’Callaghan 1948, p. 79). In ca. 1260 BC, the area of Hanigalbat was conquered and destroyed by the Assyrians and was centuries later absorbed into what was later called Armenia during the Greek and Roman periods. The original Armenians--not to be confused with the Semitic Arameans--were Indo-Europeans who began to invade into Hanigalbat sometime after 1200 BC. Once there, they too seem to have merged with remnants of the Hurrian peoples who still lived there. It was probably the invasion by the Armenians that led to the eventual disappearance of Hurrian as a spoken language in Mesopotamia.

CUSHAN-RISHATHAIM AND THE DATING OF THE EXODUS

As was seen earlier, Judges 3:7-11 states that Othniel, the first Israelite Judge, delivered the Israelites from the rule of Cushan of the Rishathaim who was the king of Aram-Naharaim. If Cushan was a king of the Mitanni as is almost certain, then Othniel must have defeated him sometime before ca. 1350 BC, because in ca. 1350 BC, Suppiluliuma I [ruled 1354-1332 BC], king of the Hittites, crushed the

Kingdom of Mitanni (Bryce 1999, p. 174). After 1350 BC the Kingdom of Mitanni was incapable of mounting a military campaign in Palestine.

The greatly-shrunk Kingdom of Mitanni became a client state of the Hittites in 1350 and was called Hanigalbat. Eventually Hanigalbat disappeared when the Assyrian King Shalmaneser I destroyed it in ca. 1260 BC and ended the reign of its rebellious client King Sattuara (Bryce 1999, pp. 303-4).

Shalmaneser I boasts that he drove the fleeing armies of King Sattuara of Hanigalbat to the west into Asia Minor. This may account for the presence of Rish/Rosh/Ras people in Asia Minor at the time of the fall of the Hittite Empire. Incidentally, the Hittites sent troops to help Sattuara fight against Shalmaneser I, and it is likely that it was the Hittites in the west to whom Sattuara and the remnants of his army fled for protection after their defeat by the Assyrian army.

Therefore, if Othniel defeated a Mitanni king who ruled over Aram-Naharaim, he had to have done so before ca. 1350 BC because after 1350 BC the Kingdom of Mitanni/Hanigalbat was a client state first of the Hittites and then of the Assyrians. In addition, after ca. 1350 BC the Kingdom of Mitanni did not control the area of Aram Naharaim and also could not have launched a military attack from there against the Israelites. If Othniel defeated a Mitanni king sometime before 1350 BC then the Late Date Theory for the Exodus becomes an impossibility.

The Late Date Theory dates the Exodus at ca. 1270 BC. According to the Late Date Theory, the Israelites were not even in the Land of Israel during the period of time that the Kingdom of Mitanni existed as an independent state.

By way of contrast, the Early Date of the Exodus does allow Othniel to have fought against a Mitanni king. The Early Date Theory of the Exodus has the Israelites leaving Egypt in ca. 1446 BC and arriving in the Land of Canaan in ca. 1406 BC.

The Book of Judges states that Othniel was the son of Caleb's brother. This suggests that Othniel was one of the early judges and that he probably defeated Cushan in ca. 1370 BC. Othniel's defeat of Cushan may even have helped cause the fall of the Kingdom of Mitanni to the Hittites in ca. 1350 BC. Incidentally, I am convinced that Cushan was an Indo-European title like pharaoh and not a proper name, but this is a topic for another article.

RISHATHAIM PEOPLES AFTER THE TIME OF OTHNIEL

The Rishathaim people—along with their former subjects the Hurrians, Arameans, and Assyrians—survived the disappearance of the Kingdom of Mitanni in ca. 1260 BC. Some Rishathaim peoples continued to live in northern Mesopotamia—probably in Urartu/ Ararat to the north—for centuries afterwards, but they never regained the power that they once enjoyed. However, as was seen

above and as will be seen below, some of the Rishathaim also appear to have migrated to various areas of Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia, and one group even migrated on to northwest Italy.

The Rish/ Rosh/ Ras people are almost certainly to be identified with the Taruisha people of central Asia Minor who are mentioned in Hittite texts after the destruction of the Kingdom of Mitanni. After the defeat of the Kingdom of Mitanni, there were bands of Rish/ Ras people located in various places. There was one band in south central Asia Minor. Another band seems to have moved to northwest Asia Minor. One large band seems to have later conquered and ruled the Kingdom of Urartu. Another band seems to have migrated to the Zagros Mountains north of Elam, and one group appears to have remained in the area of northern Mesopotamia (Billington 1988).¹¹

The Hittites' protection of Mitanni/Hanigalbat troops after their defeat at the hands of King Shalmaneser I of Assyria in ca. 1260 BC may have backfired on the Hittites. It appears that the bands of the Rish/ Rosh/ Ras immigrants in Asia Minor joined an anti-Hittite military alliance there along with the infamous Philistines and other tribal groups like the Lukka and Achaean Greeks. The Lukka/Lycians of Asia Minor and the Achaean Greeks are known to have been the mortal enemies of the Hittites at the time of the collapse of the Hittite Empire in ca. 1200 BC.

In other words, it appears that some Rishim peoples in Asia Minor, who were called the Te-resh, joined the Sea Peoples coalition in ca. 1200 BC. This coalition may even have originally been formed as an anti-Hittite military league. Certainly, the Hittite Empire was a major military target of the Sea Peoples coalition.

As suggested above and as will be argued below, the Rish/ Rosh/ Ras were known as the "Teresh" in the Sea People coalition. Rish and Teresh are almost certainly only linguistic variations of the same name. It is likely that Rish/ Rosh/ Ras was the Hurrian name for the Tiras/ Teresh/ Taruisha people. It is also likely that Tiras/ Teresh was the Indo-European name for these same people. Nancy Sanders in her book on the Sea Peoples connects the Taruisha people mentioned in late Hittite inscriptions with the Teresh people who were members of the Sea Peoples coalition (Sanders 1978, p. 112).

It should be noted that the Philistines, who were leaders in the Sea Peoples coalition, seem to have originally come from Caria in southwest Asia Minor, and are almost certainly to be identified with the Pelasgians mentioned in ancient Greek sources. As was seen above, one band of the Rish/ Rosh/ Ras people settled in south central Asia Minor where it appears that they came in contact with the Pelasgians/ Philistines of Caria who lived just to their west and who at that time probably spoke a Greek dialect.

There is also recent archaeological evidence suggesting that a Philistine state existed from ca. 1200-1000 BC in an area north of Ugarit. It should be noted that

Ugarit was conquered and destroyed by the Sea Peoples/ Philistines in ca. 1200 BC. It is likely that King Tou of Hamath, who is mentioned in II Samuel 8:9-10, once ruled this Philistine state north of Israel. II Samuel 8:10 also suggests that it was the Arameans who eliminated Northern Philistia. This Northern Philistia was certainly located close to and possibly included lands that once belonged to the Kingdom of Mitanni. In other words, there is significant evidence that the Philistines and the Taruisha/Teresh/ Rish people knew and had contact with one another.

If the Rish are to be identified with the Teresh, and they almost certainly should be, then remnants of the Rish people survived the collapse of the Kingdom of Mitanni and joined the Philistines in the Sea Peoples coalition to fight both the Hittites and the Egyptians. And if the Teresh are to be identified with the Rish/ Ros survivors of the fallen Kingdom of Mitanni, then they were eventually able to avenge themselves on the Hittites for the destruction of their Kingdom of Mitanni in ca. 1350 BC

The famous Sea Peoples coalition, with the help from the Bubonic Plague and also with help from the Tubal and Meshech people, destroyed the Hittite Empire in ca. 1200 BC and then, as was noted above, a few years later destroyed the great city of Ugarit. The Sea Peoples coalition shortly afterwards went on to launch at least two major attacks against Egypt. Egypt narrowly survived these attacks in the early years of the 12 Century BC. After their defeat in Egypt, several tribes of the Sea Peoples coalition settled in Israel where the Jews seem to have called them all “Philistines.” However, some bands of the Sea Peoples coalition migrated to other areas.

The Taruisha/Teresh people of the Sea Peoples coalition are also almost certainly to be identified with the ancient Etruscans who later moved by sea from the eastern Mediterranean to conquer northwest Italy. (Helck 1979, pp. 173-4).¹² The historian Agnes Carr Vaughn in her book *Those Mysterious Etruscans* states that the Etruscans when they dwelt in Asia Minor were called by two names the “Tursha” and the “Rasna” (Vaughn, 1964, p. 82). “Tursha” is clearly a Greek version of the Hittite “Taruisha” which is itself a version of the name Teresh. Rasna, was another version of the name Rish/ Ras.

Rasna/ Rasne is the name that the ancient Etruscans used for themselves in their inscriptions (Massimo Pallottino 1978, p. 231). As was noted earlier, it appears that the Indo-European conquerors of the Hurrians, in time adopted the Hurrian language. The ancient Etruscan language of northern Italy was almost certainly a dialect of Hurrian. The Etruscans’ name for themselves “Rasna” is almost certainly the name Ras+na. The ending –na in the Etruscan language is almost certainly the Hurrian plural definite article. In other words, the Etruscan Rasna should be translated as “the Ras people.” The alternative ending Ras+ne in Etruscan is almost certainly the singular definite article in Hurrian, and should be translated as “the Ras

person.” There are a number of other words in Etruscan which are also found in the Hurrian language.

There is strong historical evidence connecting the Teresh/Rishim with the ancient Etruscans.¹³ The name of several Etruscan kings in Italy, “Tarquinius,” can be traced back to the Mitanni/Hurrians and to northern Mesopotamia. Pharaoh Ramses II [ruled ca. 1279-1212 BC] states that, at the Battle of Kadesh, which he fought against the Hittites in ca. 1275 BC, he defeated a charioteer of the Hittites named “Tergenenes” (Breasted 1906, Vol. III, p. 153, Listing 337). The name Tergenenes is to be identified with the name Etruscan Tarquinius.

The name Tergenenes is almost certainly Hurrian. Since it is likely that most of the Rishim spoke Hurrian by ca. 1275 BC, Tergenenes may have even been a member of the Rish/ Ras people who, after the defeat of the Kingdom of Mitanni in 1350 BC, were forced to fight for the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh in 1275 BC. The ancient city of Ugarit was located less than 70 miles from where the Battle of Kadesh was fought. As was noted above, Ugaritic inscriptions mention Rish/ Rosh/ Ras people as dwelling in an area on the northeastern borders of Ugarit.

Interestingly, there were Philistines who are also said to have fought on the side of the Hittites in the Battle of Kadesh. Less than 100 years after this battle, the Philistines turned on the Hittites, formed the Sea Peoples coalition, and helped destroy not only the Hittite Empire but also the great city of Ugarit.

Fighting along side of the Philistines in the Hittite army at the Battle of Kadesh was a people wearing a strange helmet with two horns on it (O’Callaghan 1948, pl. XXIV). This same strange helmet is worn by one tribe in the Sea Peoples coalition during one of their attacks against Egypt less than a hundred years later (O’Callaghan 1948, pl. XXV).

This helmet is very different from the feathered helmet worn by the Philistines. While there is no certain way to connect the tribe, who wore these unique helmets with the Teresh people, the very presence of this unique helmet at the Battle of Kadesh proves that other members the Sea Peoples coalition once served in the Hittite army. However, I do remember reading somewhere –but I cannot find the source–that one of these horned helmets later was discovered by archaeologists excavating in Italy.

A version of the name Tarquinius also appears among the “Hurrian” rulers of the ancient Gutian people of the northern Zagros Mountains just to the east of Aram Naharaim. One “Hurrian” king of the Gutians was named Tirigan (CAH 1924-1982, vol. I, p. 434). It is possible that these Hurrian rulers of the Gutians were themselves Hurrian-speaking Rish/ Rosh. It should be noted that Roger T. O’Callaghan in his *Aram Naharaim* argues that there was some sort of connection between the Gutians and the Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni (O’Callaghan 1948, pp 47-8).

Tirigan and Tergenenes are almost certainly the same name, and both names are to be identified with the name Tarquinius. The names Tarquinius, Tergenenes, and Tirigan are all theophoric names based on that of an ancient god named “Tarhu.”

The name of the god Tarhu may also be reflected in the name of an ancient city along the Euphrates River in Aram Naharaim. This city was called “Tirqa.” Tirqa was the site of a temple dedicated to the worship of the god Dagon (O’Callaghan 1948, p. 33). As is well-known from the Old Testament, Dagon was also worshipped by the Philistines, who, as was stated above, were also members of the Sea Peoples coalition along with the Teresh/ Rish.

There was also an ancient king of “Arzawa”—an area in southeast Asia Minor—who was named after the god Tarhu. In the Amarna Letters from Egypt in 14th Century BC, this king’s name is given as “Tarhundaraba.” Samuel mercer, in a footnote in his translation of the Amarna Letters, writes of this name (Mercer, Samuel A.B. 1939):

The first element in the name of Tarhundaraba is Tarhu, the name of a god. The same deity appears among the Kassites under the name of Turgu as a storm-god. The Etruscans called him Tarqu. The name Tarhu is now held to be Hittite, Mitannian, or Hurrian (Mercer 1939, vol. I, Letter 31, p, 183).

Clearly there was some sort of a connection between the Etruscans and Hurrians. This is not to say that the Etruscans were ethnic Hurrians. To the contrary, as is argued above, the Etruscans seem to have been the descendents of the Indo-European Rishim rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni. But the Rish/ Ras did rule the Hurrians for several hundred years. Since the Rish/ Ras were a military minority and since they used the Hurrian language for administrative purposes to run the Kingdom of Mitanni, it seems likely that the Rish/ Ras eventually became speakers of Hurrian.

If the Etruscans were the descendents of the Rishim people of the ancient Kingdom of Mitanni, and if the Rishim had earlier dropped their Indo-European language and adopted Hurrian as their spoken language, then it is very likely that the mystical Etruscan language is simply the Hurrian language written in a later revised version of the Greek/ Latin alphabet.

THE NAMES RISHATHAIM, RESHET, TERESH, RASNA, AND ETRUSCAN

It has been argued above that the names Rishathaim/Reshet, Teresh/Taruisha, Rasna, and Etruscan are all versions of the same name, Rish/ Rosh. As was also argued above it is nearly certain that the Etruscan language is derived from or a later

version of the Hurrian language. If this assumption is true then the Etruscan language should provide some clues to explain these various versions of the name Rish/ Ras. While the Etruscan language is not fully understood, enough is known to provide good explanations for each of these variations of the name Rish.

As was argued above, the name Rish appears to have been the original name of the Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni. If this is true, then the question arises: From where did the variations of the name Rish—Teresh and Rishet—come?

In dealing with the variant names Teresh and Rishet, Pallotino in his book *The Etruscans* states that in the Etruscan language, the word “ta,” when used as a prefix attached to the front of a noun, functioned as a “demonstrative adjective or pronoun” (Pallotino 1978, p. 232). When suffixed to the back of a noun, Pallotino argues that the “-ta” served as a “determinative article.” As far as the use of -ta as a determinative suffix, Pallotino is clearly wrong. The -ta suffix ending in Etruscan is almost certainly a version of the Hurrian plural suffix ending -tha.

However, Pallotino may be correct about the ta-/te prefix being a demonstrative adjective (i.e. “this”), but I doubt it. In the Hurrian language, there are no prefixes at all, and as I will argue in a later article, Etruscan is almost certainly derived from Hurrian. This makes it very unlikely that the ta-/te- is an Etruscan prefix.

It seems much more likely to me that the te-/ta- prefix on the name Teresh is some version of an Indo-European definite article that became attached to the correct version of their name, the Resh. By any means, it is likely that Rishathaim and Reshet are only versions of the name Rish with a Hurrian suffix “-ta” attached. It is also possible that Teresh and Taruisha are only versions of the name Rish with an Indo-European “te/ta/tha” definite article prefixed to it.

Ras is probably the purest version of the name Rish. As was stated above, Ras+na is the version of the name Rish used by the Etruscans for themselves in their inscriptions. It is therefore likely that the names of Rishathaim/Reshet, Teresh/Taruisha, and Rasna are all linguistic versions of the name that the Indo-European rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni who called themselves the Ras/Rish. The name Rosh, which is used in many translations of the Old Testament, is just another version of the name Ras/ Ris/ Rish

CONCLUSION

The historical and archaeological evidence strongly suggests that Othniel fought against and defeated a king of the ancient Kingdom of Mitanni named Cushan. The historical and textual evidence also suggests that the Indo-Aryan ethnic group that founded and ruled the Kingdom of Mitanni called themselves

originally by a name that sounded something like “Rish” or “Ras.” This name is reflected in Judges 3:7-11 where Cushan is said to have been from an ethnic group called the “Rishathaim.”

The connection between Cushan and the Kingdom of Mitanni is further strengthened by the term Aram-Naharaim which is used in Judges 3:7-11. As was seen above, “Naharin” was a name used by the Egyptians early in the New Kingdom period for the Kingdom of Mitanni.

Since evidence strongly suggests that Othniel fought against the Kingdom of Mitanni and since the Kingdom of Mitanni is known to have ceased to exist as an independent military power after ca. 1350 BC, then the Late Date Theory of the Exodus in ca. 1270 BC cannot be true. On the other hand, the story of Othniel’s defeat of King Cushan of the Kingdom of Mitanni lends very strong support for the Early Date theory of the Exodus in ca. 1446 BC

As was noted above, after their defeat first by the Hittites and later by the Assyrians, some of the Rish/ Ras seem to have split into migratory groups. At least one of these groups, the Teresh, appears to have joined the Sea Peoples coalition and to have helped destroy the great Hittite Empire in ca. 1200.

Later, some members of the Teresh/Rish migrated to Italy where they came to be called the Etruscans and spoke the Hurrian language; today that language is called Etruscan. Eventually the Etruscans adopted the Greek alphabet to write their Hurrian language and even later adopted Latin as their spoken language.

When Othniel defeated Cushan-Rishathaim, he may have not only helped cause the collapse of the Kingdom of Mitanni but he also may have indirectly helped cause the migration of some Rish/ Ras people to northwest Italy where they came to be called the Etruscans. As strange as it may seem, when he fought against Cushan and the Rishathaim, Othniel seems to have fought against the ancestors of the Etruscans.

By any means, if the story of Othniel is true, and the historical evidence strongly suggests that it is, and if the Rishathaim are to be identified with the Indo-Aryan military minority that ruled the Kingdom of Mitanni, then the Late Date Theory for the Exodus is an impossibility. This leaves only two alternatives, no Exodus or an early-date Exodus before ca. 1350 BC (Aling 1981, pp. 80-81).

Critical Biblical scholars who argue that there was no Exodus and that the Book of Judges is historical fiction have the same problem as those scholars who argue for the late date of the Exodus; they must explain away the fact that Othniel’s defeat of Cushan fits perfectly with the political situation which existed in the early 14th century BC in the Middle East. They must also explain away the historically accurate use of the names Rishathaim and Naharaim in the Book of Judges.

The historical accuracy of the story of Othniel and Cushan argues strongly for the historical accuracy of Judges and for the Bible’s placement of the Exodus from

Egypt in the 15th century BC The best biblical date for the Exodus and the date that seems to best fit the historical and Biblical evidence is the Early Date in ca. 1446 BC (Aling, 1981, pp. 80-81).

NOTES

1. Haran, the brother of Abraham, had died earlier in the city of Ur before his father Terah moved the family to the area of Haran in northern Mesopotamia. It is possible, but not likely, that the city of Haran was named after Terah's son Haran. If Terah did name Haran after his dead son, then Terah either founded the city of Haran or else he conquered a preexisting city and renamed it after his son.
2. Genesis 22:20 even suggests—but does not state—that the name Aram was derived from “Aram” one of the grandsons of Nahor who was one of Abraham's brothers. Even if the Arameans were not named after Abraham's grandnephew Aram, the presence of someone named Aram in the family of Abraham clearly shows an ethnic connection between the Arameans and the Israelites. Nahor was also the name of a city in the area near ancient Haran. O'Callaghan notes that the migration of Abraham from Ur to Haran “Fits perfectly with the migrations of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of the entire first half of the second millennium BC”, p. 26. It is clear that the Book of Genesis is very well acquainted with the geography and history of ancient Aram Naharaim.
3. The Arameans will later expand out of Aram-Naharaim into the areas of western Syria and eastern Lebanon. By the period of the divided monarchy, the Arameans had captured the city of Damascus and made it their capital. It was from the city of Damascus that the Arameans threatened both Judah and the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel, as the Old Testament so clearly records. Consult Roger T. O'Callaghan, *Aram Naharayim*, p. 146.
4. Ancient Hebrew has no true vowels. Sometime after ca. 800 AD, Jewish scholars added vowel points and pronunciation marks to the Biblical text to aid Jews in reading the Bible. These points are considered useful but not inspired by conservative Bible scholars.

5. Consult Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. II, pp. 123-124, listing no. 299, and p. 135, listing no. 321 as well as vol. III, p. 153, listing 337.
6. On the Rish as a people known to the people of Ugarit, see the works of Freuke Gondahls, p. 178
7. On the identification of Urshu/Ursu with Warsuwa in Akkadian texts, see Trevor Bryce, p. 77.
8. These “Rish” people are almost certainly the remnants of the Indo-Aryan rulers of the Kingdom of Mitanni after their kingdom was destroyed by the Hittites in ca. 1350 BC On the city of Urshu in the Assyrian texts see O’Callaghan, *Aram Naharaim*, p. 23.
9. Some fair-haired Indo-Aryans traveled even beyond India to the borders of China. Consult Sergei Rudenko and Otto Maenchen-Helfen. Rudenko reports finding the frozen bodies of blonds in eastern Siberia, and Maenchen-Helfen argues that there were blond Indo-Europeans on the borders of China and Korea in the late ancient and early medieval periods.
10. The suggestion that the Mitanni rulers were a fair-haired people may surprise some classicists and ancient historians who have for years maintained that blonds were unknown to the peoples of the ancient Near East. However, there are a number of tomb paintings in Egypt from the Mitanni period that clearly show blond slaves working in Egypt. It appears that conquering pharaohs such as Thutmose I and Thutmose III brought back captives to Egypt from their battles with the Mitanni. I have even seen a painting from the reign of Akhenaton which shows beautiful, captive, black and blond girls holding hands in full color. cf. Robert Redford, *Akhenaton the Heretic King*.
11. Clyde E. Billington, “*Gog and Magog in History and Prophecy*.” I argue in this work that the Rosh people mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39 are to be identified with the Rish. Most English translations of the Bible mistranslate the name Rosh in Ezekiel 38:2-3 and 39:1 as “chief.” Ezekiel 38:3b should be translated: “I am against you O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.” The Septuagint properly translates Ezekiel 38-39 and has the “Ros” as one of three ethnic groups allied with Gog. On the proper translation of Rosh as the name of an ancient people and on their identification with the Rish see James Price, “Rosh: An Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel.” All three peoples—Rosh, Meshech and Tubal—are mentioned in Assyrian texts which date to ca. 700

BC. See Leroy Waterman, *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire* where all three peoples are mentioned in the same text. For another example, see vol. II listing 92, p. 46.

12. On the identification of the Teresh people with the Etruscans and their eventual migration to and conquest of northwest Italy, see Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Agyptens und Vorderasiens zur Agaus bis ins 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*” See also Sanders, *Sea Peoples*, p. 118.
13. There are Rish people who are mentioned in Assyrian texts of the 8th and 7th Centuries BC; so not all Teresh/ Ras/ Rish/ Rosh people migrated to Italy. For a number of Assyrian references to the Rish peoples still in Mesopotamia, see Waterman’s *Royal Correspondence of the Assyrian Empire*.

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