THE ORGANISATION OF THE PHARAONIC ARMY
(OLD TO NEW KINGDOM)

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The following analysis proceeds, historically speaking, in an inverse fashion than might be expected. We begin with the inception of the Egyptian New Kingdom and, having played out the significance of the military during the heyday of the empire, the focus turns back in time. Hence, the following survey unwinds the historical arrow otherwise, as if one reads a Chinese scroll or an Egyptian papyrus from the left instead of the right. This approach has been taken in order to focus upon the developed form of the Egyptian military during the period of horses, chariots, body armor and helmets, as well as the sickle-shaped sword and the composite bow.\(^1\) Tracing the antecedents of the New Kingdom’s fighting arm backwards in time allows us also to see the striking differences between the, in many ways, full-fledged and best-known system of the Egyptian military from the vantage point of the Middle Kingdom and its emphasis upon the royal marines. From that point, the First Intermediate Period is surveyed with emphasis placed upon the development of warriors owing to the internecine warfare that plagued that era. Finally, we conclude with the Old Kingdom by placing our historical telescope upon the lack of a royal standing army of significant size and which was independent of any purpose save war.

In the second part the reader will find a discussion of the developments of arms technology, but this time the course of time is forwards.

It is hoped that this analysis skirts the all too common aspects of scholarly research as it avoids the refrain of narrating one battle after another. Attention has been given to social developments in pharaonic Egypt, but no detailed analysis is presented because the other chapters in this work can amplify the remarks given below in a more detailed fashion.

The New Kingdom

On the south and west walls in the court of Ramesses II Luxor there is an intriguing text carved early in his reign of that provides a list of the hierarchy of the key bureaucratic officials of Egyptian society. This hieroglyphic inscription is set within the famous Opet festival and commences with words of the king’s heir apparent. Associated with him are the following officials: viziers, treasures of the palace, superintendants of the two houses of gold and silver (treasurers), generals, generals of the infantry, chief troop commanders (or captains of troops), controllers, overseers of the southern and northern deserts, overseers of fortresses, and the overseers of the river mouths (of the Delta). Additional high-ranking men are then listed but they are not associated with the army. All of them bring impost to the king as “work products,” from Nubia, offerings of Asia, and the accounts of Egypt. This brief inscription indicates the presentation of revenues to pharaoh at one of the most important religious celebrations of the time. One notes the strict pattern of hierarchy: vizier, intimate officials of the court or the “King’s House,” and then the military with security aides.

This account is a somewhat abbreviated “staff list” that has an almost exact parallel with the famous “Textbook of the Hierarchy,” to employ Maspero’s term, in the Onomasticon of Amenemope. As Oleg Berlev showed, the latter composition has subsections among

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