Thutmose III’s Great Syrian Campaign: Tracing the Steps of the Egyptian Pharaoh in Western Syria Part I: From Idlib to Aleppo

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Introduction

On pylon seven of the great Amun temple at Karnak, Thutmose III listed the names of various towns and cities that he had defeated in his campaigns in Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria. The greatest of these, which marked the zenith of Egyptian military power in Syria, was his eighth campaign, carried out in his thirty-third year. An excellent edition of the geographical names of this great campaign has been provided by Simmons (1937). The classic examination of the geographical locations of the place names mentioned in the Egyptian topographical lists is Helck’s 1962 monograph (1962).

The present study deals only with one section of the great list, and discusses an area in Western Syria, defined by entries 147–173, that is, twenty-seven individual entries in toto. The remainder of the entries in the list will be examined in a separate, future study.

Entries 147–173 have been studied in great detail (along with earlier and later entries) by Astour in a 1963 article (1963). Unfortunately, Astour did not realize that the entries in the list delineated an ancient itinerary of the Egyptian pharaoh, and while his basic assumption that the ancient place names enumerated in the list often find reflexes in modern toponyms is valid, his work contains a methodological flaw. This is because Astour did not restrict his investigation to a small and well defined area, and the results he achieves are not reliable at all. Virtually all his identifications turn out to be incorrect. As a result of this situation, a complete re-examination of the list is a distinct desideratum.

To start with, we shall discuss two entries that occur before No. 147. No. 122: i-m-t may possibly refer to the ancient city of Hamath (modern Ḥamāh) in western Syria. The same city likely appears in the Ebla texts written as ‘à-ma-ad. While most scholars have generally agreed with this identification, there have been some dissenting voices (see Archi, Piacente, and Pomponio 1993: 132, for the literature).

No. 127: t-n-p likely refers to the ancient city of Tunip, attested in the Ebla texts in the writing tú-ne-ep (Bonechi 1993: 114; Archi, Piacente, and Pomponio
1993: 212–13). It appears in the Alalakhean VII and IV archives as *tu-ni-ip* (Belmonte Marín 2011: 294), and in Hittite texts in a variety of spellings (for these see del Monte and Tischler 1978: 440). Ancient Tunip has generally been identified with the large mound of Tell ‘Acharneh (see Belmonte Marín 294; Frayne 2006; Klengel 1995; Fortin 2006).

**Methodology**

In order to place the various ancient toponyms of the Egyptian topographical lists at their appropriate modern locations, I have used the working hypothesis that the list in question is an itinerary of the Egyptian pharaoh. I have assumed that Entry 147: *y-t-ḥ-b* corresponds to modern Idlib, and that the list proceeds in a general northeasterly direction from that town. To locate the place names, I have used the so-called “linguistic method” described by Barjamovic in a recent study:

> One accepted way of approaching historical geography has been to isolate a given toponym in an ancient text, and then to identify it with a modern place-name that sounds similar, or for which one may reconstruct a feasible linguistic evolution from the ancient to the modern form. By this procedure, one would identify a number of fixed points on the map, and then relate such points to connected toponyms in various available itineraries. (2008: 89)

Some scholars have rightly pointed out some pitfalls of the “linguistic approach” for toponymic study. Caveats are raised when it is not supported by other data, such as determining clusters of sites in individual texts. The preliminary conclusions of my work within the framework of the Toronto Atlas of the Ancient Near East Project (https://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/taane) made it clear that there are more than a thousand examples in which ancient place names survive into modern times. Many of these are small villages. In fact, the congruence of ancient and modern place names is not an isolated phenomenon, but, despite some critics’ assertions, but is rather the norm. However, with respect to sound mutations of ancient place names through time, one cannot approach the problem with the rigid sound laws such as those formulated by the Neo-grammarians for the study of various Indo-European languages. This means that one cannot predict by a set of fixed rules precisely how a given ancient place name will mutate over time. Expected changes such as the alternation between ‘m’ and ‘b’, is very common, Other common changes are as