A Tale of Suppressions and Semantics: Reinterpreting Papyrus Mayer A and the So-called ‘War of the High Priest’ during the Reign of Ramesses XI

Abstract

The ‘War of the High Priest’ is a phrase commonly used by scholars to refer to the so-called ‘suppression’ of the High Priest of Amun Amenhotep by the King’s Son of Kush Panehsy during the reign of the last Ramesside king, Ramesses XI. The precise date of this event is debated, but it likely occurred around Regnal Year 17 or 18 of Ramesses XI (c. 1089–1088 BCE). The sources that document the ‘War of the High Priest’ are limited (P. Mayer A, P. BM EA 10052, and the Karnak Inscription) and scholarly opinion on the topic is hotly divided. What is clear, however, is that the term ‘suppression’ used to refer to this event is ineffectual in conveying the nuances of the Egyptian term thj, and by translating thj as ‘suppression’ extreme connotations are imposed upon it that alter modern perceptions concerning the ‘War of the High Priest’. This study will add to the existing debate on the ‘War of the High Priest’ by examining the terminology surrounding the event through a lexical analysis of thj, analysing its uses in other textual contexts, scholarly interpretation, and its wider implications. Chronological issues and debates will be discussed only on the periphery.

Item Type: Article

Faculty / School:
Faculty of Arts and Humanities > School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies

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Date Deposited: 13 Oct 2014 15:06

Last Modified: 04 Feb 2019 01:04

URI: https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/50368

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© UEA 2009. All rights reserved. University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK. Telephone: +44 (0) 1603 456161. Accessibility Statement | Legal Statements | The Wars of the Roses were the civil wars fought in England and Wales between the Yorkist and Lancastrian dynasties between 1455 and 1485. Though historians cannot agree on precisely when and where the conflicts concluded, the general consensus is that the Wars of the Roses ended with the battle of Bosworth in 1485, when Henry Tudor (the future Henry VII, the first Tudor king) defeated and killed Richard III. In 1980 L. Bell has treated the subject in an article, called: “Only one High Priest Ramessesnakht and the Second Prophet Nesamun his younger Son”. 9 As can be deduced from the program- I would like to thank Dr. Demaré for his valuable contributions, and Prof. Janssen for his general support. The same holds true for the so-called “claim” by Khakhpeperre Piruzem to have built part of the Temple of Khonsu: ZÄS 134 (2007), 50-63. 24 Bell, o.c., 16, with note 116. 25 KRI VI, 550; Bács, GM 148 (1995), 9f. Now that Herihor apparently predeceased his sovereign, it became necessary to “reinterpret” all sources calling Herihor king: his kingship became a mere “claim”, if not a downright lie.