

Paper 4 Phoenician inscriptions on tiles from the Tell el-Yahudiyeh temple of Ramses III confirm our 757-726 BC dates for that pivotal 20th dynasty king.

Immanuel Velikovsky, in attempting to justify his 4th century dating of Ramses III (in his 1977 volume *“Peoples of the Sea”*), argued the case that tiles from Ramses’ Tell el Yehudiyeh temple are inscribed with Greek letters from the Ptolemaic period. We argue instead 1) that the letters are Phoenician, not Greek, and 2) that they date from the middle of the 8th century.

On page 6 of his book *Peoples of the Sea*, in a section entitled *“Greek Letters on Tiles of Ramses III”* (pp. 6-12), Velikovsky describes a collection of fresco tiles which, according to him, validate his early 4th century dating of Ramses III. The reader might do well to read the half dozen pages in this section, though online access is limited to a later edition of this book, where pages 6-12 of the original volume now appear verbatim as [pages 22-29 of the later edition](#), the extra page resulting from the inclusion of plates inserted from elsewhere in the original. We quote here the introductory paragraphs from this section, with Nile Delta map added by this author:



Tell el-Yahudiya, or “The Mound of the Jew,” is an Arab village east of the Delta, twenty miles northeast of Cairo on the road to Ismailia. Over ninety years ago the Swiss Egyptologist Edouard Naville excavated there the ruins of a palace of Ramses III. Tiles, colored and glazed, once adorned its walls. They were found in great numbers on the site by traveling scholars and also by Emil Brugsch in the service of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, before Naville, assisted by F.L. Griffith, came to dig there. The tiles have rich designs, mostly of flowers, and some bear the hieroglyphic name

of Ramses III. On the reverse side of these tiles are found incised signs: these are apparently the initials of the craftsmen who produced them, inscribed before the tiles were fired.

There was no doubt that the signs on many tiles in the palace of Ramses III at Tell el-Yahudiya were Greek letters. “The most noticeable feature is that several of the rosettes have Greek letters at the back, evidently stamped on during the process of making,” wrote T.H. Lewis, orientalist and art expert, to whose judgment the tiles were submitted.

But how could Greek letters have been used in the days of Ramses III, early in the twelfth century before this era? The Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician or Hebrew much later; no traces of it have been found in Greece, on the islands, or in Asia Minor before -750. (Peoples of the Sea 6-7)

So far, so good. Velikovsky has just argued our case. The dates of Ramses’ temple tiles, and thus the dates of Ramses III himself, must be reduced from early in the 12th century to the approximate year 750 BC. Unfortunately Velikovsky did not know to stop at this point. His objective was to date Ramses III to the 4th century BC, not the middle of the 8th and certainly not the 12th. So he proceeded for the next five pages to document the conflicting opinions of scholars on the evidence from the tiles. All were seemingly convinced, apparently influenced by the opinion of a single “art expert”, that the letters inscribed on the back of the Ramses’ temple tiles were Greek and possibly as late as the Ptolemaic age, while the presence of Ramses’ name on some tiles, and the clear association of all tiles with the Ramses III temple, clearly date the tiles to the first quarter of the 12th century BC, this assuming the accuracy of the traditional Egyptian chronology. The impasse among early scholars was left unresolved and remained so till the time Velikovsky wrote his book, with the famed revisionist supporting the “expert” opinion regarding the 4th century dating of the tiles. To his credit Velikovsky wisely ends the discussion by quoting the Egyptologist Naville:

“Light will be thrown on the question someday.”

We agree, and a source of light has now arrived. Already we have established that Ramses governed Egypt in the years 757-726 BC, thus reducing the scope of the problem in question. All we need is some confirmation that the letters on the back of the temple tiles date from the approximate year 750 BC, and we can rest our case. And that confirmation is ready at hand.

We begin by emphasizing the fact that the scholars quoted by Velikovsky all lived in the early decades of the 19th century, when the science of the development of the Phoenician, Hebrew, and Greek scripts was in its infancy. No scholar today

would venture those same opinions with such conviction. And today the question would not be centered exclusively on the evolution of the Greek alphabet. It would also focus on the ethnicity and linguistic training of the artisans who manufactured the tiles, and the purpose for which the letters were inscribed on the back of the tiles. Let me explain.

Velikovsky was of the opinion that the craftsmen who fabricated the tiles were merely inscribing their initials, thus letters with which they had intimate familiarity. But it is incomprehensible why they would do that, knowing that the backs of the tiles would soon be affixed to the walls of the temple, permanently out of sight. We think instead they were using the alphabet to number the tiles, or perhaps to designate the intended position of a given tile in the fresco for which it was created, thus a means by which those tiles might be removed from the kiln and placed in a predetermined position. And we think the workmen were likely linguistically untrained, in possession of a rudimentary knowledge of the alphabet employed, and not the least bit concerned whether anyone other than themselves could identify the letters. And finally, surprisingly, we do not think the letters were actually from the Greek alphabet. We think they are Phoenician, and if Greek we insist that they originate from a very early stage in the development of the Greek script, around the year 750 BC as Velikovsky stated.

And why are we of this opinion? Because in the edition of the book to which we have provided the earlier link, Velikovsky provides nine line drawings of a sampling of the tile letters, and photographs of front and back of five of the tiles.



And we immediately recognized the Phoenician equivalent of four of the photographs and could identify the probable Phoenician equivalent of all but two of the line drawings, all based on research done in the course of writing our previous paper, where we examined a multitude of Phoenician inscriptions dated in the approximate time frame 820-680 BC. From the photographs at least, we determined conclusively that four of the letters on the Ramses' tiles were all

Phoenician. They were extremely precisely inscribed, with due allowance made for the fact that the tile fabricators were not professional scribes. Any residual doubt that the tile letters were Phoenician stems from the fact that we are here exposed to only nine line drawing of the letters, five with accompanying photographs, and four others for which no photograph is provided. And as we will soon see, the accuracy of the line drawings is highly suspect. At a later date we will perhaps return to the subject and obtain photographs of more of the actual tiles to confirm our analysis. In the meantime we must make do with the meager evidence provided. We do want to at least look at the photographs, and make a few comments regarding how accurately the line drawings reflect, or rather do not reflect, what the photographs reveal.

Velikovsky provides front and back views of five tiles. We have to assume that he has chosen samples that best support his argument, i.e. those inscribed with letters most clearly representative of Greek capital (uncial) letters of late provenance. Thus we are presented samples supposedly depicting the Greek letters alpha, epsilon, iota, lambda, and chi. We want to look at them all. We begin with the alpha.

In the lengthy dialogue which fills much of the seven pages of text, Velikovsky several times mentions the fact that the presence of the Greek letter alpha, in its existing form on a least one tile, constitutes a strong argument for dating all of the Greek letters to the 4th century. A case in point is the quote attributed to the respected Egyptologist Emil Brugsch


“The Greek letters, and especially alpha, found on the fragments and discs leave no room for doubt [ne laissent aucun doute] that the work was executed during the last centuries of the Egyptian Empire and probably in the time of the Ptolemies, but the matter becomes more difficult if we ask who the author of this work was [an allusion to Ramses III].” So wrote Emil Brugsch. (PS 8) [bracketed explanation added]


In view of the comment by Brugsch we take a closer look at the “aleph” in question. Thankfully, Velikovsky provides a large fairly high resolution photograph. We assume this is the only tile backed with an aleph. [In the instance where two tiles are backed by a “lambda”, Velikovsky provides photographs of both.] We reproduce below a close-up of the back of the “alpha” tile.















The first thing the reader should note is that there exists, on the back of this tile, four line impressions that form a backward facing capital E, rotated slightly counter-clockwise. Notice that the vertical shaft or stem of the E and the three arms do not meet at right angles. Also notice that the stem extends slightly beyond the beginning of the lowest arm, forming what we might call a “tail”. All three arms appear to be of the same length, or approximately so, but in this

example at least, each of the arms is noticeably shorter than stem, even without including the tail. The reader should block out of consideration the vertical mark that appears to extend from near the end of the middle arm to the central part of the upper arm. That is merely a flaw in the back surface of the tile. Remember that this tile was once somehow cemented in place to form a wall or floor fresco. All of the five temple tiles shown by Velikovsky exhibit some damage.

When you have followed these simple instructions you will be looking at the actual inscribed letter. Properly oriented it looks like this - . The “alpha” tile letter is actually an absolutely perfect representation of a Phoenician “he” from the approximate year 750 BC, a sign consistently represented in transcriptions as an “h”.

Now let’s look at the line drawing made of this same tile impression as it appears on the extreme left of Velikovsky’s list of nine “Greek letters” - . Notice that the angle between the vertical shaft and the upper and middle arms of the backward E has been reduced marginally to give the “A” a more convincing shape; the flaw on the back surface has been incorporated into the sign; and the lower arm of the E, which was admittedly faint in the photograph, has been deleted entirely. Equally disturbing is the fact that the length of the upper arm of the backward E has been lengthened slightly to correspond to the length of the stem, thus creating the two supporting arms of the A, and the combined length of the two parts of the “broken” cross hatch of the A, which on the tile is at least equal to the length of the stem, is now only half that length. And in the process a perfectly formed Phoenician “He” has been deliberately transformed into a Greek “Aleph” with a damaged cross-hatch. And this is what convinced Brugsch that all of the lettered tiles from the temple of Ramses III were of 4th century BC date?




And what can we say about the remaining four photographed tiles, those represented in positions #2-4 and #9 of Velikovsky's sequence of 9 line drawings. For convenience we have summarized our opinion in a single diagram, shown below.

					Tile inscription photograph
					Velikovsky line drawing of letter
ALPHA	EPSILON	IOTA	LAMBDA	CHI	Assumed Greek letter represented
		Not a letter			Improved line drawing of letter
He	He		Gimel	Taw	Actual Phoenician letter represented

Corrected interpretation of the five inscribed tiles whose photographs were provided in Velikovsky's book "Peoples of the Sea"

Velikovsky's Greek epsilon is actually another Phoenician "he", not so well inscribed as the "alpha" but clearly recognizable. Of course we have had to rotate the tile 180 degrees for proper viewing, and we still need to rotate it counter-clockwise a few degrees to view it with the stem oriented vertically, as it would appear in Phoenician inscriptions. But once we do we see that the three arms meet the shaft at less than 90 degrees, and the tail, missing from the photo, can be explained by the chipped surface of the tile precisely where the tail of the "he" is expected. In this instance the upper and lower arms are longer than the stem, somewhat atypical, but as we will see momentarily, arm length is not a critical aspect of the letter.

The other three tiles are not at all problematic. Velikovsky's "iota" is nothing but a crack in the tile extending from the center to the outer rim. His "lambda" and "chi" are perfect examples of Phoenician "gimel" and "taw", as we will see in a

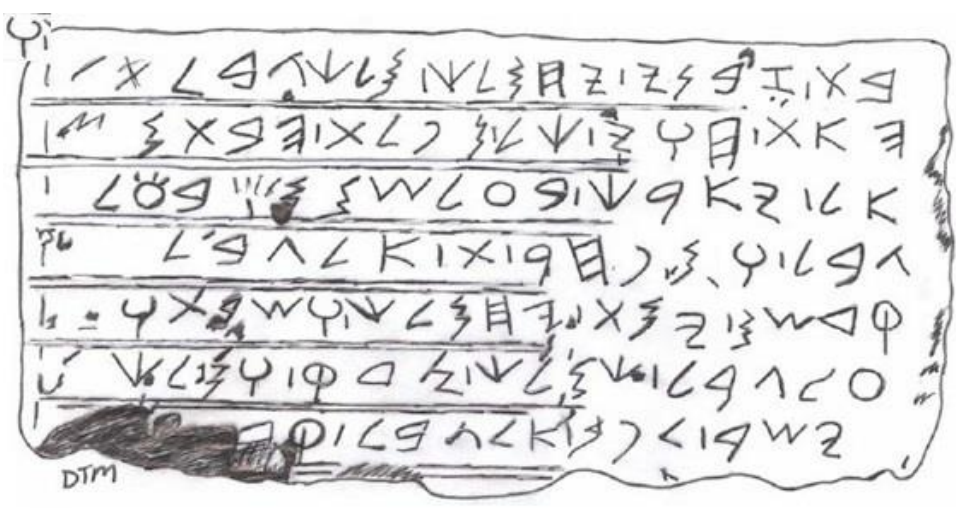
moment. The above diagram demonstrates conclusively that items #1, #3-4 and #9 on Velikovsky's list of supposed Greek letters are essentially identical with Phoenician script from the late 9th through early 7th centuries. Which leads us to ask how we might identify the temple tile letters for which Velikovsky has provided line drawings only, those in positions #5-8 on his list. May we suggest, initially, that the tiles with the "M" and the "C" should be viewed after an appropriate rotation, in which case letters #5-8 in the line drawing list should be emended from 1) M O C T to 2) W O O T or even to 3) W O U T . May we suggest further, based on example 3), that the first three letters be identified as Phoenician **shin** , **ayin** , and **waw** . With the "waw" we are assuming that the stem was either not visible due to damage, or faint, and thus ignored, as was the case with the "alpha" examined earlier. Without the photographs we cannot be overly dogmatic, but our suggestions are perfectly reasonable, particularly when we make allowances for the bias of those who constructed the line drawings, who seem to have had a tendency to modify the visual appearance of the tile letters to better represent them as Greek uncials.

And in case the critics accuse us of bias in our representations of the Phoenician letters, we might add that our depictions of the Phoenician letters, with one exception, have been copied verbatim from the internet Wikipedia site entitled [The Paleo-Hebrew Alphabet](#). The exception is the waw, which here has an unusual appearance. We have copied it from an actual Phoenician inscription, one belonging to the Phoenician king of Byblos named Yehimelek, and dated in our previous paper to the approximate year 760 BC, only three years before the beginning of the reign of Ramses III. We have copied the inscription from the [Biblia-Hebraica Blog](#).

The Phoenician inscription of Yehimelek will serve a dual purpose. On the one hand it will assist in confirming our representations of the Phoenician letters on the tiles already discussed. And it will serve additionally to assist us in identifying the one letter in Velikovsky's list of nine that we have yet to discuss - letter #8, which in his line drawing represents the Greek letter "[tau](#)" (T). A glance at the Yehimelek inscription may provide an answer. Both the Phoenician letters Gimel and Tau have the requisite lines intersecting at right angles or close to right angles. Either could be mistaken for a T given some damage to the tile surface

that either adds to or detracts from the normal appearance of the sign. That is particularly true of the Phoenician "taw". Should a chipped surface remove any one of the four "spokes", you have a T. And it is particularly appropriate, if true, that the Phoenician "taw" should be mistaken for a Greek "tau", since historically they both had the "t" sound and the one might well have evolved into the other.

The inscription of Yehimelek, king of Gebel (later Byblos)



- We leave it to the reader to find the two "he" E E
- the four "shin" W W W W
- the three "ayin" O O O, twice the second letter in name of Ba'al C O S
- the five "gimel" V V V V V always occurring as the first letter in the name of Gebal, ancient Byblos V B V
- the four "waw" Y Y Y Y
- and eight "taw" X X X X X X X X

We leave the matter there. As always, let the reader decide if we are right.