

ANCIENT HISTORY: EGYPT

Assess the Importance of Egypt's Military Campaigns in this Period.

The pharaohs of the early New Kingdom Egypt campaigned in Nubia, Syria-Palestine and Mitanni, seeking to establish control and consolidate trade routes, thus protecting and enhancing Egypt's own interests. Through numerous, accumulating campaigns which enacted the New Kingdom's expansionist policy, Egyptian foreign presence was created and strengthened, extending the borders of Egypt through the coast of Syria-Palestine, into Mitanni, and as far south as the 4th Cataract in Nubia. Thus, Egyptian military campaigns in these three regions played a significant role in consolidating Egypt's strength, wealth and security, predicating the emergence of Egypt as a military superpower.

Firstly, campaigning in Nubia yielded access to the region's rich resources and protected Egypt's southern borders, fortifying Egyptian wealth and power. Military activity in Nubia began with Ahmose's conquest of the Kerma Nubians, recapturing forts at Buhen as a launch pad for future expansion. Subsequently, Amenhotep I was the first to undergo a deliberate expansionist policy, as evidenced in the tomb of Ahmose son of Ebana "he sailed south to Kush, to enlarge the borders of Egypt", establishing strong Egyptian presence in Nubia through defeating the Nubian army and rebuilding forts, hence protecting Egyptians who lived in Nubia and strengthening Egyptian control of the South. The reign of Thutmose III saw the culmination of these campaigns, setting up the boundary of Egyptian control at Napata, the furthest southern expansion of Egypt's borders in this period. The minimal evidence for subsequent military activity under Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV suggest that Egypt was satisfied with its previously successful expansion. Thus, military campaigning in Nubia allowed for the consolidation of Egyptian power and presence, revealing the importance of campaigning in achieving militaristic goals and strength.

Correspondingly, as Egypt began to expand into Nubia through military activity, the connecting link between Egypt and the regions beyond, the supply of both Nubian goods and trade routes to Africa were secured under Egypt command. Important resources that Nubia yielded include gold, electrum and copper, whilst Nubian quarries provided diorite and granite. Campaigning in Nubia allowed Egypt to protect access to these rich trade resources and deter uprisings from interfering with trading missions. Thutmose III's Annals, inscribed in the walls of Karnak, suggest that Nubia paid taxes to Egypt, communicating the economic importance of control of Nubia, which was consolidated through military campaigns. Thus, Egypt's foreign military policy in Nubia, as well as expanding its borders, saw the growth of Egypt's trade and economic relations.

Similarly, military campaigns in Syria – Palestine were integral to subduing and preventing threats from the North. Following the expulsion of the Hyksos, an Asiatic tribe, reawakened Egypt's need for defence from its northern neighbours, achieved through the construction of forts along Egypt's eastern border. As Egypt was looking to expand northwards, however, the Northern Mitanni aimed to expand southwards, increasing the necessity to control Syria-Palestine as a buffer zone between Egypt and this potential threat. Egypt's aim to assert supremacy over the Mitanni through quelling Syria-Palestine peaked under Thutmose III, who campaigned 17 times during the first 20 years of his independent reign, securing Egyptian control and quelling rebellions. Thutmose's first campaign, at Megiddo, is recorded in his Annals as yielding wealth and prestige and asserting Egypt's strength on a widespread scale- "the capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand cities"- also revealing the importance of military activity in perpetuating the 'warrior-pharaoh' image. Thutmose III's achievements were consolidation by the campaigns of his successor Amenhotep II who suppressed rebellions and deported whole populations who had rebelled, such as the Palestinian town of Gezer. Hence, campaigning in Syria-Palestine strengthened Egypt's security, through establishing a buffer zone between Egypt and potential northern threats.

Additionally, control of Syria-Palestine through military conquest further increased Egypt's trade connections. During Thutmose III's second to fifth campaigns, he also secured control of important

trade centres and ports along the Phoenician coast, providing access to trade routes, many of these established under the Hyksos, such as Persia and the Aegean societies. The development of an administrative policy, which was consolidated through subsequent campaigns, saw the stationing of permanent garrisons to guard storehouses along the harbour. These later operations were often shows of force, to ensure their continued loyalty and the payment of tribute, the latter being recorded on Thutmose's Annals, though detailed evidence of these campaigns this is lacking. The subsequent wealth flowing into Egypt as a result of the establishment of military control in the Near East, and thus connections with the greater world, is evidenced by the growing types of luxury goods depicted in the paintings on the tomb walls of Thutmose III's officials, which also show trade gifts arriving from kingdoms such as Crete and Babylon. Thus, military campaigns in Syria-Palestine proved highly influential in securing multilateral ties and the flourishing of wealth and power in Egypt.

Furthermore, campaigns with the Mitanni, a region of northern Syria, saw the formation of diplomatic relations, strengthening Egypt's foreign position and protection. Clashes with the Mitanni over control of Syria arose, with Thutmose III attacking the Mitanni after crossing the Euphrates River, as recorded on a stela from Tirhaqu, in Year 33 of his reign, thus extending Egyptian influence as far as southern Mitanni. Thutmose III campaigned again two years later in Mitanni, having a more lasting effect. Subsequently, campaigns in Syria are believed to have stopped in the late reign of Amenhotep II with an alliance treaty signed between the pharaoh and the Mitanni King, prompted by the growing mutual threat posed by the Hittites. This association was consolidated by diplomatic relations and marriage, with Thutmose IV marrying a Mitanni princess, predicating peace between the two kingdoms for the next 65 years. Historian John Wilson asserts that the Egyptians and Mitanni must have "composed their rivalry in northern Syria and joined together to keep out the new competitor", revealing how initial military campaigning can evolve into political and military alliances. Thus, relations with the Mitanni based upon campaigning resulted in the improved protection of Egypt's borders, through the establishment of diplomatic ties.

Therefore, military campaigns in early New Kingdom Egypt had a vital contribution to the consolidation and growth of Egyptian power, wealth and control. Through campaigning in Nubia, Syria-Palestine and Mitanni, Egypt succeeded in establishing trade routes, military presence and diplomatic relations.