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Richard A. Gabriel, *Thutmose III: The Military Biography of Egypt's Greatest Warrior King*. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2009. Pp. viii, 252. ISBN 978-1-59797-373-1.

Review by Peter Nadig, Freie Universität Berlin (nadig@zedat.fu-berlin.de).

Richard A. Gabriel, a retired U.S. Army officer and currently professor of History and War Studies at two military colleges in Canada, has published over forty monographs primarily on military topics. Among several of his books dealing with the ancient world are two novels about the life of Thutmose III (r. 1479–1425 BC, 18th Dynasty).¹ This king is best remembered for military campaigns that led to the largest territorial expansion of Pharaonic Egypt. The book under review is a biography in nine chapters centering on Thutmose as a military leader.

Though Thutmose III (hereafter, simply “Thutmose”) officially reigned for some fifty-four years, during his first twenty-two years he was in practice co-ruler with his aunt and stepmother Hatshepsut, who acted as his regent, since he was still a child when he succeeded his father Thutmose II. But just a few years later, Hatshepsut styled herself as “king” and legitimate heir of her father Thutmose I. She basically acted as sole ruler while ostensibly a co-regent. Thutmose was already in charge of the army during Hatshepsut’s later years, but only after her death did he begin a series of military campaigns into Syria and Palestine. The sources for these events are a series of biographical inscriptions and stelae from Karnak. The most relevant are the “Annals” of Thutmose from the Temple of Karnak, which report his campaigns until regnal year 42. Seventeen campaigns are on record, but information for two of them (eleven, in regnal year 36, and twelve, in year 37) is lost beyond the mere fact that they took place.

Gabriel, though not an Egyptologist, has consulted most of the recent scholarly literature on Thutmose as well as many published sources in translation. His strength lies in the analysis of the military campaigns. Chapter 1 (“Warrior Pharaoh”) provides an outline of the king’s life, comparing him favorably with Alexander the Great (21–24), pointing out that in many cases Thutmose may even be regarded as superior. Alexander, for example, inherited the Macedonian army of his father Philip II’s making and his plan to attack Persia was also originally Philip’s. In contrast, Thutmose “created a new strategic vision for Egypt based solidly in calculations of national self-interest” (22). Gabriel also rates the enemies of both rulers quite differently. He succumbs to the older view that the Persian Empire was rotten to the core and that Alexander therefore fought a second-rate army and third-rate generals.² Thutmose, however, confronted well-equipped and professional armies during his campaigns in the Near East.

Chapters 2 (“Strategic Setting”) and 3 (“The Antagonists”) provide introductions to Egypt, the Land of Canaan, the Mitannian Empire, and Nubia. One deals with the historic and strategic settings of these regions and the other with their respective armies and weaponry. Various geographical maps and line drawings of army units and chariot types illustrate the chapters.

Chapters 4–8 summarize the campaigns of Thutmose. One of his most renowned victories took place early in his sole reign and is the subject of Chapter 4 (“The Battle of Megiddo”). In the city of Megiddo in northern Palestine, a group of rebellious regional rulers and chiefs headed by the king of Kadesh had gathered to plan an invasion of Egypt. The “Annals” report the king’s daring determination in choosing the direct route to Megiddo, the Aruna road, a rather narrow path through the Carmel which required the army—especially the chariots and horses—to march in single file. This advance brought an element of surprise which helped Thutmose to win the battle outside Megiddo, but, since Egyptians engaged in plundering the fallen enemy, the rebels were able to withdraw into the city and Thutmose had to start a siege. Gabriel takes a closer look at the sources and the possible logistical challenges. He doubts that Thutmose really exited the Aruna road near Megiddo and believes he instead came into the

¹ *Warrior Pharaoh: A Chronicle of the Life and Deeds of Thutmose III, Great Lion of Egypt, Told in His Own Words to Thaneni the Scribe* (Lincoln, NB: iUniverse.com, 2001), *Lion of the Sun: A Chronicle of the Wars, Battles and Great Deeds of Pharaoh Thutmose III, Great Lion of Egypt, as Told to Thaneni the Scribe* (Lincoln, NB: iUniverse.com, 2003).

² The Persian Empire still possessed some strength: W. Heckel, *The Conquests of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) 31–40. Gabriel handles the distinction between Macedonians and Greek too casually here. Alexander’s army had a Macedonian national identity, while the Greek poleis enjoyed only a cultural unity.

Plain of Esdraelon from the broader Kina Valley, north of the Aruna road, as may be read in the “Annals.” So Thutmose seems to have gone halfway through the Aruna pass and then turned north to the Kina Valley. To have used the heavily guarded regular Aruna exit would have imperiled his troops and prevented their properly assembling for battle.

Chapter 5 (“The Campaign in Canaan”) treats the drive into Canaan after Megiddo, when Thutmose continued to campaign in southern Lebanon and began securing Egyptian control over the region by requiring an oath of submission in areas he conquered, taking hostages (usually the children of chiefs), implementing taxation, and taking levies. Campaigns two through five are covered in this chapter.

The next three campaigns (six through eight) are treated in Chapter 6 (“The Campaign for the Lebanon Coast”). With the fifth campaign, Thutmose had already employed naval operations to move his army into Canaan. Egyptian sea transport of troops was not new. King Sahure of the 5th Dynasty had used it about a thousand years earlier and this sort of transport was employed on the Nile in the 17th and 18th Dynasties. Thutmose revived the navy on a larger scale as part of the “broad sweep of his strategic thinking” (140). Gabriel outlines the logistics and distances involved in those naval operations, calculating that the king might have used around eighty ships to move 12,000 troops, 1,250 horses plus pack animals, and 500 chariots from Egypt to Byblos.

One of Thutmose’s most daring expeditions was against Mitanni, discussed in Chapter 7 (“The Euphrates Campaign”). The Egyptian forces, an estimated 20,000 troops and 6,500 animals, again arrived by ship at the Lebanon coast, where the king ordered smaller ships to be built (possibly in sections for later reassembly), loaded on wagons, and pulled by oxen 270 miles inland to the Euphrates. Gabriel discusses the challenges of this enterprise, the advantage of mule carts as opposed to oxcarts as well as the likely road to Carchemish, near which the Mitanni were beaten in a battle. It was not the king’s intention to conquer Mitanni, since he could not sustain an invasion over such a long distance. This campaign brought Egypt recognition as an equal to such regional superpowers as Hatti and Babylonia (188).

Chapter 8 (“The Counterinsurgency Campaign”) offers an intriguing discussion of Egypt’s aim to establish a stronghold in northern Syrian. This was hampered by various elements. Unlike the Nubians, who lacked powerful allies to resist Egyptian overrule, the Syrian city-states and their vassals had the support of the Mitanni in their constant revolts against the Egyptians. In turn the Mitanni used their Syrian vassals as a buffer against Egyptian advances eastwards. For these reasons, Thutmose started what Gabriel terms a counterinsurgency strategy. To accomplish this, he had to isolate the Syrian states from any Mitanni support. So the king undertook several successive campaigns to strengthen his hold over the region. He even had to suppress a revolt of several city-states in his forty-second regnal year—a feat accomplished largely thanks to his control of the ports of the Lebanon coast. The sources are very sketchy about these events, but Gabriel does his best to outline Thutmose’s activities in those years.

Chapter 9 (“Epilogue”) summarizes Thutmose’s last years with a brief concluding commentary on his legacy.

This book is a very valuable assessment of Thutmose’s military plans and activities, as well as the logistics behind them. It is also a useful introduction to the military history of the times. One might, however, have wished for a deeper analysis of Thutmose’s impact in establishing Egypt as an equal to the Near Eastern superpowers (Hatti, Mitanni, Assyria, and Babylonia). Less serious shortcomings are the sometimes cursory handling of citations without any references and of the transliteration of Egyptian terms,³ as well as the occasional reliance on outdated scholarly works.

³ E.g., the term for dagger is *bagsu* (*b3gsw*) or *magsu* (*m3gsw*) (12). On the same page, Gabriel quotes an Egyptian text about the fate of soldiers, which is reminiscent of a genre known as “Satire of the Trades.”