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UNITED WITH ETERNITY

A Concise Guide to the Monuments of Medinet Habu

by

William J. Murnane

with a foreword by Kent R. Weeks

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FOREWORD

During its fifty-three year history, the work of the Epigraphic Survey has earned a reputation for accurate and detailed recording that has made its publications the standard by which all other studies of ancient inscriptions are judged. In none of its publications is the value of its meticulous recording more apparent than in the eight volumes of plates of Medinet Habu produced over a period of nearly forty-five years. All too often, weathering, erosion, and vandalism have badly damaged temple walls and some appear today to be uninscribed, although a century ago they were well carved and even painted. Without a Survey drawing in hand, little can be made of the faint traces some walls preserve.

Unfortunately for scholars studying in the field, or for tourists and students who wish to know the story of Medinet Habu, the Survey's publications are the antithesis of portability: standing nearly two feet high, weighing nearly ten pounds each, they can be used only in large research libraries. It was clear that some means of bringing the Survey's work to the public would be of value.

Several years ago, we discussed this problem and decided to produce a guidebook of convenient size that would reproduce the most important and most useful of the Survey's drawings and have them accompanied by an explanatory text that would both describe the relief scenes and give a brief explanation of their subject matter. Dr. Murnane was entrusted with producing the volume. The result is a guidebook of unusual qualities: drawings that will make the relief scenes clear; textual material that will explain their purpose; plans and reconstructions that will show how the temple functioned and why.

Medinet Habu is one of the few temples in Egypt to be completely published; it is now the first to be treated in a handbook-guide. We believe that both the tourist and the scholar will find *United With Eternity* of value both in the field and at home, and we anticipate that other such guides will follow.

Kent R. Weeks

December, 1976
Luxor

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Fig. 1 *"United with Eternity" from the East*

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INTRODUCTION

A visitor's first impulse on arriving in West Thebes is to look northwards, to take in the Colossi of Memnon, the Ramesseum, and the entire range of hills, honeycombed with ancient tombs. But just south of this panorama is an equally imposing view: in the distance, across the fields, rise massive walls and towers, a huge complex of stone gleaming against mudbrick ramparts. This was the "Mansion of Millions of Years of King Ramesses III, 'United with Eternity in the Estate of Amon'." Today it is called Medinet Habu.

The complex today is a place apart in West Thebes. It is too large to ignore, but it is often either the first or the last stop on a tourist's itinerary, and visitors rarely linger. Most of the time it is a silent place, left to its guardians, to a few melancholy vendors of faked *antikka*s, and to the women who come here to bathe in the sacred lake in hopes of conceiving children. Such neglect is a pity, for nowhere in the sprawling perimeters of West Thebes is the spirit of the ancient world more vividly evoked. For this is much more than a stately pile of ruins, more than a shrine in the city of the dead, or a monument to a bygone king's megalomania. The visitor, if he wishes, can peel away the husk of ritual and discover the deeply felt human needs that went into the creation of this temple and others like it.

Ramesses III (c. 1182–1151 B.C.) was a relative newcomer to the Theban burial ground. Over the past four centuries, most of his predecessors had been laid to rest in the Valley of the Kings, some four miles north of Medinet Habu. Servants of the crown built their tombs on the adjacent hills to the east, and the level ground that extended between this range and the cultivated land was set aside for the royal mortuary temples in which kings buried at Thebes were worshipped. This stretch of ground was crowded by Ramesses III's time, so for his own temple the king chose a site at the southern end of the old building area.

Even so, there were difficulties. The "mound of Jamu," as it was known about this time, was a place of ancient holiness, and a small temple built during the fifteenth century B.C. already stood there. The king's architects had to incorporate this venerable building into their plan, and they were also forced to put a sharp turn in the northwest end of their enclosure wall to bypass the neighboring temple of King Horemheb (see fig. 3). Fortunately, the architects were able to solve these problems without dwarfing the main project, for Ramesses III's temple was the most ambitious structure that had been planned in many years. Even in its own day it had few rivals in either size or richness.

What purpose was served by the foundation? Some scholars have suggested an analogy between the temple and a great household. Religious services were organized around the care and feeding of the gods, just as the running of an estate centered on the ultimate comfort of its owner, and the Egyptians carried out this simile in an extraordinarily literal way. The temple compound seems to have resembled a small town, with offices from which its far-flung landholdings were administered, housing for the staff, and a veritable beehive of magazines and workshops to supply the god's requirements. Just as a landowner's mansion might have its anterooms, public audience chamber, and private apartments, so was the temple laid out with semipublic forecourts leading into the festival halls in which the rites were celebrated; behind these, in the

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deepest recesses of the building, were the shrines in which the gods dwelt.

The Egyptians believed that sacrificial offerings had to be made regularly in order to ensure the gods' continued blessing on the community, and in practical terms this meant that the "Mansion" had to be self-supporting: land, primarily, and manpower for essential services were the factors keeping the magazines full and the offering tables laden. Ramesses III endowed his temple with a lavish hand, and his generosity, spread over a long reign, made it an important center in the life of West Thebes.

In the normal run of events the "Mansion" would have declined after Ramesses' death. Its endowments would have been transferred to other, newer establishments and the building itself might eventually have been used as a quarry: such, even then, had been the fate of Amenhotep III's great mortuary temple, of which little beyond the Colossi now remains. But Ramesses III's immediate successors reigned too briefly to displace existing foundations and, even later, such a formidable headquarters could not be lightly abandoned. Bands of marauding Libyans roved the countryside under the last Ramesside Pharaohs, and in the face of the state's helplessness to control this menace, the population of West Thebes often sought refuge behind the walls of the "Mansion." Civil disorders only added to these troubles, and by the end of the twelfth century B.C. the whole of Upper Egypt was engulfed in civil war. At the height of this conflict the "Mansion" was taken by storm: the attackers breached the walls and damaged the western fortified gate so badly that it was never repaired. When order was restored, power had shifted into local hands and, instead of serving as Pharaoh's southern capital, Thebes emerged as the head of an independent state embracing most of Upper Egypt. The "Mansion," now the largest functioning complex in West Thebes, remained an administrative center throughout this period, but cult services for Ramesses III could not have outlasted the fall of his dynasty for very long. As of the ninth century B.C., when Theban notables began building tomb chapels for themselves inside the compound, humbler graves were being dug in the temple itself, mute testimony to its revered status and current disuse.

But although the "Mansion" was now irrevocably in decline, Amon-Rē, "Primeval One of the Two Lands," was still worshipped in the small temple. The religious cult that centered on this building was not dependent on a particular king or dynasty, and the eclipse of Ramesses III's temple only re-emphasized the importance of this broader, more enduring strain of worship. Later Pharaohs, Ptolemaic rulers, and Roman emperors contributed a series of forecourts that gradually doubled the original building's length and, at the same time, the town that grew up around this temple extended the occupation of the site beyond the fall of paganism. During the early Christian era the Coptic town of Jēme covered the entire area: even the great temple was filled with dwellings, and the Holy Church of Jēme occupied its second court. This town might well have survived until the present day, but in the ninth century A.D. it was suddenly, inexplicably abandoned. For close to a millenium it was a ghost town, its streets empty and its name forgotten, and today only a few of these Coptic houses survive, perched atop the crumbling enclosure wall, to remind us of what was once a flourishing settlement. Even the Arabic name of the site, Medinet Habu, is of uncertain origin: a possible translation is "The City of Hapu," and some scholars have pointed out that Amenhotep, Son of Hapu—a sage of the fourteenth century B.C. who was subsequently deified—had his own temple nearby. His posthumous fame may have survived this building's decay and his name been transferred to Ramesses III's establishment. This hypothesis, though attractive,

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is difficult to prove, for the name does not appear until modern times, long after the language and traditions of ancient Egypt had died out.

The appearance of Medinet Habu today is due largely to two organizations: the Egyptian Department of Antiquities and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Between 1859 and

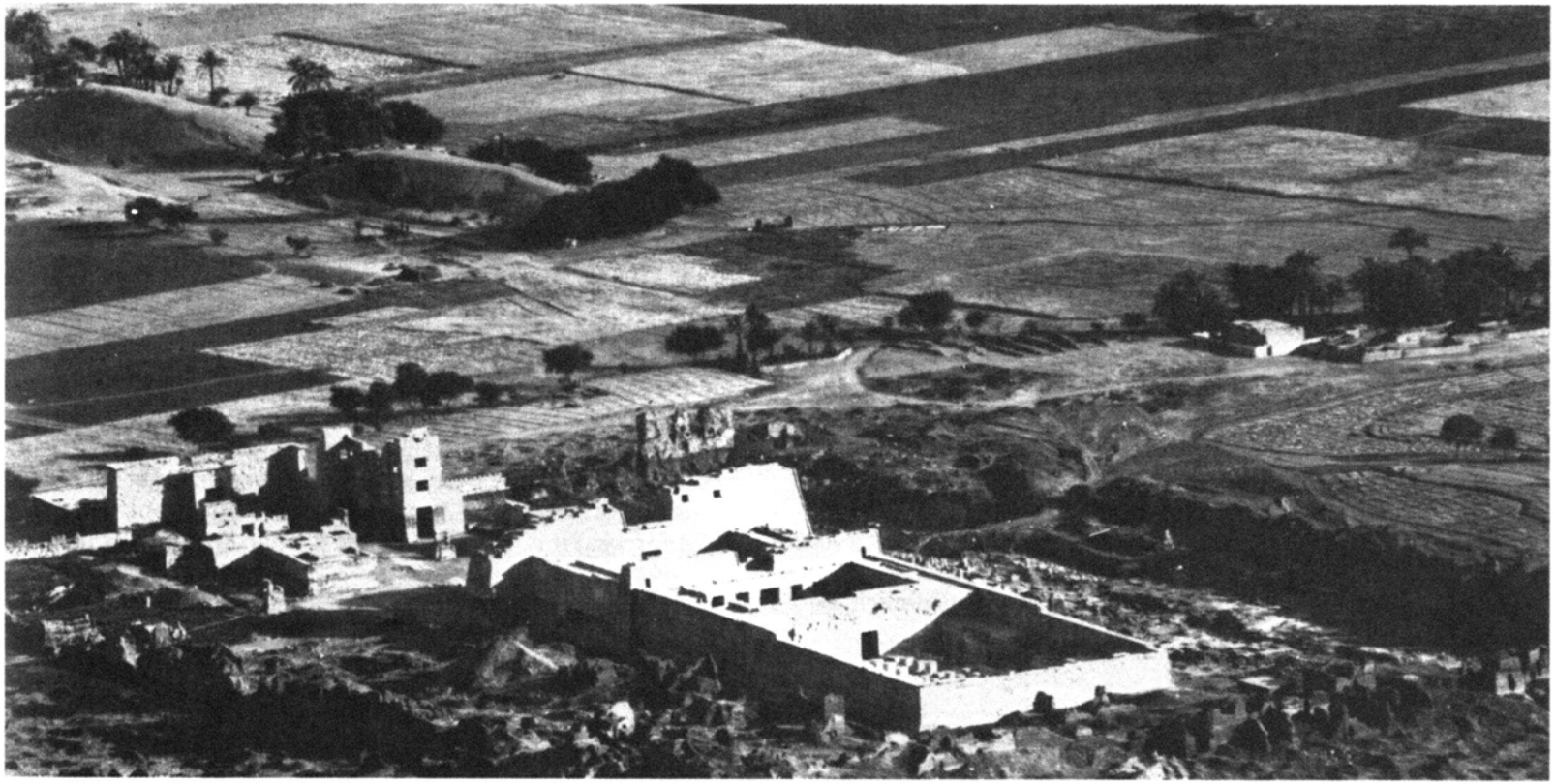

Fig. 2 *The Temple Compound before its Excavation*

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1899 the Antiquities Service cleared the main temple, removing the Coptic buildings inside and making the site more accessible to visitors. In 1924, Professor James Henry Breasted secured the concession to record and clear Medinet Habu for the Oriental Institute. Breasted's experience in the field had convinced him that many of the ancient monuments were perishing before they could be properly explored and published, and to correct this situation he founded the Epigraphic and Architectural Surveys of Egypt. Medinet Habu, the best preserved of the New Kingdom temples in West Thebes, was chosen as the initial project. The Epigraphic Survey began work on the facsimile copies of reliefs and inscriptions in the great temple in 1924, while the Architectural Survey started three years later and completed its excavation in 1933. The resulting publications—eight volumes with a complete epigraphic record of the great temple and the eastern high gate, five more dealing with the excavations, and others dealing with graffiti and ostraca found on the site—are a mine of information for the specialist, but the general reader is apt to find them weighty and virtually inaccessible. It is hoped that this book will meet a long-standing need by providing a compact guide to the site. Material from the official publications will form the basis of this work, and it will also be illustrated with drawings and photographs from them.

The sections of this book are grouped in the order that might be suggested on a visit to the site. The visitor will begin by exploring the high gate, through which the compound is entered. The war reliefs on the temple's north wall will be examined next, and then the interior of the temple proper. After leaving the temple, we shall turn south to examine the palace and other buildings in that quarter, saving the small temple and the Saite tomb chapels until last. This is a practical itinerary, for the battle reliefs should be seen early in the days and their contents should be known before entering the temple, where some of this material is duplicated. Since I am assuming, also, that this book will be used by readers interested in the functioning of an Egyptian temple as well as by visitors in the field, the descriptions are supplemented by a more general discussion at appropriate intervals. Illustrations are intended to be representative as well as to clarify obscure points on the wall.

My writing of this book was made all the more stimulating by conversations with George R. Hughes, Charles F. Nims and Edward F. Wente, all past directors of the Epigraphic Survey who spent many years at Medinet Habu. To them, and to the Survey's former director, Kent R. Weeks, who first urged on me the desirability of a guidebook, I am very grateful. The site cries out for a more extensive treatment, but I hope the readers of this book will find it useful for what it is, and not judge it too harshly for what it is not.

Luxor, 1978

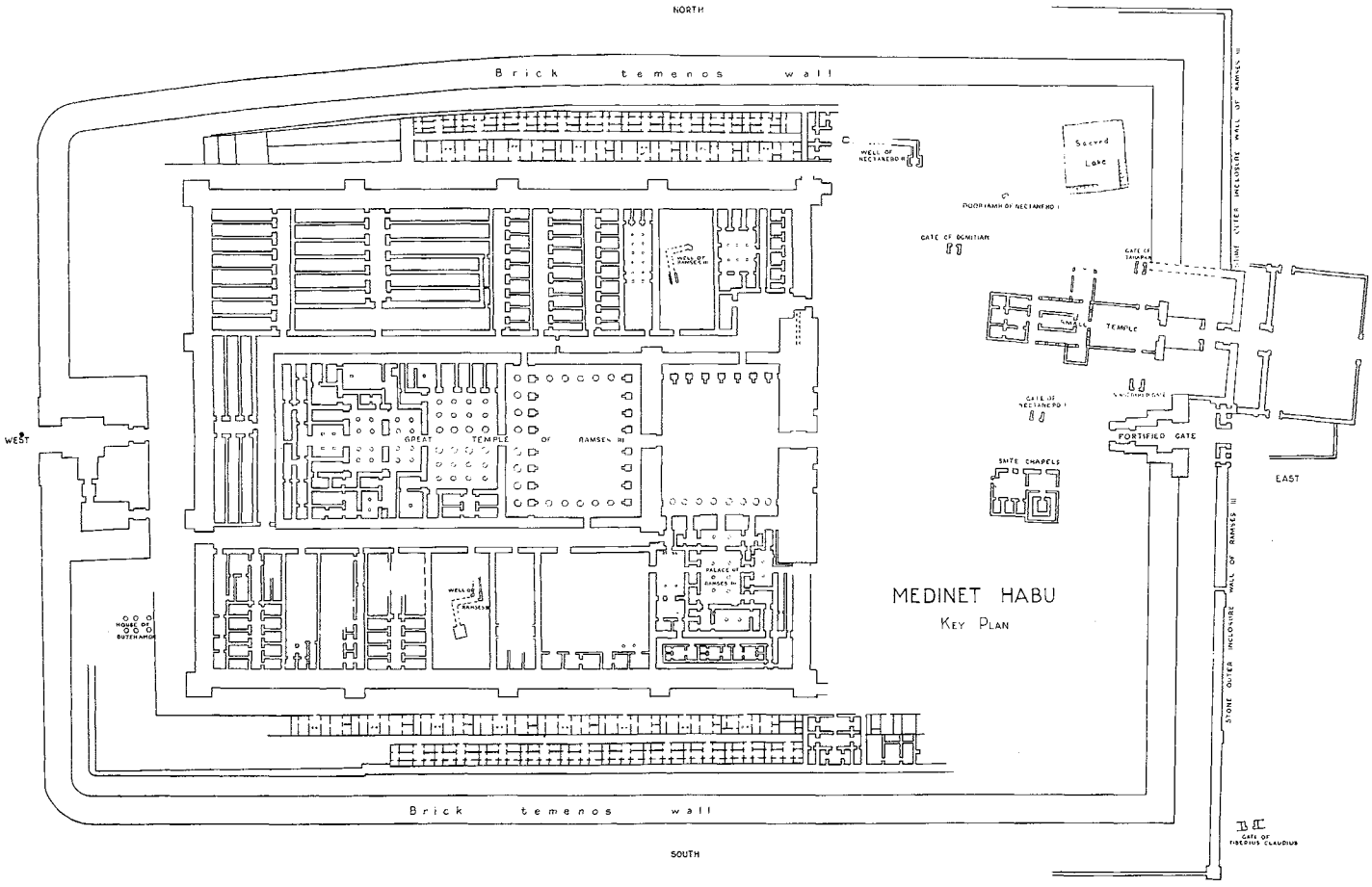

Fig. 3 *Overall Plan of Medinet Habu*

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THE APPROACH TO THE TEMPLE AND THE HIGH GATE

The only entrance to Medinet Habu today is through the eastern high gate. In antiquity, this gateway was reached by a canal that brought vessels inland from the Nile, so it was the landward entrance, on the compound's west side, which was perhaps more frequently used for the comings and goings of the temple staff. Cargos brought from afar and distinguished visitors—the gods at their festivals and the Pharaoh—were discharged on the eastern side. The basin where these ships moored is now buried under the modern road, but the visitor will walk on what is left of the ancient quay to reach the entrance. In Ramesses III's time this approach had a more harmonious appearance, for the outer buildings were then flanked only by mudbrick walls. The symmetry is spoiled today because late additions to the Eighteenth-Dynasty temple jut out on the right.

Flanking the entrance are two small buildings piercing a low wall that once surrounded the temple. These probably served to house the gatekeepers, who then, as now, controlled the admission of visitors to the temple grounds. The single-room interiors have been left rough, and the decoration outside (stereotyped scenes showing the king in the presence of the gods) had barely been started before Ramesses III died, leaving his successor, Ramesses IV, to have these reliefs carved in his own name.

The fortified entrance to the compound lies beyond these buildings. It is not easily typed stylistically, for although high towers are a feature of Egyptian defenses from an early date, the broad windows are much more typical in domestic architecture, and their presence may be due to the dual role this building had to play. Certainly, the façade of the high gate is deliberately impressive: huge figures of the king in the act of smiting Egypt's enemies bestride the faces of each tower, while bound figures of Egypt's traditional foes lie below. On the left we see Nubians and Libyans of various sorts, while on the right (fig. 4) are Asiatic princes (Hittites and Amurrites, both spent forces in Ramesses III's day) and also seminomadic peoples — Tjekker, Sherden (= Sardinians?), Shasu, Tiwresh, and (unfortunately covered by a later wall) Philistines. It is likely that the purpose governing the selection of these reliefs and their use in these places was a magical one, for the temple was a model of the world "writ small," and as the king repelled invaders from the borders of Egypt, so were the forces of chaos prevented from engulfing the world, and the temple with it.

This eastern high gate and its western counterpart (destroyed over three thousand years ago) also have serious defensive features. The sloping plinths could keep enemies away from the walls, while bringing them within the range of the defenders' arrows. It could be that the recessed doorway, with its artful impression of great depth, served a similar purpose. The large windows, seemingly so inappropriate for a fortress, could be closed when necessary, and openings masked by the stone consoles of prisoners' heads in the passage would have been ideal for hidden bowmen. The enclosure wall itself is about thirty-five feet thick and originally stood about

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sixty feet high; the foundations, which rest on bedrock, could not be tunneled through or sapped. These precautions go beyond what we would expect if Ramesses III's architects had been bent on creating only a formidable impression, and it seems likely that defense was one of the considerations they had in mind.

But the high gate had other, more appealing uses. In the recess at the south side of the passage, in the lower register, we see Ramesses III offering Maᶜat (= justice, or cosmic harmony, shown here as a small, seated goddess) to the god Ptah and his consort, the lioness Sekhmet. This scene, emphasizing the king's role as guarantor of proper order to gods and men, has more than the usual significance here, for the god's figure is a cult image in its own right: his hair, eye, and beard were originally inlaid with colored faïence, the shrine in which he stands is outlined with drill holes (as if to hold a veil), and he is described as "the great god who hears prayer within the temple of Ramesses III." State cult here gives way to popular religion: since access to the temple proper was restricted to persons who had been initiated into one of the priestly grades, common folk had to address their prayers to images such as this, located outside the sacred precincts, and this god would pass their petitions on to the great god of the temple. Across the river at Karnak, a "Temple of the Hearing Ear" was actually built between the town of Thebes and the temple of Amon-Rē for this very purpose, and the forecourts of sacred buildings were sometimes crowded with icons that competed for the privilege of "hearing prayer." A vivid example found at Karnak is seen in a block statue of Amen-

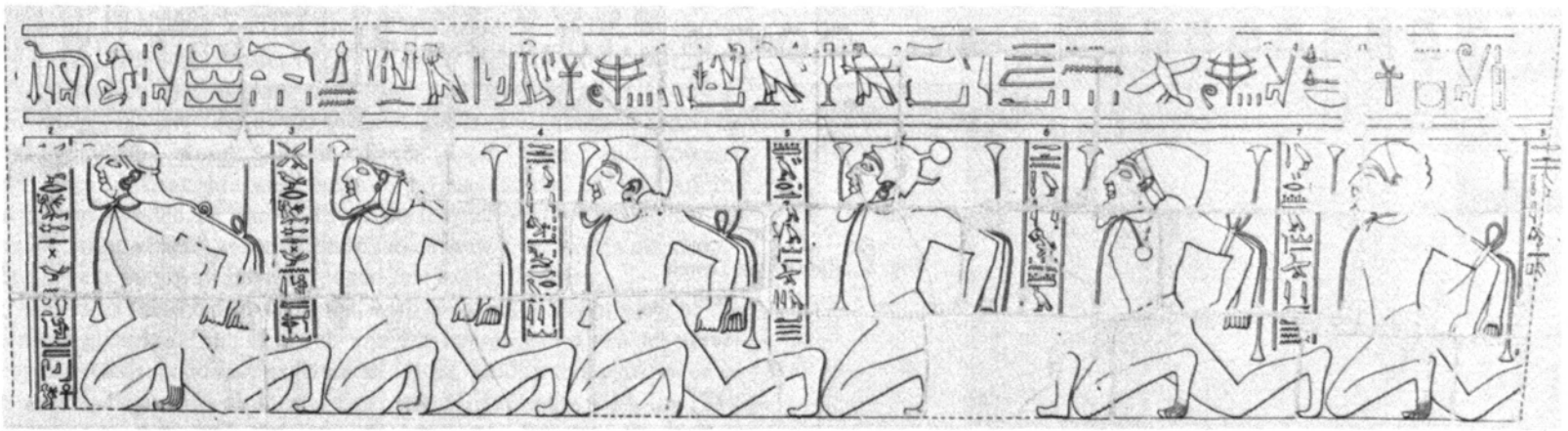

Fig. 4 *Asiatic Enemies on the High Gate*

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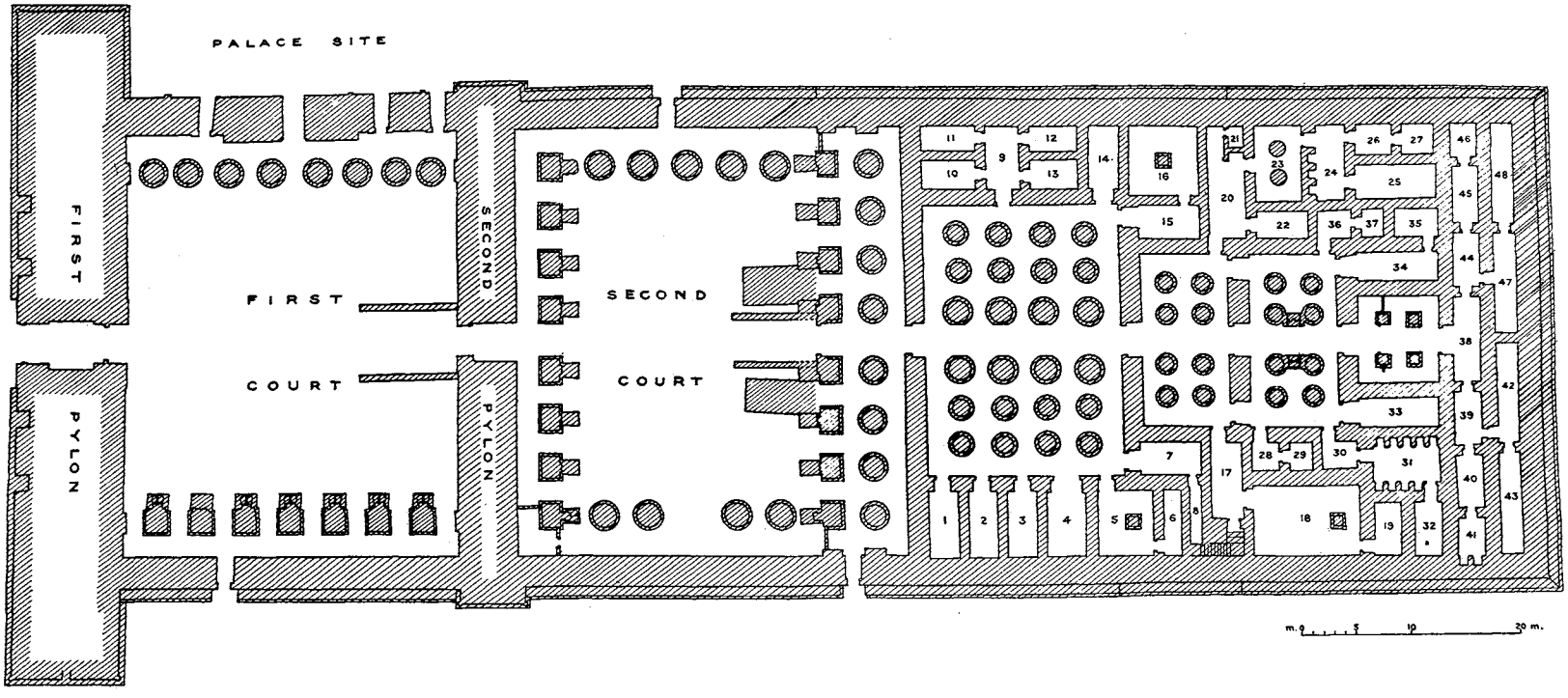

Fig. 5 *Plan of the Temple*

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hotep, Son of Hapu, which entices the "people of Karnak who wish to see Amon: come to me and I will transmit your petitions. I can address this god [because] King Amenhotep III set me up to repeat what the Two Lands [= Egypt] say." In return, the visitor is expected to "perform for me the 'Boon which the King Gives' ritual, and pronounce my name daily as is done for a 'praised one'." It is tempting to imagine that the two statues of Sekhmet in the passage of the high gate filled some such role—except that they were set up in the recesses in modern times and may well have nothing at all to do with Ramesses III's temple.

The interior of the high gate was reached originally by a ramp on the south side of the building, leading through brick-built side rooms into the second storey of the tower. Both mudbrick wings to the north and south have disappeared, leaving only the stone core of the gate. A modern stairway on the south side gives access to the upper levels. Once inside, the visitor can gaze up the well of the tower, for the planking that divided the upper floors has long since collapsed. The decoration of these rooms is in startling contrast to the military and religious scenes that dominate the exterior of the building, for here (fig. 6) the king is shown at play: surrounded by slender young women, he is offered food, drink, and flowers; he plays at draughts and bestows an occasional caress. An inscription located in one of those destroyed mudbrick side rooms tells us that at least some of these ladies were "the king's children," but others may well have belonged to the royal harīm.

It was to these window rooms, with their magnificent view of the temple grounds, that Pharaoh and his intimates retired whenever royalty was in residence at Medinet Habu. And in this place of ease, it seems, began the dramatic final act of Ramesses III's life. The occasion was the "God's Arrival" during the Feast of the Valley, Amon's yearly journey from his temple at Karnak to the west

Fig. 6 *The King and a Princess*

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bank. The king and his favorites were apparently watching the spectacle from above, at a safe distance from the crowds that thronged into the processional way of the temple. It was then that conspirators, spurred on by a dissident faction in the women's quarters, penetrated into "that other great, high place" (i.e., the less frequently used eastern high gate), bent on obscure but unmistakably mischievous purposes. In the end, the plot was discovered: the culprits were caught and punished, although not before some of the judges had disgraced themselves by "making a beer-hall" with a few of the ladies who were on trial. The defendants of higher rank were allowed to commit suicide; most of the others suffered death or mutilation—savage penalties, exacted because the plot had in fact succeeded. For Ramesses III had died—a victim of poison?—less than a month after that festival day.

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THE WAR RELIEFS

The visitor now passes out of the high gate and into a broad alley formed by the late tomb chapels (left) and the small Eighteenth Dynasty temple (right). Beyond and directly in front is the temple. Its façade is almost completely preserved: only the upper course is missing from the first pylon, which originally measured 79 feet in height, 220 feet in width and 38 feet in thickness. Originally, the surface of the wall was whitewashed and the figures were brightly painted, but the sun's rays have since subdued the more garish tones. Each tower has two niches for the massive flagpoles, which, if they projected above the roof, would have measured over 100 feet tall. Contemporary illustrations of similar buildings suggest that four pennants—blue, green, red, and white—fluttered from on high.

Rather than entering the temple at this point, we will turn right and go around to the north side of the building. On these walls, marching from east to west (= back to front) is a series of reliefs depicting in sequence the military campaigns of Ramesses III. Because of the temple's orientation, these scenes should be viewed while the day is still young: the wall is in shadow by 9:00 a.m. during the fall and winter months, although the hours of light lengthen into mid-morning with the advance of summer. Many details of the reliefs are invisible without sunlight, and the difficulty is compounded by the amount of damage the wall has suffered since these scenes were carved. The addition of Coptic doorways, malicious hacking, and the removal of bits of stone for magical purposes, which left deep gouges in many areas of the wall—all have contributed to the very bad condition of these interesting reliefs, and it was only after close study that the Epigraphic Survey managed to discern the details of the original carving.

The war reliefs actually begin on the back wall of the temple with a

Fig. 7 *First Libyan War: Libyans fleeing*

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Nubian campaign, but since these scenes are badly weathered and are not of great interest, we can pass directly to the first Libyan war on the north wall. This conflict, which broke out in Ramesses III's fifth year (c. 1180 B.C.), was yet another episode in Egypt's aggravated "Libyan problem." The tribes on the western border had always been troublesome, but what had been a mere irritant now developed into a perennial menace. Not thirty years previously (c. 1208 B.C.), Libyan tribes had allied with migrating "Peoples of the Sea" and launched a full-scale invasion of Egypt. This attack, which the invaders hoped would give them a foothold in the fertile western Delta, had been repulsed by the Egyptians under Merneptah, but the affairs of Libya were far from settled. The defeated tribes were still determined to achieve their long-range objective of settling in Egypt, and the death of a chieftain of the Temeh tribe early in Ramesses III's reign gave them a fresh opportunity. The Egyptians had apparently exercised a control over the selection of Temeh leaders for some time, but although the Egyptian candidate, "a little one of the land of Temeh . . . appointed for them to be a chief, to regulate their land," was accepted by tribal elders, they secretly formed alliances with the more westerly tribes—Meshwesh, Libu, and Seped—that had been involved in the previous war: "their warriors relied on their plan and their hearts waxed confident, [saying], 'We will advance ourselves!'"

The king was probably in his Delta residence when:

> Someone came to tell his Majesty, "The Tjehenu [= Libyans] are in motion, they are making a conspiracy. They have gathered and assembled without number, consisting of Libu-, Seped- and Meshwesh-lands, [all] assembled to advance themselves and to aggrandize themselves against Egypt."

There was not a moment to lose, and the first scene (west end of the north wall) shows the Egyptian army on the move. Above and in front are the ranks of native militia; foreign mercenaries and cavalry march below. The king in his chariot is outfitted with the warlike blue crown, and a lion (to which he is often compared) bounds alongside. In the chariot in front of the Pharaoh is the ram-headed standard of Amon, who "opens the ways in the land of Temeh." The battle (see fig. 7) is shown next. As usual, the king is depicted on a larger scale than anyone else, in keeping with the literary conceit that he alone is worth a whole army. Distinctive details—the Sherden mercenaries clubbing the enemy at the lower left, the flight of the vanquished above (fig. 7)—stand out, but the confused tangle of this scene is quite deliberate.

More interesting is the next scene, showing the assemblage of captives and spoil. This relief is in poor condition, but we can see the king facing his army from behind a portable reviewing stand. A model fortress above his chariot represents "the Town of Ramesses III, who has repulsed Temeh," probably campaign headquarters on the border. The bound prisoners are led in from the right, while in front the scribes are busily taking a rather gruesome count (see fig. 8): piled before them are the hands and genitals of the slain, allowing the enemy's losses to be computed. For centuries it had been customary for soldiers to bring in such trophies: they were rewarded with gold on the spot, with land and slaves eventually following. The totals as given here are somewhat confusing: each of the five piles accounts for over 12,500 items, and if we take all these figures seriously we arrive at over 38,000 hands, but only 25,000 phalluses. These are improbably high figures: the great invasion under Merneptah had yielded only 9,300 enemy casualties, although the invading force seems to have been larger. Fortunately, we are able to compare this scene with another version of the same event in the second court of the temple. The figures are rounded off

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here but they are otherwise more consistent, for each of the four piles is said to contain 3,000 hands and 3,000 phalluses, with 1,000 men reckoned up as living captives. If we add these figures we reach the 12,000+ of the scene on the north wall—still a high figure, but not an improbable one. By all accounts, it seems clear that the first Libyan invasion was no puny affair, but one of the most determined onslaughts that the Egyptians had yet had to face on their western border.

Three years later, in Ramesses' eighth year (c. 1177 B.C.), the Egyptians were again at war, for the Sea Peoples and other dispossessed groups had not given up their hopes:

> Now the northern countries which were in their isles were quivering in their bodies . . . they had made a conspiracy in their isles. Removed and scattered in the fray were the lands at one time. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish, Cilicia and Cyprus on, but were cut off at one time. A camp was set up in Amor [= southern Syria]: they desolated its people, its land was like that which had never come into being. . . . Their confederation consisted of Philistines, Tjekker, Shekelesh [⇒ later Sicels?], Denyen [= the *Danaoi* of the *Iliad*?] and Weshesh. They laid their hands on countries to the [very] circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting, [saying] "Our plans will succeed!"

This war occupies the next seven scenes on the north wall. First we see Ramesses III on the left, presiding over the distribution of equipment to his army: the troops, marched in to the sound of trumpets (upper left), prostrate themselves before the king, while in the middle register (fig. 9) they are given their weapons—javelins, helmets, bows, quivers, swords, and shields—under the supervision of the crown prince. The next scene, showing the army on the march, is similar to what is shown for the same episode in the first Libyan war. Since the enemy advance was on two fronts, Ramesses moved

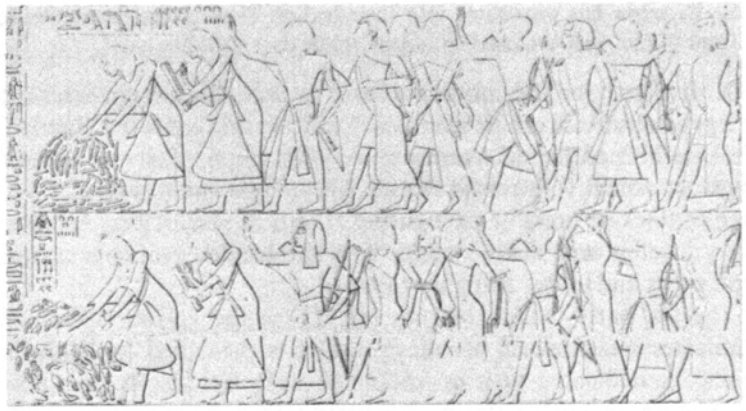

Fig. 8 *First Libyan War: Counting Hands and Genitals*

his forces into Palestine while arranging his coastal defenses to oppose the enemy's fleet:

> I organized my frontier in Djahy, it being prepared before them—i.e., the princes, garrison commanders and *marrianu* warriors [of the Egyptian army]. I caused the Nile mouths to be prepared like a strong wall with warships, galleys and coasters.

In the ensuing land battle the Sea Peoples were utterly defeated: involved in this rout were not only the warriors, with their distinctive wide headgear and striped kilts, but their women and children as well (fig. 10), seen at the upper left cowering in the ox-drawn wagons that had brought them to the very borders of Egypt.

The exultation felt at this victory is conveyed in the next, seemingly extraneous scene that shows the triumphant Ramesses III hunting lions:

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His arrow has penetrated into their bodies. They gather themselves in front of him, [as] wretched as jackals, while they yowl like cats!

A dividend for the modern viewer is that the foreign warriors in Egyptian service can be seen clearly below: first come the Sherden, wearing horned helmets surmounted by a knob; this was a crack division, armed with round shields, spears and short swords, often seen in thickest press of the fighting. The next group, also Asiatics, carry javelins and sickle swords. The bareheaded Nubians, armed with bows and clubs, bring up the rear.

The sea battle which follows (fig. 11) is the episode of which Ramesses was himself proudest, and it is described not only in the scene dedicated to it on the north wall, but also in two long inscriptions inside the temple. Egyptian strategy is tersely outlined:

As for those who came forward together on the sea, the full flame [= of the king's wrath?] was in front of them at the Nile mouths, while a stockade of lances surrounded them on the shore, they being dragged up, hemmed in and prostrated on the beach, slain and made into heaps from tail to head.

This description is clarified by the scene of the naval engagement proper, shown in the upper left quarter: the Egyptian ships (with the lion's head prow) have the obvious advantage, being manned by slingers and archers who keep up a deadly rain of missiles against the enemy's ships. The Sea Peoples seem better armed here than at the land battle, but with only swords and spears at their disposal they lie helpless under fire. Once the enemy has been sufficiently reduced, the Egyptians move in for the kill: grappling irons are

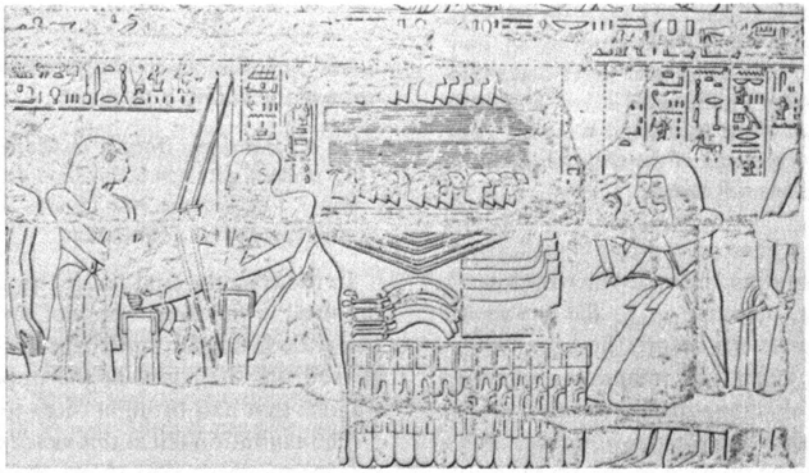

Fig. 9 *Distributing Arms against the Sea Peoples*

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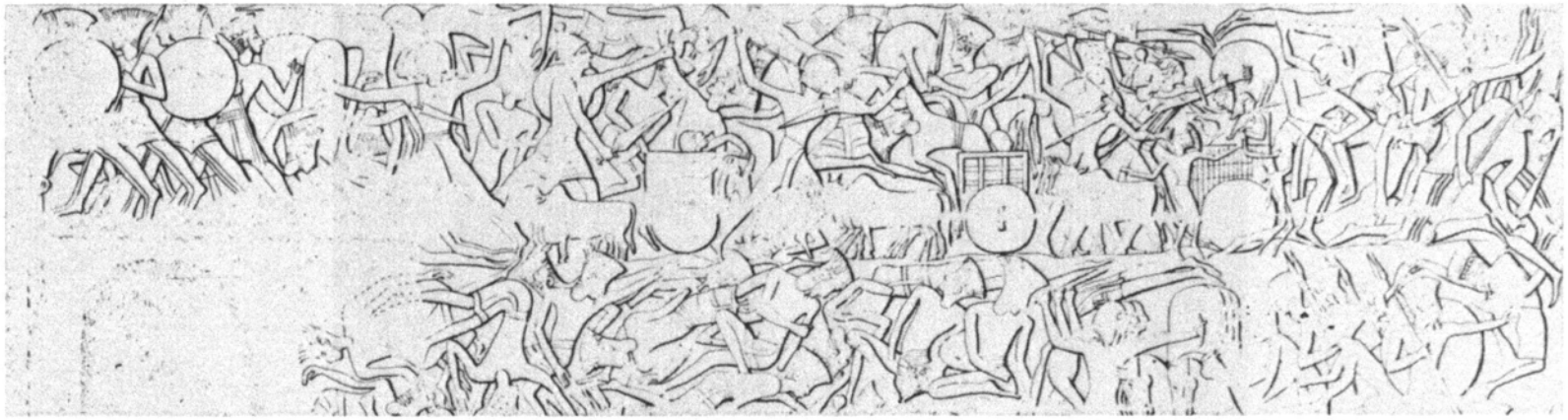

Fig. 10 *The Sea Peoples fighting around their Wagons*

thrown and the surviving foemen dragged as captives into the Egyptian ships. One invading vessel seems to have been rammed and has capsized, spilling its crew into the water. It is here that the Egyptian land forces come into their own: from the shore, a force of bowmen has been harrassing the enemy, and the king is with them, trampling on a brace of trussed-up foemen—a typical conceit. The enemy's vessels are thus prevented from landing, and the survivors who do manage to swim to shore are promptly clapped into fetters. From a distance of three thousand years, Ramesses III's strategy seems to have been flawless; small wonder that the king was so pleased with himself. The pictorial record of this war ends on a triumphant note with the usual victory celebration, held near the settlement that is shown at the upper left of the scene: the "Migdol of Ramesses III" has been identified with modern Tell al-Hêr, near the easternmost mouth of the Nile, which probably served as Egyptian headquarters during the final struggle.

This main sequence of war reliefs is brought to a close by a scene in which Ramesses III presents captives from his Libyan and Asiatic wars to the gods of Thebes: Amon-Rē of Karnak, his consort, Mut, and their son, the moon god, Khonsu. Since, on the back wall of the temple, the king had been seen entering the temple "to pray for victory and a mighty sword from his father, Amon, Lord of the Gods," this thanksgiving fittingly concludes the tale of what Ramesses III regarded as his greatest victories.

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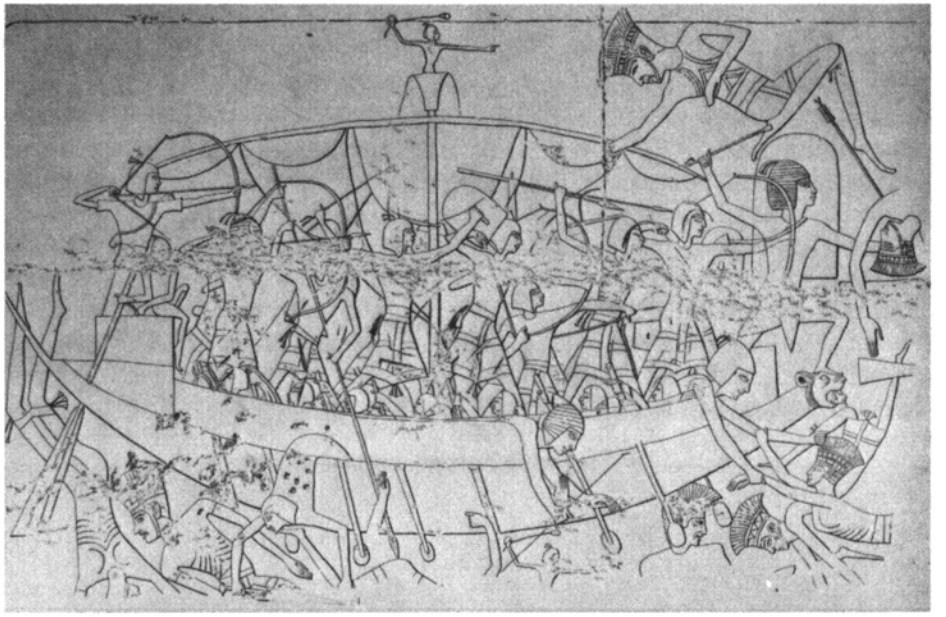

Fig. 11 *The Sea Battle: an Egyptian Ship*

But this was not his last battle. Libyans continued to filter into the Delta and three years later (c. 1174 B.C.), the Meshwesh were again on the move. Following their defeat in the first Libyan war, the Meshwesh had settled in the territory formerly occupied by the Tjehenu Libyans. The lure of Egyptian *Lebensraum* proved too tempting, however, and acting with the Libu tribe, the Meshwesh managed to occupy a large tract of the western Delta with the toleration (if not the blessing) of the Egyptian authorities. But when Meshesher, the chief of the Meshwesh, tried to lead a great migration of his people into Egypt, Ramesses III determined that the time had come to stop the Libyans before it was too late.

The two armies met in the northwest corner of the Delta, near "The Town of Ramesses III," which was located on a bluff called "Beginning of the Land." Profiting from the irregular terrain, "his Majesty was concealed and hidden . . . in order to take captives," and the vanguard of the Libyan army walked right into the ambush. Among the prisoners was none other than Meshesher himself (Fig. 13). With their leader in Egyptian hands, the Meshwesh lost

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Fig. 12 *Second Libyan War: Desert Battle*

all appetite for battle. A delegation led by Keper, Meshesher's father, was sent to discuss terms, and the Libyans presently agreed to lay down their arms—under what guarantees we do not know. What happened next, however, is described with grim humor:

> Keper came to beg for peace in the manner of a blindfolded man[?]. Together with his army, he laid his weapons on the ground, and he made a cry to the heavens to beg for his son. . . . [Then] seized upon was Keper; carried off and slain was his army, whose hearts had relied upon him to save them.

Most of the wretched Meshwesh escaped "to their towns, as well as [to] the Delta swamps to his [= the king's] rear," but 2,175 persons were killed in a hideous chase that extended ten miles into the desert (see fig. 12), out to a fortress called "Castle in the Sand." Another 2,052 were led off into captivity, including 283 youths and 588 women and girls, as well as a rich booty of over 42,000 animals (cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and asses) that the hopeful settlers had brought with them. Ramesses settled the survivors in strongholds, to serve in perpetuity as a military class. The western border was secure for now—but the descendants of these Libyans were later to rise up against Ramesses III's successors and finally to rule the Two Lands.

The reliefs that illustrate this campaign occur on the lower of the two registers occupying the space between the first and second pylons. Unlike the earlier battle scenes, these episodes are not arranged chronologically: the first scene, in which the king charges into the Libyan horde, is the first to the left (= west) of the first pylon; the next scene, the binding of prisoners, is to the left, on the west side of the first pylon itself. The other, triumphal, scenes all fall to the right of scene 1: the king bundles his captives into his chariot (3), receives the congratulations of his staff (4), returns with his prisoners to Egypt (5), and presents them to Amon-Rē and Mut (6). Additional information, supplied by inscriptions located inside the temple, has been summarized in the previous paragraphs.

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Above the scenes showing the second Libyan war is another set of battle reliefs. Starting on the first pylon and moving west, we see Ramesses III laying siege to two Hittite towns, Arzawa (1) and Tunip (2). Stages of a Syrian campaign are seen next: the king reduces an unnamed Syrian fortress (3), reviews his captives (4), returns to Egypt (5), and offers his prisoners to Amon and Khonsu (6). Since these wars are not mentioned elsewhere in Egyptian sources, and since the battle scenes lack the wealth of subsidiary details that go with the campaigns discussed above, many scholars are inclined to doubt whether the Syrian wars ever took place. Scenes like this reflect an ideology: the king, in theory, was master of "all lands" beyond Egypt's borders. He was thus expected to maintain some sort of presence in Asia—even if it was restricted to the walls of his mortuary temple.

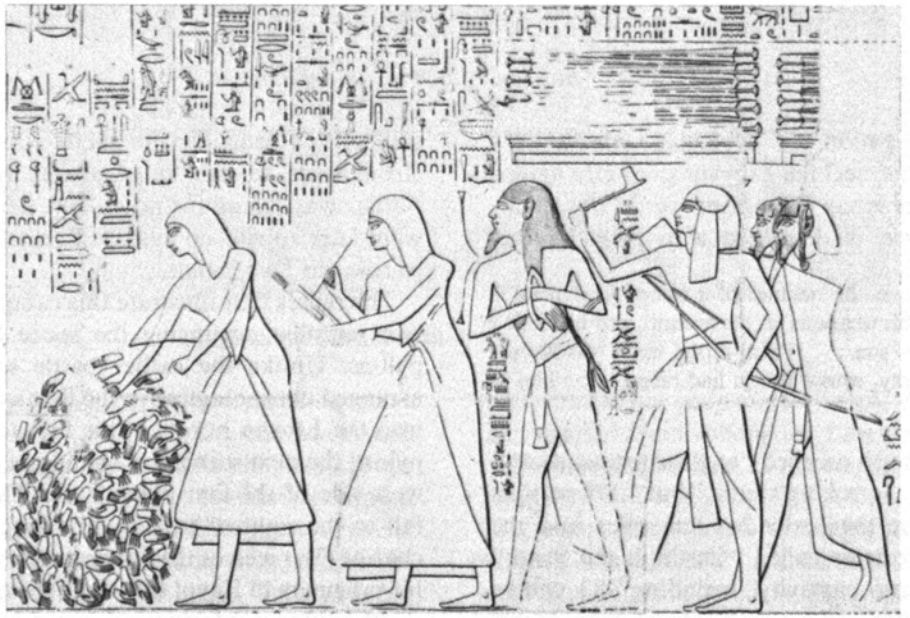

Fig. 13 *Meshesher is led before Ramesses III*

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THE FIRST PYLON

Before returning to the front of the temple, the visitor may wish to climb to the top of the first pylon. An entrance on its north side opens onto a flight of stairs leading first to a balcony above the main doorway of the temple, and from there to the top of either tower. The south tower is the better preserved and is higher than its neighbor, but from both places the visitor has an unrivaled view of the countryside, with the contrasting desert and cultivation that is typical of Egypt. The reliefs and inscriptions found inside the pylon deal mostly with the cult of the rising or setting sun, and this is not surprising: the shape of the pylon itself evokes the Egyptian hieroglyph for the horizon, two hills between which the sun rises, and the height of the towers would have made them ideal spots from which to observe celestial phenomena.

On descending from the pylon we turn the corner and see once again the temple's façade. Each of the pylon's towers is dominated by a giant relief that shows the king smiting captive enemies before Amon-Rē (south) and Amon-Rē-Harakhty (north). Ramesses wears the crown of the two kingdoms in the southern scene (fig. 14), but only the northern red crown in the other, an arrangement that reflects the dualism of the king's office. On one level he is preeminently the Upper Egyptian ruler who conquered the north in remote antiquity and absorbed its kingship; but as the active historical king of a united Egypt (called *nesūt*, with the double crown) he is also the embodiment of the *bity*, Egypt's primordial "hereditary king" who represents the essence of kingship itself and whose characteristic emblem is the red crown of Lower Egypt. This con-

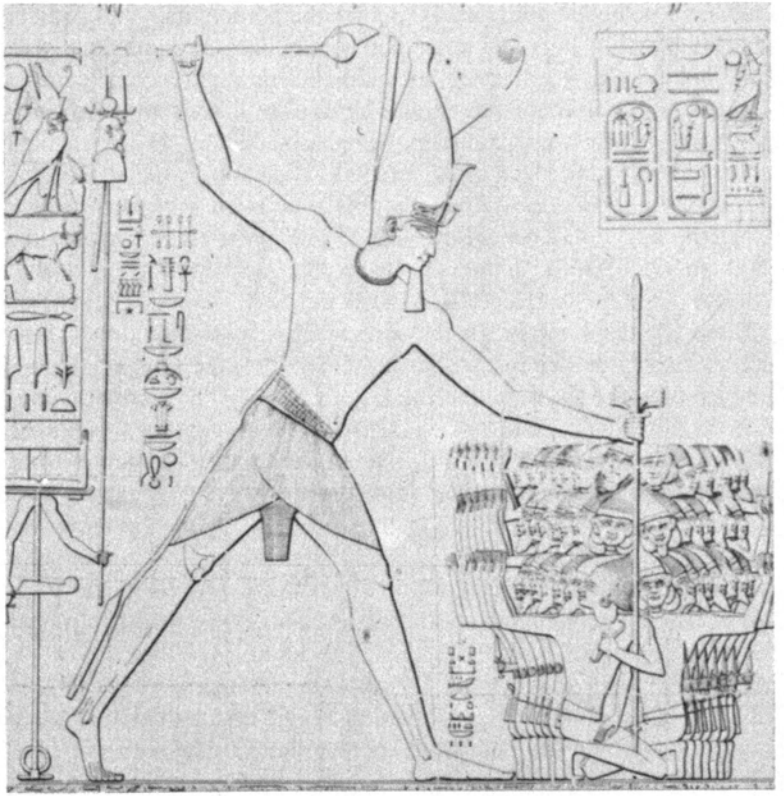

Fig. 14 *First Pylon, Triumphal Scene*

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trast, illustrating a tendency to harmonize two opposites (which is fundamental to Egyptian thought), we will see reflected throughout the plan of the temple.

As we have seen before, the Egyptians regarded their monuments as being charged with magical power, and the temple's façade is seen as a protective barrier. In both large scenes, the gods present the king with a curved sword that symbolizes strength in battle, and behind them are rows of small bound figures representing Egypt's conquered enemies: these figures are human only down to the waist, their lower quarters being replaced by an oval shield (really the ground plan of a fortress) inside which the name of a country or people is written. By this time such groups of name-rings did not reflect the actual state of the Egyptian empire, for the Nubian and Asiatic name sequences are borrowed from earlier lists of Thutmosis III (1504–1450 B.C.) and Ramesses II (1279–1212 B.C.) respectively. In the set speeches inscribed above these scenes, the gods promise to strike terror into the king's enemies, and they invoke the power of other gods (such as the warrior deities Seth and Montu) in his defense. Clearly, the pylon was seen as the last barrier between the world-image contained in the temple and the chaos outside. Even the four flagmasts seem to have been dedicated to protector deities: those closest to the doorway on either side—Isis (south) and Nephthys (north)—represent the mother and aunt of the falcon-god Horus, who concealed him from his enemies until he grew up and claimed his rightful lordship over Egypt. The outer pair—Nekhbet (south) and Wadjyt (north)—represent Upper and Lower Egypt, and these goddesses are seen often in reliefs, extending protection above and behind the king. Since all these deities enjoyed a special relationship with the ruler (the first of whose titles is "Horus"), it is not surprising to find them standing guard over the processional way into the temple.

Before entering the temple, a few words should be said about the other inscriptions carved onto the face of the pylon. On each of the towers a huge tablet is laid out in the space between the flagmast niches. The northern tablet contains a "poem" on the second Libyan war, dated to Ramesses' twelfth year, while on the south side is the "blessing of Ptah": the god here acknowledges the king as his son and promises him (among other things) a long reign, wealth, and victories. Ptah, Lord of Memphis, was honored during the late New Kingdom alongside Amon of Thebes and Rē of Heliopolis, and his presence here completes the roster of *premier* gods at Medinet Habu. Two smaller stelae flank the doorway into the temple. Both are dated to year twelve and both, in their different ways, glorify Ramesses III. The southern stela extols the king's triumph over invaders and the magnificence of his temple. The northern stela is more interesting, for it is cast in the form of a speech made by Ramesses to his courtiers in which he stresses his legitimacy and urges them to remain loyal. Kings of Egypt did not normally have to justify their position, as Ramesses does here, by saying, "I did not take my office by robbery, but the crown was set on my head willingly." We must remember that, at this time, the dynasty was less than fifteen years old: Ramesses III's father, Sethnakht, had seized the throne in about 1184 B.C., when the country had been left in the clutches of a Syrian upstart following the demise of the last member of Ramesses II's family. Since this coup had had the support of Egypt's civil administration, neither Sethnakht nor his heir were regarded as usurpers; but Ramesses III must have felt that some timely loyalist propaganda would do his cause no harm.

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THE FIRST COURT: THE HALL OF ROYAL APPEARANCES

The massive portal through which we enter the temple was originally equipped with two gates. This seems to have been a practical necessity, for the main door was an immense, single leaf of wood that could not have been moved frequently during the day. It probably stood open much of the time, resting on the north side of the passage against a decorative pattern that is termed the "Shadow of the Door." Privacy was secured by closing a smaller gateway. This doorway originally lay outside the main portal, and on entering the passage, the visitor can see remains of its jambs at either side. After the siege of Medinet Habu, however, the smaller door was relocated at the other end of the passage and the original version chiseled away. Both were double doors, opening inward, and the absence of a Shadow of the Door in either case suggests that they did not stand open for very long.

Even though the visitor now enters a space enclosed by four walls, the impression created by the first court is pleasingly open. Its layout, with its maximal standing room, cannot have been fortuitous, for this was the forecourt not only of the temple, but of the adjoining royal palace as well. The columned portico of that building, on the south side, is balanced by seven immense pillars to the north, each of which is engaged with a gigantic statue of the king facing south, towards the palace. These statues were mostly destroyed by the Copts, and only in the northwest corner is enough preserved to convey an impression of the whole. The king is seen barelegged and garbed in a kilt with a falcon-pommeled dagger thrust into his belt. His arms are crossed, and he holds the crook and the flail, symbols of his sovereign power. On his head is an elaborate version of the plumed and horned *Atef*-crown, with an anagram of the king's throne name, "Usermaᶜatrē," worked into the design. At the king's sides are two smaller figures of a prince and a princess, but they are not identified by name. Although these statues are sometimes referred to as Osiride figures, everything seems to speak against this interpretation. The king as pictured here is in the full vigor of life, his appearance far from resembling the shrouded god of the dead. Osiris is not the only god who can wear the *Atef*, moreover, and the inscription on the base of one of the statues refers to this image as being "the sovereign, beautiful as king on the throne of Atum and wearing the *Atef* like Rē-Harakhty." All these inscriptions stress the king's active role and his relationship with other gods, so he is clearly to be viewed here as the archetype of Egypt's divine king.

Some of the reliefs in the first court duplicate material we have encountered outside. On the south half of the east wall, the king is shown pursuing fleeing Libyans and receiving the prisoners and spoil after the battle; above these scenes and extending onto both towers of the pylon is a description of the second Libyan war. On the west wall opposite, Ramesses presents captives from the Sea Peoples to Amon-Rē and Mut, while on the face of the second pylon's north tower a long inscription recounts the campaign in year eight. On the north wall (lower register), he storms a fortress

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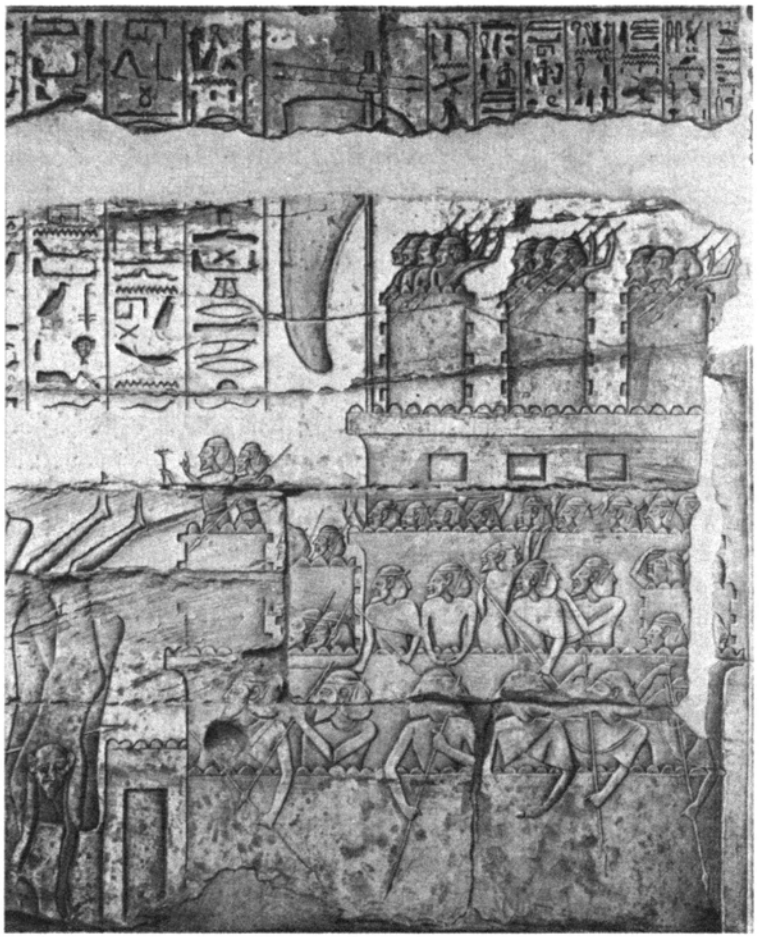

Fig. 15 *Amorite Fortress*

in Amor (fig. 15), celebrates the victory in his palace and presents Libyan and Asiatic prisoners to the Theban Triad. These scenes contain a wealth of pictorial detail: their contents have already been discussed in connection with the war reliefs outside the temple.

Since the first court functions architecturally as the vestibule of the temple, it seems likely that some formal preparations for the ritual began here. This is suggested by the provisions Ramesses III made for new endowments in his temple, in which it is said that the daily offerings rest

> upon the great offering-stand of gold that his Majesty made anew in the gr[eat forec]ourt [of his father, A]mon-[Rē, King of the] Go[ds].

It was probably here that the offerings were assembled before they were borne into the shrines at the back of the building, so it is not surprising to find on the top register of the north wall selected episodes from the daily rites that were celebrated morning and evening in the temple. These scenes are arranged from east to west, moving into the temple, and the first four scenes depict preliminary rituals: the king (1) offers incense to the goddess who protects the sanctuary (here portrayed as the lioness Sekhmet), (2) breaks the seal on the shrine, and (3) draws the bolt, allowing the door to open and reveal the god's statue; the fourth scene is destroyed.

The Medinet Habu sequence omits the extensive rites that followed—the cooking and presenting of meat, the assembling of other food offerings, and the purification of all the gifts. It resumes with the laying of the table with the god's repast: the king (5) refreshes the god with a libation and (6) invites the god to be ready to enjoy his meal. Then (7) he censes the offering table (carelessly shown as another libation here, but the text shows that the other ritual is meant), and (8) offers incense with myrrh. Now (9) he calls on the god to enter his statue, which is waiting to receive him, so

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that he can partake of the essence of the offerings before him. This brings the daily ritual to a close, and the final ceremonies are compressed into two scenes: after the god has been returned to his shrine, the king (10) departs from the sanctuary (fig. 16), waving behind him the sacred *heden*-plant to banish evil spirits; immediately thereafter, though, the king reappears (11) to consummate the so-called "reversion of offerings." Once the god had absorbed what he wanted of the food piled before him, it was removed for distribution to other deities in the temple. This process was repeated until the offerings ultimately passed to the priests and other attendants who performed the ritual. By this long-hallowed and intensely practical usage, the temple was able to provide the divine offerings and pay its staff at the same time.

Fig. 16 *The King Leaves the Sanctuary*

The south wall of the first court is also the façade of the king's palace. Its decoration displays some of the obligatory aggressiveness (e.g., scenes of the king smiting Asiatic and Libyan foes), but this note is by no means dominant. On the west end of the wall we see the king with his court on a visit to the royal stables, "to see the horses which his [own] hands have trained for the great [stable] of the palace." At the east end, the court is on parade: the king rides in a chariot, his tame lion bounding alongside; he is surrounded by his bodyguard, led by the royal princes with their characteristic sidelock of hair, followed by high officials (their shaved heads indicating that they have fulfilled the requirements of "purity" for priestly service), and lesser functionaries wearing long wigs. In front of the king march the foreign auxiliaries — Egyptian soldiers in the top register, the Sherden mercenaries below, brandishing their swords, followed by Shasu Bedouin, and the Nubian militia at the bottom. The stereotyped texts assure us that the king, "beautiful at horsemanship like Montu whenever he appears like Rē for Egypt," has intimidated all foreign enemies.

The palace façade is dominated by a rectangular opening at its center: this is the "Window of Royal Appearances," which the king entered from the palace and in which he stood (or sat) while presiding over the ceremonies held in the court. This window, lying behind the colonnade of the portico, may have been found wanting because the columns interfered with the king's view of the entire court — or perhaps the king felt that *he* could not be properly seen in this setting. Anyway, the opening was widened, and a balcony that

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projected sufficiently forward was inserted to solve the problem. This balcony, a light structure made of wood, has disappeared. Later, in Roman or Coptic times, another doorway was pushed through here into the court. The window was reconstructed during the last century, using a stone that was first believed to be part of the original. On closer inspection, though, it appears that this fragment actually came from the Ramesseum, Ramesses II's mortuary temple, which had been built over a century before. The virtually perfect fit of this stone is astounding, and we shall see other examples of how Ramesses III used the Ramesseum (sometimes slavishly) as a model for his own temple.

The king would appear in the balcony when he granted formal audience at Medinet Habu. The intertwined papyrus and lotus blossoms carved on the stone below the window symbolize the union of the two parts of Egypt which the king embodies, and the consoles of prisoners' heads are artfully placed so that the king would seem to be trampling on his enemies. We are fairly well informed about the occasions at which Pharaoh would appear publicly in this way: from here the king would reward those servants whom he wished to honor, and he could also watch the piling up of booty after a successful campaign (cf. scenes in the first court: east wall/south and north wall/east) as well as other activities in which he did not take an active part.

A number of these festive occasions must have included ceremonial wrestling, (fig. 17) as shown in the lowest register at either side of the Window of Appearances. Ten contests are seen here, usually involving an Egyptian with a foreign opponent (Asiatic, Nubian, or Libyan). These were apparently lively affairs: the contestants growl insults at one another (e.g., "Woe to you, rebellious Asiatic, boasting with his mouth! Pharaoh—live, prosper, be healthy—my lord is with me against you!") and a referee on the left side warns them, "Look sharp! You are in the presence of Pharaoh!" From the sidelines a group of courtiers enjoy the spectacle: the king's eldest son, Prince Ramesses (right side) calls out "Forward, forward, O good fighter!" to a favored contestant, and the other royal children, officials and privileged foreigners who

Fig. 17 *Athletes wrestling before the Prince's Entourage*

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may represent the diplomatic corps join in a chant, "You are like Montu, O Pharaoh—live, prosper, be healthy—our good lord! Amon has overthrown for you those foreigners who came to exalt themselves!" Here again, thinly disguised, is the eternal theme of Egypt maintaining itself against its enemies because of the king's relationship with the gods.

A number of doorways besides the main entrance to the temple give access into the first court. These side doors were single-leaved and opened inwards, so that the doorleaf rested against one side of the passage that can easily be identified by the stereotyped "Shadow of the Door" pattern. The space not covered by the door is taken up with other inscriptions or scenes that sometimes hint at the purpose the doorway served. The door in the north wall, for instance, shows Ramesses III offering food to Amon and Mut on the east side of the passage, while beside the Shadow of the Door is a short inscription that emphasizes the richness of the king's offerings to the gods. In all probability, then, the supplies of food and drink for the daily sacrifices entered through this doorway. There are similar indications attached to the doorways through the south wall: they are most easily approached from the palace and will be discussed below in that context, but we can say that the doors east and west of the Window of Appearances were used by the king during the Feast of Opet and the Feast of the Valley respectively. A third doorway at the west end of the south wall has only generalized scenes and texts, so it may have been the normal means of ingress from that end of the court.

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THE SECOND COURT

Although the second court is actually larger than the first, it seems much less spacious. Part of the reason is that it is surrounded by colonnades: on the north and south are single rows of papyrus-bud columns, while the east and west sides feature pillars with engaged statues that show the king as the mummified Osiris. The western colonnade, moreover, is elevated and forms a portico with a row of papyrus columns behind the pillars. There are two side entrances into this court: the door located at the north end of the portico may have been another passage for offerings, while the south door gave access to a well from which, in Ramesses III's time, the pure water required for the temple services was drawn.

During the period of Coptic occupation, the Holy Church of Jēme was located in this court, and many details of the Pharaonic building were destroyed at this time. The Osiride pillars are the most conspicuous loss and only the bottom halves of the northernmost pair survive, perhaps because they were out of sight and did not scandalize the congregation. The graceful appearance of the masonry screens separating the portico from the court can similarly be gauged only from the examples preserved on the north and south ends. The central column of the north colonnade was dismantled to make room for the apse of the church, and almost parallel, in the southern half of the court, are the remains of a baptismal font. The reliefs, fortunately, were only blotted out by whitewash and are consequently well preserved, with their colors virtually intact.

The second court was the "festival hall" of the temple. This function is reflected in the decoration of the walls, and only the battle reliefs in the lower register of the south half (episodes from the first Libyan war and a long inscription on the campaigns of years five and eight) break up the overall theme. The Medinet Habu calendar, inscribed on the south exterior wall of the temple, names over sixty festival days in the year, most of them occurring on fixed dates in the Egyptian civil calendar, the rest being governed by the phases of the moon. On all of these occasions the king (or his representative) celebrated the feast, satisfying the gods in the name of the community so that Maᶜat, "right order," would continue to exist and that the natural order would not be disturbed and men might expect to enjoy the good life on both sides of the tomb. The dual triumph of the king and the god, a feature of so many Egyptian rituals, ensured the continuity of their reciprocal relationship and guaranteed the stability of their universe.

Some of these ideas are reflected in a general way on the lower register in the north half of the court. In the corner, on the east end of the north wall, the king stands between Horus and Seth (fig. 18): each god holds over the king's head a vase from which issue, not streams of water, but signs meaning "life" and "dominion," and they recite a spell:

> I have purified you with life, stability and dominion; your purification is the purification of Thoth [var. "Dewen-anwy"] and vice-versa.

These gods are the masters of the four corners of the universe and the king both absorbs magical power from these quarters and extends his watchful regard towards them. This rite, which enabled the king to participate in ritual as a god, was perhaps performed in a little room that was built in this corner after the second court

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had been completed, and the theme is carried over to the east wall. Here (fig. 19) we see the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt leading Ramesses III into the presence of the Theban Triad: Wadjyt and the Spirits of Nekhen (jackal-headed deities of Upper Egypt) march behind the king, while Nekhbet and the hawk-headed Spirits of Pe (for Lower Egypt) are in front. They are led by the jackal Wepwawet, the canonical "Opener of the Ways" for the Egyptian king, and Thoth, who announces to Amon-Rē that Ramesses III, in full possession of his powers, has come to see his father.

Back on the north wall, there are two scenes that may belong to this sequence: on the right, the king follows his own portable bark shrine to meet the barks of the Theban Triad which (despite the reversed orientation) are arriving in the temple. In his speech of greeting, Ramesses recalls his many benefactions and prays that the statues he has made may be able to "follow you every time you appear at each festival of yours every day." The nature of the occasion is uncertain: it could be the Feast of the Valley, the visit by the gods of Karnak to the mortuary temple of the reigning king, which took place in early March under Ramesses III. This was an important and popular feast, during which whole families would visit the tombs of their ancestors and enjoy a ritual banquet there; but it would be surprising to see it represented so meagerly in the festival hall of its principal cult center. An inscription on the ramp leading from the first into the second court speaks, moreover, of Amon-Rē, King of the Gods when "he treads and rests upon it [= the ramp] in his feast on the first day of the year" —and this was *not* the Feast of the Valley—so it seems likelier that the relief on the north wall refers to any one of Amon's several visits to the temple throughout the year. In the scene to the left, the visitors are feted at a ceremonial banquet: the king consecrates food offerings that

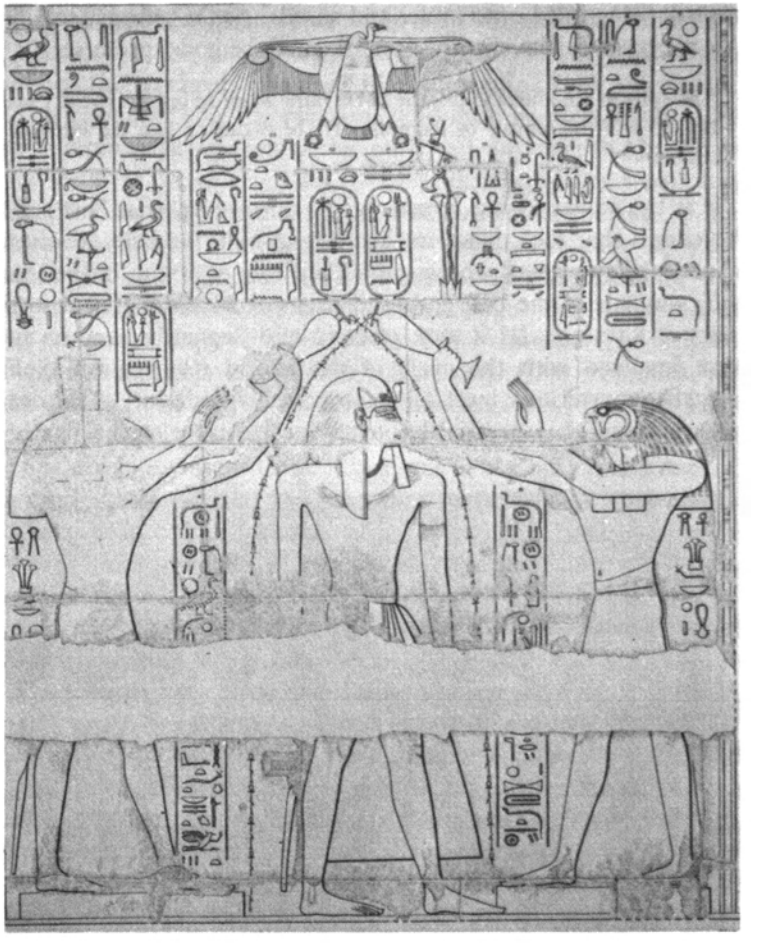

Fig. 18 *The "Baptism" of Pharaoh*

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are still being piled onto tables and stands. As the gifts are set afire, the smoke rises heavenward as a token of the gods' promise:

> So long as Rē journeys [in] the Solar Bark when he crosses the sky every day, so will the temple of Ramesses III be enduring like the horizon of heaven.

It is the scenes in the upper registers, however, that best reflect the rituals that took place in this festival hall, for here are shown episodes of two great processions. The Feast of Sokar, in the south half, was one of the best endowed feasts at Medinet Habu; in the reign of Ramesses III it took place in mid-September and its rites were involved with the cycle of death and resurrection. Sokar himself, a mysterious, inert deity associated with the city of the dead, may represent the unrealized potency for life in the earth: his realm is described by the *Book of What is in the Netherworld* as an opaque "egg" into which the sun's rays cannot penetrate, but which is activated by the sun's daily passage. Sokar was also associated at a very early date with Ptah and Osiris, and at Medinet Habu Ramesses III emphasized that his rites would be celebrated as they were done in Ptah's temple at Memphis.

Less easily understood in the context of a mortuary temple is the Feast of Min, whose procession is seen on the north side of the hall. Unlike the Sokar Feast, this was a relatively modest affair: the offerings set aside for it in the Calendar show that it was of middling importance and it was celebrated on one day only, as opposed to the ten days devoted to Sokar. Min, moreover, was not a "resident" of Medinet Habu: he may not even have had a shrine of his own in the temple, whereas the bark of Sokar was housed in Room 4,

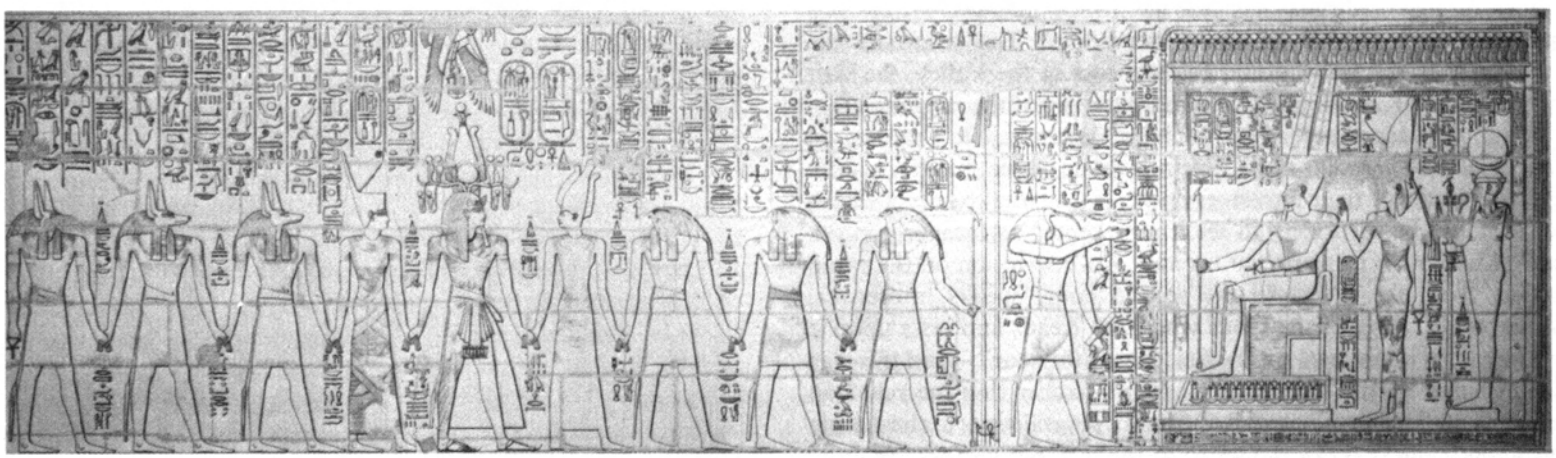

Fig. 19 *The Gods lead Ramesses III before the Theban Triad*

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off the first hypostyle hall. It could be that these festivals are shown, not because of their importance at Medinet Habu, but because they display significant, if contrasting, aspects of the being who was worshipped there. We will return to this question once the two feasts have been discussed in detail, beginning here with the festival of Sokar.

The reliefs at Medinet Habu concentrate on one climactic day of the Sokar Feast. But the Calendar, outside the temple, introduces the offering lists for each day with a brief descriptive heading, and with the aid of other sources we can reconstruct the progress of the entire festival. The first five days (not shown at Medinet Habu) involved the preparation of "Osiris Beds," wooden frames in the shape of the god which were lined with linen, filled with Nile silt and planted with grain. The opening day at Medinet Habu, called "Opening the Aperture in the Shetayet Shrine," perhaps consisted of uncovering the light-well in the roof, causing the grain to germinate. The Sokar Feast took place officially on the eve of the planting season, and this act of sympathetic magic not only illustrated the idea of resurrection embodied in the agricultural cycle, but ensured a good harvest in the coming year. Next came the "Day of Hoeing the Earth," partly an agricultural ritual, but given added meaning by Sokar's assimilation with Osiris: as a primordial ruler of Egypt, Osiris was believed to have been murdered by his brother Seth. According to the *Book of the Dead*, Osiris was subsequently vindicated before a divine tribunal and the earth was hoed with the blood of his enemies. The next three days, "Making Way in the Shetayet," "Placing Sokar in their Midst," and "Deification [?]" also seem to belong with Sokar's Osiride aspect, perhaps representing his embalming and entombment, and culminating with the infusion of new divine power into the dead god.

On the dawning of the sixth day came the "Day of the Festival of Sokar" proper. This, contrasting with the temple-bound ritual that preceded and followed it, was a popular holiday: the inhabitants of the workers' village at Deir al-Medina took the day off, as was probably true for everyone who lived in West Thebes. The reliefs begin at the west end of the south wall, moving east and around the corner for the closing rites. The first three episodes, which took place at dawn within the temple, are expanded versions of the normal morning ritual: a special "menu" was set out for the god's consumption, illustrated (1) by Ramesses III's presenting of a heaped platter before the hawk-headed Sokar-Osiris. Behind the god are two groups of deities, "the Great Ennead that is in the Shetayet," representing Sokar's companions from Memphis, and "the Ennead residing in the Great Mansion," i.e., Medinet Habu itself. The usual reversion of offerings took place next and aspects of this ceremony seem to be illustrated in the next two scenes. In the first (2) we see the king censing three of Sokar's Memphite associates: "Khnum Foremost of his Walls," "He who is upon his Bearers," and "Shesmu, Foremost of the Perwer Shrine," the god of the winepress. These gods are associated with Osiris either as fertility figures or as protectors, and as such may have been co-opted into Sokar's feast.

The scene is now transferred (3) to the chapel of the *Henu*-bark, Sokar's portable shrine, which was also occupied by the statue of the god that is shown here. The fully activated statue was now placed inside the bark shrine, which was installed on the archaic *Mefekh*-sledge. While this was being done, the king (or a priest representing him) recited the Litany of Sokar, invoking the god in all his manifestations, while "performing the Offering Which the King Gives [Ritual] and setting up braziers."

The public ceremonies could now begin. The bark of Sokar was borne out of the temple (4) on the shoulders of the priests (Fig. 20).

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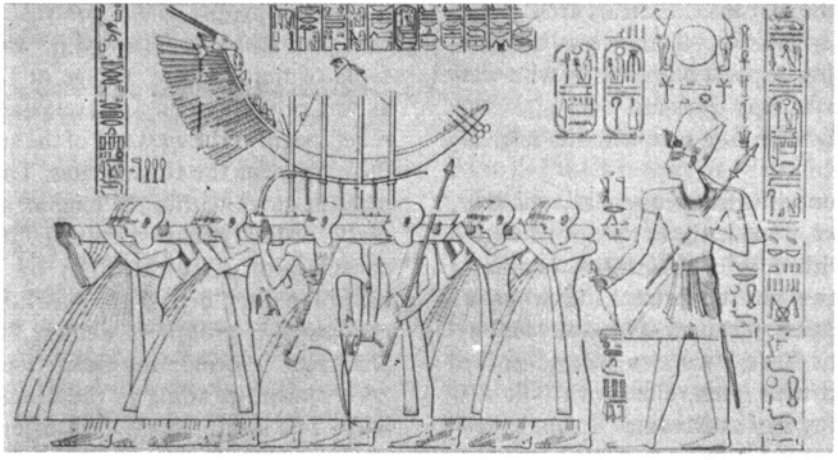

Fig. 20 *The King and the Bark of Sokar*

In their midst we can single out the Setem-priest, with his traditional leopard skin, and another official behind him who carries a pointed staff—possibly a promoter, who encouraged the participants to greater efforts, acting for the king (who follows the bark and carries a similar staff). The ritual, called "Dragging Ptah-Sokar-Osiris (and) Going Around the Walls by the King Himself," is very old: "Walls" is an abbreviation of "White Walls," the ancient name of Memphis, and in the archaic rituals Sokar would have been dragged around the city on his sledge. Here he is carried aloft like any other god and the "walls" he circumambulates are those of Medinet Habu, although it is unclear whether the inner or outer walls are meant.

The following episodes show other facets of the same procession: we next see the king (5) grasping the end of a rope which is pulled by officials, royal children, and priests; it should be attached to the *Henu*-bark, for these officials had the high honor of "dragging Sokar" on his festival day, but the bark is omitted here, perhaps because it had already been illustrated in the preceding scene. The official who leads the way reads from a scroll in his hands a litany that urges Sokar-Osiris to assert himself ("Come, do suppress the rebel [= Seth]; come, do instruct the child [= Horus?]") and grant the usual benefits to his earthly sponsor, Ramesses III. Further along we see priests carrying the standard of Nefertem (Fig. 21) in procession. This standard is a long pole capped by an

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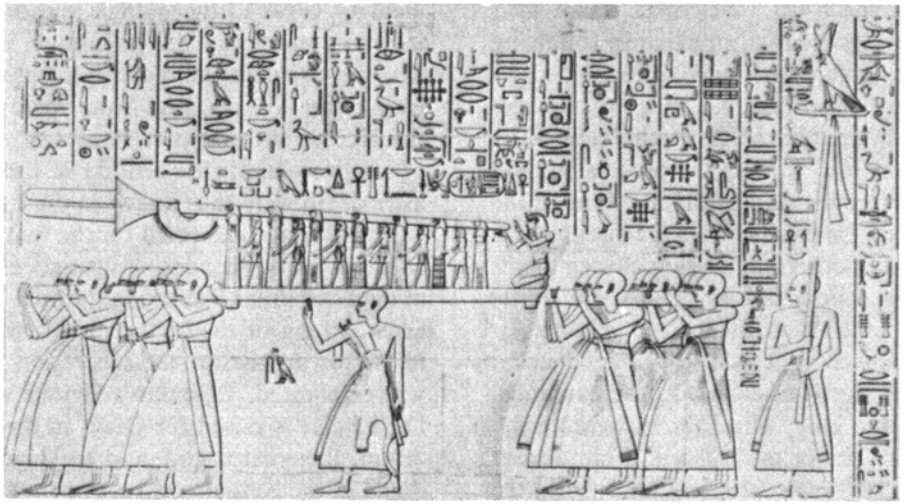

Fig. 21 *The Standard of Nefertem*

open lotus blossom from which two plumes project; on this occasion, also, it "wears" a broad collar and is secured to its carrying poles by an ornamental sling decorated with alternating figures of kings and gods. Both Sokar and Nefertem originated in Memphis, but they meet on a deeper level as well: Nefertem as a lotus flower symbolizes renewal in the theology of the sun god Rē, and thus he may appear as the realization of life that is only latent in Sokar himself. This relationship is made more probable by an exhortation uttered by a priest shown on the east wall (see fig. 21), who bears a smaller Nefertem emblem and calls out, "Around, around, like Rē!" thus associating Sokar's progress with the sun's daily path across the sky and through the underworld. A blending with another strain of myth is seen also through the priest who stands behind Nefertem's standard and bears aloft a smaller standard of "Horus Upon his Papyrus Stalk," a falcon wearing the double crown of Egypt. This god could thus represent the king, who is led to the road of his father (Sokar-Osiris) by Nefertem, or a deity who simply brings order out of chaos—like Nefertem himself, who is here referred to as "Horus, the Acclaimed One (?)," victor over the forces of evil.

The final scene (6), around the corner on the east wall, represents the closing episode of the march. The tone throughout is jubilant: the chant of the priests who purify the god's way with incense and libations and clap their hands, beginning "Open are the doors of

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heaven, so that the god may come forth," welcomes Sokar as a manifestation of the Nile who brings plenty. Immediately following are the barks of five Memphite goddesses, each accompanied by its own small Nefertem standard, who play assisting roles in the triumph of Ma^{c}at in both Osirian and solar mythologies. The festival leader is seen in the lower row, leading the procession, and other priests are seen bowing before his staff of office. Many of the participants are carrying victuals to be sacrificed when Sokar returns to the temple (upper row, right), but others (left) bear cultic emblems — standards of the gods "who follow Sokar," clubs, and other things. (Is a small child's figure in the lower row the young Horus?)

A shorter procession on the lower right side features the jackal god, Wepwawet, with Khonsu, Horus and Thoth, the canonical "Openers of the Ways" before the king, who follows wearing the double crown of a united Egypt. The priest in front of him censes the double uraeus-serpent on his brow—representing both the double crown and the two goddesses, Isis and Nephthys, who protect the king as the embodiment of Horus. The hymn inscribed on the wall, a "praising of Wepwawet by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt," is actually addressed to Horus by the king: as Horus has triumphed over the forces of evil, so is the king established as the rightful overlord of gods and men, a theme taken up by the song chanted by the king's attendants:

> He follows Sokar, he drives off the rebel and has overthrown the foes of his father so that he [Sokar-Osiris] gives the reward to his son whom he loves, consisting of millions and myriads of years forever.

Here again the king stands at the crossroads of the ceremony as the living symbol of abiding divine favor in the community.

Sokar's circuit around the walls, then, was a feast of renewal and reaffirmation: it re-emphasized the king's role as the intermediary between the human and divine orders, and it confirmed for the community the latency of life within the earth at a particularly pregnant moment in the agricultural year. We know also, from other sources, that Sokar paid a visit to a funerary shrine in the Necropolis and that statues of deceased persons formed part of his procession: the fertility of the earth and the promise of life after death were thus linked in the rites of this festival.

The closing rites (held on the tenth day, and thus not shown at Medinet Habu) consisted, fittingly enough, of the ritual "Erection of the Djed Pillar," marking the final burial of Osiris and his appearance as king of the Netherworld; while on the next day, the first in the sowing season, the succession of Horus to the earthly throne was celebrated. Egyptian religious texts assure us that when the Djed Pillar is raised for Osiris in the Temple of Sokar, Rē rises as Atum, the creator god, and he shines down on Sokar even as the doors of the Netherworld are opened: the rightful order of things—kingship and the harmony of nature—will endure (*djed*) for another year.

The Feast of Min occupies the corresponding position on the walls in the northern half of the court. It was celebrated on one day only, and its arrival was tied to the first day of the lunar month which began the harvest season. When the Calendar was inscribed at Medinet Habu this date fell in mid-February, for the Egyptian year of 365 days was shorter than the astronomical year by one-quarter of a day and thus "lost" a day every four years. The three seasons of the civil calendar, named "Inundation," "Seed," and "Harvest" respectively, thus became purely formal terms that had lost their original connection with the agricultural cycle. The discrepancy did not unduly disturb the Egyptians, however, for merely ritual correctness would set in motion the sympathetic magic which they hoped this feast would generate. Charting the Min Feast's

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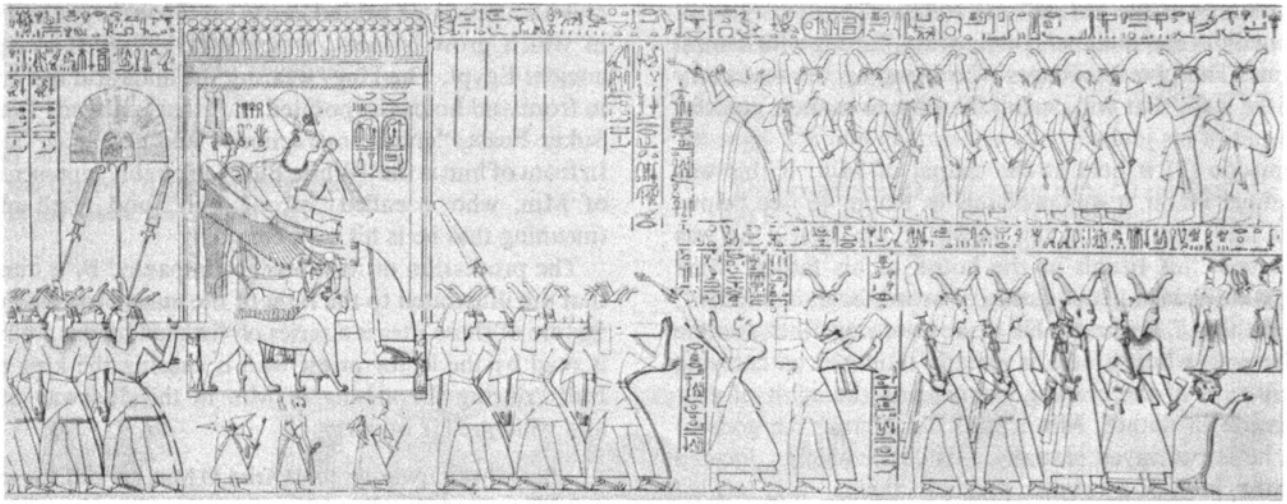

Fig. 22 *The King leaves the Palace for the Min Feast*

course is fairly easy, largely because a "program text" inscribed above the scenes outlines the progress of the ritual. The reliefs offer different and sometimes contradictory details, but we can nonetheless get a good idea of what went on from both sources.

The series begins on the west end of the north wall where, at the extreme left, we see the walls of the palace which the cortege (1) has just left. At its center is the king: he is crowned with the Blue Crown and seated on a portable lion throne (fig. 22), enfolded in the wings of two protecting goddesses of Ma'at (harmony). The guard of honor that carries this palanquin is composed of high officials and royal children, led by the "eldest (king's son)," and the procession is led by musicians—drummer, trumpeter, flautist, and sistrum player, along with two priests whose clapping beats out the rhythm—followed by the "royal acquaintances: the followers of his Majesty, the king's children, the great officials and all office holders," many of them "equipped with shields, spears, swords, and all (sorts of) weapons suitable for escort duty." Curiously, although spaces for the names of the king's children have been provided, these were never filled. Behind this first group is the chief lector priest, "performing his rituals in front of his Majesty," and two priests who face backwards towards the king and "perform a censing in front of his Majesty during the royal appearance on the carrying chair on the way to the house of his father, Min." Behind the king is another hierarchy of officials: the "chamber-

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lains and cupbearers of the palace" are followed by two rows of "officials: councillors and members of the army," along with several other royal sons. The two attendants who bring up the rear carry what must be the steps that will permit the king to make a graceful descent at the end of his journey.

The next episode (2) is held at the chapel of Min: if this was located at Medinet Habu, it was probably in Room 46 (see below, p. 65). At this time the chief lector priest, or the king if he was present, performed "his rituals in the house of his father, Min: a great sacrificial offering . . . consisting of bread, beer, oxen, fowl, and every good thing." Ramesses III is shown doing all this in the presence of the god, whose statue is already mounted on carrying poles in anticipation of the coming journey. As the spirit of exuberant procreation in nature, Min stands out among the gods of Egypt in that he is portrayed sexually. His cult emblems, located behind the statue, include a tubular "Nubian shrine" that has led some scholars to speculate whether Min may not have been of foreign extraction. The Libyan-style feathers worn by the members of the procession discussed above may also point in the same direction. But Min's cult in Egypt can be traced back to the very dawn of civilization there, so these foreign elements have been explained as reflecting his position as lord of the desert, and particularly of the roads from the Red Sea that entered the Nile Valley near Min's home at Coptos. This territory was not always effectively controlled by Egyptian rulers, and Min may have absorbed certain features from the nomadic peoples who lived there.

The festival procession that follows (3) was apparently the high point of the celebration, for it is often shown on temple walls in isolation from other events in the feast. Min's statue is borne aloft (fig. 23), not enclosed in a shrine but in full view of everyone. His carrying poles are draped with a red cloth worked with metal studs and his attendants behind carry, on top, a screen and below, a chest in which grow lettuces, which were regarded as aphrodisiacs in ancient Egypt. The king, wearing the ancestral red crown, marches in front and holds the pointed staff that is already familiar from the Sokar Feast, "giving instructions" and acting as "festival leader." In front of him is the "White Bull," probably representing one aspect of Min, who is called "strong bull" and "bull of his mother" (meaning that he is his own creator).

The procession of Min was accompanied by a number of rituals that are illustrated to the right of the main procession. A distinctive feature of these rites is a series of "mimed hymns," the first of which is read by the lector priest who is censing the king and the White Bull "during the arising of Min in the doorway of the temple," and which reads in part:

> Be exalted, O Min, my lord! Arise, O Min, my lord, for you are vindicated in the presence of Rē-Atum!

The second mimed hymn begins immediately to the right of this figure: a cloaked priest, identified as the "overseer of singers," ushers in a procession of the familiar "Followers of Horus," other divine standards and priests carrying ritual implements. Above the overseer is the chief lector priest, while behind him stands Ramesses III's queen, who plays an unspecified part in the ritual. As with the royal children, her name was never inscribed on the wall, although a cartouche was carved to receive it. In this ritual the chief lector priest and the overseer of singers jointly perform a very ancient mimed hymn in honor of the god. The only complete copy in existence is at Medinet Habu, and both the archaic language and probable corruption of the text make it extremely difficult to understand. In the main, it seems to be a celebration of Min's irresistible potency, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

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O she who raises up the land,
The place of the Great Bull [*repeat*]
She is the one whom the Great Bull impregnates.
. . . .
I am Min, standing on the desert
After he has seized all lands.
He makes you tremble [?], the outgoing strider,
The youth of the desert, the one of Coptos!
. . . .
Behold me!
As for the Great Bull [*repeat*]
The Great One penetrates into her.

A third hymn (not a pantomime) is performed by a "Nubian of Punt" who stands above the procession of priests, to the right of the text for the hymn previously discussed. The short hymn that he recites praises another manifestation of Min, perhaps one with strongly Nubian characteristics:

> You are beloved, O Min, whose parts (?) are black! Hail to you, O Min, Lord of Akhmīm, made of true lapis lazuli! How mighty is your face when you are a bull coming down from the desert ranges.

Punt, which we now believe to be the seacoast and hinterlands of the eastern Sudan, was often visited in antiquity by Egyptian trading

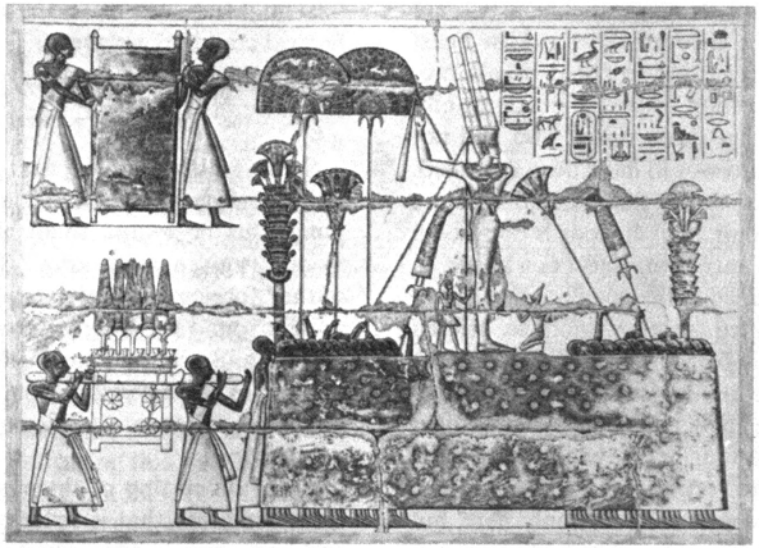

Fig. 23 *Min on his Carrying Poles*

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missions, and it is possible that exotic practices from abroad were imported into Egypt along with the more tangible cargoes that traveled along the desert roads into the god's district.

At the very front of the procession, marching before "the gods who are escorting this god [i.e., Min]," we see two rows of priests carrying small statues: these are the royal ancestors, the statues of "the kings, hereditary sovereigns and honored ones who are in his escort." There is reason to believe that all the kings who formed part of Egypt's historical tradition took part in this ceremony, but only the more recent monarchs are shown here, and it is an officially censored group at that. No Pharaohs of whom the Twentieth Dynasty disapproved—Hatshepsut, the Amarna Pharaohs, and three "usurpers" from the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty—are shown here. The participation of the ancestors in the Min Feast perhaps implies that the king was regarded in these rituals pre-eminently as a member of the corporation of sovereigns, past and present. If so, it is understandable that those rulers who had not "lived by Maᶜat" in the official record would have been excluded.

The procession described above led to the first solemn moment of the feast, the raising of Min to the dais. This episode is not shown at Medinet Habu—perhaps it was a sacred mystery, not meant to be seen at all—but the rites are described in the program text above the scenes. These ceremonies included another sacrifice offered by the king, "while the White Bull is in front of his Majesty, and the kings, hereditary sovereigns and honored ones are in the two dynastic shrines on the right and on the left." Scene 4 at Medinet Habu shows instead the releasing of four doves which, according to the program text, took place at the very end of the festival. The contradictory arrangement of the scenes occurs not only here, but at the Ramesseum, where a fragmentary copy of the Min Feast is preserved. These earlier scenes were copied almost exactly by artists of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu, and since we have reason to believe that the Ramesseum artists deliberately rearranged the episodes of the feast, we will discuss scene 4 later. Immediately to the right, however, is the figure of a lector priest reciting the "Pantomime of Min who resides in the Garden," which was probably performed after Min had been enthroned on the dais. The accompanying hymn is addressed to the composite deity, Min-Rē, and invokes the god:

> Hail to you, O Min, who fecundates his mother!. . . . You have come forth from the very great door, you stand upon the dais of Maᶜat and you give commands together with your father, Osiris, from time to time.

With Min's ascent to the dais, the most important rite of the festival could take place:

> Now comes the attendant-[priest]; he brings black copper chased with gold—the sickle—and a sheaf of emmer, which are given to the king.

Scene 5 illustrates the next step (fig. 24): "Now the king cuts it [= the emmer] with the sickle in his hand, it [= the emmer] being put to his nose [and then] placed before Min"; finally, "a wisp from it is given to the king." The queen, seen above, takes the part of the "foreign woman" who "pronounces words seven times while going around the king"—presumably while the central ritual was going on. Since the Feast of Min was theoretically held at the beginning of the harvest season, this symbolic cutting of a ripe sheaf may have been an act of sympathetic magic designed to ensure a good crop.

With the cutting of the emmer, also, Min himself underwent a transformation that is reflected in the pantomime of the "foreleg-and-horn-man." This ritual, again, is not seen in the reliefs at Medinet Habu, although the text of the hymn is inscribed on the

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wall along with a list of the functionaries who took part—royal acquaintances, priests of Horus and Seth, fly-priests, "fathers" and priests of Min, pantomime dancers of Min and, notably, butchers, who "acclaim the White Crown [and] acclaim the Red Crown" with a chorus of praise:

> Verily, Min has gone down to the dais. He has brought to us the pantomimes that issue from the mouth of his mother, Isis. . . . To us has Min come, strong and powerful! Min is vindicated against his enemies [and] the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ramesses III, is vindicated against his enemies!

The protagonist in this rite, along with the "butchers" who are listed in attendance, may have sacrificed the White Bull at this time, although the evidence is not explicit on this point.

The most important result of these ceremonies, a change in the god's aspect, now becomes apparent. Earlier, in the "Pantomime of Min who resides in the Garden," the god had been associated with Osiris and issued commands with him, presumably from the underworld. At that stage, Min had just mounted on the dais; he was powerful but, like Osiris, remote. Now, Min is identified with Horus, the immanent living god who inherited Osiris' earthly kingdom. The idea of Min as being dead like Osiris seems to us a contradiction in terms, but with the cutting of the grain he seems to have acquired a still more active life. Perhaps this is what is meant by the ancient sources when they refer to this festival as "the Birth of Min."

For the final episode of the festival we must go back to scene 4, to the left of the grain-cutting ritual. Following this rite, according to the program text, "the king goes forth from the dais, his face to the north, while going around the dais." This action is not shown, but in scene 4 the king faces left with his back to where the dais ought to be, and in his hand, along with his staff, are the whisps of grain

Fig. 24 *The King cuts the Grain*

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which he had been given only after the emmer had been cut and presented to Min (this detail is clearer in the Ramesseum, where the drawing is less schematic than at Medinet Habu). In both versions, however, is a detail that suggests why the scenes were rearranged on the wall. To the right of the priest who holds the sheaf in scene 5, another priest faces away, towards the dais. He is holding the freshly cut grain, and the words above his head tell us that he is "laying the emmer on the ground in the presence of this god." Had the scenes been carved in their proper order, we should see (a) a figure of Min on the dais, receiving the grain (presumably following the procession of ancestral statues and the White Bull, to the right of the priest); (b) the present scene 4, and (c) the present scene 6. The available space allowed no room for all of this, however, so something had to be sacrificed. It made no sense just to omit (a) from the linear arrangement of scenes, for in that case the priest with the cut grain would face, not Min, but the figure of the king in (b). Ritual requirements were evidently better served by transposing (b) to its present position and having the priest face Min as represented in (c), at the very end of the wall—in that way, (a) could be left out with no loss of sense, for the priest would still be "laying the emmer on the ground in the presence of this god" as he appeared in scene 6. The loss of continuity was apparently of lesser importance, especially since the program text kept the rites in their proper order. This solution, adopted for the Ramesseum, was transferred to Medinet Habu when Ramesses III's artists copied the earlier scenes for their master's mortuary temple.

After the king has gone around the dais,

> two priests are made to advance, bearing the Spirits of the East which are established in front of this god, their [= the priests'] faces [turned] back. Now the two tails are in the two priests' hands—the "Drunkards" they are called.

This is precisely what we see in scene 4: two figures, the "Earth-dweller of Min" (top) and a "priest" (bottom), are bent in front of two plumed standards, bulls' tails in their hands, their faces turned backwards. The Spirits of the East, mentioned several times in the program text and in the mimed hymns, attend Min by virtue of his association with the sun god. We have already seen him referred to as "Min-Rē," and his appearance in the temple doorway was expressed by a word that normally describes the sunrise. Min's renewal is thus infused with appropriate symbols from other myths: he is seen as Horus, heir of Osiris, and as the rising sun in the east.

After the two priests have performed this ritual,

> the king liberates the group of four geese (fig. 25)[while] the lector priest utters the words: "O Imsety (Hapy, Duamutef, Kebehsenuef), go to the south (north, west, east) and tell the gods of the south (north, west, east) that Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, has taken unto himself the double crown, that the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ramesses III, has taken unto himself the double crown."

(The earlier version at the Ramesseum shows these birds as geese; at Medinet Habu, somehow, they have been rendered as doves.) Min's enthronement on the dais is now balanced (and to some extent identified with) ceremonies that recall the king's coronation, and these rites are also part of his "reward" from the god: now that Min's rituals have been performed, the sons of Horus are dispatched to the four corners of the horizon to confirm that the living Horus, Ramesses III, is (still) in possession of his throne, that the order of Maᶜat prevails in the cosmos and in society. After this, the king returns with the god to his chapel and presents the usual evening sacrifice (6) to bring the festival to its appointed end.

Such, then, are the festal processions shown in the second court at Medinet Habu—but the question remains, why these two?

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The Sokar Feast would be a logical choice, for both its content and importance in the ecclesiastical year, but the same could not be said for the relatively modest rites of Min. Barring caprice, the answer must be that Sokar and Min together invoke concepts that operated in the royal mortuary temple. Min, the potent primeval deity who creates himself, and Sokar, the inert god in whom resides the potency for life—both can be seen as aspects of that complex being, the king of Egypt. On one level, it is true, the king was a divine being, with all the attributes of a god. On another, however, his mortality was an acknowledged fact: the Egyptian word we conventionally translate as "Majesty" really means "body," and when Egyptians referred to the king in this way they were alluding to the divine substance poured into a human mould. The idea of the ruler as "kingship" personified, an entity that never dies, could thus be contrasted with the mortal ruler who arose as Horus and was buried, as Osiris, in the Valley of the Kings. This duality, in fact, seems to be expressed in the very layout of the "Mansion": the palace of the living king, the Sokar Feast and (further inside) the Osiris suite on the south side; the Min Feast, the suites of the sun god, Rē, and of the Ennead (the gods of primeval time) on the north. This arrangement is hardly fortuitous, and although we can see this principle operating in earlier mortuary temples at Thebes, it is at Medinet Habu, the best preserved of them all, that we can see it most clearly in the overall plan.

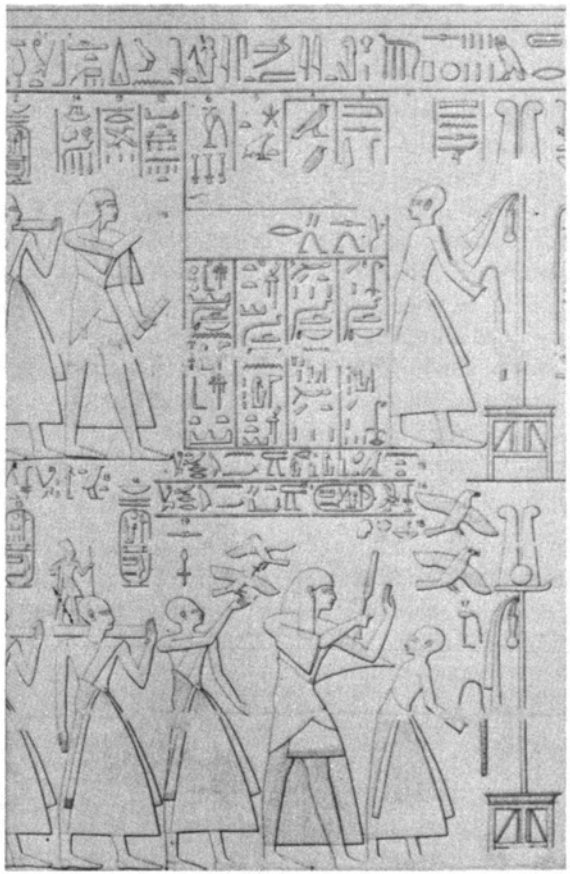

Fig. 25 *The Releasing of the Birds*

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THE PORTICO

The portico, although structurally part of the second court, is really a space unto itself. Beyond it lies the cult area of the temple proper, and both the end walls and the west face are mostly occupied by ritualistic scenes—the king offering flowers, cloth, incense etc., or performing ceremonies before various gods. Throughout these scenes the king faces into the temple, towards the gods' shrines, and in many cases his actions crystallize the rites to be held there.

Adjoining the central doorway are balancing tableaux that recall episodes of the king's coronation. On the north side the king is purified by Horus and Thoth (middle register), and he is presented with kingship by Atum and his companion deities. The goddess Seshat stands before the king and, suiting the action to her words, tells him that

> I am inscribing for you jubilees in myriads and years like the sands of the sandbank. I am establishing your records in your august mansion eternally, and I am granting that your titulary be established forever as Rē rises every day.

On the south side, Ramesses is led into the gods' presence by Montu and Atum and, as he is granted jubilees by the Theban Triad, Thoth writes for him:

> I am granting that your mansion be like heaven with the sun's disk, your name being enduring on it.

Similar scenes are carved in back of these reliefs on the east wall of the first hypostyle hall. We are not sure what ritual purpose was served thereby, but the "mirror image" effect must have been deliberate.

The same arrangement is also found on the doorway proper, where on both sides the king issues a warning to all who enter (or leave) the temple: "Be pure, be pure!" The figure on the portico side was especially elaborate: the exposed parts of the body were inlaid with red faïence, the crown was blue, and the rest of the body was brightly painted on gesso, while below there are seen drill holes that must have held metal sheathing in place.

It is also on the west wall of the portico, on the register below the scenes discussed above, that we find the famed Medinet Habu procession of princes. This is actually somewhat of a misnomer, for on the south side a few of the king's daughters are shown as well, but these are generally left out of the discussion because neither their names nor their titles were inscribed. The interpretation of these figures involves a scholarly debate that may never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, so the following discussion necessarily reflects this writer's own views on what is likely.

The figures in each of the processions are marching into the temple and face one another from across the central doorway. When they were carved during Ramesses III's reign, each one was shown adoring a large, deeply cut cartouche (containing the king's name) that occupies the space between each of the figures. The first three princes were plainly the most important, for their flowing robes contrast with the simpler costume worn by the remaining figures. It seems, however, that the princes received neither names nor titles during Ramesses III's lifetime, like the princes and the queen in the Min Feast, who are similarly anonymous. Scholars have proposed a number of explanations for this anomaly—that Ramesses III did not have a family of suitable lineage while the

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temple was being built, or that the king's workmen copied the Ramesseum version of the scenes literally, leaving blank only the spaces where the names of Ramesses II's family had occurred. In either case, though, it is hard to understand why Ramesses III did not eventually insert the names of his family into these obvious stretches of emptiness.

At a later date, ten princes on either side were supplied with matching names and titles (i.e., the first figure on the north is the same person as the corresponding figure in the southern file, and so on). Scholars are still not certain how to assign responsibility for these additions, but it does seem clear that a number of Ramesses III's successors felt they had to associate themselves (rightly or wrongly) with this king's family. The last seven princes on each side, for instance, have names and titles that are mostly identical with those borne by known sons of Ramesses III, so they can be said to provide an environment for the more important figures that precede them. These three princes, set off by Ramesses III from his other sons, also received special treatment in their subsequent history: unlike the other princes, they bear composite titles—first their functions as king's sons, followed by cartouches with the names each of them took when he ascended the throne—and the kingly uraeus has been added to each of their brows.

The identity of at least one of these figures, and the relationship of them all to Ramesses III's family, is still an open question. With the second and third there is no problem: they were both inscribed for Ramesses VI, and the king here makes use of princely titles that

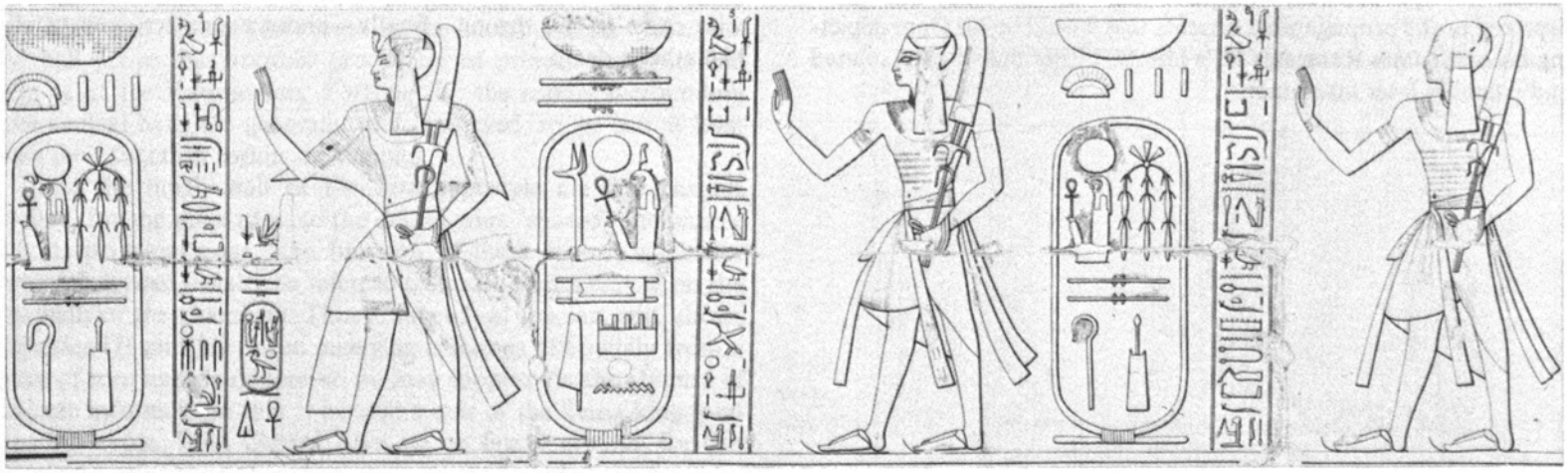

Fig. 26 *Procession of Princes*

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belonged to a son of Ramesses III called Amenherkhepeshef. Both Ramesses VI and this prince shared the same personal name, but it is not certain that they were one and the same person. More puzzling is the first figure, who is called "King Ramesses" but is given the titles once held by a Crown Prince Ramesses who apparently predeceased his father. The real question is whether the additional texts in the procession were inserted at one time or at several, and this last position would be maintained by the scholars who argue that "King Ramesses" was none other than Ramesses IV, the immediate successor of Ramesses III. This king might have wished to hide his late arrival into the line of succession by claiming, at least in the official record, titles held by an earlier crown prince, but to assume that he did so at Medinet Habu involves postulating that only one prince's figure—the first—was inscribed at this time. If, moreover, this is what happened, Ramesses IV would have been deprived of the propagandist benefits that would be his from depicting himself *within* Ramesses III's family, rather than as an isolated and palpably later interloper.

Since the three *premier* princes are all decorated in the same style, and since Ramesses VI appropriated, rather unusually, two figures instead of one, it is tempting to explain this behavior in terms of the most efficient use of available space: that is, three main prince's figures were uninscribed, and Ramesses VI allotted one to his father, Prince and now, posthumously, "King" Ramesses (even though he had never reigned), while retaining the other two figures for himself and adding texts to seven other princes in the procession.

Even later, this retrospective list of Ramesses III's sons was invaded by yet another claimant, when Ramesses VIII converted the fourth prince's figure into that of a king (fig. 26). Unfortunately, the guidelines had already been filled with prince's titles by Ramesses VI, so his successor had to squeeze his royal cartouches between the earlier texts and figures as best he could. It is possible that in Ramesses VIII we may have one of Ramesses III's younger sons who came to the throne—finally—about a quarter century after his father's death.

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THE HYPOSTYLE HALLS

Once past the portico we are in the temple proper, where the resident gods and goddesses had their shrines. Access to this section was rigorously controlled in ancient times, and on both sides of the doorway (inside the hall and out) are figures of Ramesses III and his anonymous queen (fig. 27) warning all who enter to "be pure, be pure." The separation of this area from the temple courts would have been emphasized by the near darkness that engulfed the visitor, for the only light came from small holes in the ceilings or (in the hypostyle halls) from clerestory windows. Over centuries of neglect, however, the back rooms of the temple were used as a quarry, and little beyond the column bases is preserved in the two hypostyle halls, although rows of feet carved on the back (= west) wall of the first hall prove that another procession of princes was inscribed here, as at the Ramesseum. Fortunately, the rooms surrounding these central halls are generally well preserved, so we can at least guess their function within the temple.

Along the north wall of the first hypostyle are five chapels devoted, for the most part, to the deities who "shared" the temple with its principal gods. The function of these rooms, while not always clear, can usually be inferred from the scenes carved on the side walls of the chambers. Thus Chapel 1, at the east end, shows Ramesses III and his queen receiving offerings alternately from a group of sons and daughters, so we may suppose (in the absence of concrete information) that it housed a cult of the living king, perhaps his statue. With Chapel 2 we are on firmer ground, for this was plainly the abode of Ptah: a scene on the reveal of the doorway depicts the king offering Ma^{c}at to "Ptah who resides in the Temple

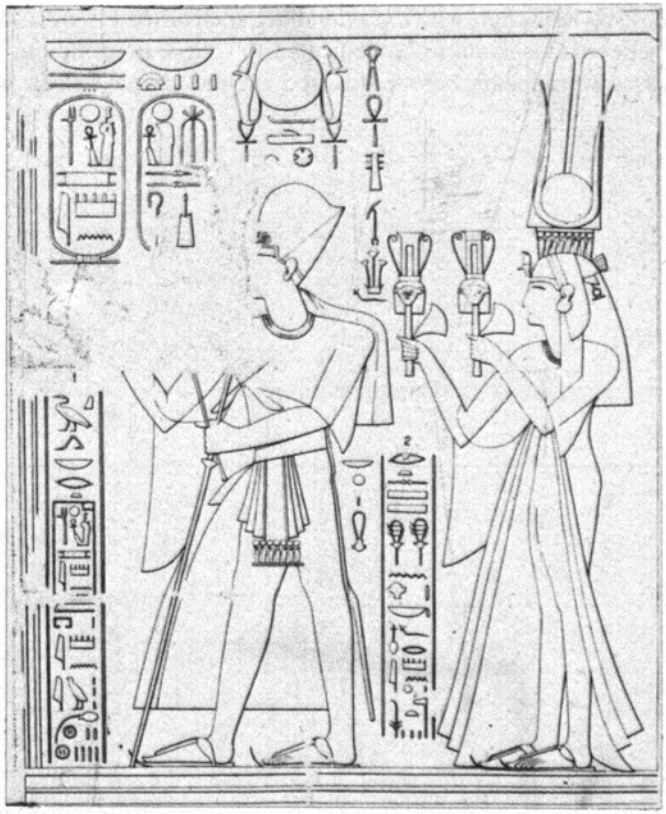

Fig. 27 *Ramesses III and his Queen*

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of King Ramesses III," while inside he offers oblations to other figures of this god and his associates, including Amon "residing in Memphis."

The occupants of the next chapel (no. 3) are, again, not clearly stated. Uvo Hölscher, who excavated the site for the Oriental Institute, believed this room to be dedicated to Osiris, pointing out that Ramesses III appears before this god on the chapel's back wall. But Osiris has an entire suite to himself (see below), while on the side walls we see an assortment of cult standards—those of Thoth and the Upper Egyptian Wepwawet on the left wall (fig. 28), with Harsiēse, Isis, and the Lower Egyptian Wepwawet on the right. In view of their importance as associates of the major gods in public rituals, it seems likely that these sacred implements were kept in this room, alongside the images of other subsidiary gods in the adjoining

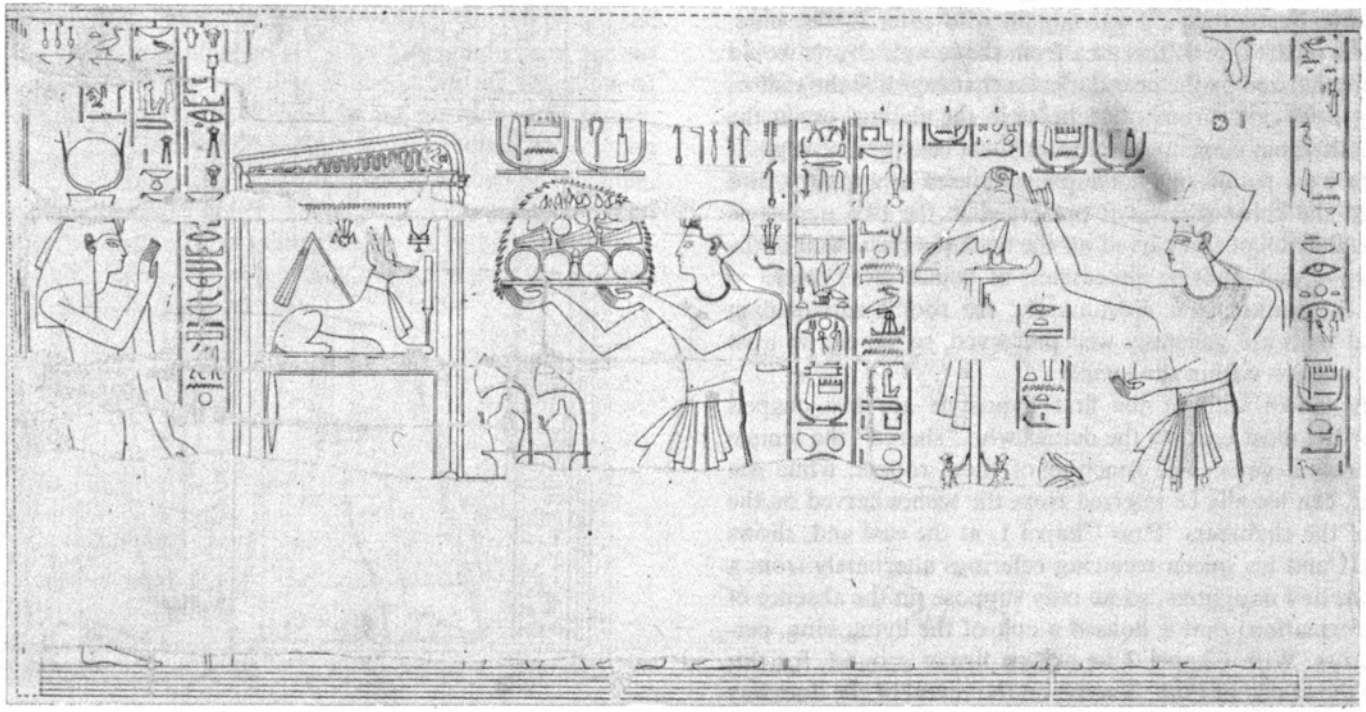

Fig. 28 *King with Divine Standards*

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chapels. Chapel 4, the largest of this group, now houses a headless alabaster statue of Ptah that seems originally to have been made under Amenhotep III. The extra-wide entrance reveals it to have been meant for a sacred bark, and the archaic *Henu*-bark of Sokar is depicted on the west wall of this room. The hidden opening ceremonies of the Sokar Feast were thus celebrated in this chamber, and it was from here that the bark was borne in the annual procession around the walls.

The next "chapel" is quite different from the others, for it consists of two rooms (the outer being partly open to the sky) and belongs to no specific deity. Most of the reliefs here depict Ramesses III presenting offerings of meat to the gods, and on the lower register of the room's east wall (fig. 29), prominently displayed, are scenes of butchering: garlanded bulls are led in (bottom) to be slaughtered, then cut up (middle) and immediately carried into the temple (top). This suite is thus called the temple "slaughterhouse," although the suite's layout makes it very unlikely that it was a functional unit: the small size of the first chamber speaks against it, as does the absence of any drains such as are found in actual slaughterhouses (e.g., in Sety I's temple at Abydos). The butcher's relief may well express the room's purpose on a magical plane, ensuring that the sacrifices would continue to be made throughout eternity. No doubt the real butchering took place elsewhere in the temple compound, although some of the cooking could have been done in the first room of the slaughterhouse, where the open roof would allow smoke to escape.

The last of the chapels on the north side of the first hypostyle is oriented from east to west. The width of the doorway, again,

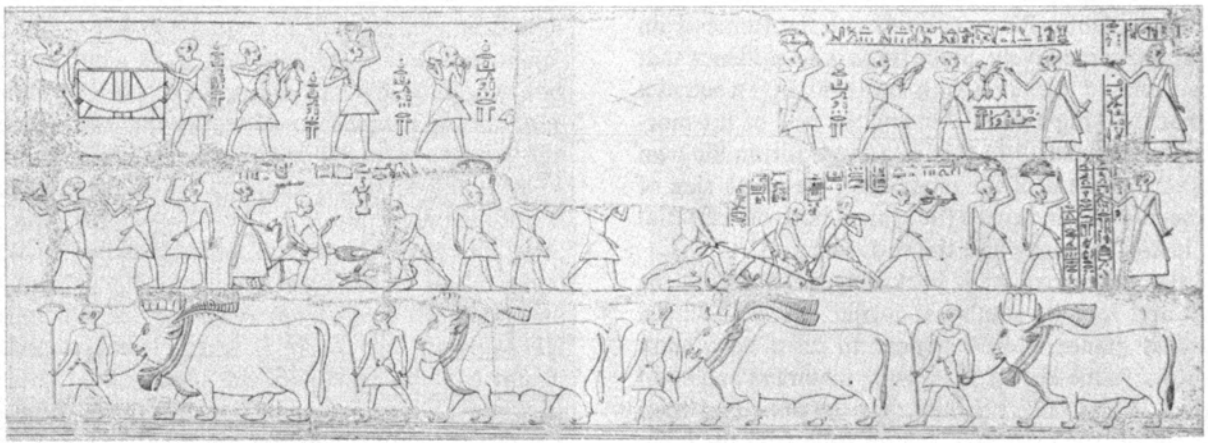

Fig. 29 *Slaughterhouse Scene*

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shows that it was a bark room, and it too consists of two chambers, although the small room in back, under the stairs leading to the roof (see below), could hardly have been more than a closet. On the north wall we see Ramesses III before "Amon-Rē, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, who resides in the Temple of King Ramesses III," while the marginal text below reports that "he [the king] made it as a monument for his father, Amon-Rē residing in United-with-Eternity, making for him a noble bark room in the Temple of King Ramesses III." This chapel, then, must have belonged to this form of Amon who was pre-eminently worshipped in this temple—but was he the chapel's only occupant? In the course of his work in the Theban temples, Harold H. Nelson, first field director of the Epigraphic Survey, pointed out that the bark shrine of the living king played a prominent role in the yearly festivals and other rites of the temple. The occupant of this bark is stated to be the king's statue in most cases, but in two exceptional examples the voice issuing from the cabin belongs to the Amon-Rē associated with the Ramesseum and with Medinet Habu respectively. Since there is no evidence that the king's statue ever shared the cabin with another deity, it seems a logical inference that the king himself *became* the god of his mortuary temple, and was referred to in this way even during his own lifetime. If so, the arrangement of the chapels on the north side of the first hypostyle begins and ends with the king in both his essential forms—the living historical entity and the enduring god.

From Chapel 7 the visitor can walk back diagonally across the first hypostyle hall and into its southeast corner. Here we find a doorway that, at first glance, would appear to have been sunk into a relief that shows Ramesses III presenting prisoners and spoil to the Theban Triad. It was once believed that the door had been enlarged so that it cut off the prisoners' figures following the king, but a closer examination by the Egyptologists of the Epigraphic

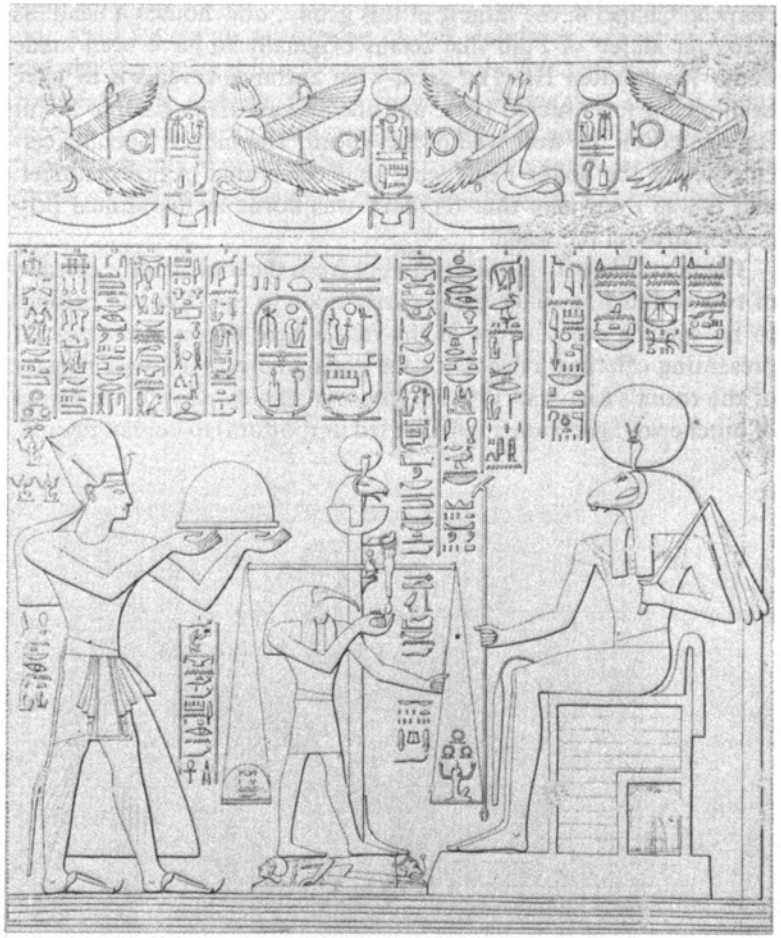

Fig. 30 *Weighing Gold inside the Treasury*

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Survey has shown that the original design is what is seen today. Since, moreover, this is the only entrance to the suite of rooms behind the doorway, it seems likelier that the missing part of the relief was carved onto a doorleaf (perhaps a wooden panel) which, once closed, concealed the entrance from the passer-by.

There was a good reason for this subterfuge, for behind the façade was the temple treasury, where cult objects of precious metal were kept and from which they would be taken only at the most solemn feasts of the year. The central vestibule of this suite is dominated by a scene on the back wall, facing the doorway, in which Thoth, the scribe of the gods, weighs the gold that the king has given to Amon-Rē (fig. 30). The objects themselves were kept in four side rooms, two of which (nos. 12–13) are equipped with low stone benches running around the walls, as if to hold items that might be accidentally damaged if left on the floor.

The king's role as the donor of precious materials to the temple is consistently stressed in the decoration of these rooms, although on the back walls of Rooms 12–13 the god Amon is shown reciprocating, as he grants Jubilees to the ruler. The workmanship and preservation of these scenes are generally excellent, and one may single out Room 10 (= first entrance on the left after entering the suite) where, on the left side (fig. 31), Ramesses III offers piles of gold, lapis-lazuli and turquoise (top), various types of chests (middle), and ingots of precious metal, including copper and gold. An assortment of furniture (including a large shrine and a harp) is presented to Amon-Rē and his consort, Mut, on the back wall of this room. We know, from Papyrus Harris I, that Ramesses III gave lavishly to all the gods during his long reign and that much of this wealth, in land, personnel and precious metals, found its way to this temple. Some of the more tangible fruits of the king's bounty were doubtless kept in this treasury suite, although other valuables may have been secreted in other hidden rooms (see below) at the back of the temple.

On leaving the treasury, the visitor proceeds along the south wall of the first hypostyle to a second door, opening into Room 14. This chapel was of special significance to Ramesses III, for in it he paid homage to the great builder whose Ramesseum inspired the very temple we are visiting—namely, Ramesses II, the lord of "United with Thebes." The dead king's processional bark is displayed on the east wall, and Ramesses III seems to have equipped it with a new canopy, since that shown here is emblazoned with his name. The statue of the deceased king occupied the cabin of this bark whenever it issued from its bark room, but (as we have seen) this image was regarded as that of "Amon-Re, residing in United

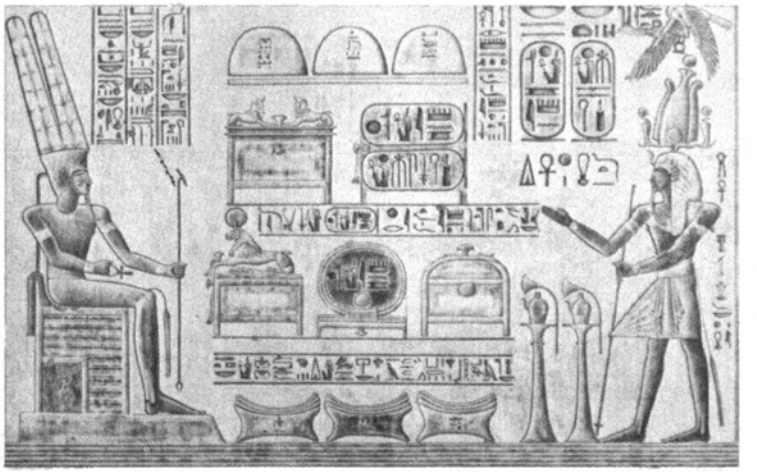

Fig. 31 *Amon-Rē receives Treasures for the Temple*

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with Thebes," and it is this entity who addresses Ramesses III here. Ramesses II thus takes his place among the gods of Medinet Habu, even though his bark shrine was still permanently installed in its own mortuary temple at this time and probably visited Ramesses III's establishment only at important festivals. On the opposite wall (fig. 32) Ramesses III offers to his divine ancestor, in company with the Theban Triad; behind the king, Thoth confers on him "life, stability and dominion, jubilees with millions of years."

Turning the corner, the visitor now enters the last of the chapels in the first hypostyle hall. This, like Chapel 7, also consists of two rooms, although the inner chamber is larger than the adjoining room of the northern chapel and is supported by a single pillar. The first room (no. 15) is mostly destroyed, although an inscription along the base indicates that it was dedicated to Montu, the ancient warrior god of the Theban nome. Montu also appears in two scenes in the inner room, receiving sacrifices from the king, but a marginal inscription here states that this room served, not Montu, but the Amon-Rē of Medinet Habu. Perhaps it was used by both gods for storage of essential cult implements, particularly in view of the cramped dimensions of the service chamber off the bark room of "Amon-Rē of United with Eternity."

The second hypostyle hall is even more ruined than the first. The corresponding room in the Ramesseum has an elaborate astronomical ceiling, and a stray fragment of this nature found at Medinet Habu may well have come from this room. Otherwise, however, the second hypostyle is mainly important because it gives access to the roof, and also to two matching suites of rooms—the complex of Osiris (south) and that of Rē-Harakhty (north).

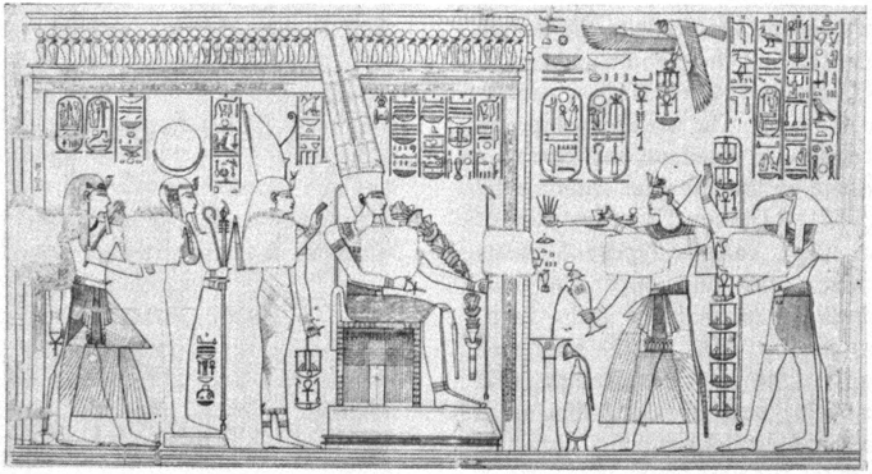

Fig. 32 *King before Theban Triad and Ramesses II*

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THE RĒ-HARAKHTY COMPLEX

The mythology of the sun—who at the end of each day entered the perilous realms of night and was reborn the next morning—was an important element in Egyptian thought on death and resurrection. The walls of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings were inscribed with such compositions as *The Book of What is in the Underworld*, *The Book of Gates*, and *The Book of Caverns*, which describe the obstacles to be encountered by the sun god—and by extension, the king—before his rebirth, so it is not surprising to find this cult practiced in the king's mortuary temple. In this respect, Medinet Habu follows a pattern that had remained consistent at least since the fifteenth century B.C. (the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty), and no doubt continued in the ephemeral temples of Ramesses III's successors.

The complex of Rē-Harakhty is entered through a vestibule on the right (north) side of the second hypostyle hall. This suite, in fact, seems to have been regarded as a separate unit, apart from the rest of the building, for a scene on the left wall (west side) shows Ramesses III "being introduced into the temple" into the presence of the hawk-headed Rē-Harakhty (fig. 33), who greets him ("Welcome in peace, my beloved son, to your temple which is in Thebes") and confers "my office and my throne as ruler over what the sun's disk encircles." On the opposite wall (east), the enthroned king is being purified with streams of water by a Iunmutef Priest (this figure mostly destroyed), while behind the throne the gods of the earth and sky utter spells confirming the king's effectiveness and duration as ruler.

Instead of turning left, into the solar suite, the visitor may proceed

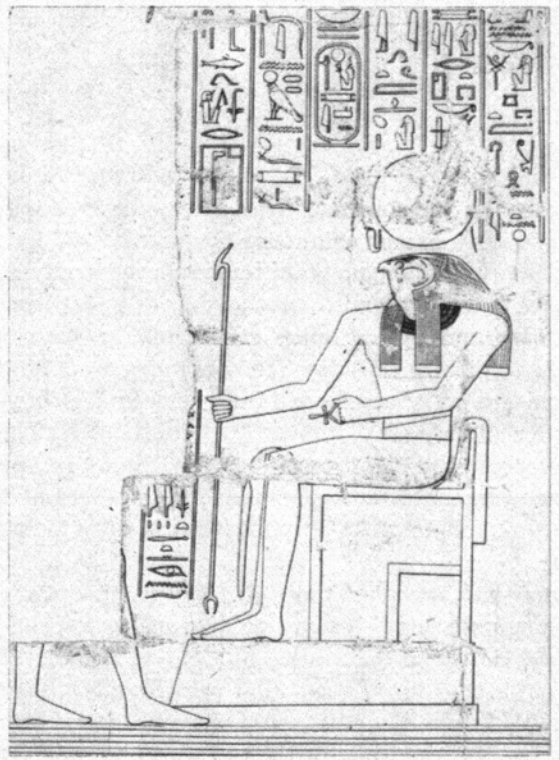

Fig. 33 *Rē-Harakhty*

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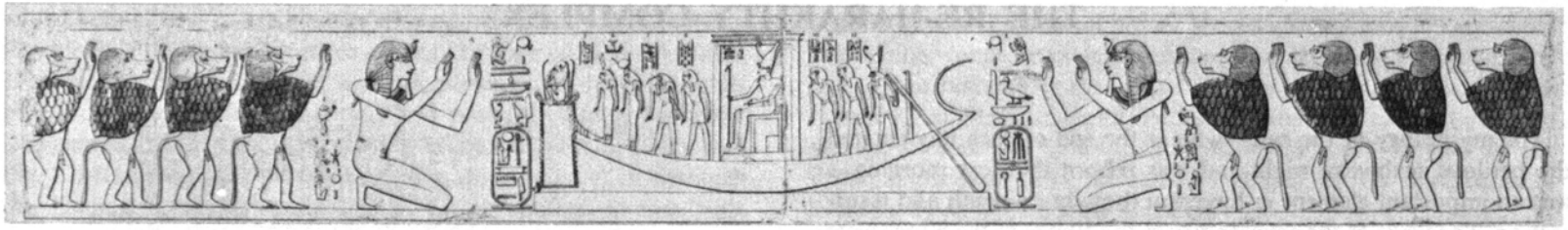

Fig. 34 *King and Baboons worship Solar Barge*

up to the roof via the staircase. The walls are covered with images of Nile gods who extend characteristic promises of fertility and bountiful harvests. The main roof terraces (now mostly destroyed) seem to have been devoted to the worship of gods from all over Egypt, as suggested by the reliefs carved on the walls that once enclosed the terrace on all sides. The surviving scenes on the north wall concentrate on deities from Lower and Middle Egypt, while on the south wall the gods of Upper Egypt (particularly Thebes) and Nubia are represented. Most of these scenes cannot be approached very closely owing to the removal of the upper storey, and the visitor may return to the suite of Rē-Harakhty by retracing his steps down the staircase.

The room which is entered now (no. 18) is partly open to the sky, like the "slaughterhouse." A single column at the west end supports an architrave on which the roofing blocks rest, while at the center of the room the remains of a sun altar were found during the excavations in 1934. The decoration of the architrave is immediately noticeable and sets the tone for the themes to be expressed in this room: the middle of this relief is dominated by the night bark of the sun, inside which the god is seen in his "aged" form as Atum, the venerable "Lord of All." At either side, the king pays homage to the bark, followed by groups of baboons which, because of the howling with which they greeted the rising sun, were regarded by the Egyptians as the god's heralds. A hymn inscribed on the east wall of this room describes their function in the following terms:

> The baboons who proclaim Rē when this god is born at the third hour of the morning,
> They rise up for him after he has come into being.
> When they are in the two shrines of this god at his rising in the eastern horizon of heaven,
> They dance for him,
> They clap for him,
> They sing for him,
> They shriek for him.
> When this Great God arises in the eyes of the subjects,
> The Sun People hear words of jubilation.
> The desert-dwellers[? = baboons] proclaim Rē in triumph,
> That he may give life, prosperity, and health to the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ramesses III.

The lower registers of the north, south, and east walls of this room are taken up with repeated scenes showing the king offering to the mysterious entities known as the Ka's ("cosmic doubles") and Ba's

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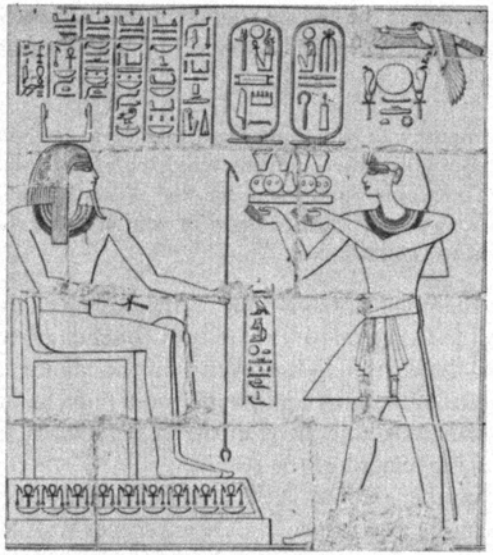

Fig. 35 *King and Ka of Rē*

("manifestations") of Rē: the former are represented as humanoid figures with upraised arms—the heiroglyph *Ka*—poised over their heads (fig. 35), while the Ba's are sportively represented with rams' heads (in Egyptian, *ba* = "ram"). It is the upper registers that reflect the "program" of this room, however, for the reliefs are keyed in their arrangement and orientation to the sun's movements throughout the day: the eastern wall is inscribed with a hymn to the rising sun, while the side walls (north and south) contain other spells and subscenes that refer to the sun's approaching entry into the caverns of night and to his battle with the forces of chaos, represented by the serpent Apophis. In one of these hymns the king, speaking for the steersman of the solar bark, gives praise to the fourteen Ka's and seven Ba's of Rē — "King Ramesses III [has satisfied you] in [these goodly] names of yours, [so that you may shine on the Son of Rē, Ramesses III]."* The connection between this passage and the scenes on the lower register may not be accidental: since the

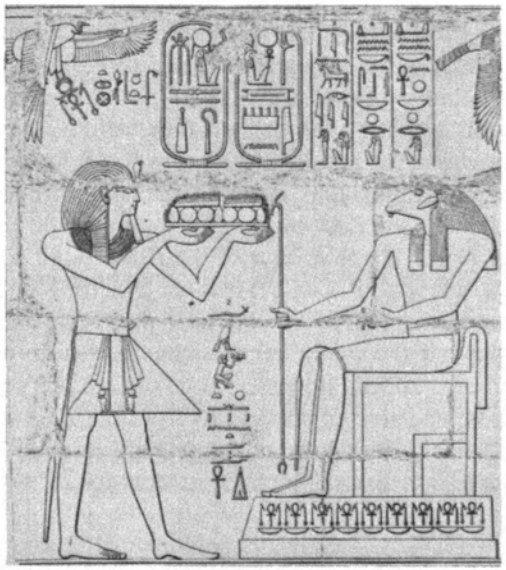

Fig. 36 *King and Ba of Rē*

*The restorations are made from a parallel text on a papyrus in the British Museum (B.M. 10541).

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Ka's and Ba's of Rē are sometimes identified with the royal ancestors —note that fourteen statues are displayed at the Min Feast in the Ramesseum, seven (*var.* nine) at Medinet Habu—the king's adoration of these beings may conceal a double meaning, making this yet another ritual supporting the principle of the divine monarchy in Egypt.

The west wall, appropriately, is reserved for the spells that accompany the setting sun, and perhaps for that reason it is covered by the roof over the western half of the room. At the top of the wall we see two groups representing the "Gods of the West, adoring Rē as he sets in the mountain of life" (fig. 37). To the right is the night bark of the sun, drawn by the western Ba's, whose jackal's ears are barely visible above the break, while below are inscribed selections from two compositions that describe the sun's traversal of the realms of night, allegories of mankind's hopes for resurrection and life after death. The first hour of the *Book of the Night* (carved above the doorway into Room 19) tells of the setting sun, the bark's entrance into the caverns, and the magical acts performed to ensure its passage beyond the many barriers that lie before it. The bulk of the inscribed surface, however, is taken up with a brief but cunningly chosen section of chapter 15 from the *Book of the Dead*, consisting of two litanies—the first a greeting uttered by the king (shown at the left) in the name of the several deities who will assist the sun on its journey; the second suggesting, very pointedly, that the sun god's own fate is inextricably bound up with that of the king in the netherworld:

> Concern yourself with King Ramesses III, O Rē, as you concern yourself with the head of your uraeus-serpent, which burns for you your enemies beneath you. Concern yourself with the Son of Rē, Ramesses III, O Rē, as you concern yourself with the prow of your bark on the day of proclaiming what will come to pass.

Because of the small size of Room 18, themes which are developed at great length in the royal tombs are only touched on (or hinted at) here. Within these limits, however, all the major associations between the fate of the king and the periodic movements of the sun are covered and even embodied in the very fabric of the building through the arrangement of the reliefs.

The rear chamber (Room 19) is less individually decorated than the first, presenting a sequence of offering scenes with Rē-Harakhty prominent among the recipients. The function of this room is obscure, but since it is approached by a ramp (like other shrines in the first hypostyle hall) it seems reasonable to regard it as a kind of sanctuary, housing the more secret cult objects of a god whose main rites (as befitting his daily presence in the sky) were held in the open.

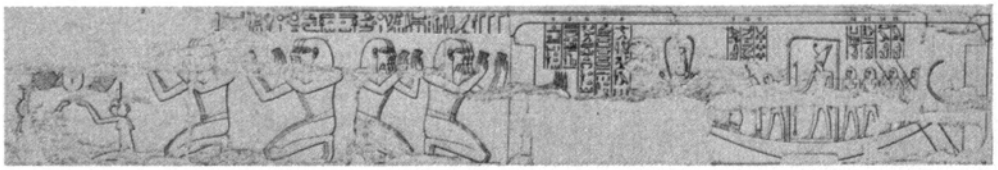

Fig. 37 *The Gods of East and West adore the Solar Barge*

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THE OSIRIS COMPLEX

This suite, occupying the south wing of the temple opposite the complex of Rē-Harakhty, is much larger than its neighbor. Like the solar complex, though, it is a unit apart from the rest of the temple, and it is devoted to another aspect of the king's hereafter: his revival and coronation in the realm of Osiris, Chief of the Westerners and Ruler of Eternity, the god *par excellence* of the dead. Osiris was a relative latecomer to Egyptian religion—the first unambiguous reference to him coming towards the close of the Fifth Dynasty—and his cult has absorbed a number of disparate influences, notably from the theology of the sun god, Rē. The Osirian afterlife had, nonetheless, its own particular character: it was more individualized than the solar resurrection, broader in its appeal. In relation to the ruler of Egypt, it laid stress on one element that was missing from the other system—the king's humanity.

The vestibule of the Osiris suite (Room 20) is one of the few rooms to have been subdivided during the active life of the temple, for a pair of small chambers (nos. 21 a and b) were added at the south end by building crosswalls over the existing reliefs. The reason for this new structure is unclear: Hölscher proposed it might be a chapel of Nefertem (see above, pp. 30–31) because this god is depicted on two of the new walls; but the very low entrance through which the visitor is obliged to crawl into Room 21 b could suggest that it was a small treasury, housing precious cult objects pertaining to this suite alone.

In any case, Room 20 as it was originally conceived depicted the first stages in the king's resurrection and his coronation in the other world. On the top register of the east wall (fig. 38) we see Ramesses III enthroned, followed by a female personification of his mortuary temple (right), facing a Iunmutef priest and a seated figure of the god Thoth (left). Between these two pairs is an offering list, a "menu" of food, drink, and incense presented to the dead king—to be supplied, perhaps, by the Nile gods of Upper and Lower Egypt, who appear at the base of all the walls in this room, bringing their produce into Ramesses III's temple. The main function of the Iunmutef priest, however, is to perform the ceremony of "opening the mouth" for the deceased ruler. This ritual, an indispensable part of every funeral in ancient Egypt, theoretically enabled the mummy to breathe, speak, and receive nourishment, and to this end the deceased's mouth was touched with an adze that symbolically "opened" this orifice. In the words of the Iunmutef priest,

> As Horus has tapped your mouth for you with a finger of [electrum],
> [(and) as he has tapped the mouth of] his [father] Osiris therewith, in this name of his, ["Sokar"],
> So have I tapped your mouth for you.

The next step, apparently, is seen on the south wall: the revived king sits inside the sacred *Ished* Tree and receives jubilees from Amon-Rē (right), while Thoth stands behind the king and writes his name on the leaves of the tree (fig. 39). When Rooms 21 a–b were added, this relief was adjusted, but it remained substantially the same: the king's figure was shifted to the right, so he now appears kneeling outside the chamber, while Amon's figure occupies the interior of Room 21 b. The retention of this scene indicates its

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significance in the overall progress of the king's resurrection, for Thoth's action ensured that the king's name would appear on the list of the recognized, legitimate rulers of Egypt. This, in turn, affects the duration of the king's memory among gods and men, and Ramesses III is promised,

> [You] will continue [to exist for the duration of heaven, just as] my name endures forever. [Likewise], I am causing the Mansion of Ramesses III in the Estate of Amon to remain like the sky, so my rising and setting will be inside it.

The scene on the west wall, inside Room 21 b, is closely related to the preceding: it originally showed Ramesses III seated and purified by the Iunmutef priest, but the addition of the crosswall required the insertion of a new figure of Ramesses III, standing to the left of the original. The ritual performed here is essentially the same as that one recorded in the northeast corner of the second court (see above, pp. 30-31) and enables the king to participate in the following ceremonies in full possession of his godly powers.

The second chamber of the Osiris complex (Room 23) is graced with two columns, making it the hypostyle hall of this miniature temple. The reliefs here dwell on the king's appearance before the gods (deities of Memphis and Thebes, as well as the conventional mortuary gods) and his formal coronation as king in the underworld. The preliminary rites occur on the east wall, where Ramesses III

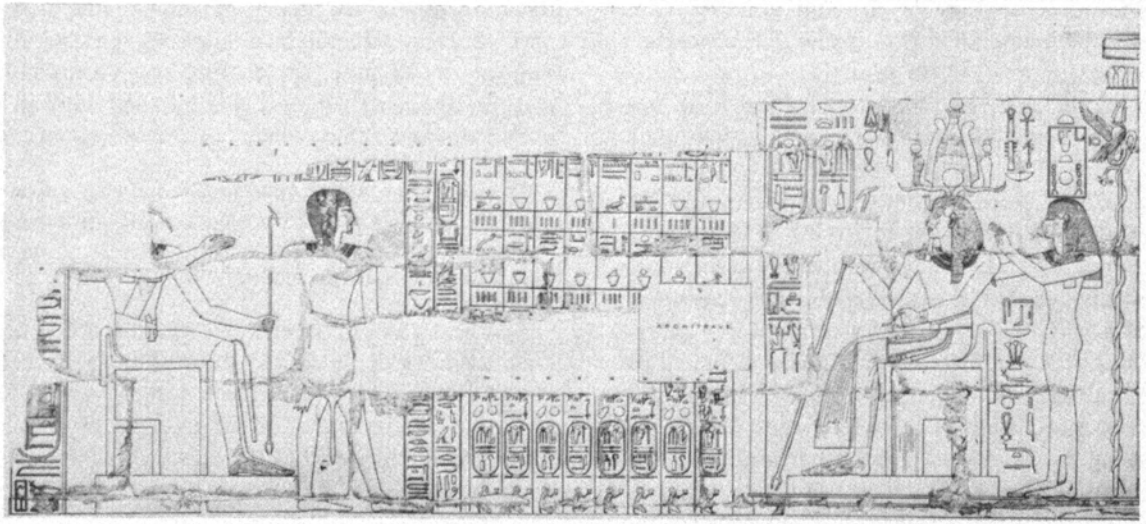

Fig. 38 *Thoth and Iunmutef before King and personified Temple*

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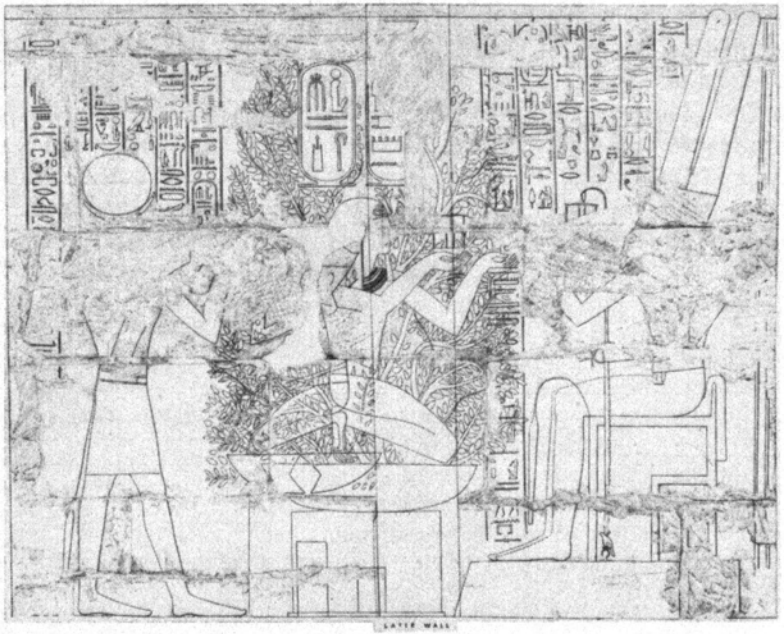

Fig. 39 *The King inside the* Ished *Tree*

offers sacrifice to Ptah Tatenen ("Rising Earth") on the left, and to Osiris, Chief of the Westerners (i.e., the dead) on the right. On the side walls the king is led into the presence of Amon-Rē by Khonsu and Thoth (north), and he offers flowers to Ptah, Lord of Memphis, in the presence of Ptah's consort, Sekhmet, and also Nefertem and Isis (south). The sequence is climaxed on the back wall (fig. 40), as Ramesses III kneels before Ptah-Sokar-Osiris and Nefertem and is crowned by Horus, Son of Isis, who proclaims:

> I am affixing the Atef Crown on your head, that you may receive the [kingsh]ip of Rē by the command of your father, the Lord of the Gods, P[ta]h, who created your beauty.

The following room (No. 24) is a broad hall that connects with two chapels beyond. By analogy with similar chambers that lie before the sanctuaries in Egyptian temples, it probably functioned as a hall of offerings, and the low stone bench that runs along three walls of this chamber may well have been used to hold the sacrifices brought in for Osiris.

The east wall shows a further distinctive feature—three niches, the walls between them being decorated with personified Djed Pillars to which the king (on the right) makes offering. The wooden

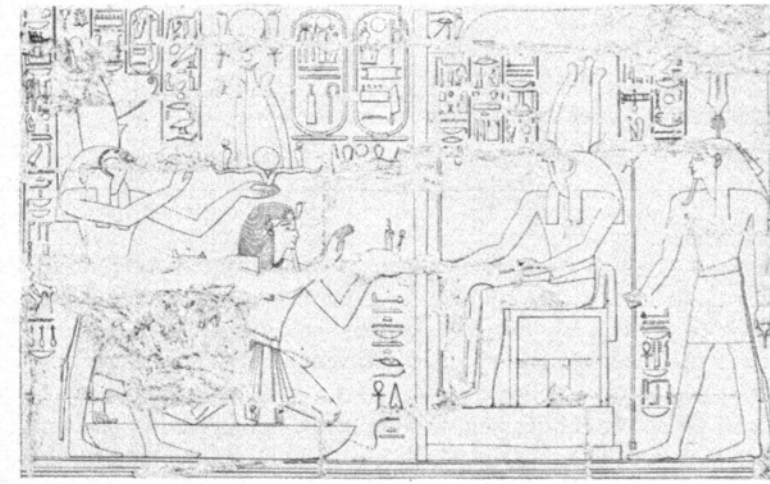

Fig. 40 *The Coronation in the Underworld*

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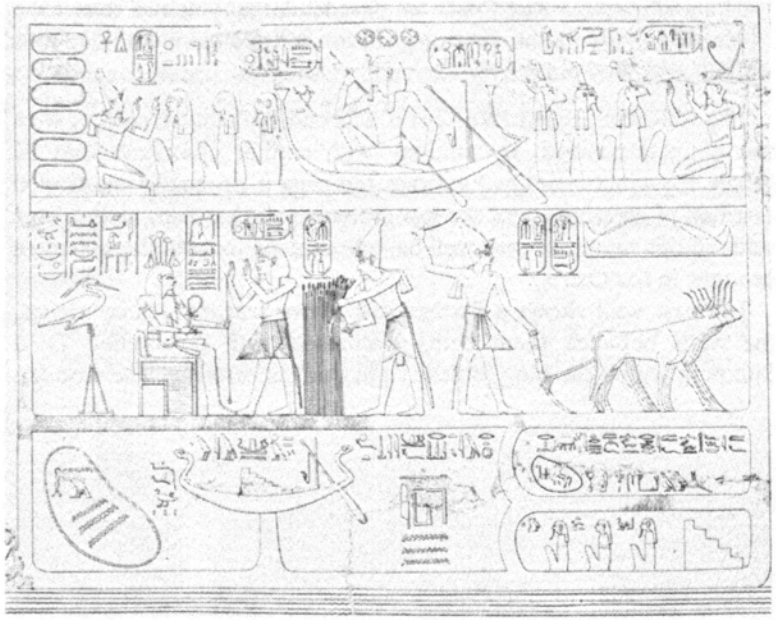

Fig. 41 *The Fields of Iaru*

doors with which these niches were doubtless fitted have disappeared, and since the interiors are themselves undecorated, the niches' contents are a mystery: perhaps they contained cult objects such as the Djed Pillars themselves (ancient fetishes whose erection, on the eve of the calendric planting season in Egypt, marked the date of Osiris' final interment as king of the netherworld), or some other standard, like the one which is annointed by the king on the north wall of this room. It is possible that the niches also housed the cult statues of other members of the Abydos "circle" and, seen as miniature sanctuaries, they were opened when sacrifice was being offered to Osiris in his chapel.

The function of the two rooms (nos. 26–27) entered through the left-hand doorway in Room 24 is unclear, but the reliefs on the walls are devoted entirely to the king's reception in the realm of the dead. A preliminary ritual for these chambers may be found outside, on the west wall of Room 24 between the two doorways, where a figure of Isis (fig. 43) receives a gift of incense from the king and utters the spell "Censing the Uraeus" from the "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony, being a magical invocation on behalf of the diadem that the king wears on his brow:

> You are pure as the Red Crown is pure,
> [For] the Red Crown has touched the lights of heaven [i.e., the stars].
> You are pure as the White Crown is pure,
> [For] the White Crown has touched the lights of heaven. . . .
> May you propitiate every god and every goddess,
> [Their a]rms [being full of the love of you],
> So your beautiful face [may be kindly] to the [Lord of the Two Lands],
> Ramesses III. . . .

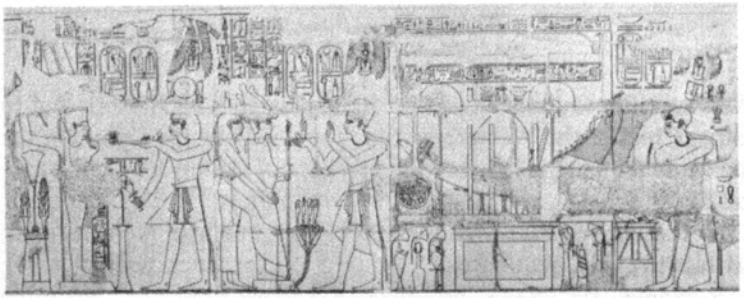

Fig. 42 *From the Chapel of Osiris*

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Inside the first of the two chambers (no. 26), the overriding theme concerns the king's successful arrival in the realm of the blessed dead. The north wall (fig. 41) is inscribed with a vignette from the *Book of the Dead*, chapter 110, that is essentially a map: at the sides, Ramesses III (top) is seen rowing past cities and worshipping the deities in the Greater and Lesser Enneads (= the nine primeval gods of Heliopolis, as well as Horus, Anubis and other significant local deities). On the bottom, the bark of Re is seen making its way through various regions in the netherworld.

The fields of Iaru, which are the king's destination, are in the middle register of the scene: this area was conceived of as a counterpart to Egypt, in which the deceased labored even as a peasant (although the more onerous tasks might fall to *ushebtis*, little statues buried with the dead man, whose function was to *usheb* ["answer"] for him whenever his services were needed). In this scene, the dead king seems quite content with his humble lot, for he is seen (from right to left) ploughing the ground with oxen, cutting grain, and appearing before a seated Nile god, behind whom is a heron on a perch, the heiroglyphic embodiment of the "flood." On the opposite wall, the king offers to Osiris and recites the appropriate passage from the text of chapter 110 of the *Book of the Dead*, recounting the paths on which he has come and demanding, as his reward, sustenance and a permanent place as king in the underworld.

The king's final triumph is represented allegorically in the inner room (no. 27): a vignette on the south wall, this one from the *Book of the Dead*, chapter 148 (fig. 44), depicts the seven celestial cows along with "the Bull, the male of the cows"; the oars of the four sides of heaven; and four groups of gods associated with heaven, earth, and the netherworld. These entities, in the full text of chapter 148, are associated with the sun god (whose mythology is here blended with that of Osiris), and a knowledge of their attributes

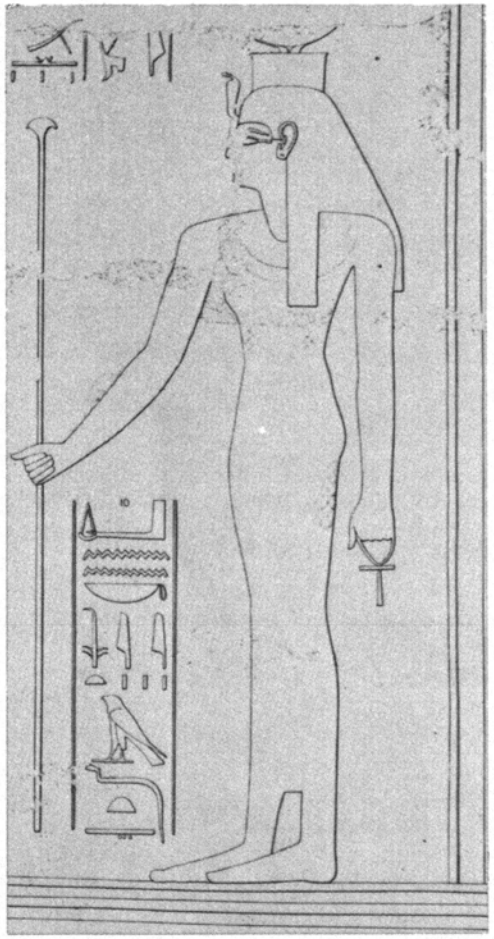

Fig. 43 *Isis*

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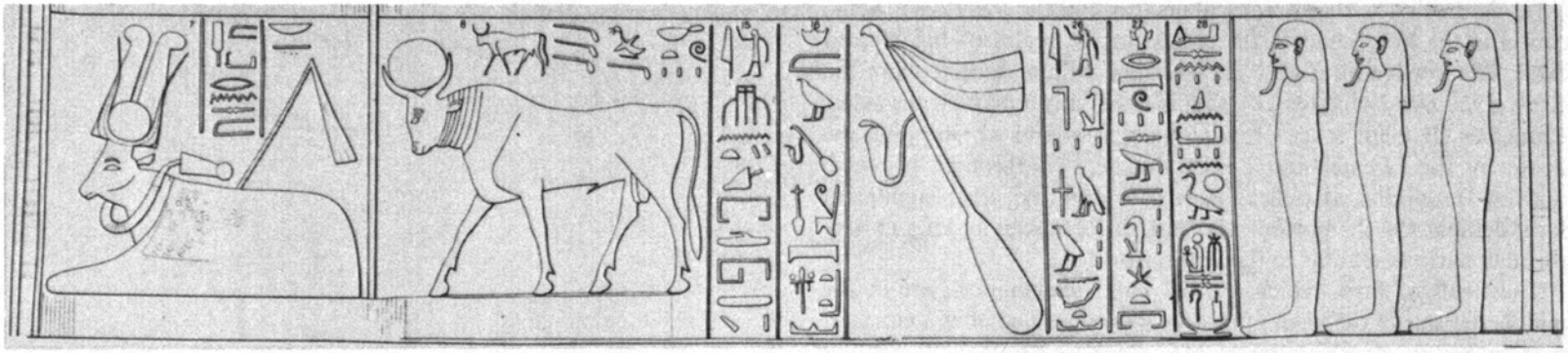

Fig. 44 *A Vignette from the* Book of the Dead *(Chapter 148)*

gives the deceased person power over them. Their protection is presumably extended now to the king who, in another passage from the *Book of the Dead*, chapter 110 (north wall), boasts that,

> I know the lakes of the fields of offerings in which I am.
> I am strong therein.
> I am glorified therein.
> I exist therein.
> I plough therein.
> I reap therein.
> I beget therein. . . .
> I remember, I do not forget: I am alive!

The king's transformation into an Osiris is now complete, and his survival in the netherworld assured.

The chapel of Osiris *par excellence* is Room 25, entered through the right-hand doorway in the hall of offerings. It was here that the god's presence was strongest, for the room is dominated by a false door at the west end, through which Osiris, Chief of the Westerners, might enter from the realm of the dead to partake of the offerings that were brought to him. The side walls are consequently taken up with scenes depicting Ramesses III making sacrifice to Osiris and his associates — although Amon-Rē and Min (as "Amon-Rē, Bull of his Mother": see fig. 42) are also present, as if to emphasize that even Osiris, master of the dead, is also the lord of grain and hence a life-supporting deity.

The most striking feature of this room, however, is the ceiling: designed as a false vault, it had collapsed in antiquity but was repaired in the nineteenth century and appears at first glance to be a puzzling complex of small figures and texts. In fact, however, this is an ancient map of the heavens (fig. 45), an assortment of astronomical elements used by the Egyptians to tell time. As represented here, these figures served more of a ritual than a practical purpose,

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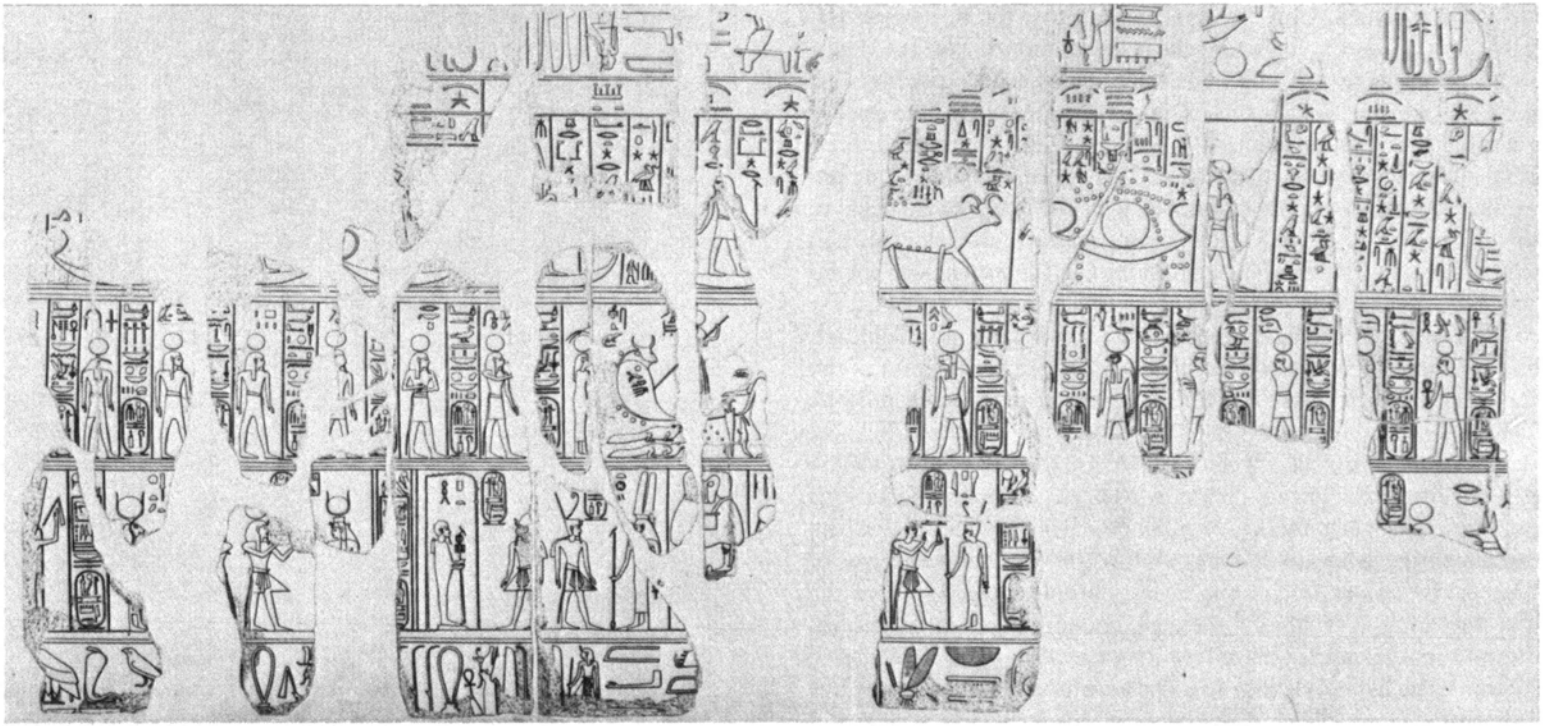

Fig. 45 *Astronomical Ceiling*

and matters were made worse by the fact that the present copy was made (rather inexpertly) from an earlier version in the Ramesseum. The topmost register (south side) contains a list of Decans (right and middle: groups of stars whose rising marked the beginning of each hour) and traces of three planets (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars) in the boats preserved on the left side. The central panel of the middle register shows some of the northern constellations, seen here as fantastic animals and other figures, flanked on either side by rows

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of attendant deities who promise well-being to Ramesses III. Finally, in the lowest register, the twelve months of the lunar calendar are represented, each one depicted as a god to whom the king offers sacrifice. Astronomical plans similar to this one appear frequently in tombs, particularly those of the kings, and their original purpose appears to have been to permit the dead to tell the time. Another, purely ritualistic purpose may have been to guide the king through the various realms of earth and sky through which (as a seeker of Osiris or as companion to the sun) he was forced to wander.

In the Osiris suite, the destiny of the dead king was fulfilled: having reached the realms of the blessed dead, he lived again in the underworld and held sway there as king. As in the royal tomb, the suites of Rē-Harakhty and Osiris provided for the two alternate modes of resurrection that were required by the dual nature of the king—the timeless, eternal being whose periodic manifestations demonstrate the permanence of a single divine principle, and the historical entity who lives, dies, and reigns in the netherworld. As the visitor passes out of the Osiris complex, the figure of the resurrected king is virtually the last encountered: in Room 20 again, on the west wall, we see him inside a portable shrine, facing out towards the hypostyle (fig. 46). The accompanying litany ensures that the name (= essence) of the king and his mortuary temple will last for the length of eternity:

> May the name of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ramesses III flourish
> As the name of Atum flourishes in the Mansion of the Prince who is in Heliopolis.
> May the name of the Temple of the Son of Rē, Ramesses III, flourish likewise for ever and ever,
> As the name of Shu flourishes in Upper Menset, in Heliopolis. . . .

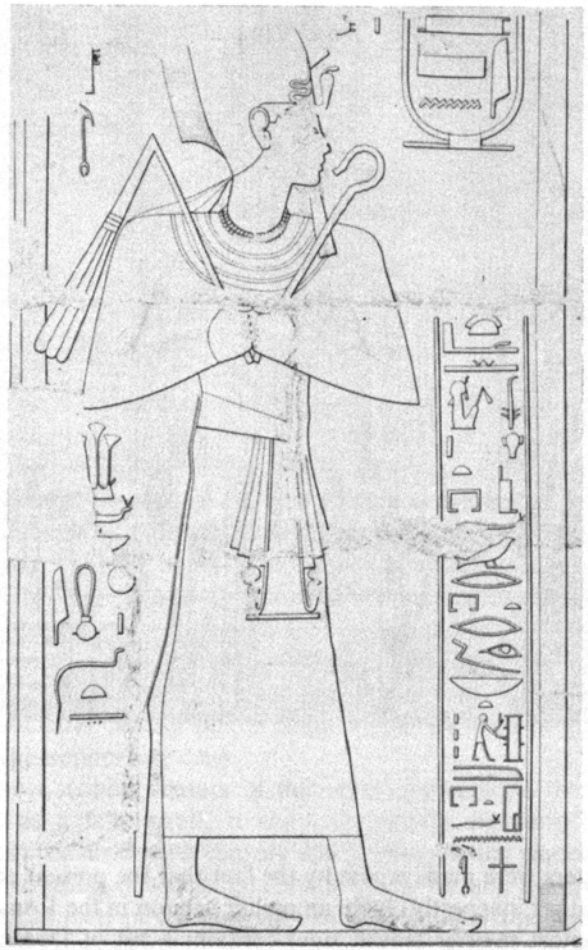

Fig. 46 *Ramesses III as Osiris*

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THE INNERMOST CHAMBERS

The destruction of much of the inner part of the temple has made it difficult to determine precisely how some of these rooms were used. Most of them were surely divine sanctuaries, but identification of their owners is sometimes impossible. Of Room 22, for instance (on the left, as one leaves the suite of Osiris), little can be said beyond that it probably served the ram-headed deity (Rē-Osiris?) before whom the king and Rē-Harakhty appear on the south wall. Rooms 36–37 (south side of the third hypostyle hall) form a unit dedicated, perhaps, to Horus Son of Isis (shown receiving Maᶜat from the king on the south wall of the chamber). As a preparatory rite already familiar from the Osiris suite, Ramesses III is crowned by two goddesses (= Isis and Nephthys?) on the south wall of the vestibule (Room 36). The identity of the occupant(s) of Rooms 28–29 is also obscured by poor preservation, although a fragmentary inscription on the north wall of the inner chamber (where two figures of the king are seen steadying a standard: fig. 47) suggests that it too was dedicated to a manifestation of Horus.

The next complex of rooms, at the northwest corner of the third hypostyle, was dedicated to a form of Amon who headed a corporation known as the Ennead. This group of deities, formed by the nine primordial beings who came into existence at the beginning of time, included the cosmic gods of earth, air, land, and sky (Shu, Tefnut, Geb and Nut), along with the Osirian circle (Osiris and Seth with their consorts, Isis and Nephthys), all of whom proceeded from the creator god, Atum. The leading position in this group was later usurped by Amon (at least at Thebes), and under him the "great Ennead which resides in Karnak" swelled to fifteen

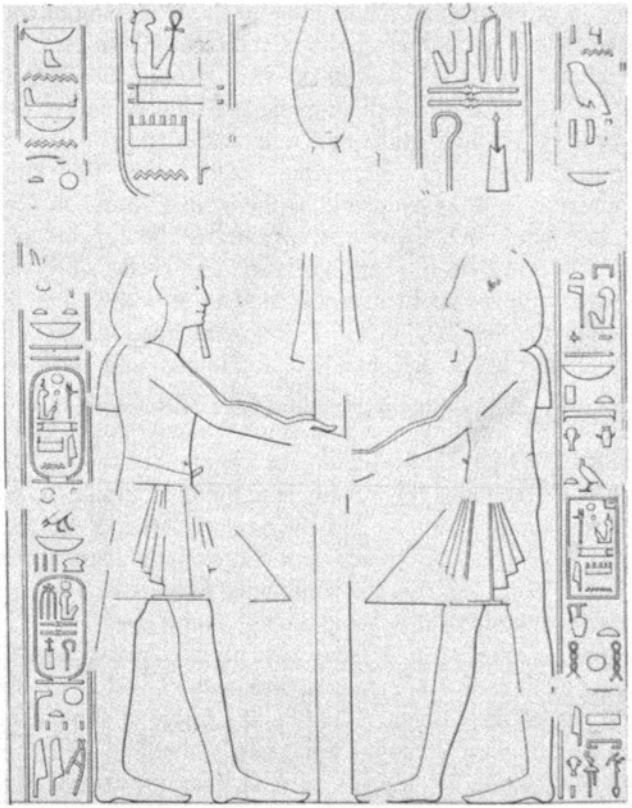

Fig. 47 *King steadies Standard*

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members by the addition of Montu, Horus, Hathor, Sobek (a crocodile god, residing in the south of the Theban nome), and a pair of goddesses from Armant, Tjenenet and Iunyt. This group constituted the essential pantheon for the Theban region, and the association of its original members with the beginning of the world imparted to Amon characteristics of the creator himself.

The remains of the vestibule of this suite (Room 30) are dominated by a relief on the north wall showing the king being escorted into the temple by Khonsu and Mut, who rattles the sistrum "to your handsome face, O Amon-Rē, Primeval One of the Two Lands." A more interesting representation of the god is found in Room 31 where, as "Amon-Rē, Chief of the Ennead," he appears as a ram-headed deity swathed in mummy bandages (see fig. 48) — a clever fusion of symbols that identifies him at once with Osiris, Rē, and the gods of the first beginning. The nine niches sunk into the side walls each housed a member of the Ennead and, perhaps, also some of their local colleagues, although most of these (excepting Hathor, Sobek and the two goddesses from Armant) had shrines of their own at Medinet Habu. As the king passed through the door from the vestibule into this room, he paused to "praise the god four times" (text on the south wall of the passage through the doorway). The other rites that took place here can only be guessed, although it does seem likely that this hall functioned as a hall of offerings when the doors of the miniature "sanctuaries" stood open.

The inner chamber (no. 32) may have been the principal sanctuary, belonging to "Amon-Rē, Primeval One of the Two Lands, the Great God, Ruler of the Ennead." This god's figure is shown receiving incense on the west reveal of the passage leading into this room (see fig. 49), while the king is seen on the opposite wall, urging "all who enter the temple, 'Be pure, four times'," which, as we have seen, occurs at strategic points where the visitor passes into an area

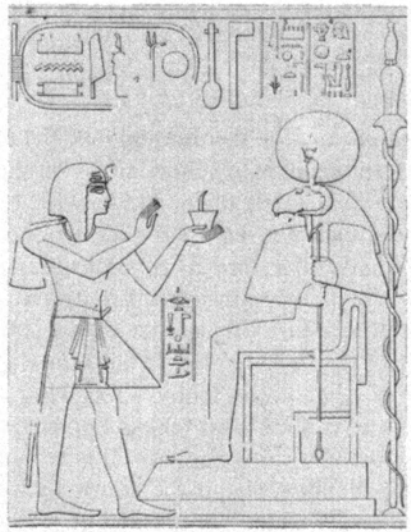

Fig. 48 *King and ram-headed Amon-Rē*

of greater holiness. An engaged stone shelf (of which only a few traces remain) once stood against the back wall, and the god's more portable cult objects perhaps rested on it. The reliefs are neither very informative nor well preserved, but the themes they evoke — the king appearing before Osiris (back wall), presenting Maᶜat (east side), and receiving jubilees (west) before deities that include the Theban Triad, Sekhmet, Isis (?), Maᶜat, and Seshat, "Mistress of Writing" —could be suggested by the sort of offering ritual that took place every day in the sanctuaries at Medinet Habu.

Paradoxically, it is where the temple is most ruined that there is

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Fig. 49 *King and Primeval Amon*

the least doubt, at least in one respect, for at the west end of the third hypostyle hall are three chapels that are the focus, not merely of this part of the building, but of the temple as a whole. These are the bark rooms of the Theban Triad itself, the chambers in which these gods' portable shrines rested when they visited Medinet Habu. Each can be entered directly from the second hypostyle through doorways aligned with the chapels' portals. Flanking the processional way into the central chamber are two double statues in red granite, showing Ramesses III enthroned beside the goddess Maᶜat (south) and the ibis-headed deity, Thoth (north): unlike other pieces of statuary at Medinet Habu now, these are part of the original decor and were found more or less in situ—for although the statues themselves were broken and scattered when the rear chambers were destroyed, their sandstone socles were preserved intact and could thus be reused for their original purpose when these pieces were reassembled in the nineteenth century.

The three chapels are grouped similarly to other triple shrines of the New Kingdom, with the chapels of Mut and Khonsu placed at the left and right respectively of Amon's central sanctuary. Of the shrine of Khonsu (Room 33) only the lower parts of the walls are preserved, but enough now remains to indicate that the king appeared here, worshipping the god's bark and (further in) before Khonsu himself in his shrine. Mut's chapel (Rooms 34–35) was more elaborate and consisted, like the shrine of Montu (see above, p. 47), of two chambers: a long, narrow, back room, now reduced to the bases of the walls; and an inner chamber that served either as a magazine or a cult room for Mut in her various forms, e.g., as "Mut, Great-of-Magic, Lady of the Palace" and "Lady of Megeb, residing in the Aphroditopolite Nome" (in the tenth nome of Upper Egypt, probably north of Kaw al-Kebir), on the south wall. This last manifestation shows the goddess in the form of a lioness, and she frequently is seen this way elsewhere, particularly at the site of her own temples, where innumerable so-called "Sekhmet statues" have been found.

The sanctuary of Amon (Room F) has a layout which, befitting its importance, is different from all other shrines in the temple. Fortunately, it resembles corresponding sanctuaries in earlier mortuary temples, for little of it remains today: a ramp (now destroyed) led up to the outer portal, which opened into a small vestibule that was closed on the west side by screen walls built between the side walls and two pillars. The central corners of these pillars were carved into door jambs for a second set of doors that opened inwards into the bark room proper. It was here that the sacred bark of Amon rested, when it visited Medinet Habu, on a pedestal which was discovered in a pit along the north wall of the room and has been relocated between a second pair of pillars at the back of the room. As in the chapel of Khonsu, only the bottoms of the scenes are preserved, but enough survives to indicate the presence of the king, officiating here before various forms of Amon.

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Directly behind Amon's sanctuary is a chamber that Hölscher, probably correctly, labeled the "Holy of Holies." Although its decoration has also suffered severely from the dismantling of the inner chambers of the temple, enough remains of the western wall to show that an enormous false door once stood here, on which the king appeared, first before an ithyphallic figure of Amon, and again, proceeding into the chapel of Amon-Rē, apparently to be crowned by him. This sequence, in abbreviated form and in a different context, is the process undergone by the king in the Osiris complex, and the false door itself marks this place as the major center for the cult of Ramesses III's mortuary temple; for although the bark of the deified king was kept in Room 7 (above, pp. 45–46), it was through this false door that the *ba* of Ramesses III — "Amon-Rē of United with Eternity" — could enter the temple and partake of the rituals performed both for him and for his associate, Amon-Rē of Karnak, whenever this god visited Medinet Habu.

Despite the truncated condition of the walls, it is clear that this chamber, along with the two adjoining rooms at either side (north and south), is decorated in quite a different way from the rest of the temple; for although the usual technique employed in the carving of the relief is to incise the figures into the stone, the sculptors carefully carved away the surface *around* the figures in these five rooms. In earlier buildings, this convention separated the interior of the temple (carved in raised relief) from the outside walls, where the cruder sunk relief was better suited to continued exposure to the elements. The distinction between the two styles had broken down early in the Nineteenth Dynasty, nearly a century before Ramesses III's time, and sunk relief came to be used both inside and outside sacred buildings: all the more reason, then, to suspect that this suite of rooms, conspicuously carved in raised relief, held some special holiness that set it apart from the other places in the temple.

The purpose of the two suites that flanked the "Holy of Holies" is not at all clear. Both, however, seem to have been dedicated to the cult of Amon: in the northern suite, for instance, the king appears before Amon-Rē Kamutef in both his ram-headed and ithyphallic forms (Room 40, west wall), and before Amon-Rē, "Primeval One of the Two Lands," represented here with a lion's head (east wall: see fig. 50). The third room also shows the king before Amon-Rē, but it is carved in sunk relief and, further, is fitted with two niches that doubtless once contained cult images. The layout of the southern suite is almost identical, but the information conveyed about the rituals performed here is perhaps more specific. The first room, again, is too destroyed to tell us much, but in the second we see Ramesses III, followed by the hawk-headed and jackal-headed Spirits of Pe and Heliopolis (fig. 51), presenting Amon with a libation vessel (Room 45, east side) and then ceremonially purifying his statue—called "Amon-Rē Harakhty," with a ram's head—in the

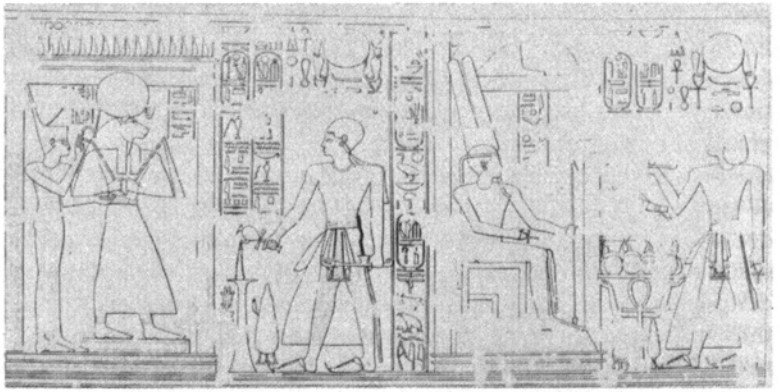

Fig. 50 *King and lion-headed Amon*

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presence of the Ennead. There are no niches in the inner chamber (Room 46), but the ithyphallic Min-Amon appears twice in its reliefs —once on the rear wall receiving incense and libations, and on the west wall (fig. 52), on his way out of the chamber, supported by the king and accompanied by priests and other attendants. On the east wall, Ramesses III offers nourishment (symbolized by an offering list) to "Amon-Rē, Primeval One of the Two Lands."

In this suite of rooms, then, the rituals that are shown involve the ceremonial washing, feeding etc. that formed part of the daily services lavished on the gods' cult statues. Room 41 at the north end, with its two niches, probably lodged two cult statues and thus, by analogy, it is tempting to suppose that a statue of Min-Amon "lived" in Room 46, the corresponding chapel to the south. Notably, the sanctuaries of the gods at Medinet Habu are otherwise all decorated with sunk relief—only the "Holy of Holies" and its adjoining chambers are carved any differently. One could imagine, then (as a very tentative suggestion), that the various statues of Amon were brought into these rooms when the daily ritual was performed and, just as the god or deified king was held to be manifest in the "Holy of Holies," so were the gods most completely alive in the cult rooms wherein they partook of the worship of the community. These, then, could be the truly dynamic places of the temple, where the essential transactions between god and mankind took place. On this basis they could be set apart from the other, more utilitarian parts of the temple. This, however, is only a hypothesis, for we really do not know what purpose was served by these chambers.

Before leaving this area the visitor may wish to wander into the innermost recesses of the temple, which consist of two suites of rooms entered *via* the vestibules (Rooms 39 and 44) of the sanctuaries at either side of the "Holy of Holies." The original entrance,

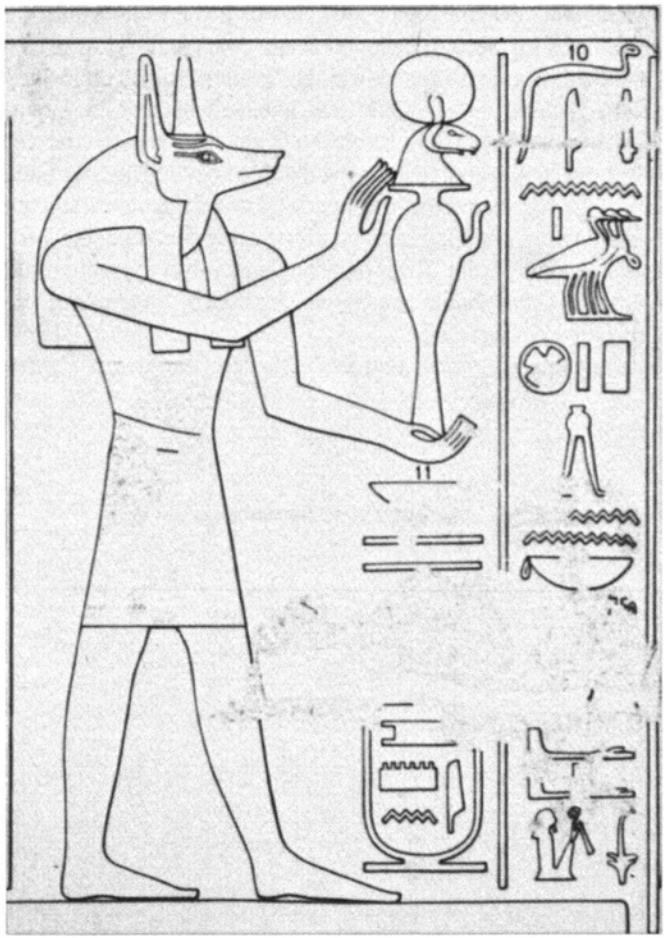

Fig. 51 *A Spirit of Pe*

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best preserved on the north side, is very low; this factor suggests that the need for security played some part in the design. The very existence of these rooms could be hidden more effectively than the main Treasury—for while the relative width of the portico and the first hypostyle would immediately reveal these rooms' location, it would not be so easy to gauge a discrepancy in the inner and outer length of the temple from the inside. The reliefs in these rooms are not distinctive—the king is seen offering various objects to gods who appear in no particular order or groupings—but it would make sense to interpret these back rooms as subsidiary magazines in which valuable objects were kept.

"An ancient Egyptian temple," the late American Egyptologist John A. Wilson once observed, "is today a silent and lonely place." Few could fail to be struck, on walking through this building, by the savage blows dealt to it by time and man, by the transformation of a once vibrant establishment into a mute and empty monument. The decay of earlier foundations could surely have warned Ramesses III, his contemporaries and successors that their memorials might not last forever—yet, despite this nagging certainty, they continued to build tombs and temples as personal guarantees of immortality. The fates were kinder to Ramesses III than to most, for his temple preserves a record of his deeds and aspirations that is hard to surpass in the dilapidated remains that have come down to us from ancient Egypt.

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THE TEMPLE OUTBUILDINGS

On leaving the temple, the visitor may turn left and proceed around the south corner of the building. An enclosure wall of mudbrick surrounded the temple, forming with it a kind of "inner city" of magazines and other buildings closely associated with its activities (see fig. 3). Little of this enclosure now remains, although it has been restored to some height at the southeast corner of the temple, along with the palace; but the visitor can gauge its height from the side of the pylon, where the surface adjoining this wall was not smoothed down.

A visitor to this area should not miss the large reliefs on the back of the first pylon, depicting the king in pursuit of game. Especially striking is the bull hunt (lower register, fig. 53): balancing himself in his chariot and wielding a long hunting spear, Ramesses III charges into the marshes after his prey. His escort marches below, brandishing bows and arrows, but their efforts will be spent on the birds and fish that occupy the lake in front of them, for the bulls are the king's own preserve. Two already have fallen and the third has just been brought to its knees as the king moves in for the final thrust. Quite possibly this scene reflects an actual event, for herds of wild bulls were occasionally sighted in the desert. The pastime was so keenly enjoyed that Amenhotep III actually issued a commemorative scarab boasting that he had bagged no fewer than ninety-six bulls in two days of hunting. Like the lion hunt on the north wall, however (see above, pp. 13–14), this scene indirectly em-

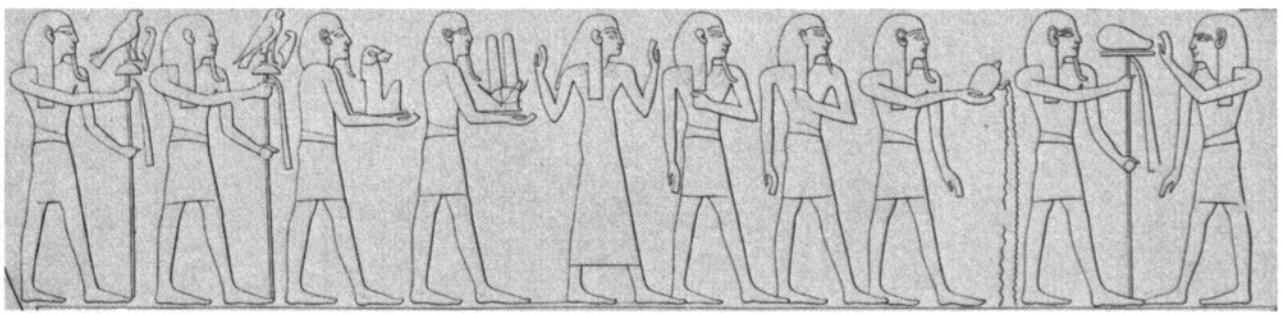

Fig. 52 *Some Priests of Min with Standards*

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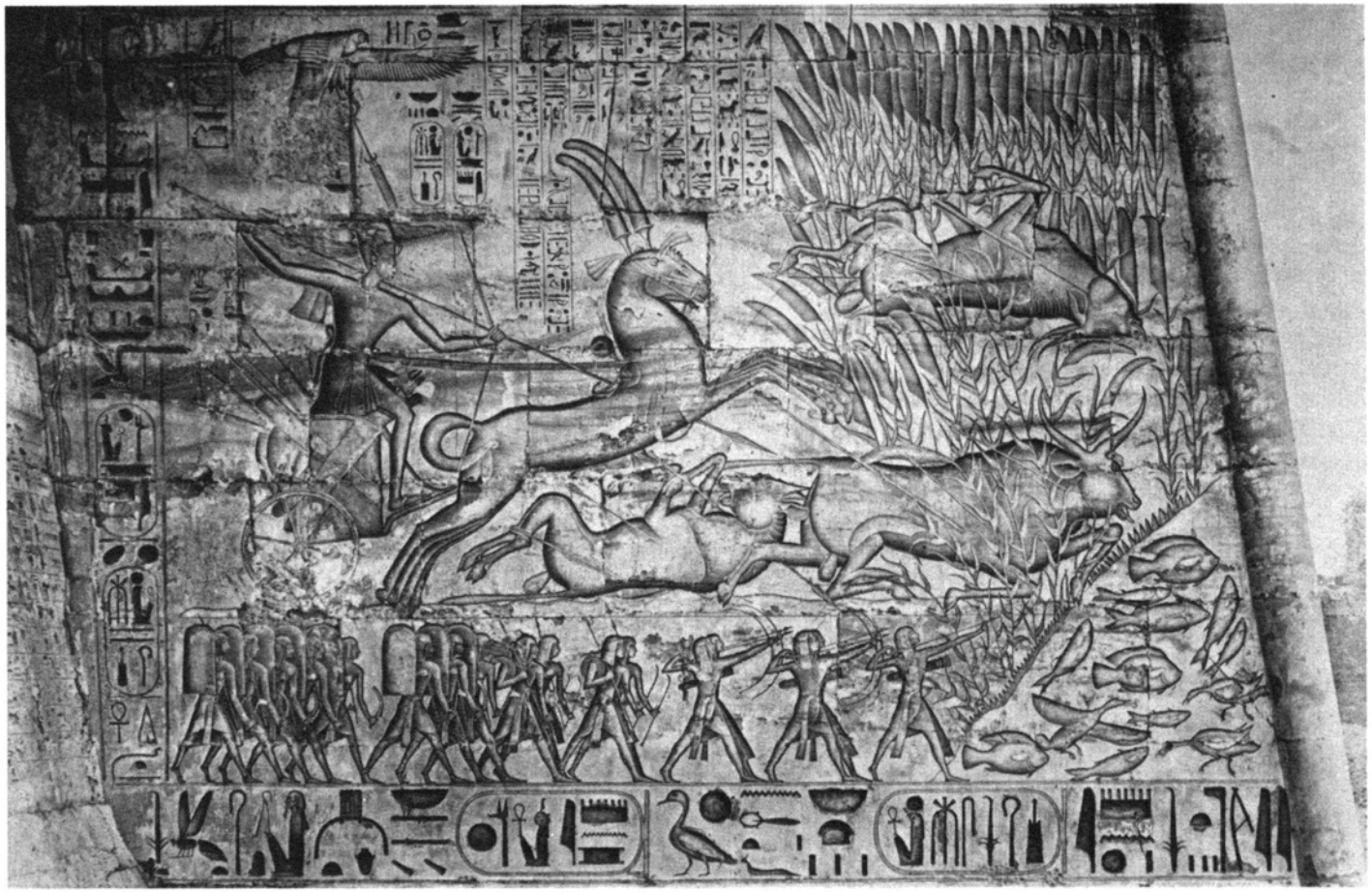

Fig. 53 *Bull Hunt*

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phasizes the king's mastery over all adverse forces that might threaten Egypt (and thus, by extension, the cosmos and its model, the temple).

The area south of the temple between the first and second pylons is occupied by the palace and, as we have seen inside (above, pp. 23–25), the south wall of the first court also served as the palace portico. Like most domestic structures in ancient Egypt, the palace was built out of mudbrick: not only is this a handy and versatile medium, but it retains heat and coolness throughout extremes of temperature better than any stone building. Millennia of neglect were not kind to this structure, and as a final blow, a disastrous excavation in 1913 deprived it of many brick walls that were still preserved to some height. Nonetheless, while working for the Oriental Institute in the late 1920s, Uvo Hölscher was able to recover traces of two distinct palaces, one superimposed on the other, and both built during the reign of Ramesses III.

The ground plan of the second (and later) palace has been restored in situ, so visitors may see how such a building was laid out. Traces of the first palace can still be seen on the south wall of the temple, for the architraves supporting the front hall were pushed into this earlier wall and can be seen in a row, level with the top of the central doorway (eight courses up from the ground), although patch-stones were inserted to mask these holes when the palace was rebuilt along different lines. The barrel vaults of the second palace's ceilings have also left their mark on the south wall of the temple: the semi-circular patterns of holes for the roof beams can still be made out, and the two rows of columns in the front hall supported architraves that were pushed into the wall of the temple between the ninth and tenth courses from the ground.

The plan of the earlier palace, a virtual copy of the palace of Ramesses II at the Ramesseum, was simpler than the building that

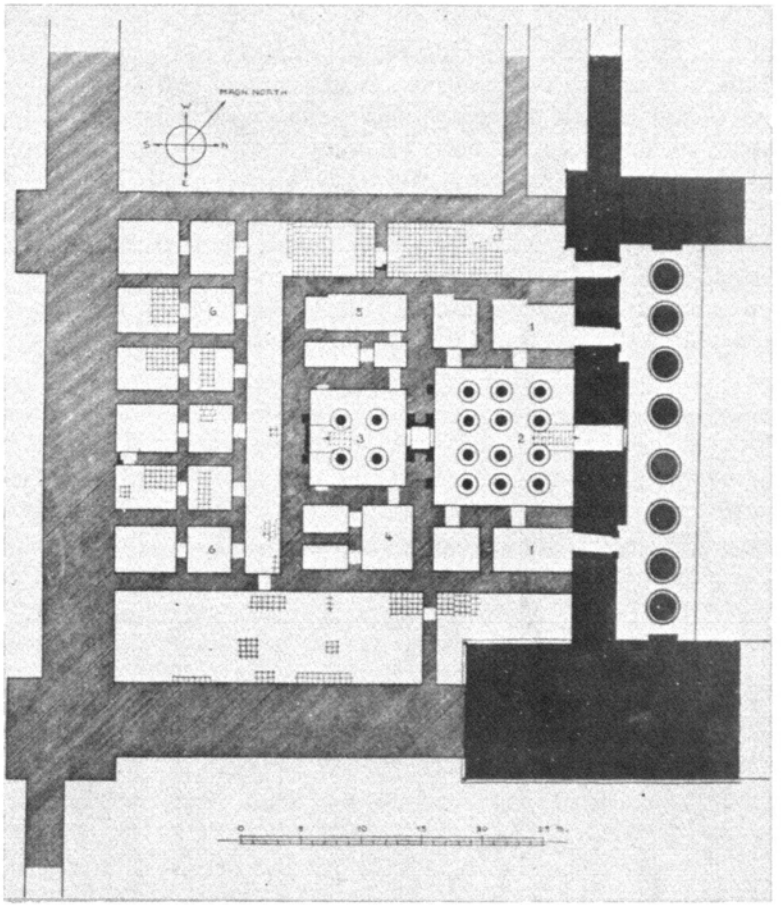

Fig. 54 *Plan of the First Palace*

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followed it and consisted of two distinct units: the inner palace proper, built around the window of appearances and the doors that flanked it; and an outer corridor, with a row of two-room apartments built against the compound's south wall (see fig. 54). There seems to have been no direct communication between these two parts except via the first court, which gave access to both. The palace vestibule was an imposing room supported by twelve columns (see fig. 55) and dominated by a short stairway that led into the royal window of appearances. Beyond this room lay the king's audience hall, a square chamber with four columns where, against the south wall, were found the remains of a throne dais and behind it, a false door similar to those in the Osiris and Amon sanctuaries (fig. 56). This detail is significant, for it indicates that the dead king was expected to visit the palace from the Netherworld, as he had in life, and there is some reason for believing that this first palace was designed with a primarily ritualistic purpose in mind rather than as a completely functional dwelling.

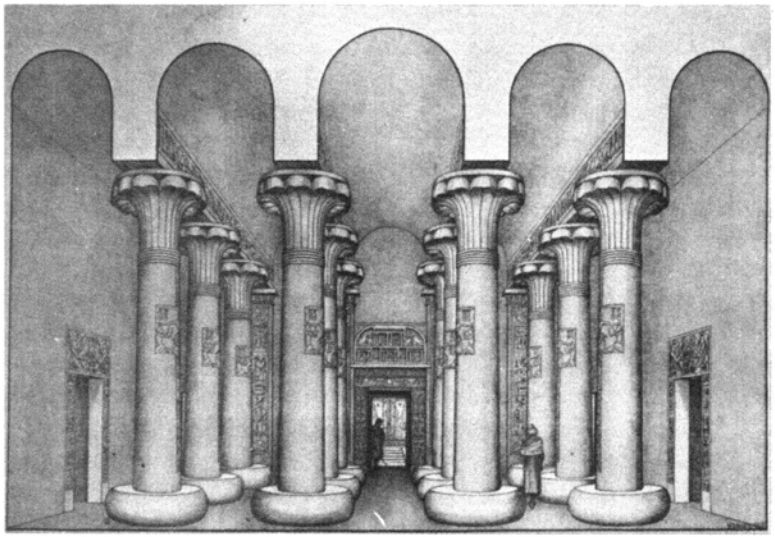

Fig. 55 *First Palace: Columned Hall*

The two doorways flanking the royal window of appearances seem to have been specifically reserved for use in the great festivals of the year. On the east side the king is entering the temple "to see his father Amon in his feast of the beginning of Opet" (probably the first day of the Opet Feast, Amon's annual pilgrimage from Karnak to Luxor, celebrated in late July/early August during the reign of Ramesses III); on the west the king is going in "to cause his father Amon to appear in the Feast of the Valley," the great occasion when the Theban Triad visited the west bank and came to rest in the current ruler's mortuary temple (celebrated in late February/early March under Ramesses III). These two doorways were the sole means of access to the inner palace, and it is notable that the third and westernmost doorway into the second court communicated with the outer corridor and, unlike the other entrances, seems not to have been set aside for any specific occasion: on the east side of the passage we see the king seated in the sedan chair (with its poles not attached) receiving bouquets from two royal sons, while behind, "the great royal butlers of the august palace who are following his Majesty" attend the king with large fans (fig. 57). On the opposite wall, beyond the "Shadow of the Door," the king is leaving the temple, "beautiful on the carrying chair and wearing the *Atef* Crown" (although he is shown with neither of these attributes). It was thus through this doorway that Ramesses III was borne in and out of his temple, and since this doorway communicated with the corridor (and thus, indirectly, with the outer

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buildings), it was really better suited for this purpose than the two doors further east.

The plan of the second palace was very different and, by contrast, less self-contained—as if the aim of the architects had been to make the various sections more accessible to one another, to make the whole into a more functional unit (see fig. 58). It was the foundations of this second palace that were built up by the excavator, Hölscher, and although each room's purpose is not always clear, the plan as a whole can be quickly grasped. The vestibule (B) in front of the new balcony of appearances was drastically shortened in the second palace, as was the staircase into the balcony, although the architects managed to preserve some of its majesty by giving it a lateral rather than a direct approach. The inner hall (C), corresponding to the earlier throneroom, is much grander than its predecessor, but no throne dais was found against its back wall and none was restored. Perhaps this hall had a function different from that of the earlier room (an assembly point for processions into the temple?) and the newer throneroom is to be sought in Room F, a chamber supported by two columns and dominated by a throne dais against the south wall. This room apparently also functioned as part of the king's living quarters, for a bedroom adjoins it to the east, with a raised niche just large enough (2 × 1.15 m. = 6.5 × 3.7 ft.) to hold a small, cot-like bed, such as was found in the tomb of Tutankhamon and which appears not infrequently in museum collections of ancient furniture. The throneroom's entrance faced, on the west side across the corridor (H), a bathroom of modest size: a small anteroom leads into the bath proper, which consisted of stone slabs built into the mudbrick wall, draining into a stone basin below. From this design it would seem that the king's ablutions consisted of a primitive shower, water being poured over his body by attendants and the waste being later baled out of the drain below.

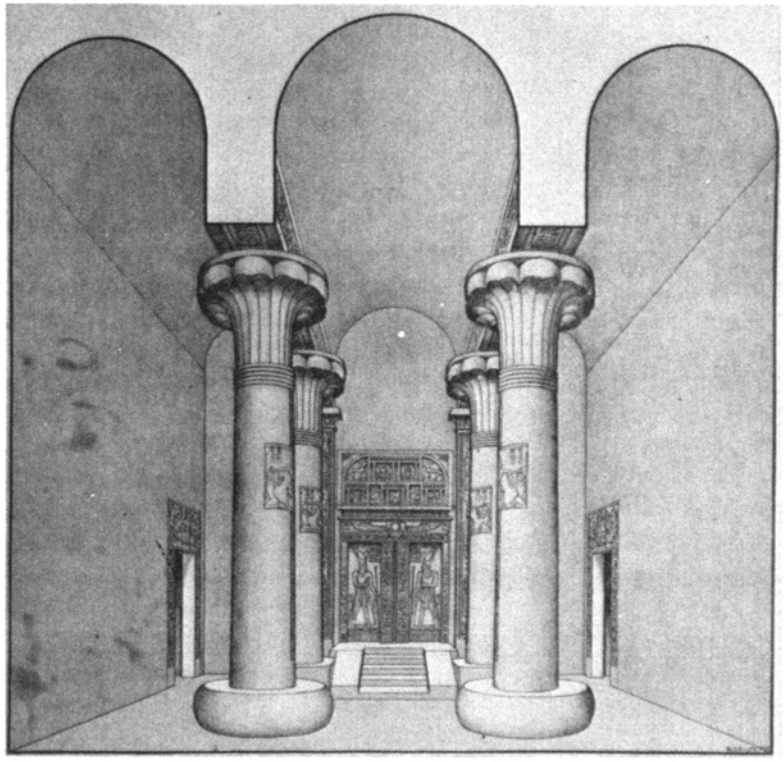

Fig. 56 *First Palace: Throneroom*

The outer chambers were also amplified in this later palace. Doorways east and west of the central hall (C) led out of the palace compound into the surrounding structures, and a glance at the plan (fig. 58) shows other connecting doors and passages that add to the

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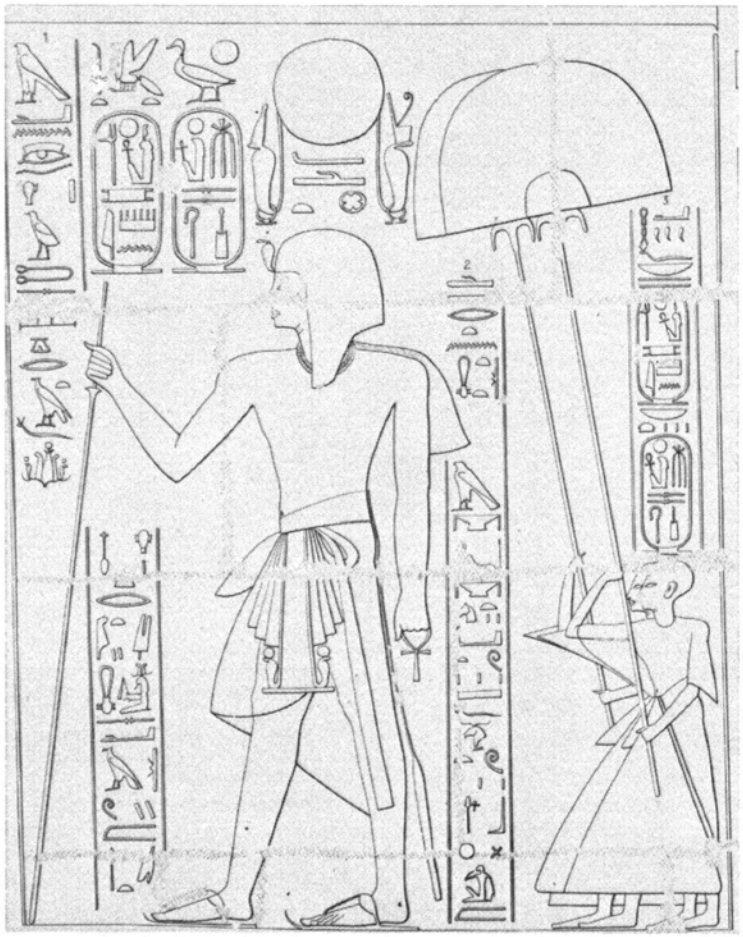

Fig. 57 *The King enters his Temple*

convenience of the various units to one another. The greatest elaboration took place on the east side, where what Hölscher referred to as a "harem court" (J) was built in the former outer corridor, complete with a small window of appearances in front of a miniature throneroom (K)—a place of ease, possibly, for Pharaoh and his intimates. The six small suites that had lined the back wall of the compound like barracks in the earlier palace were now transformed into three gracious apartments, each consisting of a vestibule and a main living-room, with a bathroom and small service chamber attached (M). The later palace also had a second storey, although nothing about these upper areas is known; perhaps the staircase between Rooms C and J led up to roof terraces, as in many Egyptian houses today.

The palace at Medinet Habu follows the pattern of others known from antiquity in that no service units were directly attached to the palace. There were, no doubt, practical reasons why this was so: Pharaoh and his court could not have used these small units on a regular basis, except on flying visits, whenever the king came to preside over important festivals; and at times like these the kitchens, stables, and other service units that normally catered to the preparation of divine offerings doubtless extended themselves to serve the visitors. But, as the false door in the throneroom surely indicates, the palace was also to some extent a "dummy"—a mock building, supplied with representative amenities to serve the king's spirit throughout eternity, even though concessions had sometimes to be made for a living king's participation in the ceremonies of his "Mansion of Millions of Years."

The inner enclosure wall surrounded not only the temple, but other buildings intimately associated with it. Most of these were magazines or workshops, although directly west of the palace apparently lay a garden with a pool that was fed from the deep well

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found in this quarter. Another well further west may have supplied the temple's daily requirements, for water was brought into the building through the south door into the second court. Facing all of these buildings is the Medinet Habu calendar, carved onto the south wall and enumerating the various daily services and annual feasts celebrated here, with specifications of the offerings to be supplied in each case. This text is a virtual copy, once again, of an original found at the Ramesseum, but despite the standardized contents and the fact that this is only a partial copy, the calendar does convey a fairly comprehensive overview of the ritual year at Medinet Habu, and also of the economic requirements of the cult. Apart from the lists and certain obligatory scenes that depict the king describing his bounty to Amon and receiving the god's thanks, bands of relief near the bottom of the wall show rows of offering bearers carrying tables laden with bread, meat, drink, and other victuals into the temple, thus symbolically transferring the gifts promised in the lists to their ultimate destination (fig. 59).

The top register (both here and on the north wall) is occupied with unimportant offering scenes that show the king presenting sacrifice to various gods from different parts of Egypt. Most of these are arranged with no apparent order or rationale, but between the first and second pylon, above the palace, the assembled deities make up a "Greater Ennead" composed of the standard nine, six other members and, lastly, the Theban Triad. Perhaps by this means the king invoked all the gods' protection on his temple, but the listing is far more systematic inside the building (see above, pp. 48–49), on the roof terraces.

The space outside the inner enclosure was filled with neatly planned rows of offices and private houses for the temple staff. These have mostly vanished today, but in the southwest quarter of the compound four slender columns rise gracefully from amidst

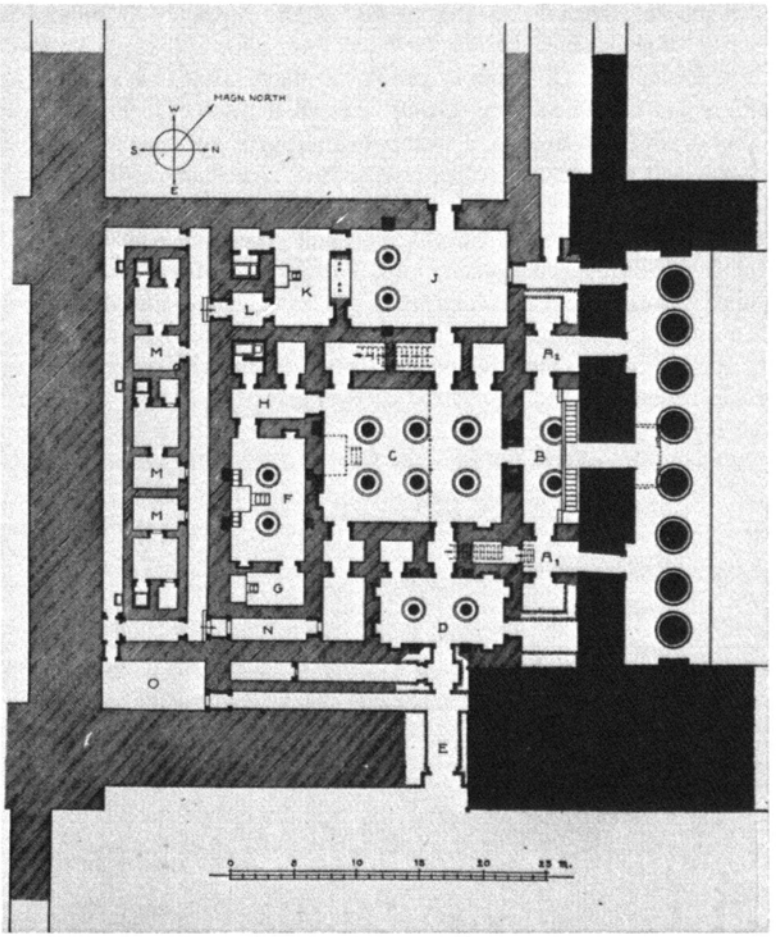

Fig. 58 *Plan of the Second Palace*

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the rubble, virtually all that is left of the house of Butehamon, Scribe of the Tomb during the later Twentieth and early Twenty-First Dynasties. This man is well known to us, thanks in part to the many graffiti he and his family scratched on the rocks of West Thebes, but also because a number of papyrus documents from his family archives, known collectively as the "Late Ramesside Letters," have survived. Butehamon and his father Thutmose were successively employed among an elite corps of workmen who excavated the royal tombs in the Necropolis. The Scribe of the Tomb, a combined secretary and administrative officer, held considerable power not only in this community but in all of West Thebes, and we hear of Butehamon engaged in projects as diverse as the reburial of the royal mummies (including that of Ramesses III) at Deir al-Bahari during the reign of Pinudjem I (c. 1055 B.C.).

During the reign of Ramesses XI, last king of Dynasty Twenty, the workers' community had moved from their village at Deir al-Medina into "the Mansion" for protection against marauding Libyans, and it was probably the house given to his father inside the compound that Butehamon later refurbished for his own use. Only the public areas of this building are preserved, with a small vestibule leading into the main room from which the master of the house, seated on a dais against the back wall, transacted his affairs. The private apartments doubtless lay behind this area, but they have perished. In size and layout, however, this is hardly the small, boxy dwelling that Ramesses III's architects designed for the interior of the temple compound; for already, by the time Butehamon's family had moved into Medinet Habu, the site had begun to take on the irregular aspect of a permanent town that it would retain down to the period of Coptic occupation.

The area between the eastern high gate and the temple was also put to use under Ramesses III, although the bare remains exposed by archaeologists make a definite identification of these structures somewhat doubtful. Immediately in front of the pylon seem to have been the stables and quarters for the king's bodyguard (south) and

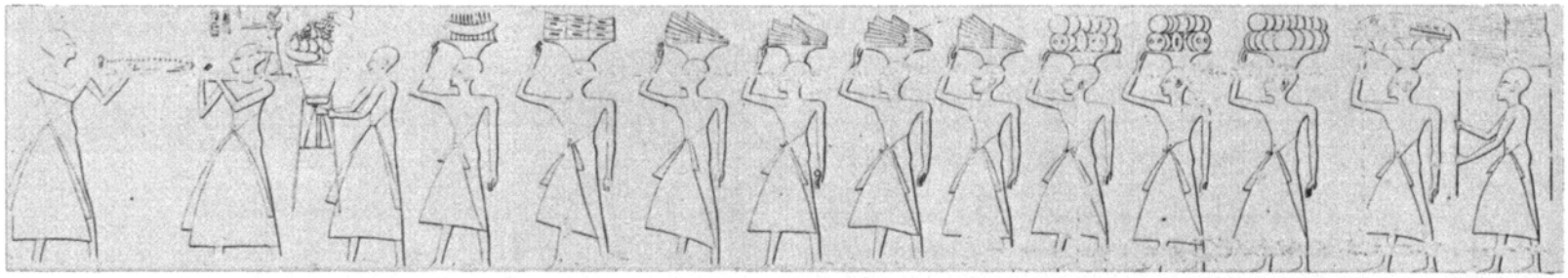

Fig. 59 *Offering Bearers under the Calendar*

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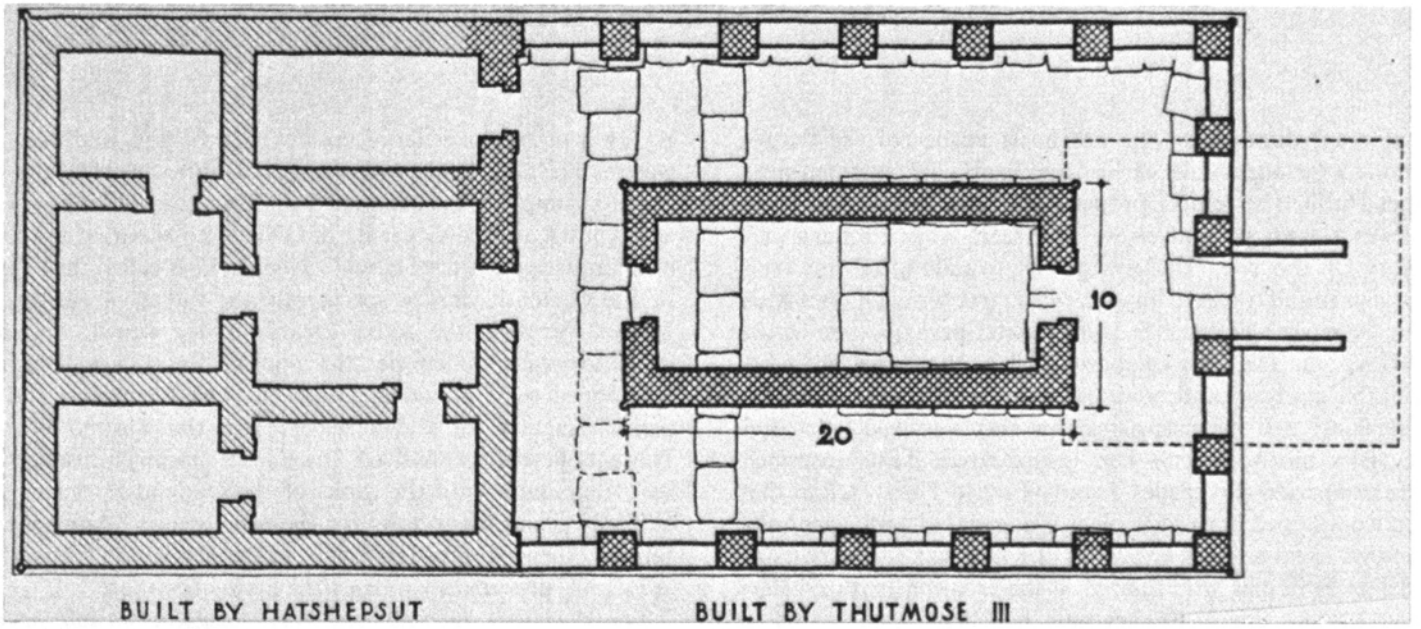

Fig. 60 *Plan of the original Small temple*

groves and pens for cattle (north). On the site of the present chapels of the divine votaresses was a large garden with a pool—as Ramesses III boasts in Papyrus Harris I:

> In front of it [= the temple] I dug a pool copious with water, planted with trees and verdant as the Delta. . . . It was surrounded by arbors, courtyards, and orchards laden with fruit and flowers for thy [= Amon's] countenance. I built their pavilions . . . and I excavated a pool before them, adorned with lotus blossoms.

None of this is visible today, and, instead, the visitor is drawn to two structures, one far older than Ramesses III's temple and the other more recent: the block of late tomb chapels on the south, and beyond, the temple of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

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THE SMALL TEMPLE

This building, dominating the northeast corner of the temple compound, is a mélange of the earliest and latest construction found at Medinet Habu. The temple proper, built in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, was already present, as we have seen, when Ramesses III began work at the site. Underneath its foundations, however, archaeologists found traces of an even older structure that goes back at least to the earlier Eighteenth Dynasty and perhaps even to the Middle Kingdom. The rites celebrated here, then, were probably of considerable antiquity and, since they were not tied to the memory of any one king, it is not surprising that they survived long after Ramesses III's mortuary cult had disappeared. Texts inscribed during the late period (Dynasties Twenty-Five to Thirty) tell us that the Amon worshipped in this temple was associated with a group of eight primeval creator gods known as the Ogdoad—four pairs of male and female deities who figured in the creation myth of Hermopolis in Middle Egypt. "Everything beneficial was created in their time," it is said of them:

> Divine Harmony [Ma^{c}at] came down to earth in their time and fraternized with the gods. Provisions were overflowing in the bellies of mankind, and there was no wickedness in the presence of the land. No crocodile seized, and snakes failed to bite in the time of the[se] primeval gods.

Although the Ogdoad exercised its creative activity in different parts of Egypt, it finally came to rest in the small temple, "the Genuine Mound of the West," which was considered its burial place.

Amon's relation with this group was a complex one, involving no fewer than four generations in which the god, in different forms, was manifest. To begin with, he was identified with (1) the Kematef ("Who Completes his Moment" = "Twinkling of an Eye") Serpent, also known as "the Great Ba of Osiris who is buried in the Mound of Djamu [= Medinet Habu]." As such, he is called the "Forefather of the Ogdoad" and is specifically the father of (2) the "Earth-Maker" Serpent, the actual creator of the world, who was also identified with Amenōpe, the god of the Luxor Temple, who "fashioned the Ogdoad in Southern Opet [= Luxor] and rests in their Cemetery [or "Underworld"] in the Mound of Djamu." This act of creation involved Amon in fashioning himself, for he was next assimilated into the ranks of the Ogdoad (3) in his province of Thebes, and he appears for the last time as "Amenōpe II" (4), called "Horus, Son of Isis" who, as the heir of the Ogdoad, resides in Djamu, presumably to start the cycle once more.

The rites that accompanied these transformations occurred in ten-day cycles, when Amon "shows himself in [i.e., leaves] Opet at the beginning of every ten-day period, so that he might be seen as King of the Gods; crossing in peace to the west of Thebes in order to present offerings to the [Kemat]ef Serpent and to offer libation to the 'Fathers' and '[Mother]s'" (in Egyptian, *tchau-mūwe*, a pun on the name, "Djamu"). Another text emphasizes that Amon travels from Luxor to West Thebes every ten days "to see his father in the company of his children, who came into being from his limbs." These visits are obliquely referred to by several Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, although the practice itself is first mentioned only by Ramesses II (1279–1213 B.C.), long after

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the building of the early temple. Given this building's status as the mythological tomb of the Ogdoad and its plain connection with the cycle of death and resurrection, one is tempted to view this installation as a dynamo for the ancient cemetery, integrating Amon into the mortuary religion of his nome and thus creating one more prototype for the transformations undergone by the blessed dead. Whatever the truth is in this instance, the cult was certainly very old and deeply respected.

The visitor will probably enter the small temple from the south, into the open passage between the bark room and the sanctuary (see fig. 60). These two parts comprise the essential Eighteenth Dynasty construction: it was begun by "King" Hatshepsut with a slightly different plan in mind, but only the sanctuary area was complete at her death, and the building was finished by Thutmose III along its present lines. The king suppressed his aunt's name in most of the places where it was found in the sanctuary and, in an apparent effort to absorb her reign into the historic lifespans of her two male predecessors, he replaced her name with those of his father and grandfather (and, less frequently, with his own) throughout these rooms (see fig. 61).

Hatshepsut's sanctuary, named "Holiest of Places," has two parts. Room M (which Hölscher called the "Sanctuary of the King") stands apart at the north and is probably a purification chapel, to be used by the king or his representative before the ceremonies in the gods' cult rooms. The main scenes here show a Iunmutef Priest, escorted by other priests and offering bearers, presiding over piles of offerings and an offering list, "making a Boon-which-the-King-Gives offering four times, [consisting of] a thousand of every good and pure thing" before an enthroned figure of Thutmose III. The rest of the sanctuary is divided into two suites (O-P and N-Q) reached via a central vestibule (L). In this first room the paving

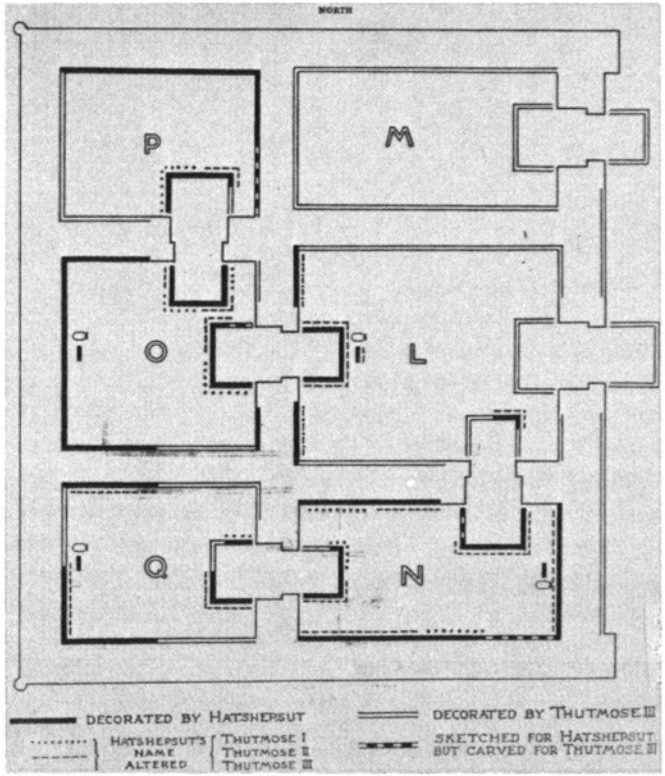

Fig. 61 *The Small Temple: Sanctuary*

blocks had been completely torn out, and in the debris under the foundation wall Hölscher discovered three fragments of a gigantic black granite statue of Thutmose III and Amon, seated side by side. Since the largest fragment was too large to fit through the doorway

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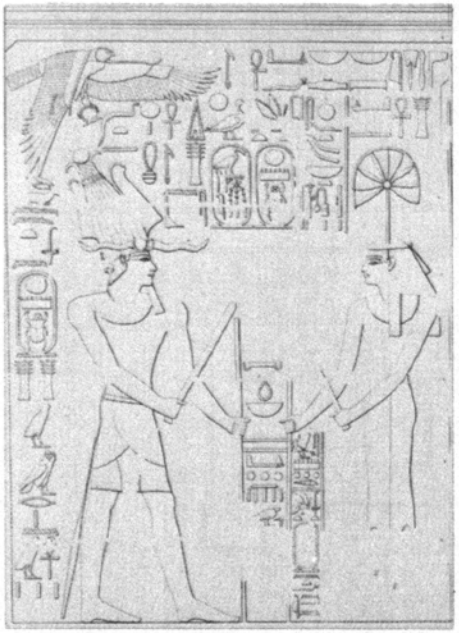

Fig. 62 *Stretching the Cord*

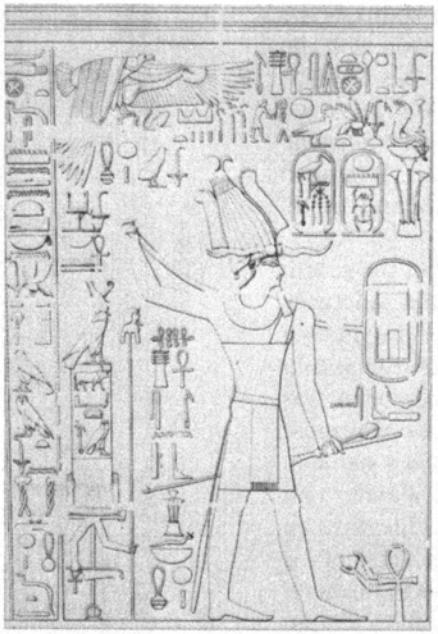

Fig. 63 *Scattering Gypsum*

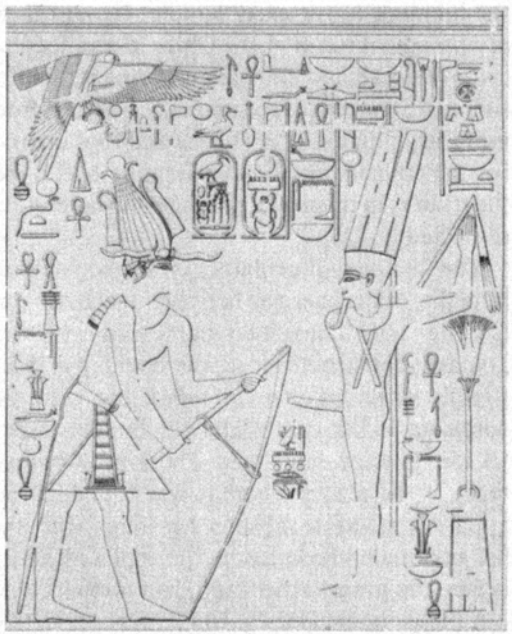

Fig. 64 *Hacking the Earth*

out of the sanctuary (and was thus reburied in the floor), it would seem that the statue originally stood in this room but was broken up and buried at a later time (perhaps after the figure of Amon was mutilated during the Amarna Period).

Each suite of rooms is decorated with scenes from the daily offering ritual and consists of an offering hall and inner shrine for the deities who "resided" in the small temple. The god shown here is Amon, either in his usual tall-plumed form, or as an ithyphallic deity. The innermost shrine, Room P, is dominated by a huge naos that doubtless contained the cult statue of the god worshipped in the small temple, and which was introduced into this room after it was built by dismantling part of the west wall: the individual blocks were given numbers so they could be reassembled more easily. In neither suite are the reliefs very distinctive, but in Room Q, on the west (= back) wall, the king is seen steadying a portable figure of the ithyphallic "Amon-Rē, King of the Gods, Lord of

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Heaven." Possibly, then, the god's processional statue dwelt in this room, while the inner chamber was reserved for the more mysterious manifestation of Amon within this temple.

The area in front of the sanctuary consists of an ambulatory porch enclosed by pillars on three sides, surrounding a bark room in the center. The exterior walls of the porch were inscribed in large hieroglyphs by Ramesses III, as if to advertise his pious regard for the temple after he had made room for it within his own compound. The bark room, like the ambulatory, was built by Thutmose III, mostly out of sandstone, but with a number of limestone blocks apparently reused from an earlier structure; these fragments can best be seen on the southern outer wall of the bark room.

On this outer wall, the original reliefs of the Eighteenth Dynasty are still preserved, and on the north wall there is an interesting sequence of scenes showing Thutmose III participating in foundation ceremonies for the temple (figs. 62–64). In six scenes, moving from east to west, we see Thutmose III engaged in (1) "stretching the cord" with Sefkhet-Abwy, the goddess of writing, a ceremony connected with laying the building's foundations; (2) "scattering gypsum": the king here seems to be tossing a lasso around a small model of the temple, but is in fact pouring white gypsum chips into the foundation trenches, to indicate where the walls are to be built; (3) "hacking the earth" before an ithyphallic Amon: the king excavates the trenches along which the masonry walls will run. The other three scenes (not shown here) depict the king (4) moulding a brick, (5) offering wine, and (6) presenting a hecatomb to Amon. These scenes, interesting enough in their contents, are also some of the finest Eighteenth Dynasty bas-reliefs extant and they also preserve extensive traces of paint, although this feature may owe something to later refurbishing.

The interior of the bark shrine was already in such ruinous condition by the second century B.C. that Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (145–116) dismantled it completely and inserted new blocks. He then recarved the original scenes (complete with the various additions and restorations made in the course of centuries) in the style

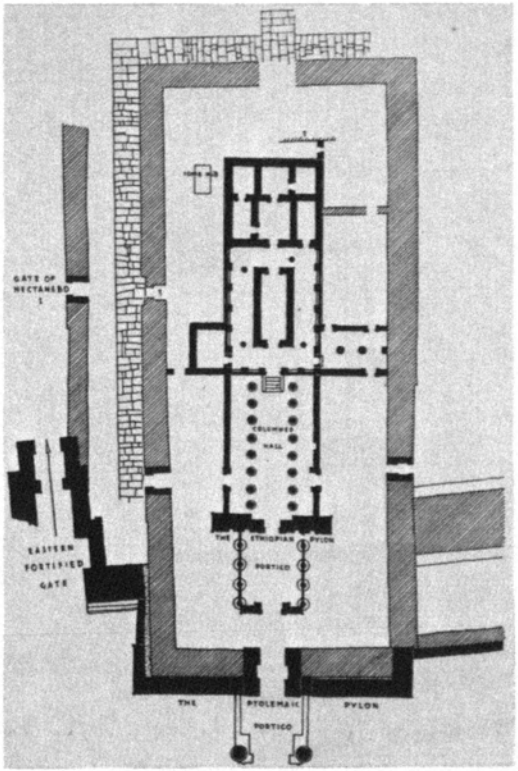

Fig. 65 *The Small Temple in the Ptolemaic Period*

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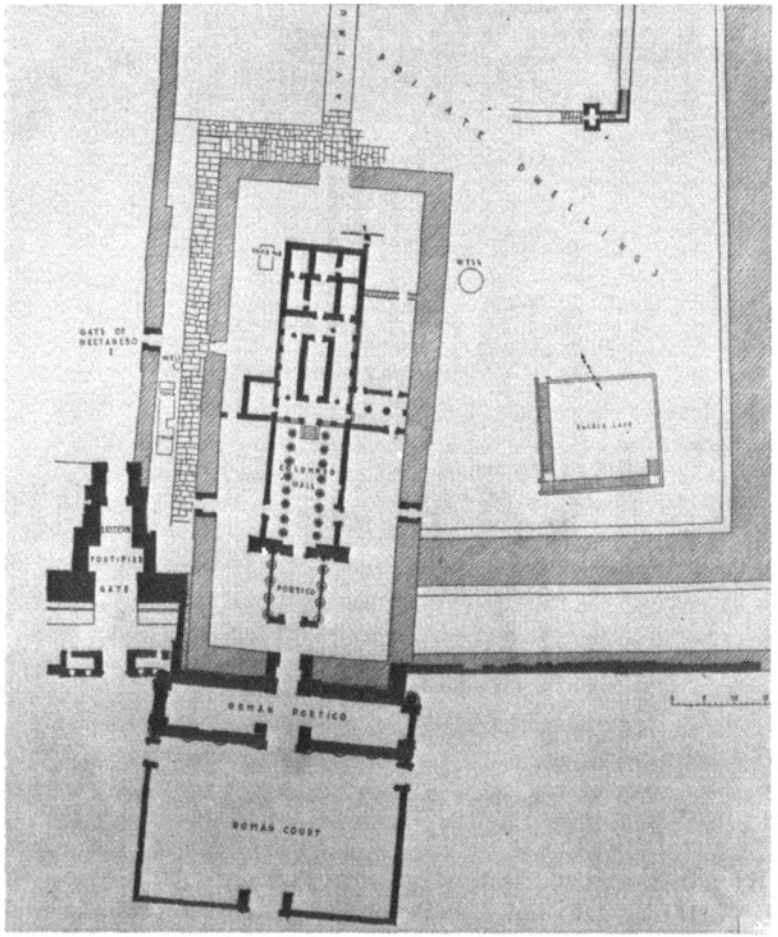

Fig. 66 *The Small Temple in the Roman Period*

of his period, a rather cramped raised relief. The scenes shown here are fairly stereotyped, but in several of them Thutmose III is accompanied by Merytrē-Hatshepsut, the "Great Royal Wife" of his final years, who survived to see her son, Amenhotep II, ascend the throne of the Pharaohs. Ptolemy VIII's restoration text occupies the frieze that runs along the tops of the walls, and this king is himself seen offering wine and other sacrifices to Amon on the north wall inside the bark room.

Although the temple was now formally complete, it was to be much enlarged, especially during the centuries following the decline of the Egyptian empire that are referred to by scholars as the "Late" and "Graeco-Roman" periods. A "restoration" by Pinudjem I (1054–1032 B.C.) is mentioned in an inscription that runs along the base of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple's outer wall, but all traces of this work have vanished. It is Hakoris (393–380 B.C.), a Pharaoh of the Twenty-Ninth Dynasty, who must be credited with the first structural alterations to the small temple itself, when he appropriated four columns belonging to the Saite tomb chapels to the south in order to prop up the sagging roof of the Thutmoside ambulatory (see plan, fig. 65). The annexes at the east end of the porch—a small room to the south and a larger chamber, supported by two columns, to the north—were apparently added by the Ptolemies, partly to set the earliest part of the temple off from the later additions, and also to fill the space between the temple and a mudbrick enclosure wall. The blocks from which these wings are built were mostly taken from the Ramesseum area, particularly from a building dedicated by Ramesses II to his mother, Queen Tuy.

The most striking change in the small temple, however, was the gradual lengthening of its forecourts. The columned hall that lies to the east, immediately in front of the Thutmoside ambulatory, was built by Ptolemy X Alexander I (107–88 B.C.), and itself re-

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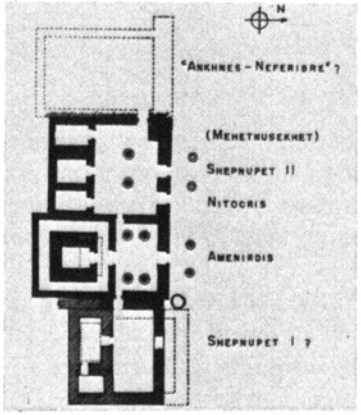

Fig. 67 *The Three Saite Chapels*

placed a gallery of the same length that was built as an entrance corridor for the temple in the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty. On the pylon built in front of the hall (also in Dynasty Twenty-Five), the names of the Nubian Pharaohs were deliberately erased and their cartouches were allowed to remain blank, perhaps a contemptuous gesture towards these foreign rulers who had themselves failed to preserve Egypt from the horrors of the Assyrian invasions. In front of this pylon (see fig. 65), a columned portico was built by a king of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty whose name was also hacked out and replaced by that of Nectanebo I (380–364 B.C.), founder of Egypt's last native dynasty. This portico served as the small temple's façade through the remainder of the Late Period, for nearly five hundred years.

The final, consciously grandiose phase began late in the Ptolemaic period (c. 100 B.C.) with the construction of the pylon and its gateway, directly in front of the Saite portico (fig. 65). The stone pylon was actually built onto the mudbrick enclosure wall, the disappearance of which gives the pylon a curiously hollow look from the rear. The frontal view is suitably grand, however, set off as it is by a splendid gateway: its cavetto cornice is especially striking, for polychrome reed-leaves form the background for a giant winged disk—one of the most elegant, and surely the most brightly painted, to come down to us from antiquity. A small portico, like that in front of the Ethiopian pylon, was probably built in front of the Ptolemaic gateway, but in the reign of the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) this feature was razed to make room for a more ambitious project: a huge portico supported by eight massive columns would have completely masked the pylon (as in other contemporary temples at Dendera, Esna, and Edfu), and a new forecourt was to be built in front of it (see fig. 66). The court, consisting of a low wall with entrances into the street, was in fact finished, but the proposed portico had to be abandoned, perhaps in response to the pressing economic difficulties that beset Roman Egypt from then on. In the end, only two of the projected eight columns were set up, leaving the Ptolemaic pylon and gateway to dominate the scene as before.

The Roman forecourt is a melancholy place today, being often overgrown with high grass, but a visitor can see here a significant relic of Egypt's days of empire, found here by roundabout circumstances. Thutmose III's mortuary temple lay north of Medinet Habu, and when the Ptolemaic pylon was being built, someone removed the granite false door from this earlier temple and reused it as a threshhold. Fortunately, it was laid on its face and was recovered in virtually mint condition, so it can be viewed today where it was set up after its rediscovery, in the southwest corner of the Roman court.

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THE SAITE CHAPELS

The northeast corner of Ramesses III's enclosure has very little to attract a visitor. A sacred lake, probably built during Ptolemaic times, is found in this quarter, and further west is a "Nilometer" (a well with a passage leading down to the water level) built by Nectanebo I (see fig. 3). North of the small temple's columned hall is a gateway of Taharqa (his names erased) which originally cut through the mudbrick wall that replaced the Ramesside enclosure during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (fig. 65). A similar gate erected under Domitian was later built into a Roman extension of this wall, near the southeast corner of Ramesses III's temple, but it was dismantled for reuse in the Coptic town and rebuilt later, in the wrong place, northwest of the small temple. Depending on whether the visitor leaves this temple via the Thutmoside ambulatory or from the columned hall further east, he will pass (on the south side) either another doorway built by Nectanebo I or an uninscribed gate pushed through the Ptolemaic enclosure wall.

Directly opposite the small temple, between the High Gate and the Ramesside temple, are two small buildings which are all that remain of a row of four chapels built here between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. for the "God's Wives of Amon." These ladies, known also as "Divine Votaresses," played an important part in the political life of the Thebaid when it was virtually an independent state: on a formal level, the votaresses were Amon's living consorts and dwelt, unmarried to mortal husbands, in ceremonial splendor. More practically, though, they were the representatives of the royal power, accepted by the Theban hierarchy as visible symbols of their loyalty to the kings who resided in the north. Real power was wielded by the Theban notables, whose civil authority was sometimes cloaked by surprisingly minor positions in the priesthood of Amon, and the divine votaresses "ruled" as mere figureheads at the head of a divine state whose actual "king" was Amon-Rē, King of the Gods.

The four chapels, which are both mausoleums and mortuary shrines, were built in a row, progressing one after the other from the east to the west across the centuries (fig. 67). The earliest belonged to Shepenwepet I, who was appointed to the office by her father, Osorkon III, during the last years of Theban independence from Nubian control (c. 754 B.C.). Almost nothing is left of the building's superstructure, but a shaft on the east side descends into the vaulted stone chambers where the divine votaress and members of her family were buried. Immediately to the west, however, is the well-preserved chapel of Amenardis I, a daughter of the Nubian King Kashta, whom Shepenwepet was obliged to adopt as her successor when Thebes lost its independence (c. 740 B.C.). This chapel was not built by Amenardis herself, however, but by her niece, Shepenwepet II, whom King Piankhy installed as his sister's heiress at Thebes in 710 B.C.

The chapel of Amenardis communicated with the earlier building of Shepenwepet I by a doorway through its east wall, but most visitors will enter through the main entrance on the north side. On the lintel above the doorway is an "Appeal to the Living" (also found at the entrances of the neighboring chapels to the west) that proceeds as follows:

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> O living ones who are on earth and pass by this Ka House which Shepenwepet[II] made for her father Anubis, Pre-eminent in the Divine Booth, and for the divine votaress Amenardis, the deceased: as you love your children, and would bequeath to them your positions, your houses, your lakes, and your canals, accordingly as it has been desired that you build them for yourselves and dig them for yourselves; as you breathe the fragrant living breeze of the Great Avenue [= the Necropolis] and follow this noble god—great of power!—at his every goodly procession; as you celebrate the festivals of the Great God who is in the Mound of Tjamu [= Amon? Osiris?], and as your wives perform rites for Hathor, Lady of the West, and she causes them to bear males and females to you without illness or suffering, and without your suffering for them, or experiencing affliction or sickness: Please say the "Boon which the King Gives' [Prayer]. . . .

The passers-by are thus encouraged to participate in the mortuary cult of the person buried inside the chapel—but perhaps "coerced" would be a better word, for the "Appeal" concludes rather ominously:

> As for those who do *not* utter these words, the Mistress of the West will cause them to be sick and their wives to be afflicted!

The first room of the chapel is a forecourt, the roof of which was supported by four columns. In the middle of the chamber is an offering table in black granite that Shepenwepet II supplied for her aunt's mortuary cult, and the walls are filled with reliefs depicting Shepenwepet performing various rituals before the gods. Another doorway leads from this court into the sanctuary area, which consists of a free-standing holy-of-holies surrounded by a corridor. This outer passage is covered with inscriptions (including many of the ancient funerary spells known as "Pyramid Texts") and reliefs that show either Shepenwepet or Amenardis before the gods. The cartouches, which contain the name of Amenardis' father, Kashta, were erased by the kings of the following Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, but the names and figures of the divine votaresses themselves were respected—a fortunate restraint, for the workmanship here is quite beautiful: the figures are cleanly executed in sunk relief that is moderately deep and yet richly detailed, with the characterful faces of the principals lending an element of portraiture to what are otherwise stereotyped genre scenes. These features are well represented in a double scene located in the top register of the rear

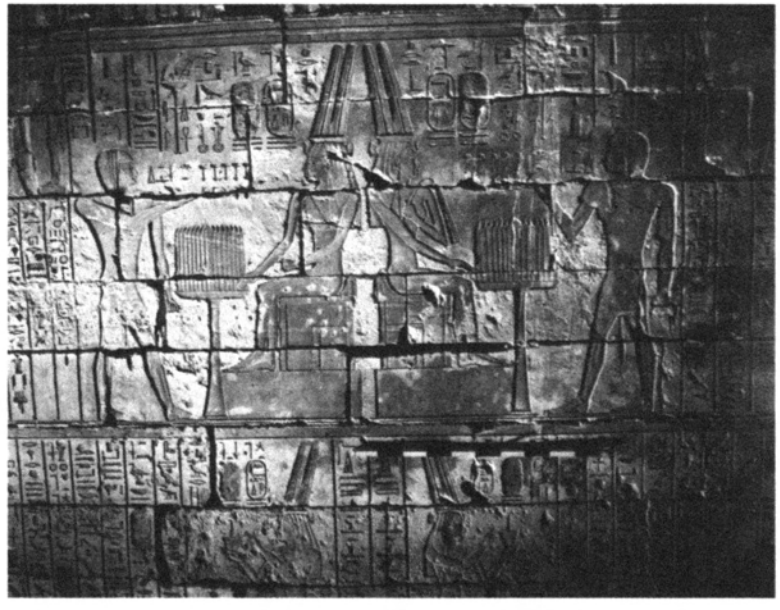

Fig. 68 *Amenirdis and Iunmutef*

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wall of the corridor, in which Amenardis is shown seated before an offering table while a Iunmutef Priest in front of her recites a purification spell (fig. 68). Similarly fine are the reliefs on the sanctuary, carved in raised relief. The outside walls give pride of place to Shepenwepet II, who officiates before Amenardis and a host of deities, but on the façade (right side), we see Amenardis led in by her divine sponsors, the jackal-headed Anubis, lord of the Necropolis, and the ibis-headed Thoth, scribe of the gods (fig. 69).

The interior of the sanctuary reflects the essentials of what the Egyptians expected from the mortuary cult—the survival of the deceased beyond death by means of the rites enacted for him by the living. The two side walls are accordingly filled with great offering lists, the "menu" that is to sustain Amenardis throughout eternity, and the divine votaress herself is shown undergoing the ministrations of priests. The actual burial was made under the floor, in a tiny crypt much less imposing than that of Shepenwepet I, large enough to hold a sarcophagus and a few other small objects, and then covered by the paving blocks of the upper chamber. The thieves who robbed the tomb in antiquity did such a thorough job that not even the stone sarcophagus has yet come to light, although a number of Amenardis' grave goods can be found scattered throughout the museums of the world.

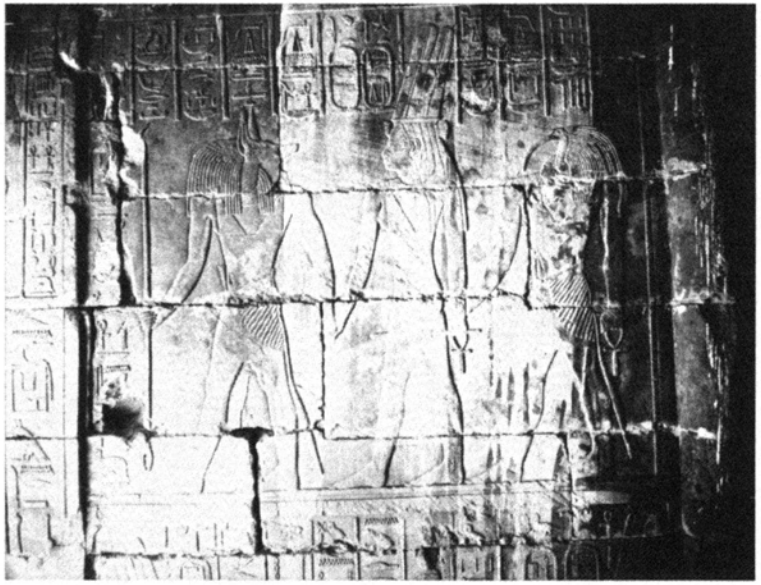

Fig. 69 *Amenirdis with Anubis and Thoth*

The checkered building history of the next chapel reflects the tangle of events that occurred in the next half-century. Shepenwepet II in due time adopted Amenardis II, daughter of King Taharqa, but the succession thus arranged did not last. Nubian rule in Egypt ended abruptly when two Assyrian invasions (671 and 666 B.C.) sent Taharqa fleeing into exile in the south, where he soon died. His successor was not able to reassert the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty's sway over the country, and it was finally left to the princes of the Delta town of Sais to pick up the pieces. Even so, the Thebans did not give up their independence lightly, and it was only in 656 B.C. that an arrangement was worked out by which Thebes agreed to accept a divine votaress from the Saite house. A great fleet set out from the north to escort Psamtik I's nominee, his daughter Nitocris, to Thebes, where she was presented to Amon and then adopted, both by Shepenwepet II and her heiress, Amenardis II, as their successor. Power had thus been transferred, as Thebes now recognized the suzerainty of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. Nonetheless, the Theban officials who had served the previous royal house re-

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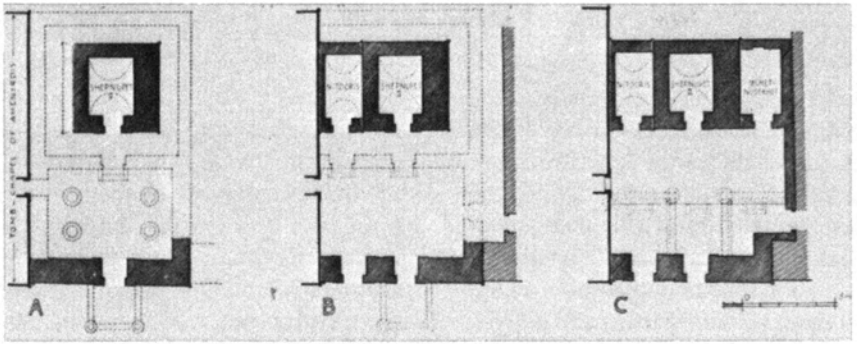

Fig. 70 *Chapel of Shepenwepet II: Successive Stages*

mained in office for their natural terms, and the new god's wife coexisted amicably with her two adoptive "mothers" from Nubia.

Shepenwepet II had planned to build for herself a chapel similar to the one she had made for Amenardis I, but this building was not finished before she died. Following in the tradition laid down before her, Nitocris completed her predecessor's tomb chapel, but she added another burial chamber for herself and, still later, made room for her actual mother, Queen Mehytenweskhet, by extending the building further west (fig. 70). With three burials squeezed into the space originally designed for one, the corridor around the sanctuary had to be sacrificed, but otherwise this chapel is quite similar to that of Amenardis I. Two doorways, each surmounted by its own "Appeal to the Living," lead into a courtyard. The level of workmanship here is mostly quite poor, compromising whatever interest might be attached to scenes such as that on the northeast wall, where Mehytenweskhet is seen before her two "hostesses," Shepenwepet II and Nitocris. In the shrines themselves the standard of carving is better, though not as fine as in the chapel next door. The decoration in the sanctuaries of Shepenwepet II and Nitocris is similar to what was seen in Amenardis I's holy of-holies, but Mehytenweskhet's peculiar status is reflected in a somewhat different arrangement: the scenes on the side walls of her chapel are more varied than the other two, and at the back of the room is a false door. Her shrine thus resembles contemporary tombs of private individuals more than the simple cult chambers of the divine votaresses. Once again, the burials were made under the floor, and all were pillaged in antiquity, although Nitocris' sarcophagus (now in the Cairo Museum) was found in a shaft at Deir al-Medina.

The fourth chapel has completely vanished, but its presence has been surmised from certain peculiarities in the west wall of Nitocris' and Shepenwepet II's building. It is assigned, by elimination, to Ankhnesneferibrē, a daughter of Psamtik II who was the last holder of the votaresses' title, and who also claimed the dignity of High Priest of Amon. Her sarcophagus, also found at Deir al-Medina, was reused by a man who lived during the reign of Augustus, and it is now in the British Museum.

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EPILOGUE

Medinet Habu is no more than a tourist attraction today. It has long since stopped functioning in any of its past roles as fortress, shrine, or administrative headquarters. Yet, with imagination, the place can fleetingly live again. Here, in the city of the dead, silent with the memories of over five millennia, we can re-create the bustle of a living community of priests, workmen, and officials, whose everyday transactions, preserved in the surviving ostraca and papyri, speak to us today with a refreshing and poignant directness. Seen through these eyes, the mazes of magazines and ateliers, courts and cult rooms cease being mute relics of a dead society, but for a moment recapture the vibrancy of this ancient people and their trust in the divine. The lofty halls and hidden sanctuaries lose some of their remoteness as they reflect the ties—sometimes amazingly familiar—that existed between these people and their gods. The ancient Egyptians have been accused of an obsession with ritual and death, and this popular notion (despite much evidence to the contrary) is not easily quelled. But the student who wishes to go beyond this façade, to discern meaning in the forms of an ancient civilization, can do no better than to stay a while at the cross section of ancient history that is found here, at Medinet Habu.

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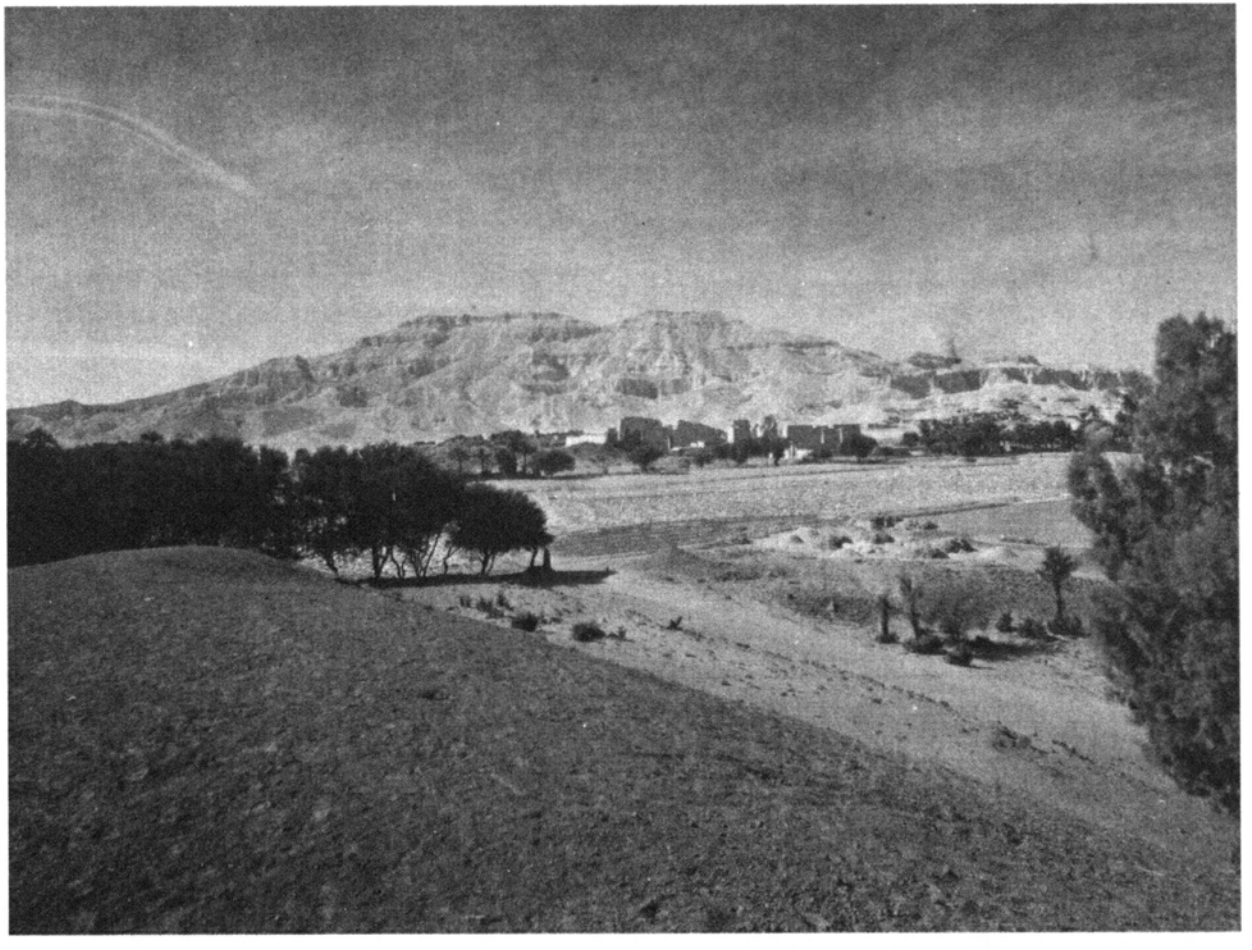

Fig. 71 *Medinet Habu against the Theban Hills*

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CAPSULE CHRONOLOGY

c. 3100–2686 B.C. Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties I-II)
c. 2686–2181 B.C. Old Kingdom (Dynasties III-VI)
c. 2181–2040 B.C. First Intermediate Period (Dynasties VII–X)
c. 2040–1786 B.C. Middle Kingdom (Dynasties XI–XII)
c. 1786–1570 B.C. Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties XIII–XVII)
c. 1570–1100 B.C. New Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII–XX)
1504–1450 B.C. Thutmose III (Dynasty XVIII)
c. 1498–1484 B.C. Hatshepsut
c. 1378–1340 B.C. Amenhotep III
c. 1340–1319 B.C. The "Amarna Period"
c. 1319–1292 B.C. Horemheb
1279–1212 B.C. Ramesses II (Dynasty XIX)
c. 1212–1203 B.C. Merneptah
c. 1184–1182 B.C. Sethnakht (Dynasty XX)
c. 1182–1151 B.C. Ramesses III
c. 1151–1144 B.C. Ramesses IV
c. 1139–1132 B.C. Ramesses VI
c. 1125–1123 B.C. Ramesses VIII
c. 1100–710 B.C. Third Intermediate Period (Dynasties XXI–XXIV
c. 1070–1055 B.C. Pinudjem I (High Priest)
c. 1054–1032 B.C. Pinudjem I (King)
c. 777–749 B.C. Osorkon III
c. 790–664 B.C. Nubian Domination (Dynasty XXV)
c. 769–756 B.C. Kashta
c. 756–716 B.C. Piankhy (Piye)
690–664 B.C. Taharqa
664–525 B.C. Saite Revival (Dynasty XXVI)
664–610 B.C. Psamtik I
595–589 B.C. Psamtik II
525–332 B.C. Late Period (Dynasties XXVII–XXX)
393–380 B.C. Hakoris (Dynasty XXIX)
380–363 B.C. Nectanebo I (Dynasty XXX)
332–30 B.C. Macedonian Domination (Ptolemiac Dynasty)
30 B.C.–641 A.D. Roman (later Byzantine) Domination

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