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978-1-108-06586-3 - Topography of Thebes, and General View of Egypt: Being a Short Account of the Principal Objects Worthy of Notice in the Valley of the Nile

John Gardner Wilkinson

Excerpt

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# GENERAL VIEW OF EGYPT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### TOPOGRAPHY OF THEBES, OR DIOSPOLIS MAGNA.

IT is not my intention, in noticing the ruins of this extensive city, to enter into a minute detail of all the subjects which the variety of the sculptures present on the walls of these stupendous monuments, nor is it necessary to arrest the attention of the reader by any previous account of the history of those monarchs, who claim the honour of having founded and embellished the metropolis of Upper Egypt. To render, however, the names of the Egyptian Pharaohs familiar to him, I shall not fail to introduce a list of those monarchs in the course of the work.

The name of Thebes is corrupted from the *Tápé\** of the Coptic, which in the Memphitic dialect of that language is pronounced *Thaba*, while that of *Diospolis* is a translation of *Amunei*, or the abode of (the Egyptian) *Jupiter*.

\* Pliny, in one place, writes the name of Thebes in the singular number: "*Thebe portarum centum nobilis fama.*" Lib. 5. c. 9.

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The time of its foundation still remains, like that of Memphis, the capital of Lower Egypt, enveloped in that obscurity which is the fate of all the most ancient cities; but probability favours the conjecture, that though Menes, the first king of Egypt, found it in the humble condition of an infant capital, its foundation will date several generations before the accession of that monarch to the throne of his native country.

The most ancient remains now existing at Thebes are unquestionably in the great temple of Karnak, the largest and most splendid ruin\* of which perhaps either ancient or modern times can boast, being the work of a number of successive monarchs, each anxious to surpass his predecessor by increasing the dimensions and proportions of the part he added. It is this fact which enables us to account for the diminutive size of the older parts of this extensive building; and to their comparatively limited scale, offering greater facility, as their vicinity to the sanctuary greater temptation, to an invading enemy to destroy them, added to their remote antiquity, are to be attributed their dilapidated state, and the total disappearance of the sculptures executed during the reigns of the Pharaohs, who preceded Osirtesen I., the contem-

\* In antiquity, the pyramids of Egypt surpass every other monument now existing in this or any other country; but they do not of course, from the nature of their construction, at all vie with the magnificence of the ruins of Karnak

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## Chap. I.] FIRST OBJECTS TO BE VISITED. 3

porary of Joseph, and the earliest monarch whose name exists on the monuments of Thebes.

To enable the mind freely to contemplate the beauties of the ruins of this city, it is obvious that Karnak, from being the most splendid, should be the last visited by the stranger, who wishes to bestow a share of his admiration on the smaller but not less interesting monuments of the western bank, the "Libyan suburb of Thebes,"\* which included the extensive quarter of the Memnonia, and extended to the small temple of Adrian on the west, and, in the opposite direction, as far as the eastern tombs of its immense cemetery.

To commence with the ruins nearest the river; the first object worthy of notice is the small temple and palace at old Qoórneh,† dedicated to Amun,‡ the Theban Jupiter, by Osirei,§ and completed by his son Remeses II., the supposed Sesostris of the Greeks. Its plan, though it evinces the usual symmetrophobia of Egyptian monuments, presents a marked deviation from the ordinary distribution of the parts which compose it. The entrance leads

\* Papyri of Paris, of M. D'Anastasy, and of Mr. Grey.

† This village was destroyed and abandoned in the time of the Ghooz, or Memlooks, since which time the people of Qoórneh have preferred the more secure abode of the Theban tombs.

‡ I have adopted this mode of writing it, though Ammon is equally correct.

§ This king, the father of Remeses II., has the name either of Osirei or Oei, in addition to the title "Beloved of Amun," in one variation, and "Beloved of Pthah," in the other.

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through a Pyloné, or Pylon, bearing, in addition to the name of the founder, that of Remeses III., beyond which is a dromos of one hundred and twenty-eight feet, whose mutilated sphinxes\* are scarcely traceable amidst the mounds and ruins of Arab hovels. A second Pylon terminates this, and commences a second dromos of nearly similar length, extending to the colonnade, or corridor, in front of the temple, whose columns, of one of the oldest Egyptian orders, are crowned by an abacus, which appears to unite the stalks of water-plants that compose the shaft and capital.†

Of the intercolumniations of these ten columns three only agree in breadth, and a similar discrepancy is observed in the doorways which form the three entrances to the building. The temple itself presents a central hall, about fifty-seven feet in length, supported by six columns, having on either side three small chambers, one of which leads to a lateral hall, and the opposite one to a passage and open court on the east side. Upon the upper end of the hall open five other chambers, the centre one of which leads to a large room, supported by four

\* They are also of Osirei. The sphinx represents the king himself. They are consequently *never* female, but always male; and have either the head of a man or of a ram, with the body of a lion.

† These, by lowering the abacus little more than two-thirds of its height, may have been the origin of the Doric column, whose simple shaft is still more easily traced in those of the grottos at Beni Ha'san, the work of a still more remote period.

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## Chap. I.] TEMPLE AT OLD QOORNEH—DEDICATION. 5

square pillars, beyond which was the sanctuary itself; but the dilapidated state of the north end of this temple affords but little to enable us to form an accurate restoration of the innermost chambers. The lateral hall on the west, which belonged to the palace of the king, is supported by two columns, and leads to three other rooms, behind which are the vestiges of other apartments, and on the east side, besides a large hypæthral court, were several similar chambers, extending also to the northern extremity of its precincts. On the architrave, over the corridor, is the dedication of Remeses II., to whom, in his character of Phrah\* (Pharaoh), or the Sun, under the symbolic form of a hawk, Amunre is presenting the emblem of life; therein, after the usual titles of the king, we are told that “Remeses, the beloved of Amun,† has dedicated this work to his father Amunre, king of the gods, having made additions‡ for him to the temple of

\* The Hebrew name פֶּרַעַה, Phrah, is merely the Coptic ΠΙΡΗ, Memphitice ΦΡΗ, Phre, pronounced Phra. I have frequently noticed the meaning and orthography of this word Phrah, or Piré, “the Sun,” a title given to the Egyptian monarchs, from the pretended analogy of the king, as chief of earthly beings, with the sun, as chief of heavenly bodies.

† That Ammon-mai or Mai-ammon are used synonymously will appear to every one who notices the two modes of writing (vertically and horizontally) the name of Remeses III., however the Coptic may seem to require the two readings, “beloved of Ammon,” and “loving Ammon,” on which M. Champollion has, I think, unnecessarily insisted.

‡ This group, the bird and sickle, reads cut or sculptured, though many of these dedications seem to require the sense

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his father, the king (fostered by Ra and Truth) the Son of the Sun (Osirei).” The whole of this part of the building bears the name of Remeses II., though his father is represented in some of these sculptures as taking part in the religious ceremonies, and assisting in making offerings to the deities of the temple he had founded.

On the north-west side of the inner wall of this corridor, the arks, or shrines of queen Ames-Nofriatre, and of Osirei, are borne each by twelve priests, in the “procession of the shrines,”\* attended by a fan-bearer and high priest, to the god of the temple; and in a small tablet added at a later period, the king Pthah-se-pthah is represented in presence of Amunre, Ames-Nofriatre,† Osirei, and Remeses II., receiving the emblems of royal power from the hands of the deity. The most interesting part of this temple is the lateral hall on the west side, which, with the three chambers behind it, king Osirei dedicated to his father Remeses I.; but dying before the completion of the hall,

“repaired,” which M. Champollion gives it; but I frequently find it in sculptures, which are merely added on an ancient wall where no repairs have been made, as at Medeenet Haboo, Dayr el Bahree, and other places. I had formerly translated it “addition,” until I observed its use for the word “cutting,” but I am inclined to adopt this reading again, in preference to “repaired.”

\* Mentioned in the Rosetta stone.

† From being placed before the king Osirei, she cannot be his wife, but will be an ancestor of the family, the queen of Amunoph I. The consort of Amosis also bore this name.

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## Chap. I.] DEDICATION AND SACRED SHRINES. 7

his son Remeses II. added the sculptures that cover the interior, and corridor in front of it. Those within the front wall, on the right hand entering the door, represent, in the lower compartment, king Remeses II. introduced by Mandoo to Amunre, behind whom stands his grandfather Remeses I., bearing the emblems of Osiris; over him we read: "The good God, Lord of the world; son of the Sun, lord of the powerful, Remeses deceased, esteemed by the great God, Lord of Abydus, (*i. e.* Osiris)." Thoth, the god of letters, notes off the years of the panegyries of the king on the palm-branch, the symbol of a year. In the compartment above this, he is introduced to the deity by Atmoo and Mandoo, who, presenting him with the emblem of life, says, "I have accompanied you in order that you may dedicate the temple to your father Amunre." In the compartment over the door, two figures of Remeses I., seated in sacred shrines, receive the offerings or liturgies of his grandson, one wearing the crown of the upper, the other that of the lower country. A perpendicular line, which divides the two shrines, contains this formula: "(This) additional work (or sculpture) made he the king Remeses (II.)\* for his father's father, the good God Remeses (I.), in place of the dedication of his father Osirei." On the other side of the door, the king is offering to Amunre, Khonso, and Remeses I.; and

\* These are prenomen, which it is useless to translate; I therefore substitute the phonetic names.

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on the side walls, Osirei also partakes of similar honours. In the centre chamber, Osirei officiates before the statue of his father placed in a shrine, like that before mentioned, from which it is evident that Remeses II. continued the dedications to the first Remeses, which had been commenced by his father, as the hieroglyphics themselves state. All the lateral chambers and hypæthral court are of Remeses II., and on the jambs of the side doors in the great hall, the name of his son \* Pthahmen was added in the succeeding reign. Queen Ames-Nofriatre occurs again in the court; and on the outside of the north-east corner, and on the fragment of a wall on the other (south-west) side, is an Ethiopian ox and Capricorn, which are brought by some of the minor priests for the service of the temple. Little else is deserving of notice in this ruin, if we except the statue and shrine of Amunre, whose door the king has just opened previous to his performing "the prescribed ceremonies" in honour of the deity. In the hieroglyphics, though much defaced, we read, "Behold, I open † . . . . . my father Amunre."

\* Apparently Thmeioftep-ho Pthahmai, or Pthahmen, which M. Champollion has transposed, and written Menephtha, but which, in the procession of the sons of Remeses II., at the Memnonium, is evidently Pthahmen, without the additional title he took on ascending the throne. The word "beloved" may either be formed of mai or men, the latter a shorter substitute for menrit, "beloved," the former signifying "the love."

† This is expressed by a hare, and the zigzag line, *N*, forming



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Following the edge of the cultivated land, and about one hundred and eighty yards to the west of this building, are two mutilated statues of Remeses II., of black granite, with a few substructions to the north of them; and seven hundred and seventy yards farther to the west, lies, in the cultivated soil, a sandstone block of Remeses III., presenting in high relief the figure of that king between Osiris and Pthah. Fourteen hundred feet beyond this, in the same direction, is a crude brick inclosure, with large towers, which once contained within it a sandstone temple, dating probably from the reign of the third Thothmes, whose name is stamped on the bricks, and who appears to have been the contemporary of Moses.

Other fragments and remains of crude brick walls proclaim the existence of other ruins in its vicinity; and about a thousand feet farther to the south-west is the palace and temple of Remeses II., erroneously called the Memnonium;\* a building,

the Coptic word *ouon*; a remarkable confirmation of which is found in the name of a wolf, *ouonsh*, which is written by a hare, *ou*, the zigzag, *n*, and a narrow parallelogram, *sh*.

\* Though apparently the Memnonium of Strabo, v. *infra*, p. 12 and 13. The title of *Miamun*, attached to the name of Remeses II., was probably corrupted by the Romans into *Memnon*, and became the origin of the word *Memnonium* or *Memnonia*, since we find it again applied to the buildings at Abydos, which were finished by the same monarch. Strabo, who says that if *Ismandes* is the same as *Memnon*, these monuments at Thebes will have the same title of *Memnonian* as those at Abydos, appears to have had in view the palace-temple of Remeses *Miamun*; and it was not till

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which, for symmetry of architecture and elegance of sculpture, can vie with any other monument of Egyptian art. No traces are visible of the dromos, that probably existed before the pyramidal towers, which form the façade of the first hypæthral area, a court whose breadth of one hundred and eighty feet, exceeding the length by nearly thirteen yards, is reduced to a more just proportion, by the introduction of a double avenue of columns on either side, extending from the towers to the north wall. In this area, on the right of a flight of steps leading to the next court, was the stupendous Syenite\* statue of the king seated on a throne, in the usual attitude of these Egyptian figures, the hands rest-

after Strabo's time that the name of Memnon was applied to the vocal statue of the plain. In short, I feel persuaded, 1st, that the word Miamun led them to imagine him the Memnon mentioned by Homer, and thence to apply the word Memnonian to the buildings erected by Remeses II.; 2dly, that later visitors to Thebes, struck with the miraculous powers of the vocal statue, transferred the name of the only monarch with whom they *supposed* themselves acquainted, to the object they admired; and, 3dly, that they ascribed to Memnon the tomb of Remeses V. in like manner from his having the title of Amunmai or Miamun.

\* Of Syenite, or granite from the quarries in the neighbourhood of E'Souan or Syene. May not this have been the work of Memnon of Syene, whose name has added so much to the confusion regarding the Egyptian Memnon? since, as Hecataeus states, it was the largest statue in Egypt. Its foot exceeds, in fact, seven cubits; and, to judge from the fragments, must have been about eleven feet in length, and four feet ten inches in breadth. The statue measures from the shoulder to the elbow twelve feet ten inches, twenty-two feet four inches across the shoulders, and fourteen feet four inches from the neck to the elbow.