

**Pharaoh smites his enemies: An  
Additional Note. The Relief of  
Merenptah's Palace of Memphis at  
the University Museum (E 17527),  
University of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia, U.S.A**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Many of the Egyptian kings had left evidences in abundance of their eminence through the ages of Memphis's supremacy. Merenptah (1213 - 1204 B. C.), who succeeded Ramesses II, built a temple in Memphis which Petrie has identified as Herodotus's temple of Proteus.<sup>(1)</sup> The site of that temple has been dug several times and all that can now be seen is a large area of potholes and trenches which gives the appearance of having had a battle fought over it.<sup>(2)</sup>

Excavations carried out at Memphis during the nineteenth century were more of the nature of object hunting than serious archaeological activities. The first comprehensive study of the site was not carried out until 1907 - 1913 by Petrie, working for the British School of Archaeology in Egypt at the precincts of the Main Ptah temple complex, the palace of Apries and at Kom el Qalaa, where he revealed three main structures including a gate or portico, a palace and a temple of Merenptah.<sup>(3)</sup> (See fig. 1)

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(\*) I would like to express my acknowledge for the University Museum's permission to publish the relevant relief of Merenptah at its Egyptian Collection.

Especial thanks are due to Dr. David O'Conner, Curator of the Egyptian Section and acting Co-Director of the University Museum for his valuable comments offered during the preparation of this paper. Mr. J. Felix, Volunteer Photographer and the staff members of the Archival Department of the University Museum were of a great help.

(1) Dimick, M.T. Memphis The City of the White Wall, The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia : 1956, p. 18.

(2) Dimick, Op. cit., p. 18.

(3) Kamil, J. "Ancient Memphis, Archaeologists revive interest in a famous Egyptian site. " Archaeology 38, 4 (1985), pp. 30-31.

The University Museum (UM) under Clarence Fisher took over the excavation of the palace of Merenptah for two seasons, 1915 - 1919 and 1921 - 1923, and found, among the structures, the most well - preserved throne room to have survived of a pharaoh of the New kingdom. The palace appeared to have been burned soon after the pharaoh's death.<sup>(1)</sup> Because of the good condition of the building's architectural elements and Fisher's excellent recording of the data, the original appearance of the structure could be comprehended, unlike the situation with the few and badly preserved remains of palaces in other area.<sup>(2)</sup> Many of the Palace's stone doorways, lintels and columns were generously assigned to the University Museum by the Egyptian government authorities and were put on exhibit in the Lower Egyptian Gallery of the Museum in what is known now as "Memphite Hall".<sup>(3)</sup>

The relevant University Museum's relief : (UM E 17527) was found in the remains of that royal palace of Merenptah at Memphis. (See fig 2-3). The depicted scene here is related to the famous royal episode of smiting enemies. Through Hall<sup>(4)</sup> touched on the other relevant scenes of smiting enemies in the Egyptian collection of the University Museum from Tell el-Retaba (UM E 3067)<sup>(5)</sup> of Ramesses II and that of Merenptah from Memphis (UM E 13575)<sup>(6)</sup>, no reference to the relevant piece of Merenptah's relief in that Egyptian Collection of the University Museum, with which we are going to discuss, is mentioned.

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(1) Kamil, *Op. cit.*, p. 31; Schwartz, J. with Brooks. G. and Hermann. J. "Museum Breif. The Merenptah Palace project of 1983-84. "Expedition 26. 3 (1984), P. 31.

(2) Silvermann, D. Archaeological Treasures of Ancient Egypt. An Exhibition organized by Amarillo Art Center. Amarillo, Texas and the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia. Amarillo Art Center : 1983, p. 5 and figs. 17-18; Schwartz *et. al.* *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

(3) Schwartz *et. al.* *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

(4) Hall, E. S. The Pharaoh Smites his Enemies : A Comparative Study *MÄS* 44 (1986).

(5) Hall, *Op. cit.*, p. 30 ; fig. 52.

(6) Hall, *Op. cit.*, p. 34; fig. 63.

## II. Description

UM E 17527

Provenance : Memphis, Palace of Merenptah. Limestone. Door Jamb, Western door. Room 14.

UM negative 9633 (Egyptian Section)  
2488 (Pal.)

Archival Department of UM, File of Mit Rahinah Diary, March 11 - June 29, 1915.

Collected by E. B. Coxe, Jr. Expedition

Measurements :

H. 1.044 m.

Mw. 0.56 m.

Thick : 11 cms.

Date : around 1213 - 1204 B.C.

Previous studies :

The Photo of the relevant relief is shown in O'Conner book<sup>(1)</sup> but without any comments on it.

In the brief Introduction of the Egyptian Collection Catalogue of the UM<sup>(2)</sup>, the relevant relief is shown with a brief comment. However a great mistake is apparent in that commentary note on the image of a king's lion that is referred to it as "a hunting cat".

The king, in a scene in such relief, is shown standing and holding by his left hand an Asiatic's hair. The king, facing right, is raising his right hand and wielding the axe-mace to smash that Asiatic enemy. Merenptah wears the Double Crown with Uraeus and has a false beard. The ceremonial tail hangs straight. Behind the king are two inscribed standards endowed with arms which hold the M3ct - feather and a staff surmounted by a divine emblem. The Asiatic enemy is turning his head towards the king and is raising his two hands soliciting mercy (fig. 4). The titles of the king are there : a - Hours name : Hr Nb hb mj M3ct, b -

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(1) O'Conner, D. *A Short History of Ancient Egypt* 1990, p. 25; fig. 18.

(2) *Introduction to the Collections of the University Museum* Edited by Lee Horne, The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania : 1985, p. 24; fig. 14.

Nb-t3wj title : Nb t3wj p3-n-Rc mrj Jmn c- Nb-hcw - title : Nb-hcw mrj-n-Pth htp(w) hr M3ct The phrase of dj(w) cnh w3s mj Rc is shown underneath the royal cartouches.

The upper part of the relief still has remains of the royal titles indicated by the lower parts of the two cartouches, and separated from the smiting scene by depiction of sky-sign. The phrase dj cnh nb "given all life" is engraved under the right cartouche, while the word dt "forever" is there under the second one.

Thus, the relevant scene depicts Merenptah ritually slaying a foreign enemy. At his side, his pet either a lion or a lioness leaps upon that enemy as a manifestation of Sekhmet, the war goddess whose aggressive nature was indicated both by her name, which means the "powerful one," and by her portrayal as a lioness<sup>(1)</sup>.

The scene of slaughtering enemies and the symbolic manifestation of the Egyptian supremacy over its enemies is known from early historic period.<sup>(2)</sup> The scene is of the dominant type of the relevant Ramesside period. However, the motif lion / lioness depiction in this ritually royal smiting scene is known early on the royal scenes of Ramesses II at his temple of Derr<sup>(3)</sup> and even continued into the ptolemaic and Roman periods<sup>(4)</sup>. At the north wall of passage through central tower, Medinet Habu of Ramesses III, a lion is shown biting the elbow of one of Asiatic enemies<sup>(5)</sup>. The royal hunting scene on minor objects, especially scarabs dated to the New kingdom, have shown the same motif of enemies' smiting and the figure of lion accompanying his king.<sup>(6)</sup>

It is notable that we have here the "new motif" of a lion / lioness depiction on the royal monuments that started only on mid XIXth dynasty. The importance of the relevant scene of Merenptah manifests

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(1) Silverman, D. "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt" In Religion in Ancient Egypt Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice. Edited by B. E. Shafer. Cornell University Press : 1991, p. 43.

(2) Hall, Op. cit., p. 44.

(3) Wreszinski, Bericht über die Photographische Expedition von Kairo bis Wadi Halfa Leipzig : 1927, Taf. 66.

(4) Hall, Op. cit., p. 44; figs. 85-86.

(5) Hall, Op. cit., p. 37; fig. 72.

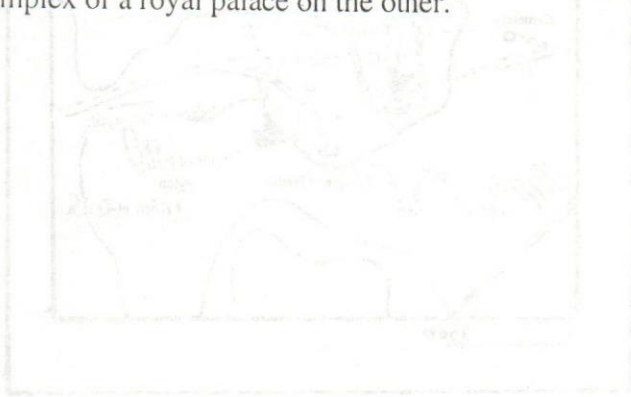
(6) Shaheen, A. "Royal Hunting scenes on Scarabs," Varia Egyptiaca 8 (1992), pp. 17-47.

in its occurrence here not on a religious "temple" or funeral "tomb" monuments but on a "civil" building. This is the first known example till now to have such motif of smiting enemy on a royal palace.

The few known examples of the royal palaces from ancient Egypt especially those of Amenhotep III at Malkata,<sup>(1)</sup> Akhenaten at Tell el-Amarna,<sup>(2)</sup> and that of Ramesses III outside the religious complex of his funerary temple at Medinet Habu<sup>(3)</sup> did not preserve any similar scene in which the king is shown accompanied by his lion smiting enemies.

### III. Conclusion

The relief of Merenptah's palace at Memphis in the Egyptian Collection of the University Museum proves to be of special interest. It has the famous symbolic scene of smiting enemies of Egypt. Though this scene is known on the Egyptian monuments even from the Archaic Period, we have it here with the new motif of depiction a lion / lioness accompanying the king on one hand and to have this motif itself within a civic complex of a royal palace on the other.



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- (1) O'Conner, D. "New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period," Ancient Egypt: A Social History Cambridge University Press: 1983, p. 221; fig. 3.8.
  - (2) Kemp, P. "Tell el - Amarna," Ancient Centers of Egyptian Civilization. Edited by Smith, H. S. et al., Kensal Press, London: 1983, pp. 62-65.
  - (3) Portman, I. Louxor, Gide des Temples & Tombeaux de Thebes, The American University in Cairo Press: 1989, p. 90.

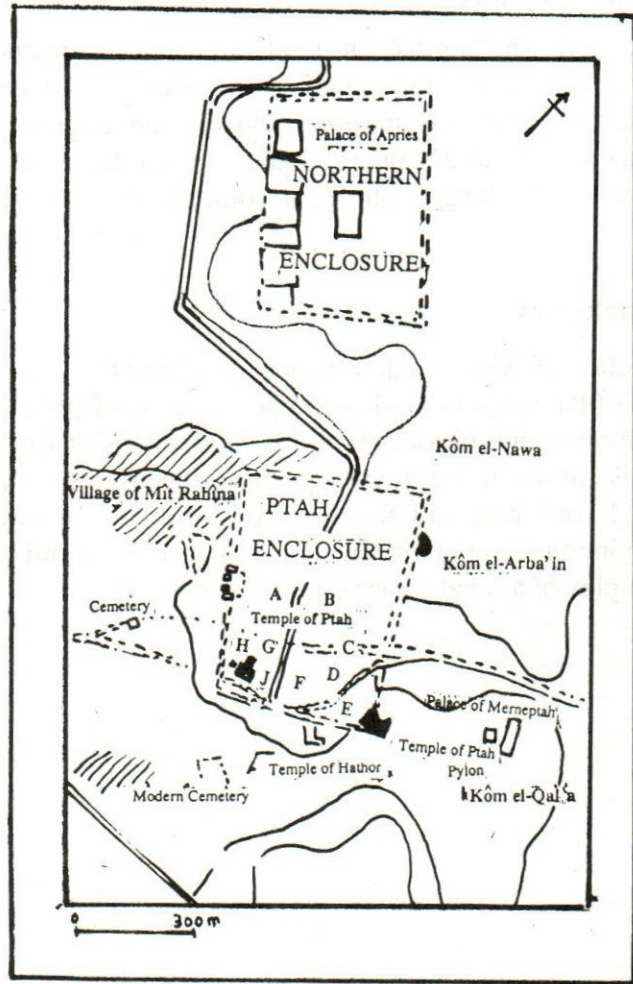


fig. 1

Site of Merenptah Palace at Memphis  
(after Baines J. and Malek, J. Atlas of Ancient Egypt, New York :  
1984, p. 136).



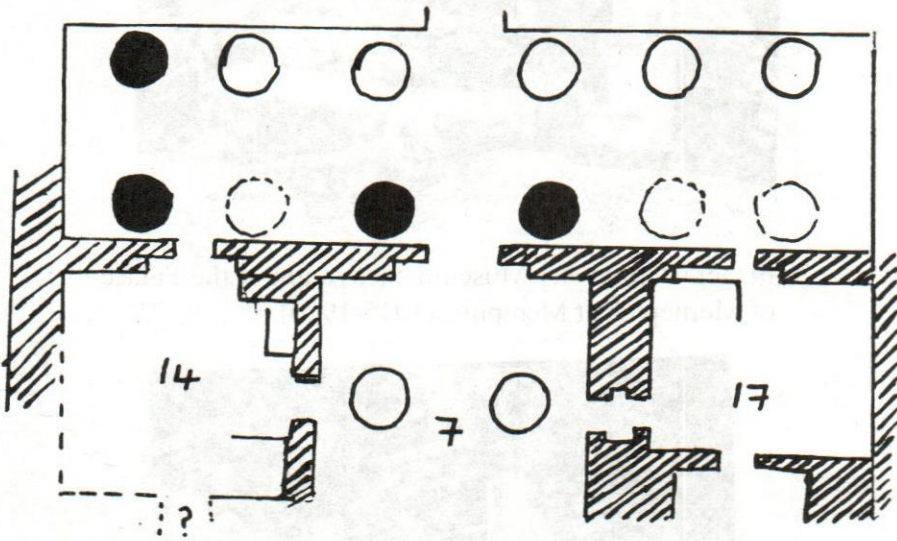
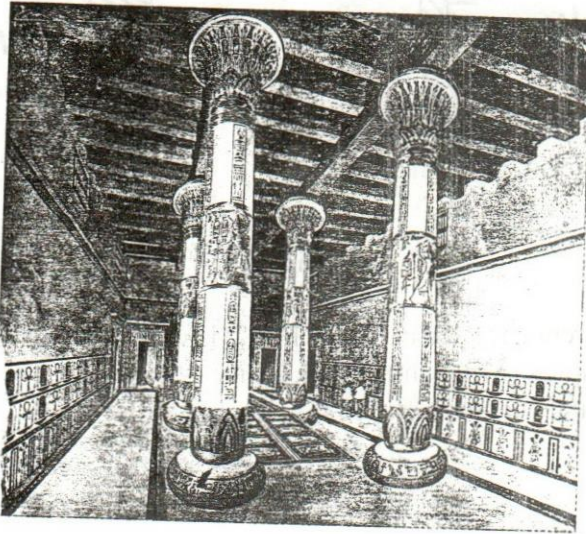


fig. 2

Merenptah Palace, Room 14. UM Archival Department  
after : Memphis (Mit Rahinah [F], Dairy - March 14, 1916 to May 10,  
1917. Original Manuscript, 101).



Fisher's University Museum excavation of the Palace of Merneptah at Memphis. (1915-1920)



Reconstruction of the Palace of Merneptah at Memphis. fig. 3

(Silverman, D. Treasures of Ancient Egypt, Texas and Philadelphia : 1983, p. 5; figs. 17 - 18)

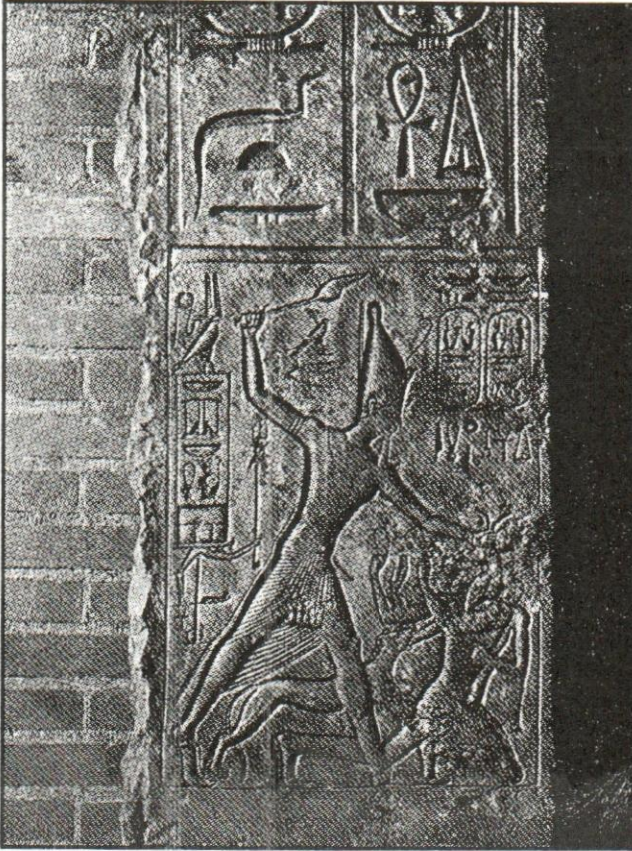


fig. 4

Relief of Merenptah's palace at  
the UM's Collection (E 17527)

