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## The smiting of the enemies scenes in the mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu

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### **Abstract:**

The ritual scenes of smiting the enemies are a *topos* of the Egyptian iconography of military nature which goes through Egyptian history almost in its entirety, from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

Regarding to the New Kingdom there are numerous known and significant cases that we can evoke as examples. There is, however, one extraordinary example, by the profusion of that kind of scenes in almost every room and its components, which arises a noteworthy emphasis: the mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, built for Ramses III (*c.* 1182 – 1151 BC), second pharaoh of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and for many scholars the last great pharaoh of the New Kingdom.

In this text we will pass in detailed review these scenes, explaining and interpreting the underlying ideological message as the function of its recurrent and appealing iconographic utilization, as in the function of the space-architectural localization where they are to be found at the Medinet Habu complex.

**Keywords:** Medinet Habu, ideology, ritual scenes, symbology, winning pharaoh.

### Resumo

As cenas rituais de massacre dos inimigos são um *topos* da iconografia egípcia de cariz militar que atravessa quase toda a história egípcia, do IV milénio a.C. ao séc. II d.C. No que ao Império Novo diz respeito, são inúmeros os casos conhecidos e significativos que se podem evocar a título de exemplo. Há, porém, um caso extraordinário, pela profusão deste tipo de cenas praticamente em todas as suas divisões e componentes, que suscita um merecido destaque: o templo funerário de Medinet Habu, edificado para Ramsés III (c. 1182-1151 a.C.), segundo faraó da XX dinastia e para muitos estudiosos o último grande faraó do Império Novo.

Neste texto procuraremos passar em detalhada revista essas cenas, explicando e interpretando a mensagem ideológica que lhes estava subjacente, quer em função da sua recorrente e apelativa utilização iconográfica quer em função da localização espacio-arquitectónica em que se encontram no complexo de Medinet Habu.

**Palavras-chave:** Medinet Habu, ideologia, cenas rituais, simbologia, faraó vencedor.



The ritual scenes of smiting the enemies are a *topos* of the Egyptian iconography of military nature that runs through almost all Egyptian history, from the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>1</sup>. Wherein the New Kingdom is concerned, there are numerous known and significant cases that can be evoked. There is, however, one extraordinary case, by the profusion of this kind of scenes in almost the entirety of its rooms and elements, which raises a worthy evidence: the mortuary temple of Medinet Habu (25° 42' N, 32° 36' E) built to Usermaetre Meriamun Ramses Hekaiunu, or Ramses III (c. 1182 – 1151 BC), second pharaoh of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and, for many scholars, the last great pharaoh of the New Kingdom and even of the independent Egypt<sup>2</sup>.

The temple in question, authentic hymn to the megalomania and enlarged royal ego and one of the best preserved and most important monuments of the Egyptian mortuary architecture<sup>3</sup>, was constructed in the southern end of the Theban necropolis, on the western bank, next to an earlier small shrine (Small Temple, *dsr st*, “sacred place”), erected by the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaohs (started by Amenhotep I and finished by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III)<sup>4</sup>. Its architectural layout spread for over

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sales, J. das C., *Poder e Iconografia no antigo Egipto*, 115-138.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lalouette, Cl., *L'empire des Ramsès*, 344; Grimal, N., *Histoire de L'Égypte ancienne*, 334; Redford, S., *The harem conspiracy*, 141; Clayton, P., *Chronique des pharaons*, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Murname, W. J., *United with eternity*, 1; Haeny, G., “New kingdom “mortuary temples” and “mansions of millions of years” in Shafer B. E. (ed.), *Temples of ancient Egypt*, 87; Clayton, P., *Op. Cit.*, 1995, 162; Shaw, I., *The Oxford history of Ancient Egypt*, 305; Málek, J., *Egyptian art*, 319.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. II. The Temples of the Eighteenth Dynasty*, 11 (fig. 19) and 47 (fig. 41). The temple of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, in its turn, was built over another from the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and was an important religious sanctuary conceived as the place where the original mound had emerged from Nun, the original ocean, when the formation of the world. It was also there, according to the Egyptian thought, that the primordial god Amun Kematef manifested for the first time and where Amun of Luxor regenerated himself in the Ten Days Festival. According to other interpretation, in ancient times this place was considered as the place of the tomb of Amun. Cf. Arnold, D., *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture* 143, 144; Wilkinson, R. H., *The complete temples of Ancient Egypt*, 194; Murname, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 77; Haeny, G., *Op. Cit.*, 121. Horemheb at the final of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and Seti I in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> restored the monument. The same was made by Pinedjem I in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC. Later, in the kushite period, pharaoh Shabaka replaced the former entrance with a pylon that his nephew Taharka would usurp. Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 26, 52, 53. The small entrance door built during the 26<sup>th</sup> dynasty would be, in the 29<sup>th</sup> dynasty, usurped by Nakhtnebef (Nectanebo I), founder

7000 sq m, with thousands of iconographic representations, with emphasis for those who represent the pharaoh Ramses III as an indisputable winner over his multiple and distinct enemies, adjusts particularly well to the concept of *hwt nt hḥ m rnpwt*, “temple of millions of years”, associated to the Egyptian mortuary temples<sup>5</sup>.

Known by the essential name of *hnmt-nḥh*, “united with eternity”<sup>6</sup>, this temple with its 150m long, projected by Païry-Sutemheb from the year 5 of Ramses III, it follows the model of the Ramesseum, constructed in the vicinities, c. 1 km to the north, by Ramses II, and its decoration is even today impressive due to the abundant traces of paint still patent<sup>7</sup>. The temple is aligned in the southeast – northwest axis, but conventionally the southeast side turned to the Nile is ascribed as east<sup>8</sup>. Despite the decline suffered by this temple after the death of Ramses III, it is admitted that the cult rituals continued to unroll in this sanctuary until the Roman period, even though then centred in the “Small Temple”, the sacred place of a special form of Amun (*Imn n dsr st*, “Amun of the sacred place”)<sup>9</sup>.

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of the last native dynasty. During the Saitic period it was added a portico with eight papyriform columns. In Roman and Ptolemaic times, there were also changes in the interior colonnade, in the court and in the portico (for instances, emperor Antoninus Pio erected a new portico with eight massif columns and a wide court in the front of the monument) - Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 26-31, 54-59, 60; Baines, J.; Málek, J., *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, 98; Wilkinson, R. H., *Op. Cit.*, 196. Therefore, rigorously, the Small Temple is a conglomerate of structures of different periods, being the temple of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty its essential nucleus.

<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian mortuary temples, like Medinet Habu, were built with the aim of supporting the deceased life (in this case, the pharaoh) in the Afterlife. It was hoped that this “royal residences” allowed the mystic union of the Pharaoh with the god for “millions of years”. Hence the designation for which they were recalled. Cf. Haeny, G., *Op. Cit.*, 86.

<sup>6</sup> The complete designation of the temple was “Temple of Usermaatre Meriamun united with eternity in the domain of Amun of western Thebes”. Like Nelson demonstrated, in this formula there are 5 key-elements. 1) the type of edifice designation (“temple” or “address”); 2) the coronation name of Ramses III; 3) the building status incorporated in “Amun’s dominion”; 4) the topographic localization and, 5) the element that classifies and distinguishes the building: “united with eternity”. Cf. Nelson, H. H., “The identity of Amon-Re of United-with-Eternity” in *JNES*, Vol. 1, Number 2 (1942): 128. The subjacent idea to this designation is well captured through an inscription on the second court where it says: “While Ra travels in the solar bark, crossing the skies every day so it shall be the temple of Ramses III, everlasting as the sky horizon”.

<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the atmospheric conditions, the erosion and vandalism seriously damaged the temple walls, to the point of some appearing today almost without inscriptions, when, a century ago, as documented in pictures and photographs, were well carved and even painted. Cf. Weeks in Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, V.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wilkinson, R. H., *Op. Cit.*, 193.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 1, 2; Baines, J.; Málek, J., *Op. Cit.*, 97, 98; Manley, B., *Atlas historique de l’Égypte ancienne*, 78; Strudwick, N. and H., *Thebes in Egypt*, 90; Wilkinson, R. H., *Op. Cit.*, 194; Wildung, D., *O Egípto. Da Pré-história aos Romanos*, 145.

Therefore, the main temple constitutes an extraordinary architectonic monument, both for its inside and the outside, as for the gigantic pylons and for the two magnificent open air courtyards (each one in the sequence of the two pylons), decorated with columns (1<sup>st</sup> court, to the left) and pillars of addorsed statues of the pharaoh (1<sup>st</sup> court, to the right) or with Osiriac pilasters porticoes and Papyriform columns (2<sup>nd</sup> court), as for the transitional portico between the second court and the first hypostyle hall and by the three hypostyle halls (the last two of reduced dimensions) to which are associated several rooms for the resident gods and goddesses<sup>10</sup>, offering chambers and the shrine for the bark of the god Amun, nowadays much destroyed<sup>11</sup>.

Besides the mortuary temple, the Medinet Habu complex (ancient *d3m.t* or *t3m.t*, “males and females”<sup>12</sup>) originally comprised a royal palace, administrative buildings, housing for its priests and officials, storehouses, stables, manoeuvre courts, a garden, a nilometer (constructed by Nakhtnebef/Nectanebo I) and a *š-ntr* or sacred lake (20 x 18 m), probably constructed in the Ptolemaic period, constituting an important administrative centre to the life of Western Thebes, from which more than 62.000 Egyptians depended on<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Besides the rooms consecrated to the gods of the Theban triad, Amun, Mut and Khonsu, there were other 48 rooms dedicated, among others, to the mortuary cult, to Ramses III deified, to a queen and to the royal children, to Ptah, to Osiris, to Montu, to the Heliopolitan Enead and to Re-Harakhty. Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, Vol. III, 15-21; Murname, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 43-59; Haeny, G., *Op. Cit.*, 122. It is not always easy to understand the function of every room and consequently the plan of this area of the temple, as well recognized by Uvo Hölscher: “It is difficult to comprehend the plan of the temple at Medinet Habu, especially the maze of subsidiary rooms at the rear, which seem to have been into the confines of the temple and thus seem to some extent to be unnatural in location and form. The fact that we know little or nothing of the individual purposes of many of the rooms adds to our difficulty in understanding the plan.” Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, Vol. III., 22.

<sup>11</sup> The royal osirified statues of the main temple second court of Medinet Habu were significantly destroyed early in the Christian era, by the Copts, who converted that place into a Christian church. Wilkinson, R. H., *Op. Cit.*, 197.

<sup>12</sup> The name Medinet Habu is the Arabic designation which means “city of Habu”, which may derive from the name of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty architect Amenhotep, son of Hapu, whose mortuary temple was located c. 300 m north, or from *hebu*, the ancient name of the ibex, symbol of Thoth, which as a Ptolemaic temple a few hundred meters to the south. *Djemet* or *Tjemet* were the Egyptian designation and, according to the popular belief, it was on this sacred place that were buried the original gods of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, which are four male gods (with frog heads) and four female goddesses (with serpent heads). This designation is, probably, the prototype for the Greek designation  $\theta\eta\beta\alpha\iota$  used to classify the whole metropolis. Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, Vol. II, 43; Siliotti, A., *Guide to the Valley of the Kings and to the Theban necropolises and temples*, 124, 125.

<sup>13</sup> It was to this centre of the Egyptian administration that the Deir el-Medina workers on strike went to complain to the vizier Ta (at the Ramesseum) and to obtain their due missing payment.

The whole complex, with 66 sq km, was surrounded by an exterior rectangular wall of mud brick (315 x 210 m), with 18 m high and 10 m width, that by itself gave the appearance of an imposing fortress<sup>14</sup>, to which was associated an unusual monumental entrance or massive pylon, cubic, denominated *migdol*, situated to the east, inspired in the architecture of the Syrian military citadels, built in sandstone and mud brick<sup>15</sup>. The *temenos* denoted and still denotes the intended and unmistakable appearance of a fortress, serving as an effective protection against the marauder nomadic assaults (“fortress to the gods”), to which the local inhabitants lately also appeal as a refuge during the civil war after the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

A complete description of the Medinet Habu complex cannot forget the mortuary chapels of the *dw3t-nṯr n Ṛmn*, “Divine Adoratrice of Amun”, Shepenuepet I<sup>16</sup>, Amenirdis I<sup>17</sup>, Shepenuepet II<sup>18</sup>, Amenirdis II<sup>19</sup>, Meheteneskhet<sup>20</sup>, Nitocris<sup>21</sup> and Ankhnesneferibre<sup>22</sup>, of the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasties, who then ruled Egypt, at least nominally on behalf of the king, located to the left of the precinct comprised between the entrance

<sup>14</sup> As J. Murnane describes it, Medinet Habu is “a huge complex of stone gleaming against mud brick ramparts” Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 1. See also Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. IV*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> It is also usual to call to the *migdol* “pavilion-door”. The upper floors, built in mud brick, constituted the harem dependencies which, unfortunately, didn’t survive to our days. The other entrance to the complex, to the west, is not as well preserved. Cf. Redford, S., *Op. Cit.*, 95, 96; Schulz, R.; Sourouzian, H., “Los templos: dioses-reyes y reyes-dioses” in Schulz, R. e Seidel, M. (coord.), *Egipto. O mundo dos faraós*, 196.

<sup>16</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty. Princess. Daughter of Osorkon III. Lived during the last years of Theban independence relative to the Nubian control, c. 754 BC. She was appointed “Divine Adoratrice” by her brother, pharaoh Takelot III. Cf. Dodson, A.; Hilton, D., *The complete royal families of Ancient Egypt*, 226 and 230.

<sup>17</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Princess. Daughter of Kashta. Amenirdis I was appointed “Divine Adoratrice” by her brother, pharaoh Piankhy, having shared this position with Shepenuepet I. This last occupied the office under the reigns of Shabaka and Shabataka. Cf. *Ibidem*, 236 and 238.

<sup>18</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Princess. Daughter of pharaoh Piankhy, c. 710 BC, first king of the Kushite Dynasty. Therefore, she was sister of pharaohs Taharka and Shabaka. She hold office from Taharka’s reign until year 9 of Psametek P’s reign. Cf. *Ibidem*, 236 and 240.

<sup>19</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Princess. Daughter of Taharka and was “Divine Adoratrice”, sharing this position with Shepenuepet II, whom she adopted in the reign of Psametek I. Cf. *Ibidem*, 236 and 238.

<sup>20</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Queen. Wife of Psametek I and mother of Nitocris. Cf. *Ibidem*, 244 and 246.

<sup>21</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Princess. She was daughter of king Psametek I. Became heiress of Shepenuepet II and Amenirdis II, whom they adopted. Cf. *Ibidem*, 244 and 247.

<sup>22</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Princess. She was daughter of pharaoh Psametek II and sister of Uahibre. By imposition of her brother, she was adopted by Nitocris, to whom she succeeded in 584 BC. Cf. *Ibidem*, 244 and 246.

*migdol* and the first pylon of the temple<sup>23</sup>. From the four original chapels built in the 8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, in the present-day only two remain. The superstructure has the shape of a temple with pylon, with a small columned court and the cultic chamber in an inner rectangular space.<sup>24</sup>

Less preserved, it should be also mentioned, near the northern part of the wall, the memorial temple of Horemheb, usurped by Ay, his predecessor in the pharaonic office. Built in stone and surrounded by mud brick walls, the temple was only a little smaller than the temple of Ramses III, with a *temenos* measuring 258 x 145m. The first entrance pylon measured 65 x 9m<sup>25</sup>.

For an accurate understanding of the military and/or paramilitary figures present in the several surfaces of this Egyptian sacred space it is necessary to frame in its essential features the time and the reign of the last great pharaoh of Egypt. Ramses III was the son of the pharaoh Userkhaure-Setepenre Setnakht (founder of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) and of Queen Tiy-Merenaset. He ruled Egypt for about 31 years, in a time characterized by significant internal convulsions – Deir el-Medina workers strike (in his 29<sup>th</sup> year of reign, the first strike known in History, after two months of salary delays) and a conspiracy plotted in his own harem (*ipt*, or *hnrt*) or *coup d'état*<sup>26</sup> – as well as external, resulting, particularly from the political

<sup>23</sup> The “Divine Adoratrice (of Amun)” played an intermediary role between temporal (pharaoh) and religious (high priests of Amun) powers and, unlike the “God’s Wife” (*hemet netjer*), they were not the wife but the pharaoh’s daughter who consecrated all of their lives to the office and to the great god Amun.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Arnold, D., *Op. Cit.*, 145.

<sup>25</sup> The temple had four pylons. Between the third and fourth pylon there was the royal palace, practically square, with modest dimensions: 21,6 x 22,0m. Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. II.* 65, 75, 80, 81, 113 – fig. 95.

<sup>26</sup> With the aim of placing his son Pentauere on the throne, one of Ramses III secondary wives, Tiy, conspired to murder the pharaoh (Poisoning? Poisonous serpent bite? Sorcery/magic?). The plot was discovered and the about forty conspirators involved (concubines, scribes, other high rank officials, inspectors, guards and their wives, a military commander from Kush, called Bonemuese, etc) were taken into trial. Some of the judges of this process eventually were also involved in the case by the conspirators. From what it seems, after having nominated the 12 judges of the criminal process, the king didn’t live long enough to assist the verdict and the sentence – the several conspirators were condemned to suffer mutilations (cutting of ears or nose) or to suffer death, by execution or by suicide (ten: the ones of higher rank, among them Pentauere) –, having died, with 65 years, c. 16 days after, very likely as a result of the conspiracy. The king was buried in the Valley of the Kings, in tomb n.º 11 (KV 11), succeeding him his son Ramses IV, by the time with more than 40 years old. Cf. Redford, S., *Op. Cit.*, 7-25; 110-114. Contradicting all thesis of his death due to the conspiracy, Ramses III’s mummy (one

unrest in the eastern Mediterranean (Aegean islands and Asia Minor) after the fall of Mycenae and the Trojan War.

This situation led to an embattled movement of repositioning of peoples and ethnic groups from the region, towards the west-east of the southern coast of Anatolia and, thereafter bending from north to south, with attacks to several neighbouring regions (making disappear the kingdoms of Hatti, Ugarit and Cyprus) and, inclusively, in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Ramses III reign (1174 BC.), with the invasion of Egypt by sea by the so-called “Sea Peoples”, a conglomeration of migrant peoples from eastern Mediterranean of 14<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>27</sup>.

Even though in the course of their history, Egyptians didn’t stood out military at sea, the battles with the Sea Peoples ended with victories of Ramses III who, to the effect, relied on his line of diligent archers, which, from land, stopped that the foreign invaders landed on the Nile banks and, then, with his Egyptian navy ships stroke the final blow to the invaders.

Already in his 5<sup>th</sup> year of reign (1177 BC), Ramses III had to face – also with relative military success (once that had no decisive character) – a coalition of tribes generically known as the *Tjehenu*, where punctuated the Libu, the Seped and the Meshuesh, which invaded the western Delta, under the pretext that the pharaoh had interfered in the succession of their chief<sup>28</sup>.

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of the found in the Deir el-Bahari cache; today in the Cairo Museum) shows, however, that he died of natural causes. There are no traces of violent death. The drafts of the four sessions of the process open against the conspirators under the reign of Ramses IV survive until present days through the Turin Judicial Papyri (hence designated for being archived in the Turin Museum) and with several fragments, some in very bad conservation state, as being: *Papyrus Rollin*, *Papyrus Varzy*, *Papyrus Lee 1* and *2*, *Papyrus Rifaud I* (A, B e C) and *Papyrus Rifaud II* (E) – Cf. Redford, S., *Op. Cit.*, 3. See also, Vernus, P., *Affaires et scandales sous les Ramsès*, 141-156.

<sup>27</sup> The Medinet Habu list and the *Papyrus Harris* (in times part of the official archives of the temple, today in the British Museum) gives detailed information about the Sea Peoples and the Philistines of the attacks from the time of Ramses III. The first attack of the Sea Peoples to Egypt occurred on the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, in the 5<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Merenptah (c. 1208 BC), when they allied with the Libyans and reached to the Delta. Fortunately to Egypt, Merenptah forces fought back and killed over 6000 invaders and imprisoned 9000, besides capturing horses, weapons and cattle. This victory is commemorated in the so-called “Israel Stele”, found in 1896. Cf. Valbelle, D., *Les neuf ans*. 146. See also Shaw, I., *Op. Cit.*, 305 and Partridge, R. B., *Fighting pharaohs. Weapons and Warfare in Ancient Egypt*, 263. The advance in the time of Ramses III it wasn’t a simple act of war: it was driven by the express wishes of introducing and fixing them in Egyptian territory. It was an entire people on the move, with their wives, children, and belongings.

<sup>28</sup>The invasion of Egyptian lands by the Libyans became moreover a recurrent problem during the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> year of his reign (1171 BC), Ramses III had to face a new Libyan coalition, also in the western Delta. This infiltration was transformed in a serious attempt to invade the Delta. The confrontation in the name of the Delta defense (= Egypt) led to a new considerable Egyptian victory, radical this time, as narrated in the temple of Medinet Habu, with the capture of the Libyan chief and with the allocation of many prisoners as mercenaries in the Faiyum and in the Delta<sup>29</sup>.

Peace was restored and the Egyptian borders made safe. It was in the end of this conflict, enhanced the credibility of Ramses III as a competent ruler, that the great complex of Medinet Habu was finished<sup>30</sup>.

Regardless of these military conflicts have occurred, according to the Egyptian sources which wants us to think, in battles (concentrated attacks, organized and concerted of peoples in coalition) or in a series of bellic episodes, skirmishes and raids, the Egyptian propagandistic celebration used it to give a wide iconographic expression on the available surfaces in Medinet Habu complex.

### The *migdol* scenes

The entrance to the Medinet Habu complex is made nowadays through the *migdol*, situated about 80m from the mortuary temple. This is a pavilion with two towers of two storeys<sup>31</sup>, topped with battlements, originally 22m high. In pharaonic times, the *migdol* supervised, in the area immediately ahead, the pier which, through two canals, connected the temple to the

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Cf. Valbelle, D., *Histoire de l'état pharaonique*, 323. See also Gardiner, A., *Egypt of pharaohs. An introduction*, 283, 284, 285; Pritchard, J. B., *ANET*, 262-263; Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 13; Lalouette, Cl., *Op. Cit.*, 309; Dias, G. C., "Os 'Povos do mar' e a 'Idade Obscura' no Médio Oriente Antigo" in *Cadmo 1* (1992): 148.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Gardiner, A., *Op. Cit.*, 287; Grimal, N., *Op. Cit.*, 334. See also Valbelle, D., *Les neuf arcs*, 147.

<sup>30</sup> Therefore, there were three campaigns under the orders of Ramses III: two against the Libyans (year 5 and 11) and another against the Sea Peoples (year 8). It is accepted that Medinet Habu temple has been completed in Ramses III year 12, after the final campaign against the Libyans. Cf. Shaw, I. *Op. Cit.*, 305.

<sup>31</sup> The internal divisions, with 4,56 m x 1,85 m, had two windows and their decoration has scenes with religious and intimate-erotic scenes. Cf. Araújo, L. M. de, "Medinet Habu" in Araújo, L. M. de (dir.), *Dicionário do antigo Egípto*, 552.

usual bed of the Nile and allowed the arrival of vessels, especially of the Egyptian divinities processional barks, of the pharaoh at times of formal or ceremonial visits, of dignitaries of foreign countries and of the complex everyday service personnel<sup>32</sup>.

The walls of the large entrance door on the outside are decorated with abundant and deliberately impressive images of a gigantic and haughty pharaoh smiting Egypt's enemies, like dominated captives, kneeling, which appear seized by their hair. The "ritual offering" is made to Amun which, in turn, gives the pharaoh the victory weapon *kehepesb*<sup>33</sup>. From the quantitative point of view, these scenes can be compared to the also stereotyped scenes showing the king in the presence of the gods, emphasizing his role as mediator and guarantor of order.

In addition, in the inferior registers of the *migdol* there are represented the Egyptian traditional enemies, according to the same defeat iconography: kneeling, with their necks tied and hands bound behind their backs<sup>34</sup>. To the left there are Nubians (*Nebesym*) and Libyans (*Tjebenu*, *Tjemebu*, *Meshwesh* or *Libu*), while at the right there are representations of the Asiatic princes from the time of Ramses III (Hittites and Amorites), as well as semi nomadic peoples (*Tjekker*, *Sherden*, *Shasu*, *Tiuresh*, *Philistines*)<sup>35</sup>. The "Nubian war" and the "Syrian war" are Ramses III fictitious conflicts, in much copied from the walls of the Ramesseum, turned mandatory by the Egyptian ideology of domination<sup>36</sup>. The inclusion of these plastic and ideological accounts in the *migdol* showing the pharaoh "destroying the chiefs from all lands" aim to increase Ramses III role in history.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. IV*, 11-13. The Medinet Habu temples were the aim of the processions celebrated during the religious festivities, e.g. the "Beautiful Festival of the Valley". Cf. Schulz, R.; Sourouzian, H., *Op.Cit.*, 197. About the divine processions at Medinet Habu, Marie-Ange Bonhême and Annie Forgeau say: "*Au Nouvel Empire, à Médinet Habou, se recensent cent soixante-deux jours de solennités exceptionnelles.*" Bonhême, M.-A.; Forgeau, A., *Pharaon. Les secrets du pouvoir*, 148.

<sup>33</sup> The *kehepesb*, curve weapon of bronze, was introduced in Egypt by the Hyksos and was rapidly adopted by the Egyptians.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 1980, 7, fig. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 5 and plate 6; Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Nubia was, at the time, a well submissive colony who didn't pose any major problems to the Egyptian crown.

On the inside of the high entrance door, facing east, six other groups arise, each representing the pharaoh dominating the enemies: two in the upper register, two in the middle register and two in the lower register. The two figures from the upper register and the two in the lower one show a relaxed Ramses III, resting the hatchet on his shoulder. This typology follows the one by Ramses II at Beit el-Uali<sup>37</sup>. On the north wall of the *migdol* passageway, a new scene shows the pharaoh with the *atef* crown on his head with six *uraei* and with a *mibet* mace-axe in his hand aided by an aggressive lion in the “maatic” action of dominating two kneeling Asiatic enemies<sup>38</sup>.

All these reliefs placed in this transitional place between the unprotected and chaotic world (outside the complex walls) and the orderly and protected world (inside the *temenos*) fulfil the explicit magical purpose of establishing the pharaoh as the capable and responsible element, according to the Egyptian way of thought, of sustaining and repelling Egypt’s invaders, the same is to say, the chaos forces (*isfet*) always ready to submerge the world created by the demiurge gods in the beginning of times<sup>39</sup>. The Medinet Habu *migdol*, as a microcosmic structure, glorifies the pharaoh as the champion of battles, whether real or symbolic.

Therefore, it can be said that Medinet Habu’s entrance tower fulfilled a double function of protection: on one hand as a physical structure, imposing and powerful, served as a defence for its “owners” (its wide upper window even allowed to launch a destructive attack upon the invaders); on the other hand, through the magic message released from the reliefs, acted as “supplementary defense” against all potential assaults from Egypt’s enemies. Hence, Ramses III architects searched to provide the sacred space with all precautions and conditions of durability and eternity, as the name of the temple presupposed, creating in this way the formidable and unique defensive impression of the complex.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Hall, E. S., *The pharaoh smites his enemies. A comparative study*, 37, figs. 68, 69; Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, plate 19.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Hall, E. S., *Op. Cit.*, 37 and fig. 72. The lion bites the elbow of one of the enemies. This scene is also an imitation of the similar scenes of Ramses II. Cf. Partridge, R. B., *Op. Cit.*, 272.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 6.

### The scenes of the entrance pylon

The entrance pylon of Medinet Habu mortuary temple is one of the most impressive pylons of Egyptian religious buildings: originally measuring 66m x 24m x 11m<sup>40</sup>. The upper part of the massif on the right (north) is today much destroyed. Two recesses were made on both massifs, which occupied almost half of the wall, vertically, allocated to support the four festive masts projected above the top of each massif, adorned with colourful banners<sup>41</sup>.

The pylon was decorated with colossal statues, incised, painted with bright colours, of the pharaoh offering to the gods (to Amun-Re in the southern massif; to Amun-Re-Harakhty on the northern massif) the enemies captured and subdued. In the pylon façade, the pharaoh bears the *pschent* crown of the unified Egypt, offering the Asiatic enemies, while on the right appears with the *desheret* from the northern Egypt and offers Nubian and Libyan enemies, in this way referring to the typical dualism that simultaneously express the unity of the pharaonic power and of the kingdom<sup>42</sup>.

Besides the enemies directly seized by their hair by the pharaoh, who is preparing, in the scene to the left, to strike the *coup de grâce* with his mace-axe in an half-moon profile (*mibt* mace-axe) and, in the scene to the right, with his pyriform mace (*bedjet* mace), the lower registers of the pylons' two massifs show two extensive lines of small figures which represent the conquered enemies of Egypt<sup>43</sup>. Their heads and their arms tied behind their backs are well distinguished, being the rest of the bodily elements replaced

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, Vol. III, 4.

<sup>41</sup> The four poles were dedicated to two pairs of goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon profoundly associated to Egypt and to the protection of royalty: Isis (south) and Nephthys (north) – the mother and the aunt of the falcon god Horus from which the pharaoh was the incarnation – and Nekhbet (south) and Wadjet (north), deities who symbolized, respectively, Upper and Lower Egypt upon which the pharaoh ruled. Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Sales, J. das C., “Coroas” in Araújo, L. M. de (dir.), *Dicionário do Antigo Egípto*, 241, 242.

<sup>43</sup> There are almost 250 names of peoples, although most of them are unknown to us. Similar representations appear in earlier topographic lists of Thutmose III (seventh pylon of the temple of Amun, at Karnak) and of Ramses II (in the temple of Abydos) and in another list of Ramses III, at Karnak.

by an oval shield (in fact, a fortress plan), in which is inscribed the name of the country or the name of the people. In the right massif, the enemies are figured in the same way behind the god Re-Harakhty who holds and drags them with several chains, like domestic pets pulled by their leashes<sup>44</sup>.

In both inscription-scenes, the gods offer to the thankful pharaoh the *kehepesh* – a kind of metal (bronze) curved scimitar – or victory weapon<sup>45</sup>. The victory is a gift from the gods; they are, in the end, the real winners. Such is the message which Medinet Habu's first pylon proclaims through its gigantic iconographic representations and inscriptions. Pharaoh and deities stand out by their visual and iconic accented role.

In the context of the Egyptian spatial-architectonic conceptions, the first pylon is a physical structure which acts as a protective barrier that magically establishes the demarcation of spaces: “*Clearly, the pylon was seen as the last barrier between the world-image contained in the temple and the chaos outside*”<sup>46</sup>. Besides this apotropaic dimension, as in the *migdol*, the representations located in this free access area assumed, simultaneously, a propagandistic character: “*Ces représentations étaient destinées à être vues par les fidèles, qui n’avaient pas accès à l’intérieur: le temple sert ainsi de lieu d’affichage. Mais en même temps, dans la mesure où il est une représentation de l’univers centrée autour de la personne du dieu dont le roi assure le service, il est le lieu où ce dernier témoigne de son action en faveur du dieu dans tous les domaines où elle doit s’exercer.*”<sup>47</sup>

The inner surface of the first pylon (southwest wall), adjacent to the area where the palace was built, shows Ramses III in his chariot hunting three powerful wild desert bulls: two are already pierced and dominated (with their paws in the air), while the pharaoh with his arch and bows

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Hall, E. S., *Op. Cit.*, 36 and fig. 65. The victory hymns recorded on both massifs of the first pylon of Medinet Habu, complements of the iconographic representations, are very enlightening. The hymn recorded on the southern massif, expresses the military eulogy of Ramses III through words said by Amun, while in the hymn recorded on the northern massif is Re-Harakhty who praises the pharaoh.

<sup>45</sup> In the case of Re-Harakhty's scimitar, it is surmounted by a curious falcon head, equal to the head of the god himself. To Emma Swan Hall it is the most complex and compact representation of a victory scene ever performed Cf. *Ibidem*, 36 and fig. 65.

<sup>46</sup> Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Grimal, N., *Op. Cit.*, 340.

chase the third who flees towards the river, where nourished Nile tilapia (*Tilapia nilotica*) quietly swim<sup>48</sup>. The theme is traditional, but the treatment achieved in this true masterpiece of relief from the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty is innovative by the painstaking care in the execution and in the detail of the incisions and by the enormous scale used. A row of soldiers, in a fair modest scale, form a frieze below this representation. With this emblematic hunting scene in great scale it emphasizes the operation of dominion of the adverse forces of Nature by the irreplaceable Egyptian pharaoh<sup>49</sup>.

In Medinet Habu, hunt and war are thus assimilated, in spatial terms and in symbolic terms: the massacre of the rebels or the hunting of the great and fierce animals in the desert areas or in swamps (chaotic areas) constitute two actions that Egyptian ideology gives to the brave pharaoh, responsible for pushing back any possibility for the surrounding chaos (the enemies or the wild animals) to penetrate in Egypt.

### The northern outer walls

The outer walls on the north side of the building also represent important historical battles and victory scenes, showing Ramses III and his armies triumphant over Nubians, Libyans and Sea Peoples who attacked Egypt during his reign. As Dominique Valbelle writes, “*Cette victoire éclatante constitue l’un des thèmes décoratifs les plus spectaculaires et les plus originaux de son Temple de Millions d’années à Medinet Habou, l’équivalent pour Ramsès III de la bataille de Qadech*”<sup>50</sup>.

Due to temple orientation, many of these scenes are practically invisible without the sunlight, whereby in most cases, only in the early morning one

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Manniche, L., *L’art égyptien*, 240; Wildung, D., *Op. Cit.*, 144; Málek, J., *Op. Cit.*, 320; Schulz, R.; Sourouzian, H., *Op. Cit.*, 198.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Bonhême, M.-A.; Forgeau, A., *Op. Cit.*, 1988, 214.

<sup>50</sup> Valbelle, D., *Histoire de l’état pharaonique*, 323. One of the main ideological characteristics of Ramses III reign was precisely the admiration-emulation, almost obsessive, of the monarchic manifestations of Ramses II. Cf. *Ibidem*, 324.

can obtain a minimal satisfactory observation and yet still stained by the destructions imposed by time and by history<sup>51</sup>.

The military reliefs start with Ramses III Nubian campaign (badly damaged), to be followed by the ones regarding the conflict of year 5 (c. 1177 BC) with the Libyans (first Libyan war). The image of the pharaoh, of great dimensions, wearing the *kehepresb* crown and in his chariot, emerges like a proud and confident conqueror, aided by the omnipresent Amun, whose banners with the rams head mark the highlighted presence.

By the order and “arrangement”, the Egyptian armies and the mercenaries and cavalry associated to the Egyptians contrast with the enemies, defeated and captured, who appear figured in the most varied and contorted positions. Order (*maat*) and chaos (*isfet*) and its representatives are thus clearly prefigured, according to the Egyptian worldview, on the outside military reliefs of Medinet Habu.

The existential devaluation of enemy forces receives the assistance of an additional and significant reason in the iconographic treatment: the counting of cut off right hands and genitals scenes<sup>52</sup>. Result of a diligent action of zealous army scribes who proceed in rigorous counting, we see piles of enemy hands, cut off (38.000, according to numerical data – surely exaggerated – provided by the inscriptions) and of phalluses (25.000), which can give us the idea of the Libyan force in confrontation with Ramses III (well superior to the one faced by Merenptah about 30 years earlier<sup>53</sup>), at the same time as they witness the intentional barbarous costume of enemies’ mutilation, thus eternally weakened and debased, absolutely prevented of any attempt to reorganize themselves, militarily or ethnically<sup>54</sup>. The “trophies” of war thus represented by Egyptians symbolize and

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> The hands severing was a practice more common than cutting the penis off.

<sup>53</sup> The informations related to the attacks of Merenptah’s reign (c. 1213 – c. 1203 BC) came to us through a long list from the temple of Karnak, from the Athribis’ stela, from the fragment of the Cairo column and from the famous “Israel Stele” (stela from year 5 of Merenptah), dating from c. 1231 or 1207 BC, conform the adopted chronologies. All these texts were translated by Breasted, 1906 and Kitchen, 1972. Cf. Dias, G. C., *Op. Cit.*, 148.

<sup>54</sup> This information can be compared with the ones reporting the same event in the second open-air court, where the values mentioned are, respectively, 3000 hands and 3000 phalluses.

mean the effective massacre of the enemies, in this particular case the Libyans, and intend to show the magnitude of the Egyptian victory.

The exterior walls also record the seven scenes concerning the new battle of the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Ramses III, this time against the Sea Peoples: in the first the pharaoh appears presiding to the distribution of the military equipment to his army (*benty*-spears), helmets, *pedjet*-bows, *cheser*-arrows, quivers, *mesu*- and *nekhen*-swords and *ikem*-shield). In the next scene, the army is on the move marching to the battle, with the disposition of coastal forces, in Palestinian territory, to cope with the two enemy fronts on their way to Egypt.

Several episodes of the battle are recorded as well as the corresponding Egyptian exultation to the achieved victory. In a first moment it appears, oddly, the triumphant Ramses III, hunting lions. Also here there is obviously an assimilation of the enemies (representatives of chaos) to the wild animals (another way of chaos manifestation), whereas, in both cases, it is the duty of the Pharaoh to dispose its “ordering” or dominance through victory or through hunt.

Interesting in all Medinet Habu’s context and, in an even more general way, in Egyptian art, is the representation of the scene of maritime confrontation between Egyptians and Sea Peoples, in all likelihood to have occurred in the verdant Delta region: four Egyptian vessels with prows ending in lion heads, with its 20 – 22 rowers, besides archers and other common soldiers, completely destroy the enemy fleet (five vessels, even though smaller than the Egyptians<sup>55</sup>), among hundreds of adversary bodies thrown to the water in the midst of the turmoil, pierced with arrows and deadly wounds, which contrast with the calm and efficient Egyptian soldiers. This is the first major naval battle to be recorded<sup>56</sup>. Even though better armed here than in the land battle, the Sea Peoples face, to rejoice

<sup>55</sup> In three of them follow Philistenes, recognizable by their helmets with plumes. On the other two are figured the Sikala, wearing helmets with horns. The Egyptian ships were equipped with topsail baskets (the oldest to be recorded), where guards scrutinized the “battlefield” and helped the archers in the orientation of their lines of fire, thus obtaining a strategic advantage towards the enemy. Cf. Partridge, R. B., *Op. Cit.*, 269, 270.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Valbelle, D., *Les neuf arcs*, 148.

and encomiastic of Egyptian ideology, a new military setback. Through the image, according to convention, it are highlighted the superiority and bravery of the king and the mortal terror caused to the invaders who, obviously, attack on their own.

Much significant of the ideological background that supports the military representations of Medinet Habu is the scene in which Ramses III presents captives from the Libyan and Asiatic wars to the god Amun-Re of Karnak, to his consort Mut and to the son of both, the moon-god Khonsu. The Egyptian major military victories are assigned to the great god of Thebes; it is Amun who aids and gives victory to the pharaoh and, consequently, the pharaoh must bestow the god, not only with military spoils, but also with the production of the appropriate scenes allusive to this acknowledged “gratefulness”. Symbolically the winner is Amun.

The celebration of victory over the Sea Peoples does not exhaust the “military record” of the northern exterior walls of Medinet Habu mortuary temple. The Libyans continued their infiltration movements in the Delta and, three years after, in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Ramses III (c. 1147 BC), the Meshwesh returned to charge. The reliefs show the reunion of the two armies in the north-western area of the Delta, near the so-called “City of Ramses III”<sup>57</sup>. Once again, the Egyptian forces came out as winners, capturing Meshesher, chief of the Meshwesh, showed in one representation, trapped, escorted by Egyptian guards armed with axes, quivers and bows<sup>58</sup>. It seems to have been the *coup de grâce* over the Libyan bellic urges: a delegation led by Keper, Meshesher’s father, sets the terms of deposition of weapons, before Egyptian firmness. The western frontier was, so far, secure<sup>59</sup>. Also in this case, Medinet Habu victorious records represent the pharaoh presenting / dedicating the defeated to Amun-Re and Mut.

<sup>57</sup> These campaign reliefs, without obeying to the chronological order of the historical events, are located at the bottom of two registers in the outer space that mediates between the first and the second pylon of the temple.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 18, fig. 13.

<sup>59</sup> However, as is known, the descendants of these Libyans rise again against Ramses III successors and eventually came to occupy the Egyptian throne for almost 200 years (21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty; 945 – 712 BC).

### The Southern exterior walls

In the temple exterior, to the south, there stood the royal palace, occupying, in the rear, the space that lies between the first and the second pylons. This is the only structure belonging to the mortuary temple set of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty built on the exterior. This is why many authors (including Uvo Hölscher) prefer to call this kind of palaces “temple-palace”, so as to distinguish them from the “palace-residence”<sup>60</sup>.

Medinet Habu “temple-palace”<sup>61</sup>, with a quadrangular plan, with its vestibules, its six audience rooms (the larger one with twelve palmiform columns, disposed in four rows of three columns each), the throne room (with four columns and a dais for the royal throne), the royal dormitory and the bath rooms, directly connected through three entrance doors and the “Window of Royal Appearances”, to the first open-air court, was, like the majority of domestic structures, built in mud bricks (except the doors and columns), and seems to have functioned simultaneously as a royal resort whenever Ramses visited the temple to officiate in certain ceremonies and as a spiritual building for the extra-earthly life<sup>62</sup>.

Similarly, the southern exterior façade of the temple-palace presented the same representation, still seen today. Besides the wall-side posts of the “Window of Royal Appearances” (central element of the façade) in which the pharaoh faces two enemies, in an infighting scene and raises a threatening scimitar, there is also another similar scene in the remaining surface of the façade, where the pharaoh pierces with a long spear the Libyan enemy subdued by his hair<sup>63</sup>. In all these situations, the enemies are represented with their backs to the interior of the temple, therefore the pharaoh being always in “front” as if moving towards the interior. Sym-

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 37.

<sup>61</sup> It is important to attend to the fact of frequently speaking of the “first palace” and of the “second palace” of Medinet Habu. Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 37. The “first palace” is the one contemporaneous of the mortuary temple.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Wilkinson, R. H., *Op. Cit.*, 198; Redford, S., *Op. Cit.*, 100; Shaw, I.; Nicholson, P., *British Museum dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, 178.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 38 and plates 26 and 30; Partridge, R. B., *Op. Cit.*, 10.

bolically the space belongs to Amun and the pharaoh ritually offers him the massacred enemies, thus adjusting particularly well to this conception to the material distribution of the scenes on the available occupied surfaces.

The interior porticoes of the palace equally allowed some attention to the ritual-warrior dimension and this is currently noticed in the existing lintels nowadays on the ground (harem's court northern entrance door), where the pharaoh, properly equipped with the royal *regalia* (*kehepres*h crown, *uraeus* and the victory weapon) is represented in full melee with his enemies, again in an infighting combat (holds the kneeling enemy by an arm) from where he obviously arises as winner<sup>64</sup>.

### **First court: the appearing and royal victories room**

Medinet Habu's first court (48 x 35m) consisted of a space with double functionality, in the way that it was not just the mortuary temple's open court, but it was also the court of the attached royal palace<sup>65</sup>. The centre of the first court constitute the place where occurs the axis intersection of temple and palace<sup>66</sup>. Relating to the temple, it worked as a vestibule where the offerings were accumulated and prepared for the rituals occurring on the interior. Hence, consistently with this dimension, the figurations of the upper register of the north wall refer to the daily ritual episodes, morning and evening, celebrated in the temple<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, plates 32 and 35.

<sup>65</sup> Let it be said that the main palace (palace-residence) was located in the eastern Delta, in the city of Pi-Rameses, Egypt's capital over a period of at least 120 years, including the reign of Ramses III. Cf. Redford, S., *Op. Cit.*, 90. The palace of Medinet Habu may never have effectively served as a royal residence complex, being used by the pharaoh to these ceremonial acts during the religious festivals which took place in Medinet Habu. Cf. Baines, J.; Málek, J., *Op. Cit.*, 99; Sourouzian, H.; Stadelmann, R., "The temples of New Kingdom" in Ziegler, Ch.; Tiradritti, F. (eds.), *The pharaohs*, 179. Therefore, its main purpose would not be to accommodate the sovereign during his existence, but to play a ritual role for his mortuary cult, through the presence of a statue of himself. Cf. Manniche, L., *Op. Cit.*, 228; Schulz, R.; Sourouzian, H., *Op. Cit.*, 197.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. IV*, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 22, 23.

For those who enter the courtyard, to their right (north), seven columns with addorsed statues of the king wearing the *atef* crown on his head, arms crossed holding the sceptres *hekat* and *nekhakha*<sup>68</sup>, are turned to the eight papyriform columns, with open capitals of the south portico, that is, to the palace façade. In full vitality and vigour, the pharaoh is represented as an active agent in the cosmic order and it is established a “magical dialogue” with the painted and inscribed scenes on the south portico columns.

In these, the pharaoh is shown according to the same military iconography from the exterior. Also here, Ramses III presents Libyan and Sea Peoples captives to the Theban divine couple Amun-Re and Mut. Being all decorated to the same height and with the same kind of massacre scene incised (only varying the crown worn by the pharaoh<sup>69</sup>), the columns produce an interesting scenic game which, in some angles, it is possible to capture in the whole: the pharaoh overcomes the several kneeling enemies whom he offers to a different Egyptian deity which, in turn, gives him the victory weapon. For what it seems, the same motif and the same effect existed in the interior colonnade of the first palace, at least judging by the reconstitution of these columns<sup>70</sup>.

The second Libyan war appears copiously illustrated on the interior wall of the first pylon, while in the façade of the second pylon (north) a long inscription narrates the campaign of year 8<sup>71</sup>. The south wall of the first open air courtyard was planned as the palace façade and, for that, the representations today visible behind the south colonnade of the first court are programmed scenes to flank the “Window of Royal Appearances” (1,04m width)<sup>72</sup>. Meaningfully from the ideological point of view,

<sup>68</sup> Almost all of these statues were also destroyed by Copts. Flanking the royal statues (identified as “the sovereign, perfect as the king in the throne of Atum, wearing the *atef* as Re-Harakhty”), in smaller size, there are statues of a prince and of a princess, without any onomastics identification. On the mirror of one of the bases of these statues, by the way very deteriorated, appears Ramses III figured as an animated cartouche, with two arms which holds the vanquished enemies by their hair. Cf. Partridge, R. B., *Op. Cit.*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Hall, E. S., *Op. Cit.*, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. III*, 47 and plate 7.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> About this window Murnane writes: “The window was reconstructed during the last century, using a stone that was first believed to be part of the original. On closer inspection (...) it appears that this fragment actually came from the Ramesseum (...), which had been built over a century before.”, Murnane, W.J., *Op. Cit.*, 24. On the other hand, Lise Manniche associates

the king “appeared” in a window framed doubly by his own representations slaughtering Egypt’s enemies (Libyans and the Sea Peoples): in the first frame appear two representations (one on each side) occupying the whole height of the window, where the pharaoh with the *kehepresh* in his head holds his enemies by the hair, who are standing on their feet, with their arms bound behind their backs, holding passively on his other hand an *akhu* axe, rectangular in configuration, then follow-up on the rest of the surface, almost with twice the height of the window, two other figures of the pharaoh, now in an active pose, with the *atef* crown on his head and a mace-axe in hand, slaying the kneeling captives<sup>73</sup>. Complementarily, below these four representations, there is an abutment constituted by a row of 20 prisoners of war heads (Nubians alternating with Libyans and Asiatics)<sup>74</sup>. Imagine the impressive scenic effect obtained when the king, alive to accompany any ritual or activity in the courtyard (e.g. tribute reception; the grant concessions to his subjects), dressed with all the eloquent *regalia* inherent to his condition, appeared on the window of appearances... As mentioned in a local inscription: “*The king appeared as divine son of Re in his august palace, as Re’s horizon when he shines in the skies*”<sup>75</sup>.

### The second pylon and the second court: the festival court

The second pylon (16m high) shows the monarch’s glorious military campaigns and contains (exterior wall, north side) the longest hieroglyphic inscription known, precisely the literary account of the confrontations between Ramses III and the Sea Peoples.

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them to the constructions of Amenhotep IV: “(la) grande fenêtre (...) rappelle la Fenêtre d’Apparition des bâtiments d’Aménophis IV”. Manniche, L., *Op. Cit.*, 1994, 228.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 38 and plate 3.

<sup>74</sup> Six of these heads are just below of the “Window of Royal Appearances” and the other fourteen are distributed for both sides (seven each side). Nowadays, *in situ* remain only three on each side. Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 40 and plate 3.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 4. The palace façade, mainly the doorjambs of the entrance doors and the “Window of Royal Appearances”, were modified at the end of the reign of Ramses III, at the same time as it was constructed the Second Palace. In subsequent periods (Roman and Coptic) the “Window” was even more destroyed, in order to be adapted as a lateral entrance to the court. Cf. Hölscher, U., *Op. Cit.*, 43, 44.

The second court (38 x 42m) is surrounded by papyriform columns: to the north and south and to the east and west by statues of the king as a mummified Osiris adorsed to the pilasters. The second court is therefore also decorated with a portico of Osiriac pillars. It was the king's chosen place to carry out the annual festivals connected with the royal rebirth, such as the "Beautiful Festival of the Valley", the festival of Sokar-Osiris and the festival of Min<sup>76</sup>. Thus, the iconographic decoration of this court is mainly dedicated to those major religious festivals and only the military reliefs on the lower register of the south wall (episodes of the Libyan war and the long inscription of the campaigns of years 5 and 8) break this theme.

During the Coptic period occupation, it was on this court that the Holy Church was erected which ultimately destroyed many of the details of the Pharaonic period, namely in the king's Osiriac pillars from which only one pair survives, although incomplete<sup>77</sup>.

### Saite portico of the Small Temple

To complete this "tour" on the theme of the ritual smiting of captives in Medinet Habu's complex, there must be mentioned the scenes present on the eastern intercolumnar wall of the portico built during the Saitic period and usurped by Nakhtnebef (Nectanebo I) on the Small Temple. There, it is possible to see the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaoh Kheperkare Nakhtnebef, wearing the *shendjit* and the *pschent* on his head, clutching a bundle of enemies (ten exactly, divided in two groups of five each) extraordinary armed with knives and daggers<sup>78</sup>. A deity who seems to be the warrior goddess Neith, holding a bow and arrows, although smaller than the

<sup>76</sup> William J. Murnane gives an excellent description of the rituals associated to these festivities, in Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 28-38.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Murnane, W. J., *Op. Cit.*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. I*, Plate 18; Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. III*, Plate 31. The identification is made through the coronation name Kheperkare that appears within a cartouche surmounting a *ka*-banner, usually used to mention the Horus name of the pharaoh and not the *praenomen*.

pharaoh and the captives, presides to the scene, in the way performing the same role as Amun-Re and Re-Harakhty played in other scenes towards Ramses III: receive the ritual offering from the pharaoh and helps him and sanctions his military victory.

The founder of the Egyptian 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty historically had to face a “mixed” army formed by Persians and Greeks who penetrated in Egypt through the west of the Delta (Mendes) in order to avoid the fortress of Pelusium, in the eastern Delta. Only the delay of the invaders in the final assault to Memphis and the climatic conditions (flooding of the Nile) allowed Nakhtnebef to regroup his army, to gain a certain advantage of dislocation and thus, to counterattack in a successful way, expelling them from the country. The ritual representation on the portico of the Small Temple may allude to this protective action of the Egyptian pharaoh.

Although today with the upper part incomplete, there are in this place (western inter-columnar wall) another scene similar to the later, where the enemies also appear armed<sup>79</sup>. Besides the legs and the bodies of the enemies, it is also clearly seen on the surviving register the legs and feet of the pharaoh. By the traditional body positioning (sole of the foot more advanced completely firm on the ground and heel high on the farthest foot, to transmit a certain idea of tension, of movement and of potency), one realizes that, as in the other case, he was preparing to strike, with the necessary intensity, the *coup de grâce*, eventually with an hatchet like in the nearby scene. Here, the scene is “presided” by a male divinity, however impossible to be identified with exactitude.

### Conclusion

The apotheotic military representations in the various dependencies of Medinet Habu’s complex, with more or less historical view or in a more or less poetic style, with special emphasis to the ones on the mortuary temple

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Hölscher, U., *The Excavation of Medinet Habu, Vol. I*, Plate 18.

of Ramses III, have an archetypal value thus making them escape the passage of historical time. Through the apotropaic representations of the massacre of the enemies' scenes, Ramses III eternally wins the Libyans and the Sea Peoples confederates (whom historically he won on the battlefield, even though relating of proportion it is impossible to accurately determine from the unilateral considerations of Egyptian sources), to the ones he adds, although fictitious, the ones his homonymous ancestor Ramses II won. In this undifferentiated but intentionally modelled form, he wins all Egypt's enemies.

Medinet Habu's reliefs bet on a constant transposition and transference of the historical and mythical dimensions. History becomes an element of cult and, namely, this justifies the military scenes of Ramses III on the temple's interior, in the first and second courts, side-by-side with the commemoration of elements purely religious or more political in character<sup>80</sup>. The pharaoh's warrior acts (like an armed arm of the deities) manifest the immutable established order by the gods in the beginning of times and, therefore, are the fulfillment of a pact registered in the immemorial time. Inscribed in a temple of the "million of years", reaffirm that mystical bond for all eternity. In the case of Medinet Habu, the own formula of the temple's theological designation ("united with eternity") it's a strengthening of this vision: a mortuary temple is, by definition, an immemorial temple; a temple of the immemorial.

The first addressee of the temple's reliefs is the deity and, in that sense, the adopted scenography must always reflect an idealized version of history that, therefore, is fixed for all eternity. Secondly, the temple's visitors (whether contemporaneous or future comers), accordingly with the areas they have access, also receive impressive "history lessons", always in conformity to the established norm and to the defined rule of glorification by tradition. To these, it is usually the pharaoh who stands out, not just as victorious the triumpher in war, but also as an ubiquitous provider of ritual and myth.

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Grimal, N., *Op. Cit.*, 340.

Despite its selected or stereotyped repetitiveness, the smiting of the enemies scenes at Medinet Habu constitute a paradigmatic case of figurative syntax in which the brave and dynamic pharaoh (in this specific case, Ramses III), theoretically provided with superhuman abilities, favourite of the gods of victory, transforms the chaos into order, even when his military movements towards the adversary, real or fictitious, are more defensive than offensive.

Invincible, infallible, avenger, in active poses, proud and dominant: here is the king that the coloured reliefs, usually on a colossal scale, of the preeminent mortuary temple of Medinet Habu proclaimed.

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