

FRAGMENT OF A STATUE OF RAMESSES II

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Rameses II, who reigned from 1292 to 1225 B.C., is probably the best known of all the kings of ancient Egypt. This fact is due chiefly to his long reign of sixty-seven years and his great activity as a builder. Nearly half of all the surviving temples of Egypt date at least in part from his reign, and his name is found in a vast majority of the ancient sites there. He was not, however, so far as we can tell, the ablest of the pharaohs, either as a governor or as a military commander. He made the most of his Syrian campaigns in his records, but the net result of them was a stalemate with the Hittites and a treaty whereby Egypt retained possession of Palestine while Khattushil, King of the Hittites, was acknowledged as the suzerain of northern Syria. The text of this treaty has survived in its Egyptian version on the walls of two Theban temples, and the cuneiform original was discovered in 1906 in the Foreign Office files of the ancient Hittite capital of Boghaz-köi in central Asia Minor. It should be noted that the Boghaz-köi text was not in the language of the Hittites (who also used the cuneiform script) but in Babylonian, the diplomatic language of the eastern Mediterranean during several centuries.

The most original temple of Rameses II

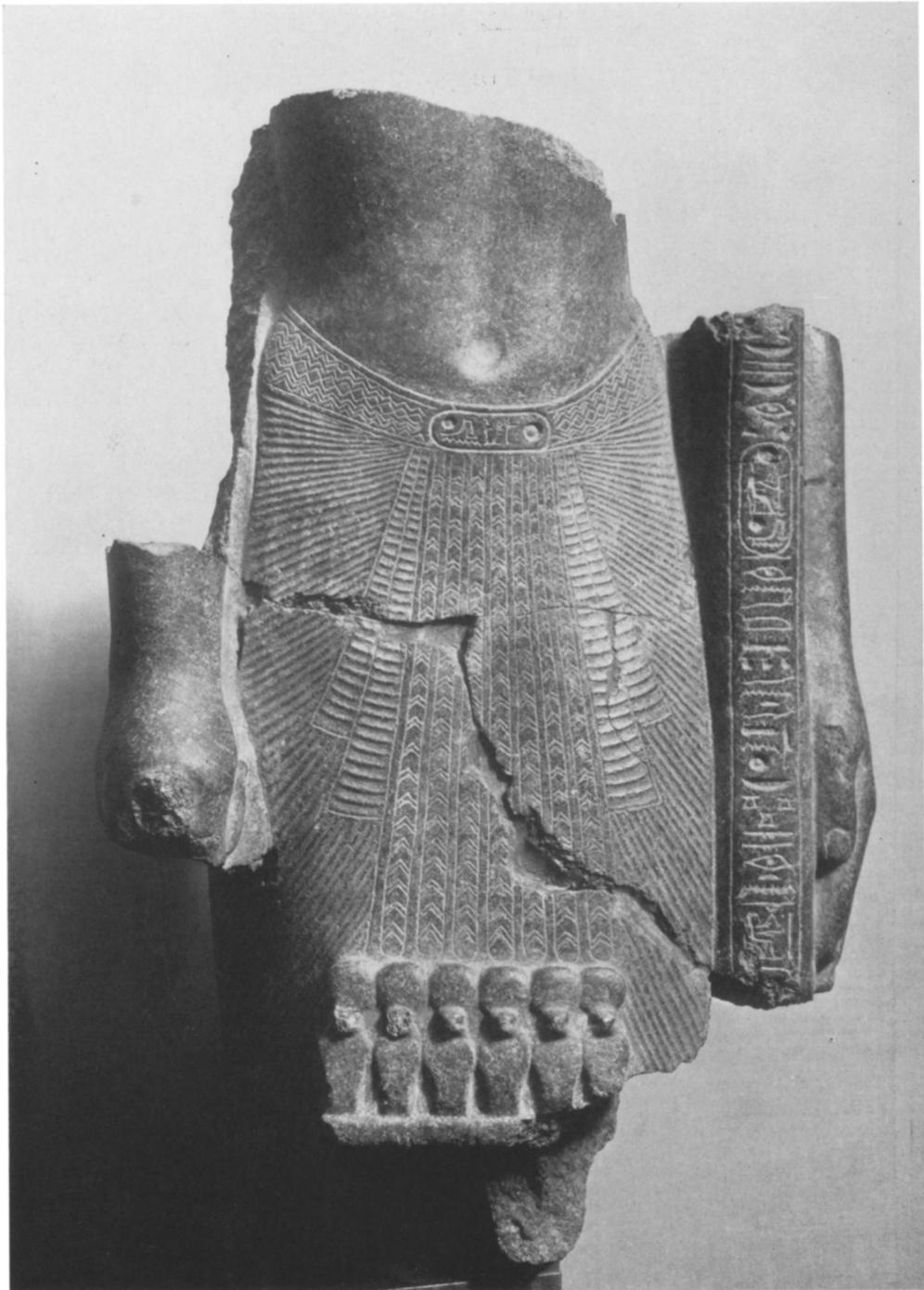
was that at Abu Simbel in Nubia, cut out of the solid rock of the western cliff to the Nile Valley. Some of his most famous work was the completion of buildings planned by his father, Sethy I, such as those at Karnak and Abydos, and it cannot be denied that he frequently used the temples of his predecessors as quarries for his own buildings. It was so much easier and so much less expensive to do this than to cut out stone from distant quarries and transport it to the building sites.

Altogether it seems fair to say that the reputation of Rameses II is somewhat greater than he deserved, when one compares him with some of the great kings of the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the XVIII Dynasty.

The Museum has recently acquired part of a life-size standing statue in gray granite of Rameses II. In its original state the piece was a very fine example of royal sculpture of the XIX Dynasty, a period whose best work equaled in grace and delicacy the best work of the XVIII Dynasty. The statue was dedicated by the king in a temple of Amun Rē', and it has considerable interest as being of a type of which few examples are known. Rameses is shown standing with the left leg advanced. The upper part of



Quartzite head of Rameses II acquired by the Metropolitan Museum in 1934



Fragment of a granite statue of Ramesses II recently acquired by the Museum

the body is bare, except, undoubtedly, for a jeweled collar, while the legs are covered by a sort of skirt extending to the ankles behind, made of finely pleated linen and supported by a girdle, presumably embroidered in colors, with a zigzag pattern. The buckle of the girdle is engraved with the king's so-called throne name, User-ma'et-Rē' Sotep-en-Rē'. This name is composed of two parts which mean, respectively, "strong of truth is (the sun-god) Rē'," and "chosen one of Rē'." From the front of the girdle depends nearly to the knees a stiff apron-like tab, presumably representing an embroidered fabric or beadwork and adorned at the bottom with six cobra heads (uraei), symbols of divinity, each crowned with the disk of the sun. In the actual garment these may have been of wood plated with gold.

With his left hand the king holds against his side a tall ceremonial staff whose butt rested on the ground and whose upper end, terminating at about the level of his face, almost certainly bore a ram's head, symbol of the god Amun Rē'. Several statues with staves of this type are in the Cairo Museum (*Catalogue général: Legrain, Statues*, vol. II, pls. XII, XIII, XXIV, XXXII). An inscription on the shaft of the staff probably extended its whole length. What has survived of this is fortunately the significant part. The inscription began with a somewhat abbreviated form of the royal titulary. The surviving part reads: "King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands (i.e. Egypt), lord of ritual observance, User-ma'et-Rē' Sotep-en-Rē'. He made it as his monument for his father Amun Rē', lord of the Thrones-of-the-Two-Lands (the name of the temple of Karnak), namely, the fashioning for him of an august staff of (some material of which the name is lost)." The preposition which is the last surviving word of the inscription could also mean "in" here, and in that case would have been followed by the name of the temple in which the statue was placed and

to which, I believe, the king presented the original of the staff on whose copy in stone the inscription appears. The formula used here is quite commonly found on statues erected by kings in temples, but the word generally translated "monument" is also used of objects of the temple cults when made of costly materials. Moreover records have survived of gifts by kings of ceremonial staves to temples. A king of the preceding dynasty, for example, states that he "made Father Amūn on" a certain number of "staves," meaning that he presented to a temple staves of exactly the kind shown with our statue. It seems likely that our inscription refers rather to the staff than to the statue and that it is a copy of an inscription placed on the original staff, which was presented to the temple. It is possible, of course, that Ramesses II presented a number of staves to the temple where the statue was placed, each one bearing a similar inscription. Such staves were perhaps of wood, plated with heavy gold, while the ram's head at the top may have been of solid gold. Another possible material for such staves would be fine blue faience, with the inscription in black. Which of the many temples of Amun Rē' that existed or were built during the reign of Ramesses II once contained our statue, it is impossible to say as we have no knowledge of the place where it was found.

The plinth at the back of the statue bore a vertical inscription giving another version of the titulary of the king, the surviving part of which reads as follows: ". . . Lord of the Two Lands, lord of might, User-ma'et-Rē' Sotep-en-Rē', son of Rē', of his body, his beloved. . ."

While it is unfortunate that we possess only a part of this statue, we may be thankful that even a fragment of a piece of such high quality has come into our hands.

The statue is now on exhibition in the Thirteenth Egyptian Room. The head illustrated on page 219 is shown in the Twelfth Room.