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Recontextualising an Elite Ramesside Family from Tell Nabasha (Ancient Imet)*

Nicky Nielsen

While excavating the site of Tell Nabasha (ancient Imet) in 1886, a large Ramesside block statue belonging to the Royal Scribe and Charioteer Merenptah was uncovered. Eventually transferred to the Chautauqua Archaeological Museum, the statue vanished in 1930 and was rediscovered more than 50 years later and subsequently sold into a private collection. This paper contextualises the object, provides a full translation of the inscriptions found on the statue, and links Merenptah's family to several other pieces of Ramesside private sculpture. It also suggests a potential administrative and religious link between the site of Imet and the nearby capital of Piramesse.

While working on behalf of the Egypt Exploration Fund at the site of Tanis in 1884, British archaeologist Flinders Petrie was informed by local excavators of a “great stone”¹ which stood in a field some distance to the south at a site known by varying sources as Taquieh Pharaoun² or Ras Farun. Petrie visited the site briefly in 1884 and concluded that it merited further archaeological excavation. It had been previously visited by the French antiquarian Jean-Jacques Rifaud who had discovered the remnants of Late Period and Ptolemaic tombs in the area, and also commented on a large red granite sarcophagus found at the site³. Petrie's “great stone” which he originally identified as an upright sarcophagus⁴, he later concluded to be a large shrine built during the reign of Amasis II and dedicated to the god Min⁵.

Petrie arrived at the site in January of 1886⁶ and – together with Francis Llewellyn Griffith and more than a hundred local excavators⁷ – he worked at the site for several weeks before leaving it in the care of Griffith and embarking on a longer reconnaissance journey around the Nile Delta. He returned to the site in March to finish up excavations before moving to the nearby site of Tell Dafana⁸.

The site, which Petrie dubbed Tell Nebesheh (also known as Tell Nabasha and Tell Fara'un) is located on the western edge of the modern town of el-Hosayneya⁹ and comprised, in Petrie's time, a large mudbrick *temenos* wall surrounding a most likely Ramesside temple

* This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the 2019 International Congress of Egyptologists held in Cairo. I would like to thank the Ministry of State Antiquities for hosting this conference and accepting me as a speaker. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Jon Schmitz, the Chautauqua Institution archivist and historian for facilitating research into the history of the collections and access to images.

¹ About his first impressions of Tell Nabasha, Petrie would later write: “While living at Tanis I heard of a great stone, and a cemetery, some miles to the south of that place, and took an opportunity of visiting it [...] The great stone was seen to be a monolith shrine, and therefore probably a temple lay around it” from PETRIE 1893, 64.

² RIFAUD 1830, 168-169.

³ “J'ai examiné aussi un superbe sarcophage en granit noir y dont les accessoires hiéroglyphiques m'ont paru d'un travail extrêmement précieux. Je parle dans mon grand ouvrage de ce sarcophage et avec tout le détail qu'il mérite. Les buttes de Taquieh Pharaoun s'étendent jusqu'à la route de Salaièh à El-Arich; on y découvre encore des sarcophages en terre cuite avec leur couvercle, de même forme et de même matière que les momies, chargé d'inscriptions grecques et juives. Je signale ce lieu comme un des plus favorables pour faire des fouilles.” RIFAUD 1830, 168.

⁴ “I find the great sarcophagus (as I supposed it) is a shrine, as Naville suggested: and that it stood in a temple, within a great enclosure.” (Griffith Institute Archive, Petrie MSS 1.5.1–50)

⁵ For an extensive discussion of the attribution of the smaller temple at Tell Nabasha see in particular RAZANAJAO 2009, 103-108.

⁶ PETRIE 1888. For an overview of Petrie's archaeological work at Tell Nabasha, see in particular RAZANAJAO 2014, 48-63 and NIELSEN, GASPERINI and MAMEDOW 2016, 65-74.

⁷ QUIRKE 2010. Lists of the Egyptian excavators employed by Petrie also appear in several of the notebooks and diaries kept by Francis Griffith during the excavations now held in the Griffith Institute, Oxford University.

⁸ LECLÈRE and SPENCER 2014.

⁹ MUSTAFA 1988, 141-149.

dedicated to the goddess Wadjet, and a smaller temple dedicated to Min dating to the Late Period, which included the monolithic granite shrine constructed during the reign of Amasis II. In addition, the eastern portion of the site comprised a large cemetery with tombs ranging from the Ramesside to the Byzantine Period. A third area comprised a settlement which was dated by Petrie to the Late Period, but which in reality most likely spanned at least the Late Period to the end of the Ptolemaic Period and potentially beyond (**Fig. 1**).

While Petrie was absent from the site, his assistant Griffith continued to conduct excavations in the temple area¹⁰. There, Griffith and his excavators uncovered a large block statue by the northern edge of the temple of Wadjet, a structure of which little more than its sand foundations and a few fragments of limestone were preserved¹¹. The block statue, which was photographed *in situ* (**Fig. 2**), was found lying on its side, highlighting the inscriptions which covered both the side, front, back pillar and lap of the figure.

Griffith Notebook 8 contains a sketch of the rough dimensions of the block statue, as well as a draft of the inscriptions which would later form the basis of the transcription published by Petrie in 1888. In addition, the same section of the notebook records a number of dates, including the 5th, 6th and 7th but with no month indicating when these dates were. It is likely however, that they refer to the 5th, 6th and 7th of March during Petrie's absence and so it is likely that the block statue was uncovered during this time. In addition, a number of names are preserved in this section of the notebook. These appear to be the names of the Egyptian excavators who worked with Griffith at the time and who were, most likely, responsible for the actual excavation of the block statue. Sadly, not all the names are now legible due to the state of the notebook, but those that are, can be read as: "Said [///], Suleiman Hassan, Abdalla Ahmed, Ali Salim, Hany [///] Ali, Salamah Salim, Hassan [///] Naqda, Salah Hassan, Ali Hassan."¹².

1. Post-excavation history

Following its excavation, the statue of Merenptah was transferred to London, and temporarily stored in the British Museum where Griffith conducted a more detailed examination of the piece at some point during 1887 from where it was expected to go to the Boston Museum¹³. Subsequently, the statue formed the basis of a significant donation of 456 artefacts purchased from the Egypt Exploration Fund by Reverend J. E. Kittredge, the Secretary of the Chautauqua Archaeological Society and also a regional secretary of the Egypt Exploration Fund¹⁴.

The Chautauqua Archaeological Society and Museum was intrinsically linked to the Chautauqua Movement, a late 19th century educational movement founded by the Methodist minister John Heyl Vincent¹⁵. The movement took the form of a summer school for Sunday school teachers hosted on the banks of Chautauqua Lake in New York State. As a result of the

¹⁰ PETRIE 1888, 10. In his 1886 diary, in an entry dated February 10th 1886, Petrie wrote: "After considering everything, I have decided to take all my excursion in one, and I shall go to Nebireh, take next week about the neighbourhood from Tel el Ferain (N.E. of Desuk) de up to Kafr Zayat, &c; thence train to Manseera, & be a fortnight around that neighbourhood, hunting up tells & ruins. Thus I shall be out 3 weeks, unless any other cause should make me divide my trip [...] In case Griffith wants me, he can get me at the end of the first or second week, by writing." Griffith Institute Archive, Petrie MSS 1.5.51-100.

¹¹ PETRIE 1888, 11.

¹² Griffith Institute Archive, Griffith Notebook 8. Griffith's notebooks from the 1886 Tell Nabasha mission contains extensive records of the Egyptian excavators who worked with Petrie as well as details of salaries paid.

¹³ GRIFFITH 1894, 87-91.

¹⁴ STEVENSON 2019, 75-76.

¹⁵ VINCENT 2003, 99-101.

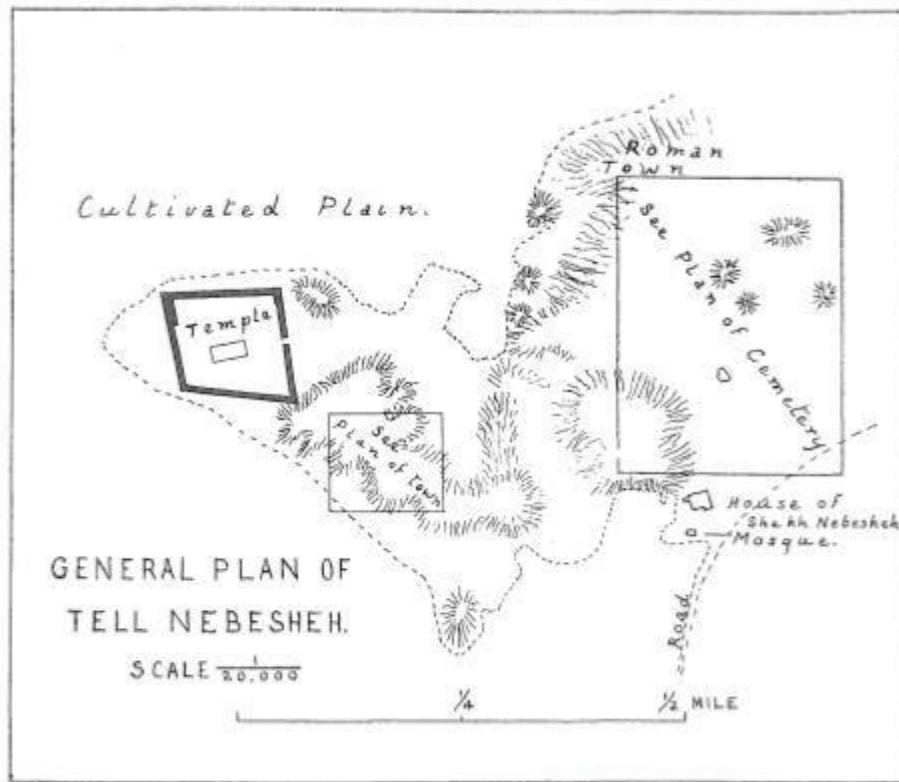


Fig. 1. Petrie's plan of Tell Nebesheh drawn in 1886.



Fig. 2. The block statue of Merenptah *in situ* following its discovery in 1886 (Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society DE.NEG.467).



Fig. 3: Photo showing the interior of Newton Hall around 1900 (Credit: Chautauqua Institution Archives, Oliver Archives Center).



Fig. 4: The statue of Merenptah being moved shortly after its discovery in 1982 (Credit: Chautauqua Institution Archives, Oliver Archives Center).



Fig. 5: The statue of Merenptah photographed prior to its sale (Credit: Chautauqua Institution Archives, Oliver Archives Center).

movement's growth, in 1881 the Chautauqua Archaeological Society was formed. The aim of the society was, according to Kittredge: "[...] to collect and preserve here for its students such casts and copies of the monuments of the past as to shed light upon the history and chronology of the Bible."¹⁶

To this end, Kittredge and his colleagues began amassing archaeological material from excavations in Egypt and the Near East, material which was displayed at Newton Hall, the society's museum¹⁷. The museum itself functioned partly as a display space, partly as a place for live demonstrations. The museum's curator, Augustus Van Lennep seems to have had no specific academic or heritage background, but frequently dressed as an 'Egyptian' and conducted demonstrations of a call to prayer for visitors¹⁸. He also conducted several different rites and rituals supposedly described in the Bible¹⁹.

By 1905, the Newton Hall Museum (**Fig. 3**) had been closed to visitors, and by 1930 the building was demolished. The collection was dispersed, with some of the material even ending up on the local dump²⁰. Most of the collection, however, simply vanished, including the statue of Merenptah. Some 52 years later, in 1982, a box containing the block statue of Merenptah was re-discovered by Allyson Shephard, a Bryn Mawr archaeology student in a corner of the Chautauqua Visitor Bureau – a former trolley station. Its presence had been known to staff for years, and the statue had acquired the nickname 'Ralph' (**Fig. 4**). After verifying the statue's authenticity, it was put on sale at Sotheby's on June 10th 1983 and sold to a private buyer for the sum of \$341.000²¹ (**Fig. 5**). Its last known location is in a private collection in New York City²². Since this time, the statue has been the subject of sporadic scholarly interest, in particular in the thesis of Vincent Razanajao where a translation of the statue also appeared²³.

2. Description and inscriptions

The block statue of Merenptah is of a relatively simple type, with no significant elements of decoration, such as a naos or a 3-dimensional representation of a deity. The statue is fashioned from red granite, and weighs an approximate 550kg (height app. 80.0cm). Merenptah wears a typical Ramesside lappet wig or feathered hairstyle and a short beard. Both hands are visible on the lap of the statue, with the left hand clutching a lettuce leaf symbolising rebirth and regeneration and the right hand resting flat²⁴. The primary decoration of the statue is in the form of a depiction of two deities on the statue's front. The right deity is identifiable by an inscription as the goddess Wadjet, Mistress of Imet. The deity on the left has been chiselled

¹⁶ Statement made by J. E. Kittredge on August 14th 1883, HUMPHREYS 2015.

¹⁷ RIESER 2003, 152.

¹⁸ RIESER 2003, 153.

¹⁹ Not all visitors to the museum were impressed. The author Rudyard Kipling who visited Newton Hall and the Chautauqua Assembly in 1889 described the movement as a: "[...] sort of lawn-tennis academy of the arts and sciences" populated with Bible-thumping fanatics. He reserved his ire in particular for the museum and for the nearby 'Park of Palestine', an attempted recreation of the Holy Land, which, at the time of Kipling's visit, was little more than a muddy field.

²⁰ SCHMITZ 2019.

²¹ ANON 1983.

²² SCHULZ 1992.

²³ RAZANAJAO 2006. A transcription and translation of the statue with a brief commentary can also be found in *KRI III*, 247-248.

²⁴ This configuration of the hands is similar to a somewhat later 3rd Intermediate Period example, namely the block statue of Iti in the British Museum (EA 24429). For a discourse on the depiction of lettuce on ancient Egyptian block statues, see in particular SCHULZ 1992, 638-639.

out, although following both the sketches and publication of Griffith²⁵ and the research conducted by Razanajao²⁶, it seems likely that this deity should be identified as Seth of Avaris.

The statue carries several longer inscriptions, on the left side, right side and back pillar. The right-side inscription has suffered heavy damage and is largely illegible, while the bottom of the three columns of text found on the back pillar have likewise suffered from the extensive damage to the base of the statue which has also destroyed its feet. Shorter pieces of inscription have been preserved between the hands of the statue, on its left arm and beside the depiction of Wadjet, Mistress of Imet. The translation of the statue's inscriptions has been conducted with reference both to the sketches found in Griffith's notebook and to the transcriptions published by Petrie in 1888²⁷, as well as what is visible of the inscription both from the Sotheby's auction images and the photo taken by Griffith in 1888 of the statue *in situ*.

2.1. Left side

The inscription found on the statue's left side consists of four horizontal lines of text and is the most complete piece of inscription found on the piece. It introduces Merenptah, lists some of his titles and also contains a combination of an Appeal to the Living and an abbreviated Offering Formula.



sš-nswt kdn mr-n-ptḥ mꜣꜥ-ḥrw ḏd=f tw=i r-gs rid šps nt nbt tꜣwy (i) wꜥb nb im(y)-ꜣbd=f ḥry-ḥꜣbt ḥm-nṯr imi snw snṯr kbḥ n pꜣ wršy mr-n-ptḥ sꜣ pꜣ-imy-r-ḥw ms.n tꜣ-wsrt sꜣ=f ḥm-nṯr-tp n wꜣdyt sꜣ-wꜣdyt mꜣꜥ-ḥrw ms.n wrt ḥnr(wt) wꜣdyt nbt[-pr iꜣ(?)]

The Royal Scribe and Charioteer Merenptah, the Justified, he speaks: I am beside the noble forecourt/staircase^a of the Mistress of the Two Lands. (O) every wab-priest on his monthly service, lector priest and god's servant, give bread offerings, incense and libation to the Watchman (*wršy*)^b Merenptah, son of Pamerihu^c, born of Tawosret, and his son the High Priest of Wadjet Sa-Wadjet, the Justified, born of the Great One of the Harim of Wadjet^d, Mistress [of the House Ia(?)]^e

- a. The term *rid*²⁸ appears to be a specifically Late Egyptian (and notably Ramesside) development of the older term *rwd*²⁹ which has traditionally been thought to denote a temple terrace or staircase³⁰. The precise location of the Ramesside *rid* is less certain,

²⁵ Griffith Institute Archive, Griffith Notebook 8 and Griffith 1894.

²⁶ The identity of this deity has been the subject of some speculation which is summarised by RAZANAJAO 2006, 58-59 and in particular RAZANAJAO 2010, 364-366 and also CORNELIUS 1994, 149 who considered the deity to be a representation of the Canaanite god Reshep.

²⁷ Petrie 1888, Pl. XI.

²⁸ *Wb* 2, 401.2-4; see also Lesko 2002, 266. A near-identical spelling of *rid* also appears in the Great Dedicatory Inscription of Ramesses II at Abydos (*KRI* II, 266: 4) where it is associated with pillars or columns. This section of the text, and the precise location of the *rid/rwd* is discussed extensively in SPALINGER 2009, 89-91.

²⁹ *Wb* 2, 409.9-15.

³⁰ For a discussion of the Middle Kingdom term, see in particular LICHTHEIM 1988, 129-134.

although Razanajao³¹ speculates that it may denote a columned portico or forecourt preceding the temple's main naos. The precise findspot of the statue of Merenptah is not known, and was most likely either secondary or tertiary in nature. As such, this location cannot further inform us about the precise nature of this architectural component of the Temple of Imet at Tell Nabasha.

- b. A parallel to this phrasing can be found on the Ramesside statue of Setau, Viceroy of Nubia who is similarly described as “your watchman” (*wršy=k*) of the Temple of Amenhotep III at Elkab as discussed by Froot³² who also discusses Merenptah's statue as a specific example. The term *wršy*³³, customarily translated as ‘watchman’ or ‘sentry’ appears prominently in the Middle Kingdom *Tale of Sinuhe*³⁴, and appears to be a wholly military title. The context of the title is important in understanding its presence: The speaker of this section of text is not the living individual Merenptah, but rather the statue itself³⁵ (e.g., ‘I am beside the noble forecourt/staircase of the Mistress of the Two Lands’). As such, it is the statue that fulfils the role of sentry, or guard. Given the immediately preceding list of offerings, it is likely that the inscription alludes to the statue's role in guarding the offerings and cultic items stored within the temple itself.
- c. The name of Merenptah's father, *p3-imy-r-iḥw*, is somewhat uncommon. It is attested only rarely during the 18th and 19th Dynasties. Aside from the attestations discussed below, the name appears in Pap. Anastasi VI³⁶, on a 19th Dynasty stela from Deir el-Medina³⁷, and in addition on a small number of mostly 18th Dynasty funerary artefacts³⁸, most of them without any clear archaeological provenance. See also a discussion of this name and its potential geographical origin by Razanajao³⁹.
- d. The term *wrt ḥnr(wt)* is commonly translated as ‘Great One of the Harim’⁴⁰, although as argued by Nord⁴¹, the term may more usefully be associated with a performance troupe within a cultic environment. The title may then more accurately be translated as ‘Chief of the Performance Troupe’. The title was, during the 19th Dynasty, associated with women from the highest echelons of Egyptian society, including royalty⁴², and in the context of the inscription of Merenptah, the performative aspect of the title is of

³¹ RAZANAJAO 2006, 60.

³² FROOD 2019.

³³ *Wb* 1, 336.7-12. See also LESKO 2002, 106. The term is also briefly mentioned in FAULKNER 1953, 41.

³⁴ “I crouched in a bush for fear of being seen by the guard (*wršy*) on duty upon the wall” in LICHTHEIM 1975, 224.

³⁵ An interesting parallel for this first-person narrative by a Ramesside block statue can be found on the statue of Amenmose, a priest of Hathor who not only requests food offerings in a similar, though more detailed, manner to Merenptah, but also claims to be one who stands watch by the goddess, echoing the sentiment expressed in the inscription of Merenptah. For further details, see: SCHULZ 1992, 404, pl. 103.

³⁶ Pap. Anastasi VI, 9-12: “I came to the place in which my lord was after the soldier of the ship had been taken – (the soldier) whose work as a cultivator had been given to me. He was put in the prison in the village of Tjebnet. He tills the land for the scribe of the army Pamerihu who dwells in the village of Tjebnet.”, CAMINOS 1954, 280.

³⁷ Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Egyptian 158.

³⁸ Most significantly, from the British Museum and dating to the later 18th Dynasty, a scribal palette (EA5513), a model coffin (EA35029) and a shabti (EA8703), all from the Tomb of Pamerihu at Saqqara (see BIERBRIER 2000, 7-8), as well as slightly later Ramesside shabti box now held in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (1984.411).

³⁹ RAZANAJAO 2006, 59 and 432-433.

⁴⁰ See for instance AL-AYEDI 2006, no. 868.

⁴¹ NORD 1982, 137 -145.

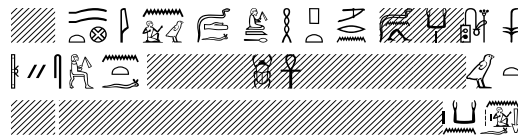
⁴² The sister of Ramesses II, Tia, for instance is shown as a holder of this title on several pieces of private and royal sculpture, see LISLE 2014, no. 252.

particular interest. The title is held by Merenptah's wife, Ia (see below), while Merenptah's own mother is, in a separate portion of the inscription, described as a sistrum-player (*iht*), another performative title associated with the sacred landscape of Imet and the cult of Wadjet. This may suggest that not only did Merenptah's son, Sa-Wadjet, become high priest of Wadjet at Imet, his mother and grandmother also held significant roles within the religious hierarchy during their lifetime.

- e. The name of Merenptah's wife is not readable on his block statue, with this particular section being too impacted by surface damage. However, given the information provided on a limestone lintel found at Tell Nabasha in 1969 and which almost certainly belongs to the same Merenptah (see **3** below), it is reasonable to assume that the name can be re-constructed as *i3*. The short name furthermore fits within the available physical space at the end of the damaged line.

2.2. Right side

Unlike the inscription on the left side of the statue, the inscription on the right side has suffered heavy damage. It was most likely originally composed of four lines – mirroring the arrangement found on the left side of the statue – albeit only sections of the first three lines have survived. These are themselves heavily damaged, and the inscription adds little in terms of historical or genealogical information. Rather, it takes the form of an extended self-laudatory statement which emphasises Merenptah's connection to the local area.



sš-nswt [kdn] mr-n-ptḥ m3^c-ḥrw dd=f n wi imt /// tw /// [nḥ ḥpr] /// n it=f špsy n sn(w)=f [n] k3 n ///

The Royal Scribe and Charioteer Merenptah, the Justified, he speaks: I belong to Imet⁴³ /// [life, creating] /// for his noble father, for his brothers [for] the ka of ///

2.3. Back pillar

The back pillar inscription is largely preserved, aside from the signs towards the base which have been entirely destroyed. The inscription continues the self-laudatory themes developed in the inscription on the right side of the statue.

⁴³ This emphatic declaration of belonging which serves to underline Merenptah's desired association with ancient Imet has been discussed extensively by RAZANAJAO, 2006: 433.



[sš-nswt kdn] mr-n-ptḥ dd=f iwyt nb /// n rn(=i) mryt /// [ḥr]-nb ʒw n=k rhyt ʿ(w)=sn ḥr-ḥr mr-n-ptḥ di.tw n=k /// iwt /// pr m-bʒḥ n kʒ n (k)dn mr-n-ptḥ sʒ sʒb imy-r ḥʒswt pʒ-imy-r-ḥw ///

The Royal Scribe and Charioteer Merenptah, he speaks: all who shall come /// for [my] beloved name /// the masses. The Rekhyt-people shall extend their arms to you^a, under the control of Merenptah. There shall be given to you /// come /// what comes before for the *ka* of the charioteer Merenptah, son of the dignitary and Overseer of Foreign Lands Pamerihu [...]

- a. The phrase ʒw n=k rhyt ʿ(w)=sn ḥr-ḥr is somewhat unusual, and it may, as speculated by FROOD⁴⁴ be another example of the statue of Merenptah speaking about itself in the third person, and that the phrase conveys a wish that the statue be in receipt of the praise of the masses as they assemble in the more public quarters of the temple during festivals.

2.4. Legs

This small piece of inscription is located on the front of the statue's legs, near to the depiction of Wadjet, Mistress of Imet. Originally running to three vertical columns, only fragments of two of these were preserved. This small inscription is significant as it again provides the name of Merenptah's father and also – uniquely – that of his mother.

⁴⁴ FROOD 2019, 11.



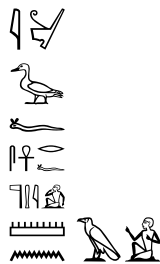
*R^c-ms-sw-mry-*imn* p₃ n^{tr}*

Ramesses-Meryamun the God^a

- a. While being a reference to the ruling king, Ramesses II, this short inscription on the lap of the statue, also specifically refers to the colossal statue *R^c-ms-sw-mry-*imn* p₃ n^{tr}* which was the focus of a statue cult at the nearby capital of Qantir/Piramesses during the 19th Dynasty⁴⁸. The same statue is also named and depicted on a contemporary stela found at Qantir and held in The Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim⁴⁹. The significance of this short inscription is profound. It suggests, perhaps, that while Merenptah and his family were certainly significant members of the local elite at Imet, Merenptah himself – most likely through his role as charioteer and royal scribe – also maintained links to the nearby capital and the royal cults in effect at this site. The now heavily destroyed depiction on the front of the statue which most likely shows Seth of Avaris facing Wadjet of Imet, may represent a further attempt to visually underline this duality of Merenptah’s administrative, religious and familial allegiances and roles.

2.7. Left arm

The short inscription preserved on the left arm of the statue is the only one which names the individual who ordered the statue to be created: Merenptah’s son, the god’s servant Imena. Imena is not known from any other inscriptional material pertaining to Merenptah and his family. Given this auxiliary positioning and Imena’s relatively junior title, as opposed to Merenptah’s other son, the high priest of Wadjet of Imet, Sawadjet who is included in the main inscription on the statue’s left side, it seems likely that Imena was Merenptah’s younger son.




in s₃-f s-^cnḥ r <n> =f ḥm-n^{tr} imn₃

It is his son who causes his na<me> to live, the god’s servant Imena

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the royal statue cults in effect at Piramesses, and in particular the extensive study of attestations of *R^c-ms-sw-mry-*imn* p₃ n^{tr}* see BRUNNER 1981, 101-106.

⁴⁹ Hildesheim 04/030/0397

3. Additional attestations of Merenptah

During excavations conducted in the cemeteries of el-Hosayneya by the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation in 1969, a tomb was discovered which contained a limestone lintel depicting two seated figures⁵⁰. The male figure is identified as  the “Charioteer of His Majesty, Merenptah the Justified” (*kḏn n ḥm=f mr-n-ptḥ mꜣꜥ-ḥrw*). No further biographical details are provided in the preserved sections of the inscription, aside from a mention of Merenptah’s wife, the mistress of the house Ia. It is tempting to conclude that this is the same Merenptah who is commemorated on the block statue under investigation.

However, while no further inscriptions or artefacts have been located at Tell Nabasha or elsewhere which contain definitive mention of Merenptah, several other pieces of sculpture and artefacts allow a tentative reconstruction of Merenptah’s immediate ancestors and close family, namely through the line of his father, Pamerihu.

4. Merenptah’s father Pamerihu

As discussed above, the name Pamerihu while rare, nevertheless has several attestations during the New Kingdom. However, in combination with the titles that this individual held – at least according to the inscription of his son – namely “dignitary” and “Overseer of Foreign Lands”, it is nevertheless possible to tentatively attribute a number of artefacts and statues to this specific individual which in turn further augments our knowledge of Merenptah and Pamerihu’s family and social standing during the early Ramesside Period.

4.1. The Tomb of Pamerihu

During the excavations at Tell Nabasha by Flinders Petrie in 1886, the earliest identified tomb excavated by Petrie’s workmen (Tomb 35)⁵¹ was a poorly preserved brick-lined series of chambers which Petrie identified as belonging to Pamerihu, the father of Merenptah on the basis of two limestone shabtis (now in the British Museum⁵²) which contained inscriptions naming this individual. Sadly, both shabtis have been heavily damaged in storage, and the inscriptions are now entirely gone, making it impossible to verify Petrie’s attestation. The tomb itself was removed during the night after its excavation by local farmers⁵³. The shabtis, even before being damaged, contained no titles which would allow a clearer identification of their owner. As such, while it is certainly possible that Tomb 35 belonged to Merenptah’s father, it is by no means a certainty.

4.2. Boston Museum of Fine Arts 2002.736

A more well-evidenced link can be established between the dignitary Pamerihu mentioned on the block statue of Merenptah, and Pamerihu, the Overseer of Every Foreign Land and Overseer of Troops of the Lord of the Two Lands to whom belonged a fragmentary lintel now held in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts⁵⁴. The lintel has no clear archaeological provenance. It was donated to the museum in 2002 by the widow of the renowned photographer Yousuf Karsh and allegedly purchased from an antiquities shop in Amsterdam in 1970. The identical name and similar variations of the title *imy-r ḥꜣswt* do however suggest strongly that the lintel

⁵⁰ BAKR, BRANDL and KALLONIATIS 2014, 48–63.

⁵¹ PETRIE 1888, 19.

⁵² BM EA 20697 and BM EA 20698 respectively.

⁵³ Petrie writes: “[...] the people fell on it in the night after we found it, and carried off all the bricks”, PETRIE 1888, 18.

⁵⁴ BMFA 2002.736. This piece was published by DOXEY 2010.

belonged to the same Pamerihu who is mentioned as the father of Merenptah on the block statue under investigation in this paper. The lintel shows, most likely, two mirrored scenes of the kneeling Pamerihu, although only the right side is significantly preserved. Pamerihu is depicted wearing a long linen robe and short wig facing the deities Osiris (left side) and Re-Horakhty (right side).

4.2.1. Left side

The left side of the lintel is mostly entirely missing. The seated figure of Osiris wearing an *atef*-crown and the raised hands of, most likely, Pamerihu only remain. The majority of the text, including any mention of Pamerihu himself is missing entirely.

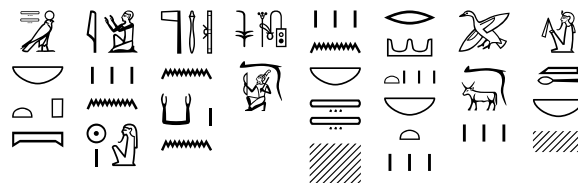


wsir nb nhh izw n wsir /// n=f

Osiris, Lord of Eternity. Praises to Osiris /// to him

4.2.2. Right side

The right side of the scene is mostly intact with only some minor damage to the text and the top of the lintel. It shows Pamerihu kneeling before Re-Horakhty and the text includes both his name and two high-ranking military titles.



r'-hr-šhty nb pt izw n r' ntr ʿ3 n k3 n sš-nswt imy-r mšʿ n nb-t3wy [imy]-r ḥ3swt nbwt p3-imy-r-ihw m3ʿ-hrw nb-[im3ḥ]

Re-Horakhty, Lord of Heaven. Praises to Re, Great God to the ka of the Royal Scribe, the Overseer of the Troops of the Lord of the Two Lands, [Overseer] of Every Foreign Land Pamerihu, the Justified, Possessor [of a Venerated State]

On the block statue of Merenptah, Pamerihu is given only the title *imy-r ḥ3swt*. On the lintel from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts a variation of this same title appears, namely *[imy]-r*

*ḥzswt nbwt*⁵⁵ alongside a second military title *imy-r mšꜥ n nb-tꜣwy*⁵⁶. Interestingly, Pamerihu is also given the title *sš-nswt*, an identical title which is also held by Merenptah, further strengthening the likely link between the Pamerihu depicted on BMFA 2002.736 and the Pamerihu mentioned as the father of Merenptah on the latter's block statue from Tell Nabasha.

4.3. British Museum EA 853

BM EA 853⁵⁷ is a large 19th Dynasty naophorus limestone block statue which also belong to a military officer by the name of Pamerihu. The statue depicts Pamerihu squatting on a cushion and holding a lettuce leaf in each hand. Before him is a naos containing a statue of a standing Osiris wearing an *atef*-crown. Either side of the naos is supported by a *djed*-pillar topped with plumes and a horned sun-disk mimicking Osiris' crown. The naos is surmounted by a winged sun-disk in raised relief. Pamerihu himself is depicted wearing a short lappet wig similar to the one worn by Merenptah on his block statue from Tell Nabasha.

The statue carries a number of short hieroglyph inscriptions: At the bottom of the naos and along the front bottom of the statue are two lines containing a standard Offering Formula (*wsir nb tꜣ dsr ḥtp-dī-nsw wsir nb nḥḥ*). Pamerihu himself is named as the “Royal Scribe, Great Overseer of Troops” (*sš-nswt imy-r mšꜥ wr pꜣ-imy-r-ihw*) both on the right side, left side and across the head and lap of the statue with very little variation. The identical name and titles, as well as its date suggests strongly that the Pamerihu commemorated on BM EA 853 is identical as the individual mentioned on BMFA 2000.736 and – by extension – the Pamerihu who fathered the Royal Scribe and Charioteer Merenptah from Tell Nabasha. In addition, the sides of the block statue contain very faint hieratic signs which have faded too far to be legible. It is possible that these represented a draft version of a longer biographical inscription which was intended to be carved on either side of the statue, but which was – for unknown reasons – never accomplished. The origins of BM EA 853 are less clear: It is among the earliest Egyptian artefacts to arrive in the British Museum as part of the d'Athanas collection in 1845. Much of this collection was assembled by d'Athanas while he was stationed in Luxor, so a Theban provenance for the piece is certainly possible, perhaps even likely.

This Theban connection may also provide a possible, if tenuous, link between BM EA 853 and the military officer Pamerihu mentioned on BM EA 292⁵⁸, a round-topped limestone stela belonging to the Ramesside official Nakhtmin who held the rather obscure title *ḥry iwꜣyt*, translated by Bierbrier⁵⁹ as “Garrison Captain”. Behind Nakhtmin, a second male figure bears the name Pamerihu and holds the same title as Nakhtmin, that of *ḥry iwꜣyt*. The figure carries no other titles, and so a definitive link between this official and the Pamerihu represented on BM EA 853, BMFA 2000.736 and the statue of Merenptah from Tell Nabasha must remain

⁵⁵ This title, or close variations, are held by a number of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom dignitaries, notably Heqaib of Elephantine according to the inscription found in the Middle Kingdom shrine erected to his memory, see HABACHI 1985, Fig. 3e. A variation of the title (“Overseer of all Foreign Lands of the Head of Upper Egypt”) is also held by the 6th Dynasty dignitary Harkuf (see STRUDWICK 2005, 330) and can also be found listed in Ward 1982, no. 291.

⁵⁶ This variation of the more common title *imy-r mšꜥ* is perhaps most notably attested during the late 18th Dynasty on a sarcophagus belonging to the notable architect and dignitary Amenhotep, son of Hapu currently held in the Egypt Centre Swansea (W1367b), although it is also attested during the Ramesside Period, for instance on a door jamb from the tomb of the official Nehesy who, aside from holding this military title, was also – similar to Pamerihu – a Royal Scribe, see FROOD 2007, 201.

⁵⁷ BIERBRIER 1993, Pl. 78-79 and SCHULZ 1992, 375-376.

⁵⁸ BIERBRIER 1993, Pl. 58-59.

⁵⁹ For this title see AL-AYEDI 2006, 23 and BIERBRIER 1993, Pl. 58-59.

highly speculative. It is possible though, that the Pamerihu mentioned on BM EA 292 was not only, given the identical titles, the son of Nakhtmin, but in fact a younger man who had not yet attained the titles of Royal Scribe and Great Overseer of Troops which he would later hold. This would suggest that the garrison commander Nakhmin may have been Merneptah's grandfather.

5. Conclusion: Imet and Piramesses

By considering not only the block statue of Merenptah itself, along with its inscriptions, but also additional inscriptional material relating to his family – namely his father, Pamerihu, a tenuous family tree can be created. It is possible, although by no means certain, that the *ḥry iwꜣt* Nakhtmin was Merenptah's grandfather. Nakhtmin's son, Pamerihu, took his title and later rose in the ranks accumulating additional responsibilities within the military and state machinery, namely the titles *sš-nswt*, *[imy]-r ḥꜣswt nbwt* and *imy-r mšꜥ n nb-tꜣwy*. Pamerihu's son, Merenptah, inherited the title of Royal Scribe and also functioned within the military as a charioteer. The potentially Theban origin of two of the pieces tentatively associated with Pamerihu (BM EA 292 and BM EA 853) may suggest that the family was originally Theban although this cannot be definitely proved⁶⁰. However, it should be noted that on none of Pamerihu's monuments are Imet, Wadjet or any locale in the eastern Nile Delta mentioned, suggesting perhaps that the family did not originally hail from this region. Rather, the family may have been more recent arrivals in the area, most likely due to their association with the royal capital and the state administration at the nearby site of Piramesses.

Within this context, Merenptah's immediate familial ties are even more fascinating. His wife was evidently closely linked to the cult of Wadjet, Mistress of Imet, and Merenptah's eldest son was even named Sa-Wadjet, further emphasising this connection. His son's title, High Priest of Ptah may, given the lack of any senior religious titles held by Merenptah or his father, have been inherited not through the paternal line, where military titles dominated, but rather through the father or perhaps a brother of Sa-Wadjet's mother and Merenptah's wife Ia.

Merenptah strongly emphasised and invoked his relationship to Imet and its local cult in his inscription, along with his role as a protector of the temple and its offerings. Yet his block statue also contains clear references to the nearby capital of Piramesses, notably the figure of Seth of Avaris facing Wadjet of Imet on the front of the statue, as well as the mention of the colossal statue *Rꜥ-ms-sw-mry-ḫmn pꜣ ntr* which stood and was a focus of worship at Piramesses. Merenptah's life and career was most likely very much one of duality between two cities and communities, two foci of power – one religious and one temporal – Imet and Piramesses.

In Razanajao's⁶¹ study of the early history and development of the site of Imet he has concluded, on the basis for instance of the statue-group of Minmose now held in the Ashmolean Museum, that the Temple of Wadjet at Tell Nabasha/Imet was functioning at least by the late 18th Dynasty. By the time Piramesses was selected as a royal capital and its expansion began, there was already an existing sacred landscape a short distance to the north of the city, in much the same way the Temple of Seth at Avaris had also continued to function throughout the 18th Dynasty before being integrated into the wider sacred landscape of Piramesses by the Ramesside kings. It is perhaps in this context that the description of the sacred landscape of Piramesses from Pap. Anastasi II⁶² should be viewed: "Its western part is the House of Amun,

⁶⁰ The possible Theban origin of the family has also been discussed by RAZANAJAO 2006, 432-433.

⁶¹ RAZANAJAO 2006, 70-73.

⁶² Pap. Anastasi II 1.4-5 and Pap. Anastasi IV 6.4-5

its southern part the House of Seth. Astarte is in its East and Wadjet in its northern part.” As Bietak and Forstner-Muller⁶³ have speculated, perhaps this reference to Wadjet being housed in the north of Piramesses is not only, and perhaps not at all, a reference to a temple or chapel very close to the nucleus of the city, but rather a reflection of the broader sacred landscape of the settlement, a sacred landscape that covered nearly 12km from the Temple of Seth at Tell el-Dab’a to the Temple of Wadjet at Tell Nabasha. Recent research conducted by Franzmeier⁶⁴ has convincingly demonstrated that many of the elite officials who worked, and most likely lived for most of their lives, in Piramesses, may have been buried at various sites throughout Egypt – Saqqara, Sedmet and Thebes for instance – to which they had a stronger familial or historical connection. Given the absence of the clear Ramesside cemetery-area at Piramesses, it is furthermore likely that some members of the state administration and court at Piramesses both settled, and were eventually buried, within existing, and heavily expanded, cemeteries near to the capital – for instance at the site of Tell Nabasha. This practice may account for the significant amount of Ramesside funerary materials found by Petrie and other excavators at the site of Tell Nabasha during the last century-and-a-half⁶⁵.

The block statue of Merenptah, though its current whereabouts remain unknown, is a significant source for the history of both Tell Nabasha/Imet and Qantir/Piramesses. The clear links between the two settlements displayed by the iconography and texts on the monument as well as the potential role of Merenptah and his family as immigrants to the area during the early Ramesside Period allow us to – very tentatively it is true – reconstruct a small part of the broader life cycle and role of the individuals who inhabited and worked within the eastern Nile Delta during the height of Egypt’s Ramesside Period.

⁶³ BIETAK and FORSTNER-MULLER 2011. Also noted by RAZANAIAO 2006, 374-376.

⁶⁴ FRANZMEIER and MOJE 2018, 113-126.

⁶⁵ See for instance a summary of some significant discoveries of Ramesside funerary materials in RAZANAIAO 2014, 48-63.

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Abbreviations:

GM *Göttinger Miszellen*

MDAIK *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*

JEA *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*

PSBA *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*

Ä&L *Ägypten und Levante*