CHAPTER XVI

RAMESES III. MEDINET HABU

WHEN Rameses II died at the age, as some say, of 100 years, his son Merenptah who succeeded him was already advanced in years. The beginning of his reign was occupied with successful wars against the Libyans on the west, and tribes of Palestine on the east, and when he had succeeded in establishing peace, he apparently lacked both energy and the needful time to undertake extensive building operations, such as his father and grandfather had delighted in. Like his father, however, he did not hesitate to appropriate many of the

¹ Prof. Petrie puts his age at 85 (Hist., vol. iii, p. 72). Prof.Breasted (p. 462) says he was over 90.

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buildings of his predecessors, and he is supposed to have completed the destruction of the magnificent temple of Amenhetep III, in order to use the material for his own mortuary temple, which in its turn has almost disappeared. After the death of Merenptah the succession was disputed, and Egypt fell into a state of internal discord until a viceroy of Nubia secured the throne as Seti II. He built a small temple in front of the hypostyle hall at Karnak, and is the only king of any note before the end of the XIXth dynasty, until a certain Setnekht, "probably a descendant of the old line of Seti I and Rameses II," succeeded in founding a stable dynasty. He was succeeded by his son Rameses, the third of the name, which henceforth became titular, and was borne by the nine remaining kings of the XXth dynasty.

The chief monument of Rameses III is the great temple of Medinet Habu, which is the best preserved of the older temples of Egypt. It lies to the west (or strictly speaking to the north-west) of the temple of the XVIIIth dynasty already mentioned (p. 125), but though the two face in the same direction there is a slight divergence in their axes. The plan is very similar to that of the Ramesseum, there is a forecourt about 110 feet by 135, fronted by a large pylon, with a portico of seven square Osiride pillars on the north side, whilst that on the south has eight circular columns with calyx

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1 It stood south-west of the Ramesseum and north-west of the Colossi. Only foundations remain, and some of the stones bear the name of Amenhetep III.

2 Breasted, p. 475.

3 That it is well preserved is probably due, as Prof. Petrie remarks, to the fact that it was the last of the great temples at Thebes, and that no later builder had occasion to make use of its material.
THE TWO TEMPLES OF MEDINET HABU


capitals. The latter is supposed to have formed the façade of a royal palace, which adjoined the temple on this side and communicated with it by three doors and a large balcony window. A second pylon, with a red granite doorway approached by a short ramp led to another open court. The surfaces of the pylons are covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions and representations of Rameses’ victorious campaigns, similar in style but not equal in merit to those of Seti at Karnak. The second court, which is 125 feet by 138 in area, is entirely surrounded by a colonnade. The pillars on the east and west sides are of the Osiride type, those on the north and south are of the lotus-bud pattern. The court is
almost a reproduction of the second court of the Ramesseum, but is in a much better state of preservation, and is generally regarded as one of the finest examples of this form of Egyptian art. The hypostyle hall was comparatively small. It had four rows of six pillars, the eight lining the central avenue being more massive than the rest. This portion of the building, and several smaller pillared halls beyond, surrounded by the chambers connected with the service of the temple, are in a very dilapidated condition.

The most noteworthy feature about the temple is the detached gateway to its precincts, sometimes called the Pavilion (2 in plan), which in plan and architectural detail is unlike any other existing building in Egypt. It stands about 100 yards from the first pylon, and on the central axis of the temple. At each side of the entrance is a three-storied tower with very slightly battering sides and a crenellated parapet. Within this entrance is an elongated courtyard in three sections, which narrow successively by the side-walls being set forward. At the west end is a door of exit which led into a large open space, across which a dromos 265 feet long ran in a straight line to the doorway in the first pylon.

Amongst the peculiar architectural features of the entrance-building are three ornamental consoles on each side of the court. They consist of an upper and lower slab, between which are sculptured busts of captive enemies. Professor Petrie seems to suggest that they supported timber galleries or bridges accessible by doors in the walls.1 The outside of the towers and the walls of the court are covered with incised sculptures. Like those in the temple, they are weak imitations of the work of the

1 Hist., vol. iii, p. 162.
Entrance. (Pettie's "Hist. of Egypt."

South Side
Medinet Habu. The Prolylaeum or Pavilion
XIXth dynasty, but have considerable historical value as evidence of the king’s victory over the Libyans, and his wars with various tribes inhabiting Syria, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean coasts. The building was originally isolated with a space between it and the older XVIIIth dynasty temple on its northern side, but Ptolemaic additions to the latter and the construction of later boundary walls have obscured its relation to the large temple, and led to its being regarded as a small palace. That it was not a purely religious building is evident from the fact that some of the upper rooms, which are reached by a staircase in the southern tower, are lighted by windows of some size, and contain reliefs illustrating scenes of the harem and domestic life; and it seems probable that it may have served as an occasional royal lodging as well as a state entrance to an assemblage of buildings which included both a palace and a temple.

Its architectural features no less than the reliefs on its walls testify to the effect of foreign influences; and the towers with their almost vertical sides, rectangular cornices, and leaf-like crenellation, differing altogether from the conventional pylon, suggest a derivation from a western Asiatic type which is more fully developed in Assyrian art.

Rameses III also built the small temple at the west end of the great temple at Karnak dedicated to the same
Theban triad, and began that of Khonsu about 200 yards to the south of it. It is remarkable that whilst the former faces north-north-east, the other is turned in the exactly opposite direction. The plans of both, though differing in details, follow the usual general arrangement, having an entrance pylon, an open forecourt, a hypostyle hall, and the usual assemblage of smaller chambers surrounding the sanctuary. They are both built apparently on a preconceived complete plan, though in the case of the temple of Khonsu the building extended over many years. The hypostyle hall, which is a small one with only eight columns, was completed by Rameses XII, the forecourt was added by Herihor the priest king of
the XXIst dynasty, and the pylon was only completed under Ptolemy I. Part of the material used by Rameses III seems to have come from other buildings, for the walls of the sanctuary include blocks bearing the cartouche of Thothmes III, and the small pillared hall behind it has four polygonal columns of sixteen sides, and may possibly be some of those originally in the great temple which had been displaced by the alterations of the XIXth dynasty.