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## **A Narrative of Kingship:**

### **Royal Legitimization through Chapel Building in the reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II**

#### Introduction

Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II heralded great change in the Eleventh Dynasty as he steered Egypt to reunification, transitioning the fragmented political state that characterized the First Intermediate Period to a centralized pharaonic rule and the Middle Kingdom. This quite momentous shift brings into question the modes in which Mentuhotep II was able to gain support and legitimacy. Indeed, to many during the beginning of his reign, the idea of a centralized pharaonic rule would have been entirely foreign: the collapse of Egypt at the end of the Sixth Dynasty is dated to around 2181 BC, more than a hundred years before Mentuhotep II took up rule. There was therefore a meaningful need for him to establish himself and his idea of kingship to the areas of his rule. As his reign progressed, there would then be greater flexibility to expand upon this already established idea of kingship. The ebb and flow of what Mentuhotep II wanted to express about kingship in a certain time or place can be exemplified by reading the scattering of chapels he built throughout his reign as a whole body of text. Indeed, by comparing Mentuhotep II's pre-unification chapels in Denderah and Gebelein to his post-unification chapels found at Ballas, Karnak, and Abydos, a narrative of royal legitimization can be traced in which Mentuhotep II is adapting the motifs of kingship to his political and religious stake in each locality.

## *The Reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II*

Mentuhotep II had three titularies that can be used to roughly divide his reign. His first Horus name was *S'nh-jb-tAwy*, which appears for the first fourteen years of his reign while he was in Thebes; he later replaced this Horus name with the Horus name *Ntry-hdt*, a switch that came during regnal Year 14; around regnal year 39 he took up an additional Horus name of *SmA-tAwy*.<sup>1</sup> This third titulary, which translates to “Uniter of the Two Lands,” marks the period of time after which Mentuhotep II united Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of Mentuhotep II's reign saw the tail end of the First Intermediate Period, a period traditionally characterized as inundated with disorder and conflict due to the lack of a central governing body. The two major powers at play during this time were the Theban realm in the south and the Herakleopolitan realm in the north, the former of which had taken control of the entirety of the north and a significant portion of Middle Egypt at the start of Mentuhotep II's reign.<sup>3</sup> He subsequently pushed to absorb the rest of the north and reunify Egypt, either through military or diplomatic pressure; since Middle Egypt retained its nomarchs until the next dynasty, Willems hypothesized a greater role of political pressure compared to military.<sup>4</sup> Considering the varied political landscape of the First Intermediate Period and its narrowing into a singular rule in the Middle Kingdom, and additionally considering the retention of some pre-unification polities, it is reasonable to conclude that Mentuhotep II's reign was not smooth sailing in terms of support, both pre-unification and post-unification.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa K Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, 122.

<sup>3</sup> Harco Willems, “Egypt's Middle Kingdom: A View from Within,” in *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East: Volume II*, ed. Karen Radner et. al (Oxford Academic, 2022), 682.

<sup>4</sup> Willems, “Egypt's Middle Kingdom,” 683.

It is against this setting of political uncertainty that Mentuhotep II conducted significant building projects, through which he sought divine and popular support for his political assertions. His royal mortuary complex at Deir el-Bahri in Thebes, built over the course of his reign, holds a relief program that situates him in a variety of religious mortuary contexts, utilizing both local styles and styles from the Old Kingdom as well as entirely novel portrayals.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this large-scale monument, Mentuhotep II built a scattering of small local chapels: the pre-unification chapels at Denderah and Gebelein bear his second titulary, and the post-unification chapels (or presumed parts of chapels) at Abydos, Ballas, and Karnak bear his third titulary.<sup>6</sup>

### *Defining Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II's Chapel*

The terms used to describe Mentuhotep II's chapels are slightly varied. The only distinct term other than "chapel" that Habachi uses in his study of Mentuhotep II's building program is "kA-chapel" to describe the chapel at Denderah, which he defines as a monument built to benefit the souls of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom kings.<sup>7</sup> O'Connor in a later analysis puts the k□-chapel under the same umbrella as tomb chapels and temples, that is, monuments to service a statue cult.<sup>8</sup> Marochetti states a slightly different interpretation, defining the *ḥwt-kA*, the Denderah chapel, as a chapel specifically for a kA cult.<sup>9</sup> Then, with the 2014 discovery of a chapel of Mentuhotep II at Abydos, a distinction was made between this *m ḥ 't* chapel and the

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<sup>5</sup> Laurel Bestock, *Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt: Image and Ideology Before the New Kingdom*, Routledge Studies in Egyptology (2018), 142.

<sup>6</sup> Labib Habachi, "King Nebhepetra Mentuhotep: His Monuments, Place in History, Deification and Usual Representations in the Form of Gods," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 19 (1963), 16-43.

<sup>7</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 21.

<sup>8</sup> David O'Connor, "The Denderah Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep: A New Perspective," *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H. S. Smith*, ed. Anthony Leahy et. al, (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1999), 216.

<sup>9</sup> Elisa Fiore Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein (CGT 7003/1-277)*, trans. Kenneth Hurry (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, v.39, 2010), 23.

*kA*-chapel,<sup>10</sup> which was challenged by Bialostocka, who reasserts O'Connor in regarding all the aforementioned chapels as generally buildings with mortuary character and overlapping definitions.<sup>11</sup>

Although all these chapels have slightly different religious functions by definition, they all nevertheless converge in displaying kingship and connecting Mentuhotep II to the locality of the chapel.

### Pre-Unification Chapels

The themes and visual imagery of the pre-unification chapels at Denderah and Gebelein are consistent. Both chapels most notably share the motif of a smiting scene, which forefronts an aggressive characterization of kingship most likely relating to reunification. Additionally, not only is the subject matter aggressive, so is the art style: Müller in an art historical analysis characterizes the pre-unification relief style as having an intentional “aggressive dissonance,” in particular referring to the disproportion of facial features, the hands, and the torso.<sup>12</sup> Another similarity in the chapels is the engagement of regional religious motifs to situate Mentuhotep II as a prominent religious figure. Indeed, the strength of a king as a religious figure went hand in hand with the strength of a king as a political figure all throughout pharaonic history, with Mentuhotep II as no exception. The ultimate effect was the implementation of an idea of kingship that was in dialogue with the efforts of unification in the sites of Denderah and Gebelein.

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<sup>10</sup> Ayman M Damarany, Yasser Abdel-Razik, and Ashraf Okash, “The MaHa.t-Chapel of Nebhepetre at Abydos,” in *Abydos: The Sacred Land at the Western Horizon*, ed. Ilona Regulski (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Bialostocka, *Temples of millions of years*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Maya Müller, “Die Königplastik des Mittleren Reiches und ihre Schöpfer,” qtd. in Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 19.

*The Denderah Chapel*

The Denderah Chapel consists of four main sections: an entry section with an inscription (fig. 1), a rear wall with a large smiting depiction (fig.2), and a left (fig.3) and right (fig.4) wall with various scenes of divine interaction.

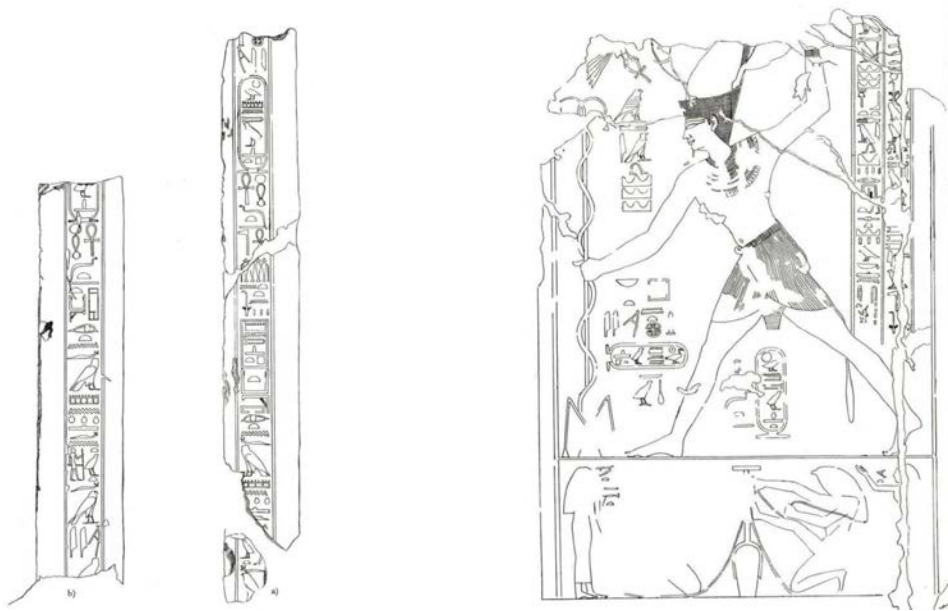


Figure 1 (left). Labib Habachi, *Inscription on the entrance of Denderah Chapel*, 1963, 20, fig.5.

Figure 2 (right). Labib Habachi, *Rear wall of Denderah Chapel*, 1963, 22, fig.6.

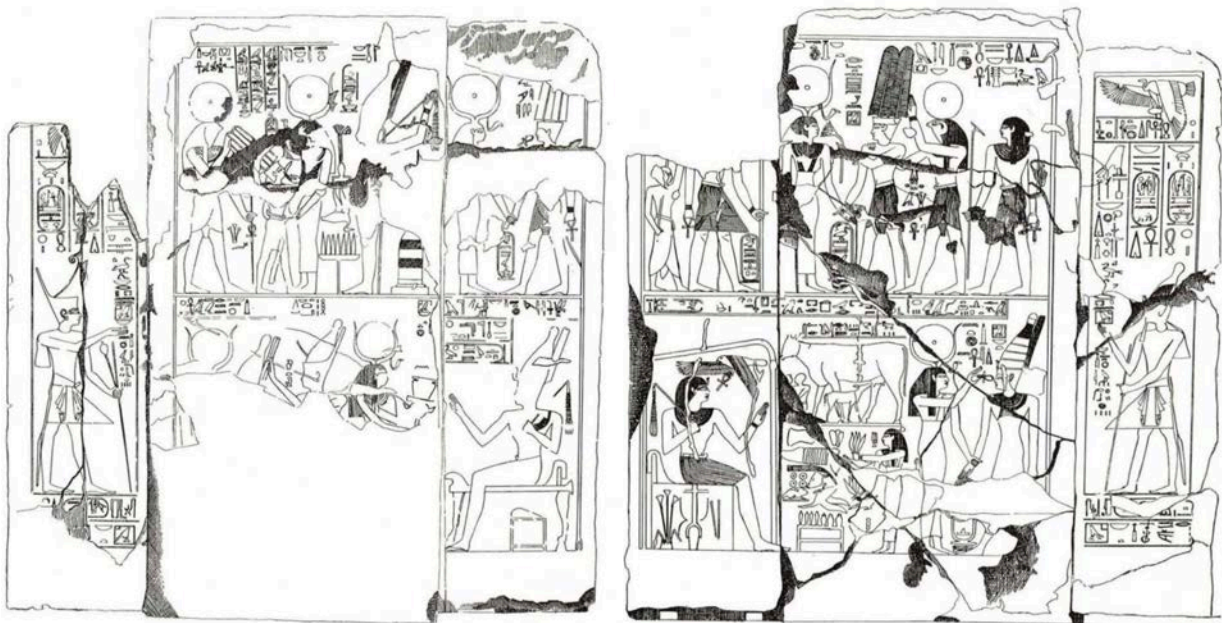


Figure 3 (left). Labib Habachi, *Left wall of Denderah Chapel*, 1963, 26, fig.8.

Figure 4 (right). Labib Habachi, *Right wall of Denderah Chapel*, 1963, 24, fig.7.

The rear wall is overtaken by a depiction of Mentuhotep II wearing the dual crown and holding a smiting pose: he is striding forward, and one of his arms is lifted above his head. It is unclear what he is holding with this lifted arm, but the other is gripping a staff in front of him, as if the former hand is smiting the latter. Above his head, the feet and tail of a flying falcon are visible directing an ankh toward the face of Mentuhotep II. The scene is symbolic of Mentuhotep II's subjugation of Lower Egypt, using an abstract representation of Lower Egypt as the recipient of the smiting instead of a human victim typical of most smiting scenes.<sup>13</sup> This invocation of reunification is supplemented by the repeating motifs of the falcon, the use of the *sm*-*t*-*wy* plant, and the accompanying inscription "clubbing the eastern lands, striking down the hill countries, trampling the deserts, enslaving the Nubians...uniting Upper and Lower Egypt..."<sup>14</sup> O'Connor additionally notes that the staff Mentuhotep II wields entwines the emblematic plant of northern Egypt with the hieroglyph for 'year,' and interprets the scene as symbolizing the 'year Mentuhotep II takes over the north.'<sup>15</sup>

All together, the relief communicates a powerful kingship. The motif of smiting and subjugation has been used repeatedly throughout pharaonic history to signal the presence of kingship, such as the smiting scene in the Narmer Palette which signified King Narmer's reunification of Egypt at the beginning of the Early Dynastic Period.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the inscription under the flying falcon is "Horus 'who-subdues-the-foreign-countries,'" a distinction that both equates Mentuhotep II to Horus and emphasizes through religious imagery the idea that a king is intrinsically a figure who utilizes violence and subjugation.<sup>17</sup> Given the historical associations with violence and kingship, the motif of smiting, which undoubtedly carries connotations of

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<sup>13</sup> Bestock, *Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt*, 168.

<sup>14</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> O'Connor, "The Denderah Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep," 218.

<sup>16</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 23.

violence, characterizes Mentuhotep II as a strong ruler, both justifying and celebrating his efforts of reuniting Egypt.

The smiting wall refers back to historically established characteristics of kingship; the other walls of the chapel specifically connect Mentuhotep II to the local religion of the site to communicate kingship. In particular, they emphasize his relationship with a set of deities: Hathor, Horakhti, and Sema-tawy. Hathor is most imperative to Denderah in the Eleventh Dynasty and quite possibly may have been since the fourth dynasty, since three priests and six priestesses of Hathor have been found nearby from the fourth to sixth dynasty.<sup>18</sup> Horakhti is described as the spouse of Hathor and is a manifestation of Horus with a sun disk, and links the solar religion and the aforementioned motif of Horus as king and uniter of Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Sema-tawy is described as the son of Hathor, and has been associated with her since the fourth dynasty as well.<sup>20</sup> O'Connor attempts to organize the chapel sequentially in a way that situates Mentuhotep II within a divine narrative. First, he asserts that the lower section of the left wall (fig.3) implies a sexual interaction between Hathor and the king, with Mentuhotep II as the product of this interaction. The scene above that depicts Mentuhotep II as being suckled, then endowed with life, by Hathor. Next, he describes the right wall (fig.4) as depicting Mentuhotep II participating in the cult of Hathor overlooked by Horakhti and Sema-tawy, then Hathor endowing a deceased Mentuhotep II with life.

The left and right walls of the Denderah chapel call upon the idea that an ideal kingship is one heavily involved in cult worship, and situates Mentuhotep II as wholeheartedly participating in this tradition: he supports the cult of Hathor, he supports all other divine cults, and he supports

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<sup>18</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> O'Connor, "The Denderah Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep," 220.

<sup>20</sup> Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, 134.

funerary cults.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the reliefs legitimize the kingship of Mentuhotep II by situating him in intimate and familial relationships with deities already established and significant in the region. His religious importance is highlighted, and thus his political importance: Mentuhotep II is a figure fit to be the focus of a cult, and thus a figure fit to be a ruler.<sup>22</sup>

All together, the inscriptions at Denderah invoke an ideal of kingship related to power and religion that both asserts Mentuhotep II's takeover of Northern Egypt and his subsequent role as the king of a united Egypt.

### *The Gebelein Chapel*

The Gebelein Chapel can also be interpreted to illustrate kingship through the same motifs of aggressive unification and participation in divine cults.

There are several broken fragments of the chapel that have been found, and included in the most intact are two wall reliefs that depict a smiting scene like that in the Denderah Chapel. The first features four men proceeding in front of two standards on the left, and a king with the crown of Upper Egypt posing to strike another man who is holding a feather and almost near the floor (fig.5). The smiting figure is "King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Netjeri-hedjet," and the figure being smited is "the Prince of Tehenu, Hedjuash"<sup>23</sup> The second features a similar king with a crown of Upper Egypt and a uraeus. He holds the hair of a man crouched near to the floor, with three other men kneeled behind him (fig.6). The smiting figure is labeled "Mentuhotep Son of Hathor, Lady of Denderah," the figure being smote is unnamed but identifiable as an Egyptian by his kilt, and the three kneeling figures are labeled as "Nubians," "Asiatics," then "Libyans."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> O'Connor, "The Denderah Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep," 220.

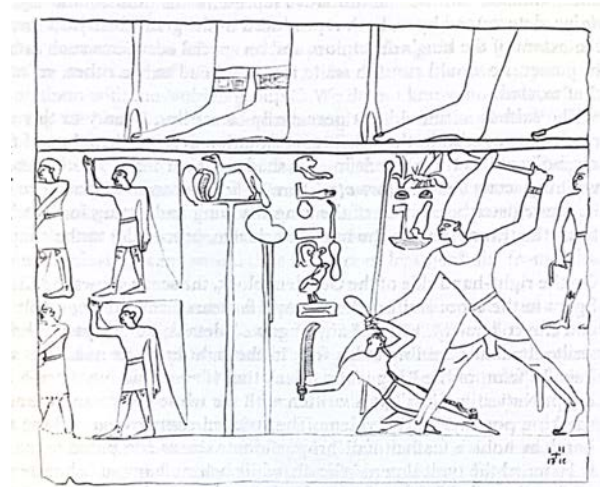
<sup>22</sup> O'Connor, "The Denderah Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep," 218-220.

<sup>23</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 58.

<sup>24</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 52.

These depictions of smiting are notably more direct than that in the Denderah Chapel since the king is smiting the figure of an actual person, rather than a representation of peoples.

Furthermore, one of the victims in the scene is an Egyptian, evident from the *shendyt* kilt.<sup>25</sup>



Enemy and Temple Foundation Ceremony, 2010, 57.  
Figure 6. Elisa Fiore Marochetti, Scene of Smiting the Enemy with Procession of Subjugated Peoples and Personifications, 2010, 51.

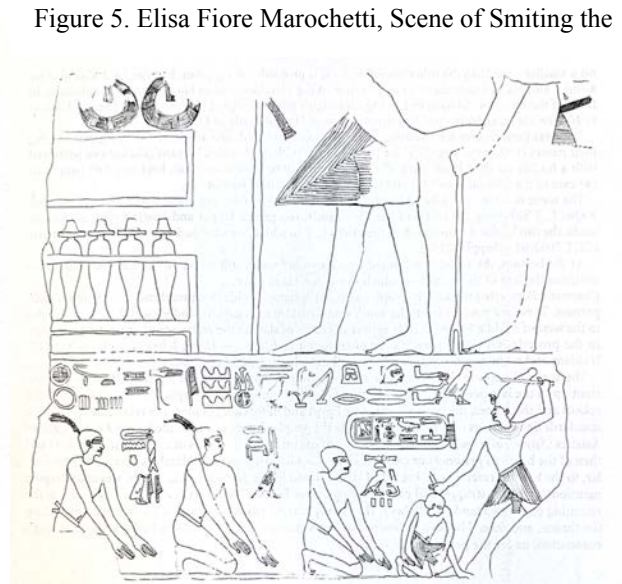


Figure 5. Elisa Fiore Marochetti, Scene of Smiting the

A greater political opposition in Gebelein can explain the decision to depict Mentuhotep II directly smiting. Indeed Gebelein, although it was indeed administered by a Theban nome, was also under the influence of a Hierakonpolis nome that proclaimed loyalty to the Herakleopolitan king.<sup>26</sup> Local tomb inscriptions additionally showed heavy opposition to Theban takeover.<sup>27</sup> Mentuhotep II is thus adapting his presentation as king to the locality of the chapel in order to convey the full force of his future kingship. The themes of smiting and subjugations are evident in the chapel and present to appeal to the aforementioned ideal of kingship, but they are augmented as a response to the greater political instability in the region.

<sup>25</sup> Bestock, *Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt*, 163.

<sup>26</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 9.

The Gebelein chapel also situated Mentuhotep II within the religious landscape of the region. The gods depicted in the fragments of the chapel are numerous, and include deities such as Hathor, Seshat, Khnum, and Sematawy, and possibly Neith/Satet and Montu/Horus/Horakhty.<sup>28</sup> In contrast with the Denderah Chapel, however, the Gebelein Chapel does not directly situate Mentuhotep II in relationships with any of these deities. Instead, the chapel served to host a ceremonial centered around the king and his ascension to power.<sup>29</sup> His involvement in these ceremonies and the proximity to these deities carved in the reliefs serve wholly to legitimize Mentuhotep II as a religious figure, which in turn augments his political assertions in the region.

#### Post-unification Chapels

Post-unification building activity is explosive throughout all of Upper Egypt, incorporating the Deir el-Bahri style and even recalling the Old Kingdom style.<sup>30</sup> The post-unification style is one that takes up flatter reliefs, more greatly renders hands and muscles, and exhibits a more natural and proportional approach.<sup>31</sup> It has been suggested that the reason for this change is Mentuhotep's explicit order for the northern style to be adopted, and his hiring of Memphite workmanship after unification.<sup>32</sup>

Evidence of post-unification chapels specifically are less robust than that for pre-unification chapels. Possible chapels have been hypothesized from blocks found at Ballas dating to Mentuhotep II's reign and remnants at Karnak, and the most significant instance is a

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<sup>28</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Rita Evelyn Freed, "Relief Styles of the Nebhepetre Montuhotep Funerary Temple Complex," in *Chief of Seers: Egyptian Studies in Memory of Cyril Aldred*, ed. Elizabeth Goring et. al (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), 154-155.

<sup>31</sup> Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Sabbahy, *Kingship, Power, and Legitimacy in Ancient Egypt*, 135.

more recently found m'ḥ'.t chapel at Abydos. The decrease of chapel building amongst an increase in other building activity may suggest a lesser need for Mentuhotep II to establish himself in specific localities after reunification.

### *Possible chapels*

Habachi names the blocks found at Ballas dating to Mentuhotep II's reign to be belonging to a chapel, and discusses two in particular. One contains more visual imagery: depicted is a king labeled with Mentuhotep II's third titulary holding two maces and a sceptre, and a description in which the motif of a united Upper and Lower Egypt occurs often (fig. 7).<sup>33</sup> Here, the difference from pre-unification visual imagery is present in that, although the king is holding a mace, there is no explicit motion of smiting or an emphasis on aggression in either depiction or description. The other block mentioned by Habachi is mainly textual and does not include Mentuhotep II's name, but he asserts that it concerns military action that lines up with that taken up by Mentuhotep II.<sup>34</sup> Darnell calls into question the origin of this block, suggesting a possible transportation of the block from another locale.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, this block is unique in its specificity of the geographic, economic, and cultic conditions of Thebes.<sup>36</sup> If the blocks were indeed to belong to a chapel erected near Thebes, it is fitting to conclude that it served to emphasize Mentuhotep II's involvement in the region.

At Karnak a lintel and two offering tables have been found, which Habachi also suggests was from a chapel.<sup>37</sup> The lintel depicts a king sitting on a throne sporting the sema-tawy, flanked by two gods on each side, all holding wꜣs sceptres (fig.8). The positioning is quite similar to the

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<sup>33</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 29.

<sup>35</sup> John Coleman Darnell, "The Eleventh Dynasty Royal Inscription from Deir El-Ballas," *Revue d'Égyptologie* 59 (2008): 82.

<sup>36</sup> Darnell, "The Eleventh Dynasty Royal Inscription from Deir El-Ballas," 82-106.

<sup>37</sup> Habachi, *MDAIK*, 36.

upper register of the other Gebelein block (fig.5), in which two figures stand next to *w*□*s* sceptres, with one slightly striding and the other standing with their feet together. The flanking gods seem to be Isis, Set, Horus, and Nephthys, thus equating Mentuhotep II with Osiris. This scene is quite a standard presentation of kingship found in both Old Kingdom and pre-unification depictions, and does not display any unique assertions of kingship by Mentuhotep II.

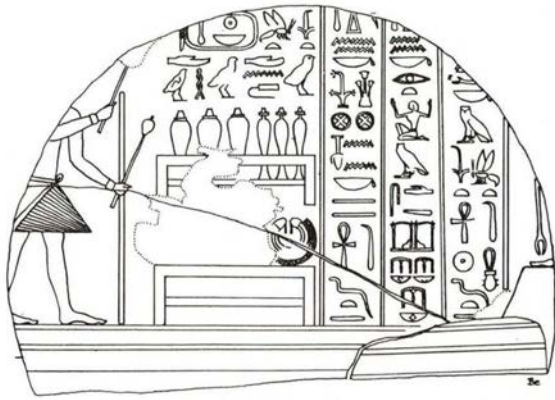


Figure 7. Labib Habachi, Block from Ballas, 1963, 28, fig.9.

Figure 8. Labib Habachi, Lintel from Karnak, 1963, 35, fig.14.

### *The Abydos M'ḥ.t Chapel*

An accidental 2014 discovery at Abydos revealed a chapel built by Mentuhotep II post-unification. The south wall depicts Mentuhotep II himself (fig.9), the north wall depicts a scene with deities Neshmet and Menit (fig.10), and the west wall depicts a scene with Osiris, Khentiamentiu, and Mentuhotep II (fig.11).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Damarany, "The MaHa.t-Chapel of Nebhepetre at Abydos," 125-129.

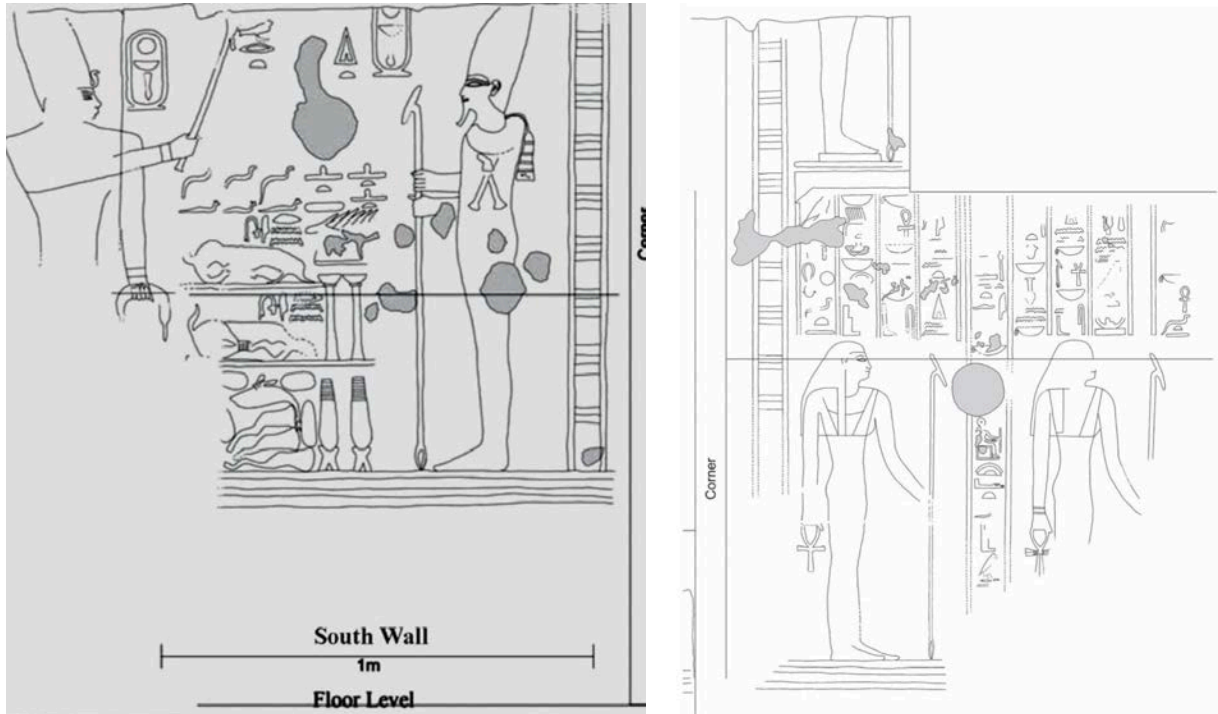


Figure 9 (left). Ayman M. Damarany, Decorated block depicting Nebhepetre holding a baton while presenting offerings to Osiris, 2019, 125, fig.6.

Figure 10 (right). Ayman M. Damarany, Drawing of the north wall depicting Neshmet on the right and Menit, the mooring post, on the left, 2019, 127, fig.9.

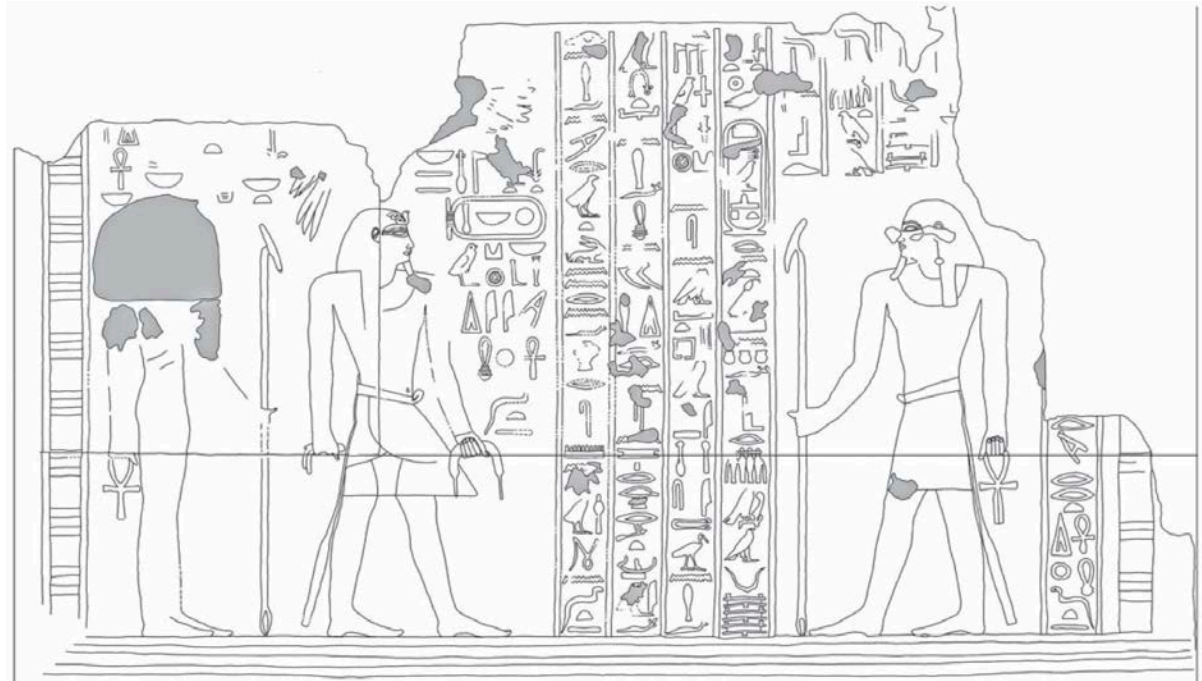


Figure 11. Ayman M. Damarany, The west wall with the building dedication text, 2019, 129, fig.12.

The chapel seems to have been built for the veneration of the aforementioned gods: the chapel's building dedication specifically names it to "the gods who are in Abydos."<sup>39</sup> It names Osiris as the primary recipient of the cult, and indeed it is situated within the landscape of Abydos in a way which directly connects it to the annual Osiris procession. Furthermore, the chapel faces directly toward the tomb of Djer, a symbolic tomb of Osiris at Umm el-Qa'ab.<sup>40</sup>

Mentuhotep II is depicted with an uraeus and crown of Upper Egypt in the south wall holding a staff before Osiris. Although the staff is motioned toward Osiris and the offering table, the depiction is indeed not a smiting scene. Rather, the scene serves to further emphasize Mentuhotep II involving himself in this significant cult of Osiris at Abydos. It is intriguing that a cartouche with his name not only appears in front of his face, it also appears in front of Osiris's face: Mentuhotep II is possibly also equating himself to Osiris here, similar to the block found at Karnak. Thus, in building this *m 'h 't* chapel, he asserts himself both in the physical ritual landscape of Abydos and the religious canon of Abydos.

Notably, the reliefs do not communicate any direct political assertions. The lack of a smiting scene and any suggestions of aggressive character make these post-unification chapels distinct from the Gebelein and Denderah chapels, and reflect the changing priorities of Mentuhotep II after more securely establishing his kingship after unification.

### *Addressing Deir El-Bahri*

The pattern of pre-unification chapels and post-unification chapels is harder to ascribe to his mortuary complex at Deir el-Bahri, which is nevertheless important to include because of its significance in Mentuhotep II's building program. The difficulty lies in that the temple was built

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<sup>39</sup> Damarany, "The MaHa.t-Chapel of Nebhepetre at Abydos," 125-129.

<sup>40</sup> Damarany, "The MaHa.t-Chapel of Nebhepetre at Abydos," 132.

over a long period of time, indeed over the course of his whole reign, and the line between pre-unification and post-unification thus becomes less clear.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, since the mortuary complex was intended to encapsulate the entirety of Mentuhotep II's reign in its relief program, there is less to say about how it specifically related to individual localities. However, the reliefs are still very valuable in that they exhibit what Mentuhotep II wanted to communicate in different parts of his reign, and opens up the possibility for further analysis on the chapels.

### Conclusion

By examining and contrasting against each other the pre-unification and post-unification chapels, a narrative of kingship can be seen in which Mentuhotep II emphasizes and deemphasizes certain motifs in order to adapt to his political and religious situation at critical localities. The period before the reunification of Egypt was marked with greater political instability and opposition, therefore the chapels of Mentuhotep II contain smiting scenes and a more aggressive character to emphasize his power. He evokes the traditional method of depicting the vanquishing of enemies before he takes his own throne, working on previously established modes of kingship. The difference between the smiting scenes at Denderah and Gebelein additionally serve to show how Mentuhotep II emphasized violence differently in accordance to the political situation of each locality. Furthermore, his religious claims pre-unification serve to supplement his political claims. Mentuhotep II is shown to be inserted into a religious canon that has been established for many years prior, especially at Denderah. Post-unification chapels maintain certain motifs seen pre-unification, such as the equating of Mentuhotep II to a god, in this case Osiris, and the participation in religious cults. However, there is notably less emphasis on the direct assertion of kingship and the assertion of aggressive power in the chapels at Ballas,

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<sup>41</sup> Bestock, *Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt*, 128.

Karnak, and Abydos, particularly because of the lack of a smiting scene. All together, the chapels of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II illustrate the figure of a king that placed himself strategically upon the land of Egypt to secure it as its ruler.

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