

Łukaszewicz, Adam

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Adam Łukaszewicz

MEMNON, KING OF EGYPT

An unusual acoustic phenomenon first recorded in Roman times brought worldwide fame to one of the colossi of king Amenhotep III in the West of Thebes. One of a pair of enormous statues of red quartzite transported from Gebel el-Ahmar to western Thebes and erected under supervision of the ingenious Amenhotep son of Hapu¹ is even now, eighteen centuries after vanishing of the strange voice, universally known as the vocal Memnon.

The nature of Memnon's voice and its disappearance after works performed in III century A.D. in order to restore the mutilated statue² have been discussed in several studies. In the course of the last two centuries many researchers wrote about this famous monument. There is no real necessity to re-examine all these considerations in this essay. The most detailed analysis of the problem can still be found in the old work of Letronne.³ The present writer published in 1993 his arguments for a date of the restoration works on the colossus in the reign of the Emperor Caracalla and more precisely c. A.D. 215.⁴

¹ A. GARDINER, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, Oxford 1961, 209; R. S. BIANCHI, 'Memnon-kolosse', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV, Wiesbaden 1982, 23 with references in n. 3.

² For a recent discussion see G. W. BOWERSOCK, 'The Miracle of Memnon', *BASP* 21, 1984, 21-32. In a forthcoming study by the present writer, being a version of the *Aegyptiaca Antoniniana* (cf. n. 4) the problem of the date of the restoration works will be discussed.

³ A.-J. LETRONNE, *La statue vocale de Memnon considérée dans ses rapports avec l'Égypte et la Grèce*, Paris 1833; cf. IDEM, *Oeuvres choisies*, I, 2, 1881, 1-236.

⁴ Cf. A. ŁUKASZEWICZ, *Aegyptiaca Antoniniana*, Warszawa 1993, 163-166 (in Polish).

The Greek and Roman sources that bear witness to the vocal miracle have been thoroughly examined by modern scholars. Yet, we have no positive knowledge about the date of the beginning of the acoustic phenomenon. We do not know either at what date exactly the Greeks began to call the statue by the name of Memnon.

Unfortunately, the extant sources throw no light on the question whether the name of the Egyptian Memnon originally results from the sound produced at dawn by one of these two giant statues. It is obvious that the Greek name of the statue agrees perfectly well with the vocal occurrence and that an interpretation of that phenomenon in terms of Greek mythology was possible.

The statues stood in front of an enormous temple of Amenhotep III, now completely lost. To every traveller approaching the Theban necropolis they are the main landmark at the boundary of the area. They are the guardians of the Theban West and they must have been considered as such in the Greco-Roman Antiquity.

The necropolis of Thebes was called in Greek τὰ Μεμνόνια (τὰ Μεμνό-*νεια*). It is only natural that the name of Memnonia can be now commonly considered a reflexion of the name applied first to the colossus or both the colossi. Also in the Roman period this was probably the popular explanation of the homonymous appellations of Memnon and Memnonia — of the statues and of the necropolis.

Scholars agree that the name of Memnon applied to these places is not entirely imaginary but is founded upon an *interpretatio Graeca* of an Egyptian appellation.

There is more than a single theory on the subject. The idea of Memnon = *mnw* (“monument”),⁵ referring to the colossal statues of Amenhotep III is one of the explanations.⁶ G. Haeny understood *memnoneion* as “le terme grec définissant un temple funéraire égyptien” (according to the wording of Letronne). Haeny thought it was a distortion of *mnemoneion*. In his opinion the name of Memnoneion, applied to the Ramesseum, gave the identification of the neighbouring colossi as Memnon.⁷

⁵ Cf. e.g. A. GARDINER's *Egyptian Grammar*, Oxford 1964, *Glossary*, p. 568.

⁶ The followers of this theory quote a text from the temple of Luxor mentioning “Amon dans Menmenou” Daressy, *Rec. de Trav.* XXXII, 1910, p. 64, no. 39, quoted in A. BATAILLE, ‘Thèbes gréco-romaine’, *CdE* 26, 1951, 331; cf. *Guide Bleu, Égypte*, Paris 1956, 402.

⁷ G. HAENY, ‘L’origine des traditions thébaines concernant Memnon’, *BIFAO* 64, 1966, 203–212 (especially 210–211).

Other hypotheses deducing the name of Memnonia from the Egyptian language have been discussed by A. Bataille.⁸

Some scholars maintain that *Nebmaatre* (*Nb-m^{3c} t-R^c*), the prenomen of king Amenhotep III of the XVIII Dynasty, pronounced allegedly *Nimmuria* or *Mimmuria* (according to the spelling *Nimmuaria* of the cuneiform tablets), could sound like Memnon to the Greeks. Such was the opinion of Sir Alan Gardiner, whose article on the Egyptian Memnon became a reference work concerning the subject.⁹

In actual fact, however, we cannot disregard the important circumstance that the name of Memnonia given to the necropolis is confirmed much earlier than the name of Memnon applied to the statues. Papyri mention the Memnonia in the Ptolemaic period.¹⁰ Strabo, who knows of both the Memnonium in Abydos and one in Thebes, and who for the first time records the vocal phenomenon of the Theban colossus, does not call the statue by the name of Memnon.¹¹

Therefore attempts were made to find another explanation of the name of the Memnonia. Some of them have been mentioned above. It has also been assumed that the prenomen of *Menmaatre* (*Mn-m^{3c} t-R^c*) Sethos I of the XIXth Dynasty became the basis of an identification of that Theban ruler with Memnon.¹² *Menmaatre*, probably pronounced then *Menmare* or *Memmare*, was allegedly taken by Greek visitors as the name of Memnon, legendary king of Ethiopia.¹³ There was a temple of Sethos I in the Theban West, and its pres-

⁸ A. BATAILLE, *Les Memnonia. Recherches de papyrologie et d'épigraphie grecques sur la nécropole de la Thèbes d'Égypte aux époques hellénistique et romaine*, Le Caire 1952, 4-7.

⁹ A. GARDINER, 'The Egyptian Memnon', *JEA* 47, 1961, 91-99; A. THÉODORIDÈS, 'Pèlerinage au Colosse de Memnon', *CdE* 64, 1989, 267-282.

¹⁰ *UPZ* II 180, p. 85.

¹¹ Strabo XVII.1.46. GARDINER's attempt to demonstrate the contrary on the mere basis of the immediately preceding mention of the Memnonium is not convincing: *JEA* 47, 1961, 92.

¹² *Kleine Pauly*, s. v. "Memnon" is a token of this widely disseminated identification.

¹³ The question whether there were two Memnons, the Trojan and the Ethiopian, (as suggested by Philostratus, *Her.* 3, 4) or a single hero, was present in the ancient mind. An extensive discussion of Memnon can be found in the erudite study by A.-J. LETRONNE, *La statue vocale de Memnon*. For a more recent discussion see A. BATAILLE, *Les Memnonia*, 1-21; A. GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 91-99; G. HAENY, *BIFAO* 64, 1966, 203-212; R. S. BIANCHI, 'Memnonskolosse', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* IV, 1980, 23-24; G. W. BOWERSOCK, 'The Miracle of Memnon', *BASP* 21, 1984, 21-32; cf. A. & E. BER-

ence could be a sufficient reason for *Menmare*/Memnon to give the name to the area.

An important temple built by Sethos I at Abydos was, according to the testimony of Strabo, called the Memnonium (ἡ Ἰβυδος, ἐν ἧ τὸ Μემνόνιον).¹⁴ A similar statement can be found in Pliny: *Abydus Memnonis regia et Osiris templo inclutum*.¹⁵ Also Athenaeus¹⁶ associated that temple with Memnon. Athenaeus states that in Abydos crowns were deposited by the Ethiopians after Memnon's death. These testimonies are no doubt important evidence which could possibly support the view that *Menmare* produced Memnon as a Greek version.

This interpretation, however, brings no explanation of the name of Memnon given to the colossal statues of Amenhotep III on the western plain of Thebes. Are two different etymologies of Memnonia and Memnon possible in the same area? We are approaching again the very essence of the problem. Is the name of Memnonia a derivative of the appellation of the vocal colossus or is that name independent from the name of Memnon applied to the statue of Amenhotep III? Consequently, the question is whether there was an Egyptian Memnon different from Amenhotep III or was the name of *Nebmaatre* the unique source of the Memnonian place-names in western Thebes?

Even though *Nebmaatre* could perhaps sound similarly to *Nimmare* or *Nimmuria* (*Mimmuria*), which is the version known from the el-Amarna correspondence,¹⁷ it is really difficult to agree with Gardiner that it could give Memnon as a final variant. It seems to be one of those etymological explanations which find acceptance only *faute de mieux*. In a recent article A. Théodoridès, however, seems to be quite positive about that etymology. Even more, he seems to ignore any other possible identification of Memnon, including *Menmaatre* Sethos I,¹⁸ a possibility which has not been overlooked by Gardiner.¹⁹

NAND, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines du Colosse de Memnon*, (= IFAO, *Bibliothèque d'Etude*, vol. 31), Le Caire 1960.

¹⁴ Strabo, *Geogr.*, XVII 1.42 (813).

¹⁵ Plin., *Nat. hist.* V 60.

¹⁶ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* XV 680.

¹⁷ Cf. *Les lettres d'el-Amarna. Correspondance diplomatique du pharaon*, trad. W. L. MORAN, Paris 1987.

¹⁸ A. THÉODORIDÈS, *CdE* 64, 1989, 267–282.

¹⁹ GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 96.

Amenhotep III and Sethos I are by no means the only candidates for the name of Memnon. Strabo states: “the Labyrinth might also be a Memnonium and a work of the same man who built both the Memnonia in Abydos and those in Thebes; for it is said that there are also some Memnonia in Thebes”.²⁰ Thus also Amenemhat III of the Middle Kingdom becomes involved, but most probably only by a mistake.²¹

Yet, an additional argument for *Nebmaatre* = Memnon has been deduced from the fact that the tomb of Ramesses VI, a direct neighbour of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings, was taken in Graeco-Roman times for the tomb of Memnon, “da dessen Thronname wie der Amenophis’ III. *Nb-m^{3c}.t-R^c* lautete.”²² Accordingly, visitors left there a number of appropriate graffiti.²³

In the Manethonian tradition there is a rather late record of Syncellus (κατὰ Ἐφρικανόν) containing an identification of Memnon as Amenophis of the Eighteenth Dynasty.²⁴ That testimony is, however, undoubtedly influenced by the Roman tradition concerning Memnon.

An ancient testimony complicates that apparently coherent *tableau*. In the passage of Strabo quoted above²⁵ we read that the second name of Memnon was Ἰσμάνδης = Osymandyas (*Usermaatre*) which is one of the royal names of the Ramesside period, known to us chiefly from innumerable inscriptions left by Ramesses II. King *Usermaatre* finished the temple erected by his father Sethos I in Abydos. As far as Abydos is concerned, it seems that Memnon = Ἰσμάνδης actually refers to Ramesses II. Otherwise, we would have to admit a confusion of two important rulers: *Menmaatre* Sethos I = Memnon and *User-*

²⁰ Strabo, *Geogr.* XVII 1,42 (813); the English translation after the ed. in *Loeb Classical Library*, 113.

²¹ See below, n. 26.

²² *Kleine Pauly s.v.* ‘Memnon (2)’, vol. 3, 1191. Repeated after KEES, *RE*, s.v. ‘Memnon’; cf. GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 97.

²³ J. BAILLET, *Inscriptions grecques et latines des tombeaux des rois ou syringes*, Le Caire 1926.

²⁴ Manetho, *Aegyptiaca*, fr. 52 (Syncellus), transl. W. G. WADDELL, ed. *Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge – London 1981, p. 112: Ἀμενώφης, ἕτη λα΄. Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Μέμνων εἶναι νομιζόμενος καὶ φθειγγόμενος λίθος; cf. fr. 53(a) (Syncellus/Eusebius), *ibidem*, p. 114.

It is noteworthy that in this passage the word *νομιζόμενος* is used, which may convey some doubt about the identification.

Cf. fr. 53(b), Eus., *Chron.* I (Armen.), p. 99, *ibidem*, p. 116: Amenophis, annis XXXI. Hic est qui Memnon putabatur, petra loquens.

²⁵ Strabo XVII 1.42 (813): ὁ Μέμνων ὑπὸ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων Ἰσμάνδης λέγεται.

maatre Ramesses II = Ismandes. Such an explanation does not seem really satisfactory.

However, in our quest for explanation of the Greek name of the *Memnoneia* or western Thebes, we cannot concentrate on the temple of Sethos I in the distant Abydos.

As we have seen, the ancient evidence gives us basically²⁶ three different identifications of Memnon:

- (1) Memnon = Amenhotep III or *Nebmaatre* (inference from the attribution of the colossal statues extremely popular under the Roman empire and from an explicit statement in Eusebius/Africanus dating to the Later Roman Empire).²⁷
- (2) Memnon = Ismandes i.e. *Usermaatre* (an explicit statement by Strabo).
- (3) Memnon = Ramesses VI whose tomb was shown to visitors as that of Memnon (that Ramesside king was also called *Nebmaatre*, like Amenhotep III).

In the sources there is no direct confirmation of an identification with Sethos I, unless we take as such Strabo's information about Memnon = Ismandes of Abydos.

It must be once again stressed here that *Nebmaatre* in any phonetic variant is in the present writer's opinion not really likely to produce Memnon as a Greek version. The identification of Memnon as Amenhotep III should rather be considered as a misunderstanding. Moreover, before the Roman period there is no real evidence for such an identification. If the reason of such an identification was really phonetic, why did it not appear in the a more remote past, at least in the Ptolemaic period? On the other hand, the name of Memnonia was in use long before the earliest record of the cry of Memnon.²⁸

Did Memnon ever utter his cry before the Roman period, before the time when the miracle became propagated by writers? Or is it due to an astonishing coincidence that a statue already known as Memnon began to cry at dawn as if to confirm the king's legendary descent from Eos?

²⁶ In Strabo XVII 1.37 the tomb in the Labyrinth in the shape of a *πυραμὶς τετραγώνος* is attributed to *Ἰσμάνδης* or *Μαίνδης*. Some editors unnecessarily correct it to *Ἰμάνδης* to agree with Diodorus, who states that Mendes was the builder (Diod. Sic. I 61.1–2). Probably the mss. confuse here *Ἰσμάνδης* and *Μαίνδης*, the latter being Amemhat III, the probable builder of the Labyrinth.

²⁷ Cf. n. 24. The remark concerning an Amenophis who reigned for 31 years reads: "This is the king who is reputed to be Memnon and a speaking stone statue" and certainly does not come from the original text of Manetho, which could not contain a mention of the *φθεγγόμενος λίθος*.

²⁸ UPZ II p. 85 and *passim*.

The interpretation of the northern colossus as Memnon is possibly as late as the beginning of the vocal phenomenon, i.e. 27 B.C. (or 26, according to Bowersock,²⁹ quoted also by Théodoridès), although some researchers insist, without any evidence to support it, that the identification took place “à l'époque même du Roi (au XIV^e siècle av. J.-C.)”.³⁰

In reality, the Memnonian interpretation of the vocal colossus of Amenhotep III may be even significantly later than the earliest phase of the acoustic occurrence. As stated above, Strabo does not yet give the name of Memnon to the vocal colossus. The following passage in his *Geography* describes the topography of Thebes:

μέρος μὲν τι ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ, ἐν ἧ ἤπερ ἡ πόλις, μέρος δέ τι καὶ ἐν τῇ περαιᾷ, ὅπου τὸ Μεμνόμιον. ἐνταῦθα δὲ δυεῖν κολοσσῶν ὄντων μονολίθων ἀλλήλων πλησίον κτλ.³¹

Notwithstanding Gardiner's biased arguments,³² ἐνταῦθα must not, and most probably does not, refer to the Memnonium but designates more generally the western bank of the Nile.

As stated above, in Strabo's text there is not the slightest trace of the story about Memnon greeting his mother Eos, the Dawn.³³ The geographer gives only a laconic description of the phenomenon. Strabo remains extremely sceptical as to the genuine character of the occurrence: “on account of the uncertainty of the cause I am induced to believe anything rather than that the sound issued from stones thus fixed”. If the Memnonian interpretation were actually current in the times of Aelius Gallus when Strabo went to Thebes, he would certainly not fail to report it in his concise but detailed and adequate statement.

In spite of Gardiner's reasons, it seems that the old argument of Letronne is not off the mark:

“1. Le Colosse n'a jamais été pour les Égyptiens que celui d'Amenophis; il n'a été celui de Memnon que pour les Grecs et les Romains.

²⁹ *BASP* 21, 1984, 23.

³⁰ A. THÉODORIDÈS, *CdE* 64, 1989, 273; cf. P. GILBERT, ‘Homère et l'Égypte’, *CdE* 14, 1939, 49.

³¹ Strabo XVII 1. 46.

³² *JEA* 47, 1961, 92 and n. 6: “Bataille, 12, curiously uses this very word to argue the exact opposite to what is here maintained”. Cf. BATAILLE, *Les Memnonia*.

³³ Cf. D. G. WEINGÄRTNER, *Die Ägyptenreise des Germanicus*, Bonn 1969, 158: “Die Bezeichnung des nördlichen Kolosses als Memnon, die bei Strabon noch fehlt, stand zur Zeit des Tacitus auch in der lateinischen Literatur fest”.

2. Que la dénomination de palais ou quartier Memnonien est égyptienne, et n'a primitivement aucun rapport avec Memnon."³⁴

One can only express admiration of Letronne's perspicacity. We must bear in mind that his conclusions were formulated at a time when the author could not possibly confirm them with evidence taken from the Egyptian sources.

When Gardiner says "Letronne's claim that ... the colossus was ... for the Greeks and Romans only Memnon is certainly much exaggerated",³⁵ he slightly, but significantly distorts the sense of Letronne's actual statement "il n'a été ... Memnon que pour les Grecs et les Romains". That means only that there is no evidence of Egyptians taking Amenhotep III for Memnon.

Consequently, what Gardiner records as evidence contrary to Letronne's idea, does in actual fact confirm it. The Greeks and Romans who took their information from Egyptian priests were obviously aware that for the Egyptians the vocal statue represented "Aménoth, roi égyptien, à ce que rapportent les prêtres instruits des récits anciens" (Bernard's translation).³⁶ Also Pausanias gives a confirmation of that awareness: "The Thebans, however, say that the image represents, not Memnon, but a native called Phamenoth".³⁷ His statement, if examined with care, is extremely significant: The real Memnon is *not the same man* as "a native called Phamenoth". In other words, the original Memnon was not Amenhotep III.

At the time when the area was called *Memnoneia*, the statues of king *Neb-maatre* Amenhotep, being a prominent element of that region, could easily be mistaken by Greek-speaking tourists for images of the eponym of western Thebes. Yet, it is doubtful whether during Strabo's visit that interpretation, as well as the application of the name of *Μεμνόμιον* to the temple of Amenhotep III, already existed. By the time of Strabo's arrival to Thebes even the occurrence of the matutinal voice probably did not yet generate the story of Memnon greeting his mother.

In view of unequivocal evidence the name *Memnoneia* must, however, obviously be an earlier creation and probably comes from another king's name.

³⁴ A.-J. LETRONNE, 'La statue vocale de Memnon' in: *Oeuvres choisies*, 52, 54.

³⁵ *JEA* 47, 1961, 95.

³⁶ A. & E. BERNARD, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines du colosse de Memnon*, (= *IFAO* 31), Le Caire 1960, p. 87, no. 29.3-4: ἡ Ἀμένωθ, βασιλεὺς Αἰγύπτου, τὸς ἐνέποισιν ἴρηες μύθων τῶν παλάων Ἰδριες. Cf. *ibidem* no. 31.2, p. 97: Μέμνονος ἡ Φαμένωθ; no. 105.2, p. 211: Memnon ... sive Amenot ...

³⁷ Φαμένωφα δὲ εἶναι τῶν ἐγχωρίων: Paus., *Gr. Descr.* 1.42.3; cf. GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 95, who quotes the English translation.

We must therefore first of all reconsider whether *Menmaatre* or *Menmare* (= Sethos I) can actually be regarded as the origin of *Μέμνων* and whether the ancient tradition pointing to *Ἴσμάνδης* = *Usermaatre* as Memnon is due only to Ramesses' II works in Abydos.

G. Haeny gave an answer to this question which is very important to our considerations.³⁸ He states that the identification of the colossi of Amenhotep III as Memnon is a result of the belief that they belonged to the neighbouring *Memnoneion* which — according to Haeny — cannot be anything else than the Ramesseum. Haeny, who excavated in the area of the funerary temple of Amenhotep III, has no doubt that in the Greco-Roman period — and even as early as the later New Kingdom (after Merenptah) — Amenhotep's temple was completely ruined. It could not be the *Memnoneion* to the Greeks and the Romans. Although Haeny's opinion that the Ramesseum is a Memnonium seems convincing, and agrees with a long established tradition,³⁹ the scholar still does not explain the origin of the name. He only points to a possible misunderstanding (*memnoneion/mnemeoneion*) that in our opinion can be only a part of the answer.

It is certainly not quite impossible that *Menmaatre*'s temple in western Thebes could be the origin of the name of Memnonia. But it seems that a more plausible solution can be found in the titlature of Ramesses II who was called *Meryamun*, (*mrj-Jmn*, “beloved by Amun”) or *Miamun* (*Meamun*), according to a probable pronunciation of that time.⁴⁰ That is much closer to *Memnon* than any other of the pharaohs' names usually taken into consideration and adduced before. That would agree with Haeny's remarks and complete them.

Unmistakably, the Memnonium of Abydos owes its name to *Wsr-M3^c t-R^c stp.n-R^c* Ramesses II *mrj-Jmn*. Also the Memnonium mentioned by Pliny (V 60)⁴¹ seems to be the same temple founded by Sethos I and finished by Ramesses II.⁴²

³⁸ G. HAENY, *BIFAO* 64, 1966, 203–212.

³⁹ To the authors of *Description de l'Égypte* the Ramesseum was nothing else but Memnonium (A. vol. II, pll. 19-37).

⁴⁰ The Hittite texts give the name of Ramesses II as *Ri3amašeša Ma3i-Amana*; H. RANKE, *Keilschriftliches Material zur altägyptischen Vokalisation*, Berlin 1910, 12; cf. *Rea-mashesha mai Amana, Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. J. B. PRITCHARD, 3rd ed., Princeton 1969, 202; cf. the Coptic me for *mrj*.

⁴¹ Cf. above, n. 15.

⁴² For that identification see A. H. GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 93; G. HAENY, *BIFAO* 64, 1966, 203–212. Cf. P. PERDRIZET, G. LEFEBVRE, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos*, Nancy 1919.

It is, however, necessary to observe that *mrj-Jmn* was part not only of Ramesses' II name, but also of the names of a series of later rulers: Merenptah, Sethos II, Sethnacht, Ramesses III and other pharaohs of the XXth Dynasty. We should not overlook here the fact that in the Greco-Roman period the name of *Memnoneia* designated particularly the western Theban area of Djeme,⁴³ closely associated with the famous temple and palace complex of Medinet Habu built by Ramesses III. Suffice it to quote Gardiner's own statement: "In Ptolemaic times this (i.e. τὰ Μεμνόνεια, A. L.) was a purely Greek term, the demotic papyri and ostraca giving *D3my* (Coptic *ΧΗΜΕ*) as equivalent or even as a direct translation;"⁴⁴ In later Roman times the temple precinct of Medinet Habu was called *κάστρα Μεμνονείων*⁴⁵ which remained as a designation of the place also in the Coptic documents (*ΠΚΑΣΤΡΟΝ ΝΞΗΜΕ*).⁴⁶

It seems that Memnonia or Djeme was then originally the name of the site of Medinet Habu which in Graeco-Roman times, together with the decline of Thebes, grew and became an extensive township. Its name was occasionally extended to embrace a large area of the Theban west.⁴⁷

Gardiner is certainly right, when he says that the term *Μεμνόνιον*, modelled after the pattern of *Ἀμμωνεῖον* and the like, "must obviously be explained as referring to a building where the hero called Memnon was in some way commemorated".⁴⁸ His further inference points to Memnonium as the great temple of Amenhotep III, which, as Haeny demonstrated, is an error.

The temple of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu, dedicated to the memory of king *mrj-Jmn* and preserved in excellent state during the whole of antiquity, is

⁴³ H. MESSIHA, 'Memnonia', *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. V, New York 1991, 1586.

⁴⁴ GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 91.

⁴⁵ Cf. *UPZ* II 180 b. 22–26, commentary p. 173; cf. KEES, *RE* XV, 650; A. BATAILLE, *CdE* 26, 1951, 327 n. 3. In the present writer's opinion the genitive form does not imply that only a part of the Memnonia formed the *castra*, but that what was called Memnonia *par excellence* was considered the *castra*. As a matter of fact from the very beginning the precinct of Medinet Habu had the nature of a fortress and was used as such on various occasions.

⁴⁶ E. g. no. 116 [in:] W. E. CRUM, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djême (Theben)*, 1. Band, Leipzig 1912; cf. W. TILL, 'Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen', *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Wien, 229/2, 1954, 212f.

⁴⁷ See *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. V, s.v. 'Memnonia' (cf. above, n. 43); P. GROSSMAN, 'Madinat Habu', *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. V, New York 1991, 1496–1497.

⁴⁸ GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 92.

much more likely to be the Memnoneion than the débris of the temple of Amenhotep III.⁴⁹ It is not very probable that in 117 B.C. the great god Amun of Thebes could annually cross the river to visit the dilapidated temple, while such visits to the well preserved precinct of Medinet Habu would be quite natural.⁵⁰ The temple of Ramesses II, the Ramesseum, which could also be called Memnonium because of the presence of the same epithet in the king's name, was in Greco-Roman times less intact than Medinet Habu. Therefore it seems that it was the temple of Medinet Habu that was the Memnoneion *par excellence*, although probably both the temples shared at that time the name of Memnonia.

The interpretation of Memnon = *mrj-Jmn* proposed here agrees with the testimony of Strabo who clearly states that the other name of Memnon is Ἰσμάωνδης. That is perfectly true in the case of a king called *Usermaatre* (Ἰσμάωνδης) *Meryamun* (Μέμμων). It presumably agrees better with the prenomen of Ramesses III (*Wsr-M3^c t-R^c mrj-Jmn*) than with that of Ramesses II (*Wsr-M3^c t-R^c stp.n-R^c*), who has the *mrj-Jmn* element combined with "Ramesses" in his nomen cartouche.⁵¹ N.B. — there is no doubt that the Egyptians in their official usage called their kings chiefly by the prenomen.⁵² This, however, does not exclude Ramesses II as the original Memnon.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that Ramesses III reign (c. 1184–1153 B.C.) is close to the traditional date of the Trojan war. Could the contact of Ramesses III with the Sea Peoples inspire an early version of the Greek story of Memnon, making of him an Eastern king involved in fighting with the Mediterranean peoples at the periphery of the Greek world and especially in Troy?

It is still, however, a question whether it is Ramesses III rather than his great predecessor Ramesses II (who was also called *mrj-Jmn* and was a founder of a funerary temple in the area, the Ramesseum) whom we may suppose to be the model of the "Egyptian Memnon" of the Greeks. The appellation Miamoun for Ramesses II — found even as late as in the excerpts of the Greek history of Manetho — shows that the epithet accompanying his nomen could certainly be the origin of the name of Memnon.⁵³ Anyway, it may be taken for granted that

⁴⁹ For the opinion of BATAILLE on the state of the temple of Amenhotep see *CdE* 26, 1951, 327; cf. J. ČERNÝ, *JEA* 26, 1941, 130 and HAENY, *BIFAO* 64, 1966, 203–212.

⁵⁰ Ἐν ταῖς κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν γινομέναις τοῦ Ἄμμωνος διαβάσειω εἰς τὰ Μέμμωνεια, *UPZ* II, p. 85, cf. GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 93 n. 3.

⁵¹ J. VON BECKERATH, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, München–Berlin 1984, 94.

⁵² GARDINER, *JEA* 47, 1961, 95.

⁵³ Παρέσεως Μιαμμού[ν]. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* III.20 [in:] Manetho, *Loeb Classical Library*, London 1980, 108. Cf. also Syncellus: Μιαμούς, *ibidem*, 236.

the Memnonium *par excellence* was the temple complex of Medinet Habu built by Ramesses III. We are also allowed to presume that the story of the “Egyptian Memnon” arose from the magnificence of the buildings of Ramesses III in Medinet Habu.

Ramesses III should certainly not be dismissed with the qualification of a mere imitator of Ramesses II. Although virtually obsessed with imitating the achievements of the glorious ruler of the XIXth dynasty, Ramesses III was himself a great king,⁵⁴ a victorious warlord, a ruler who (at least in terms of his own official propaganda) saved Egypt from a disaster that could bear unpredictable consequences. The still lasting material prosperity of his kingdom is certified by the magnificent *P. Harris I*.⁵⁵ His contacts with peoples of the Mediterranean obviously contributed to the worldwide renown of the great king from the south.

It would be useless to search for specific elements of the actual biography of an Egyptian king which could serve as the basis of the Greek story of Memnon. Anyhow, as for the warlike character and deeds of Rameses III, they found powerful artistic expression on the walls of Medinet Habu and could possibly inspire the fantasy of early Greek visitors, thus contributing to the legend of Memnon, hero of Troy fighting on the “Oriental” side. The southern situation of Thebes made possible a confusion of that Upper Egyptian site with Ethiopia.

It is quite possible that it was the Memnonia or the complex of Medinet Habu that are recorded in the *History of Alexander* of Curtius Rufus as “Memnonis Tithonique celebrata regia” that Alexander desired to visit.⁵⁶ Tithonos, the mythical father of Memnon is thus recorded as a co-proprietor of the famous “palace”. In the present writer’s opinion even this statement should not be dismissed as a purely mythological or commonplace entry. Since the times of Ramesses II the god Tatenen is largely present in the titles of the Egyptian kings. He also appears in inscriptions as the king’s father.⁵⁷ Sethnacht, the

⁵⁴ P. GRANDET, *Ramsès III. Histoire d’un règne*, Paris 1993; see also A. J. PEDEN, *The Reign of Ramesses IV*, Warminster 1994.

⁵⁵ W. ERICHSEN, *Papyrus Harris I, Hieroglyphische Transkription* (= *Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca*, 5), Bruxelles 1933; translation in J. H. BREASTED, *Ancient Records of Egypt IV*, Chicago 1906, 87–206; P. GRANDET, *Le Papyrus Harris I (BM 9999). Traduction et commentaire*, [in the press]; cf. GARDINER, *Egypt*, 292.

⁵⁶ Curt. Ruf. IV 8.3.

⁵⁷ Cf. H. S. SCHLÖGL, *Der Gott Tatenen. Nach Texten und Bildern des Neuen Reiches*, Göttingen 1980, 56 ff.; BECKERATH, *Königsnamen*, 89: Ramesses II; 94: Ramesses IV; 95: Ramesses VII.

predecessor and father of Ramesses III bore as his *Nebty*-name an appellation containing the name of the god Ptah-Tatenen. Also some later rulers of the XXth dynasty, including Ramesses III, were — in their less important names — called after that god.⁵⁸ It is almost certain that the name of *T3tjn* could easily be taken for that of Tithonos by the Greeks. Either this fact modelled the Greek names of the legend or, less probably, the similarity of the names (including perhaps *Ese* = Isis, one of the frequent elements in names of the Ramesside queens,⁵⁹ bearing a possible association with Eos?) served as a basis for the identification of *Maiamun/Miamun* Ramesses III as Memnon son of Tithonos already present in the Greek mythology. Anyhow, there is no satisfactory Greek etymology of the name of Tithonos and the existing attempts of other etymologies may be easily rejected.⁶⁰

The process of formation of the myth was certainly not a simple one. Memnon could originally be a completely Egyptian person. He was probably a subject of many mythical tales and subsequently he was “rediscovered” by Greek visitors to Egypt, after which the whole story was perhaps enriched with further details. In the later phase of the development of the myth, the more detailed knowledge about the archetype of Memnon was lost and the history of the hero as it is found in later authors never contains elements close to historical truth.

What role did the tomb of *Nebmaatre* Ramesses VI play in the history of the Greco-Roman Memnon? The identity of an element of his full name (*Nebmaatre*) with the prenomen of Amenhotep III is certainly relevant. The tomb of Ramesses VI was in the Greco-Roman period accessible and open to visitors, and it was in Roman times considered “the tomb of Memnon”.

The signs for *Nebmaatre* in the cartouche of Ramesses VI may have been a sufficient reason for the false identification of the king in the times of extreme popularity of the vocal Memnon. The graffiti are usually not dated and we do not know when the interpretation of Ramesses VI as Memnon began. Probably it is not earlier than the Roman period. In the same cartouche of Ramesses VI there are also hieroglyphs indicating *mrj-Jmn*.⁶¹ This may be also a contribution to the solution of the riddle — it is perhaps not only because of *Nebmaatre*, but also because of the epithet *mrj-Jmn* (which, as stated above, was a standard element in the names of the rulers of the XIXth and of the XXth Dynas-

⁵⁸ BECKERATH, *Königsnamen*, 93–95.

⁵⁹ E. g. queen Isis, mother of Ramesses VI; cf. VANDERSLEYEN, *L’Egypte*, 632.

⁶⁰ See E. WÜRST, ‘Tithonos’, *RE* VI A.2 (1937), especially 1512–1513.

⁶¹ BECKERATH, *Königsnamen*, 95.

ties) that Ramesses VI could be mistaken for Memnon. However, he shared this epithet with other Ramesside monarchs.

In reality it was his father *Usermaatre Meryamun* Ramesses III, probably confused with Ramesses II, who was the original Memnon of the Greeks. We must, however, bear in mind that the constant presence of the *mrj-Jmn* element in the royal names of the XXth Dynasty could certainly contribute to the creation of a kind of a collective identity of Memnon with the Theban (for the early Greeks perhaps = “Ethiopian”) kings of that period.

It is sure that Memnon the builder of the Memnonium at Abydos was Ismandes or Osymandyas, *Wsr-M3^c t-R^c stp.n-R^c R^c msj-sw mrj-Jmn*, i.e. Ramesses II. Also the Ramesseum could be called *Memnoneion* by the Greeks. This might be even the origin of the plural of τὰ Μεμνόνεια. The modern explorers were convinced that the Ramesseum should be called “Memnonium”.⁶²

The version about Memnon — Amenhotep III seems to be a story dating from the Roman times, created after the name of Memnonia had already been applied to the Theban necropolis *sensu largo*. This fact has been recognized by Bataille⁶³ and found further confirmation in Haeny’s paper. The name of Memnon given to the colossi of Amenhotep III was due both to the particular properties of one of those statues and to the neighbouring area of the “Memnonia”.

It seems even thinkable, although not very convincing, that it was the presence of the name *Nebmaatre*, the same as that of the owner of the “tomb of Memnon”, in Amenhotep’s cartouche that secondarily contributed to the interpretation of the colossi as Memnon. It is, however, far more probable that the identification was done *vice versa*, and that the tomb received its name only after the statues were named in allusion to the neighbouring Memnonia. The ultimate confirmation could perhaps be brought by a closer chronological examination of the graffiti of the tomb of Ramesses VI. The publication by Baillet seems to indicate that the graffiti date from the Roman period and those mentioning explicitly the Memnonian identification are probably not among the earliest items.

⁶² See above, n. 39.

⁶³ *CdE* 26, 1951, 332: “... il est à peu près certain que cette rive ne tire pas son nom du fameux colosse de Memnon. Bien au contraire le roi éthiopien n’a pu usurper la statue d’Amenhotep III qu’à une date postérieure d’un siècle et demi à celle des premiers documents qui nous révèlent l’usage de l’expression τὰ Μεμνόνια pour désigner la Nécropole”.

Thus we would have the following phases of the presence of "Memnon" in the western part of Thebes:

- (1) Ramesses II erected his temple in western Thebes; Ramesses III built the temple complex of Medinet Habu. Both kings were called *Meryamun*, *Meamun* = Memnon.
- (2) The name of Memnonium was applied to Medinet Habu by later Greek visitors. The name was also used with regard to the Ramesseum, being the work of an earlier "Memnon", *Meryamun* Ramesses II.
- (3) The name of Memnonia was extended to the whole area.
- (4) The relative proximity of the colossi to the Memnonium of Ramesses II (Ramesseum) and also to the Memnonium *par excellence* of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu) made possible the interpretation of the colossi as statues of Memnon.
- (5) The Greek interpretation of the voice of a statue of Amenhotep III as a greeting directed to Eos emerges in the early Roman period. The area being called Memnoneia, the colossi are taken for Memnon by the Greek and Roman visitors, and when one of them began to "sing" at dawn, this gave the possibility of a romantic interpretation.
- (6) The tomb of Ramesses VI (*Nebmaatre Meryamun*) was misinterpreted as that of Memnon.

As stated above there is no reason to believe that the voice of Memnon appeared before the beginning of the Roman period. At the time when the cry of Memnon is recorded for the first time, the true identity of *mrj-Jmn* = Memnon had probably been forgotten. But the name of *Memnoneia* continued to be used as the name of the area of the temples and of the necropolis. We do not know when the tomb of Ramesses VI with a cartouche similar to that of the "Roman Memnon" (Amenhotep III) and also to an earlier Memnon (Ramesses III) was first shown to visitors. Probably the "collective" Ramesside identity of the "true" Memnon was always vaguely remembered. But soon, owing to a poetic interpretation of the famous miracle happening in the neighbourhood, a prodigious event which could be connected with the mythical relationship between Memnon and Eos, the monumental statues of the XVIIIth Dynasty king and consequently also the tomb of Ramesses VI were inserted into the story of Memnon of Thebes. A new legend was created and — due to the popularity of *Memnon vocalis* in the ancient world and to the powerful and widespread

propagation of literary records — it very soon overshadowed the older and less picturesque story of Memnon, king of Egypt and his Memnonium. The fact that *Nimaatre* Amenemhat III, with a prenomem phonetically close to Amenhotep III and Ramesses VI, also became a supposed Memnon, brought an additional complication to the later version of the story of Memnon.

[Warszawa]

Adam Łukaszewicz