



# “I Passed over Difficult Mountains”

Studies on the Ancient Near East  
in Honor of Mario Liverani

Edited by Francesco Di Filippo,  
Lucio Milano and Lucia Mori

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Mario Liverani at work in the archaeological site of Arslantepe, South-Eastern Turkey.  
(Photo by Roberto Ceccacci)





## Table of Contents

Prefazione	ix
“The Heroic Age of Assyriology”: An Unpublished Manuscript of Archibald H. Sayce at The Queen’s College, Oxford <i>Silvia Alaura / Marco Bonechi</i>	1
In Search of Meaning: Ramesses II in his Court of the Luxor Temple <i>Emanuele Marcello Ciampini</i>	19
Three Amarna Notes: Scribal Training, Scribal Hands and Tablet Provenance <i>Yoram Cohen</i>	31
City-States, Canton States, Monarchy and Aristocracy: The Political Landscape of the Early Iron Age in Central Anatolia within the Context of the Eastern Mediterranean (11 <sup>th</sup> –9 <sup>th</sup> century BCE) <i>Lorenzo d’Alfonso</i>	49
The Materiality of the Cuneiform Tablets and the Puzzle of the Hittite Historical Geography <i>Stefano de Martino</i>	79
The “Eastern Turkey in Asia”: A Digital Edition of the Map Series IDWO 1522 <i>Francesco Di Filippo</i>	87
Archaeology in the Sahara: Before and after the “Arab Spring” <i>Savino di Lernia</i>	101
Factions, Fictions and Frictions: Assurbanipal’s Letters to the Babylonian Citizens <i>Frederick Mario Fales</i>	109

Some Reflections on the Nişantaş Inscription and Related Issues <i>Massimiliano Marazzi / Natalia Bolatti Guzzo</i>	131
Adapa at Khorsabad: Interpreting the “Grand Royal Emblem” <i>Paolo Matthiae</i>	153
Barley and Sheep in Kululu (Central Anatolia, late 8 <sup>th</sup> century BC) <i>Clelia Mora</i>	181
The “Fields of the Town”: On the Shape of Public Land in Late Bronze Age Ekalte <i>Lucia Mori</i>	197
Different Degrees of Empathy: On the Mobility of Images in Ancient Mesopotamia <i>Davide Nadali</i>	217
Some Thought about the Tell Halaf Reliefs: A Neo-Syrian Cycle of Carvings between Tradition and Innovation <i>Frances Pinnock</i>	233
Peering through the Door: A Note on the Functions and Relations of the <i>atû</i> in Neo-Assyrian Society <i>Simonetta Ponchia / Giovanni B. Lanfranchi</i>	265
Myth and Politics Continued: The Ideological Discourse of Lagash and Ebla on a Cultural Continuum <i>Beate Pongratz-Leisten</i>	289
“Canine Instincts and Monkeys’ Features”: Animal and Demonic Traits in the Construction of “Otherness” in Sumerian Literature <i>Lorenzo Verderame</i>	313
Glosses in three El-Amarna Letters (EA 107, 108 and 124) <i>Juan-Pablo Vita / Andrés Diego Espinel</i>	329
Oriental Despotism, the Enlightenment’s Evil Twin <i>Eva von Dassow</i>	339
<i>Ištēnūtu</i> , <i>tāpalu</i> and <i>šimittu</i> : Accounting and Material Culture in the Near East <i>Carlo Zaccagnini</i>	377

## In Search of Meaning

### Ramesses II in his Court of the Luxor Temple

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The self-presentation of the kingship is a fundamental support for that concept of power, which has represented a topic in the activity of Mario Liverani; thus, I hope he might accept this note on an organic architectural and statuary ensemble in the Luxor Temple, dated to Ramesses II.

#### The temple of Luxor

The ramesside court at Luxor is a single compound in the plan of the temple. It stands in front of the sanctuary, built by Amenhotep III:<sup>1</sup> here, in the most secret rooms of the building, the divine cult merged together with a very sophisticated doctrine of the nature of the kingship, embodied by the living royal ka (*k3-nsw ʿnh*).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the sanctuary became the best seat for the Festival of Opet, during which the king celebrated his union with this abstract concept of the power; at the end of the ritual union, he was no more simply the ruler, but rather a physical personification of the divine kingship, or also an “effective image of Amon” (*tît imn*), as stated by some royal names.<sup>3</sup> A direct consequence of this speculation is the concept of the royal image: in the Theban area, as well as in other centers of Egypt and Nubia, Amenhotep III used to celebrate his divine nature by means of a statuary, in which the representation of the physical body of the king, and his divine status are merged together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the sanctuary started before Amenhotep III, as clearly confirmed by the scenes reproducing the Festival of Opet (*infra*) in the Red Chapel of Hatshepsut: Lacau / Chevrier 1977–1979, 154–169.

<sup>2</sup> For this doctrine in the temple of Luxor is still valid the study of L. Bell (1985).

<sup>3</sup> See Thutmosis I (von Beckerath 1999, 135: T4), Amenhotep III (op. cit., 143: T6) and Sethi I (op. cit., 149: H21); the concept of *tît* expresses a consubstantiality of the royal person with the divine substance, and can identify the solar nature of the king, see *tît rʿ*, “effective image of Ra”, in the names of Amenhotep III (op. cit., 141: H5; 143: T5), Ramesses I (op. cit., 149: T6) and Sethi I (op. cit., 151: T10).

<sup>4</sup> Beside the study of Bell (note 2), we can mention Bell 1997 and 2002. The meaning of the statuary in the concept of the divine kingship can be summarized by the quartzite

### The foundation of the ramesside court at Luxor

The architectural plan of Ramesses II at Luxor materialized in a colonnaded court that ensured a monumental access to the sanctuary of Amon in Opet;<sup>5</sup> we are dealing with a coherent compound, which joined the temple with a royal palace, built just in correspondence of the east side of the court. Its foundation is celebrated in an inscription describing the structure and the main features:

*ir.n.f m mnw.f n it.f imn-r<sup>c</sup> nb nswt t3wy nb pt*  
 [...] *r<sup>c</sup>-ms-sw mr-imn hnm nhh m pr imn*  
*m inr hḏ nfr n rwd*  
*wsh.t.s m hft-hr ipt.f*  
*phr.ti m wh<sup>c</sup>w sb3w snwt m <sup>c</sup>ḫnt-ḫ*  
*ndbw m ḫsmn stt*  
*hnm.n.s hntw nb <sup>c</sup>nh wḏ3 snb*  
*m bi3t m3t inr km* (Kitchen 1979, 607).

“He (i.e., the king) made as his monument for his father Amon-Ra, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, Lord of Heaven [... making for him the temple] ‘Ramesses-Merimen united with Eternity in the Estate of Amon’<sup>6</sup>

in white and fine sandstone;

its large court is in front of his (i.e., Amon of Luxor) shrine, surrounded by columns, and its doors and flagpoles are made in high-quality wood from the Lebanon, chiseled with copper from Asia.

It comprises statues<sup>7</sup> of the ‘Lord’,<sup>8</sup> live, protection and health, of quartzite, red granite and black granite.”

The description of the structure, embellished by precious materials, mentions a specific feature, the royal statues, which actually characterizes the court. This impressive presence of the king surely represents a ramesside feature, according to which the royal monumental image of the king is part of the open courts. Generally, royal statues are placed against the pillars of the porticos, realizing a perfect fusion between statuary and architecture. In the Luxor court, the concept of the royal representation does not focus this fusion, but rather its nature that

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statue of Amenhotep III from the temple of Luxor: el-Saghir 1992, 21–27; Ciampini 2011–2012, 129. On the concept of the kingship and the royal ritual at the New Year Festival see also Ciampini 2016.

<sup>5</sup> This aspect of Amon inhabited the southern rooms of the temple: Brunner 1977.

<sup>6</sup> The official name of the court.

<sup>7</sup> The determinatives of *hntw* (“statues”) specify the shapes: seated, standing and Osirian.

<sup>8</sup> This title of the statues identifies the divine ipostasis of Ramesses II in Nubia, see *infra* and note 23.

seems to represent the rule for the statues ensemble and other epigraphic patterns of the same court.

### Statues as representation of royal deity

According to the Egyptian mind, a statue represents specific aspects of a subject; the best sample of this concept in Luxor court is the statue of Ramesses' royal ka, called *r<sup>c</sup>-n-ḥk3w*, "The god Re of the rulers";<sup>9</sup> nevertheless, the whole statuary program of the court can be read as a celebration of a unique royal entity in his several forms. Each form stresses a specific element of the kingship, briefly described in epithets added to the royal names; we mention here some of these texts, as evidence of elements for depicting the divine king Ramesses.

Statue D (Kitchen 1979, 630).

(On the left shoulder) *r<sup>c</sup>-ms-s(w) mr-*imn* mr *imn** "Ramesses-Merimen, beloved of Amon".

Here, the epithet *mr imn*, added to the royal name, identifies a specific aspect of the king, i.e. the representation of his royal ka (see *infra*).

Statue E (Kitchen 1979, 630).

(On the right shoulder) *wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> r<sup>c</sup> n ḥk3w* / (On the left shoulder) *r<sup>c</sup>-ms-s(w) mr-*imn* r<sup>c</sup> n ḥk3w* "Usermaatre-Setepenre, Re of the rulers / Ramesses-Merimen, Re of the rulers".

(On the back pillar) *ir.n.f m mnw.f n it.f imn-r<sup>c</sup> irt n.f ḥnty wr n s3.f wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> r<sup>c</sup> n ḥk3w s3-r<sup>c</sup> nb-ḥ<sup>c</sup>w r<sup>c</sup>-ms-s(w) mr-*imn* mry imn-r<sup>c</sup> nsw ntrw dt* "He has made as monument for his father Amon-Re, the making for him a great cult image of his son, Usermaatre-Setepenre, Re of the rulers, the son of Re, lord of the crowns Ramesses-Merimen, beloved of Amon-Re, king of the gods, forever!"

The focus of these inscriptions is the identification of a cult image of the king, representing the incarnation of the divine kingship. This concept, identified with the royal ka, is labelled with the dogmatic title, which merged the royal names and the name of the statue: "Re of the rulers". The last part of this complex elaboration frequently appears in a shorter form "Beloved of Amon": it means that often this title did not identify the king, but his cult image. The origin of this doctrine, connected with the Luxor temple, dates back at least to the thutmoside period, as confirmed by the scenes on the Red Chapel of Hatshepsut at Karnak.<sup>10</sup>

Statue F (Kitchen 1979, 630).

(On the back pillar, left) *nsw-bit nb t3wy wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> s3-r<sup>c</sup> nb-ḥ<sup>c</sup>w r<sup>c</sup>-ms-s(w) mr-*imn* mry mnw-*imn* ḥnty-ipt.f* "The king of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the Two Lands Usermaatre-Setepenre, lord of the crowns Ramesses-Merimen, beloved of Min-Amon, foremost of his sanctuary".

<sup>9</sup> Kitchen 1979, 630.

<sup>10</sup> Lacau / Chevrier 1977–1979, 162, 166, 168, 171.

(On the back pillar, right) *nsw-bit wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> s3-r<sup>c</sup> nb-h<sup>c</sup>w r<sup>c</sup>-ms-s(w) mr-*imn mry mwt wrt nbt pt* “The king of Upper and Lower Egypt Usermaatre-Setepenre, the son of Re, lord of the crowns Ramesses-Merimen, beloved of Mut, the great, mistress of heaven”.*

The inscriptions of the pillar celebrate the connection of the king with Amon of Luxor and his paredra Mut. Here, the two deities might represent the aspects of the primeval creator, housed in the temple and celebrated as origin and patron of the royal power.

Beside these texts, that represent a description of the king in connection with the divine world of the temple, some other inscriptions on Ramesses statues might celebrate the divine profile of the king, as representation of the gods (see *infra*, statue H).

Statue G (Kitchen 1979, 630).

(Back pillar, epithets of the king) *ir 3ht m ipt-swt wn psdt m r\$wt* “Who makes what is useful at Karnak, and the Ennead rejoices (for it)”.

*mw ntry n nsw ntrw sh<sup>c</sup>.f hr nst.f tp t3 r nb w<sup>c</sup>n t3 nb* “The divine substance<sup>11</sup> of the gods’ king (= Amon), whom he (= Amon) crowns on his throne upon the earth, so that he could be the unique lord of the entire world”.

These statements summarise the role of the king upon the earth; he acts for the gods as son of Amon, called *mw ntry*, a pregnant expression that describes the inner nature of Ramesses (see note 11): his physical body transforms by means of a divine essence, represented by the crown given by Amon.<sup>12</sup> This short description, with the mention of Karnak, recalls the coronation and legitimation scenes on the walls of the hypostyle hall of Karnak, i.e. the seat of the royal rituals.<sup>13</sup>

Statue H (Kitchen 1979, 631).

(Back pillar, epithets of the king) *rnn imn m wdḥ hr <sup>c</sup>wy mwt nbt pt r nsw it t3w nbw* “He (i.e., the king) whom Amon nursed as a child in the hands of Mut, mistress of the heaven, so that he could be a king who conquers all the lands”.

*w3ḥ ib r irt mnw m ipt n it.f imn km3 nfrw.f smnh r3-pr.f m k3t nhḥ* “Whose heart is stable in making monuments in the sanctuary of his father Amon, who creates his perfection,<sup>14</sup> who (= king) benefits his sanctuary with neverending works”.

<sup>11</sup> Litt. “the divine progeny”; the title identified the king as part of a divine family, whose essence is supposed to be a kind of constant flow, that linked the divine entities; it can also represent the link between the sun god Re and his son, the king.

<sup>12</sup> It is striking to note the role of the crown in the transformation of the essence of the person-king, who becomes the concept-king, see the role of the crown in the Roman and Medieval ideology: Kantorowicz 1989, 289–329.

<sup>13</sup> For the coronation and confirmation scenes in the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, see Nelson 1981, pll. 52, 69, 70, 74, 79, 106, 150, 192, 200.

<sup>14</sup> The term *nfrw*, “perfection”, is traditionally used in substitution of his direct mention; the grammars read in it a linguistic protection, which abstains from the direct mention of sensitive entities (king or god) in the texts.

The first statement defines Ramesses as natural son of the divine couple of Thebes. We are dealing with a ramesside elaboration of a well-known tradition, whose best samples date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty: the divine origin of the king is described in a mythic context, which transforms his human father in a divine incarnation.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the activity of Ramesses in Luxor becomes the natural result of a true son of the gods; the legitimation of the royal work depends on the divine will, which creates the physical shape of the king, in Egyptian *km3 nfrw.f*.

Thus, the divine essence of the king in the court is described by means of the same statues of the king; we may now wonder, whether his divine manifestations in a specific architectural context could represent a collection of aspects of the royal power, that is the concrete presence of the divine ruler on the earth.

### The court as seat for the divine manifestation of the king

The function of the court as seat for the celebration of the king, coming from the inner rooms of the sanctuary, is stressed by several items; the statues and their inscriptions represent the best indicator for this issue, but the same architectural space is described by some other dedication texts, concerning the doorway of the court and the pylon.

An inscription on the eastern doorway refers its own name as: *sb3 3 nsw-bit wsr-m3t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> dw3 rhyt nb 3nh.sn* (Kitchen 1979, 610, northern and southern jamb) “The great doorway: ‘the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Usermaatre-Setepenre, is the one whom the whole mankind adores, and they live’”; the passage (*sb3*) opens to a court, where the mankind can access to adore the appearance of the king. Thus, in this part of the temple the effective actor is the king, just after his transformation as incarnation of the divine kingship. The same concept repeats in a second inscription on the passage of the pylon, where the court is described as: *st smnh sdm sprwt ntrw rmt* (Kitchen 1979, 607) “A place of supplication and of hearing the prayers by gods and men”.

The description of the ramesside court in the foundation text and its own name (*supra*) state the function of this space as independent compound in the temple, being at the same time a place for those forms of personal piety, typical in the ramesside religion’s phenomenology. The core of this cult place is the divine king, represented by his statues; he is praised by the men, *rmt* or *rhyt*, the last traditionally part of the temple *decorum*. The foundation text of the court describes it as “place of supplication (*smnh*)”, where “the prayers (*nsprwt*) are heard”; the same terms used are typical in those Theban contexts where acts of popular religion are performed (see the Eastern temple at Karnak, also represented in a scene of the temple of Khonsu).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Brunner 1964; the myth of the divine birth of the king is also known in monuments of Ramesses II: Desroches Noblecourt 1990–1991.

<sup>16</sup> For a general presentation of the Eastern Temple at Karnak and its use until the Roman

Thus, several elements contribute to the nature of a new architectural space as specific element in the celebration of the divine king; it perfectly fits with the function of the temple of Luxor where, during the Festival of Opet, the doctrine of the divine kingship was embodied by the image of the royal ka. The appearance of the new king, merged with his royal ka, was here worshipped by the mankind; this statement supports the interpretation of the court as specific and independent cult space, stressing also its role in the connection between the inner rooms and the eastern royal palace (see *supra*). The statues in the court are part of this concept, but they also represent one of the media, useful for the celebration of the divine king: another medium is represented by the same name of Ramesses, elaborated as divine icons, engraved on the eastern architrave of the court.

### The royal names as divine icons

The celebration of the kingship in the ramesside court is also stressed by a well-known long frieze on the eastern architrave of the portico;<sup>17</sup> we are dealing with an elaboration of the five royal names, built by means of divine icons. The long row of deities, represented moving from the entrance of the court to the doorway leading to the inner sanctuary, respects the classical *decorum* of the temple: according to this, the king is represented moving towards the inner part of the temple, where he is welcomed by the gods. In the case of the frieze, the gods representing the royal names facing the inner of the temple: it means that they are actual parts of the royal essence.

Statues and iconic rendering of the royal names are both media for stressing the nature of the king: both the languages celebrate the status of his person, after the ritual performed in the inner rooms of Luxor, and what seemed to be part of the exoteric union of the physical body of the king and the divine concept of the kingship (i.e., the royal ka) became the core for a celebration of the divine kingship by the mankind. The concept creates a refined correspondence in the decorative patterns of the court: the statues represent the divine essence in the royal aspects (i.e., each statue is a specific aspect of the royal deity), whereas the divine icons represent the divine multiplicity in the unique image of the king.

### On the Ramesses icon

A meaningful link connects the image of the king and the gods in the court of Luxor: to the royal statues, representing specific aspects of Ramesses as god and king, corresponds the divine icons in the eastern architrave frieze, representing

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period see Klotz 2008; for the scene of the cult in the same structure, called *msdr sdm*, “the hearing ear”, see Epigraphic Survey 1979, pl. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Kitchen 1979, 612–613, integrated by Boraik 2008; analysis of this iconic writing in Ciampini 2011–2012, 141–146.



the several aspects of the divine world, united in the names of Ramesses. In this organization of the decorative programme, we could recognize an evocation of that deity concept, typical of the ramesside period, and summarized a statement concerning the name, the appearance and the body of the god, identified with Amon (the name), Ra (the appearance) and Ptah (the body).<sup>18</sup> It is surely striking to recognize the strong link between physical shape and name in the concept of the ramesside god; it means that the deep essence of the deity manifests in several ways: some of them are physical and intelligible, such as the body and the appearance (“face” in the text), others are hidden concepts, such as the divine name.

The court becomes the best place for a divine manifestation of the king, and seems to confirm the traditional meaning of the temple of Luxor as seat for the king legitimation; probably, the ramesside tradition reflects an evolution in the concept of the temple, which became not only the screenplay for the Festival of Opet, but also a true seat for coronation and legitimation (see for instance the coronation of Horemheb).<sup>19</sup> When Ramesses appears in his court, at the end of the Festival of Opet, he is a true divine manifestation, and his deep nature is represented by the statues (above all, the ka-statues) and the iconic writing on the eastern architrave.

### The nature of the king’s manifestation

As already noted, the manifestation is a central concept in the ramesside speculation; it is the core in the so-called ba-theology and defines the system in organizing the world.<sup>20</sup> In the court of Luxor, the royal manifestation realizes by means of statues and iconic writing, but these forms represent only one of many solutions, with which the ramesside culture defines the complexity of the cosmos.

The concept of the manifestation is the core in those speculations, centered on the nature of the deities; a good sample for the role of the manifestation can be found in the Litany of Ra, whose main invocations have been connected with the use of *hprw*, “manifestation”, in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty royal names.<sup>21</sup> The multiplicity of the solar *hprw* can have several meanings: it represents the many forms of the solar god, but also the many forms of the kingship, embodied by the sequence of the kings; Rolf Gundlach (see note 21) supposes that the true *hprw* of the sun god Ra is the kingship, whereas the king is the “effective image” of the god. This position of the king is part of a wider concept of the kingship, which is not an abstract idea, but rather a concrete presence in the world. We can identify the

<sup>18</sup> Pap. Leiden I 350, 4.22: *imn rn.f m imn ntf r<sup>c</sup> m hr dt.f pth*: Assmann 2001, 238. This concept represents a theological construction of the divine reality.

<sup>19</sup> Kemp 1991, 207 and fig. 72.

<sup>20</sup> For the ba-theology see Assmann 2001, 238–239.

<sup>21</sup> Gundlach 2003, 19–20.

kingship in those kings list: in the list, the ancestors are at the same time an earthly representation of the divine collegium in the Litany of Ra, and an image of that abstract concept of the divine power, identified with the royal ka.

The correspondence between the solar manifestations and the ancestors of the kings list can be found in the version of Litany of Ra in the Ramesses temple at Abydos; here, the solar manifestations end with a group, comprising the direct ancestors of Ramesses, i.e. the father Sethi I, the mother Tuia and the grandfather Ramesses I.<sup>22</sup> The royal family is explicitly part of the solar forms, stressing the nature of the kingship as current manifestation of the divine essence;<sup>23</sup> the same concept can be found in the Stela of the Year 400, where the founder of the family is identified with the god Seth.<sup>24</sup> All these data can offer the evidence for the earthly manifestation of the deity, i.e. the king, as ruling power;<sup>25</sup> we can now understand the meaning of a gallery of images, like the court of Luxor is; a place for the celebration of the divine and ruling king, where he is worshipped by the mankind (*supra*); the role of Ramesses, incarnation of the divine kingship (the statues) and, at the same time, image of the gods collegium (the icons in the writing of the royal names), can be understood as part of the ideology, that celebrates the divine origin of the kingship, even outside of Egypt.

### Political use of the king's manifestation

The nature of the kingship as mediator between gods and men is well defined in the decorative programme of the ramesside court at Luxor; nevertheless, this use of the royal icon knows a wide diffusion also outside of Egypt, where it also acquires a political significance. This use can be recognized in the representation of the king in Nubia, where the royal icon plays a fundamental support for the ideological message. In this perspective, a typical use of the royal image is given by the dromos of Uadi es-Sebua, where statues, sphynx and historical reliefs celebrate the effective presence of the Egyptian power in the south.

Other evidence from Nubian monuments confirms the role of the royal image as true divine manifestation. On the façade of the small temple at Abu Simbel, the statue at north of the entrance is called: *r<sup>c</sup> n ḥkꜣw* (Kitchen 1979, 765), “Ra of the rulers”;<sup>26</sup> it bears the same name we have seen on the statue of the royal ka in the court at Luxor (above, statue E), and testifies to the use of a specific iconographical

<sup>22</sup> Mariette 1880, pl. 17, at the end of lower row.

<sup>23</sup> See above the concept of the *mw ntry* and note 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ciampini 2014, 204–205.

<sup>25</sup> The strong connection of king and god has been detected in Goebis 2011, especially regarding to the ways of manifestations (*ḥprw*) of the creator god and his earthly reply, i.e. the king, during the ritual; an invocation to the sun god identifies the king as alter ego of the cosmic deity, in whom Ra and Osiris are united: Hornung 1975–1977, vol. I, 107–112.

<sup>26</sup> For the reading of the statue in the writing of the name, see Ciampini 2011–2012, 135.

model, representing the divine effective presence in the body of Ramesses. The full celebration of the divine image of the king in Nubia is found in the temple of Aksha, dedicated to Ramesses *nb t3-sti* “Lord of Nubia”.<sup>27</sup> The political nuance of this cult is clear enough: Ramesses is celebrated as true and divine lord of the whole region, and his presence in the temple is part of the temple’s life. An inscription of the sanctuary runs: *sb3 3 wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> stp.n-r<sup>c</sup> ir.n.f m mnw.f n hnty.f ʿnh tp t3-sti rn.f nfr ir.n hm.f wsr-m3<sup>c</sup>t-r<sup>c</sup> dsr šfyt* (Kitchen 1979, 774) “The great doorway of Usermaatra-Setepenra, which he has made as his monument for his living *hnty*-statue<sup>28</sup> in the Land of Nubia; the perfect name, which his majesty has made is: Usermaatra, whose dignity is renown”. In this case, the physical image of the king is part of the construction of the sacred space; here, his statue play a role, very close to that of the god, but at the same time it represents the effective presence of the Egyptian power in Nubia.

### Some final remarks

The interpretation of the gallery of royal images in the court at Luxor let us suppose a refined speculation about the concept of the kingship and its role in representing the deity on earth. This abstract meaning of a historical figure (the king) is a typical feature of the late New Kingdom ideology, and foresees what has been studied by Philippe Derchain in the ritual scenes of the Graeco-Roman temples:<sup>29</sup> here, the figure of the king is deprived of any historical aspect. If we compare the late context with the documentation of ramesside period, we can recognize a correspondence with what is a trend to the abstraction of the royal institution; in ramesside period, this trend is represented to the concept of the king as atemporal image of the god, whereas in Graeco-Roman temples his role is now only ritual.

The abstract concept of the kingship, connected with the doctrine of the royal ka, finds its natural location in that temple of Luxor, where the union of the king with his divine and royal essence is performed. We are dealing with a concept of the kingship, called theological politics, whose nature is described in an Amon hymn; here, the king is a god’s incarnation, and his body represents the physical presence of the god upon earth<sup>30</sup>. By means of this conception, the king is the ka of

<sup>27</sup> The divine nature of this aspect of Ramesses is confirmed by the lack of the cartouche in the writing of the royal name.

<sup>28</sup> The term here used in identifying the royal statue in the temple of Aksha (*hnty*) is the same of the representation of the royal ka of Ramesses (see above, statue E).

<sup>29</sup> Derchain 1997.

<sup>30</sup> Assmann 1994, 194. The uniqueness of the creator god Amon in the southern rooms of Luxor and the concept of the cosmic deity in a text of personal religion (solar hymn of Suty and Hor), has been analyzed, with some interesting suggestions, in Gulyás 2009; we can just note here, that the lack of any mention of the king in the solar hymn might depend on the direct identification of the pharaoh with the god’s manifestation.

the god: a new concept of the power on earth, in which the historical body of the kingship transforms in the image of an abstract concept. The images of Ramesses in the court of the temple of Luxor offer a clear evidence of this evolution of the royal doctrine, centered on the physical representation of a divine and eternal power, embodied by an historical king.

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