Was Amenmesse the Viceroy of Kush, Messuwy?

FRANK J. YURCO

During the mid-1970s, Rolf Krauss developed the controversial thesis that the usurper pharaoh, Amenmesse, verily was the former Viceroy of Kush, Messuwy, who had held office during the reign of Pharaoh Merenptah (1212–1202 B.C.). In addition he argued that Messuwy usurped the throne after Sety-Merenptah, son and chosen successor of Merenptah, had succeeded to the throne and had ruled for a short time, and that the usurpation took place in the far south of Egypt and Nubia.1

During his tenure as Viceroy of Kush, Messuwy, like all other viceroys left relief scenes and inscriptions depicting himself venerating his pharaoh, Merenptah, and also reflecting his own position and prestige in the Nubian administration. Since the creation of the viceroy’s office, early in Dynasty 18, or perhaps even in the Late Dynasty 17,2 the appointed official who served as Viceroy of Kush was a non-royal person almost consistently.3 Perhaps this was deliberate pharaonic policy since the viceroy held considerable authority within Nubia, and also controlled military forces available in the Battalion of Kush, a largely Nubian force recruited mainly from local Nubian and Kushite peoples.4 The command structure under the viceroy was modeled after the Egyptian military pattern, and the viceroy also commanded the civil administration of Nubia. Furthermore, Nubia had considerable resources, especially gold and manpower, with Upper Nubia, the former Kushite Kerma area, also possessing a strong agricultural-pastoral base. In the absence of a strong Egyptian state, Kush had already once previously emerged as a powerful state during the Late Middle Kingdom era.5 It was in the light of this experience and the potential power base that Nubia and Kush represented, that the early Dynasty 18 pharaohs devised the office of Viceroy of Kush to administer this region. In Egyptian, this title read, literally, “King’s Son of Kush,” though as stated earlier, this official normally was not a direct physical son of the reigning pharaoh.

The lengthy reign of Ramesses II (1279–1212 B.C.) had passed largely uneventfully in Nubia, except for the building of major temples at many locations in Nubia and Kush.6 The largest of these were the double temples of Abu Simbel, built early in the reign, as was Beit el-Wali, also a mostly rock-cut shrine. Later the temples of Derr, Gerf Hussein, Amara, Gebel Barkal, and Wady es-Sebua were added, or rebuilt. This large-scale temple construction was the final phase of the Egyptianization of Nubia-Kush.7 Ramesses II’s final viceroy, Sethau, was a notable character who carved many scenes and inscriptions of himself, and who also oversaw the Wady es-Sebua temple’s construction, during regnal year 44. Abu Simbel, the largest temple complex, and its rock environs became covered with inscriptions of the viceroys and their subordinates, carved into the rock surfaces

4 Trigger, Nubia Under the Pharaohs, 110–17.
6 Kenneth Kitchen, Pharaoh Triumphs (Mississauga: 1982), 177.
around the temples. Kha-em-ter probably followed Sethau as viceroy, perhaps late in the reign of Ramesses II.

Messuwy, who became viceroy following Kha-em-ter was appointed by Merenptah, Ramesses II's successor, by regnal year 5, and like all his predecessors in the office, he added scenes and inscriptions throughout Nubia. Unlike his predecessors, however, he left virtually no tracings of himself at Abu Simbel, but chose instead the older Dynasty 18 temple of Amada, built under Ameinhotep II and Thutmose IV, for the majority of his scenes and inscriptions, though he also added texts and scenes at Beit el-Wali, Wady es-Sebua, Aksha, Amara, and on Bigeh Island in the cataract area, opposite Philae, and along the Aswan-Philae Road. Amada temple was the shrine especially favored by Messuwy. Merenptah's regnal year 5 war against the Libyans and Sea Peoples also involved a rare Nubian uprising, and its suppression was documented by Messuwy with long inscriptions in the doorway areas of Amada, Wady es-Sebua, and Amara temples, that at Amada being the best preserved copy.

The scenes of this viceroy, Messuwy, are the subject of this paper and the companion essay, by Aidan Dodson. Amada clearly was Messuwy's favored temple for inscriptions and scenes, for he added here not only the long regnal year 5 victory inscription of Merenptah, but also scenes of himself kneeling before the royal cartouches on the outer temple door jambs, along with a long inscription with a figure of Messuwy kneeling before Re-Horakhty, on the upper northern exterior wall of the Amada temple. Messuwy seems to have held the office of Viceroy of Kush from after Kha-em-ter, who followed Sethau midway in the reign of Merenptah, and perhaps onwards into the reign of Sety II, as documented by another of his inscriptions with pharaoh's cartouche on a rock at Bigeh Island, facing the original Philae Island (fig. 1). The cartouche, once thought to be that of Ramesses II, in fact, proved to be Sety II, following a detailed assessment of it, in varying light conditions, made by this author, Dr. William J. Murnane, and a number of other colleagues, in the mid-1970s during a visit to Philae and Bigeh. Inscriptions like this one, on rough rock faces of Bigeh Island, and others, such as the vast array on the cliffs of Sehel Island at its northern end, are very difficult to read accurately as the bright sunlight of the Nubian day may blind-out, or distort the signs on the uneven rock faces. Such was the problem with the Bigeh Island text, especially the royal cartouche above Messuwy's column of text. It contains, in fact, the prenomen of Sety II, in the form, User-kheperu-Re Setep-en-Re, the earlier form of prenomen that Sety II utilized, early in his reign. This variant is very similar to Ramesses II's prenomen, User-ma'at-Re, Setep-en-Re. Clearly, the varying light conditions and the rough rock face at Bigeh had led some of the early copyists to misread it, especially as, before this author's research, Sety II's early distinctive prenomen variant was not widely known, the later variant User-kheperu-Re-meru-Amun, being far more prevalent. Only with multiple observations, made during varying light conditions over the course of the day, did it become clear that the Bigeh text cartouche indeed was to be read User-kheperu-Re Setep-en-Re.

The strong sunlight of the Nubian day can make even carved, leveled surfaces of rock be deceptive, especially in the Nubian sandstone that has weathered severely on exposed rock faces over the 3,000-plus years since they were carved into the stone. The granite of the Aswan area survives weathering better, and additionally

8 Kenneth Kitchen, Ramesside Inscriptions (KRI) (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell's 1982), vol. 4, 93–96. Krauss, SAK 5 (1977), 192. Fragmentary scenes and texts of Merenptah's victory text of regnal year 5, are found at Wady es-Sebua and Amara temples also. As at Amada, Messuwy is closely associated with this same victory text, by a kneeling figure, he probably added the two other fragmentary texts also.

9 KRI IV 33–57.

10 Paul Barquet, and M. DeWachter. Le Temple d'Amada (Caire Centre de documentation et d'études sur l'ancienne Égypte, 1967), pl. 3, pl. 100, pl. 113. Cahier IV, B 1–4, T 1–2 (hereafter referred to as CEDEAF); KRI IV 94–95.

11 KRI IV 96, no. 9: Krauss, SAK 5 (1977), 132–33, no. 2 and 135.


13 KRI IV 242, no. 1; 243, no. 3; 244–45, no. 3c, 3a–b; 246, no. 7, 247, nos. 9–10, 248–50, nos. 11c, 274, no. 29 a–b and no. 29 (dated regnal year 2), and no. 30 (dated regnal year 1), contrasted with all other Sety II inscriptions. To be discussed fully in my dissertation.
develops a dark colored patina, that protects and makes the carved surfaces easier to read. The carved and decorated surfaces appear pinkish, and thus stand out clearly against the dark patinated background.

The above remarks, about the friability of the Nubian sandstone also have relevance for the analysis of Messuwy’s depiction on the outer jambs of the Amada temple. It is partly owing to the inaccessibility of the Nubian temples other than Abu-Simbel and those relocated near the High Dam, that these scenes did not become the focus of discussion prior to the mid-1990s. All prior research depended, perforce, on the published photographs and drawings of the French-Egyptian Documentation Center, of the mid-1970s, and earlier, mid-1920s publications. All the photographs made by these earlier expeditions were subject to the vagaries of the strong Nubian sunlight mentioned earlier, and the bad weatherings of exposed rock faces; and this produced uncertainties in these published sources.

Messuwy’s depiction on the outer jambs of the entrance to the Amada temple also was subject to severe weathering. In the CEDAE publication of Amada, on the line drawings, both figures of Messuwy were depicted with nothing unusual at his forehead. However, in their published photographs, there was visible something that looked like uraeus images, added to

14 See CEDAE, note 10, above.
both of the figures. Examining these supposed uraei on the photographs published, they looked more like incidental damage and erosion, and given their published line drawings, this seemed to affirm that the CEDAE scholars likewise considered these traces as incidental damage and erosion. Gauthier's 1913 publication had only one distant view of the front entrance of Amada, with Messuwy's figures too indistinct for any reasonable analysis.

In late 1995, Aidan Dodson, author of the companion essay, had a chance to travel on Lake Nasser, in one of the first cruises offered, and subsequently he contacted me with regard to these outer Amada jamb blocks. Considering these traces as incidental damage and erosion, he stated that in his view these traces were not uraei, added to Messuwy's figures, and that therefore it confirmed the thesis of Krauss, that Messuwy became later, the pharaoh Amenmesse.17 Dodson also sent me copies of the color photographs, and these were far superior in quality to the earlier published black and white photographs. In his photographs the same supposed uraei traces appeared above the foreheads of both figures, but as I examined his photographs, my own conclusion remained unchanged that this was but incidental damage and natural erosion, not surprising given the almost 3,000 years that have passed since this temple was built and the scenes were added in the very friable sandstone of which this temple is built. At last, in February 1996, there was an opportunity for me to travel on Lake Nasser and to visit Amada temple. Inspecting these jamb scenes of Messuwy, and photographing them also, I remained unconvinced that these figures had uraei added. Indeed the skeptical feelings were strengthened, for clearly, some of the supposed traces that Dodson saw as lines were formed mostly by eroded strata and gashes in the sandstone blocks. On the right jamb, the supposed uraeus is very deep, if really carved. The line of the proposed serpent body is jagged in profile, not cleanly cut with tools, as would be expected. Its join to the forehead is deceptive in a photograph; for if there, it has vanished into a deep gash in the sandstone, that extends into Messuwy's forehead. What would be the serpent's head vanishes into another deep gash, that rises to the right land sign, in the group ḫ ḫw. Thus, the only possible carved lines might be the vertical traces. The image of Messuwy on the left jamb has more problems still. A long, extended gash runs right into Messuwy's forehead, where the supposed uraeus would join. What looks in the photograph like a vertical trace, is, in fact a jagged line, very doubtful as a cut edge, unless very severely eroded. The head of the supposed uraeus vanishes into a long, deeply eroded stratum. In summary, the supposed uraei are indeed a collection of gashes and badly eroded strata lines, plus dubious vertical traces, formed of jagged lines, with hardly a trace of carved edge line. No really certain carved lines were visible. The badly gashed and eroded surface revealed no apparent evidence of carving with tools of the supposed uraei traces. These observations solidified my view, also confirmed by other colleagues who examined the photographs, that these supposed uraei were completely coincidental strata erosion and incidental gashes made in the rock, plus a couple of dubious traces. They are not just very unconv, but indeed the uraeus heads are gashes that intrude into the other inscriptions of the scenes, while the joins to the forehead vanish on both jamb into deep gashes that extend into Messuwy's head. Dodson made much of the coincidence of these traces on both images, considering them too fortuitous for coincidental damage, but given the friable Nubian sandstone, and the exposed position of the entrance reliefs, plus 3,000 years of wear and tear, the coincidence is no longer so surprising. This sharply contrasts with the clearly added uraei visible in many scenes depicting Horemheb in his private Memphite tomb, and Merenptah images, added to his depictions as prince, as well.18

With this in mind, an examination of all of Messuwy's depictions, from all published and documented sources, demonstrated not one additional instance of an image of the viceroy with uraeus added to his forehead subsequently. Neither do any such traces appear in the far

17 Aidan Dodson, "Messuwy, Amada and Amenmesse," (pp. 41–48 above).
18 Geoffrey Martin, The Hidden Tombs of Memphis (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 61, fig. 25; 73, fig. 43; 74–75, figs. 46–47, 77, fig. 49; and 89, fig. 69. Kitchen, Pharaoh Triumphant, 113, fig. 37.
better preserved interior depictions of Messuwy in the Amada temple (fig. 2), nor on the outside of Amada Temple, where Messuwy left a long text plus a figure of the viceroy kneeling before Re-Horakhty (fig. 3). That these other Amada depictions have no uraeus added adds to the skepticism. Nor do other depictions of Messuwy elsewhere demonstrate any traces of uraei added to the figures. Moreover, so far as is known, Messuwy had a tomb at Aniba, that has been explored, excavated, and published. In it were ushabtis and other funerary goods, suggesting it had really contained the viceroy’s burial. Again, no uraeus was appended to his figure, nor was any royal titulary or cartouche naming him as Amenmesse found with his figures or in his tomb. This contrasts sharply with Horemheb’s depictions in his Memphite tomb, as well as with Merenptah’s depictions as prince where both persons scrupulously added uraei or cartouches (in Merenptah’s case).

Lastly, there is a carving on Bigeh Island, in the First Cataract area, opposite the original Philae Island location. On an outcrop of granite of which Bigeh is formed, there is inscription where Messuwy’s name appears, surmounted by the cartouche with Sety II’s prenomen, in the form, Userkheperu-Re Setep-en-Re. However, this cartouche is on a separate block above the Messuwy text, on a lower separate block. Perhaps they are associated, but an alternative interpretation is that Sety II added his cartouche subsequently. Nevertheless, nowhere did Sety II

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Fig. 3. Messuwy kneeling before Re-Horakhty.

spare Amenmesse’s usurped or original scenes and inscriptions, while most of Messuwy’s depictions were not attacked. Sety II had Amenmesse’s royal tomb, KV 10, utterly erased, both scenes and texts, and probably had its burial desecrated. Amenmesse’s mummy was not in either of the two great caches of royal mummies, found in 1881 and 1901. The Bigeh Island inscriptions, if taken at face value, show that Messuwy survived in office as viceroy into the early reign of Sety II, but alternately, the cartouche may have been added subsequently.

In summary the Amada temple outer jambs with scenes and texts of Messuwy added, at or near the brow of each of his two figures, reveal what is likely to be incidental strata erosion in the highly friable sandstone, plus a couple of coincidental gashes in the stone. Most of the so-called uraeus traces are composed of this strata erosion and incidental gashes, that in fact intrude into the text of the scene, and even the vertical traces seem doubtful. Under the vagaries of the strong Nubian sunlight, in photographs these gashes and erosion may appear somewhat like uraei added to the figures, but on closer inspection, they are mostly gashes and strata erosion. From the Epigraphic Survey’s experience with epigraphy, it is well known how tricky photography alone can be, especially on eroded and damaged areas of scenes and text.


Finally, who, precisely, was Messuwy? The text and scene on the side wall of the Amada Temple may contain the answer. In that text, besides giving the title King’s son of Kush, Messuwy calls himself s s n rd j sf, a passage that may be translated, "king’s son, himself," or "verily king’s son." This raises the possibility that, unlike other viceroys of Kush, Messuwy may have been a son of the reigning king, Merenptah in this case. Late 19th Dynasty texts document close relatives of royalty holding the key positions in government. This policy was started by Ramesses II, who appointed his sons to key government posts. Also Hori, the southern vizier from Siptah’s to Ramesses III’s reign, was a grandson of Khaemwaset, Ramesses II’s famed son, and High Priest of Ptah at Memphis. So, Messuwy perhaps may be added to this list of royal relatives who were appointed to high office, in particular, as a son of Merenptah. Against his identification with Amenmesse stands the fact that Amenmesse’s mother was a certain Takhat, probably a later royal wife of Ramesses II, or a minor wife of Merenptah. Merenptah’s chief queen, by contrast, was Isis-nofret II, mother of Prince Sety-merenptah and probably also of the officer Khaemwaset II depicted in the Karnak reliefs of Merenptah. Amenmesse, who closely modeled his royal titulary after Ramesses II was either his, or Merenptah’s son, but certainly not Sety’s II son. Thus if Messuwy was Merenptah’s son, as also suggested by the Amada inscription, he could not be Amenmesse, except on the chance that Takhat was another chief royal wife of Merenptah, and not of Ramesses II.

In conclusion, it seems doubtful that Messuwy, the viceroy of Kush became Amenmesse, as Takhat was Amenmesse’s mother, while Messuwy nowhere names his mother, and further, Messuwy was buried at Aniba, and not in KV 10, Amenmesse’s royal tomb. From Messuwy’s burial at Aniba, twelve ushabti are known, as well as other funerary goods, while another ushabti was found at Wady es-Sebua. What has often been described as a pyramion, is indeed Messuwy’s offering stand, of sandstone, found at Amada, again with his name intact. The outer jamb scenes at Amada depicting Messuwy adoring Merenptah’s cartouches, most probably did not have uraei added to the viceroy’s forehead. Instead what in photographs deceptively look like uraei are in reality only a coincidental group of deeply eroded strata in the sandstone, plus a few gashes, with no evidence whatever that any of those traces ever were lines cut with tools. So, the Amada scenes in summary seem scant and dubious evidence to propose as vindication of Krauss’ thesis, a theory that itself remains most speculative. Deceptive traces hardly seem like the evidence that would indicate that Messuwy became Amenmesse, especially as the
Bige Island inscription may indicate that he held the viceroy’s office into Sety II’s reign. Amenemesse’s usurpation of the throne fits best right after Merenptah, and before Sety II, as conventionally considered.32

An additional note, the Kha-em-ter, whom Krauss posticed as Messuwy’s predecessor as viceroy may well be the same person who became Amenemesse’s vizier, and who is depicted in a relief shared between the Oriental Institute of Chicago and the Turin Museum.33 This could account also for the intentional damage to his name throughout Nubia, cited by Krauss and others34 as on the Oriental Institute fragment of the relief, Pa-Re-em-hab’s name replaced Kha-em-ter’s, while Sety II usurped Amenemesse’s cartouche, on the Turin piece. Indeed, the fact that Kha-em-ter’s inscriptions were so thoroughly erased that until Krauss’ and Habachi’s articles, his career as viceroy was scarcely known, shows how thorough Sety II’s agents were.35 By contrast, though in some of Messuwy’s inscriptions his name was damaged, in most cases it was not done intentionally.36 Given Sety II’s thorough usurpation of Amenemesse’s inscriptions, as well as those of anyone associated with him, that Messuwy’s name went untouched in so many cases strongly suggests that Sety II had no animus against him, scarcely believable, if as Krauss and Dodson believe, Messuwy, indeed, had become Amenemesse.37 It is not certain whether Messuwy supported Amenemesse’s usurpation of the throne. Again, if the Bige Island texts are taken at face value, the issue must be considered, for the basic interpretation then is that he survived into Sety II’s reign. His tomb objects, however, that named a pharaoh, all named Merenptah; and on the interpretation that the Bige Island Sety II cartouche was added subsequently, Messuwy may have died around the same time as Merenptah. No other viceroy of Nubia, however, is attested for Amenemesse’s reign.

Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago University of Chicago


33 Krauss, SAK 5 (1977), 134–35; Habachi, MDAIK 34 (1978), 59, 64–67; Mario Tosi and Alessandro Roccati, Stele e Altre Epigrafi di Deir el Medina, n. 30001–n. 30262, Cata
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34 Krauss, SAK 5 (1977), 134–35; Kitchen, KRI IV 97; Ricardo Caminos, The New Kingdom Temples of Buhen, Archaeological Survey of Egypt, Memoir (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1974), vol. I, 16–17, and plate 16; 25–26, plate 26–28; H. S. Smith, The Fortress of Buhen: The Inscriptions, vol. 2, 48th Excavation Memoire (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1976), 96, Plate XII, 6, cat. no. 443; 112, plate XXI, 3, cat. no. 1107; 150–51, plate XLI, 3, cat. no. 1745; this last, a fragmentary stela has a broken cartouche with the traces of User . . . re . . . . This could be User-kheperetre (Sety II), as Habachi, MDAIK 34 (1978), 64–65 proposed, but as easily User ma‘at re setep en re (Ram
esses II), as Krauss, SAK 5 (1977), 194–95, interpreted it. All agree, Kha-em-ter’s name was deliberately mutilated.


36 See Habachi, MDAIK 34 (1978), 66, note 49, citing Caminos, who noted that though Messuwy’s name might have suffered somewhat from natural erosion or sheer accident, it certainly has not been subject to malicious damage, Caminos, New Kingdom Temples of Buhen, vol. I, 17, note 4.

37 Krauss, SAK 4 (1977), 101–99; SAK 5 (1977), 131–74; Dodson, DE 2 (1985), 7–9. Dodson’s point about the relative incompleteness of Sety II’s tomb is negated by the fact that Sety II was having three tombs carved simultaneously, KV 15 (his own), KV 11 (for his great royal wife, Tawosret) and KV 18 (for his minister, Ray), all this with no expansion of the Deir el-Medinah workforce. This triple workload ade
quately explains the relatively slow work on KV 15, for no one could foresee that Sety II would die after but six years of reign. The damage to the front of the tomb is explained by Pa‘uel’s uratum scribium rubbing of stone from this pharaoh’s tomb, mentioned in Papyrus Salt 124, see Jaroslav Černý, “Papyrus Salt 124 (Brit. Mus. 10055),” JEA 15 (1929), 245, recto, 2, lines 5–10.