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AN UNPUBLISHED STAMPED BRICK OF MENKHEPERRE, HIGH PRIEST OF AMUN

In the Czartoryski collection (presently the department of the National Museum in Cracow), renowned for its interesting Egyptian gallery, recently systematically described and published¹, there is also an ordinary brick bearing a stamp impression (Fig. 1)².

This stamp enables us to ascertain, that the said brick comes from the structure erected by Menkheperre, one of the High Priests of Amun in Thebes in the times of the 21st Dynasty:

1. Mn-hpr-R²

2. hm-nfr tpt n Jmn.

His name and title are arranged here in regular, typical cartouches, situated vertically one next to the other (Fig. 1) and delimited at the bottom by a horizontal crossbar. The stamp had been impressed in the wet clay before firing; it was a single double stamp.

¹ Cf., among others, the following specification: J. Śliwa, Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids and Plaques from the Cracow Collections, Prace archeologiczne 38, Studia z Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej 8, Cracow 1985, pp. 11–12 (note 21), and some items published there.

² Inv. No. MNK XI—987. Dimensions 34.8×18.2×9.3 cm (height of the cartouches 16.7 cm). Fired mud with much organic admixtures; colour after firing: greyish-red. In the lower part
Fig. 1. Stamped brick of Menkheperre, High Priest of Amun. National Museum, Cracow (Czartoryski Collection), Inv. No. MNK XI-987. Phot. by Jacek Książek

the brick is strongly burned out (perhaps as a result of a fire). Upper left corner of the brick is broken off; crack in the lower part is glued together. On considerable parts of the surface a light, milky layer is preserved. It cannot be excluded, that the object was purchased by Prince Władysław Czartorski in the course of his voyage to Egypt in 1889/1890.
The bricks with the stamp impression of Menkheperre, High Priest of Amun, known throughout literature and also kept in Egyptian and European collections, are not very attractive for any exhibition, but they enable some light to be shed on his building activity. However, the majority of bricks bearing his name display not the cartouches as in the case of our object, but only simple ovals.

Menkheperre was a son of the High Priest Pinudjem I. He succeeded to the office of the High Priest of Amun following the death of his elder brother Masaharta in the 25th year of Smendes, and held it for at least 53 years. He died in the 48th year of Psusennes I. The period of his pontificate thus fell to the years 1045—992 B.C. His successors were in turn his two sons borne by his spouse Istmekheb: Smendes II and Pinudjem II.

The stamped bricks of Menkheperre appear in several places, where he erected fortresses: El Hibeh, Shurafa, Medamud, Gebelein East (near Sheikh Moussa) and Kom es-Sheikh Mubarak. In some of them (e.g. at El Hibeh and Gebelein East) also the stamps that bear the name of his wife Istmekheb alongside the name of Menkheperre are to be encountered.

Menkheperre’s building activity is also to be traced in Thebes. The bricks bearing his name are known from Luxor as well as from Karnak, where the construction of a solid wall in the northern part of the temple of Amun is mentioned by the text of a stela of the 48th year. The said wall survived until the times of the 25th Dynasty; it was then destroyed, and the bricks coming from it were used for the construction of houses.

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3 K. A. Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (1100—650 B.C.), Warminster 1986, p. 77. The author maintains, that when assuming his office Menkheperre was about 35, so at his death he reached the age of 88. However, M. L. Bierbrier, *The Late New Kingdom in Egypt* (c. 1300—644 B.C.). A Genealogical and Chronological Investigation, Warminster 1975, p. 47, suggests, that these numbers are too high and is rather of the opinion that “he was in his late twenties or early thirties and hence aged c. 80 at his death”.

4 Cf. Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, p. 77. This author mentions also another hypothesis according to which the period of the pontificate of Menkheperre would be only 49 years (Kitchen, as above, p. 77, note 382; also pp. 28, 36 and 465 [table 1] and 466 [table 2]).


10 Cf. D. B. Redford, *Report of the first season of excavations in East Karnak*, JARCE XIV, 1977, pp. 16—17, who mentions some 20 such bricks found up till now in East Karnak; see also
Finally, another detail should be mentioned once again: the name and title of the High Priest were placed within a true cartouche (Fig. 1), and not in a single oval. According to K. A. Kitchen, "But Menkheperre made no very serious claim to kingship, merely using the isolated title «King of Upper and Lower Egypt» on some brick stamps upon the bricks for his buildings at El-Hibeh, and hardly ever a cartouche". One of these rare instances of the employment of a cartouche is to be found just on the brick from the Cracow collection. It should be regretted, that the lack of more detailed data on the provenance of this object renders impossible the ascertainment, whether our brick comes from one of the above said structures or from a site hitherto not associated with building activity of the High Priest Menkheperre.


11 Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period*, p. 262 and also p. 51; see also the *Supplement*, § 501, p. 572.