
Naukratis: Greeks in Egypt

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The decoration of the temple of Amun

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In Naukratis, evidence for Egyptian religious activity is poorly known.¹ However, some objects have been discovered in the area of ancient Naukratis and its surroundings, which – mostly due to their inscriptions – indicate the presence of Egyptian cults and religious activity since the earliest time of the city's history, i.e. the 26th dynasty (664–525 BC). A cult of Amun and his entourage seems to have been the most important. The local manifestation of this deity was labelled *Imn(-R^c) b3 dd* 'Amun(-Ra), the enduring ram/ba' or *Imn(-R^c) nb Btt* 'Amun(-Ra), Lord of Betet' respectively – the latter being a religious place name of Naukratis and evidently connected with the aforementioned epithet. Based on a Greek inscription on the base of a sphinx dating from the Ptolemaic period,² this god was a manifestation of Amun of Thebes.³

From the 26th dynasty onwards, secure evidence for a temple of Amun is provided mainly by epigraphic evidence. No precise information about its style, proportions and location are thus known, even if the most recent geophysical fieldwork at the site raises the possibility of some remains still being extant on the ground.⁴ Indirectly, the famous Naukratis Stela – one of the examples of the *Decree of Sais*⁵ – points to the existence of a sanctuary at the beginning of the 30th dynasty. Since the stela was found somewhere in the area of the so-called Great Temenos in 1899, this might be a clue for the position of the sanctuary in this period.⁶ For the early Ptolemaic period archaeological evidence exists for a sanctuary made of stone in the Great Temenos – a vast area in the south of Naukratis (see the chapter on [Topography](#), Fig. 1; see further below).

This evidence consists of a few fragments of reliefs made of basalt, which belong to the decoration of the dado of the temple walls – in Egyptology, this architectural element is traditionally labelled with the French term *soubassement*. Some blocks were discovered in Kom Geif in 1914 and published by C.C. Edgar in 1922.⁷ Two other fragments are now on display at the Museum August Kestner in Hanover, purchased by the museum in 1970.⁸ All these reliefs date to the reign of Ptolemy I (king 306/4–284 BC); they depict part of a sequence of deities, consisting of female entities and so-called fecundity figures. To each deity belongs a hieroglyphic inscription of six columns (Fig. 1). They form a coherent unit and are to be regarded as a single chapter of a longer text. This decoration pattern is typical for

¹ This short paper is an abstract of a study dealing with the reliefs of the temple of Amun in Naukratis, which will be published elsewhere in more detail. I am indebted to the members of the Naukratis Project at the British Museum for granting to me the opportunity to publish this preliminary report at this point and for their remarks concerning the results of the recent fieldwork at Naukratis and forthcoming literature. I am indebted as well to Christian Loeben (Museum August Kestner Hanover) for the permission to publish the two blocks which are on display at this museum.

² British Museum, 1886,1005.22.

³ For the sources in general and the epithet in particular see Yoyotte 1982–3, 129–36; Guerneur 2005, 126–38; cf. Leclère 2008, 113–57; Weber and Geissen 2013, 253–4. For a discussion of substantial material relating to Egyptian religion see Masson forthcoming a; b; c.

⁴ Thomas and Villing 2013; Thomas forthcoming a; Thomas and Villing forthcoming.

⁵ von Bomhard 2012.

⁶ Spencer 2011, 36; von Bomhard 2012, 5–7. The ceramic evidence suggests that Egyptian occupation of the site, most likely as a sanctuary, goes back to at least the 6th century BC; cf. Thomas and Villing 2013.

⁷ Edgar 1922.

⁸ Inv. 1970.38–39; Munro 1973, 319–320; cf. Yoyotte 1993–4, 684 (= Yoyotte 2013, 544); Leitz 2014, 73, n. 10. These two reliefs may perhaps be linked to 'some fragments of a similar kind' to those found in Kom Geif and noticed by Daressy in Gabares (see Edgar 1922, 2).

the soubassement of the temples of the Graeco-Roman period.⁹ For this reason, one can easily identify all these relief fragments as part of a soubassement decorative scheme.¹⁰ These deities form a procession offering a wide array of products to the temple gods. In most cases, the king alone or the royal couple lead these processions. As the temple was understood to be a model of the cosmos, with the decoration reflecting this view, the soubassements are the area representing the world of the living – that is the actual and real environment of the ancient Egyptians. Important topics are the description of agricultural products, the (inundation of the) River Nile or mineral resources. Another relevant constituent are the geographical processions that depict the nomes – in earlier times the administrative provinces of Egypt.

phw-region of the 11th nome of Lower Egypt

12th nome of Lower Egypt



Figure 1 Example of a soubassement relief from Naukratis. Museum August Kestner, Hanover, Inv. 1970.39, courtesy of Museum August Kestner, Hanover

⁹ See now Rickert and Ventker 2014.

¹⁰ For these particular soubassements see already Yoyotte 1993–4, 684–9 (= Yoyotte 2013, 544–9).

However, in the Graeco-Roman period, they do not serve as an up-to-date picture of the administrative framework of Egypt, but rather seem to establish a mythological cult-topography.¹¹ These processions are divided into two parts – one representing the nomes of Upper Egypt, the other those of Lower Egypt – and they are distributed on the soubassements of two symmetrically corresponding walls. For iconographical reasons alone, the Hanover pieces and one relief from Kom Geif¹² are without any doubt part of such a nome procession: as is typical for this kind of procession all personifications wear on their heads a standard with the symbol or the name pertaining to their respective topographical entity. To be more precise, they belong to the Lower Egyptian part of a so-called quadripartite nome procession. In this type of geographical procession, a nome is represented by a female personification symbolizing the nome proper and by three additional deities symbolizing certain sub-divisions of the nome: the *mr*-canal represents watercourses, the *w*-region cultivated land and the *phw*-area a swampy region.¹³ Apart from the example from Naukratis, quadripartite nome processions are documented in the extant temples of Upper Egypt, with the earliest dating to the reign of Ptolemy VIII/IX (second half of the 2nd century/first half of the 1st century BC) and the others mostly to the Roman period. Thus, the reliefs from Naukratis are by far the oldest evidence for this type of procession and the only ones originating from Lower Egypt.¹⁴ The other remains from Naukratis are part of a so-called economic procession.¹⁵ In this type, the deities represent important aspects of provisions and their production. In so doing, they guarantee the continuation of the daily offering to the gods in a symbolic way.

Beside the soubassement reliefs, parts of an obelisk made of sandstone were found in 1914.¹⁶ Petrie for his part excavated large parts of a sphinx and of two rams, as well as a base of a possible further animal sculpture, which once were set up in front of the pylon and formed the dromos between the pylon and the branch of the River Nile.¹⁷ In addition, a few more objects made of several different types of rock were discovered.¹⁸ However, none of these objects is to be interpreted as an architectural part of the temple proper.

For this reason, the soubassement reliefs are the only remains of the Amun temple of the Ptolemaic period extant today.¹⁹ Before attempting to reconstruct the position of the said reliefs in the temple, their composition

¹¹ This is especially true for the so called supplementary nomes; see von Recklinghausen 2014, 141–5 (with further bibliography).

¹² Labelled as fragments 'A, D–F' in Yoyotte 1993–4, 684–9 (= Yoyotte 2013, 544–9) with another fragment originating from Noqrash. For the text of fragment 'A' (from Kom Geif) see Edgar 1922, 4.

¹³ For a recent overview of these processions see Leitz 2014.

¹⁴ Yoyotte 1967–8, 109 (= Yoyotte 2013, 309); Yoyotte 1982–3, 129, n. 5; Yoyotte 1993–4, 688–9 (= Yoyotte 2013, 549); cf. Cauville 1992, 68; Leitz 2014, 73.

¹⁵ Labelled as fragments 'B–C' in Yoyotte 1993–4, 684–9 (= Yoyotte 2013, 544–9). For the text of fragment 'B' see Edgar 1922, 5. For these kinds of processions see Rickert 2011; Rickert 2014.

¹⁶ Edgar 1922, 1; for the obelisk see recently Guerneur 2005, 128; Leclère 2008, 131.

¹⁷ Petrie 1886a, 27–38, pls 30–31.

¹⁸ Cf. Yoyotte 1982–3, 129–36; Guerneur 2005, 126–38.

¹⁹ Aurélia Masson kindly drew my attention to the fact that there are more remains *in situ*, visible on the magnetometry survey; see the chapter on [Topography](#), Fig. 2. As they are not excavated yet it is impossible to say whether or not they belong to the temple decorated in the reign of Ptolemy I. Hopefully, further results of the investigation of the site will give an answer to this question in the future.

and layout should be examined in more detail. Although the preserved parts of the soubassement decoration can be allocated to two separate processions, they all are very much alike in style, material and their given date, as indicated by the cartouches of Ptolemy I. Since the role of the god Amun as the recipient of the offerings is ubiquitous, one can safely assume that he was the owner of this temple. This corresponds well to the other sources about religious life in Naukratis already mentioned. All these aspects might be a hint that the conceptual design of both processions was composed at the same time and that both were strongly connected within the temple's architecture.

Also noteworthy is their analogous decoration pattern. Each panel of the soubassement decoration – consisting of a deity and an associated inscription – follows the same layout and textual structure. This phenomenon can be demonstrated by using a subdivision of the 11th nome of Lower Egypt (Figs 1–2). The inscription starts with a stereotypical introduction in which the king and Amun are presented as the protagonists. The second part ('Dedication formula') is introduced by *in=f n=k* 'he brings to you'. The 'you' addressed here directly is, of course, Amun, who receives the personification of the nome – the deity depicted – with its specific products, introduced by the king. Within this second part, the toponym, which at the same time serves as the headdress of the deity, occupies the whole of the fourth column. Thus, iconography and inscription are linked in a subtle way (Fig. 1). The last part of the inscription ('Identification formula') starts with *ntk* 'you are', by which the god is directly addressed again and connected mythologically with the respective nome or subdivision.

Introduction:



[Recitation: The Son of Ra,] Lord of the Crowns Ptolemy [has come] to you Amun.

“Dedication formula”:



He brings you the *phw*-region (called) “The two eyes” (?) with its ...-plants, their surroundings being encompassed by reed.

“Identification formula”:



You are the one who executes the plans the ennead is fond of, [who makes the gods joyful with his laws].

Figure 2 The text pattern of the nome procession (*phw*-region of the 11th nome of Lower Egypt). Museum August Kestner, Hanover, Inv. 1970.39

In spite of the fragmentary character of the reliefs of Naukratis, what makes them so important – beyond their providing proof for a local temple of Amun – is the fact that all extant soubassement inscriptions at this site have exact parallels in the temples of Upper Egypt, which are of a much later date and which allow us to reconstruct certain destroyed passages of the texts in Naukratis (and vice versa). This remarkable circumstance may be exemplified again by means of the preserved subdivision of the 11th

Lower Egyptian nome (Fig. 3). The mythological parts of the text are completely identical to their corresponding parts of a quadripartite nome procession in the temple of Edfu, engraved in the great courtyard during the reign of Ptolemy IX – more or less 200 years later than the texts of Naukratis.²⁰

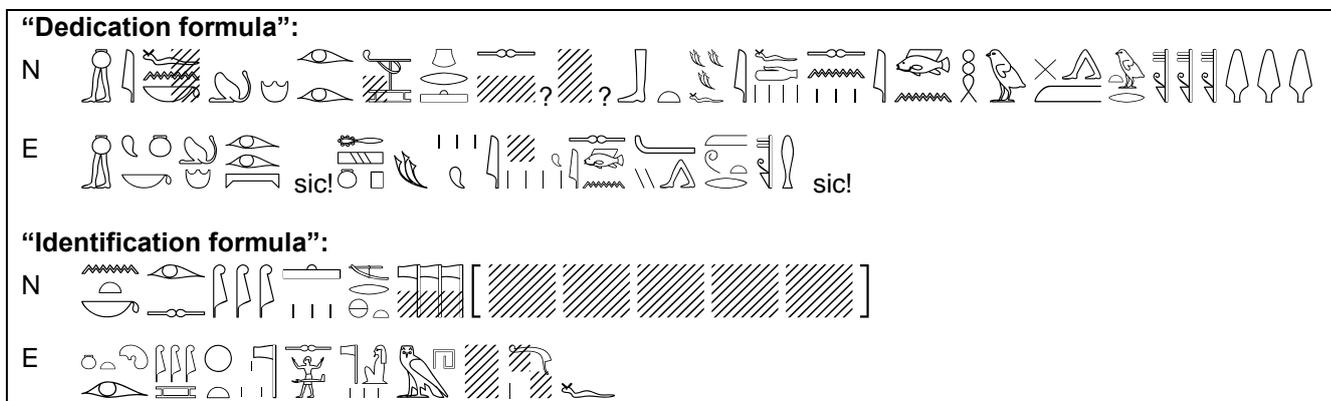


Figure 3 Textual parallels in the soubassements from Naukratis (N) and Edfu (E) (*p/hw*-region of the 11th nome of Lower Egypt)

A comparison of the inscriptions from Naukratis and Edfu shows that at both locations identical sources were used, which are embedded in the same phraseology. This may lead to the assumption that in both temples a pre-composed draft or even a kind of pattern book for a quadripartite nome procession was employed. They differ only in the introduction, since the names of the god and king depend, of course, on the time and place of their engraving. Furthermore, the Naukratis version demonstrates that both the texts presented here and the general concept of the quadripartite nome procession were already fully developed at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, and therefore might be regarded as a creation of the Late Period or even of earlier times.

After dealing with the decoration and the texts of the soubassement reliefs, one may seek their possible location within the temple. The ancient position of the Ptolemaic temple of Amun in Naukratis can be reconstructed with some certainty. Edgar, influenced by the discoveries from Kom Geif, was the first to claim the existence of an Egyptian temple in Naukratis situated in the southern part of the city.²¹ This was exactly the area which was excavated for the first time by Petrie starting in 1884 and which is labelled the Great Temenos (see the chapter on [Topography](#), Fig. 1).

Petrie identified this area as a Greek sanctuary named Hellenion, which is mentioned by Herodotus (2.178).²² However, the Great Temenos is to be regarded as an Egyptian temple compound.²³ This area was surrounded by a mud-brick wall, for which Petrie found some evidence, but which had already disappeared completely a few years later. Within this enclosure wall only scarce remains of architecture were found, among them a

²⁰ Chassinat 1930a, 19, 14–16, minor corrections to the publication based on a recent photograph of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (N° C 3234).

²¹ Edgar 1922, 4–6.

²² Petrie 1886a, 24–34.

²³ See recently Leclère 2008, 120, 128–37; Spencer 2011; von Bomhard 2012, 5–7; Thomas and Villing 2013, 97–101; Thomas 2014b, 197–9.

monumental mud-brick structure in the southern section of the area, which is interpreted today by most scholars as some kind of storage facility with a cultic background – a so-called *šnꜥ wꜥb* or ‘High Temple’.²⁴ In the northern area of the western part of the enclosure wall, Petrie found the remains of a pylon. It can be dated to the reign of Ptolemy II (285–246 BC) because the objects in the foundation deposits included a cartouche-plaque with the name of this pharaoh (see the forthcoming chapter on **Foundation deposits**).²⁵ The westward orientation of this gate pointed to the Canopic branch of the Nile. On the axis of this pylon within the Great Temenos no remains were excavated by Petrie. However, this is where many scholars – probably correctly – locate the temple of Amun, and where most recent magnetometry has now identified traces of a large structure. Like the pylon, it would have been orientated towards the Nile,²⁶ a common Egyptian practice. The temple would therefore have had an east–western orientation with the main sanctuary in the east.

Given that the main temple building made of stone existed in this form, how can the preserved soubassement reliefs be placed in this building? The Lower Egyptian part of a nome procession would most likely have been engraved on a longitudinal side of the temple naos connected with the north, as a comparison with other attestations of nome processions shows.²⁷ The execution in sunken relief indicates that the reliefs in Naukratis are quite likely to have been situated on an exterior wall. The orientation of both figures and hieroglyphs to the left would support this assumption well, since as a rule they are orientated towards the owner of the temple in the main sanctuary. Assuming an east–western orientation of the temple, the deities on the northern longitudinal side of an exterior wall would indeed have been looking left.

The fragments of the other soubassement procession may also indicate the longitudinal sides of the exterior wall as the position of the nome procession. The extant reliefs can be pieced together into two sequences. As can be deduced from the different orientation of the deities and hieroglyphs, they belong to different parts of a bipartite economic procession (Fig. 4). The fragments constituting the larger block show a layout of three deities – two fecundity figures and a female entity between them.²⁸ The first fecundity figure is identified as the grain god Neper (*Npr*). As in many other soubassement inscriptions, he is accompanied by the female personification of the provision of bread called ‘Nurse’ (*Hnmt*).²⁹ The third deity is again depicted as a fecundity figure and represents an aspect of the inundation named ‘Old Flood’ (*Nt i3wt*). This sequence of deities (Neper – ‘Nurse’ – ‘Old Flood’) is not attested elsewhere in the inscriptions of the Graeco-Roman temples. However, one should note the interesting fact that exact parallels of the Naukratis texts of Neper and the ‘Nurse’ can be found in exactly the same position in Dendara and Edfu – that is on the

²⁴ Muhs 1994; Villing and Schlotzhauer 2006b, 5; Leclère 2008, 134–7. A second smaller casemate building is visible in the magnetometry: see the chapter on **Topography**, Fig. 2.

²⁵ Petrie 1886a, 28–30, pls 25–6; today BM EA 27505.

²⁶ Kees 1935, 1956, 1958; Leclère 2008, 117; Thomas and Villing 2013, 92.

²⁷ Normally, they are found on the longitudinal sides of the exterior wall of the naos building: Leitz 2014, 69; 102–3 (Dendara); 108–9 (Edfu); 116–17 (temple of Opet in Karnak); 119–20 (Medamud). A further example is attested at Komir (unpublished).

²⁸ Fragment ‘B’, Edgar 1922, 5.

²⁹ For both deities, see Rickert 2011, 65–6; 258–63.

soubassement of the rear part of the exterior naos wall.³⁰ In both temples, the soubassement is decorated with an economic procession divided into a Lower and an Upper Egyptian part. Both Neper and the ‘Nurse’ belong to the Upper Egyptian group and form a pair. If it were possible to establish this layout as the standard decoration pattern of the rear of the exterior naos wall, one could perhaps say that for this type of procession a special set of texts existed. If so, the fragments from Naukratis could also have been situated in the rear part of the exterior naos wall. However, the orientation of the deities and the hieroglyphs would indicate that the panels were part of the Lower Egyptian section and not of the Upper Egyptian one (Fig. 4). In addition to the otherwise unattested sequence of the three deities already mentioned, this excludes an identical position in Naukratis to that in the layout of Dendara and Edfu.

(south)	soubasement of the exterior naos wall, rear part (east)				(north)
<i>Upper Egyptian part</i>			<i>Lower Egyptian part</i>		
fragment “C” (position not known in this section)			fragment “B” (position not known in this section)		
Unknown deity →	“Field of Imau” →	“Neper” ←	“Nurse” ←	“Old Flood” ←	

Figure 4 Probable location of fragments ‘B’ and ‘C’ as parts of the soubassement at the exterior rear wall with arrows indicating the orientation of deities and hieroglyphs

As a result, it becomes clear that a definite reconstruction of the soubassement decoration with regards to the Naukratis fragments is impossible today. However, all extant fragments would fit well in a decoration pattern of an exterior naos wall. If one accepts this assumption one might see in the Naukratis fragments an indication of an elaborate decoration pattern for the soubassement zone already fully developed at the beginning of Ptolemaic rule.

³⁰ Chassinat 1929, 197, 2–7, pl. 98; Cauville 2007, 6–12, pls 7–8.