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Ptolemaic temple of Amun-Ra at Naukratis**

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# A new relief fragment from the *soubassement* of the Ptolemaic temple of Amun-Ra at Naukratis

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During recent work on reconstructing the old mosque of the village of el-Nebeira in el-Beheira governorate in the region of Itay el-Baroud, a number of antiquities were discovered; they are presented in this article.<sup>1</sup> An area of 22 × 14m was excavated, and at a depth of 3m, on 20 July 2010, four pieces of stone were encountered. One is a round millstone made from limestone with a central squared hole (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Rotary millstones of this type, in a variety of stones, are common from Ptolemaic levels at many sites in Egypt (see the numerous examples recently published in Spencer 2016, 7–8, pl. 13b). The other three are architectural pieces: a smooth cylindrical limestone column shaft (Fig. 2);<sup>3</sup> a seemingly unfinished, badly worn limestone Corinthian capital, perhaps of Alexandrian type (IV) or one of its later successors (Fig. 3) (for Alexandrian capitals of the Ptolemaic period and their later successors, see McKenzie 2007, 85–90, 222–27);<sup>4</sup> and a portion of a black basalt (or granodiorite?) block with hieroglyphic inscriptions and figured relief decoration (Fig. 4).<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: Limestone rotary millstone. Photograph by Ahmed Said el-Kharadly



Fig. 2: Limestone column shaft. Photograph by Ahmed Said el-Kharadly

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1 I would like to thank Alexandra Villing, Penny Wilson and the British Museum Naukratis team, as well as Daniel von Recklinghausen, for help in the preparation of this article.

2 Diam. 1m, Th. 37cm.

3 H. 1.80m, Diam. 37cm (at the base) to 27cm (at the top).

4 W. 83cm, Diam. 83cm, H. 40cm.

5 H. 49cm, W. 63cm, Th. 35cm. Register no. 295 in the MSA register book of the el-Beheira region; currently kept at the MSA storeroom of 'Tell el-Fara'in in Kafr el Sheikh.





Fig. 3: Limestone Corinthian capital. Photograph by Ahmed Said el-Kharadly



Fig. 4: Relief fragment from the basalt *soubassement* of the temple of Amun-Ra at Naukratis, with detail of the inscription. Photograph by Ahmed Said el-Kharadly

All four pieces originally must come from the ancient site of Naukratis, the Egyptian–Greek trading city and trading port founded in the late 7th century BC (on Naukratis and its archaeology, see Villing et al. 2013–19) and located just east of el-Nebeira. They were probably transferred to el-Nebeira location for reuse after the decline of Naukratis in the 7th century AD. Although several other villages are today located on and around the territory of ancient Naukratis (Thomas and Villing 2013), el-Nebeira appears to have been the main village in the region after the decline of Naukratis. Flinders Petrie, who first rediscovered and excavated the site in 1884, noted that several antiquities had been reused in the village’s mosque or were being kept there, including a

'fine Romano Greek altar, circular, with bulls heads & garlands, in blue limestone', a 'red granite pillar cut out of an inscribed block' and 'a byzantine capital in white marble; & five Roman marble columns, one with Corinthian capital in the mosque'.<sup>6</sup> In 1948, an inscribed stone was transferred from the mosque to the museum of Alexandria University (Aly 1948; Bernand 1970, 625, 635–36).

Of the newly found pieces, it is the basalt relief that is of particular interest, since it can be identified as belonging to the relief decoration of the Ptolemaic temple of Amun-Ra at Naukratis.

The block is broken on three sides (left, right, top); the bottom is damaged but the original base is preserved at the bottom right. On its surface it preserves a hieroglyphic inscription and figured decoration in sunken relief. Preserved are the remains of three offering-bearers walking towards the left, but only scant traces of the third figure survive. The leading male figure is shown holding an offering table on which are four *hs*-jars. Behind him is a vertical column of hieroglyphic inscription, orientated facing left like the figure. To the right of this inscription is a relief carving of a female figure, shown wearing a long wig and with her hands extended forwards in a pose to carry an offering table, apparently bearing flowers. On the extreme right edge of the block are traces of more carving, including another *hs*-jar from a tray of offerings, and part of the arm of an additional male figure lost from this side. At the top edge of the block in front of this figure are very slight traces of the word *ntk*, all that remains of a column of text. The better-preserved text between the first and second figures is just the final part of a longer inscription that would have been placed in the missing area above the head of the leading figure.

Although the inscription is difficult to read (Fig. 5), it follows the pattern of Hapy-inscriptions: 'He has brought to you [N=epithet of the flood]. You are ...' followed by a sequence of epithets. The sign at the top after the break is most probably an eye (an *r* would be less likely), although difficult to translate here owing to the lack of the preceding signs. The following signs can be read as '... you are the one who is in his cavern and who hides in the Nun for[ever]...'. The latter half of this sequence is a phrase found attested in a nome procession belonging to the Lower Egyptian second nome, the Letopolite (Leitz 2002, 334). In the description of the nome's water a damaged text in the temple of Edfu (Chassinat 1929, no. 22.12) has the same epithet, although the earlier part of the description is lost. Other parallels occur at Kom Ombo (de Morgan et al. 1894, no. 87.11; 1905, no. 876) and in the Opet temple at Karnak (Opet I, 189 right), in another version of the Letopolite text.

The relief undoubtedly belonged to a series of reliefs representing processions of divinities on the Ptolemaic *soubassement* (dado) of the temple of Amun-Ra at Naukratis, of which several other fragments are known already. Three slabs were discovered in 1914 in 'different parts of the site' of Naukratis and published by C. C. Edgar (Edgar 1922; see Yoyotte 1993–94, 684–89; von Recklinghausen 2015).<sup>7</sup> Two further fragments are now in the Museum August Kestner in Hanover, purchased by the museum in 1970 (Inv. 1970.38–39, published by Munro 1973; von Recklinghausen 2015, esp. p. 3 fig. 1; cf. also Yoyotte 1993–94, 684–89; Leitz 2014, 73, n. 10). A fourth inscribed block, described as decorated with 'androgynous Nile-figures' bringing offerings, was seen by Griffith in the village of el-Noqrash at the southern edge of Naukratis and must belong to the same monument.<sup>8</sup>

6 Both the altar and the inscribed column were noted by the American survey of the Naukratis region under William D. E. Coulson: Coulson 1996, 14, pl. VI. The altar was later confiscated by the Supreme Council of Antiquities: Abd el-Fattah and Seif el-Din 2010.

7 They were kept in the Museum of Tanta (Tanta Museum inv. no. 1016; 983+988+991+994+1002; third fragment unnumbered) before being transferred to an MSA storeroom at Tell Basta in 1995.

8 Mentioned by Griffith 1888, 80 and Griffith 1890, 69. According to Jean Yoyotte (1993–94, 688), it belongs with one of the blocks published by Edgar (1922, 4).

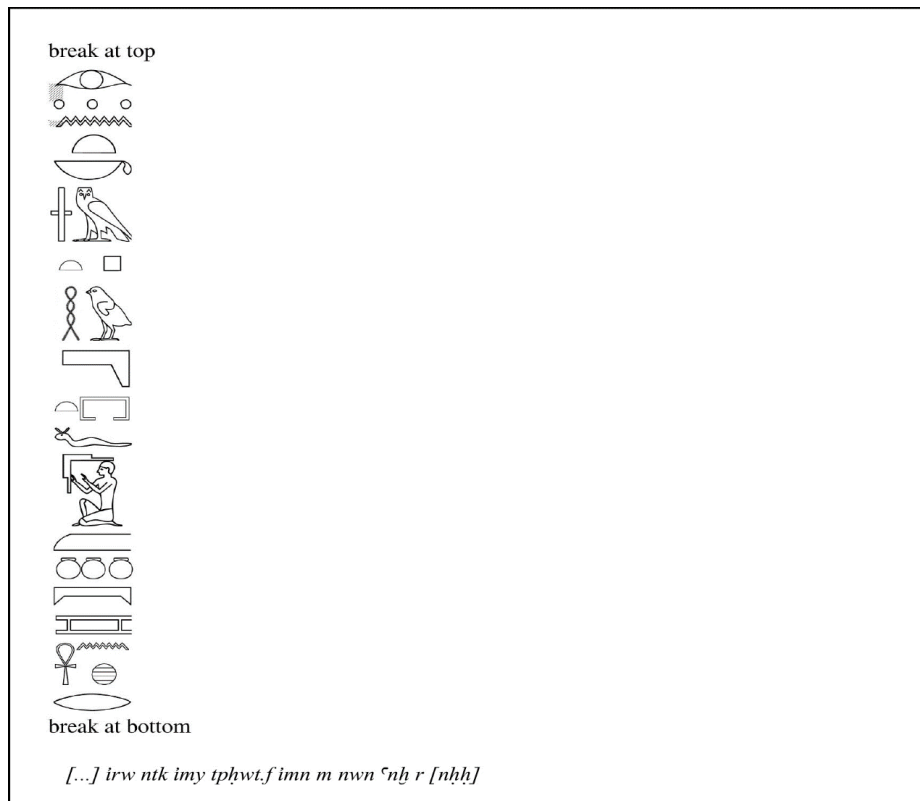


Fig. 5 Suggested reading of the relief's hieroglyphic inscription (by Penelope Wilson).

The cult of Amun-Ra, alongside his consort Mut and their son Khonsu, was the most important of the Egyptian cults of ancient Naukratis. His local manifestation was known as *ʿImn(-Rʿ) b3 dd* 'Amun(-Ra), the enduring ram/ba' or *ʿImn(-Rʿ) nb Btt* 'Amun(-Ra), Lord of Betet', the latter being a religious place name of Naukratis (as evidenced by a 4th-century BC inscription, British Museum 1886,1005.22: Johnston 2015, 8, fig. 9). He was equated by the Greeks at Naukratis with Zeus Thebaios (see Yoyotte 1982–83, 129–36; Guermeur 2005, 126–38; Leclère 2008, 113–57). From Dynasty 26 onwards, secure evidence for a sanctuary of Amun is provided by epigraphic and archaeological evidence (Masson-Berghoff forthcoming). The earliest mention dates to 577 BC (Yoyotte 1982–83; Leclère 2008, 118, 120, 128–38; cf. Muhs 1994). The god's temple was known as Hut-neferet, 'The Beautiful Castle' (Yoyotte 1993–94, 684). Archaeologically, the sanctuary of Amun-Ra can be identified in the so-called 'Great Temenos', a large precinct in the southern part of the city first excavated by Flinders Petrie in 1884–85 (Petrie 1886; cf. also Leclère 2008, 120, 128–37; Spencer 2011; von Bomhard 2012, 5–7; Thomas and Villing 2013, 97–101). Petrie mapped the Great Temenos as a precinct measuring 298m × 259m, covering nearly 8ha and surrounded by a massive mud-brick enclosure wall, the existence of which is confirmed by recent fieldwork (Spencer 2011; Thomas and Villing 2013; Thomas et al. 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018). The monumental limestone-faced gate building (pylon) set into its western wall, measuring 107m by 24m, is one of the largest such gates known in Egypt; foundation deposits excavated by Petrie (Masson 2015) indicate that it was built during the reign of Ptolemy II Philopator (r. 284–246 BC). The gate was approached from a sacred quay on the Nile via a processional road, probably



once flanked by sculptures of rams and sphinxes (Petrie 1886; Gardner 1888, 13–14). Inside the temenos, Petrie's excavations uncovered a large 59m × 64m building on a casemate foundation, probably a sacred storage building (Petrie 1886, pl. 43; cf. Muhs 1994; Leclère 2008, 134–37), but no traces of the main temple to Amun-Ra itself, which must have stood in the gateway's axis. Indeed, this is where recent magnetometry by the British Museum's Naukratis Project has now identified traces of a large structure with an east–western orientation that most likely represents one or several phases of the temple of Amun-Ra (Thomas and Villing forthcoming).

Besides these buried traces, the only remains of the temple preserved today are the fragments with relief decoration from the dado (or *soubassement*) of the temple, to which we can now add the piece presented here. All of them show processions of alternating female entities and so-called fecundity figures. Each figure carries offerings for the temple gods on their outstretched hands. Above and in between the figures are hieroglyphic inscriptions incised in vertical columns; to each deity belongs an inscription of six columns. The upper edge of the reliefs is formed by a continuous strip of sky with stars. Cartouches in the inscriptions date the reliefs to the time of Ptolemy I Soter (r. 306/4–283 BC), confirming that the sanctuary underwent a major rebuilding phase during the time of Ptolemy I and II.

As has been set out most recently by Daniel von Recklinghausen (von Recklinghausen 2015; evidence first assembled and discussed in Yoyotte 1993–94, 684–89) in his study of the temple's decoration, the reliefs form part of a single decorative scheme that probably adorned the exterior walls of Amun-Ra's temple. They comprise processions of two different types: economic, with figures representing the country's agricultural wealth and its resources being offered to the gods,<sup>9</sup> and geographical, with personifications of districts of Upper and Lower Egypt reflecting the country's religious topography.<sup>10</sup> The latter procession was quadripartite, i.e. each nome was represented by a female personification symbolising the nome proper and by three additional figures symbolising its subdivisions: the *mr*-canal representing watercourses, the *w*-region cultivated land and the *phw*-area a swampy region. It was also divided into two parts, one procession representing the nomes of Upper Egypt and the other those of Lower Egypt. The two parts would have been distributed on the *soubassements* of two symmetrically corresponding walls, with the Lower Egyptian nome procession probably on the northern longitudinal side of the naos (von Recklinghausen 2015, 7). The economic procession, too, most likely was divided in two parts (von Recklinghausen 2015, 7–8).

The new fragment is a welcome addition to the small collection of blocks from the Amun-Ra temple. The incomplete state of the inscription makes precise identification with the parallel texts in the Edfu temple problematic (especially since not all of the geographic or economic procession texts are completely preserved there) but there is no doubt about the general character of the piece. Like the other fragments, it presumably belonged to the decoration of the external wall of the naos as suggested by von Recklinghausen.

As has been highlighted by von Recklinghausen (2015, 4–6), the processions on Amun-Ra's temple are the earliest known example of a scheme that is typical for the *soubassement* of Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period, but otherwise only known from later, mostly

9 One fragment published by Edgar 1922, 5 and another unpublished fragment also found at Kom Geif; see von Recklinghausen 2015, 4. On economic processions in general see Rickert 2011; 2014.

10 The two fragments in Hanover and one block published by Edgar (1922, 4), to which also the fragment mentioned by Griffith belongs (Gardner 1888, 80; Naville and Griffith 1890, 69). On geographic processions in general, see Leitz 2014.

Roman, temples. It is also the only example so far from Lower Egypt, as all other parallels are in Upper Egypt, with the quadripartite nome procession finding an especially close parallel in the temple of Edfu dating to the reign of Ptolemy IX (Chassinat 1929; 1930) – a continuity that could be explained by the use of a pattern book that was either a very recent, early Ptolemaic development or that might go back as far as the Late Period or earlier.

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