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UCLA ENCYCLOPEDIA of EGYPTOLOGY

EL-DAKKA (PSELCHIS)

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Martina Minas-Nerpel

Dakke
Dakka

The settlement of el-Dakka, ancient Pselchis, is best known for its temple, built and decorated in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, but settlement there can be traced back to prehistoric times. At the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty an Egyptian fortress was built opposite el-Dakka, at Quban (or Contra Pselchis). Lower Nubia formed a military buffer-zone at Egypt's southern frontier, and Quban and its fortress played a significant role in the establishment of direct Egyptian control over natural resources. Around the fortress a settlement developed during the New Kingdom, when Nubia was Egypt's southern colony. In the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods el-Dakka was part of the Dodekaschoinos, a border region where a series of temples was built or extended, including the temple of el-Dakka, dedicated to Thoth of Pnubs.

تُعرف مستوطنة الدكّة (بسلخيس القديمة) بشكل أساسي بمعبدها الذي شيد وزُيّن في عصري البطالمة والرومان، غير أن الاستيطان في هذه المنطقة يمكن تتبعه إلى عصور ما قبل التاريخ. في مطلع الدولة الوسطى، وتحديدًا في بدايات الأسرة الثانية عشرة، أُقيم حصن مصري مقابل الدكّة في موقع كوبان (أو كونترا بسلخيس). وقد شكّلت النوبة السفلى منطقة عسكرية عازلة على الحدود الجنوبية لمصر، ولعبت كوبان وحصنها دورًا محوريًا في ترسيخ السيطرة المصرية على الموارد الطبيعية. ومع مرور الوقت، نشأت حول الحصن مستوطنة خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة، عندما كانت تُعدّ المستعمرة الجنوبية لمصر. وفي عصري البطالمة والرومان أصبحت الدكّة جزءًا من منطقة "الدوديكاشوينوس"، وهي منطقة حدودية شُيّد فيها عدد من المعابد أو جرى توسيعها، ومن بينها معبد الدكّة المكرّس للإله تحوت رب بنوبس.

El-Dakka in its original, now flooded, location lies c. 105 kilometers south of Aswan (Roeder 1930: 11) in Lower Nubia on the west bank of the Nile, opposite the point where the route from the Eastern Desert, via the Wadi Allaqi, meets the river-bank route (figs. 1a–1b). The settlement was known in Egyptian as *p(r)-srḳt* (or *pslkt*), "the place of the Skorpion" (*GDG II* 151). Its classical name was Pselkis or Pselchis. Today it is known as el-Dakka or Dakka.

A large Predynastic settlement, including remains of stone huts, existed in the el-Dakka Plain (Török 2009: 40–41; Gatto 2019: 276). The northern region of Lower Nubia, between el-Dakka and the First Cataract, was sparsely populated in the Late A-Group phase (c. 3150 – 2800 BCE), but early A-Group habitation sites and cemeteries were found around el-Dakka (Török 2009: 34–35, 51). From around 2400 to 2300 BCE, small settlements appeared in the fertile zones around el-Dakka, their early C-Group culture displaying affinities with early Kerma (Török 2009: 62). In the first half of the

Figure 1a. Map of Nubia between the First and Sixth Cataracts.

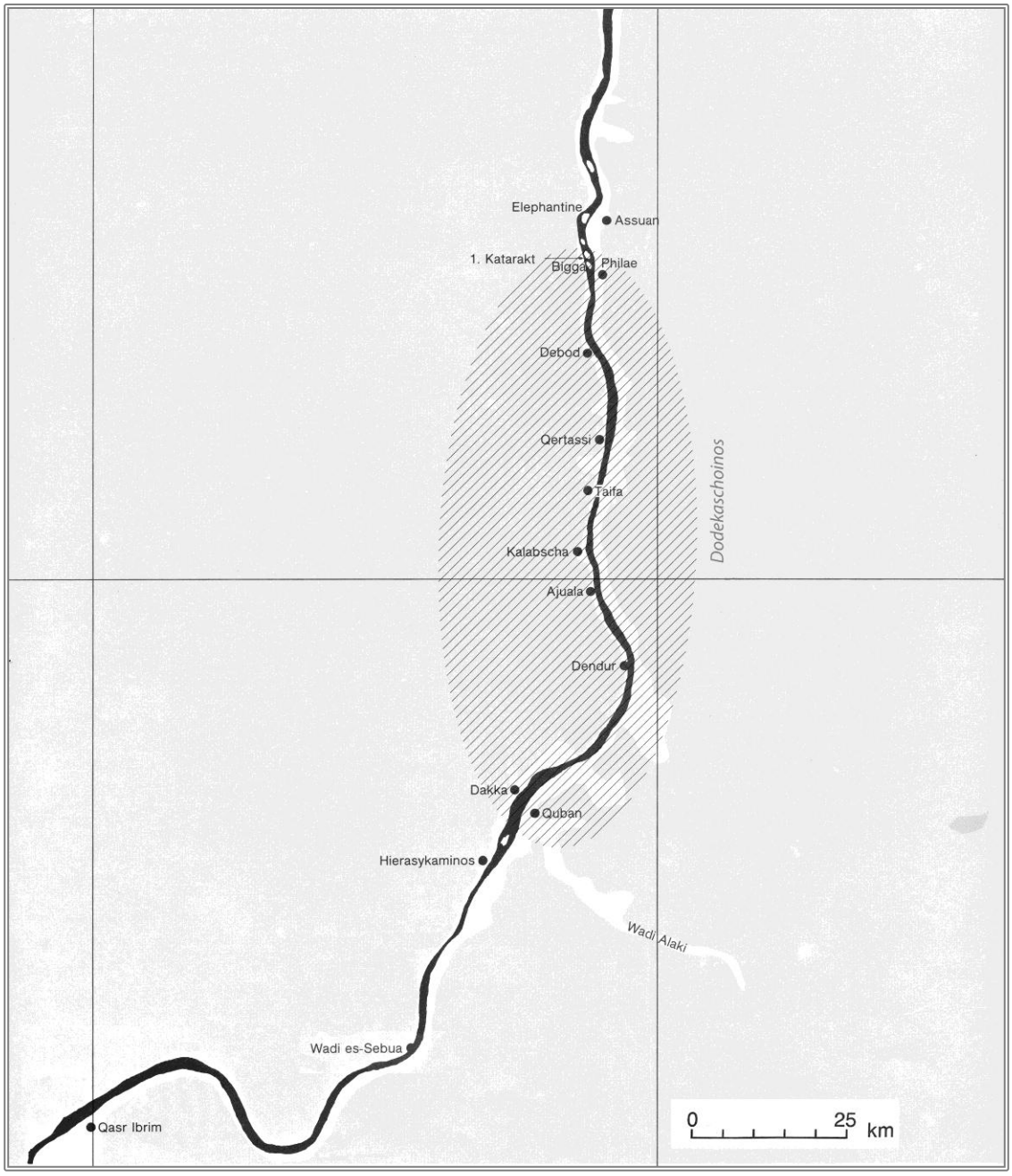

Figure 1b. Map of Lower Nubia and the Dodekaschoinos region.

Egyptian Sixth Dynasty large cemeteries reflect the concentration of Nubian populations in various locations in Nubia, including el-Dakka (Raue 2019: 300). Also dating to the Old Kingdom, mainly to the Sixth Dynasty, are rock inscriptions around el-Dakka (Auenmüller 2019: 402).

Opposite el-Dakka, on the east bank, an Egyptian fortress was built at Quban (Egyptian *bꜣkj*, classical Contra Pselchis, see *GDG II* 6–7) at the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty (Roeder 1930: 10; Donadoni 1984: 52), with a possible precursor in the Old Kingdom (Baines and Málek 1980: 181). Egyptian settlements had already been established at Quban in the

Second Dynasty (Török 2009: 55). The fortress guarded the entrance to a mining area: gold was smelted at Quban and shipped to Egypt. Economically, Nubia, especially its northern area, was a region through which exotic African goods reached Egypt and an important source for gold, minerals, and wood. The importance of the gold mines of Wadi Allaqi is attested, for example, by the Quban Stela (*KRI*: 353.01–360.06; *KRI Notes*: 214–216; *KRI Translations*: 188–193; Davies 1997: 233–244; Zibelius-Chen 1994), found in the fortress in 1834 (Tresson 1922: vii) and now kept in the Musée de Grenoble (Inv. MG 1937, MG 1969, MG 3565). Made of red granite and originally 175 centimeters high, the stela dates to year 3, first month of *Peret*, day 4, of Ramesses II (28 October 1277 BCE). A copy of the inscription was also engraved on the thickness of the pylon gateway of the Ramesside temple at Aksha (*PM VII*: 127; *KRI*: 353.01–360.06), whose few remains were relocated to the museum garden in Khartoum. The text bears witness to the king's determination to exploit the gold mining area and his concern over the waterless conditions in the eastern desert: the water shortage in the barren region of Wadi Allaqi was relieved by digging a well, and water was reached at a depth of twelve cubits (approximately 6.30 meters) (*KRI* 359.4: Quban Stela, l. 32).

With regard to the military, the northern part of Lower Nubia formed a buffer zone at the southern frontier of Egypt (Baines and Málek 1980: 178), and Quban and its fortress played a significant role in the establishment of direct Egyptian control over the area's natural resources (Török 2009: 85). Around the fortress a settlement developed during the New Kingdom, when Nubia was Egypt's southern colony (Spencer, Stevens, and Binder 2017: 1). Traces of cult buildings within the fortress or the settlements are attested, mostly for Horus of Quban (Ullmann 2019: 528–529; see Ullmann 2007: 66–79 for a detailed discussion of the temple buildings within and near the fortress).

To briefly characterize the later historical context of Nubia: In the eighth century BCE, a powerful kingdom, Napata being its capital, arose at the Fourth Cataract and was later moved even farther south to Meroe (Säve-Söderbergh 1987: 39). The Kushite kings conquered Egypt and ruled it for almost half a century, until driven out by the Assyrians in 660 BCE. In the third century BCE, relations were established between Egypt and Nubia, especially during the reign of the Meroitic ruler Ergamenes II (or Arkamani II, c. 218 – 190 BCE). According to Huß (1976: 182–184) relations were at times rather cooperative, an assumption further discussed below.

El-Dakka was part of the Dodekaschoinos, the southernmost area of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, located between Aswan and the entrance to the Wadi Allaqi (see fig. 1b), and consisting of twelve *schoinoi*, (singular *schoenos*: a land measurement of roughly seven miles) extending for approximately 75 miles (Dietze 1994: 69; Hölbl 2004: 78–79, 166; Locher 1999: 152). As in dynastic Egypt, it was a border region, in which a series of temples was built or extended under the Ptolemies and in the Roman Period, including the temple of el-Dakka, dedicated to Thoth of Pnubs.

As Roeder (1913: pls. 1b–2, 13–14; 1930: 13–16, 64–90) described, the sanctuary built at Quban under Thutmose III was reused as building material in the dromos of el-Dakka Temple (see also Ullmann 2007: 72–77). Blocks found at el-Dakka bearing the names of Thutmose III, Sety I, and Merenptah most probably originated from cult buildings at Quban, though the possibility that they also may have derived from a New Kingdom temple for Horus of Quban at el-Dakka cannot be excluded (Ullmann 2019: 529 n. 14). New Kingdom blocks can be found today at New Wadi el-Sebua, collected in a lapidarium near the temple (fig. 2), a location to which they were removed due to the flooding caused by the Aswan High Dam.

The Impact of Dam Construction and the UNESCO Salvage of Nubian Temples

In the 1960s many Nubian temples were removed through UNESCO salvage operations to new locations because of the construction of the Aswan High Dam, inaugurated in 1971. Between 1962 and 1968

Figure 2. El-Dakka Temple and the lapidarium after their relocation to New Wadi el-Sebua.

Figure 3. The temples of el-Dakka and Muharraqa after their relocation.

The temple of el-Dakka was dismantled and removed to a new site near el-Sebua (Bresciani 1975; Säve-Söderbergh 1987: 229), roughly 40 kilometers south of its original position. The small Roman temple of Muharraqa (Hierasykaminos) was also relocated close by (fig. 3).

Before its removal el-Dakka Temple was located on the west bank of the Nile in the middle of a fertile zone, which Roeder (1930: 10) described as being c. 25 kilometers long and up to 1.5 kilometers wide; the east bank, in contrast, was almost entirely barren desert. El-Dakka's original location comprised more than the temple, but the effort to rescue the cultural heritage of Nubia from flooding focused on the temples: the mudbrick structures and intangible heritage, the social history, and the connection to the land are gone, so that the re-erected stone temple is devoid of its relationship to the cultural landscape, which is the case for all relocated Nubian temples.

Various travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reported on el-Dakka Temple (for details, see Roeder 1930: 1–7). David Roberts (1796 – 1864) traveled up the Nile in 1838 and preserved many of the Nubian temple buildings in watercolor,

Figure 4. The temple of el-Dakka in 1838; watercolor by David Roberts.

including el-Dakka Temple (fig. 4). He thus contributed to shaping the European perception of the region, which may possibly have influenced the temples' preservation in the 1960s. Yet even before the High Dam was built and the temples moved in a rescue effort, Lower Nubia was threatened by the successive raising of the height of the Old Aswan Dam between 1908 and 1910, and in 1929. Moreover, parts of el-Dakka Temple had collapsed in 1896 and 1902 and were rebuilt by Alessandro Barsanti between 1908 and 1909 (Roeder 1930: 7, 42).

The documentation of the decorated stone temples of Lower Nubia, principally of New Kingdom and Ptolemaic and Roman date, was motivated by concerns about their damage from seasonal flooding and resulted in the series of publications *Les temples immergés de la Nubie*, the first volume published by Henri Gauthier in 1911 on the temple of Kalabsha. In 1910, Roeder (1930: 8) conducted field work for the series at el-Dakka from January to March and from November to December, publishing two volumes, first his plates (Roeder 1913), followed by the text (Roeder 1930). He concentrated on the excavation, the architectural description, and the temple inscriptions, which were published in type-set hieroglyphs. As a third part of the el-Dakka Temple series, Ruppel (1930) investigated the temple's Greek and Latin inscriptions and graffiti. The Meroitic inscriptions were published by Griffith (1912) in his volume of Meroitic inscriptions from Napata to Philae. Subsequently Griffith (1935, 1937) published the Demotic graffiti of the Dodekaschoinos, including those in el-Dakka, to which Bresciani (1969) added many more.

The Temple of Thoth of Pnubs at el-Dakka

Building and decoration in the Ptolemaic Period

At the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period (when exactly is unclear), a temple for Thoth of Pnubs was erected at el-Dakka (figs. 5-6),

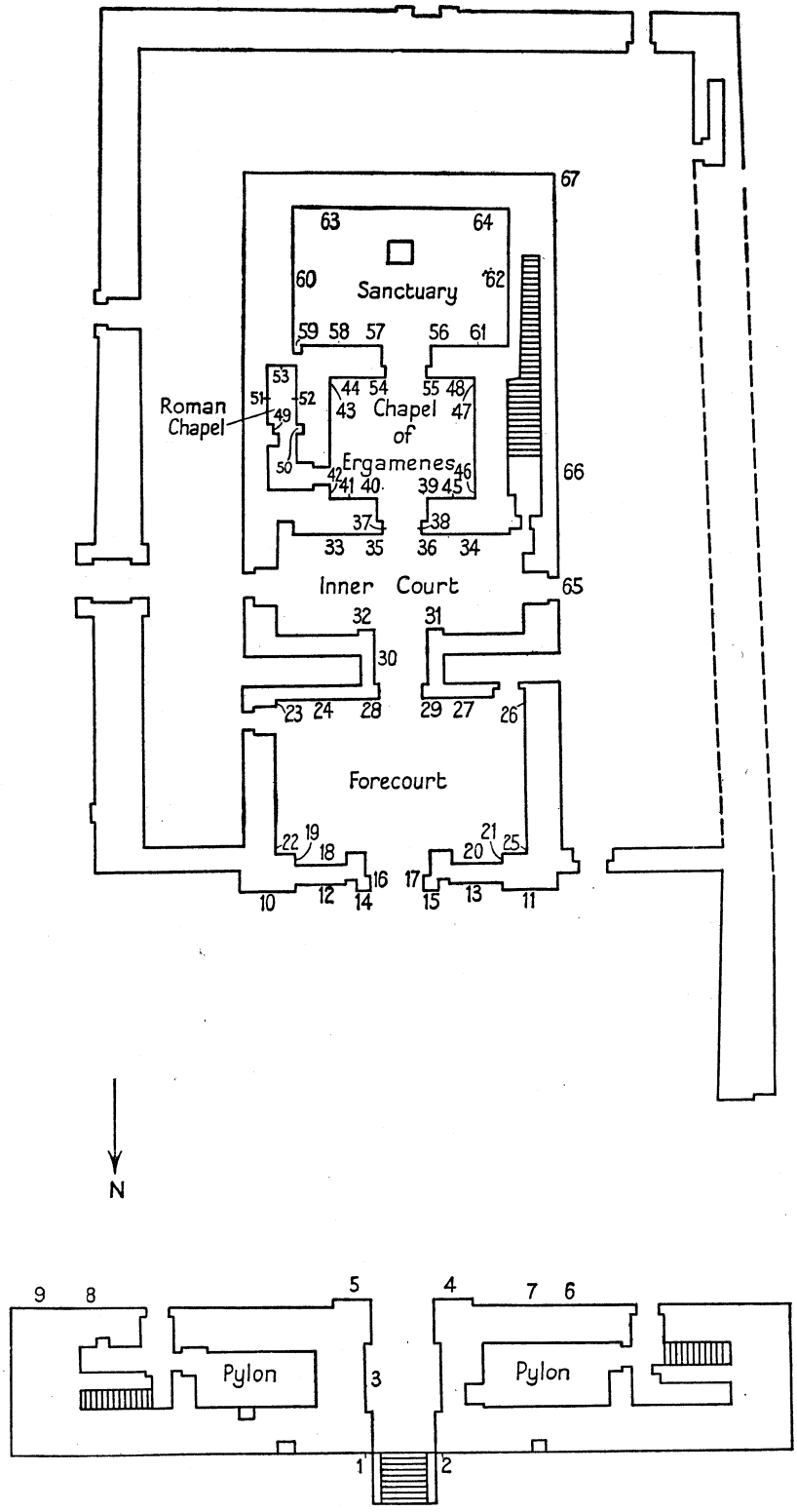

Figure 5. General plan of el-Dakka Temple.

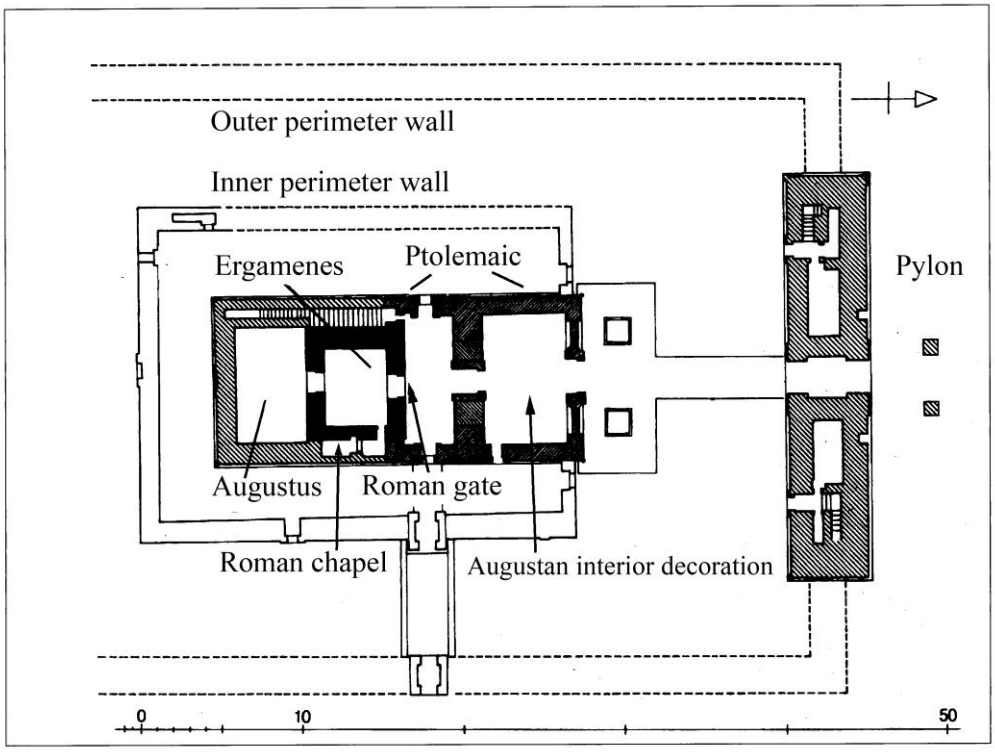

Figure 6. Plan of el-Dakka Temple, indicating the phases of construction and decoration.

perhaps replacing a preceding New Kingdom sanctuary. The earliest rulers attested by name are the two—at times contemporary—rulers of Egypt and Meroe, Ptolemy IV Philopator (221 – 205 BCE) and Ergamenes/Arkamani II (c. 218 – 190 BCE). Under their rule a single-chambered chapel on a 5 × 6.8-meter base was built, topped by a cavetto cornice (Arnold 1999: 179). This core temple was extended and decorated under Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (170 – 163; 145 – 116 BCE), and later by Augustus (30 BCE – 14 CE) and Tiberius (14 – 37 CE), whose names are all attested in the hieroglyphic inscriptions. At the latest under Trajan (98 – 117 CE), the temple was integrated into a fortress (Hölbl 2004: 138).

El-Dakka Temple is oriented north-south, that is, parallel to the Nile (Roeder 1930: 13), thus constituting an exception among most Egyptian, and especially Nubian, temples (Bresciani 1975: 988). The Nubian provenance of its main god, Thoth of Pnubs, might explain why it is facing the north (see also Preys 2006: 145–146). Pnubs is identified with Dukki Gel, one kilometer north of Kerma at the southern end of the Third Nile Cataract (Bonnet 2019). The excavations at Pnubs or Dukki Gel/Kerma have brought to light several Egyptian temples erected and expanded at Pnubs in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Three were built side by side and, like the temple of Thoth of Pnubs at el-Dakka, were oriented along a north-south axis (Valbelle 2017: 123, with further references).

According to Dietze (1994: 103–105), the Ptolemaic temple was initiated under Ptolemy IV Philopator and his advisors as part of the Ptolemaic expansionary politics, because Wadi Allaqi, as a rich mining region, was of great importance to Egypt and the Ptolemies. She assumes the temple at el-Dakka was also built in order to demonstrate Ptolemaic power. It was placed in a precinct originally secured by a strong enclosure wall dating to the Ptolemaic Period (Roeder 1930: 12), which might indicate

that soldiers were stationed there for the area's defense.

Under Ptolemy IV, a gate and a broad hall (*PM VII* 45–6 [28]–[32]; Roeder 1913: 59–63, 66–67; 1930: 152–171; Arnold 1999: 180, fig. 128) were built in front of the single-chambered chapel. This gate is not architecturally connected with the adjacent walls of the inner court or broad hall. The door presents a slope both on the outside and the inside, which is not standard for a gate within a temple. Both sides are decorated in low relief, so that Winter (1981: 510–511) assumed that the gate had been part of a brick wall around the temple. On the door jambs, Ptolemy IV is designated as "the god who loves his father," ***nṯr mrj jt.f*** (Roeder 1930: 157, 162 [pl. 62], 166, 167, 168 [pl. 68], 169 [pl. 69]), or *Theos Philopator* in Greek. Because his cult name is written in the singular, the jambs' decoration must pre-date Philopator's marriage to his sister Arsinoe III, which took place following his ascension to the throne in 221 and before the autumn of 220 (Hölbl 2001: 127). In contrast, the decoration of the gate's lintel, on both the north side (Roeder 1930: 152–154; 1913: pl. 63) and the south (Roeder 1930: 163–165; 1913: pl. 70), includes his queen Arsinoe III and the cult title in the dual (Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 95, 114–116). The lintel of the inner face of this doorway (fig. 7) is also the southernmost point under Ptolemy IV in which his dynastic ancestors are named in a complex form (Minas 2000: 3–5, Dok. 1): on the east side, the cartouches of the ruling couple are followed by the names of their parents, Ptolemy III Euergetes I and Berenike II, and on the west side, by the names of their grandparents, Ptolemy II Philadelphos and Arsinoe II.

Under Ptolemy IV and Ergamenes II, the building and decoration sequence at el-Dakka Temple, reflecting the power struggles in the region, is not always easy to establish, but can be attempted by analysis of the relief scenes, especially the use of royal names and epithets (for a detailed discussion, see Preys 2021; Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 94–96, 115–116). Because of the seemingly entangled building and decoration activities of these two rulers at el-Dakka, relations between Ptolemy IV and Ergamenes II were interpreted as cooperative in the time between the battle of Raphia (217 BCE) and the beginning of the native insurrection around 207/206 BCE (e.g., Huß 1976: 179–183; Žabkar 1975: 32). Joint building projects of Ptolemy IV and Ergame-

Figure 7. Gate lintel showing the Ptolemaic ancestors of Ptolemy IV Philopator at el-Dakka.

Figure 8. The Dodekaschoinos Decree of Ergamenes II at el-Dakka, with the partly eliminated epithet of the Theoi Philopatores outlined in red.

nes II were assumed for el-Dakka, contra Erich Winter (1981), who clearly showed that Philopator's activities preceded those of Ergamenes II.

The decoration of the single-chambered chapel, even if built under Ptolemy IV, is in the name of Ergamenes II—hence it was dubbed the Ergamenes Chapel. In this chapel Ergamenes is twice referred to as the "father-loving god," which is the cult name of Ptolemy IV Philopator. Huß (2001: 424 n. 3) is of the opinion that the epithet indeed belongs to Ergamenes, but since no other monuments of this ruler confirm the use of this cult epithet for the Nubian king, it clearly indicates that the decoration was conceived for Ptolemy IV, probably in Philae (Roeder 1930: 278; Winter 1981: 511; Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 95). Political circumstances and the changing powers must have prevented the execution of the project at el-Dakka.

In the chapel, one of the two occurrences of Philopator's epithet attested for Ergamenes is featured in its singular form in an offering scene (Roeder 1913: pl. 111; 1930: 274). Therefore, the decoration's *conception* must date to the very beginning of the reign of Ptolemy IV, before his marriage to Arsinoe III. Ergamenes used this concept, and the designing priests simply changed the cartouche name, but not the epithet.

A second use of the epithet, now in its dual form, the "two father-loving gods," is part of the so-called Dodekaschoinos Decree, which attests in stone the donation of the region between Philae and the Wadi Allaqi to the goddess Isis. Rather unconventionally, this decree is located within an offering scene (fig. 8) dedicated to the goddess (Roeder 1913: pl. 100; 1930: 249–253; see also Kormysheva 1997; Locher 1997; 1999: 234–238). The presence of the cult name "father-loving gods," which was later erased (Roeder 1930: 251 with notes 4–5), indicates that the original

decree was issued in the name of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III, the Theoi Philopatores (father-loving gods). When Ergamenes II gained control over the region, including Philae, he confirmed the endowment by having it engraved at its southern end at el-Dakka. Although the decree was engraved in Ergamenes' name, the priests responsible for designing this specific scene apparently forgot to eliminate the reference to the king who originally issued the decree, that is Ptolemy IV Philopator (outlined in red in Figure 8). It appears that, once the engravers of Ergamenes' decree realized their mistake, they tried to eliminate the allusion to the Theoi Philopatores (Preys 2021: 131–136; Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 115–116).

It is impossible to say if a stela with the decree text was erected at el-Dakka during Philopator's reign, but if this was indeed the case, it was probably linked to the construction activities of the Theoi Philopatores in this temple. Locher (1997; 1999: 234–238) demonstrates convincingly that the decree was inserted on the temple walls in el-Dakka in a later form adopted for this ritual scene, copied from the original decree text issued by the Theoi Philopatores. By copying the decree in his name, Ergamenes II confirmed the control of the Dodekashoinos by the priests of Philae, a control later reinforced by Ptolemy VI Philometor (a grandson of Philopator), as established in his Dodekaschoinos Decree at Philae (Locher 1999: 341–342). This interpretation clearly supports Winter's theory that Philopator's activities preceded those of Ergamenes II, even while other scholars (e.g., Säve-Söderbergh 1987: 39) have continued to maintain that the temple of el-Dakka was begun by Ergamenes. The building and decoration sequence of the Ergamenes Chapel can thus be summarized as follows (see Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 115–116):

• At the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy IV—when the king is referred to in the singular as "the father-loving god" (*nṯr mrj jt.f*), that is, before his marriage to Arsinoe III—the concept for the decoration of the Ergamenes Chapel is created.

• After the marriage of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III, the Dodekashoinos Decree is issued, employing the dual form, *nṯr.wj mrj.wj jt.w*. The original version does not survive.

• The Ptolemies lose control of Nubia to the Meroitic rulers.

• Under Ergamenes II the chapel at el-Dakka is decorated in his name, applying the already existing decoration concept created under Ptolemy IV. In one case, the engravers overlook the singular form of the cult title "the father-loving god."

• The Dodekashoinos Decree of Ptolemy IV is confirmed by Ergamenes II.

• The decoration concept of the chapel is modified to incorporate the decree text in an offering scene. The endowment of Ergamenes is based on the decree of Ptolemy IV (per step 2 above), but the engravers forget to eliminate the dual form of the cult title (of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III). Once they realize their mistake, they erase the allusion to the Theoi Philopatores.

The decoration activity of Ptolemy IV at el-Dakka was limited to the gate, while the temple itself was subsequently decorated under Ergamenes II. Since the inscriptions, both on the lintel of the gate and in the decree, mention the "father-loving gods"—that is, Ptolemy IV and his sister-wife Arsinoe III—el-Dakka must still have been under Ptolemaic control after the king's marriage, which took place by autumn 220 BCE at the latest. It is generally accepted that the control of Ergamenes II and his successor Adikhalamani over the Dodekaschoinos corresponds to the Upper Egyptian uprising of 206 to 186 BCE, during which the Meroitic kings extended their rule across the area (Winter 1981: 512). If this is the case, there would have been ample time (roughly 15 years) to continue the temple decoration under Ptolemy IV beyond the gate, but political problems in Nubia may have arisen earlier than the Theban revolt, so that it might have become impossible to continue work in el-Dakka.

Figure 9. The front of the pronaos of el-Dakka Temple.

Figure 10. El-Dakka Temple from the northeast.

It was only after the reestablishment of Ptolemaic rule over the Dodekaschoinos that the temple was further enlarged by a pronaos (figs. 5–6, 9–10), or forecourt (*PM VII*: 44–45). It had two front columns and two screen walls but no interior support. Architraves over six meters long bridged the pronaos, which made further columns unnecessary (Arnold 1999: 204). At the same time, the inner stone enclosure wall, which joined the front of the pronaos, may have been built. The facade of the pronaos (*PM VII* 43–44 [10]–[17]; Roeder 1930: 98–127; Arnold 1999: 204; Hölbl 2004: 140, Abb. 205) was decorated under Ptolemy

Figure 11. Outer face of the pylon at el-Dakka Temple.

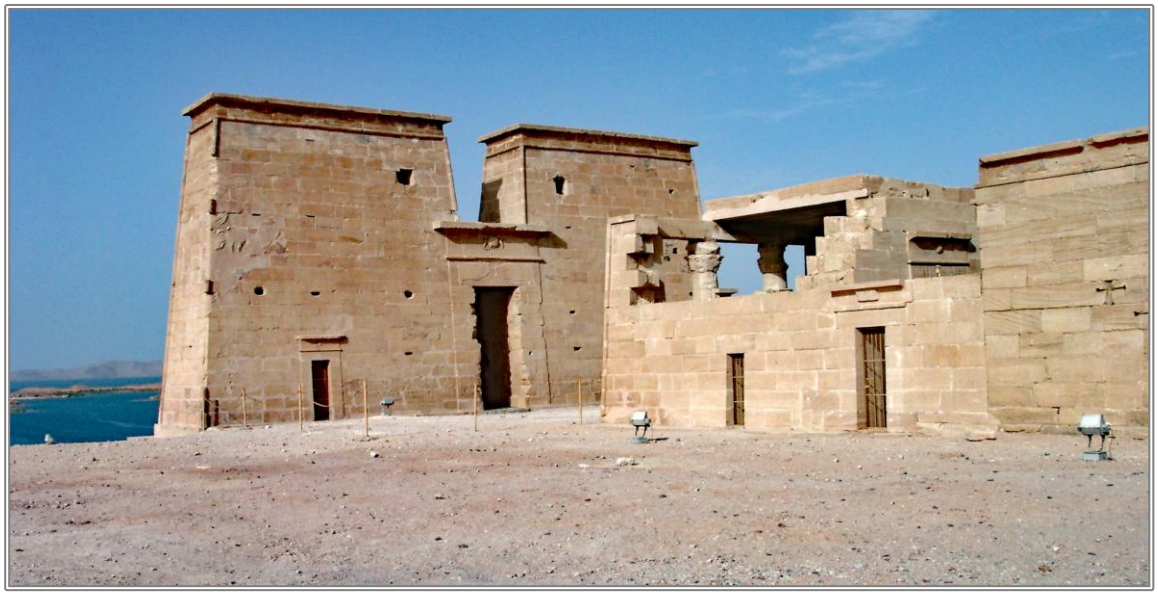

Figure 12. Inner face of the pylon at el-Dakka Temple.

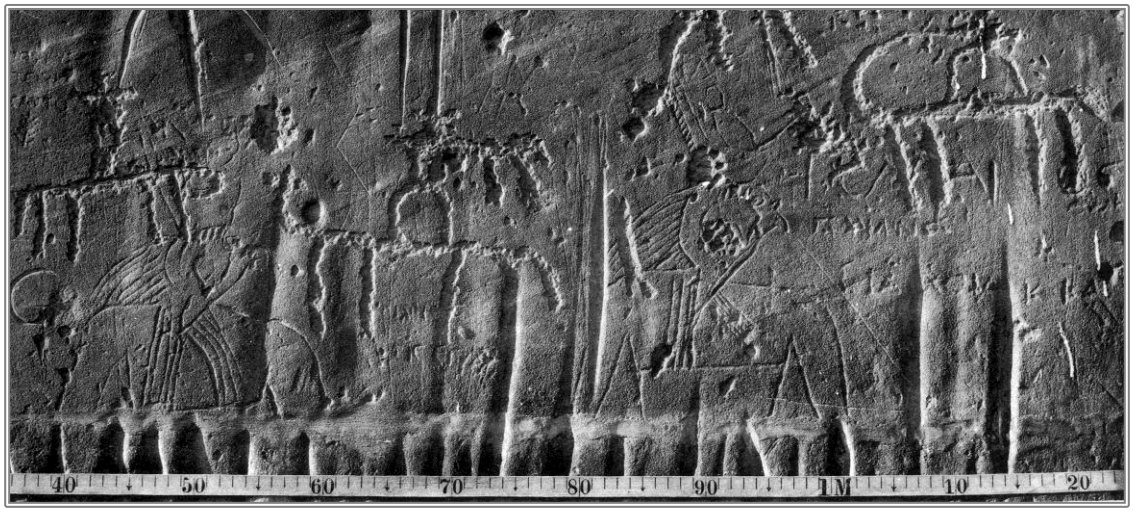

Figure 13. Sketches and graffiti on the eastern door jamb of the pylon doorway at el-Dakka Temple.

VIII, making el-Dakka the southernmost location that attests the name of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, one of the grandsons of Ptolemy IV Philopator, followed by the names of his dynastic ancestors (Minas 2000: 5–6, Dok. 2–3). The reliefs were probably carved between 145 and 142/140 BCE, that is before his marriage to his second wife, Cleopatra III, since only Cleopatra II is mentioned (Minas 1997: 109).

Probably also under Ptolemy VIII, but by 25 BCE at the latest, the pylon (figs. 11–12) was erected (Dietze 1994: 106; Hölbl 2004: 140–142). The pylon is 24.31 meters wide and 11.62 meters high (Roeder 1930: 16–17; Arnold 1999: 244) and was left mostly undecorated. The cornice of the entrance is decorated on both the inner and the outer face with a winged disk, and at the jambs' base are sketches of Horus (fig. 13) (*PM VII* 43 [1]–[2], [4]–[5]; Roeder 1913: pls. 2–5, 17a–b). The eastern thickness is decorated with ritual scenes (*PM VII* 43 [3]; Roeder 1913: pls. 15–16; 1930: 92–94), and sketches or unfinished scenes can be seen on the inner tower walls (*PM VII* 43 [4]–[9]; Roeder 1913: pl. 4). The pylon's date can only be determined on architectural grounds and by the many graffiti that visitors left on its walls (see fig. 13). A new inner, stone enclosure wall was connected to the pylon. From the pylon, a causeway (or dromos), c. 55 meters long and c. 5 meters wide, led to the Nile. In the causeway numerous New Kingdom blocks were inserted (Roeder 1930: 14).

Roman extensions and decoration

Under Augustus, parts of Lower Nubia were reconquered from the Meroitic rulers and a copious temple construction program was undertaken (Minas-Nerpel 2012, esp. 373–374). Because of its military importance, the Dodekaschoinos received substantial political and ideological attention. Especially after the peace treaty of Samos (21/20 BCE), when the southern frontier of the *Imperium Romanum* was established south of el-Dakka at Hierasykaminos (Muharraqa) and the conflict between Rome and Meroe was brought to an end, an explicit manifestation of the new ruler as pharaoh was required to mark the reincorporation of the region. At Philae, Biga, Debod, Qertassi, Tafa, Kalabsha, Ajuala, Dendur, el-Dakka, and Muharraqa, Egyptian temples were built or extended, and in these Augustus is represented venerating Egyptian and local Nubian gods (see Hölbl 2004; Verhoeven 2008). Under his rule, more temples were expanded, initiated, and decorated than under any other Roman pharaoh. The temple of Thoth at el-Dakka also received attention and the inner walls of the pronaos, erected in Ptolemaic times, were decorated (*PM VII*: 44–45 [18]–[27]; Hölbl 2004: 142 and Abb. 206).

Figure 14. Naos of red granite in the Roman sanctuary at el-Dakka Temple.

Also under Augustus a sanctuary (*PM VII*: 48–49 [5]–[64]) was added to the south of the Ergamenes Chapel, in which a naos of red granite (fig. 14) was placed (Roeder 1913: pl. 143b; Ruppel 1930: 55–56, Taf. 147b). A Demotic graffito (Griffith 1935: pl. 5; 1937: 25, Dak. 29; Török 2009: 437–438, no. 3) was carefully carved on the west half of the sanctuary's north wall beneath the cartouche names of Augustus, in a ritual scene in which the Roman emperor makes an offering to Isis. This secondary inscription dates to his year 40 (10/11 CE) and introduces the Meroitic *strategos* Selewe, "the agent of Isis of the Abaton and Philae; the agent of Thoth (of) the *nubs*-tree, the Great God; who caused the sanctuary to be made in the name of the kings forever." Such "district commissioners" or state-

Figure 15. Tiberius, followed by Cleopatra, before Osiris.

appointed officials, all of whom had non-Egyptian names such as Selewe (Török 2009: 435), emerged from the priesthoods of the temple of Philae or the temple of Thoth at el-Dakka. Their documents, written in Demotic, date from the period between the late first century BCE and the mid-first century CE (ibid.: 435–439). Thus, it appears that the temple policy was probably stimulated by the local Meroitic elite, just as it commonly was by the elite in Egypt (see Baines 1997: 229).

The Roman sanctuary at el-Dakka, for which a door must have been cut into the south wall of the Ergamenes Chapel, is slightly wider than the older chapel. A thick wall encompasses both the sanctuary and the chapel, with a staircase to the roof on the western side, and an additional Roman chapel on the east side (*PM VII*: 47–48 [49]–[53]). This lateral Roman chapel is almost entirely dedicated to the Distant Goddess, the mythical raging lion goddess who needed to be fetched back after her flight to Nubia (Junker 1911; Inconnu-Bocquillon 2001; Preys 2006). Thoth of Pnubs plays a pivotal role in this myth of the Return of the Distant Goddess.

In the reign of Tiberius (14 – 37 CE), the lintel of the entrance door to the Ergamenes Chapel at el-Dakka (*PM VII* 46, [35]–[36]; Roeder 1913: pl. 77) was redecorated (fig. 15). As Hölbl (2004: 143) pointed out, the style of these Roman Period reliefs is less sophisticated than that of the second-century BCE reliefs under Ergamenes, or of the early Roman Period reliefs at Philae. One detail of the lintel's decoration is of particular interest—namely, the depiction of a queen named Cleopatra behind Tiberius. To see a queen so named behind a Roman pharaoh is not a singular occurrence and can also be observed for Octavian on the Kalabsha gate (Winter 2003: 211, Taf. L: scene 24): here a space had been reserved for Cleopatra II, the sister-wife of Ptolemy VIII, but only her names and epithets were carved, while the space for her figure was left empty. We can only speculate that the priests at Kalabsha realized their mistake in designing the scene. Cleopatra's titles were transferred from the original scene in Philae to this Roman scene further south in Nubia. Similarly, a Ptolemaic queen, in both cases unnamed, is depicted behind Augustus in the temple at Kalabsha (Hölbl 2004: 128, Abb. 184) and behind Tiberius in the Isis temple at Philae (Hölbl 2004: 62, Abb. 79). Priests clearly copied scenes from Ptolemaic reliefs

Figure 16. Monumental false door, or contra-temple, in the center of the rear wall of el-Dakka Temple.

and did not question the queen's identity or adopt it to the political circumstances.

Some drastic changes can be observed in the temple precinct in the second century CE, when el-Dakka was the central military base of the Dodekaschoinos. The temple was integrated into a Roman fortress, perhaps around the time of Trajan (98 – 117 CE) (Hölbl 2004: 138). According to a Greek inscription on the exterior of the western wall of the temple, a Roman veteran in the second century CE, Saturnius Aquila, had gilded a naos, which is probably the one mentioned above of red granite and placed in the Roman sanctuary (Hölbl 2004: 146–147). This demonstrates the connectivity of the Roman military to this temple. This connectivity can already be traced from the time of Augustus onwards, when Roman soldiers left their dedication inscriptions and graffiti on the pylon walls, venerating Thoth in his Greek interpretation as Hermes, in Greek often designated as Pauthnuphis, which could refer to "the perfect man," ***pꜣ-ꜥḥꜣwtj-nfr*** (*LGG II* 188a). Hölbl (2004: 138) translates this epithet as "the perfect warrior," which, he suggests, could refer to Thoth as a combative lion. Thoth of Pnubs is also called ***ꜥḥꜣwtj n pr-nbs***, "the man of Pnubs" (*LGG II*: 188a), attested in Demotic graffiti as ***ḥwṯ n pr-nbs***, for example at el-Dakka (Griffith 1937: 20, el-Dakka 10; Bresciani 1969: pls. 69–70: inscr. 54, B dém. 19) and Philae (Griffith 1937: 44, ph. 11 and ph. 15; Cruz-Uribe 2016: 49, GPH 11). But the Roman soldiers did not venerate Hermes or Thoth exclusively: a gilded statue of Serapis, seated on a throne, was discovered in the Roman lateral sanctuary of el-Dakka but is now lost (Ruppel 1930: 68–70, Gr. 100; Hölbl 2004: 146 with n. 363). According to its Latin inscription, it was donated by T. Flavius Valens, a Roman centurion in the time of Trajan, and was initially misinterpreted as "Jupiter Olympian"; the accompanying headless Cerberus was misunderstood as a lion.

In the center of the rear wall of el-Dakka Temple—that is, on the main temple axis—a monumental false door, 2.53 meters wide and 4 meters high (Roeder 1913: pl. 12; 1930: 41; not indicated in *PM VII* 42), forms a contra-temple (Preisigke-Borsian 2021: 456–460; Hölbl 2004: 146 with fig. 214; Borchardt 1933: 9) in the otherwise undecorated wall that had not even been smoothed in preparation for decoration (fig. 16). Because the false door was formed from the blocks of the rear wall, it necessarily dates to the same time, the Roman Period. The details of the false door were left unfinished. Only the upper part of its inner section shows some carving, the four-feathered crown of Thoth of Pnubs. The presence of a false door in an otherwise undecorated and unsmoothed rear wall is not unique and can also be observed at the temple of Isis at Deir el-Shelwit, likewise dating to the Roman Period (Zivie-Coche 1992: 51, pls 47–48, 50; Minas-Nerpel 2018: 40 with fig. 11).

The practice of establishing contra-temples goes back at least to the Eighteenth Dynasty (Minas-Nerpel 2018: 38). Contra-temples vary architecturally from rather small to monumental cult reliefs, false doors, or even edifices with several rooms (Minas-Nerpel 2018; Preisigke-Borsian 2021). They share one characteristic, their location at the rear wall of

a larger temple, most often at the back wall of the sanctuary. The focus of the contra-temple was the primary deity(ies) of the temple to which it abutted. It thus connected with the primary cult and established a further location for cult practices, and has often been analyzed as a place that "permitted the lay public—unable to enter the sanctum itself—close access to the god whose holy of holies was on the other side of the rear wall" (Brand 2007: 61). In el-Dakka Temple, an entrance was cut through the false door at some later point, creating an additional entrance to the naos. This later door was filled with cement by Barsanti (1908 – 1909) to stabilize the wall (Roeder 1930: 41). Highly exceptionally, this opening in the false door had made the sanctuary accessible from the contra-temple (Minas-Nerpel 2018: 42). Whether the creation of an additional access was perhaps related to the rededication of the Roman lateral sanctuary to Serapis and the possibility of lay people entering the naos remains speculative. The question is rather what triggered the creation of such a shrine and the additional display of cult practice at the rear wall of the temple, unless, of course, the temple was no longer used as such when the secondary entrance was created.

There was yet another contra-temple at el-Dakka, which is now lost. Located slightly to the west of the main temple axis, it was formed as another false door on the rear or south part of the enclosure wall (Roeder 1930: 29; Borchardt 1933: 9), and is still visible on David Roberts's watercolor (see fig. 4). In contrast to the contra-temple located at the rear wall of the naos, this structure is indicated in the plan of Porter and Moss (*PM VII*: 42). It is exceptional for a rather small temple such as this one to have two contra-temples located on the main temple axis, even if one is positioned slightly to the west.

Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Meroitic Graffiti at the Temple of el-Dakka

The interaction of different groups of the population, as well as the Roman military, with the Egyptian temple at el-Dakka is attested from the time of Augustus onward by numerous graffiti on the walls (Hölbl 2004: 138, 142). Griffith (1937: 17–32) counted 33 Demotic graffiti (Dak. 1–33), to which Bresciani (1969: pls. 48–94) added many more, attesting 90 in total. Ruppel (1930) published 100 graffiti in Greek and Latin. Many of these secondary inscriptions are located on the pylon, to which visitors had easy access, but they can also be found in the internal spaces of the temple (see the plan of Bresciani 1969: pl. 48). The local Nubian elites, who served as priests and administrators for the kingdom of Meroe, left inscriptions in Demotic (see Griffith 1937: 25, Dak. 29) and also in Meroitic. For example, one rather large Meroitic cursive graffito, dated to the first century BCE, is located on the outer face of the pylon's west tower, near the top (*PM VII*: 42–43; Breyer 2014: 302–303, no. 7; Griffith 1912: no. 92, pls. xii–xiii; *FHN II*: no. 173; Török 2009: 499, no. 2): encircled by a cartouche topped by a sun disk and two feathers are eighteen lines of Meroitic text, referring to King (Meroitic *qore*) Teriteqas, Candace Amanirenas, and Akinidad ***pḳr*** ("high official," see *FHN II*: 670, comment ad no. 152, l. 38).

The west exterior wall of the sanctuary (*PM VII* 50 [66]; Roeder 1913: pl. 144–145; Bresciani 1969: pl. 78) attests Greek, Meroitic, and Demotic graffiti near a relief of Horus, Thoth of Pnubs, Arensnuphis, Tefnut, and Hathor. Preisigke-Borsian (2021: 457 with n. 19) lists this relief as a secondary cult place, because holes around the figure of Thoth of Pnubs indicate that some sort of construction had been attached over his figure to conceal him. Roeder (1930: 264) doubted that the holes indicated the application of gold foil or cover. Cayzac's study (2012) of the holes in and around sixty offering scenes in Philae indicated the frequent use of holes in the application of cover—mainly a gold coat—to (parts of) these scenes. Brand (2007: 60–61) argues, based on the holes in the stone around many reliefs in contra-temples, that the images might have been enclosed, almost concealed, like the "veiled" images of some gods on temple walls. He proposes that the holes supported frames for fabric coverings that could reveal the image to ordinary people at particular times. Frood (2013: 290) considers the notion of veiling as anachronistic. In her view, the holes indicate

the employment of different types of "enrichment" of the images, such as gilding, or embellishment with wood, fabric, or other materials.

El-Dakka's Connection with Philae and the Region of the First Nile Cataract

The influence that the First Cataract region had on Nubian temples and their decoration is well documented (e.g., Winter 1995; Török 2009: 395–396; Laskowska-Kusztal 2010; Eller 2022). As shown above, the decoration of el-Dakka Temple was lastingly influenced by Philae and its theologians (Minas-Nerpel and Preys 2023: 94–96, 114–116, with references). For example, the Dodekaschoinos Decree of the Meroitic ruler Ergamenes II attested in el-Dakka Temple was originally created for Ptolemy IV in Philae, but was used by the Meroitic king after he had conquered the area and built at both Philae and el-Dakka. Hölbl (2004: 145) argues: *Dieses theologische Denken im fernen Dakke in augusteischer Zeit eine Lebendigkeit und Entwicklungskraft erkennen läßt, die nur über die direkten Beziehungen zu Philae erklärbar sind.* Inconnu-Bocquillon (2001: 333) even suggests that Thoth of Pnubs was a purely theological creation of the priests at Philae.

The island of Philae at the First Cataract is embedded in the Nubian-Egyptian cultural environment of the Dodekaschoinos, to which the temple of Arensnuphis (Kockelmann 2012: 3, with further references) also pays tribute. This rather modest temple was, like the core of el-Dakka Temple, erected under Ptolemy IV upon the remains of an older temple and extended over roughly two hundred years, from the time of Ergamenes II to the reign of Tiberius (Haeny 1985: 220–221; Vassilika 1989: 133–136, pl. 23A–D; Locher 1999: 129–130; Hölbl 2004: 42). Arensnuphis, also attested (four times in total) in the Ergamenes Chapel at el-Dakka (Roeder 1913: 171–276), has often been seen by scholars as a Nubian god (also Kockelmann 2012: 3) who was not venerated north of Philae but, rather, much earlier in Meroe, thus exemplifying the intellectual exchange between Meroe and Egypt (Winter 1973; Török 2009: 388). However, Lanciers (2016: 187–216) conclusively demonstrates that by the early third century BCE the cult of Khnum-Arensnuphis, for whom sanctuaries and cult personnel are attested at Elephantine from the seventh to the fourth centuries BCE, had evolved in the Theban area into a cult of the autonomous god Arensnuphis. This speaks in favor of an Egyptian origin of Arensnuphis, who is attested in Nubia only at a later stage: the earliest evidence for Arensnuphis in Nubia that can be securely dated comes from the lion temple at Musawwarat el-Sufra (north of the Sixth Cataract), built by the Meroitic king Arnekhamani (c. 235 – 218 BCE). The inscriptions at the lion temple were clearly influenced by texts from Philae (Winter 1973: 240; Hallof 2006); at Musawwarat el-Sufra, Arensnuphis is called Lord of the Abaton (Lanciers 2016: 206–207), connecting him with Osiris's burial site on Biga Island. Already under the early Ptolemies, Arensnuphis, Lord of the Abaton, appears at Elephantine. This connection with the Abaton might also explain why Arensnuphis's cult flourished until the late second century BCE at Medinet Habu, the location of another tomb of Osiris (Lanciers 2016: 206–207).

Fernández-Pichel (2022) may also demonstrate a connection with Theban concepts in his study of the typological analogies between two scenes, one from the pronaos of el-Dakka Temple, the other from the Ergamenes Chapel. Both scenes represent the Theban triad, comprising Amun-Ra-of-the-Abaton, Mut-of-Isheru, and Khonsu, who is designated as Khonsu-in-Thebes-Neferhotep. These epithets also occur in Philae (Guermeur 2005: 473–745; Fernández-Pichel 2022: 29 n. 57), and this might be the reason they were included at el-Dakka.

Conclusion

The Nubian temples such as el-Dakka are embedded in a Nubian-Egyptian cultural environment of the Dodekaschoinos, the northern part of Lower Nubia. Because of its military importance the Dodekaschoinos received substantial political and ideological attention in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. El-Dakka Temple and its decoration reflect the

changing political situation, which led to its construction, extension, and decoration over several hundred years. We can trace the official "state religion" through the ritual scenes and temple inscriptions. Greek, Latin, Demotic, and Meroitic graffiti demonstrate that the temple continued to be a place of private worship for the various communities living in and around el-Dakka, including the military personnel stationed around the temple and the local Nubian elites who served as priests and administrators for the Kingdom of Meroe. The temples of Philae and el-Dakka continued to function as centers of territorial and economic administration and jurisdiction during the first centuries of Roman rule. However, as Török (2009: 446) points out, the principal means of mutual acculturation was provided by the cults rather than the military. The common devotion to Isis of Philae and Thoth of Pnubs, beside Mandulis of Kalabsha, contributed to the cultural exchange, just as the priesthoods of these gods contributed to the acculturation process (Török 2009: 507–513).

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Roeder (1913, 1930) published the temple of el-Dakka in two volumes of the series *Les temples immergés de la Nubie*. He presented the archaeological and epigraphic details in brilliant photographs and the hieroglyphic inscriptions in type-set script. The rich corpus of secondary inscriptions of el-Dakka Temple was published by various authors: the Meroitic graffiti by Griffith (1912); the Latin and Greek by Ruppel (1930) as the third part of the el-Dakka series initiated by Roeder; and the Demotic by Griffith (1935, 1937) and Bresciani (1969). After el-Dakka Temple was removed in the 1960s to its new location in New Wadi el-Sebu'a because of the Aswan High Dam, a short but useful entry in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Bresciani 1975: 988) was published. Arnold (1999) included el-Dakka in various pages of his study on the Egyptian temples of the later periods, but only with very brief notes. Hölbl (2004) comprises a general survey of all Egyptian temples built and decorated in Nubia under Roman rule, and el-Dakka is presented with useful photographs and comments (ibid.: 138–147). Research on the Dodekaschoinos and its temples has focused on el-Dakka because of its texts and relief decoration, which connect it to Philae and its theological concepts, as exemplified in the work of Winter (1981), Dietze (1994), Locher (1997, 1999), and Török (2009).

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Abbreviations

GDG
Gauthier, Henri
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KRI/Translations/Notes
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Figure 1a. Map of Nubia between the First and Sixth Cataracts. (© Iris Hoogeweij, 2023, produced with QGIS and Google Satellite.)

Figure 1b. Map of Lower Nubia and the Dodekaschoinos region. (Based on Map 5 in *LÄ VII*; © Iris Hoogeweij, 2023.)

Figure 2. El-Dakka Temple and the lapidarium after their relocation to New Wadi el-Sebua. (Photograph © Martina Ullmann, 2023.)

Figure 3. The temples of el-Dakka and Muharraqa after their relocation. (Photograph © Martina Minas-Nerpel, 2005.)

Figure 4. The temple of el-Dakka in 1838; watercolor by David Roberts. (https://www.flickr.com/photos/153584064@N07/29003731528.)

Figure 5. General plan of el-Dakka Temple. (*PM VII* 42.)

Figure 6. Plan of el-Dakka Temple, indicating the phases of construction and decoration. (after Hölbl 2004: 139.)

Figure 7. Gate lintel showing the Ptolemaic ancestors of Ptolemy IV Philopator at el-Dakka. (Photograph © Martina Minas-Nerpel, 2005.)

Figure 8. The Dodekaschoinos Decree of Ergamenes II at el-Dakka, with the partly eliminated epithet of the Theoi Philopatores outlined in red. (Roeder 1913: pl. 100.)

Figure 9. The front of the pronaos of el-Dakka Temple. (Photograph © Monica Hanna, 2017.)

Figure 10. El-Dakka Temple from the northeast. (Photograph © Monica Hanna, 2017.)

Figure 11. Outer face of the pylon at el-Dakka Temple. (Photograph © Martina Minas-Nerpel, 2005.)

Figure 12. Inner face of the pylon at el-Dakka Temple. (Photograph © Martina Ullmann, 2002.)

Figure 13. Sketches and graffiti on the eastern door jamb of the pylon doorway at el-Dakka Temple. (Roeder 1913: pl. 17b.)

Figure 14. Naos of red granite in the Roman sanctuary at el-Dakka Temple. (Photograph © Martina Minas-Nerpel, 2005.)

Figure 15. Tiberius, followed by Cleopatra, before Osiris. (Photograph © Martina Minas-Nerpel, 2005.)

Figure 16. Monumental false door, or contra-temple, in the center of the rear wall of el-Dakka Temple. (Roeder 1913: pl. 12.)