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## GEBEL EL-SILSILA جبل السلسلة

*Andrea Kucharek*

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## GEBEL EL-SILSILA

### جبل السلسلة

*Andrea Kucharek*

Gebel el-Silsila

Gebel Silsileh

*Gebel el-Silsila, located on both banks of the Nile between Edfu and Kom Ombo, is a place whose significance was defined by its unique topographic features, namely, the extremely narrow river bed hemmed in by sandstone hills. From the New Kingdom on, huge quantities of sandstone for temple building were quarried here, and during the New Kingdom, Gebel el-Silsila was of considerable religious importance as a place of worship of the inundation. It was also a place of conspicuous royal favor towards private individuals. All of this resulted in a substantial number of monuments, from temples down to graffiti, most of them cut into the rock and thus still in situ.*

يمتد جبل السلسلة على جانبي النيل ما بين إدفو وكوم أمبو، حيث تميزه تضاريسه وعناصره الطبوغرافية الفريدة والتي تتمثل في وادي النيل الضيق الذي تطوقه جبال الحجر الرملي. وبداية من عصر الدولة الحديثة فصاعدا بدأت أعمال التحجير بجبل السلسلة للحصول على كميات كبيرة من الحجر الرملي اللازمة لبناء المعابد، ومن هنا جاءت أهمية جبل السلسلة الدينية خلال عصر الدولة الحديثة، حيث اعتبره المصريون القدماء مكان لعبادة الفيضان. كما كان جبل السلسلة هو أحد النقاط التي كرم فيها الملوك الأفراد، حيث كان نتاج ذلك وجود العديد من الشواهد الأثرية بالمنطقة بداية من المعابد نزولا الي الجرافيتي (النقوش الصخرية) التي أغلبها محفور بالصخور والتي لا تزال بإمكانها.

**T**he ancient Egyptian name of the site known today as Gebel el-Silsila was Kheny or Khenu, perhaps “Rowing-Place” (Sethe 1930: 125, note 1, and 1933: 874, note 34; but see Caminos 1977: 441, 444, note 1; Gomaà 1986: 31 - 35; Thiem 2000: 31 - 32). The name is first attested as that of a funerary domain in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Jacquet-Gordon 1962: 59, 115, 432, no. 6). A toponym *Ra-Khen*, attested in the Middle Kingdom, probably refers to the same place (Hayes 1955: 26, 31 - 32). Another designation, *pa mu wab*, “The Pure Water,” applies to the religious dimension of Gebel el-Silsila and was perhaps restricted to a small area at the southern extremity of the site (see

below). No Greek or Coptic name seems to be attested.

The modern Arabic name Gebel el-Silsila, “Mountain of the Chain,” is generally applied to the whole area, but specifically designates the highest elevation on the east bank of the Nile, while the western cliff is called el-Ramadi Gibli (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 242). The word “Silsila” is said to be derived from “Khol-khol,” as it was “sometimes known to the later Egyptians,” meaning barrier or frontier, transformed to Sil-sil or Silsili in Roman times (according to Weigall 1910: 360). There is also an unproven assumption that the place-name Silili in a Latin document dating to about 400 CE refers to Gebel el-



Figure 1. Satellite image of the Gebel el-Silsila area, showing the fault scarp of Nubian sandstone across the Nile.



Figure 2. View of a quarry on the eastern bank.

Silsila (Caminos 1977: 441, 444, note 5).

#### *Location and Layout of Site*

Gebel el-Silsila is located in Upper Egypt, about 40 km south of Edfu and 18 km north of Kom Ombo. The site covers an area on both banks of the Nile and is characterized by a massive fault scarp of hard Nubian sandstone traversing the river bed from east to west (Said 1962: 90); this results in the narrowest passage of the Nile in Egypt (fig. 1), where the width of the river measures only about 350 - 400 m, as compared to 800 m at Edfu and 1250 m at Luxor (Caminos 1987b: 58; Lyons 1906: 299).

At least from the Middle Kingdom on, the site was used as a quarry—extensively so from the New Kingdom until Roman times and even later—thereby destroying an unknown number of other features.

While the east bank today is mainly known for the huge quarries dating mostly to Ptolemaic and Roman times (fig. 2), there was also a Predynastic cemetery and a Ramesside temple, probably the only remnant of the settlement Khenu/Kheny. The quarries on the western side are mostly smaller, and here a large number of monuments cut into the rockface have survived (fig. 3). From north to south these are the speos of Horemheb, 32 rock shrines owned by private individuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and the so-called Nile stelae dedicated by several Ramesside kings. All along the cliff-face there are numerous rock

stelae and inscriptions dating to the New Kingdom. Another temple of Horemheb was located a little to the north, at Nag el-Hammam.

In the Middle Kingdom a fortress may have been located at Gebel el-Silsila, as implied by a partially destroyed toponym in a list of Nubian fortresses preserved in Papyrus Berlin 10495 (Gardiner 1916).

While the area of Gebel el-Silsila proper seems to have yielded no related finds, it has lent its name to an Epi-palaeolithic industry—the Silsilian (more recently renamed Ballanan-Silsilian) whose eponymous site is located in the northern part of the Kom Ombo plain. The closely related or even identical Sebekian industry was named after Sobek, Gebel el-Silsila's principal deity (Schyle 1996: 93 - 96; Smith 1966)

#### *Significance/Historical Context*

The significance of Gebel el-Silsila was twofold: it became, during the New Kingdom, the most extensive quarry in Egypt, and, in the wake of this rise, it became—for a while—a site of significant religious meaning. As this religious meaning originated in the particular characteristics of the river at Gebel el-Silsila, the significance of the place as a whole rested on its topography.

The quarrying of Nubian sandstone set in, on a rather small scale, during the Middle Kingdom (Bloxam 2010; Harrell 2012;

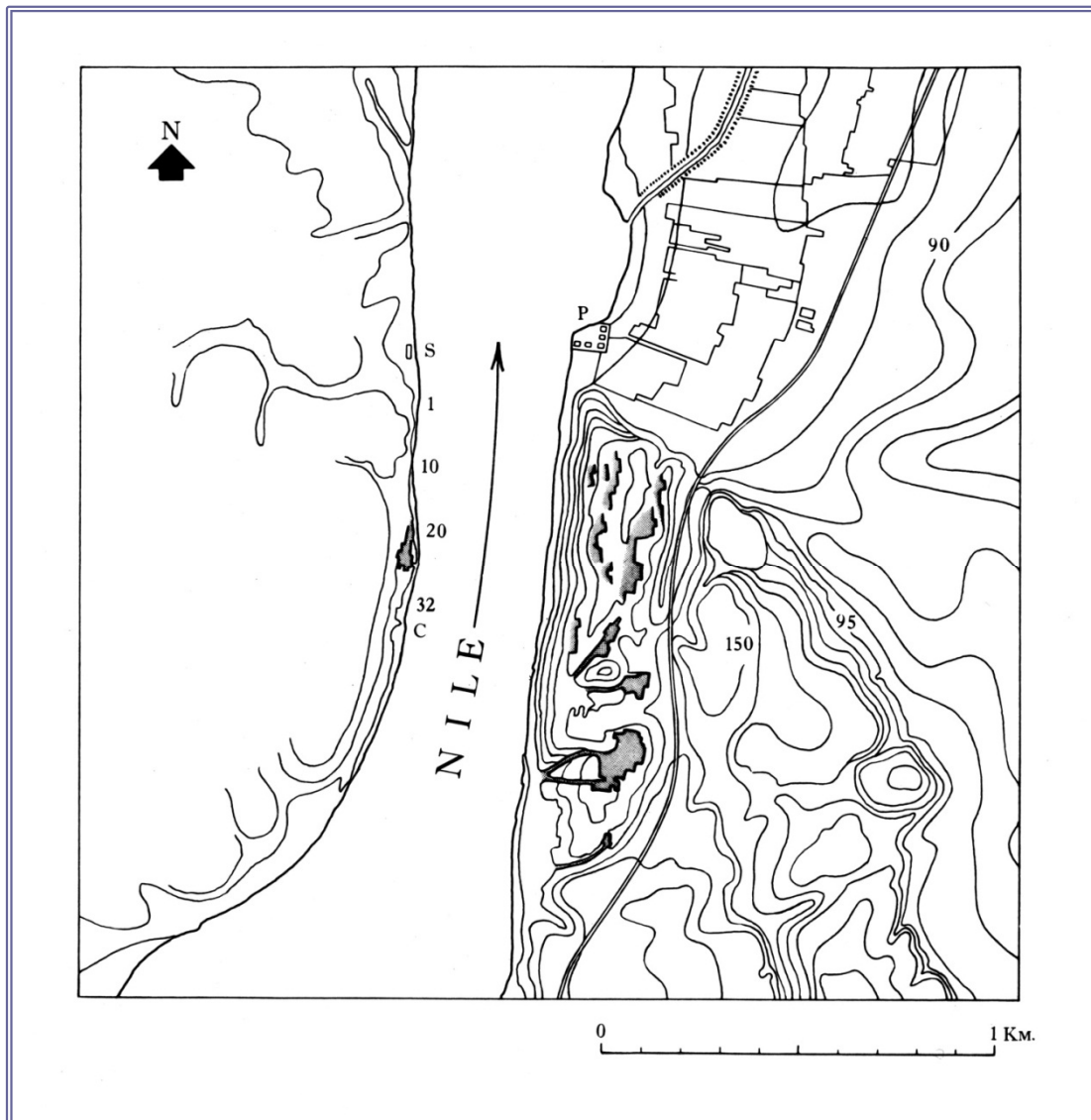


Figure 3. Map of the Gebel el-Silsila area. S = speos of Horemheb, 1 - 32 = 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock shrines, C = capstan (close to the Ramesside Nile stelae), P = pump-station.

Klemm and Klemm 1993: 243, 247, 251). When, from the reign of Hatshepsut onwards, sandstone replaced limestone as the main building material for temples, quarrying began on a serious scale (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 243 - 251, 259; for New Kingdom quarrying expeditions and selected expedition inscriptions, see Hikade 2001: 47 - 49, 225 - 230). The probable reason for the change of material was the exhaustion of the limestone quarries at Gebelein (de Putter and Karlshausen 1994; also Delvaux 1998). From

now on, virtually all of the great temples—Karnak and Luxor as well as the Theban mortuary temples, Dendera, Esna, Edfu, Kom Ombo—were built with sandstone from Gebel el-Silsila, the one notable exception being the Temple of Isis at Philae (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 259). The amount of sandstone quarried in Gebel el-Silsila during Pharaonic times is estimated at eight million tons, making up more than half of the Egyptian total (Klemm and Klemm 2001: 638). Quarrying continued at least into the late twentieth century (Camino 1987b: 64;

Klemm and Klemm 1979: 132, 135, 1993: 243, 250, 251).

The cultic dimension of Gebel el-Silsila was firmly associated with the Nile and its inundation. The principal deity and the only one given the epithet “Lord of Kheny” was Sobek, who had been venerated at least since the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Godron 1965: 197 - 198; Griffith 1898: 69, pl. XXVIII; see also Altenmüller and Moussa 1991: 20 [“Sobek” a more probable option than “Hapi”]). Nun is mentioned in several of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock shrines, while the Nile stelae were dedicated to Hapi. The New Kingdom was undoubtedly the zenith of the religious importance of Gebel el-Silsila. According to the extant monuments, cultic activity at the site practically came to an end with the passing of that era. Even though Sobek, Lord of Kheny, was still mentioned in the nearby Ptolemaic temple of Kom Ombo (see Yoyotte 1962: 103, note 3), there is no attestation of him at Gebel el-Silsila itself after the Ramesside Period. The reason for the inclusion of Gebel el-Silsila in a list of places said to have been founded by Shu (on the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty naos from el-Arish) is unclear, but may be sought in the importance of the place as a quarry for temple buildings rather than in its cultic relevance (Goyon 1936: 20 l. 35).

During the New Kingdom the religious significance of the river was emphasized by the cult-topographical designation *pa mu wab*, “the Pure Water,” which first occurs during the reigns of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV (Caminos and James 1963: 34, pl. 25/4) and Horemheb (Thiem 2000: 33, 246 - 247) as an epithet to an unspecified group, the “gods in the Pure Water.” It is almost exclusively in the Ramesside Nile stelae that the epithet “dwelling in the Pure Water” is attached to specific deities such as Amun-Ra, Osiris, Horus, Geb, Nut, Shu/Onuris-Shu, Thoth, and Taweret (Champollion 1844: 250, 641, 1845: pls. CIII/1/3, CXXIIbis/3; Lepsius 1853: pls. 175c, 200e; Thiem 2000: 33). The “Pure Water,” also mentioned in the main text of the Nile stelae, perhaps specifically designates the little plateau at the southern

end of Gebel el-Silsila above which the Nile stelae rise, as well as the river in front of it (Kucharek 1998: 20 - 21, *fc.*). The epithet *pa mu wab*, “(of) the Pure Water,” invariably attached to the goddess Taweret, also occurs several times at Deir el-Medina, clearly as an import from Gebel el-Silsila (Kucharek 1998: 86 - 87). On one stela from Deir el-Medina she is even called “mistress of the Pure Water” (*henut mu wab*; Hodjash and Berlev 1982: 135 - 136, no. 76).

It is also worth mentioning that Gebel el-Silsila is one of the few places north of the first cataract where the Elephantine triad Khnum, Satet, and Anuket was venerated (Valbelle 1981: 125 - 126, §45).

Another conspicuous feature of the cults at Gebel el-Silsila during the New Kingdom is the role of the king not merely as officiant, but very often as addressee of private veneration, as dispenser of favors, and as an intermediary for private individuals (Kucharek 1998: 99 - 102, *fc.*).

### *East Bank*

1. Quarries. Quarrying began in the Middle Kingdom at the northern boundary of the area, progressing ever further to the south in the course of the New Kingdom and later (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 247 - 253; for the quarrying of talatat blocks at Gebel el-Silsila, see Kramer 2009). A notable feature is a basin used for loading stones during the inundation season, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 249 - 250, fig. 282). The walls of the biggest quarry, dating to Ptolemaic times, measure up to 40 m in height (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 251).

2. Shrines, stelae, statues, graffiti. While less numerous than on the west bank, there are still a number of Pharaonic monuments in the eastern quarries (*PM V*: 220 - 221; for a map, see Klemm and Klemm 1981: 42 - 43, fig. 44), among them 24 stelae (Caminos 1987b: 59). There are several rock stelae and shrines from the time of Amenhotep III, at least two of them dedicated by his vizier Amenhotep (Caminos 1987a; Klemm und Klemm 1993:

247, 249, fig. 281; Legrain 1903b; Topozada 1975: 100, 300 - 301, 302 - 304, 402 - 403). Two stelae, one of them uninscribed, date to the Amarna Period (Caminos 1987b: 59 - 60; Klemm 1988: 43, 44, fig. 2; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 247, 248, fig. 279; Sandman 1938: 143 - 144; Topozada 1975: 101). Two additional stelae date to the reign of Sety I (Brand 2000: 262 - 264; Kitchen 1975: 59 - 61). The cartouches of Apries find an exact counterpart on a cliff near Aswan (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 251).

There are several unfinished statues in some of the quarries (Caminos 1977: 442; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 247, 248, fig. 280, 250, fig. 283).

The walls of the quarries are covered by a huge number of graffiti and rock-carvings from all stages of Egyptian history down to the present (Caminos 1987b: 60 - 61; Cervicek 1974: 88, figs. 472 - 478; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 248, fig. 278; Osing 2004; Preisigke and Spiegelberg 1915; see also Huyge 2009 for “graffiti” and “rock art”).

3. Nilometers. Two nilometers as well as a Nile level inscription, probably all dating to Roman times, are located on the east bank (Borchardt 1934; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 251).

4. Temple and settlement. To the north of the quarries are some remains of a temple dating to the reign of Ramesses II (Borchardt 1934: 195, fig. 1, 196; Griffith 1889a: 233; Leclant 1982: 87; Lepsius 1901: 96). This and “a great deal of pottery” mentioned by Griffith indicate that the ancient town Kheny/Khenu was located here.

5. Cemetery. Also to the north of the quarries, close to the stela of Amenhotep IV and the village of Nag el-Kagug, there was a Predynastic cemetery that, following a three-day excavation, was pillaged by tomb-robbers (Legrain 1903d). The finds, many of which seem to have been given to the Musée d’archéologie nationale in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, date to the Naqada Period (cf. Beck et al. 1982, 138 - 141; Graff 2009: nos. 191, 548, 594, 621 - 623, 625).

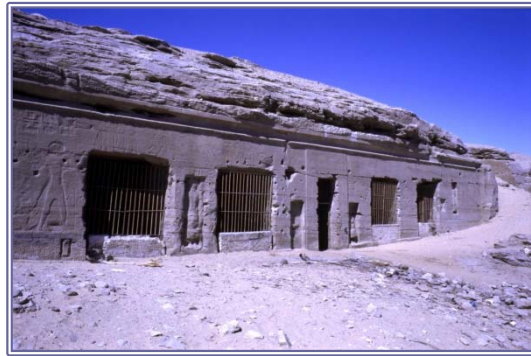


Figure 4. Speos of Horemheb, façade.

### *West Bank*

1. Quarries. The quarries on the west bank date mainly to the New Kingdom, the quarry at the northern extremity being the largest in Gebel el-Silsila; smaller areas were exploited in the Middle Kingdom and in the Ptolemaic era (Klemm and Klemm 1993: 243 - 247).

2. Temples. Two temples are attested on the west bank, both dating to the reign of Horemheb. The remains of one of them, at Nag el-Hammam, were completely destroyed in the 1970s by modern quarrying with explosives. The most conspicuous item from that site is part of a stela showing the king offering a field to Osiris and Isis. This temple seems to have been part of a contemporary settlement (Caminos 1987b: 64; *PM V*: 208; Sayce 1907: 98; Thiem 2000: 30).

About 350 - 450 m to the south of this temple is the so-called “speos of Horemheb” (Thiem 2000), probably a former gallery quarry (Klemm 1988: 44 - 45; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 245 - 247; see also Thiem 2000: 28). The rock-cut temple consists of a broad gallery connected to the outside by five openings, the middle one being the principal entrance (fig. 4). This main axis is prolonged into the sanctuary. Both gallery and sanctuary teem with unusual features. On the back wall of the sanctuary, statues of the seven main cult recipients are cut out of the rock (fig. 5; Seidel 1996: 247 - 253, pls. 61b - 62; Thiem 2000: 107 - 108, 240 - 242). Amun-Ra occupies the center, flanked by Mut to his right and Khons to his left. Next to Mut are

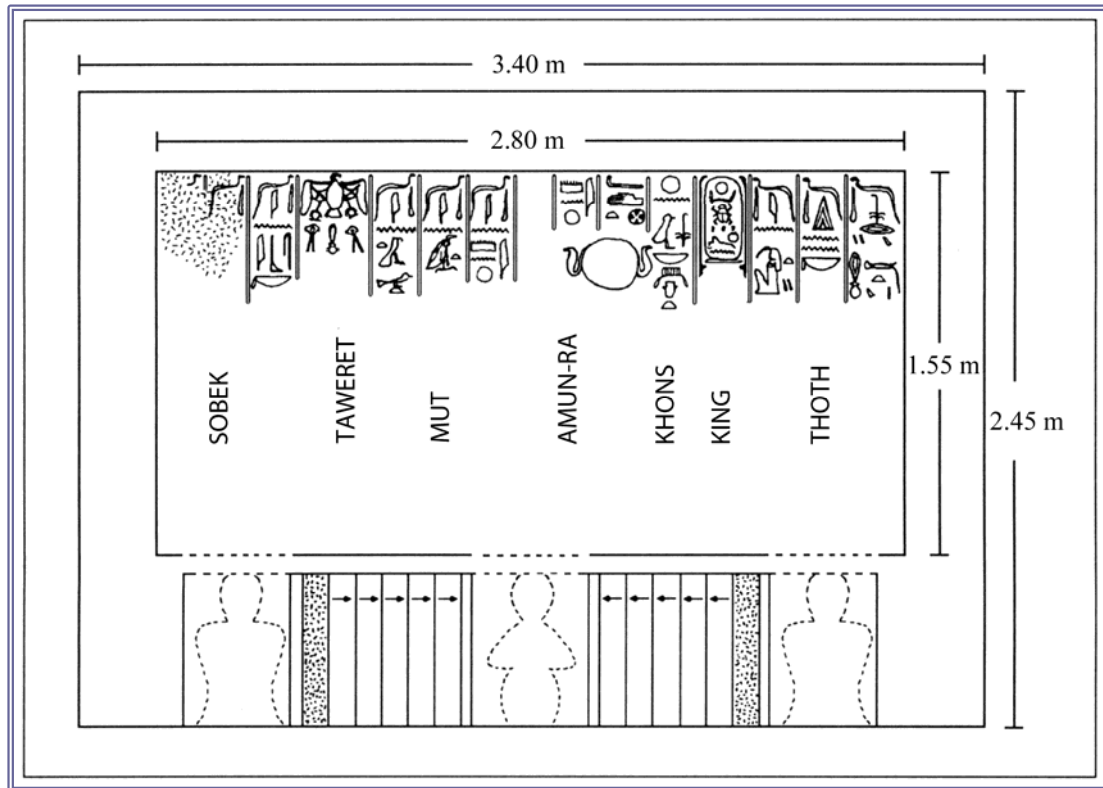


Figure 5. Speos of Horemheb, layout of the back wall of the sanctuary.

Taweret and Sobek. The king himself is placed between Khons and Thoth. While Taweret is not the central deity, she is singled out by the relief of a vulture suspended above her statue. The statues stand upon a kind of high ledge, in front of which three statues—a kneeling one in the center, flanked by two block-statues—were cut out of the rock; at some point in history all three statues were so completely destroyed that only their outlines remain. Several inscriptions in the sanctuary, however, inform us that the statues belonged to the architect of the temple, Ramose (Caminos 1992; Hofmann and Seyfried 1995: 50; Legrain 1903c; Thiem 2000: 247 - 248, note a). The side walls of the sanctuary are covered by the names and figures of 61 deities (Thiem 2000: 182 - 239). The gallery seems to have been only partly decorated during the reign of Horemheb. The most important scenes are the one on the south wall, showing Taweret suckling the king, and the military scenes on the west wall (Thiem 2000: 103, 104

- 105, 133 - 140, 141 - 153).

Most striking nowadays, however, is the multitude of later, exclusively Ramesside additions in the form of statues, chapels, stelae, and inscriptions by royalty and private individuals alike on the façade and in the gallery (Caminos 1977: 442; Habachi 1956: 53 - 57, pl. II; Kitchen 1979: 391, 393, 394 - 395, 891, 1980: 32, 46, 48, 1982: 73 - 74, 89 - 91, 125, 134, 147 - 148, 292, 371, 373 - 374, 1983a: 227 - 229, 341, 342, 393 - 394, 419, 1989: 245 - 246; *PM V*: 213; Radwan 1976; Sourouzian 1989: 3, 197 - 198, pls. 2, 37; Thiem 2000: 243 - 248). Among them are stelae, reliefs, and inscriptions by the High Priest of Memphis Khaemwaset, several of them commemorating jubilee festivals of his father Ramesses II (Gomaà 1973: 88 - 89, 126 - 130; Habachi 1971; Kitchen 1979: 377, 384 - 385, 390 - 391, 392).

3. Rock shrines. Thirty-two rock-chapels cut into the cliff-face above the Nile (fig. 6) are

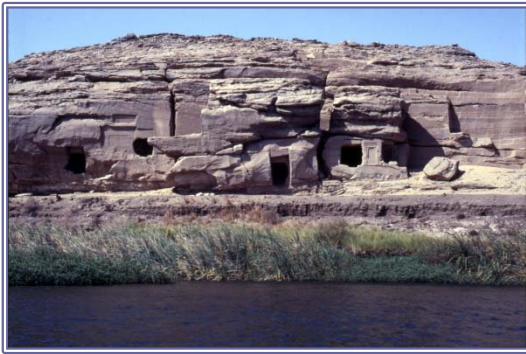


Figure 6. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, view of nos. 3 - 7 (right to left).

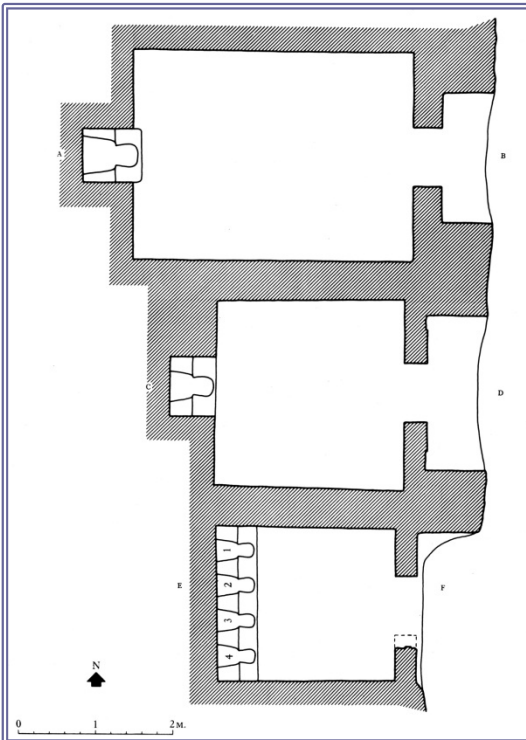


Figure 7. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, ground-plans of nos. 15 - 17.

still more or less extant today, between the speos of Horemheb to the north and the Ramesside Nile stelae to the south (Caminos and James 1963). The shrines are remarkably uniform as to their architecture, decoration, and inscriptions. In size, however, they vary from about 2 square meters to 18 square meters. Most of them consist of one square or oblong room, at the back of which is a niche containing one or several seated rock-cut

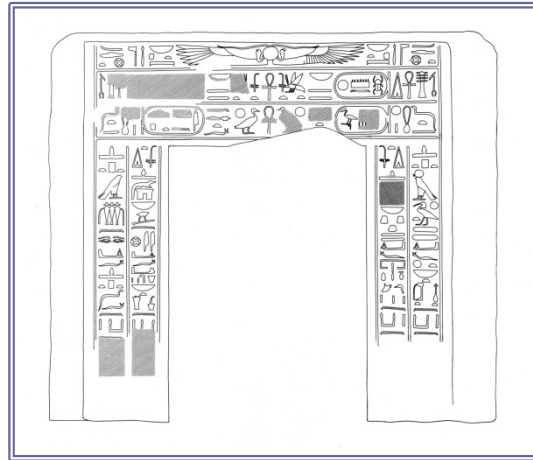


Figure 8. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, door-frame of no. 30.

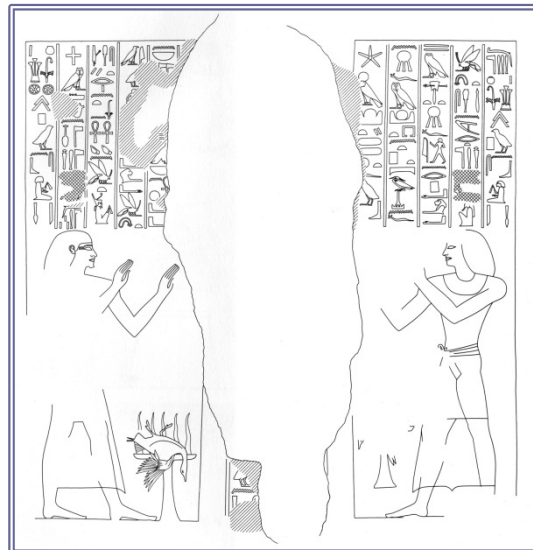


Figure 9. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, inner entrance-frame of no. 15.

statues (fig. 7). The façade is marked by a doorframe inscribed with offering-formulae on the jambs and royal cartouches on the lintel (fig. 8). The inner entrance wall shows the owner of the shrine offering to the sun god, Amun-Ra on the north side and Ra-Harakhte on the south side (fig. 9). The decoration of the two side walls is more or less identical: both show the owner and his family receiving offerings, accompanied by offering-bringers, musicians, and dancers (fig. 10). The back wall is most often decorated with offering-bringers approaching the statue-



Figure 10. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, northern side wall of no. 15.

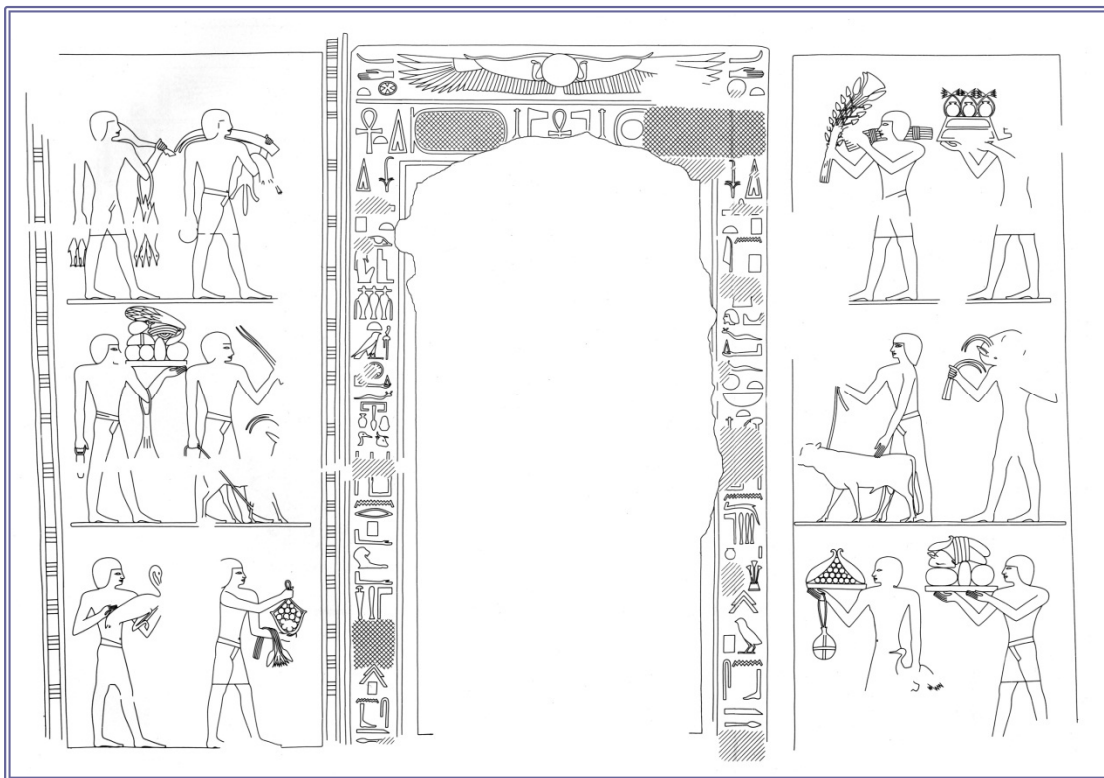


Figure 11. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, back wall of no. 15.

niche (fig. 11). The frame of the niche frequently replicates the inscriptional structure of the entrance frame.

The owners of the shrines, as far as they can be ascertained, were high officials of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, often well-known from other monuments or documents. Fifteen shrines are

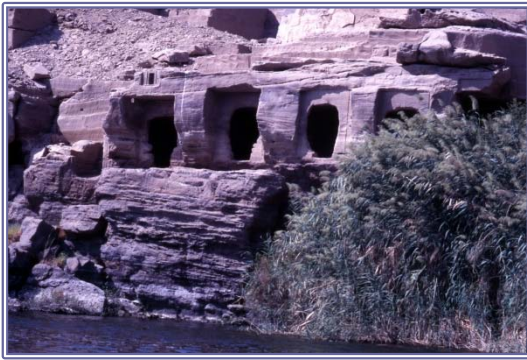


Figure 12. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, view of nos. 12 - 17.

firmly dated by the royal names on their doorframes: one to the reign of Thutmose I, another to the regency of Hatshepsut, eight to the reign of Hatshepsut, two to the reign of Thutmose III, one to the joint reign of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, one to the sole reign of the latter king, and one to the reign of Amenhotep III. Eight further shrines can, for various reasons and with a varying degree of certainty, be assigned a date: one (no. 20) to the reign of Thutmose I, two (nos. 25 and 31) to the reign of Thutmose III, one (no. 11) to the reign of Amenhotep II or Thutmose IV, one (no. 27) to the reign of Thutmose IV or Amenhotep III, and three (nos. 1, 2, and 4) to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (from the pre-Amarna Period onwards; Kucharek 1998: 30 - 37). The spatial arrangement of the shrines conveys the impression of their being unrelated to each other, with the exception of nos. 12 - 17, which were constructed side by side and on the same level (fig. 12; Kucharek 1998: 52, *fc.*).

As the shrines contain no burial arrangements (the grave pits in some of the shrines are later intrusions, see Caminos and James 1963: 13, 79), the often-used term “cenotaph” is misleading. The closest parallels are contemporary Theban tomb chapels dedicated to the offering-cult of the deceased and his family (Kucharek 1998: 40 - 42). In combination with the royal cartouches adorning the doorframes, the shrines may most aptly be described as a royal favor consisting of an offering and memorial cult

placed in an area sacred to the life-giving inundation (see below, *s.v.* “Nile stelae”). The inclusion of musicians, dancers, and, in one case, a song emphasizes the festival character of the occasion (see Kucharek 2000). Considering the location of the shrines in the cliff face, the performance of the cult will have been largely virtual. Some authors have advanced the view that the cult was meant to be performed by the inundation itself, entering the shrines (as well as the speos of Horemheb) at high Nile (Bommas 2003; Delvaux 1998: 318; Thiem 2000: 267 - 268). While there is every reason to think that the shrines were constructed as closely as possible to the inundation, sometimes resulting in the partial flooding of the structures, there is no reason (and no clue in the decoration of the shrines) why they should willingly have been exposed to the destructive force of the water.

The one exceptional shrine is that of the famous courtier of Hatshepsut, Senenmut (no. 16), the decoration of which only partly conforms to the general principles outlined above. On the side walls Senenmut offers to various deities who reciprocate with gifts of life, stability, and dominion, while on the back wall, flanking the statue niche, Hatshepsut is embraced by Sobek and Nekhbet. The decoration of this shrine thus approximates that of a temple, with Senenmut replacing the king on the side walls. Some features of the heavily damaged niche statue indicate that it was of the theophorous type, functioning as a kind of sanctuary to Sobek and Nekhbet (Kucharek *fc.*).

4. “Nile stelae.” At the southern end of the west bank there is a small plateau above the Nile surrounded by several huge, shrine-like stelae, set deep into the rock and flanked by papyrus columns (fig. 13; Barguet 1952). They were dedicated by Sety I, Ramesses II, Merenptah (Sourouzian 1989: 191 - 196), and Ramesses III. While the first three are very similar architecturally and are all cut into the cliff facing the Nile, the latest one is a simple rectangular stela cut into a freestanding rock on the north side of the plateau. This does not necessarily reflect the waning religious



Figure 13. The Nile stela of Ramesses II (left) and Merenptah (right). To the right of the Merenptah stela there are the remains of another, unfinished stela.

importance of the site in the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Much rather it was the consequence of simple bad luck. Immediately to the right of the stela of Merenptah are the remains of a further great stela, albeit without the flanking columns. Only the cavetto-cornice and the upper part of the frame are partly finished, and only the left part of the stela is extant. Perhaps the loss of the right edge of the cliff occurred during the construction of the stela, resulting in the modest substitute on the nearby rock (Kucharek 1998: 15, note 69, fc.).

Below the stela of Sety I, a staircase cut into a now dislocated rock leads down to the river (Griffith 1889b: 102; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 244 - 245, fig. 275). Griffith also mentions a second flight of steps leading up from the river to the stela of Ramesses II.

While the date of the first stela is lost, those of Ramesses II and Merenptah were dedicated in their first year, that of Ramesses III in his sixth year. The main inscriptions as well as the adoration scenes on the side walls of the recesses (Kitchen 1975: 81 - 96, no. 44, 1982: 74 - 76) are very similar, but not completely identical. The stelae commemorate a thrice-yearly offering to Hapi, the god of the inundation (including a rite called the “throwing of the book of Hapi,” cf. Grandet 1994: 143 - 150, note 593), here at the southern end of the narrow passage where the waters of the rising flood must have been most conspicuous and where, even at the time

of the lowest Nile, the water level seemed higher than anywhere else. It was precisely at the time of the first rising of the inundation and at the time of the lowest level that offerings were presented to Hapi at this place (Kucharek 1998: 58 - 59). The purpose of these offerings as stated by the stela text was “to cover the *djeseru* of the Duat,” which most probably refers to the protection of the corpse of Osiris in the Underworld (Kucharek 1998: 60 - 65, fc.).

5. Other monuments. From the speos of Horemheb down to the Nile stela, the cliff face is covered by numerous stelae and inscriptions, mostly by private individuals (*PM V*: 213 - 216; for several Ramesside ones, see Kitchen 1979: 851, 1982: 91 - 92, 133, 1983a: 342, 1983b: 224 - 225). The largest of these stelae, dedicated by Shoshenq I (Caminos 1952), is also one of the very few monuments dating after the New Kingdom. Another one, some 100 m south of the Nile stela and dating to the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, depicts the god Heron (Caminos 1977: 443; Klemm and Klemm 1993: 247). Even further south is the so-called “Rhetorical Stela” of Sety I (Brand 2000: 264; Kitchen 1975: 80 - 81).

About 300 graffiti and rock-carvings, ranging in date from Predynastic to Roman times and beyond, were recorded in Gebel el-Silsila West (Caminos 1987b: 62 - 63, 64 - 65; Osing 2004).

#### *Excavation/Research History*

Omitting descriptions and illustrations by early travelers and the Napoleonic expedition (cf. Caminos and James 1963: 10), the research history of Gebel el-Silsila begins with Champollion’s and Rosellini’s expedition, which spent several days on the west bank in 1829, describing and copying mainly Ramesside monuments (Champollion 1844: 248 - 265, 640 - 650, 1845: pls. CII - CXXII; Rosellini 1832: pls. XLIV, XLIVbis, XLIVter, XLIVquater, XLIV quinquies, CXIX - CXXI, 1838: 215 - 216, 1844a: 206 - 235, 1844b: pls. XXX - XXXVII). The same applies to Lepsius’ expedition, which spent a few days in

1843 and 1844 on both banks of the Nile. Besides copying Ramesside material, Lepsius was the first to publish inscriptions from the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock shrines (Lepsius 1853: pls. 81, 110, 119 - 121, 141, 174, 175, 218, 200 - 202, 223, 254, 274, 1856: pl. 23, 1901: 84 - 100). These early documentations are still indispensable, as the rock stelae and inscriptions remain virtually unpublished to this day.

In the winter of 1886/1887, Griffith and Petrie managed to copy, in the course of less than two days, almost all of the texts belonging to the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty shrines, making note also of the principal stelae and inscriptions (Griffith 1889b). Additionally, they accomplished some work in the quarries on the east bank (Griffith 1889a: 232 - 234).

In 1897 Legrain undertook a short excavation of a Predynastic cemetery on the east bank (Legrain 1903d); he also published articles on several subjects relating to Gebel el-Silsila (Legrain 1903a, 1903b, 1903c). In 1906 Sayce excavated several sites, mostly to the north and south of Gebel el-Silsila proper, among them the surroundings of the temple of Horemheb at Nag el-Hammam (Sayce 1907). De Morgan, in 1906 - 1908, conducted a survey of Predynastic and Early Dynastic sites between Gebel el-Silsila and Esna, reporting, however, very few finds from Gebel el-Silsila (Bard 1994: 270; Needler 1984: 49, 63 - 64).

In 1952 Bargout published a synopsis of the main texts of the Nile stelae (augmented by Kitchen 1975); for copies of at least some of the adoration scenes on the thicknesses of the stelae recesses, one still has to consult the volumes by Champollion, Rosellini, and Lepsius.

A complete recording of all monuments of Gebel el-Silsila was undertaken by the Egypt Exploration Society under R. A. Caminos (Caminos 1955). The project commenced in 1955 and was successfully concluded in 1982 (Caminos 1987b: 57 - 58). It is much to be regretted that, with the single exception of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock shrines (Caminos and James 1963), none of this material, stored in the archives of the Egypt Exploration Society, has since been published.

In 2000 Thiem published her dissertation on the speos of Horemheb, including a complete record of this temple, excluding, however, all of the numerous later additions to this structure.

In recent years the site of Gebel el-Silsila has been developed for visitors, entailing the clearing of some parts of the area (Storemyr 2009: 107). Moreover, the Supreme Council of Antiquities' Department of Underwater Archaeology has recently started mapping out the quarry harbor (information kindly provided by W. Wendrich). Graffiti by travelers have been collected by de Keersmaecker (2011).

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### *Bibliographic Notes*

There is as yet no comprehensive treatment of the site. For the quarries, see the valuable section in Klemm and Klemm (1993) as well as the useful map of Gebel el-Silsila in Klemm and Klemm (1979). A concise overview of the graffiti is included in Smith (1999). The most important publications on the religious monuments have been noted in the previous section. For the sake of brevity and clarity, citations for the *Translation and Annotation* as well as the *Notes and Comments* volumes of Kitchen's *Ramesside Inscriptions* have not been included; they may easily be inferred from the citations for the initial volumes.

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## *Image Credits*

- Figure 1. Satellite image of the Gebel el-Silsila area, showing the fault scarp of Nubian sandstone across the Nile. Image by Google Maps.
- Figure 2. View of a quarry on the eastern bank. Photograph by Eva Hofmann.
- Figure 3. Map of the Gebel el-Silsila area. S = speos of Horemheb, 1 - 32 = 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock shrines, C = capstan (close to the Ramesside Nile stelae), P = pump-station. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)
- Figure 4. Speos of Horemheb, façade. Photograph by Eva Hofmann.
- Figure 5. Speos of Horemheb, layout of the back wall of the sanctuary. (Seidel 1996: 252, fig. 71. Courtesy of M. Seidel)
- Figure 6. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, view of nos. 3 - 7 (right to left). Photograph by Eva Hofmann.
- Figure 7. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, ground-plans of nos. 15 - 17. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 33. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)
- Figure 8. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, door-frame of no. 30. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 73. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)
- Figure 9. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, inner entrance-frame of no. 15. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 36. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

- Figure 10. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, northern side wall of no. 15. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 37. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)
- Figure 11. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, back wall of no. 15. (Caminos and James 1963: pl. 39. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)
- Figure 12. 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rock-shrines, view of nos. 12 - 17. Photograph by Eva Hofmann.
- Figure 13. The Nile stelae of Ramesses II (left) and Merenptah (right). To the right of the Merenptah stela there are the remains of another, unfinished stela. Photograph by Eva Hofmann.