

# Epigraphic Evidence from the Dakhleh Oasis in the Late Period

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Until the 1990s, no information existed on the history of the Dakhleh Oasis during the Late Period (Dynasties 26–30, 664–332 BCE). There were, in fact, some archaeological remains from this period that had come to light in the cemetery of ‘Ain Tirghi (Mills 1983, 128; Frey 1986; Hope 1999, 229), together with dated skeletal remains (Molto 2001, 85). Yet outside of Dakhleh, the involvement of the kings from this period in the Western Desert was obvious, because of the well-known Saite chapels at ‘Ain el-Muftella, Bahriyya, and the Persian period and 30th Dynasty temple decoration at Hibis, Kharga. It was clear that also Dakhleh, being the largest oasis, must have benefited from similar royal attention. But it was only in 1990 that the first dated inscriptional evidence from the Late Period was discovered at Tell Marqula. This took the form of a block of temple relief with the name of Psamtik II, described further below, found together with other Late Period finds and ceramics (Yamani 2002; Hope 2000, 192, 200–1, figures 4j and 6a). Another Late Period cemetery was found at Balat (Ginsburg 1995; Castel *et alii* 2005). In recent years, excavations at the sites of Mut al-Kharab and Amheida (Amhida) have substantially expanded our knowledge of the involvement of the Saite and Persian kings in the Dakhleh Oasis. In this paper, all royal inscriptions of the Late Period are described that have been found in Dakhleh. The focus on securely dated material is aimed to provide a historical framework for the oasis through which other archaeological evidence may be seen in a new light. The inscriptions from the two principal sites

Mut al-Kharab and Amheida will be described in turn, after which the new evidence will be interpreted in the context of the political developments of the times.

## Mut al-Kharab

The temple at Mut al-Kharab dates back to the 18th Dynasty at least. The earliest royal names found on the fragments of temple reliefs reused at the site are those of Thutmose III and Horemheb (Hope 2005, 46–7). From the smaller Dakhleh Stela in Oxford, which dates to the reign of Piye, it is clear that this temple was dedicated to Seth and Amun-Re jointly (Kaper 1997, 56). It is possible that this double dedication pertained already earlier, because both Seth and Amun-Re are named on New Kingdom monuments from the temple (Hope 2003, 57; Hope and Kaper 2011, 225, 226–9). This temple at Mut al-Kharab may have been preceded by an early Middle Kingdom sanctuary for the god Igai, some blocks of which have been found at the site (Hope and Kaper 2010). The existence of an earlier shrine from the Old Kingdom at the site is suggested by the recent finds of fenestrated stands and ceremonial flint knives from that period (Hope and Pettman, this volume), but no associated architectural remains have as yet been found.

The temple was regularly extended throughout the Ramesside Period (Hope and Kaper 2011; Hope 2012) and the Third Intermediate Period (Kaper 2009; Hope 2012). The archaeological material from the site

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<sup>1</sup> At the conference in Lecce, I presented the historical development of the temple at Amheida, which has been supplemented here with material from Mut al-Kharab and some other sites. The Late Period in Dakhleh I discussed previously in 2005 at the *7th Egyptological Tempeltagung*, Leuven University, and at the British Museum Colloquium of 2006. Except where stated, the material discussed in this article has been excavated by different missions that make up the Dakhleh Oasis Project, directed by Anthony J. Mills. The temple enclosure at Mut al-Kharab is being excavated by Colin A. Hope (Monash University). The town site of Amheida is being excavated under the direction of Roger S. Bagnall (New York University), with Paola Davoli in charge of excavations. The drawings and photographs in this paper are by the author, except for Plates 8, 9 and 10, which are by Bruno Bazzani, and Figure 1 which is adapted from Davies 1953. Elsbeth van der Wilt, Carina van den Hoven and Lisa Saladino-Haney acted as field assistants in various seasons at Amheida. I thank all the above for their help in various ways. Colin Hope commented in detail on a draft version of this paper, from which I have benefited much.

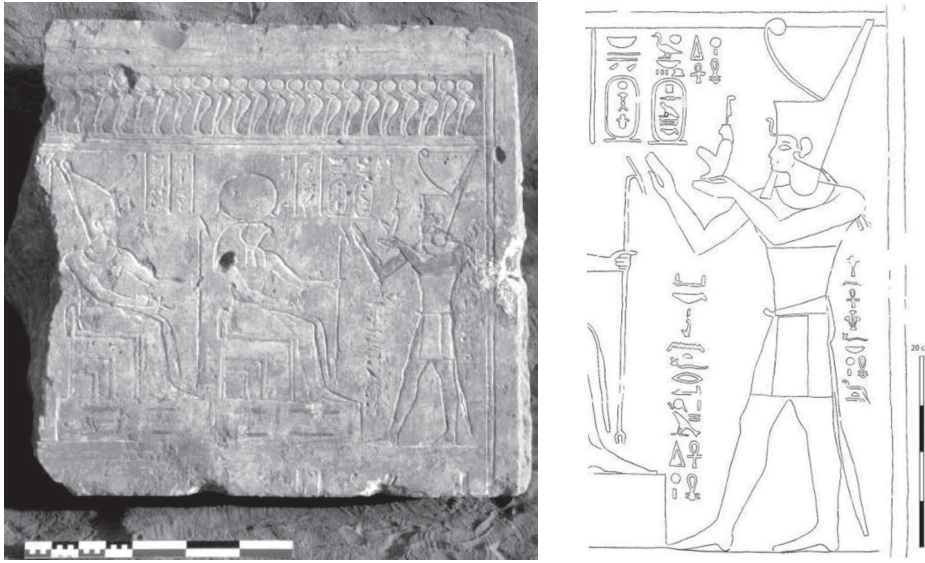


Plate 1 Sandstone relief block from a chapel of Psamtik I at Mut al-Kharab; the king is shown presenting Maat to the gods Re-Harakhty and Atum; height 90 cm, width 102 cm, thickness 22 cm; © O. E. Kaper.



Plate 2



Plate 3


Two faces of a sandstone block from a temple doorway erected by Psamtik II, found reused in the cemetery of Tell Marqula (Mut); width 38 cm, height 48.5 cm; © O. E. Kaper.



indicates that there were increasing levels of activity between the Ramesside Period and the Roman Period (Hope *et alii* 2009, 65). During the Late Period the kings Psamtik I and Psamtik II were responsible for erecting some of the temple buildings at Mut al-Kharab.

### Psamtik I Wahibre (664–610 BCE)

The relief of Psamtik I in Plate 1 was discovered in 2001 in Room 1 of a structure due west of the temple (Trench 6; Hope 2001, 41; Kaper 2001, 75–6, plate 23). The original placement of this relief is, unfortunately, unclear, because its context was disturbed (Hope *et alii* 2009, 64; Hope and Kaper 2011, 224).

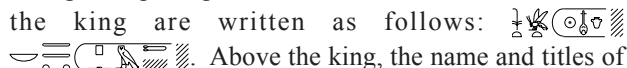
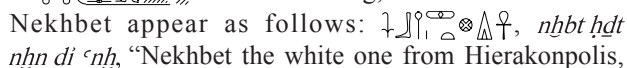
The names of Psamtik I are written as follows: . The king is shown offering the symbol of Maat to the gods Re-Harakhty and Atum (texts in Perdu 2002, 138–9, no. 31). This offering scene was originally complemented by a symmetrical scene joining it to the left, of which several small fragments remain. Its symmetrical arrangement indicates that the relief was part of the rear wall of a small chapel, whose original width was *circa* 2 m. The thickness of the block is only 22 cm, which suggests that the relief did not form a structural part of the walls of the chapel, but that it was used as cladding on the walls of a pre-existing building. Another block belonging to the same building phase was found nearby (in Trench 10;


Hope 2003, 58); it stems from the jamb of a decorated doorway depicting the king offering linen to Amun-Re.

Elsewhere in the temple enclosure part of a faience plaque with the cartouche of Psamtik was found, which may have been part of a foundation deposit (Trench 18; Hope 2005, 42; Hope *et alii* 2009, 65). Unfortunately, the plaque was found reused among material of Ptolemaic date, so that it is not possible to suggest which king Psamtik was intended.

### Psamtik II Neferibre (595–589 BCE)

An isolated block of temple relief dating to the Saite dynasty came to light close to Mut al-Kharab, reused in one of the tombs of the cemetery at Tell Marqula. It emerged in excavations by Sayed Yamani for the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation.<sup>2</sup> Since a large part of this cemetery was constructed during the Late Period (Yamani 2002), it is possible that the original temple building from which it derives was demolished not long after it was built, but the moment when the block was brought to Tell Marqula remains unknown. In the same cemetery, a stamp seal in the shape of a crocodile was found that was inscribed with the name Psamtik (Yamani 2002, 429), probably referring to a private person of that name.

The relief block is dated to King Psamtik II, and it stems from the left outer jamb of a temple doorway. The jamb originally represented the king wearing the red or the double crown with the vulture of Nekhbet overhead, facing the opening of the door. The names and titles of the king are written as follows: . Above the king, the name and titles of Nekhbet appear as follows: , *nḥbt ḥdt nḥn di nḥ*, “Nekhbet the white one from Hierakonpolis, [may she] give life” (Plate 2). A comparable doorjamb of Nekau II, probably from an Osiris chapel in Karnak, is now in the Hearst Museum, Berkeley (Lutz 1927, plate 41, Nr. 81).


The block of Psamtik II, which is badly eroded, has an additional inscription column on its right side (Plate 3), which would have adorned the passage of the doorway. It reads: . Unfortunately, there is not enough preserved for its message to be understandable.

### The Temple of Amheida

Excavations have been carried out at the site of the temple of Thoth at Amheida, the Roman town of Trimithis, since 2004. Hundreds of building blocks were found of a demolished Roman-Period temple at the highest point of the site, which were largely reused from a temple of the Late Period that was dedicated to the same god (Davoli

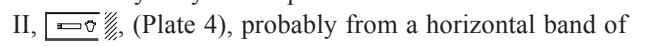


Plate 4 Fragment with the Horus name of Nekau II, probably from a temple doorway, Amheida; height 7 cm, width 14.25 cm; © O. E. Kaper.

and Kaper 2006). The Late Period temple probably stood close to the site of the Roman temple, because an ibis cemetery from the Late Period was found next to its remains. Some blocks from an even earlier shrine of the Third Intermediate Period were also found. The name of the god Thoth of Set-wah,  *st-w3ḥ*, appears on many blocks. Set-wah was the name of the area around Amheida in the western part of the oasis (Kaper 1992, 124–9).

Three kings of the 26th Dynasty are named on the blocks: Nekau II, Psamtik II and Amasis. A fragmentary cartouche also identifies Darius I as one of the temple’s patrons. The demolition and reuse of the Saite and Persian buildings in the later temple of the Roman Period is evident from the occurrence of gypsum mortar on the faces of all earlier reliefs. Often these blocks also display a roughly cut groove across their relief face, which may relate to the process of cutting down the size of the blocks during reuse (Kaper and Demarée 2005, 22).

### Nekau II Wehemibre (610–595 BCE)

The earliest dated fragment of temple decoration from the Saite Dynasty shows part of a Horus name of Nekau II,  (Plate 4), probably from a horizontal band of inscription. Only a few other relief blocks and fragments may be associated with this piece, all of which seem, at the present state of our knowledge, to derive from a single temple doorway. The appearance of Nekau II is surprising, as there are only few extant remains of his activities as a temple patron nationwide (Leahy 2009, 237–40). There is no usurpation of the king’s name by Psamtik II in this case, as has been attested in a number of other monuments throughout Egypt (Leahy 2009).

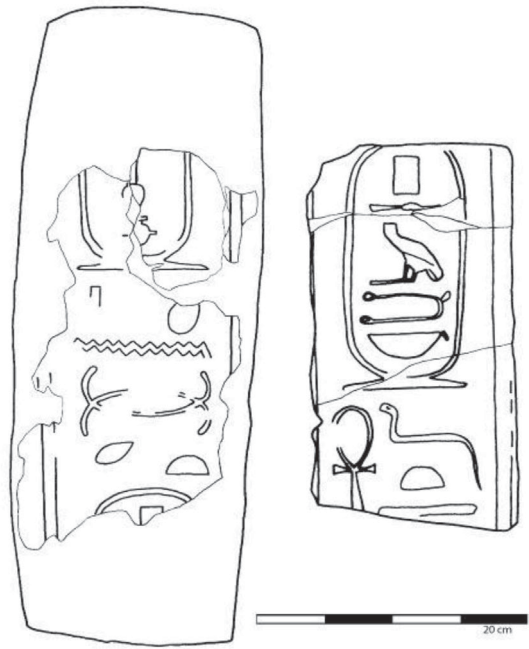
<sup>2</sup> Excavations by the Inspectorate for Pharaonic Antiquities at this site were carried out between 1988 and 1992. I thank Mr Yamani for allowing me to make a drawing of the block, which was previously mentioned in Kaper 2001, 76, note 12.



Plate 5



Plate 6



Two fragments from a doorway decorated in the name of Psamtik II, Amheida; height of larger piece: 51 cm, width 17.8 cm; © O. E. Kaper.



Plate 7 Building inscription of Amasis, Amheida; height 50.5 cm, width 23 cm; © O. E. Kaper.



Plate 8 Cornice fragment with the name of Amasis, Amheida; height 20.5 cm, width 40.5 cm; © O. E. Kaper.



Plate 9 Block from the chapel of Thoth built by Amasis, Amheida; height 41.7 cm, width 72 cm; © O. E. Kaper.

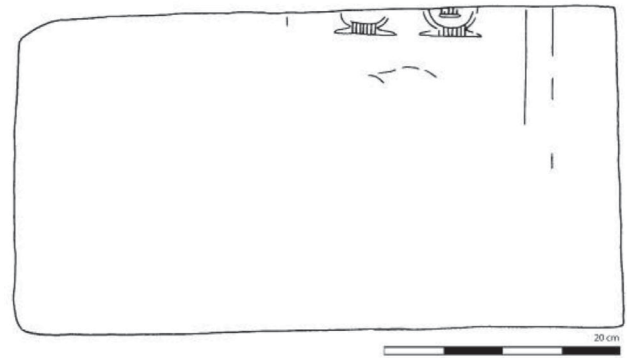
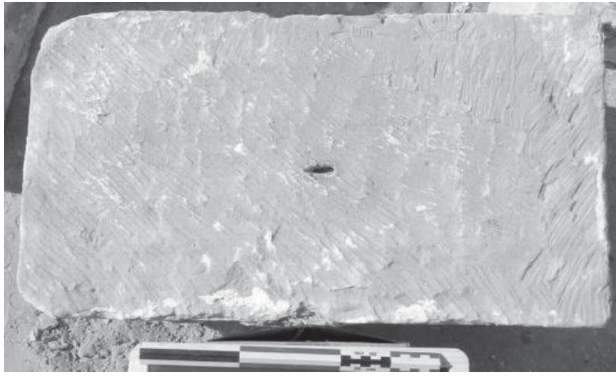


Plate 10 Block with remains of the cartouches of Darius I, Amheida; height 32 cm, width 56 cm; © O. E. Kaper.

### Psamtik II Neferibre (595–589 BCE)

The name of Psamtik II has been attested on several blocks at Amheida, which probably derive from a single temple doorway. Two of these show evidence of reuse in the time of Darius I, so that it seems that this part of the building only stood for about a century at most. In an inscription column from the passage of the doorway, the king is indicated with the title Son of Neith instead of the usual Son of Re (Plate 5): *Nfr-ib-[R<sup>c</sup>] s3 n Nit P[smtk]*. There is no other example of this use of the title ‘Son of Neith’ preceding the royal name during the Saite Dynasty. The title was a common epithet of Amasis, but it followed his name and was placed within the cartouche. On another fragment, probably from the parallel inscription on the opposite jamb of the same doorway, the royal name is written as follows (Plate 6): *Psmtk ʿnh dt*, “Psamtik (II), who lives for ever”.

### Amasis Khnemibre (570–526 BCE)

Amasis (Ahmose II) is frequently attested among the reused temple blocks at Amheida. There is clear evidence for a new chapel for Thoth being erected during his reign, which was entirely decorated in sunk relief, of which the predominant colour was blue.

Among the blocks are two joining fragments of a building inscription (Plate 7) with the following content: *s3 R<sup>c</sup> nb h<sup>c</sup>w I<sup>c</sup>h-ms ʿnh dt ir-n-f m mn[w ...]*, “The Son of Re, Lord of appearances Amasis, who lives for ever, he has made as a monument (...)”. Building inscriptions from Amasis’ reign have thus far only been attested upon naos-shrines, a stela, an obelisk and an offering table (Grallert 2001, 670), but not on a temple wall.

Amasis’ name often displays an unusual spelling at Amheida, which includes the determinative of the child following the *ms*-sign: although it also occurs without this addition. This spelling is well-known from Demotic writings of the royal name (Gauthier 1916, 114, 116–21, 127), but it has not been attested previously in

hieroglyphs. In Plate 8, the lower part of a cavetto cornice is visible, decorated with the cartouche of Amasis set upon the sign *nbw*.

The block in Plate 9 probably derives from the rear wall of the chapel of Amasis. It preserves the name of the king as: facing that of Thoth: *dhwtj ʿ3 3 nb st-w3h*, “Thoth the twice-great, the Lord of Amheida”. Several other blocks of this large-scale relief scene have been preserved (Bagnall *et alii* 2006, figure 9).

### Darius I (521–486 BCE)

Only a small part of the name of Darius I has been preserved on a single relief block from the temple (Plate 10). Yet the evidence from other anonymous relief blocks and fragments suggests that a complete chapel for Thoth was erected in this reign, which must have stood close to the chapel built by Amasis. The block in question was only partially cut, and its scene was finished in plaster, so that only the lower part of two cartouches remain visible today. The same carving technique is visible on a contiguous face on the same block, which shows part of the goddess Meret. Only a single sign is inside the cartouche: which is distinctive for the names of Darius, Xerxes or Artaxerxes, but there are three arguments for attributing the cartouche specifically to Darius I:

1. There are no Egyptian temple buildings known for Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Darius II or Darius III, whereas Darius I was responsible for building activities at the temples of el-Kab, Edfu, Thebes, Koptos, and Busiris (Traunecker 1980, 209–13), and especially in the neighbouring Kharga Oasis. Finding another temple of Darius I in Dakhleh would not be unlikely, therefore.

2. The relief style that is associated with the fragmentary cartouche in Amheida closely resembles that of the temple at Hibis (Figure 1 and Plate 11), so that it seems possible that the same group of artists worked in both locations. It has been suggested by Klotz (2006, 8–9) that the priests and artists involved were transferred to



Figure 1 Detail from Davies' line drawing of the exterior of the temple at Hibis, south wall, upper register (after Davies 1953, plate 50).




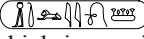
Plate 11 Detail of a relief of the god Khepri from a doorjamb at Amheida belonging to the same building phase as the block in Plate 10; © O. E. Kaper.



Plate 12 Potsherd with a stamped cartouche of Darius (I), Amheida; stamp 4.6 x 1.9 cm; © O. E. Kaper.

the oases from Thebes. Mysliwicz (1998, 186) has studied the carving of the Hibis temple in detail and he pointed out its remarkable combination of traditionalism and creative freedom, which is encountered again at Amheida. A close comparison with the Hibis reliefs needs to be undertaken when the full extent of the decoration attributable to Darius I at Amheida is known.

3. Another cartouche of Darius was found in the temple area at Amheida in the form of a stamp on a ceramic vessel (Plate 12). The potsherd was found on the surface of the site of the temple and it shows a cartouche of Darius surmounted by a crown of ostrich feathers flanking a solar disk. The name Darius is written as follows: , in a spelling not attested elsewhere (Gauthier 1916, 140–50), but corresponding closely to other known writings of the name (Cruz-Urbe 1992/1993). Theoretically it could also refer to Darius III, but this is unlikely, as only a single hieroglyphic writing of his name is known (Mond and Myers *et alii* 1934, plate 37.2). Therefore, this vessel will have been made specifically for the temple of Darius I at Amheida, in order to regulate the temple's supplies. The sherd is of local manufacture, and it was probably part of a keg (cf. Hope 2000, type A1 or B1). The vessel was stamped prefiring close to its neck, comparable to another keg of this period found at 'Ain el-Azizi in Dakhleh, and which has been interpreted as belonging to a local temple (Hope 2000, 209, figure 6.b; Kaper 2000). The measurements of the Amheida and 'Ain el-Azizi stamps correspond closely, as also their locations upon the respective vessels.

The temple of Darius I at Hibis or at Ghueita may have possessed a similar method of stamping vessels destined for the temple, because a bronze stamp with the cartouche of Darius surmounted by a feather crown was found in Kharga (Hall 1913, 284, No. 2744). Its spelling of the name is that which is commonly encountered in Kharga: . The stamp measures 7.6 cm in height, which is considerably taller than the impression in Amheida, but it may well have been employed for the same purpose of marking vessels.

## Conclusions

The history of the Saite Dynasty has been written largely on the basis of evidence from the north of Egypt, because of the state's close and often tense relations with powers to its North and East. Yet, there was also a military threat at the southern border, from the powerful state in Nubia (Bonnet and Valbelle 2005, 164–71). The present collection of royal inscriptions shows that the western border of Egypt was recipient of much royal attention too, throughout the Saite period and into the reign of Darius I. The control over the southern oases of Kharga and Dakhleh was reinforced by temple building projects. It remains to establish the reasons for this policy.

The two temple sites of Mut and Amheida were favoured already during the Third Intermediate Period, of which the temple at Mut al-Kharab was the oasis' most

important structure. Additions to its decoration continued to be made intermittently between the early 18th Dynasty and the Third Intermediate Period (Hope 2005, 46–7; Kaper 2009; Hope and Kaper 2011). During the late Ramesside Period, violent incursions into the Nile Valley by Libyan groups, as documented in the records from Deir el-Medina (Haring 1992; 1993), had made it clear that this part of the Western Desert could pose a threat to security. The Banishment Stela of Menkheperre (Jansen-Winkel 2007, 72–4) mentions the oases as a place of banishment for adversaries of the government, which made tight control over the region even more urgent. The larger Dakhleh Stela, now in Oxford, was erected at the temple at Mut al-Kharab in the reign of Shoshenq I or perhaps Shoshenq III (Leahy 2010), and its text testifies to the central administration's continuing efforts to maintain law and order in the oases.

There is not much information from the period of the 25th Dynasty. Two blocks found near the village of El-Qasr (Bahriyya) provide evidence for building activity under Shabako at Bahriyya (Fakhry 1950, 73; Yoyotte 1951, 221 Nr. 34; Jansen-Winkel 2009: 21, no. 46.35). No involvement of the Nubian Dynasty in building works in Kharga or Dakhleh has as yet been attested, and it is possible that central control over the region had lapsed. In Mut al-Kharab, the excavations have yielded much ceramic remains from this dynasty (Hope 2004; Hope *et alii* 2009, 64), showing its continuing economic activity and importance.

Psamtik I first expanded his control over Egypt southward in his 9th regnal year, in 656 BCE, when he sent a diplomatic mission to Thebes to break the power of the vizier Montuemhat and to install his daughter Nitocris as the future God's Wife of Amun (Goyon 2005, 303–4). Considering the Theban control over the Southern Oasis during the preceding Libyan Period (Kaper 2009, 159), it seems reasonable to assume that Psamtik could only have extended his influence to Dakhleh and Kharga after the peace with the south had been concluded. In year 11 (654 BCE) the king undertook a punitive expedition against the Libyan tribes that still controlled the western fringes of northern Middle Egypt and the Delta, as recorded on Stela VII from Saqqara (Manuelian 1994, 323–32; Gozzoli 2006, 93–5, no. 34). Goyon (2005, 305) has suggested that the southern oases were pacified during the same expedition. According to Hope (2003, 74) and Perdu (2010, 142), who both commented on Psamtik's reasons for extending his influence to Dakhleh, the building works at the temple of Mut were part of a policy aimed at countering a perceived Libyan threat to Egypt's stability. If this link with the campaign of year 11 is accepted, the building activities may have started shortly afterwards. The new temple buildings would have been significant as an expression of the renewed domination of the region by a king with a Libyan name.

However, security may not have been the only reason behind the royal patronage of the temples of the oasis. I think there were two further objectives for the Saite kings

in their dealings with the Western Desert, that applied equally or in different degrees of emphasis throughout the dynasty. The second of these objectives was religious. Psamtik I is known for his extensive building programme at temples throughout Egypt (Perdu 2003, 9; Perdu 2010, 143), and the king's building activities at Mut al-Kharab may therefore be seen as forming part of a more general religious policy aimed at supporting the major temples of the country. In this case the building works may have commenced later in the reign, when Dakhleh had been fully integrated into the new administrative system. Psamtik I and his successors seem to have treated all parts of the country equally in their building works. This policy would, however, change again under the Persians, because Darius I is known to have devoted remarkably more attention to the temples of the southern oases than to the temples in the rest of the country (Chauveau and Thiers 2006, 379).

A third objective of the kings who wished to control the Western Desert oases may well have been long-distance trade. Smoláriková (2008, 26) has pointed at this aspect in relation to Apries' activities in Bahriyya, and she concluded that "the western oases turned into flourishing trade centres which profited from the passing caravans". Evidence for this trade is hard to find, but the site of Qasr Allam in northern Bahriyya has yielded an important storage centre from this time (Colin 2004). It can certainly be argued that trade was one of the principal interests of the Saite kings (Lloyd 2000, 374–6). The foundation of Naukratis demonstrates this, but also the digging of a canal to the Red Sea under Nekau II, which was motivated by the important trade routes over sea (Lloyd 2000, 376). The canal was finished under Darius I, and the development of trade routes was carried on under Persian rule (Lloyd 1976, 135). By developing the infrastructure of the oases, and by building temples, the conditions for trade through the Western Desert were improved. The nature of this trade still needs more information from other sources and it remains the least documented aspect of the history of the oases. Hopefully the large amounts of Late Period ostraka found at Mut in recent years will fill in some of this gap.

The prospects of a reliable year-round water supply and continuous agriculture in the oases must have been attractive to the rulers as well, and this would have provided a significant additional impetus to the economic development of the Western Desert oases. The political considerations of national security, religious policy, and the organisation of long-distance trade formed the motivation behind the close involvement of the Egyptian state in the oases, and this was a policy that also brought economic stability through which the population could expand. The agricultural produce of the oases is likely to have been one of the most important commodities in the long-distance trade with the Nile Valley and its neighbouring countries.

Continuing the work started under Psamtik I, Nekau II extended the temple for Thoth at Amheida (Perdu 2010,

144). The extent of his contribution may have been limited to the decoration upon a single doorway, which was added to the existing temple from the Libyan Period. His successor Psamtik II contributed at least one other decorated stone doorway to the same temple. The name of this king is also linked to the remains of a temple doorway at Mut al-Kharab or its immediate surroundings. According to Cruz-Urbe, Psamtik II was responsible for extensive building works at Hibis (Cruz-Urbe 1987, 230; 1988, 196, figure 2), a position also adopted by Arnold (1999, 77–9), but the evidence for this is far from convincing. The supposition that Psamtik II had constructed the entire Hibis temple, and started decorating the rooms A–M, as the two scholars suggest, is too much to expect of a king who ruled for only six years and left no record of having built much else anywhere in Egypt. There is indeed evidence for a Saite construction date for the sanctuary room at Hibis (Winlock 1941, 9, plate 43; Cruz-Urbe 1988, 196), as also at Qasr el-Ghueita (Darnell 2007), but the king involved may have been Apries or Amasis rather than Psamtik II, if judged by the length of their reigns and their known activities elsewhere in the oases. The single occurrence of the Horus name *mnḥ-ib* in the Hibis temple (Davies 1953, plate 13) is no proof of Psamtik's involvement, as this occurs in the context of several unaltered cartouches of Darius I upon the same wall. Already Winlock (1941, 6) suggested that the scene with the Horus name of Psamtik II may have been a copy of an earlier scene in the building, but not part of the Saite construction at the site.

The cartouche of Apries has been found in Kharga on a fragment of a stone dish excavated by the expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at Hibis (Winlock 1941, 5–6, 41, plate 26.B). However, this dish provides evidence for trade rather than proof of the involvement of this king in building or extending the temple. There is evidence for building works in the name of Apries at Bahriyya (Fakhry 1950, 2–5), which was from now on the site of much activity by the local governors of that oasis during the remainder of the 26th Dynasty (Colin and Labrique 2002, 60–72). Previously, Bahriyya was ruled by an official from the Nile Valley, because the Theban official Ankh-Hor had been governor of Bahriyya around the start of Apries' reign (Graefe 1978).

During the reign of Amasis, the intensity of economic activities increased. Temple building in this king's name was undertaken by the local governor of Bahriyya, Djed-Khonsu-iuf-ankh at 'Ain el-Muftella (Colin and Labrique 2002). A bronze statuette found at this site was attributed to Amasis (Fakhry 1950, plate 10; Mysliwiec 1988, 50 [15]). Amasis also forced the local ruler of Siwa, the 'Chief of the Two Deserts' (*wr ḥṣty*) Sethirdis, to recognize his authority, after which the temple at Aghurmi was built and decorated in both their names (Kuhlmann 1988, 42–3; Colin 1998).

In Dakhleh, Amasis ordered a new temple for Thoth to be erected at Amheida. No local governors are known from the southern oases at this time, which is a notable

difference with the oases in the north. It is possible that the political system of powerful local governors, that was still in evidence by the end of the Libyan Period (Kaper and Demarée 2005), had been replaced by a different system in the 26th Dynasty, of which we have not yet encountered the archaeological or textual remains. It is clear, at any rate, that the importance of the governors in the life of the oases had diminished, so that their name could not appear on the temples alongside those of the rulers. Again, more administrative documents from this period are needed to fill in the details of this situation.

The successors of Amasis, Psamtik III and Cambyses, are not encountered in the texts from the oases. Cambyses was responsible for sending an army into the Western Desert which famously disappeared after reaching Kharga (Herodotus III, 26). However, the Persian rulers did not abandon the region after that. Under Darius I there is a new spate of building activity, which surpassed that of any previous king in the Western Desert. The great temple at Hibis was erected and decorated in his reign, but also the smaller temple at Ghueita (Darnell 2007), and a new temple for Thoth at Amheida. Ceramics found at Mut al-Kharab indicate that the existing temenos wall was possibly already in existence by the 27th Dynasty, because the kegs in the deposits associated with this wall are known from Dynasty 26 (Hope *et alii* 2009, 65; Hope, personal communication). The mud-brick temple at 'Ain Manawir also dates to the 27th Dynasty, but it is not known from which reign (Wuttmann *et alii* 1996, 393). A bronze door hinge (Michaélidis 1943, 91–3, plate III) inscribed with the name of Darius in cuneiform is said to be from Kharga, and it probably stems from one of these temples.

According to Herodotus, Cambyses had sent his army against the Ammonians in Siwa. This oasis appears to have been finally brought under Persian rule under Darius I (Lloyd 1976, 134–5). In this case, economic motives related to trade would have played a major role, because of the caravan routes linking Egypt with Cyrene.

By the end of the Late Period, the 30th Dynasty kings Akoris, Nektanebo I and Nektanebo II were responsible for ordering extensions to the Hibis temple (Traunecker 1979, 411–5; Perdu 2010, 155–6). In Siwa, the temple of Umm Ubayda was built by the local governor Wenamun in the time of Nektanebo II (Bruhn 2010, 31). At the same time, a local king Wenamun erected an Egyptian temple at the small oasis of Bahrein, and he was probably the same as the governor of this name depicted at Umm Ubayda (Gallo 2006, 29–30). No evidence of any 30th Dynasty kings has yet been found in Dakhleh, but judging by the evidence presented above, this can only be a matter of time.



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