



Philae & Kalabsha Two Unique Island Temples

ARTICLE & LOCATION PHOTOS BY CLUB MEMBER THOMAS

Sandladder presents this 6th article in the latest series on regional antiquities, written by the club's resident history enthusiast Thomas. This month's piece focuses on the unique island temples of Philae and Kalabsha in southern Egypt and

their associated relief scenes. Thomas's article provides us with a fascinating insight, not only into these temple edifices but also into aspects of life in ancient Egypt such as pharaoh names, state structure, royal crowns and insignia.

The rising waters from the Nasser dam were not only a threat to the Abu Simbel temples, but to many more archeological sites, some of which were lost for ever.

Unfortunately the economical interests to produce hydroelectric power to develop Egypt's industry was more important 40 years ago, than to preserve Egypt's important history, which today creates many jobs and is a key foreign exchange income source.

It must have been an extraordinary and scary experience paddling by boat through the tall columns of the Philae temple, which was already four meters

under water, when it was decided to move it to higher ground, thereby saving it from the rising water levels.

A small islet called Agilkia was found close to Aswan, between the small old dam and the new massive Nasser dam, where the whole Isis temple complex was re-erected stone by stone taking over ten years and was finally finished in 1980. The approach by boat today is spectacular including the rocky neighboring islands around.

Isis Temple

The ancient Isis Temple on Philae Island was built by Greek origin Pharaoh Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos

approximately 370BC, so it is a late Egyptian structure.

It is surprising that the colonnaded forecourt is not rectangular and in line with the main temple, like in all Egyptian buildings, but the shape and limited space of the islet might have forced the builders to accept this fact.

But let me give you a quick tour of what you are going to see as a visitor today.

Similar to other temples, such as Edfu, the so-called mammisi or birth house is situated outside the main entrance, but still within the temple perimeter walls. The first pylon gate is richly covered and is 45m wide and 18m high, still



Best view of 18m high pylon gate of Isis Temple on Philae Island



Small Kertassi "kiosk" on Kalabsha Island



Kertassi with beautiful views over Nasser Lake



impressive for the smaller Philae temple.

The first courtyard is colonnaded on both sides and has a staircase to the pylon roof, which unfortunately is not open to the public. The eastern colonnaded passage has six side chambers possibly used for administration, scribes and archive purposes.

The second pylon was not built parallel to the first, but at a slight angle, with two granite lion figures flanking and protecting this gate. Like in many temples, during Byzantine times they were converted into churches, here the second courtyard was reused as a Coptic church by Roman Emperor Justinian.

Moving on you will see various halls and 12 side chambers for cosmic zodiac balance. This is also the area of the sanctuary with an altar to place the holy barge.

On the left side you will see again a staircase to the temple roof, where a chapel for death god Osiris was erected and which unfortunately is not in situ any longer. The last hieroglyphs in this temple were carved 437AD.

The Isis temple on Philae was also the last temple where priests could still practice parson rituals, which were forbidden, while Christianity rapidly spread in Egypt. In 535AD the Isis temple was finally closed for this purpose by Roman Emperor Justinian. If you can, ask your guide to also visit the opposite Biga Island with the tomb and temple of death god Osiris, which gives you an excellent view back to the Philae/Agilkia islet.

Relief Scenes

Some very interesting relief scenes can be seen at the Isis temple including the important zodiac cosmic

order relief carvings and Pharaoh Ptolemy XII presenting the double crown to falcon headed god Horus (being the god of heaven and pharaohs, and god of the living and fertile land) and to death goddess nebet-hut or Nephthys.

There are also repeated scenes of incense offerings to main goddess Isis and her son Harpokrates, who represented Horus as a child. Isis was replaced during the New Kingdom Period by goddess Hathor as mother of Horus. This is demonstrated in a temple relief scene showing Isis giving birth to Horus.

Other relief scenes depict priests carrying the holy barge of Isis in a procession, as well as showing the deceased god Osiris with the pharaoh. Osiris is praying for his ach or soul, seen by ancient Egyptians as the ghost of the deceased and representing his heavenly



Kertassi with Hathor headed columns and flower capitals



immortality and his liaison to eternity, in many cases depicted as an Ibis with a crown.

Do not be surprised to see on the temple reliefs Roman Emperors in full Egyptian Pharaoh ornate, which you will find also at the temples of Edfu and Esna which were all built during the last Egyptian dynasty 2,000 years ago.

Other Philae Buildings

Despite its small size, Philae islet was fully covered by buildings. The list included a small Harthor temple on the east side of the main Isis temple and the tall half open Trajan hall, the latter being the second most impressive building on island.

Roman Emperor Hadrian built a gate on the west side and the Harendotes temple next to it.

Pharaoh Ptolemaios II erected the east gate and a small Arensnuphis temple.

Again a small Asclepios temple was built in front of the first pylon together with a Nektanebes hall. Later a second Coptic church was added behind the Isis temple together with an Augustus temple and the Roman gate.

You see Roman Emperors now added temples for their Roman gods all built in Egyptian style, but the ancient Egyptian empire and culture had died already and

was over with the suicide of Cleopatra VII.

Kalabsha Island

As mentioned before, the rescue efforts to save as many temples from the rising waters of the Nasser dam ended with re-erecting three temples on Kalabsha islet. In antiquity the three temples were actually situated at different sites along a 50km stretch of the Nile.

The Mandulis temple is the most important temple in Nubia after Abu Simbel. From Aswan we have reached Nubian territory which can be seen today by the different colorful lady dresses in the street and Nubian villages close by, which are worth a visit as well. Nubia's ancient name was wawat.

The partly unfinished temple was built to worship the local Nubian god Mandulis, which can be compared with Horus. An internal staircase leads to roof of the plain pylon 15m high up. After the first colonnaded court yard a hall with three rows of four big columns follows, all of which have rare flower capitels.

If you move on you will pass another three halls with the typical inner and outer corridors.

Watch out for the lion headed water sprouts used as fountains in antiquity in the inner corridor. At the southwest corner is the common mammisi with its walls covered with interesting relief scenes.

The relief scenes show again Roman Emperors in full Pharaoh ornate and pose in front of gods. This includes Emperor Augustus delivering offerings in front of gods Isis, Horus and Mandulis.

One really interesting inscription can be found here dated 248AD. It is an instruction to pig herd owners to keep their animals at a safe distance from temple. Another even more interesting inscription is that of Nubian King Silkos praising his victory over the desert tribes written in old Mawa script and dated 500BC.

Kertassi & Bet Al Wali

The small Kertassi temple consists of an open hall with beautiful Harthor headed columns plus flower capitels. Today is overlooks the expansive Nasser Lake giving the impression that one is looking out from a Greek island on the Mediterranean.

Bet al Wali is a small rock sanctuary built by Ramses II. It has some relief and painted scenes including many battle scenes of Ramses II the typical enemies at the times which were the Libyans, Nubians and Syrians. Interesting is the scene with goddess Isis feeding her child Ramses.

State Structure

To be able to effectively administer the fast Egyptian empire with a population of over two million, living on a 1,000km



Colonnaded gallery of rare columns in front of Isis Temple first pylon gate - columns are different and have head of goddess Hathor above lotus flower capitels



So called Trajan Hall named after Roman emperor Trajan who visited Philae Island



long stretch on the borders of the Nile, a complex organization was needed. Therefore the pharaoh appointed a so-called vizier as head of his state administration. This was the most powerful position in ancient Egypt and practically his deputy when the pharaoh was away on military campaigns, a very common situation in ancient Egypt.

Viziers already existed in the Old Kingdom between 2700BC - 2200BC, but had much less power at that time. But since the 11th dynasty in the Middle Kingdom, starting from 2119BC, two viziers were appointed, one for Lower Egypt and one for Upper Egypt. The Upper Egypt vizier naturally was more powerful as he was closer to the pharaoh in Thebes/Luxor.

Rechmire was the most important vizier as he was in the job for 60 years, initially starting to work under Tuthmosis III and

even serving his successor Amenhotep II.

Rechmire left two important documents painted as text on the walls of his tomb, the "appointment of vizier" and the "instructions for viziers". These texts give us a deep insight into the Egyptian administration during the New Kingdom Period. For example all civil servants had to report on the 4th day of every month to the vizier based at the royal court.

The pharaoh rewarded his most important servants and secured their loyalty with valuable gifts, such as gold jewelry. This was done publicly to honor those civil servants for their loyalty and work and also to inspire others to work harder and more importantly stay loyal.

We also learned from these texts that one third of the population was employed as civil servants in the vast ancient Egyptian administration. Some experts

even say the old Egyptians invented bureaucracy, paper work, the first forms and detailed reporting, and had already become masters of bureaucratic inefficiency 4,000 years ago. So what have we learned from history? Do things really repeat themselves?

In addition to civil servants a great number of people found employment in another growth sector, the priesthood. Religious and political powers were combined with the pharaoh being the highest priest performing many important rituals. Pharaohs based their power on their god born origin, which is demonstrated in the many wall relief scenes on temple walls still to be seen today.

The provincial governors were another institution next to the vizier and high priests. In the Old and Middle Kingdom provincial governors built up a strong



Massive column in Philae Isis Temple with scenes of worshipping pharaohs presenting sacrifices



Column of Ramses II with nemes head scarf, sechem scepter & ankh symbol of life, part of Mandulis Temple on Kalabsha Island



power base with the intent to become more independent. As normal jobs were inherited by the first born son, governors installed the same and passed on the governorship within their family.

The independence and power of governors became a real threat to the pharaohs from time to time. Therefore Sesostri III replaced the governor inheritance system in 1860BC with a fully centralized administration again under the management of the vizier.

The Great House

This was the name for royal residential palace of the pharaoh in ancient Egypt. The crowning ceremony was the most important act in the life of the pharaoh, and an important demonstration of his god like nature.

The pharaoh was seen as the human incarnation of falcon headed god Horus on earth, warranting harmony and the all important balance of all things called maat, also represented by a goddess of the same name.

In Egyptian belief sun god Amun-Re selected a queen and induced the birth of a divine child, which was recognized by gods as a child of the sun and the legitimate heir of the throne of both lands.

The sed festival was the second most important event in the rulers life, a ritual necessary to renew the pharaohs power after a period of 30 years. It also symbolized the ritual burial of the pharaoh using a statue and thereafter re-enthroning him for the next period, giving him new powers to perform his duties and re-juvenating him as well.

Having received his renewed power the pharaoh demonstrated this by running past various gods and temples. After the first sed festival others followed every three to four years. Some rulers could not wait 30 years and had their sed festival earlier. They possibly felt when things got politically difficult that they needed a quick boost of power and staged a sed festival.

Complex Pharaoh Names

Tuthmosis III in power from 1458BC - 1426BC during the 18th dynasty is the first king to call himself pharaoh, meaning great house or palace. For ease I only use the title

pharaoh in this article. Before the fourth dynasty around 2600BC, pharaohs only used Horus names written in a serekh panel with the divine Horus falcon on top.

Khasekhemwy started to use both signs.

Pharaoh Semerkhet was the first to use nebti names, but it was only in the twelfth dynasty that nebti names became standard as part of the five other royal ruler names.

Since the Middle Kingdom, pharaohs started to use title combination of all five names.

Pharaoh Snefru introduced the cartouche, the common recognition of a royal name. The cartouche symbolizes a rope loop with tied ends. The double cartouche was first used by Pharaoh Neferirkare in the fifth dynasty.

On crowning of a pharaoh his normal or birth name was combined with his throne name in a cartouche.

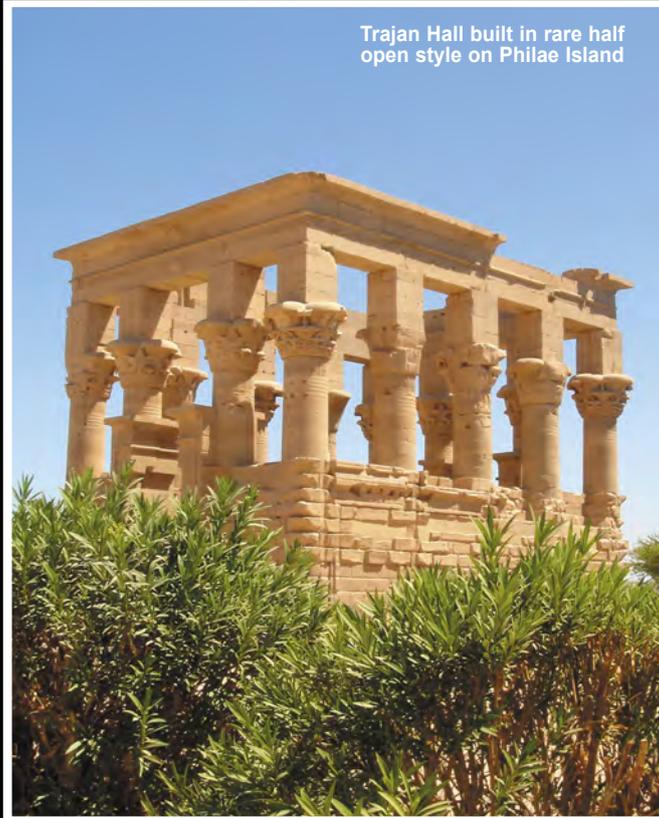
The Horus name symbolized the heavenly link of the pharaoh, only Old Kingdom rulers had this single name. With the start of the New Kingdom, all pharaoh names started with "strong bull". Let me give you an example for Pharaoh Tutankhamun: his Horus name was ka-nakht tut-mesmut best translated as "strong bull, fitting from created forms" a hint to the divine creation of the ka on a potter wheel.

The nebti name symbolized the two goddesses for Upper and Lower Egypt, being Uto and Nechbet depicted as snake and vulture over a basket linked with gods Horus and Seth. Pharaoh Tutankhamun's nebti name was nefer-hepu segereh-tawy sehetep-netjeru nebu meaning "dynamics of laws, who calms the two lands, who propitiate all the gods".

The gold name was symbolized by a falcon over a collar sign for gold. Tutankhamun's gold name was wetjes-khau sehetep-netjeru meaning "who displays the regalia, who propitiates the gods".

The throne name indicates the ruler of Lower and Upper Egypt encircled by a cartouche. Since the late Old Kingdom Period the name of sun god Re was added, represented by the sun disc sign. Tutankhamun's throne name was nesu-bity neb-kheperu-re meaning "king of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of manifestations is Re"

The birth name or the pharaohs natural



Trajan Hall built in rare half open style on Philae Island



Isis Temple with massive first pylon gate measuring 45m x 18m

The first serekh was shown on the famous Namer Palette. Pharaoh Peribsen added the sign for god Seth to his serekh and his successor



name was followed by the words son of Re. Tutankhamun's birth name was sa-re, tutankhamun heqa-iunu-shema meaning "son of Re, living image of Amun, ruler of Upper Egyptian Heliopolis"

Royal Crowns & Insignia

During the various Egyptian periods covering 3,000 years different crowns and royal insignia were created and added to the royal inventory and picture codex.

The most important crown was the red and white crown called shmtj, pschemt or sechemti, representing the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt and was used throughout the Egyptian history.

At first the white crown was called hedjet or shemas and symbolized a lotus flower plus the vulture emblems for Lower Egypt. The red crown was called deshret

or mehus and symbolized the papyrus and cobra emblems for Upper Egypt.

In addition more royal head dresses were created later, such as the blue crown called chepresch, this was a helmet like crown worn only during battle and introduced by Pharaoh Tuthmosis I. Another type of crown used was called shuti a double feather crown with ram horns. Or the so-called henu a double ostrich feather crown again with ram horns.

The famous nemes became well known with the discovery of the Tutankhamun tomb, showing his death mask with a gold and blue colored royal head scarf.

Other crowns seen on wall reliefs are the chat, a royal wig with hair bag and the atef, a plant bundle crown with ostrich feathers and ram horns, as well as the

hemhemet, a triple plant bundle crown.

Royal regalia was also based on symbols and it is difficult to explain their forms and why those were used for this purpose. The heqat scepter was a long stick with a fully looped top slightly open at the end and the symbol of rule and the sechem scepter was the symbol of power.

The nechacha was a whisk and the symbol of royalty. The anch sign was the symbol of life and the was scepter was the symbol of happiness and rule.

Other royal regalia were the nekes a papyri holder, the djed pole a symbol of stability and eternity, the chepesch a bend sword, the bagesu a dagger and the hedsch a club for the annual ceremonial clubbing of enemies to demonstrate superiority and power as shown on many wall relief scenes famous for the New Kingdom Period.



Nile river boat vendors & Nubian ladies in Aswan



Boats close to Aswan waiting for Philae Island visitors

Tips for Visitors

- Avoid the European holiday season - if you are used to heat you could go in low summer season
- Plan for 1 week if you wish to visit Karnak, Luxor and the tombs & temples at West Thebes
- It is advisable to book your own private guide, as this allows you to avoid the masses
- Go to Karnak & Luxor temples twice, once in the morning & afternoon - light is different
- Get up early and do the hot air balloon flight over West Thebes temples - best Nile views
- Be in line at the Valley of Kings on opening time as you do not need to stand in line for each tomb
- If you like tombs and their colourful painted walls, visit workers tombs at Deir al Medinah and nobel tombs at Sheikh Abd el Qurna
- Highly recommended temple visits: Hatshepsut, Medinet Habu, Ramessesum
- Also recommended is a cruise to Aswan and flight to Abu Simbel - not the bus tour
- On the cruise, stop and visit temples at Esna, Edfu & Kom Ombo - the latter 2 are a "must see"
- In Aswan visit temples on Elephantine, Philea and Kalabsha islands which are all close by
- If you like cruises do Nasser lake cruise to Abu Simbel plus other temples - no flight needed
- Luxor and the Nile cruise can be done in a week, incl. Nasser cruise can be done in 10 days
- You either can do the cruise from Luxor to Aswan and fly back, or vice versa, or both ways
- Fewer tourists doing the cruise down river, so you will have less crowds to enjoy the temples