

Ramesside Temples and the Economic Interests of the State: Crossroads of the Sacred and the Profane*

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1. Temples, economy, and the state

The great temples of Ramesside Egypt had considerable estates that included various means of production, transport and storage. Such estates were founded by kings for temples when these were still under construction, or for temples that already existed. During their reigns, pharaohs added even more wealth to temple foundations, usually in the form of incidental gifts. The Egyptian expression for 'temple estate' was *hetep netjer* „divine offering“. Although the *raison d'être* of the estate thus seemed to be the production of offerings, its productive capacity was far greater than was strictly necessary for that purpose. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that its agricultural domains were cultivated in cooperation with other institutions and with private landowners or tenants, who were entitled to major parts of the produce. In this way, society at large benefited from the resources theoretically belonging to temple estates, and the greater temples must have been important motors of the national economy.¹

Whereas older Egyptological literature stresses the idea of the temples as economic competitors, even threats, to the government, recent studies emphasize their integrative role.² Agricultural co-

operation is one example. The intricate relationships between temples, government departments and private individuals are shown by various Ramesside documents of the agrarian administration, especially the Wilbour Papyrus from the reign of Ramesses V.³ Here we see, for instance, how one plot of land could be part of crown domains called *khata*, which were assigned to a temple estate that took care of its cultivation and received part of the crop. Another field of the same temple estate was actually the property of a wealthy individual, who had to pay a small part of the crop to the temple. The cultivating, however, was probably done by one or more peasants leasing the plot and sharing the crop with the owner. In this way, different institutions and persons benefited from the same piece of land.

Another important indication of government-temple interaction are inspections of temple estates by the royal treasury. Most famous are those by the chief archivist of the royal treasury Penpata in the reign of Ramesses III, but we know of several more, and Anthony Spalinger has suggested that such inspections were followed by endowments to temples in order to compensate losses in the course of time.⁴

Finally, there were payments by the temples to the government, which are possibly to be interpreted as taxes. For instance, papyrus BM 10401, dated by Janssen to the late Twentieth Dynasty, lists commodities taken by a chief taxing master from temples in Elephantine, Kom Ombo, Edfu, Nekhen and Esna.⁵ Another example is an

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1 See, for instance, B.J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt. Anatomy of a Civilization*, London and New York 1989, 183-317; D. O'Connor, The Social and Economic Organization of Ancient Egyptian Temples, in: J.M. Sasson ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East I*, New York 1995, 319-29; B.J.J. Haring, *Divine Households. Administrative and Economic Aspects of the New Kingdom Royal Memorial Temples in Western Thebes* (Egyptologische Uitgaven 12), Leiden 1997.

2 The integrative role was emphasized already in the 1970s by B.J. Kemp, Temple and Town in Ancient Egypt, in: P.J. Ucko, R. Tringham and G.W. Dimbleby ed., *Man, Settlement and Urbanism*, London 1972, 657-80, and by J.J. Janssen, The Role of the Temple in the Egyptian Economy of the New Kingdom, in: E. Lipinski ed., *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East II* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 6),

Leuven 1979, 505-15, whereas W. Helck, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des alten Ägypten im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend vor Chr.* (Handbuch der Orientalistik 1.1.5), Leiden and Cologne 1975, 202 and 203, was still in favour of a state-temple dichotomy.

3 A.H. Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus II*, Oxford 1948; Haring, *Divine Households*, 283-326.

4 A.J. Spalinger, Some Revisions of Temple Endowments in the New Kingdom, *JARCE* 28 (1991), 21-39.

5 J.J. Janssen, Requisitions from Upper-Egyptian Temples, *JEA* 77 (1991), 79-94, pl. IV.

inscription in the Karnak temple from year 10 of Ramesses IX, in which the high priest of Amun Amenhotep is praised by the king, not only for collecting the production of the temple estate of Amonrasonter, but also for „(...) the *inu, tep-djeret*, and the provision of Amonrasonter, which you have caused to be brought to Pharaoh, your lord, (being) what a good and useful servant does for Pharaoh, his lord.“⁶ Exactly what goods and amounts were raised is not stated, but Pharaoh must have appreciated them, given the fact that Amen-hotep was rewarded for his trouble with almost two kilogrammes of gold and and one kilo of silver objects, and other goods.⁷

Some papyri indicate that Amenhotep's predecessor Ramessesnakht kept an eye on expeditions searching for galena, the raw material for eyepaint, in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, and saw to it that material collected there reached the royal residence.⁸ The same priest controlled teams of gold-miners belonging to the Karnak temple, and supervised the delivery of gold and galena from the Eastern Desert at the Karnak treasury.⁹

The data concerning temple economy as presented in the preceding paragraphs enable us to look at temple estates in three different ways:

a. On the ideological or religious level there is the notion of a temple estate as the sum of economic

provisions created by the king for the house of his divine father or mother. This notion finds its clearest expression in the Egyptian word *hetep-netjer* „divine offering“ as a reference to the temple estate.

b. On the economic or administrative microlevel, collected information of a quantitative and qualitative nature shows the economic power of the temple: the estate includes personnel, cattle, fields, storerooms, workshops and ships as capital assets, as well as their produce. Their size and numbers vary according to the size and importance of the temple.

c. On the macrolevel or state level, the temple estate was certainly not an isolated unit. Its agricultural fields were cultivated, and part of their produce claimed, by other institutions, by private landholders and by tenants. Inspections by the royal treasury suggest a close watch on temple finances. Indications also exist for deliveries, perhaps to be interpreted as taxes, made by the temples to the government.

Data on economic reality thus show big temples as powerful autonomous units (more or less in keeping with the ideological view), yet not entirely isolated from economic interests of the society at large, and more specifically from those of the government.

2. The Theban Temples of Millions of Years

A special role, ideological and economic, was reserved for the personal temple foundations of the New Kingdom pharaohs: the „Temples of Millions of Years“. These temples were named after the founding kings, but were dedicated mainly to deities who usually had their older temples nearby. This double focus (king and deity) is expressed on the religious level by the temple name: „The Temple (of Millions of Years) of King X in the House of God Y“.¹⁰

The Theban Temples of Millions of Years are relatively well-documented examples. Those of the early New Kingdom (ca. 1550-1350 BCE) were small, and economically very much depended on the major temple of Amun-Re at Karnak. This is shown, for instance, by the list of incense supplies to various

6 W. Helck, Die Inschrift über die Belohnung des Hohenpriesters *Imn-ḥtp*, *MIO* 4 (1956), 161-178.

7 As recorded beneath the scene: Helck, *MIO* 4 (1956), 166-9. The figures are arrived at by multiplying the amounts expressed in *deben* with 0.091 kg., as is usually done by Egyptologists. See, however, E. Graefe, Über die Goldmenge des Alten Ägypten und die Beraubung der thebanischen Königsgräber, *ZÄS* 126 (1999), 19-40. Graefe argues that the *deben*, when used for gold and silver in New Kingdom texts, stands for a weight of 13.1 grammes, as it had done in earlier periods. In that case, the objects given to Amenhotep would have amounted to 131 gr. of gold (for a necklace and 3 more items of jewelry) and 262 gr. of silver (as the weight of 12 vessels).

8 W. Helck, Eine Briefsammlung aus der Verwaltung des Amuntempels, *JARCE* 6 (1967), 134-151.

9 Ibid.; Y. Koenig, Livraisons d'or et de galène au trésor du temple d'Amon sous la XXe dynastie, in: *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron 1927-1976 I* (Bibliothèque d'Étude 81), Cairo 1979, 185-220, pls. XXX-XXXVII; idem, Livraisons d'or et de galène au trésor du temple d'Amon sous la XXe dynastie: document A, partie inférieure, *BIFAO* 83 (1983), 249-55, pls. LII-LIV.

10 See M. Ullmann, *König für die Ewigkeit – Die Häuser der Millionen von Jahren. Eine Untersuchung zu Königskult und Tempeltypologie in Ägypten* (Ägypten und Altes Testament 51), Wiesbaden 2002.

Theban temples in the tomb of Puyemre, from the reign of Thutmose III. The royal memorial temples are among the institutions receiving incense from the Karnak treasury, and they are said to be „in the retinue“ (*im.y.w-ht*) of the temple of Amun.¹¹ If this indication of economic dependence is still vague, a text from the reign of Amenhotep III certainly is not, when it states that the king's newly founded memorial temple in Memphis is „on the provision“ (*hr sdf3*) of the temple of Ptah, and that this situation is similar to that of the Theban royal temples with respect to the temple of Amun.¹²

From the reign of Amenhotep III onwards, however, the Theban memorial temples became significantly larger, and in the Ramesside Period (1292-1070 BCE) it was their storerooms that often provided for the offerings at Karnak. Ramesses III established new daily offerings in the Karnak temple in his regnal year 6, and again in years 7 and 16. According to the texts recording these offerings in Karnak and in the king's own temple at Medinet Habu, it was the latter temple that supplied all the necessary materials: grain, vegetables, flowers, fruit, wine, fowl, fat, honey and incense, and these in substantial quantities.¹³ The Temple of Millions of Years would seem to have become an economic 'counterweight' to the central temple of Amun-Re, and the founding king referred to it in dedicatory inscriptions as „my“ as much as „your (i.e. Amun's) temple“.

The weak point of these personal temple foundations, however, was the fact that they were seldom extended, or even protected, in later reigns: later pharaohs would build their own Temples of Millions of Years, and concentrate their endowment policy on these institutions. The resulting impoverishment of the older institutions runs against their presentation by the founding kings as homes and provisions for their father Amun-Re for all eternity.

Thus, it is possible to look at the Theban Temples of Millions of Years on three different levels, as we have done in the previous section for the Egyptian temples in general:

a. On the religious level, the king creates a pious foundation in his own name in the house of his divine father Amun.

b. On the economic level, he supplies the foundation with the means necessary for its continued existence, but later kings fail to protect the estate.

c. On the intra-institutional level, the new temple either shares in the supplies made to the central temple of Amun, or represents a separate basis of economic power contributing to it.

When compared with the temples in general, the Theban Temples of Millions of Years show a more specific situation on levels b and c. The old temple of Amun remained the true focus of the king's endowment policy, whether passing on part of its revenues to the new royal foundations in its vicinity, or benefiting from the riches of these new foundations. The Amun temple continued to exist, even to grow, whereas any specific Temple of Millions of Years would suffer impoverishment under later kings. Yet on the religious level, the king's own temple was also Amun's home, and would exist forever.

3. The Temple of Millions of Years of Seti I in Abydos

Another case in point is the magnificent temple built by Seti I in Abydos, which was his Temple of Millions of Years in the House of his divine father Osiris. Exactly how this temple was economically related to the main local temple of Osiris is uncertain. However, the extant documentation concerning Seti's temple does shed some light on how the king and his successor probably used it in the interest of the royal treasury.

There are two texts from the reign of Seti I that stipulate the economic role of his temple with respect to resources lying outside the Egyptian Nile Valley. One is the decree of regnal year 4 carved high on a rock at Nauri, in Nubia; the other is a dedication text dated in year 9 and engraved in a small rock temple near Kanayis, in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. Both sites were located in important mining regions, the principal product of which was gold, and both texts are explicit on what is to be done, and what is not to be done, with this most precious of all Egyptian resources.

11 Haring, *Divine Households*, 134-41.

12 R.G. Morkot, *Nb-M3't-R'-United-with-Ptah*, *JNES* 49 (1990), 323-37; for *sdf3* or *sdf*, see Haring, *Divine Households*, 169-73.

13 Haring, *Divine Households*, 66-8 and 88-95.

The scope of the Nauri decree is actually wider.¹⁴ The decree is concerned with various economic interests of Seti's Abydos temple in Nubia, including temple fields, workforce, and animals. Thus, for instance, the decree stipulates that it is not allowed to take away a bull, donkey, pig or goat from the estate, to pass it on to anyone else, or even „to let it be sacrificed to a different god, it not being sacrificed to Osiris, their lord, in his noble temple which His Majesty has made“.¹⁵ Such stipulations, although apparently of a 'profane', juridical character, underline the religious concept of the temple estate as „divine offering“ (*hetep-netjer*): at least some of the animals were meant to be transported to Abydos, and to be sacrificed there to Osiris. Reliefs depicting the butchering of animals in the the Abydos Temple of Millions of Years of Ramesses II (Seti's son and successor) confirm this practice, since the cattle presented there include a „first bull of Kush“.¹⁶

The protected personnel of the temple in Nubia also include gold-miners,¹⁷ and the decree contains specific regulations for the temple ships loaded with the „tribute of Kush“; gold being the first product mentioned here.¹⁸ The tribute was destined for Seti's temple in Abydos, but the text is not explicit about the exact purpose of the gold. It is, however, explicit about the punishments awaiting any person unlawfully interfering with the transports. Such a person, even an exalted government official like the governor of Nubia himself (the „King's Son of Kush“), was sure to suffer heavy fines, grave mutilations and forced labor. On the religious level he would also suffer the curse of Osiris himself.

Similar interests were at stake at Kanayis, where

Seti stationed teams of gold-miners, had a well dug, and a small temple cut in the rocks in which three texts were carved about these local resources (numbered A-C by Siegfried Schott, who published the temple and its inscriptions).¹⁹ The texts are not explicitly introduced as a 'decrees', but as recently noted by Arlette David, they contain enough legal formulas to be considered as such, and at least part of text C is referred to at the end as *wḏ.t tn* „this decree“.²⁰ The gold was to be brought to the king's Temple of Millions of Years in Abydos in order to gild the divine images,²¹ in Seti's reign as well as under future kings. Those who did not keep to this stipulation would be cursed by Osiris himself.

In order to gain some idea of the quantities of gold produced and delivered to the temple, we must turn to Theban sources. According to one list in the Great Harris Papyrus, compiled at the end of the reign of Ramesses III, the Theban temple estates newly founded by this king had access to gold mining regions in Nubia and in the Eastern Desert.²² If we are to trust the figures, the new Theban temples together mined an average amount of 5 1/2 kg. of gold yearly in the Eastern Desert, the so-called „Gold of the desert of Koptos“. The average yearly produce of the same temples in Nubia, the „Gold of Kush“, was 26 1/2 kg. A papyrus from a slightly later date records the mining of gold in the Eastern Desert by three Theban temples: the House of Amun, the House of Re, and the Temple of Millions of Years of

14 Principal edition: F. Ll. Griffith, *The Abydos Decree of Seti I at Nauri*, *JEA* 13 (1927), 193-208, pls. XXXVII-XLIII. Modern translations: K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations I*, Oxford 1993, 38-50; B.G. Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions of the Nineteenth Dynasty* (Documenta Mundi Aegyptiaca 2), Jonsered 1997, 277-308.

15 Lines 59-60 of the text: Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Translations I*, 47 (§ 18). Sim. lines 76-7: *ibid.*, 48 (§ 23).

16 E. Naville, *Détails relevés dans les ruines de quelques temples égyptiens*, Paris 1930, pl. XXXI; K.A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical II*, Oxford 1979, 536, 9.

17 Line 40: Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations I*, 45 (§ 9).

18 Lines 82-97: Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations I*, 48 (§§ 25 and 26).

19 S. Schott, *Kanais. Der Tempel Sethos I. im Wadi Mia* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen 1/6), Göttingen 1961; Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations I*, 56-60; Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions*, 205-20.

20 A. David, *Syntactic and Lexico-Semantic Aspects of the Legal Register in Ramesside Royal Decrees* (Göttinger Orientforschungen IV/38), Wiesbaden 2006, 112-32. Text C contains formulas that are much similar to those in the Nauri decree (e.g. cols. 14 and 15: „as for any official who shall ...“; col. 17: „as for anyone who shall interfere with ...“), but the sanctions for transgressors take place on a divine, rather than on an 'earthly' judicial level.

21 Text C, col. 9: *r nb ḥsm.w=sn nb.w*. Schott, *Kanais*, 152 (§ 20); Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations I*, 59.

22 List B in the Theban section of P. Harris I, 12a, 6-9: P. Grandet, *Le Papyrus Harris I* (Bibliothèque d'Étude 109), vol. I, Cairo 1994, 238. Of all Egyptian temples mentioned in the Harris Papyrus, it is only the Theban temples that seem to have had direct access to the gold-mines.

Ramesses III at Medinet Habu.²³ The yearly result of their joint efforts was little more than 1 kg.²⁴

The gold produce of the Eastern Desert was substantial, and Kanayis was a major mining site. The yearly produce of well-organised mining expeditions may have amounted to several kilogrammes in the reign of Seti I, and it is difficult to believe that this all ended up on the statues in Abydos. The New Kingdom pharaohs needed much gold for their courts, warfare and foreign politics, and for rewarding their officials. In fact, a tiny inscription in the Kanayis temple carved in regnal year 60 of Ramesses II dryly informs us about gold being fetched from there for the celebration of the king's eleventh jubilee (*sed*-festival).²⁵

Again, the stipulations of the founding king do not seem to have had everlasting power. But even during the reign of Seti I himself the Abydos temple and its satellite²⁶ at Kanayis may already have been instrumental in exploiting the gold-mining regions for governmental purposes. Some support for this idea may be found in documents of the late Ramesside Period. Reference has already been made to the high priest of Amun Ramessesnakht supervising the mining of gold and galena in the Eastern Desert, which was subsequently delivered to the temple treasury *and* to the royal residence. His successor, the high priest Amenhotep, caused part of the income of the Karnak temple to be brought to

Pharaoh, and for this action he was duly praised by the king in an inscription on the temple walls. To be sure, all this information applies to different temples: Theban ones, among them the great temple of Amonrasonter at Karnak. The relevant documentation is also from a different period: the middle of the Twentieth Dynasty, that is about 150 years later than the reign of Seti I at the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty, and 90 years later than the eleventh *sed*-festival of Ramesses II. It is tempting, however, to combine the data, as it seems unlikely that the royal residence was not interested in the mining of gold by the Abydos temple as much as in the products of the Theban temples. The elaborate Nauri and Kanayis decrees themselves also lead us to suspect that state interest went further than the mere protection of 'autonomous' temple property. Seti I assigned the very sources of gold supply to 'his' Abydos temple, just as later Ramesside kings would assign them to Theban temples. He did not opt for exploitation by the residence, and for passing on some of the gold to the temple. Instead, he probably chose the reverse: using the infrastructure of a large temple estate as an instrument in collecting the gold, part of which would reach the court in the form of taxes or otherwise.

The above discussion shows us the Abydos temple of Seti I:

- a. on the religious level, as the pious foundation of the king in the house of his father Osiris;
- b. on the economic level, as an institution secured with all kinds of income, including gold from Nubia and from the Eastern Desert, at least part of which was meant for the manufacture of divine images;
- c. on the state level, as an instrument through which Seti's successor, and possibly Seti himself, secured gold supplies for the royal court.

The national interest supposedly underlying the Nauri and Kanayis decrees even appears to be reinforced by religious statements. Surprisingly, the deities depicted in the top of the Nauri stela do not include Osiris, but only the three 'national' deities Amun-Re, Re-Horakhty, and Ptah.²⁷ These were the most prominent deities of Ramesside Egypt; in administrative lists of temples, for instance, it is their temples that are mentioned first. The fact that Osiris, the deity whose temple is of central importance in

23 P. IFAO A+B, presumably from the reign of Ramesses VII: Koenig, in: *Hommages Sauneron* I, 185-220, pls. XXX-XXXVII; idem, *BIFAO* 83 (1983), 249-55, pls. LII-LIV; Haring, *Divine Households*, 180 and 250-2.

24 For the figures as yearly averages of the temples' own production, and realistic as such, see Haring, *Divine Households*, 179-83. If one keeps to 13.1 gr. as the weight of the gold *deben* (cf. Graefe, *ZÄS* 126 (1999), 19-40; see note 7 above), the yearly average of „gold of the desert of Koptos“ becomes 0.8 kg., the „gold of Kush“ 3.8 kg., the yearly produce in P. IFAO A+B 170.3 gr.

25 C.R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien. Text* IV, Leipzig 1901, 82; Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions*, 220.

26 „Ableger-Tempel“, as justly formulated by R. Stadelmann, Sethos I., in: W. Helck and W. Westendorf ed., *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* V, Wiesbaden 1984, 911-7. See Kanayis text B, cols. 12-13: „May they preserve for me the things I have made under the supervision (*hr s.t-hr*) of my temple in Abydos.“ In text C, cols. 16-19, the local group of gold-miners is explicitly said to belong to „the temple of Menma'atre“.

27 Griffith, *JEA* 13 (1927), pl. XXXVIII.

the decree, is missing here was considered 'noticeable' by Davies.²⁸ But it is equally noticeable that Osiris is not the most prominent deity mentioned in the long preamble of the decree referring to *his* temple.²⁹

Things are similar at Kanayis. Its temple was dedicated, not to Osiris, but to Amun according to text A, and in text B we read that it was also constructed for Re-Horakhty and Ptah, as well as for Osiris, Horus and Isis, and of course for the founding king himself (Seti I).³⁰ The sanctuary of the temple has statues of the king, Amun and Re-Horakhty.³¹ Thus, even in the religious 'dressing' of the possessions of Osiris in Nubia and in the Eastern Desert, the king and the three universal deities of Ramesside Egypt took precedence, leading one to suspect a religious translation of the economic interests of the state.

This means that the combined interests of temple and government are expressed also on the religious or ideological level (a), and that this level and the two levels of economic reality (b/c) do not merely stand in contrast to each other. Both ideology and economy are real in their own way. Even to see nothing but discrepancy between enduring temple property on the religious level and reduction in economic reality would be too simple. The endowment ideology of an enduring and unchanging situation is itself an instrument in the struggle against the recurring loss of property. If not actually effective in minimizing future reduction (possibly supported in this by inspections and restorations of temple property), at the very least it proclaims the undesirability of such reductions as a truth in itself.

28 Davies, *Egyptian Historical Inscriptions*, 277.

29 Lines 1-29: the names 'Osiris' and 'Onnophris' together occur six times; that of the sun god in his various forms (Re, Re-Horakhty, Atum, Khepri, Aten) no less than twelve times.

30 The same group of deities is represented in the seven sanctuaries of Seti's temple at Abydos; from south to north: Seti, Ptah, Re-Horakhty, Amun-Re, Osiris, Isis, Horus. J.W. Wegner, Abydos, in: D.B. Redford ed., *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt* 1, Oxford etc. 2001, 10. Thus, the Temple of Millions of Years of Seti I in the House of Osiris presents itself as a shrine of national importance (R. Stadelmann, Sety I, in: *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt* 3, 272).

31 Schott, *Kanais*, pl. 9.