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The great temple of Bastet at Bubastis

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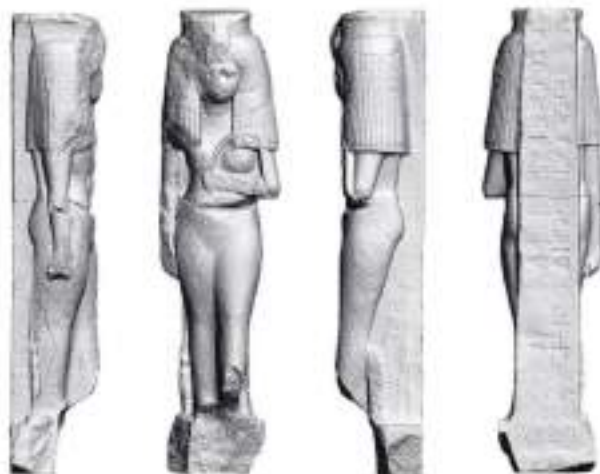
First excavated by Edouard Naville for the Egypt Exploration Fund in the late nineteenth century the great temple of Bastet at the ancient city of Bubastis is now being studied by a joint German/Egyptian mission, as **Daniela Rosenow** describes.

The remains of the ancient Egyptian city of Bubastis (Tell Basta) are situated in the south-east Nile Delta, on the south-eastern edge of the modern city of Zagazig and since 1991 archaeological and epigraphic fieldwork has been undertaken at the site by the Tell Basta Project, which is a joint mission of the University of Potsdam, Germany and the Egyptian Supreme Council for Antiquities.

The visitor to the temple today sees a large area of blocks and broken monuments, as it was destroyed during an earthquake probably 2,000 years ago, but many of these blocks have datable inscriptions which help us to trace the temple's history.

Although monuments from every period of Egyptian history have been found there, Bubastis attained its greatest importance when it was the residence of the Libyan kings of the Twenty-Second Dynasty. During this period the great temple of Bastet was extensively extended, with further major work being undertaken by the last native Egyptian king, Nectanebo II, who probably renewed the sanctuary itself of the temple.

The main entrance to the temple in the east is dominated by blocks naming Osorkon I and showing the king making offerings to a variety of gods. The distribution of these scattered blocks and of columns with palm-leaf capitals allows us to reconstruct the temple's peristyle court which measured 30m x 50m, with columns on



3D documentation and reconstruction of the monumental statue of a Ramesside queen, by Object Scan GmbH Potsdam

its eastern, southern and northern sides. In the court a monumental pink granite statue of a Ramesside queen was found and uncovered between 2001 and 2003 (see also the cover photograph of *EA 21* and *EA 28*, p.11). The reconstructed statue is more than 9m high, which makes it the tallest statue so far discovered in the Nile Delta. It dates to the reign of Ramesses II and probably represents his wife Queen Nefertari, though it was later usurped by Osorkon II, who modified the inscription on the dorsal pillar to give his own name and that of his wife Karomama.

The area west of the peristyle is dominated by architectural fragments with the name of Osorkon II and reliefs showing different episodes of the king's *sed* festival, which are outstanding in both quality and content, as they show the most extensive series of this royal ritual.

To the west of this festival gate the foundation of a long colonnade, almost 30m long and with papyrus bundle columns, leads to the next structure, a five-aisled hypostyle hall, with papyrus bundle columns with Hathor capitals. Further to the west there is a small pillared court where



The queen's statue during its restoration. Photograph: Daniela Rosenow



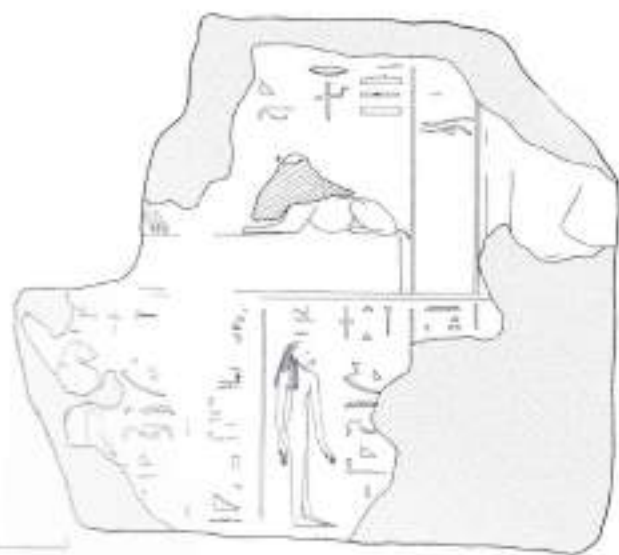
A Hathor capital in the central court, Photograph: Hans-Dieter Beyer

the columns also have Hathor capitals. The colonnade, the hypostyle hall and the pillared hall are the core of the Osorkon II temple.

Many statues were placed in the central court and they can almost all be attributed to Ramesses II while some stylistically seem to date back to the early Middle Kingdom. They probably once lined the inner side of the walls that enclosed the central court.

In the westernmost area Nectanebo II constructed a separate hall where a number of shrines were situated. The façade of the hall was once adorned by a large-scale frieze of uraci, below which was a horizontal torus moulding and a cornice, with the king's cartouches. A band of text ran around the whole building and named the goddess Bastet, other gods and the king himself. Large scale scenes showing the king in front of Bastet and other gods worshipped at Bubastis as minor deities, covered the outer walls. The ceiling was decorated with stars, and some blocks additionally have a column of inscription naming Nectanebo II, the city Bubastis and the goddess Bastet.

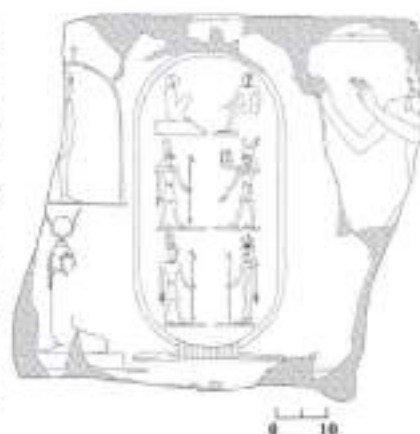
In the westernmost area around 20 blocks were discovered that clearly represent the remains of shrines. These fragments can be reconstructed to form at least



Part of an inventory list from the Thirtieth Dynasty sanctuary. Copy by Daniela Rosencow

eight shrines, belonging to four different types which can be distinguished by their architecture, decoration or function. The first type is exemplified by the naos for 'Bastet, lady of the shrine'.

This was once



A cryptographical cartouche with the name of Nectanebo II. Drawing by Daniela Rosencow

c.1.80m wide and 3m high and showed an unusual architectural feature: it had an additional inner niche within the actual naos structure, which was invisible from the outside. Its outer walls were decorated with depictions showing the king worshipping Bastet and upholding the heaven. The pedestal supporting the inner niche was decorated with a *sm' tswy*-scene undertaken by two Nile gods.

Another shrine (type 2) was originally c.3.50m high and 1.50m wide and had similar architectural elements to the first one. Its decoration shows long rows of gods



Relief from the sed festival hall of Osorkon II. Photograph: Hans-Dieter Beyer



Shrine (type 1) from the Thirtieth Dynasty sanctuary. 3D documentation and reconstruction by Object Scan GmbH Potsdam

and, most interestingly, Osiris and other creator gods play a prominent role on this shrine and the cycle of creation is obviously a main focus of the decoration. This shrine was erected in the centre of the sanctuary and thus was the main naos.

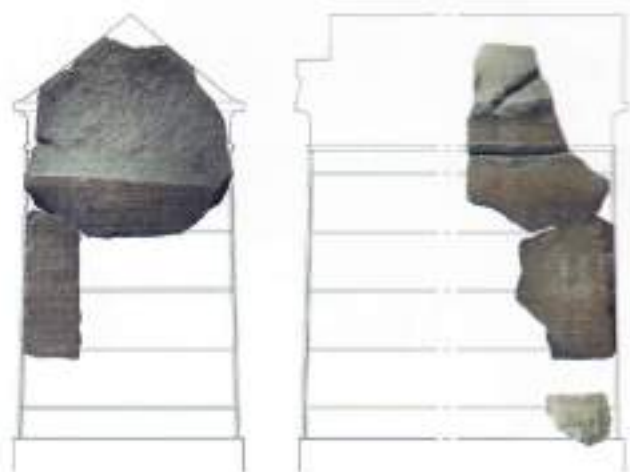
A further shrine fragment (of type 3) is inscribed with a mythological text, which allows us to assign this inscription to a special genre, the so called 'monographies' (inventory lists designed to preserve the traditional, religious knowledge about a city, temple or nome). Here, the protective troops of the 'Seven arrows of Bastet' are mentioned. It may be possible to reconstruct four of this type of shrine, originally erected in the four corners of the main sanctuary to provide a special magical protection.

A fourth type of shrine is that of the *naos* dedicated to the minor deities of Bubastis. Discovered fragments represent parts of at least six different shrines that were architecturally quite similar to the first two *naos* described above. The inscriptions allow us to assign these shrines to Monthu, Horhekenu, Harsaphis, Sekhmet, Wadjet, and Shesemet.

Apart from the shrine fragments many other blocks were discovered that provide important hints about the cult in this Late Period temple. One block represents a fragment of an inventory list naming the cult statues of Shesemet and Wadjet, which were one cubit high and



Block of a cult topographical list from the Thirtieth Dynasty sanctuary. Photograph: Daniela Rosenow



Shrine (type 2) from the Thirtieth Dynasty sanctuary. Reconstruction by Neal Spencer, British Museum

made of gold. There are also several blocks which once belonged to the walls of the sanctuary and were decorated with a kind of topographical cult list. These fragments show long rows of gods, holy animals, plants or emblems and the accompanying inscriptions always name a specific deity and his/her place of worship. A concentration on a special region or a certain order is not discernible. Perhaps this list of gods and temples on the sanctuary walls was supposed to represent their actual cultic settings, which were necessary for the performance of all rites during the festival for Bastet and the daily ritual.

A last group of blocks shows huge cartouches with six gods arranged in three pairs and facing each other. The depictions suggest that here the king's name was cryptographically presented. The king has a very prominent position in this iconography, as he offers to and worships the cartouches. So he not only acts as a terrestrial ruler, but is depicted here in his cultic role as the 'lord of rituals'.

A recent discovery demonstrates the importance of Bubastis after the Thirtieth Dynasty. In 2004 a new duplicate of the famous Canopus Decree, dating to the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (238 BC), was found in the entrance area of the temple. The fact that the edict was erected here demonstrates that this temple in the third century BC still belonged to the three foremost categories of Egyptian sanctuaries, illustrating that the temple of Bastet was one of Egypt's most important cult centres for more than six centuries.

□ Daniela Rosenow is a PhD candidate at the Humboldt University Berlin and has been working as a member of the Tell Basta Project since 2001. She would like to thank the Supreme Council for Antiquities and the University of Potsdam for giving her the opportunity to work at Tell Basta, and Marcel Marée of the British Museum for help in translating this article. Illustrations © Tell Basta Project.