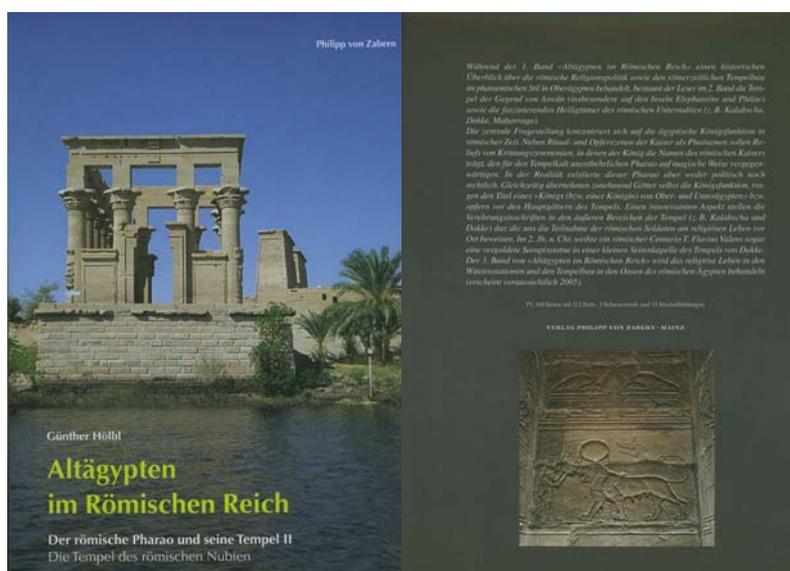


Hölbl, G. 2004. **Altägypten im Römischen Reich II. Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel II: Die Tempel des römischen Nubien.** – Mainz, Philipp von Zabern (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie)

Book review by J. Moje



This book is the second volume of a tripartite series ‘Altägypten im Römischen Reich’. The first volume focused on Roman policy and ancient Egyptian ideology from the reigns of Augustus to Diocletian, as well as Roman temple building activities in Upper Egypt. The present book deals with the temples of Roman Nubia.

As in the first volume, the connection between the Roman emperor and Egyptian pharaoh are discussed; apparently this theme was not dealt with exhaustively in the author’s previous volume. Hölbl has published extensively about his research, clearly demonstrating his detailed knowledge on this topic (for example Hölbl, 1996, 2000, 2004). The author’s extensive knowledge of the subject matter is immediately apparent upon opening the book. Many of the book’s illustrations were made on recent journeys.

In the introduction (p. 5–8) the author summarises the most important themes which are discussed. Here there are also clearly arranged maps showing all villages, towns and streets that are mentioned in the text. According to Hölbl, the capture of Alexandria by Octavian after the Battle of Actium (31 BC) indicates an insistent *caesura* in Egyptian history, political as well as religious. All earlier foreign rulers like the Persians or the Macedonians/Ptolemies were accepted, albeit rather reluctantly, as Egyptian kings. They were integrated in pharaonic ideology almost seamlessly, and they could be depicted symbiotically as both a pharaoh and a Persian, Macedonian or Hellenistic king in. However, after 30 BC this became unviable, because the function of the Roman Emperor differed completely from that of the pharaoh’s; according to Hölbl, from this moment on the function of the pharaoh was *de facto* abolished on the political level. However, on the cult level this presented difficulties, because for a *myst*-conforming ‘Weltordnung’ the cultic function of the pharaoh was absolutely necessary. Consequently, in the time of Octavian resp. Augustus the priesthood was forced to act to find a means of combining the world of reality and the (theological) world of the temples and religion, without causing damage on either side. How this was overcome can be seen in the reliefs of the great Roman temples, not only in Egypt itself, but also in Nubia.

The religious policy of Augustus caused widespread building activity, demonstrating a far-sighted understanding of the absolute necessity of an acceptable coexistence between policy and religion. This was continued up to the end of Caracallas reign, until it fell victim to the great Imperial crisis at the beginning of the 3rd c. AD. However, for the common man visiting ‘his’ temple for praying to his favourite deities, not much changed in religious life since the Roman occupation of Egypt.

This book deals with the religious life and the temple building activities in the region from the first cataract (Aswan/ Elephantine) up to northern Lower Nubia, the so called Dodekaschoinos (see below). This area was a threat for the Roman borderline security over and over again. As a component of his research, the author analysed many of Egypt’s monuments and inscriptions. He also referred to the most important classical Greek and Roman writers regarding Roman Egypt and its special policy, rather than depending exclusively on indigenous sources alone.

Following the introduction Hölbl gives a detailed overview (p. 9–27) of the history from Ptolemaic to Roman times of northern Lower Nubia, the Dodekaschoinos. That term, used since the 3rd c. BC, designates the

country from Aswan up to Maharraqa. Only this part of Nubia was connected politically and administratively with the *Imperium Romanum*. Since about 275 BC the Dodekaschoinos was under Ptolemaic administration, as a result of an expedition of Ptolemaios II. Here Philae, the first great Ptolemaic temple, was erected. During the reign of Ptolemaios IV, there are temples also in the south near Dakke/Pselkis. About 200 BC the Ptolemies lost Nubia due to revolts in the Thebaid area and the Meroitic kings took over control. Consequently, Meroitic kings are shown in the Nubian temples as Egyptian pharaohs. The Ptolemaic sovereignty over the Thebaid area and the important and powerful area of Philae were restored before ca. 185 BC.

Under Ptolemaios VI (since 163 BC), Lower Nubia was incorporated into the Ptolemaic kingdom, but our knowledge of this period is scanty due to lack of information. Hölbl supposes, I think correctly, that in the time of Augustus' invasion of Egypt, the Ptolemaic administration in Nubia had already ceased to exist. The first *Praefectus Aegypti*, C. Cornelius Gallus, invaded Nubia, when a rebellion in Thebes had to be put down. After this, many inroads and pillages by Lower Nubian tribes as well as the Meroitic kingdom occurred until peace was made in 21/20 BC. But only the Dodekaschoinos came under Roman influence; the regions south of it were abandoned.

Augustus replaced the Hellenistic kingship of the Ptolemies in Lower Nubia by Imperial rule, and the Imperial cult of the emperor was developed and expanded. At the same time, ancient Egyptian kingship was continued in order to demonstrate an essential continuity. This 'double reign' also continued under the following Roman emperors. Up to about 200 AD no important political affairs are known from Nubia, but the sources are very inadequate.

Roman influence fluctuated, and from the mid 3rd century Lower Nubia was completely under Meroitic control, although no military confrontations with Rome had taken place. The Romans tried to renew Roman rule in Nubia, although Diocletian withdrew the official border to Philae because it was clear that the region south of it would be of no value for the empire in the long-term. This temple was the last bastion of the ancient Egyptian religion as a place of contact with the pagan tribes of Nubia, until Justinian closed all temples in the 6th century AD.

The next part of the book deals with the religious centres in the Egyptian–Nubian border region (p. 28 – 98). At first, Hölbl describes the buildings in Elephantine and Syene, the modern Aswan in detail, as well as the temple complex of Philae. The author also mentions in passing the architectural history of Elephantine previous to Roman times, after which he elaborates on the early Roman extensions of the 30th dynasty Khnum temple. At Elephantine, it proved possible to reconstruct the architectural history of the Satet sanctuary back to the predynastic period. At this temple the Egyptians worked until halfway the 2nd century AD. Since the early 11th dynasty, Khnum was also worshipped at his own, separate temple, during the Middle Kingdom, which was re-erected under Hatshepsut and enlarged until the 30th dynasty. The late phases of the Satet sanctuary contain many architectural innovations, which influenced the Roman sacral architecture in Egypt, such as the *Wabet* or the *couleur mystérieux*. Also in the Ptolemaic and early Imperial period, this temple was extended; but later only under the adoptive emperors. Hölbl deals with the Roman extensions in detail, his text accompanied with new photos and plans.

After this the temples on the island of Philae are analysed. These buildings marked the southernmost border of the *Imperium Romanum* for a long time. This complex was not built before the 26th dynasty. A first climax of the Isis cult can be seen during the 30th dynasty, while today's temple was erected under Ptolemaios II. It was not completed before Imperial times. Next, the author considers very precisely nearly all architectural elements of Roman Philae. The next chapter is titled 'Egyptian temples and Roman military in the Dodekaschoinos south of Philae' (p. 99 – 150). In the time of a (political) powerful Meroitic Empire, the Meroitic influence was stronger than that of the Romans, so Rome needed to secure the border near Philae but occasionally organised expeditions across the border southwards. In order to show the cooperation of the Roman emperor with the priesthood, the sanctuaries south of Philae up to Maharraqa/ Hierasykaminos and the local cults of the natives were given more attention by the Roman religious policy.

It was probably Tiberius who undertook the risky step of removing all economic resources of the Dodekaschoinos from the Isis temple of Philae, so that such a building policy was necessary; military presence and religious policy are linked here.

Especially at the temple of Dabod it is recognisable that the Romans preferred to carve the pronaos with reliefs, while the inner rooms stayed undecorated. The pronaos was visible from outside, and so it might be suggested that it was their idea to confront as many people as possible with the programmatic reliefs rather than the few people who gained access to the innermost chambers. Other temples of this region, Qertassi, Taffe, Ajuala, Dandur, Dakke and Maharraqa, are introduced and discussed with regard to the Roman decoration. Here again Roman policy can be clearly detected. The important Mandulis temple of Kalabsha, a huge Roman building project, is discussed in detail. Here, the development of the Roman pharaoh can be followed: on the outer surfaces, which are decorated first, Augustus is shown without his own name, but is designated in hieroglyphs as 'H-Romaios' and 'Kaisaros' (i.e. 'The Roman' and 'Emperor'). This is the first attempt to deal

with the changed religious situation: the priests needed a pharaoh for their cult, but they did not appreciate Augustus in that role. The development of the pharaoh's role is clearly visible here as well. It begins with reference to Pharaoh Amenhotep II, the King Ptolemaios, the Autokrator Kaisaros up to the so called 'cultic pharaoh', as Hölbl calls it, the ruler who is named in the cartouches only as 'pr-s3', 'pharaoh', or referred to by means of empty cartouches only. So the pharaoh lost his historic reality and became a purely religious, cult idea. The real rulers of Egypt were the gods: in the reliefs they are performing acts that once were done by the pharaoh of 'flesh and blood'. The gods are offering in front of other gods and receiving the kingship from them.

Next, a short chapter of three pages deals with Egyptian kingship in the Roman temples of Nubia, a theme which had been discussed extensively in the first volume of this trilogy. In Nubia the development of the 'Roman pharaoh' occurred in the same way as in Egypt. The new ruler of Egypt, residing in far off Rome was a historical person and his existence was not questioned; nevertheless in Egypt he had no legitimate character. Differing from Ptolemaic custom, the Roman ruler was represented alone, without a queen, because in Rome the wives of the emperors had, officially, no part in their reign.

A tabular list with a synoptic chronology lists the Meroitic kings and the contemporary Roman emperors, so that readers who are unfamiliar with Meroitic history are informed about the rulers mentioned. On the next pages we find a glossary with several Egyptological terms. The glossary is very short and I would have wished for a more comprehensive one.

The notes at the end of the volume are very comprehensive and contain the latest publications as well, so that the book is not only useful for interested persons, but for Egyptologists, too. Indeed, this book enlarges the knowledge of Roman Egypt, and it also offers a good insight into the existing research, which is illustrated impressively with many new photos and plans. The illustrations as well as the production of the book itself demonstrate usual, very high standard of the publisher Philipp von Zabern.

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