

POLITICAL IDEAS EXPRESSED BY VISUAL NARRATIVES: THE CASE OF THE PTOLEMAIC EGYPTIAN TEMPLES

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ABSTRACT:

The kings from the Ptolemaic dynasty are represented in the divine temples of Edfu, Philae and Kom Ombo by garments, emblems and traditional Egyptian symbols, doing the typical gestures established by the political tradition, with the clear goal of being accepted as legitimate kings in the line of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs. In fact, using the millennial artistic vocabulary available, the Ptolemies filled the columns, the walls and the pylons of the great temples with bas-reliefs and scenes of high symbolic codified value. These expressive visual narratives, often in areas of free access for the population, asserted the prestige of the kingship. There is then an intentional ideological and propaganda value linked to these representations that justify the designation of «visual ideological narratives», that is, scenes of political nature with an effective scenic effect. To understand the visual impact and the ideological meaning of these representations in sacred spaces is consequently to enter in the core of the Ptolemaic political thought, enlighten their motivations, know their practices, interpret their messages and decode their goals.

KEY WORDS:

Visual Narratives, Ptolemaic Period, Temples, Rituals, Ideology.

RESUMEN:

Los reyes de la dinastía ptolemaica se representan en los templos divinos de Edfu, Filae y Kom Ombo con vestidos, emblemas y símbolos egipcios tradicionales, haciendo los gestos típicos establecidos por la tradición política, con el claro objetivo de ser aceptados como reyes legítimos en la línea de los antiguos faraones. De hecho, utilizando el vocabulario artístico milenarío disponible, los Ptolomeos llenaron las columnas, las paredes y los pilonos de los grandes templos con bajorrelieves y escenas de alto valor simbólico codificado. Estas narrati-

vas visuales expresivas, a menudo situadas en zonas de libre acceso para la población, reafirmaron el prestigio de la realeza. Ello implica un valor ideológico y propagandístico intencional vinculado a estas representaciones que justifican su designación como «narrativas ideológicas visuales», es decir, escenas de naturaleza política con un impacto escénico efectivo. En consecuencia, para comprender este impacto visual y el significado ideológico de estas representaciones en los espacios sagrados es necesario adentrarse en el pensamiento político ptolemaico, comprender sus motivaciones, conocer sus prácticas, interpretar sus mensajes y descifrar sus objetivos.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Narrativas visuales, Periodo Ptolemaico, Templos, Rituales, Ideología.

From the year 305 BC, Egypt was under the domination of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Ptolemy I Soter took the title of *basileus* and assumed the heritage of Alexander the Great. This domination lasted until 30 BC, with the famous death of Cleopatra VII, having stretched, therefore, for round 300 years.

It is not possible to equally consider these 300 years of history of the Ptolemaic monarchy. On one hand, the information that we have is discontinuous, which does not allow us to accompany and describe in the same manner the functioning of the institution in all the reigns. On the other hand, there are substantive differences between the initial reigns, basically those that extend up to the 3rd century BC, those that comprise the 2nd century BC, and those that drag for the 1st century BC.

There is, although, a feature that is common to all the kings of this dynasty: by dominating politically ancient Egypt, the Ptolemies fulfilled all their ritual and piety obligations that were required to an Egyptian king, namely building, rebuilding and decorating sanctuaries, chapels and religious temples. As a result, there are still today many divine temples erected or decorated by them, being Edfu, Philae and Kom Ombo major examples of this factor. The Ptolemies were, in fact, the last great constructors in Egypt: if we exclude the Islamic edifices, the last great monuments erected in Egyptian soil have their signature.

In these monuments the kings from the Ptolemaic dynasty were represented by their garments, their emblems and their traditional Egyptian symbols, performing the typical gestures consecrated by the political tradition, with the clear goal of being accepted as legitimated kings in the line of ancient Egyptian pharaohs¹.

With the plan of divine constructions, the rulers showed their tolerance towards the traditional Egyptian devotions, while they projected an idea about their own power in Egypt². Thus, the political domination of Egypt by the Ptolemies, who were foreigners (Macedonians), was accompanied by an intelligent and advantageous profit of the decorative iconography of the Egyptian temples as an active process of affiliate them in the local political tradition.

¹ AUFRÈRE, GOLVIN, GOYON (1991: 217, 218); SAUNERON, STIERLIN (1975: 105); DUNAND, ZIVIE-COCHE (1991: 223-225).

² FINNESTAD (2005: 185, 186).

There are, then, three very significant examples of the way in which they used the typical visual narratives of the ancient Egyptian culture to transmit and impose their political ideas: i) the ritual scenes of smiting the enemies; ii) the scenes of purification-coronation-deification of the pharaoh; and iii) the scenes of foundation-inauguration of the temples.

THE RITUAL OF SCENES OF SMITING THE ENEMIES

On the scenes of military triumph, we have already had the opportunity to approach this theme, through the consideration of its symbolism and its functions, in the *Third Interdisciplinary Conference: Thinking Symbols*, which was held from 30th of June to 2nd of July, 2015, at the Pultusk Academy of Humanities in Pultusk³. In fact, the case of the ritual scenes of smiting the enemies is a *tópos* of the Egyptian iconography of military nature which goes through the Egyptian history almost in its entirety, from the 4th millennium BC until the 2nd century AD⁴. Among the decorative scenes used on the walls of the pylons, those that depict the ritual massacre of enemies, also known as military triumph scenes, deserve special attention. These scenes were impressive visual narratives meant to glorify the sovereign as being an irreplaceable medium among the symbolical spheres of order and disorder, making the theme of the warrior victory ritual an essential one in the pharaonic ideology. The pylon of the temples acts as gigantic «political posters» where the pharaoh's victory is proclaimed as being indispensable to the good functioning of cosmic order.

The first pylon of the Isis Temple at Philae/Agilkia (height of 18 meters and width of 45,5 meters) presents enormous representations of the pharaoh Ptolemy XII *Neos Dionysos* (the father of the well-known Cleopatra, the VII, Thea Philopator) in the traditional pharaonic pose: standing and holding his kneeling enemies by their hair, ready to sacrifice them to the divinities of the temple, Isis, Horus and Hathor⁵ (Fig. 1). Under the scope of the usual Egyptian representations, the enemies —«everyone that is unfaithful»— are represented kneeling on the ground, in three rows, arms raised, in a position of vain plea, «ready» to receive the final finisher blow of the energy and symbolism inherent to these scenes of massacre of enemies.

³ SALES (2017: 257-267).

⁴ SALES (2008a: 105-140). The oldest of these scenes is shown in a painting on tomb n° 100 at Hierakonpolis, and is dated as of approximately 3500 BC, in the Predynastic period (Naqada II), in which a figure that is bigger than the others holds a weapon in one hand and, in the other, holds three smaller figures on a rope (archaic plural expressed in the repeating of elements thus conveying the idea of «many» enemies). These are kneeling and facing the other way (SALES (2008a: 115); HALL (1986: 4, fig. 5); PARTRIDGE (2002: 5); PÉREZ LARGACHA (2017, 28); DE WIT (2008, 149, 150)). One of the last scenes is in the pylon of the temple of the sun and warrior god with the head of a lion, Apedemak, at Naga-Meroe, dating back to the end of the 1st century BC and beginning of the 1st century AD. Here, depicted in classic Egyptian attitude, we can see King Natakamani (on the left) and Queen Amanitore (on the right), though bearing meroitic details in their clothing and personal adorns, also dominating an inferior and unprotected group of enemies (PM VII (1952: 268); HALL (1986: 44, 45)).

⁵ WILKINSON (2000: 214); SALES (2008b: 63-69). The complex temple of the island of Philae has been moved to the neighbouring island of Agilkia because of the lake newly formed behind the modern High Dam of Aswan.



Figure 1. The first pylon of the Isis Temple at Philae / Agilkia. Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos subjugating and sacrificing prisoners to the gods. [PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 86)].

Besides these two public scenes of ritual massacre of the enemies in the first pylon (one in the west massif, other in the east massif), there are still other two on the exterior walls in the naos or hypostyle hall (one on the western exterior wall, other on the eastern exterior wall), where the pharaoh that is represented is the Roman imperator Tiberius (14-37)⁶. On the inferior register to the west, the pharaoh Tiberius, followed by his *ka*, massacres the enemies in the presence of the little god Ha (the personification of the western mountainous regions) and before Isis, Horus and Hathor (Fig. 2); on the inferior register to the east, the two goddesses «preside», once again, the scene. This time they are accompanied by the boy Horus, Horkakhred/Harpocrates, and Sopedu (the god of the eastern mountainous regions), that substitutes Ha, fulfilling, however, the same functions, with the crown *shuti*, his crown of two high plumes with the solar disc – Fig 3. As the one in the western scene, this one also extends the weapon of victory to the pharaoh. As in the scenes of the pylon, the pharaoh displays the same *regalia* (*shendyt*, *hemhem* crown, bull tail, sharp mallet, fake beard, various *uraei*)⁷.

Practically the same political and symbolic components, with minor differences, appear certified in the monumentally sculptured decoration of the two bas-reliefs of the pylon of the Temple of Horus at Edfu (36 m of height and 70 m of width): outer face west and east⁸. Again, a gigantic figure of Ptolemy XII appears grasping a mace

⁶ SALES (2008b: 69-70).

⁷ SALES (2008b: 70).

⁸ PM VI (1939: 121, 122); WATTERSON (1998: 55, 56); KURTH (2004: 66); PARTRIDGE (2002: 294, 295); ARNOLD (2003:183).



Figure 2. Isis Temple at Philae - Exterior walls in the naos or hypostyle hall (inferior register of the western exterior wall). Photo by the Author.

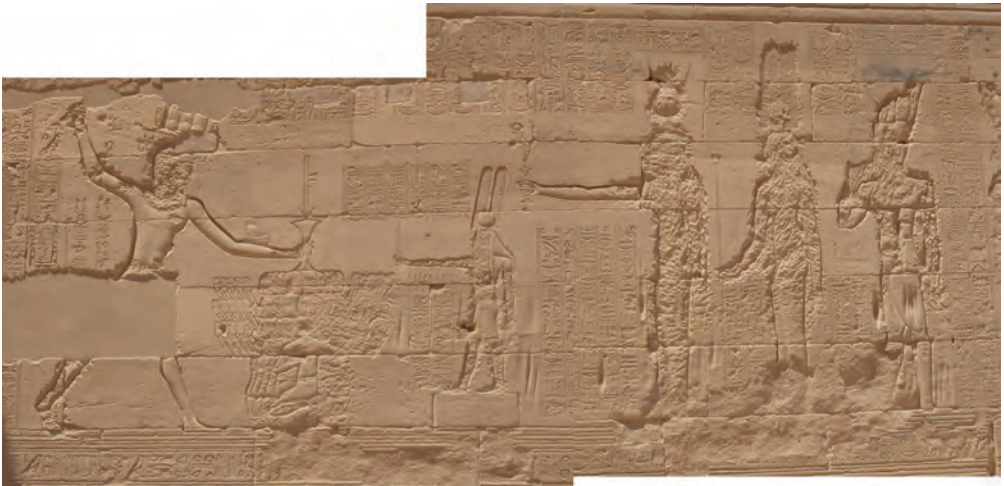


Figure 3. Isis Temple at Philae - Exterior walls in the naos or hypostyle hall (inferior register of the eastern exterior wall). Photo by the Author.

in one of the bas-reliefs, before Horus and Hathor⁹. The enemies are being grasped by their topknots (Fig. 4).

Also in the exterior wall of the pronaos, on the west and east wall, the king followed by the *ka* smites de enemies before Edfu triad¹⁰. In the western and eastern

⁹ SALES (2008b: 73-75); ARNOLD (2003: 78); WILKINSON (2000: 204-207); WATTERSON (1998: 39, 47, 48, 51); CAUVILLE (1987: VI); BEVAN (1934: 274); CAUVILLE, DEVAUCHELLE (1984: 32); MICHALOWSKI (1994: 305); DAUMAS (1980: 261); SAUNERON, STIERLIN (1975: 110); AUFRERE, GOLVIN, GOYON (1991: 250, 251); WILDUNG (1998: 196).

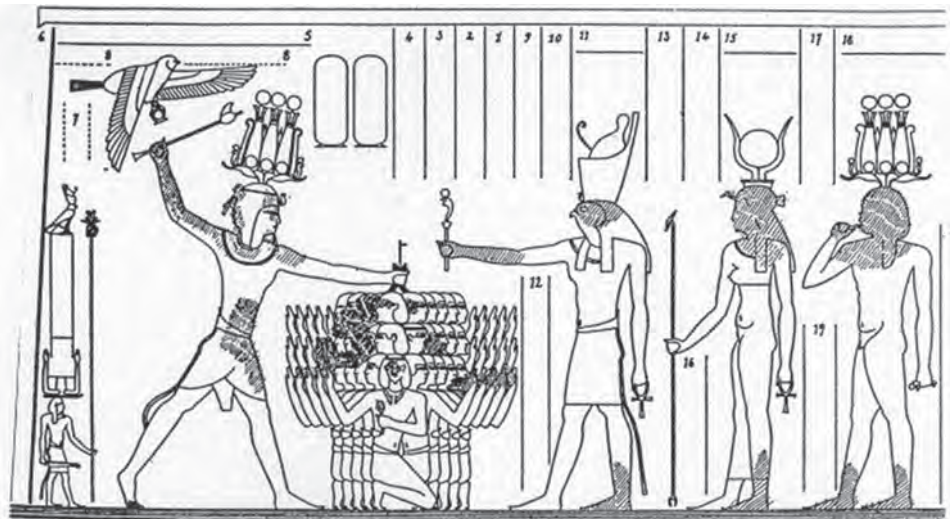
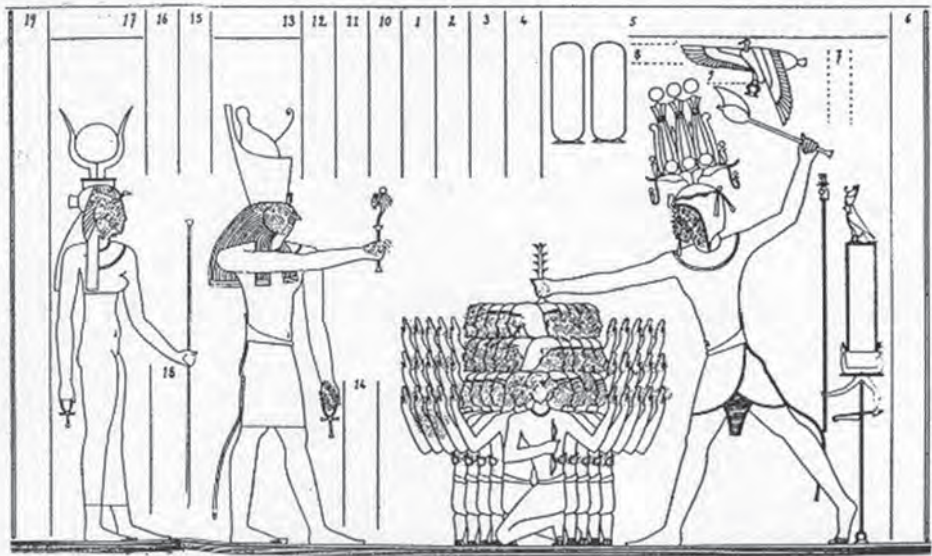
¹⁰ PM VI (1939: 156, 158); CHASSINAT (1960: pls. CV and CVII).



Figure 4. Wall relief of the pylon of the Temple of Horus at Edfu. (Photo by the Author).

exterior walls of the pronaos of Edfu the same iconography is repeated: the pharaoh, followed by his *ka*-name of Horus, equipped with all the insignias of power (displaying the *hemhem*), prepares to decapitate the imprisoned adversaries/opponents before Horus of Behedet and Hathor of Dendera (western scene) and the Edfu triad, Horus, Hathor and Harsomtus (eastern scene) – (Figs. 5 and 6). In the western scene, Nekhbet, as a vulture, «helps» the king in his action, while in the eastern scene is the falcon of Horus the one who performs such function. In both representations, the god Horus extends to the pharaoh the sceptre *uraeus*, in one of the scenes (western) Hathor is holding the typical sceptre *uadj* and in the other (eastern scene) an exceptional sceptre *uas*, while the god-child Harsomtus is shown naked in the scene where he appears, also with a *hemhem* crown in his head and with the index finger on his mouth, a distinctive feature (as the nudity that he also exhibits and the dropped lock of hair that he also seems to display) of the Egyptian god-children (scene of the eastern exterior wall of the pronaos).

In these reliefs of Philae and Edfu, the pharaoh can be seen wearing a set of insignias and symbols linked to the function and attributes of an authentic Egyptian sovereign. They are all inserted in the millennial iconography and Egyptian military ideology: powerful and victorious, the pharaoh uses the *shendjit*, the bull's tail, a ceremonial fake beard, the old mace, several *uraei* and the crown *hemhem* (formed by three crowns *atef* which are juxtaposed). Like in ancient times, the enemies can be seen kneeling on the ground, with the arms above their heads waiting for the final blow, with all the energy and power that one can find in these scenes of enemy massacres.



Figures 5 and 6. Temple of Horus, at Edfu: exterior wall of the pronaos, on the west (Figure 5) and east wall (Figure 6) - the king followed by the ka smites de enemies before Horus of Behedet and Hathor of Dendera (western scene) and the Edfu triad, Horus, Hathor and Harsomtut (eastern scene). [CHASSINAT (1960: pls. CV and CVII)].



The political and ideological message of these visual narratives is the same: the figure presented is, by the *regalia*, by his pose, deeds and idealized emblems, a victorious warrior, a supposedly invincible one. Focus is brought upon the courageous warrior

acts of a single king. It is meant to emphasize his required exceptional position and the divine support subjacent to his acts.

The image of the monarch punishing his enemies has become a mandatory reference of royal ideology in the Ptolemaic Period. Even if the combats represented are fictitious or the warrior achievements exaggerated, these artistic works are witnesses to conventional royal propaganda. The Ptolemaic sovereign is portrayed in an idealized way using all the apparatus linked to his warrior function¹¹.

THE SCENES OF PURIFICATION-CORONATION-DEIFICATION OF THE PHARAOH

In the temples of Kom Ombo, Philae and Edfu, the tripartite scenes of purification-coronation-deification of the pharaoh are another visual illustration of the conceptions of power by the ancient Egyptians adopted by the Ptolemies.

Regarding the **purification scenes** (the so called «Baptism of Pharaoh»), the pharaoh is purified by the gods Horus and Thoth that pour over him vases of water, *hes*. The water that «baptizes» the pharaoh is iconographically represented as *ankh* signs (symbols of life: ) and *was* symbols (symbols of power: ) suggesting that, more than purifying, such ceremony is a confirmation of the real prerogatives to pursue with vigour and tenacity. The «bath» of life and power conveys a magical charge of rejuvenating force¹².

In the case of the temple of the Haroeris/Sobek, in Kom Ombo, such representation decorates the two intercolumnar screen wall of the façade of the hypostyle room¹³. On the northern ail, the pharaoh Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II or Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos is «baptized» under the observation-approval of Haroeris, the divinity responsible for that ail in the temple of Kom Ombo¹⁴. In the southern ail, Horus and Thoth, the gods that symbolize the Upper and the Lower Egypt, «baptize»-«purify» the pharaoh under the tutelage of Sobek, the god with crocodile head, that superintends and is worshiped in that ail of the temple¹⁵ (Figs. 7 and 8).

In the same sanctuary, in Room B or inner hypostyle hall, west wall, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II also appears receiving the «life» and the «power» by the hands of Thoth and Horus after leaving the palace with Inmutef and standards (the prelude to the performance of any ritual)¹⁶. In this case, the purification scene doesn't exhibit any of the main divinities of the temple but represents part of a sequence that continues with the coronation of the pharaoh¹⁷ (Figs. 9 and 10). Another scene of purification appears in Room C or Outer Vestibule (side west, north wall): Ptolemy VI is purified

¹¹ PARTRIDGE (2002: 50, 51); WATTERSON (1998: 56).

¹² GARDINER (1950: 3-12); LECLANT (1968: 48-51).

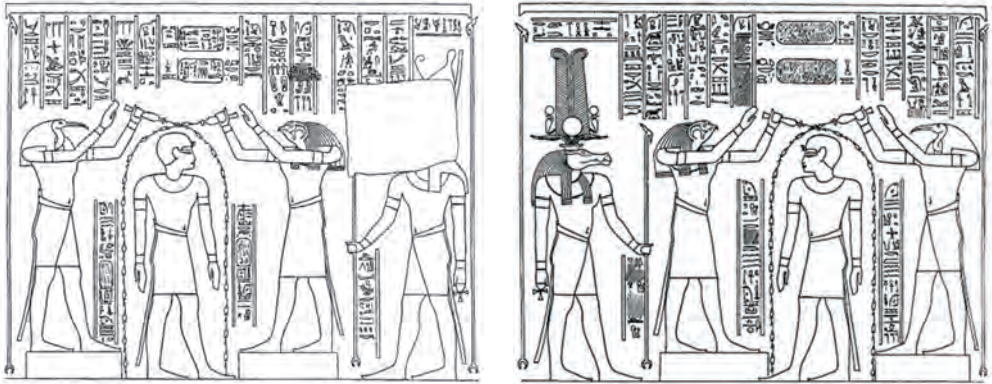
¹³ PM VI (1939: 182).

¹⁴ MORGAN et al. (1895: 139, pl. 179).

¹⁵ MORGAN et al. (1895: 145, pl. 191).

¹⁶ PM VI (1939: 188, 189); MORGAN et al. (1895: 342, pl. 465).

¹⁷ PM VI (1939: 188, 189); MORGAN et al. (1895: 341, pl. 464).



Figures 7 and 8. Representations of the two intercolumnar screen wall of the facade of the hypostyle room of the Temple of the Haroeris/Sobek, in Kom Ombo, [MORGAN et al. (1895: 139, pl. 179 and 145, pl. 191)].



Figures 9 and 10. Representations of the Outer Vestibule (side west, north wall) of the Temple of the Haroeris/Sobek, in Kom Ombo, [MORGAN et al. (1895: 342, pl. 465; 341, pl. 464 ; 340, pl. 463)].

by Thoth and Horus¹⁸ (Fig. 11). The visual narrative suggests that the purification ceremony, that is already a ceremony of choice and approval of the man who is going to assume the power, precedes the reception of the crowns of power, that is, the actual ceremony of coronation.

In the main, the iconography of the **coronation scene** is also extremely stereotyped: the protecting goddess of Lower Egypt, Wadjet, with the *decheret*-crown (the red crown of Lower Egypt) and the goddess Nekhbet, guardian goddess of Upper Egypt using the *hedjet* (the white crown of Upper Egypt), anthropomorphically represented, hug and coronate the pharaoh under the responsibility of Haroeris (Room

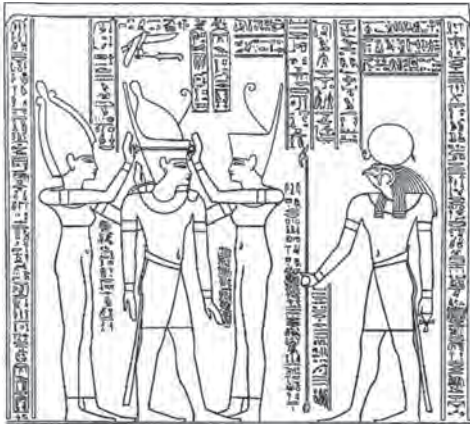
¹⁸ PM VI (1939: 190); MORGAN et al. (1902: 55, pl. 599).



Figure 11. Representations of the inner hypostyle hall, west wall, of the Temple of the Haroeris/Sobek, in Kom Ombo, [MORGAN et al. (1902: 55, pl. 599)].

B or inner hypostyle, west side, north wall¹⁹) or of Sobek (interior of outer hypostyle hall or room A, east side, intercolumnar north wall²⁰) (Figs. 12 and 13).

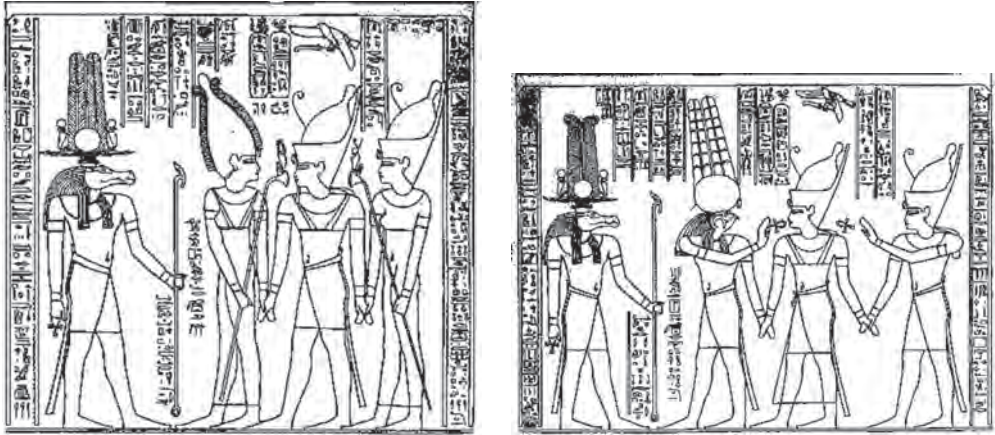
In Kom Ombo, the narrative succession of these illustrations exhibits in addition the pharaoh Ptolemy VI conducted by Wadjet and Nekhbet and by Atum and a mixed



Figures 12 and 13. Coronation scenes of Kom Ombo (Room B or inner hypostyle, west side, north wall and interior of outer hypostyle hall or room A, east side, intercolumnar north wall). [MORGAN et al. (1895: 340, pl 463, and 167, pl. 214)].

¹⁹ PM VI (1939: 188, 189); MORGAN et al. (1895: 340, pl. 463).

²⁰ PM VI (1939: 184); MORGAN et al. (1895: 167, pl. 214).



Figures 14 and 15. The deification scenes of the Temple of Kom Ombo: the pharaoh Ptolemy VI conducted by Wadjet and Nekhbet and by Atum and by a mixed god Amun-Ré-Horus, always under the supervision of Sobek (Room B or inner hypostyle, east side, north wall, third register). [MORGAN et al. (1895: 323, 324, pls. 439, 440)].

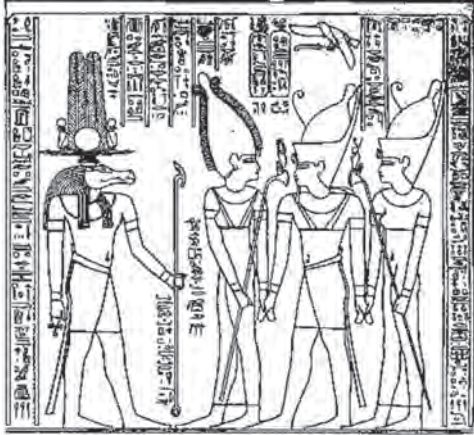
god Amun-Ré-Horus, always under the supervision of Sobek (Room B or inner hypostyle, east side, north wall, third register²¹ (Figs. 14 and 15). It is, in fact, the demonstration of the divine affection earned by the pharaoh over various scenes. Moreover, the purification scene represents the human dimension of the owner of power; the coronation scene signals his passage of status; the deification scene or introduction in the presence of the gods symbolizes his approval by the gods in true equal basis.

In the Temple of Horus, in Edfu (courtyard, south wall, west section), we also find the purification and the royal coronation scenes, with Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II²² and with the divine participation of the same agents: Horus and Thoth to the purification and Wadjet and Nekhbet to the coronation²³ (Figs. 16 and 17). Purified, the pharaoh receives the *pschent* crown, the Double Crown, adorned with the serpent *uraeus*, which symbolizes the union of the Two Lands. The Ptolemaic pharaoh, a crowned *nesu*, proclaims, therefore, his legitimacy to the Egyptian throne and the domination of

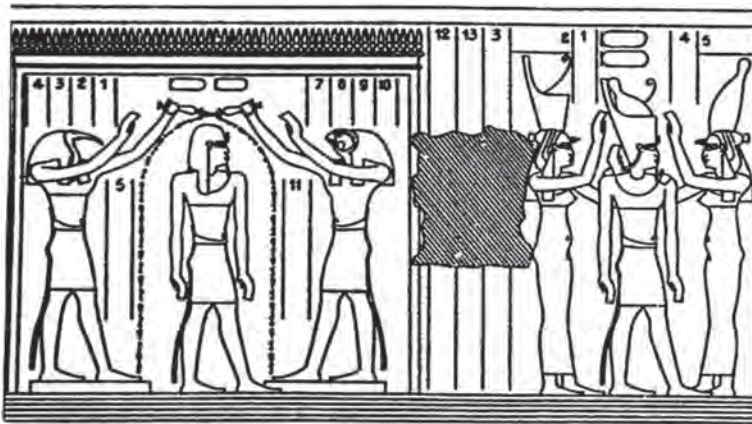
²¹ PM VI (1939: 189); MORGAN et al. (1895: 323, 324, pls. 439, 440).

²² PM VI (1939: 126); CHASSINAT (1960: CXIII). Based on the titulatures of the scenes with the *Nomen* and the *Prenomen* of the pharaoh, there's still some doubt regarding the identification of the pharaoh, once not only Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II but also Ptolemy VI Philometor used the same onomastic. Serge Sauneron and Henri Stierlin, for example, identified the pharaoh from the scene as Ptolemy VI Philometor (SAUNERON, STIERLIN (1975: 50, 51). Alan K. Bowman, on the other hand, opts for Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (BOWMAN (1986: 29), as does Thomas Schneider (SCHNEIDER (s.d.: 326). A similar representation at Kom Ombo allows akin concerns, but also in that case we are inclined towards Ptolemy VIII. Ptolemy VII Euergetes II dedicated the naos of Edfu in 142 BC.

²³ The two goddesses (Wadjet and Nekhbet) are equally present in the pharaonic titlature used by the Lagids: they are the «Two Ladies» (*Nebti*), the ones to which the second title makes a direct reference. The Name of the Two Ladies is not more than the homage to these two goddesses of the monarchy, present in the royal protocol (SALES (1999:195-202)).



Figures 14 and 15. The deification scenes of the Temple of Kom Ombo: the pharaoh Ptolemy VI conducted by Wadjet and Nekhbet and by Atum and by a mixed god Amun-Ré-Horus, always under the supervision of Sobek (Room B or inner hypostyle, east side, north wall, third register). [MORGAN et al. (1895: 323, 324, pls. 439, 440)].



Figures 16 and 17. The purification and the royal coronation scenes in the Temple of Horus at Edfu (courtyard, south wall, west section). [CHASSINAT (1960: CXIII)].

the unified territory. The king uses the *shendyt* kilt, the bull tail and the fake beard, all power insignias fixed by the pharaonic tradition. In the outer hypostyle hall of Edfu (section east, south wall, intercolumnar screen wall next to the House of Books or temple library), there's also a purifying scene, very damaged nowadays, in which the pharaoh Ptolemy VIII is purified by the gods Thoth and Horus²⁴ (Fig. 18).

²⁴ PM VI (1939: 132); CHASSINAT (1929: Pl. LIX); WATTERSON (1998: 67, 124).



Figure 18. The purifying scene of the outer hypostyle hall of Edfu (section east, south wall, inter-columnar screen wall next to the House of Books or temple library). [(CHASSINAT (1929: Pl. LIX)].

Also in the exterior wall of the naos of the Edfu temple, on the west and east wall, the king emerges from the door of the palace, is purified by vases of «water» pouring over him by the gods Horus and Thoth, is crowned with the Double Crown by Nekhbet and Wadjet, tutelary goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt and is inducted in the presence of gods (on the west wall, Hathor and Atum on one side and Montu and Harsomtus on the other; on the east wall, Hathor and Atum on one side and Montu and Harpocrates on the other)²⁵ (Figs. 19 and 20). Another scene on the face interior of the inner corridor or pure ambulatory (east wall) shows the same sequence. This time, the pharaoh is conducted by Harsomtus and Horus²⁶ (Fig. 21). A similar scene exists in the courtyard, south wall, inferior register (inner wall of the pylon)²⁷ (Fig. 22).



Figure 19. Exterior west wall of the naos of the Edfu temple -from right to left: the king emerges from the door of the palace, is purified by the gods Horus and Thoth, is crowned with the Double Crown by Nekhbet and Wadjet, and is inducted in the presence of gods (Hathor, Atum, Montu and Harsomtus). [CHASSINAT (1960: Pls. LXXXIV and LXXXV)].

²⁵ PM VI (1939: 157, 159); CHASSINAT (1960: Pls. LXXXIV, LXXXV, XC, XCI); WATTERSON (1998: 124, 126).

²⁶ PM VI (1939: 164); CHASSINAT (1960: pl. CL).

²⁷ PM VI (1939: 125); CHASSINAT (1960: pl. CXI).

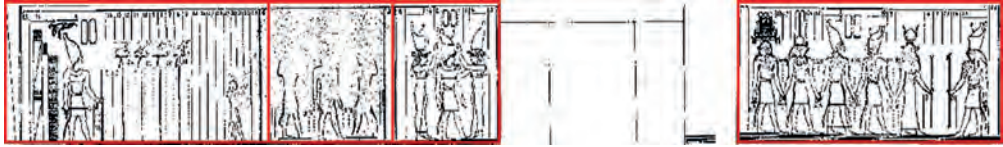


Figure 20. Exterior west wall of the naos of the Edfu temple - from left to right: all the scenes are like on the Figure 19. When the king is inducted in the presence of gods, in this case they are Hathor, Atum, Montu and Harpocrates. [CHASSINAT (1960: Pls. XC and XCI)].

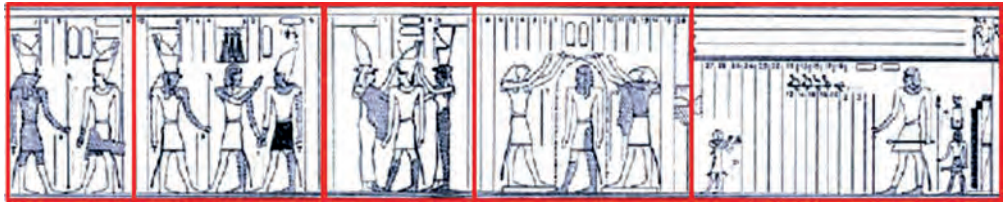


Figure 21. Another scene on the face interior of the inner corridor or pure ambulatory (east wall) shows the same sequence (from right to left). This time, the pharaoh is conducted by Harsomtut and Horus [CHASSINAT (1960: Pl. CL)].



Figure 22. Similar scene in the courtyard, south wall, inferior register, of the Edfu temple (from left to right) [CHASSINAT (1960: Pl. CXI)].

In the Isis' complex, in Philae, we find the representation of the purification-coronation-deification scenes in three different locations: one, of the pharaoh Ptolemy XIII Neos Dionysos Auletes, in the interior of the outdoors' courtyard (exterior intercolumnar screen wall of the *mammisi*)²⁸, the second on the exterior east wall of the naos of Isis temple, being that the pharaoh represented is Augustus²⁹, and the third, of the pharaoh Tiberius, on the northern interior surface of the exterior wall of the corridor of the temple of Arensnuphis³⁰.

The east intercolumnar screen of the *mammisi* shows the narrative scenes of the ritual purification, crowning and procession of the king into the temple in order from

²⁸ PM VI (1939: 229), PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 132, 133); CHASSINAT (1960: Pl. CXIII); VASSILIKA (1989: 3, 4, 354 - BAP 1, CRN 1 and LED 1).

²⁹ PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 204); PM VI, p. 246; BENEDITE (1895: pl. XXVII.) The decoration is therefore from the early Roman period.

³⁰ PM VI (1939: 202, 204, 209); PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 85). The Arensnuphis temple was built and partially decorated by Ptolemy IV. Unfortunately, it was unfinished and usurped in parts. For that reason, we can't identify the Ptolemaic king that is represented (VASSILIKA (1989: 49).

south to north³¹ (Figs. 23-25). Also in the outside wall of the temple and in the wall of the temple of Arensnuphis, the narrative takes place from left to right, this is from south to north of the temple of Isis and from west to east of the temple of Arensnuphis (Figs. 26-28).



Figures 23-25. The representation of the purification-coronation-deification scenes in the east intercolumnar screen of the mammisi of the Isis' complex, in Philae. Photos by the Author.

³¹ VASSILIKA (1989: 79, 354 - BAP 1, CRN 1 and LED 1). The remaining scenes of the intercolumnar screen are composed of royal offerings to Hathor, Osiris Wenen-nefer and Isis.



Figures 26-28. The representation of the purification-coronation-deification scenes on the northern interior surface of the exterior wall of the corridor of the temple of Arensnuphis. Photos by the Author.

In the inferior register of the exterior east wall of the naos of the temple of Isis, the purifying scene is carried out by the traditional gods Thoth and Horus while Wadjet and Nekhbet grant the double crown to the pharaoh. Represented more to the right holding a sceptre *uadj* is Isis-Hathor, that supervises this scene (with the typical crown of lyriform horns surrounding the Sun, topped with the little throne with which her name was written in hieroglyphic writing)³² (Fig. 29).

³² BENEDITE (1895: pl. XXVII).



Figure 29. Exterior east wall of the naos of Isis temple [BENEDITE (1895: pl. XXVII)].

In a stereotyped way the *regalia* existing in Kom Ombo and in Edfu are repeated and the autochthonous Egyptian divinities are associated to the ritual-scenes: Thoth and Horus to the purification ritual and Wadjet (the only one totally visible) and Nekhbet to the coronation one³³. In the case of the deification scenes of the temple of Isis (Pharaoh Augustus) and of the temple of Arensnuphis, the pharaoh appears always with two masculine divinities, holding hands, thus expressing the familiarity and equality with the gods. In the first case, Atum or Re-Horakhti and Montu³⁴; and in the second case Atum (?) and Horus³⁵. In the intercolumnar panel of the *mammisi*, only one god is represented (Atum?), holding hands with the pharaoh while the third element is a female divinity (the goddess Hathor/Isis?), represented a little further to the right holding a sceptre³⁶.

In all the cases exhibited in the Ptolemaic temples, the purification-coronation-deification scenes are found in public areas, accessible to all the ancient Egyptians, thus helping to proclaim, even to those that didn't know how to read the written inscriptions, the ideas of legitimization and universal domination linked to those visual narratives³⁷.

The ideological value of these representations is undeniable: they show and demonstrate the approval and choice of the Ptolemaic pharaohs by the Egyptians gods as worthy, legitimate and legitimised successors of the autochthone pharaohs. The visual narrative is constructed to emphasise this explicit sanction of the practice of royalty by the main divinities of Egypt, in their function as protectors of the monarchy and the kingdom.

³³ PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 132, 133).

³⁴ PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 204); PM VI (1939: 246).

³⁵ PETERS-DESTERACT (1997: 85).

³⁶ All the figures (god, pharaoh and goddess) are represented without the respective heads, being, therefore, hard to identify the divinities in question.

³⁷ Similar scenes, specifically with the purification and the coronation that appear i) in the intercolumnar screen wall of the hypostyle room of the temple of Khnum, in Esna (applied to the imperators Claudius and Titus), ii) in one of the intercolumnar south screen wall of the exterior façade of the pronaos or hypostyle room (left side of the entrance) of the temple of Mandulis, in Kalabsha, to an undetermined «*per aa*», «pharaoh», as it is in the identifying *cartouche*, with Harsiesis watching the purifying scene performed by the regular Thoth and Horus, and iii) in the great hypostyle room of the temple of Hathor, in Dendera, with the Roman pharaoh Nero (WATTERSON (1998: fig. 15, between p. 64 and 65); GOHARY (1998: 29, 30 and 91); HAWASS (2004: 25); PM VI (1939: 46, 47, 111); MARIETTE (1870: Planches 10-12)).

THE FOUNDATION-INAUGURATION SCENES OF THE TEMPLES

The elaborated rituals of foundation of religious buildings in ancient Egypt date back to the early times of its history. Comparisons of texts and representations from many sites show that the complete foundation ceremonies consisted of as many as ten discrete rites or sequences, most of which were enacted before actual constructions could begin. In theory, the rites were conducted by the king himself, assisted by various deities, and consisted of:

- 1.«Stretching the cord»: fixing the plan of the building by «stretching the cord» (*pedj-shes*)³⁸;
- 2.«Releasing the cord»: scattering gypsum on the assigned area to purify it;
- 3.«Hacking up the ground»: digging the first foundation trench;
- 4.«Scattering the sand»: pouring sand into the foundation trench;
- 5.«Making bricks»: moulding the first brick or bricks;
- 6.«Placing the bricks»: placement of foundations deposits at the corners of the structure and initiation the work of building;
- 7.«Scattering *besen*»: purification of the completed temple;
- 8.«Handing over the house to its Lord»: Presentation of the temple to its intended deity/ies;
- 9.«Making offerings»: offering of sacrifices³⁹.

It is impossible without specific information to know how many of these activities were conducted by the pharaoh in the building of a specific temple. In theory, each was the king's prerogative. Indeed, all stages of the temple construction were performed at least symbolically by him, but in Ptolemaic temples it was merely a conventional depiction⁴⁰.

In the outer hypostyle hall or pronaos of the temple of Horus at Edfu there are various scenes or ritual sequences of the foundation ceremony of the temple, developed by the pharaoh Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II according to the autochthone tradition⁴¹: in two scenes of the interior intercolumnar wall of the west section of the hall. He leaves the palace with Inmutef and standards, measure the temple area («stretching the cord») helped by Sefkhet-Abuy («She-of-the-Seven-Horns») before Horus, the principal deity of the temple⁴² (Fig. 30); in six scenes of the same sections of the hall

³⁸ The rite involved the careful orientation of the temple by astronomical observation and measurement. The king is usually assisted in this ritual by the goddess Seshat or Sefkhet-Abuy, the scribal goddess of writing and measurement.

³⁹ WILKINSON (2000: 38); WATTERSON (1998: 87-90). In the Ptolemaic temples of Kom Ombo and Edfu, are included other aspects of the king's performance such as the departure from the palace (the prelude to the performance of any ritual) and the arrival at the site of the new temple (WILKINSON (2000: 38)).

⁴⁰ WATTERSON (1998: 85).

⁴¹ The temple conformed to convention and showed almost no foreign influence; nevertheless, it is also obvious that their makers took tradition into their competent hands and, with purpose and understanding, carried them further (FINNESTAD (2005: 188, 189)).

⁴² PM VI (1939: 130, 131); CHASSINAT (1929: Pl. LVIII). At Edfu, the building was oriented from Orion in the south and to the Great Bear in the north (WATTERSON (1998: 87)).

(west wall, from left to right), the king hacks the ground with a big hoe, pours sand, lays the foundation-stone, purifies the temples, offers the temple and offers *hts*⁴³ (Fig. 31). The eight scenes carved on the lowest register are read along the register, starting with the two scenes on the south west wall and proceeding with the six scenes on the west wall (↑, ←)⁴⁴.

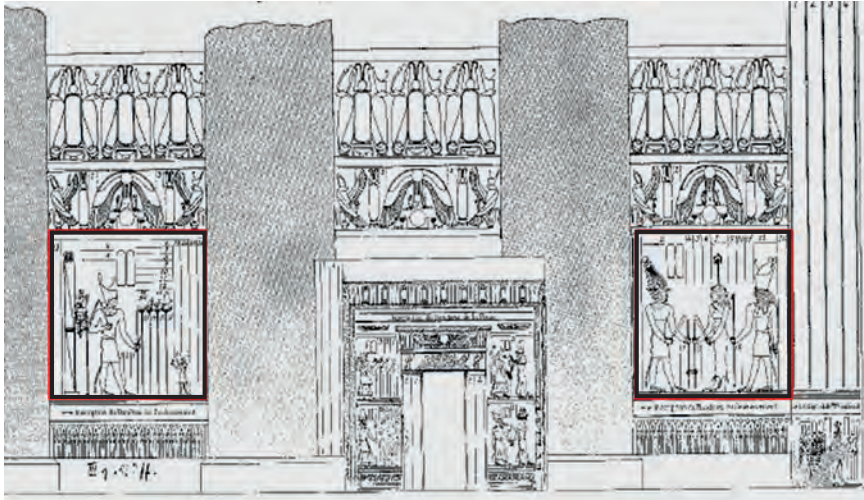


Figure 30. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: two scenes of the interior intercolumnar wall of the west section of the hall. [CHASSINAT (1929: Pl. LVIII)].



Figure 31. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: six scenes of the hall (west wall, from left to right) [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLVIb and LXI)].

Similar scenes or sequences are also inscribed on the first register of northern wall (west and east side of the entrance door)⁴⁵, (Figs. 32 and 33). The eighteen scenes of the pronaos are divided equally in two halves and are read alternately from the left half of the wall to the right half, starting with the scene in the north west corner of the hall⁴⁶.

⁴³ PM VI (1939: 130, 131); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLVIb and LXI); CAUVILLE (1984: 21, 22).

⁴⁴ WATTERSON (1998: 86).

⁴⁵ PM VI (1939: 130, 132, 133); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLVIa).

⁴⁶ WATTERSON (1998: 86, 87).



Figure 32. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: five scenes on the first register of north wall (west side of the entrance door) [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLVIa)].

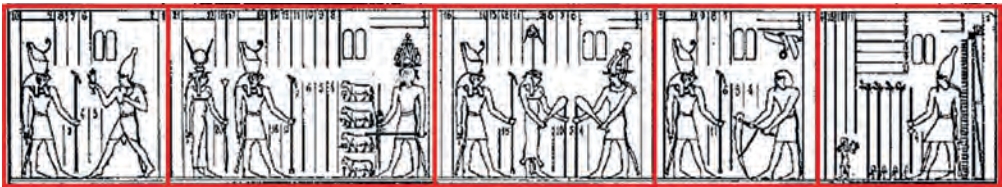


Figure 33. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: five scenes on the first register of north wall (east side of the entrance door) [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLVIa)].

Likewise, in the inner hypostyle hall or naos the theme of foundations-inaugurations ceremonies reappears with profuse illustrations in the south wall, west section (three scenes: Ptolemy IV leaves the palace with Inmutef and standards, is conducted by the goddess Hathor before Horus and measures the temple with Sefkhet-Abuy)⁴⁷ (Fig. 34); east wall, east section (four scenes: Ptolemy IV lays blocks and purifies the temple before Horus and consecrates and offers the temple to Horus and Hathor)⁴⁸ (Fig. 35); south wall, east section (three scenes: Ptolemy IV leaves the palace with Inmutef and standards, hacks ground and lays brick)⁴⁹ (Fig. 36) and west wall, west section (five scenes: Ptolemy IV pours sand, offers model bricks, purifies, consecrates and offers the temple. All these pharaoh activities are made towards Horus)⁵⁰ (Fig. 37). This arrangement allowed the decorator to have a consecutive development of scenes depicting rites enacted first on the behalf of Lower Egypt, on the west wall, followed by those enacted for Upper Egypt on the east wall. Where the titles of the officiating king are preserved, he bears, on the west wall, titles connected with Lower Egypt, and, on the east wall, titles connected with Upper Egypt⁵¹.

⁴⁷ PM VI (1939: 130, 136); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLd).

⁴⁸ PM VI (1939: 130, 137); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLc).

⁴⁹ PM VI (1939: 130, 137); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLe).

⁵⁰ PM VI (1939: 130, 137); CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLb); CAUVILLE (1984: 26). The Rite of Consecration of a temple employed at Edfu consisted partly, if not entirely, in a version of the Opening of the Mouth (BLACKMAN, FAIRMAN (1946: 85); FAIRMAN (1954: 172, 173); WATTERSON (1998: 90-92).

⁵¹ WATTERSON (1998: 85, 86).

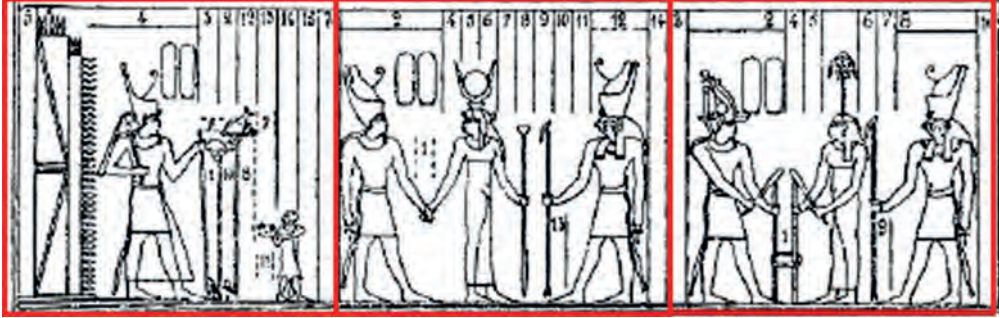


Figure 34. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: inner hypostyle hall - three scenes in the south wall, west section [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLd)].



Figure 35. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: inner hypostyle hall - four scenes in the east wall, east section [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLc)].



Figure 36. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: inner hypostyle hall - three scenes in the south wall, east section [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLe)].



Figure 37. The foundation-inauguration scenes of the temple of Horus, at Edfu: inner hypostyle hall - five scenes in the west wall, west section [CHASSINAT (1929: Pls. XLb)].

Barbara Watterson describes the scenes development as follows:

«First scene to the left of the doorway followed by the first scene to its right; then the second to the left followed by the corresponding scene to the right; then the third scene to the left followed to the third scene to the right of the doorway. The remaining nine rites which make up the ritual are found in scenes on the west and east walls of the Hall. These scenes are read alternately from wall to wall while progressing along the register, starting with the scene at the southern end of the west wall, which is paralleled by a corresponding scene on the east wall»⁵².

The temple of Kom Ombo, dedicated to the gods Hor Uer (Haroeris) and Sobek, exhibits a very fragmented condition in some of its rooms which doesn't allow a re-constitution/ observation as coherent and effective of the foundation-inauguration scenes as the temples of Edfu. Nevertheless, it's still possible to detect some of the sequences of those ceremonies: Sefkhet-Abuy «stretches the cord» (*pedj-shes*) to measure the temple area helped by the king (destroyed) before Haroeris, the principal deity of that side of the temple⁵³ (Fig. 38); The king (Ptolemy VI) pours sand before Haroeris and Tasetnofret⁵⁴ (Fig. 39); The king (Ptolemy VI) purifies the temple be-

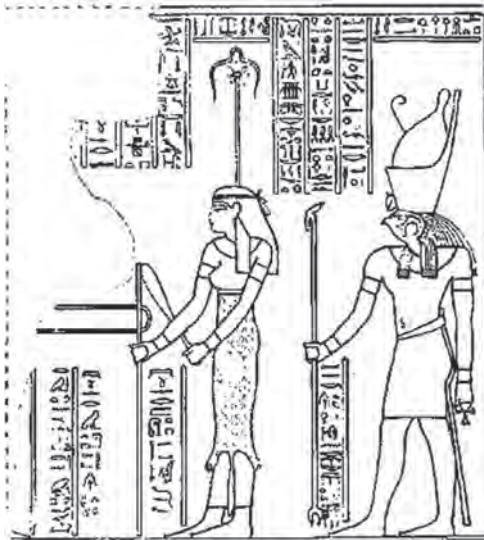


Figure 38. Temple of Kom Ombo: Room C or Outer vestibule, west side, south wall or façade [MORGAN et al. (1902: 54, pl. 598)].

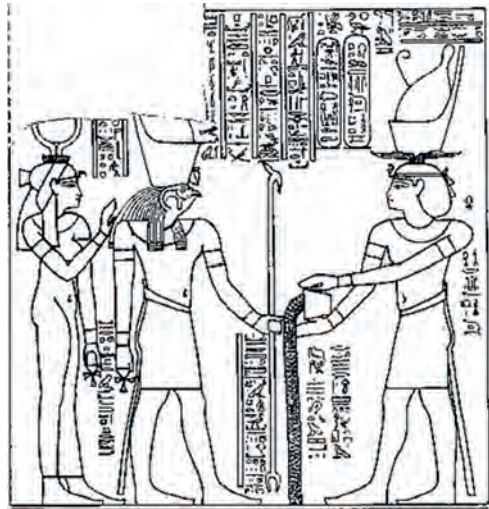


Figure 39. Temple of Kom Ombo: Room C or Outer vestibule, east side, north wall [MORGAN et al. (1902: 65, pl. 611)].

⁵² WATTERSON (1998: 86).

⁵³ Room C or Outer vestibule, west side, south wall or façade (PM VI (1939: 191); MORGAN et al. (1902: 54, pl. 598).

⁵⁴ Room C or Outer vestibule, east side, north wall (PM VI (1939: 190); MORGAN et al. (1902: 65, pl. 611).

fore Haroeris⁵⁵ (Fig. 40) and before Haroeris and Tasetnofret⁵⁶ (Fig. 41), and finally consecrates the temple before Sobek and Hathor⁵⁷ (Fig. 42).

The multiple scenes of the foundation-inauguration ceremonies were a mythical construction in which the pharaoh was the agent of all elements, sometimes with the help of some divinities (Seshat or Sefkhet-Abuy), always before and for the main gods of the temples. The pharaoh supervised the delimitation of the area that the temple will occupy, setting it with a stretched cord («stretching the cord», *pedj-shes*), the digging of the foundations, the delivery of the sand and bricks for construction,



Figure 40. Temple of Kom Ombo: Room C or Outer vestibule, central façade [MORGAN et al. (1902: 68, pl. 614)].

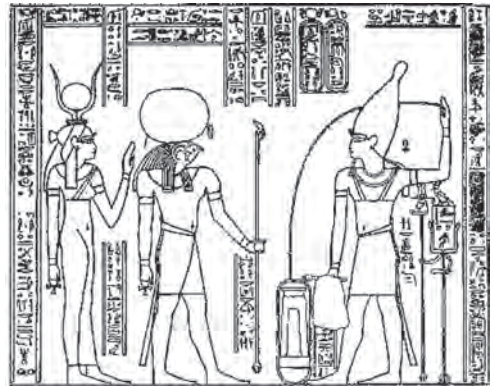


Figure 41. Temple of Kom Ombo: Room A or Outer hypostyle hall, east side, south wall, i.e. façade of the inner hypostyle hall façade [MORGAN et al. (1895: 196, pls. 263)].

⁵⁵ Room C or Outer vestibule, central façade (PM VI (1939: 191); MORGAN et al. (1902: 68, pl. 614).

⁵⁶ Room A or Outer hypostyle hall, east side, south wall, i.e. façade of the inner hypostyle hall façade (PM VI (1939: 187); MORGAN et al. (1895: 196, pls. 263).

⁵⁷ Room A or Outer hypostyle hall, east side, south wall, i.e. façade of the inner hypostyle hall façade (PM VI (1939: 187); MORGAN et al. (1895: 195, pls. 262). The foundation-inauguration ceremonies are also represented in the inner hypostyle hall of the temple of Hathor, at Dendera and at Esna. At Dendera, in nine registers (four in the east wall and five in the west wall), the king performs the ritual. On the foundations-ceremonies of the east wall, the king leaves the palace with Inmutef and standards, offers bricks to goddess, purifies the temple before Hathor and Isis, and with a small god Ihy consecrates the temple before Hathor and Horus. On the west wall, the king leaves the palace with Inmutef and standards, hacks the ground, lays brick, lays the foundation-stone, before Hathor and offers the temple to Isis and Harsomtut (PM VI (1939: 44, 50); MARIETTE (1870: Planches 20-22). The foundations-inaugurations ceremonies also appear in the east and west exterior walls of the temple, performed by the Roman pharaoh Augustus (PM VI (1939: 76, 77); DÜMICHEM (1877: Taf XLIV-LVI). The scenes of the temple foundation ritual in the temple of Esna (Esna II: 71, 113, 136, 162, 183, 497, 499, 529, 530), also erected in the Ptolemaic Period (from Ptolemy V to Ptolemy VIII) and enlarged with a hypostyle hall and decorate mainly in Roman times, are made under four different Roman rulers (Vespasian, Domitian, Septimius Severus, and Caracalla). They offer no evidence for the history of the temple's construction but maintain the visual narrative according to tradition (HALLOF (2011: 4).

the colocation of the «foundation-stone», the purifying (with natron and incense), the consecration of the *hut-netjer* and its offering, already built, to its true owners, the gods. After all these symbolic scenes, the sacrifices and the offerings to the divinities could begin in a regular basis.

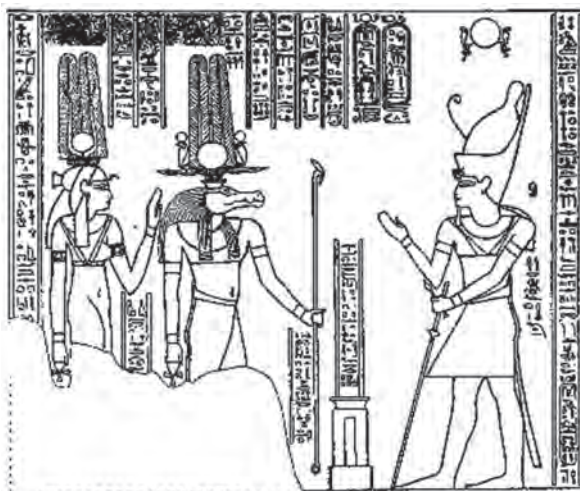


Figure 42. Temple of Kom Ombo: Room A or Outer hypostyle hall, east side, south wall, i.e. façade of the inner hypostyle hall façade [MORGAN et al. (1895: 195, pls. 262)].

CONCLUSION

The Ptolemies understood at once that because of their Macedonian origin, they eventually needed to be recognized and legitimized as authentic Egyptian sovereigns.

By using the millenary artistic vocabulary available, the Ptolemies covered the columns, the walls and the pylons of the great temples with bas-reliefs and scenes of high symbolic value, sort of codified, stating in them the prestige of the royalty through the expressive visual narratives, many times collocated in free access areas to the majority of the population. In that exuberant decoration, with high quality of execution, it is almost always valued the narrow relationship between the royalty and the Egyptian divinities, and it is presented the real function as necessary to the world order.

Greco-Roman temples are more richly decorated with reliefs and texts than earlier temples and, so, they are ideological *mediums* used with the purpose of reach a high number of potential recipients and, in this way, politically legitimize the new kings of Egypt⁵⁸. There is, then, an intentional ideological and propaganda value associated to these representations that justify the designation of «visual ideological narratives»,

⁵⁸ FINNESTAD (2005: 191).

that is, scenes of political nature with an effective cenographic effect. In this sense, we should, above all, value the functional aspect of the representations and not only the decorative one.

The themes of military victory, of the divine dimension of the pharaoh and of the foundation of the temples include the ritual scenes whose images are true visual stories of easy comprehension that are told to every Egyptianized observer. They made what they represented culturally present.

The ethnic origin of the rulers meant little to the Egyptian conception. The most important thing was that the holders of the royal post fulfilled the traditional role of assurers of the cosmic and social balance and that the mitographical representation and the ritual practices were repeated and exalted without interruption.

The ritual acts represented artistically on the exterior and interior surfaces of the temples, introduce, then, directly the Lagid king in the iconographic traditional grammar. The artistic integration denotes a political integration-acceptation, or, at least, that intention defended both by the royalty and by the priesthood. The sanctity and the sweet atmosphere of the sanctuary acted as a type of approval and transcendent protection of conduct of the new kings of the present, as it had already been done in the past, in many places and several occasions. The sacred places, sources of energy and of its perpetual renovation, as petrified vegetable microcosms, cluster the spiritual dynamism that, once met the conventional rites and the rituals, would radiate to Egypt and to its higher delegate, the pharaoh.

To understand the visual impact and the ideological meaning of those representations in sacred spaces is, thus, to enter in the core of the Ptolemaic thought as to say, to enlighten their motivations, to know their practices, to interpret their messages and to decode their goals.

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