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# The lost chapels of Elephantine. Preliminary results of a reconstruction study through archival documents

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## Abstract

Two bark repositories used to stand on Elephantine Island until the beginning of the 19th century: an almost complete chapel called ‘South Temple’, built by Amenhotep III, probably on the occasion of his second *heb-sed*, and a much ruined but similar building, the ‘North Temple’, built by Sety I or Ramesses II. Both were destroyed by the local governor in 1822 and the stone blocks reused for new constructions. Nowadays, not a single trace of them is left on the field: the only sources available are architectural cross sections and plans, relief copies, textual descriptions, and landscape views made by travellers before that date. These comprise Norden, Bruce, Jomard, Vivant Denon, Ricci, Huyot, Linant, Barry, and Wilkinson among the others. The remarkably high quality of their drawings and texts allows an almost complete reconstruction of the two buildings and their history. The use of archival sources poses some methodological questions that are addressed in this paper: how to locate the original construction site, assess measurements and proportions of the buildings, collate different copies of a single scene, create a palaeography for copies of hieroglyphic inscriptions, and choose the right colours for a 3D reconstruction.

## Keywords

Elephantine; Amenhotep III; bark-shrine; 3D modelling; Egyptological archives

In November 1822 Louis Linant de Bellefonds visited once again the Island of Elephantine and reported to his patron William J. Banks: ‘Je viens d’être témoins à Eléphantine de la cruelle barbarie de Mehemet Bay [...]’allais avec des Messieurs anglais visiter les temples de cette Isle, mais je n’ai pu même en voir une trace et pas même un éclat de pierre. C’est Mehemet Bay qui a eu la brutalité de détruire ces antiquités par haine pour les Européens et a ce qu’il dit pour qu’ils ne viennent plus l’envoyer à Assouan’ (Linant de Bellefonds 1822). Later sources can only add small details, such as that the materials were reused for modern constructions. They generally record that the blocks were used to build the barracks and the quay of Aswan (Foucard 1897: 213-216) or the military hospital later destroyed during the construction of the Hotel Savoy (Ricke 1960: 52). These buildings were all demolished later, so there seem to be little or no hope to find the remains of the two temples.

What were these two buildings mentioned by Linant, irremediably lost in 1822? Porter and Moss (1962: 227-29) list a ‘Temple of Amenophis III. North of Nilometer (Destroyed in 1822)’ and a ‘Temple of Tuthmosis III. North of Temple of Amenophis III (Destroyed in 1822).’ Ludwig Borchardt (1938a: 156) quickly corrected the latter identification in his book review, pointing out that Ramesses II should be credited for the erection of the temple. The two buildings were sandstone peripteral bark-chapels gravitating around the great temple of Khnum. The southern one, erected by Amenhotep III, was almost completely preserved down to 1822 (Figure 1), while less than half of the North Temple along the main axis was at that time still standing, surrounded by modern mud constructions. The authors of this study started from different points of view and at different times, unaware of each other, but both came to the conclusion that further research into archival material could lead to a better knowledge of the two buildings, if not a complete reconstruction.

This paper intends to present some of the preliminary results of this research.

Apparently, the first description of the Elephantine chapels dates back to the account and drawings of Frederick Ludvig Norden (1755: 195-6, pls. 129, 132), who visited the island in 1737-1738. The previous travellers who left a record of their visit to the First cataract do not refer to Elephantine in their accounts. There is much room for confusion in both the description and the plan given by Norden. Some architectural details (one frontal column in *antis* between corner-walls) apparently fit the North Temple best, but it seems unlikely that Norden described this less-known building and left out the more prominent South Temple. The position of the building described (by the hill of the main temple) and its

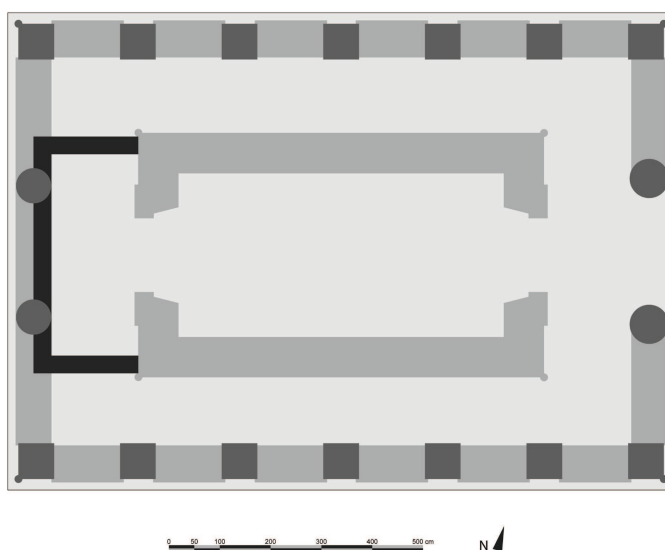


FIGURE 1

condition (half-buried by debris) would indeed point to the South Temple. This identification is supported by the mention of a nearby Greek inscription, which Norden could not copy, but that is described in the report of Richard Pococke's visit around the same time (Pococke 1743: 117-8).<sup>1</sup> Pococke also mentions an Osiris statue in front of the temple, a detail confirmed by other sources describing the South Temple.

The Napoleonic campaign represents a turning point in the quality of sources: the *Description de l'Égypte* provides a detailed map of the island, several views of the South Temple, measured plans, reconstructions, and a long descriptive essay by Edme-François Jomard (1809). Another product of the French campaign, Dominique Vivant Denon's *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute-Égypte*, also adds important visual and descriptive material. Denon's original drawings also survive at the British Museum.

Worth mentioning here are also the accounts of Edward J. Cooper and Silvestro Bossi, Heinrich Menu von Minutoli, and Edouard De Montulé. The former provides a beautiful view of the South Temple (Cooper 1824-1827: pl. [10]) and some words of description. Minutoli (1824: pl. XXIII.2-3) publishes copies of two scenes from both temples originally made by Alessandro Ricci. De Montulé (1821: pl. 48 [upper]) provides a mediocre view of the South Temple with the seated Osirian statue in its surroundings.

Archival sources are much more informative. Italian traveller Alessandro Ricci, who visited Elephantine in several occasions between 1819 and 1822, represents the bulk of the unpublished sources. His series of drawings of the South Temple are particularly interesting for the accuracy of the epigraphic copy. All drawings except one (see *infra*) are currently kept at the Museo Egizio in Florence (Usick 1998: 73-92). Ricci had been employed for several years by William J. Bankes along with Linant de Bellefonds, whose account was quoted at the beginning of this paper. A few drawings of Elephantine made by Bankes and Linant are within the Bankes Mss, at the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester (Ref. No. IV.C.4-7, XXI.F.31). A detail of the pectoral of Amenhotep III is within the pages of a large manuscript at the British Museum (Bankes 1815-1819a: 7).

Some scenes and inscriptions from the South Temple, with few notes, were copied by John Gardner Wilkinson, who also sketched a plan of the South Temple and surrounding structures. This was done little before their destruction. The drawings are now housed at the Griffith Institute, Oxford (Wilkinson MSS I 121-124, XIV 4 dentro [14-21], 45 A [4], 52 [2-3], 52A [1]). They constitute a valid integration of Ricci's work. It is perhaps not surprising to find a drawing of the South Temple made by the latter among Wilkinson's papers in Oxford (Ricci 1821b). The two men met in Egypt in 1822, when Wilkinson asked Ricci – who was a physician – to treat his fellow traveller James S. Wiggert (Thompson 1992: 41). He might have acquired the drawing directly by Ricci in that occasion.

The papers of Charles Barry, the famous British architect, revealed unexpected surprises too. He visited Egypt in 1818-1819 and left some high quality drawings. In particular, a fine not-to-scale but measured plan of the South Temple (Barry 1818-1819a) and two beautiful views of both temples (Barry 1818-1819b; Barry 1818-1819c). Another interesting addition to archival sources is a stunning watercolour view of the façade and a measured plan of the South Temple drawn

by Jean-Nicholas Huyot (1819a; 1819b) and now kept at the Bibliothèque Centrale des Musées Nationaux in Paris.

After this limited presentation of the available sources, we would like to touch briefly upon the possible arrangement of the two temples within the cultic landscape of Elephantine, such as their original position, orientation, and measures. To our knowledge, only two maps of the island before 1822 survive: one in Jomard (1809: pl. 31) and a manuscript map made by Ricci (1821a). The latter claims that the drawing is 'tratto dalla grande opera francese' (Salvoldi 2011: 307), but it draws little resemblance with its alleged model and it is distinguished for imprecision in orientation, scale and location of the buildings: it is little more than a sketch. It is interesting though, because it seems to reproduce Elephantine during the flood, as can be seen from the outline of its banks, which make up an almost round island. This is consistent with the date of the second documented visit of Ricci, July 13, 1821, i.e. coinciding with the fast increase of the Nile flood.

It is impossible to superimpose the two historical maps on satellite imagery through a GIS software, because they are too imprecise. It is also not possible to use modern techniques of perspective analysis through central projection (Leopold 1999), because we do not know the exact position of the artists when they took views of Elephantine from the Nile bank in Aswan.

The map of the *Description* shows that the North Temple used to lie to the north of the road connecting the southern village with the western bank of the island. Since both the road system and the village are still standing in approximately the same position, the location of the North Temple appears easy to determine. A bare mound near the village marks the probable ancient location of this building.<sup>2</sup> Its coordinates are: 24° 5' 18.03" N and 32° 53' 9.51" E.

The location of the South Temple is more challenging. It clearly stood on the slope to the northeast of the great temple, with its southwest side threatened by rubble. Views of the island taken from Aswan in Jomard (1809: pls. 30.4, 32.2), Denon (1802b), and Gau (1822: 1.a) show that the temple rested between the Nile sanctuary and the monumental staircase, more towards the latter. For the aforementioned reasons, the best guess for the location of the South Temple would be to the northeast of the New Kingdom temple of Satet and of the sanctuary of Heqa-ib, in the area where the Aswan Museum now stands: roughly 24° 5' 6.03" N, 32° 53' 12.81" E.

The relative distance between the two buildings would therefore amount to around 385m; Denon (1802a: 130) gives this distance at 600 paces (457m), Ricci (1821a) gives a closer estimate of 400 paces (305m). The distance between the South Temple and the gate of the temple of Khnum would be around 92m, almost agreeing with Ricci's (1821a) figure of 110 paces (84m).

As for the measures of the two buildings, they can be assessed by comparing the different figures given by the various sources. Figure 2 summarizes them, uniformed in metres.

Jomard (1809: 7) makes further considerations: 'Le fût seul est égal à six fois le demi-diamètre ou module, pris à la hauteur

<sup>1</sup> For the inscription of Emperor Diocletian, see Brennan 1989.

<sup>2</sup> We should like to thank Dr Cornelius von Pilgrim, Schweizerisches Institut für Ägyptische Bauforschung und Altertumskunde in Kairo, for his most valuable comments on this issue.

|                                   | Jomard | Jomard <sup>1</sup> | Jomard <sup>2</sup> | Ricci | Barry        | Norden | Hyde | Huyot |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------------------|---------------------|-------|--------------|--------|------|-------|
| <b>Width</b>                      | 9,5    | 9,42                | 9,34                | 9,71  | 8,79         |        |      | 8,81  |
| <b>Length</b>                     | 12     | 12,02               | 12,64               | 12,55 | 12,34        |        |      | 12,29 |
| <b>Sanctuary width</b>            |        |                     | 5,04                | 4,61  | 4,71         |        | 3,05 | 4,75  |
| <b>Sanctuary length</b>           |        |                     | 7,88                | 7,85  | 7,91         |        | 6,71 | 7,92  |
| <b>Sanctuary width (inside)</b>   | 3,25   | 3,25                | 3,30                | 3,13  | 3,18 to 3,10 | 6,28   |      | 3,26  |
| <b>Sanctuary length (inside)</b>  | 6,50   | 6,50                | 6,23                | 6,45  | 6,40         | 25,12  |      | 6,42  |
| <b>Height column-abacus</b>       |        |                     |                     | 3,23  | 3,18         |        |      | 3,28  |
| <b>Sanctuary height</b>           |        |                     |                     | 3,05  |              |        |      |       |
| <b>Total height (with podium)</b> |        |                     |                     | 6,09  |              |        |      | 5,69  |
| <b>Total height (from floor)</b>  |        |                     |                     | 4,34  |              |        |      | 4,43  |

FIGURE 2

<sup>1</sup>Jomard (1809: 5) provides two different sets of measures, in pieds de roi and in metres.

<sup>2</sup> Measures taken on plates.

du stylobate. Le chapiteau le contient deux fois, le dé avec l'architrave deux fois, et la corniche, compris le cordon, aussi deux fois. Par conséquent, la colonne, non compris le dé, contient huit de ces modules; et l'ordre entier, douze. L'entrecolonnement du milieu en contient six. La largeur totale du temple comprend vingt-quatre fois ce même module, et l'intérieur de la salle le renferme neuf fois sur un côté et dix-huit sur l'autre.' The discovery of the module by Jomard comes from the application of an architectural doctrine dating to the Renaissance, but is itself inspired by Graeco-Roman architectural treatises. So, even if the remarks of Jomard are not intrinsically false, the analysis is anachronistic.<sup>3</sup> Measured on the plates, the module amounts to 0.34 or 0.35m.

|                    |               | Dimensions in cubits |        | Dimensions in modules |        |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
|                    |               | Number of cubits     | Meters | Number of modules     | Meters |
| <b>Temple</b>      | <b>Length</b> | 24                   | 12,60  | 36                    | 12,60  |
|                    | <b>Width</b>  | 18                   | 9,45   | 27                    | 9,45   |
|                    | <b>Height</b> | 12                   | 6,30   | 18                    | 6,30   |
| <b>Bark-chapel</b> | <b>Length</b> | 12                   | 6,30   | 18                    | 6,30   |
|                    | <b>Width</b>  | 6                    | 3,15   | 9                     | 3,15   |

FIGURE 3

It is noteworthy that with a cubit at 0.525m and a module at 0.35m, the measures of the building coincide. We suppose that we are dealing here with the dimensions wished for by the architect rather than the real measurements of the temple, with figures being multiples of six (in cubits) or nine (in modules).

The measures of the North Temple can only be extracted from the to-scale plan given on plate 38.2 of the *Description*. The results of the measurements are shown in the following table:

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Width</b>                     | 7,73 ( <i>Description's</i> approximation) to 8,46 (our approximation) |
| <b>Length</b>                    | 12,00  |
| <b>Sanctuary width</b>           | 4,76   |
| <b>Sanctuary length</b>          | 8,30   |
| <b>Sanctuary width (inside)</b>  | 2,66 ( <i>Description's</i> approximation) to 3,54 (our approximation) |
| <b>Sanctuary length (inside)</b> | 6,85   |

FIGURE 4

<sup>3</sup> We should like to thank Jean-Francois Carlotti, Centre de recherche HALMA – UMR 8164 (CNRS, Lille 3, MCC), for his most helpful remarks.

Because only half of the temple along the main axis was preserved, the exact width can only be approximated by doubling the extant part. The *Description* offers its own reconstruction; the measurement given here as an alternative is based on a larger entrance gate, measured on the South Temple. It seems that the two temples roughly shared the same proportions.

The orientation of the South Temple is usually given with the façade looking east. A more accurate measurement is to be found in the *Description*: 'L'axe du temple fait un angle de 72° ½ a l'est avec le meridian magnetique' (Jomard 1809: 5). This datum coincides exactly with the

compass given in Barry's (1818–1819a) plan of the building.

The orientation of the North Temple received considerably less attention. Ricci (1821a) places it with exactly the same orientation of the South Temple, but his survey is not precise enough to be safely employed. We could only rely on the general map of Aswan and Elephantine in Jomard (1809: pl. 31). Measurements taken directly from the map reveal that the North Temple had his facade looking perfectly southeast. This isolated piece of information is confirmed by two views of the temple published by Denon (1802a: pls. 63.2, 65.2), where the back wall of the building is facing the Nile.

The South Temple and the North Temple were both used as bark-stations during processions. We know of two other buildings of this kind on Elephantine: the bark-chapel of Satet, built by Senwosret I, later dismantled and now re-constructed, but whose original location is unknown (*Elephantine: The Ancient Town* 1998: 50); the bark-chapel of Hatshepsut, the core blocks of which were discovered in April 2016, while sparse blocks had emerged before (Ministry of State for Antiquities 2016). If the Roman monumental staircase reflects the position of a previous mooring post, then the South Temple in the New Kingdom would have likely been the first cult-building approached by those landing there. It would also be on the way to the temple of Satet and the great temple of Khnum. The position of the North Temple within the sacred landscape of Elephantine is less clear; the map of the *Description* places this building in a rather isolated location, apparently cut off from the other known remains of the cult complex of Khnum. Because of its very nature, the North Temple would rest on a processional way, maybe one touring the whole island, perhaps marking its limit during high flood – as Ricci's (1821a) map suggests – or the presence of another landing site.

The South Temple is the best documented of the two buildings. All the sources together cover approximately 61% of all texts and 65% of all scenes. We are less informed about the pillars, as only two are fully known. We also lack coverage of the decoration of the outer west side and of the inner side of both short walls of the sanctuary. The inner northern wall of the sanctuary is described as being very similar to its southern counterpart, so we can imagine its iconographic content, but not much can be done with the texts.

The study of the inscriptions has provided a bounty of information. Most interesting probably is the inscription running on the northern architrave, where what seems to be the name of the temple can be read:



[...] (It is) a peaceful place for the one who resides in Elephantine during his processional feast to Perkhutnisut he loves, the son of Re, Amenhotep Heqa-Waset [...]

Even if the name ‘Mansion of the Protection of the King’ could refer to another building, i.e. the final target of a procession along which the South Temple was a station, it fits very well a chapel erected in connection with the *sed*-festival and is more likely to refer to the South Temple itself.

Different methodological approaches can help to date the building. Raymond Johnson (1990: 41; 2001: 85) already concluded that the scene on the inner wall of the shrine dated to the end of the reign of Amenhotep III on the basis of stylistic and iconographic considerations. Two different inscriptions confirm and refine this conclusion. The first inscription occurs on one of the south pillars, the second from the east (Jomard 1809: pl. 36.4):



His second *sed*-festival: may he achieve many more!

The second inscription was carved on the outer south wall of the shrine, on the east end, just beside a scene showing Satet and Montu-Re accompanying the king to Heliopolis (Minutoli 1824: pl. 23.5; Ricci 1821b):<sup>4</sup>

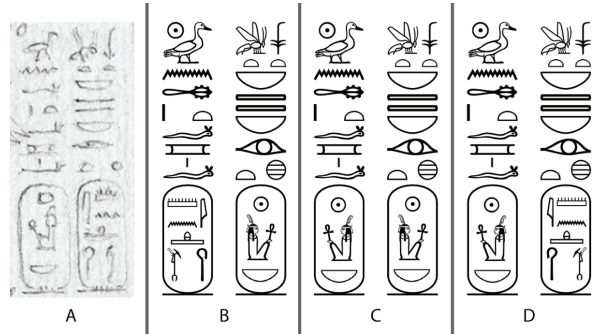


Words spoken by Satet, Lady of Elephantine: ‘I am your mother, Nebmaatre, my child. I want to decree that you will do a second *sed*-festival’.

These two inscriptions constitute a *terminus post quem*. Since Amenhotep III celebrated his second *sed*-festival in his 34th regnal year, the decoration of the South Temple must have occurred around this year, maybe a little before, in preparation for the *sed*-festival itself, but in any case no later than the 37th regnal year, when the king celebrated his third *sed*-festival. The South Temple provides the only mention of the second *sed*-festival of Amenhotep III, besides the jar labels from Malqata (Kozloff 2012: 213).

During the Amarna Period, all the mentions and representations of Amun were erased and later restored. Such changes are visible in some epigraphic details, both texts and

scenes. We draw the attention here to a couple of problematic examples. A drawing by Ricci (1821c) shows the text on the northern side of the façade of the shrine, where the king is being greeted by Khnum. Here, the praenomen and the nomen inside the cartouches are inverted and the orientation of the signs is wrong. Perhaps Ricci left the cartouche blank and later added the signs inside, just copying from the opposite scene. A second explanation requires a closer analysis and suggests the obliteration and later re-inscription of Amenhotep III’s nomen (A):



The original text (B), carved during the reign of Amenhotep III, is reconstructed as:

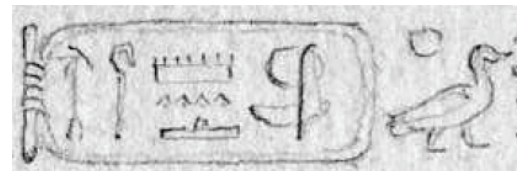
The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the ritual, Nebmaatre.

The beloved bodily son of Re, Amenhotep Heqa-Waset.

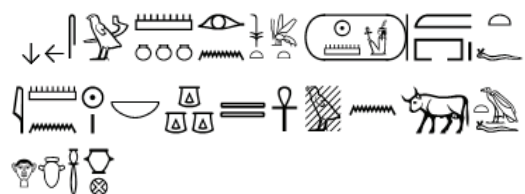
During the Amarna period (C) the stonecutter obliterated the nomen Amenhotep Heqa-Waset and inscribed in its place the praenomen Nebmaatre reversed, making a first mistake. Therefore, during the Amarna period, both cartouches featured the praenomen Nebmaatre.

After the Amarna period, the text was restored (D), but the stonecutter committed a second mistake, obliterating the original praenomen and inscribing in its place the nomen Amenhotep Heqa-Waset reversed.

On the south architrave, another cartouche shows traces of a palimpsest. It was noticed both by Ricci (Ricci 1821d) and Wilkinson (1821a; 1821b):



The hacked cartouches were restored under the reign of Sethi I, as indicated by dedicatory inscriptions carved close to the figures of Amun on the outer walls of the shrine. The north wall inscription runs as follows:



<sup>4</sup> In Ricci’s drawing the numeral is not included; Minutoli must have based his edition on another copy, now lost.



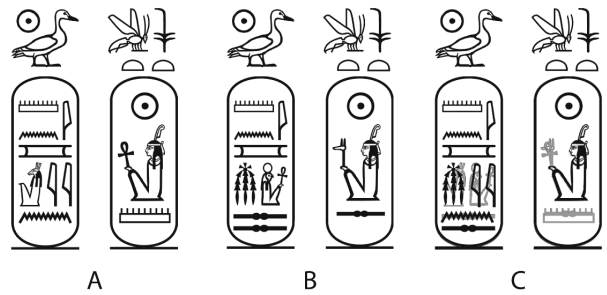
*Renovation of the monument which the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menmaatre did in the estate of his father Amun-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands, living for Kamutef who resides in Elephantine.*

Other inscriptions were added by Ramesses IV, but they do not seem to be restorations of previous decorated areas, nor do they indicate precisely when they were carved.

The texts of the North Temple are only little known; besides a glimpse in a sketch by Barry (1818–1819c) and a note by Bankes (1815–1819b: 62), most of the surviving text is preserved in a drawing by Ricci published by Minutoli (1824: pl. 23.2). A couple of cartouches carved in front of the king poses some serious reading problems, as can be seen in the following image:



First of all, in the title ‘King of Upper and Lower Egypt’ the reading direction of the sign *sw* is wrong. Then, the praenomen Nebmaatra is also carved in the wrong direction. Finally, the second cartouche has a difficult reading and again the signs are wrongly oriented.



The temple was already dated to the early Ramesside period by Ludwig Borchardt (1938b: 100–1), especially considering the style of the columns as drawn by Vivant Denon (1802: pl. 60.4, 61.5). Moreover, the cartouches of Ramesses II and Nefertari also figure in the same scene, and Ramesside cartouches are recorded in the aforementioned sketches by Barry and Bankes. The praenomen of Amenhotep III here is therefore suspicious.

It is of course possible to assume mistakes made by Ricci, or even mistakes during the unsupervised process of carving the lithographic plates by the publisher of Minutoli, but since the quality of Ricci’s epigraphic copy is usually reliable, we prefer to give here an alternative explanation. We assume the existence of three phases.<sup>5</sup> At first Sethi I had his cartouches inscribed, but the stonecutter made several mistakes (A): except for the name of Amun in the second cartouche, all the signs were carved in the wrong direction. The reading of the cartouches would be:

*The King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menmaatre, the Son of Re Sethi Merenamun.*



FIGURE 5

<sup>5</sup> Kitchen (1999: 632–3, § 401) reaches the same conclusion.

Later, Ramesses II usurped the cartouches of his father (B). In the first cartouche, he had a sign *wsr* added in the hands of Maat (C10F) and the *mn* turned into an *s*. In the second cartouche, the stonemason corrected the reading orientation with the addition of new signs. The reading of the cartouches would be:

*The King of Upper and Lower Egypt Usermaat, the Son of Re Ramesses Merenamun.*

When Ricci copied the cartouches, the palimpsest was visible again, perhaps as a consequence of falling plaster or decaying colour (C). In the first cartouche, Ricci read the sign *nb* instead of *mn* or *s*. In the second, he drew the signs *j* and *n* from the name of Sethi I and the signs *ms* and *s* from the name of Ramesses II.

The accurate study of the measures and of the reliefs/inscriptions was the base for the development of a 3D model. This has huge potential, both as a means of dissemination and popularization, and as scientific tool. In fact, the 3D model allows us to reconstruct the different phases of the buildings, from its likely original appearance to how it looked in the early 19th century. It also offers a chance to experiment with various architectural and iconographical solutions in case of doubt or lack of sources, change the colour palette, and integrate lacunae (Figure 5).

As this preliminary report shows, both published and archival records have much to say about ancient Egypt; their careful reading can lead to important results. At the same time, we need to be very cautious, as there are many uncertainties. The great Elmar Edel (1984) published inscriptions originally carved on the entrance doors of three different First Intermediate Period tombs of Asyut. These had by then completely vanished and he based his study on the *Description* and Wilkinson's unpublished notes. Fifteen years later, Jürgen Osing (1998) published some hieroglyphic papyri from Tebtynis dating to the Roman period. Incredibly enough, they were copies of the Asyut inscriptions and, correcting some of Edel's reconstructions, perfectly show the limits of our method.

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