

On the Archaeological Background of the Aramaic Papyri from Elephantine in the Light of Recent Fieldwork

Cornelius von Pilgrim

IT IS A RARE CASE in historical research when epigraphic data can be directly linked with archaeological structures on site. Various disciplines may then inevitably benefit from each other when inscrutable expressions are contrasted with local conditions and archaeological features, whereas silent witnesses such as layers, bricks, and walls regain life through their historically known context. It is the wealth of information provided by the Aramaic Elephantine papyri that offers this unique opportunity for a better understanding of the town of Elephantine in the Persian period and some of its inhabitants. Corrupt letters and illegible words, however, impede proper readings of the texts similarly, as it is the poor state of preservation that hinders the full reading of the soil and the interpretation of archaeological features.

The ancient town of Elephantine has particularly suffered a loss from destruction in ancient as well as in modern times. It is represented today by an irregular mound with a maximum height of 12 m. The upper layers containing all building periods down to the first millennium BCE have been almost entirely destroyed by the search for rich, fertilizing soil in the ruins. A steep, almost vertical cut marks the spot where *sebakhin* activity ceased and gives now a general impression of the superimposed settlement layers. But already in ancient times building layers of entire periods were cleared away in order to prepare the ground for new construction projects. When Elephantine eventually lost its importance in the Byzantine period, the temples in the town were destroyed, and the building material was reused in new constructions at Syene.

The deplorable condition of the site is the main reason it was virtually neglected by early researchers who in those days were mainly interested in temples and tombs, inscriptions, and objects for collections. Only after the discovery of Aramaic papyri at the beginning of the twentieth century, two missions started excavations on the search for the reported Jewish temple and further documents of the Jewish and Aramean mercenaries.¹ However, neither mission fulfilled their expectations, although they made many collateral discoveries, such as the cemetery of the sacred rams and a pyramid of the Third Dynasty, which was erroneously interpreted as the substructure of the Jewish temple by the French excavators. In retrospect, however, the inadequately recorded work contributed much to a further loss of information. Scientific excavation only started in 1954, when the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research on Ancient Egypt began to work at the late Temple of Khnum. Finally, in 1969 the German Archaeological Institute and the Swiss Institute started a longterm

1. An overview on the research history of Elephantine and Syene is given in von Pilgrim 2011, 63–96.

project to investigate the town site in all its aspects, a project that continues until today.²

A further search for the historically reported buildings of the Persian period was not among the main objectives of the mission. Only in the framework of a broader study of the structure and development of the town did this question again become the focus of attention. The initial point was the discovery of a short segment of an enclosure wall to the north of the late Khnum Temple that was tentatively dated to the Twenty-Seventh Dynasty. Excavations on the southwestern side of the temple, however, were confronted with a sequence of thick layers ranging from the Ptolemaic period to the ninth century CE that superimposed structures to be correlated with the same enclosure wall. Excavations conducted between 1996 and 2003 contributed to a better understanding of the topographical information provided by the Aramaic Elephantine papyri and eventually led to the identification of the Yahu Temple (von Pilgrim 1998, 485–97). Further research, however, had to await the completion of all excavations in the superimposing strata that was not achieved until 2013. Work in the Late Period strata was resumed in spring 2014 and focused on the sequence and chronology of enclosure walls of the Khnum Temple precinct and its relation to the Jewish temple. The current work further demonstrates that the settlement of the Persian period and the quarter of the mercenaries in particular are only to be understood in the context of the general urban development of Elephantine.

The General Structure of the Town

The formative presuppositions reaches back to earliest times, as the town is located on the southern tip of an elongated island that is the result of a long geomorphological process. At the beginning of historic times, the island consisted of several granite ridges forming separate islands, and the ancient town developed at first on the isle to the southeast. The starting point of the long-lasting urban history of Elephantine was the foundation of a fortress during the First Dynasty. Not before the Second Dynasty the settlement area outside the fortress—and subsequently the northern tip of the island—was enclosed with a town wall. Its course was clearly determined by the topography and followed an irregular line. On a western island, a royal complex was built in the Third Dynasty, followed by a necropolis and temporary domestic installations. As early as the Third Dynasty, an extramural settlement developed, and as soon as the valley between both islands filled up, this settlement reached a size twice as large as the formerly fortified town in the east. During the second millennium, when Elephantine had lost its status as a border town, the town extended as an open settlement. A town wall was only built during the reign of Sesostri III and disappeared again at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty. However, until the end of the Pharaonic period, the general town structure of Elephantine was strongly determined by these historic roots, and the earlier development on two separate islands or mounds. Due to the persistence of the major temples and institutions on their original locations, the town was divided into two major sectors. On one side existed what

2. References on all publications related to the project are given in the latest report (see Seidlmayer et al. 2016, 197; see also <http://www.swissinst.ch/html/elephantine.html>).



FIGURE 1.1. Sketch map of Elephantine in the Late Period. Graphics: C. von Pilgrim, © Swiss Institute Cairo.

could be interpreted as an official district with the temples and royal institutions on the eastern mound. This sector included the temenos of the Satet Temple, the newly founded temple for the god Khnum, located in the center of this old part of the town, the governor's palace to the south of it, a constantly growing sanctuary for a deified governor of the Old Kingdom named Heqaib, and other cult installations such as the Nile Festival Courtyard of the Satet Temple to the north of it.

The residential quarters, however, spread on the western mound and in the valley between the two mounds, respectively. These sectors were separated by the town's central main street (fig. 1.1), which runs on the line that corresponds with the western edge of the former eastern island (von Pilgrim 2010, 257–65).

The persistence of this street is extraordinary and lasted for about two thousand years. The street dates back to the Sixth Dynasty and was kept on the same line until the Thirtieth Dynasty when the enlarged rebuilding of the Khnum Temple caused a major change of the general town structure. The significance of this main street is also evident from its growing width. Whereas in the Old Kingdom a width of 2 m is attested, it was widened up to 3 m in the Middle Kingdom. In the Ramesside period, it was widened again to a width of 5 m and might have been a central processional route in the town.

Only at the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period, when the Nubian Kingdom of Kush again threatened Egypt, was Elephantine refortified. The ruins of the fortification have long been misdated to the Byzantine period. This led to an odd contradiction that, although a strong garrison including mercenaries was well known from the Elephantine papyri in the Late Period, no traces of any fortification appear to have survived.

Based on a recent reinvestigation of the chronology of the town walls, we may now correct this earlier assessment. In fact, a much stronger wall replaced the older one of the Twenty-First Dynasty and was built on top of it, and all subsequent phases of repairs and additional buttresses are to be dated to the Late Period (von Pilgrim 2013, 203–8). Evidence for limited restoration measures of the fortification during the Persian period can be found at the steep eastern edge of the town—and here it might be assumed that the work was executed by non-Egyptian builders, most probably by those foreign mercenaries who were themselves garrisoned in Elephantine. This is because the wall is repaired with square bricks, which are alien in Egyptian architecture but commonly used in Mesopotamian and Iranian architecture.³

Syene

Elephantine primarily monitored the river access into Egypt. But it was almost impossible to control the land route, which was hardly visible from the island. As early as the Middle Kingdom, a twin town on the mainland developed, well known in the Late Period as the fortress of Syene.

No proper archaeological research has ever been conducted in Aswan, for the ancient town was overbuilt by the modern town during the late nineteenth century. In addition to their investigations on Elephantine, the Swiss Institute started in 2000 a joint archaeological mission with the local Inspectorate of the Ministry of Antiquities on the east bank of Aswan.⁴ The project's focus is to make not only a thorough investigation of the few protected antiquities areas (Area 1–Area 3) but also systematic salvage excavations in all current construction sites in the modern town

3. Spencer 1979, 50, 143. A square brick of same dimensions (36 × 36 × 12 cm) was recently found in the backfill of the robber's trench of the northern wall of Enclosure D, indicating buildings in Persian construction methods also in the center of the town.

4. The project is headed by the author and the acting Director General of the Aswan inspectorate of the Ministry of Antiquities. Work is directed in the field by Wolfgang Müller to whom I owe further details on the findspots of the newly discovered Aramaic ostraca. Annual reports of the excavations are available online at http://www.swissinst.ch/html/forschung_neu.html.

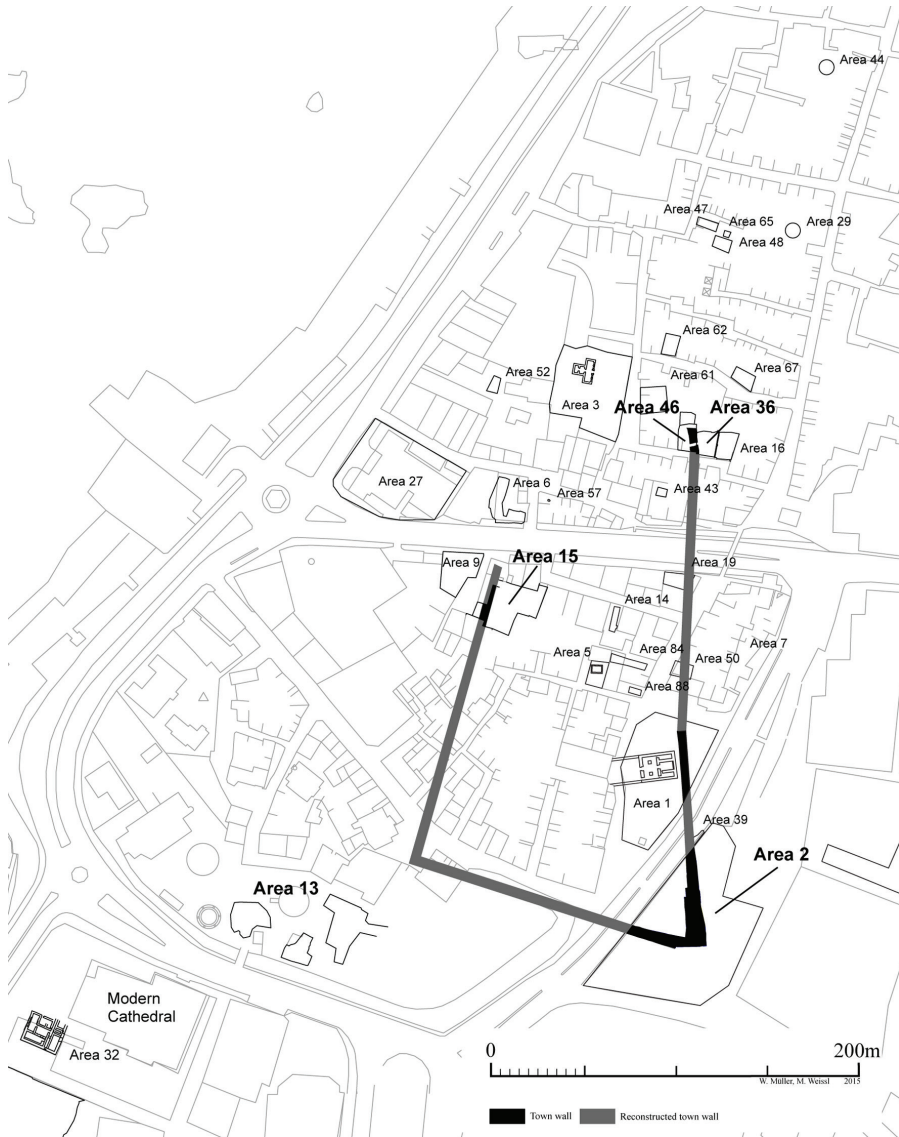


FIGURE 1.2. Map of investigated areas in Syene (Aswan) with indicated outline of Persian fortification wall. Graphics: W. Müller, © Swiss Institute Cairo.

(fig. 1.2). In respect to the subject of this essay, the following results may be of particular importance.

In a rescue operation in 2005, the glacis wall of a fortress dating to the Persian period (at the latest) was encountered in a deep sondage (Area 13a: fig. 1.2). It indicates clearly the location of a separate fortress to the south of the town. A large number of arrowheads of various shapes found in the layers above the rampart as well as in all other layers of the Persian period in the town further confirm a strong military presence at Syene. Unfortunately, the main part of the fortress today lies deep beneath a major road and is inaccessible for any further excavation (von Pilgrim et al. 2008, 313–14).

The town proper spread farther north and was fortified during the Persian period. The southeastern corner of the fortification is well preserved in one of the few protected antiquities zones of Aswan (Area 2). The town wall had a width of up to 9 m and was constructed in an exceptional technique. The lower part was built with undressed pieces of granite, the upper part with mudbricks (Müller 2012, 5–12). Another segment of the wall was uncovered in two rescue excavations (Areas 36 and 46) and proves the extent of the fortified town toward the north (Müller 2009, 11–13; 2010, 198–99). The eastern limit of the fortified town was located in a salvage excavation (Area 15) in the center of the town and indicates an elongated trapezium shape of the whole fortification (von Pilgrim et al. 2008, 315–18). Recent investigations in Area 2 have shown that the fortification was built in the Persian period, and the uncommon construction technique may be taken as an indication for a non-Egyptian nature of this building project. The houses of Stratum G in Area 2—as well as in Stratum J in Area 15—correspond widely in shape and layout to the houses of the so-called Aramean quarter in Elephantine (*Bauschicht* 4) and may have been built for a similar group of inhabitants (Müller 2015, 7–8). Direct evidence for the presence of the Persian army and foreign mercenaries were met in the domestic quarter of the earliest stratum (G) contemporary to the fortification wall in Area 2 (fig. 1.3). Fourteen Aramaic ostraca inscribed with single names prove the presence of Assyrians, Phoenicians, Iranians, and other foreigners among the inhabitants of the town. One of these provides also a direct link to the contemporary and well-known Aramean community in the twin fortress at Elephantine island.⁵ The majority of ostraca were found in two groups in aeolian sand accumulations along the outside of the eastern town wall (findspot nos. 12-2-130 and 12-2-4). Two additional pieces were found in the context of Building 4, the southeasternmost house inside the fortified area (12-2-56-10/13 and 13-2-38-2/1). Only one piece (9-46-139-7/2) comes from another excavation area in the town. It was found in debris on the inside of the fortification wall in Area 46, a findspot that may further emphasize the link between the fortification of Syene and the Persian army in this period (Müller 2009, 11–12).

Excavations in Area 2 were completed in April 2015. Numerous Aramaic ostraca from the same quarter may provide further information about the houses and their inhabitants in Stratum G. Of utmost significance, however, is a group of folded papyri discovered in Building 2 in the spring of 2014. The Aramaic script and an associated Achaemenid sealing place them in the same context as the ostraca from the same stratum (von Pilgrim and Müller 2014, 3, 7).⁶

The Houses of the Persian Period

The houses of the Persian period (*Bauschicht* 4) in Elephantine are located in the center of the town to the (north)west of the Khnum Temple of the Thirtieth Dynasty.

5. Cf. the discussion of the ostraca by Bezalel Porten and André Lemaire in chapter 11.

6. According to the expertise of a conservator with special knowledge, however, the extremely fragile condition of the papyri does not allow us to unfold the rolls, leaving us to wait for virtual methods of deciphering. I am grateful to the director of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin Friederike Seyffried for their support and especially to the conservator Myriam Krutzsch for her careful evaluation of the archive.



FIGURE 1.3. Southeastern corner of the fortified town of Syene (Area 2). Preliminary plan of Persian period with indicated findspots of Aramaic ostraca. Graphics: W. Müller, © Swiss Institute Cairo.

They were discovered by Otto Rubensohn and properly investigated during the late 1980s by Achim Krekeler (1990, 214–17).

If we compare these houses of the Persian period with those in the preceding building layer (*Bauschicht 5*), the difference in the organization of the urban setting and in the type of houses becomes obvious. Since the Old Kingdom, houses in the domestic quarters of Elephantine were usually grouped together in larger blocks, each house sharing its walls with neighboring houses. The blocks were not arranged in a regular pattern, so that the streets do not follow the same line for more than two blocks. The houses differ in size and shape, but there are two basic types of houses: courtyard houses (*Hofhäuser*) and tripartite houses (*Dreistreifenhäuser*; von Pilgrim 2003, 190–204).

In *Bauschicht 4*, the urban pattern is different, and a new type of house dominates the architecture. Houses with a comparably small floor space were erected as solitary

buildings on separate building lots. They were built wall to wall or were separated from each other by small alleys, which were not public ground. Staircases and the thickness of the walls as well as the limited number of rooms in the ground floor leave no doubt about that the houses had several stories. Such tower houses reflect not only a new organization of urban space but a completely different concept of housing. A separation of storage rooms and work areas in the basement and living rooms in the upper floors as well as a lack of inner courtyards are two of the characteristic features. Compared to the rural origin of typical Egyptian houses, these are true town houses.

Since it was evident that some of these houses were inhabited by foreigners, it was always taken for granted that this new house type was also introduced by them. This assumption, however, causes serious problems since we cannot trace any comparable contemporary house types elsewhere, which might serve as a prototype. In fact, in the ancient Near East the courtyard house also continues to be the most common type of house.

It is a given fact that the advantage of tower houses is that they provide the same living space on a reduced building area.⁷ The preference for this type of house may therefore be caused by a radical increase of population, which may be directly linked with the influx of foreign mercenaries in the Late Period. The number of the foreign troops garrisoned at Elephantine and Syene, for instance, has been estimated at about five hundred households at minimum (Porten 1968, 31–32). All of them had to be accommodated in a short period of time. As we can see in Elephantine, they were given houses in which to take up residence with their families not in an isolated precinct but in the middle of the town. This was not possible without a radical intervention in the growth of the urban structures. It required a totally new parceling out of the living quarters, ignoring the older pattern of properties and building lots, in order to increase the number of separate building lots and thus provide each family with its own plot of land. The layout of the “Aramean quarter,” however, does not show any planned, state-organized building program. The houses are not uniform in their plan and were apparently built to meet the needs of the individual family, but the limited area did not leave more space than for a very modest house for each owner. On a closer look, however, one can see that not all houses were tower houses from the beginning. In fact, we can trace back most of the houses to the most typical plan of an Egyptian house of small size, known since the age of the pyramids: the so-called “*Dreiraumgruppe*” or “three-room house.”⁸

In the course of time, however, some of them were divided to provide further apartments. The lack of floor space, however, could not be compensated by an enlargement of the house—only by a vertical extension. Accordingly, staircases were then installed and multi-story houses came into being in order to increase the living space. A good example of this process can be shown by the development of House M. At the beginning, the house consists of three rooms showing a simple Egyptian type of house. Later on, the house was divided into two separate parts, both equipped with a staircase now indicating a multi-story building (Krekeler 1988, 171–74).

It is interesting to note that the Egyptians gradually adopted this new kind of house and that tower houses became the standard during the Ptolemaic period. Although it

7. On the Egyptian townhouse and its later development, see Arnold 2003, 186–91.

8. See Type B in Bietak 1996, 23–43.

was not the mercenaries who imported the idea of this new type of house, the massive influx of foreign groups to be settled in the restricted space of fortified towns acted in a sense as a catalyst for this change that finally led to a new appearance of Egyptian towns and a new concept of housing. The main source of information about the mercenaries—who lived in these houses—and about the cosmopolitan society on Elephantine in general is provided by the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine. In the deeds and conveyances, the urban context of the houses is well defined and the houses are located according to their four boundaries. These are designated “east” and “west,” and “above” and “below.” All attempts to produce a schematic reconstruction of the specific town quarter suffered for a long time from the unresolved meanings of above and below, specifically whether above means north or south.

Accordingly, a number of differing sketches were offered. It was Bezalel Porten who at first took into consideration the orientation of the available structures on the island and presented a most reliable proposal (Porten 1961, 38–42). Moreover, since the orientation of the settlement is diagonal to the compass points, it became clear that the scribes were as confused as some archaeologists in the past, who sometimes designated the northwestern side of a house as “north” and sometimes as “west.”⁹

The general structure is clear: the houses of the Aramaic mercenaries were located on the northwestern and northeastern side of the Jewish temple, separated from each other by a public street. The temple in turn was situated on the northwestern side of another public street that served as a processional way and possibly was bordered by the temenos of the Khnum Temple.

However, at the beginning the small number of archaeologically attested buildings of the Persian period made it impossible to correlate the rich data with the fragmentary archaeological town plan—all the more since the location of the contemporary Temple of Khnum in the Late Period was unknown.

Only after the investigation of the older history of the temple precinct began did the town plan of the Late Period settlement gradually become apparent and led to an identification of many structures mentioned in the papyri, including the Temple of Yahu (von Pilgrim 1998). The contemporary Temple of Khnum—of which mainly the sand-filled foundation pits and trenches have survived—was located much farther to the east, beneath the courtyard of the Greco-Roman temple (von Pilgrim 2005, 38–43). It was surrounded by an enclosure wall, which ran only at a short distance from the temple. During the New Kingdom, the administration of the temple and the economic institutions with large granaries and magazines extended to the south and to the west of the temple as far as the central main street, which had divided the town for about one thousand years. The localization of the temple precinct of Khnum and of the most significant main street of the town was the key to correlating the schematic plan produced from the descriptions in the documents with the actual town plan. Accordances in archaeological features and details provided by textual evidences are suitable to confirm this general correlation. Since the documents span a period of several decades they also reflect the changes of boundaries and property holders and the urban setting of the whole quarter.

9. To simplify reading, in the excavation reports (and in this paper) the northwestern side is conventionally designated west.

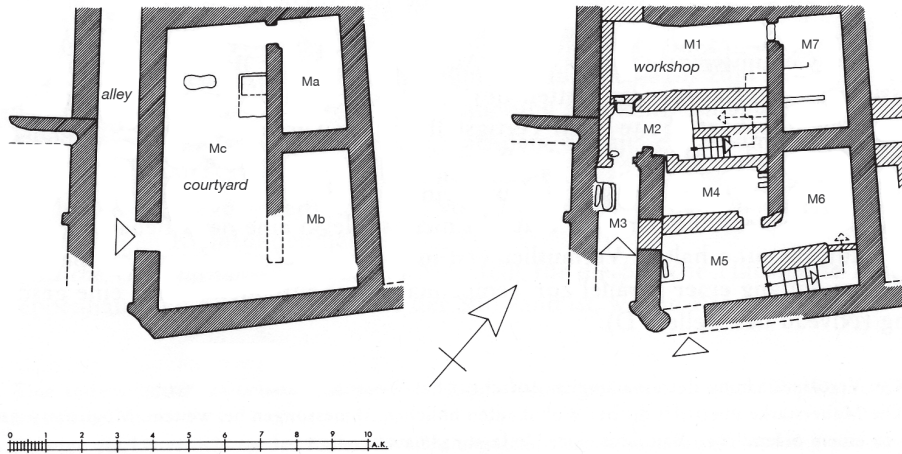


FIGURE 1.4. Development of House M—the property of Dargamana. Graphics: C. von Pilgrim, © Swiss Institute Cairo, after Krekeler 1988, fig. 12.

The houses mentioned in the documents of both family archives group into three separate clusters, one around the house of Ananyah, and two around the houses inherited by Mibṭaḥyah. The close vicinity of all clusters is indicated by the attested relation of some houses to the Temple of Yahu and to the so-called “way/town of Khnum.” The houses dealt with in the archive of Ananyah, north of the Yahu Temple, are no longer preserved, but the reconstructed arrangement, which takes account of the mentioned dimensions of some of the houses, fits perfectly in the available space between the town’s main street and the preserved part of House G.

The houses of the uncovered Aramaic Quarter to the west of the Yahu Temple are to be identified with those dealt with in the archive of Mibṭaḥyah. The documents cover a period of fifty-four years from 471 until 416 BCE, representing two generations. The house of Mibṭaḥyah herself is to be identified with House MA. Although no more than the outer walls are preserved at the steep edge of the mound, the identification is beyond any doubt. The dimensions of the house are given in two documents—13 cubits and 1 handbreadth by 11 cubits—and correspond exactly with the dimensions of the preserved remains of the house. Moreover, another piece of evidence derives from the attested development of the house. In the older documents related to this property, the house was disused and probably partly collapsed. Twelve years later, however, when Mibṭaḥyah received the house from her father Maḥseyah, it was mentioned that the northern house belonging to Dargamana now adjoined it—a change that indeed reflects the archaeologically attested development. After an internal modification of the northeastern House M, it was extended to the south and overbuilt the little alley that originally separated both houses (fig. 1.4; see Krekeler 1988, 170–74).

The Yahu Temple

On the eastern side of the street along this cluster of houses we find the temple precinct of Yahu (fig. 1.1: F). It was surrounded by an enclosure wall, of which the lower part on

its western side was constructed as a retaining wall, in order to consolidate the higher level nearer the houses.

The temple was built in the traditional Egyptian way with sun-dried mud-bricks and stood on a slightly raised platform of which the western limit is still preserved. Not much is left of the temple proper. A brick-paved floor limited by one-meter wide walls is the main feature. Some additional bricks and traces of walls were uncovered between the deep foundations of the later Khnum Temple, indicating at least one more room to the north. The walls of the temple were carefully built with newly made large rectangular bricks. In the pavement, however, numerous square bricks are used. Most of them seem to be fragments of formerly rectangular bricks deliberately reused in the pavement of the new temple.

The courtyard's surface consisted of a well-made mud-floor. Two distinct phases can be discerned, both covered with a layer of pure windblown sand. It is very possible that the accumulation of sand may be connected with both periods when the temple was abandoned: the first after its destruction in 410 BCE and the second after its final abandonment sometime after 399 BCE.

A religious function for the building is a priori indicated by some specific architectural features, such as the dimensions of the walls and the overall setting within a wide courtyard. Furthermore, the litho-stratigraphy, consisting only of floors and windblown sand without any accumulations of debris, waste, and discarded objects also strongly points to a nondomestic function.

The scant architectural remains, however, impede any typological classification of the temple plan. Nevertheless, the general plan shows a certain resemblance to a Syrian "*Langraumtempel*" type, known for example from the temple buildings II and XVI at Tell Tayinat in northwestern Syria (Harrison and Osborne 2012, 125–43), which occasionally are taken as a basis for the hypothetical reconstructions of the Solomonic temple at Jerusalem. However, it should be emphasized that none of the salient features of this Syrian temple type have survived in the building in Elephantine, neither the distinctive columned-porch entryway nor the flanking antae, the projecting ends of the lateral walls.

Initially, the uncovered temple remains were identified with the one rebuilt in the year 406 BCE.¹⁰ However, the latest investigations revealed that they in all probability represent the original building. The reported destruction of the temple left most likely the main structure intact and did not require a complete rebuilding from scratch. A layer consisting of brick rubble and drifting sand inside the sequence of well-made mud floors in the courtyard might have been accumulated after the destruction of the original temple in 410 BCE.

The Urban Setting

The northeastern cluster of houses attested from the archive of Ananyah was located not only along a public street ("street of the king") but also opposite a much-debated

10. This assumption was favored by a thick burned layer directly underneath the temple pavement. This layer, however, must now be seen in a different context.

topographical point of reference, a loanword from demotic translated either as “way of Khnum” or “town of Khnum” (Kraeling 1953, 79, 160; Porten 1968, 309). In previous analyses of the topographical data and the archaeological record, the latter meaning was preferred (von Pilgrim 2003, 302–17). This was not only due to the consideration that “town of Khnum” would be an appropriate designation for the extended precinct of the Khnum Temple but also in order to avoid the otherwise peculiar situation of a street located beside a way. Since an enclosure wall of the Khnum Temple precinct is archaeologically attested along the main street not far from the Aramaic houses, it seemed quite plausible that this term alludes to the walled temple area. In a recent article, however, Joachim Quack strictly refused this equivalence for linguistic and semantic reasons (Quack, forthcoming). The thorough argumentation requires a new model in order to explain the close relation of a street and a way. It is obvious that the “way of Khnum” corresponds to the expression “way of the god” attested in another document, and similarly refers to a processional route in the town. Quack suggests this processional route is inside the walled temple area right behind the enclosure wall. However, it is not very likely that a topographical point of reference is given that is not even visible and that a construction that dominates the district was neglected as determinant of plot boundaries. If the “street of the king” and the “way of Khnum” were each on either side of the enclosure wall, it is this wall that would have been the logical point of reference. Therefore, at present it seems to be the only solution to take the phrase literally and to deduce that both routes laid side by side. And indeed, it is not so far off to assume that a part of the public main street was marked-off as a processional route. The structuring of public space in such a way was already attested in the northern continuation of the same street but about 1,400 years earlier (von Pilgrim 1996, 124–26, fig. 43). In one phase of *Bauschicht* 13, the center of the main street in front of the sanctuary of Heqaib (as well as in front of the Nile Festival courtyard) was delimited on either side with narrow walls. The confined space in the middle was equipped with a sequence of exceptionally well-made mud floors that gives evidence to understand this section of the street as a processional way.

The significance of the main street as a determinant of the town structure is evident. Therefore it is vitally important to understand the development and appearance of the street in relation to the adjacent buildings and constructions in the Late Period. The limited access to the relevant strata, however, hampered a complete investigation during the first phase of excavation. Any further investigation of the layers of the Late Period had to await the completion of the excavation of the well-preserved Late Roman houses superimposing the area in question to the south of the late Khnum Temple. After this task had been achieved, work was resumed in the western precinct of the Late Period Khnum Temple in spring 2014. The archaeological record, however, is extremely fragmentary. The earlier layers of the Late Period had suffered extensive destructions during the construction of the Khnum Temple in the time of Nectanebo II. Only bits and pieces of foundations from various enclosure walls have survived, lacking any floor levels and other layers contemporary to the walls. A meticulous analysis of the available stratigraphy and new results, however, produced new data that now allow for the correction of some previous assumptions even though final conclusions must await the end of still ongoing investigations.

In search of an eastern wall of the enclosure of the Yahu Temple a puzzling situation was met when a first sondage was dug in 1999 and remains of three thick enclosure walls were uncovered side by side (von Pilgrim 2003, 302–17). The easternmost one (M329) is in alignment with the southwestern corner of an enclosure that extends to the east. This enclosure is clearly connected to the Khnum Temple and thus was interpreted as a western extension of the Khnum Temple precinct. Scarce remains of another thick wall are preserved along its western side (M500). The building technique and the wall's appropriate distance to the Yahu Temple reasoned the assumption that this wall may be identified as the eastern sector of the temple's enclosure wall. Finally, there is a massive wall at the western end of the trench (M495). It shows traces of a second construction phase (M490) and borders the eastern limit of the main street. Further segments of the same wall show up at a distance of 30 m to the north indicating its enormous length (fig. 1.1: C).

In a first model of explanation, this wall was correlated with the so-called “protection wall” (*hanpana*) mentioned in two Aramaic documents (von Pilgrim 2003, 302–17). New investigations at the eastern side of the wall, however, let us now correct this interpretation. The preserved lower part of the wall (M495) shows clearly that it was built as a retaining wall indicating a higher level at its west side. There, all layers are cut by the construction of the wall. At the other (eastern) side, however, a sequence of muddy surfaces deriving from the construction of the wall, and subsequently dumped layers of debris adjoin the wall. Accordingly, a street must not be assumed at its eastern side but at its western side where actually the main street was located ever since. If one additionally considers the significant width of the wall and its enormous length, the wall must hence be explained as an earlier perimeter wall of the quarter to the east—that is, the precinct of the Khnum Temple. The enclosure's date of construction can be deduced from its stratigraphic position as well as from a first assessment of pottery shards and mud sealings collected from the debris adjoining the wall. Accordingly, the enclosure was built in the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty but not earlier than during the reign of Amasis. It presumably not only surrounded the Temple of Khnum but also included the Satet Temple in a large sacred district. It is tempting to assume that the advent of larger contingents of soldiers and mercenaries in the town created the impetus to wall in the temple precincts, but due to the lack of contemporary settlement layers any connection between these events must be left open for the moment.

The identification of a walled temple area to the east of the central main street in the Saite period is a major step forward in understanding the basic structure and development of the town and has inevitably serious implications to earlier considerations regarding the spatial relationship between the Khnum Temple and the “Aramean quarter” further to the west.

Provided that the Saite temple enclosure was not destroyed before the new temple project of Nectanebo II had started, all uncovered structures of the Late Period to the east of the main street were buildings inside the temenos of Khnum. This is particularly true for the remains of a broad wall (M500) next to the Saite enclosure wall, which so far had been taken as possible relics of an eastern enclosure of the Yahu Temple. The same also accounts for the enclosure initially taken as a western extension of the Khnum Temple precinct (M329; von Pilgrim 2003, fig. 1). This enclosure

was evidently built later than the Saite temenos and actually surrounded only a limited district to the southwest of the Khnum Temple (fig. 1.1: D). Whereas the northern corner was clearly identified during targeted investigations in spring 2015, only a short segment of the northeastern side of the enclosure escaped the destruction in the time of Nectanebo II. Most of the deep-reaching wall foundations were entirely robbed for the recovery of bricks as raw material, so that only the foundation trench (or robbers' trench, respectively) indicates the former line of the wall. Since no contemporary layers are preserved inside the enclosure, the function of this separate precinct remains unclear.

Another separate enclosure inside the walled temenos was located farther to the north (fig. 1.1: E). As the only preserved wall segment is in the line of the western wall of the southern enclosure, it had been previously interpreted as its northern continuation. Further excavation, however, revealed a much larger wall thickness. Hence, it is most unlikely that both wall segments were part of the same structure. A stone foundation at its northern and eastern side proves that the wall ended here with a gate (von Pilgrim 1999, 118–24). A gate at its eastern side, however, may now be excluded since in the same line farther to the east the foundation pit of a small Saite temple was discovered (fig. 1.1: B). On the other hand, a gate at its northern end would well correspond to a second gate farther to the east at the western corner of the Saite temenos. A processional route, 5 m wide and well paved with stone slabs, is already attested on the same line in a preceding building layer of late Twenty-Fifth / early Twenty-Sixth Dynasty date (von Pilgrim 2016, 27). It may be assumed that this processional route was branching off the central main street so that also in the Saite enclosure (C) a gate must be expected.

The function of this enclosure (E) can be at best explained in the light of the earlier development in this quarter. It replaces an older enclosure that walled in a separate temple of the New Kingdom located to the west of the main Temple of Khnum (fig. 1.1: A). An enlargement of this separate precinct was necessary after further construction works had been conducted at the front of this temple during the reign of Psametik II (fig. 1.1: B).

Due to the most recent fieldwork the basic development of the Khnum Temple precinct gradually begins to emerge. Since the New Kingdom, the precinct reached to the west as far as the central main street and was walled in during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty. The "Aramean quarter" and the Yahu Temple were located on the other, western side of the main street. As a matter of fact, the east wall of the Yahu Temple corresponds to the western limit of the central main street, as it overbuilds a house wall that evidently defines the street in an older stratum. Provided that the Jewish temple precinct did not expand into the street, the temple enclosure would have joined the temple proper. However, it appears quite unusual that the actual temple directly borders on public space.

Therefore, it may be assumed that once the area of the former temple, which was reportedly destroyed in 410 BCE, was possibly larger and extended into the street. Any enclosure wall east of the temple would have been reducing the width of this most important street or even blocking it completely.

A legal dispute would have been the logical consequence. Even if we are lacking explicit archaeological evidence, the destruction of the Yahu Temple may be at best

explained by a litigation as already deduced from the texts by Pierre Briant (1996, 115–31; 2002, 604–5). Final conclusions, however, must await further completion of ongoing excavations. Only a thorough analysis of all available archaeological data will provide sufficient evidence for a conclusive evaluation.

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