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Lauren Dogaer, Katelijn Vandorpe

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Amun's Userhat Boat and its Role in the Theban Festivals: Data from the Theban Royal Bank Archive Contextualized*

LAUREN DOGAER, KATELIJN VANDORPE

Abstract

This paper examines an undernoticed theme of the papyrus archive of the Theban royal bank, contextualizing data on Amun's Userhat boat and the Theban religious festivals in the later Ptolemaic period. The bank archive reveals the fraudulent use of money deposits destined for the replacement of two iron anchors for the Userhat and for the maintenance of this sacred riverine ship which transported Amun's sacred bark twice a year (during the Opet and the Valley Festivals). The Userhat is well attested in the pharaonic period, while the information for the Ptolemaic era, though scarce, shows that the main Theban festivals were still organized and that the Userhat still played a major role. The documentary evidence offers more detail on royal investment in the ship's maintenance even during a civil war, its outer appearance, on the saline basin where it was moored and the storage place of its removable parts. The association of the Ptolemaic Userhat with the Opet temple, as suggested by the bank records, fits with a shift in focus towards this sanctuary in the later Ptolemaic period.

Keywords: Papyrology, Graeco-Roman Egypt, Theban festivals.

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine un thème sous-exposé des archives sur papyrus de la banque royale thébaine, en replaçant dans leur contexte les données sur la barque Ouserhat d'Amon et les fêtes religieuses thébaines de la période ptolémaïque tardive. Les archives de la banque royale révèlent l'utilisation frauduleuse de dépôts d'argent destinés au remplacement de deux ancres en fer de l'Ouserhat et à l'entretien de ce bateau fluvial sacré transportant la barque sacrée d'Amon deux fois par an (pendant les fêtes d'Opet et de la Vallée). L'Ouserhat est bien attesté à l'époque pharaonique, tandis que les informations de l'époque ptolémaïque, bien que rares, montrent que les principales fêtes thébaines étaient toujours organisées et que l'Ouserhat jouait toujours un rôle majeur. Les preuves documentaires offrent plus de détails sur les investissements royaux dans l'entretien du navire (même pendant une guerre civile), sur son apparence extérieure, sur le bassin salin où il était amarré et sur le lieu de stockage de ses pièces amovibles. L'association de l'Ouserhat ptolémaïque avec le temple d'Opet, comme le suggèrent les dossiers bancaires, correspond au changement d'orientation vers ce sanctuaire vers la fin de la période ptolémaïque.

Mots-clés : papyrologie, Égypte gréco-romaine, fêtes thébaines.



I. INTRODUCTION

This paper contextualizes data on Amun's Userhat boat and the Theban religious festivals in general, as found in the Theban royal bank records (TM Arch 205, 134–130 BC). The papyrus archive contains records of a public bank, which administered not only the account of the royal treasury (*basilikon*), but also a number of private accounts. Hence, transactions are registered involving, among others, the priests of Amonrasonther in Karnak (UPZ 2 198–203).¹

¹ See TM Arch 205:

- UPZ 2 198 (TM 3600): order for payment of *syntaxis* to the Amun priests, with notes in the margin of the recto and address on the verso; the order was endorsed by the royal scribe (133 BC);
- UPZ 2 199 (TM 3601): copy of a letter of the vice-Thebarch to the banker on the verso of an older bank document (131 BC);
- UPZ 2 200 (TM 3602): order for repayment to the Amun priests; the order by the vice-Thebarch was endorsed by a representative of the royal scribe (130 BC);
- UPZ 2 201 (TM 3603): copy of a report (*anaphora*) of the banker to a superior (the banker of the Thebaid) and probably also to the *strategos* of the Thebaid; the report includes copies of other letters and a note in the margin (130 BC);
- UPZ 2 202 (TM 3604): order for payment of the price of two iron anchors to the Amun priests, including a summary and the address on the verso, a copy of a letter from the *dioiketes* and a report on the market price of the iron anchors by a certain Panas. The order by the vice-Thebarch was probably endorsed by a representative of the royal scribe (see Fragm. II, ll. 11–13). The document also contains some traces of Demotic. The original document (Fragm. I and II) as well as a duplicate (Fragm. Ia and IIa) are fragmentarily preserved (after 10 July, 130 BC);
- UPZ 2 203 (TM 3605): order for payment of maintenance costs of the Userhat to the Amun priests, including a summary and the address on the verso; the order by the vice-Thebarch was endorsed by a representative of the royal scribe (130 BC).

The staff of the Theban royal bank received orders from the *oikonomos* or financial head of the district (*nomos*), the vice-Thebarch, and the *dioiketes* or finance minister. All archival papyri are written in Greek, in three² cases endorsed with a Demotic autograph subscription.

2. THE DIVINE USERHAT AND THE THEBAN FESTIVALS OF PHAOPHI AND PAUNI

The Theban royal bank archive holds a number of documents testifying to fraudulent practices by the vice-Thebarch Dionysios, which were unravelled by Raymond Bogaert in his 1988 article “Un cas de faux en écriture à la Banque Royale thébaine en 131 avant J.-C.”³ The same documents play a crucial role in the chronology and course of the dynastic strife between Ptolemy VIII and his sister-wife Cleopatra II in the tumultuous years 132–130 BC, most recently reviewed by Eddy Lanciers.⁴ Also one of the protagonists in this indecorous affair, the rebel king Harsiesis, has, debatably, been exposed as a phantom, a “historiographical myth”, by Anne-Emmanuelle Veïsse.⁵

Here we focus on an underexposed facet: on what the fraudulent practices bear upon, notably deposits of money (*themata*) destined (a) for the maintenance of “the sacred ship for (the feasts of) Phaophi and Pauni of regnal year 40” (τοῦ ἱεροῦ πλοίου τοῦ Φαῶφι καὶ Παῦνι τοῦ μ ἔτους) and (b) for its (two) iron anchors kept in the Papoerieion (ἀγκυρῶν τῶν Π[α]ποηριείου) (UPZ 2 199, ll. 5–7). The beneficiaries of the money were the priests of Amonrasothen, a transliteration of Egyptian *ʿImn-Rʿ-nsu.t-nṯr.w*, “Amun-Ra, king of the gods”. These served in the Karnak temple complex on the East bank and took part in the festivities celebrated within the Theban religious landscape. The most prominent annual festivals were the Opet Festival (held in the month of Phaophi, or Oct./Nov. at that time) and the Beautiful Festival of the Valley (held in Pauni, or June/July).⁶

² UPZ 2 202, 207, *O. Métrologie* pp. 321–322 + UPZ 2 224.

³ BOGAERT 1988; see also VEÏSSE 2011, pp. 92–97, and GRZYBEK 2017, pp. 124–138.

⁴ LANCIERS 2020.

⁵ VEÏSSE 2011. The bank archive mentions a Harsiesis, “enemy of the gods” (UPZ 2 199, l. 4), who, in the past, has been identified with a rebel king, worsening the dynastic strife between Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II. In her article of 2011, A.-E. Veïsse convincingly exposed this rebel Harsiesis of 132/131–129 BC as a historiographical myth, presenting a twofold argumentation: 1. Harsiesis’ qualification as an “enemy of the gods” does not prove that he was a rebel, as it is a general qualification used to disparage adversaries or bad people (see also below, note 23); 2. The date of the only two papyri in which Harsiesis is recorded as a reigning counter-pharaoh, moreover in an unconventional way, is debated (15 Sept. 130 BC, P. Karara 1 and 2, TM 45932, from the Herakleopolite nome): Quack suggests for palaeographical reasons a much earlier date (QUACK 2011, pp. 124–125). The argumentation of A.-E. Veïsse has been accepted by e.g. BIELMAN SÁNCHEZ, LENZO 2015, p. 293, and LANCIERS 2020, p. 30, contrary to e.g. GRZYBEK 2017, p. 129, n. 289.

⁶ For the Graeco-Roman Valley Festival, see KLOTZ 2012, pp. 389–390, DOGAER 2020 and SMITH 2020–2023.

The “sacred ship” (ἱερὸν πλοῖον) is sometimes wrongly identified with the famous sacred bark of Amun,⁷ that rested in a chapel of the Karnak temple: initially in Hatshepsut’s Red Chapel, which was replaced by the Bark Chapel of Thutmose III and finally by the one built by Philip Arrhidaeus (323–317 BC). The latter, still *in situ*, in all likelihood functioned as the resting place of Amun’s sacred bark in Ptolemaic times.⁸ The details on the maintenance of the ἱερὸν πλοῖον as recorded in *UPZ* 2 203 and the need for anchors show that this “sacred ship” was not Amun’s sacred bark, but a ship that actually sailed on the Nile, to be identified with the Userhat-boat described in a hieroglyphic source from the Late or early Ptolemaic period as the “great and noble riverine bark of Amun”.⁹ During grand processions of the annual festivals the sacred bark of Amun with the god’s statue, about 3.65m in length,¹⁰ left its resting place in the Karnak complex to visit, during the Opet Festival, the Luxor temple (on the East bank) and, during the Valley Festival, Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple (on the West bank). On these occasions, Amun’s sacred bark (*wjꜥ nꜥtr*) was on land transported by priests carrying the bark on their shoulders,¹¹ while on the Nile it was conveyed on a special riverine vessel, called Userhat or “Mighty of Prow” (*wsr-hꜥ.ty*). In Pharaonic times this was about 67 metres long, built of cedar from Lebanon and covered with gold.¹² Fig. 1 shows the transport of the sacred bark of Amun on the Userhat.¹³

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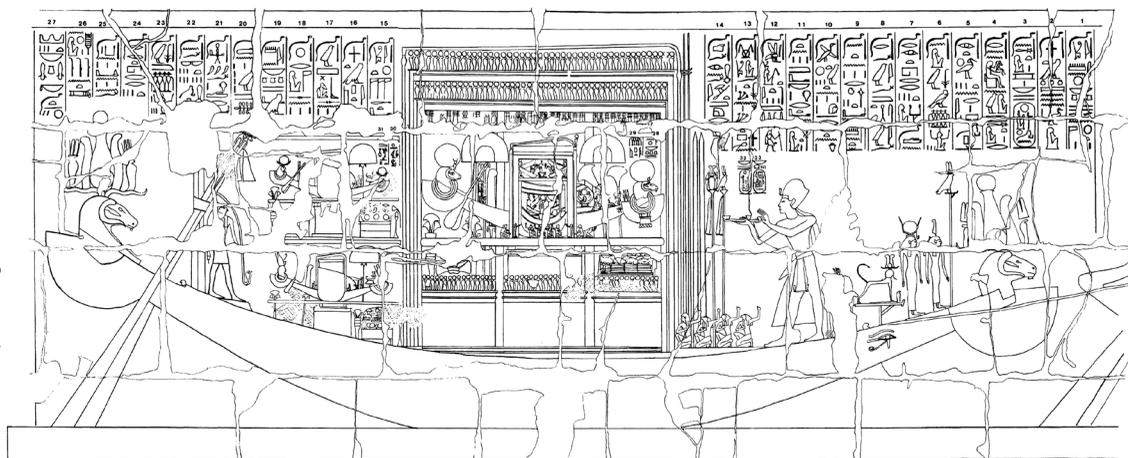


FIG. 1. The Userhat transporting Amun’s sacred bark (hypostyle hall in Karnak). See *The Epigraphic Survey* 1981, pl. 38, <https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/oip/great-hypostyle-hall-karnak-volume-1-part-1-wall-reliefs>.

While the use of the Userhat for the Nile crossing during the Valley Festival is obvious, the track of the Opet-procession, which also started in the Karnak complex and had Luxor as its

⁷ Cf. e.g. BOGAERT 1988, p. 147: “la barque sacrée”.

⁸ For a study of sacred barks in Pharaonic Egypt and their chapels, see KARLSHAUSEN 2009.

⁹ See below, note 51.

¹⁰ TRAUNECKER, LE SAOUT, MASSON 1981, p. 81.

¹¹ The priests carrying the bark on their shoulders are most probably to be identified with the so-called *rd.wi-nꜥtr*, see TÖPFER 2015, pp. 42–44.

¹² See e.g. *Papyrus Harris* I, 7.5–7.6 (GRANDET 1994). See also FOUCAUT 1921.

¹³ See also FOUCAUT 1924, pls. 13 and 18; KARLSHAUSEN 2009, pl. 14.

destination, needs clarification. Amun's sacred bark was first transported overland towards the Mut temple, accompanied by the bark of Chonsu; "after being joined by the bark of Mut, the procession then proceeded to the Nile embarkation [...] and disembarked at Luxor"; The procession also returned to Karnak by water.¹⁴

Both the Opet Festival and Beautiful Festival of the Valley, originally rooted in the Pharaonic period, were still being celebrated in the Ptolemaic period with great display and in the presence of high officials and even sometimes the king. The latter was usually represented by one of his top officials, the viceroy (*epistrategos*).¹⁵ But did these festivals take place during the tumultuous years of the civil war between Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II and Cleopatra II?¹⁶

2.1. The civil war – Summer 131 BC: Thebes still under control of the king, who sponsored the maintenance of the Userhat

Preparations for both prominent festivals took place this summer in special circumstances, due to the civil war between the king and his sister Cleopatra II, which had started in late 132 BC. Cleopatra II, supported by the Greeks and Jews of the capital and by allies in the *chora*, was never able to unite the country during her brief reign. Euergetes II could count on the support of the native Egyptians and some allies, and when he lost control of Alexandria to his sister, he initially remained in Egypt, accompanied by a number of high officials, eponymous priests, soldiers and a travelling mint.¹⁷ Several regions in Upper Egypt were alternately in the hands of the king and of his sister, among these the Theban area.

Probably in late summer 131 BC, shortly before the start of the new Egyptian year when Thebes was still controlled by the king, two sums of money were deposited in the Theban royal bank by the Crown with the two major Theban festivals in view:

- A sum of 50 talents was transferred for the maintenance of the Userhat, "the sacred ship for Phaophi and Pauni of regnal year 40", in order to get the sacred ship ready for use during the Opet Festival in Phaophi (Oct./Nov. 131) and the Valley Festival in Pauni (June/July 130) (*UPZ* 2 199).
- Another 40 talents were transferred for the two iron anchors of the Userhat, which had been lent by the Amun priests to Chlidon "for royal services" (εἰς τὰς βασιλικὰς χρείας, *UPZ* 2 202, *Fragm.* I, ll. 4–5; Ia, ll. 3–4; II, ll. 1–2). Chlidon was the Chief Seneschal (ἀρχιδέατρος) at the royal court, bearing the court title "one of the friends" (τῶν

¹⁴ DARNELL 2010. For a discussion on the possible original routes of the Valley Festival on the West bank, see RUMMEL 2020.

¹⁵ See below, with notes 32 and 33.

¹⁶ We do not discuss the possible involvement of a rebel king called Harsiesis, whom A.-E. Veïsse exposed as a phantom rebel, see above, note 5. Even if we would accept the existence of such a rebel king in that period, he was not attested as a reigning Egyptian dynast in the city of Thebes, only in the Herakleopolite nome (P. Karara 1 and 2, TM 45932). See also VEÏSSE 2011, p. 100: "Compte-tenu du fait que, dès le 4 octobre et jusqu'au 15 au moins, la reine Cléopâtre II était reconnue à Thèbes, la domination d'Harsiesis ne pourrait guère se placer que dans un intervalle fort court, entre le 16 octobre et le 9 novembre 131" and "On pourra ajouter que les documents thébains laissent bien peu de place, de toute manière, à une domination autre que celle d'Evergète II ou de Cléopâtre II sur la ville de Thèbes au cours de l'année 131".

¹⁷ LANCIERS 2020, pp. 44–47, esp. p. 46.

φίλων).¹⁸ The use of the anchors by the king may be connected to military actions in this tumultuous period. They may have been used for the royal barge, which could serve “as a flagship in battle”, though its prime purpose was “for the transport of their owners in suitable style and comfort”.¹⁹ Ptolemy Philopator’s famous monster river barge for instance, about 105m in length, was a floating palace, including luxurious rooms with numerous columns and couches, women’s quarters, decorated halls, etc. The presence of a palace official such as the Chief Seneschal on the royal ship during the civil war is not surprising since the king and his retinue had been expelled from Alexandria. The two anchors of the sacred Userhat, possibly a ship of about 67 metres in length (see above), had a weight of about 220 kg in all, suitable for a large royal river barge. With the 40 talents provided by the Crown, the iron anchors of the Userhat could be replaced.²⁰

The sum of 90 talents was not transferred directly to the private account (*thema idiotikon*) of the priests of Amonrasonther, but to a kind of escrow account of the Theban bank. Once the priests invoiced the actual costs involved (see below), the money would then be available to them.

The above procedure shows that even in difficult times the Ptolemaic king acknowledged the importance of traditional religious festivities by continuing his investments, of course undoubtedly at the same time counting on the support of the mighty Theban priesthood at a time of dynastic strife.

In the same period as the 90 talents were deposited by the Crown, the priests withdrew from their private account 250 talents to buy the γέρας πτεροφορίας, the priestly perquisite of collecting the income of the priesthood of the *pterophoria* (UPZ 2 200). The priests named *pterophoroi* (“feathered, winged”) after their particular headdress and called the “scribes of the sacred book” (*sh.w n mdy-ntr*) in Egyptian Demotic, were responsible for the texts which preserved the rituals necessary for the divine and royal cults.²¹ The 250 talents for the *geras*, intended for the Crown, were first deposited on an escrow account of the Theban bank as the origin of the money had to be scrutinized before the sale could be approved.

2.2. The civil war – Autumn 131 BC: Thebes under control of Cleopatra II, leading to a delay in the Userhat’s maintenance

Cleopatra II was recognised as sole ruler in Thebes by 10 Thoth (the beginning of the Egyptian year) or October 4, 131 BC at the latest, but only for a maximum of two months as the king would regain control of the Theban area between November 22 and December 4 of that same year.

¹⁸ MOOREN 1975, Prosopography no. 0293; Pros.Ptol. 14695; TM People 14922.

¹⁹ THOMPSON 2013, p. 193.

²⁰ Pace Bogaert, who considered the 40 talents a pledge. For the value of iron, see below note 68.

²¹ The *pterophoroi* are to be distinguished from the *hierogrammateis*, see PFEIFFER 2004, p. 78; NESPOULOUS-PHALIPPOU 2015, pp. 170–172.

We do not know whether the Opet Festival took place²² as it would need to be organized during Cleopatra's two-month reign. In any case, the maintenance of the Userhat had not been carried out before the festival took place as the costs were not invoiced until Pauni or July 131 BC (*UPZ* 2 203), when the Userhat was refurbished in view of the Valley Festival. So the two anchors had not been replaced in time for the Opet Festival.

Moreover, at that time, the dynastic strife involving the king's loss of control in the region provided opportunities to the vice-Thebarch to commit fraud in himself using part of the 250 talents that the priests had paid for the income of the priestly office of the *pterophoria* and had deposited on an escrow account: 90 out of these 250 talents were fraudulently diverted to a certain Harsiesis, who would later be qualified as "the gods' enemy" (ὁ θεοῖσιν ἔκτρος, *UPZ* 2 199, l. 4), a general qualification used in other papyri and in Greek literature to disparage adversaries or bad people, including frauds.²³ On 10 November 131 BC, shortly before the king regained control of the area, the vice-Thebarch must have known that the king was winning and that the fraud would be disclosed. In a panicking mood, he wrote to the banker explaining the problem and expressing his regrets and his fear that his act would be considered sacrilegious; after all, the 250 talents were for the purchase of a priestly office. The vice-Thebarch suggested using the money intended for the Userhat's maintenance and for the anchors (90 talents) to fill the gap. He had convinced (and probably pressurized) the priests, who were entitled to that sum, to "lend" the money, promising to refund the 90 talents from his own pocket at a later stage. The vice-Thebarch furthermore ordered the banker to get rid of all the records so that the fraud could not be traced, although the latter took his precautions by copying the vice-Thebarch's letter on the back of another document (*BGU* 10 1925).

2.3. The civil war – Winter 131 until Summer 130 BC: Thebes regained by the king and organisation of the Valley Festival, on which occasion the Userhat finally received its maintenance and the anchors were replaced

Between November 22 and December 4 131 BC Euergetes II regained control of Thebes, although Cleopatra II could still count on the support of nearby Hermonthis. The vice-Thebarch's fraud was not immediately detected.

- A few months later, in the month of Pharmouthi (April-May) we know for sure that the king was in Thebes with his troops (*UPZ* 2 212, ll. 3–4; 213, ll. 7–8). Also higher officials accompanied him, as they had been expelled from Alexandria, among them undoubtedly the right hand of the king, the finance minister (*dioiketes*) Apollonios. The priests had probably complained when the king was in the area, as on 21 May 130 BC, apparently in view of the Valley Festival in Pauni (June/July), the *dioiketes* in person urged the Thebarch to replace the Userhat's two anchors (*UPZ* 2 202, Fragm. I, ll. 1–6, and Fragm. II, ll. 1–5). The request came into the hands of the (fraudulent) vice-Thebarch,

²² For another example of the Opet Festival not taking place (21st dynasty), see KRUCHTEN 1991, p. 183; CABROL 2001, p. 732.

²³ VEÏSSE 2011. On the problematic identification of Harsiesis, see above, notes 5 and 16.

who followed up the case (*UPZ 2 202*). We do not know whether the anchors were replaced in time, but apparently the priests were reimbursed only shortly after the Valley Festival, after a man called Panas had provided information on the market price of iron objects.²⁴ The vice-Thebarch addressed a pay order to the banker Herakleides on 19 Pauni (July 10), date of *UPZ 2 202*, to pay out the 40 talents to the priests.

- Also the maintenance of the Userhat had been delayed, as the costs were not invoiced until Pauni or July 131 BC (*UPZ 2 203*), when the vice-Thebarch issued an order to pay 36 talents 4600 drachmas to the priests.
- As a result, the priests were short of money in view of the preparation of the Valley Festival. Therefore, they cancelled the purchase of the *geras* of the *pterophoria* for which they had already put aside 250 talents. The money had for several months already been blocked in an escrow account of the bank, officially because the Thebarch had the right to scrutinize the origin of the 250 talents, but probably rather because the vice-Thebarch had embezzled part of the money. Consequently, the priests had already for several months been without income from the *geras*. They requested the money back shortly before 18 Pachons (June 9) as they were in need of the money for “urgent services of the temple” and because they wanted to use it for other liturgies (*UPZ 2 200*, ll. 11–12). The vice-Thebarch agreed to refund the priests, issuing a pay order (*UPZ 2 200*), to which the royal scribe or his representative had to agree; the latter did this on the proviso that the origin of the money was “clean” (*UPZ 2 200*, ll. 1–3). Nevertheless, it took another two months before the priests were actually refunded (the Valley Festival had already taken place) (*UPZ 2 201*). Moreover, the amount of money returned was 160 talents and not the initial 250 talents, as 90 talents were still missing due to the fraudulent behaviour of the vice-Thebarch, who in the meantime had been sacked along with the Thebarch Demetrios and the former banker Diogenes. The latter had participated in the fraud, although undoubtedly under pressure; the former was probably held accountable for the deeds of his subordinate.

The priests were the victims of the vice-Thebarch’s actions: they lost 90 talents of their own money, and were refunded only after the Valley Festival for the costs involved in the Userhat’s maintenance (40 talents for the replacement of the anchors and 36 talents 4600 drachmas for the refurbishment of the Userhat). It is not clear whether the king was present at the Valley Festival in June/July or if he had already fled to Cyprus.²⁵

²⁴ The price was 500 bronze drachmas per mina weight, that is 40 talents in money for the total weight of 220 kg of iron, see *UPZ 2 202*, Fragm. II, ll. 6–10 and see below, note 68.

²⁵ The king fled to Cyprus sometime after April/May 130 BC, see LANCIEERS 2020, pp. 45–47 and 53.

3. THE DIVINE USERHAT IN THE PTOLEMAIC PERIOD

3.1. References to the Userhat and the main Theban festivals

The Userhat was a divine riverine vessel that carried the sacred bark of Amun to and/or from Luxor on the East bank during the Opet Festival and to the West bank during the Valley Festival. It is often depicted on reliefs and described in detail in Pharaonic texts, while evidence for the Userhat in Ptolemaic times is scarce. That the Userhat under Ptolemy VIII still carried Amun's sacred bark twice a year is confirmed by our Theban bank records that refer to “the sacred vessel for Phaophi and Pauni of year 40” (τοῦ ἱεροῦ πλοίου τοῦ Φαῶφι καὶ Παῦνι τοῦ μ ἔτους) in 131/130 BC, for these occasions to be refurbished with funds of the Crown.

Further evidence for a Ptolemaic version of the Userhat is provided by the Karnak Decree, edited by Guy Wagner.²⁶ In the year of its issue, Ptolemy V, VI or VIII²⁷ was personally present with his sister-wife at a festival and was honored because of “the constructions carried out under ancient kings at the cost of considerable expense and the repairs carried out thanks to the piety and solicitude of the king”.²⁸ The Userhat was “fully prepared” for a festival, undoubtedly for the Valley Festival²⁹ (τὸ ἱερὸν πλοῖον κατεσκευασμένον καθόλ[ου], Fragm. C-D, ll. 9–10); “On the 9th day, during the Ammonieia Festival, he (the king) set up the statue of the god on it (the Userhat), which was towed to the temple as also during other Nile crossings”.³⁰

The Hermias lawsuit dossier³¹ does not mention the Userhat, but provides further evidence of the organisation of the Valley Festival in 117 BC, when Demetrios the viceroy (*epistrategos*)

²⁶ WAGNER 1970, no. 1 (TM 98534). Wagner dates this inscription to the reign of Ptolemy V. For a date under the reign of Ptolemy VI (152/1) or VIII (141/140), see BIELMAN SÁNCHEZ, LENZO 2015, pp. 128, 199–200. For a possible date under Ptolemy V (between 193/192 and 181 BC) or Ptolemy VIII (c. 142–140 or even 121/120 BC), see the references in SEG 52 1805.

²⁷ If the text dates from the reign of Ptolemy VIII, the mention of the 30th anniversary provides a clue to the date of the decree according to Lucia Criscuolo and Willy Clarysse (see CRISCUOLO 1995, pp. 23–24, nn. 14 and 20): in 141/140 BC, Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II had held power for 30 years. The Heb-Sed Festival was regularly celebrated after 30 years of reign, to be repeated thereafter every three years (first celebration after 30 years, then repeated after 33 years, 36 years, etc., see BUNSON 2019). The date 141/140 BC, however plausible, remains uncertain, see BINGEN 2002, esp. p. 301: “*Nous ne possédons aucune certitude sur la nature même de ces τριακονετηριδες: sont-elles des anniversaires de règne ou des cycles sacrés?*”; Jean Bingen further suggests that the mention of (a) ἱέραξ on a ship from Alexandria, does not refer to the well-known official Hierax (*floruit* under Ptolemy VIII), but rather to the falcon-figure on the prow of a ship (“*la figure du proue*”).

²⁸ Fragm. C-D, ll. 14–16. For the Greek text, see also BINGEN 2002, pp. 298–299.

²⁹ We believe that (as suggested by the editor WAGNER 1970, p. 17) the Karnak priestly decree, part C+D, refers to the Valley Festival, not only because it mentions the *diabasis* or crossing (l. 12) of the “sacred ship” (the Userhat, l. 10) to the Memnoneia on the West bank (l. 2), but also because the crossing happens τοῖς Ἀμμωνιείοις, that is “during the Ammonieia” festival (l. 11), on the occasion of which the “statue of the god” (l. 11) is transported. The use of the plural “crossings” in the clause “the statue (on the Userhat) ... being towed as also during other crossings” is in our view not problematic, as it may compare the current crossing to the previous annual crossings. For another view, see SMITH 2020–2023, pp. 45–46.

³⁰ τῆι δὲ θ τοῖς Ἀμμωνιείοις κατέστησεν ἐν αὐτοῖσι τὸν ἀ[νδριάντα τοῦ θε]οῦ εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν ῥῦμουλκούμενον καθότι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων διαβάσει[ν], Fragm. C-D, ll. 10–12, see WAGNER 1970, p. 17, who translates: “*Le 9^e jour, pour/lors les fêtes d’Ammôn, il fit élever sur elle (= la barque sacrée) la statue du dieu qui était ainsi halée jusqu’au temple exactement comme lors des autres traverses*”; G. Wagner considers “the temple” (τὸ ἱερὸν) one of the stations on the West bank. ῥῦμουλκούμενον, “being towed”, grammatically belongs to τὸν ἀ[νδριάντα τοῦ θε]οῦ, “the god’s statue”, which was of course towed together with the Userhat on which it was placed.

³¹ Hermias was a military officer who sued a choachyte family which, according to him, had illegally taken possession of a Theban house formerly owned by his father. Several trials were held, the details of which are found in *P. Tor. Choach.* 11 (TM 3561), 11bis (TM 3562) and 12 (TM 3563) (125–117 BC).

as the king's deputy and the local governor (*strategos*), who was based in Latopolis, traveled in the month of Pauni to Thebes to participate in the *diabasis* or Nile "crossing" of the greatest god Amun; perhaps also the *chrematistai* (Greek judges), who had their home base in the Greek city of Ptolemais, were present.³² Also on 11 Pauni 111 BC the viceroy Phommous issued orders in Thebes, perhaps again present in the city to attend (or after attending) the Valley Festival.³³

Furthermore, the Hermias trial dossier provides information on the role the *pastophoroi*-priests³⁴ played during festivals; they performed services in the procession during the "yearly crossings of Amun to the Memnoneia" (the Valley Festival), and "on public and legally established and named feast days" (ἐν ταῖς γινόμεναις δημοτελέσιν ἐνθέσμοις καὶ ἐπωνύμοις ἡμέραις, undoubtedly including the Valley and Opet Festivals) they prepared the processional routes by scattering dust or sand on them: on the *dromos* of Amun and inside his temple, and on the *dromos* of Mut and inside her temple.³⁵

The Karnak Decree, the royal bank archive and the Hermias texts all show the importance that the Ptolemaic king still attached to the Valley Festival in the second century BC. The spatial distribution of funerary assemblages in the Theban necropolis may be further evidence for the importance of the Valley Festival during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. This festival was still instrumental in the rejuvenation of the deceased: the places chosen for secondary burials tended to be located in areas that have a connection to the festival.³⁶ Finally, in the Roman period the Userhat is still mentioned, for instance, in a version of the Book of Traversing Eternity: "You shall see the Userhat decorated in its regalia [ornamental elements; *hkrw*],"³⁷ and in the Liturgy of Opening the Mouth for Breathing: "You will ro[w] in the 'Mighty of Prow' bark. You will mo[or] at the House of Amun."³⁸

32 P. Tor. Choach. 12 (TM 3563), col. II, l. 35 – III, l. 3: ἐν δὲ τῷ Παῦνι τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔτους ἐπιβαλόντος σοῦ εἰς τὴν Διὸς πόλιν σὺν τῷ Δημητρίῳ πρὸς τὴν διάβασιν τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ Ἄμμωνος; see P.W. Pestman, in P. Tor. Choach., pp. xxvi–xxvii and p. 184, note a.

33 P. Tor. Choach. 4 (TM 3593); see for this suggestion P.W. Pestman, in P. Tor. Choach., p. xxvii.

34 The text only mentions the title of *choachytai* (see following note), but according to their archives, *choachytai* were also *pastophoroi*-priests, involved in the processions of public feasts, see e.g. TM Arch 50.

35 P. Tor. Choach. 12, col. VIII, ll. 14–23: "For Horos and his associates were not *taricheutai*, but *choachytai*, and did not perform the same tasks, but their services were different; and on public and legally established and named feast days they brought dust [*konia*] to scatter on the road [*dromos*] of Ammon and through the sanctuary and went to the sanctuary of Hera [Mut] to do the same thing, and in the yearly crossings of Ammon to the Memnoneia they precede the procession to perform the services proper to them and they pour out libations to the dead and this is their priestly office." Translation by BAGNALL, DEROW 2004, no. 132. The "dust" (*konia*), mentioned here and e.g. in the *Iliad* 21.271 (where it is to be interpreted as "riversand"), is probably a reference to sand being scattered over the *dromoi*, maybe to avoid the priests who carried the bark from slipping. However, the bark of Amun may also have been placed on a sledge, as was the statue of Sokar during the Choiak Festival. This sledge was towed from the eastern gate, around the walls of the Karnak complex, towards the Opet temple. A similar phenomenon may have occurred for Amun's bark and the sand would then have served to facilitate the towing of the sledge. For the statue of Sokar towed on a sledge, see WOHLGEMUTH 1957, p. 97, and GRAINDORGE-HÉREIL 1994, pp. 26–28.

36 DOGAER 2020. For a different interpretation of the spatial distribution of Ptolemaic and Roman period secondary burials in the Theban necropolis, see SMITH 2020-2023, pp. 49–51.

37 KLOTZ 2012, p. 390; For P. Leiden T 32, *Book of Traversing Eternity*, see HERBIN 1994.

38 SMITH 1993, pp. 76–78.

3.2. Priests in charge of the Userhat³⁹

According to the late Ptolemaic royal bank archive “priests” (ἱερεῖς, these are “pure” (*wab*)-priests) were in charge of the maintenance of the Userhat. Early Ptolemaic block and striding statues of a well-known Theban family⁴⁰ show that, at least at that time, the highest echelons of the priesthood were responsible for Amun’s Userhat: Pchorchonsis (II), son of Esbendetis and T-peret, and his two sons Esbendetis and Chensephonychos, all held the offices of divine father (*ἱt-ntr*) and prophet (*ḥm-ntr*) of Amun in Karnak, and also bore the title “prophet (*ḥm-ntr*) of Amun’s Userhat”. And according to one of his striding statues, Pchorchonsis was also the *lesonis* (*mr-šn*) of a particular year, that is financial manager of Amun’s temple complex in Karnak, a high profile position granted for one year and renewable:⁴¹ he was “god’s father, prophet of Amun in Karnak, prophet of Amun’s Userhat, prophet and *wab*-priest of Re on the roof of the temple of the domain of Amun of the first phyle, officiant of Amun of the third phyle, *lesonis*, chief of priests, keeper of the secrets of Mut the great One, Mistress of Isheru, of the third phyle (and) of the fourth phyle, keeper of the secrets, god’s purifier” (TM 702194, see below).

Pchorchonsis (II) and his two elder⁴² sons may be the first members of their family who became “prophet (*ḥm-ntr*) of Amun’s Userhat”, as the title is not attested for Pchorchonsis’ father (Esbendetis II), grandfather (Pchorchonsis I) and great-grandfather (Esbendetis I).⁴³ Pchorchonsis (II) and his sons were probably active during the 30th dynasty and/or early Ptolemaic period.⁴⁴

The relationship of an Esbendetis, son of Pchorchonsis and Senminis, also a “divine father of Amun in Karnak and prophet of Amun’s Userhat”, to the above-mentioned Theban family is not clear, as he has another mother (Senminis) than had Pchorchonsis’ above-mentioned sons (their mother was Nehemes-ra-tawi).

Attestations of the title “prophet (*ḥm-ntr*) of Amun’s Userhat”:

- Pchorchonsis (II),⁴⁵ son of Esbendetis (II) and T-peret, grandson of Pchorchonsis (I), and married to Nehemes-ra-tawi

TM 701255, block statue, Cairo, JdE 36747, ined., see JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, p. 216, no. e; BIRK 2020, p. 496 descr.; <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck59>, version 28 August 2017.

TM 702194, striding statue, London British Museum EA 48038, ined., see JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, p. 216, no. d; BIRK 2020, pp. 417–418, 492; <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck1208>, version 28 August 2017.

³⁹ Most of the references were kindly provided by Dr Ralph Birk.

⁴⁰ The family is discussed by JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, pp. 215–220; see also BIRK 2020, pp. 417–418, n. 562.

⁴¹ See CHAUFRAY 2023 on the *lesonis*.

⁴² The titles of Pchorchonsis’ other two sons, Amenophis and *Dj-sj-Ḳmn*, are not attested, see JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, pp. 218–219.

⁴³ See JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, pp. 215–220.

⁴⁴ BIRK 2020, pp. 417–418; see also PERDU 2016, esp. 475 with note 37 (“*vers la fin du IV^e s. et le début du suivant*”).

⁴⁵ Pros.Ptol. 5787 = TM Per 460858. See also CHAUFRAY 2023, Catalogue prosopographique, TH.29.

- TM 702187, striding statue, Cairo, TR 7/6/24/4, ined., see <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck1201>, version 28 August 2017.
- TM 112664, striding statue, San José, RC 1583, ed. BOTHMER 1960, pp. 130–131, no. 102: Pchor[chonsis]; names of parents are lacking.
- TM 702104, block statue, Cairo, SR 172, ined., see <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck1118>, version 28 August 2017: [Pchor?]chonsis son of Esbendetis and T-peret.
- Esbendetis (III),⁴⁶ (?eldest) son of Pchorchonsis (II) and Nehemes-ra-tawi
TM 48479, block statue, Baltimore, WAM 22.165 (= Cairo, JdE 37165), ed. STEINDORFF 1946, pp. 55–56 and pl. CXV no. 163.
 - Chensephonychos,⁴⁷ son of Pchorchonsis (II) and Nehemes-ra-tawi
TM 701431, block statue, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina BAAM 597 (= Cairo, JdE 37104), ed. JANSEN-WINKELN 2001, I, no. 34; PERDU 2016, p. 465, n. 37.
TM 48492, block statue, Turin 3070, ed. DONADONI-ROVERI 1967, pp. 115–118; PERDU 2016, p. 465, n. 37.
 - Esbendetis,⁴⁸ son of Pchorchonsis and Senminis
TM 701342, block statue, Cairo, JdE 36978, ined., see <https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck1201>, version 28 August 2017.

To the evidence listed above on the Theban family of Pchorchonsis (II), a block statue belonging to Iriri,⁴⁹ son of Herisenef and Esemchebis, and possibly dating to the early Ptolemaic period, may be added though this displays a different Userhat-title.⁵⁰ Iriri is divine father (*it-ntr*) and prophet (*hm-ntr*) of Amun in Karnak, as were the family members of Pchorchonsis, but he is also the one “who has overseen the work on the great and noble riverine bark [of Amun] which is called Userhat”.⁵¹ The “work” may refer to the building or maintenance of the Userhat. The title is not found on the other statues of Iriri and his sons, and may be a temporary title linked to the one-time building or occasional maintenance of Amun’s riverine ship.

3.3. The appearance of the Userhat

In his article of 1921, “un temple flottant”, Georges Foucart describes the Userhat in the Pharaonic period on the base of 15 reliefs and some 50 texts: the Userhat was fabricated of precious wood; the hull was decorated with bas-reliefs, “overlaid with fine gold to the water line, like the bark of the Sun” according to the historical records of Ramesses III.⁵² Huge rams’ heads rose up at the ends, plated with gold and electrum. A large necklace surrounded the

⁴⁶ Pros.Ptol. 5557+add. = TM Per 8253.

⁴⁷ Pros.Ptol. 5566a add. = 6082a = 6352a = TM Per 16802.

⁴⁸ TM Per 459495.

⁴⁹ Pros.Ptol. 5625+add. = 5951 = TM Per 9420.

⁵⁰ Karnak Karakol no. 69 + Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 51897 (TM 702537), dating to the period 399–250 BC: the family mentioned on this block statue is also found in two other hieroglyphic sources, all attributed by Herman De Meulenaere (1987) to the early Ptolemaic period.

⁵¹ Ibidem, text B, ll. 4–5: *iw hrp.w k3.t m w3 3 šps [n Īmn] n tp itr.w nty r3f W3ir-h3.ty*.

⁵² Translation by BREASTED (1906–1907, vol. IV, §331); see also LANDSTRÖM 1970, p. 120.

necks of the divine rams. The ship was completed by a rudder oar support frame: two large vertical posts, like the ends of the oars, were decorated at their top with large rams' heads and long purple streamers that fluttered in the wind.⁵³

For the Ptolemaic period we have to turn to the Karnak Decree,⁵⁴ where the Userhat is said to be χρυσόσκαλμος (Fragm. B, l. 4), an enigmatic adjective. G. Wagner provides parallels for compounds with -σκαλμος, such as τρίσκαλμος, and suggests translating the term as “à trois rangs de rames”, hence according to G. Wagner (cf. also Liddell-Scott-Jones dictionary, *s.v.*) -σκαλμος refers to the benches of the rowers. In his view, the Userhat had gilded benches for the rowers (“*bancs couverts d'or*”).⁵⁵ However, the Userhat, unlike ships described in Greek literary texts, had no rowers or rowing benches at all, since the sacred vessel was pulled by ropes already in Pharaonic times with the help of ships sailing alongside it and/or in front of it (compare Fig. 2, showing the divine riverine vessels of Mut and Chonsu, towed by vessels). According to the Luxor reliefs, the Userhat was towed by a vessel with 37 oarsmen on either side.⁵⁶

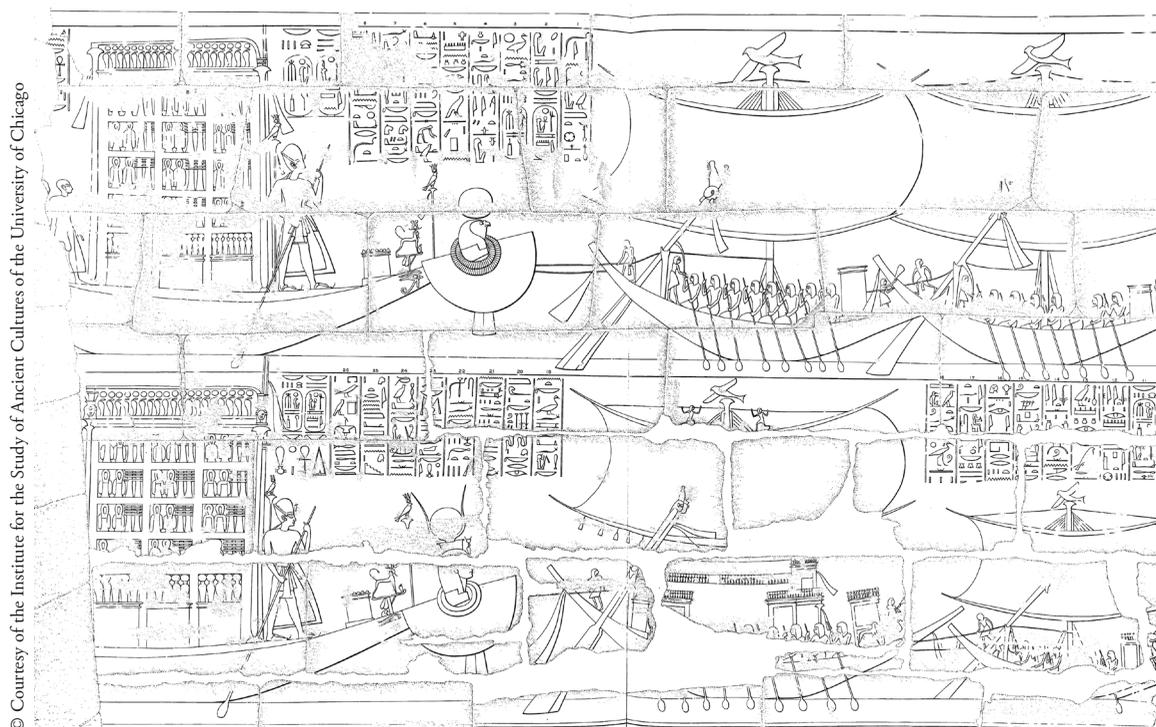


FIG. 2. The divine riverine vessels of Mut and Chonsu on the Nile during the Opet Festival, towed by vessels staffed by rowers (Karnak, Ramesses III's temple, exterior, west wall). See The Epigraphic Survey 1936, pl. 92, <https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/oiip/reliefs-and-inscriptions-karnak-volume-ii-ramses-iiis-temple-within-great>.

⁵³ FOUICART 1921; see also JONES 1988, pp. 232–233; TRAUNECKER 1989, esp. pp. 102–103; STEPHENS 2022, pp. 29–33 (Sacred ceremonial vessel), p. 53 and 220.

⁵⁴ WAGNER 1970 (TM 98534).

⁵⁵ WAGNER 1970, pp. 12–14. See also SEG 52 1805: “the σκαλμός is the thole or the row of tholes; probably the gilded element is a galloon running along the thole(s)”.

⁵⁶ LANDSTRÖM 1970, p. 120; see the figure in GOLVIN, GOYON 1987, p. 48. See also STEPHENS 2022, pp. 123–133, on the towing of ships by other boats or from the shore.

The Karnak Decree indicates this was still the case in the Ptolemaic era, as suggested by the participle ῥυμουλκούμενον, “towed” (Fragm. C-D, ll. 11–12). So, which component(s) of the vessel could be meant then by χρυσόσκαλμος? The Userhat had a twin rudder at the stern of the ship, with two oars for steering (not for rowing, see Fig. 1, left side). Here we should keep in mind the basic meaning of σκαλμός: “pin or thole to which the oar was fastened”.⁵⁷ Were the Userhat’s tholes in gold or gilded? The Userhat’s tholes, however, were not the classical, Greek tholes, but two prominent, quite high, vertical posts, decorated with large ram’s heads on top and long purple streamers that fluttered in the wind,⁵⁸ also a visible feature of the hieroglyph used to determine the Userhat on the above-mentioned block statue of Iriiri:



The steering-oars attached to these posts had ram’s heads and purple streamers, showing the importance of these components. Probably in Ptolemaic times these ram-headed posts were gilded as suggested by the term χρυσόσκαλμος. The sacred vessel of Ptah in Memphis was also given the epithet χρυσόσκαλμος in an inscription from late second or first century BC.⁵⁹

3.4. The Userhat’s anchors⁶⁰

Iron anchors, mentioned in the bank archive and stored in the Papoerieion or Opet-temple when the Userhat was not under sail (UPZ 2 199, ll. 6–7), are unattested to date in relation to the sacred vessel.

Anchors in Egypt and the Ancient Near East more generally were for a long time made of stone, with a special shape: the oldest such objects were stone anchors with a single hole pierced for a cable, attested already in the first half of the third millennium BC. These formed the dominant anchor type in the second millennium and survived into the first millennium BC.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Pace G. Wagner (“*bateau avec des bancs de rameurs couverts d’or*”), followed by Étienne Bernand (see below, note 59). The question is whether we should also return to the original meaning for Greek literary texts, with τρίςκαλμος for example referring not to the benches, but rather to the gilded pins of the three rows of rowers, or, as Bingen (2002, p. 300, n. 13) suggested: “*Le σκαλμός est un tolet, le dispositif qui donne le point d’appui à la rame, ou la rangée de tolets, manière de désigner souvent une rangée de rames, comme par exemple τρίςκαλμος. Ce qui me semble avoir pu être doré pour être vu doit certainement être le parement qui longe la ou les toletières le long de la coque.*”

⁵⁸ FOUCART 1921, pp. 151–152, on the Pharaonic Userhat: “*Le navire proprement dit se complète par le bâti-support des rames-gouvernails. Les deux grands poteaux verticaux, comme les extrémités des rames, sont décorés à leur sommet de grandes têtes de béliers, coiffées de l’iof, et de longues banderoles de pourpre flottant au vent.*” On rudder shapes and rudder posts of Egyptian ships, see in general STEPHENS 2022, pp. 87–89 and 92–95.

⁵⁹ BERNAND 1992, I. Louvre no. 24 (TM 104137): ἱεράς νεός χρυσόσκά[λ]μου, translated by É. Bernand as “*de la barque sacrée aux bancs d’or*”. This inscription was dedicated by a member of the crew of Memphis’ sacred vessel. For the sacred vessel of Ptah, see KARLSHAUSEN 2009, p. 113. For a photograph of the inscription, see the website of the Corpus of Ptolemaic Inscriptions (CPI) project, <http://cpi.csad.ox.ac.uk/CPI-I/CPI-199.html>, accessed on 05/08/2021.

⁶⁰ Several references were kindly provided by Dr Gregory Votruba.

⁶¹ VOTRUBA 2019. Circa the 15th century BC, a variant, the so-called stone-frame staked anchors, appeared, more suitable for sandy sea- or riverfloors, with two or more piercings for wooden stakes which thus produced more friction when in use, see VOTRUBA 2019.

They could not just anchor a ship, but were also used to slow down and/or stabilize ships, for example when moving downstream, as described by Herodotus for Nile boats.⁶²

The Userhat's anchors that had been claimed by the king and needed replacing, were, however, made of iron:

- τῶν κατασκευασθησομένων ἀγκυρῶν δύο ἀγουσῶν σιδήρου ὀλκῆς (τάλαντα) ἡ (UPZ 2 202, Fragn. I, ll. 2–3; Ia, l. 1–2; II, l. 11–2): “the two anchors to be produced/replaced weighing 8 talents of iron”;
- τῶν ἀγκυρῶν δύο ὀλκῆς (ταλάντων) ἡ (UPZ 2 202, Fragn. II, l. 7): “the two anchors of 8 talents of weight”. See also UPZ 2 202, Fragn. II, l. 8, mentioning the price (τιμή) of the ὀλκίον, the “weight”.⁶³ Here, we are probably dealing with a new type of anchor⁶⁴ that appeared in the 7th/6th century BC in the Mediterranean:⁶⁵ the stock-anchor, with a stock or horizontal arm (fastened at the top of the anchor), a shank and two arms.⁶⁶ The stock (set at right angles to the arms) was removable, so that the anchor could lie “out of the way on the deck”. An iron anchor could be made totally of iron (including stock, shank and arms) or it could have a stock of a different material (e.g. lead, stone or wood with a thin iron bar as core).⁶⁷ The Userhat's anchors were probably completely of iron, as they had to be replaced by new ones and for that purpose the market price only of iron was checked: 500 bronze drachmas per mina weight.⁶⁸

The two iron anchors of the bank archive weighed 4 talents or about 110 kg⁶⁹ each (UPZ 2 202, Fragn. I, Ro, l. 3; II, l. 3), a weight in proportion to the size of the ship. We may compare this weight to a galley anchor of iron with a leaden stock (ἄγκυρα σιδηρᾶ καὶ λίθος μολυβδοῦς)

⁶² Herodotus 2.96: “The boats in which they carry cargo are made of [...] acacia [...]; downstream they are managed thus: they have a raft made of tamarisk wood, fastened together with matting of reeds, and a pierced stone of about two talents weight (λίθος τετραμήνος διτάλαντος); the raft is let go to float down ahead of the boat, connected to it by a rope, and the stone is connected by a rope to the after part of the boat. So, driven by the current, the raft floats swiftly and tows the ‘baris’ (which is the name of these boats), and the stone dragging behind on the river bottom keeps the boat's course straight.” Translation by GODLEY 1920. See e.g., CASSON 1971, p. 335; NIBBI 1975, pp. 39–40.

⁶³ The use here of the word ὀλκίον (known as a word for “bowl, basin”) instead of ὀλκή, “weight”, casts some doubt on the interpretation of both words in the context of anchors. The interpretation of ὀλκή, “weight”, in the context of anchors is demonstrated by Delian evidence, see CASSON 1971, p. 256, n. 131; *ID (I. Délos)* 442 (TM 43919), 443 (TM 768763), 444 (TM 47820), 1409 (TM 47991).

⁶⁴ There are some contraindications, as suggested to us by G.F. Votruba: contrary to stone-frame anchors, stock anchors could sink deep into the mud and were not ideal for use mid-stream in the Nile. In addition, Nile ships sailing mid-stream were rather tied to trees/rocks or tied up to mooring-stakes hammered into the shore (as was the case, for instance, in the basin in front of the Karnak complex). On the other hand, in Roman times stock anchors are clearly attested for use mid-stream in the Nile, see below, note 72.

⁶⁵ FROST 1982; KAPITÄN 1984; HALDANE 1990; VOTRUBA 2019, p. 226 with note 10. See also CASSON 1971, pp. 250–256.

⁶⁶ The stock or horizontal arm fastened at the top of the anchor is “set at right angles to the arms [...] of the lower part of the anchor. The stock ensures that the arms rest vertically on the seabed”, see <https://www.britannica.com/technology/anchor-nautical-device>. Accessed on 04/10/2022.

⁶⁷ CASSON 1971, pp. 250–256, quote on p. 253. Regardless of the material used, the Greek term for stock seems to be λίθος, literally “stone”. See also VOTRUBA 2014.

⁶⁸ UPZ 2 202, Fragn. II, ll. 6–10, see above, note 24.

⁶⁹ We assume the Egyptian-Attic standard is involved, which is based on the 32-stater-*mina*, that is a *mina* of 456.96 g (456.96 g × 60 = a talent of 27.41 kg). For the different commercial weight standards in Ptolemaic Egypt, see ASHOUR 2021.

which, according to the temple accounts of Delos, weighed 4 talents (text of 178 BC).⁷⁰ The bank archive provides the first textual attestation of iron anchors in Egypt (135–130 BC);⁷¹ these are better attested for the Roman period.⁷²

3.5. The Userhat's dock

The bank records provide some data about the Userhat's storage location or permanent mooring place, as the ship was in practice used only twice a year. It is not clear what or where that mooring was located in Pharaonic times; the vessel was in any case too large to be pulled ashore when not in use. Agnès Cabrol addresses this issue in her book *Les voies processionnelles*, suggesting that the (pharaonic) Userhat was moored in a dock: “Où est conservé le navire de la divinité, l'Ousirhat, en dehors des périodes fériales? Il paraît probable qu'il reste à quai : un navire d'une telle envergure ne peut être aisément remisé, voire démonté puis remonté au moins deux fois par an. [...] L'on peut penser qu'il y avait quelque part à Karnak un grand bassin où étaient regroupés les navires sous bonne garde”.⁷³ The maintenance details for the Userhat as found in one of the documents of our bank archive can confirm this view for the Ptolemaic period, because one of the reasons why the Userhat needed maintenance (θεραπεία)⁷⁴ in 131–130 BC was the salinity (άλμυρι . .) of the *limne*, a Greek word for “pool of standing water” or “artificial pool or basin”.⁷⁵ The saline character of the dock can be explained by the same cause as in the case of fertile land that became salinated due to continuous, heavy Nile floods.⁷⁶ Among other things, almost 100 litres (30 *chous*) of vinegar were needed to clean the ship.⁷⁷ This *limne* or dock in which the Userhat was moored had several anchorages (ὄρμυι),⁷⁸ which reminds of temple docks and their quays, having anchorages, which are archaeologically attested.⁷⁹

Such a dock was connected to the Nile by a channel and can probably be identified for the 18th dynasty with a basin just in front of the Karnak temple, a representation of which is found in the tomb of Neferhotep (TT 49; ca. 1300 BC), see Fig. 3.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ *ID (I. Delos)* 443, *Fragm. Bb*, l. 92 (TM 768763); see CASSON 1971, p. 256, n. 131. The stone anchors for Nile boats mentioned by Herodotus weighed two talents: “a pierced stone of about two talents' weight”, see above, note 62.

⁷¹ *P. Cairo Zen.* 4 59782a, l. 64 (TM 1407) of mid third century BC mentions an iron cable (*katablema*) of an anchor, weighing 11 mna or about 5 kg, to be distinguished from *katablemata* or awnings mentioned by CASSON 1971, p. 250, n. 99.

⁷² E.g. *P. Lond.* 3 p. 163–165 no. 1164 h (TM 22819) of AD 212, for iron anchors with iron stocks; see CASSON 1971, pp. 257–258. See also *P. Michael. Gr.* 18 (TM 31558) of AD 225–275 and *P. Oxy.* 63 4388 (TM 22151) of AD 423, recording iron anchors.

⁷³ CABROL 2001, p. 633; Cabrol points out that some Pharaonic texts mention a *tp-itrw*, literally “head of the river”, for the Userhat, which she considers a kind of dock (CABROL 2001, pp. 631–634; see also pp. 550–551 and 621–622), although in most cases *tp-itrw* does not refer to an actual place, but is a generalizing term qualifying boats as “riverine”, see for references The Epigraphic Survey 1994, pp. 12–13, n. c; see also BORAİK 2017, p. 9, who refers to both possible meanings of *tp-itrw* (“an expression which may define a boat, like the *User-h't*, as well as a quay”).

⁷⁴ See *UPZ* 2 203, *Fragm. II*, l. 29 and verso; *Fragm. III*, l. 11.

⁷⁵ Liddell-Scott-Jones dictionary, *s.v.* λίμνη.

⁷⁶ BONNEAU 1971, pp. 68–69, 72.

⁷⁷ See *UPZ* 2 203, *Fragm. II*, ll. 29–30.

⁷⁸ See the damaged passage in *UPZ* 2 203, *Fragm. III*, ll. 8–9: [- - -] . μενα τοῦ πλοίου διὰ τὸ ἐν λίμ[νη] ἀλμυρι . . [- - -] καθηκόντων ὄρμων.

⁷⁹ For a photograph of anchorages of one of the tribunes at Karnak, see BORAİK, GABOLDE, GRAHAM 2017, p. 109, fig. 6 (“North-west corner of the western tribune with a mooring stone in the fifth course of the north wall”).

⁸⁰ CABROL 2001, pp. 433–437; see also BORAİK, GABOLDE, GRAHAM 2017, p. 129.

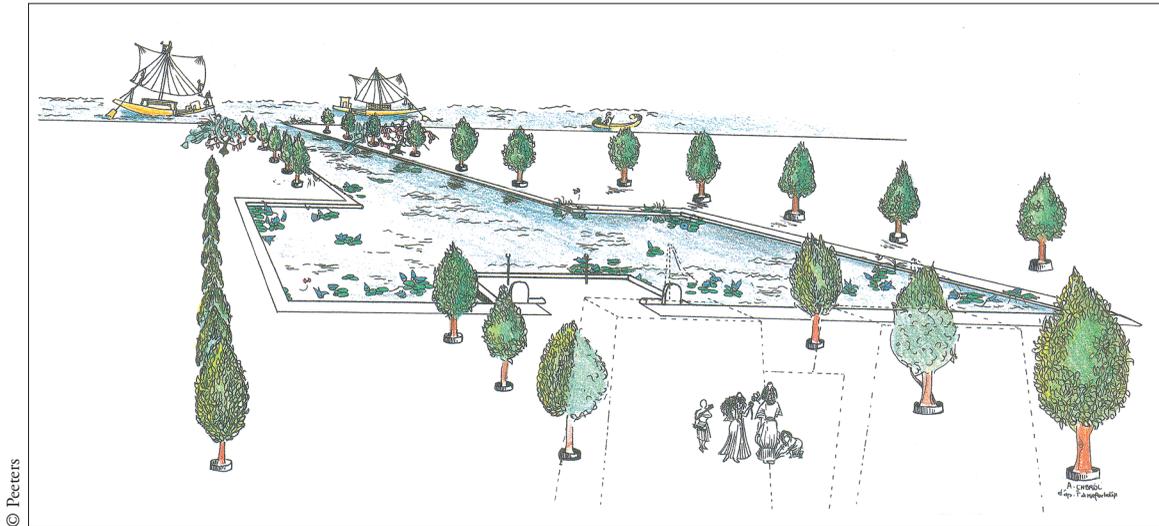


FIG. 3. The 18th-dynasty dock in front of the Amun temple according to the tomb of Neferhotep (Theban Tomb 49) (Cabrol 2001, pl. 23: “*Restitution en perspective des abords ouest de Karnak figurés dans la tombe de Neferhotep (TT 49)*”).

But in the Ptolemaic period, the Neferhotep basin no longer existed: due to the silting of the Nile (or nearby canal) new land was created in that area in the late New Kingdom and Late Period, which led to the expansion of the Karnak temple complex:⁸¹ the first pylon was built under Nectanebo I (380–362 BC) and in the Saite period two long quays (a northern and a southern quay) were constructed where ships could moor, up to the early Ptolemaic period.⁸²

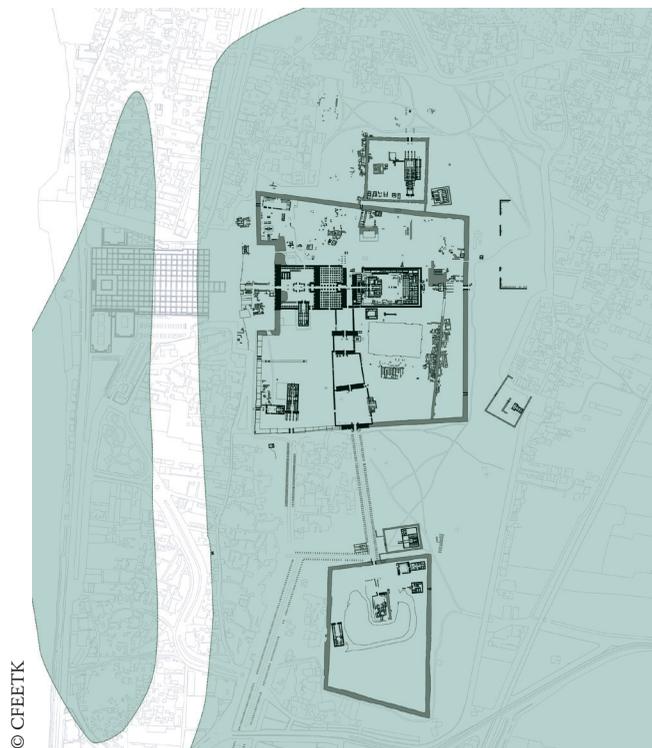
The silting process in front (and to the west) of the Amun precinct continued in the later Ptolemaic period (see Fig. 4), the Nile advanced further westward,⁸³ and the Saite quays were no longer in use c. 131–130 BC: the quays and the dock had already been abandoned for quite some time by then and Ptolemaic baths had been built on top of the quayside wall, abandoned in their turn before c. 125 BC when a mudbrick structure was built above these baths.⁸⁴

⁸¹ BORAİK, GABOLDE, GRAHAM 2017, pp. 97–144. See also Digital Karnak, <http://wayback.archive-it.org/7877/20160919152317/http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/archive>, version Sept. 19 2016.

⁸² The shrine of Achoris, constructed under Pharaoh Hakoris (393–380 BC) near the main entrance of the Karnak temple, played a key role in the (dis)embarkment of the portable, sacred bark of the god on/from the Userhat moored in the dock. The Achoris shrine was “used to house the portable bark of Amun-Ra on its processional journey outside the temple. The ingenious design of the chapel allowed the bark to be moved directly from the river (prow to the north) into the shrine via the northern door, and removed again through the western door (prow still to the north) without changing the bark’s orientation as it entered into the temple precinct”, see Digital Karnak, <http://wayback.archive-it.org/7877/20160919152228/http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/feature/ChapelOfHakoris>, version Sept. 19 2016; for a detailed description of the ingenious design, see TRAUNECKER, LE SAOUT, MASSON 1981, pp. 89–94. See also LAUFFRAY 1995.

⁸³ BORAİK, GABOLDE, GRAHAM 2017, pp. 134–136, with fig. 22.

⁸⁴ BORAİK et al. 2013, pp. 47–77; BORAİK, GABOLDE, GRAHAM 2017, p. 112; for the Ptolemaic hoard of coins of about 125 BC, found in the mudbrick structure, see FAUCHER, MEADOWS, LORBER 2017, p. 12.



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FIG. 4. Hypothetical view of the situation of the Karnak temple's embankments in the Late Ptolemaic and Roman periods (Boraiik, Gabolde, Graham 2017, fig. 22).

As the New Kingdom basin in front of the Amun temple and the quaysides were no longer extant in the later Ptolemaic period, where was the dock located where the Userhat was moored in 131–130 BC? The bank archive may help us here. As the anchors of the Userhat were kept in or near the Papoerieion, identified by Jan Quaegebeur with the Opet temple south of the actual Amun temple (see below), the Userhat dock may have been located in that area.

- The Userhat may have been docked in the area to the south of the Opet temple, in a harbour basin accessible through the *dromos* of the Chonsu temple, with which the Opet temple formed a unity. We call it here the Opet-Chonsu dock. The location of such a dock in that area would have been advantageous also for other, smaller festivals that included the Nile crossing of divine statues on smaller ships, leaving the Opet-temple and the adjacent Chonsu-temple: amongst others the statue of Chonsu-Chou left his sanctuary every day to cross the Nile to Djeme (Medinet Habu) to bring offerings for the Ogdoad.⁸⁵
- The location of the Userhat's mooring in an Opet-Chonsu dock may be in line with data found in the Hermias trial about the processional routes of the festivals: the *pastophoroi*-priests had to prepare these routes taken by the priests who carried Amun's bark. For the Opet Festival, that was the *dromos* and the temple of Mut.⁸⁶ After Amun's bark left the Mut temple, it could almost immediately be embarked on the Userhat (waiting in such an Opet-Chonsu dock) and be transported to Luxor via the Nile.

⁸⁵ Texts on the Euergetes-gate mention a crossing of Chonsu-Chou from his temple in the Karnak-complex towards Djeme (Medinet Habu), to bring *hṯp*-offerings for the Ogdoad, see FERNANDEZ-PICHEL 2021, p. 83. See also BOULET 2015, p. 57.

⁸⁶ See above, note 35.

The presence of an Opet-Chonsu dock south of the Opet temple was suggested by Jean-Claude Golvin in his visual reconstruction of Karnak.⁸⁷ The area, however, has not yet been excavated and has not yet undergone soil augering and coring, and therefore, our suggestion is no more than a *tentative* conjecture. Other candidates in the neighbourhood of the Opet/Karnak-complex, as suggested to us by Angus Graham, are natural bodies of standing water which came into existence when new land or islands were formed in the Nile: in the second century BC, an “island of Amun” was located in front of the Karnak-complex (see Fig. 4), which may have harboured such a natural, semi-closed dock.⁸⁸

In conclusion, the Ptolemaic Userhat, used only twice a year for the great Theban festivals, was apparently docked in a basin close to the Opet-temple, called *limne* (“pool or basin”) in Greek, and this had several anchorages (*hormoi*) according to the bank archive. Maintenance of the vessel, involving almost 100 litres of vinegar, was necessary due to the saline character of the water in the basin. The Userhat's loose parts, such as the iron anchors of about 110 kg each, were stored safely in one of the storerooms of the Opet-temple, as discussed in the next section.

3.6. The storage place of the Userhat's removable parts

According to the bank archive the anchors of the Userhat were kept in or near the Papoericion, identified by J. Quaegebeur with the Opet temple south of the actual Amun temple,⁸⁹ under Ptolemy VIII this small temple was considerably modified.⁹⁰ We assume that the anchors were not kept in the actual temple (as they were not in fact cult objects), but rather in an adjacent warehouse, such as the “pure warehouse” (*šn' w' b*) to the north-east of the Opet temple and to the west of the Chonsu temple,⁹¹ or in the mud brick storerooms to the north-west of the Opet temple.⁹² That removable parts of the Userhat were stored to prevent theft has already been suggested by A. Cabrol for earlier periods; certain parts, she suggests, could be deposited in the temple as cult objects, while less important parts such as anchors were rather stored in a temple warehouse.⁹³ The Userhat's regalia (ornamental elements, *hkrw*) of the Roman Book of Traversing Eternity (see above, note 38) undoubtedly involved removable parts, such as the anchors and oars.

⁸⁷ See <https://jeanclaudegolvin.com/en/karnak/>. See also TRAUNECKER, GOLVIN 1984, p. 20, fig. 12 (plan des temples de Karnak, dessin C. Segond) including a “*bassin des barques*” south of the Opet and Chonsu temples.

⁸⁸ For island formation in the Nile, see GRAHAM 2002.

⁸⁹ Papoericion is the Greek transliteration of Egyptian *Pr-ḫp.t-wr.t*, “the House of Opet the Great”, see QUAEGBEUR 1975–1976, pp. 473–476 = CLARYSSE, BLASCO TORRES (eds.) 2019, pp. 291–294; see also VANDORPE 1995, p. 215; TM Geo 12409. The Opet temple was a small temple dedicated to the hippopotamus-like goddess Opet the Great (Greek Demeter). Opet was a local city goddess of Thebes, who was depicted in a manner similar to that of Taurt (Thoeris), the hippopotamus-like goddess of fertility and childbirth, as a protective and nourishing deity.

⁹⁰ The temple of Opet, originally built by Nectanebo I (380–362 BC), was modified by Ptolemy III (246–221 BC) and Ptolemy VIII (first regnal period, 170–163 BC). The latter finished the temple while the Roman emperor Augustus had the exterior decorated, see Digital Karnak, <http://wayback.archive-it.org/7877/20160919152249/http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/feature/OpetTemple>, version Sept. 19 2016.

⁹¹ FERNANDEZ-PICHEL 2021, p. 83.

⁹² LAROZE, CHARLOUX 2008, see the map p. 1306.

⁹³ CABROL 2001, pp. 633–634.

The 19th dynasty tomb of Neferrenpet confirms the suggestion that loose parts of the Userhat were stored in a separate place. The storerooms this tomb owner managed as “Chief scribe of the Treasury of the estate of Amun-Re”, are depicted in his grave: in one of the rooms six huge oars are stored with, among other things, ram’s heads, and including pairs of oars from the Userhat (see Fig. 5).

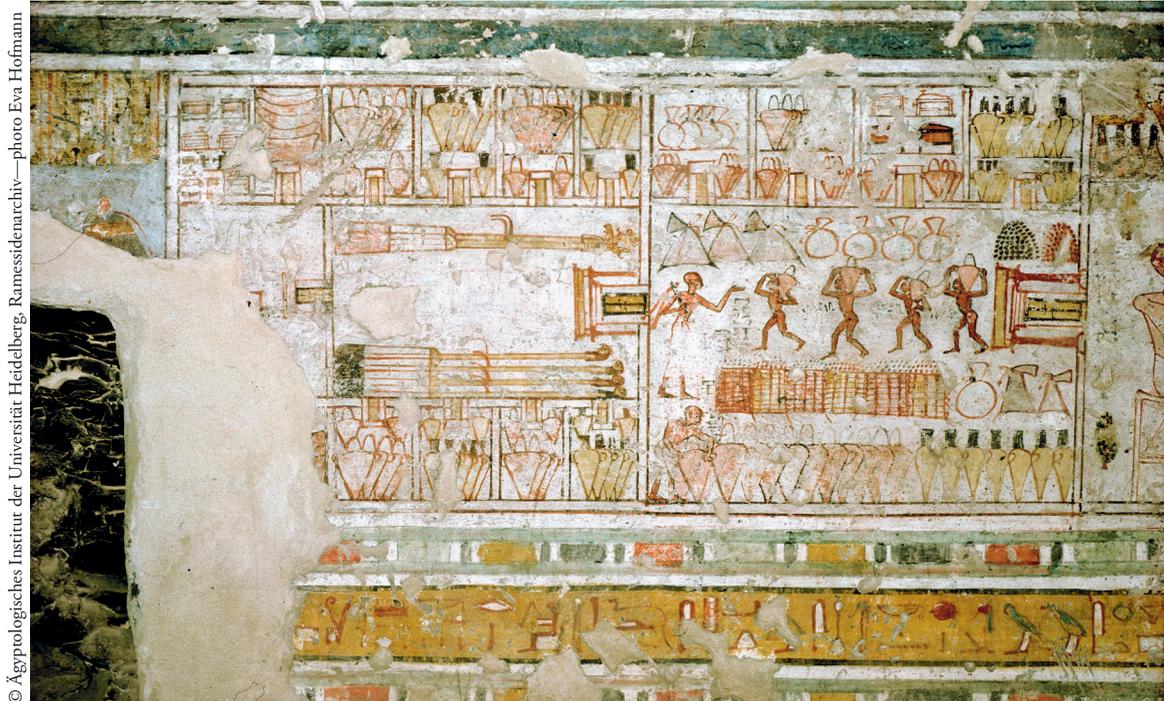


FIG. 5. Storeroom in the Karnak complex where pairs of oars from the Userhat are kept (see the left side), as depicted in the 19th-dynasty tomb of Neferrenpet (Theban Tomb 178). Hofmann 1995, pl. xl.⁹⁴

4. THE VICE-THEBARCH WORSHIPPING AMONRASONTER, AMENOPHIS AND OSIRIS

As described earlier, the vice-Thebarch Dionysios had fraudulently taken hold of 90 talents of money belonging to the priests of Amonrasonther and destined for the purchase of a priestly office. Because he wanted to make amends for the sin (μεταδραμεῖν τὸ γεγονός ἀσέβημα, *UPZ* 2 199, II, l. 8) that he had committed against Amonrasonther, and because he wanted “to find mercy from the god who was from the beginning and is now my savior” (εὐίλατον τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν τὸν καὶ ἀρχῆς καὶ νῦν σώζοντα ἡ[μ]ᾶς, *UPZ* 2 199, II, ll. 8–9), he made up the gap of 90 talents with money intended for the maintenance of the Userhat used in the Opet and Valley Festivals. Since he thereby harmed the gods Amenophis and Osiris, he also wanted to make up for this godless act in the long run and pay the 90 talents out of his own pocket, because

⁹⁴ See also HOFMANN 1995, p. 77, and CABROL 2001, pp. 633–634; TRAUNECKER 1989.

“we are pious concerning the matters of Amenophis and Osiris” (διὰ τὸ εὐλαβῶς ἔχειν ἡμᾶς τὰ πρὸς τὸν Ἀμενωφιν καὶ τὸν Ὀσίριν, *UPZ* 2 199, II, ll. 16–17).⁹⁵ In this, the vice-Thebarch connected the maintenance of the Userhat with the gods Amenophis and Osiris. The question rises why he did not simply connect the two festivals with Amun? Amun traditionally played the leading role in both festivals and is still mentioned as the main god of the Valley Festival in papyri dealing with the Hermias trial (117 BC).⁹⁶ Wilcken briefly explains this connection by the involvement of Amenophis in the Opet Festival and of Osiris in the Valley Festival.⁹⁷ But the situation is more complicated.⁹⁸

Wilcken's assumption of an Osiris connection with the Valley Festival⁹⁹ may be explained by the process of Osirianisation of festivals and rites during the first millennium BC, which resulted in an increase in the number of connections between Osiris and Amun.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Osiris became the beneficiary during the Valley Festival, rather than Amun, although the latter still figured as the provider of offerings. According to Mark Smith, the process of Osirianization added another layer of meaning to the Valley Festival (as well as to the Decade Festival), but did not replace the original meaning.¹⁰¹

Although Amenophis played an important role in the theology of the Opet-temple and his priests are attested in the nearby sanctuary of Chonsu,¹⁰² it is not necessary to connect Amenophis with the Opet Festival, as Wilcken did. Amenophis, who performed libation offerings on a weekly basis during the Decade Festival, had been transplanted to the Valley Festival as well: the Decade and Valley Festivals cross-fertilised each other and certain aspects can be linked to both, as discussed by M. Smith.¹⁰³

Therefore, the worshipping of Osiris and Amenophis could both be connected to the Valley Festival. The former because of the process of Osirianization, the latter because of his role during the Decade Festival. After all, in the end it was mainly the Valley Festival that was affected by the fraudulent behavior of the vice-Thebarch.

⁹⁵ Translation by Ulrich Wilcken: “weil ich besorgt bin um den Amenophis und den Osiris”.

⁹⁶ *P. Tor. Choach.* 12, see above, note 35.

⁹⁷ U. Wilcken, comment on *UPZ* 2 199, l. 17.

⁹⁸ Amenophis is, for instance, also mentioned in connection with the Valley Festival (e.g. HERBIN 2008, pp. 104–105, pls. 64–67 and https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10124, accessed on 29/01/2021; BOMMAS 2005; BUDKA 2014, p. 43).

⁹⁹ Osiris is mentioned in connection with the Valley Festival (the temple of Deir el-Medina refers to “fresh air in the nose of Osiris in his time of the Valley Festival” (*ḫw nḏm r fnd n Wsir m tr:f n ḥḥb int*), see Ptolemaic entrance to the temple of Deir el-Medina (Ptolemy VIII): DU BOURGUET, GABOLDE 2008, p. 74; SEYFRIED 2013, p. 102; The Hieratic papyrus BM 10209 (c. 305 BC) containing a liturgy that was probably to be recited during the Valley Festival, not even once mentions the name of Amun, but refers abundantly to Osirian rituals, see BM 10209, published in HAİKAL 1972, vol. 2, pp. 11–16; SMITH 2009, pp. 178–192; The Hieratic papyrus P. Leiden T 32, 7.4 indicates that the beneficiary of the text “will acclaim Orion and praise the foremost in the West on the days of the Festival of the Valley” with “Orion” and “foremost in the West” being two epithets from Osiris, see SMITH 2020–2023 and HERBIN 1994), and the Decade Festival (e.g. HERBIN 1984; *P. Assoc.*, p. 122; *WB* V, 28 Belegst. 6 and 8).

¹⁰⁰ SMITH 2009; BUDKA 2019; DIELEMAN, BACKES 2015.

¹⁰¹ SMITH 2020–2023, pp. 51–55 and 63.

¹⁰² See e.g. QUAEGBEUR 1986, p. 105 = CLARYSSE, BLASCO TORRES (eds.) 2019, p. 60.

¹⁰³ SMITH 2020–2023, pp. 51–55 and 63.

CONCLUSIONS

Theban religious festivals are often studied from a strictly religious point of view, neglecting their economic and practical aspects. Documentary papyri can fill the gap, such as those of the Theban royal bank archive, registering among other things transactions involving the priests of Amonrasothen in Karnak and contextualizing data on Amun's Userhat and the local religious festivals.

The Userhat was a divine riverine vessel which carried the sacred bark of Amun to and/or from Luxor on the East bank during the Opet Festival and to the West bank during the Valley Festival. Whereas it is often attested in Pharaonic times, evidence for the Ptolemaic Userhat is scarce. The Theban bank records confirm that under Ptolemy VIII the Userhat still carried Amun's sacred bark twice a year. The Userhat survived into the Roman period, when it is mentioned in a version of the Book of Traversing Eternity and the Liturgy of Opening the Mouth for Breathing.

Both the Opet Festival and Beautiful Festival of the Valley, originally rooted in the Pharaonic period, were still being celebrated in the Ptolemaic period, with great display and in the presence of high officials and sometimes even of the king. Even during the tumultuous years of the civil war between Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II (131–130 BC), the king acknowledged the importance of traditional religious festivities by continuing his investments in them, of course undoubtedly at the same time counting on the support of the mighty Theban priesthood during a time of dynastic strife. The king had two sums of money deposited in the Theban royal bank with the major Theban festivals in view, 90 talents in all: 50 talents for the maintenance of the Userhat, “the sacred ship for Phaophi and Pauni of regnal year 40”, in order to get the ship ready for use during the Opet and Valley Festivals in Phaophi (Oct./Nov.) and Pauni (June/July) respectively, and another 40 talents for the two iron anchors of the Userhat, which had been lent out by the Amun priests “for royal services”, undoubtedly for the royal barge in a period when the king was expelled from Alexandria.

We do not know whether the Opet Festival took place in Oct./Nov. 131 BC when the king had briefly lost control over the Theban area and the festival would need to be organized during Cleopatra's two-month reign. In any case, the maintenance of the Userhat and the replacement of its anchors had not been performed as planned: the costs were not invoiced until the summer of 131 BC, when the Userhat had been refurbished with the Valley Festival in view.

Several versions of the Pharaonic Userhat are known from multiple reliefs and texts, all of them showing it as made of precious wood and with several parts (overlaid) in gold. According to the Karnak Decree, the Ptolemaic Userhat was towed (as in Pharaonic times) and was χρυσόσκαλμος, an enigmatic epithet. As σκαλμός is in the first place a pin or thole to which the oar was fastened, the epithet may refer to the Userhat's golden rudder oars support frames on the stern; these are two large, vertical posts, possibly decorated with large ram's heads and long purple streamers that fluttered in the wind.

The Userhat's two iron anchors of 4 talents or about 110 kg each, mentioned in the bank archive, were safely stored in the Opet-temple or in one of its storerooms. These represent the first textual attestation of iron anchors in Egypt.

Where was the Ptolemaic Userhat moored? The 18th dynasty dock in front of the Amun temple and the Saite quaysides were no longer extant, due to the silting process and the westward migration of the Nile. The Ptolemaic Userhat was, according to the bank archive, docked in a *limne* (pool of standing water) which had several anchorages (*hormoi*). Maintenance of the ship, involving the use of about 100 litres of vinegar, was needed due to the “saline character” of the basin water, as stated in the bank archive. Since its anchors were stored in the Opet-temple (or in one of its storerooms), the dock may have been located nearby. The location of a dock in that area would be advantageous also for other, smaller festivals that included the Nile crossing of divine statues on smaller ships that left from the Opet-temple and the adjacent Chonsu-temple.¹⁰⁴

ABBREVIATIONS

For abbreviations of papyrological editions and instrumenta such as Pros.Ptol., *P. Oxy.*, *P. Survey*, *BGU* or *UPZ*, see <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

ID (I. Délos): Inscriptions de Délos, Paris, 1926–1972.

SEG: Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, Leiden, 1923–1971; 1979–

TM: Trismegistos, see online database, www.trismegistos.org, version 20 Jan. 2023; TM Arch: Trismegistos Archives, TM Geo: Trismegistos Places, TM Per: Trismegistos People.

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¹⁰⁴ This would fit with the shift in focus towards the Opet and Chonsu temples in the Ptolemaic period, see LAROZE, CHARLOUX 2008 and FERNANDEZ-PICHEL 2021.

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