

‘A Temple Comes to Being’ A Few Comments on the Temple Foundation Ritual

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Abstract: Building a temple in Ancient Egypt began with the Foundation Ritual and ended with the consecration of the completed monument to its gods. The moment when the temple was ready for its cultic functions is by a majority of authors placed at the end of the process. The importance and complexity of the Foundation Ritual shows that directly after its completing the Egyptians might have treated extent of the future temple as a sacred space which already during the construction of the temple required some sort of cult. There seems to be no royal document referring to the official worship, but a number of ostraca from Deir el-Bahari and another longer document may be linked to this early stage unmaterialized existence of the temple. All these documents record the offerings presented in the temple by different officials of the time of Hatshepsut. At least some of them predate the completion of building operation.

Keywords: Pharaonic Egypt, temple Foundation Ritual, Deir el-Bahari, temple of Hatshepsut, ostraca

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Building a temple in ancient Egypt was a complex undertaking not only on the practical side that included planning and organizing the construction process, but also for its religious and symbolic significance of creating a new symbolic microcosm. Most of the texts that allude to this symbolic side of the process lack in detail and are difficult to interpret. Prior to the Ptolemaic period the scenes of the Foundation Ritual were but a sort of conventional selection of the complete ceremony. The accompanying texts are schematic and provide little evidence for the significance and sequence of the ritual. The evidence from such late temples as Edfu, Dendera, etc. is much more detailed. In addition, the texts preserved on the walls of these temples shed light on the mythical archetypes of the temples that might have been based on a much earlier tradition. The Foundation Ritual followed the mythical events that happened at the beginning of the creation.¹

¹ Reymond 1969.

A text on the Karnak stela of Thutmose III describes the beginning of the Foundation Ritual, lasting at least few days. This took form of a feast with procession lead by the king who left his palace and went to the place of the planned new temple.² The most important act *pd-šs* – ‘Stretching the Cord’, occurs in all the preserved depictions of the ceremony on temple walls. The Foundation Ritual preceded the construction process and the decoration of temple elements. These consisted of levelling the ground, digging the foundation trenches, quarrying and transportation of the building material, construction of walls, columns and roofs, decorating the temple, painting the decoration. In reality, the construction and decoration could take some years or even decades to complete. At the end the temple was consecrated through purification, Opening of the Mouth ceremony performed on the entire temple, probably at its main entrance, its statues, wall figures of gods and kings and possibly even on the particular rooms of the temple.³ Finally the temple was handed down to the main divinity of the temple (*rdit pr n N*).

The list of ceremonies of the Foundation Ritual may be restored from preserved scenes dating from all the periods of the Pharaonic civilisation. It must be kept in mind that no sequence of scenes in particular temples is complete. They usually show a characteristic selection from the entire suit of episodes. Thus, e.g. the Consecration of the Foundation Deposit is known only from the Solar Temple of Newoserre from Abusir⁴ and is omitted in all the remaining examples. How important this act was is proved by numerous foundation deposits known from ancient Egyptian temples of all epochs.⁵ On the other hand, the ceremony of filling the bottom of the foundation ditch with sand is depicted on two Abusir blocks and on the walls of the Ptolemaic temples only,⁶ being absent from all the remaining and preserved examples.

The restoration of the sequence of the ceremonies is usually based on comparison of particular occurrences and their analysis aimed at finding a logical order.⁷ The temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari gives a typical New Kingdom selection of scenes on the west wall of the southern wing of the Lower Portico. The Foundation Ritual follows here the famous scene of transportation of obelisks from Aswan to the temple of Amun-Re at Karnak and another scene of presentation of two pairs of obelisks at Karnak.⁸ The Foundation Ritual is separated from the two preceding scenes by yet another depiction showing Thutmose III in a ceremonial run before the ithyphallic form

² *Urk.* IV, 835–838 and Burkhardt *et al.* (Eds) 1984: 275–277; Beckerath 1981: 42–49. See also the New Kingdom copy of a Twelfth Dynasty text: Buck 1938: 48–57.

³ This is apparent from two dedicatory texts from the Horus temple at Edfu: Blackman, Fairman 1946: 75–91.

⁴ Bissing, Kees 1923: Pl. I.2.

⁵ Weinstein 1973.

⁶ Bissing, Kees 1923: Pls. 1,1b (second scene from the left), 2,5; see description on p. 3; Montet 1964: 89–91.

⁷ Bissing, Kees 1922: 3–13; Moret 1902: 130–142; Montet 1964: 74–100; David 1973: 69–74; Letellier 1977; Zibelius-Chen 1986; Adly 1981; cf. Goyon 1983: 352–354.

⁸ PM II², 342 (nos 5 and 6,1); Naville 1908: Pls CLIII–CLVI.

of Amun-Re.⁹ All the foundation scenes of the Deir el-Bahari temple show Hatshepsut as the only builder of the monument. Her figures and names were destroyed with chisel. At some point also the background around the lower parts of the queen’s figures was hammered out. Under Akhenaten the figures of gods were destroyed. Finally, the divine depictions were restored under Ramesses II, who placed his restoration texts ‘for his father, Amun-Re’ in front of each of the restored figures. Probably at the same time the destroyed surfaces left after the removing of the queen’s figures were again plastered and whitewashed.

The Hatshepsut Deir el-Bahari scenes start with the ceremony of Stretching the Cord performed with the goddess Sefekhet-abuy.¹⁰ The restorers of Ramesses II modified her figure, and at present she is shown holding the *w3s*-sceptre in her right hand and the *ḥb*-sign in her left one (**Fig. 1a**). The remaining traces of signs of the scene title make possible the restoration of the complete text between two poles kept together by a rope (**Fig. 1b**). The lower, completely destroyed part of the text is restored after a contemporary parallel from the Hours temple at Buhen.¹¹ The following two scenes show untypical arrangement. Usually the pharaoh was shown performing each religious ceremony before a divinity, but in the first scene the god’s figure was omitted (**Fig. 2**). Together with the next scene the episodes of the ritual are performed before a single figure of Amun-Re placed to the right of them.¹² Originally, the first scene showed the queen, accompanied by her *k3*, Scattering the *bsn*-grains (*wps* *bsn*) around an oval containing a small hieroglyph of a shrine (*sh-nt*). The next scene apparently depicts the ceremony of offering the Deir el-Bahari temple to Amun-Re (**Fig. 3a**). The name of the temple inside the *hwt*-enclosure is recognizable in the thoroughly erased scene title once placed between the queen and the god (**Fig. 3b**). These three scenes are followed by the Great Offering before the ithyphallic form of the same god (**Fig. 4**).¹³

Thus, the Deir el-Bahari version of the ritual omits important episodes depicted on the walls of the late temples at Edfu and Dendera. The idea to build a new temple was always taken by the pharaoh. According to Pierre Montet ten ceremonies of the Foundation Ritual should be restored:

1. departure in procession from the palace to reach the area of the future temple;
2. the gods join the pharaoh to take part in the ritual;
3. Stretching the Cord with Sefekhet-abuy;

⁹ PM II², 342 (no. 6,2) – Thutmose III is wrongly described as ‘the Queen’; Naville 1908: Pl. CLVII – the king is named ‘Hatshepsu’ in apparent disaccord with signs inside the fragment of the cartouche above the king; cf. some additional blocks from storerooms with almost complete cartouches of the king in: Karkowski 1976: 256, Fig. 4.

¹⁰ PM II², 342 (no. 6,3) – only the restored figure of the goddess is shown. Some additional blocks with the goddess’ head and the text above are shown in Karkowski 1976: 255, Fig. 3.

¹¹ Caminos 1974: 20–21, Pl. 26.

¹² PM II², 342 (no. 6,4) the scene of Scattering the *bsn* is not mentioned; Naville 1908: Pl. CLIX – only part of the oval with the small shrine from the scene of spreading *bsn* is shown.

¹³ This scene remains unpublished, despite its comparatively better preservation. This enumeration is based on author’s study of scenes, tracings of identified blocks, and copies of texts. In addition to fragments published in Karkowski 1976: 255–256, Figs 3–4, many more fragments from the foundation scenes were identified in the temple storage areas.

4. Hacking the Ground with a Hoe;
5. Forming the mud-brick;
6. Pouring Sand into the foundation trench;
7. fabrication of plackets of gold and stone for the four angles of the temple (episode known from the Ptolemaic temples only);
8. building the temple, transporting and manoeuvring the stone blocks (again scene absent from earlier examples);
9. Scattering the grains of *bsn* around the temple to purify it;
10. Giving the Temple to Its God.¹⁴

To this list the Consecration of the Foundation Deposits should be added, known from a fragmentary scene in the temple of Newoserre at Abusir.¹⁵ This part of the ritual might have followed the Stretching the Cord ceremony.

In the Egyptological literature the listed episodes of the ritual are treated as a continuous process – from the selection of the site until the final ceremony of handing down the temple to the divinity.¹⁶ The construction of a temple with all its noise, dirt, dust and sweat is treated as a sort of gap, when no cult could be performed in the building as long as it was under construction. A temple was meant to be not ready to play its religious role until its construction has been completed, has undergone the purification, and has been ritually animated. On the other hand the stela of Thutmose III from Karnak and a text on a leather scroll, possibly a copy of the Twelfth Dynasty document,¹⁷ show the importance of the beginning of the Foundation Ritual, preceding the construction activity. Already the most characteristic ceremony of Stretching the Cord (*pd-šs*) performed at the very beginning of founding of a new temple had great symbolic significance, and so the Thutmose III text reports that the day of the new moon during a feast of Amun was chosen to perform the ceremony. A much later texts speak about observation of *mshntyw*, or the Ursa Maior constellation during this ritual, using the *mrhyt* instrument. Only after this action, the four angles of the temple were fixed.¹⁸ It seems probable, that the Stretching the Cord took place during the night of the new moon to make the observation of the stars easier. The observation of Ursa Maior is an easy way to find the true north and had a purely symbolic meaning, since almost all the New Kingdom or later temples were not oriented in accordance with the cardinal points, thus one has to look for different principles according to which particular temples were oriented: direction towards the Nile, towards the point of the sun-raising during the Winter Solstice, towards the point of reappearance of Sirius, and other stellar or topographical reasons.¹⁹ Observation of the stars gave a greater importance

¹⁴ Montet 1964: 74–100.

¹⁵ Bissing, Kees 1923: Pl. 1,2, the leftmost scene.

¹⁶ See: Weinstein 2001: 559; Belmonte, Molinero Polo, Miranda 2009: 197–198.

¹⁷ Buck 1938: 48–57.

¹⁸ Chassinat 1932: 44; Montet 1964: 77–82.

¹⁹ Gabolde 1998: 127–137; 2010; Shaltout, Belmonte 2005; 2006; Shaltout, Belmonte, Fekri 2007; 2008; Cauville-Colin 1992.

and a cosmic dimension to the performed ceremony. The remaining episodes of the ritual were intended to secure the sanctity of the place of the future temple. Contrary to Montet’s opinion the ‘Scattering the *bsn*’ should be moved to this early stage of ritual before the construction. It had a purifying meaning and might have been performed on a model of the future temple.²⁰

The first ceremonies of the Foundation Ritual delimited the sacred place of the planned temple. It may be asked if these important ceremonies were not the true coming into being of the temple that was yet to be built. The pharaoh conceived the idea to provide the god with his new sacred seat and ritually brought it to life. If this assumption was true, one might expect some further cultic actions within the extent of the ritually activated future temple during its construction. It seems that no archaeological evidence is known of such actions performed in the name of the pharaoh. There seems to be none royal document with clear record of actions performed during the temple construction, such as offerings during the feasts.²¹ If such cultic actions took place, they might have been performed in a temporary shrine of light construction or even in a space protected from the disorder of the building activity by a light mud-brick wall. Such a construction might have left no traces, since it could be eventually dismantled when the temple construction had been completed.

It is among the private documents that we may find record of offerings presented by private persons of the high rank at the early stage of construction. Already the expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art found at Deir el-Bahari two ostraca with receipts of offerings. Unfortunately, neither of the two documents has a regnal year preserved. Both objects were found in a rubbish dump, in a hollow in the south-east corner of the Lower Court of the Hatshepsut temple. The first of them belongs to the wife of the well-known First Prophet of Amun, Hapuseneb.²² It is noteworthy, that the temple of Deir el-Bahari in this ostrakon is called *pr Imn m Dsrw*. This may point to an early date of the text. The second document records offerings presented by the Scribe of the Steward Senenmut – another name connected with Hatshepsut – and by the Steward Rau.²³ Another fragmentary ostrakon of the same kind was found by the Polish-Egyptian mission in 1975. It has no regnal year, neither. The text records the receipts of offerings of Senenmut (*recto*) and another one of a more obscure *sdm-ꜥš Hat* (*verso*).²⁴ The ostrakon was discovered in the dust filling the triangular relieve construction above the roof of the Bark Room of Amun-Re. The very place in which it was found shows that it was put there relatively early, still during the construction of the temple. The triangular construction was sealed when the

²⁰ For the meaning of *bsn* see: Ćwiek 2009.

²¹ A number of jar labels from Ramesseum may point to the cult in the temple possibly following the completion of the sanctuary (Leblanc 1997: 49).

²² Hayes 1960: 36–37, Pl. XI, no. 9.

²³ Hayes 1960: 37, Pl. X, no. 10.

²⁴ Marciniak 1978: 165–170, Pl. LI. The same Hat may be depicted on the prow of one of the ships in the scene of transportation of obelisks (Naville 1908: Pl. CLIII, first ship in the second register). This reference author owes to J. Iwaszczuk.

central part of the casing wall of the protective platform was built above the west part of the Upper Terrace of the Hatshepsut temple.²⁵

The text of Hat was written on day 20 of the first month of the *akhet*-season. The month-sign and the numeral below in the text on *verso* is not preserved, and only the season and day 1 are readable. This means that the two texts were written on different days. M. Marciniak proposes to restore ‘month 1’ on the *verso*. In this case, the span of time between the two recorded events would have amounted to twenty days. Another possible restoration ‘month 2’ would have reduced this span to eleven days. In any case, the fact that the same flake of limestone was used twice to record two visits to the temple area supports the suggestion already expressed by W.C. Hayes, that receipts of this kind were destined to be copied on a papyrus roll or another material, to be stored in the future temple archive.²⁶

The occasion at which the offerings were made and the divinity to which they were presented are not mentioned in the above documents. However, the place in which the three documents were found leaves little doubt that the offerings were made in the temple of Hatshepsut for its god Amun-Re.

There is yet another document which may show another stage of recording the offerings brought to the temple of Hatshepsut. This is a wooden tablet with hieratic texts on both sides. On the *recto* a text of a different character was inscribed. It is the text on the *verso* that shows close similarities with the three receipts of offerings discussed above. In this case, the text contains a list of receipts arranged in a tabular form.²⁷ The document may be interpreted as a draft for the final recording on papyrus of offerings brought by twenty four different personages and institutions, including many well-known officials of Hatshepsut. Among them one finds the following entries: ‘Domain of the Pharaoh’, ‘Domain of King’s Wife’, ‘Vizier User’ and ‘Senenmut’. The document is dated to ‘year 5, second month of the *peret*-season, day 26’. There can be little doubt, that the King’s Wife was Hatshepsut, who used this title until her coronation in year seven of Thutmose III, when she assumed the complete royal titulary. As to the Pharaoh it must be Thutmose III himself who succeeded his father.

This important document leaves many questions unanswered. Its connection with the Deir el-Bahari is probable, but not sure, because it is not known where the tablet was found. The early date in the reign of Thutmose III is in disaccord with the names of the queen on objects from the foundation deposits. Hatshepsut’s names as the royal consort or royal daughter do occur on scarabs in some of the deposits, but the majority of objects in the same deposits show her royal titulary. The earliest date which was proposed for the foundation of the temple is year seven of Thutmose III. It is based on a hieratic text on a broken oil jar, found under the embankment of the processional avenue of the temple.²⁸ On the other hand, the Deir el-Bahari temple seems to be the earliest temple constructed by Hatshepsut on the

²⁵ Wysocki 1983: 243–253, Pls 60–65.

²⁶ Hayes 1960: 37.

²⁷ Vernus 1981: 106–118, 121–124, Pl. 5.

²⁸ Hayes 1957: 78–79, and 81 with Fig. 1A.

West Bank. The fact that so many people presented offerings during the same day means that it must have been a rather important religious occasion. P. Vernus, who published the document, proposes the feast of Amun, which took place on this day of the *peret*-season.²⁹ The first line mentions the place where the offerings were presented. Vernus translates this fragment: *enumeration des offrandes faites dans (le district) du canal*.³⁰ Further he points to two ostraca from Deir el-Bahari, with mentions of two channels. One of these documents is especially important: its text lists participants, Senenmut among others, in some event that takes place on the ‘landing stage (*d3d3w*) of the channel’.³¹ But the word *d3d3w* was also interpreted as a building or a colonnade within the temple precinct that served as a resting place during temple processions.³² Could it not be the place arranged for a temporary cult located at the entry to the temple under the construction? Could not this celebration precede by two years the actual Foundation Ritual in the Upper Temple at Deir el-Bahari in year seven? The two years could have been spent on preparation of the transportation road and preliminary levelling the area of the future temple to facilitate the performance of the Foundation Ritual.

The above argument merely points to a possibility, that after the Foundation Ritual the area of a temple could have been treated by the contemporary Egyptians as a sacred place and an animated entity that requires provisions. Some offerings apparently were presented in the temple still under construction by nobility members. It is possible that the feasts might have been celebrated in a place, or more places arranged within a sacred space created during the Foundation Rituals.

Waiting until a temple was completed and all the technical activity ceased would have meant that many temples might have never functioned properly. In some sanctuaries, and first of all in the Amun temple at Karnak, the building, rebuilding, dismantling, decorating, restoring, and changing the decoration practically were going on continuously. On the other hand, this unmaterialized existence of the temple does not exclude the final inauguration of a completed building after all the animation and purification rituals on the temple, on all its statues, and possibly also on depictions of gods and kings on its walls.

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²⁹ Vernus 1981: 115–116.

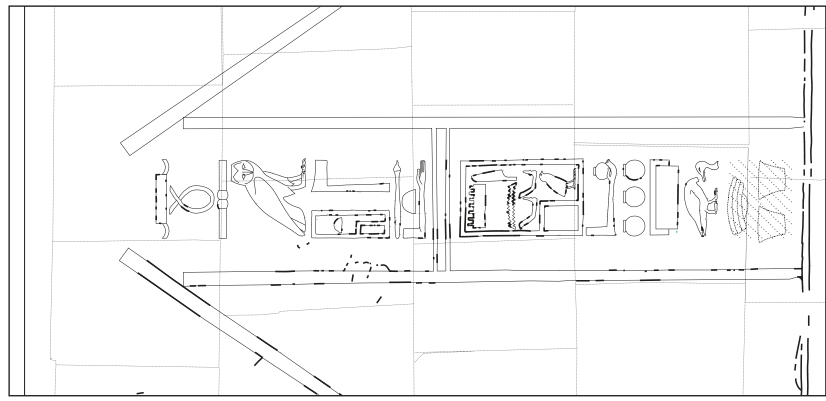
³⁰ Vernus 1981: 107, and 112 with n. d.

³¹ Hayes 1960: 35–36, Pl. X, no. 8

³² Spencer 1984: 130–133; *Wb* V, 532.6–7 ‘Gebäude vor dem Tempel’; Barguet 1962: 301–302, proposes to identify the term *d3d3w* with the front colonnades or pavilions at the temple entrance (such as Taharka’s colonnade in front of the Second Pylon at Karnak). See also: Szafranski 1998: 102–106, where *d3d3w* constitutes part of the palace and has its own stone doorway (examples predate the New Kingdom).

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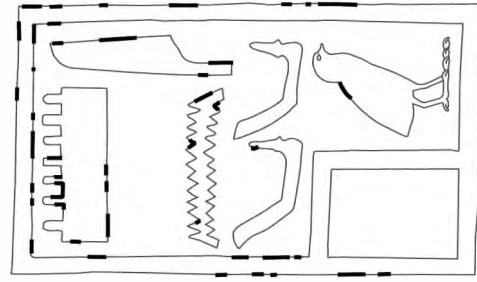
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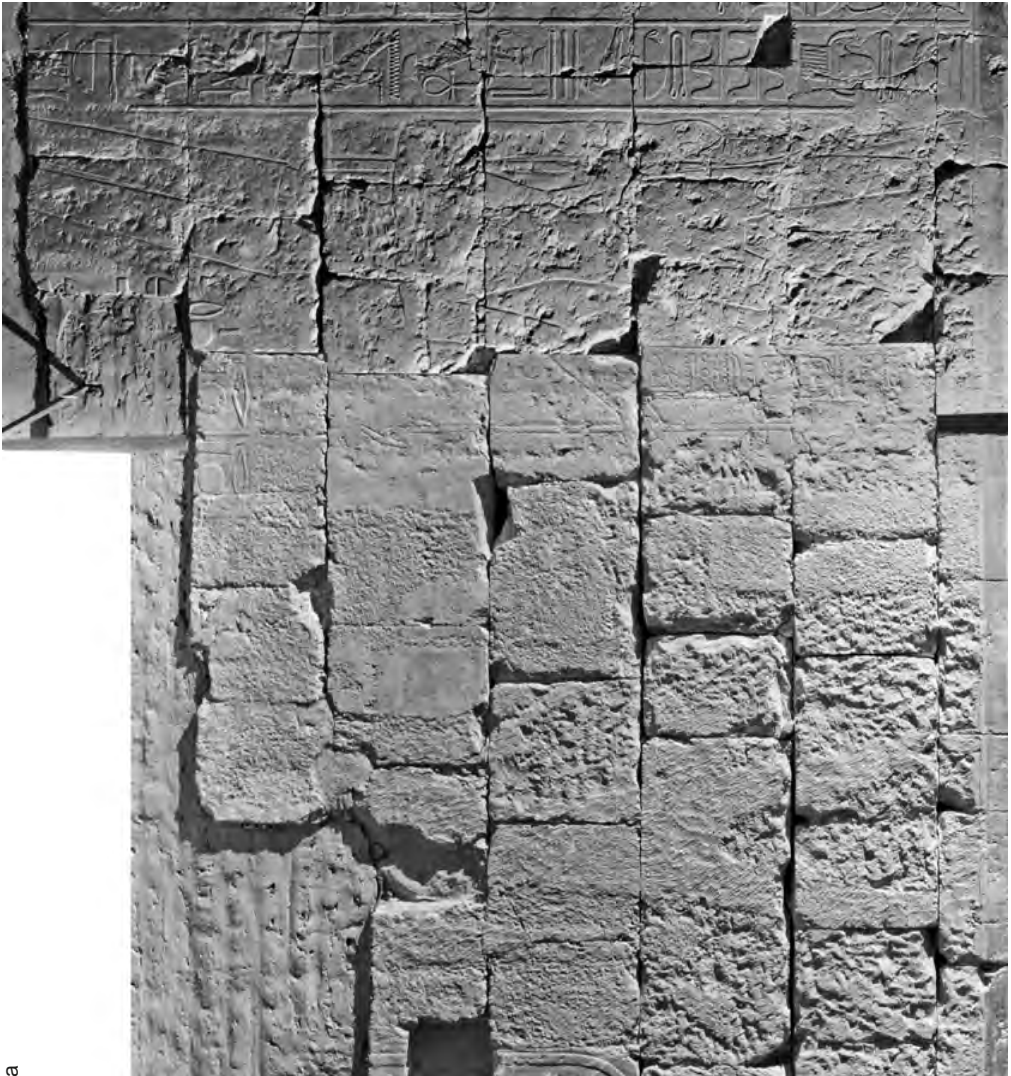
1a. Remains of the scene of Stretching the Cord. Hatshepsut's figure on the left has been destroyed with chisel. The attitude of the goddess on the right has been modified after the Amarna destruction; b. restored title of the scene: heavy line – preserved outline of the original text; thin line – restored signs (no traces has remained of the lower signs) (Phot. Z. Doliński, repertory of documentation IKSIO PAN; drawing: J. Karkowski).



2. Remains of the scene of Scattering the *bsn*-grains. Hatshepsut's figure and her *k3* were destroyed with chisel (Phot. Z. Doliński, repertory of documentation IKStO PAN).



b



a

3a. Remains of a much reworked scene, most probably of Giving the Temple to Its Lord; b. restored name of the Deir el-Bahari temple in the scene; heavy lines figure preserved outline of the original text; thin line – restored signs (Phot. Z. Dołński, repertory of documentation IKŚIO PAN; drawing: J. Karkowski).

4. Scene of the consecration of meat offerings to ityphallic Amun-Re-Kamutef (Phot. Z. Dolinski, repertory of documentation IKŚ(O PAN)).

