

Pepi I and the Temple of Satet at Elephantine

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For fifteen years, the early provincial temples of Egypt have been viewed in light of a structural historical paradigm: the relationship between residential and provincial culture (Kemp 1989, 65–83; O'Connor 1992; Seidlmayer 1996; Wilkinson 2000, 303–320). Barry Kemp observes the difference between the 'preformal' divine temples of the 3rd millennium and the 'formal' temples of the following eras. The preformal temples are modest mud-brick constructions compared to the royal mortuary complexes made of stone. Kemp concludes: "It means that for about a third of its history, Pharaonic Egypt was a country of two cultures" (1989, 83).

This article will treat the Satet temple against this background. My central question will be how Pepi I behaved with regard to the Satet temple, considered with special reference to the royal objects found in the temple. The discussion will touch upon some archaeological problems involved. Finally, an alternative reconstruction of the 6th Dynasty temple will be proposed.

From the 6th Dynasty onwards, at the latest, Egypt was subject to a growing regionalisation. This regionalisation undermined the administrative and cultural primacy of the residence and resulted in the principdoms of the First Intermediate Period. The *ka*-house policy of the kings of the 6th Dynasty can be seen as a reaction to this regionalisation (Fischer 1958).

According to Egyptian texts, the term *ka*-house refers to a tomb or, more generally, to a cult place detached from a burial (Kaplony 1980). As far as we know, the first *ka*-houses of the latter kind were erected by the kings of the 6th Dynasty (Franke 1994, 118–127; Müller-Wollermann and Vandekerckhove 2001, 331–332). Pepi I erected *ka*-houses for his own cult throughout the country. We have evidence from Bubastis in the Delta, Memphis, Zawyet el-Meytin, Assiut, Nagada,

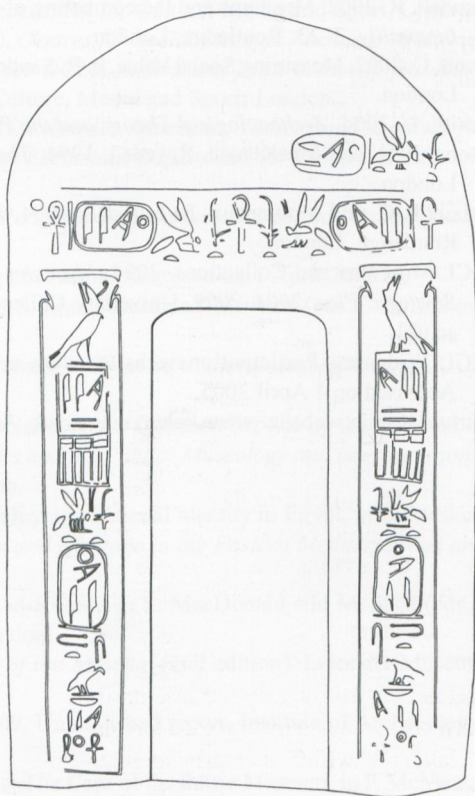


Figure 1. Naos of Pepi I (after Ziegler 1990, 51.)

Elkab and possibly Abydos and Hierakonpolis as well. The extensive list reveals an underlying programmatic strategy. One aim of Pepi I was probably to strengthen the royal presence in the province. How is the new relationship between the Crown and the provincial temples reflected in the temple of Satet?

Only a few royal objects dating before the 6th Dynasty have been found in the temple (Dreyer 1986, no. 28 and 426). At the beginning of the 6th Dynasty the number of objects with royal names increases. Among the votive material are several faience tablets with the names of Pepi I and Pepi II (Dreyer 1986, no. 428–447). Some of them mention their *Sed*-festivals. Moreover, a limestone vessel in the shape of an ape with its offspring bears the cartouche of Pepi I (Dreyer 1986, no. 455).

Stone vessels of this and other types were distributed by the residence to high ranking officials (Fischer 1993; Minault-Gout 1993; Ziegler 1997). Medunefher from Balat is one prominent example (Valloggia 1986, 105–119). Therefore, the ape vessel from the Satet temple was probably a present to a high provincial official who offered it secondarily as a votive offering in the temple. In contrast, the faience tablets are known only from the Satet temple and the temple of Abydos (Petrie 1903, pl. 21, no. 12–14) as well as from the mortuary temple of Pepi I (Leclant 1978, 279–281, pl. 27, fig. 22). It seems reasonable to conclude that the faience tablets were not presents to high officials but votives directly offered by the kings in the temples.

The most prominent royal object from the Satet temple is the red granite *naos* of Pepi I (Figure 1; Ziegler 1990, 50–53). It came to light in the debris near the late temple. It is 1.32m in height and the front side has a shallow niche.

To the left and right of it, we read the name of Pepi I followed by the epithet “beloved of Satet”. Obviously, Pepi I endowed the temple of Satet with this *naos*. Merenre then had his name written above the inscriptions of his predecessor. Where did the *naos* stand within the temple?

Let us turn now to the archaeology of the temple (Dreyer 1986, 11–17). It began with a natural niche formed by three granite rocks. The oldest temple layers, VIII and VII, had a skewed orientation towards the northern rock. The following layer, VI, had an orientation towards the western rock. The same is true for layers V to I where the area of the sanctuary had a rectangular plan.

Layer V is only poorly preserved and is marked by a dotted line on the drawing. That is why I refer to the plan of layer IV which is nearly identical and far better preserved (Figure 2). In the middle of the court there is the so-

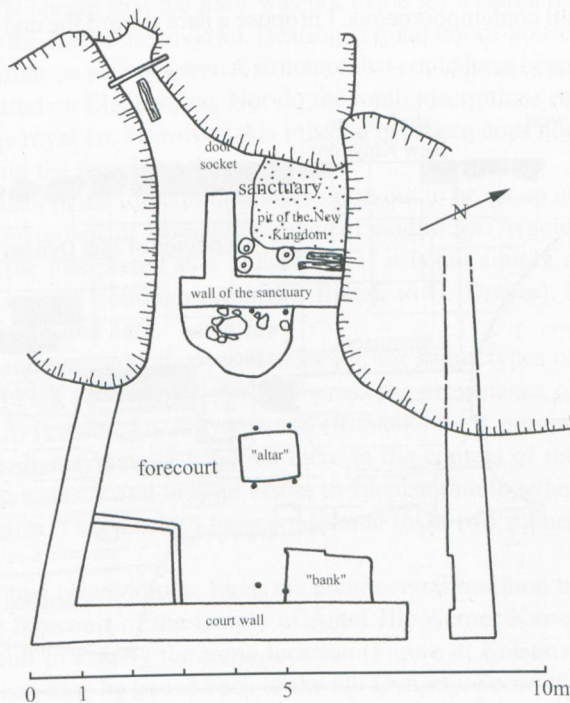


Figure 2. *Satet temple, layer IV (after Dreyer 1986, Abb. 4).*

called 'altar' (Bussmann 2006). Next to the entrance is a mud-brick structure labelled "bank" in the publication. The entrance to the sanctuary was located at a door in the rear of the rock niche. Beneath the door socket the excavators recovered a foundation deposit which will be discussed below. What remains from the original furnishing of the sanctuary, are two pots, a pottery stand and two wooden boards.

In order to avoid an anachronistic reconstruction, the date of the layers must be determined on the basis of their stratification (Figure 3; Dreyer 1986, Abb. 7–8). The designation of the layers is due to the different phases of renovation of the wall of the sanctuary. The layers VIII to I represent the brick constructions of the 3rd millennium. What follows is the stone foundation of the temples of the 11th to 18th Dynasty.

The only dating criteria currently available are stratified objects with inscriptions. Beneath the wall of the sanctuary of layer V the earliest object with an inscription has been found. It is a faience tablet with the name of Pepi I (Dreyer 1986, no. 435). On top of the layers of the brick temple, several stone slabs came to light. They probably served as the foundation for a chapel of Antef II built during the 11th Dynasty (Kaiser *et al.* 1993, 145–152). Thus layers V to I can be dated to the period between Pepi I and Antef II.

One major archaeological problem is the coherence of the layers. The floors that once connected the architectural features, such as the court wall, the so-called altar and the wall of the sanctuary, were largely disturbed and badly recorded. Consequently, and in contrast to the current interpretation, we cannot be sure of their chronological relationship to one another. On the other hand, it seems highly probable that the rebuilding of the court wall I, the altar I and the wall of the sanctuary V result from one overall reorganisation of the temple, thus making them all contemporaneous. I propose a date toward the end of the reign of Pepi I. The final publication

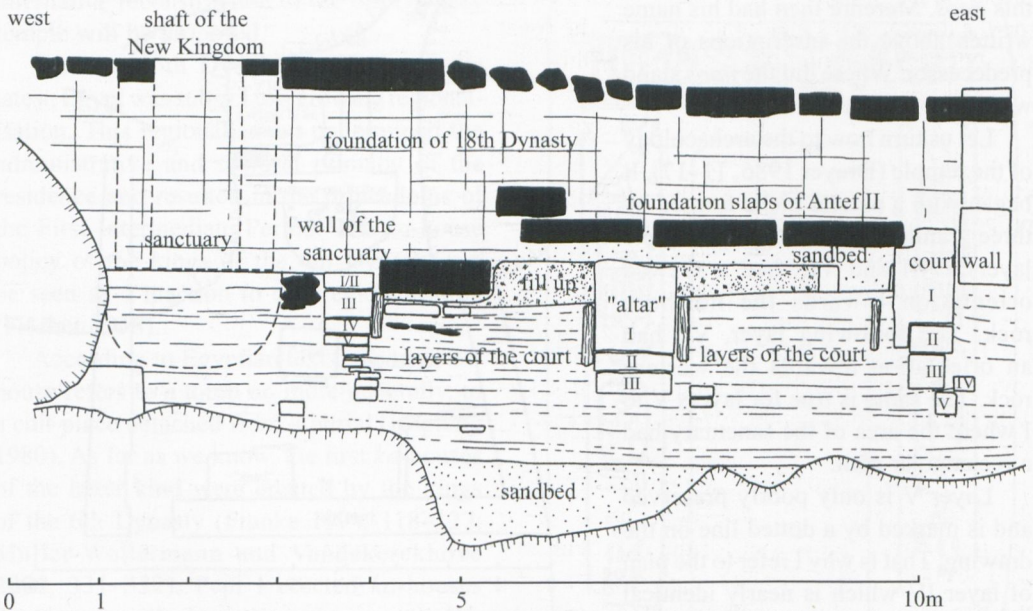


Figure 3. Satet temple, section of early layers (after Dreyer 1986, Abb. 7)

of the architecture and the pottery of the temple will provide further details for the dating.

The renovation of the temple is revealing in terms of my central question. The reorganisation of the temple from layer VI to V dates to the reign of Pepi I. However, there is no reason to believe that it was Pepi I who initiated it. The current interpretation of the faience tablets as foundation offerings (Dreyer 1986, 94) does not hold. The tablets were not concentrated in one deposit. They were found between different walls and in the layers of the court. The above mentioned foundation deposit beneath the door socket of the sanctuary of layer V (Dreyer 1986, findspot number 6972) contained a triangular tile, a model brick, the figure of a baboon, the figure of a boy, the lower part of a female figure, the fragment of a faience vessel, beads, gold leaf, four pebbles and fragments of an ostrich egg. Evidently, we are dealing here with old votive objects used secondarily as foundation objects. Therefore, the deposit and the reorganisation of the temple attest to a local rather than royal initiative. If it were actually a royal deposit, one would expect to find a faience tablet with a king's name, maybe the skull of an ox and pottery (Weinstein 1973).

I will now return to the location of the granite *naos*. In the present-day reconstruction of the early temple, the German Archaeological Institute has erected a copy of the *naos* within the sanctuary at the rear (Ziegler 1990, 52). According to this reconstruction, a statue of the goddess Satet had been set up in the niche of the *naos*. This reconstruction is important because it is a model for other early temples whose cult layout is otherwise unknown. The excavators of Tell Ibrahim Awad in the eastern delta reconstructed a comparable *naos* in the local temple along these lines (Eigner 2000).

In contrast, Detlef Franke (1994, 121) supposes that the *naos* was not made for a statue of Satet, but for a statue of Pepi I belonging to the cult of the royal *ka*. Bearing in mind the *ka*-house policy of Pepi I outlined above, this reconstruction makes sense. A structure that could have been the *ka*-house of Pepi I has not been excavated on Elephantine. Nor do the tomb inscriptions of the local cemeteries mention a priest of the royal *ka*. However, this missing evidence does not rule out the possibility of a royal cult within the temple enclosure.

Looking more closely at the so-called bank in the forecourt, its bricks turn out to be set up in a vertical position. This construction is characteristic of foundations made of mudbricks (Arnold 1994, 86–87). The 'bank' might therefore be interpreted as a foundation, if it is not simply a collapsed part of the wall of the court (personal communication M. Bietak to G. Dreyer). I propose that the granite *naos* of Pepi I was located here.

I have tried to visualise this arrangement more concretely and searched for statue types of Pepi I. I found two *Sed*-festival statues of Pepi I (Romano 1998). Whereas the provenance of the statue Brooklyn 39.120 (Romano, no. 3) is unknown, the other one (Romano, no. 1, present location unknown) was found in Dendera. It may have functioned there in the context of the royal cult. Accordingly, the king could have sent a *Sed*-festival statue to Elephantine together with the above mentioned *Sed*-festival tablets. This is why I have considered these two statues for my reconstruction.

My reconstruction is based mainly on two observations. First, the architectural tradition of the temple points to this direction. In the forecourt of the temple of Antef III, Werner Kaiser has reconstructed a chapel for the royal cult in exactly the same location (Figure 4; Kaiser *et al.* 1993, 148–151). This cult topography can now be traced back to the 6th Dynasty. Secondly, the historical context seems to support my reconstruction. Pepi I did not dedicate a *naos* to Satet. Rather, the *naos* was erected in the forecourt to install his own cult, as in other provincial temples.

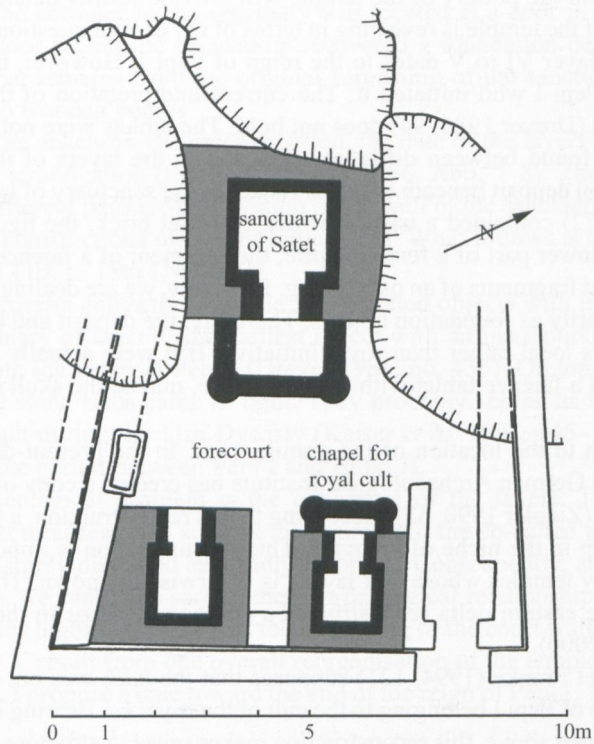


Figure 4. Reconstructed Satet temple of Antef III (after Kaiser et al. 1993, Abb. 7).

The other royal objects from the Satet temple can be explained consistently within this reconstruction. The faience tablets give the name of Pepi I and II and mention their *Sed*-festivals. Neither do the other objects refer to Satet. Merenre and Pepi II had two inscriptions written on the rocks of the sanctuary (Kaiser *et al.* 1976, 78–80). They did not include the epithet “beloved of Satet”. The inscription of Merenre on the left begins with a date and mentions the visit to the temple in the context of an expedition to strike down the chiefs of the foreign land. Merenre did not visit the temple for the sake of Satet, but en route to a military mission in the south.

In conclusion, on the one hand, the royal objects reveal a royal engagement with the temple of Satet from the reign of Pepi I onwards. On the other hand, this engagement seems to have been motivated by interests of the residence rather than on behalf of the provincial goddess Satet.

I have attempted to analyse the Satet temple at the time of Pepi I in light of the discussion about the relationship between residence and provincial Egypt. The background to my considerations is a functional definition of the early provincial temples. They served as an institutionalised interface between residence and province in an Egypt of two cultures.

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