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A PTOLEMAIC GRAFFITO FROM THE COURT OF THE 3RD PYLON AT KARNAK

Ahmed al-Taher (MoA, Luxor)*

IN POST-DYNASTIC THEBES, a time when popular piety in temples had significantly developed, temple institutions seem to have introduced new cultic practices and iconography to carry on their service to the gods as well as to facilitate popular worship. In this period only a few large-scale projects were undertaken, and existing monuments were usually appropriated and adapted. At Karnak and Luxor, wall surfaces along processional ways and on the exterior of temples, that had hitherto been left undecorated, became a medium for carving and/or painting images of gods.¹

In this contribution I analyse implications of these added images through a case-study, which focuses on a graffito from the Ptolemaic period that represents a formal composite image of gods, beautifully carved, “enriched/fitted” with holes, and accompanied by formal hieroglyphic texts. It represents a large investment connected with temple activities and performances, although of a different character compared to traditional temple decorations. Its location relates to priestly movement in and out of inner temple areas and the processional ways.² These images are usually understood as focal points for popular religion.³ This paper presents an overview of the content and development of this graffito. I then attempt to situate this composition in the wider context of graffiti of sacred images in Karnak, offering a preliminary analysis of the implications of such group of evidence for the changing of sacred space in Ptolemaic temples.⁴


* I would like to thank Dr. Christophe Thiers and Chiara Salvador for reading and commenting on drafts, Chiara kindly correct the English of the paper also. This paper wouldn't be possible without all what I learned from Dr. Elizabeth Froid.


1. Over 1400 figural and textual graffito were recorded during extensive field seasons undertaken by Claude Traunecker in the 1960s and 1970s. His archive is now in the Griffith Institute, Oxford; see overview in Cl. TRAUNECKER, “Manifestations de piété personnelle à Karnak,” *BSFE* 85, 1979, p. 22-31.
2. E. FROID, “Egyptian Temple Graffiti and the Gods: Appropriation and Ritualization in Karnak and Luxor,” in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World*, *OIS* 9, 2013, p. 292.
3. P.J. BRAND, “A Graffito of Amen-Re in Luxor Temple Restored by the High Priest Menkheper,” in: G.N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, *PdÄ* 20, 2004, pp. 261-262.
4. Note Elizabeth Froid republication of Horkhebi's text, in “Graffiti Context”: E. FROID, “Horkhebi's decree and the development of priestly inscriptional practices in Karnak,” in: L. Bareš, F. Coppens, K. Smoláriková (eds.), *Egypt in transition: social and religious development of Egypt in the first millennium BCE. Proceedings of an international conference, Prague, September 1-4, 2009, 2010*, pp. 103-128. This is what this paper attempts to do within this graffito.

The graffito is carved next to the southern end of the fourth Pylon at Karnak, on the left jambs of the sandstone gateway⁵ leading to the long corridor around the central complex of the temple of Amun-Re, on two blocks positioned at eye level (2nd and 3rd courses from the ground). It depicts sacred images of deities which were carved in raised relief with hieroglyphic captions in sunk relief (**Figs. 1-2**).


The graffito depicting Hathor-Isis in her traditional form stands toward the north in the direction of the axis of the main temple. The goddess holds the ankh sign in her left hand and the *wꜣd* scepter in her right hand.⁶ Her left eye was deeply carved for inlay (now lost).


In front of her face are four columns of a hieroglyphic caption in sunk relief which read as follows: ←↓

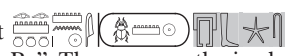

 *mr(y) Ḥw.t-Ḥr nb(.t) Jwn.t jr.t R^c*
Beloved of Hathor, Lady of Dendera, eye of Re.

 *ꜣs.t wr.t mw.t nꜥr nb.t p.t*
Isis the great, the god's mother, lady of the sky.

Between the legs of the goddess and the sceptre in her right hands stands Harpocrates-Ihy in small with his finger to his mouth⁷, and the crown of the two feathers on his head; the text mentions: ←↓

 ¹ *Ḥr-pꜣ-ḥrd* ² *ꜣ wr tp(y) n(y) Jmn*
Harpocrates the great, the first born of Amun.

 *Jḥy wr sꜣ Ḥw.t-Ḥr*
Ihy the great, son of Hathor.

5. This gate (PM II², p. 76 [191-b]) was built under Thutmose III, who called it  *sbꜣ (Mn-hpr-R^c) ptr mnw Jmn-R^c* “gate of (Mn-hpr-R^c) who contemplates the monuments of Amun-Re”. The scene on the jamb beside the graffito depicts Amun-Re, giving the Ankh to Thutmose III. Then we find that Ramesses II carved his name over this of Thutmose III’s and called the gate  *sbꜣ (Wsr-mꜣ'.t-R'-stp-n-R^c) ptr nꜥrw Jmn-R^c* “Gate of (Wsr-mꜣ'.t-R'-stp-n-R^c) who contemplates the monuments of Amun-Re”; H. CHEVRIER, “Rapport sur les travaux de Karnak (1931-1932),” *ASAE* 32, 1932, p. 101C; Ch. NIMS, “Places about Thebes,” *JNES* 14, 1955, p. 123, fig. 2 (16); P. BARGUET, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak. Essai d'exégèse*, *RAPH* 20, 1962, p. 93; Th. GROTHOFF, *Die Tornamen der ägyptischen Tempel*, *ÆgMon* 1, 1996, p. 85, figs. 16-17; p. 420 (doc. 11a) = KIU 1318.
6. Translation for the captions of Hathor-Isis and photograph of the graffito published by P. BARGUET, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94, pl. 12B; Cl. Traunecker recorded it in his notebook (Notebook 2, 42-44) about Karnak temple graffiti in the 1960s-1970s; K. Mysliwiec (“Isis, Hathor ou Cléopâtre ? À propos d'une figurine trouvée à Tell Atrib,” *ÉtTrav* 19, 2001, pp. 272-273) mentioned the graffito in his study about figurine of Isis, Hathor or Cleopatra found at Tell Atrib; in her study about the child deity Harpocrates, S. Sandri (*Harpokrates (Harpokrates). Die Genese eines ägyptischen Götterkindes*, *OLA* 151, 2006, pp. 30-31, 223-224 [T 55], pl. 6) published the captions of the deity (except Nefertem). In series of papers to publish Ptolemaic period blocks from Karnak, Chr. Thiers mentioned the graffito in his “*Membra disiecta ptolemaica* (I),” *Karnak* 13, 2010, p. 385, n. 59; finally, the graffito is numbered (KIU 1266) into the database of *Projet d'index global des temples de Karnak* <http://sith.huma-num.fr/karnak/1266>; Accession date: 6/2016). Many thanks for Elizabeth Frood and Chiara Salvador for allowing me to see Traunecker’s record of the graffito.
7. The most significant iconographic markers of child deities are the index finger held to the mouth which Plutarch interprets as a gesture of silence. As a hieroglyphic sign, the lock represents the sound *hrd* (“child,” “being young,” “to rejuvenate”), but can by association also be read as *rnꜣj* (“to regenerate”) and thus refer again to the principle of cyclical regeneration, which child deities guarantee. Further markers are nudity, possibly symbolizing renewal and rolls of belly fat to denote abundance. The child hieroglyph, attested since the Old Kingdom, combines these markers with the seated posture. See D. BUDDÉ, “Child,” in: J. Dieleman, W. Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2010, pp. 2-3 with references (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9cf2v6q3>; Accession date: 8/2016).

In front of Harpocrates-Ihy there is figure of Nefertum (**Fig. 3**), smaller than the one of Harpocrates: ←↓

 *Nfr-tm, Nefertum.*

Beside the captions of the deities there are two royal texts on this tableau mentioning king Ptolemy III and his wife Berenice II and a text of king Ptolemy IV and his wife Arsinoe III. The texts read:

Text of King Ptolemy III and Berenice II: →↓



[...] *n nsw.t bjty* (*Ptwlmys-ḥḥ-d.t-mry-Pth*) *nb(.t) T3.wy* (*[B]rnyg3*) *nṯr.wy mnḥ.wy*

[...] *by the King of Upper and Lower Egypt (Ptolemy living for ever, beloved of Ptah), (and) the Lady of the Two lands ([B]erenice), the two benefit gods.*

Text of King Ptolemy III and Berenice II: →↓



nsw-bjty (*Ptwlmys-ḥḥ-d.t-mry-3s.t*) *nb(t) [T3.wy] ([Jrsjrn3y]) nṯr.wy mr(wy) jt*

The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, (Ptolemy living for ever, beloved of Isis), (and) the Lady [of the Two lands] (Arsinoe), the two gods who love their father.

A closer examination of this composite graffito allows some considerations:

- The composition has been realised with more than one technique of carving: while Hathor-Isis, Harpocrates-Ihy and Nefertem are in raised reliefs, their captions are in sunk relief, as are the names and titles of the two kings.
- The carving style of Nefertem differs from that of Hathor-Isis and Harpocrates-Ihy. Although they are all carved in raised relief, Hathor-Isis and Harpocrates-Ihy are more protruding than the figure of Nefertem.
- Hathor-Isis's head is deliberately carved on a loose block.
- There are several types of holes on the scene and some overlap: six circular holes around the body of Hathor-Isis, filled with plaster; six squared holes around the whole composition; seven rectangular holes (some semi rectangular) around the whole composition.
- King Ptolemy IV and the text of Arsinoe crammed in a narrow space between the text of the Hathor-Isis and her sceptre.

Through the above considerations, it can be said that this graffito went through several developments over the first half of the Ptolemaic rule of Egypt. The graffito in its original design was prominently depicting Hathor-Isis in her traditional form of that period, holding the sceptre of papyrus in her right hand and an ankh sign in her left hand, crowned with cow horns surrounding the sun disc (Hathoric crown), wearing a long wig on her head and adorned vivid forehead cobra. At that phase, the goddess's eye was designed in order to contain the vaccination it might be inlaid with costly materials such as faience or precious stones and metals to draw attention to the passers-by, and also to those who are far away, but they are in the field of vision where the shiny flicker of the inlaid eye in this shady area would have contributed to the image's visual impact. Especially when the sunlight

is reflected from the eyes to indicate the presence of a sacred image in that place.⁸ The figure of Harpocrates-Ihy may be also engraved in this phase with Hathor so its depiction located within the primary initial planning to the graffito as the sculpture method is one.⁹

Sometime later also at that phase, which included Hathor and Harpocrates-Ihy, the two deities surrounded by circular holes that were probably functioning, as Brand suggests, to hold wooden shrines or other light structure directly against the wall, so that the sacred image could be concealed with scarves or linen veils from the sight of passers-by, and displayed only at specific times as needed.¹⁰ Examination of this graffito reveals that the shrine around it was supported by at least six circular holes.

Within the Ptah temple at Karnak, Hathor was worshipped as early as the 18th Dynasty.¹¹ The pairing of Hathor and Ptah is surprising, as one would expect him to be accompanied by Sekhmet. However, Hathor and Ptah appear together in Memphis.¹² No syncretism between Hathor and Sekhmet is attested in any Greco-Roman text within the Ptah temple, and Sekhmet only appears in one scene together with Nefertem.¹³

Despite the image depicts Hathor in her traditional form the caption associates her to Isis. This graffito shows the increasing similarities between Isis and Hathor in the Greco-Roman period.¹⁴

Hathor at Karnak functions primarily as a Theban form of Isis. This assimilation is expressed both directly,¹⁵ and through the appropriation of Isis epithets such as “god’s mother (*mw.t-ntr*),” or “Lady of the Rekhyt (*nbty.t-rhy.t*).” The latter epithet is associated with royal succession.¹⁶

A text mention the relationship between Isis-Hathor and Ptah say: *wnn Ptḥ m nb Jwnw-Šm' Nbw.t m ḥr(y).t-tp Ws.t sw m tṣty sṣb m jrwwfn dḥn Ṣs.t r-gsʿf m Ḥw.t-Ḥr*, “As long as Ptah is Lord of Southern Heliopolis, and the Golden One is the Chief of Thebes, he is as the judge-vizier in his form of the ibis; Isis is beside him as Hathor.”¹⁷

8. Other examples of graffiti with eye inlaid include a very large ithyphallic figure of Amun graffito on the east jamb of the east gate leading into the long colonnaded hall between the court of Ramesses II and the forecourt of Amenhotep III Luxor Temple. Here, the eye, eyebrow, and chinstrap of which once bore inlay. (See: EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple II, the Facade, Portals, Upper Register Scenes, Columns, Marginalia, and Statuary in the Colonnade Hall*, OIP 116, 1998, 55, Gr. 5). Also a figure of Ptah whose eye was deeply carved for inlay in a niche-like area created by the “lip” at the rear of the east side of Ramesses III temple pylon it is partly incised and partly rendered in raised relief (See: EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, Ramses III's Temple within the Great Inclosure of Amon, part 2, and Ramses III's Temple in the Precinct of Mut*, OIP 35, 1936, pl. 112k).

9. We note that his body is deliberately hammered; this is may be because he is naked so the Christians or Muslims want to hide this, we note that this is just for him.

10. P.J. BRAND, in: G.N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 263-264; *id.*, “Veils, Votives, and Marginalia: The Use of Sacred Space at Karnak and Luxor,” in: P. Dorman, B.M. Bryan (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes, Occasional Proceedings of the Theban Workshop*, SAOC 61, 2007, pp. 60-65; S. BISTON-MOULIN, Chr. THIERS, *Le temple de Ptah à Karnak I (= Ptah I)*, *TravCFEETK, BiGen* 47, 2016, p. XII, n. 17 (with bibliography). This is against the theory of the inlaid eyes which aimed to attracting people with its shiny flicker, so it is probably quite difficult to think that the graffito from the beginning has the structure and the inlay.

11. *Urk.* IV, 771, 6; A. KLUG, *Königliche Stelen in der Zeit von Ahmose bis Amenophis III.*, *MonAeg* 8, 2002, pp. 137-46, 511-12; Chr. THIERS, “Le temple de Ptah à Karnak. Remarques préliminaires”, in: H. Beinlich (ed.), *9. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung. Kultabbildung und Kultrealität, KSGH* 3/4, 2013, pp. 333-334.

12. J. BERLANDINI, “La déesse bucéphale : une iconographie particulière de l’Hathor Memphite,” *BIFAO* 83, 1983, pp. 33-50.

13. *Ptah I*, no. 102 (= KIU 3536); D. KLOTZ, *Caesar in the City of Amun. Egyptian Temple Construction and Theology in Roman Thebes*, *MRE* 15, 2012, p. 115.

14. See S.H. AUFRÈRE, *Le propylône d’Amon-Rê-Montou à Karnak-Nord*, *MIFAO* 117, 2000, p. 248.

15. P. CLÈRE, *La porte d’Évergète à Karnak*, *MIFAO* 84, 1961, pl. 28; 189(9); 190b; 192b; C. DE WIT, *Les inscriptions du temple d’Opet, à Karnak*, *BiAeg* 11, 1958, p. 25 (= KIU 4290, l. 11); 140 (= KIU 1997, l. 13).

16. D. KLOTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 115 with notes 595-596-597.

17. P. CLÈRE, *La porte d’Évergète à Karnak*, pl. 28 = *Urk.* VIII, no. 80i = KIU 4013; D. KLOTZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.

According to this text, Ptah and Hathor in Thebes were local forms of Thoth and Isis, two deities who interact frequently (particularly concerning Horus) but never as consorts. Their association in Thebes can be understood in terms of the traditional Memphite ideals of coronation and royal legitimacy.¹⁸ This is the first attested representation of a child deity Harpocrates from the Ptolemaic period in Theban temples.¹⁹ Harpocrates²⁰ and Ihy grew in importance in temple cult and popular worship from the first millennium BC, and became particularly prominent in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.²¹ Their birth was believed to secure royal legitimacy and hereditary succession as son of Isis and heir of Osiris. As such, this iconography incorporates types belonging to royal iconography presenting the king as the child of the gods. Isis is the most common and widespread deity associated with Harpocrates.²² The epithet formula of Harpocrates *ꜥ wr tpy* (“the great, eminent, and first born (one)”) indicates the deity’s first position in the hereditary succession.²³

A Roman Period ritual scene from Esna, in which the king receives the symbols of regnal years, captures these ideas in the epithets of the local child deity Heka-pa-chered promising the king a long reign and physical regeneration. “The perfect youth, sweet of love, who repeats the births again and again.”²⁴ Thus, despite their child status, these deities became the object of cult, which manifested itself – no earlier than the end of the New Kingdom and particularly in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods – in temples dedicated to them, priesthoods, theophoric personal names, ritual and other learned texts, stelae, bronzes, terracotta figurines, scarabs, gems, other small objects, and also as we note here graffiti.

The most important function of child deities is to be providers of life and food and be guarantors of fertility, vouchsafed protection against enemies, diseases, and other dangers. They also guaranteed a successful birth, regeneration, and, by extension, victory over death and eternal renewal.²⁵ These were the most important things that any person passing by could ask these sacred images, which gives an idea why such child deities were carved as graffiti.

The iconography of Ihy as a child holding musical instruments is first attested at Deir el-Bahari, in the reign of Queen Hatshepsut.²⁶ He acquired significance at Dendara as the child of Hathor (in addition to Harsomtupa-chered) and, cross-regionally, as divine musician and solar child. The deity’s functions in cult, particularly in appeasement rituals, are addressed in epithets like “he with sweet lips.” Such epithets are characteristic for Ihy, the musician and dancer, who is also often designated as “the great god”. In temple cult and private devotion, he was a source of joy and Hathor was especially appeased by the sight of her child Ihy playing music.²⁷ The

18. D. KLOTZ, *Caesar in the City of Amun*, p. 117.

19. S. SANDRI, *Har-pa-chered*, p. 30.

20. Horus-pa-chered (Harpocrates), like the other child deities, did not develop into an independent deity before the end of the New Kingdom. Religious texts testify that the concept of the child deity goes back as early as the Old Kingdom. Nonetheless, the worship of child deities did not become prominent in temple cult and private devotion before the Third Intermediate Period. The first developments in their theology can be observed at Thebes, where Khonsu in particular, but also child forms of Horus, such as Harpocrates, were worshipped as sons of Amun. For further readings see: D. MEEKS, in: *LÄ II*, cols. 1003-104, s.v. Harpocrates; M.-A. BONHÈME, A. FORGEAU, *Pharaon: Sohn der Sonne: Die Symbolik des ägyptischen Herrschers*, Düsseldorf, Zürich, 2001, pp. 78-82; D. BUDDE, in: J. Dieleman, W. Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, p. 1.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

22. D. MEEKS, “Iconography of Deities and Demons,” in: Electronic Pre-Publication, p. 1, 7 (http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/prepublications/e_idd_harpocrates.pdf; Accession date: 2/2016).

23. *LGG II*, 17f. Like Amun, this title also comes with Isis is who depicted in the graffito. See S. SANDRI, *op. cit.*, p. 147 (T 54).

24. S. SAUNERON, *Esna II*, 1963, no. 51; D. BUDDE, *op. cit.*, p. 1, fig. 2.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 1-4.

26. É. NAVILLE, *The temple of Deir el Bahari 4. The shrine of Hathor and the southern hall of offerings*, *EEFMem* 19, 1901, pl. 104.

27. R. PREYS, “La fête de la prise de pouvoir d’Ihy ‘le grand dieu’ à Dendera,” *ZÄS* 128, 2001, pp. 146-166; D. BUDDE, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

previous title may added? and happening while the procession of Hathor when the Hathor procession passed by the graffito from the Khonsu temple to the Ptah temple during the New Year's celebration so perhaps Ihy was carved here for this purpose.

The graffito remained like that until the reign of Ptolemy III, when the temple institution asserted his involvement in this sacred graffito by renewing the image of the deities. At that time a text, mentions the king and his queen and the caption of Hathor is engraved in sunk relief. The image of Hathor is also recarved.²⁸ This recarving is particularly visible in the new outlines of the bodies, especially on the right shoulder and arms of Hathor. In addition, perhaps he was the person responsible for the carving of the image of Nefertem in raised relief the one who made the images of Hathor and Ihy in raised relief to have an artistic symmetry in the graffito. The caption of Hor-pa-chered was possibly added at that stage, even though it is more likely that it dates back to the first phase, since its style differs from that of the text of Ptolemy III.²⁹

Also during this second phase, the structure around the graffito was possibly replaced or renewed, so six new square-shaped holes were probably drilled when the original veil canopy was replaced with a new one and the original holes were filled in with plaster.³⁰

The text of Ptolemy III possibly mentioning the restoration of this graffito tell us that it is he who did that with Queen Berenice. This type of renewal texts by the king and the queen can be compared to several examples at Karnak.³¹ These examples give us an idea about the damaged part at the beginning of the caption of the king. From these, it is clear that the restoration texts of Ptolemy III begins with two different prefix: *smꜣwy mnw jr~n* followed by the name of the king and queen, as in restoration text on the gate erected by Nectanebo I on the Opet Temple:³²



smꜣwy mnw jr~n nswt bjty (Ptwlmys-^hnh-^{dt}-mry-Pth) nb(.t) Tꜣ.wy (Brnygꜣ) nꜥr.wy mnꜥ.wy (...)

Renewal of the monument which the King of Upper and Lower Egypt (Ptolemy ever-living, beloved of Ptah), (and) the Lady of the Two lands (Berenice), the two beneficent gods, (...) made.

28. Probably the loose block on the goddess upper part was put in this phase as part of the renewal of the graffito, or at the next phase by Ptolemy IV.

29. Sandra Sandri (*Har-pa-chered*, p. 30) mentioned that whether the figure of Nefertem, standing in front of the Goddess and the God child, was also mounted only under Ptolemy IV Philopator, look let's not say with certainty. The same applies to a text column before the legs of Harpocrates.

30. There are many examples of holes filled in with plaster like the figure of Ptah at Medinet Habu: P. DILLS, "'Ptah-de-la-grande-porte' : un aspect du fonctionnement du temple de Medinet Habu," *Scriba* 1, 1995, p. 70; the graffito of Amun at Luxor temple: P.J. BRAND, in G.N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 261-262; and a graffito of Amun from Monthu precinct at North-Karnak: L. GABOLDE, V. RONDOT, "Une catastrophe antique dans le temple de Montou à Karnak-Nord," *BIFAO* 93, 1993, p. 257, fig. 4, pl. 6B; *Ptah* I, pp. XII-XIII.

31. Previous example of text mention renew of graffiti is a text belong to graffito of Amun-Re from Luxor temple, done by the high priest of Amun-Re king of the gods *Mn-hpr-R'* of the 21st Dynasty; the text reads:



smꜣw mnw jr~n ḥm-nꜥr tpy n(y) Jmn-R' nswt nꜥr.w Mn-hpr-R' mꜣ' ḥrw sꜣ nsw nb Tꜣ.wy (Pꜣy-ndm-mry-Jmn) m pr jrꜣf Jmn-jp.t

"Renewal of the monument which the high priest of Amun-Re king of the gods *Mn-hpr-R'*, true of voice, the son of King (*Pꜣy-ndm-mry-Jmn*) in the domain of his father Amenope"; see P.J. BRAND, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

32. KIU 2286; PM II², p. 245 (3a); *Opet*, p. 4; J.Br. McCLAIN, *Restoration inscriptions* 1, Chicago, 2007, p. 368. There is another restoration text with the same prefix from the Ptah temple at Karnak but it does not mention the Queen, see *Ptah* I, no. 108; KIU 3530; PM II², p. 199 (12e); J.Br. McCLAIN, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

This prefix form of the restoration texts by Ptolemy III is probably the same as in the graffito. The second form begins by *nh smwy mnw jr.t* then mentions the king and the queen with enumeration of titles as in the following text on a lintel from Karnak:³³



nh smw[y] mnw jr.t] nsw[t] bjty nb Tz.wy (Jw'-n(y)-ntr.wy-sn.wy-stp(~n)-R'-sh̄m-'nh-n(y)-Jmn) hn'
nb(.t) Tz.wy (Brnyg:) ntr [...] ... [...]

Life. Renewal of the monument which the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, lord of the Two lands (Heir of the father-loving gods, chosen of Ptah, living image of Amun), (and) the Lady of the Two lands (Berenice) [the two beneficent] god[s], made.

Now it can be said that the missing part probably contained *smwy mnw jr.t*, so the text of Ptolemy III then restored as:

[smwy mnw jr.t]~n nsw.t bjty (Ptwlmys-'nh-d.t-mry-Pth) nb(.t) Tz.wy ([B]rnyg:) ntr.wy mn̄h.wy

This is one of the most common forms of Nefertem which depicts him in anthropomorphic form with his symbol on his head, and an *nh* and a *wss*-scepter in his hands.³⁴ The name of Nefertem in the graffito is not accompanied by any title. From some of the titles he holds in other scenes one may guess why his image carved as part of this graffito. He is connected to the king as the king may appear as Nefertem,³⁵ and may also exist (*wmn*) as Nefertem.³⁶ The scent of the king belongs to every god as Nefertem.³⁷

Two texts from a ritual scene at Dendara mentions that: “the king is his son”³⁸ another ritual scene from the temple describe: “The king is as him”,³⁹ also “The king is his image”⁴⁰. A text from the Opet temple mentions that he was born in Karnak.⁴¹ What if the representation of Nefertem in the graffito is as substitute, or a metaphor of the king this could mean that here the king (Nefertem) acts as a mediator between the god and those who would worship the graffito?⁴²

Some years later during the reign of Ptolemy IV, a text mentioned his name with his wife queen Arsinoe and the text caption of Isis was carved. The carving style of this text differs from that of the text of Hathor, which was done in the reign of Ptolemy III. The writing of the caption of Isis is narrower in width than the text of Hathor, although there is enough space to make them with the same width. Also the sculpture method varies a little bit, and the frame around the text of Isis is double-lined, while that of Hathor is single-lined.

33. KIU 2133; PM II², p. 180; P. BARGUET, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê*, p. 256, n. 5; S.H. AUFRÈRE, *Le propylône d'Amon-Rê-Montou*, p. 17; J.Br. McCLAIN, *Restoration Inscriptions* 1, p. 368 and n. 49; Chr. THIERS, *Karnak* 13, 2010, p. 386, § 5.1.

34. H. KEES, *Gotterglaube in Alten Agypten*, Berlin, 1956, pp. 287-289.

35. J.-Cl. GOYON, *Confirmation du pouvoir royal au Nouvel An (Brooklyn Museum Papyrus 47.218.50) 2*, *BdE* 52, 1972, p. 4.

36. Stele CG 34509; *KRI* II, 305, 5.

37. A. MARIETTE, *Abydos : description des fouilles I, Ville antique. Temple de Sêti I*, pl. 51, l. 48 (= *KRI* I, 188, 6).

38. *Dendara* II, 163, 14; *Dendara* III, 160, 6.

39. *Dendara* IV, 66, 16.

40. *Dendara* IV, 172, 14-5; *Dendara* II, 177,12.

41. *Opet* I, 186, 1; KIU 4205.

42. In this period, we note that the king was not far from the representation in the graffiti like the graffito depicts the Pharaoh (*pr-ʿs*) with incense and libation before Amun-emblem in palanquin with smaller one behind, and an altar in the front. See PM II², p. 24 (13), plan VII; H. CHEVRIER, “Rapport sur les travaux de Karnak (1933-1934)”, *ASAE* 34, 1934, p. 161, fig. I; R.A. SCHWALLER DE LUBICZ, *Les temples de Karnak* II, Paris, 1982, pl. 27, and i (3), fig. II; P. BARGUET, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê*, p. 53.

The text of Ptolemy IV and his wife is squeezed between the scepter of Hathor and another column of text. Differently from his predecessors this text does not include a renewal formula, probably due to lack of space. The names of the king and queen with their titles alone probably implied that they renewed this graffito.

We note that the square holes in the graffito has two phases of work, and some of the later square holes overlap with earlier ones, so it is likely that Ptolemy IV at that phase also renewed or replaced the structure around the graffito, which required a new set of holes to sustain it. Unlike his predecessor's phase these holes were not filled with plaster, as they overlap with earlier ones.⁴³

This is an instance of graffiti generating dialogues: “‘speaking’ to each other and their surroundings, as well as to a viewer”.⁴⁴ The process of addition is therefore central to their function. These acts of dedication of sacred images, their re-fashioning and their ‘enrichments’ were performed for individuals and the priestly group. They probably relate directly to priestly activities connected with the court and the primary axis of the temple; more broadly, they ritualize, and perhaps renew, this contact zone between outer and inner areas. Similar to this renewed graffito is restoration text by Ptolemy V for image of Osiris from Coptos in the northeast corner of the enclosure wall of Thutmose III / Ramses II.⁴⁵ The text of this restoration “graffito” is the only document from Karnak certainly dated from the reign of Epiphanes.⁴⁶ Here also the dedicated restoration text in the name of Couple Epiphanes,⁴⁷ this statues and temple wall texts support Bickel’s argument that during the first millennium BC temples “acquired a new dimension. They had become a place of intense communication between men and the gods”.⁴⁸

Surely, this inscription postdates the graffito itself, since the text claims that restoration work has been done here. The fact that the text is incised confirms that it is more recent than the raised relief images.⁴⁹

Then, what was the date of the original relief? Graffiti can be difficult to date. Dating often relies on combined analysis of context, content, orthography, prosopography, and palaeography.⁵⁰ There is nothing to suggest that we discuss here a graffito from the reign of Thutmosis III who built the gate or Ramses II who put his name instead of Thutmosis III names or even traces of artistic evidence that it is originally a Pharaonic Dynasties

43. The aim of filling the ancient holes with plaster was in order to keep on the graffito form distortion: when there are too many holes without using deformation of the general form of the graffiti happens. However, when the holes are very close or overlapping they are being hidden behind the frame and became difficult to see them so there are no need to fill them with plaster.

44. E. FROOD, in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth*, p. 292; J.A. BAIRD, Cl. TAYLOR, “Ancient Graffiti in Context: Introduction,” in: J.A. Baird, Cl. Taylor (eds.), *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, London, New York, 2011, p. 7.

45. KIU 2395, l. 4; PM II², p. 130 (476), plan pl. XII (2); J.Br. McCLAIN, *Restoration Inscriptions 1*, pp. 382-384; Chr. THIERS, “*Membra disiecta ptolemaica* (II),” *Karnak 14*, 2013, p. 480, n. 2.

46. The text mention: *smꜣwy mnw jr~n nswt bjty ([Jw']-n(y)-ntr.wy-mr.wy-jt-[stp]~n-Pth-[wsr-kꜣ]-R'-shꜣm-'nh-Jmn] sꜣ R' (Ptwlmys-'nh-ꜣt-mry-Pth] nb(.t) Tꜣ.wy (Ql[ꜣw]pdr(ꜣ) ntr.wy pr(.wy) n jtꜣf Wsjr.*

47. So after the year 12 (194/193), date of marriage with Cleopatra I in Raphia.

48. S. Bickel (“The Inundation Inscription in Luxor Temple,” in: G.P.F. Broekman, R.J. Demarée, O.E. Kaper [eds.], *The Libyan Period in Egypt: Historical and Cultural Studies into the 21st-24th Dynasties. Proceedings of a Conference at Leiden University, 25–27 October 2007*, *EgUit* 23, 2009, pp. 52-55) makes a similar suggestion for a royal inscription carved in monumental hieratic, at the point of transition between the court of Amenhotep III and the hypostyle hall in Luxor temple. Also E. Frood in discussion of graffito on the west side of the south façade of the Ramses II court at Luxor temple: E. FROOD, in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth*, p. 292, with Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple II, the Facade, Portals, Upper Register Scenes, Columns, Marginalia, and Statuary in the Colonnade Hall*, OIP 116, 1998, pl. 202, 54-55, Gr. 3.

49. Except the image of Nefertem as discussed above.

50. E. FROOD, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

reliefs. True, the surface of the wall has been cut back surrounding the figure, but this was done to create a raised relief on the wall. So, there is no epigraphic evidence that we are dealing with an icon from the Pharaonic times renewed by Ptolemaic kings.⁵¹ In fact, it was designed and carved in Ptolemaic style.⁵²

The icon itself is not a graffito left by the temple staff or devotees, which in most cases can be rudely scratched on temple walls. This is quite large and carefully rendered in raised relief, and was provided with a veil. The use of raised relief is striking because most of the very formal graffiti are usually incised or carved in sunk relief. Raised relief is associated with the primary decoration on the interiors, and hence spaces with a heightened sanctity. Here the choice of raised relief grants a generalized prestige to the scene, like the raised relief of ithyphallic Amun carved on the west exterior wall of the Luxor temple.⁵³ It is highly recommended that the priesthood of that time officially sanctioned the image, and the lack of a royal official standing before the gods would tend to confirm that it is an institutional practice. This type of graffiti representing sacred images of gods were made by the temple institutions to be secondary images for worshiping as part of the development of the popular religion from the end of the New Kingdom.⁵⁴ As a development of this practice in the Ptolemaic period, such graffiti became a practice that Kings involved in.⁵⁵

It is most likely that the temple authorities added these images at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period in order to provide places of worship for those who could enter the temple enclosures but not the temple proper.

The presence of the names of these kings is remarkable. Many of the titles of Hathor at Thebes associated with royal succession and to secure the throne for her son, Somtous as metaphor of the King. This perhaps explains why interest in her worship from the kings of that period and the creation of graffiti was one of the things these king express on that interest. Hathor acts as “protector of her heir” (*nd(.t) jw'z:s*) and “she who puts Horus (var. “her son”) upon the throne of his father (*rd.t Hr hr ns.t jtzf*) in Thebes. “She who supplicated concerning her son, who reached Thebes, who beseeched the Chief of the Gods (Amun) who united the two lands beneath the throne of her heir” (*njs(.t) Hr sz:s spr(.t) Wzs.t nh(.t) hry-ntr.w smz(.t) Tz.wy hr ns.t jw'z:s*)⁵⁶. Hathor of Thebes is also the one who “united for him the two lands by the double crown” (*smz(.t) nzf Tz.wy m shm.ty*)⁵⁷. This is also an indication to the king himself. She “makes the King through her speech, under whose authority the lord appears in glory” (*jr(.t) nsw m dd.wz:s, h' nb hr s.t-rz:s*).

The Pharaoh was also the son of Hathor-Isis, and this interpret the presence of Hathor-Isis with the king's names in this graffito.⁵⁸

51. In fact, such *ex voto* images of the gods carved on blank exterior walls of Theban temples do not seem to antedate the later Ramesside period.

52. There is at least three other parallel example of a recut *ex voto* images: from Luxor temple on the west exterior wall of the solar court or Amenhotep III; in the Monthu precinct at North-Karnak on a wall space left blank by the original builder. See: A. VARILLE, *Karnak I, FIFAO* 19, 1943, p. 4, fig. 3; L. GABOLDE, V. RONDOT, *BIFAO* 93, 1993, p. 257, fig. 4. pl. 6B; a figure of Ptah in a niche-like area created by the “lip” at the rear of the eastern side of the Ramesses III temple pylon at Karnak: *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, Ramses III's Temple within the Great Enclosure of Amon 2, and Ramses III's Temple in the Precinct of Mut, OIP* 35, 1936, pl. 112k.

53. P.J. BRAND, in: G.N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 257-266.

54. For the the development of the popular religion during the New Kingdom, see A. SADEK, *Popular religion in Egypt during the New Kingdom, HÄB* 27, 1987.

55. Note that the only trace of decoration at Thebes under Nero/Claudius is a well-carved graffito depicting Amun of the *Akh-menu* on the south face of the Ninth Pylon in Karnak: P. BARGUET, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê*, pp. 254, 287, n. 1; M.P. CESARETTI, “Nerone in Egitto,” *Aegyptus* 64, 1984, pp. 8-9; *id.*, *Nerone e l'Egitto. Messaggio politico e continuità culturale, Studi in Storia Antica* 12, Bologna, 1989, p. 30; D. KLOTZ, *Caesar in the City of Amun*, pp. 299-303; KIU3651.

56. P. CLÈRE, *La porte d'Évergète à Karnak*, pl. 28 (= *Urk.* VIII, no. 80c = KIU 4013); D. KLOTZ, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

57. *Ptah* I, no. 71 = *Urk.* VIII, no. 211 = KIU 3567.

58. *Ptah* I, no. 26 = *Urk.* VIII, no. 190e = KIU 3599; D. KLOTZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

The previous titles reflected indirectly the King's succession to a deity on the throne of Egypt which may explain Isis's and Hathor's religious importance in relation to the kings of that period. This is reflected in her frequent presence in the inscriptions of that period and the establishing of several monuments dedicated to her. Graffiti of both deities were part of this royal attention.

In a text written in Greek, it was stated that Ptolemy III went to Persia and brought with him statues of Egyptian gods and other precious things that the Persians had looted during their occupation of Egypt, as well as the Egyptian text recorded on the stela of Canopus does not tell us only about Ptolemy III's going to Persia and bringing the statues; it also tells us that the king and his wife Berenice gave many gifts to the Egyptian temples, and continues the text to mention the good work done by the king and queen.

As a result of all these good works of Ptolemy III and his wife the priests established a new job of a priest pray by their names, the title of this priest was called "the priest of the good gods". This job included all the temples of the Upper and Lower Egypt. No doubt that priest like this appointment at Karnak; so the renewal of this graffiti was a reflection of that kind of graffiti which had been used as secondary images of worship done by the temple institution which was mandated to accept these grants from them by Ptolemy and Bernice, and the renewal of the graffiti was reaction of these grants.

There is also a relationship between Isis and Bernice, the wife of Ptolemy III whose name is mentioned in this graffiti. Canopus stela mentioned that the queen suddenly died during the priests' meeting with Ptolemy III. This incident a big affair as held funerary celebration of her and the priests of the town of Canopus venerated and established her worship with Osiris in their temple. This indicates that she corresponded with Isis, which corresponded, with Hathor in the graffiti.

Graffiti of divine images have often been interpreted as objects of popular devotion and worship and connected with the "rise of personal piety", rather than being related to elite modes of self-presentation. This interpretation depends on features of content and style, but most especially on their location in areas thought to be accessible to temple staff and in some cases to ordinary people.⁵⁹ Especially these in connection with processional routes.⁶⁰ As such, they are understood to delineate "contact zones", points of interface and perhaps tension, between the core, restricted temple cult and the wider populace.⁶¹

The holes, which pierce the stone around the images of the deities probably point to different types of "enrichment",⁶² beside the above suggestion that it was probably supported wooden or other light structure directly against the wall,⁶³ it could have consisted of applications of metal sheets, as Borchardt⁶⁴ thought. Or it was to support frames for fabric coverings which could reveal the image to ordinary people at on special occasions like the different feasts and festivals. Here it could represents the "shadow of the god" resting on the cult image.⁶⁵

59. E. FROOD, in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth*, p. 289.

60. A. CABROL, *Les voies processionnelles de Thèbes*, OLA 97, 2001, pp. 720-731.

61. K. ASHLEY, V. PLESH, "The Cultural Processes of Appropriation," in: K. Ashley, V. Plesh (eds.), *The Cultural Processes of Appropriation*, Special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32 (1), 2002, pp. 4-6; V. PLESH, "Memory on the Wall: Graffiti on Religious Wall Paintings" in: K. Ashley, V. Plesh (eds.), *The Cultural Processes of Appropriation*, pp. 167-197; E. FROOD, in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth*, p. 289.

62. Cl. TRAUNECKER, "Observations sur le décor des temples égyptiens," in: Fr. Dunand, J.-M. Spieser, J. Wirth (eds.), *L'image et la production du sacré : actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 20-21 janvier 1988*, Paris, 1991, pp. 88-89.

63. P.J. BRAND, in G.N. Knoppers, A. Hirsch (eds.), *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World*, pp. 263-264; *id.*, in: P. Dorman, B.M. Bryan (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes*, pp. 60-65.

64. L. BORCHARDT, "Metallbelag an Steinbauten," in: *Allerhand Kleinigkeiten*, Leipzig, 1933 pp. 1-11.

65. P.J. BRAND, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

The court of the 3rd Pylon is open to the sky, directly led to the northern group of the Karnak complex and is next to the north-south processional way of the temple, thus the court was probably understood as an exterior space (although not generally accessible). The door onto which this graffito is carved led to a long corridor which was used to move around the central complex of the temple. Thus, it was probably an appropriate place to display this graffito of divine images, which meant to be highly visible, perhaps a focal point of adoration? It is marking out the daily movements of priests and other temple staff through this side door and courts which would have been entered by these side doors from service and administrative areas. They are not only pious interventions but seem also to govern and ritualize these regular activities. The spaces around the graffito was active performative spaces for festivals and other cultic activities. Such additions and reworking create “contact zones” between the central rituals of temples, which are manifested in the primary decoration and realize core cosmologies, and daily, ephemeral but vital practices, activities, and performances.

Hathor within the temple of Ptah, from the beginning of the New Kingdom to the last Ptolemy, was the first lady of Thebes (*hry.t-tp W3s.t*). She was one of the most ancient deities in Thebes. In the other side of Karnak, in the temple of Khonsu, Hathor was “the one who resides in Benenet”.⁶⁶ Drawing a straight line between the gate of Khonsu and the temple of Ptah give us a south-north axis.

It is a route of the procession for the New Year. This line crosses through the hypostyle hall, from the south door to the north corner. On its south wall, one can see the theogamy or holy birth in a much-summarized manner: Khnum is modeling a form on his wheel; Hathor suckling the child king.⁶⁷

On all of the walls, the king’s crowning is always facing north, towards the Ptah’s temple for the memphite coronation, in the hand of Hathor, daughter and eye of Re. It is the same orientation of all figures in our graffito. In the north part of the hypostyle (on the east wall), is the great royal ritual of the New Year (with the ceremonial candle). Directly opposite that, on the west wall, we see fifteen Hathors in position for the numerous ceremonies of the coronation.⁶⁸

If graffiti of divine images were set up by temple institution in order to provide places of worship, piety, veneration, and ritual action for non-elites and some of the clergymen, temple administrators and other temple staff employed in the temple workshops and offering making places who could enter the temple enclosures but not the temple proper,⁶⁹ then those while they do their work and participate on the procession would pass by this graffito and do their prayers. also as the graffito located in the way from Khonsu to Ptah and close to South/North processional way, it would very active during the festivals on these ways.⁷⁰

Thus, graffiti not only delineate places of devotion for temple staff, they ritualize their regular activities and movements in association with central cult rituals and performances. The gods depicted are mostly major deities and this strengthens the connection with primary cult.

66. PM II², p. 242 (110), plan XX.

67. H.H. NELSON, W.J. MURNANE, *The Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak I/1. The Wall Reliefs*, OIP 1981 ,106, pls. 66, 67.

68. S. CAUVILLE, “Karnak ou la quintessence de l’Égypte”, *BSFE* 172, 2008, pp. 17-31.

69. Cl. TRAUNECKER, “Manifestations de piété personnelle à Karnak”, *BSFE* 85, 1979, pp. 22-31; W. GUGLIELMI, “Die Funktion von Tempeleingang und Gegentempel als Gebetsort: zur Deutung einiger Widder- und Gansstelen des Amun,” in: R. Gundlach, M. Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel: Struktur, Funktion und Programm. Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz 1992*, *HÄB* 37, 1994, pp. 55-68; A. CABROL, *Les voies processionnelles de Thèbes*, pp. 721-722; E. FROOD, in: D. Ragavan (ed.), *Heaven on Earth*, pp. 289-290.

70. Note the New Kingdom seated graffito depicted “Hathor, lady of the sycamore” which faces south and locates on the inner east wall of “Cour de la cachette” (PM II², p. 131 [482], plan XIV). I thank Chiara Salvador for showing me her work on this graffito as part of her PhD.

In Karnak, graffiti points towards subtle transformations of construction, production, and delineation of sacred space within central areas, levels of sanctity, movement through temple space, and zones of priestly practice were no longer indicated primarily by architecture and royal decorative schemes, but also by the presence of graffiti and added votive images, which demonstrate the dynamism of sacred space. Eugene Cruz-Urbe observed that graffiti “is found in a location that is dynamic and not static and once an area has a graffiti written on it, the nature of the location changes”.⁷¹



Fig. 1. Graffito of Hathor-Isis on the side door south the fourth Pylon (Photo by the Author).

71. E. CRUZ-URIBE, *The Graffiti from the Temple Precinct, Hibis Temple Project 3*, San Antonio, 2008, p. 224; E. FROOD, in: L. Bareš, F. Coppens, K. Smoláriková (eds.), *Egypt in transition*, p. 123.



Fig. 2. General view of Hathor-Isis Graffito on the side door south the fourth Pylon (Photo by the Author).



Fig. 3. Close shot for Harpocrates (right) and Nefertem (left) (Photo by the Author).

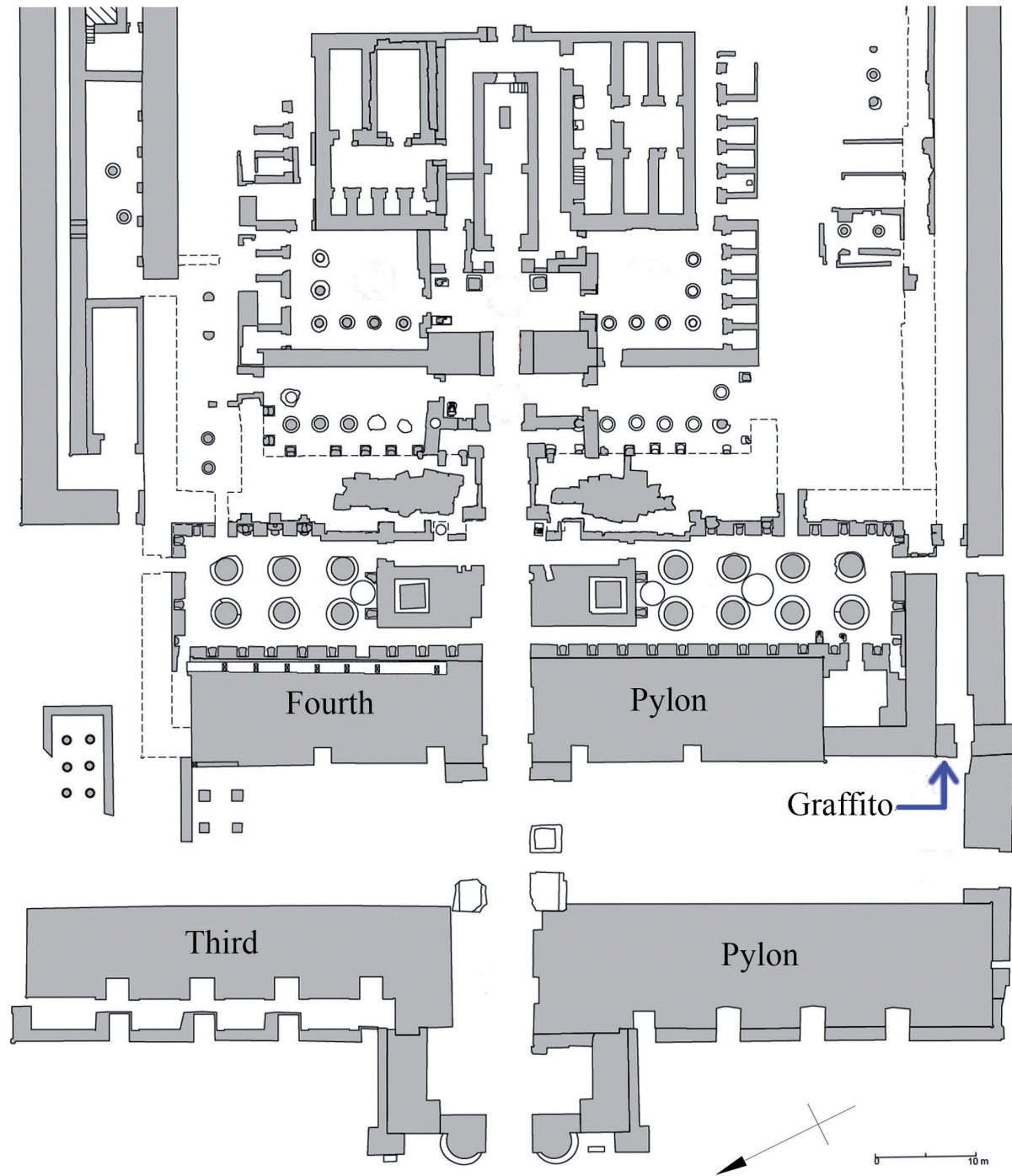


Fig. 4. Plan of the Central zone of the temple of Amun-Re showing the location of the Graffito. © CNRS-CFEETK.