

LIFE IN THE EASTERN DESERT OF EGYPT

Unit 8 – Seeking Sanctuary:
Gods in the Desert

HPAH7006

Evidence for religious activity

Evidence:

- ▣ Formulas written on steles or graffiti + ostraka and papyri
- ▣ Figurative scenes
- ▣ Votive offerings
- ▣ Structural remains, but also *speoi* or rock-cut “temples” (or shrines) created from natural caves or outcrops



Temple of Seti I – el-Kanias

Problems:

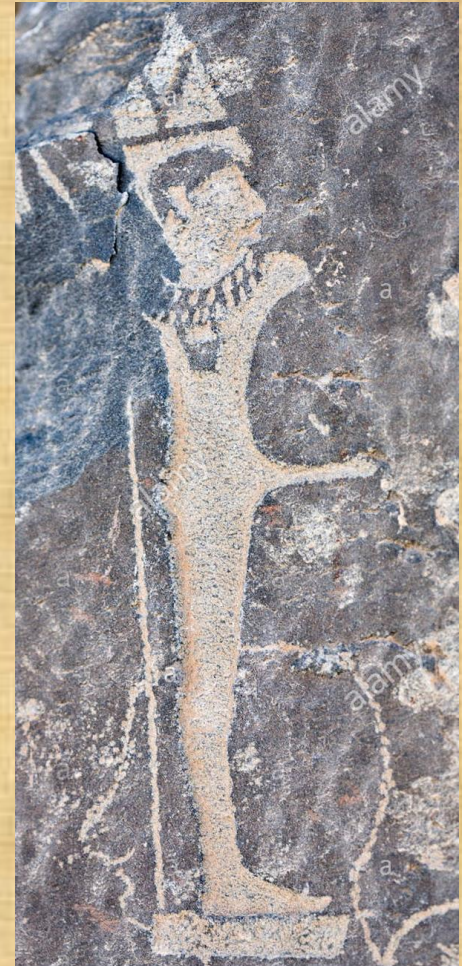
- ▣ Difficulty of comparisons with the Nile Valley
- ▣ Religious influences between indigenous and “intrusive” groups.
- ▣ Difficulty of dating rock art.



Rock Art – Wadi Hammamat

Gods in the Desert

- ▣ Various Egyptian gods and their worship can be connected to the Eastern Desert including, Ptah, Amon, Hathor and Sopdu, among others.
- ▣ Notable prominence of Min (later to be identified by the Greeks with Pan) and Horus.
- ▣ Min often appeared in rock shelters (alongside other deities).
- ▣ Images of falcons or anthropomorphic figures with a falcon head are represented in rock art (often connected to New Kingdom).



Min – Wadi Hammamat

Graeco-Roman activity: mines

- Promulgation of worship of Serapis by Ptolemies: a god which amalgamated aspects of Osiris and the Apis bull (among other deities)
- Amethyst mining settlement at Wadi Abu Diyeiba (southwest of Safaga). Numerous inscriptions set up by the miners and administrators of the area to Pan, Harpocrates (a deity connected to “Horus the Child”), Isis, and Serapis.
- Sikait temple dedicated to Serapis, Isis of Senskis (the ancient name for Sikait), Apollo, and other gods.

Figure 6.8

The large rock-cut temple at Sikait with side chambers north and south of the main entrance.



Figure 6.3

Relief found at the amethyst quarries at Wadi Abu Diyeiba, probably dating to the second century BC. Scale = twenty centimeters.



Images from Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens (2008)

Elephant Tracks?

- Bir Abu Safa: rock cut temple whose location may link into a route leading from Aswan to the Ptolemaic-Roman fort at Abraq (about 13km from the site).
- Set up by Ptolemy III in 228/227 BC – first noted by Louis Maurice Linant de Bellefonds in 1832.
- Rock cut temple may connect to a pooling of water nearby which would have been of great benefit to travellers.

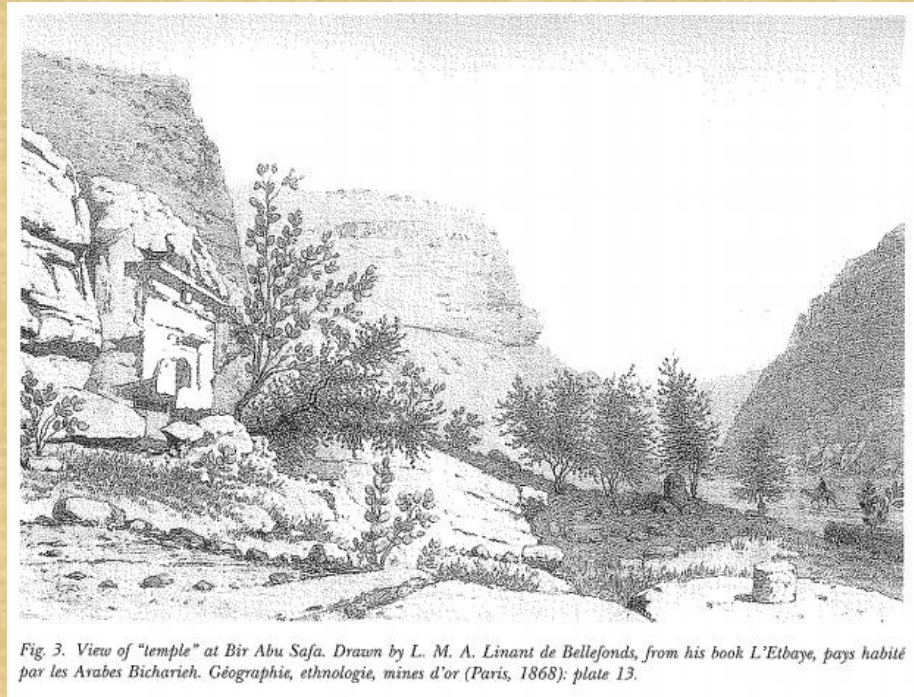


Image from Sidebotham, Mikhail, Harrell and Bagnall (2004)

Hardstone Quarries and Emerald Mines

- Mons Porphyrites - satellite settlement at Wadi Ma'mal has temple of Serapis, which while dilapidated, still reveals a number of columns, column capitals, entablatures and its dedicatory inscription.
- Temple identified at near the main fort at Mons Claudianus. Inscription from the building reveals that it was dedicated 'to "Zeus Helios Great Serapis" and the other gods who share his temple'
 - identification of a terracotta head of Isis by Wilkinson.

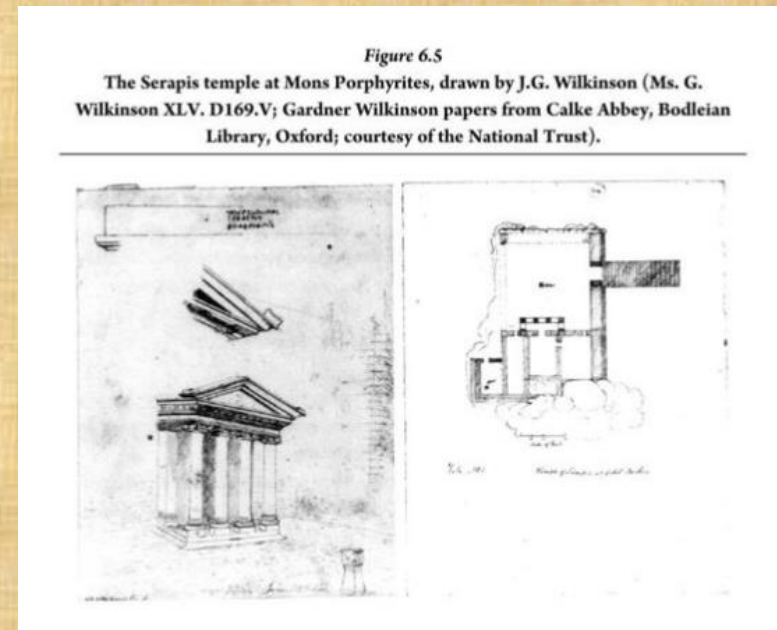


Image from Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens (2008)

The Fortlets and Ports

- Common practice for each of the *praesidia* lining the ED routes to have its own patron deity.
 - e.g. Simiou (El-Laqeita), probably founded by the explorer Simmias (under Ptolemy III), worshiped the deified Philotera (sister of Ptolemy II).
 - Difficulty of identifying religious structures at Myos Hormos - possible synagogue?
- Berenike: evidence for a number of traditional Egyptian deities and deities popularised in the Graeco-Roman period, as well as “foreign” gods.
 - “Shrine of the Palmyrenes”
 - bilingual Greek and Palmyrene text mentioning a statue of Yarhibol/Hierobol;
 - gypsum head of Harpocrates;
 - *cista mystica* associated with Bacchic rituals
-
-
- Images from Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens (2008)



Figure 6.22
Shrine of the Palmyrenes at Berenike.

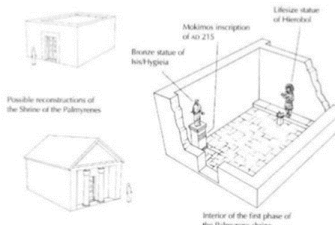


Figure 6.23
Reconstruction of statue base, inscription, and statue fragment from the shrine of
the Palmyrenes at Berenike.

Images from
Sidebotham,
Hense and
Nouwens
(2008)

Great Temple

- Great Temple (so-called Temple of Serapis): worship of Horus, Isis, Osiris, Khem/Min, Isis-Hathor, Mut(?), Geb, and Harpocrates, among others.
 - Greek inscription set up to honour the (probably Puteolian) merchant Marcus Laelius Cosmus (Μάρκος Λαίλιος Κόσμος) during the reign of Tiberius.
- Thousand black pepper-corns which were found inside an Indian terracotta storage jar.
- Note also the many charred black peppercorns in deposits at the site.

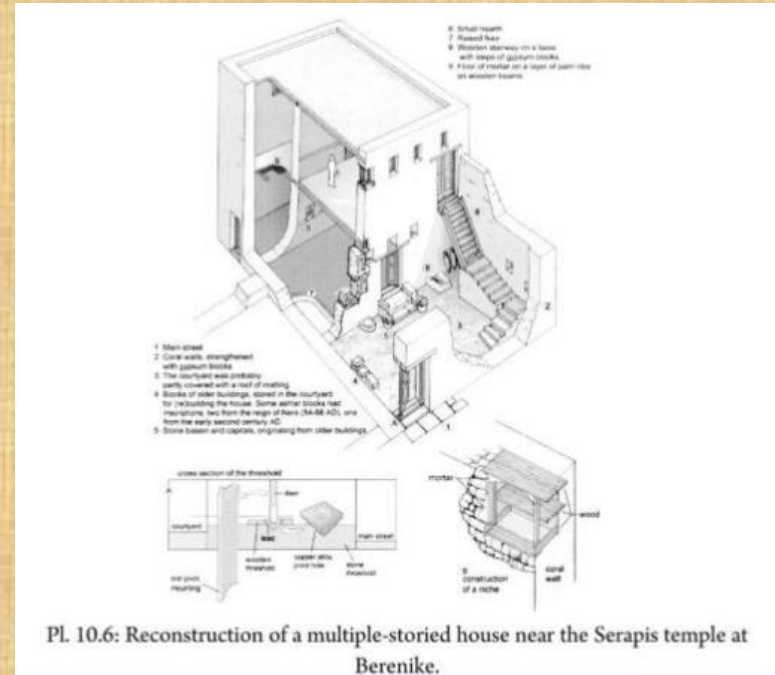


Image from Sidebotham, Hense and Nouwens (2008)

