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KHARGA OASIS
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KHARGA OASIS (Ar. Ḵārja), the largest oasis in the Western Desert of Egypt, approximately 200 km west of the Nile Valley (Figure 1, Figure 2). Together with the neighboring Dakhla Oasis it was known in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic as *wḥ3.t rsy.t*, the 'southern oasis' (Giddy, pp. 39-40). Although there is a long history of human activity and habitation in the Western Desert, the oasis was only sparsely populated during the pharaonic period of Egyptian history (Caton-Thompson, pp. 45-53). Instead, Egyptian activity in the desert was focused primarily on expeditions, trade and the procurement of raw materials (Darnell, 2013). Following the Persian conquest of Egypt around 525 BCE, Cambyses launched an invasion of the Kharga Oasis (Osing, pp. 1447-8; Cruz-Uribe, 2003, pp. 35-7). According to Herodotus (3.26), the goal of this expedition was to subdue the "Ammonians," but recent research at Amheida in Dakhla suggests that Petubastis IV, a pretender and rebel against Cambyses, may have had a base there which was the actual target (Kaper). Although Herodotus presents this expedition as a failure, it is clear that the Kharga Oasis was under Persian control for the duration of Achaemenid rule of Egypt (see Egypt i. Persians in Egypt in the Achaemenid period), save perhaps for a brief period during the revolt of Inarus, whose name appears in a dating formula on a single demotic ostracon from ʿAyn Manāwir (Chauveau, 2004). There are several sites in the oasis with archaeological remains dating to the Persian period, in particular temples and subterranean aqueducts often referred to as *qanāt* (pl. *qanāthā*; Colburn 2014, pp. 149-96; forthcoming; *see* Kāriz*)*

The most notable monument of Achaemenid date in the Kharga Oasis, and

indeed the best preserved temple from the Egyptian Late Period, is the temple of Amon/Amun at Hibis. Hibis, meaning “town of the plow,” was the primary settlement in the oasis, and the temple is located just north of the modern town of Kharga. The original temple consisted of a forecourt, hypostyle hall, a sanctuary, several smaller rooms, and several chapels on the upper level, accessible via staircases (Winlock; Ismail). Later a second, larger hypostyle hall and a portico were added to the entrance of the temple on the eastern side, as was an enclosure wall and pylons. The temple is richly decorated with reliefs and inscriptions on both its interior and exterior walls (Davies; Cruz-Uribe, 1988; Klotz). Most of these reliefs display images of the king making offerings to various gods, especially Amun, Mut, Khonsu, Osiris and Horus. The main sanctuary of the temple features images of some 700 different gods from throughout Egypt in high relief. These reliefs have been interpreted as “cult-topographical,” that is, they serve to catalog deities and cult practices from across Egypt (Sternberg-el Hotabi; Kessler; Colburn, 2014, pp. 187-89), a well-known feature of temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.

The foundation and construction of the temple is usually attributed to Darius I, whose name appears many times on the walls of the earliest part of the temple (Winlock, pp. 7-9; Colburn 2014, pp. 177-78). However, some scholars argue that construction actually began under Psamtik II (r. 595-589 BCE), on the grounds that Psamtik’s Horus name (i.e., one of his royal names) appears once in the forecourt (Cruz-Uribe, 1988, pp. 164-65). But this evidence is not definitive. First, royal names were sometimes reused in order to confer legitimacy (Kahl), and it is entirely possible that Darius used Psamtik’s Horus name. Second, none of the cartouches naming Darius in the temple show signs of painting over or re-cutting of Psamtik’s name (Ismail, pp. 21-22).

Qasr el-Ghueita (known as *pr-wsḫ* in Egyptian), some 20 km south of Hibis, is the site of a small sandstone temple within a mudbrick fortification wall. The wall is thought to be of Roman date, but the temple itself was built in the reign of Darius I, a date confirmed by two cartouches in the main sanctuary (Darnell, 2007, p. 30). The temple consists of a forecourt, hypostyle hall, a vestibule, and three rooms at the back, oriented east to west. The middle of these, interpreted as being the temple’s main sanctuary, is decorated with raised relief and painted plaster and includes images of the king before the gods Amun, Mut, Khonsu, Min and Isis (Darnell et al.). This room is not aligned with the rest of temple, and it seems that the main sanctuary was originally a freestanding shrine that was incorporated into the temple building by Darius

(Darnell, 2007, pp. 31-32). Further additions to the temple were made during the Ptolemaic period.

In the south of the oasis there are five hill sites in the Baris basin, all of which have subterranean aqueducts, often known as *qanāt*s: ʿAyn Manāwir, Dush, Dikura, ʿAyn Ziāda, and ʿAyn Boreq (Bousquet, pp. 179-91, 195-202). *Qanāt*s are widespread in Iran, and are generally thought to have originated there, though this is now a subject of debate (Colburn, 2014, pp. 163-67; forthcoming; Boucharlat). Twenty-two *qanāt*s have been identified at ʿAyn Manāwir, ranging in length from about 200 to 350 m (Wuttmann; Gonon); there is also a mudbrick temple, flanked by two clusters of houses (Wuttmann et al., 1996; 1998). The temple includes a forecourt, hypostyle hall, sanctuary and three chapels. Remains of painted decoration have been found in several rooms, as have several hundred bronze statuettes, many representing the god Osiris (Wuttmann et al., 2007). Abutting the temple is another, smaller structure, where numerous ostraca were recovered, bearing texts written in demotic Egyptian; it is thought to be the office of the temple scribe (Chauveau, 1996, pp. 34-35).

Around 450 ostraca have been found at ʿAyn Manāwir, ranging in date from 483 to 370 BCE (Chauveau, 1996; 2001; 2005; 2008; 2011). Some of these texts refer to the leasing of water rights in exchange for a portion of the harvest, and they thus confirm the Achaemenid date for the settlement and its attendant *qanāt*s. They also indicate that one of the main crops grown there was the castor bean, and archaeobotanical remains from the site also provide evidence of the cultivation of olives and date palms (Newton et al., 2006; 2013; Agut-Labordère and Newton, 2013; Agut-Labordère, 2016). These are all cash crops, and they attest to the success of *qanāt* irrigation in making the southern Kharga Oasis into a productive agricultural zone. Indeed, the ostraca even contain references to ‘staters of Ionia,’ which must be Athenian tetradrachm coins, as units of account (Chauveau, 2000; Agut-Labordère, 2014). These coins came into use in Egypt during the Persian period, likely as an indirect consequence of Achaemenid tribute requirements (Colburn, 2014, pp. 352-87), and their occurrence in these texts from ʿAyn Manāwir illustrate the extent to which the oasis had become intertwined with economic activity in the Nile Valley and beyond.

Dush (ancient Kysis), about 5 km to the east of ʿAyn Manāwir, is another settlement with two small temples, both in poor condition, and at least three *qanāt*s. One of the temples is sandstone, and surrounded by a mudbrick

enclosure called the "*kasr ancien*" by Reddé. It has inscriptions dating from the reigns of Domitian (r. 81-96 CE) to Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161 CE), but a radiocarbon date obtained from the *kasr ancien* provided a range of 450-350 BCE (Reddé, pp. 172-3). The other temple is mudbrick and preserves no inscriptions; it provided a radiocarbon date of 423-179 BCE (Reddé, p. 180). These dates, along with references to Kysis in the ostraca from ʿAyn Manāwir (Chauveau, 1996, pp. 38-9), suggest that although most of the remains from Dush date to the Roman period, the settlement itself was probably established in the fifth century BCE; the *qanāt*s there may also date to this period. The other three sites in the Baris basin with *qanāt*s – Dikura, ʿAyn Ziāda, and ʿAyn Boreq – have only been subject to limited study. While it is fairly clear they were active in the Roman period, it is possible they were established earlier as well.

*Qanāt*s have also been documented in the northern Kharga Oasis, at ʿAyn Gib and Qasr el-Sumayra (Schacht), ʿAyn Lebekha (Rossi and Ikram, 2010, pp. 238-9), and Umm el-Dabadib (Rossi, pp. 348-52; Rossi and Ikram, 2006, pp. 301-2). All of these sites are of Roman date, but the *qanāt*s themselves cannot be dated firmly, and may have been dug earlier, since *qanāt*s were often reused over long periods of time.

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