

LOOKING FOR THE EGYPTIAN QUEENS OF THE LATE PERIOD AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ENDEAVOUR

MARTA KACZANOWICZ

INSTITUTE OF MEDITERRANEAN AND ORIENTAL CULTURES, POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

MARTA.KACZANOWICZ@GMAIL.COM

INTRODUCTION

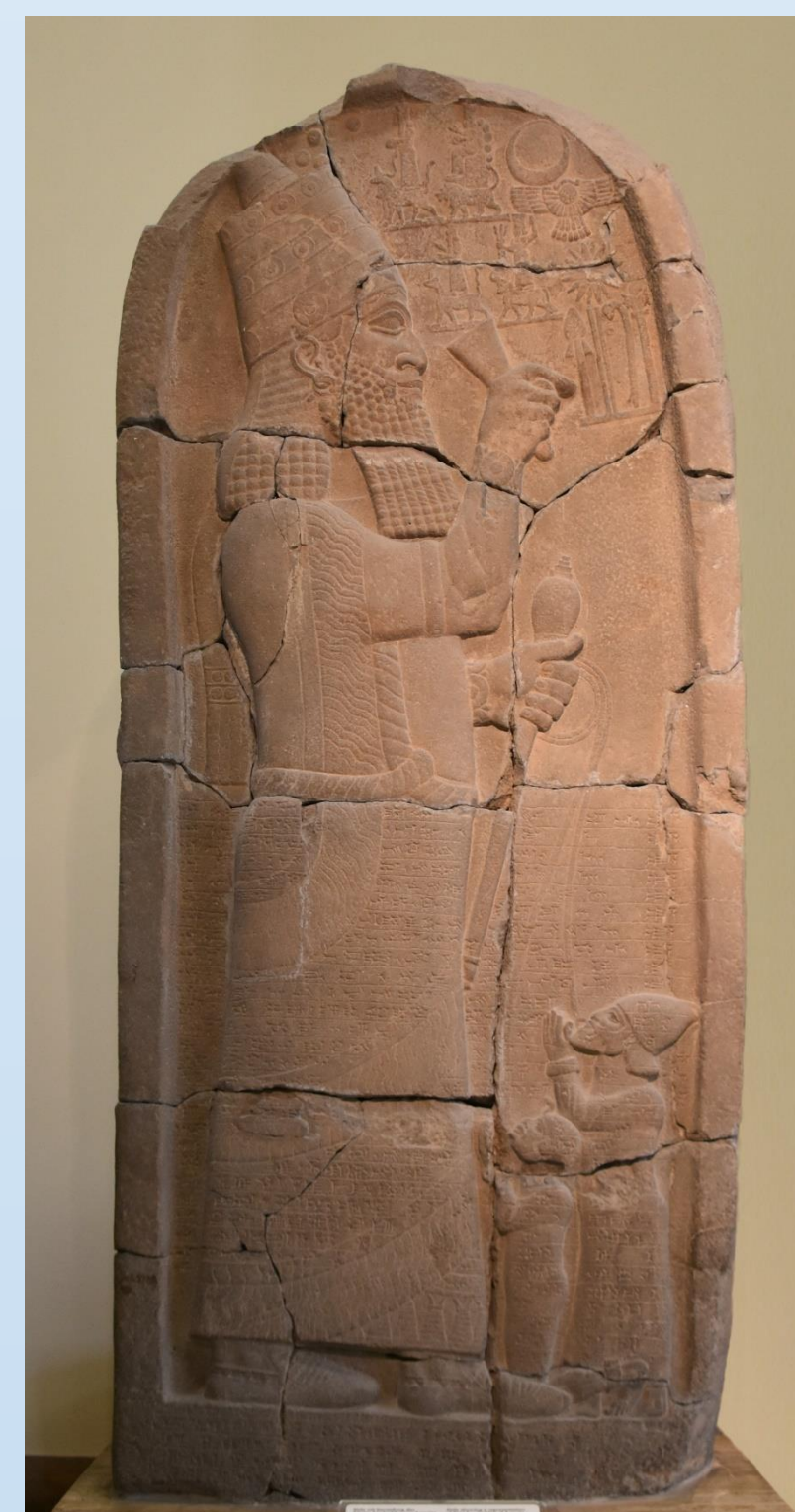
In the Late Period (ca. 747–332 BCE), Egyptian queens seem to disappear from history. They are no longer featured in Egyptian temples' iconography and rarely appear in Egyptian textual sources. This has led to their omission from general discussions on the Egyptian queenship, as it was proposed that their symbolic role in the ideology of power from this moment onwards was fulfilled by goddesses.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Did the role of the queen change in the Late Period or was there a continuation of the earlier tradition?
2. Did the significance of the queen diminish?
3. Does the lack of data reflect the actual scarcity of evidence or rather trends in earlier scholarship?

CASE STUDY 1: QUEEN IS GONE!

The famous Assyrian Zincirli Stela describes the sack of Memphis by Esarhaddon in 671 BCE in the following words: *As for Taharqa, the king of Egypt and Kush, (...) I inflicted serious defeats on him daily, without ceasing. Moreover, (with regard to) he himself, by means of arrows, I inflicted him five times with wounds from which there is no recovery; and (as for) the city of Memphis, his royal city, within half a day (and) by means of mines, breaches, (and) ladders, I besieged (it), conquered (it), demolished (it), destroyed (it), (and) burned (it) with fire. I carried off to Assyria his wife, his court ladies, Ušanahuru, his crown prince, and the rest of his sons (and) his daughters, his goods, his possessions, his horses, his oxen, (and) his sheep and goats, without number* (E. Leichty, Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, Winona Lake 2011, 185).



ZINCIRLI STELA
(phot. R. Mortel ©, CC BY 2.0)

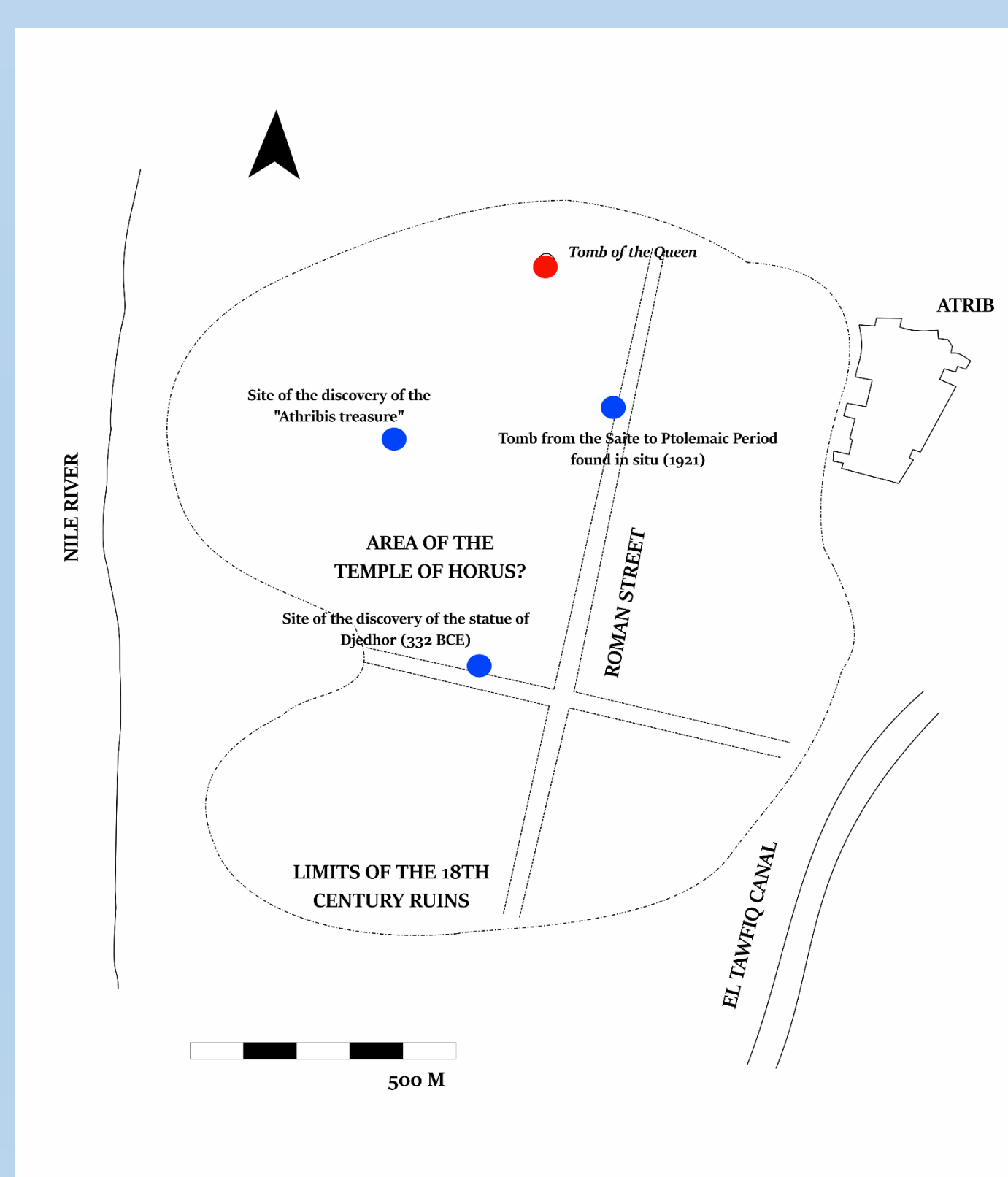
The same event is recalled in several other Assyrian sources (Nahr el-Kelb Stela, cuneiform tablet K8692, etc.), which, albeit typical in their boastful character, employ some unusual wording in reference to the queen and the harim (MUNUS E2.GAL). According to D. Kahn (2004), the text of the „Taharka's Prayer“, inscribed in the vicinity of Pylon VI in Karnak – one of the most extraordinary Egyptian literary compositions ever made – also refers to this event.

The name of the captured queen has not been identified.

CASE STUDY 2: BURIAL OF QUEEN TAKHUT

In May 1950, an intact burial of Queen Takhut (wife of Psamtek II) was discovered accidentally in Tell Atrib (ancient Athribis) and subsequently excavated by R. Nueir and S. Adam. The grave goods consisted of the Queen's sarcophagus, ushebtis, heart scarab, and jewellery, including a diadem and a golden mask.

Takhut was buried in a mudbrick tomb, in a burial chamber lined with thick walls. It is possible that she was interred within the temple temenos, as two blocks with the names of her husband (mutilated) and Osiris Lord of Athribis were found to the south of her tomb. The discovery was published very cursorily. Apart from Takhut's funerary goods, her burial contained scarabs belonging to Psamtek I and the God's Wife of Amun Shepenwepet II – neither of whom were buried in Athribis.



PLAN OF TELL ATRIB
(after: L. Dąbrowski, ASAE 57 (1962), Pl. I)

CASE STUDY 3: TOMB LG 83 (G 9550)

A tomb, given number 83 by K. Lepsius and located approximately in the middle of the causeway of Khefren in the Giza Plateau, proved to contain three sarcophagi: of Queen Nakhtesbastetru (wife of Amasis), her son Ahmose, and a woman named Tashentihet. In the 1980s, the tomb was completely filled with sand and therefore inaccessible.

It remains unclear whether the tomb was hewn in the 26th dynasty, later, or – possibly – earlier and then reused; its structure (a single burial shaft) is somehow untypical for the Saite Period. The sarcophagi of Nakhtesbastetru and Ahmose, found by the Duke of Leuchtenberg, are currently in the Hermitage (767, 766), while the third one, seemingly later than the previous two, is now lost. A green faience shabti of the Queen was found in the vicinity of the Sphinx.

The tomb is curiously close to the Late Period „Osiris Shaft“, excavated by Z. Hawass in 1999, which also cut through the causeway of Khefren approximately halfway. This area seems to have been held particularly sacred in the 1st millennium BCE. It is unknown whether the tomb of the Queen and the „Osiris Shaft“ were somehow connected.

CASE STUDY 4: INAROS AND AMESTRIS

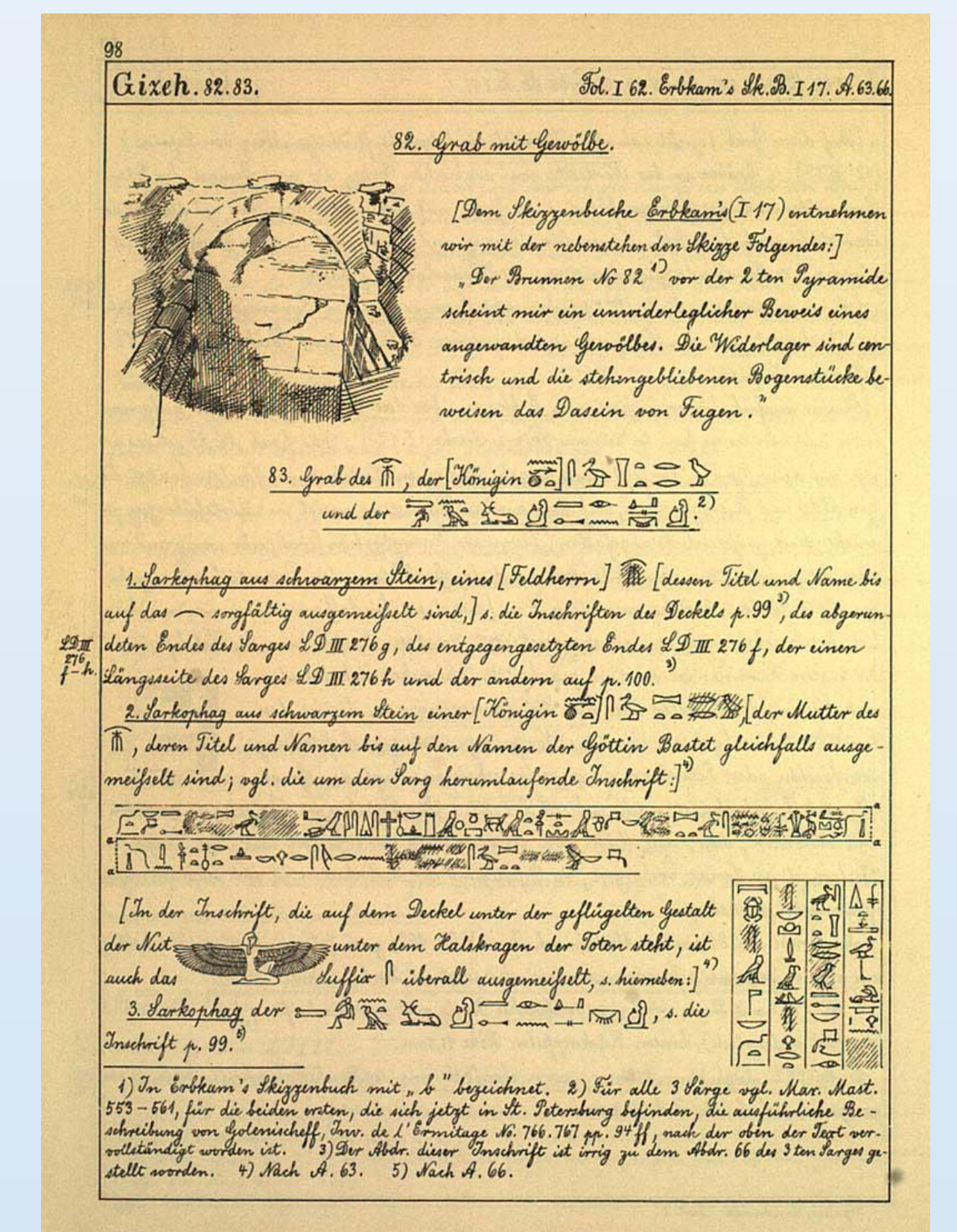
In *Persica* (FGrH 688 F 14 36–9), Ctesias recounts the fate of the Egyptian rebel Inaros after the fall of his revolt against Persia in 457 BCE: *But Amytis (sc. Amestris) is furious that no revenge is exacted from Inaros and the Greeks for her son Achaemenides. She demands this from the king, who does not give way, then from Megabyzus, who repulses her. Then, as she continues to nag her son, she succeeds, and after five years she receives Inaros and the Greeks from the king and impales the former on three poles; as for the fifty Greeks, all those she managed to get hold off, she cuts off their heads* (A. Kuhrt, Persian Empire, London-NY 2010, 324).

This terrible punishment, which was retribution for the death of Amestris' son, killed at the beginning of the rebellion, fits the Classical stereotype of Persian women as cruel, sly, and scheming, therefore can simply be a literary cliché. However, the 27th dynasty queens' interest in Egypt (at least in economical terms) is confirmed by Herodotus (Hist. II, 98) who states that the Egyptian city of Anthylla was the Persian queens' personal property to cover their shoe expenses.

CONCLUSION

While it is true that the queens of the Late Period remain largely missing from the temples' iconography, nevertheless the available sources allow us to attempt to investigate the issue of the position of the royal wives during this era. Since the majority of the queens of Egypt at that time were not Egyptian, in order to do so, one must consult not only Egyptian sources but also Kushite, Assyrian, Classical ones, etc. Archaeology provides important evidence as well, including an intact burial of a 26th dynasty queen. The earlier focus on solely Egyptian iconography and texts led to the omission of these women from scholarship.

What makes the study of the Late Period queenship unique compared to earlier periods of Egyptian history is the blending of Egyptian and non-Egyptian concepts. The intense contact between the Egyptians and Greeks resulted in works such as Herodotus' *Histories*, which offer some more personal glimpses of the Egyptian queens than usually present in the Egyptian sources.



LEPSIUS' DESCRIPTION OF LG 83
(Lepsius, Denkmäler IV, 98)

