



NEITH AS LEGITIMATOR: PERSIAN RELIGIOUS STRATEGY AND UDJAHORRESNET

Marissa Stevens

University of California, Los Angeles

ABSTRACT

While many scholars have interpreted Achaemenid religious policy as one of indifference, the inscriptions on the *Naoforo Vaticano* statue of Udjahorresnet tell a different tale. These texts demonstrate a strategic willingness to allow—and even support—heterogeneous religious customs to the benefit of the Achaemenid Empire. On the statue of Udjahorresnet, both the religious and political importance of Neith is clear: She, as the mother of the sun god Re, was at the center of the religious cult in Sais, the political center of power for Egypt's Twenty-sixth Dynasty. A reading of the inscriptions of Udjahorresnet's statue reveals a deliberate policy on the part of Cambyses, and later Darius, to reestablish and maintain a critical Egyptian cult, thus imbedding Persian dominion within the religious tradition of Egypt and making a strong political statement.

INTRODUCTION: PERSIAN RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND STRATEGY

The Achaemenid Empire embraced cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity within its expansive territory. Much scholarship has flourished surrounding the political and economic policies of the Achaemenid Empire in Egypt, as well as its extensive military campaigns, but less attention has been paid to the religious policy of the Persians.¹ Interpretations regarding Achaemenid religious policy both within Egypt and throughout the wider reaches of the empire have ranged from perceived indifference, non-committal permissiveness, reinterpretation, and reorganization, to tactical adherence to local religious customs.² I would argue that the Achaemenid Empire practiced a strategic willingness to allow—and even support—heterogeneous religious customs in Egypt when such practices benefited the Achaemenid

Empire and the stability of their rule in Egypt.

The inscriptions on the *Naoforo Vaticano* statue of Udjahorresnet (Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Egiziano 22690)³ are evidence in support of this multifaceted tactic of religious tolerance and support by the Persians in Egypt. With the preserved texts on this famous statue, both the religious and political importance of Neith is clear: She, as the mother of the sun god Re, was at the center of the religious cult in Sais, the political center of power for the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties. Politically, a reading of the inscriptions of Udjahorresnet's statue reveals a deliberate policy on the part of both Cambyses and Darius to reestablish and maintain a critical Egyptian cult, thus imbedding Persian dominion within the religious tradition of Egypt and making a strong administrative statement.

There is much evidence testifying to the desire of

the Persian Empire to organize whenever possible the religious landscape of its empire without imposing their own religious beliefs on their diverse subjects.⁴ In contrast to any form of imposition, the Persian kings of the Twenty-seventh Egyptian Dynasty instead focused their efforts on enmeshing themselves into the Egyptian religious landscape, appearing as traditional Egyptian pharaohs in relief and statuary. They maintained traditional Egyptian cult centers, albeit with an augmented balance of power benefiting the crown,⁵ and generally utilized their knowledge and perpetuation of Egyptian religion to their ruling advantage in a “politico-religious” arena of power.⁶

One specific example of contextualizing local religious tradition within the politico-religious organization of the Achaemenid Empire can be found in Egypt at the Hibis temple in the Kharga Oasis. This temple was decorated by the Persian king Darius⁷ as part of an Achaemenid imperial building program. In this temple, Darius is depicted in elaborate reliefs as pharaoh and with royal names encircled in cartouches. What is most striking in this context, however, is not Darius’s depictions of himself as an Egyptian pharaoh, but the extensive display of Egyptian gods to whom he pays homage that also adorn the temple walls. Although the temple is specifically dedicated to the god Amun, Darius is represented making offerings to a myriad of approximately 700 Egyptian divinities, neatly organized, according to the regions in which their cults originated.⁸

There has been much discussion over the origin and meaning of these organized reliefs, including proposals that these images collectively present a microcosm of Egyptian religion,⁹ an attempt to codify Egyptian religious and ritual knowledge in a time of foreign domination,¹⁰ and a precursor to the “pan-Egyptian” temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.¹¹ I do not think that any of these interpretations are mutually exclusive, and the Hibis temple probably aimed both to consolidate and to expand knowledge of Egyptian religious traditions. I believe that these reliefs also reflect the culmination of an imperial project enacted by the Persians to codify and order local religious tradition in order to signal to their subjects¹² the understanding and support of those local beliefs. In this temple, the Persians ordered the Egyptian pantheon without reorganizing or coloring it with their own religious notions and in so doing validated their own power as rulers capable of guiding the land of Egypt in a

way conducive with native religious intent. Thus, the Egyptians were able to accept (at least within a religious context) the Persian kings as part of the ideological frame of the state.

NEITH THE GREAT AND SAIS

I would argue that this injection of Persian ordering into the Egyptian religious system was strategically connected to those areas of Egypt that the Persians needed to exert their control more forcefully. In particular, the city of Sais was a necessary stronghold for the Persians to secure, as it was the political capital of the last native Egyptian dynasty before the Persian conquest, the Twenty-sixth Dynasty (664–525 BCE). The patron goddess of Sais was Neith. While Egypt had a unified national religion with the pharaoh at the helm as High Priest, manifesting in large state temple complexes administered by the palace while simultaneously acting as a polarizing political and economic power to the throne, the focus placed on particular deities varied regionally. Major cities had patron deities, most often a male and female pair.¹³ Unsurprisingly with such an arrangement, when a particular city expanded its political power and increased its economic influence, the deities associated with that city often catapulted into the national spotlight, taking a place of priority in the national Egyptian religious landscape.¹⁴

Such is the story of Neith. Her cult is ancient, even by Egyptian standards, as she was worshiped widely as a creator goddess as far back as the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods.¹⁵ By the Old Kingdom, if not slightly earlier, her cult center at Sais was solidified, with her trademark symbol of crossed arrows and a shield coming to represent the standard for the town. In addition to the standard on her head, she is often depicted in anthropomorphic form wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt (FIG. 1) and carrying the *was*-scepter (a sign of authority), directly connecting her to notions of divine kingship.¹⁶

While many creation myths exist in the Egyptian religious tradition,¹⁷ the one relevant to Neith is the creation account according to Sais-Esna. This account from the temple of Khnum in Esna dates to the 2nd century CE, but recounts a much earlier version originating in Sais.¹⁸ In this text, translated and published by Serge Sauneron,¹⁹ Neith is described as a creator goddess and personification of the primordial waters and a manifestation of the Great Flood. Using the powers of thought and speech, she creates Egypt and thirty gods to inhabit



FIGURE 1: Statuette of the Goddess Neith, Twenty-sixth Dynasty, cupreous metal, H. 24.8 cm; W. 5 cm; D. 7.7 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art 08.202.9.

it. She separates night from day and then, in the form of a cow, gives birth to the sun god, Re. She prophesizes that Re will be the ruler of Egypt and that from his tears mankind will be created. From Neith's own spit or vomit, the giant serpent

Apophis, the chaotic enemy of Re, manifests. The text describes Neith as a neutral creator, generating both order and chaos, but, most critically, after she has created the world and sets it into motion, she selects the side of order for what must ultimately prevail.

She restates her position of supporting order versus chaos in the Egyptian myth of the "Contentings of Horus and Seth,"²⁰ where the assembly of gods writes to Neith the Great, the Divine Mother, asking if Horus (representing order and proper inheritance) or Seth (representing chaos and disruption of hereditary kingship) should become the next king of Egypt, following the death of Osiris. Neith writes a letter in reply, stating, "Give the office of Osiris to his son Horus, and don't do those big misdeeds that are out of place. Or I shall get angry, and the sky will crash to the ground!"²¹ Her position is clear: Neith created the world so that a stable and righteous kingship could maintain ordered rule throughout the land.

By the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, Neith had a secure and successful cult at Sais, and the six pharaohs of the Saite Period rebuilt an earlier, New Kingdom temple dedicated to Neith on a truly grand scale. While poorly preserved and plundered by *sebakhin* diggers in need of fertile soil, a 700–900-meter-long and 500–700-meter-wide (and 28-meter-thick!) enclosure wall was first found in the 19th century²² and later identified as the probable enclosure for the Saite Period temple to Neith.²³ The grand scale of such a monument speaks for itself. This environment would also have been the one in which the Persians would find themselves when the Twenty-sixth Dynasty fell to the Achaemenid Empire.

UDJAHORRESNET'S ROLE IN CONSTRUCTING EGYPTIAN IDENTITY

Confronted with this religious landscape, the Persians, most basically, had three broad options: They could choose to attempt to dismantle such a belief system, ignore it to the degree possible, or embrace it as part of their official political policy. While some scholars interpret the lack of drastic change in Egyptian religious practice during Achaemenid rule as a sign of disregard on the part of the Persians,²⁴ it seems most likely that the Persians adopted specific and strategic policies to maintain and enhance Egyptian cults when it would be beneficial to the validation of their kingship. Evidence for this can clearly be discerned from the

texts preserved on Udjahorresnet's famous *Naoforo Vaticano*.

Although these texts are written in first person, it is unclear how much input Udjahorresnet had in the commissioning of the statue or the presentation of himself and the historical narrative.²⁵ However, regardless of Udjahorresnet's involvement in the crafting of the texts and construction of the statue, it is clear that his persona was a tool used by first Cambyses and then Darius in order to legitimize their rule over Egypt. The chief physician Udjahorresnet claims to be many things in the texts of this statue,²⁶ but most prominent among his titles is that of "The One Honored by Neith-the-Great, the Mother of God." Udjahorresnet introduces himself in the inscriptions as an individual who first served as the commander of the royal navy under the reigns of first Amasis/Ahmose II and then Psammetichus/Psamtik III. While at first this may seem abhorrent to mention dedicated service to the defeated enemies of Cambyses, it not only provides a carefully veiled narrative of the Persian takeover of Egypt but also situates Cambyses within a validated line of Egyptian rulers.²⁷ Yes, his succession to the throne may have been unconventional by traditional hereditary standards, but by mentioning Amasis and Psamtik III, Udjahorresnet places Cambyses on equal footing with his predecessors.

The historical narrative component of the statue's text does not end there, however. Udjahorresnet describes the evolution of Cambyses's titles:

The Great Chief of all foreign lands, *Cambyses*, came to Egypt, and the foreign peoples of every foreign land were with him. When he had conquered this land in its entirety, they established themselves in it, and he was the Great Ruler of Egypt and Great Chief of all foreign lands.

His majesty assigned to me the office of chief physician. He made me live at his side as companion and administrator of the palace. I composed his titulary, to wit his name of King of Upper and Lower Egypt, *Mesutire*.²⁸








Udjahorresnet was careful to introduce Cambyses first as a "Great Chief of All Foreign Lands," not as the "King of Upper and Lower Egypt," the title he used to describe both Amasis and Psamtik III. After Cambyses conquered Egypt and established himself

as the political ruler, Udjahorresnet elevated his title to "Great Ruler of Egypt and Great Chief of All Foreign Lands." These Egyptian terms of "ruler" and "chief" have historically connoted elements of foreignness and otherness, often used to refer to enemy leaders.²⁹ In this careful narrative crafting of the ordering and hierarchy of titles, one can infer that Cambyses did not become a true pharaoh in the minds of the Egyptian people until Udjahorresnet provided him with an Egyptian throne name (prenomen)—a rite of passage for all Egyptian kings upon taking the throne. The name that Udjahorresnet bestowed upon Cambyses was "King of Upper and Lower Egypt, *Mesutire*."

According to this narrative, then, it can be understood that Cambyses's control over Egypt was not complete until Udjahorresnet composed the royal titulary, providing Cambyses with the throne name *Mesutire*. Being the "Offspring of Re" directly connected him to Neith, as well as emphasized his legitimacy to rule via the Egyptian religious pantheon. This prenominal also established him as a ruler within the context of the last two Twenty-sixth-Dynasty rulers, as Amasis held the name of *Khenemibre* ("Joined with the Heart of Re") and Psamtik III held the name of *Ankhkare* ("Living Ka of Re"). Indeed, all six of the Twenty-sixth-Dynasty pharaohs had a prenominal that connected them with the sun god Re, but Cambyses's throne name boasts the most intimate connection to the god. While all the other pharaohs claimed to be associated with an element or particular component of the sun god, only Cambyses claimed to be the offspring of Re, the son of the sun.³⁰ I would argue that the deliberate choice of *Mesutire* was a statement made by Udjahorresnet on behalf of Cambyses to elevate his connection to the Egyptian pantheon in comparison to Amasis, Psamtik III, and the earlier Saite pharaohs, as being an offspring of Re clearly outranks them all (TABLE 1).

Furthermore, this connection to Re was of critical importance to what constituted a legitimate ruler in the Egyptian mindset. While there exists no formal treatise on kingship in Egypt, one solar hymn does illustrate the fundamental connection between Re and the sanctioning of Egyptian kingship. This text, of probable Middle Kingdom composition, has its earliest preserved copies dating from the New Kingdom, and its copies extend into the Late Period.³¹ A short portion of this text reveals the deep connections between Re, divine kingship, and the maintenance of cosmic order:

Table 1: Prenomens of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty kings and Cambyses.

DYNASTY	NOMEN	PRENOMEN		
26th Dynasty (Saite)	Psammetichus / Psamtik I		<i>Wahibre</i>	Constant is the Heart of Re
	Necho II		<i>Wehemibre</i>	Carrying out the Wish of Re [Forever]
	Psammetichus / Psamtik II		<i>Neferibre</i>	Beautiful [is the] Heart of Re
	Apries		<i>Haaibre</i>	Jubilant is the Heart of Re [Forever]
	Amasis /Ahmose II		<i>Khnemibre</i>	Joined with the Heart of Re
	Psammetichus / Psamtik III		<i>Ankhkaenre</i>	Living <i>Ka</i> of Re
27th Dynasty (Persian)	Cambyses		<i>Mesutire</i>	Offspring of Re

Re has placed the king
on the earth of the living
for *neheh* (continual cyclical time) and *djet*
(eternal linear time)
so that he may judge between men
to make the gods content,
so that he may create *maat* (order)
and drive out *isfet* (chaos).
He (the king) brings divine offerings to the
gods
and voice offerings to the blessed dead.³²

In this text, it is clear that the king (in this case, Cambyses) is the one chosen of Re, and indeed is the offspring of Re, meant to uphold the values of Egyptian kingship. He is to preserve the creation of the world in both linear and cyclical time for all eternity by maintaining both law and cult, two specific forces under his purview distinguished in the text. He must do all of this by actively participating in Egyptian cultic practice, which benefits both the pantheon of Egyptian deities and the blessed dead.

The proliferation of this solar hymn ensured that this was the accepted view of kingship held by at least the Egyptian elite—the strata of society that mattered most to the ruler. It is thus clear that Cambyses, with the assistance of Udjahorresnet's religious knowledge, forged a connection to both the

past legitimate kings of Egypt and the deity responsible for authorizing his rule, utilizing a well-known and accepted perspective on Egyptian kingship familiar to those over which he most needed to establish control.

NEITH'S ROLE IN PERSIAN LEGITIMIZATION

This association with Re is also clearly a connection to Neith, as Neith was, particularly in the Saite religious tradition, viewed as the mother of Re. An offspring of Re was also an offspring of Neith. By championing himself as the son of Re, Cambyses could exploit a connection to the goddess Neith, and by extension her validation of kingship and order that her cosmogonic mythology provided.

Furthermore, Neith's centrality in Egyptian state cultic practice at Sais is not a factor to be ignored. It would have been critical for the new Persian rulership in Egypt to secure the defeated dynasty's capital city. The need to safeguard the city in order to maintain control of Egypt was the political reason behind the religious motivations described in Udjahorresnet's inscriptions. Immediately after providing Cambyses with his Egyptian titulary, Udjahorresnet "... let his majesty know the greatness of Sais, that it is the seat of Neith-the-Great, the mother who bore Re and inaugurated birth when birth had not yet been; and the nature of the

greatness of the temple of Neith, that it is heaven in its every aspect...."³³

Perhaps my interpretation is overly cynical, but I do not see this exchange between Udjahorresnet and Cambyses resulting in the Persian king becoming so deeply inspired by the religious might of Neith that he became a fervent devotee of Egyptian religious tradition. I instead see, carefully camouflaged in Udjahorresnet's pious words, the recognition for opportunity to utilize existing religious structures to benefit the fledgling Persian king-turned-pharaoh in creating a stronghold in Egypt. Cambyses would have recognized the political, economic, and military (do not forget the 28-meter-thick walls) power of the Egyptian state temple institution at Sais and realized that an easy way to create a stronghold in that capital city would be to assume its rightful role as the pharaonic High Priest and administer that institution as a proper king should. When Udjahorresnet petitioned Cambyses to restore the sanctity of the temple by expelling the foreigners and refugees that had taken residence inside its once purified walls following the battles of Persian conquest, Cambyses readily agreed.

Cambyes ordered Udjahorresnet to reinstate the defunct cult and all temple personnel to the goddess, and ensured, by the appointment of Udjahorresnet as a priest in the temple, that the correct offerings were made and the proper festivals were performed. Politically, the reestablishment of the temple and cult of Neith in Sais was a tool Cambyses used to situate himself in the same seat of power as the preceding dynasty. Again, Udjahorresnet was utilized to the Persian's advantage, as he was a high-ranking official who was already familiar with the religious and political significance of Sais. He was an individual who, through both his connections to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty and backing from the new Persian authority, could and would establish a religious and political landscape advantageous to Cambyses.

With the cult to Neith thus reestablished and the temple refurbished, Cambyses could complete his religious performance of authority by traveling to Sais for a proper Egyptian coronation.³⁴

The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, *Cambyses*, came to Sais. His majesty went in person to the temple of Neith. He made a great prostration before her majesty, as

every king has done. He made a great offering of every good thing to Neith-the-Great, the mother of god, and to the great gods who are in Sais, as every beneficent king has done. His majesty did this because I had let his majesty know the greatness of her majesty Neith, that she is the mother of Re himself.³⁵

Entering the sanctuary of the temple, he prostrated himself before the statue embodiment of Neith, made the appropriate offerings to her, and was formally crowned as Egypt's pharaoh. He performed these actions, Udjahorresnet states, because this was "as every king has done." Indeed, Egypt possessed a millennia-old cultural memory³⁶ that validated Cambyses's actions as those appropriate of a proper Egyptian king. By participating in and perpetuating this cultural memory—a reenactment of traditional Egyptian religious ritual that results in kingship sanctioned by the gods—Cambyses became part of the collective identity of Egypt, while, in the same act, he annexed Egypt as part of the Achaemenid Empire. Thus, Cambyses, with this coronation performance, placed himself in an uninterrupted line of legitimated Egyptian divine kingship and secures the politico-religious landscape of Egypt within the broader context of Persian dominion.

Udjahorresnet later mentions his service to Darius, stating that he was sent by the Persian king (and King of Upper and Lower Egypt) back to Egypt when it was learned that the administrative and workshop parts of the temple complex of Neith had fallen into disarray.

The majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, *Darius*, ever-living, commanded me to return to Egypt... in order to restore the establishment of the House of Life...after it had decayed... I furnished them with all their staffs consisting of the wellborn, no lowborn among them... His majesty had commanded to give them every good thing, in order that they might carry out all their crafts. I supplied them with everything useful to them, with all their equipment that was on record, as they had been before. His majesty did this because he knew the worth of this guild in making live all that are sick,

in making endure forever the names of all the gods, their temples, their offerings, and the conduct of their festivals.³⁷

Udjahorresnet restored all the physicians, scribes, and skilled laborers to their crafts and ensured that they had the proper space, equipment, and materials to perform their services.³⁸ This was done, Udjahorresnet claims, because Darius “knew the worth of this guild.” This statement in the inscription on Udjahorresnet’s statue is a clear indication that the Persian kings realized the economic and social worth of temple spaces. The Egyptian state religious system functioned not just to support the pantheon of Egyptian deities, but also to serve the communities in which they functioned. Controlling religious spaces as the justified High Priest was an easy way to control the social fabric of the community in which the temple operated.

CONCLUSION

Udjahorresnet, whether knowingly or not, can thus be seen as a creator and manipulator of Persian identity in Egypt. Through his intimate knowledge of Egyptian religious tradition, he was able to provide Cambyses with a meaningful royal identity recognizable in the minds of the Egyptians. Udjahorresnet was able to present the king as a valid ruler in an eternal line of royal succession. By connecting Cambyses first to Re with his selected throne name and, by greater extension, to Neith, the tutelary goddess of Sais, Udjahorresnet grounded Persian dominion over Egypt in a religious tradition already well-respected by the native Egyptian population.

Thus, the political motivations of establishing control of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty’s capital city, appeasing the administrative and priestly classes with the perpetuation of state temple activities, and controlling local populations reliant on stable economic forces was couched in an outward display of religiosity and divine approval: Udjahorresnet constructed a narrative in which Cambyses only became a rightful ruler of Egypt after he became an offspring of Re. Upon learning of the importance of Neith and the sanctity of her temple in Sais, Cambyses made the correct and just decisions as rightful pharaoh to restore her cult, priesthood, temple personnel, daily offerings, festivals, and purity of the temple space—acts that proved he was befitting the role of a proper pharaoh. Practically, this restoration of the temple to its former glory

allowed Cambyses to maintain a stronghold in Egypt’s Saite capital city and present himself to the Egyptian people as a ruler without a native alternative. With his coronation in Neith’s temple, Cambyses ensured that he would not be viewed as an absent overlord, but as a fully fledged Egyptian pharaoh like any other. We can observe Darius making the same politico-religious move when he restored the administrative and production centers of the temple complex.

Udjahorresnet was able to navigate the realms of politics and religion as an Egyptian insider to the benefit of the Persians. Using his intimate knowledge of Egyptian religion and embedding it in the strategic political landscape of Sais, he was able to legitimize Achaemenid authority in Egypt, which allowed the Persians to maintain the façade of minimal interference in local religious practice that has convinced many to this day.

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NOTES

- ¹ Henry P. Colburn has recently written an excellent overview on the status of research into

Achaemenid Egypt. See “The Study of Achaemenid Egypt” in Colburn 2020, 1–26.

- ² This discussion among scholars is highly nuanced, and conclusions are derived from inevitable modern interpretation and biases of the historical context, data, and events. For example, in *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt*, Colburn (2020, 81) concludes that the cult of the Apis bull during the Twenty-seventh Dynasty remained “business as usual,” indicating a type of religious indifference on the part of the Persians. However, he earlier notes the uniqueness of an Apis sarcophagus and stela (Louvre IM 4133) from the reign of Cambyses that indicates that the king might have attended the Apis funeral in person. He also notes that during the reign of Darius, renovations to the Serapeum allowed for the internment of much larger sarcophagi than previously possible. This evidence from the reigns of Cambyses and Darius indicate that the Persians were not just taking “business as usual,” but were going “above and beyond” to make a politico-religious statement of power to the Egyptians. Furthermore, Damien Augt-Labordère (2016) has also nuanced this discussion by pointing to specific circumstances where the Persians supported religious policies in Egypt when they benefited the crown and undermined religious institutions in other instances when their power threatened Persian authority. He concludes that the Persians had a more policy-oriented attitude towards religious institutions, while maintaining indifference towards the religious beliefs themselves (Augt-Labordère 2016, 325). I would argue that Achaemenid religious policy was one of fluid strategy, where different actions were taken based on the specific context confronted.
- ³ See the contributions of Melanie Wasmuth and Cristina Ruggero in this volume for discussions of this statue.
- ⁴ Edelman et. al. 2016.
- ⁵ Augt-Labordère 2016.
- ⁶ Mathieu 2010.
- ⁷ There is debate among scholars as to what pharaoh and—more importantly—what dynasty founded this temple. Eugene Cruz-Uribe (1986, 1987) has argued that the temple’s construction

is of Twenty-sixth-Dynasty date, begun by Psamtik II. He bases this argument on the presence of Psamtik II’s Horus name and two distinct decorative styles found within the temple space. Other scholars, such as Henry P. Colburn (2018, 99; 2020, 116), argue for the temple’s foundation and majority of its construction to be situated firmly within the Twenty-seventh-Dynasty reign of Darius. For another recent discussion of the cult chapels of the Hibis temple, see also Ismail 2019.

- ⁸ Davies 1953.
- ⁹ Zivie-Coche 2008, 6–8.
- ¹⁰ Assmann 1992.
- ¹¹ Colburn 2020, 123.
- ¹² This is, of course, with the major caveat that the naos of any Egyptian temple is a highly restricted space. These reliefs were never meant to be displayed to Egyptians en masse. The Persian kings, however, like all of their predecessors in Egypt, would have used a tactic of monumental display to showcase their authority and legitimacy. It was a time-honored tradition in Egypt for the king to add to sacred temple spaces in his role of divine builder, and part of that act is to present himself as a High Priest who is fully understanding of Egyptian religious rites and rituals. While only viewed by a select few priestly elites, these reliefs would serve, like all other temple reliefs, as a tool of royal validation in a religious realm.
- ¹³ Neith’s male counterpart at Sais was Atum. Due to the fluidity of Egyptian myth and cosmogony, these pairings were not concrete. For example, in the city of Esna in Upper Egypt, Neith was the consort of Khnum.
- ¹⁴ Silverman 1991, 40.
- ¹⁵ Shaw and Nicholson 1995, 250.
- ¹⁶ El-Sayed 1982.
- ¹⁷ These myths, although contradictory in their content, existed simultaneously and harmoniously in the Egyptian religious mind. For a foundational discussion of the multiplicity of approaches emic in the Egyptian belief system that allowed for the validity of multiple cosmogonies, see Frankfort 1948.
- ¹⁸ A discussion of the dating of these two literary

- traditions first appeared in Sauneron 1962, 249–251. For a more detailed discussion on the Saitic tradition, written in classical Middle Egyptian, see von Lieven 2000, 101, n. 333.
- ¹⁹ Sauneron 1962.
- ²⁰ Papyrus Chester Beatty I (recto). For a full publication of the papyrus, see Gardiner 1931.
- ²¹ Lichtheim 2006a, 215.
- ²² Arnold 1999, 70.
- ²³ Habachi 1943.
- ²⁴ See Arnold 1999, 91–92 for a brief discussion on this traditional narrative.
- ²⁵ For a discussion of the originality of the texts presented on Udjahorresnet’s statue, see the contribution by Alexander Schütze in this volume.
- ²⁶ The translation used in this discussion is taken from Lichtheim 2006b, 36–41.
- ²⁷ I use the term “validated” here deliberately, and this should not be confused with concepts of nativeness and foreignness. By the Late Period, emic perspectives of who Egyptians would have considered “native” versus “foreign” becomes increasingly complicated (and one can easily argue that such notions were never simple). The Twenty-sixth-Dynasty kings traced their lineage back to the Twenty-fourth Dynasty. The two kings of the Twenty-fourth Dynasty, Tefnakhte and Bakenrenef, held titles such as Great Chief of the Ma and Great Chief of the Libu, indicating Libyan origins. It is therefore likely that the Twenty-sixth Dynasty had Libyan ancestors, but whether or not they personally viewed themselves as Libyan is a matter of debate with probably no definitive conclusion. The Twenty-sixth Dynasty, just like the Twenty-fourth Dynasty and the Nubian Twenty-fifth Dynasty, were part of a validated line of Egyptian kingship regardless of their ethnic origin or potential “foreignness.”
- ²⁸ Lichtheim 2006b, 37–38.
- ²⁹ Bard 2007, 199; Van de Mieroop 2011, 132; Candelora 2017, 203–221.
- ³⁰ Cambyses’s prenomen should not be confused with the *s3 R* title, which was a common epitaph of most royal titularies.
- ³¹ The best-preserved example is Text 37 in the tomb of Pediamenopet (TT 33). The earliest preserved attestation can be found on the east wall of the sun chapel in Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari. It is also reproduced faithfully in the southern part of Luxor Temple, which dates to the reign of Amenhotep III, and the sun chapel of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. It can also be found in one elite Theban tomb dating to the New Kingdom, the inscriptions of the Edifice of Taharqa at Karnak Temple, two Twenty-fifth-Dynasty royal coffins from Nuri, and three elite Saite Period tombs. It is also part of chapter 15B of the Book of the Dead. See Assmann 2009, 17–30.
- ³² Translation adapted from Assmann 1970.
- ³³ Lichtheim 2006b, 38.
- ³⁴ Posener 1936; Dandamayev 1990, 726–729
- ³⁵ Lichtheim 2006b, 38.
- ³⁶ For a discussion of cultural memory and collective identity in the ancient Near East, see Assmann 2006.
- ³⁷ Lichtheim 2006b, 39–40.
- ³⁸ Francesco Lopez’s contribution in this volume for a discussion of motivating factors in restoring the House of Life.