

P'A-LEK.

BY THE EDITOR.

[CONCLUDED.]

THE beautiful buildings of Philæ which add so much to the natural charm of this sequestered spot are all of comparatively late origin. The pylons of the temple of Isis bear the name of Nektanebos, but other portions of the sacred building were erected under the Ptolemies.

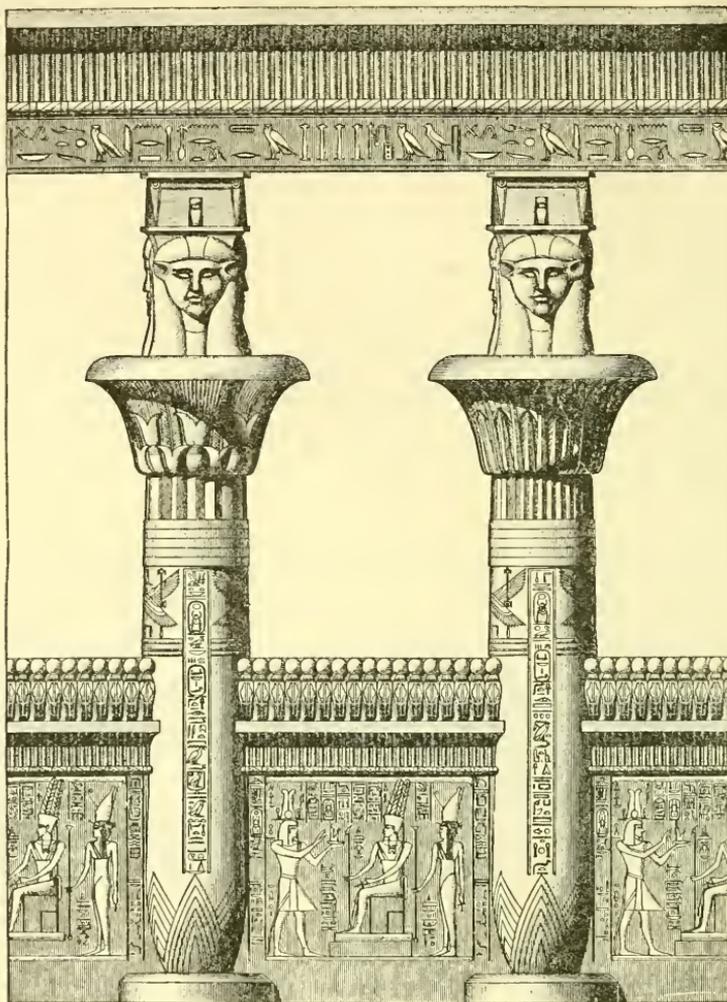


LANDSCAPE OF THE NILE.

None of the buildings are older than 350 B. C., yet all of them have preserved a truly Egyptian character, even the latest additions of the Roman emperors, with the sole exception of the Coptic ruins of later date and also of the triumphal arch of Diocletian on the north-east (XI), who was the last pagan emperor to visit the island.

Processions of pilgrims and embassies that visited the island were obliged to approach it down stream from the south, where stood a special building (I) for their reception, bearing the name of Nektanebos. On landing, the visitors were welcomed by some

of the priests, and were accompanied through a courtyard (II) between two colonades, the one toward the west (*a—b*)¹ built by



COLUMNS OF THE PAVILLION OF NEKTANEBOS.

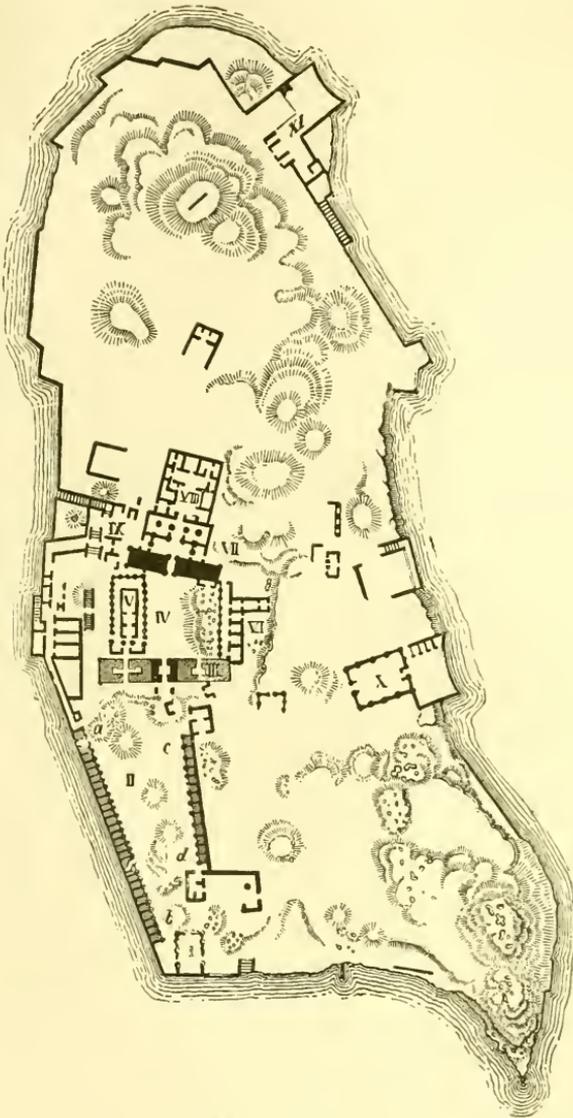
(Reproduced from Prisse d'Avennes.)

The vestibule of Nektanebos, originally served as the entrance to a temple. It is dedicated by Nektanebos to his "Mother Isis, revered at Abaton, Mistress of Philæ, and to Hathor of Senmet."

the Roman Emperors, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, the other toward the east (*c—d*) of later date and still unfinished.

¹A subterranean stairway here leads down to a Nilometer.

The pylons, or entrance towers (III), which adorn all Egyptian temples, are ornamented with battle scenes glorifying the victories of Ptolomy Philometor. On entering through the portal between

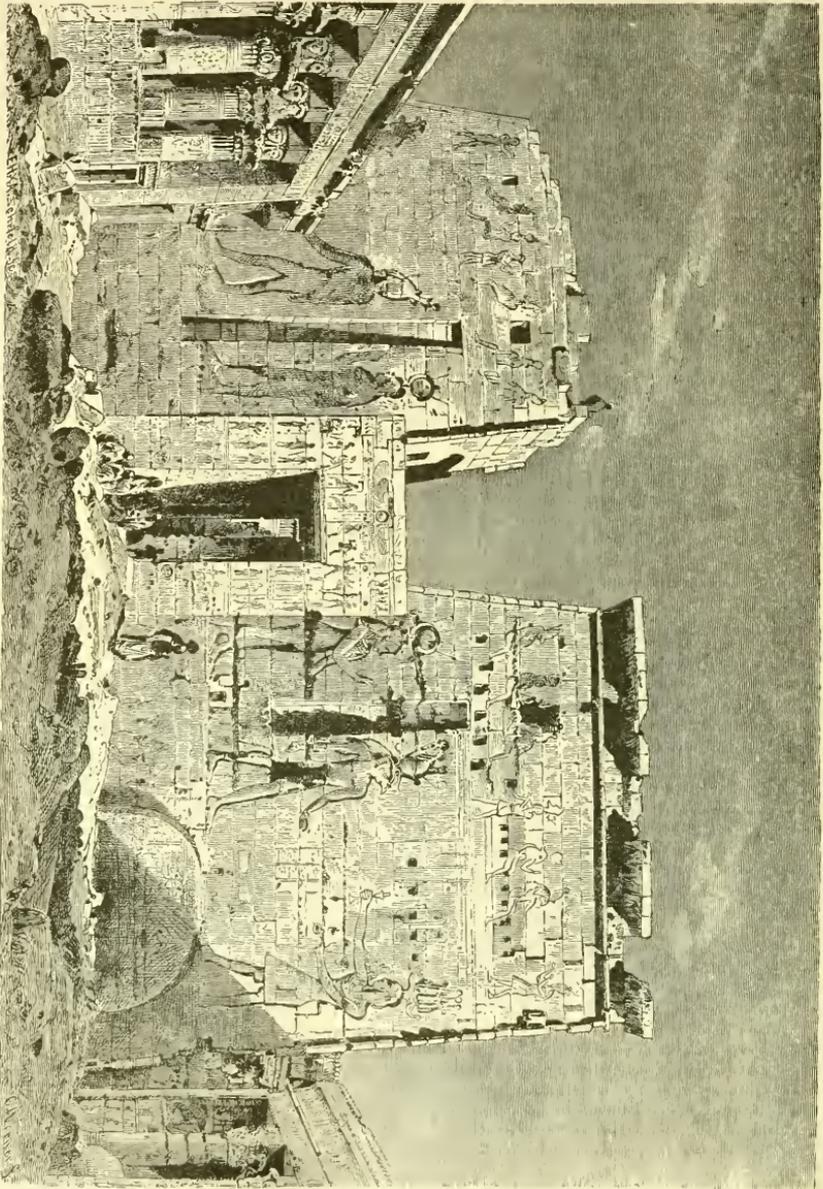


MAP OF PHILÆ.

the pylons one stands in the first courtyard (IV), of the temple surrounded by a solemn peristyle.

Here a detachment of French soldiers was encamped in 1799 and left the inscription in French, "An sept de la République,"

and underneath the name of their leader "Bonaparte." The words "République" and "Bonaparte" were erased but afterwards re-



FIRST TEMPLE COURT.

stored with the comment: "Une page d'histoire ne doit pas être salie."

The building toward the east, called the Mamisi or house of birth (V) is a temple which must have harbored the image of Isis giving suck to Hor. It is called the House of Birth, because the walls of the cella, the third room, exhibit scenes of the life of the god-child Hor, his birth in the marshes and his education. One fresco represents Hathor laying her hand in blessing on the head of the Horus child.

Hathor plays an important part in the events of Hor's childhood. She appears as a sisterly friend of the divine mother, and performs the offices of godmother, nurse, and teacher. The word



COLUMNS OF HATHOR.
Southern part of the Mamisi.

“Hathor” means “the House of Hor,” signifying “the dawn of day.” She is said to assist at the sun’s birth, and we have reason to believe that originally the goddess was only another form of “Isis,” for in some local shrines she was worshipped as the mother of Hor. Her face, surmounted by a crown in the shape of a house, is carved on the columns of the colonade surrounding the Mamisi, a design that is frequently repeated in late Egyptian art, e. g., in Denderah and in the Nectanebos pavillion.

The bas-reliefs in the colonades surrounding the Mamisi represent among other scenes Buto, the goddess of the North playing

the harp to Hor and Isis, and also a chapel in which Isis is seen nursing Harpocrates (Hor the child), the door of the chapel being opened by an Egyptian king, as if he intended to show the goddess to the spectator and point out the good example she was setting to human mothers. On the upper part of the wall we find two inscriptions of which one, referring to Ptolomy Neos Dionysios has become illegible, while the other is a duplicate of the hieroglyphic text of the Rosetta stone.

The smaller building toward the east (VI) contains several rooms. The first one on the south was the apartment¹ of the door-keeper whose duties concerning the admission of strangers are specified on the walls. Another room served as a library. It contained according to its hieroglyphic inscriptions the documents of donations, the archives of the temple, and a number of valuable manuscripts. We are also informed that the goddess of history, Safekh, presided here. A niche in the north wall with a cynoskephalos underneath and a squatting Ibis of Thot above was destined to receive the most sacred papyri. Next we enter the chamber of purification in which visitors underwent the ceremony of cleansing themselves before they were admitted to the temple of Isis.

Passing on through the second gate between two other pylons one enters a most magnificent hypostyle. The sunlight which is admitted freely through a large opening in the roof could be dimmed by veils. The color effect of the wall paintings is cheerful and soothing at once, so bright are the pictures and so majestic are the columns.

The hypostyle leads to the inner temple with the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary of Isis (VIII), surrounded by several small treasury rooms. The inscriptions speak of the munificence of Ptolomy Philadelphus and Euergetes I., who erected this part of the temple and endowed it richly with presents.

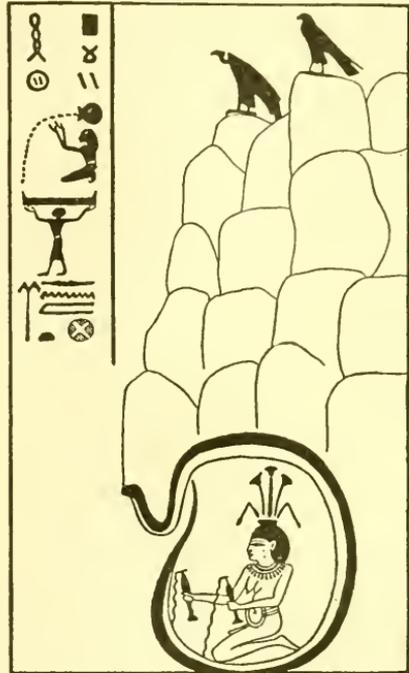
On top of the sanctuary are several rooms all of them embellished with pictures representing events that took place after the death of Osiris. In the largest room called "the Chamber of Osiris" we find the following scenes, beginning at the left with the upper row: (1) Isis and Nephthys by the bier of Osiris; (2) two goddesses beside the dead Osiris, whose head is wanting; further away the tomb before which lies a lion; (3) four demons carrying the hawk-headed mummy. In the lower row we find: (1) the frog-headed Heket, and the hawk-headed Harsiesis by the bier of Osiris, beneath which stand the jars for the entrails; (2) the corpse

¹A staircase in the antechamber here leads to the roof of the first pylon.

of Osiris among marsh plants, the priest pouring the consecrated water; (3) the jackal-headed Anubis by the bier of Osiris beside which kneel Isis and Nephthys.

Outside the temple of Isis there are a few more buildings, among which the picturesque Kiosk, popularly called "the Bed of Pharaoh," is most characteristic of Philæ. It was built under Tiberius, but left unfinished. The architect infused here into the somber forms of Egyptian art the soaring spirit of Greece, so dainty, so exquisite, so lofty is this little shrine and at the same time so airy as if it were an unrealisable fancy, a mere dream, the petrified orison of a religion of mystery and joy.

Turning toward the west, we reach a kind of vestibule, called "the gateway of Hadrian," which commanded a beautiful view on the island of Bigét, another sacred spot covered with ruins of an ancient temple. The walls on either side are decorated with curious pictures, among which two are of special interest: one represents Osiris in mummy-form crossing the Nile on the back of a crocodile (Isis expecting him on the shore, illustrating the Egyptian prototype of the story of two lovers separated by a river); the other shows Hapi, the god of the Nile, sitting in a snake-encircled cave and pouring water from a vase.



HAPI, THE GOD OF THE NILE, IN HIS CAVE AT PHILÆ.¹

West of the sanctuary of Isis and north of Hadrian's gateway are the walls of a temple of Harendotes (viz.; Hor, the avenger of his father), built by Emperor Claudius, and east of the second pylon directly north of the Kiosk lie the ruins of the temple of Hathor. The sanctuary of the latter is utterly destroyed and only

¹The god is pouring forth from a libation vase the water of the river. On the top of the rock are perched the hawk of the north and the vulture of the south. The god's head is decked with water-plants and his cave is concealed by a serpent.

the front colonade, restored in modern times, is left. Directly north of the temple of Isis stands a Coptic church, and further north on the hill, the ruins of a temple of Augustus.

The banks of the island were well protected from the annual Nile inundations by substantial walls.

Soon after the suppression of the last vestiges of paganism on the island, the Christian Copts took possession of the temple of Isis and changed the hypostyle to a church. This happened in the year 577 A. D. The beautiful wall paintings were covered with Nile mud, so as not to offend the eyes of Christians by idolatrous representations, and the Virgin Mary was now worshipped in place of the Egyptian goddess. The name and to some extent also the character of the divinity that presided over this sacred place was changed. Instead of the gay and joyous music of the harp, the songs sung to the lute, and the ring of the sistrum, monotonous psalms were intoned and the wickedness of human nature was taught, yet after all the Virgin Mary remained as before the "mother of the Saviour," and was addressed with similar and sometimes the same titles as "Our Lady" and "Queen of Heaven." In spite of the radical changes, the religious sentiment, reverence for a divine mystery, respect for the ideal of maternity, and the pious submission of the devotees to the higher powers of life continued the same as of yore.

Scarcely a century passed when new changes came over Egypt. Islam spread rapidly over the Orient, and Mohammedan conquerors took possession of Egypt. The armies of Arabian fanatics swept over the Nile valley, and now the sacred building of Philæ was turned into the mansion of an Arabaïc Sheik.

The island was not inhabited in later years but served as a resort for travellers who like the pilgrims of yore reached here the end of their journey. Natives living on the neighboring islands served as ferrymen or guides, and many travellers of Egypt that visited this remarkable spot will long be haunted by the memories which the beautiful island left in their minds.

The latest change of the island is a most dreadful cataclysm. On December 10, 1902, the great dam at Assuan was completed, and with the closing of the gates all the islands with their many ruins, and among them the most beautiful of all, Philæ, were doomed. Since the inundation has set in, most of the islands of the Nile above Assuan have disappeared.

Sic transit gloria mundi!