

On the Composition and Inscriptions of the Vatican Statue of Udjahorresne



JOHN BAINES

THE NAOPHOROUS STATUE OF UDJAHORRESNE IN THE VATICAN HAS been studied repeatedly for its important inscriptions, which form the only preserved native Egyptian account relating to the Persian conquest in 525 BCE and its aftermath.¹ Both internally and in historical terms, the texts pose problems of order of reading that have been analyzed in particular by Ursula Rößler-Köhler.² In this brief study I return to similar questions in honor of William Kelly Simpson, who has contributed so much to the study of Egyptian literature and history, and of the monuments whose owners integrated those two categories to proclaim their role in events.

The inscriptions are divided quite rigidly down the vertical axis of the statue, except for the back pillar, which has a single text in three

¹ Vatican collections, 196; perhaps from Hadrian's villa at Tivoli. *PM VII*, 416 (giving no. as 158). See Ursula Rößler-Köhler, *Individuelle Haltungen zum ägyptischen Königtum der Spätzeit*, *GOF IV:21* (Wiesbaden, 1991), pp. 270–72, no. 78a, with references; good general photographs, with the eighteenth century head: Orazio Marucchi, *Il Museo Egizio Vaticano descritto ed illustrato/Catalogo del Museo Egizio Vaticano con la traduzione dei principali testi geroglifici* (Rome, 1899/1902), pp. 79–102 with pls. I–II, no. 113; see also Giuseppe Botti and Pietro Romanelli, *Le sculture del Museo Gregoriano Egizio*, *Monumenti Vaticani d'Archeologia e d'Arte* 9 (Vatican City, 1952), pp. 32–40, pls. 27–32, no. 40, with bibliography and photographs of the original and of casts; treatment of the 1930s restoration of the head, as against the “rococo” head it previously had, and of the texts, with many photographs and bibliography: Alberto Tulli, “Il Naoforo vaticano,” in *Miscellanea Gregoriana*, *Monumenti Vaticani ... 6* (Vatican City, 1941), pp. 211–80; valuable translation, indicating the distribution of the texts: Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings III: The Late Period* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 36–41. A second statue of Udjahorresne, apparently made in the fourth century, was found at Mit Rahina: Rudolf Anthes *et al.*, *Mit Rahineh 1956* (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 98–100, pl. 35f–g; Edda Bresciani, “Ugiahorresnet a Menfi,” *EVO* 8 (1985), pp. 1–6. His pit tomb was discovered at Abusir in 1988–89: Miroslav Verner, “La tombe d'Oudjahorresnet et le cimetière Saïto-Perse d'Abousir,” *BIFAO* 89 (1989), pp. 283–90. See also Vilmos Wessetzky, “Fragen zum Verhalten der mit den Persern zusammenarbeitenden Ägyptern,” *GM* 124 (1991), pp. 83–89. Section letters and column numbers of inscriptions used here are those of Georges Posener, *La première domination perse: recueil d'inscriptions hiéroglyphiques*, *BE* 11 (Cairo, 1936), pp. 3–26. I owe a great debt to Anthony Leahy for advice over this article and to Richard Parkinson for reading and commenting on a draft.

² “Zur Textkomposition der naophoren Statue des Udjahorresnet/Vatikan Inv.-Nr. 196,” *GM* 85 (1985), pp. 43–54. Rößler-Köhler's lettered subdivisions are not those of Farina and Posener, also used here.

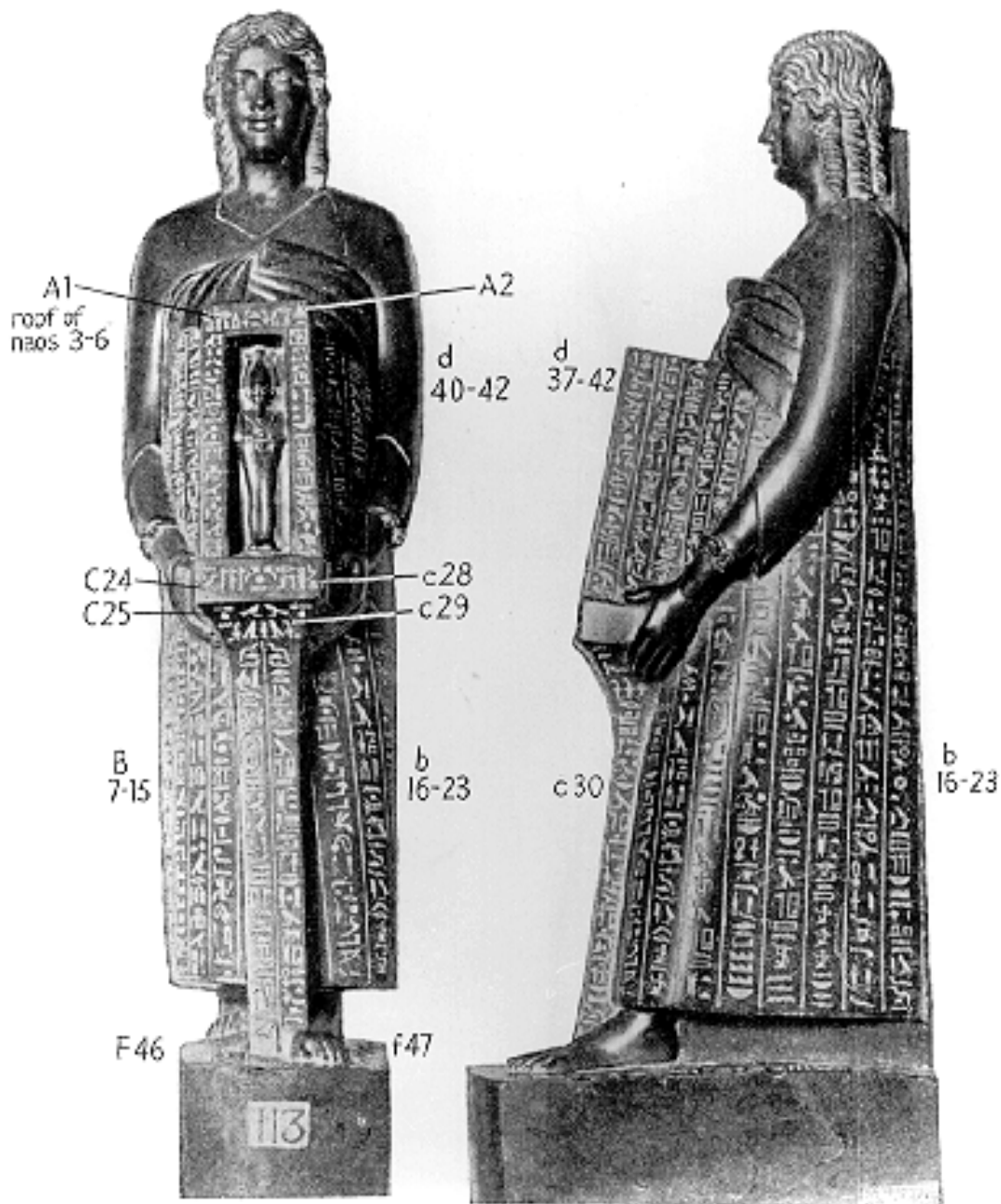


Fig. 1. Front and left side of the naophorous statue of Udjahorresne, taken in the late nineteenth century with the older restored head. The lettering (added after Farina, *Bilychnis* 18:1 [1929], pp. 449–57, and Posener, *La première domination perse* [Cairo, 1936], pp. 3–26) indicates the distribution of the inscriptions. Rephotographed from Marucchi, *Il Museo Egizio Vaticano descritto ed illustrato* (Rome, 1899/1902), pp. 79–102.

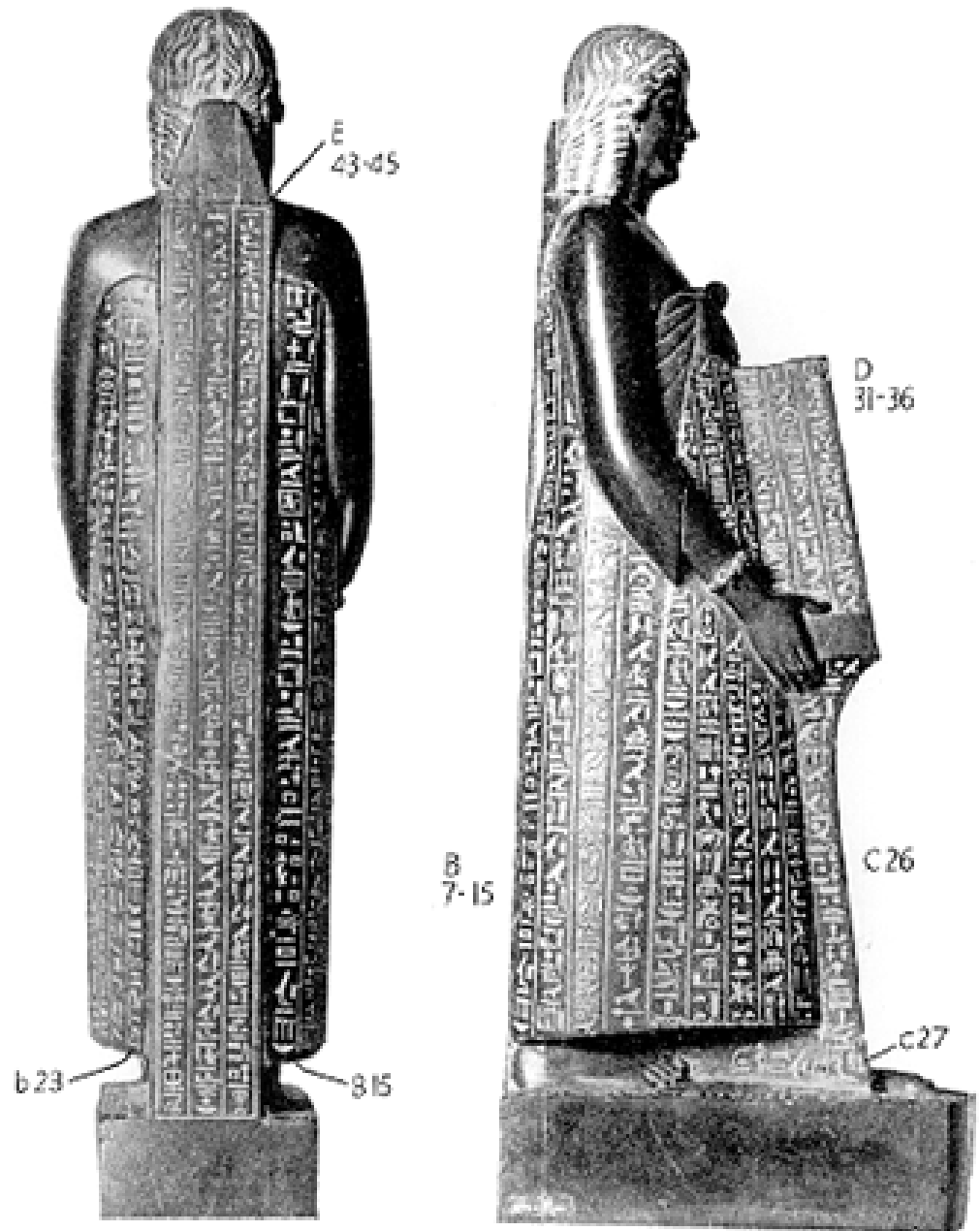


Fig. 2. Back and right side of the naophorous statue of Udjahorresne. Rephotographed from Marucchi, *Il Museo Egizio Vaticano descritto ed illustrato* [Rome, 1899/1902], pp. 79–102.

vertical columns. Georges Posener (see n. 1) followed Giulio Farina³ in his presentation, lettering the sections on the statue's right in upper case and on its left in lower case (see figs. 1–2).⁴ They began with the material framing the naos (A, 1–2) and on top of it (A, 3–6), continuing with the major panels beneath the arms (B, 7–15; b, 16–23). They then treated the columns on the naos support at the front (C, 24–27; c, 28–30) and the panels on its sides and on the body above the arms (D, 31–36; d, 37–42), concluding with the back pillar (E, 43–45) and the plinth (F, f, 46–48). It may not be possible to devise any single ordering and this could be inappropriate, since a work of art such as the statue may not impose any one sequence of viewing and reading, even if texts are necessarily more sequential than pictorial materials. It is, however, worth investigating whether the distribution of the texts has a thematic or iconographic significance, in addition to the sequence in which the inscriptions may best be read. While the distribution of the inscriptions on the statue will hardly have been deliberately ambiguous, its prime purpose was probably not to create a single consistent narrative.

The longest narratives of Udjahorresne are contained in the two visually balancing inscriptions under the arms of the statue (B, 7–15; b, 16–23). These are of uneven textual size (38 and 26 metrical verses respectively), together giving a seemingly consecutive treatment of the protagonist's relations with Cambyses, as well as looking back to Amasis and Psammetichus III. The back pillar (E, 43–45), which has a narrative of the reign of Darius I, may perhaps be read continuous with these. Nineteenth century scholars⁵ presented the side panels first, whereas Farina, Posener, and later writers⁶ have started with the upper part of the naos surround. While this latter ordering is better in terms of

³ "La politica religiosa di Cambise in Egitto," *Bilychnis* 33¹, year 18, fasc. 1 (1929), pp. 449–57.

⁴ This lettering also covers the naos, which is best described from the statue's point of view (contrary to the practice of Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* III, pp. 36–41). Rößler-Köhler, *Individuelle Haltungen zum ägyptischen Königtum der Spätzeit*, p. 50 n. 11, states incorrectly that Posener reversed the main inscription panels (compare published photographs). This impression was probably given by the changes in orientation in descriptions of the naos and the statue: her usage of "right" and "left" in her figs. 1–2 is the opposite of conventional statue description.

⁵ E.g., Heinrich Brugsch, *Thesaurus Inscriptionum Aegyptiacarum* IV (Leipzig, 1884), pp. 636–42, 691–97; Karl Piehl, *Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques*, 1st series (Stockholm and Leipzig, 1886), pls. 32–35, pp. 39–42; Marucchi (see note 3 above), pp. 81–100.

⁶ E.g., Alan B. Lloyd, "The Inscription of Udjahorresnet, a Collaborator's Testament," *JEA* 68 (1982), pp. 166–80; Torben Holm-Rasmussen, "Collaboration in Early Achaemenid Egypt. A New Approach," in *Studies in Ancient History and Numismatics Presented to Rudi Thomsen* (Aarhus, 1988), pp. 29–38; both use Posener's order without comment. See further Günter Burkard, "Literarische Tradition und historische Realität: Die persische Eroberung Ägyptens am Beispiel Elephantine," *ZÄS* 121 (1994), pp. 93–106.

the statue's composition, it is a little illogical because it presents the remaining areas around the naos toward the end and treats the narrative sections written on the naos sides, which are above the arms, after the parts written beneath the arms. Apart from the awkwardness of this selective movement around the statue, the resulting overall shape of the composition may not be satisfactory, because the formulaic phrases and general religious actions which are the presupposition of the whole are placed near the end. In comparison, unitary royal inscriptions and non-royal biographies tend to begin with extensive formulaic materials and only then move to the narrative. It is therefore worth testing a placing of the formal material, which is at the front of the statue and closest to the naos and its statuette of Osiris, near the beginning.

Rößler-Köhler orders the material according to two principal criteria. She distinguishes between Cambyses's orders, which are said to be executed by others after advice by Udjahorresne, and those of Darius, which are executed by Udjahorresne himself without such advice. On this basis she assigns the episodes of § D, d to the reign of Darius I. Rößler-Köhler then groups the texts thematically according to the deities mentioned, demonstrating that Neith is principally named on the right (her "left," see n. 4) and Osiris on the left. Her assignment of D to Darius I additionally produces a visual distribution of the material, illustrated in her fig. 3, in which the parts set highest on the statue are related to his reign.

I should like to propose another approach to the ordering. The passages covering the walls of the naos and continuing on the figure's torso above the arms (D, 31–36; d, 37–42) remain the center of discussion. Temporally they cannot be assigned with certainty, because they refer to the king as "His Person" and not by name. Rößler-Köhler's assignment criterion of the way actions are described is fragile, because the Darius I sections are much shorter than those relating to Cambyses and the distinction could be based simply in the part Udjahorresne played in the two reigns and in a desire to give him a visible role.

A parallel translation of the two crucial passages follows:

RIGHT (D, 31–36)

The revered one before the gods of the Saite Nome,
Chief Physician, Udjahorresne

says: I established divine offerings for Neith the great, the
mother of the god,
on the order of His Person for the extent of time (*m swt dt*).

I made monuments for Neith mistress of Sais
consisting of every good thing, as an efficacious servant
does for his lord.

I am a man who is good in his city.
I saved its people in the great turmoil
when it happened in the entire land
—the like had never happened in this land.

I protected the wretched from the mighty;
I saved the fearful when his time (of fear) had come.
I did everything beneficial for them
at that time of acting for them.

LEFT (d, 37–42)

The one revered before his city god,
the Chief Physician, Udjahorresne

says: I was one revered of his father,
favored of his mother,
who was in the hearts of his siblings.

I established them <in?> the office of priest.
I gave them good fields
on the command of His Person, for the extent of time.

I made a good burial for the one who had no burial;
I supported all their children and reestablished their houses.

I did everything beneficial for them,
as a father does for his son,

when^a the turmoil occurred in this district,
among the very great turmoil
which happened in the entire land.

a. This *s(t)* could be read as beginning a new sentence, but that would leave the last three verses of the section without any clear relation with what comes before.

The most striking feature of these passages is their mixing of traditional elements of ideal biography with references to what seems to be a specific “turmoil (*nšni*⁷)” through which the land had passed. The mixing of ideal biography and other elements has much older literary parallels, for example in the Story of Sinuhe,⁸ but is unusual in biographies, which tend to separate formulaic sections from ones with individual content and to start with the formulaic. Since the texts must in any case have been carefully composed for their place of inscription on the statue, this mixing of genres could be related in part to the passages’ placing in the highest, and in some respects most prominent, position on the statue. Udjahorresne would then cite his general concern with the state of people in his district as well as referring discreetly to the more embracing catastrophe which had happened in Egypt. From around two centuries later, the long biographical inscription of Petosiris in his tomb at Tuna al-Gabal has a similar formulation, referring to events during the time when the “ruler of foreign lands” was the “protector (*ndti*)” in

⁷ On the interpretation of this word, see Lloyd (n. 5), pp. 176–77.

⁸ Here, the presentation of Udjahorresne’s journey back from Elam on the back pillar (E, 44) offers another striking parallel: “The foreigners carried me / from foreign land to foreign land,” recalling Sinuhe’s “foreign land gave me to foreign land” (B 28–29, 182—the king’s letter to Sinuhe). This coincidence need not mean that the author of Udjahorresne’s inscriptions was familiar with Sinuhe, although that is conceivable. It is more likely that he drew upon established classical usage.

Egypt, and “the south was in turmoil (*nšni*) / and the north in uproar (? —*swḥi*).”⁹

Udjahorresne’s references to the episode of turmoil have been variously interpreted, but mostly identified with a rebellion or rebellions early in the reign of Darius I.¹⁰ On such a reading, and if the text is taken to report events relatively soberly, such a rebellion would have had a severe effect throughout Egypt, something for which there does not seem to be strong evidence.¹¹ It would also follow that Udjahorresne made no extended or explicit reference to the Persian conquest itself, only to its aftermath.

I suggest placing these passages near the beginning of the statue’s sequence of texts. In comparison with Farina and Posener, this position gives an order A D C B E (F lies outside such a schema), but does not require that the whole be read in a consecutive sequence. The essential difficulty, already referred to, that the king of D is not mentioned by name, is presumably why scholars have placed this section near the end. But unless local knowledge bridged the gap, the ambiguity of reference of “His Person” would have been just as great in antiquity as it is now; it might refer to any of three kings named elsewhere—Psammetichus III, Cambyses, and Darius I (Amasis can be excluded because he died before the Persian conquest) and so cannot be used to decide the position of the situations described there. One reason for not naming the king might possibly be the small amount of space for writing available above the statue’s arms, but since the whole composition could no doubt have been rearranged, such an approach is unsatisfactory. It is more cogent to see the reference as being unspecific because the matters referred to were delicate.¹² If the king referred to was Psammetichus III, to recall him here was inappropriate under Darius I, when the inscription was presumably composed.¹³ In the analogous case of Petosiris, the

⁹ Also cited by Lloyd (see note 6 above): Gustave Lefèbvre, *Le tombeau de Pétosiris II Les textes* (Cairo, 1923), no. 81, ll. 28–30, p. 54; see, e.g., Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature III*, p. 46.

¹⁰ So Rößler-Köhler, *Individuelle Haltungen zum ägyptischen Königtum der Spätzeit*. See Anthony Spalinger, “Udjahorresne,” *LÄ VI* (1986), cols. 821–23, with references. Dependent on how it is interpreted, this inscription appears to be the only definite evidence from Egypt for the revolt.

¹¹ See the comments of Jean Yoyotte, “Pétoubastis III,” *RdE 24* (1972), pp. 222–23.

¹² Compare Anthony Leahy, “The Date of Louvre A.93,” *GM 70* (1984), pp. 50–51 (disputed by Rößler-Köhler, *Individuelle Haltungen zum ägyptischen Königtum der Spätzeit*, pp. 244–45).

¹³ Darius I is said to have looked back to Amasis for a precedent, at least in his recording of the laws of Egypt; see e.g. Edda Bresciani, “The Persian Occupation of Egypt,” in Ilya Gershevitch, ed., *The Cambridge History of Iran II The Median and Achaemenid Periods* (Cambridge etc., 1985), pp. 505–508.

vagueness of the reference to a foreign ruler has meant that it has remained uncertain how his tomb should be dated. It is economical to heed this parallel and to interpret the passage as a description of the Persian invasion, deliberately kept vague in part because that was the period during which Udjahorresne switched his allegiance.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it cannot be finally established in historical terms, or in terms of the statue's texts, whether the episode referred to here was the Persian conquest or a revolt early in the reign of Darius; the reference could also be generic rather than specific.

In thematic terms, an early placing of these passages sites the evocation of the most fundamental theme of disorder and the response to it in the most prominent position while tying it to the core statements of a traditional biography. The inscriptions above and below the naos tend to confirm the significance of this central area. The naos front (A, a) has offering formulas, while its vertical support (C, c) has a record of Cambyses's visit to the temple of Neith in Sais and the consequent ritual actions and endowments. The naos roof (A, 3–6¹⁵) has a short prayer to Osiris. Finally, the plinth texts (F, f, 46–48), which presuppose the rest of the composition, summarize Udjahorresne's achievements under "every lord of his"¹⁶ and appeal to the living, asking that they should preserve his reputation both with the gods and on earth, on account of all the good he did.

This reading implies a double composition. The "core" consists of the material at the front and near the naos, including both the statuette of the god and the identification of Udjahorresne and the main statue itself. Both treatment and subject matter are more schematic in the core than in the other sections, which may then be seen as extended and relatively "secular" elaborations of the given themes. Apart from the parallels such a distinction offers with the organization of long biographies, it is also comparable to the distinction between the decoration in stela lunettes, which include pictorial material, and extended texts beneath. A lunette is brief, tightly constructed, and visually ordered, while a running text is discursive and of variable length. Like modern scholars, such Egyptians as had access to the stature might have been drawn most to the longer narratives.

¹⁴ This is also the interpretation of Lloyd (see note 6 above), pp. 176–78, who follows Posener's ordering but does not comment on the resultant oddity of the reference to the conquest near the end of the inscriptions.

¹⁵ Excellent photograph: Tulli (see note 1 above), p. 236 fig. 19.

¹⁶ *nb=f nb*, a rare phrase, but compare *nswt nb* in cols. 29 and 30.

The distribution of the core texts is also analogous with the cosmological implications of temple and stela decoration. The artfully worded prayer on the naos top (A, 3–6) is the most intimate and sacred material on the statue, drawing Udjahorresne visually and thematically close to his god. The wording makes this clear:

O Osiris, lord of everlasting, / the Chief Physician Udjahorresne has placed / his hands around you in protection. // May your *ka* command that everything good be done for him, / inasmuch as he has made protection around you for ever.

As in temple reliefs, a direct address is placed in the most remote location.¹⁷ This treatment contrasts with the thematically similar plinth inscriptions, which are addressed to visitors and not to the god. The rather conventional offering formula around the naos front is complemented on the sides by the description of turmoil, which occupies the same conceptual space as royal “historical” action in this world, establishing the “order” which is incorporated in the dedication of the statuette of Osiris. In comparison, the inscriptions on the naos support (C, 24–27; c, 28–30), which describe the visit of Cambyses to Sais and his dedication and endowment of offerings there, give a material and ritual basis for the continued interaction between humanity and the gods embodied in the texts above. This low placing of dedication texts has general parallels in the organization of stelae and a specific temple analogy in the great dedication text at Edfu.¹⁸ The texts on the naos support end with praise of Neith and a strong statement of Udjahorresne’s role, couched in very classical language, which would be visually prominent for a viewer first looking at the statue. This material duplicates to some extent what is said in the first main biographical section (B, 12–15). Such repetition may be best understood not as the narration of different episodes in similar language but as summarizing and fuller accounts of essentially similar material.

The inscriptions and composition of Udjahorresne’s statue show a coherence and artistic balance that can be pursued both in literary terms¹⁹ and through the distribution of the material on the object itself. Just as the texts at the front of the statue carry the greatest symbolic weight even though they have relatively little precise “historical” content, their verbal parallels with literary texts are most striking—

¹⁷ Compare Erich Winter, *Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Tempelreliefs der griechisch-römischen Zeit* (DÖAW 98, 1968), pp. 53–55.

¹⁸ Dimitri Meeks, *Le grand texte des donations au temple d’Edfou*, BE 59 (Cairo, 1972).

¹⁹ Thus, Rößler-Köhler (*GM* 85, p. 48) shows that all the main sections of the text end with *dt* “for ever.” This feature is compositionally significant, but it does not help to choose between orderings because it is compatible with several of them.

although all the texts have strong literary qualities. These artistic characteristics, which underpin the religious and biographical significance of the object, should be given due weight in a reading. On this basis, the composition can be interpreted as referring to the Persian conquest in a way that has not hitherto been proposed, while a revolt under Darius may not be mentioned. For the actors, however, the chief interest of the front of the statue is likely to have been its presentation of general and cosmological concerns rather than particular historical events. Despite the large amount of historical information in the texts, the statue should be read first as a dedicatory piece in the temple of Neith in Sais, which is the major single subject of the narratives, and only thereafter in more general historical terms. As in other biographical sources, the statue's focus is on the individual, and it is organized for biographical information much less than such texts as the comparably significant inscription of Ahmose son of Ebana.²⁰ A very rare quality of the composition as a nonroyal monument is its semi-iconographic organization to imply that its owner embodied the essentially royal role of setting order in place of disorder.



²⁰ E.g., Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 12–15. On personalities of the Persian period, their biographies, and their historical role, see now Didier Devauchelle, “Le sentiment anti-Perse chez les anciens Egyptiens,” *Trans-euphratène* 9 (1995), pp. 67–80, esp. pp. 78–79.