CHAPTER 5

Pharaoh and Temple Building in the Fourth Century BCE*

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1 Introduction

The fourth century BCE was a period of widespread transformation, marked by the transition from the Oriental empires to the Hellenistic states, in which Egypt played a central role. After the first Persian Period (525–404/1), the Twenty-eighth (405/401–399) and Twenty-ninth Dynasties (399–380) were short-lived and seem to have been undermined by competition for the throne.1 The rulers were also struggling to repel Persian invasions. It is therefore not astonishing that there are very few traces of temple building or decoration from this short period, which might nonetheless have paved the way for further developments.2 According to Neal Spencer, significant temple building was probably planned in the Twenty-ninth Dynasty, but there is no way to prove this. He suggests that much of the cultural renaissance which is attested for the Thirtieth Dynasty may “represent a flourishing of trends nascent in the previous dynasty”.3

Nectanebo I Nekhetnebef (380–362) and Nectanebo II Nekhethorheb (360–342) of the Thirtieth Dynasty were the last great native pharaohs of Egypt.

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1 All dates according to von Beckerath, Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen. For the historical background, see Ruzicka, Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 35–48.


3 Spencer, A Naos of Nekhthorheb, 47.
Nectanebo I, a general from Sebennytos in the Delta, usurped the throne from Nepherites II, the last king of the Twenty-ninth Dynasty, and was crowned king of Egypt at Sais, the former capital city of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty in the western Delta. The key political event in his eighteen-year reign was the defeat of the Persian forces attempting to invade Egypt in 373. For Egypt, Nectanebo I began a period of great prosperity, which is reflected in massive temple construction, from the first cataract region to the Delta, as well as in the oases of the western desert (for details, see below). His co-regent for two years and successor, Teos (or Tachos; 364/62–360), moved into Palestine; but soon, in 360, his nephew Nectanebo II was placed on the throne. Nectanebo II continued the building activity on a large scale. The Thirtieth Dynasty left an impressive legacy of temple construction at the major sites of Egypt, so that the sacred landscape changed considerably and with long-lasting effects. This legacy also demonstrates the economic effectiveness of the Thirtieth Dynasty. Nectanebo II, the last native pharaoh, repelled a Persian invasion in 350 and ruled until 342, when Artaxerxes III conquered Egypt and the second Persian Period of Egypt began.

In the turmoil of the second Persian Period from 343 to 332, no temple seems to have been built; at least, nothing has been found so far. Unfinished building projects of the Thirtieth Dynasty were only completed after the liberation from the Persians, mainly in the early Ptolemaic period.

With the victories of Alexander the Great, the Persian Empire disintegrated, and he took the land by the Nile without resistance. Under his reign, Egyptian temples were extended and decorated at crucial points (see below). Although his two Macedonian successors never visited Egypt—neither his brother Philip Arrhidaios nor his son Alexander IV—their cartouches can be found on some Egyptian monuments, which suggests that the building projects continued,

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4 Nectanebo I took the throne name Kheperkara (von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, 226–227), which refers back to Senwosret I of the Twelfth Dynasty. It seems that he wanted to evoke the grandeur of his predecessors, referring to a time before the Persian rulers conquered Egypt. Artistic traditions of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty were taken up again and developed (Spencer, *A Naos of Nekhthorheb*, 47).

5 For collections of data and short discussions of the construction programmes of the Thirtieth Dynasty, see Blöbaum, “*Denn ich bin ein König …*, 351–360; Jenni, *Die Dekoration des Chnumtempels*, 87–100; Spencer, *A Naos of Nekhthorheb*, 47–52. For the historical background, see also Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire*, 145–198.