



The gallery to the right of the open court.



Originally, this court was filled with hundreds of larger and smaller statues - as indeed was every Egyptian temple court. Now only a few of the largest still stand, such as this one of Ramesses II. At his feet is one of his daughters.



Also in this court was the so-called kiosk of Taharqa (a king from the 25th or Ethiopian dynasty). It had ten columns of over 20 meters high, but not a roof - not one of stone anyway, because the span of the columns would have been too wide for this. The walls between the columns were some 3 or 4 meters high.

It was an enlarged reproduction in stone of one of the light constructions of wooden poles and reed matting that served, during a procession, as a temporary resting place for the divine image (or perhaps rather for the priests who had to carry it around). It had an alabaster pedestal, visible below to the left, on which the divine bark could be placed (a portable boat-model, holding the effigy of the god).





The intercolumniae (walls between the columns) are now nowhere higher than 1.5 meters, but as the depiction of feet on the top of this wall shows, they once were considerably higher.



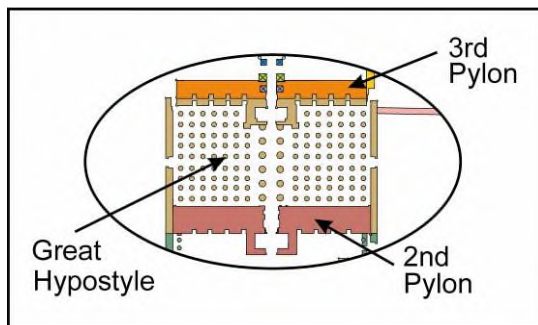
The capital of the only column that still stands to its original height.



This is the vestibule for the doorway of the 2nd pylon, which now has been reduced to maybe one-third of its original volume. Behind this pylon lies the Great Hypostyle: part of its elevated middle nave is just visible to the right.



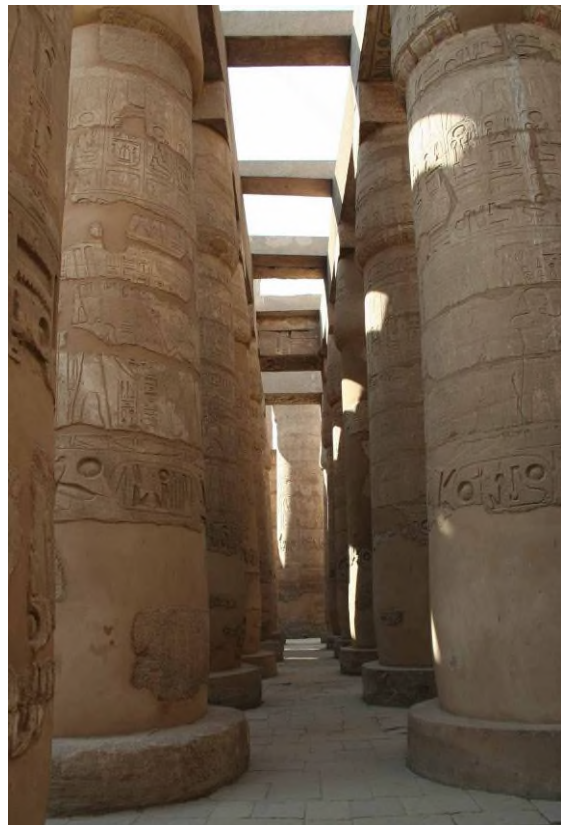
1.3. The Great Hypostyle



The Great Hypostyle (a Greek word, meaning “supported by columns”) has been rightfully likened to a forest of stone. Its 134 huge columns stand so close together, that one can only see the opposite side of the hall (of almost 100 x 50 meters) in directions perpendicular to its axes - and even that not everywhere.



A view from the central corridor to the side. The far end is a side wall of the hypostyle.

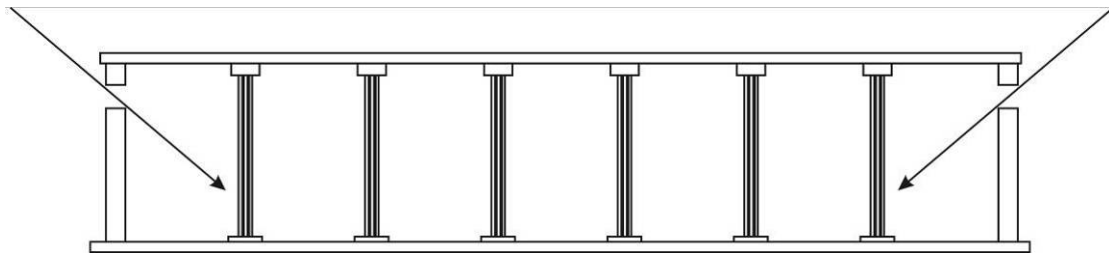


From the side to the center: our view is blocked by one of the columns of the central corridor.

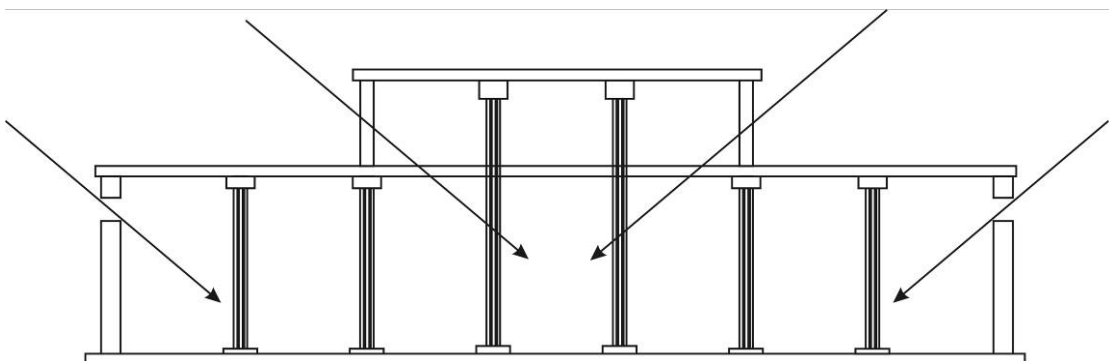
Originally, these columns carried a roof of heavy stone slabs.

A problem with very large columned halls is, that they tend to be rather dark in the middle. The light that comes through the windows in the outer walls just doesn't reach the center of the room. (And for the Egyptians the situation was even less favorable, as they preferred not to have any windows in the walls at all: these would weaken the so highly valued sense of seclusion inside the temple. To have any light at all in a sacred building, they relied on small, square openings in the ceiling - typically a solution for an arid climate)

In a classic type of columned hall, things would look like this:



In the Amun temple of Karnak, this problem was solved - not for the first time ever, as we will see shortly, but for the first time on a really grandiose scale. The two middle rows of columns rise several meters higher up than those around them. As a result, the middle part of the roof was also higher, creating room for the insertion of windows. This construction of an elevated middle nave was later adopted by the Romans, from where it became part of European (church) architecture. This makes it the - admittedly distant - forebear of the high Gothic middle nave with its stained glass windows.





The central nave, with the higher two middle rows of columns.



A detail of one of the columns of the central nave.



In the foreground the higher columns, in the background the capitals of the lower columns, with on top of the architrave one of the windows (now empty).