

With the roof gone, this hall now has light enough, but when you focus on the floor, you can still sense something of the somber impressiveness it once must have had.



The columns in particular have suffered a lot, but originally all of the interior of the Great Hypostyle was decorated with colored reliefs.

Only on the more elevated parts the reliefs are still unharmed, as here between two of the windows of the middle nave. Note the remarkably reverential attitude of the king (to the right) as he approaches Amun.



The relief below is high on one of the side walls of the hypostyle. To the left stands the god Amun. The king who kneels before him has all but gone: we can only see one of his hands. It holds an offering platter with a broad, heavy necklace.

The god responds to this gift with the following words: "I grant that you conquer the south and be victorious over the north forever."⁵



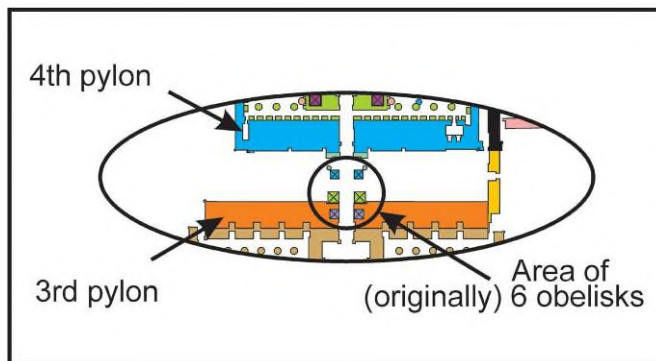
To the right, the king kneels for a goddess with the head of a lioness. Her name is Weret-Hekaw, literally: "Great of magic". He offers her a statuette of a sacred baboon, "made of cedar". (The small figurine in his hand is a token for a full-sized statue that was erected in a temple.)

In response, the goddess promises to make sure that Egypt's enemies "are under your sandals for ever and ever".

⁵ All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.



1.4. Between the 3rd and 4th pylon



The 4th pylon has for a considerable period been the entrance to the temple. During that period, this area was furnished with ultimately no less than three pairs of obelisks (in the plan represented by squares with a diagonal cross in them).



Of those six obelisks, only this one (from Thutmose I) still stands today. (To the left of the picture are the remains of the 3rd pylon, to the right those of the 4th).



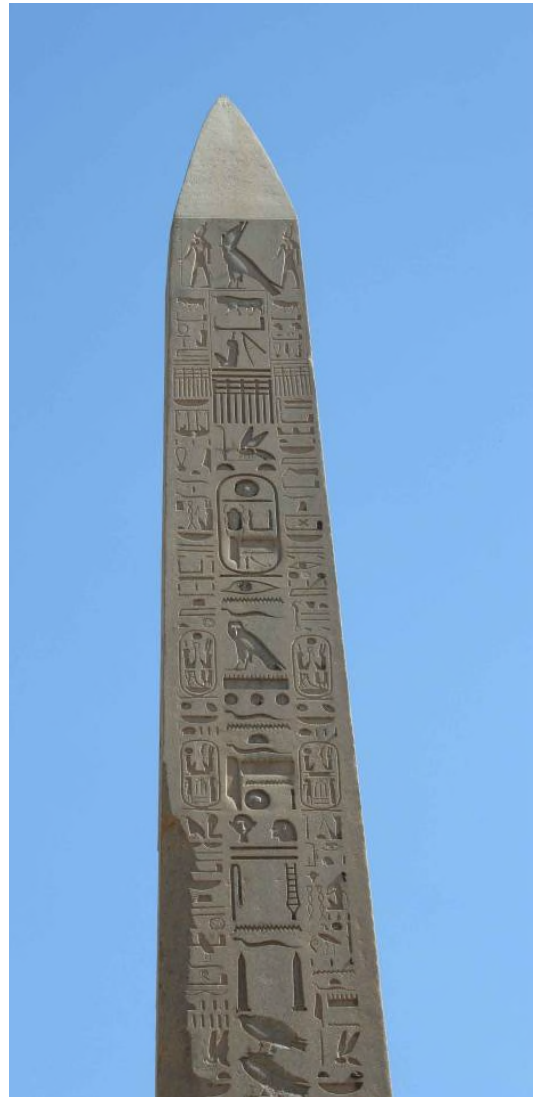
The lower end of the same obelisk. To the left is an empty pedestal of a missing obelisk.

The middle column of hieroglyphs on this obelisk (➔) is a text by its founder, king Thutmosis I. It says: "He (= the king) had these two large obelisks erected to be his monument for his father Amun-Re, master of the Two Lands". The two text columns on either side of this are from Ramesses IV. In his time (3½ centuries later), Egypt's power had already faded to the point, where its kings could no longer execute works of this magnitude themselves. Instead, they added their names to the works of their ancestors.



A relief of Tutmosis IV, revamped by Shabaka.

There have been several dozens of obelisks in and around this temple, but today only two still occupy their original position. Over the centuries, the others have been carried off one by one, and now embellish the squares of cities like Paris, Rome, London, Istanbul and Washington.

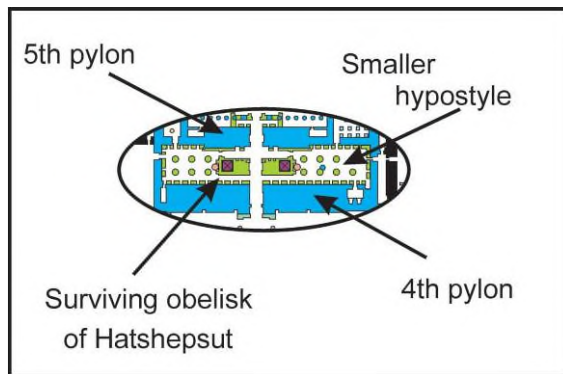


A detail of the obelisk of Thutmosis I.

The lovely reliefs to the left are on the portal of the 4th pylon. Their originals dated from about 1400 BC, but what we see now is a restoration of some 700 years later. Egyptian history is one of few to have lasted long enough to bring forth its own restoration projects.



1.5. The smaller hypostyle



Between the 4th and 5th pylon lies the “smaller” hypostyle - although only small in comparison with its bigger brother. It’s still a space of about 12 x 75 meters.

The walls were on the inside outfitted with heavy buttresses. In the niches thus created stood colossal statues. The buttresses, together with sturdy columns, carried a stone roof.





These are the statues of the northern wing of the smaller hypostyle. They wore the Red Crown, associated with Lower Egypt: the north of the country. Their counterparts in the southern wing carried the White Crown of Upper Egypt: the south of the land.



The columns of this hall closely resembled those of the Great Hypostyle.

Queen Hatshepsut (one of few women ever to occupy the throne of Egypt) had two huge, granite obelisks, each 30 meters high, erected, right in the middle of the hypostyle. Its roof, which was at that time still of wood, had to be removed for this. It was her successor (Thutmosis III) who had a stone roof installed.



Hatshepsut's obelisk in the smaller hypostyle.



A detail of the same obelisk.



This picture is taken from outside the temple walls. At the far left, a bit of the Great Hypostyle can be seen. Going right, we then see successively the obelisk of Thutmosis I, the ruins of the 4th pylon, the only surviving obelisk of Hatshepsut, and a bit of the 5th pylon.



Thutmosis III did everything in his power to obliterate Hatshepsut's memory. He even had her red granite obelisks (up to the point where they went through his stone roof) encased in sandstone, to hide them from view. Parts of this encasing can here be seen.