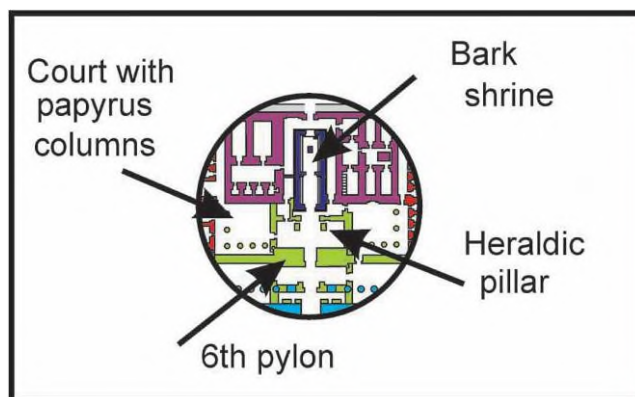




1.6. Beyond the 6th pylon

Beyond the 6th pylon, we finally approach the Holy of Holies.



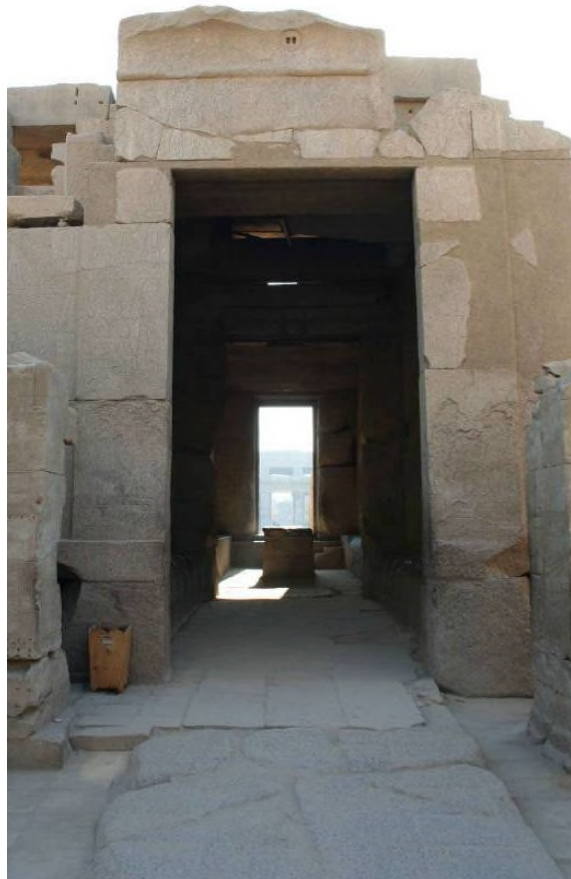
First we pass, on either side of the temple axis, two small columned courtyards. The columns here are very different from what we have seen so far: graceful and elegant, representing bundles of papyrus stalks.





Then we come to these two “heraldic pillars”. The northern one (to the left) carries the image of papyrus: the emblem plant of northern or Lower Egypt. The southern pillar (to the right) shows the lotus: symbol of southern, or Upper Egypt.⁶ These pillars once carried a wooden roof that covered the antechamber of the bark shrine.

Finally, we arrive at the bark shrine. This is the place where, resting on a granite pedestal, the god’s sacred bark was kept. It was in this bark, that priests would carry the image of the god during processions. (The opening in the back, behind the pedestal, is not original).



⁶ For beginners, the designations Upper and Lower Egypt can be confusing, because we subconsciously expect these to relate to the upper (northern) and lower (southern) part of the map. In this case, “Upper” is to be taken literally: it signifies the higher, more elevated part of the country, which lies in the south.



Some of the walls around the bark shrine carry rows of small holes. These once held wooden pegs to secure sheets of gold leaf. These walls were literally covered with gold.

It is a major indication that the bark shrine actually was the Holly of Hollies. Another one is the plan of the temple: the sequence of halls and pylons appears to funnel all attention straight to this point.

An alternative candidate for the position of Holly of Hollies would have been the shrine in the back of the temple of the Middle Kingdom (see the next paragraph). As that temple is now utterly destroyed, its claims can no longer be examined.



The bark shrine was rebuild several times. Its current version - build entirely from massive, dark red granite - dates from the 4th century BC. It was erected in the name of Philippos Arrhidaeus: half-brother and successor of Alexander the Great.

(The Macedonian Alexander the Great conquered around 330 BC all of the then “civilized world”, including Egypt. A few years after his death, one of his generals founded in Egypt the dynasty of the Ptolemies.)



These reliefs on the outside of the bark shrine show the coronation rites. We can see how the king is consecutively purified by the gods, crowned, and then taken to the god Amun for whom he kneels to be crowned again.

Below these reliefs are images of a procession. We see priests carrying the divine bark, in which the statue of the god is hidden, on their shoulders.



In a corridor near the bark shrine, this tall relief can be seen. Thutmosis III here presents all sorts of things to Amun, among which a pair of obelisks.



In front of the obelisks we see two tall, wooden masts, or rather: flag poles. Flag poles like these, that could be over 30 meters high (made from cedar wood from the Lebanon) were placed before the pylons. (They did not carry flags though, but narrow pennants.)



Below is part of Thutmosis' spoils of war: jewelry, and all sorts of vessels, plundered from the temples and palaces of Syrio-Palestinian city states. Their quantities are supplied: a stroke means one, an arc is ten, and a curl is one hundred.

