

Karnak Temple Complex



The Karnak Temple Complex, commonly known as Karnak (/ˈkɑːr.næk/),^[1] comprises a vast mix of temples, pylons, chapels, and other buildings near Luxor, Egypt. Construction at the complex began during the reign of Senusret I (reigned 1971–1926 BCE) in the Middle Kingdom (c. 2000–1700 BCE) and continued into the Ptolemaic Kingdom (305–30 BCE), although most of the extant buildings date from the New Kingdom. The area around Karnak was the ancient Egyptian Ipet-isut ("The Most Selected of Places") and the main place of worship of the 18th Dynastic Theban Triad, with the god Amun as its head. It is part of the monumental city of Thebes, and in 1979 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List along with the rest of the city.^[2] Karnak gets its name from the nearby, and partly surrounded, modern village of El-Karnak, 2.5 kilometres (1.6 miles) north of Luxor.

OVERVIEW OF KARNAK TEMPLE COMPLEX

Overview

The complex is a vast open site and includes the Karnak Open Air Museum. It is believed to be the second^[citation needed] most visited historical site in Egypt; only the Giza pyramid complex near Cairo receives more visits. It consists of four main parts, of which only the largest is currently open to the public. The term Karnak often is understood as being the Precinct of Amun-Re only, because this is the only part most visitors see. The three other parts, the Precinct of Mut, the Precinct of Montu, and the dismantled Temple of Amenhotep IV, are closed to the public. There also are a few smaller temples and sanctuaries connecting the

Precinct of Mut, the Precinct of Amun-Re, and the Luxor Temple. The Precinct of Mut is very ancient, being dedicated to an Earth and creation deity, but not yet restored. The original temple was destroyed and partially restored by Hatshepsut, although another pharaoh built around it in order to change the focus or orientation of the sacred area. Many portions of it may have been carried away for use in other buildings.

The key difference between Karnak and most of the other temples and sites in Egypt is the length of time over which it was developed and used. Construction of temples started in the Middle Kingdom and continued into Ptolemaic times. Approximately thirty pharaohs contributed to the buildings, enabling it to reach a size, complexity, and diversity not seen elsewhere. Few of the individual features of Karnak are unique, but the size and number of features are vast.

Hypostyle Hall

The Great Hypostyle Hall in the Precinct of Amun-Re has an area of 50,000 sq ft (5,000 m²) with 134 massive columns arranged in 16 rows. One hundred and twenty-two of these columns are 10 metres (33 ft) tall, and the other 12 are 21 metres (69 ft) tall with a diameter of over 3 metres (9.8 ft). The architraves, on top of these columns, are estimated to weigh 70 tons.

These architraves may have been lifted to these heights using levers. This would be a time-consuming process and also would require great balance to get to such heights. A common alternative theory regarding how they were moved is that large ramps were constructed of sand, mud, brick or stone and that the stones were then towed up the ramps. If stone had been used for the ramps, they would have been able to use much less material. The top of the ramps presumably would have employed either wooden tracks or cobblestones for towing the megaliths.

There is an unfinished pillar in an out-of-the-way location that indicates how it would have been finished. Final carving was executed after the drums were put in place so that it was not damaged while being placed.[6][7] Several experiments moving megaliths with ancient technology were made at other locations – some of which are amongst the largest monoliths in the world.

HISTORY OF KARNAK TEMPLE COMPLEX

History

The history of the Karnak complex is largely the history of Thebes and its changing role in the culture. Religious centers varied by region, and when a new capital of the unified culture was

established, the religious centers in that area gained prominence. The city of Thebes does not appear to have been of great significance before the Eleventh Dynasty and previous temple building there would have been relatively small, with shrines being dedicated to the early deities of Thebes, the Earth goddess Mut and Montu. Early building was destroyed by invaders. The earliest known artifact found in the area of the temple is a small, eight-sided column from the Eleventh Dynasty, which mentions Amun-Re. Amun (sometimes called Amen) was long the local tutelary deity of Thebes. He was identified with the ram and the goose. The Egyptian meaning of Amun is "hidden" or the "hidden god".[10]

Major construction work in the Precinct of Amun-Re took place during the Eighteenth Dynasty, when Thebes became the capital of the unified Ancient Egypt. Almost every pharaoh of that dynasty added something to the temple site. Thutmose I erected an enclosure wall connecting the Fourth and Fifth pylons, which comprise the earliest part of the temple still standing in situ.

EUROPEAN KNOWLEDGE OF KARNAK

knowledge

Thebes' exact placement was unknown in medieval Europe, though both Herodotus and Strabo give the exact location of Thebes and how long up the Nile one must travel to reach it. Maps of Egypt, based on the 2nd century Claudius Ptolemaeus' mammoth work *Geographia*, had been circulating in Europe since the late 14th century, all of them showing Thebes' (Diospolis) location. Despite this, several European authors of the 15th and 16th centuries who visited only Lower Egypt and published their travel accounts, such as Joos van Ghistele and André Thévet, put Thebes in or close to Memphis.