

## CHAPTER 22

# EGYPTIAN TEMPLES

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FROM the beginning of their rule in Egypt, the Ptolemies initiated a gigantic temple construction and decoration programme, which the Roman emperors continued well into the second century CE. Temples were still decorated on a much smaller scale into the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries. The last known cartouche of a Roman emperor in a temple was inscribed under Maximinus Daia (305–13 CE) on blocks belonging to the temple of Horus at Tahta (Hölbl 2000: 45 n. 177; 114, fig. 157). Otherwise, the latest evidence comes from Esna (Sauneron 1975: 65–6, no. 495; 84–7, no. 503), where the temple of Khnum was still being decorated under Decius (249–51 CE). Stelae inscribed in hieroglyphs continued to be set up in Egyptian temples, for example in the Bucheum at Armant, of which the latest is dated to 340, the fifty-seventh year of the era of Diocletian (Hölbl 2000: 45 n. 178; Goldbrunner 2004: 78–9, 302). The temple of Isis at Philae, where hieroglyphs were carved in the temple of Harendotes as late as 394 (Winter 1982: 1023), was the last to be kept open, being closed down under Justinian between 535 and 537 (Winter 1982: 1026), when it was converted to a church (Dijkstra 2008).

The Hellenistic and Roman periods of Egypt are often subsumed under the term ‘Graeco-Roman Egypt’. In his examination of Egyptian society under Ptolemaic and Roman rule, Naphtali Lewis (1970) correctly pointed out that this phrase should not be used to imply continuity between the two eras, since the changes in the governmental structure, social patterns and politics, administration, and the economy were so fundamental in Roman times as to render the term misleading. Nonetheless, for the indigenous temples, the term ‘Graeco-Roman’ is appropriate as it emphasizes the continuity of temple construction and decoration throughout the longer period.

In view of the massive amount of evidence, this chapter concentrates on architecture, decoration, and certain questions of cult topography. The relations of temple and king and the interaction of Egyptian deities and humanity’s protagonist, the Roman emperor as the Egyptian pharaoh, were central to the development of the Roman province, at least in the understanding of the Egyptian priests. The temples’ socio-cultural context (Finnestad 1997: 198, 227–32), their function as centres of learning that produced vast numbers of hieroglyphic and literary texts, and their artistic aspects are mentioned, but not discussed in detail.

## THE EGYPTIAN TEMPLES AND THEIR TEXTS AND WRITING SYSTEM(S)

Egyptian scholar priests of the Graeco-Roman period developed for the indigenous temples a highly intellectual, very artificial language and a vastly expanded writing system. The temple walls were decorated on an unprecedented scale with scenes and inscriptions that provide manifold insights into the religious thinking of the priests, cult topography, mythology, religious festivals, daily cults, the ruler cult, and building history, as well as the function of various rooms.

Patterns in the inscription of texts show that those of both Ptolemaic and Roman periods should be studied together. Since the temple of Horus at Edfu is almost complete and is rich in inscriptions that are published and accessible, it has become a focal point for studies on hieroglyphic texts of these periods, cult topography, and temple ritual—despite its provincial location. The cultural centre was in the north and the most creative regions were probably in the Delta and the Memphis area. Therefore, one could assume that Roman temples there were probably even larger and more richly decorated than those in the south, but almost all surviving buildings of the Roman period are in Upper Egypt, and this bias causes well-known problems of interpretation. According to Penelope Wilson (1997, p. x), the temple of Edfu, founded in 237 and completed in 57 BCE, is regarded in many ways as ‘the leader of this series of Upper Egyptian temples whose texts provided the standards for the temples which followed’, at least in the south. For example, under Ptolemy XII, texts from Edfu were copied with some variant writings in the Second East Colonnade leading to the temple of Isis at Philae. From the differences in script, Erich Winter (1995: 310–19) presumes that the inscriptions were not copied from papyri, but that the priests from Edfu travelled to Philae, taking with them their knowledge. Another text in the Second East Colonnade at Philae, also of the reign of Ptolemy XII, was copied under Augustus at Kalabsha (Winter 1995: 306–10, 319). In this case graphic similarities suggest that a papyrus template was used. These two cases show a rather smooth transition from Ptolemaic to Roman period practices. Obvious variations in script and texts occur in different temples (Junker 1906, p. v), since mythological and ritual requirements would produce specific interpretations. The variety of texts and orthography is one index of energetic creativity in the Graeco-Roman temples.

The temple texts of the Graeco-Roman period have attracted much philological attention, from analyses of individual hieroglyphic signs (Fairman 1943, 1945) and wordplay (e.g. Preys 2009) to complete text publications of entire temples such as Edfu. Work on Graeco-Roman temple inscriptions is very active and no longer considered as an arcane specialization, nor are the texts regarded as faint imitations of earlier periods. On the contrary, the texts display the maintenance of textual tradition (Quack 2010) and show a new level of integration of mythical motifs. Phrases in texts as early as the Pyramid Texts are incorporated in Ptolemaic and Roman compositions (Graefe 1991), exemplifying that Graeco-Roman temples should be studied not in isolation, but in the broader context of ancient Egypt. The origin of many features can be traced back to the Dynastic period; these were developed dynamically in Graeco-Roman temples. This is true for architecture (discussed below) as well as texts. An example is the highly developed schematic framing columns of inscriptions in scenes and



their formulas, whose organization was discovered by Erich Winter (1968) in his pioneering work on the organization of Graeco-Roman period temple reliefs and of their distribution in registers. Almost thirty years later, John Baines (1994) discussed the New Kingdom forerunners to these formulas that express the idea of the temple as the cosmos and its eternal duration.

Since Philippe Derchain (1962a) proposed the existence of a 'temple grammar', an idea taken up and developed by Erich Winter (1987), texts and architecture are no longer viewed separately. In order to understand the underlying 'grammar' of a specific temple, one should take into account that temples were built and decorated according to specific rules that included the inscriptions as well as architectural and iconographic characteristics. This has been discussed in detail, for example, for the outer wall of the sanctuary at Dendara (Leitz 2001). Graeco-Roman temples were highly and comprehensively systematized. Baines (1994: 31) concludes, 'Their inventiveness lies partly in the creation of complex and rigid structures', which is a 'salient distinction between the designs of the New Kingdom and the Greco-Roman period'.

Although many of the hieroglyphic inscriptions are accessible in extensive publications and, to a much lesser extent, in translation (see Grenier 1980; Leitz 2002), a vast number of texts remain to be copied, translated, and especially analysed. Each temple was a world of its own, with the logical consequence that each temple complex needs to be published completely. Besides the temple of Edfu, whose texts are pretty much all published, long-standing projects have been initiated for the large temples at Dendara, Esna, Kom Ombo, and Philae (for an overview and bibliography, see Kurth 1997: 154) and now Athribis (Leitz, Mendel, and el-Masry 2010), as well as smaller ones such as el-Qal'a (Pantalacci and Traunecker 1990–8) and Shanhur (Willems et al. 2003; Minas-Nerpel et al. forthcoming). Penelope Wilson's dictionary (1997) and the grammars of Hermann Junker (1906) and Dieter Kurth (2007–8) are important results of these publications. Owing to the enormous amount of evidence, no overview of all the Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period has ever been attempted. A major goal should be to classify the temple texts properly. Christian Leitz has initiated a research project at the University of Tübingen, 'The Temple as Canon of Egypt's Religious Literature', which aims at a classification, analysis, and comprehensive interpretation of the hieroglyphic texts of all temples.

## DENDARA: AN EGYPTIAN TEMPLE OF THE GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD

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Besides the temple of Horus at Edfu, the temple of Hathor at Dendara is one of the best-preserved temples in Egypt (Daumas 1974). The question of how typical it was cannot be evaluated easily because roughly 90 per cent of the temples north of Athribis are lost. However, the *Book of the Temple*, a manual that describes how the ideal Egyptian temple should be built and operated, might shed light on this question. This handbook is attested in over forty fragmentary manuscripts, demonstrating its wide and supra-regional use in antiquity. The mostly unpublished papyri all date to the Roman period, but the manual's origin predates the foundation of Edfu in 237 BCE (Quack 2009).

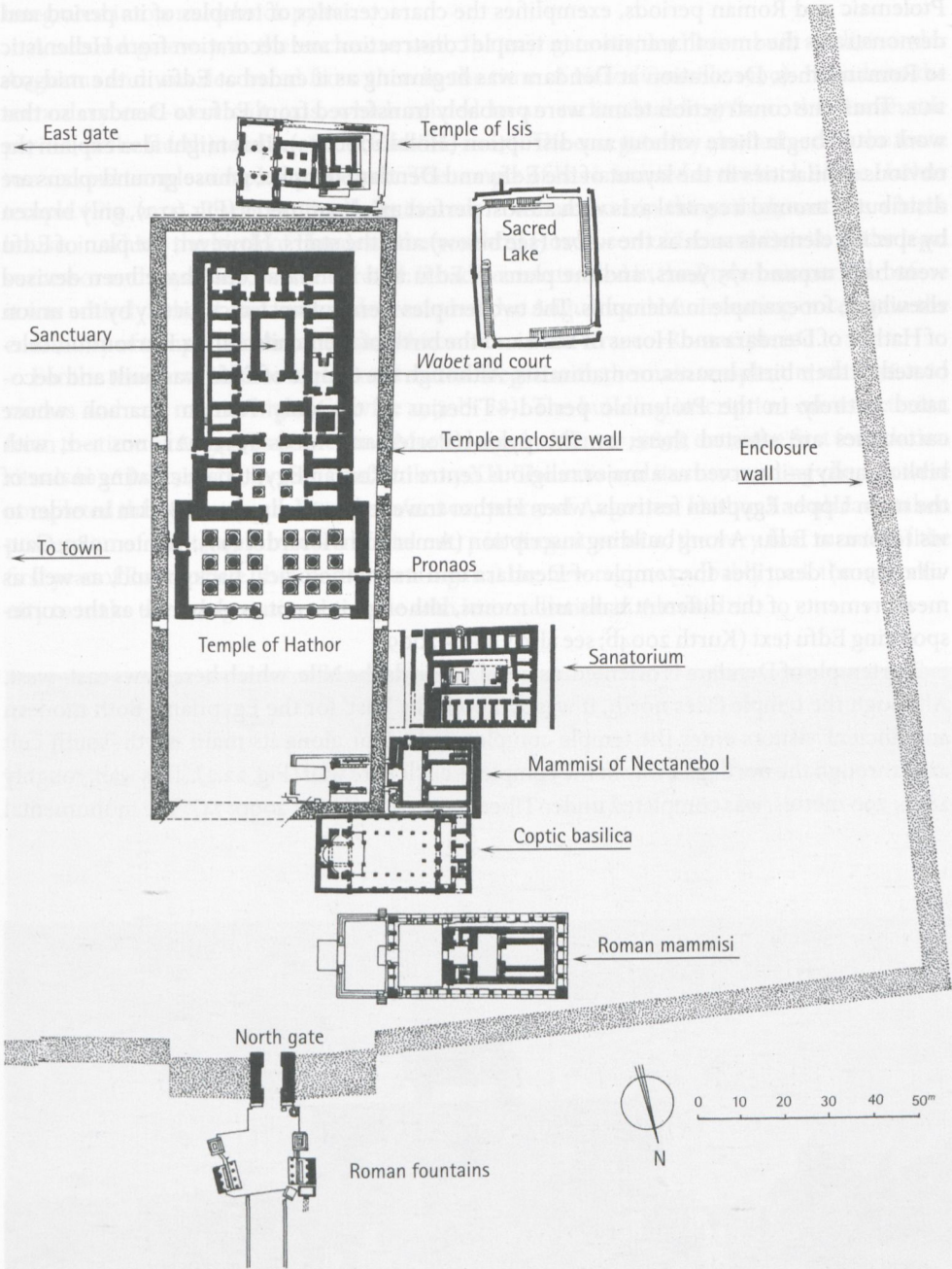


FIG. 22.1 Plan of the temple complex at Dendara

Based on Cauville (1990b: 27).



The Dendara temple complex, which is the result of a radical architectural renewal in late Ptolemaic and Roman periods, exemplifies the characteristics of temples of its period and demonstrates the smooth transition in temple construction and decoration from Hellenistic to Roman times. Decoration at Dendara was beginning as it ended at Edfu in the mid-50s BCE. Thus, the construction teams were probably transferred from Edfu to Dendara so that work could begin there without any disruption (Hölbl 2000: 75). This might also explain the obvious similarities in the layout of the Edfu and Dendara temples, whose ground-plans are distributed around a central axis with almost perfect axial symmetry (Fig. 22.1), only broken by specific elements such as the *wabet* (see below) and the stairs. However, the plan of Edfu went back around 175 years, and the plans of Edfu and Dendara could have been devised elsewhere, for example in Memphis. The two temples were connected cultically by the union of Hathor of Dendara and Horus of Edfu and the birth of their child Ihi, or Harsomtus, celebrated in their birth houses, or *mammisi*. Although the temple of Edfu was built and decorated entirely in the Ptolemaic period—Tiberius is the only Roman pharaoh whose cartouches are attested there, on the pylon (Porter and Moss 1939: 121, nos 1–2, with bibliography)—it served as a major religious centre in Roman Egypt, participating in one of the main Upper Egyptian festivals, when Hathor travelled annually about 180 km in order to visit Horus at Edfu. A long building inscription (Amer and Morardet 1983; Winter 1989; Cauville 1990a) describes the temple of Dendara and its mythological background, as well as measurements of the different halls and rooms, although it is not as elaborate as the corresponding Edfu text (Kurth 2004b; see also Quack 2009).

The temple of Dendara is oriented, as usual, towards the Nile, which here flows east–west. Although the temple faces north, it was symbolically ‘east’ for the Egyptians. Both modern and ancient visitors enter the temple complex of Hathor along its main north–south cult axis, through the north gateway in the complex’s enclosure wall (Fig. 22.2). This wall, roughly 280 × 290 metres, was completed under Tiberius in 23 CE (Hölbl 2000: 74). The monumental



FIG. 22.2 Temple of Hathor and north gateway, Dendara

Author's photograph.

stone gateway was decorated under Domitian (81–96) and Trajan (98–117) and was once integrated into a mud-brick pylon.

A second gateway in the enclosure wall, the east gateway, had been built earlier under Augustus and was decorated from then to the time of Nero (Cauville 1999). It leads to the secondary east–west cult axis, which related to an earlier building from the Ramesside period, to the (birth) temple of Isis (Cauville 2007). The east gateway also led across the town to a second temple complex to the east. The temple of Isis is located at the back of the Hathor temple (Fig. 22.3). It was originally built under Nectanebo I in the 30th dynasty as a birth house, in which the birth of Harsiese, the youthful Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, as the legal successor and royal heir, was celebrated. It had been extended in the Ptolemaic period, before it was entirely rebuilt and further decorated under Augustus, demonstrating once again the continuity of temple construction and decoration in the Graeco-Roman period.

For the temple of Hathor itself, construction began with the main temple, the naos, 36 × 60 metres and 12.5 metres high (Cauville 1990b: 28). The building inscription on its exterior, from the time of Augustus (Amer and Morardet 1983; Winter 1989), dates the first foundation rituals to 16 July 54 BCE, in year 27 of Ptolemy XII. The naos and its surrounding chapels were completed thirty-four years later, in 22/21 BCE, year 9 of Augustus. Hathor had already taken possession of her temple by ceremonial entry in August 30 BCE, the very first month of the first year of Roman rule, thus demonstrating that the new regime probably took the opportunity to make the inauguration coincide with its installation in Alexandria.



FIG. 22.3. Temples of Hathor and Isis at Dendara, from the south-east

Author's photograph.



The subterranean crypts (Waitkus 1997), which were decorated under Ptolemy XII and his co-regent Cleopatra VII until 51 BCE, had been completed before the walls of the naos were erected. They were regarded as the underworld and used as storerooms for the statues, which would be taken out and revived at various religious festivals (Coppens 2009).

All outer walls of the naos were decorated under Roman rule, except for the rear wall, which had been executed first, probably because of the important locus of the contra-chapel around the large Hathor head, carved in the middle of the wall, which was originally gilded and surrounded by a wooden canopy (Hölbl 2000: 74, fig. 83). On the rear wall, Cleopatra VII is depicted in the famous offering scenes together with her son King Ptolemy XV Caesarion (Figs 22.3 and 22.4), called Philometor Philopator, who combined in his name and person the legacy of the Ptolemaic dynasty and his Roman heritage. Thus, the foundation was laid for a Hellenistic–Roman dynasty (Heinen 2007: 186–7), but with the death of Julius Caesar in 44 and that of his son Ptolemy in 30 BCE, this idea was abandoned. Instead, Egypt became a Roman province.

The sanctuary at Dendara, the innermost part of the temple, was a separate structure completely enclosed within the naos. Here, sheltered from everything outside, the principal cult image of the main deity, Hathor, stood within a shrine, accompanied by the cult barques of



FIG. 22.4 Naos on the rear wall of the temple of Hathor at Dendara: Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XV Caesarion offer to the deities of Dendara at both ends of the wall. The large Hathor head carved in the middle of the wall marks the location of the contra-chapel

Horus of Edfu, Harsomtus, and Isis. The sanctuary is surrounded by a corridor, from which the surrounding chapels can be reached. They are dedicated to Hathor, Isis, Sokar-Osiris, Harsomtus, and Horus of Edfu. Directly in front of the sanctuary are two transverse halls, first the Hall of the Ennead, where the deities' statues were assembled for processions during festivals, and secondly the Offering Hall, where the offering tables were placed. The deities' statues appeared in the Hall of Appearance, which was supported by six composite columns with plant motifs and the sistrum capitals, comprising four Hathor masks, one facing in each direction. Around the Hall of Appearance six further chambers are located, such as the treasury, in which precious cult objects were kept.

The Hall of the Ennead gives access to a small open court leading to the *wabet*, the 'pure chapel' (Fig. 22.5), where all the cult images of the temple were assembled in order to be purified, clothed, and adorned for the festival of the 'unification with the solar disk' at the New Year. From the open court priests would carry the images up the western staircase to the temple roof, where the procession went to the kiosk at the back. Here, the main ceremony of the festival was celebrated (Cauville 2002: 35–49), when the statues of the deities were exposed to



FIG. 22.5 *Wabet* and open court at the temple of Hathor, Dendara



the rejuvenating rays of the sun, being finally carried back into the temple down the eastern stairway, as depicted on the walls. The open court and the *wabet* are specific Graeco-Roman transformations of features that had existed at least since the New Kingdom, the 'sunshades' (*šw.t Rꜥ*) of the New Kingdom Theban temples, the open solar court in Taharqa's edifice in Karnak, or the Ra-Horakhty chapels of the Nubian temples (Coppens 2007: 209–19).

In the temple of Hathor, there were two further rooftop chapels, consisting of several adjoining rooms, dedicated to the cult of Osiris, especially for the mysteries performed in the month of Khoiak, the fourth month of the inundation. This ritual included the annual production of two types of Osiris figurine, 'corn mummies' made from earth and grain, which would sprout and symbolize the resurrection of Osiris (Raven 1982), and the recently identified Sokar-Osiris figurines. Both types of figurine are described in the Khoiak texts (Chassinat 1966–8; Cauville 1997a,b), and archaeologically attested (Minas-Nerpel 2006). This example illustrates how temples need to be interpreted in their archaeological, architectural, and textual context, using all categories of evidence. Only then can the cult be analysed in full in its topographical setting.

The ceiling of the great pronaos, or outer hypostyle hall, rests on twenty-four Hathor columns, of which six are linked by intercolumnar screen walls to form the façade of the building, another feature typical of the Graeco-Roman period that can be traced back to the New Kingdom (Elgawady 2010). The Dendara pronaos is the largest completely preserved structure of Roman Egypt, 43 metres wide, 26 metres long, and 17.2 metres high (Cauville 1990b: 28). In comparison, only eighteen columns support the Edfu pronaos. The Dendara hall was added to the naos in a second building phase, of which the completion is commemorated in a Greek dedication inscription on the façade, dating to 32–7 CE, the last years of Tiberius (Bernand 1984, no. 28; Winter 1989: 76 n. 2; Hölbl 2000: 78–9). Most parts of the pronaos were decorated later, under Claudius and Nero. The dedication inscription emphasizes that the inhabitants of the *metropolis* and the nome have dedicated this pronaos to Aphrodite-Hathor. This corresponds to the Greek building inscription on the east gate in the enclosure wall (Hölbl 2000: 74 n. 233), which had also been paid for by the inhabitants, who thus initiated the construction of important temple parts. This leads to the central question of who initiated and financed Egyptian temple buildings in the Roman period and how much land and therefore resources the temples and the Egyptian priests still possessed. Most of the land belonging to temples had been appropriated by the state in the early Roman period, and the privileges the Egyptian priests enjoyed had been curtailed, but the Egyptian temples as institutions obviously still possessed the means to continue to build and decorate temples during the principate (Monson 2005; Herklotz 2007: 114–16; for the Ptolemaic period, see Manning 2003). It seems unlikely, however, that the monumental temple complexes resulted from initiatives other than of the rulers (or the state). With the aid of royal and also private donations from non-Egyptian officials, private citizens, and Roman soldiers (Kockelmann and Pfeiffer 2009), the Egyptians were able to build new temples or to extend those already existing. The wealthy elite thus funded not only classical-style city construction (McKenzie 2007: 154, 162, 170) but also to a certain extent some Egyptian temples. Arthur F. Shore (1979) discussed votive objects from Dendara with Greek, hieroglyphic, and Demotic inscriptions, which provide information concerning high officials of the Tentyrite nome and their contributions to the building and decoration of its principal temples in the late Ptolemaic and the early Roman period.



In the reign of Nero (54–68), after the pronaos had been completed, a stone enclosure wall was planned and had been partly erected around the entire temple, but it was never completed. The north-west corner of this wall cuts through the 30th dynasty birth house, the oldest archaeologically surviving example, which was replaced by one of the Roman period, dedicated to Ihi, the son of Hathor. In a birth house (Daumas 1958), which was usually a separate building facing the axis of a main temple, the birth and enthronement of an infant god as part of the local divine triad was celebrated in the form of a mystery drama that identified the young deity with the rising sun, and so took on cosmic dimensions (Louant 2003). The concept of the child-god and the daily rebirth of the sun supported the equation between the king and the eternal regeneration of kingship, already attested in New Kingdom Theban temples, for example for Hatshepsut in her temple at Deir el-Bahri on the west bank and for Amenhotep III in the temple of Luxor.

## ARCHITECTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL VARIATION

Although Dendara and Edfu are closely linked and the design of their two main temples is rather similar, there are clear differences in their architecture, for example the number of columns in the Halls of Appearance (six in Dendara, twelve in Edfu) and the pronaos (twenty-four in Dendara, eighteen in Edfu). Graeco-Roman temples could vary greatly in their function, design, and size. Already in Ptolemaic times, Egyptian temples were classified into first, second, and third rank, as known from the sacerdotal decrees (Pfeiffer 2004: 194–6). From the Mediterranean coast to Nubia and from the oases in the Western Desert to the Red Sea, more than a hundred Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period are known (Kurth 1997: 152). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to list or discuss all Egyptian temples built, extended, and/or decorated in the Roman period. The presentation of Dieter Arnold (1999) needs to be updated, especially for decoration executed after Antoninus Pius (Hölbl 2000, 2004b, 2005; Hallof 2010), and further analysed (Minas forthcoming). Here, I concentrate on two further examples, Kom Ombo and el-Qal'a.

At Kom Ombo (Fig. 22.6), temple construction and decoration started under Ptolemy VI Philometor and continued through to the early third century CE. This large building, which replaced an earlier one, was conceived as a unique double temple with two main east-west temple axes, the southern one leading to the sanctuary of Sobek, the northern one to the sanctuary of Haroeris, Horus the Elder. The temple thus exhibits an architectural doubling of many features, except for such elements as the *wabet* complex, which occurs only on the north (Haroeris) side. Both principal deities formed the centre of a triad: Haroeris was linked to Hathor and Khonsu, Sobek to rather abstract deities with almost no individual characteristics, Tasenetnofret ('the Good Sister/Spouse') and the child-god Panebtawy ('the Lord of the Two Lands'), whose name alludes to the king's role. Sobek's family is exceptional, and the names look Late Egyptian rather than belonging to a subsequent linguistic phase, so that the deities might have existed long before the temple was built (Baines 1997: 231). Kom Ombo thus perfectly demonstrates the continuation and elaboration of theological traditions and the ongoing creative thought processes of the priests, which can be detected in the architecture as well as in the iconography and the texts.



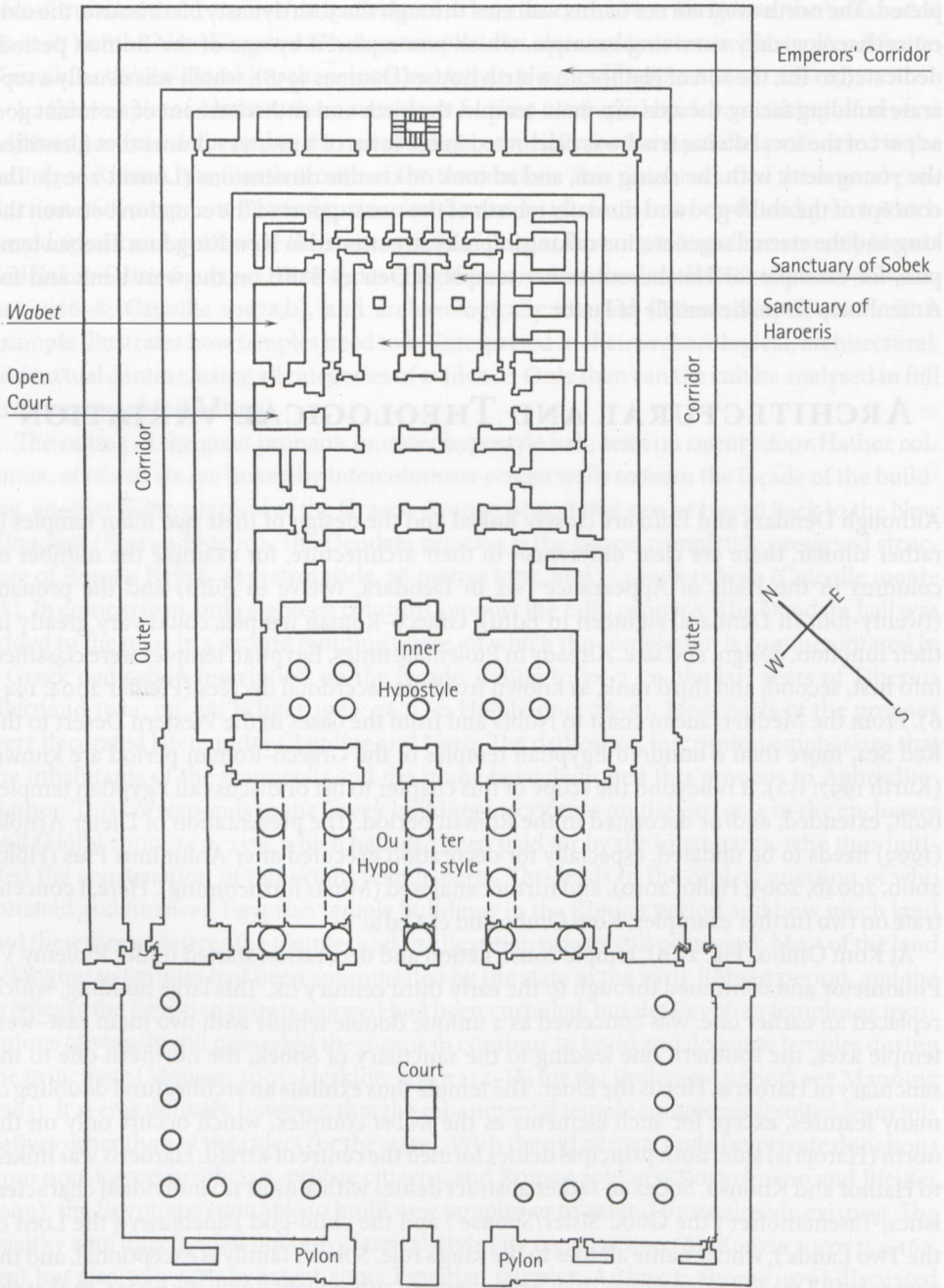


FIG. 22.6 Plan of the temple of Sobek and Haroeris at Kom Ombo

Based on Porter and Moss (1939: 180).

A dual temple, but of a different form, again with abstract concepts of deities, is also found at el-Qal'a, a small, rather well-preserved and richly decorated structure located 600 metres north of the temenos of Min and Isis at Koptos, at the edge of the local region where these gods were worshipped (Pantalacci and Traunecker 1990–8). It has a main east–west axis and was built in limestone, unlike most temples of the period; it was begun during the reign of Augustus and decorated until the time of Claudius. As a small temple (26 × 16 metres), it is 'a kind of an abstract for the architecture of the large temples like Dendera and Edfu' (Traunecker 1997: 170). The main sanctuary is on the west side, surrounded by a corridor that gives access to two chapels and the *wabet* complex. The sanctuary is reached from the east through three halls, an entrance hall, an intermediary room, and the Offering Hall. The temple has a secondary north–south axis, with a small entrance hall to the south of the Offering Hall and a secondary sanctuary to its north, perhaps a birth house for the divine child. The Offering Hall thus served both sanctuaries. As at Kom Ombo, the temple had two axes, but this time not two parallel ones but two perpendicular ones, like the temple of Isis at Dendara. The main goddess of the temple at el-Qal'a, 'Isis, the Great, the Mother of Horus', was also named 'the Great Goddess' during the reign of Augustus, whereas under Claudius this epithet became a deity, so that Isis and 'the Great Goddess' figure separately on the temple walls. A similar process can be observed for the local child-god Harpocrates, who splits into 'the eldest (son) of Amun' and the son of Osiris (Traunecker 1997: 171–6). Neither at el-Qal'a nor at Kom Ombo should this abstraction be taken as a sign of decline in the vitality of the ideas propounded in the temple.

Even if el-Qal'a was a relatively minor sanctuary on the periphery of a city, its theological and cultic system is connected to the small contemporaneous temple at Shanhur, located between Koptos and Thebes, which was influenced by both theological systems, but mainly by the Koptite one. The main goddess of Shanhur is 'the Great Goddess Isis', sometimes abbreviated to 'the Great Goddess'; even the Theban triad is represented in its Koptite variant (Willems et al. 2003). Although Thebes had been a dominant religious centre in earlier times, in the Roman period construction and decoration in the Theban area were confined to smaller temples such as that of Isis at Deir el-Shelwit at the south end of the religious territory of the Theban west bank or relatively modest additions to existing temples. The enormous ancient temples at Thebes were kept in use and extended selectively, but not replaced. The Koptite region, on the other hand, enjoyed particular interest in the Roman period. The quarries of the Eastern Desert were heavily exploited under Roman rule and were supported by a major road system, with Koptos being the principal emporium for the caravan routes to the Red Sea ports, including the route through the Wadi Hammamat. In the remote regions of the Western Desert, especially Kharga and Dakhla (Kaper 1998; Chapter 43), the Roman period is also characterized by the new construction or extension of temples on a large scale. These areas reached a peak of importance and prosperity in the Roman period (Hölbl 2005: 9–101).

Under Augustus the state reconquered part of Lower Nubia and undertook a copious construction programme. Because of its military importance the Dodekaschoinos (the northern part of Lower Nubia) received substantial political and ideological attention. In particular after the peace treaty of Samos (21/20 BCE), when the southern frontier of the Imperium Romanum was established at Hierasykaminos (Maharraqa) and the conflict between Rome and Meroe was brought to an end, an explicit manifestation of the new ruler as pharaoh was required to mark the reincorporation of the region. At Philae, Biga, Debod, Kertassi, Tafa,



Kalabsha, Ajuala, Dendur, Dakka, and Maharraqa, Egyptian temples were built or extended, and in these Augustus appears venerating Egyptian and local Nubian gods (Hölbl 2004b; Verhoeven 2008; Minas-Nerpel 2011). The reign of Augustus exemplifies the pattern of royal involvement in construction to a high degree along the Nile. Under his rule, more temples were initiated and decorated than under any other Roman pharaoh.

A final peak of construction and decoration of Egyptian temples was reached in the reigns of Trajan (98–117), Hadrian (117–38), and Antoninus Pius (138–61), but this was not on the same level as that of Augustus. According to Arnold (1999: 265), the reign of Antoninus Pius was the last productive phase of Egyptian temples of the Roman period. However, under Marcus Aurelius (161–80), Lucius Verus (161–9), and Commodus (180–92), the indigenous temples continued to be extended and decorated far more than Arnold (1999) notes (see Minas-Nerpel forthcoming). Even in the time of Septimius Severus (193–211) and his sons Caracalla (198–217) and Geta (198–211), the temple of Khnum at Esna was further decorated, for example with the significant scene of the Severan family inside the pronaos (Sauneron 1975: 68–70, no. 496; Hölbl 2000: 108–9, fig. 49a–b), which was carved, including the names, when the imperial family visited Egypt (Sauneron 1952). Geta was later erased, demonstrating that the Egyptian priests were informed about his *damnatio memoriae*. Judith McKenzie (2007: 170) notes that, after Antoninus Pius' reign, construction in the Egyptian style in Egyptian temple complexes ceased, while new classical buildings continued to be erected. There may have been a shift in use of resources from Egyptian temples to classical civic buildings and temples, but the Egyptian temples still received enough attention to be extended and further decorated, although on a much smaller scale, until the early third century.

## THE ROMAN EMPEROR AS PHARAOH AND THE PRINCIPLES OF DECORATION

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The Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period are the principal surviving monuments of the Ptolemies and the Roman emperors in the country, so it seems obvious that these rulers attached great importance to these enormous buildings. The big temples such as Dendara, Edfu, and Kom Ombo are also much larger than anything that went before. Yet these foreign rulers, especially the Romans, knew little of the meaning of these buildings, and they could not read their inscriptions. The building and decoration policy must have been stimulated by the priests and native elite, whose lives focused around the temples, which were fundamental repositories of native Egyptian culture—under Roman rule almost its sole carriers (Baines 1997: 216, 231). At the same time, two different worlds could be joined in a temple complex, the Egyptian and the Hellenic–Roman one, as exemplified by the Greek building inscriptions in Dendara. In addition, outside the main entrance are classical structures, while within the temple of Hathor, the traditionally styled Egyptian decoration dominated. Very few hellenistic features are present in the Egyptian temples proper, for example in the zodiac on the ceiling of one of the Osiris rooftop chapels at Dendara (Cauville 1997a,b). The zodiac is a rather unique planisphere, a map of the stars or the sky on a plane projection in circular form, reflecting Greek and Babylonian influences in astronomy. In the temple, however, the



zodiac signs themselves take Egyptian representational form whereas in tombs and on the Soter coffins, some signs are in classical artistic form (Riggs 2005: 201–3).

The Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period were not only architecturally and textually sophisticated, but also decorated and originally painted in very complex ways (for principles of decoration, see Kurth 1994, with bibliography). Despite their provincial locations, many of these temples display a high standard of execution, but they have hardly been studied from an art-historical perspective, with few exceptions, such as Eleni Vassilika's *Ptolemaic Philae* (1989) or Judith McKenzie's *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt* (2007: 119–46). New insight into the temple decoration of this period might be gained from an as yet unpublished papyrus from Tanis (Papyrus Bodleian Library Egyptian p. A5–8), which Joachim F. Quack (2010) has recently identified as a handbook for temple decoration, including drawings, written in hieroglyphic script but mainly in Demotic grammar.

Cosmological associations vouchsafed the integrity of the temple, which served as an image of the world (Hornung 1992: 115–29). Every single temple mirrored the entire cosmos and was a microcosmos as well as the earthly residence of the main deity. The Egyptians re-enacted creation by ceremonially founding and constructing a temple, in the process re-establishing *maat*, universal order. The inner sanctuary symbolizes the primeval mound of earth that emerged from the marshy waters at creation. The cosmic dimension of the temple is reflected in the depiction of the ceiling as sky, the plant decoration on the base of the wall, or the columns of the pillared halls, which have the forms of aquatic plants. In the Graeco-Roman period they often have composite capitals, which bring together different vegetal elements (McKenzie 2007: 122–32) and also form a point of contact with the column capitals of classical architecture.

The ritual scenes show two categories of protagonists involved, the Roman emperor as pharaoh in traditional Egyptian regalia and one or several deities. The offerings the king presents are diverse, ranging from real objects, such as food, flowers, or amulets, to symbolic acts like smiting the enemies or presenting *maat*. Further topics of the temple decoration included the festivals, foundation, and protection of the temple and its gods. In their database SERaT, Horst Beinlich and Jochen Hallof (2007) offer an overview of all ritual scenes of the Graeco-Roman period. It was a cultic requirement to show the pharaoh performing the rituals that would guarantee the existence of Egypt. The necessity of this is explained, for example, in the Ptolemaic period Papyrus Jumilhac, a cult handbook from the eighteenth Upper Egyptian nome, which includes a discourse on the importance of maintaining the cults of the deities. If the king and the priests were to fail to do so, Egypt would be obliterated (Vandier 1961: 129–31, col. xvii, line 14–col. xviii, line 21; Derchain 1990).

From the very beginning of Roman rule Octavian was depicted as a pharaoh, as exemplified by the Kalabsha gateway, now reconstructed in Berlin. When the temple of Kalabsha was moved because of the construction of the Aswan High Dam, the gate was discovered reused as building material in the late Augustan temple. The gate had been constructed and decorated before Octavian was even named Augustus in 27 BCE (Winter 2003), which means that this is one of the first buildings to be decorated under Roman rule. In several of the ritual scenes, Octavian offers a field that symbolizes the Dodekaschoinos (Winter 2003: 200, pls 46, 50, scenes 18, 24, 33), reaffirming an ancient donation, a fact that was important for the priests. In reality, Octavian did not present the offerings to the Egyptian gods, especially not the deities in animal form such as the Apis, whom he detested (Minas-Nerpel 2011). As a Roman magistrate whose nominal desire was to serve the Roman republic in theory, he could not assume royal power in a



Roman province. The priests, on the other hand, needed to sustain their religious claims and probably saw through the Roman propaganda: for them, Octavian was simply a ruler. The fictitious role of a cultic pharaoh in the temple decoration was sufficient for them and did not threaten Octavian's republican claims. He and the following Roman emperors officially played a cosmic role in the temple, but it was a theoretical or abstract one (Derchain 1962b).

For the Egyptians, the Roman emperor as the pharaoh still represented the entire world of Egypt in dealings with the divine realm (Otto 1964: 69–74). Although a non-Egyptian, he was in theory the high priest who approached the divine power in order to sustain *maat* and thus the well-being of the world. In everyday rituals the priests fulfilled assigned duties, officially in the name of the king. The pharaoh was the essential element of the iconographic system, but outside the pictorial context he seems to have been conceptually dispensable (Baines 1997: 230–1). The Ptolemies might have regarded it as beneficial to be provided with this religious legitimacy, but Roman emperors do not seem to have been concerned about this, even if they might have minded about being seen to do the proper thing in the temple context. Few emperors visited Egypt, which means that Egypt was not high on their list of priorities. Hölbl (2000: 18, 117; 2004b: 102–5) hence concludes that the Roman emperor should be seen as a 'cultic pharaoh' who had lost his historical significance. The Roman pharaohs were therefore rather timeless, especially since they were rarely present in the country. This seems to be valid for most relief scenes, but a political or historical meaning can be detected in several instances, for example the above-mentioned offering scene at Esna which resulted from a royal visit and exhibits Geta's *damnatio memoriae*.

The fact that those priests responsible for the temple decoration took note of the identity and the standing of the emperor is further demonstrated by Galba's cartouches at Ain Birbiya in Dakhla Oasis. The change of his name from Lucius Galba Caesar to Servius Galba Imperator Caesar Augustus, resulting from the events in Rome in September 68, and the names' unusual phonetic features on the western, or rear, wall of the sanctuary remarkably demonstrate the priests' alert allegiance. In the name of Galba, the letter *l* is consistently rendered as *m*, which is unparalleled, since *l* would usually be rendered with an Egyptian *r*, as for example in the names of Ptolemy and Cleopatra when written in hieroglyphs. According to Olaf Kaper (2010: 195), these details suggest that the secular authorities were closely involved in the execution of the temple decoration, as they were roughly 150 years later at Esna. Kaper has further established that the depiction of the Roman pharaoh with his full name in hieroglyphs was still of vital importance, but the spelling of the name could be adapted according to local preferences (Kaper 2010: 199).

Some of the most interesting 'historical–political' ritual scenes were carved between the second half of the second century to the second decade of the third century CE in the temple of Kom Ombo, on the inner east face of the outer corridor at the back of the temple (de Morgan 1902, nos 946–56; Porter and Moss 1939: 197, nos 228–31; Hölbl 2000: 94–9, figs 119, 121–5), now called the 'Emperors' Corridor' (Figs 22.6 and 22.7). On the northern half of the wall (Porter and Moss 1939, nos 228–9), seven ritual scenes depict Marcus Aurelius (161–80) either as the sole ruler or accompanied by his co-regent Lucius Verus (161–9). The southern half (Porter and Moss 1939, nos 230–1) has only three scenes, of which the earliest are the two northern ones, bearing the cartouches of Commodus (180–92). In each case, parts of his name were erased, exhibiting his *damnatio memoriae* and reflecting developments that affected the Roman world as far as the indigenous temples in Egypt. The latest relief scene on this wall was



decorated under Macrinus Augustus and his son Diadumenianus (217–18), who is otherwise not attested in Egyptian temples. The southern half of the Emperors' Corridor follows a pattern known from elsewhere, that the ambulatory would be decorated from the middle to the outer edges: since the first scene shows Marcus Aurelius with his co-regent, we can assume that the last one on the northern half was carved after the death of Lucius Verus, that is, between 169 and 180. The empty panels on the southern half show that the decoration of the corridor (and the temple) was abandoned after the death of Diadumenianus. Even if Egyptian temples received less attention than before, the degree of historical and political reflection in such an atmosphere, as exemplified in the Emperors' Corridor, is still quite impressive, but the style is arguably less accomplished and more 'provincial' than earlier in the empire, thus reflecting the general decline in funding and requisite artistic skills in the Egyptian temples.

The amount of temple decoration that was executed decreased rapidly in the third century CE. Frankfurter (1998: 27) states that 'the Egyptian temples were doomed to follow the empire's downward spiral in the various economic catastrophes of the third century'. This does not take into account the fact that construction work on classical buildings continued in Egypt during the third century, with a considerable amount being spent during the middle and later third century (McKenzie 2007: 170, 399 n. 96). The shift to classical forms in the



FIG. 22.7 The Emperors' Corridor at the temple of Sobek and Haroeris, Kom Ombo, viewed from the south

Author's photograph.



third century reflects a shift in the focus of attention, and paved the way for the decline of religious centres in the fourth century.

## CONCLUSION

In a rather smooth transition from the Ptolemaic to the Roman period, Egyptian temples continued to be built and decorated well into the second century CE and, on a much smaller scale, into the beginning of the fourth century. The Egyptian temples of the Graeco-Roman period mostly survive from Athribis in Middle Egypt up the Nile, including the Dodekaschoinos, and also in the deserts, mainly in the Kharga and Dakhla oases. The temples and their decoration were highly systematized, but theological and architectural variations were prevalent. The Roman pharaoh was the essential element of their iconographic system, but outside the pictorial context of the Egyptian temples he seems to have been conceptually dispensable. The Roman emperors therefore primarily played a rather fictitious role as 'cultic' pharaohs, though historical-political facts were reflected in the cult reliefs and inscriptions as late as the beginning of the fourth century.

## SUGGESTED READING

In their archaeological introduction to Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Bagnall and Rathbone (2004) provide a cursory description of the main Egyptian temples. Hölbl (2000, 2004b, 2005) presents a detailed overview of the Egyptian temples of the Roman period with excellent photographs in three volumes and also discusses the perception of the Roman emperors as 'cultic' pharaohs. Minas-Nerpel (2011) examines Octavian-Augustus as pharaoh in detail and is preparing a thorough study on all Roman pharaohs as reflected in the Egyptian temples. Finnestad (1997) supplies a valuable introduction to the social and cultural context of the Graeco-Roman period temples. For general architectural studies, see Arnold (1999) and also McKenzie (2007), who looks at both the classical and the Egyptian temples, while Coppens (2007) illuminates the *wabet*, a specific architectural feature of Egyptian temples in the Graeco-Roman period, and its cultic significance. Kurth's (2004b) short book on the building inscription of the temple of Horus at Edfu offers easy access to the long hieroglyphic text in translation and its interpretation. It is thus a valuable insight into how Egyptians of the Ptolemaic period thought. Cauville (1990a) provides a French translation and rather specialized interpretation of the building inscription of the temple of Hathor at Dendara.

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