



Processional Routes and Festivals

Introduction

Like today, in ancient times the Egyptians enjoyed commemorating days of religious and political significance (both local and national) with special festivities. For the Egyptians, this meant a few days or weeks off from their usual daily labor, as well as feasting and celebrating with their family and community. Records of the endowments given to temples for the celebration of the largest, state-sponsored festivals show that huge amount of food and drink (usually bread, beer and meat) were allotted for the celebrations. Preparations for one three-week festival included the production of over eleven thousand loaves of bread and cakes.¹ The distribution of such quantities of food suggests that the entire community took part in at least some celebrations.

Ancient Egyptian festivals were often linked to astronomical phenomena, agricultural seasons and political events. Minor celebrations took place monthly, while larger events occurred annually or sometimes only once in a pharaoh's lifetime.² For example, the king traditionally celebrated a *sed*-festival, a ritual ceremony aimed at his rejuvenation, only after thirty years of rule. Some festivals were observed throughout the country, and others were linked to local or regional deities or events.³ Some of the most interesting festivals are those that linked two temples together, with the cult image of one temple traveling to another temple in a ritual procession.

Festival processions were a unique type of celebration, as the image of the god came forth from the temple before the populace. Since regular Egyptians did not commonly have access to the interior of the temples, this was a rare chance to interact with the divine. Written records show that during these processions of the divine cult image, private people sought and received oracles and revelations from the god.⁴

Depictions of bark processions suggest that a variety of types of people directly participated in the parade. Troops of soldiers, priests, dancers, musicians, and singers are all shown on tomb or temple reliefs as part of the cortege. The addition of music - rhythmic clapping, the rattling of *sistra* (a percussion instrument that sounds when shaken), and chanting or singing - must have heightened the experience for both the viewer and the participants.



A scene from Luxor Temple showing the procession during the *Opet* festival.

- 1 Kitchen 1982: 169
- 2 Shafer 1997: 25
- 3 Shafer 1997: 25
- 4 Spalinger 2001: 523

DIGITAL KARNAK

Processional Routes and Festivals

For the occasion, the cult statue of the god was placed in a covered wooden litter shaped like a boat. This portable “bark” was painted, gilded and equipped with long carrying poles. Temple priests used the poles to support the bark on their shoulders while moving by foot within or outside the temple.⁵ Often, processions would include a journey on the Nile and the portable bark would be placed within a river barge and ferried to the site of the next ritual. When the river journey was over, the priests would again shoulder the portable bark and the procession would move by foot.

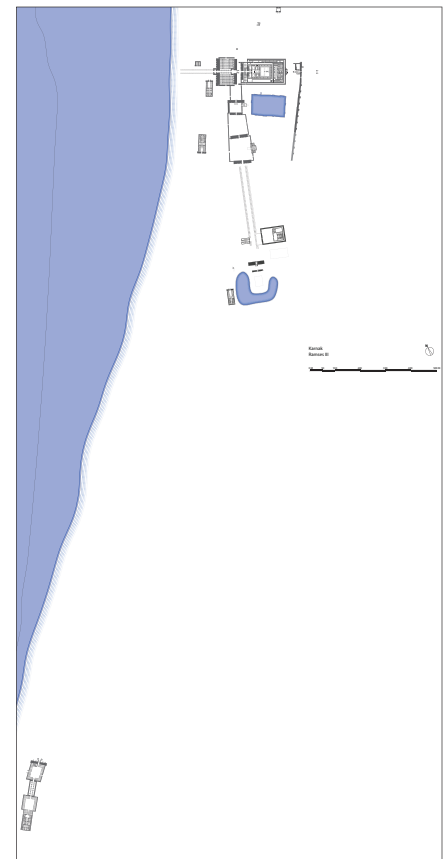
From the New Kingdom onward, processions usually began within a temple’s hypostyle hall, called a “hall of appearances.”⁶ Along the processional route between temples, a series of bark shrines (small buildings with a central stone altar for the placement of the bark) were erected. Ideologically, these stations allowed the divine image to rest within a ritually protected area, while practically they gave priests a break over the long journey to another temple. In some cases, the processional pathways were lined with stone, enclosed with sidewalls and flanked by sphinx statues.⁷

The *Opet* festival

Thebes served as the backdrop for a number of unique religious festivals. One of these, the “*Opet* Festival,” held national importance. Once a year, in the second month of Inundation season, Amun-Ra of Karnak and his divine family Mut and Khonsu left their temples and processed to the temple of Luxor to the south. There resided a special form of the god Amun, *Amun-em-opet*, who was infused with powers of fertility and regeneration. The king and Amun-Ra of Karnak entered into the furthest recesses of the hosting temple, where a series of ceremonies then took place. When the king emerged, he had been imbued with the powers of the royal *ka* (the *ka* is a part of the being imagined by the Egyptians to hold life force). The king took on the might of Amun-Ra, and divine kingship (the inhabitation of the divine role of king by a mortal human) was renewed.⁸

The successful performance of the *Opet* festival was vital for the maintenance of kingship, as well as for the regeneration of Amun-Ra and Amun-em-opet themselves, who needed these rituals to maintain their efficacy.⁹ For this reason, it appears that the king himself often participated in the festival, traveling downstream to Thebes from the administrative center of Memphis.¹⁰

The first mention of the *Opet* festival comes from the reign of Hatshepsut, and it may be that the queen inaugurated its performance at Thebes.¹¹ However, it is also possible that the ceremonies date back much earlier, possibly to the Middle Kingdom, when they were celebrated at an early form of Luxor temple.¹² Recent excavations around Karnak’s ninth pylon uncovered a platform that may have held a bark shrine of Middle Kingdom king Senusret I.¹³ If so, the existence of a



Map of the Theban area showing Karnak and Luxor Temples.

- 5 Kemp 1991: 185-187
- 6 Arnold 2003: 27
- 7 Kemp 1991: 205
- 8 Bell 1997: 157; Murnane 1975
- 9 Bell 1997: 157
- 10 Kitchen 1982: 168
- 11 Roth 2005a: 151 note 3
- 12 Roth 2005a: 151 note 3
- 13 Van Siclen 2005: 32

southern processional route leading out from Karnak towards Luxor at this time would support the theory that the *Opet* festival indeed began much earlier.

There are a number of different sources from Karnak that depict the *Opet* festival, including the blocks of Hatshepsut's "red chapel," the east face of the third pylon, and the interior walls of the hypostyle hall. Other Theban representations are found at Medinet Habu, the temple of Deir el Bahri and Luxor temple itself.¹⁴ These texts and images show that the festival changed significantly over time, both in relation to the processional route followed and to the duration of the ceremonies. Tracing the festival through two of its cycles can help highlight these differences.

Opet in the reign of Hatshepsut

Much of the information about the *Opet* festival in the reign of Hatshepsut, the queen who assumed the role of pharaoh in the early 18th Dynasty, comes from the inscribed texts and scenes on the south wall of her bark chamber at Karnak. A number of blocks of this "red chapel" represent the procession of the portable bark of Amun-Ra during its journey from Karnak temple to Luxor temple. It also depicts six shrines in which the bark rested during its trip from Karnak to Luxor.¹⁵

Additional information about the ceremonies has been pieced together from archaeological remains in Karnak and Luxor. A small bark shrine inscribed for Hatshepsut and her nephew Thutmose III was located just north of the temple of Mut, along the processional route between the Karnak and Mut temples. There is little doubt that this composed one of the bark shrines mentioned on the "red chapel," perhaps the first stop.¹⁶

A second shrine has also been tentatively located. Inside the first court at Luxor, a sandstone triple bark shrine built by Ramesses II included reused blocks from a structure inscribed for Hatshepsut. Egyptologists think the Ramesside shrine was constructed from an earlier shrine for the god's bark on the same location. In the reign of Hatshepsut, this single shrine would have probably stood slightly north of Luxor temple proper, which only expanded to include the area of the shrine in the reign of Ramesses II.¹⁷ This likely served as the sixth, and final bark shrine along the processional route.¹⁸

The reliefs from the "red chapel" and the temple of the queen at Deir el Bahri¹⁹ provide some interesting clues about who participated in the *Opet* festival in the early 18th Dynasty. The queen, her nephew Thutmose III, and the priests carrying the divine image are depicted as involved in the outward journey from Karnak.²⁰ Only one divine portable bark is shown, suggesting that the divine statues of Amun-Ra, Mut and their child Khonsu all traveled together. This representation matches well with the archaeological evidence, as the bark shrine near the



Priests carrying the divine bark of Amun. This scene comes from Luxor Temple.

- 14 For a list of the relevant publications, see: Murnane 1975: 575. A new publication of the red chapel (Larché and Burgos 2006) includes detailed photos and line drawings of the individual blocks of the chapel as well.
- 15 Gabolde 1992: 25; Larché and Burgos 2006: 45-53, 59-66
- 16 Gabolde 1992: 26
- 17 Murnane 1983: 239
- 18 Gabolde 1992: 26
- 19 The *Opet* scenes are located on the east wall (south wing) of the upper terrace at Hatshepsut's temple of Deir el Bahri (Karkowski 1979).
- 20 Haeny 1997: 103-104; Larché and Burgos 2006: 45-53

DIGITAL KARNAK

Processional Routes and Festivals

Mut temple has a single central chamber for the placement of only one bark. The Hatshepsut shrine at Luxor temple and the four unknown shrines would also have had only one chamber.²¹

The Procession

The route of the *Opet* procession has been pieced together from all this information. The procession would have begun within the “holy of holies” of Karnak itself, within the “red chapel.” It was here that the image of Amun-Ra would have been hidden within a naos and placed on a splendidly decorated portable bark.²²

The bark, carried by priests, would have emerged from the core of the temple and passed through the *Wadjet* hall and into the festival hall of Thutmose II. Turning to the south, the group would have emerged into the southern court of the temple, created or embellished by the construction of Hatshepsut’s pylon (the eighth).

It may have been that the image of the god Khonsu joined the processional at this point, as Amun-Ra traveled south past his temple.²³

The party would have continued its slow walk southward, following the path to the temple of the goddess Mut. Before reaching the temple, the divine bark would have halted within the small way station just north of Mut’s northern gate.²⁴

The statue of the goddess Mut may have become part of the procession at this point.²⁵

The three divinities continued their journey south to Luxor via path that extended three kilometers (about 2 miles). Along the way, the group stopped at a series of four additional bark shrines, probably quite similar to the structure north of the Mut temple. Small, with a single central chamber and stand for the placement of the portable bark, the stations were adorned by statues of the queen in the white or double crown in an Osiride pose.²⁶

The final stop would have been the single bark shrine to the north of Luxor temple, discussed above.

Having reached the temple, Hatshepsut, Thutmose III and the divine triad would have entered and begun the sacred rites. Because Luxor temple’s present form was constructed during the reign of Amenhotep III, the location for these ceremonies within the earlier temple remains unknown.



The “red chapel” (as reconstructed in the Open Air Museum) from where the sacred bark began its journey.

- 21 Bell 1997: 293-294 and note 108
- 22 Gabolde 1992: 25
- 23 Bell 1997: 158-160 suggests this for the reign of king Tutankhamun.
- 24 Gabolde 1992: 25
- 25 Bell 1997: 158-160 suggests this for the reign of king Tutankhamun.
- 26 Gabolde 1992: 25; Larché and Burgos 2006: 45-53

Once the religious rites had finished, the group returned to Karnak. This leg of the journey, however, took place via the Nile. The portable bark was loaded onto a boat and sailed downstream north to Karnak (the Nile flows from south to north).²⁷ The “red chapel” reliefs shows Hatshepsut and Thutmose III on the *Userhat* boat accompanying the god (hidden within a decorative naos) downstream.²⁸ This time, the bark is accompanied by music, dance and a parade of standard-bearing priests.²⁹

The exact location of the temple quays servicing this part of the festival in the reign of Hatshepsut remains unknown. At Luxor, it is presumed that the quay stood west of the later peristyle court of Amenhotep III.³⁰ An 18th Dynasty tomb painting suggests that the Nile was connected to the Amun temple at Karnak by a canal leading to a T-shaped basin, possibly near the later second pylon.³¹ Information about access to the temple of Khonsu is even more speculative. The 18th Dynasty temple would have lain outside the Amun temple enclosure wall, an independent unit. It is supposed that this earlier Khonsu temple was located on the same site as the present temple, dated to the 20th Dynasty.³² The 21st Dynasty processional route leading from this temple south did not connect with the route to Luxor, but instead connected to the temple’s own basin and Nile canal, evidence for which has been found in recent excavations.³³ Whether this was the case in the early 18th Dynasty is unknown. At Mut, a western-running extension of the processional alley along the temple’s north side can still be seen today. Excavations in parts of the modern village showed this path extended some distance to the west, likely to another basin or Nile quay.³⁴ Again, the date of this road has not been determined.

Presumably, the portable bark would have been unloaded from the riverine barge at one of these quays. On the “red chapel” reliefs, we next see the god’s bark back on land, being welcomed back to Karnak by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III within the festival hall of Thutmose II.³⁵ Amun-Ra makes a last stop in the bark shrine of Amenhotep I.³⁶

The images of the gods were then taken back to their respective temples, reinvigorated from their interaction with *Amun-em-opet* and the ceremonies of the royal *ka*. The entire *Opet* festival celebration and procession at this time lasted eleven days.³⁷

Opet in the reign of Ramesses II

Sources from the mid-18th and 19th Dynasties show that the celebration of the *Opet* festival underwent a number of changes over time. A series of relief scenes carved along the walls of a double colonnade during the reign of Tutankhamun at Luxor temple vividly depict one of the later forms of the procession.³⁸ A court fronting this colonnade, built by Ramesses II, offers more information on the

- 27 Bell 1997: 162
- 28 Larché and Burgos 2006: 60-61
- 29 Larché and Burgos 2006: 64-65
- 30 Gabolde 1992: 26-27
- 31 Gitton 1974
- 32 Bell 1997: 293 note 107
- 33 El-Molla, Hegazy and Abd el-Hamid 1993: 246-247.
- 34 Bell 1997: 294-295 note 112; Es-Saghir 1992
- 35 The location of the scene in the “festival court” (*weskhet-hebyt*) is labeled on the upper left hand corner of block 176 (see: Larché and Burgos 2006: 62). That this must refer specifically to the “festival court” of Thutmose II is supported by the fact that the inscriptions from the remains of that court show it was identically designated (*weskhet-hebyt*) (Gabolde 1993: 30-31).
- 36 Larché and Burgos 2006: 63. The shrine of Amenhotep I, originally standing in the center of the temple and serving as the main bark chamber of the temple, may have been moved by Hatshepsut to a position north of the eighth pylon to make way for her own “red chapel” (Blyth 2006: 36). It is shown in this location on the model during the reign of Hatshepsut. The position of the bark at this time is based on the fact that Thutmose III replaced the Amenhotep chapel with an identically named copy on this location (Björkman 1971: 58).
- 37 Schott 1934: 66
- 38 Survey 1994

arrival at Luxor.³⁹ Images of festival processions are also included inside the hypostyle hall of Sety I and Ramesses II.⁴⁰ Egyptologists have used texts and images carved into the walls of the interior of Luxor temple, built by Amenhotep III, to better understand how the temple's layout related to the rites taking place within.⁴¹

The Tutankhamun reliefs show that by the mid-18th Dynasty, Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu no longer traveled in a single bark. Now, each god had his or her own portable bark, as did the king and the queen.⁴² The change was maintained in Ramesses' era, as separate barks of the three divinities are also shown in the hypostyle hall reliefs of the 19th Dynasty.⁴³

The Procession

The Ramesside reliefs do not provide much detail about the procession between Karnak and Luxor. However, the slightly earlier Tutankhamun scenes present a lively depiction of this journey, and the route in the reign of Ramesses II can be surmised to be essentially similar. The 18th Dynasty reliefs suggest that the divine images and the royal couple convened at an open court at Karnak. The five portable barks then exited through a temple pylon and proceeded to the temple quay.⁴⁴ In the reign of Ramesses II, the meeting of the king and god would have occurred in the new hypostyle hall. To leave the temple, they would have processed through the second pylon. An alternative interpretation of the festival procedure has also been suggested, in which only the king and his ka statue, processing from the *Akhmenu* temple within Karnak, joined the bark of Amun-Ra within the Amun temple. The group would have marched southward, stopping at the temples of Khonsu and Mut to gather the other divinities for the procession.⁴⁵ In the reign of Ramesses II, the processional route would have thus taken the bark of Amun through the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth pylons. As in the earlier celebrations of Hatshepsut, the barks could have halted at the shrine just north of the Mut precinct. Finally, the whole group would have turned towards the river, and marched to the Nile quay somewhere west of the Mut temple.⁴⁶

In either scenario, the processional route had therefore altered, with both sections of the procession between Karnak and Luxor traveling via the Nile River. The southward journey between Karnak and Luxor would have been upstream, and indeed the Tutankhamun reliefs show the river barges of each god being paddled and pulled from shore to counter the river's current. A joyful throng of festival attendees marched along the shore, with musicians, dancers, soldiers and dignitaries accompanying the parade. Once arrived at Luxor, the royal and divine participants disembarked and moved toward the temple. More celebration commenced, with fresh dancing and music making. Divine offerings were prepared: cattle butchered, bread, beer, and other foods laid out to welcome the king and gods to the temple.⁴⁷



A scene of the *Opet* Festival procession showing dancers and priests, from Luxor Temple.

- 39 Bell 1992, 1997
- 40 Murnane 1975: 595
- 41 Bell 1992, 1997
- 42 Survey 1994: xviii
- 43 For example, Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 38, pl. 152, pl. 180
- 44 Bell 1997: 158-160
- 45 Bell 1997: 160
- 46 Bell 1997: 160
- 47 Murnane 1983: 240-241; Survey 1994: xviii

DIGITAL KARNAK

Processional Routes and Festivals

Each portable bark is shown within its own riverboat in Tutankhamun's scenes, but images of festival processions from inside the Ramesside hypostyle hall represent the portable barks of Amun, Mut, Khonsu and the king traveling within a single ceremonial riverboat named *Userhat-Amun*. Perhaps the number of boats used for river travel changed by the 19th Dynasty.⁴⁸

The procession entered Luxor temple through a door on the first court's western side. Immediately to the left, a triple bark shrine awaited the three divine barks as their last stop before entering the most sacred parts of the temple.⁴⁹ The shrine seems to have been a reconstruction of the earlier 18th Dynasty shrine of Hatshepsut on the same location. When Ramesses II added his new court to Luxor temple, the shrine was enclosed within its walls and rebuilt, this time with separate chambers for each portable bark.⁵⁰

Inscriptions carved onto the Ramesside court suggest it offered a location for the larger Theban community to view the barks of the gods before they moved into the temple colonnade and disappeared from sight. A specific hieroglyph, representing a lapwing bird with upraised, human arms, symbolizes the Egyptian concept for "the common people." Inscribed images of this bird, the *rekhyt*, adorn the eastern door and lower columns of the eastern side of the court. Egyptologists believe its presence marks the location where regular Egyptians could access and stand within the court to celebrate before the divine images moved inside.⁵¹ Most scholars agree that only priests would have been allowed within the sanctuary and core areas of Egyptian temples.

At this point the public part of the procession was completed. The king and the divine barks left the first court and passed through the double colonnade of the temple, through the second court to parade through the hypostyle hall. The barks of Mut and Khonsu then reached their final destination – the two small bark chambers opening onto the southeast corner of the hypostyle. The barks of the Ramesses II and Amun-Ra continued along the central axis, entering the rectangular hall behind the hypostyle (the so-called "chamber of the divine king"). Then the king's bark too broke off from the procession, as it turned left and entered a third small chamber, behind those of Mut and Khonsu. Now only Amun-Ra's image continued forward through a small columned offering vestibule, into the central bark chamber.⁵²

Study of the texts and reliefs on the walls of Luxor temple provide more information on the exact nature of the *Opet* rituals from the mid-18th Dynasty, as well as the location of the rites within the temple. The performance of these rituals probably proceeded quite similarly in the reign of Ramesses II. These reliefs tell us that at some point, the king underwent a renewal of his coronation within the "chamber of the divine king," presided over by Amun-Ra. The king then moved to the central bark chamber and made offerings to the divine image. He opened



The triple bark shrine at Luxor Temple.

48 Schott 1934: 67-68. Nelson and Murnane 1981: pl. 38 shows the portable bark of Amun-Ra in the center, followed by the smaller barks of Khonsu (upper) and Mut (lower). Ramesses censes before them.

49 Bell 1992: 28

50 Bell 1997: 162-163; Murnane 1983: 239

51 Bell 1992: 28, 1997: 135, 164

52 Bell 1997: 173-174 and fig. 56

the doors concealing the god from view, an act that allowed him to not only see the god, but also take on some of Amun's power.⁵³

After all the rituals at Luxor were completed, the royal and divine barks returned to Karnak. The Tutankhmaun *Opet* reliefs at Luxor show that this again took place via the Nile, and the event was continued cause for celebration. The scenes show soldiers marching along the riverbanks with large fans and standards, followed by men clapping and playing instruments while the boats sail along a wavy band of water in the register above them.

Reaching Karnak, the procession may have disembarked at a basin or quay along the temple's western entrance, the exact location of which remains unknown.

[See Essay: [Temple Development](#) for a discussion of the changing position of the Nile river in relation to the temple and the form of the western entrance and sphinx-lined processional route.]

They may have then entered the hypostyle hall and passed through the third pylon. Amun-Ra's bark would have subsequently returned to the temple sanctuary, and the barks of Mut and Khonsu would have retraced the southern processional route to their respective temples.⁵⁴

At the completion of the *Opet* festival, divine kingship was renewed, the king's power bolstered, and the divine images imbued with fresh regenerative strength. These cumulative benefits ensured that Egypt's well being was assured.

Overall, the festival expanded significantly from the earliest ceremonies in the reign of Hatshepsut, increasing its duration from eleven days to more than three weeks in the reign of Ramesses II.⁵⁵

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi

Festival Origins

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi celebration seems to have its origins in a popular festival linked with the goddess Hathor. Often depicted as a cow, or a female human with cow's horns, the goddess was honored as emerging from the western mountains (where the sun disappeared each night in the Egyptian landscape, and thus where the Egyptians located the entrance to the underworld) to greet the dead, welcoming them to eternal life. The concept dates back to the Old Kingdom, and the rituals may have taken place everywhere in Egypt.⁵⁶

At Thebes, the Wadi festival was linked to the god Amun-Ra, who then traveled to the western hills across the river where Hathor was imagined to dwell.⁵⁷ The ritual journey began by the 11th Dynasty, as evidence shows that a mud brick



Temple of Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II at Deir el Bahri.

53 Bell 1997: 176

54 Bell 1997: 176

55 Kitchen 1982: 168-169

56 Bell 1997: 136-137

57 Bell 1997: 136-137

temple to Amun-Ra existed on the east bank of Thebes as early as the reign of king Intef II.⁵⁸ One of his 11th Dynasty successors, Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II, constructed a terraced temple in the curve of a natural valley of cliffs directly across from Karnak (the modern Arabic name for this area is Deir el Bahri). Its lack of support buildings shows it was built as a staging ground for ceremonial events and the focal point for the festival.⁵⁹

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi in the reign of Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut constructed a terraced temple in the sacred valley, next to that of Mentuhotep II, in what may have been an attempt to associate her reign with the glory of the 11th Dynasty kings.⁶⁰ The temple, named *Djeser-djeseru* (holy of holies), had three levels, each fronted by a square pillared portico. It included a bark chamber for the portable bark of Amun-Ra during the Wadi festival, as well as chapels for other deities. Space for the mortuary cult of Hatshepsut and her father, king Thutmose I, were also included in the building. Like the temple of Mentuhotep, it seems to have operated more as a festival stage than a traditional cult temple. A walled causeway led from the temple to a landing station on the low desert plain. Here, a canal or basin would have connected the pathway to the Nile. A bark shrine stood between the temple and the landing, providing a place to rest the god's bark during the processions along the causeway.⁶¹

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi procession began at Karnak, with the portable barks of Amun-Ra, Mut, and Khonsu leaving the east bank. The route of the divine images within greater Karnak is unknown, and whether they approached the river at the Amun temple's western gate, or from the quays of Mut or Khonsu, remains unclear. Situated directly across the Nile from Karnak, the position of the Deir el Bahri temples was probably influenced by the location of the Amun temple. A processional route moving directly across the Nile from the Amun precinct's western gate and quay could have accented this ritualized relationship. However, one scholar has also suggested that the procession would have exited the temple through Hatshepsut's new eighth pylon. It is almost exactly on line with the central axis of the Hatshepsut west bank temple.⁶² Where the parade would have then accessed the river remains unknown.

Crossing the Nile, the riverboat ferried the divine barks and the royals to the east bank. After navigating through a channel or to a basin, the festival cortege stopped at the landing station and the participants disembarked. The group would have processed along the walled causeway, halting to rest within the bark shrine at the halfway point.⁶³ The ceremonial march continued to the temple's first court, the route now lined by sandstone sphinxes of the queen. A series of ramps led up to the second and third terrace levels. Having carried the barks to the third (or upper) terrace, the priests would have placed it within the central sanctuary where it rested for the night.⁶⁴



Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el Bahri.

- 58 Gabolde 1998, 1999
- 59 Arnold, Dieter 2005: 137
- 60 Roth 2005a: 147
- 61 Arnold, Dieter 2005: 137 and fig. 90
- 62 Roth 2005a: 147
- 63 Arnold, Dieter 2005: 137 and fig. 90
- 64 Arnold, Dorothea 2005: 271-272

DIGITAL KARNAK

Processional Routes and Festivals

The festival procession during the reign of Hatshepsut is depicted in relief on the eastern wall (north wing) and northern wall of the *Djeser-djeseru's* upper terrace court (although the image of the queen was cut out and replaced with text or other features in the later part of the reign of Thutmose III). The scenes originally showed Hatshepsut and her nephew Thutmose III at the very start of the festival, praising the gods before they left the temple at Karnak. The procession is then portrayed as moving from the temple to the river. The royal duo is represented traveling across the Nile, accompanied by priests, soldiers, members of court and ritual objects such as divine standards and royal statues. Two royal ships and two ceremonial barges are shown making the crossing. Offerings were made after landing on the west bank (presumably at the landing station), as well as within the bark shrine along the causeway. The scene of the latter shows the royal pair burning incense before the bark while dancers perform for the ceremony.⁶⁵ In the next group of scenes, set inside the temple proper, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III welcome the divine barks to the temple. The joyous procession is accompanied by singers, dancers and torch-bearers. The queen makes offerings to Amun-Ra in the court and then within his private bark chamber. When Hatshepsut emerges from the temple interior, the necessary rituals appear to have been completed, and the next stage of the festival began.⁶⁶

The queen's "red chapel" at Karnak also included a number of scenes (located on the north wall) commemorating the festival. Two depictions of the procession from Karnak to *Djeser-djeseru* have been preserved. The blocks show the queen and her nephew offering to the bark of Amun-Ra, once on their path to the Nile from Karnak temple, and once with the bark resting in a shrine on the west bank.⁶⁷

The Theban populace, having followed the procession to the Deir el Bahri temples, now dispersed among the west bank cemeteries. Families visited the rock-cut tombs of relatives and ancestors, making offerings of food and drink to the spirits of the dead. They accompanied the ritual with drinking and feasting. For the Thebans, the festival reaffirmed the connections between the living and the dead, highlighting the importance of the necropolis in the community.⁶⁸ Painted scenes from a number of 18th Dynasty tombs vibrantly depict these celebrations.⁶⁹

The next day, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III again presented offerings to the gods, and the journey back to Karnak began. The return route seems to have followed the same path, and relief scenes from *Djeser-djeseru* show that stops were again made (presumably at the bark shrine and landing station along the causeway) for praising and censuring to the divine barks.⁷⁰ Six blocks from the "red chapel" record the return trip to Karnak as well. These depict the procession of the bark from Deir el-Bahri on foot, the transport of the god's bark across the river and the arrival of the bark on the east bank. In another scene, Hatshepsut and Thut-



A block from the "red chapel" showing Hatshepsut and Thutmose III offering to the divine bark of Amun-Ra.



A block from the "red chapel" showing priests carrying the bark.

65 Karkowski 1979, 1992: 155-160

66 Murnane 1983: 262-263

67 Larché and Burgos 2006: 95-99

68 Murnane 1983: 75

69 Schott 1952

70 Karkowski 1992: 161

mose III accompany Amun's bark within the festival hall of Karnak temple. Next, we see the queen and the Apis bull (a sacred animal whose strength and power were associated with pharaoh) before the portable bark, now resting in the bark shrine of Amenhotep I. A scene of male and female dancers and musicians suggests the return to Karnak was a joyous occasion.⁷¹

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi: changes over time

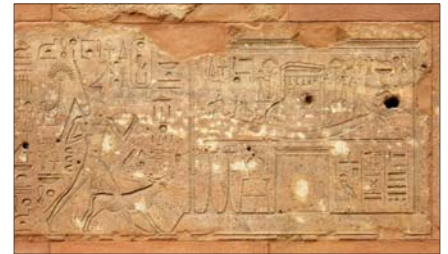
The Wadi festival, like the Theban *Opet* festival, changed and grew more elaborate through time. From a variety of sources (archaeological, iconographic and textual), additions or innovations to the festival have been traced. It is impossible to conclusively identify the route of the festival during each New Kingdom king's reign, but a number of interesting modifications have been documented that suggest the festival was constantly evolving.

A major change took place in the next reign, when Thutmose III came to the throne after Hatshepsut's death. A new temple, named *Djeser-akhet* (holy of the horizon), was built wedged between the temples of Mentuhotep II and Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahri. Similar to *Djeser-djeseru*, it was formed by a series of terraces with square-pillared porticoes.⁷² The temple was built to function as the new home for the Wadi festival, replacing Hatshepsut's as the main destination for the procession and resting place for Amun-Ra through the night.⁷³ *Djeser-djeseru* itself was defaced, with statues of the queen removed and buried and relief images of the queen erased and recarved.⁷⁴ This appears to have been part of a larger program of proscription of the female pharaoh by her nephew, and her monuments were removed, altered or covered over in other parts of Karnak as well.

See the essays on Temple Development and Orientation to the Temple for more information on the proscription of Hatshepsut.

Information from the 18th Dynasty shows that during the reign of Thutmose III or after, the festival procession route was altered to allow the gods to visit the mortuary temples of the kings on the west bank. A tomb inscription from this time suggests that one year, the parade not only stopped at *Djeser-akhet*, but also the mortuary temples of Thutmose III (*Henket-ankh*) and Thutmose I (*Henmet-ankh*). Other such inscriptions from later in the dynasty suggest that Hatshepsut's temple was still part of the Wadi festival, as they mention not only the *Djeser-akhet* but the *Djeser-djeseru* as well, which seems to have still functioned as a place for the worship of Amun-Ra and the male Thutmoside kings. Perhaps Amun-Ra traveled to both temples at this time.⁷⁵

The visitation of royal mortuary temples became an important part of the ceremony, and tomb and temple inscriptions show that many of the kings wanted



A block from the "red chapel" showing Hatshepsut with the Apis bull before the bark of Amun-Ra.

71 Larché and Burgos 2006: 108-114

72 Lipinska 2005

73 Dolinska 1994: 36-37

74 Arnold, Dorothea 2005; Dorman 2005; Roth 2005b

75 Dolinska 1994: 37

to be included in the ritual procession. An inscription from the pillared hall of the Ramesseum shows that king Ramesses II participated in the festival when the bark of Amun-Ra rested overnight within his mortuary temple.⁷⁶ On the south wall of Ramesses III's temple of Medinet Habu, an inscription boasts that the king built a "festival hall" within his temple for the appearance of Amun-Ra during his feast days, including the Wadi festival.⁷⁷ Indeed, a papyrus that recounts an assassination attempt made on this same king mentions that the king was watching the bark of Amun-Ra arrive for the Feast of the Wadi from somewhere high in the temple when the conspirators breached the temple's western gate.⁷⁸ The site of Medinet Habu held special religious meaning, as it was considered the burial place of Amun and the eight primeval gods who created the world. In the 18th Dynasty, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III built a small temple there, possibly over earlier cult buildings of the 18th and 11th Dynasties. The temple, enlarged and modified through the Roman period, served as a key center for the cult of Amun-Ra on the Theban west bank. Ramesses III enclosed the small Thutmoside temple within the precinct walls of his larger mortuary temple, associating himself directly with the ancient holy place.⁷⁹ It is possible that the divine image of Amun-Ra of Karnak paused within the 18th Dynasty temple to visit his west bank cult form during the processions for the Wadi festival.

The End of the Beautiful Feast of the Wadi Festival

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi festival came to a spectacular end some time in the late 20th Dynasty. An earthquake dislodged part of the limestone cliffs above the temples, and all three were smashed by falling rock.⁸⁰ Hatshepsut's temple fared the best, and has been almost fully reconstructed in recent years by a Polish archaeological team. The temple of Thutmose III was almost completely destroyed, although bits of pillars and wall relief have been recovered and used to understand the function and decoration of the *Djeser-akhet*.⁸¹

The Wehem-Ankh and Procession of Statues

The Amun-Ra temple was involved in a number of other festivals of more local significance. One of these, depicted in the *Akhemnu* festival hall of Thutmose III, forged a link between the king and the goddess Mut, whose temple lay close by in south Karnak. The details of this festival remain sketchy, but the relief scenes provide more information on the purpose and participants than is available for most celebrations, so a few observations about the festival can be made.

The central chapel of the *Akhemnu* hall records a procession for the festival of *wehem-ankh* (repetition of life). In these scenes, statues of queen Sat-Yah and Thutmose III are transported to and from large seated images of Amun and Mut, likely representing the cult statues of these deities in their respective temples. Priests carrying statues and cult equipment are accompanied during the celebra-



Priests carrying statues of Thutmose III and his queen Sat-Yah.

- 76 Kitchen 1982: 169
- 77 Nelson 1942: 140-141, 148
- 78 Murnane 1980: 10
- 79 Hölscher 1939: 3-7, 43-44
- 80 Dolinska 1994: 38
- 81 Dolinska 1994

tion by male and female singers.⁸² The king himself is shown burning incense and pouring libations before the goddess on one side of the procession scene, and similarly attending to Amun on the opposite side. The corresponding texts inform the reader that the king is “performing the ritual according to the ritual book, presenting life to the statues.”⁸³ A bordering set of reliefs show Thutmose III offering before a series of funerary chapels, symbolically linked to the ancient city Buto.⁸⁴ It is possible that the honoring of his dead royal ancestors was part of the larger ritual.

A second set of scenes, in a long hallway behind the chapels, represents a similar procession of the royal statues. The upper register of the scenes is destroyed, but the preserved lower register shows the festival participants, including female and male singers with upraised clapping hands, *wab*-priests making praises, a *hem*-priest with a small statue of the king and *hem*-priests carrying ritual vases and cult equipment.

The actual processional route of the festival can only be hypothesized from the existing architecture of the reign of Thutmose III. The main door to the *Akhmenu* hall led out of the southwest corner of the temple, down a long narrow corridor connected to the courts before the suite of rooms around the central bark shrine. Three doorways accessed the temple from this corridor, though which exit was used for processions remains uncertain. However, the door leading into the court of the fifth pylon was repeatedly widened, probably to facilitate the movement of divine barks, and this may therefore have served as the main processional door to and from the *Akhmenu*.⁸⁵

Where the group traveled next can only be conjectured. Inscriptions accompanying the relief scenes state that: “the statues go forth after performing the ritual of praising, going around the palace outside it.”⁸⁶ This could suggest that the procession exited the temple (likely through the western or northern doors in the festival hall of Thutmose II), circled the royal palace (probably located just north of the Amun temple at the time⁸⁷), and then continued on to the Mut temple. They probably would have again passed through the festival court of Thutmose II and marched along the southern processional path elaborated by the seventh and eighth pylons of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. The celebrants would have continued south to the Mut temple, passing a bark shrine just north of the temple, and entering the goddess’ precinct either through a pylon or gate on the temple’s north side or via a stone gateway in the temple’s western enclosure wall. This western gateway was inscribed by both the queen and her nephew and may have been used for such processions.⁸⁸ Once inside the temple enclosure, the group likely would have moved into the temple sanctuary, visiting the image of Mut in her “holy of holies.” Here, the king would have made offerings to the goddess. The plan of the Thutmoside Mut temple (and hence, the possible route of the festival procession) is currently not known, as the form and



Depiction of a larger procession during the *wehem-ankh* festival, located in the *Akhmenu*.

82 Bargout 1962: 179

83 Troy 2006: 137

84 Bargout 1962: 181-182

85 Carlotti 2001: 19-20

86 Troy 2006: 137

87 Gittton 1974; O’Connor 1995

88 Kozloff and Bryan 1992: 96

layout of the temple was significantly changed in the Third Intermediate Period. The earlier temple is currently under excavation, and its early 18th Dynasty form may therefore soon be better understood.⁸⁹

After the rituals of “presenting life” to the statues at the Mut temple had concluded, the procession would have probably returned to Karnak along the same route. Presumably, the statues would then have passed through the sanctuary of the Amun temple, visiting the image of that god, as was depicted on the reliefs. The royal statues, accompanied by the king and the parade of priests and singers, may have then returned to the *Akhmenu* where they would have been stored or displayed in niches or cult chambers within.

Conclusion

The Amun temple at Karnak participated in a number of festivals of mythological and political significance. These included celebrations that linked the Amun temple with other Theban temples by elaborate processions of the divine image or images. The importance of these festival processions and rituals should not be underestimated. The entire Theban landscape from the New Kingdom onward seems to have been designed around these events, with the location and orientation of temples, bark shrines, and paved pathways reflecting the links between these cult places.

Works Cited

Arnold, Dieter

2003 *The encyclopedia of ancient Egyptian architecture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2005 The temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 134-146. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Arnold, Dorothea

2005 The destruction of the statues of Hatshepsut from Deir El-Bahri. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 270-276. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Barguet, Paul

1962 *Le temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak; essai d'exégèse*. Le Caire: Impr. de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

Bell, Lanny

1992 Les parcours processionnels. In: *Louqsor: Temple du Ka royal*, pp. 27-29. Dijon: Editions Faton.

1997 The New Kingdom 'divine temple:' the example of Luxor. In: *Temples of ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron Shafer, pp. 127-184. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Björkman, Gun

1971 *Kings at Karnak: A study of the treatment of the monuments of royal predecessors in the early New Kingdom*. Uppsala: Universitet.

Blyth, Elizabeth

2006 *Karnak: evolution of a temple*. London: Routledge.

Bryan, Betsy

2005 The temple of Mut: new evidence on Hatshepsut's building activity. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 181-183. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Carlotti, Jean-François

2001 *L'Akh-menou de Thoutmosis III à Karnak: etude architecturale*. Paris: Recherche sur les civilisations.

Dolinska, Monika

1994 Some remarks about the function of the Tuthmosis III temple at Deir el Bahri. In: *Ägyptische Tempel--struktur, funktion und programm*. Hildesheimer ägyptologische Beiträge 37, pp. 33-45. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag.

Dorman, Peter

2005 The proscription of Hatshepsut. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 267-269. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

El-Molla, Magdi, El-Sayed Hegazy, and Ma'arouf Abd el-Hamid

1993 L'allée sacrée du temple de Khonsou. Rapport sur les fouilles de l'avenue de sphinx à têtes de béliers effectuées en 1982-1983. *Cahiers de Karnak IX*, pp. 239-262.

Es-Saghir, Mohammed

- 1992 The great processional way of Thebes (the avenue of sphinxes at Luxor). In: *Atti Sesto Congresso internazionale di egittologia*, vol. I, ed. Jean Leclant, pp. 181-187. Turin: International Association of Egyptologists.

Gabolde, Luc

- 1992 L'itinéraire de la processoin d'Opet. In: Louqsor: *Temple du Ka royal*, pp. 25-26. Dijon: Editions Faton.

- 1993 La <<cour de fêtes>> de Thoutmosis II à Karnak. *Cahiers de Karnak IX*, pp. 1-100.

- 1998 *Le "grand château d'Amon" de Sésostris 1er à Karnak: la décoration du temple d'Amon-Ré au Moyen empire*. Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres tome 17. Paris: Diff. de Boccard.

- 1999 Aux origines de Karnak: les recherches récentes dans la "cour du Moyen Empire". *Bulletin de la société d'égyptologie* 23, pp. 31-49.

Gitton, Michel

- 1974 Le palais de Karnak. *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 74, pp. 63-73.

Haeny, Gerhard

- 1997 New Kingdom 'mortuary temples' and 'mansions of millions of years'. In: *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron Shafer, pp. 86-126. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hölscher, Uvo

- 1939 *The excavation of Medinet Habu: the temples of the eighteenth dynasty*. The University of Chicago Oriental Institute publications 41. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Karkowski, Janusz

- 1979 The question of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley representations in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahari. In: *Actes of the first International Congress of Egyptology, Cairo, October 2-10, 1976*, Vol. 1, ed. Walter Reineke. *Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des alten Orients* 14, pp. 359-364. Berlin: Akademie-Verla.

- 1992 Notes on the Beautiful Feast of the Valley as represented in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahari. In: *50 Years of Polish excavations in Egypt and the Near East: acts of the symposium at the Warsaw University*, ed. Janusz Karkowski, and Stefan Jakobielski, pp. 155-166. Varsovie: Zaklad Archeologii Sródziemnomorskiej.

Kemp, Barry

- 1991 *Ancient Egypt: anatomy of a civilization*. London: Routledge.

Kitchen, Kenneth

- 1982 *Pharaoh triumphant: the life and times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips.

Kozloff, Arielle, and Betsy Bryan

- 1992 *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and His World*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art.

- Larché, François, and Franck Burgos
2006 *La chapelle Rouge: le sanctuaire de barque d'Hatshepsout/1: Fac-similés et photographies des scènes*. Paris: Recherche sur les civilisations.
- Lipinska, Jadwiga
2005 The temple of Thutmoses III at Deir el-Bahari. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 285-288. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Murnane, William (1975). Opetfest. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. ed. Eberhard Otto, Wolfgang Helck, and Wolfhart Westendorf. Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz. vol. IV: 574-579.
- 1980 *United with eternity: a concise guide to the monuments of Medinet Habu*. Chicago: Oriental Institute.
- 1983 *The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt*. New York: New York.
- Nelson, Harold
1942 The identity of Amun-Re of United-with-Eternity. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1(2), pp. 127-155.
- Nelson, Harold, and William Murnane
1981 *The great hypostyle hall at Karnak*. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- O'Connor, David
1995 Beloved of Maat, the horizon of Re. In: *Ancient Egyptian kingship*, ed. David O'Connor, and David Silverman. Probleme der Ägyptologie, pp. 263-338. New York: E.J. Brill.
- Roth, Ann Macy
2005a Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 147-157. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 2005b Erasing a reign. In: *Hatshepsut, from queen to pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, pp. 277-284. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Schott, Siegfried
1934 The feasts of Thebes. In: *Work in western Thebes, 1931-33*, ed. Harold Hayden Nelson, Uvo Hölscher, and Siegfried Schott. Oriental Institute Communications 18. Chicago: The University of Chicago press.
- 1952 *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstentale; Festbräuche einer Totenstadt*. Abhandlung der geistes und socialwissenschaftlichen klasse 11. Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur.
- Shafer, Byron
1997 Temples, priests and rituals. In: *Temples of ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron Shafer, pp. 1-30. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Spalinger, Anthony
2001 Festivals. In: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald Redford, pp. 521-525. New York: Oxford University Press.

Survey, University of Chicago Oriental Institute Epigraphic

1994 *The Festival procession of Opet in the colonnade hall*. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Troy, Lana

2006 Religion and Cult during the Time of Tuthmose III. In: *Thutmose III: A new biography*, ed. David O'Connor, and Eric Cline, pp. 123-182. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Van Siclen, Charles

2005 La cour du IXe pylône à Karnak. *Bulletin de la société d'égyptologie* 163, pp. 27-46.

Short Citation:

Sullivan 2008, Processional Routes and Festivals. *Digital Karnak*.

Full Citation:

Sullivan, Elaine, 2008, Processional Routes and Festivals. On *Digital Karnak*, Los Angeles. <http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak>.