

LUXOR TEMPLES

The temple of [Amun](#) in the middle of the modern town is one of the best preserved temples of the New Kingdom. It was erected by Amenophis III (1408-1372 B.C.) in the place of a smaller older sanctuary. About a century later Ramses II, with a somewhat different building-axis, added in front the present first peristyle and a pylon. All the walls are decorated with numerous finely worked reliefs of the history and the gods of pharaonic times. In the late period the importance of the temple declined. From the time of Nectanebos (378-360) came an outer walled forecourt, from the north gate of which an avenue of sphinxes started. This linked the Luxor temple with the temple of Amun at Karnak.

In the time of Alexander the Great, a chapel was erected in front of the inner sanctuary of this temple for the keeping of the bark of Amun. The walls carry portrayals of the king before the god [Amun](#) and his fellow gods.

In the Ptolemaic and Roman periods dilapidation set in. The last repair [measures](#) mentioned in the texts took place in the time of the emperor Tiberius (Daressy, 1920, pp. 163-66).

A new phase in the history of Luxor began when the emperor DIOCLETIAN, on the occasion of the suppression of the Upper Egyptian revolt under L. Domitianus (A.D. 297), set up a large legionary camp in the domain of the [Amun](#) temple. The area of the temple was converted into a rectangle, the surrounding walls of which were provided with several gates and projecting semicircular towers. Large parts of these fortifications can still be clearly recognized on the ground. The main axis of the temple became the main street of the camp (*via praetoria*), with the *porta praetoria* at the passage way of the pylon. Some internal structures have also survived, such as several colonnades and two tetrastyla at the intersections of the pillared side streets. The *principia*, which in the time of the tetrarchs served the imperial cult, was set up in the chamber at the

end of the hypostyle hall. It contained an [apse](#) flanked by columns, and on its walls [Diocletian](#) and his coregents were portrayed (Deckers, 1979, pp. 640-47; formerly often mistaken for the [apse](#) of a Christian church).

Outside the camp there was a civilian settlement, which was never lacking at any Roman base camp, and in the present case continued right into the Arabic period. It is from this civilian settlement that present-day Luxor developed. The camp itself was very probably in operation down to the time of the [Persian](#) conquest (619). Whether it was garrisoned again after the retreat of the Persian occupation army is not evident from the sources presently available.

During excavations by the Egyptian Antiquities Service in the region of the Luxor temple, no fewer than five early Christian churches were brought to light in and around the area of the late Roman camp, all of them erected on the BASILICA pattern. The oldest is in front of the temple pylon, and is to be dated to the turn from the sixth to the seventh century. However, only its sanctuary survived. The rest was pulled down when the site was cleared by the Antiquities Service (Abdul Qader, 1968, p. 253). The [apse](#) in the east wall of the church was once adorned with an inner circle of applied columns. The northern side chamber had columns in all four corners and was covered with a dome. In front of the apse opening there was a second triumphal arch raised upon lofty columns. The narthex porch with a stair to the roof, a room with recesses, and a large baptistery adjoining on the north side were, according to the survey report (Abdul Qader, 1968, p. 251), added only later.

All the remaining churches are no earlier than the period after the Arab conquest, when the Roman camp was certainly no longer garrisoned. The church in the northeast corner of the pillared court of Ramses II, underneath the mosque of Abu al-Hajjaj later built over it, is today accessible only in the area of the narthex. It is one of the few churches from the early Christian period still standing to the height of the side windows.

Two more churches are on the west side of the temple. The northern one, close to the court of Ramses II, has a very long and narrow ground plan with a narthex extending to the south beyond the width of the church; to this, further rooms whose purpose is not known are attached on the west side. The sanctuary, probably three-part, has been destroyed. In the northeast corner there is an annex with a circular piscina, probably to be identified as a baptismal font.

Of the southwest church, lying a few paces away, only a few pillars have survived. These have been raised again into position, as well as some quite short sections of wall. This church was also provided with a second triumphal arch in front of the [apse](#) opening. The western end is covered by the modern road along the river bank.

The fifth church lies again to the north on the east side of the avenue of sphinxes. Besides the usual western return aisle and the narthex in front of it, it has an additional antechamber in the southwest corner and a long narrow hall on the south side. This building is also equipped with a second triumphal arch raised upon columns. The building of this church is to be dated to the seventh century.

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