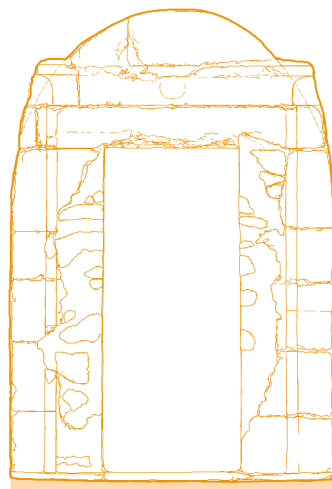


# The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahari.

## An introduction to architectural studies



**Abstract:** The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari has been studied repeatedly, but never comprehensively (Neville 1906; Winlock 1932; Wysocki 1985). In preparation for a full architectural study of this complex, which is one of the oldest parts of the Eighteenth Dynasty mortuary temple, the paper presents a general specification of the preserved architecture, contextualized in a brief account of the discovery of the sanctuary and the history of its restoration and conservation, tied by necessity with the bigger works conducted by Polish specialists in the temple itself. The sanctuary in its present state is the combined effect of a number of phases of development, the most recent being a rebuilding in the Ptolemaic period. The inventory drawings of the current state of the complex, made by the author, an architect, leave the reader with a good idea of the form of the sanctuary, opening the way to a comprehensive architectural study, which will trace the original plan through all the subsequent phases of development and modern conservation and restoration work.

**Keywords:** Deir el-Bahari, Hatshepsut Temple, The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra, Architecture

The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra is part of the Temple of Hatshepsut, called *Djeser-djeseru* ('Holy of Holies'), one of the most astounding examples of ancient Egyptian architecture. The mortuary temple, referred to by

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the ancient Egyptians as the Temple of Millions of Years (*hwt hhw m rnpwt*) (Iwaszczuk 2017: 6), lies in the Theban necropolis on the west bank of the Nile, opposite Karnak and the modern city of Luxor. In fact, the location in the Deir el-Bahari valley is on the axis of the eighth pylon of the Karnak temple complex that Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty, built (Iwaszczuk 2017: 50). During the celebration of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, one of the most important religious festivals taking place in the Theban necropolis, the sacred bark of Amun-Ra would be carried in a sacred procession from Karnak in an itinerary that ended at Hatshepsut's temple with the sanctuary as the final station (Pawlicki 2017: 10). The location of the queen's mortuary temple is also clearly in correspondence with her tomb (KV 20) in the Valley of the Kings (Ćwiek 2014: 67). The site occupied by the temple is next to the tomb complex of Mentuhotep II Nebhepetra of the Eleventh Dynasty and it is more than likely that its architecture was modelled on the earlier monument (Arnold 2003: 104; see also Ćwiek 2014: 62). The construction of the temple also covered the remains of a defunct mud-brick building of Amenhotep I (Dodson 1989–1990: 42–43). Some of the bricks recovered from excavations carried out under the Middle Terrace of Hatshepsut's temple bear seal impressions with the praenomen of Djeserkare Amenhotep I and the king's mother, queen Ahmes Nefertari (Madej 2018: 293–294).

The temple was erected in the 15th century BC, most probably in the seventh year of the reign of Thutmose III

(Dorman 1988: 37) and the first year of Hatshepsut's official reign as a king (Iwaszczuk 2017: 51). The construction work was supervised by Senenmut, a high-ranking dignitary in the king's court. The temple is arranged on three levels, starting with the Lower Courtyard at ground level. The walled courtyard is lined with porticoes at the western end and has a centrally located ramp leading up to the Middle Terrace with another courtyard that ends with a set of two more porticoes flanking the ramp leading to the next terrace on the west. Located in the southwestern corner of this terrace was the Hathor Shrine, a complex consisting of a vestibule, bark hall and sanctuary, preceded by a hypostyle hall. On the opposite, northern side of the Middle Terrace was the Lower Chapel of Anubis, small in size, also preceded by a hypostyle hall.

The third and highest level of the temple is the Upper Terrace, fronted with a pillar portico extending on either side of the entrance ramp. Statues of Hatshepsut depicted as the god Osiris decorate the pillars in the portico facade. A granite portal leads to the Upper Courtyard which is surrounded by colonnaded porticoes. A passage runs to the north, into the Complex of the Sun Cult. On the south, a doorway opens from the courtyard into the Complex of the Royal Mortuary Cult dedicated to the worship of the deceased Hatshepsut and her father Thutmose I (Karkowski 2001: 145). Directly from the courtyard, one could also access the Room of the Window and the Southern Room of Amun on the south side and the Northern Room of Amun on the north.

It is here, in the middle of the west wall of the Upper Courtyard, on the central building axis, that the most important part of the temple, the Main Sanctu-

ary of Amun-Ra, was located [Fig. 1 inset]. The entrance to this complex is marked today by a portico built in the Ptolemaic period.

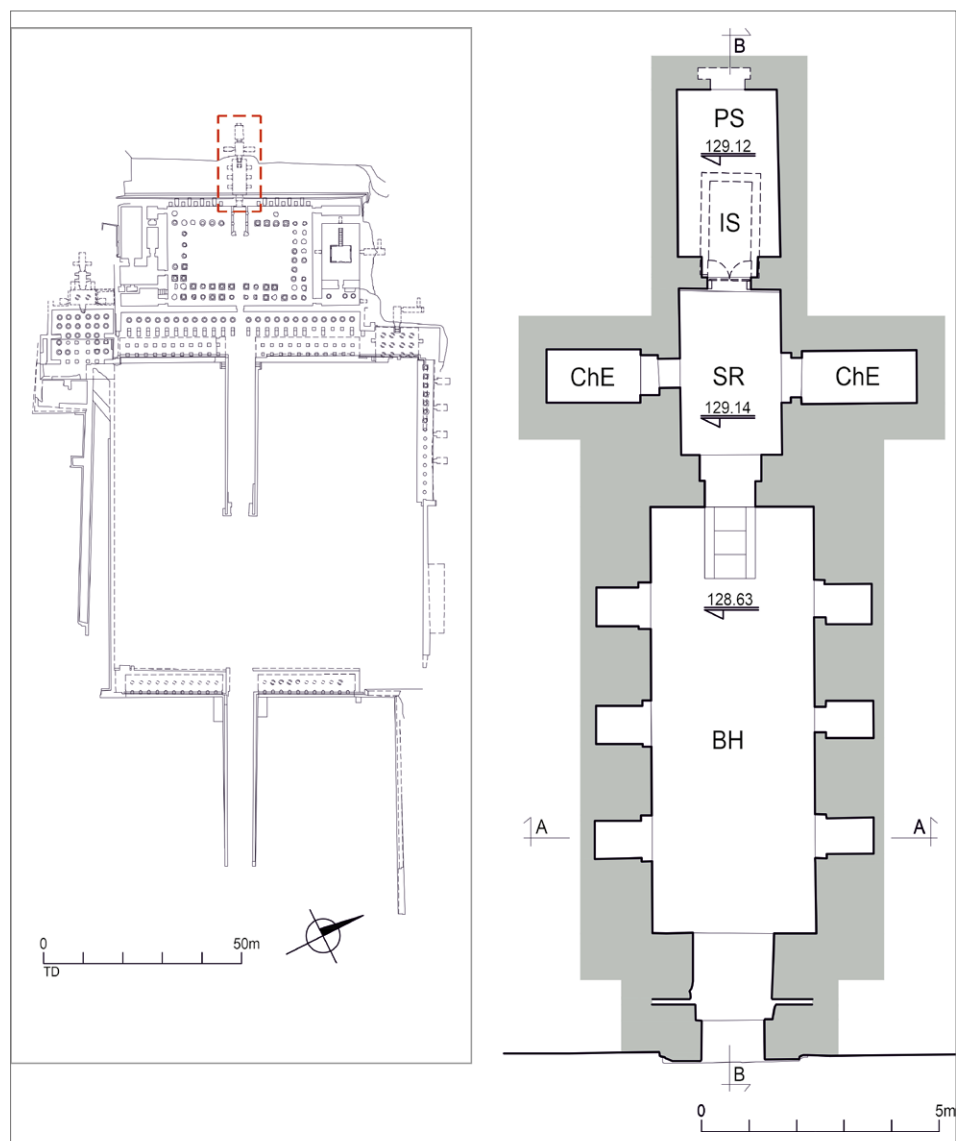


Fig. 1. Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari: BH – Bark Hall, SR – Statue Room, ChE – Niches of the Great Theban Ennead, PS – Ptolemaic Sanctuary, IS – Inner Sanctuary; inset, location of the sanctuary within the Temple of Hatshepsut complex (PCMA UW | plan of the Main Sanctuary U. Kraśniewska, inset T. Dziedzic)

## MAIN SANCTUARY OF AMUN-RA

The complex was cut in part into the limestone massif rising behind the temple. It is likely to be one of the oldest parts of the temple, existing already in some form when Hatshepsut was crowned king in 1473 BC. It encompasses the following units: Bark Hall (BH), Statue Room (SR), Niches of the Great Ennead (ChE), the Inner Sanctuary (IS), replaced later by the Ptolemaic Sanctuary (PS) (Pawlicki 2017: 6) [see *Fig. 1*].

A red granite portal leads into the Bark Hall, which is the largest chamber in this complex. The Sacred Bark of Amun-Ra stood inside this chamber for the duration of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley. The rectangular hall had a false cradle-shaped vault with massive limestone blocks [*Fig. 2*]. Regularly spaced niches, three on the north wall and three on the south one, were situated about 1 m above the floor. They were of similar dimensions, most probably housing statues of members of the royal family, both dead and living (Budzanowski 2004: 269). Statues of King Hatshepsut in the form of Osiris stood in the four corners of the chamber, fixed to the east and west walls (Winlock 1932: 17). Conservator Janusz Smaza, a stone sculptor, reconstructed two of the statues against the west wall (Szafrński 2001: 69), incorporating recognized elements of the original figures [*Fig. 3*]. Three original limestone heads of these statues are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Acc. Nos 31.3.153, 31.3.154, 31.3.155, see Winlock 1935: 176). A pedestal for the bark, now lost, is presumed to have occupied the middle of the room.

Four steps of stone led up to the doorway in the west wall opening into the Statue Room [see *Figs 3, 4*]. The daily rituals that were performed in this room also found reflection in the decoration of the walls (Pawlicki 2017: 14). It was rectangular in plan and covered with a false cradle-shaped vault of stone. Deep niches on either side of the room were dedicated to the Great Theban Ennead. A third niche was located in the west wall on the main temple axis; originally it contained an ebony naos with a statue of Amun standing on a base raised 0.79 m above the level of the floor in the Statue Room. The bottom of the niche was approximately 0.30 m above the floor. Its width is estimated at 1.22 m, its frame at 1.96 m, and its depth at approximately 2.05 m (Barwik 2010: 5–6).

A rebuilding of the back rooms of the sanctuary took place even as the temple complex as a whole was still under construction. The niches in the north and south walls were enlarged to their present size [see *Fig. 3*], using stone blocks from the smaller earlier niches. In time, that is, in the first half of the 2nd century BC, the niche in the west wall of the Statue Room was replaced by the so-called Ptolemaic Sanctuary. The sanctuary was turned into a cult place for Amenhotep, the son of Hapu, and Imhotep, both of whom were revered in Ptolemaic Egypt as healers and physicians. The healing tradition associated with this sanctuary was the reason why the temple remained a popular pilgrimage destination for several centuries (Laskowska-Kusztal 1984: 109).

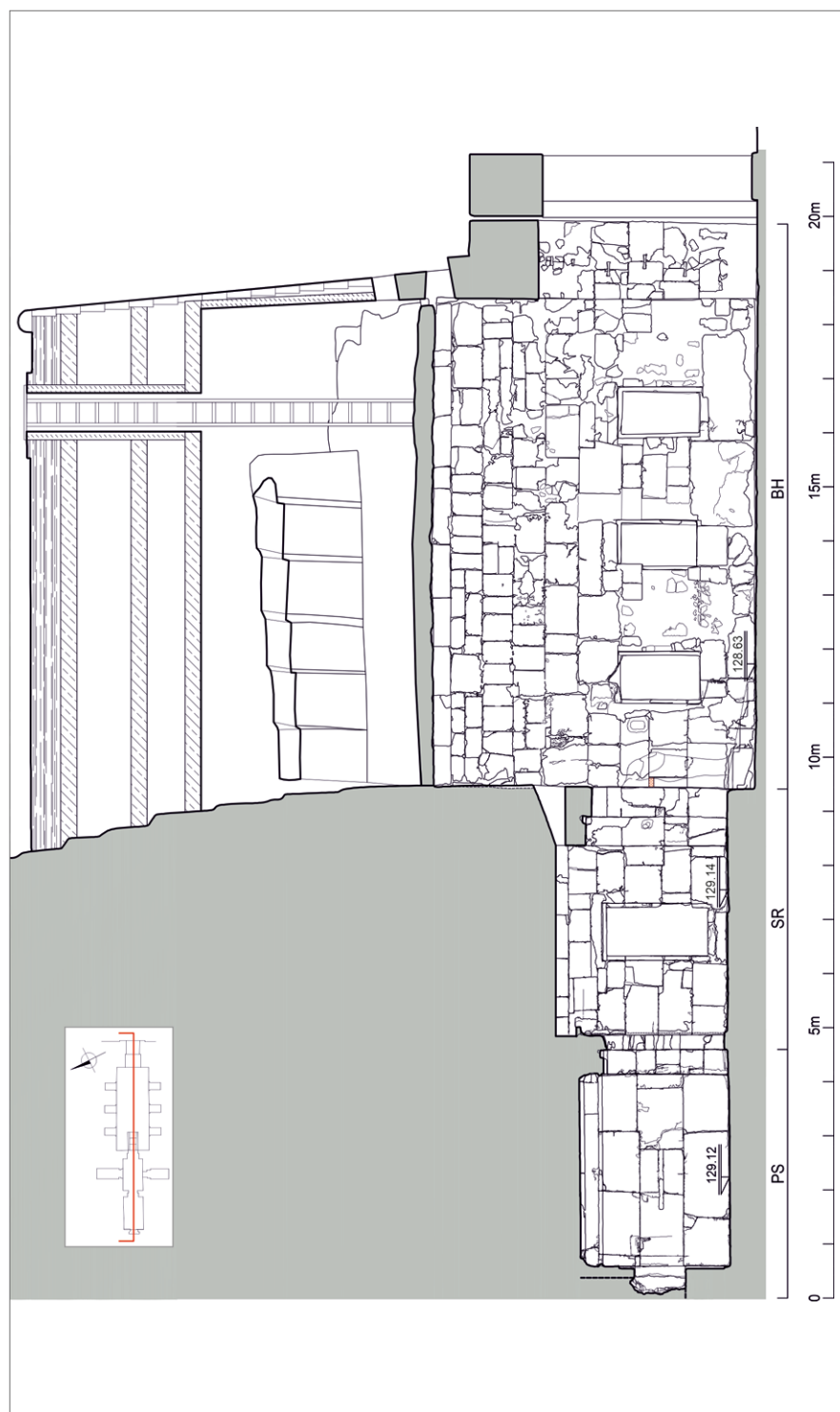


Fig. 2. The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in the Temple of Hatshepsut. Section looking north; state of preservation in 2020 (PCMA UW | architectural inventory drawing U. Kraśniewska)

### DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION

The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra was first mentioned in 1817, when Giovanni Battista Belzoni, together with Henry William Beechey, excavated the entrance to the sanctuary and reached the last room, the Ptolemaic Sanctuary. The sanctuary rooms were described briefly by John G. Wilkinson, who worked there in 1827 and 1831 (Wilkinson 1843: 198). He also gave the general size of the Bark Hall: “30 ft × 12 ft”. In 1829, Jean-François Champollion identified Amun-Ra as the most important deity of the temple. He focused on the wall decoration in the sanctuary, which he described in considerable detail, making several copies (Champollion 1868: 247–251). He drew attention to the dissimilarity of the decoration in the last room.

The sanctuary was clearly indicated on the first plan of the Temple of Hatshepsut made by Robert Hay probably in 1832. Hay indicated alterations of the temple interior dating from the Coptic phase. However, he failed to mark the niches in the Bark Hall and all the rooms of the sanctuary located on the axis of the temple were of equal width (Godlewski 1986: 14). The sanctuary appeared also as a separate drawing in the detailed notes that German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius published from his excavations of the temple in 1845 (LD Text 111). Included was a cross-section through the Bark Hall with a view of the west wall. The cross-section passes through two niches and shows a relief structure above the room’s apparent vault (LD Pl. 87). Like his predecessors, he focused mainly on the wall decoration in the sanctuary.

Before Auguste Mariette came in 1855, little was known about the work carried out there previously. Mariette began to remove rubble from the Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra but did not complete the work (Naville 1906: 2). In 1893, Edouard Naville undertook the excavation of the temple for the Egypt Exploration Fund (Naville 1893–1894: 1). He described a complex of rooms and included a plan, cross section, and a drawing of the wall decoration (Naville 1906: 9, Pl. CXIX). Somers Clark, an architect working with Naville, made the first architectural study, containing, among other things, an analysis of the construction and a description of the damage. It is the first comprehensive study of the sanctuary.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art expedition led by Herbert E. Winlock worked for a decade from 1921 to 1931. In the Bark Hall, the team was able to match various sculpted remains found in the ruins of the temple to traces still visible on the walls in the corners of the room, proving that Osiriach figures had once decorated this space. The west wall of this room was also reconstructed at this time (Winlock 1932: 13).

### RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION

The Polish project was initiated in 1961, organized first by the Polish Station of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw under the direction of Kazimierz Michałowski, and then entrusted in 1968 to a conservation team headed by Zygmunt Wysocki from the State Ateliers for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. In the 1974/1975 season, a reinforced concrete vault was

constructed over the original vaulting of the Bark Hall to protect it, enabling essential work on the central part of the rock platform and the western curtain wall of the Upper Courtyard (Wysocki 1983: 251). An analysis of block courses and joints in the Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra led to two niches being uncovered in the central part of the north and south walls of the Bark Hall; these niches appear to have been walled up

most probably in the Ptolemaic period (Wysocki 1985: 364–366). The expedition's architect Adam Stefanowicz documented them and went on to study the walls, corners, and joints, in the granite entrance portal leading to the Bark Hall. He also examined the gable wall above the portal (Stefanowicz 1988: 5).

Epigraphic research in the Sanctuary from 1994 prepared the ground for architectural and conservation work at

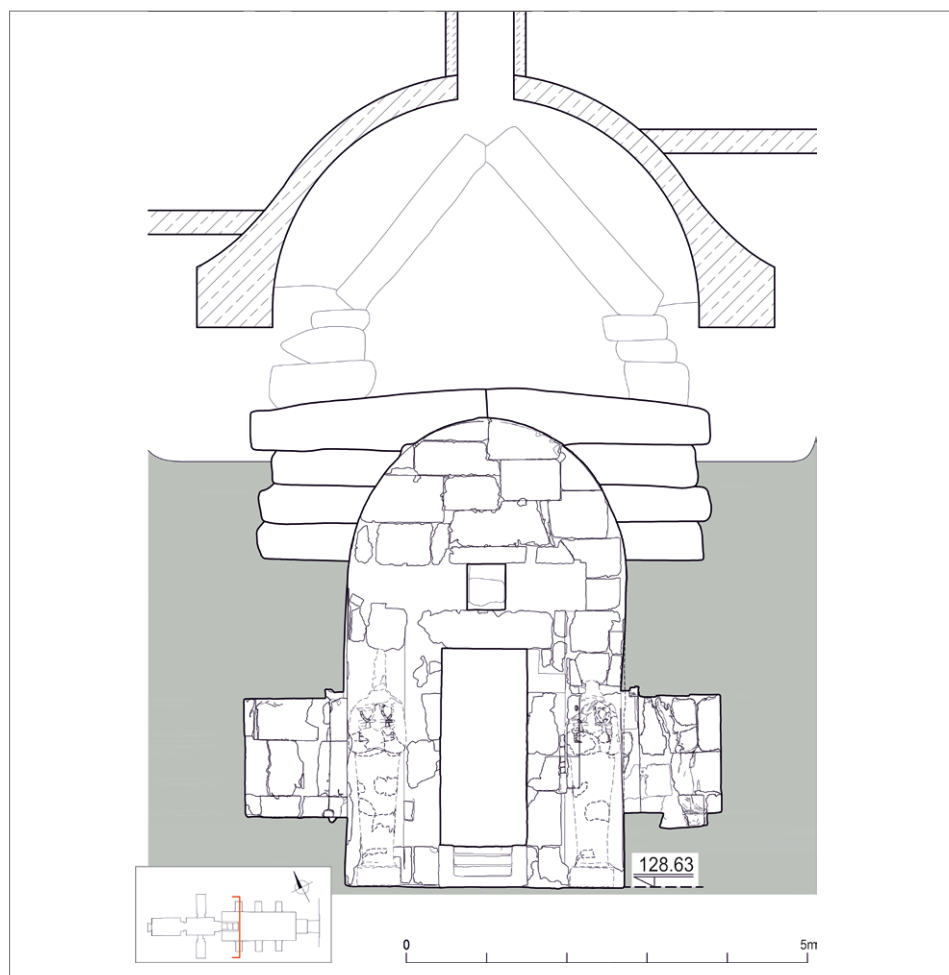


Fig. 3. The Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra in the Temple of Hatshepsut. Section looking west; state of preservation in 2020 (PCMA UW | architectural inventory drawing U. Kraśniewska)



a later date (Karkowski 1995: 48). The walls of the Bark Hall were cleaned of the blackening left by a fire during the time that a Coptic monastery functioned on the site (late 6th to late 8th century) (Pawlikowska-Gwiazda 2020: 140). In the following seasons, missing blocks and their fragments were reinserted into the walls of the Main Sanctuary. The red-granite entrance portal was restored; a fragment of the floor preserved in this area assisted in a full reconstruction of the portal in the first room. The walls of the Statue Room were conserved and the necessary additions were made. Two of the four Osiris statues on the west wall of the Bark Hall were reconstructed. The walls of the Great Ennead niches were also conserved. Conservation work in the following seasons continued alongside an intensive epigraphic study of the scenes covering the sanctuary walls (Pawlicki 2016: 303). On 9 December 2017 the Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra was opened to the visiting public.

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The first and the largest room in the sanctuary complex is the Bark Hall [see *Fig. 1*]. It is 9.05 m long and 3.45 m wide. At the highest point of the vault, it is approximately 5.95 m high. The room was built into an open trench cut into the rock (Polocznanin 1983: 7). The Esna Shale, a natural rock formation underlying this part of the temple, appears about 0.55 m below the lower edge of the wall blocks (Pawlicki 1999: 122). The false vault above the room is semicircular in shape and was made of large limestone blocks in cantilever technology [see *Fig. 2*]. A well-preserved triangular structure above it

was designed to relieve the pressure on the vault exerted by the central part of the rock platform over it [see *Fig. 3*]. The inclined blocks, coming together at the top of the triangle, are placed on a superstructure of limestone blocks, which is located directly on the end parts of the cantilevered slabs of the vault. In structural terms, these slabs are perpendicular to the north and south walls. The false vault was constructed by offsetting successive elements, projecting them inward until they met at the apex and a keystone was formed [see *Fig. 3*]. Three pairs of stone slabs are missing from the front part of the structure (Wojdon 1970: 5).

The walls were made of stone blocks 25–30 cm thick (Wojdon 1970: 6); these blocks were of varying width and height. The walls underwent a thorough conservation, with more original blocks and fragments added over time. In places, the blocks are arranged in regular rows, with individual blocks being of the same height. Irregular arrangements can also be observed, e.g., in the gable of the west wall of the room [see *Fig. 3*]. The walls were completed with fragmentary decorated block faces, of different sizes and irregular shapes. The space between the stone blocks is filled with modern conservation mortar. The floor of the room was reconstructed based on original blocks preserved in the northwestern corner of the room (Pawlicki 1999: 122).

Regularly spaced niches, three per wall, are located opposite one another in the north and south walls of the Bark Hall [see *Figs 2, 4*]. Their floors are about a meter above the floor and they measure approximately 0.80 m in width, 1.45 m in height, and 1.22 m in depth. The niches,

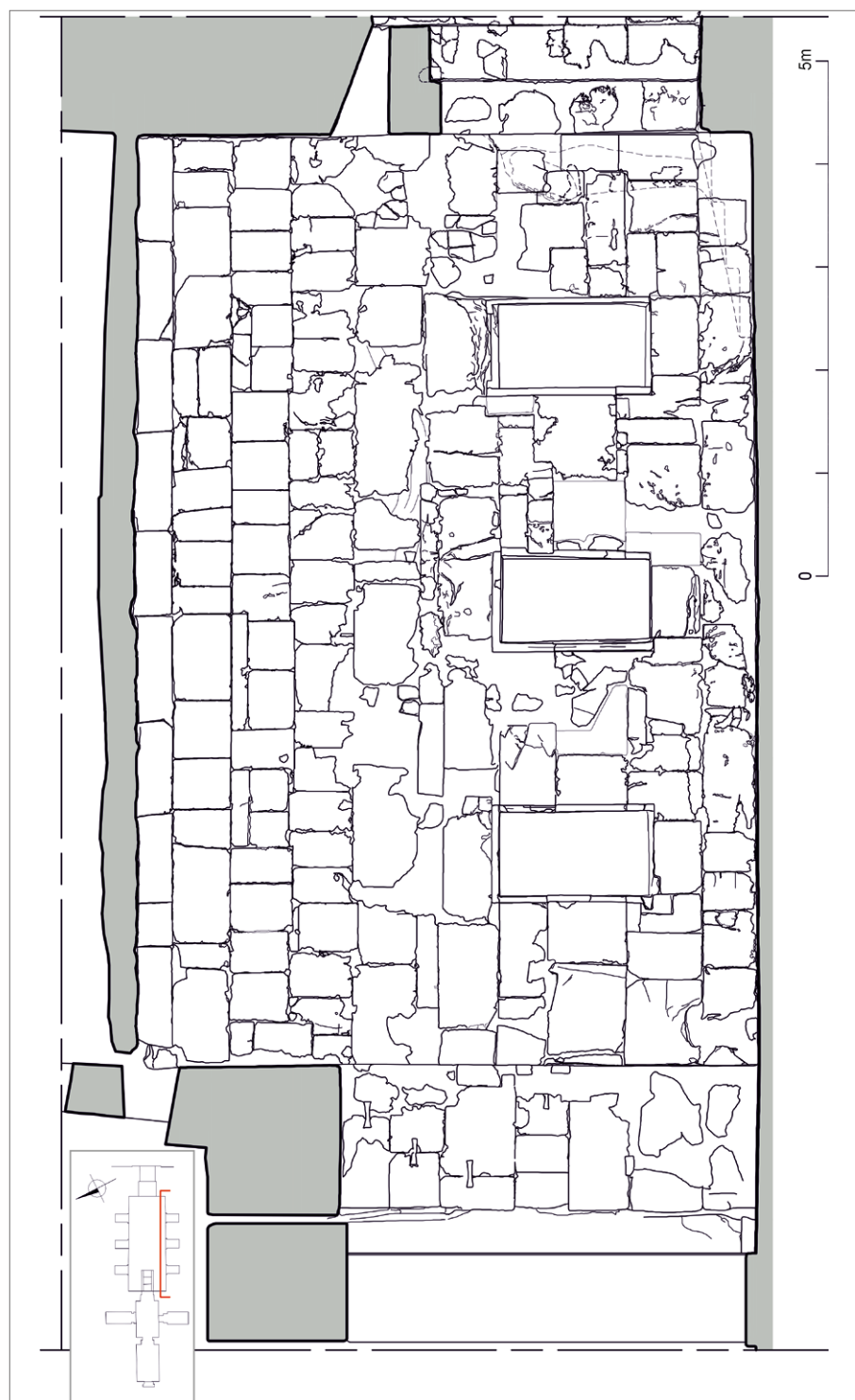


Fig. 4. South wall of the Bark Hall: state of preservation of the structure in 2020 (PCMA UW | architectural inventory drawing U. Krasniewska)

like the walls of the room, were successively returned to their original appearance by the reinsertion of original decorated blocks into the voids (Pawlicki 1999: 121).

The floor of the Statue Room is raised 0.51 m above that of the Bark Hall. The room is 3.50 m long and 2.16 m wide, the vault rising to a height of 3.18 m. It was created by lining with stone blocks the sides of a tunnel-like cut in the rock (Połoczanin 1983: 7). The bondwork in the north wall is irregular, while the south wall [Fig. 5 bottom] is regular save for a part in the northwestern corner where an offset can be seen. Similar to the case

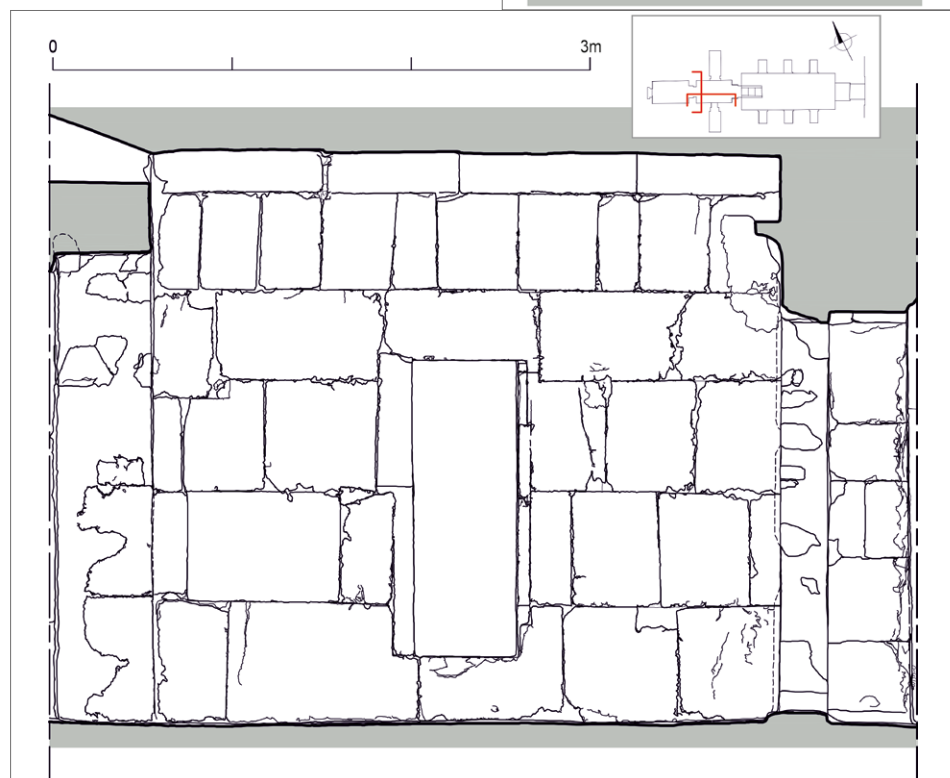
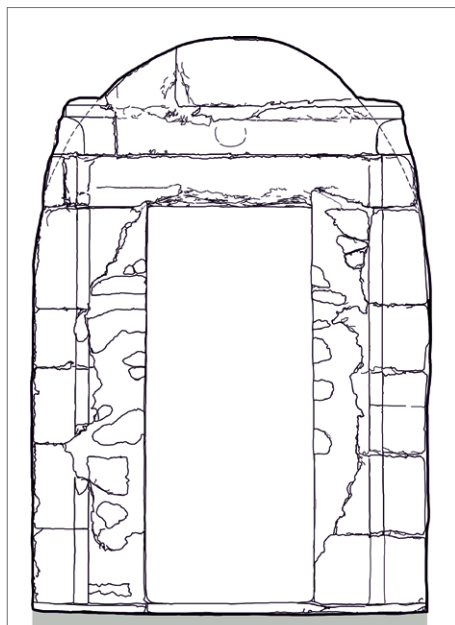


Fig. 5. Walls of the Statue Room: top, west wall; bottom, south wall; state in 2020 (PCMA UW | architectural inventory drawing U. Kraśniewska)

of the Bark Hall, the limestone blocks differ in width but are of the same height for each course. Original mortar has not been noted anywhere. The eastern section

of the north wall was removed in order to clear the rock debris behind it, which had caused it to bulge and shift. It was subsequently reconstructed (Pawlicki 1999:

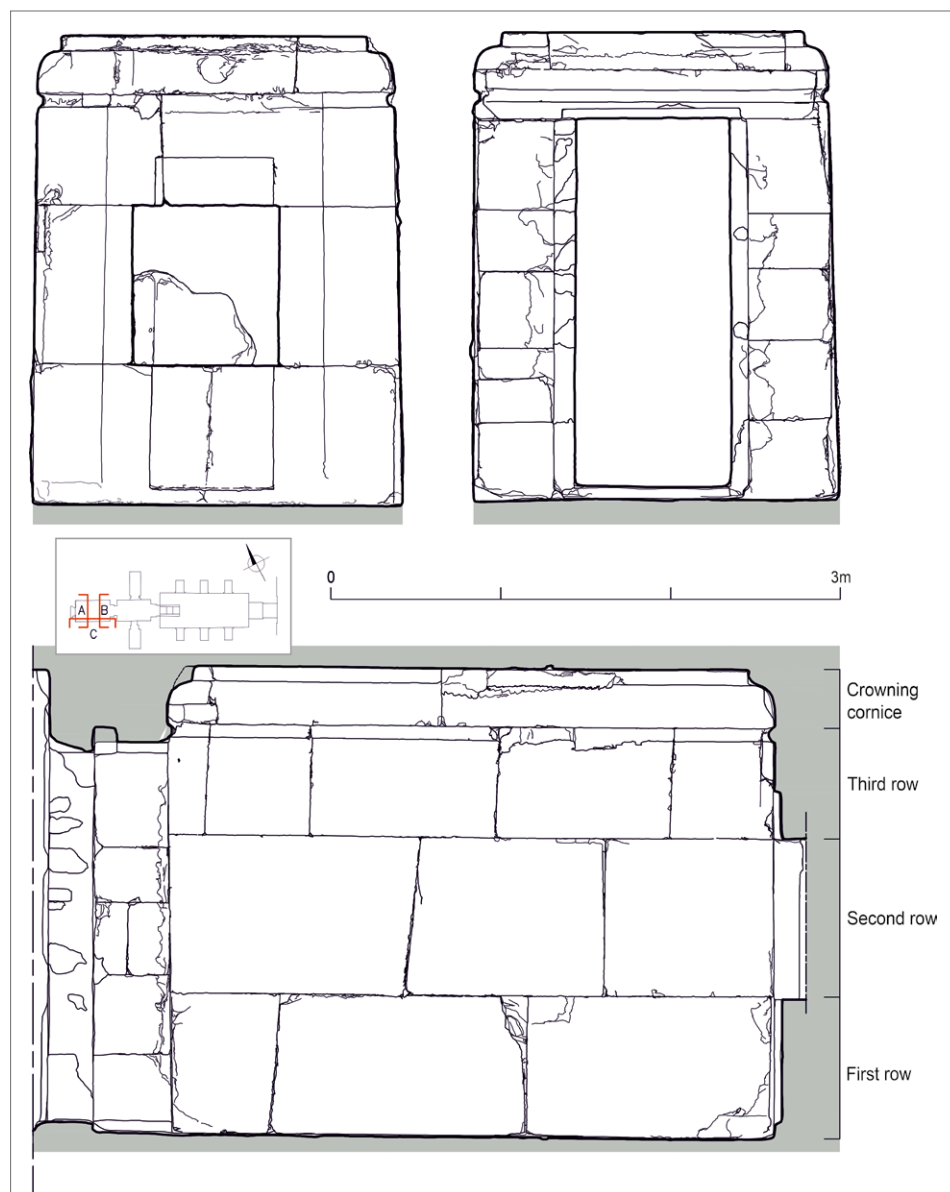


Fig. 6. Walls of the Ptolemaic Sanctuary: A – west wall; B – east wall; C – south wall; state in 2020 (PCMA UW | architectural inventory drawing U. Kraśniewska)

124). The west wall [Fig. 5 top] in its current form is the result of an ancient reconstruction, introducing a room in place of the original western niche. Blocks of sandstone were used to form a portal with a passage in the doorway, topped by a cavetto cornice. To place the cornice block above the opening, the ancient builders had to cut the necessary space in the false vault of the Statue Room. The damage to these blocks was significant; the voids were filled with conservation mortar, fixing small preserved fragments of the blocks in place. The stonework in the west wall is even. A characteristic torus was carved in the stone surface, paralleling the outline of the opening, vertical on both sides, and horizontal under the cavetto cornice.

A system of skylights in the gable walls of the Bark Hall and the east wall of the Statue Room [see Figs, 2, 4, 5 bottom] represents the original lighting system. A beam of light passed through progressively smaller openings until it reached the darkest room at the back, illuminating the cult statue of the god Amun once set up there.

The Statue Room gave onto two side niches dedicated to the Great Theban Ennead (the third, now defunct niche was in the west wall) [see Fig. 1]. These were two long rooms situated approximately 0.30 m above the floor level of the Statue Room and approximately of the same size: the northern one 1.10 m wide, 2.40 m long, and 2.64 m high, the southern one 1.12 m wide, 2.10 m long, and 2.50 m high. Both rooms had false vaults of flattened ogival shape, constructed of longitudinal blocks that form a keystone at the apex. The wall bondwork in both cases was regular. The

joints are filled with modern mortar.

Situated on the main building axis is the last, westernmost room of the complex, the so-called Ptolemaic Sanctuary [see Fig. 1]. It is 2.16 m wide and 3.55 m long. The height of the room is 2.76 m. The room was cut in the Theban Limestone massif and lined with sandstone blocks. The relief decoration was then carved into these wall surfaces. It was additionally painted in red, green, and blue, and gilded; gilding can be observed on the west wall of the room and on the outside of the portal (west wall of the Statue Room) (Laskowska-Kusztal 1984: 20). Each wall, except for the eastern one with the doorway, consists of three rows of blocks. The bondwork is regular, the blocks being of considerable size, but of roughly the same height in each row, with small misalignments visible in the northeast part of the north wall. The east wall is an exception, smaller blocks arranged in five courses appearing there and topped by a block acting as a lintel [Fig. 6:B]. A convex torus is carved into the blocks of the highest, third row, projecting about 4 cm from the face of the wall. Crowning it is a cornice projecting from the wall surface roughly 14–17 cm. The flat stone ceiling slabs were set directly on top of the walls.

### CLOSING REMARKS

The presentation, which introduces the reader to the architecture of the Main Sanctuary of Amun-Ra, has the main task of preparing the ground for a detailed study that will analyze the original design and the historical development of this part of the great Temple of Hatshepsut.

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## Abbreviations

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LD Text   Lepsius, K.R. (1849). *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien. Textbände III. Thebes*. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung

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