Architecture of Great Temple Complexes

The golden age of the New Kingdom created huge prosperity for Egypt and allowed for the proliferation of monumental architecture.

**Figure 1:** Colonnaded design of Hatshepsut temple

Hatshepsut's temple is most famous for its Djeser-Djeseru, a colonnaded structure of such architectural skill, predating the Parthenon by nearly one thousand years.

- Luxor Temple is a large temple complex located in what was ancient Thebes, and is known for its use of symbolism and illusionism.
- The Temples at Karnak, part of the great city of Thebes, were constructed as an ancient place of worship for the god Amun. They consist of a vast mix of temples, chapels, pylons, obelisks, and hypostyle halls decorated with elaborate friezes.
- The complex consists of four main parts: the Precinct of Amun-Re, the Precinct of Mut, the Precinct of Montu, and the Temple of Amenhotep IV.
- Although pyramids were no longer built at this time, magnificent tombs were constructed for the pharaohs and powerful nobles of the New Kingdom in the Valley of the Kings over a period of nearly 500 years.
- Among the most famous tombs in the Valley of the Kings are the tombs of Tutankhamun, Hatshepsut, Ramesses, and Nerfertiti.

*Note:*

A **frieze** is any sculptured or richly ornamented band in a building or, by extension, in rich pieces of furniture.

A **pylon** is a gateway to the inner part of an Ancient Egyptian temple.

**Hypostyle** means having a roof supported on a row of columns.
Figure 2:
A panorama of the great hypostyle hall at Karnak

The Precinct of Amun-Re, also known as the Temple of Amun, is part of the great temple complex at Karnak.

Figure 3:
A panorama of a frieze in the precinct of Amun in Karnak

Great monuments and temples were often decorated with elaborate relief sculpture during the New Kingdom.
The New Kingdom is known as the golden age of ancient Egyptian history, and is the period of Hatshepsut, Tutankhamun, Ramses II, and other famous pharaohs.

The wealth gained through military dominance created huge prosperity for Egypt and allowed for the proliferation of monumental architecture, especially works that glorified the pharaohs’ achievements. Starting with Hatshepsut, buildings were of a grander and larger scale than anything previously seen in the Middle Kingdom.

**Luxor Temple**

Luxor Temple is a large Ancient Egyptian temple complex located on the east bank of the Nile River in what was ancient Thebes (today the city of Luxor). There are six great temples: four on the left bank known as Goornah, Deir-el-Bahri, the Ramesseum, and Medinet Habu; and two on the right bank: the Karnak and Luxor. The Luxor temple was built with Nubian sandstone from south-western Egypt. Like other Egyptian structures, common techniques were the use of *symbolism* and *illusionism*. For example, a sanctuary shaped like an Anubis Jackal was used as a representational symbol of Anubis. To emphasize height and distance and enhance an existing pathway, two obelisks flanking the entrance were built with the illusion that they were the same height - even though they weren’t.

**Temples at Karnak**

This complex comprises a vast mix of decayed temples, chapels, pylons, and other buildings. An ancient place of worship for the god Amun, it was part of the *monumental city of Thebes*. Today the complex is a vast open-air museum and the largest ancient religious site in the world. The complex consists of four main parts. *The Precinct of Amun-Re*, also referred to as the *Temple of Amun*, is the largest of the temples and the only one open to the public today. Almost every pharaoh of that dynasty has added something to the temple site. It features large sandstone columns (Figure 1), several colossal statues, and one of the largest obelisks, weighing 328 tonnes and standing 29 meters tall. Many of the walls were decorated with richly ornamented friezes (Figure 2). Located to the south of the newer Amen-Re complex, *the Precinct of Mut* was dedicated to the mother goddess, *Mut*. Hapshepsut helped to restore the original precinct, which had been ravaged during the Hyksos occupation, and had twin obelisks erected at the entrance to the temple; one still stands as the tallest surviving ancient obelisk in the world. The precinct has several smaller temples associated with it and has its own sacred lake, constructed in a crescent shape. Six hundred black granite statues were found in the courtyard to her temple, possibly the oldest portion of the site. The smaller *Precinct of Montu* is dedicated to the war-god of the Theban Triad, *Montu*, and is located to the north of the Amun-Re complex. *The Temple of Amenhotep IV* was located east of the main complex, and was destroyed immediately after the death of its builder, so that its full extent and layout is currently unknown.

Source URL: https://www.boundless.com/art-history/ancient-egyptian-art/new-kingdom/architecture-great-temple-complexes/
Saylor URL: http://www.saylor.org/courses/ARTH110#3.4

Attributed to: Boundless

www.saylor.org
Page 3 of 4
The Valley of the Kings

By this time pyramids were no longer built by kings, but they continued to build magnificent tombs. This renowned valley in Egypt is where, for a period of nearly 500 years, tombs were constructed for the Pharaohs and powerful nobles of the New Kingdom. The valley is known to contain 63 tombs and chambers, the most well known of which is perhaps the tomb of Tutankhamun (commonly known as King Tut). Despite its small size, it is the most complete ancient Egyptian royal tomb ever found. In 1979 the Valley became a World Heritage Site, along with the rest of the Theban Necropolis. The Temple of Hatshepsut was Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, and was the first to be built in the area. The focal point of the tomb was the Djeser-Djeseru, a colonnaded structure of perfect harmony that predates the Parthenon by nearly one thousand years. Built into a cliff face, Djeser-Djeseru sits atop a series of terraces that once were graced with lush gardens (Figure 0). The Tomb of Nefertiti, the most famous of Ramesses' consorts, is also located in the Valley of the Kings and is known for its magnificent wall paintings.

The Ramesseum was the great mortuary temple of Ramesses II. An enormous pylon representing scenes of the great pharaoh's reign stood before one of the opening courts, with the royal palace at the left and a gigantic statue of the king looming up at the back. Scattered remains of two statues of the seated king can be seen, one in pink granite and the other in black granite, which once flanked the entrance to the temple. 39 out of the 48 columns still stand in the hypostyle hall, and part of the gold-and-blue decorated ceiling has also been preserved.