



## Work in the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak

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After the pyramids and sphinx, no ancient monument is more evocative of pharaonic Egypt than the west ruin of Karnak — and the most striking of its splendors is its great Hypostyle Hall. The gigantic central colonnade is flanked by what seems to be a forest of columns on a similarly majestic scale, 134 in all. Built in the early part of the Thirteenth Century B.C., it was the largest hall of this type yet attempted, and it was not to be surpassed.

The appeal of the Hypostyle Hall as a tourist attraction is well-founded; but, as is so often the case with ancient ruins, publication has lagged behind excavation. Even today, details of the Hypostyle Hall's building history and of the part it played in the liturgy of Karnak are not well understood. Scholars at the Oriental Institute have been prominent among those who contributed to what is known. In 1940 the late Keith C. Seele published a monograph in which he discussed the decoration of the Hypostyle Hall with special reference to the coregency of its two chief "architects," Sety I and his son, Ramesses II. And at about the same time, the late Harold Hayden Nelson had already embarked on an ambitious project to record all of the reliefs and inscriptions carved on its walls. By 1954, all of the material inside the hall (except for the columns, architraves and other marginalia) was finished. Nelson's death came before his work could be put into final form, however, and it was not until 1977 that his manuscripts were re-examined with a view to publication. Under my editorship, this project came to a happy conclusion in the summer of 1982, with the publication of *The Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak*, Volume I, Part 1, *The Wall Reliefs* (OIP 106).

Useful as it may be, the appearance of this book by no means closes the file on the great Hypostyle Hall. There is still a great deal that is not properly recorded; and the length of the Epigraphic Survey's season has provided both the opportunity and the inducement to further close the gap. In the 1982-83 season I worked jointly with Vincent Rondot, an Egyptologist associated with the Centre

*The great columns, and the clerestory windows flanking the main passage through the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak.*

Franco-Égyptien des Temples de Karnak. M. Rondot's duties for the Center, which included cataloguing the many blocks lying north and south of the main axis at Karnak, had called his attention to the numbers of fragmentary architraves from the great Hypostyle Hall. If these were carefully copied, they might in many cases be joined with one another and also to architraves still in place inside the hall. Since my collation of Nelson's drawings had been done in cooperation with the Franco-Egyptian Center, a joint project by M. Rondot and myself seemed particularly appropriate; and in April of 1982, it was agreed that while he would work on the architraves, I would concern myself with the inscriptions carved on the columns — all except the scenes, which would require a whole volume to themselves.

To copy the seemingly innumerable cartouches, divine names and other stereotyped texts on the 134 columns of the great Hypostyle Hall might appear to be a thankless task. It certainly was a tedious one, even after I had worked out codes to abbreviate some of the more common variants of the royal names found there. But these formulas, so often ignored or taken for granted, can cumulatively tell some interesting tales. It is becoming increasingly apparent, for instance, that Ramesses II's royal names took on different forms at particular points in his reign. By paying close attention to these spellings, and to where they occur, one can chart a continuous course of additions, alterations, and still more additions, stretching over at least the first three decades of the king's reign. The sequence of decoration — when various elements were carved, and why — becomes much clearer. It is also emerging that, at important axes in the Hypostyle Hall, the king's cartouches favor ideographic rather than phonetic spellings of divine names. Along the main passages, for instance, one sees — where it is most visible — the enthroned figure of Ma'at, the goddess who represents the right order of things, rather than the more prosaic writing of her name that is common elsewhere: this composite figure embodies in itself Ramesses II's throne name, "Powerful is the right order of (the sun god) Re," and in one attesting image underscores what the contemporary viewer regarded, in religious terms, as the outstanding benefit conferred by the pharaoh's rule. Elsewhere, along the central passage that borders the processional way leading into the temple, it is noticeable that ideographic rather than spelled out forms of the name "Amun" are preferred as one gets closer to the sanctuary of Amun-Re, further inside the temple. These variants might be dismissed as interesting but essentially meaningless conceits, but for the fact that in other temples — notably, the Ramesside court at the Temple of Luxor — they clearly reflect the ritual usage of different

parts of the building. It is becoming apparent, then, that the ancient Egyptians could, and did, use these banalities in meaningful ways, and that we can learn something of their intentions by studying such data.

The principal field work on both the architraves and the columns was finished by the close of the 1982-83 season in Luxor, allowing M. Rondot and myself to prepare the first drafts of our publication in the summer of 1983. It is expected that final checking in the field will take place during the 1983-84 season, so that our manuscripts can be put into final form and sent to press in the summer of 1984.