

## The Contra-temple at Shanhûr\*

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It is a great pleasure to offer this article as a tribute to Sven, to celebrate him and his achievements, and to express my gratitude for many years of generous advice as a supportive mentor and colleague. I hope he will find my lines about Shanhûr's contra-temple enjoyable, having heard much about the Shanhûr project during my visits to my *alma mater* over the past decade.

The Roman Period temple of Isis, the Great Goddess, at Shanhûr (figs 1–2), which is 44 m long and 29 m wide, is located about 20 km north of Luxor on the east bank of the Nile. The temple was constructed and decorated in several stages from the reign of Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE) to that of Trajan (98–117 CE). From 1989 until 2001 a team from KU Leuven investigated the temple;<sup>1</sup> in 2010 a final epigraphic campaign was undertaken in a joint project by Swansea University and KU Leuven to complete the recording for the second epigraphic volume of the temple publication.<sup>2</sup>

This article presents and analyses the contra-temple at the north exterior wall of the main temple. After a short description of its architecture, I discuss its decoration and some of the inscriptions. To set the shrine in its wider context, it is compared with other Egyptian contra-temples, with the wider aim of clarifying their functions and religious implications.

\* I am grateful to the Shanhûr team members Marleen De Meyer (Leuven), Peter Dils (Leipzig), René Preys (Leuven), Troy Sagrillo (Swansea), and Harco Willems (Leuven). This article could not have been written without their manifold input into the Swansea–Leuven Shanhûr project, which was generously funded by the Gerda Henkel-Foundation (Düsseldorf, Germany). I am especially grateful to John Baines and Marleen De Meyer for comments on a draft, to Ken Griffin for discussions, to Troy Sagrillo and Peter Dils for the drawings.

1 H. WILLEMS – F. COPPENS – M. DE MEYER, *The Temple of Shanhûr, I: the Sanctuary, the Wabet, and the Gates of the Central Hall and the Great Vestibule (1–98)* (OLA 124, Leuven, 2003), with extensive bibliography. For a recent overview see M. DE MEYER – M. MINAS-NERPEL, 'Shenhur, Temple of', in: E. FROOD – W. WENDRICH (eds), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles, 2012: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5hc3t8dh>).

2 M. MINAS-NERPEL – H. WILLEMS (eds), authored by M. DE MEYER – P. DILS – M. MINAS-NERPEL – R. PREYS – T.L. SAGRILLO – H. WILLEMS, *The Temple of Shanhûr, II: the Hypostyle Hall, the Lateral Chapel, and the Exterior of the Augustan Temple* (OLA; Leuven, forthcoming).

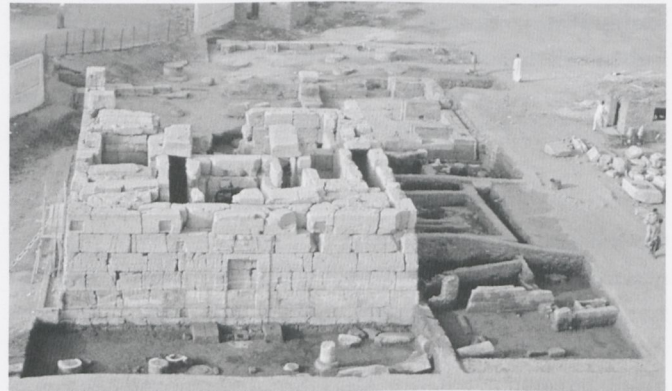


FIGURE 1 *Shanhûr temple in 2001, with excavation trenches to the north and west of the temple*  
PHOTOGRAPH: M. DE MEYER

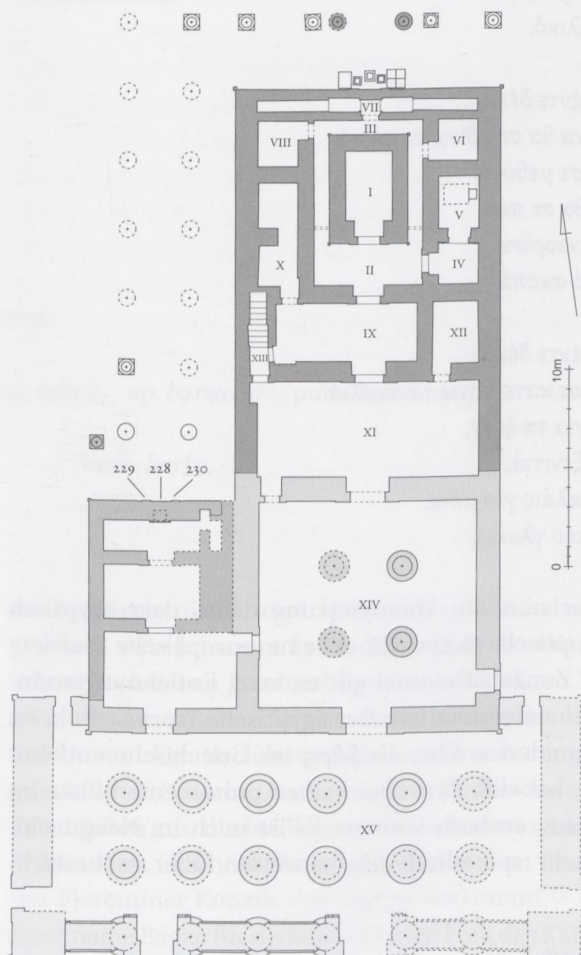


FIGURE 2 *Ground plan of Shanhûr temple*  
DRAWING BY P. DILS (WILLEMS – COPPENS – DE MEYER, THE TEMPLE OF SHANHÛR, I, PL. 3)

## Description of the Contra-temple at Shanhûr

The northern or core part of the main temple at Shanhûr (rooms I–XIII) is the oldest, built under Augustus (fig. 2). The sanctuary (room I), its façade, and the central doorways leading to rooms II and IX were decorated under Augustus. The same is true of the cult relief on its exterior north wall (figs 3–4), which is located exactly on the temple axis in the centre of the rear wall, below the aperture of the false door, where the Great Goddess Isis, the main goddess of Shanhûr, could manifest herself. Since the sanctuary and the false door were the two principal places of cult activity, it is not surprising that they were decorated first, along with the entrance leading to the sanctuary. Adjacent to both sides of the false door are two exceptionally large ritual scenes, executed under Tiberius and devoted to the Theban deities to the west (no. 105, see fig. 4) and the Coptite ones to the east (no. 108). Above each of these two scenes, there are two smaller ones (nos 106 and 107 to



FIGURE 3 *Shanhûr temple, contra-temple adjoining the north exterior wall*

PHOTOGRAPH: M. DE MEYER

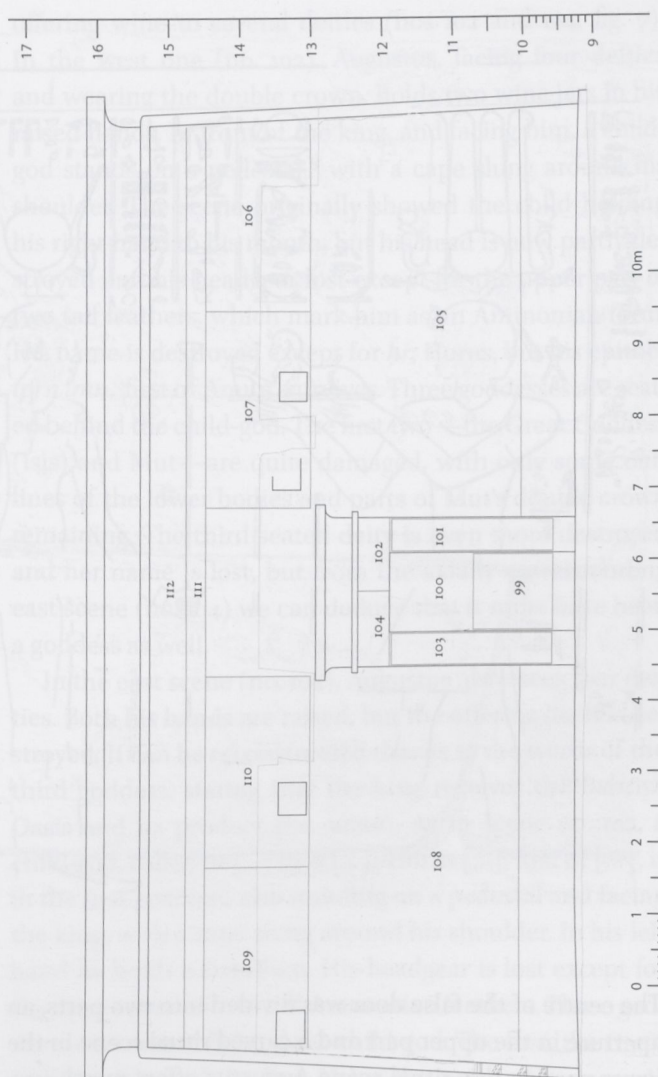


FIGURE 4 *Shanhûr temple, plan of the north exterior wall*  
DRAWING: P. DILS

the west, nos 109 and 110 to the east), which are severely damaged.<sup>3</sup> The bandeau inscription (no. 111) and the frieze (no. 112) are entirely lost.

<sup>3</sup> The entire exterior north wall (nos 99–112) will be published in detail in *Shanhûr*, II. Scenes 106–7, 109–10 were executed in the reign of Tiberius at the earliest (perhaps together with the large scenes below, nos 105 and 108), but cannot be dated exactly due to their poor state of preservation. For different phases of the decoration of a contra-temple, respectively a rear wall of a temple, compare the exterior south wall of the Hathor temple at Dendera discussed below (see notes 41–42), which was embellished in two phases, first the Hathor head and the large neighbouring scenes under Ptolemy XV and Cleopatra VII, then the much smaller scenes above under Augustus.



FIGURE 5  
 Shanhûr temple, north exterior wall, no. 99 (cult relief  
 of the false door)  
 DRAWING: T. L. SAGRILLO

The centre of the false door was divided into two parts, an aperture in the upper part and a carved ritual scene in the lower part. In this ritual scene Augustus offers myrrh (no. 99, fig. 5), presented in a container in the shape of a sphinx, to the main deity of the temple, *t3-ntr.t-3.t 3s.t hr.j.t ib p3-š-n-hr irt r' hnw.t ntr.w nb.w*, 'the Great Goddess Isis who resides in Shanhûr, the eye of Ra, the lady of all gods'. In the upper corners of the aperture some holes are visible.<sup>4</sup> They indicate that a wooden frame was inserted in the aperture, which was holding two door leaves. The lower beam of the frame would have been used as a base supporting a wooden panel decorated with a cult scene that could be covered with the two wooden door leaves.

Few wooden cultic panels of the Roman period survive. One that was found 1931 in the temple of Soknebtynis at Tebtynis shows Soknebtynis together with Min.<sup>5</sup> It is not

known where it would have been set up within the temple. Another panel, found in 1902 in a house in Tebtynis, shows the enthroned figures of Suchos or Soknebtynis and Isis (fig. 6),<sup>6</sup> with a small figure of Harpokrates in the background. They date to the second to third century CE, rather later than the contra-temple at Shanhûr. Although the context of the Fayum panels was different to the Shanhûr one, they illuminate the habit of producing such cult furniture and mounting them to walls. The Shanhûr panel would

4 I am grateful to Peter Dils, who is in charge of the architectural study of the Shanhûr temple, for providing me with the information.

5 Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv. no. 22978: V. RONDOT, 'Min, maître de Tebtynis', in: W. CLARYSSE – A. SCHOORS – H. WILLEMS (eds), *Egyptian Religion – The Last Thousand Years*:

*Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, 1 (OLA 84; Leuven, 1998), pp. 242–255. IDEM, *Derniers visages des dieux d'Égypte: iconographies, panthéons et cultes dans le Fayoum hellénisé des II<sup>e</sup>–III<sup>e</sup> siècles de notre ère* (Paris, 2013), pp. 75–80.

6 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. no. 15978 (lost during World War II). See RONDOT, *Derniers visages des dieux d'Égypte*, pp. 122–127. I am grateful to Jana Helmbold-Doyé and Olivia Zorn for sending me the photograph (fig. 6) and for granting me permission to publish it.

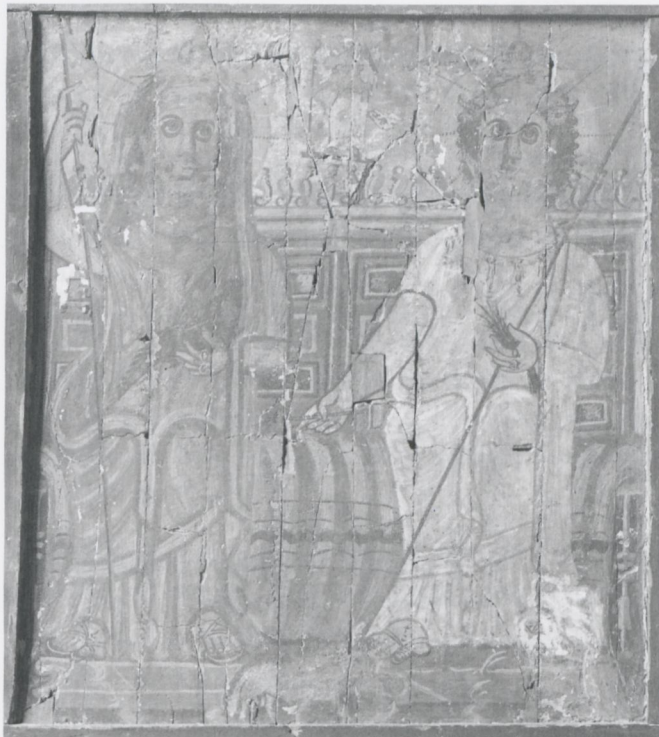


FIGURE 6 *Wooden panel from Tebtynis; Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Ägyptisches Museum, inv. no. Berlin 15978*  
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probably have borne an image of the Great Goddess Isis, possibly gilded, as traces in other contra-temples suggest.<sup>7</sup>

Under the cavetto cornice of the false door, which is decorated with a winged sun disk, the lintel is adorned with two severely damaged ritual scenes of the king

offering wine to several deities (nos 102 and 104, fig. 7). In the west one (no. 102), Augustus, facing four deities and wearing the double crown, holds two wine jars in his raised hands. In front of the king, and facing him, a child-god stands on a pedestal,<sup>8</sup> with a cape slung around his shoulder. The scene originally showed the child holding his right hand to his mouth, but his head is now partly destroyed and his headgear lost except for the upper part of two tall feathers, which mark him as an Ammonian form. His name is destroyed except for *hr*, Horus, but his epithet *tpj n' imn*, 'first of Amun', survives. Three goddesses are seated behind the child-god. The first two—the Great Goddess (Isis) and Mut—are quite damaged, with only some outlines of the lower bodies and parts of Mut's double crown remaining. The third seated deity is even more destroyed and her name is lost, but from the axially corresponding east scene (no. 104) we can deduce that it must have been a goddess as well.

In the east scene (no. 104), Augustus also faces four deities. Both his hands are raised, but the offering itself is destroyed. It can be reconstructed thanks to the words of the third goddess, stating that the king receives the Bahriya Oasis and its product (i.e. wine). As in scene no. 102, a child-god, called *hr* [...] *tpj n* [...], 'Horus [...], first of [...]', is in the first position, also standing on a pedestal and facing the king, with a cape slung around his shoulder. In his left hand he holds a flagellum. His headgear is lost except for the upper parts of two tall Ammonian feathers. Three goddesses are seated behind the child-god. The first, the Great Goddess Isis, and the last, Nebet-ihy, wear rather generic Hathor-crowns, while the middle one, Mut, has her typical double crown. Thus, the different manifestations of the

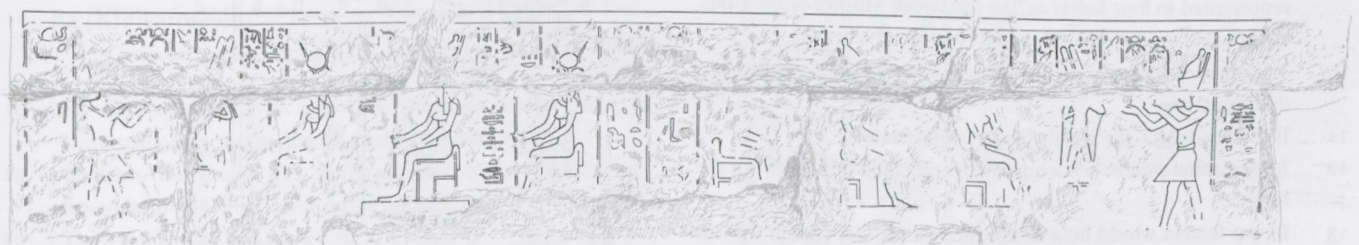


FIGURE 7 *Shanhûr temple, north exterior wall, no. 102–104 (lintel of the false door)*  
DRAWING: T.L. SAGRILLO

7 See, for example, Ismant el-Kharab in Dakhleh Oasis: C.A. HOPE – O.E. KAPER – G.E. BOWEN – S.F. PATTENET, 'The Dakhleh Oasis Project: Ismant el-Kharab 1991–92', *JSSEA* 19 (1989; published 1993), p. 15. See also the cult relief at the Hathor temple of Dendera (see below, note 43).

8 Probably the upper part of a *smj t.wj*-group, as attested in several other ritual scenes at Shanhûr; see, for example, no. 152, in the first register of the east exterior wall.

goddesses of Shanhûr (Isis, the Great Goddess, Nebet-ihy, and Mut) are represented.<sup>9</sup>

The two door jambs are inscribed with three columns of text on each side (nos 101 and 103, figs 8 and 9). Even in their badly damaged state, these columns shed light on the relations of the goddess with the population. The principal goddess, called 'the Great Goddess, who resides in Shanhûr, the eye of Ra, the mistress of all gods', is taking care of the nome and making it prosperous. The inscriptions are setting the context of the cult topography by illuminating the relations of Shanhûr, Thebes, and other places, but due to the poor preservation, the study of these relations remain difficult. Emphasis is given to the district of Thebes (no. 101, 1), highlighting that Shanhûr was under the influence of the Theban theological systems (besides the Coptite ones).

False door, west columns, no. 101 (fig. 8):



- [1] [...] *ntj* (place name)<sup>10</sup> *wn sꜣw m swꜣ.w n wꜣs.t (m)-rwt*  
*inb n hꜣj.t<sup>11</sup> šꜣm-m-tꜣ<sup>12</sup> m wꜣ pr m [rꜣ n (?) ity/hꜣqꜣ r šꜣrj*  
*...<sup>13</sup>*
- [2] [...] *šꜣm wr.t..... =s r bꜣh spꜣ.t=s m hꜣm.w s[hꜣ].n=s<sup>14</sup> šꜣr=s*  
*m hꜣnw n ib=sn hꜣpr hꜣkꜣ(?)<sup>15</sup> (r)dj (?) ...[...] dꜣd=s r [...]*
- [3] [...] *=sn mw=sn šꜣp=sn<sup>16</sup> ihꜣ.t nb.t im wr=sn m kꜣ.w dꜣꜣw*  
*m wꜣ n hꜣnw.t ndb<sup>17</sup> hꜣpr=sn [...] [...] mj [...]*

9 Isis the Great, Mother of the Gods, is not present. See H. WILLEMS, 'Die Theologie der Innenräume des Schenhurtempels', in: B.J.J. HARING – A. KLUG (eds), 6. *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung, Leiden, 4.–7. September 2002* (Akten der ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen, Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 277–290, who has established that the goddess of Shanhûr formed a sort of *Isis Quadrifrons*, represented in four facets as 'Isis the Great, Mother of the Gods', 'The Great Goddess Isis', Mut, and Nephthys Nebet-Ihy.

10 The remaining signs clearly designate a place name, marked by a determinative.

11 If this reads *hꜣj.t*, the writing is very abbreviated.

12 It seems that *šꜣm-m-tꜣ* is a toponym, or it could be a name for the temple.

13 In the lacuna would be a determinative for *šꜣrj* (either  or ) , probably followed by a word for 'enemy'.

14 The reading of the verb is not entirely clear.

15 Either one reads 'magician', or the man is a mistake; then one should read 'magic'. The man and the arm could also be read as *hꜣr-(wj)* 'at once'.

16 An alternative, equally possible reading could be *šꜣpr=sn*, with *=sn* referring to the gods.

17 For *hꜣnw.t ndb*, see *LGG* V, p. 192c (especially a): 'Die Herrin des Fundamentes' als Bezeichnung der Isis.



FIGURE 8 *Shanhûr temple, north exterior wall, no. 101 (west door jamb of the false door)*

DRAWING: T. L. SAGRILLO

- [1] [...] (place name). There is protection of the district of Thebes outside the wall of the hall of *šhm-m-t3* according to the command that comes forth [from the mouth of (?)] the sovereign in order to remove [...]
- [2] [...] The great one ... goes [...] her ... in order to fill her nome with servants. She has caused her plan to appear in their hearts. Magic (?) came into existence [...] she united [...]
- [3] [...] They [...] their water, they (= the servants) bring into being everything therein. They are rich in provision and nourishment, according to the command of the mistress of the foundation (= the entire earth), and they come into existence [... for the King of Upper and Lower Egypt ...?].

False door, east columns, no. 103 (fig. 9):

- [1] [...] *r rdj.t n=s* [...] *sm3.tj* [...] *fk-ħr.t* [*šm*]*s[=s]* *ib=s m in.t ntjw*<sup>18</sup> [...] *n=s w.w n...* [...]
- [2] [...] ...<sup>19</sup>*f* [...] *n*<sup>20</sup> ... [...] *š n s3=s ħpr ħm.t=s sndm m ħnt=f ħr sm*<sup>21</sup> *r tr n mr=s* [...]
- [3] [...] ... *št3 r* [*ħw*]*jj.t=s m sp3.t tn t3 ntr.t 3.t ħr:j(.t)-ib p3-š-ħr ĩr.t r ħnw.t ntr.(w) nb.(w)* [...] *t nb ...*<sup>22</sup>*=sn n s3 r* (*k[jsrs?]*)

- [1] [...] in order to give to her [...] road ... *fk-ħr.t* (= toponym)<sup>23</sup>. She may follow her heart in the valley of myrrh [...] for her, the districts of ...
- [2] [...] ... the lake of/to her son. Her Majesty came to be seated in it (= the lake), being happy whenever (= at the time) she liked [...]
- [3] [...] ... secrets at her sanctuary in this nome, the Great Goddess, who resides in Shanhûr, the eye of Ra, the mistress of all gods, ... their (offerings?) for the son of Ra (K[aisaros?]).

18 For *in.t ntjw*, see P. WILSON, *A Ptolemaic Lexikon* (OLA 78, Leuven, 1997), p. 87: 'perhaps a poetic name for Punt'.

19 Remains of a square sign, perhaps a house determinative, followed by plural strokes, indicating a building.

20 The *n* is followed by a book roll.

21 For *sm*, see *Wb.* IV, p. 121.3: 'von Herzen froh sein'.

22 We see a *g* and a bird. The meaning is unclear; perhaps *g3w* 'offering'?

23 For *fk-ħr.t* see H. GAUTHIER, *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, II (Le Caire, 1925), p. 163: 'Région de Afrique, apparaissant seulement à l'époque grecque et en relation avec le pays de Pount, Ta-neTer, Qmaou et Khabst (?); elle est donc probablement à placer soit dans l'extrême Soudan égyptien soit en Abyssinie'.

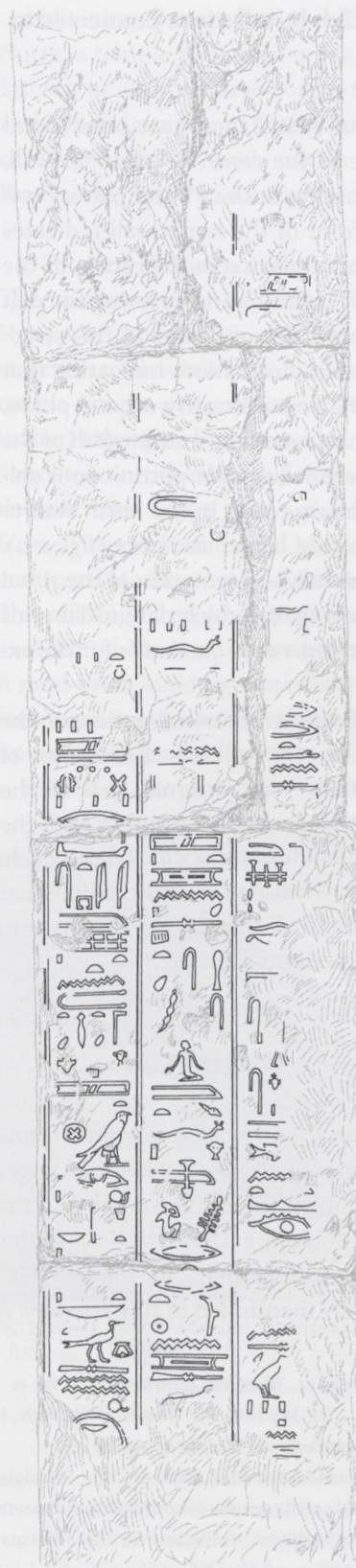


FIGURE 9 *Shanhûr temple, north exterior wall, no. 103 (east door jamb of the false door)*  
DRAWING: T. L. SAGRILLO

### The Portico and Cult Installations Connected to the Cult Niche

Remains of the original cult installation have been found in front of the cult niche in the centre of the rear wall, including a number of libation basins.<sup>24</sup> The pair of column bases excavated in front of the north wall indicates that there was a small roofed portico in the centre of the north façade, supported by columns and covering the cult niche. The holes to support the roof beams of this structure do not cut through relief decoration, indicating that they were planned from the beginning. In a second phase, a larger roofed area, which spanned the entire width of the north wall, replaced the original, smaller portico. Four column bases align with four large slots in the north wall to support the roof beams of the bigger structure (figs 1–2). These slots cut through the carved decoration of the ritual scenes 107, 109, and 110 (see fig. 4), which date to Tiberius at the earliest, giving a *terminus ante quem non* for the extended portico.

Dating to the same phase as the construction of the extended portico along the rear wall is a double row of columns flanking the entire west external wall of the Augustan temple, which was decorated, together with the east exterior wall, under Claudius (41–54 CE). The east side of the temple has not been excavated, so it is possible that a similar row existed there, thus turning the temple into the unexpected form of a peripteral temple.<sup>25</sup>

### Other Contra-temples along the Nile

In order to set Shanhûr's contra-temple in context, one needs to examine other constructions attached to a larger temple. The following review begins with Karnak and the Theban West Bank, before looking at Dendera, Kom Ombo, Kalabsha, and Dakka; contra-temples in the Western Desert are only occasionally mentioned in this article.<sup>26</sup> A

full study of Egyptian contra-temples is a *desideratum*; here I only provide comparative material for the contra-temple at Shanhûr. The types of contra-temples vary considerably from a false door or a relief protected by a wooden structure (through a small porch or an extended portico) to the largest examples, which consist of a series of rooms.

#### Karnak

The earliest known contra-temple adjoining the exterior rear wall of a large temple is the east shrine at Karnak, attached to the centre of the east exterior wall of the *Akh-menu* on the main west-east temple axis, opening to the east and consisting of a complex of rooms. It was dedicated to Amun-Re-Horakhty and dates to the reign of Thutmose III or earlier, with further extensions and decoration until the time of the Roman emperor Domitian (81–96 CE).<sup>27</sup> It was linked to the *s.t mtj n.t msdr sdm*, 'proper place of the hearing ear', marking it as a site of popular worship, where Amun listened to supplications and prayers and would heal and protect those who were loyal to him.<sup>28</sup> The inscriptions of the contra-temple dating to the reign of Domitian are primarily solar in nature, associating the structure with the nearby single obelisk of Thutmose III/IV, now standing in the Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome,<sup>29</sup> and the East Temple of Ramesses II in Karnak's

sée au temple de Khonsou', *CahKar* 6 (1980), p. 174; P.J. BRAND, 'Veils, Votives, and Marginalia: the Use of Sacred Space at Karnak and Luxor', in: P.F. DORMAN – B.M. BRYAN (eds), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes: Proceedings of the Theban Workshop, Held at the British Museum in September 2003* (SAOC 61, Chicago, 2007), p. 61. See also the section on the 'Gegenkapelle' in P. DILS, *Der Tempel von Dusch. Publikation und Untersuchungen eines ägyptischen Provinztempels der römischen Zeit* (PhD thesis, Universität zu Köln, 2000: <http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/1614/>), pp. 43–46, 225.

27 PM 11<sup>2</sup>, pp. 215–218. See for example BRAND, in: *Sacred Space and Sacred Function*, pp. 60–61; D. KLOTZ, 'Domitian at the contra-temple of Karnak', *ZÄS* 135 (2008), pp. 63–77 (with extensive bibliography). Very interestingly, F. LARCHÉ, 'Nouvelles observations sur les monuments du Moyen et du Nouvel Empire dans la zone centrale du temple d'Amon', *CahKar* 12 (2007), pp. 409–422, offers a new reconstruction of the Middle Kingdom temple area, suggesting that the blocks of Senusret I formed a small temple with a double portico, similar in appearance to the contra-temple in Karnak East.

28 KLOTZ, 'Domitian at the contra-temple of Karnak', pp. 65–66, see especially the evidence listed there in note 37.

29 L. HABACHI, *Die unsterblichen Obeliskten Ägyptens* (KaW 11, Mainz, 1982), pp. 106–108. At 36 m the obelisk is the tallest erected.

24 DE MEYER – MINAS-NERPEL, 'Shenhur, temple of', p. 6, fig. 9.

25 WILLEMS – COPPENS – DE MEYER, *The Temple of Shanhûr*, 1, p. 7; WILLEMS, in: 6. *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung*, p. 281.

26 At the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Julia Preisigke is preparing a PhD thesis on the contra-temples of the Western Desert. I am grateful to Friedhelm Hoffmann for this information (9 November 2015). Several lists of contra-temples have been published, for example by L. BORCHARDT, *Allerhand Kleinigkeiten: seinen wissenschaftlichen Freunden und Bekannten zu seinem 70. Geburtstage am 5. Oktober 1933 überreicht* (Leipzig, 1933), p. 9; F. LAROCHE – C. TRAUNECKER, 'La chapelle ados-

*hwt bnb*n section with its Heliopolitan connotations. This variety of functions shows that contra-temples could be multifaceted in nature, as is true of temples and Egyptian beliefs in general.

Additional contra-temples at Karnak are the one abutting the rear wall of the Mut temple, for which the oldest dated evidence is a graffito of Montuemhat and his first son Nesptah, which developed into a three-room structure in the Ptolemaic period.<sup>30</sup> According to Fazzini, it housed a cult for Montuemhat and came to celebrate the Theban Triad and various processions of Mut, including those related to the return of the angry goddess and her propitiation.<sup>31</sup>

Architecturally completely different is the contra-temple of the Ptah temple next to the north wall of the main Karnak enclosure. In the centre of its otherwise undecorated east exterior, or rear, wall is a relief showing six figures.<sup>32</sup> First, a group of three and accompanying inscriptions were carved, showing Imhotep preceded by Hathor and the child-god Harsomtus. Holes around the group indicate that a wooden frame was once attached to the wall. In a second stage, a figure of Amenhotep, son of Hapu was added. Finally, a figure of Ptah accompanied by a small figure of Imhotep was carved in front of Harsomtus. Further holes in the wall indicate that several wooden frames were added in three different phases, as well as a solid roof in a fourth phase.

At the rear wall of the Khonsu temple a contra-temple of the Thirtieth Dynasty and Ptolemaic period was created. It comprises ritual scenes protected by a portico made entirely of stone, with screen walls and a gateway.<sup>33</sup> Laroche and Traunecker state that it was not used for popular worship or oracles but played an important role in the cult of the temple: 'cet édifice s'intègre entièrement dans l'ensemble cultuel de Khonsou. Il ne s'agit ni d'une construction secondaire, ni d'un édifice annexe'.<sup>34</sup>

Adjoining the rear of the Montu temple at Karnak North, a temple dedicated to Maat was constructed in the fashion of a rather large contra-temple, consisting of several halls or rooms and dating perhaps already to the reign of Amenhotep III, with further work being done in the Ramesside period and under Nectanebo I.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Deir el-Medina, Hathor temple (fig. 10)*

The contra-temple adjoining the Ptolemaic temple of Hathor is probably one of those closest in time of construction to Shanhûr.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Shanhûr, the Deir el-Medina contra-temple was not planned when the temple was built under Ptolemy IV but was added two centuries later under Augustus. In the centre of the rear wall of the temple, a double relief scene shows the first Roman emperor offering Maat to Hathor and Maat on the left (north) side<sup>37</sup> and myrrh to Tanenet und Rattai on the right (south).<sup>38</sup> The offering of myrrh, which is attested in both Shanhûr and Deir el-Medina, seems to be central to such chapels. A mud-brick building was created adjoining the rear wall, forming a small sanctuary, whereas Shanhûr was embellished with a portico.

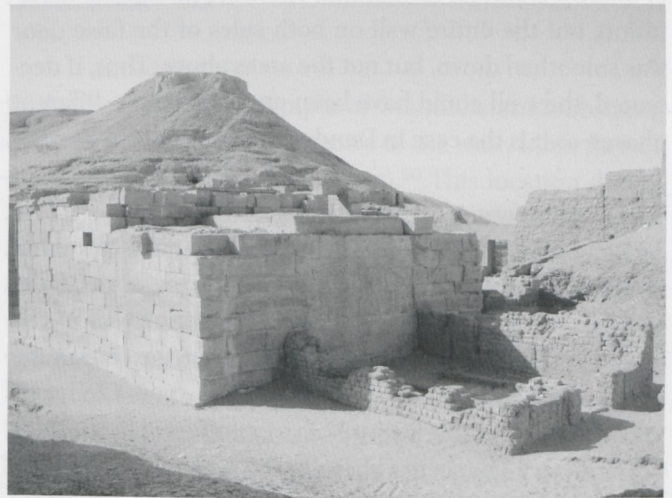


FIGURE 10 *Deir el-Medina, contra-temple adjoining the Hathor temple*

PHOTOGRAPH: M. MINAS-NERPÉL

30 PM II<sup>2</sup>, pp. 58–59. R. FAZZINI, 'Aspects of the Mut temple's contra-temple at South Karnak, part II', in: S. D'AURIA (ed.), *Offerings to the Discerning Eye: an Egyptological Medley in Honor of Jack A. Josephson* (CHANE 38, Leiden – Boston, 2010), pp. 83–101.

31 FAZZINI, 'Aspects of the Mut temple's contra-temple at South Karnak, part II', p. 101.

32 PM II<sup>2</sup>, p. 176 [O]. D. WILDUNG, *Imhotep und Amenhotep: Gottwerdung im alten Ägypten* (MÄS 36, München – Berlin, 1977), pp. 201–206, pls 49–51.

33 PM II<sup>2</sup>, p. 243 (125)–(126); LAROCHE – TRAUNECKER, 'La chapelle adossée au temple de Khonsou', pp. 167–196.

34 LAROCHE – TRAUNECKER, 'La chapelle adossée au temple de Khonsou', p. 194.

35 PM II<sup>2</sup>, pp. 11–13; D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (New York – Oxford, 1999), p. 116 and plan ix; L. GABOLDE – V. RONDOT, 'Le temple de Montou n'était pas un temple à Montou (Karnak-Nord 1990–1996)', *BSFÉ* 136 (1996), pp. 27–41.

36 PM II<sup>2</sup>, p. 407; P. DU BOURGUET, *Le temple de Deir al-Médina* (MIFAO 121, Le Caire, 2002), pp. 173–175, nos 184–187.

37 DU BOURGUET, *Le temple de Deir al-Médina*, no. 184 (on p. 359).

38 DU BOURGUET, *Le temple de Deir al-Médina*, no. 186 (on p. 360).



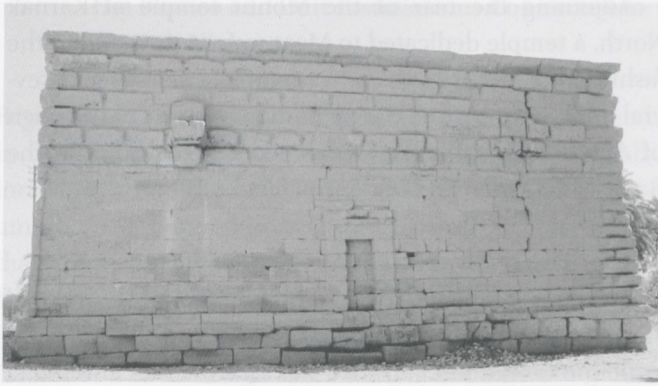


FIGURE 11 *Deir el-Shelwit, contra-temple adjoining the Isis temple*

PHOTOGRAPH: M. MINAS-NERPEL

### *Deir el-Shelwit (el-Chelouit) (fig. 11)*

The Isis temple at Deir el-Shelwit, a perfectly preserved sandstone structure, is the latest surviving Roman period temple on the Theban West Bank, inscribed with the cartouches of Roman pharaohs as late as Antoninus Pius.<sup>39</sup> The exterior walls are undecorated, except for a false door in the centre of the rear wall, directly behind the sanctuary.<sup>40</sup> In having a false door, the contra-temple at Deir el-Shelwit is similar to Shanhûr. There are no signs of decoration, but the entire wall on both sides of the false door was smoothed down, but not the areas above. Thus, if decorated, the wall could have been embellished in different phases, as it is the case in Dendera (see next point below).

### *Dendera*

At Dendera, a monumental relief of Hathor's head in full frontal view, crowned by a sun disk and cow horns, is located in the centre of the rear, south exterior wall of the temple of Hathor (fig. 12). It was carved at the same time as the neighbouring relief scenes, which show Cleopatra VII and her son Ptolemy XV Kaisarion offering to the gods of Dendera.<sup>41</sup> The scenes above in the second register were decorated later, under Augustus,<sup>42</sup> and, as is also the case in Shanhûr, of much smaller scale. As the holes still indi-



FIGURE 12 *Dendera, rear wall of the Hathor temple*

PHOTOGRAPH: M. MINAS-NERPEL

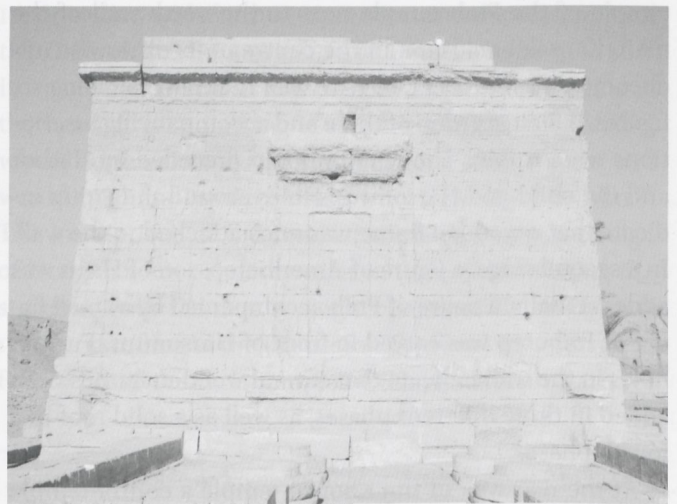


FIGURE 13 *Dendera, contra-temple adjoining the Isis temple*

PHOTOGRAPH: M. MINAS-NERPEL

cate, a wooden construction once enclosed Hathor's head, which was also gilded.<sup>43</sup>

A second contra-temple at Dendera is at the east wall of the Isis temple (fig. 13), respecting the previous east-west alignment of the building under Nectanebo I. The Isis temple was altered and extended under the Ptolemies and Augustus, and the orientation of the temple rotated to facing north as the Hathor temple does, so that the temple retained a dual alignment.<sup>44</sup> The monumental false door at the east exterior wall relates to the old eastward orientation.<sup>45</sup> Below the cavetto cornice, it is decorated

39 Cult activities are even attested as late as the third century, see G. HÖLBL, *Altägypten im Römischen Reich: Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel*, I: *Römische Politik und altägyptische Ideologie von Augustus bis Diocletian, Tempelbau in Oberägypten* (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie, Mainz, 2000), p. 57.

40 C. ZIVIE-COCHE, *Le temple de Deir Chelouit, IV: Etude architecturale* (Le Caire 1992), p. 51, pls 47–48, 50.

41 *PM* VI, p. 79 (257)–(260); *Dendera* I, pls XXVII–XXX; *Dendera* XII 11, 11–15, 3; 28, 13–32, 7; pls 1–3.

42 *Dendera* XII 15, 4–20, 14; 32, 8–53, 15; pls 1–3, 14–6, 24–26.

43 BORCHARDT, *Allerhand Kleinigkeiten*, p. 9.

44 S. CAUVILLE, *Dendera: le temple d'Isis* (Le Caire 2007), pp. xx–xxiii and pls 3, 5.

45 CAUVILLE, *Dendera: le temple d'Isis*, pp. 291–299, pls 241–246; ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, p. 230.

with two scenes on the lintel and six registers on each of the jambs, plus a column on each side. In the left (north) scene, the king, accompanied by Harsomtus, offers Maat to Isis, Osiris, Harsomtus, and a fourth, lost deity. In the right (south) lintel scene, the king, this time accompanied by Ihy, offers Maat to Hathor, Horus, Ihy, and Harsomtus.<sup>46</sup> The inside of the door is left blank.

### *Kom Ombo*

In the temple of Sobek and Haroeris at Kom Ombo, a monumental cult relief is located in the centre of the temple's rear wall (fig. 14), accessible through the 'emperors' corridor' – the outer corridor at the back of the temple which was decorated in the Roman period.<sup>47</sup> In the scene of the lowermost register (*Kom Ombo*, II, 938), dating to the time of emperor Trajan, a synthesis of the temple's complex mythology is presented, and this highlights the importance of the contra-temple. Strikingly, the entire cult relief is carved in raised relief, while the neighbouring scenes are in sunk relief, as on most exterior temple walls. Sobek and Haroeris face each other, with their symbols of power positioned directly in front of them. In the case of Haroeris, it is his monumental *ȝ.t*-knife,<sup>48</sup> in case of Sobek his sceptre, decorated with the head of a lion. Between these two symbols, exactly in the middle of the temple axis, are six columns of inscription, comprising two hymns (*Kom Ombo*, II, 939), one to Sobek and one to Haroeris. Above this inscription, a miniature false door is carved, marking the cult relief clearly as a contra-temple. One of its functions is illuminated by the neighbouring emblematic inscription *nb*

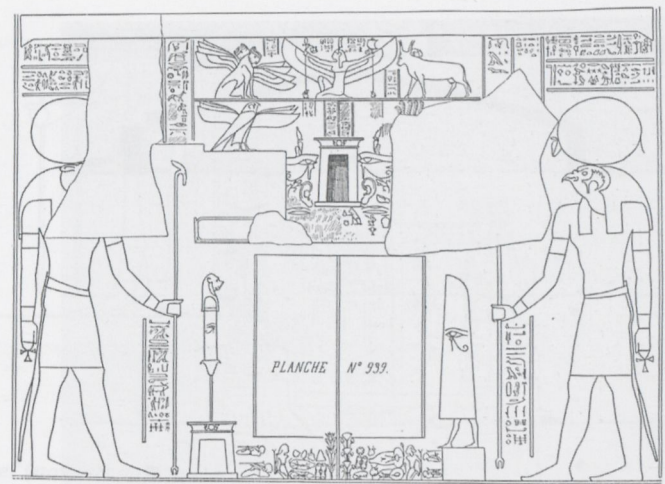


FIGURE 14 *Kom Ombo*, cult relief on the rear wall of the Sobek and Haroeris temple  
DE MORGAN, KOM OMBO, II, 938

*wḏ.t ʿšṣ nḥ sdm spr.w hr nb* 'Lord of the udjat, manifold of ear(s), who hears everyone's prayers'. The *nb wḏ.t* refers to Sobek on the left and Haroeris on the right side. This phrase is reminiscent of the contra-temple in Karnak East. In the shrine or false door itself a statuette of Maat was carved in high relief.<sup>49</sup>

### *Kalabsha*

In the Roman period temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha, a cult relief is located in the centre of the west, inner face of the temple enclosure wall (fig. 15).<sup>50</sup> This location differs from the examples discussed so far, which are all placed on the temples' outer walls, usually right behind the sanctuary on the other side. In Kalabsha, the relief faces the back wall of the temple proper. Measuring 2.46 m in height, it was once protected by a wooden construction with a gabled roof, whose outline is cut in the stone. Two forms of Mandulis face each other and an altar in the middle. To the left, the younger Mandulis is depicted, wearing the *hmhm*-crown, to the right a senior form of the same god wears a rather odd form of the double crown in frontal view.<sup>51</sup>

46 CAUVILLE, *Dendara: le temple d'Isis*, pp. 292–294, pl. 243.

47 *PM* VI, p. 197 (227); *Kom Ombo*, II, 938–941. See A. GUTBUB, 'Éléments ptolémaïques préfigurant le relief cultuel de Kom Ombo', in: H. MAEHLER – V. MICHAEL STROCKA (eds), *Das ptolemäische Ägypten: Akten des internationalen Symposiums, 27.–29. September 1976 in Berlin* (Mainz, 1978), pp. 165–176. *IDEM*, 'Kom Ombo et son relief cultuel', *BSFÉ* 101 (1984), pp. 21–48; D. DEVAUCHELLE, 'Un archétype de relief cultuel en Égypte ancienne', *BSFÉ* 131 (1994), pp. 50–53. For the context of the emperor's corridor see M. MINAS-NERPÉL, 'Egyptian Temples', in: C. RIGGS (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 376–377.

48 For the *ȝ.t*-knife, which is offered to Haroeris at Shanhûr in the seventh scene in the first register of the east exterior wall (no. 157), and its context in ancient Egypt, see M. MINAS-NERPÉL, 'Offering the *ȝ.t*-knife to Haroeris in the temple of Isis at Shanhûr', in: R. JASNOW – G. WIDMER (eds), *Illuminating Osiris: Egyptological Studies in Honor of Mark Smith* (Material and Visual Culture of Ancient Egypt 2, Atlanta, 2017), pp. 259–276 with plates 17–18.

49 GUTBUB, 'Kom Ombo et son relief cultuel', p. 35.

50 *PM* VII, p. 19 (68). H. GAUTHIER, *Le temple de Kalabchah* (Les temples immergés de la Nubie; Le Caire, 1911), pp. 317–318 (with fig. 19), pls 107–108.

51 G. HÖLBL, *Altägypten im Römischen Reich: Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel*, II: *Die Tempel des römischen Nubien* (Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie, Mainz, 2004), pp. 122 and 131 with fig. 191.

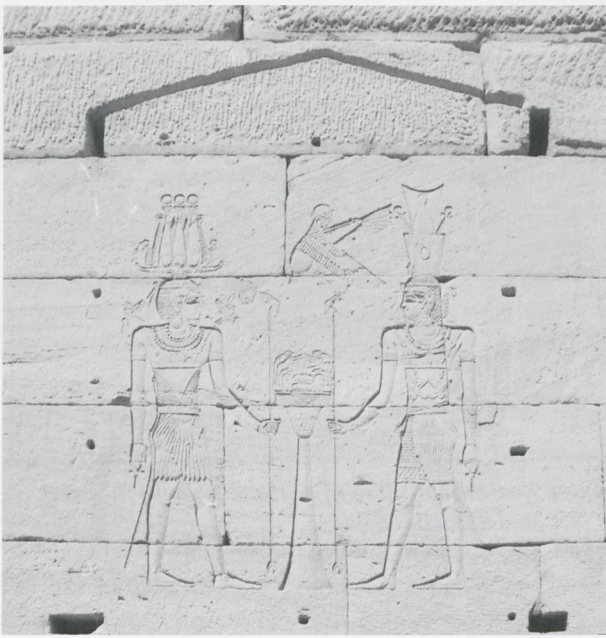


FIGURE 15 *Kalabsha, contra-temple adjoining the Mandulis temple*  
PHOTOGRAPH: K. GRIFFIN

### *Dakka*

The temple at Dakka (Pselkis), built and decorated in the Graeco-Roman period, was dedicated to Thoth of Pnubs and the gods of Philae. From at least the time of Trajan, the temple was integrated into a Roman fort when Dakka became the central military base of the *Dodekaschoinos*. The interaction of the Roman military and the Egyptian temple is attested from the time of Augustus onward by numerous graffiti on the walls.<sup>52</sup> A monumental false door was located in the centre of the otherwise undecorated south exterior wall of the temple that faces north.<sup>53</sup> Behind the rear wall is the sanctuary, to which an additional entrance was cut through the false door at some later point.<sup>54</sup> Very exceptionally, this made the sanctuary accessible from the contra-temple, unless, of course, the temple was already disaffected, when the secondary entrance was created.

### *Shanhûr, Lateral Chapel*

Yet another contra-temple that should be mentioned here is the one located at the rear wall of the lateral chapel in

52 HÖLBL, *Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel*, II, p. 138.

53 HÖLBL, *Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel*, II, pp. 146–147 with fig. 214. The false door is not indicated on the plan in *PM VII* on p. 42.

54 HÖLBL, *Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel*, II, pp. 146.

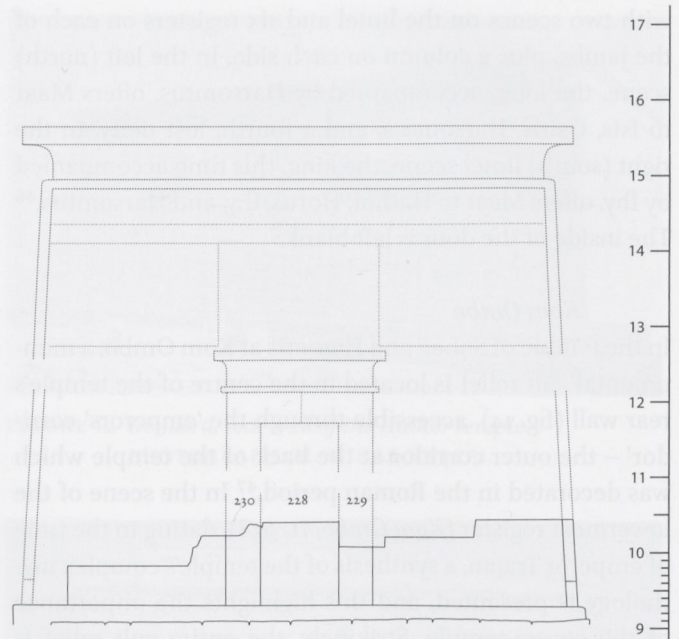


FIGURE 16 *Shanhûr, lateral chapel, plan of the north exterior wall*  
DRAWING: P. DILS

Shanhûr (see figs 2 and 16), which was built under Tiberius to the south-west of the Augustan temple.<sup>55</sup> Originally free-standing, it was connected in a later phase to the Augustan temple, probably during the reign of Nero, when a hypostyle hall with four columns was built in between them. In a final stage, during the reign of Trajan, a wide pronaos (13 × 29 m) was added in front of both the hypostyle hall and the lateral chapel.

Due to heavy limestone quarrying only the lower courses of the walls have been preserved throughout the chapel, so that most of the decoration is lost. Therefore, the exact function of the lateral chapel remains uncertain. In the *bandeau* inscriptions of the entrance, dated to the reign of Trajan, the king is said to come to Horudja on the west side (Shanhûr no. 234) and to the Great Goddess on the east side (no. 237). This is also the case in the *soubassement* of this gateway, where Trajan leads the Nile figure to Horudja (no. 233) and to the Great Goddess (no. 236) respectively. The scenes surmounting the *bandeaux* show Trajan in adoration before the Great Goddess and Horudja (nos 235 and 238).<sup>56</sup> At the time of Trajan, Horudja must thus have played a central role in the edifice, which may have been

55 C. TRAUNCKER – H. WILLEMS, 'Chenhour: Rapport des travaux de 1996 et 1997', *CRIPPEL* 19 (1998), pp. 119–122.

56 Details of the entrance to the lateral chapel and its decoration (nos. 233–238) will be published in *Shanhûr*, II.

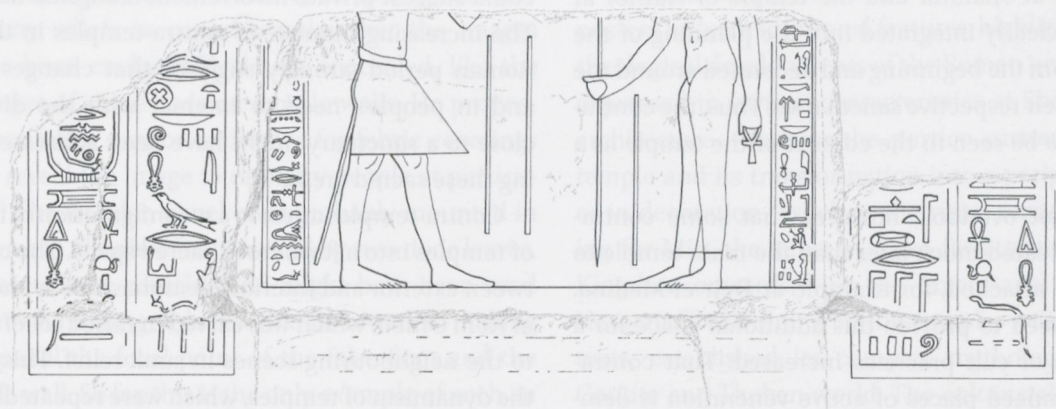


FIGURE 17 *Shanhûr*, contra-temple of the 'lateral chapel' (nos 228–30)  
DRAWING: T. L. SAGRILLO

even dedicated to the cult of this son of the Great Goddess Isis.<sup>57</sup> It is, however, not possible to determine the role of the child-god before the reign of Trajan.

The centre of the chapel's rear (north) wall was decorated with a central cult relief (no. 228, fig. 17), framed by pairs of columns of text on each side (nos 229 and 230, fig. 17). The figures are only visible from their waist down. While the offering itself in the central scene is not preserved, the texts in the framing columns suggest that an alcoholic beverage was presented to a goddess. The royal framing column attests the following: [...] *n t3 {nb} (r) 3wj=f r sb.t th t n hnw.t=f*, '[...] of the entire land in order to bring drunkenness for its lady'. The 'scene title' and the lower captions to the figure of the goddess were never carved, and the royal cartouches are lost. The divine framing column states: [...] *sh̄m hm=k m t3.wj nb.w mj sh̄m gb m p:t* '[...] may your majesty have power over the entire two lands as Geb has power over the *pat*'.

Since the cult relief of the rear wall was dedicated to a goddess, she must have been central to the chapel's theology. It is significant that Horudja is not shown here. If the chapel was dedicated to him, he would have been present. Thus, the contra-temples of both the core temple and the lateral chapel were dedicated to a goddess, possibly the same one.

### Conclusion

A short overview of contra-temples shows that they vary architecturally from rather small to monumental cult reliefs, false doors, or even edifices with several rooms. They share one characteristic, their location at the rear wall of a larger temple, mostly also the back wall of the sanctuary. At Kalabsha, the relief rather exceptionally faces the rear wall. Even if a contra-temple consisted only of a relief, possibly gilded, it was in most cases protected by a wooden shrine or some fabric.

The focus of the contra-temples was on the main deities of the principal temple it was abutted to. They thus connected with the primary cult and established a further location for cult practices, often analysed as a place that 'permitted the lay public—unable to enter the sanctum itself—close access to the god whose holy of holies was on the other side of the rear wall'.<sup>58</sup> Laroche and Traunecker demonstrate that the contra-temple of the Khonsu temple at Karnak was neither a secondary nor an annex building, but played an important role in the temple's cult.<sup>59</sup> The

57 WILLEMS – COPPENS – DE MEYER, *Shanhûr*, I, p. 5, n. 1, assumed that it could perhaps also have served as a birth house.

58 BRAND, in: *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes*, p. 61. See also D. FRANKFURTER, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998), p. 168, who connects the addition of an oracle 'chapel' to the south end of the temple at Dush (Kysis) 'at some point following the decline of its temple cult proper in the mid- or late fourth century', emphasising in rather generic terms that 'Those parts of temples' outer walls ... were commonly the location of public or popular cult, and temples like Dendera, Karnak, and Kom Ombo even carried special iconographic reliefs at this spot to focus such piety'.

59 See note 34 above.

contra-temples at Shanhûr and the temple of Hathor at Dendera were clearly integrated into the planning of the temple right from the beginning and decorated around the same time as their respective sanctuaries. Thus, the contra-temples need to be seen in the context of the temple as a whole.

One must not overlook, however, that some contra-temples were created much later than the main temple to which they are attached, for example at Deir el-Medina. Evidently the need to provide this additional space for a particular style of cult practices increased. That contra-temples were indeed places of active veneration is demonstrated by associated cult installations, including basins discovered at Shanhûr's contra-temple, which was enlarged in a second phase, further demonstrating its importance. The same is true for the contra-temple adjoining the Ptah temple at Karnak, which was extended in three stages. Other contra-temples, however, such as the one in Deir el-Shelwit, were never decorated.

The practice of establishing contra-temples goes back at least to the Eighteenth Dynasty, as attested in Karnak East. The question is, what triggered the creation of such a shrine and the additional display of cult practice there? If lay people indeed worshipped there, was their practice a form of personal piety, a feature that became more pronounced in this dynasty?<sup>60</sup> The use of contra-temples developed further in the Late Period and reached a peak in the Graeco-Roman period. These spatial developments have evident religious and perhaps societal implications, including the question of who was involved in financing contra-temples.<sup>61</sup> The cult installations in Shanhûr

could suggest private involvement alongside institutional. The increasing number of contra-temples in the Graeco-Roman period strongly suggests that changes in society and in people's need to interact with the divine world close to a sanctuary might have been addressed by creating these sacred areas.

Contra-temples attest to a reconfiguration of the exterior of temples into a formalised sacred space. The contrast between exterior and interior is emphasised by the cult relief at Kom Ombo, which was carved in raised relief in contrast to the neighbouring scenes in sunk relief. This 'highlights the dynamism of temples, which were repeatedly renegotiated and reconfigured by individuals and institutions. This renegotiation is visible in the appropriation and intensified significance of specific exterior and secondary spaces', as Elizabeth Froid puts it in her discussion of graffiti at Luxor and Karnak.<sup>62</sup> The same principles are relevant to contra-temples. They probably provided a place for prayers for those who were not allowed to enter the temple interior, so increased accessibility seems to have been a significant part of this development, but contra-temples fulfilled various functions, as the shrine in Karnak East demonstrates in particular. In this context, it is important to note that, in the Roman period, temple interiors were also, at least to a certain extent, accessible, with people having full view of what was going on in the sanctuary, as demonstrated in the temple of el-Qal'a: the three doorways on the south-north axis leading to the northern sanctuary were fitted with partial screen doors that only prohibited access, but allowed visitors to see inside.<sup>63</sup>

60 For an evaluation of personal piety see J. BAINES AND E. FROID, 'Piety, change and display in the New Kingdom', in: M. COLLIER – S. SNAPE (eds), *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K.A. Kitchen* (Bolton, 2011), pp. 1–17.

61 The wealthy elite funded not only classical-style construction in cities but also parts of some Egyptian temples. See, for example, J. MCKENZIE, *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, c. 300 BCE to CE 700* (New Haven – London, 2007), pp. 154, 162, 170; A.F. SHORE, 'Votive objects from Dendera of the Greco-Roman Period', in G.A. GABALLA – K.A. KITCHEN – J. RUFFLE (eds), *Glimpses of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honour of H.W. Fairman* (Warminster, 1979), pp. 138–160, discussed votive objects from Dendera with Greek, hieroglyphic, and Demotic inscriptions, which provide information concerning high officials of the Tentyrite nome and their contributions to the building and decoration of its principal temples in the late Ptolemaic and early Roman period. See H. KOCKELMANN – S. PFEIFFER, 'Betrachtungen zur Dedikation von Tempeln und Tempelteilen in ptolemäischer und römischer Zeit', in: R. EBERHARD – H. KOCKELMANN – S. PFEIFFER –

M. SCHENTULEIT (eds), *"... vor dem Papyrus sind alle gleich!" Papyrologische Beiträge zu Ehren von Bärbel Kramer (P. Kramer)* (APF Beiheft 27, Berlin, 2009), pp. 93–104. For the Ptolemaic period see also C. THIERS, 'Égyptiens et Grecs au service des cultes indigènes: un aspect de l'évergétisme en Égypte lagide', in M. MOLIN (ed.), *Les régulations sociales dans l'antiquité: actes du colloque d'Angers, 23 et 24 mai 2003* (Rennes, 2006), pp. 275–301; IDEM, 'Observations sur le financement des chantiers de construction des temples à l'époque ptolémaïque', in: R. PREYS (ed.), *7. Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Structuring Religion. Leuven, 28. September – 1. Oktober 2005* (Wiesbaden, 2009), pp. 241–243.

62 E. FROID, 'Egyptian Temple Graffiti and the Gods: Appropriation and Ritualization in Karnak and Luxor', in: D. RAGAVAN (ed.), *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Rituals, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World* (Oriental Institute Seminars 9, Chicago, 2013), p. 285.

63 L. PANTALACCI – C. TRAUNECKER, 'Le temple d'el-Qal'a à Coptos: état des travaux', *BIFAO* 93 (1993), pp. 380–382.

Peter Brand argues from the holes in the wall surface around many reliefs in contra-temples that the images might have been enclosed,<sup>64</sup> almost concealed, like the 'veiled' images of some gods on temple walls. He proposes that these holes supported frames for fabric coverings that could reveal the image to ordinary people at particular times.<sup>65</sup> The wooden panel once probably mounted in the false door at Shanhûr was covered by two door leaves, which protected the painting and might have been used in rituals in which the goddess would be revealed, making the cultic panel the focal point of the false door and the entire north wall. So far, this is the only example of such an arrangement in a contra-temple.<sup>66</sup>

64 BRAND, in: *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes*, pp. 60–61.

65 FROOD, in: *Heaven on Earth*, p. 290, considers the notion of veiling as anachronistic. In her view the holes rather point to different types of 'enrichment' of images, sometimes through gilding or embellishments with wood, fabric, or other materials. She also refers to the monumental Hathor head in Dendera.

66 According to DILS, *Der Tempel von Dusch*, p. 46, note 109, a wooden cultic panel was probably mounted on the rear wall of the temple at Qasr el-Zayan in the Western Desert; a chapel or false door is not discernible.

Shanhûr temple, small as it is, has proved once again to possess rather exceptional features, highlighting the active theological developments of the Roman period, which was expressed in various characteristics at Shanhûr, either in architecture—such as the portico surrounding the core temple and its transformation into a peripteral temple—or in decoration—such as the ritual scene of pole-climbing for Min, the latest of 32 so far attested from the Old Kingdom onwards,<sup>67</sup> or the exceptional *ijt*-offering for Haroeris.<sup>68</sup> Shanhûr's contra-temple, with its reliefs and texts, established its complex mythology between the Coptite and Theban world. The cult installations indicate that it was actively used, while the cult niche demonstrates that the Great Goddess Isis was venerated and that she was manifested to those who came to worship her at this place.

67 M. MINAS-NERPEL – M. DE MEYER, 'Raising the Pole for Min in the Temple of Isis at Shanhûr', *ZÄS* 140 (2013), pp. 150–166.

68 MINAS-NERPEL, in: R. JASNOW – G. WIDMER (eds), *Illuminating Osiris: Egyptological Studies in Honor of Mark Smith*, pp. 260–262.