

---

# UCLA ENCYCLOPEDIA *of* EGYPTOLOGY

---

SHRINE

الناوس

*Neal Spencer*

---

EDITORS

WILLEKE WENDRICH

Editor-in-Chief

Area Editor Material Culture

University of California, Los Angeles

JACCO DIELEMAN

Editor

University of California, Los Angeles

ELIZABETH FROOD

Editor

University of Oxford

JOHN BAINES

Senior Editorial Consultant

University of Oxford

---

Short Citation:

Spencer, 2010, Shrine. *UEE*.

Full Citation:

Spencer, Neal, 2010, Shrine. In Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles.

<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz0025k5gf>

---

1144 Version 1, September 2010

<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz0025k5gf>

## SHRINE

## الناوس

Neal Spencer

Schrein  
Portatif, naos

*Shrines, defined here as the architectural element immediately surrounding a sacred image, usually of a god, are attested throughout Pharaonic history, but with regional and chronological variations very evident. The architectural form of Egyptian shrines was developed from that of archaic "tent-shrines" made of timber and matting, but later examples represent a distillation of formal temple architecture. Eventually, classic shrine-forms were deployed in non-temple contexts.*

يُعرَّف الناوس هنا كعنصر معماري يحيط بتصوير غالباً ما يكون لإله، ويظهر الناوس عبر التاريخ الفرعوني مع وجود اختلافات زمانية ومكانية واضحة. تطور شكل الناوس المصري من شكل الناوس العتيق المسمى بالـ"الناوس الخيمة" المصنوع من الخشب والحصير، ولكن نماذج الناوس اللاحقة تجسد جوهر العمارة الرسمية للمعابد. أخيراً تطور الشكل التقليدي للناوس بسياقات غير سياقات المعبد.

**T**he focal point of most Egyptian formal religious rituals was the divine image, a physical manifestation of one or several deities, typically (but not always) in the form of a statue. Much of religious architecture served to shroud the divine image in nested layers of protection from the chaotic—and hence dangerous—outside world. It is thus unsurprising that a formal code of architectural forms was developed over the millennia to provide this protection. The present discussion addresses stand-alone shrines, whether portable or not, rather than integrated components of temple architecture such as temple sanctuaries. Evidently, this division is a modern distinction and there was much overlap between these spheres, both in terms of function and form.

### Early Shrines

The earliest iconographic representations of architectural settings for deities and royal



Figure 1. Depiction of a shrine: detail from the mudstone "Hunters Palette." Naqada III. British Museum, EA 20790.

display are on late Predynastic and Early Dynastic seals, maceheads, palettes, and decorated ceramics (fig. 1), and in the small

models found buried in deposits in and around early temples (Kemp 2006: 142 - 150). The seals and maceheads show figures within, and processions leading towards, stylized structures, seemingly built from a combination of reeds, matting, wood, and perhaps textiles. Some depictions may represent portable shrines. The forms of some of these shrines had been codified by the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty, when they were replicated in stone within the Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara (fig. 2). Reliefs from Old Kingdom pyramid-temples label these architectural forms as the *pr-nw* and *pr-wr* shrines, associated with the North and South, respectively. Many of the distinctive elements of these shrines can be found in later temple and funerary architecture, particularly the corner pillars and vaulted roof of the *pr-nw*, or the curved roof of the *pr-wr*. However, the classic form of shrine, known from the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onwards but attested in hieroglyphic and representational evidence in the Old Kingdom, is that combining torus-molding, cavetto cornice, and a flat roof, as embodied by the hieroglyphic determinative for *zh-ntr*. Other elements were combined with this form, particularly pyramidal roofs, plinths, and decorative details such as *kbeker*-friezes, uraeus-friezes, and winged sun-discs. Some shrines' ceilings were decorated with rows of vultures. Many of these "classic" shrines thus represent a distillation of formal Egyptian sacred architecture—they are effectively temples in miniature. Much of the architectural language used in shrines thus evoked imagery relating to solar religion and cosmic rebirth. These same themes are prevalent in the daily temple rituals focused around shrines.

Of course, the use of stone and metal, or solid wood construction, allowed embellishment with developed decorative schemes not possible on the archaic shrines. As early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty, a Heliopolitan shrine or chapel of Djoser bore finely carved scenes featuring divinities (Donadoni Roveri 1989: 200), but perhaps more typical is the decoration on a granite naos of Pepy I found at Elephantine. Here, the rather stark



Figure 2. Limestone dummy-building, replicating the form of archaic tent-shrines made of timber and matting. Step Pyramid complex, Saqqara, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty.

architectural form was only embellished with the royal titulary and epithets (Ricke 1960: 54, n. 18, fig. 15).

By the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, the classic forms of shrines were already a widely accepted part of formal religious imagery. Surviving royal examples are rare, but include the naos of Senusret I found at Karnak, decorated with offering scenes (Pillet 1923), and the wooden shrine found at Dahshur, which housed the *ka*-statue of pharaoh Hor of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (de Morgan 1895: 91 - 93, figs. 213 - 216). From the Middle Kingdom onwards, the same architectural forms were being employed for shrines housing private statues, some originally set up along the processional routes at sites such as Abydos (e.g., Roeder 1914: 122 - 133, pls. 40 - 43).

#### *Shrines of the New Kingdom and Later*

Abundant representational evidence survives in New Kingdom temples. The reliefs in the temple of Sety I at Abydos show a range of types, including complex groups of nested



Figure 3. Detail of decoration, showing register of divine figures, from a monolithic red granite naos of pharaoh Nakhthorheb from Bubastis, 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. British Museum, EA 1078.

shrines (Gardiner 1938: pls. 10, 13, 14, 16, 33, 41). Unusual shrines were also produced, such as the low chapels for statues set up by Ramesses II at Per-Ramesses (Myśliwiec 1978; Saleh and Sourouzian 1987: 204 - 205). Finally, the distinctive chapels for processional barks, open at either end (effectively transitory shrines), were densely decorated with ritual and processional scenes (e.g., Arnaudès-Montélimard 2003; Burgos et al. 2006). Wood and matting shelters, and perhaps textile veils stretched onto wooden frames, were another form of sacred protection, now known only from the holes drilled around certain reliefs of deities (Brand 2007: 61 - 64).

A large number of monolithic shrines, typically in hard stones such as granite, have survived from the Late Period, but it is one iconographic scheme, seemingly developed in the cult centers of the Delta, that signals a shift in function for these monuments, complementary to the core function of housing the divine image (Spencer 2006; fig.

3). This complex iconography featured registers of divine images, which embodied cosmogonical narratives particular to certain temples and must have been seen as supporting the eternal cycle of re-creation. Other monolithic shrines of the Late Period bore complex mythological narratives, representations of divine imagery from within the temple, or even astronomical information. The scale of these shrines is rather imposing: some are over 3 m in height, and at Mendes reaching 7 m, emphasizing their protective function. The term *k3r* is used to refer to shrines of this form. In some cases, the proportions of the shrine strongly suggest that the images housed within featured more than one deity (Boeser 1915: 1, pls. 1 - 5).

At Bubastis, at least twelve monolithic naoi were commissioned in the reign of pharaoh Nakhthorheb alone (Spencer 2006: 39 - 46); alas, the destruction of the building has deprived us of a clear sense of their original layout. It has been suggested that one of these shrines may have been associated with coronation rituals (Rosenow 2008). In contrast, the shrines at Mendes were provided with minimal decor yet stood facing each other in an open-air court; these truly afforded the god protection from the Delta climate (fig. 4; Hansen 1967: 7 - 9, pls. 3, 6 - 8). Monolithic naoi continued to be produced throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman eras (e.g., Rondot 1990; Thiers 1997). The podium at Elephantine supported three naoi housing stelae (Kaiser et al. 1976: 88 - 92, figs. 2 and 3). The distinctive characteristics of Pharaonic shrine architecture were also present in Meroitic temples (fig. 5).

#### *Materials and Ritual*

Building inscriptions indicate that the shrines were typically sealed with wooden doors, embellished with metal or other lavish materials. The Ritual of Mut describes the priest unbolting these doors for the morning service (Moret 1902: 31 - 48); depictions of a similar ritual survive in the temple of Sety I at Abydos (Gardiner 1935: pls. 3, 4, 13, 14, 21 - 23). We need to accept that many cult statues



Figure 4. One of the four monolithic naoi set up in the sanctuary of the temple at Mendes, inscribed for Amasis, 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.



Figure 5. Fragment from a small copper-alloy shrine found at Kawa, Meroitic Period. British Museum EA 63586.

would have been stored within shrines in a disassembled state, as some were too tall for their own shrine (e.g., Chassinat and Daumas: *Dendara II*: 56). In Papyrus Harris I, a shrine set up at Memphis is described as containing statues of Ptah, Sakhmet, and Nefertum, flanked by “statues-of-the-lord” (kings in ritual poses?) making offerings (Grandet 1994:



Figure 6. Wooden door of a shrine, inlaid with polychrome glass. The scene depicts Darius I before Anubis and Isis. Provenance unknown. 27<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. British Museum EA 37946.

287). Furthermore, that the doors of many naoi opened inwards makes it clear that the divine image would have been housed towards the rear, often in a smaller internal niche. Other shrines, even within large formal temples, would have been made of wood, sometimes elaborately painted or inlaid with glass and precious metals; some were then covered in sheet metal (fig. 6; and see, for example, Hope 1998: 829 - 837; Yoyotte 1972: pl. 19) or provided with elaborate openwork wooden or faience sides (as depicted in a papyrus in Turin: Donadoni Roveri 1989: 90). The caches from the Sacred Animal Necropolis temples at North Saqqara provide a glimpse of the range of sizes and qualities that would have existed (Insley Green 1987). Many of these shrines were destined to house copper alloy statues, dedicated by individuals, rather than principal cult images.

Some shrines were evidently intended to be portable, most notably for use in processional temple festivals. The extensive representational evidence relating to Theban festivals includes depictions of the large sacred bark of Amun, which supported a



Figure 7. Naophorous statue featuring an archaic shrine-form combined with pyramidal roof; held by Overseer of Priests Wahibra. Sais, 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 672.



Figure 8. Faience sistrum in the form of Hathor-head, topped with shrine façade featuring cavetto cornice, torus moulding, and battered walls. 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Said to be from Bubastis. British Museum EA 38173.

shrine (or even nested shrines) on its deck, also festooned with dozens of figures of officiants, royalty, and even deities in ritual poses. In some depictions the shrine seems to be quite exposed, with only a textile veil occasionally depicted to shroud the divine image (also at Abydos: Gardiner 1935: pl. 5). Of course, shrines for royal display are well attested for royal festivals such as the *Heb-Sed*, with representations of architectural forms similar to those attested for the shrines of deities.

The architectural language of shrines also appears in other aspects of Egyptian material culture. In addition to the integration of shrine representations in naophorous statuary (fig. 7), objects from the funerary sphere echoed the form—notably some coffins and sarcophagi, shabti boxes, canopic chests, and animal coffins. Pectorals and sistra of the Late Period could also incorporate shrine forms (fig. 8). Miniature shrines, in stone, copper



Figure 9. Miniature copper-alloy model of shrine with figure of Amun-Ra, inscribed for King Djehutyemhat. Late Third Intermediate Period. British Museum EA 11015.

alloy, and other materials, faithfully represent the key architectural components of the classic shrines. Those with suspension loops must have been attached to walls in temples or houses, as they are too heavy to wear about the neck (fig. 9).

The smallest shrines could evidently be the product of a single artisan, but in the case of the larger decorated naoi, a skilled team of craftsmen would have been required. The

quarrying of the stone and initial sculpting into a recognizable shrine-form prior to transport are attested at a quarry in the Eastern Desert (Harrell 2002). Proportional drawings for naoi have survived, particularly for wooden shrines (Donadoni Roveri 1989: 90; Tait 2004). In many cases, the final decoration must have been completed in the dark interior of the temple sanctuaries in which the naoi were set up.

### *Bibliographic Notes*

An in-depth study of shrine function, architecture, iconography, and lexicography, has yet to be undertaken; the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* covers certain aspects (e.g., vol. IV: columns 341 – 342, 932 – 936; vol. V: columns 709 - 712). The Egyptologist thus relies on published photographs of individual monuments housed in museums or discovered in excavations; rarely do these publications feature accurate architectural drawings. The most comprehensive museum collection is in Cairo (Roeder 1914). Elephantine is unusual in the preservation of three contemporary naoi in one temple, found almost in situ (Niederberger 1999: 86 - 91). For a discussion of the distinctive Late Period naoi, see Spencer (2006); Thiers provides a list of royal monolithic naoi across all periods (1997: 259 - 265).

### *References*

- Arnaudière-Montélimard, Emmanuelle  
2003 Un reposoir de barque en calcite édifié par Thoutmosis III dans le temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak. *Les Cahiers de Karnak* 11, pp. 159 - 234.
- Boeser, Pieter A. A.  
1915 *Beschreibung der ägyptischen Sammlung des niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden 7: Die Denkmäler der saïtischen, griechisch-römischen, und koptischen Zeit*. M. Nijhoff: The Hague.
- Brand, Peter  
2007 Veils, votives, and marginalia: The use of sacred space at Karnak and Luxor. In *Sacred space and sacred function in ancient Thebes*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 61, ed. Peter Dorman, and Betsy Bryan, pp. 51 - 83. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Burgos, Franck, François Larché, and Nicolas Grimal  
2006 *La chapelle rouge: Le sanctuaire de barque d'Hatshepsout, Vol. I: Fac-similés et photographies des scènes*. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations.
- Chassinat, Émile, and François Daumas  
1934- *Le temple de Dendara*. 12 volumes (*Dendara I - XII*: 1934 - 2007). Cairo: Institut d'archéologie orientale. (Volumes XI and XII by Sylvie Cauville.)
- Donadoni Roveri, Anna Maria  
1989 *Egyptian civilization III: Monumental art*. Milan: Electa; Turin: Istituto Bancario San Paolo.
- Gardiner, Alan  
1935 *The temple of King Setbos I at Abydos II: The chapels of Amen-Re, Re-Harakhti, Ptah and King Setbos*. London: The Egypt Exploration Society; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

- 1938 *The temple of King Sethos I at Abydos III: The Osiris complex*. London: The Egypt Exploration Society; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.
- Grandet, Pierre  
1994 *Le Papyrus Harris I: BM 9999*. Bibliothèque d'étude 109. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.
- Hansen, Donald P.  
1967 The excavations at Tell er-Rub'a. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 6, pp. 5 - 15.
- Harrell, James  
2002 Pharaonic stone quarries in the Egyptian deserts. In *Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the desert*, ed. Renée Friedman, pp. 232 - 243. London: British Museum Press.
- Helck, Wolfgang, and Wolfhart Westendorf (eds.)  
1982 *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Vol. IV. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.  
1984 *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Vol. V. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Hope, Colin  
1998 Objects from the Temple of Tutu. In *Egyptian religion: The last thousand years: Studies dedicated to the memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, Vol. 2, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 85, ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, and Harco Willems, pp. 803 - 858. Leuven: Peeters.
- Insley Green, Christine  
1987 *The temple furniture from the sacred animal necropolis at North Saqqâra, 1964 - 1976*. Egypt Exploration Society Excavation Memoir 53. London: Egypt Exploration Society.
- Kaiser, Werner, Günter Dreyer, Robert Gempeler, Peter Grossmann, Gerhard Haeny, Horst Jaritz, and Friedrich Junge  
1976 Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine: Sechster Grabungsbericht. *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 32, pp. 67 - 112.
- Kemp, Barry  
2006 *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a civilization*. 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge. (1st edition published 1989.)
- Moret, Alexandre  
1902 *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte, d'après les papyrus de Berlin et les textes du temple de Sêti 1er, à Abydos*. Paris: E. Leroux.
- Morgan, Jacques de  
1895 *Fouilles à Dabchour: Mars - Juin 1894*. Vienna.
- Myśliwiec, Karol  
1978 La naos de Pithom. *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 78, pp. 171 - 195.
- Niederberger, Walter  
1999 *Elephantine XX: Der Chnumtempel Nektanebos' II: Architektur und baugeschichtliche Einordnung*. Archäologische Veröffentlichungen, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo 96. Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern.
- Pillet, Maurice  
1923 Le naos de Senouset I. *Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 23, pp. 143 - 158.
- Ricke, Herbert  
1960 *Die Tempel Nektanebos' II in Elephantine und ihre Erweiterungen*. Beiträge zur ägyptischen Bauforschung und Altertumskunde 6. Cairo: Schweizerisches Institut für Ägyptische Bauforschung und Altertumskunde in Kairo.
- Roeder, Günther  
1914 *Naos*. Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Nos 70001 - 70050. Leipzig: W. Drugulin.

Rondot, Vincent

1990 Le naos de Domitien, Toutou et les sept flèches. *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 90, pp. 303 - 337.

Rosenow, Daniela

2008 The naos of "Bastet, Lady of the Shrine" from Bubastis. *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 94, pp. 247 - 266.

Saleh, Mohamed, and Hourig Sourouzian

1987 *The Egyptian Museum Cairo: Official catalogue*. Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern.

Spencer, Neal

2006 *A naos of Nekhthorheb from Bubastis: Religious iconography and temple building in the 30th Dynasty*. British Museum Research Publication 156. London: British Museum. (With a contribution by Daniela Rosenow.)

Tait, John

2004 A papyrus bearing a shrine plan and a *Book of the Dead*. In *Res severa verum gaudium: Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich zum 65. Geburtstag am 8. Juni 2004*, *Studia Demotica* 6, ed. Friedhelm Hoffmann, and Heinz-Josef Thissen, pp. 573 - 582. Leuven: Peeters.

Thiers, Christophe

1997 Un naos de Ptolémée II Philadelphie consacré à Sokar. *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 97, pp. 253 - 268.

Yoyotte, Jean

1972 Pétoubastis III. *Revue d'Égyptologie* 24, pp. 216 - 223.

## Image Credits

Figure 1. Depiction of a shrine: detail from the mudstone "Hunters Palette." Naqada III. British Museum, EA 20790. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 2. Limestone dummy-building, replicating the form of archaic tent-shrines made of timber and matting. Step Pyramid complex, Saqqara, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty. Photograph by the author.

Figure 3. Detail of decoration, showing register of divine figures, from a monolithic red granite naos of pharaoh Nakhthorheb from Bubastis, 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. British Museum, EA 1078. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 4. One of the four monolithic naoi set up in the sanctuary of the temple at Mendes, inscribed for Amasis, 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Photograph by Jeffrey Spencer.

Figure 5. Fragment from a small copper-alloy shrine found at Kawa, Meroitic Period. British Museum EA 63586. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 6. Wooden door of a shrine, inlaid with polychrome glass. The scene depicts Darius I before Anubis and Isis. Provenance unknown. 27<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. British Museum EA 37946. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 7. Naophorous statue featuring an archaic shrine-form combined with pyramidal roof; held by Overseer of Priests Wahibra. Sais, 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 672. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Figure 8. Faience sistrum in the form of Hathor-head, topped with shrine façade featuring cavetto cornice, torus moulding, and battered walls. 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Said to be from Bubastis. British Museum EA 38173. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 9. Miniature copper-alloy model of shrine with figure of Amun-Ra, inscribed for King Djehutyemhat. Late Third Intermediate Period. British Museum EA 11015. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.