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THE TEMPLE OF ESNA NORTH

معبد إسنا الشمالي

Jochen Hallof

Der Tempel von Esna Nord


Le temple d'Esna nord

The temple at Esna North was the main temple of the local deity Khnum-Ra, Lord of the Field (Hnmw-R^c nb sht). Its ancient name was Pr-Hnmw-n-sht. Only little information about this temple is available, because the building, first seen and described by Claude Sicard in 1718, was demolished shortly after a visit by Jean François Champollion in 1829. The temple consisted of a hypostyle hall and adjacent undecorated chambers. It can be regarded as a smaller copy of the Temple of Esna. Like its model, the hypostyle hall was decorated with an astronomical ceiling, and the outer walls of the hypostyle hall showed the king smiting enemies. The temple of Esna North was erected and decorated in Ptolemaic and Roman times.

كان معبد إسنا الشمالي هو المعبد الرئيسي للمعبود المحلي خنوم رع سيد الحقل (عنمو-رع نب سخت). كان اسمه القديم بر- عنمون-سخت. أول من رأى ووصف هذا المعبد كان كلود سيكار وذلك عام 1718، ولكن لا يعرف سوى القليل عن هذا المعبد بسبب هدمه بعدما زاره جون فرانسوا شامبليون عام 1829. تكون المعبد من صالة أعمدة وحجرات مجاورة خالية من النقوش، ويمكن إعتباره نسخة مصغرة من معبد إسنا. مثل للنموذج الأصلي، زين سقف صالة الأعمدة منظر فلكي، وصورت النقوش على الجدران الخارجية لصالة الأعمدة الملك وهو يضرب الأعداء. لقد شيد وزين معبد إسنا الشمالي بالعصور البطلمية والرومانية.


The temple of Esna North was situated on the west bank of the Nile; according to Arnold (1992: 106), 3.7 km north of the main Temple of Esna. Serge Sauneron (1959: 29) gives a slightly different distance of about 5 km northwest of Esna. The site is known as Ed-Deir or Ed-Deyr (“the Convent”), a name given to many ancient temples in Egypt (Lane 2000: 393). Sauneron (1962: 316 and especially note 1) ascertained it as *Pr-Hnmw (n sht)*, the main temple of Khnum-Ra, Lord of the Field (*Hnmw-R^c nb sht*), a local ram-headed deity identified with Shu. By doing so, he rejects his earlier identification of the temple of Ed-Deir with *Pr-ntr* (as given in Sauneron

1959: 28 - 29). This temple is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Temple of Esna as the northern sanctuary in the area around Esna. Its ancient Egyptian name is

 *Pr-Hnmw-n-sht* (Esna 196,1; alternative spelling

 Esna 81,2, abbreviated

as  *Pr-Hnmw* Esna 478,14; and

 Esna 530,8). Early travelers were able to see the almost completely preserved temple. Today nothing remains of this building, which was orientated towards the east, that is, towards the Nile. The function of

the sanctuary of *Pr-Hnmw* is explained by the etiologic texts Esna 81 and Esna 196. Together with the sanctuary of *Pr-ntr*, it formed the abaton of Esna, where the deceased deities were buried and worshiped.

History of the Site

All our knowledge about the temple of Esna North comes from travel reports from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*PM IV*: 118; as well as some recently published travel reports, see *Bibliographic Notes* below). The earliest report was written by Claude Sicard, who visited the site on May 31, 1718, and a second time on December 28, 1720 (Sicard 1982: 79 - 81). His description is confirmed by the recently published diary of his companion Pietro Lorenzo Pincia (1998: 146). Older than these written reports is a drawing found among the correspondence of the famous universal scholar Athanasius Kircher (1602 - 1680, see Beinlich et al. 2002), which depicts four offering scenes and some details of the temple's astronomical ceiling (Hallof 2008).

According to the travel reports, the temple of Esna North and its history can be reconstructed as follows. The temple consisted of a hypostyle hall, supported by four columns and four half-columns. The whole hypostyle hall and all the columns and half-columns were covered with hieroglyphs. Behind the hypostyle hall were six rooms. They were undecorated except for the winged disk in the lintels of the doors. Sicard and Pincia found the temple of Esna North in a more or less complete state of preservation. When Dominique Vivant Denon and the members of Napoleon's expedition visited the temple in 1799, two of the front row columns and the front wall itself had collapsed because of the insufficient foundation of this part of the building. The *Description* contains a ground plan and view of the temple (figs. 1 and 2; Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 84.2 and 85.1). Moreover, due to the activities of a certain Hassan Bey, who was looking for buried treasures, the sanctuary and the rooms at the back were demolished as well (Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 84.2). Some thirty years later,

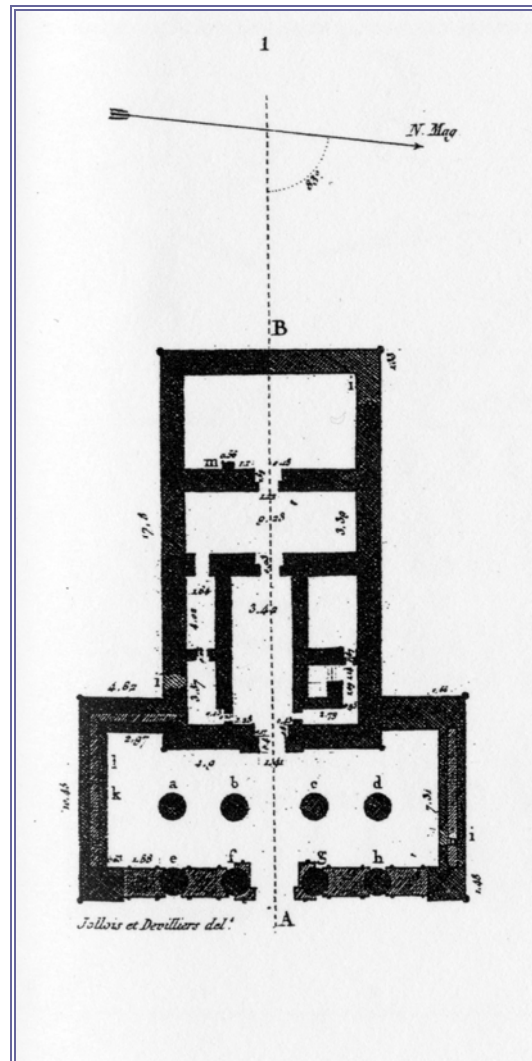


Figure 1. Ground plan of the temple of Esna North.

Edward William Lane witnessed the further dismantling of the temple. On May 10, 1826, he noted: "I found there about twenty labourers, who had been pulling down a part of the temple, to employ the materials in constructing a bridge over a neighbouring canal: they had just completed their work, and were carrying away the stones" (Lane 2000: 393). When Jean François Champollion visited this building on March 6, 1829, the only remains of the once complete temple were one single column and a small part of a wall (Champollion 1833: 204). Some time later, this last evidence of the small temple disappeared forever.

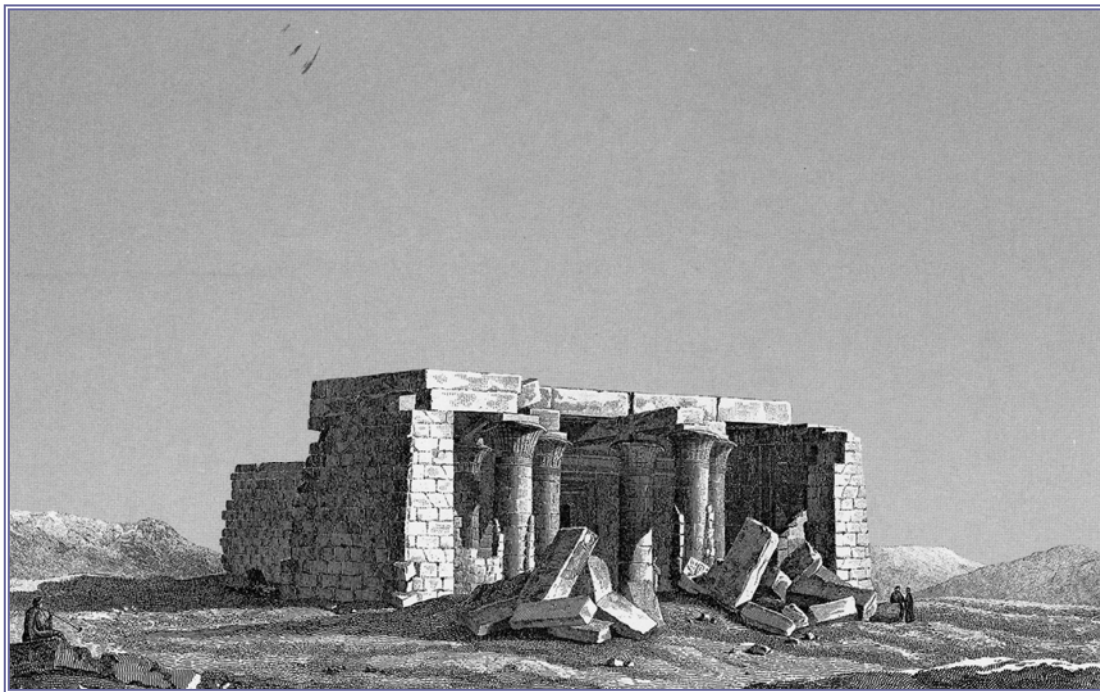


Figure 2. View of the temple of Esna North in the late eighteenth century.

Description of the Temple

This description is a compilation of different travel reports, the sources for which are listed in the references below or come from archival materials used by Porter and Moss (*PM VI*: 118). Among the parts of the temple, the decoration of the hypostyle hall and its columns and the representations of the outer wall attracted the interest of the visitors the most. The hypostyle hall and the columns were entirely decorated with offering scenes, some of which still had the original colors. Only six offering scenes were described or drawn by Champollion and the members of the Franco-Tuscan expedition. They show different pharaohs before the more or less same deities as in the Temple of Esna itself (Khnum-Ra, Nebet-uu, Neith, Heka, Seshat, and Thoth). From two sources (Champollion 1833, and Bankes cartouches, see *PM VI*: 118), the names of Ptolemy III, Ptolemy V, Ptolemy VI, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Lucius Verus are known.

The colored roof of the hypostyle hall attracted the special attention of all the visitors. It was decorated with the zodiac

(Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 87). Other motifs mentioned were different boats, one of them being towed by three jackals (Hallof 2008). In the center of the roof, a procession of 30 deities, 15 on each side, was worshipping a Nile perch (*Lates niloticus*; Egyptian name *ḥꜥ*) swimming in a kind of basin (Sicard 1982) or—more likely—surrounded by a sun disk (Pincia 1998). Nearly all of the visitors mentioned the brilliant colors, which were surprisingly well preserved. The columns were decorated with different capitals, most of them were drawn by the artists of the *Description* (Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 86).

On the outer wall, pharaoh Ptolemy III was depicted, smiting enemies before Khnum and Menhyt (as described by Otto Friedrich von Richter, see Hinkel 2002). The names of the enemies, among them Armenia, Persia, Thrace, and Macedonia, were engraved on their bound bodies. This scene and its placement are identical with scene Esna 570 (Sauneron 2009).

In summary, the temple of Esna North can be regarded as a smaller copy of the Temple of Esna itself.

Bibliographic Notes

Several reports from early travelers, such as Lane, Parthey (1840), Pincia, Richter, Sicard, and Uxkull provide extremely important information. Many have been (re-)published recently by Thompson, Hinkel, Sauneron, and Martin, e.g., Lane (2000 edited by Thompson), Pincia (1998), Hinkel (2002, for the reports of von Richter and Uxkull), and Sicard (1982, with notes by Sauneron and Martin). For the publication of the texts of the Temple of Esna, see Sauneron (1963, 1968, 1969, 1975, 2009). Texts Esna 81 and 196 are translated in Sauneron (1962: 317 - 319) and Sternberg (1985: 86 - 87, 89 - 90, note r and 106).

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Figure 1. Ground plan of the temple of Esna North. (Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 85.1.)

Figure 2. View of the temple of Esna North in the late eighteenth century. (Aufrère 2001, Vol. I: pl. 84.2.)