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Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt

This book is a vivid reconstruction of the practical aspects of ancient Egyptian religion. Through an examination of artifacts and inscriptions, the text explores a variety of issues. For example, who was allowed to enter the temples, and what rituals were performed therein? Who served as priests? How were they organized and trained, and what did they do? What was the Egyptians' attitude toward death, and what happened at funerals? How did the living and the dead communicate? In what ways could people communicate with the gods? What impact did religion have on the economy and longevity of the society? This book demystifies Egyptian religion, exploring what it meant to the people and society. The text is richly illustrated with images of rituals and religious objects.

Emily Teeter, PhD, is a Research Associate and Coordinator of Special Exhibits at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. She has curated temporary and permanent exhibits of Egyptian art at the Oriental Institute Museum, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago. The author and co-author of a wide range of popular and scholarly publications, her most recent books include *Ancient Egypt: Treasures from the Collection of the Oriental Institute*, *Egypt and the Egyptians*, and *The Life of Meresamun: A Temple Singer in Ancient Egypt*.

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Contents

<i>List of Maps, Plans, and Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Color Plates</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Chronology of Ancient Egypt</i>	xv
Introduction	1
1 The Egyptian Mind	3
2 Priests	16
Types of Priests and Their Duties	19
Priestesses	27
Becoming a Priest	28
Purity and the Priesthood	32
Organization of Priests	35
Remuneration of Priests	36
3 Inside the Temple: The World of the Gods	39
The Care and Feeding of the God	41
The Daily Offering Ritual	46
The King's Offering Cult	51
Knowledge of Temple Ritual	51
What Happened to the Cult Statues?	53
4 Festivals	56
Festivals of Osiris	58
Feast of the Valley	66
The Festival of Amunhotep I	73

5	Contacting the Gods	76
	Places of Prayer	77
	Outside the Temple	84
	Votive Offerings	87
	Statue Cults	92
	Intercessory Statues	96
	Trances and Dreams as a Means of Contacting the Gods	101
	Self-Dedication to the God(s)	102
6	In the Presence of the Gods: How the Gods	
	Communicated with Men	104
	Controlled Contact with the Gods	105
	Uncontrolled Contact with the Gods	112
	Seeking Protection from the Gods	115
7	Death and Funeral Rites	119
	The Egyptian Attitude Toward Death	119
	Building the Tomb	121
	Provisioning the Dead	128
	Preparing the Mummy	132
	The Funeral	137
8	Communicating with the Dead	148
	<i>Akb</i> Spirits	148
	Letters to the Dead	153
	Dreams and Nightmares	158
9	Magic to Charm and to Kill	161
	Toward a Definition of Magic in Ancient Egypt	161
	Who Were the Magicians?	163
	Evidence for Magical Practices	165
	Spells of Protection	167
	Magic to Cure	171
	Spells to Maim and Kill	177
10	The Amarna Period: Practical Aspects of "Monotheism"	182
	The Nature of the Aten and the Rise of the God	184
	Impact of the New Theology	188
	The Conception of the Afterlife in the Amarna Period	190

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84855-8 - Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt
Emily Teeter
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Impact of the New Religion on Society	193
What Did the Amarna Theology Offer the People?	194
Conclusion	196
Afterword: An Appraisal of Egyptian Religion	197
<i>Notes</i>	201
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	219

List of Maps, Plans, and Figures

Maps

1	Egypt	<i>page</i> xix
2	Thebes	xx

Plans

1	The Karnak Temple	xxi
2	The Luxor Temple	xxii
3	Medinet Habu	xxiii

Figures

1	Aerial view of the necropolis in western Thebes	5
2	King Senwosert III	6
3	Statue of Nenkhefetka and his wife, Nefershemes	7
4	The sun (Atum) in the form of a ram	10
5	The vault of the sky represented as the goddess Nut	11
6	Ramesses IV offering a tray of food and four trussed cows to the god Khonsu	18
7	Procession of anonymous priests carrying shrines	19
8	Scene from the tomb of Khons showing him acting as a priest	20
9	Two <i>hem ka</i> (<i>ka</i> priests)	23
10	Priests performing the Opening of the Mouth ritual	24
11	The God's Wife Amunirdis embracing Amun	29
12	A priest of Hathor, Basa	30

13	Doorway at the Temple of Amun at Karnak with inscription that all who entered must be "four times pure"	33
14	Signs that identify each of the groups (phyles) of priests who worked in rotation in the temples	36
15	Aerial view of granaries surrounding the Ramesseum in western Thebes	37
16	Wall at Karnak covered with scenes of King Ramesses II making offerings to various deities	40
17	The corridor surrounding the sanctuary at the Edfu Temple	42
18	Scene from the daily offering ritual in the Second Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Seti I at Abydos	46
19	Temple to the Aten at the city of Akhetaten	49
20	Procession of sacred boats	50
21	Relief in the chapel on the roof of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera recounting the "script" of the festival of Osiris in the month of Khoiak	59
22	Osiris, on his funerary bier, impregnating his wife, Isis	60
23	A corn mummy	63
24	The Osiris catacombs at East Karnak	64
25	Bronze Osiris figurines deposited in the "Osiris Grave" at Medinet Habu	65
26	Brick representing the sarcophagus of the god Osiris	66
27	View of the three temples at Deir el Bahri	69
28	Triple shrine of Seti II at the Karnak Temple	78
29	Relief of Ramesses II surrounded by holes that supported a covering	79
30	Alabaster (calcite) "shrine of the hearing ear" at Karnak	80
31	The Temple of "Amun Who Hears Petitions" at East Karnak	81
32	Scene on the High Gate at Medinet Habu showing Ptah "Who Hears Petitions" and Sekhmet inside a shrine	82
33	Exterior back wall of the temple at Kom Ombo decorated with the ears of the god	83
34	Stela incised with the ears of the god who would hear petitions	84
35	Stela showing the god Amun standing before a shrine that contains statues of Ptah and Ramesses II	85
36	Shrine to Meretseger	86
37	Votive stela in honor of Meretseger	87

38	Baked clay figurines in the form of women	88
39	Statue of Peraha with his hand to his mouth in a gesture of begging for offerings	97
40	Statuette of Imhotep	98
41	Statues of Amunhotep Son of Hapu in the guise of a scribe	99
42	Scene of a procession during the Opet Festival	106
43	Veiled shrine of a god	107
44	Flake of pottery (ostrakon) inscribed with an oracle text	108
45	Falcon that may have been used as an oracle	110
46	Papyrus inscribed with an oracular decree from the goddess Nekhbet	116
47	Baked clay votive offering in the form of a woman's vulva	117
48	Diagram of a tomb with chapel and subterranean burial chamber	124
49	Magic brick made of mud with remains of a figure of a recumbent jackal	125
50	Fragment of a curse	126
51	Interior of the wood coffin of Ipi-ha-ishutef	127
52	Group of statues that represent the deceased's family and house workers	130
53	Mummiform statue (shabti) of Hedj-renpet	133
54	Materials from an embalmer's workshop	136
55	Limestone label used to identify a mummy in an embalmer's workshop	137
56	Nephthys and Isis, the sisters of Osiris, in the form of winged goddesses	140
57	The Nine Friends dragging the sarcophagus to the tomb	141
58	A group of female professional mourners	142
59	Anubis, the guardian of the necropolis, embracing the coffin of the priest Ramose on the day of his burial	143
60	Clay mask in the form of the head of Anubis	144
61	<i>Muu</i> dancers who impersonated people of the marshes at funerals	145
62	The ceremony of breaking red pots	146
63	An <i>akh iker n Re</i> stela	151
64	Limestone bust representing an <i>akh iker n Re</i>	152

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-84855-8 - Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt
Emily Teeter
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

65	Line drawing of a stela showing a woman pouring an offering before an <i>akh</i> bust	153
66	A letter to the dead written on a jar stand	154
67	Wood figurine of an enemy, his arms bound behind him	159
68	Wood statue from the "magician's box" from the Ramesseum	168
69	Section of a bronze snake wand	169
70	Section of a magic wand	170
71	Painted fabric mask of Bes or his female counterpart, Beset	171
72	Ivory wand	172
73	Clay statue of Bes	173
74	Section of a Book of the Dead with instructions about the manufacture of amulets	174
75	Cippus (healing statue)	175
76	The Metternich Stela	176
77	Akhenaten	183
78	The Temple to the Aten at East Karnak	185
79	Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their daughters under the rays of the Aten	188
80	Scene of Akhenaten and Nefertiti awarding gold collars	192

List of Color Plates

Plates follow page xxiv.

- I Stele of the nobleman Uha
- II Scenes of craftsmen depicted in the tomb of the noblemen Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181)
- III Mery, a temple singer of Amun. Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96)
- IV Reconstruction of the façade of the Temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu
- V Reconstruction of the sanctuary of the Luxor Temple
- VI Silver statue of a falcon-headed god, possibly a cult statue
- VII Nakhtamun and his wife pray to Hathor. Tomb of Nakhtamun at Thebes (TT 341)
- VIII Procession during the Beautiful Feast of the Valley
- IX Men celebrating the Beautiful Feast of the Valley
- X The presentation of a floral *ankh* bouquet to the nose of the deceased. Tomb of Paury (TT 139)
- XI Reconstruction of the front of a votive bed
- XII Mummy of an ibis in geometric linen wrappings
- XIII Set of coffins
- XIV Model workshop
- XV Stages in the mummification process as shown on a coffin
- XVI Scene of a funeral procession. Tomb of Roy at Thebes (TT 255)
- XVII A *tekenu* bundle. Tomb of Nebamun (TT 17)
- XVIII Akhenaten as a sphinx in the rays of the Aten

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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Chronology of Ancient Egypt

The history of ancient Egypt is divided into thirty-one dynasties. The individual dynasties are grouped into three kingdoms, separated by intermediate periods. A Predynastic Period preceded Dynasty 1. The division of Egypt's history into dynasties was devised by Manetho, a third-century BC priest-historian. In many cases, the divisions between dynasties are arbitrary. This chronology is based primarily on Shaw 2000.

All dates prior to 664 BC are approximate.

Early Dynastic Period (Archaic Period): Dynasties 1–2 3100–2686 BC

Consolidation of the Egyptian state.

Old Kingdom: Dynasties 3–8 2686–2125 BC

Dynasty 3: 2686–2613 BC. First large-scale stone funerary monuments for kings and stone mastaba tombs for nobility.

Dynasty 4: 2613–2498 BC. Construction of pyramids in Lower Egypt. Increase in documentation for religion and culture through wall reliefs and written texts.

Dynasty 5: 2497–2345 BC. Appearance of Pyramid Texts that explicate the king's afterlife. Elaboration of private tombs, wall reliefs, and tomb furnishings.

Dynasty 6: 2345–2181 BC. Height of Old Kingdom tomb decoration.

Dynasties 7–8: 2181–2160 BC. Many ephemeral rulers.

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 Emily Teeter
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[More information](#)

First Intermediate Period: Dynasties 9–11 2160–2055 BC

Fragmentation of the state and the rise of local power centers.

Middle Kingdom: Dynasties 11–14 2055–1650 BC

Dynasty 12: 1985–1773 BC. Rise of the god Amun at Thebes.

Second Intermediate Period: Dynasties 15–17 1650–1550 BC

Incursion of people from western Asia into Lower Egypt.

The New Kingdom: Dynasties 18–20 1550–1069 BC

The “Golden Age” of ancient Egypt; foreign conquest and great building projects in Egypt and Nubia. Detailed documentation of religious and funerary beliefs in decorated tombs, papyri, and funerary objects.

Dynasty 18: 1550–1295 BC. Period of great building and expansion of the temples in Thebes. Expansion of the Karnak Temple, construction of the temples at Deir el Bahri, the core of the Luxor Temple, the Small Amun Temple at Medinet Habu, and the Aten temples of Amunhotep IV/Akhenaton. Establishment of royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens.

Dynasty 19: 1295–1186 BC. Expansion of the Karnak and Luxor Temples; construction of the Ramesseum (Ramesses II).

Dynasty 20: 1186–1069 BC. Construction of Medinet Habu (Ramesses III). Last period to use the Valley of the Kings as a royal cemetery.

Third Intermediate Period: Dynasties 21–25 1069–664 BC

Period of political decentralization of the country. During Dynasty 25, Egypt was ruled by Nubian kings. Period of fine coffins, elaborate mummification procedures, mythological papyri, and rise of animal cults.

Saite Period: Dynasty 26
664–525 BC

Period of renaissance in arts and building; construction of large private tombs at Thebes.

Late Period: Dynasties 27–31
525–332 BC

Period of native rule interrupted by two Persian dominations.

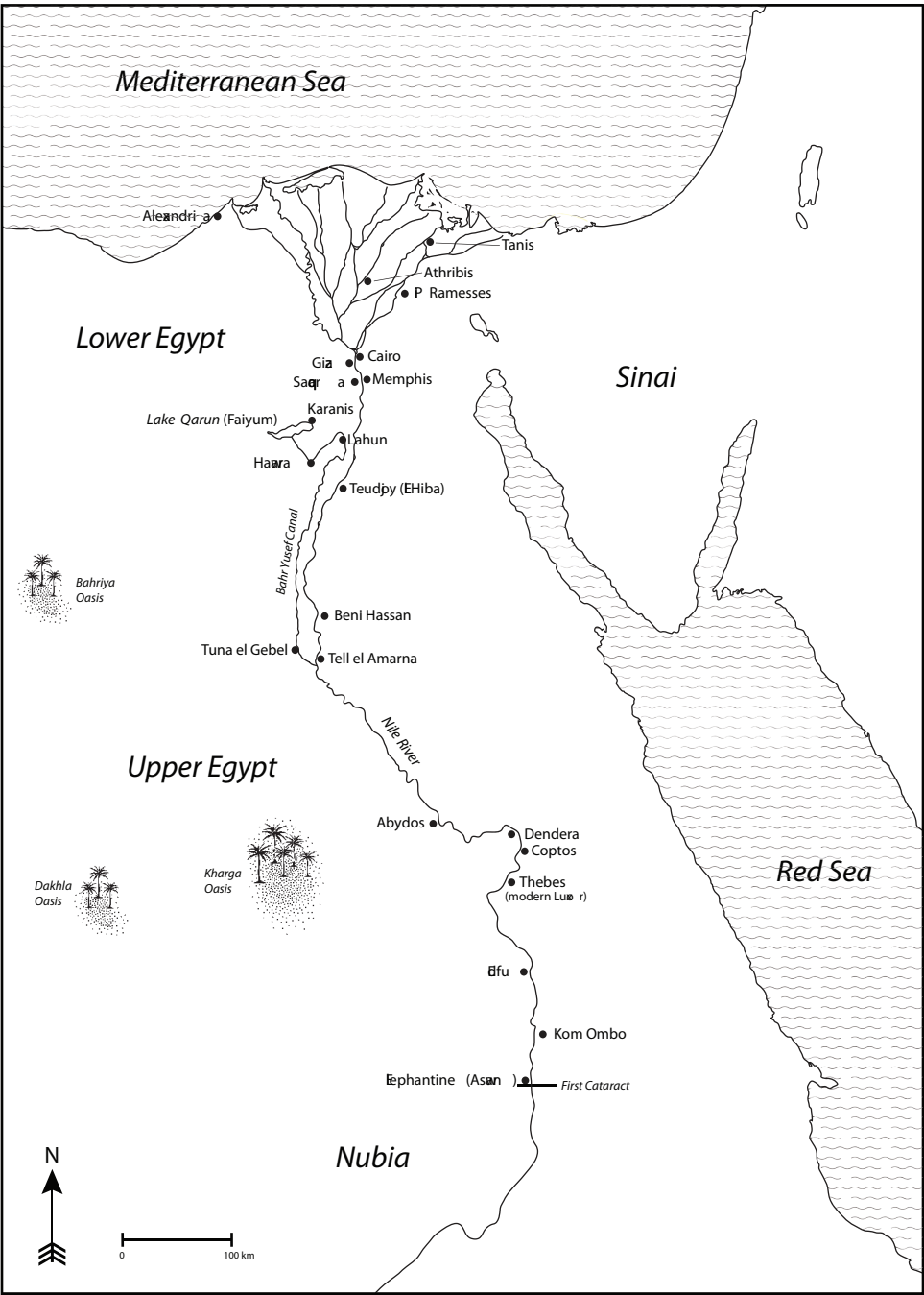
Ptolemaic Period
332–30 BC

Following the death of Alexander the Great, Egypt was deeded to his general Ptolemy after whom the Greek period in Egypt is named. Continuation of most religious traditions.

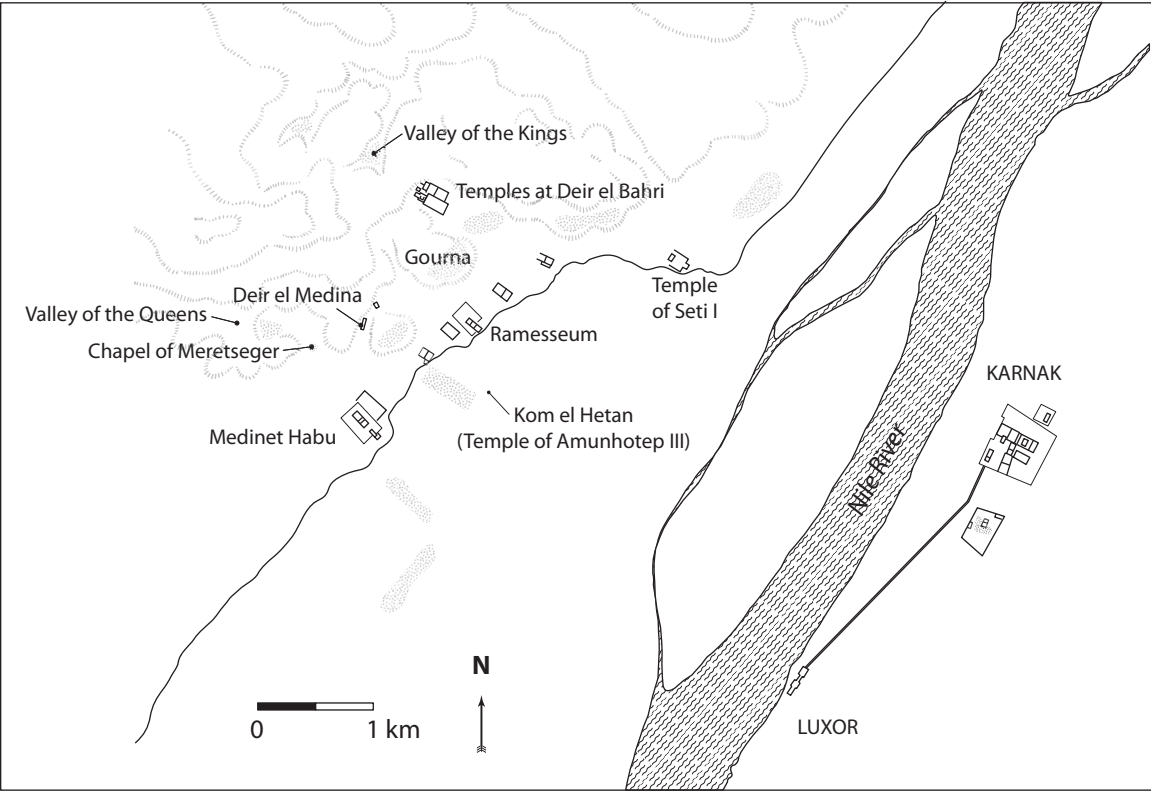
Roman Period
30 BC–AD 395

With Octavian's defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Egypt was annexed to the Roman Empire.

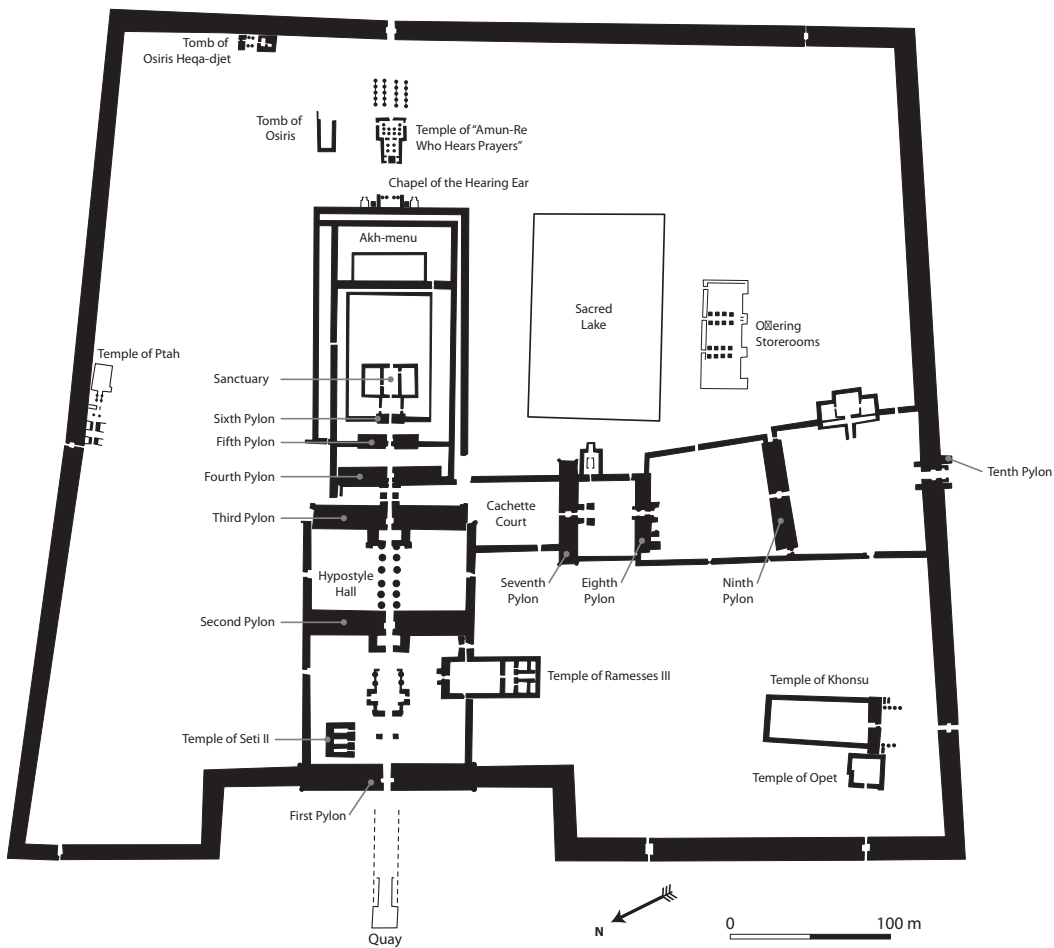
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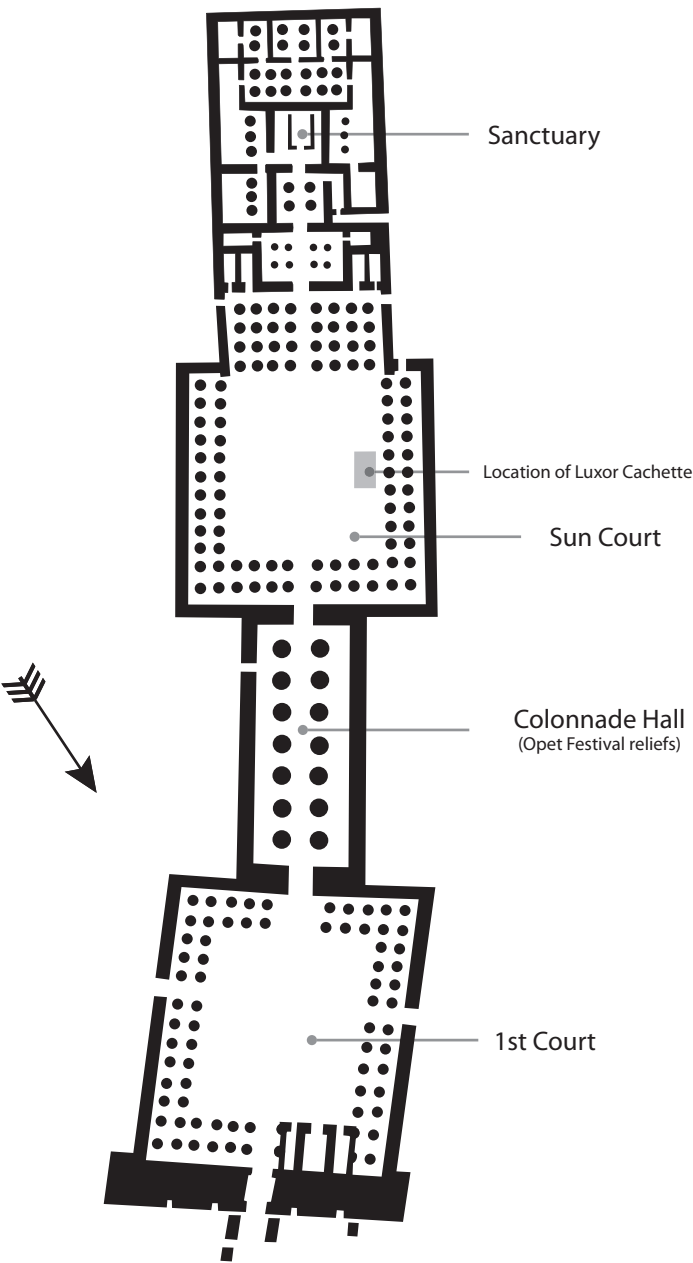
Map 1. Egypt



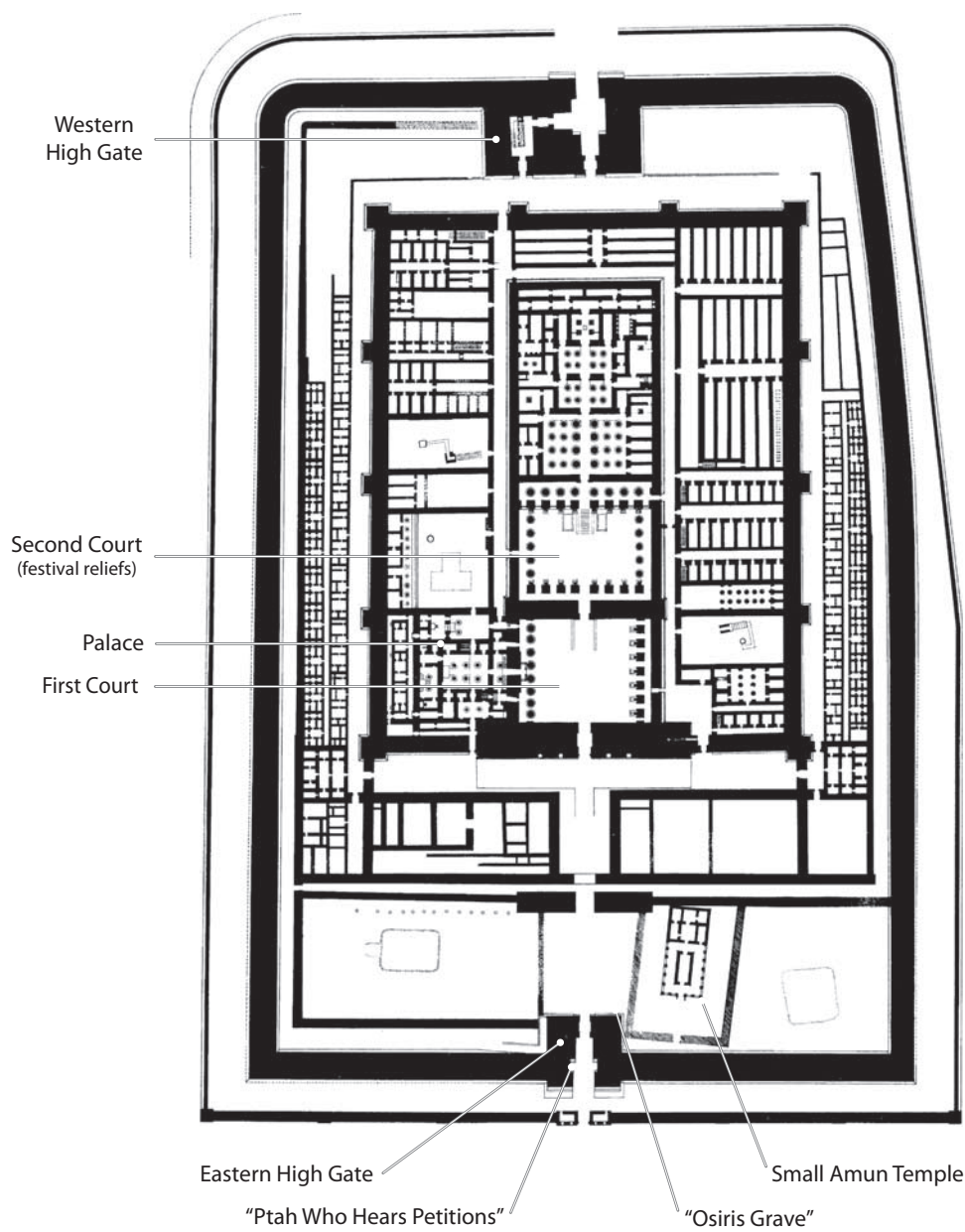
Map 2. Thebes



Plan 1. The Karnak Temple



Plan 2. The Luxor Temple



Plan 3. Medinet Habu