
**REUSED CHAPELS IN THE THIRD PYLON AT KARNAK
TEMPLES
BY AMENHOTEP III**

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ABSTRACT

The ancient Egyptians, despite their deep respect for their rich history, readily dismantled predecessors' constructions for personal interests. Reusing building materials, driven by ideological and economic factors, was common throughout Egyptian history. This study utilizes a descriptive and analytical methodology to explore the dynamic interplay between past and present in ancient Egypt's architectural landscape. Temples were frequently repurposed, reusing sacred sites, materials or entire buildings with modifications. Amenhotep III dismantled Karnak's monuments, including Thutmoses II and IV's festival hall, to construct the third pylon. This incorporated materials from various structures spanning the 12th to 18th Dynasty, revealing a complex history of construction and reuse. Amenhotep III's motivation was to honor god Amon, seeking divine favor for religious satisfaction and contributing to both the king's glorification and the temple's spiritual significance.

KEYWORDS: Reused – Chapels – Pylon – Karnak Temples – Amenhotep III.

INTRODUCTION

The reuse of building materials by rulers is witnessed throughout Egyptian history to legitimize new facilities where reuse blocks of monuments of royal predecessors may have given legitimacy to newer construction or for economic reason, using blocks from older monuments could be cheaper and easier than getting new blocks quarried and transported for a distance.

Even in some cases, for antipathy towards an earlier ruler or political reason.¹

The best example of reusing earlier elements of monuments in new construction is the pyramid of Amenemhat I at Lisht, which contains hundreds of inscribed blocks taken from many ruined pyramid complexes of rulers of the old kingdom at Giza and Saqqara that strongly indicates that Amenemhat I was not simply looking for nearby source of cheap building materials. Instead, he seems to have intentionally reused blocks inscribed from various famous predecessors to provide credibility to his own reign, both the design of his pyramid complex and the imitation of Old Kingdom relief patterns and themes in its decoration confirm this.²

This practice is not approved in the official sources. King Merikara's instructions advise the royal pupil: "Do not despoil the monument of another, but quarry stone in Tura. Do not build your tomb out of ruins, [using] what had been made for what is to be made."³

Karnak Temples (*Ipt Sout*) which means in Ancient Egyptian Language the most selected of places,⁴ had humble beginnings as a small temple dedicated to the god Amun. Over time it evolved significantly with the addition of pylons, halls, shrines, and enclosures. The temple complex's expansion was a collaborative effort spanning various Egyptian Dynasties, initiating in the Middle Kingdom under the rule of Antef I. During this period, Antef I erected an initial mud brick temple and sandstone column found in later constructions at Karnak carries an inscription dating back to his reign. This inscription stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Karnak temples and the contributions made by successive rulers. Many Egyptian Dynasties added to the temple complex that began in the era of the Middle Kingdom.⁵

¹ Richard, H. (2000). *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, New York, p. 51.

² Goedicke, H. (1971). *Re-used Blocks from the Pyramid of Amenemhet I at Lisht*, Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition 20, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, p. 5-6

³ Bjorkman, G. (1971). *Kings at Karnak: A Study of the Treatment of the Monuments of Royal Predecessors in the Early New Kingdom*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, p. 16-17.

⁴ Weeks, K. (2005). *The Illustrated Luxor, Tombs, Temples and Museums*, The American University in Cairo press, p. 64-66.

⁵ Sullivan, E. (2008). Introduction to the Temple of Karnak, *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Vol.1, p.1- 36.

In the New Kingdom, Thebes becomes Egypt's greatest city and its Karnak Temple complex became the largest space ever built in the world for a religious purpose. For more than 1500 years, the temples of Karnak experienced stages of construction, destruction, renewal and expansion.⁶ Amenhotep III, ruled for nearly 40 years, which was one of the most stable and prosperous in Egyptian history⁷ like all other kings of the New Kingdom, Amenhotep III extended the temple complexes at Karnak, so the king provided a new façade in form of the third pylon.⁸ Amenhotep III reused several blocks taken from earlier constructions which the king found already in ruins or he demolished to reuse their material, such second hand blocks. When the third pylon at Karnak collapsed at the end of the 19th century, archeologists removed these blocks from the interior of the pylon and found that many came from earlier, impressive structures. In 1924, the general director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, Pierre Lacau, ordered his director of works at Karnak, Henri Chevrier, to repair this pylon, but in order to do so, the pylon had to be dismantled, and the material which taken down and used as filling showed to had been come originally from no less than eleven different buildings. This material now forms the basis of the Open Air Museum at Karnak Temples.⁹

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the reasons of reusing of ancestors' monuments by Amenhotep III in the construction of the third pylon in Karnak temples.
- To specify reused chapels of predecessors by Amenhotep III in Karnak temples.
- -To describe the blocks of earlier chapels reused in the construction of the third pylon by Amenhotep III in Karnak temples.
- To indicate the original owner, original site, the re-user, and the new location of the monument.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and analytical methodology is applied to achieve the objectives of this study.

⁶ Simson, R. (2003). *Egypt, Trunk of the Tree*, Vol. I, XIII.

⁷ Peter, A. (1994). *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*. Thames and Hudson Ltd, London, p. 117.

⁸ Aidan, D. (2014). *Amarna Sunrise.: Egypt from Golden Age to Age of Heresy*, The American University in Cairo, p. 99.

⁹ Keith, C. (1940). *The Co Regency of Ramses II with Seti I and the Date of the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak*, The University of Chicago press, Chicago, Illinois, p .4.

II- REUSED CHAPELS IN THE THIRD PYLON

1-REUSED WHITE CHAPEL OF SENUSRET I

Through the Middle Kingdom, Senusret I built his white chapel made out of limestone in the middle of the great temple of the god Amun Ra, which is one of the oldest and most famous buildings in Karnak Temples, where it originally constructed somewhere in the middle of the great temple of Amun Ra which its blocks were reused by Amenhotep III in the foundation of the third pylon, during the Eighteenth Dynasty, when the king dismantled this chapel during the renewal of the area that surrounding the festival hall of Tuthmosis III, so the white shrine was discovered completely inside the southern tower of the third pylon, Other parts of the white chapel of Senusret I were buried within the ninth pylon. Now this chapel in the Open Air Museum at Karnak Temple. The chapel is called the white chapel because its blocks of fine limestone almost square (6.8x 6.45).¹⁰ Its area about 46 meters square, its height is 4.80 cm. it contains 16 pillars in four rows. a part of one of these pillars is representing the statue of this king in an Osiran form. The statue is about 5 m. high and is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.¹¹ Also white chapel of Senusret I was called the one who raises the two crowns of Horus; the white and red crown.¹²

The pillars are supporting the roof with a cavetto cornice. The reliefs are of fine quality, decorated on the four sides representing Senusret I in front of the god Amen, On the outer walls, a series of columns lists of nomes or administrative districts of Egypt, with the size of each district and its capital city. The white chapel was reconstructed in the open museum in 1935 and it was recently restored in 1985- 1986.¹³

The chapel is considered to be a small chamber, it was built for Senusret I's first jubilee or Sed Festival, it was probably held in the 31st year of the king's reign, where the king could sit on a double throne. Holes in the

¹⁰ El-Derby, A. (2013). *The Reconstruction of Ancient Egyptian Buildings and Site's Remains and Ruins, The Justifications and an Overview of Some Practices*. JGUAA, (13), Cairo, p. 42.

¹¹ عبد القادر محمد، 1982، *اثار الاقصر* ، الجزء الاول ، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، ص 44.

¹² Traunecker, Cl., & Favicon, N. (1982). *Rapport Préliminaire sur la Chapelle de Sésostris Ier Découverte dans le IXe Pylône* , Karnak 7, p.121.

¹³ Kadry, A. (1986). *The Open Air Museum at Karnak*, Egyptian Antiquities Organization Press, Cairo, p. 65

floor between the four central pillars were made for the poles that hang banners to hide the king from the public eyes.¹⁴

The shrine was probably built to house the royal bark; it is sometimes referred to as a bark shrine. The white chapel was converted into a bark shrine during the reign of Amenemhat III or Amenemhat IV the kings of the Twelfth Dynasty. Alter made out of rose granite within the chapel dates back to this period, and the chapel remained in its original location, later included within the festival hall of Thutmosis III.¹⁵

This chapel is the only building of Senusret I which had been lost and was found, where there were 35 constructions built by the king, most of them are lost; the king built many temples from the Delta to Elephantine in the south including buildings at Thebes. The chapel also is representing the oldest construction at Karnak today after reconstruction.¹⁶ (Fig.1)



Fig.1: White Chapel of Senusret I

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.

¹⁴ El-Derby, A. (2013). p. 43.

¹⁵ Lacau, P., & Heneri, Ch. (1956). *Une Chapelle de Sesostris Ier à Karnak*, Le Caire, p. 130.

¹⁶ El-Derby, A. (2013). p. 42.

2- REUSED ALABASTER CHAPEL OF AMENHOTEP I

At the village of the workers the villagers dedicated a temple to Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari his mother, who were both defied Amenhotep I upon his death and became the patron deity of the village at Deir El-Madina with a number of festivals throughout the year. Amenhotep I and his mother were worshipped in the site and were revered for almost five hundred years as local deities. His chief architect, Ineni,¹⁷ mentioned that he commissioned building work at Karnak. The original tomb of Amenhotep I has not yet been found. The mummy was discovered in 1881 A.D. at Deir El-Bahari Royal Cache in the west side of the Nile at Luxor, where the officials of the Twenty First Dynasty hide the mummies of many New Kingdom kings and nobles to protect them from tomb robbers.¹⁸

Amenhotep I made his chapel out of Alabaster. This chapel was for the sacred bark of the god Amen during Amon's procession festivals in the names of Amenhotep I and Thutmosis I. The alabaster chapel was reused by Amenhotep III in the foundation of the third pylon, so its blocks were found in the Northern East corner of the third pylon between the year 1922 and 1927. The chapel was rebuilt in the Open Museum inside Karnak Temple in 1947, its original site in the temple is unknown, but it was probably was at the site of the chapel of Thutmosis III on the eastern side of the sacred lake as the names of the two buildings similar. The name of the alabaster chapel is "Amen – is – Enduring – of – Monuments" while that of Thutmosis III, "Men - Kheper - Ra - is - Enduring- of - Monuments." ¹⁹

The chapel was built and decorated by Amenhotep I apart from the south exterior which was made by king Thutmosis I. it was depicted on two blocks from the red chapel of Queen Hatshepsut. Inscriptions on the chapel doorway refer to the building material used to build it, which is the alabaster stone which came from Hatnub in middle Egypt, while the wood and bronze used for the doors came from Asia. Inside the chapel the scenes depict the sacred bark of Amen on the upper part of the walls, while in the

¹⁷ Ineni, a noble man who held the offices of superintendent of the granaries, workmen in Karnak temples, the royal buildings and Ha-Prince of the city during the reign of Amenhotep I, Thutmosis I, II, III, And Hatshepsut for more information see; Arthur, w. (1910). *Guide to the Antiquities of Upper Egypt*, London: Mentheun & Co, p. 133-137.

¹⁸ Saleem , S., & Hawass, Z. (2021). *Digital unwrapping of the mummy of king Amenhotep I (1525-1504 BC) using CT*, Cairo university, Egypt, p. 1-2.

¹⁹J.- Carloti, F., & Gabolde, L, & Graindorge, , C., & Martinez, Ph.. (2019). *La Chapelle de Barque en Calcite aux Noms d' Amenhotep Ier et de Thutmosis Ier*, Trav. CFEETK, BiG, p.58.

lower part the king is giving offerings to the god Amen. On the exterior there are ritual scenes for the god.²⁰

This chapel is (6.75 meters long, 3.6 meters wide and 4.5 meters high). It is a roofed rectangular construction with access doors on its short sides of solid copper or wood is covered with copper and decorated with gold figures. The interior scenes are considered to be the oldest surviving representation of the sacred bark of the image of Amun-Ra in Karnak. Each of outer sides of the chapel was decorated with a single scene belonging to the festivals of the temple.²¹

The chapel may have been moved by Hatshepsut from the central area of the temple to the south east of the seventh pylon (her new pylon), where in its original place she built her shrine (red chapel) the area now occupied by the shrine of Philip Arrhidaeus. Then the two shrines (the alabaster chapel and the red chapel) were dismantled by Thutmosis III who built as an identical alabaster chapel near by the seventh pylon and named his new chapel as the name of the chapel of Amenhotep I. The shrine is considered to be the only building of Amenhotep I still visible in Karnak after it was reconstructed out of the blocks that were discovered in the core of the third pylon in the open air museum.²² (Fig.2)

²⁰ Kadry, A. (1986). p. 64.

²⁰ Michel, A.. (1982), *les Travaux au IX Pylone de Karnak en 1978-1980*, Extrait des Cahiers de Karnak 7, p. 19-55.

²¹ Sullivan, E. (2008). Amenhotep I Calcite Chapel, *Digital Karnak*, p.1.

²² Sullivan, E. (2008). P. 2.



Fig.2: Alabaster Chapel of Amenhotep I

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.

3- REUSED CHAPEL OF AMENHOTEP II

Amenhotep II made his bark chapel out of calcite in front of the fourth pylon at Karnak temples, it was discovered in the southern wing of the third pylon, and this chapel was rebuilt by Fr. Burgos at the entrance of the Open Air Museum. This reconstruction allowed Ch. Van Siclen to know the discovery of the chapel's original location, which was in front of the fourth Pylon. Most of the calcite blocks of this chapel were found reused to fill the core of the third pylon, except for two huge blocks of this chapel which were converted into a stela by Ramses II to stand at the entrance of the Mut complex at Karnak complex. Each block formed the second course framing the door of this chapel. On the right doorjamb Amenhotep II wears the red crown that means the chapel must have faced east. The huge roof

slab (103 tons) was found reused in the south wing of the third Pylon, probably very close to the chapel before it was dismantled.²³

During the time of Amenhotep II, three pairs of obelisks stood to the west of the fourth Pylon, in the center of the festival courtyard of Thutmosis II, shows that the only possible location for the chapel was between the bases of obelisks of Thutmosis I. the chapel was dismantled by Thutmosis IV in order to build his golden porch in front of the door of the fourth pylon, the blocks were reused by Amenhotep III to build the third pylon.²⁴(Fig.3)



Fig.3: Bark Chapel of Amenhotep II

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.

²³ Barguet, p. (1962). p. 85.

²⁴ Francois, L. (2010). *The Chapel of Amenhotep II Embedded between the Obelisks of Thutmosis I*, Cahiers de Kamak 13, p. 305-310.

4- REUSED RED CHAPEL OF QUEEN HATSHEPSUT

The red chapel was built by Queen Hatshepsut to house the sacred bark of Amun. Hatshepsut started the construction of the chapel in the seventeenth year of her reign. It is called the red chapel because of the beautiful color of its red quartzite walls, while the lower blocks and door were of black granite and gray diorite, now located in the Open Air Museum at Karnak temple. The red chapel was dismantled by Thutmosis III after the death of Queen Hatshepsut; its blocks were left on the ground for a long time until they were reused by king Amenhotep III to build the interior of the third pylon. Two more blocks from the red chapel of Queen Hatshepsut were found in the foundation of the ninth pylon.²⁵

The chapel was originally consisted of two parts, a vestibule on the west and the bark repository or a sanctuary to the east. The chapel was raised on a grey diorite platform and accessed by short ramps on either side. The chapel was not covered. It has the form of a rectangle consists of two open courts (17.30 x 6.30 x 5.5 m high meters), the facade of the vestibule is 7.70 meters high, while that of the sanctuary is only 5.77 meters. It contains three doors in the same dimensions and installed at the same level.²⁶

Only about two third of the blocks of the chapel 300 in all, have been discovered. Most of them were found inside and around the third pylon, between the years, 1923 and 1947. The decoration on the blocks is incomplete and probably the chapel was actually left unfinished. It is assumed that the chapel was standing in the sanctuary of the temple, the palace of Ma'at. Thutmosis III started to erase the representations of Queen Hatshepsut on the blocks, and then he destroyed the chapel in order to erect a sanctuary of his own in red granite. The two black granite exterior doorways of the chapel were incorporated into his renovations of the palace of Ma'at during the renovation of the core of the temple. This one was replaced by the chapel of Phillip Arridaeus which is still in place in the central part of the temple, The carved scenes on the outer sides of the chapel are representing the erection of the two obelisks of Queen

²⁵ Michel, A.. (1982). p. 27-32.

²⁶ El-Derby, A. (2013). *The Reconstruction of Ancient Egyptian Buildings and Site's Remains and Ruins, The Justifications and an Overview of Some Practices*. JGUAA, (13), Cairo, p. 50; Frank, B., & Francois, L. (2006)-92008). *La Chappelle Rouge: Le Sanctuaire de Barque de Hatshepsout, volume 1: Facsimilie et photographies des scenes*, Centre Franco- Egyptien des Etudes des Temples de Karnak, Paris, p. 432; Frank, B., & Francois, L., & Nicholas, G., (2014). *La Chappelle Rouge: Le Sanctuaire de Barque de Hatshepsout, volume2: Textes*, Centre Franco- Egyptien des Etudes des Temples de Karnak, Paris, p. 486.

Hatshepsut in the Wadjet²⁷ hall and the procession of the Opet festival and the festival of the valley.²⁸ (Fig.4)



Fig.4: Red Chapel of Queen Hatshepsut

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.

²⁷ **Wadjet Hall** was located between the fourth pylon and fifth pylon. Originally was built by Thutmosis I. According to the Ramesside inscriptions, the Wadjet Hall was used for both the king's coronation ceremony and the celebration of the jubilee (Hed-Sed) festival until it was superseded by the hypostyle hall in the nineteenth century. For more information; Carlotti, J., – F., (2003). *Nouvelles donnees sur la Ouadje*, Cahiers de Karnak, vol. XI, p. 255-338; Larche, Fr., (2007). *Nouvelles Observation sur les Monuments du Moyen Etdu Nuovel Empire dans la Zone Centrale du Temple d'Amon*, Cahiers de Karnak, vol. XII, p. 407- 592.

²⁸ Kadry, A. (1986). P. 67.

5- REUSED ALABASTER CHAPEL OF THUTMOSIS IV

The second pylon and third pylon foundations produced blocks in alabaster inscribed for which formed a small bark shrine remains. The chapel of Thutmose IV has only a few joining blocks preserving some interior scenes. Van Siclen argued that the chapel's original home in the vicinity of the peristyle court of Thutmose IV.²⁹ (Fig.5) Amenhotep III seems to have added a door to the edifice before he destroyed more than half of his father's structure, a block from the pylon foundation, now visible in the Karnak Open Museum, shows the kneeling king offering to an enthroned Amun. The cartouches of Amenhotep III are visible on the king's Djed pillar offering.³⁰

Van Siclen recently provided a conjectured ground plan. There are still blocks missing from the structure, but the overall plan of decoration and some of the architecture is apparent. The shrine was 7 meters long by 5.15 high by 4.65 wide. The main entrance was topped by a cavetto cornice with an inscribed architrave.³¹

The name of the chapel appears twice-on the left and right door jambs of what must have been the main, and perhaps only, entrance. The texts are identical: "The king of Upper and Lower Egypt *Menkheprure*: he made as his monument for father Amun-Re, making for him a temple of white alabaster of Hatnub, (called) Thutmoses *kha khau* who receives the crowns of Amun. May he do given life".³² Van Siclen has suggested that the chapel may have been set up in the Thutmose II or Thutmose IV court before one of the north doorways.³³

Amenhotep III did not use all the alabaster blocks as foundation fill. A few were left about and were later used in the foundation of the second pylon by Horemheb, but only after Akhenaten's followers destroyed them One such piece was re-used by Ramses II as a statue base for a colossal alabaster group of Amun and the king. It was placed against the north flank of the second pylon.³⁴ (Fig.6)

²⁹ Van Siclen, C. (1986). *The Alabaster Shrine of King Amenhotep II*, San Antonio, pl. 13.

³⁰ Porter, B., & Moss, R. (1972). *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, Vol. 2: Theban Temples. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 74.

³¹ Van Siclen, C. (1986). p.13.

³² Bryan, B. (1991). *The Reign of Thutmose IV*, Baltimore, London, p.173.

³³ Van Siclen, C. (1986). pl. 13.

³⁴ Porter, B., & Moss, R. (1972). P. 43.



Fig. 5 Peristyle Court of Thutmosis IV (the Festival Court at Karnak)

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.



Fig. 6 Chapel of Thutmosis IV

Photograph captured by the researcher on October 20, 2023.

CONCLUSION

The reuse of temple materials in new constructions was common throughout the Egyptian history. Egyptian kings would frequently dismantle earlier structures that they found to be blocking their own planned expansions and were also not averse simply to quarrying buildings of earlier kings as cheap and convenient sources of building materials. Reuse of masonry became common during the New Kingdom, when kings were building their temples of stone instead of mud-brick. A good example of this is the Karnak Temple complex, which was continuously expanded and rebuilt during the Eighteenth Dynasty. The temple complex did not just grow outwards: pylons, chapels, courts, halls, and sanctuaries were built, demolished, and replaced by new buildings, sometimes after only a few decades or a few years.

When Amenhotep III decided to build the third pylon, he dismantled several monuments at Karnak, in order to find way to build the pylon in whose foundations the blocks of these monuments were re-employed. These constructions are including the festival hall of Thutmose II, and Thutmose IV. It seems strange that Amenhotep III, felt obliged to demolish his father's festival hall and many other monuments of his ancestors in form of small bark shrines to house the sacred bark of Amun when there was clearly space to the west. But the huge ritual importance of this area could not be ignored by a king so intent on creating a work that would secure the glory of his name forever.

The material which taken down and reused as filling showed to had been come originally from no less than eleven different buildings, reusing masonry from the festival hall of Thutmoses II, and Thutmoses IV and earlier monuments dating back to the Middle Kingdom as fill for the foundations and solid cores of the third pylon towers, which includes a number of complete buildings dating back from the Twelfth till the Eighteenth Dynasty.

A new façade was provided in form of the third pylon, which replaced the forecourt of Thutmosis II and IV, in front of the fourth pylon, to which Amenhotep III added a gateway earlier in his reign. The short gap between the new edifice and pylon IV appears to have been the result of the restriction of the viable building area to the west of the temple: continuous remote sensing work indicates that the river retreated westward throughout the new kingdom, implying that the site of the third pylon may have been underwater before a century or two earlier.

The reused blocks of theses chapels, which discovered in the core of the third pylon in the twentieth century, were rebuild in the Karnak Open Air Museum. These chapels representing the main collection of the museum, which includes a number of complete buildings dating back from the Twelfth till the Eighteenth Dynasty.

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