

Djeser-Djeseru (Dsr-dsr.w)
“The Holy of Holies”

also known as

Hatshepsut Mortuary Temple

An Illustrated Visitor's Guide



Deir el-Bahari • 18th Dynasty • Ma'at Ka Ra Hatshepsut

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1. Introduction

Hatshepsut — **Maatkare Hatshepsut (M³t-k³-R^ʿ H³t-špswt)** — ruled as king during the 18th Dynasty and stands as one of the most remarkable figures in ancient Egyptian history.

Hatshepsut rose above the limits traditionally placed on royal women, she assumed full pharaonic authority, complete with regalia, titulary, and divine justification through Amun. Her reign marked a period of stability, prosperity, and ambitious architectural expansion throughout Kemet.

Her crowning achievement is the terraced mortuary temple at **Deir el-Bahari**, a masterpiece of design and statecraft. This structure represents the perfect blending of royal ritual, master craftsmanship, and sacred landscape alignment. Built directly against a dramatic limestone amphitheater of cliffs, the temple unfolds in three ascending terraces connected by ramps, echoing and enhancing the natural contours of the mountain.

The precision of its colonnades, the symmetry of its courts, and the narrative reliefs carved into its walls make it one of the most recognizable and influential monuments of the New Kingdom. Its design later inspired subsequent pharaohs, but none matched the elegance or visionary execution of Hatshepsut's original construction.

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Below is her royal name as preserved in New Kingdom hieroglyphs:



Ancient carved cartouche of Hatshepsut in stone.

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Granite cartouche of Hatshepsut from an obelisk at Karnak.

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To help visualize the monument, here is a reference image of the three-terrace façade:



Front view of the three-terrace façade of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari.

2. The Setting: Deir el-Bahari

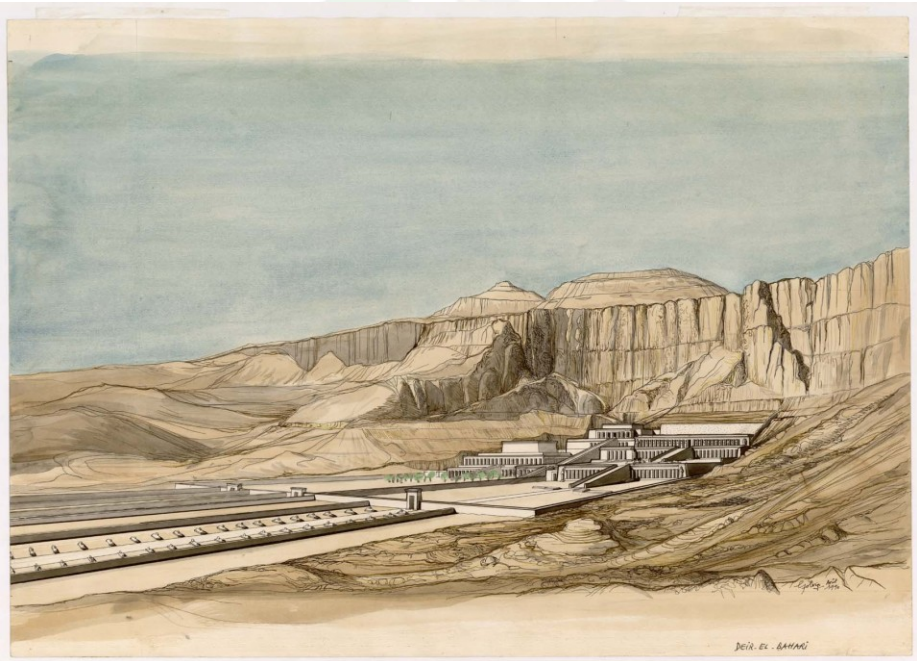
The temple stands on the west bank of Thebes, directly against a dramatic limestone cliff. The choice of site reflects continuity with the earlier 11th-Dynasty temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II, which occupies the adjacent bay.

The principal architect was Senenmut, a court official who held numerous prestigious titles: Chief Architect, Steward of the God's Wife, and Overseer of Works. He is widely credited with the conceptual and structural planning of the temple.

Many modern scholars note the unusual number of statues, inscriptions, and administrative records tying Senenmut directly to Hatshepsut's projects. This concentration of honors has contributed to the long-standing hypothesis that Senenmut and Hatshepsut may have shared a personal relationship in addition to their formal political and architectural collaboration.

While no ancient Egyptian document confirms or denies this, the suggestion remains part of the broader historical discussion surrounding her reign.

Below is a 19th-century illustration of the temple's cliff setting:



Watercolor reconstruction of Deir el-Bahari showing the temple set against the cliffs.

3. Architectural Overview

The temple's design is organized into three rising terraces, each linked by broad ascending ramps. The layout produces a processional movement toward increasingly sacred spaces.

Lower Terrace

Open forecourt

Long colonnades

Primary entrance ramp

Public approach to the temple

Middle Terrace

Colonnades featuring scenes of the Punt Expedition

Shrine of Hathor (southern end)

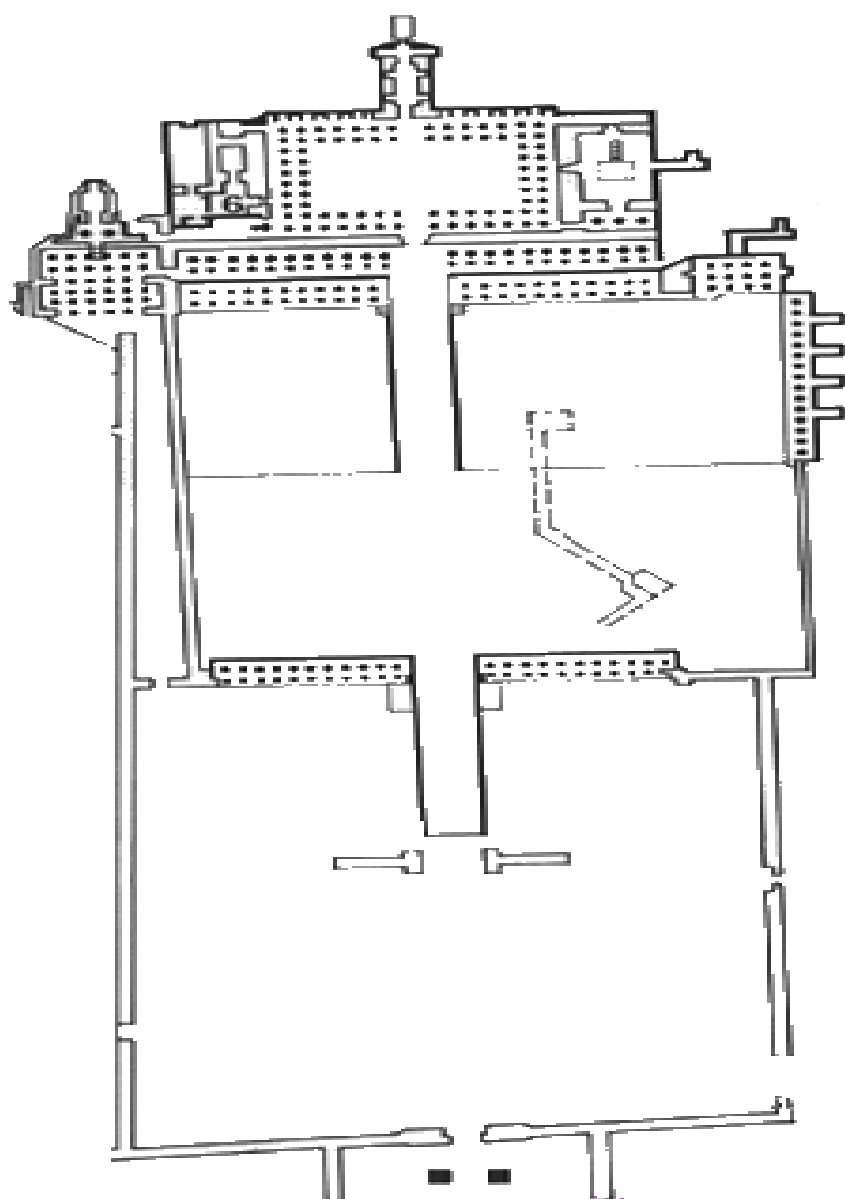
Transition space between public and ritual areas

Upper Terrace

Deep rock-cut sanctuary dedicated to Amun

Inner cult spaces

Areas for ritual, offerings, and divine procession



Ground plan of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple showing the main terraces and ramps.

4. Key Features of the Temple

A. The Terraced Structure

The repeating colonnades and elevated platforms create a rhythmic ascent toward the sacred core of the complex. It was one of the earliest major examples of this multi-level design in Egyptian architecture.

B. The Punt Expedition Reliefs

The south portico of the Middle Terrace preserves the famous Punt scenes, depicting maritime travel, exotic flora and fauna, and trade with the region known as "God's Land." These reliefs remain a primary source for understanding 18th-Dynasty foreign relations.

C. Shrine of Hathor

Located at the southern end of the Middle Terrace, this chapel features Hathor-headed columns and scenes of ritual offerings. It reflects Hatshepsut's close association with the goddess of music, joy, and protection.

D. Divine Birth Narrative

The northern colonnade of the Middle Terrace preserves scenes

of Hatshepsut's divine conception and birth, establishing her legitimacy as ruler through the direct involvement of Amun.

E. Cliff-Cut Sanctuaries

At the highest terrace, the inner sanctuaries are carved directly into the rock face. These chambers housed statues and received offerings during ritual ceremonies, especially during festival processions from Karnak.



Punt Expedition relief from Deir el-Bahari, showing figures bringing goods from Punt.



Hathor-headed columns from Hatshepsut's temple, symbolizing joy, protection, and divine motherhood.

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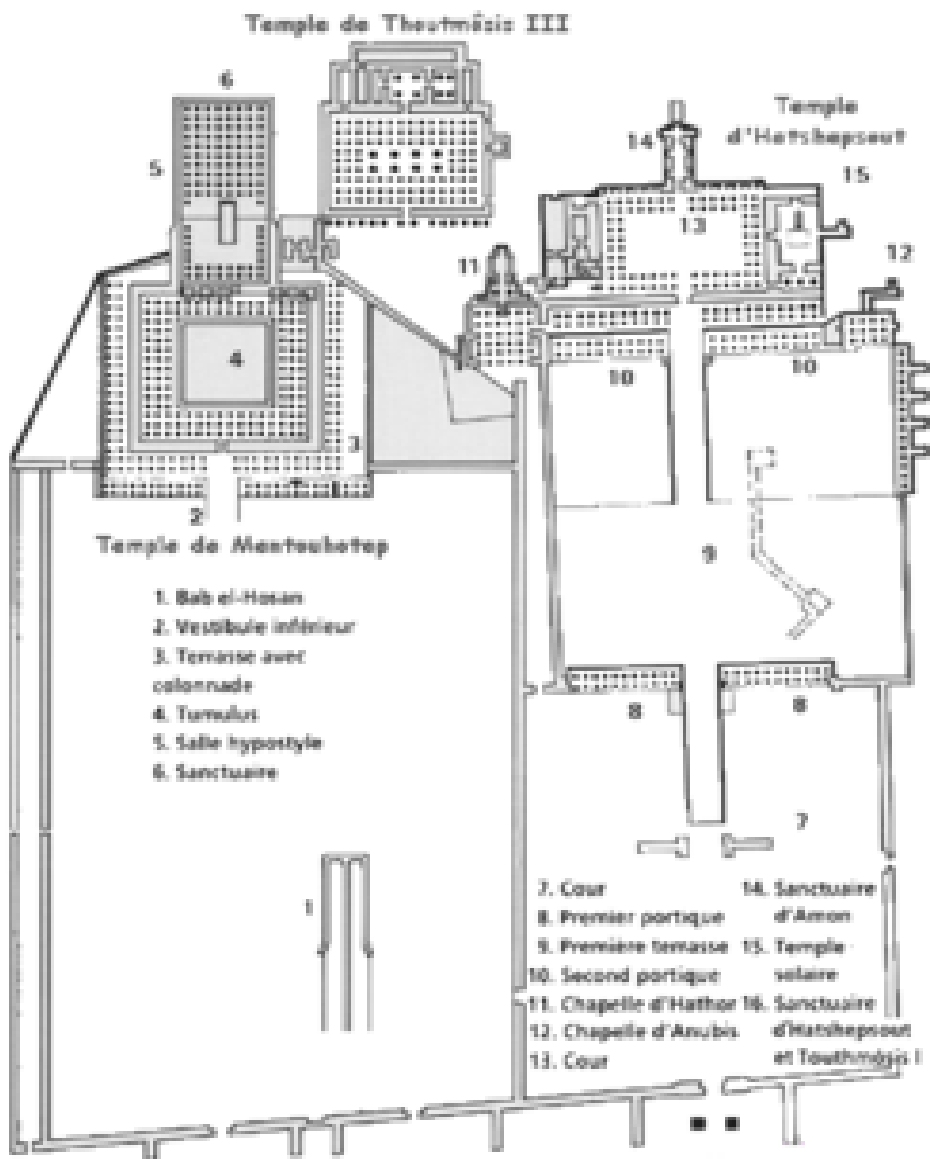
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PRIEST BRINGING A CRANE.

Colored facsimile by Howard Carter from the Southern Hall of Offerings at Deir el-Bahari.

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Plan of Deir el-Bahari showing the temples of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III, and Mentuhotep II.

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5. Historical Context

Hatshepsut's reign was marked by political stability, administrative development, and an ambitious building program. Her temple served as a statement of religious devotion, royal ideology, and architectural innovation.

Themes emphasized in the reliefs include divine kingship, diplomatic outreach, order and cosmic balance, and restoration of sacred traditions.

This complex stands as one of the clearest expressions of early 18th-Dynasty statecraft and ritual performance.⁶ Early Modern Exploration

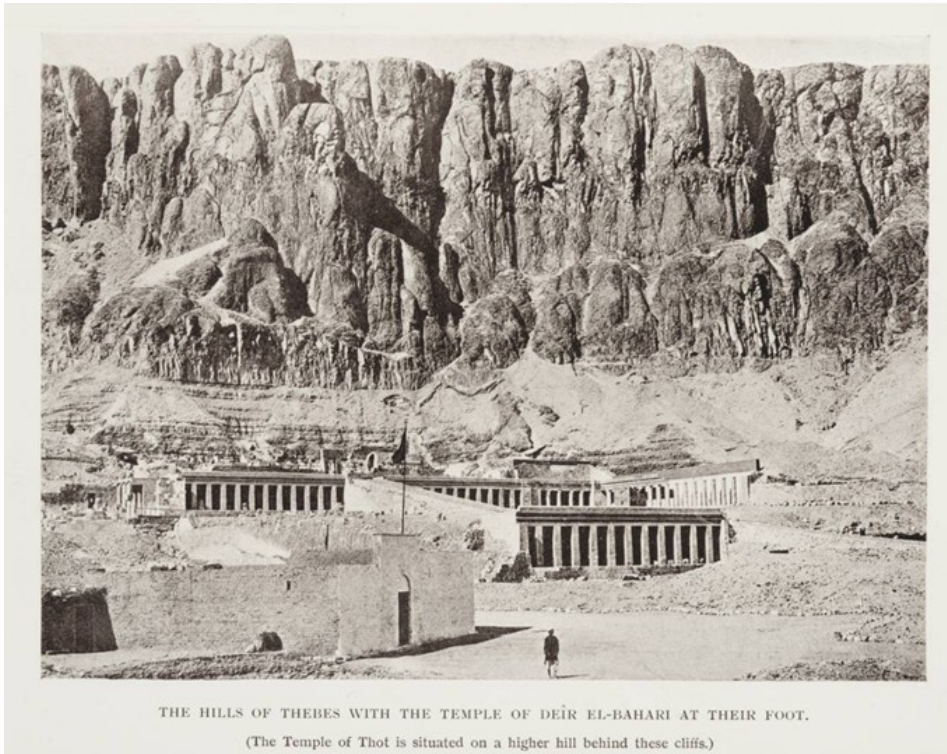
During the 19th century, Deir el-Bahari drew significant attention from scholars and explorers like Jean-François Champollion, John Gardner Wilkinson, and Karl Richard Lepsius.

Édouard Naville's excavations for the Egypt Exploration Fund (1890s) produced some of the earliest systematic drawings and plates of the monument.

7. Conclusion

Hatshepsut's mortuary temple remains one of ancient Egypt's most compelling architectural achievements. Its integration with the natural cliff, its innovative terraced layout, and its rich relief program give it an enduring place in the study of the New Kingdom.

This guide offers a concise foundation for further exploration of Deir el-Bahari in historical, architectural, and cultural context.



THE HILLS OF THEBES WITH THE TEMPLE OF DEÏR EL-BAHARI AT THEIR FOOT.

(The Temple of Thot is situated on a higher hill behind these cliffs.)

Historic photograph of the hills of Thebes with the temple of Deir el-Bahari at their foot.

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Judgement Scene Papyrus



The Judgement Scene reflects the values and spiritual beliefs of Kemet, also referred to as Ancient Egypt.

It depicts the judgement of a person's soul as they seek to enter the afterlife known as the Hall of Maati.

Art like this papyrus replicates the papyri of Hunefer and Ani, who were 19th Dynasty scribes. They were each buried with a Pert Em Heru, which is often referred to as the "Book of the Dead". The judgement scene is a part of that burial process.

The papyrus has the image of the cat deity Bast, the three pyramids of the Giza Plateau, and the ankh that is only visible in the dark.

It is made with authentic papyrus paper. It is 36 inches wide x 17 inches long.

[Click here to view the Judgement Scene Papyrus](#)

PAPYRUS ZODIAC OF DENDERA TEMPLE!



This papyrus replicates the great Dendera Zodiac. The Dendera Zodiac is among the most celebrated and enigmatic artefacts of ancient Egyptian astronomy.

This circular zodiac presents a map of the stars, with the twelve zodiacal constellations arranged in a wheel, along with an intricate celestial composition of thirty-six decans, symbolic of ten-day intervals within the 360-day Egyptian civil year.

Papyrus Paper. length 16 inches x height 23 ½ inches

[Click here to view the Dendera Zodiac Papyrus](#)