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Mohamed Abdel-Rahman Ali

The Lost Temples of Esna

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The Lost Temples of Esna

MOHAMED ABDEL-RAHMAN ALI

For Serge Sauneron

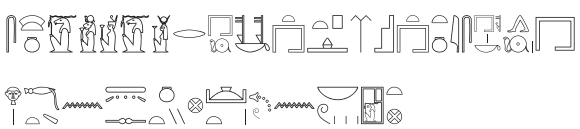
The texts in the great temple of Esna mention three temples located to the north of the current temple. They have now disappeared. As the fourth temple, located on the eastern bank, it is only known from the writings of travellers.[1]

The first temple: *Pr-S3ḥw-Rˁ*

Because of its name, the temple called *Pr-S3ḥw-Rˁ* may have been founded at the time of king Sahure in the 5th dynasty.[2] According to the texts of the great temple, the temple was a resting place on the way of the procession, probably located at the beginning of the route going to the northern field, somewhere to the north of the modern Esna village, where Labib Habachi found some stone blocks.[3] All this can be deduced from the following texts.

– In *Esna* II, no. 77,14, the temple's name:  *Pr-S3ḥw-Rˁ* "temple of Sahure" has been replaced by  *W3ḥ-S3ḥw-Rˁ* "Sahure rests".[4]

– In *Esna* III, no. 199,27 (*Esna* V, p.25, n. (b)) it is referred to the location of the temple at the north of Esna:



1 S. Sauneron, *Quatre campagnes à Esna*, *Esna* I, Cairo, 1959, p. 28-29.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 28; see also S. Sauneron, *Les fêtes religieuses d'Esna aux derniers siècles du paganisme*, *Esna* V, Cairo, 1962, p. 12, n. (d).

4 See also *Esna* V, p. 24, n. (m).

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sḫˁ n Ḫnm Mnḥyt Nt Ḫnm Nbtww r Pr-Sɜḥw-Rˁ ḥtp m st tn ỉs(t) Pr-Sɜḥw-Rˁ ḥr mḥyt n Tɜ-snt ỉɜt pw n nbw ḥwt-Ḫnm

The departure (of the procession) of Khnum, Menhyt, Neith, Khnum and Nebtu to the temple of Sahure; resting in this place; behold, the temple of Sahure is in the north of Esna, it is the mound of the gods of Khnum temple (= Esna).

– As well as in *Esna* III, no. 199,28 (*Esna* V, p.25, n. (b)):



wnn Pr-Sɜḥw-Rˁ ḥr mḥyt[5] *n Ỉwnyt*

The temple of Sahure is at the north of Esna.

– According to *Esna* II, no. 55,1 (*Esna* V, p. 11), the departure of Khnum's procession, together with his Ennead, was held in the first month (Thot) of the inundation. It used to set off to the northern temple of Khnum (of the field) and then to stop in the resting place of Sahure:



sḫˁ n Ḫnm-Rˁ nb Tɜ-snt ḫnˁ psḏt.f [r] Pr- Ḫnm Pr-Sɜḥw-Rˁ ḫnm ỉtn ḥtp

The departure of the procession of Khnum-Re, lord of Esna with his Ennead: the temple of Khnum; the temple of Sahure; the union with the sun disk; resting.

– According to *Esna* II, no. 77,14 (*Esna* V, p. 24), the procession which took place in the month of Payni also used to stop in the temple of Sahure:



sḫˁ n Ḫnm Nt Nbtww ḫnm ỉtn wṯst r Pr-Sɜḥw-Rˁ

The departure of the procession of Khnum, Neith and Nebtu; the union with the sun disk; rise to the temple of Sahure.

The second temple: *Pr- Ḫnm nb sḫt*

This temple was located about 4 kilometres north of Esna at a place called Kom ed-Deir,[6] on an artificial terrace facing the Nile approximately 500 m away (fig. 1).[7] Its name *Pr- Ḫnm n sḫt* "temple of Khnum of the field" could be abbreviated simply as *sḫt* "the field".[8]

5 For the reading of the sign as *mḥ*, see S. Sauneron, "Un hymne à Imouthès", *BIFAO* 63, 1965, p. 80 (r)

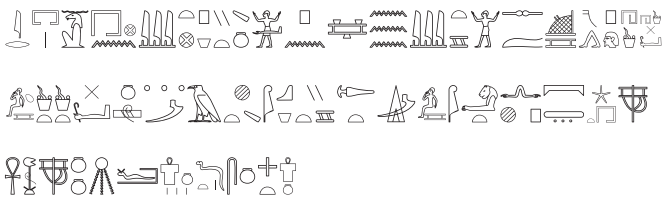
6 A. Weigall, *A Guide to the Antiquities of Upper Egypt from Abydos to the Sudan Frontier*, London, 1913, p. 305; S. Sauneron, *Esna* V, p. 12, n. (d), p. 316; *id.*, *Villes et légendes d'Égypte*, *BdE* 90, 1983, 2nd edition, p. 20. Note that S. Sauneron (*Esna* V, p.316, n.1) explains that the localisations proposed by himself (*Esna* I, p. 28-29) were wrong.

7 D. Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, New York, Oxford, 1999, p. 168.

8 S. Sauneron, *Esna* I, p. 28.

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– According to *Esna* III, no. 196,1 (*Esna* V, p. 317), it was not a simple resting station for the procession, but a permanent centre for the worshiping of an image of the god Khnum, known as "Khnum lord of the field, the beautiful protector" [9] and his Ennead.

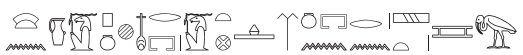


ỉr Pr-Ḫnm n sḫt šʿt n ḥʿpy sḫt ḳɜ s(y) m sḫt ḥwỉ pɜ tp [?] hbhb nwn btbt nš m ɜḫt m ḳɜt tpt dỉ m nwn m ḥɜt n ḫpr pt tɜ dwɜt ṯɜw ʿnḫ wḫɜ ṯɜw wbn pr.sn ḏt.sn (=ḏs.sn) ỉmỉ-tw.sn

As for the temple of Khnum of the field, (it is) the sandy land of flood. It is the field that increases above the water-sḫt, the summit (beginning of the high floodwaters) rushing (?). The flood waters were repelled, the sand was mixed with the agricultural land doing a first mound placed above the primeval water at the beginning, before the creation of heaven, earth and the netherworld. The breath of life, the wind and the light, all came out by themselves among them (= heaven and earth).

– Between this temple and the temple of *Pr- nṯr* to the north, there was a lake called the "red lake",[10] at which the procession of Khnum stopped.

• *Esna* II, no. 77,16 (*Esna* V, p. 26):



ḫʿ n Ḫnm pɜ n ḫw nfr r Pr- Ḫnm ḥtp m-ḫnw n rɜ n š dšr

The apparition of Khnum, the beautiful protector, in the temple of Khnum; resting at the entrance of the red lake.

• *Esna* III, no. 196,2 (*Esna* V, p.324):



(ỉ)r mw ỉmỉ-tw.sn tỉ sw ḫr mḥyt n Pr-Ḫnm n sḫt

As for the water (of the lake), which is between them (= Khnum temple and the temple of Pr-nṯr), it lies to the north of the temple of Khnum of the field.

9 About the god Khnum the beautiful protector, see *Esna* V, p. 329, n. (a), p. 333-334.

10 About this red lake, see H. De Meulenaere, "La légende de Phéros", *CdE* 28, 1953, p. 253-255; S. Sauneron, *Esna* V, p. 336-337, n. (k).

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– According to *Esna* II, no. 55, 5-7 (*Esna* V, p.15), many gods gathered in the temple of Khnum lord of the field, in the period from the first day until the sixth day of the Khoiak month of each year, where they poured water and made offerings to their ancestors.



ḫpr nn nṯrw n pr-Ḫnm n sḫt šsr ꜣbd 4 ꜣḫt nfr tr ḥrw 6 ḥr ỉr ḳbḥ n ỉmyw ỉmḥ.t
These gods happen to be in the temple of Khnum of the field, (since) the beginning of the fourth month of inundation (= Khoiak month) until the sixth day in order to pour water to those in the cave.

No ruins of this temple are left now, but it still existed in the 19th century AD.[11] When J.-Fr. Champollion visited the site, he copied some scenes and texts after what was left of the walls on the temple or on stone blocks scattered on the ground. According to these texts, the temple was dedicated to the triad of the great temple of Esna, Khnum, Nebtu and the child god Heqa:



ḏd mdw ỉn Ḫnm-Rꜥ nb sḫt
Recitation by Khnum-Re lord of the field.



ḏd mdw ỉn Nbtww nbt sḫt
Recitation by Nebtu mistress of the field.[12]



ḏd mdw ỉn Ḥkꜣ pꜣ ḫrd nb ḥkꜣw wr ḥkꜣw
Recitation by Heqa, the child, lord of magic, great of magic.[13]

The temple was built by Ptolemy III Euergetes I, seen with his wife Berenike II standing in front of the goddess Neith .[14] Ptolemy V Epiphanes is also represented on the columns of its façade, offering milk to the child god Heqa.[15] The name of Ptolemy VI Philometor has

11 A. Weigall, *op. cit.*, p.305.
12 J.-Fr. Champollion, *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie* II, Paris, 1845, pl. 145, sept, 1.
13 *Ibid.,* pl. 145, sept, 3.
14 *Ibid.,* pl. 145, sext, 2.
15 PM VI, 118-119. J.Fr. Champollion, *op. cit.,* pl. 145, 7, scène 3. Among the important scenes copied by Champollion, one depicts the birth of the solar god in the form of a winged scarab, see J.-Fr. Champollion, *op. cit.,* pl. 145, sept, 2.

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also been found,[16] as well as names of several Roman emperors: Antoninus Pius,[17] Augustus, Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius.[18]

As for the plan of the temple, it has been drawn by the French Expedition scholars (fig. 2).[19] and they also drew a restitution of the monument (fig. 3). They did notice the lively colours of the decoration and in the "Description de l'Égypte", they describe with many details the astronomical scenes representing the zodiac on the roof of the pronaos.[20]

They found, a few meters in front of the temple, some huge sandstone blocks,[21] which could have belonged according to D. Arnold to a cult terrace.[22] It is most likely that those blocks were the ruins of the port on the Nile that was used during the processions of the gods from the great temple to this temple.

The third temple *Pr-nṯr*

The temple named *Pr-nṯr* was located some 900 m to the north of the previous temple, in a place called Kom Senun "mound of the swallows"[23], about 5 km north-west of Esna; it was dedicated to Osiris and Isis and to the gods who were buried in the divine mound where their ancestors Kematef, Tatenen were resting.[24]

• *Esna* III, no. 196, 2 (*Esna* V, p. 319):



Pr-nṯr n nṯr n nṯrw mʿḥʿt n Km-ɜt.f pr n Tɜ-tnn nỉwt n Nt st sšṯɜ n nṯrw pɜwtỉw ḏɜỉsw ʿɜw n pɜwtyw tpy ʿḥt n Rʿ ḥwt bɜw n Šw Tfnt dwɜt sšṯɜ.t pw n mɜɜ s(y) rmṯ nb ỉmh.t n ḥptyw wɜỉ r sḫnt.s ỉn ʿwt nbwt ỉr tkn s(y) st ḥp(r) ḥrwyw m tɜ ḏr.f

The temple Pr-nṯr of the god of the gods, (it is) the tomb[25] of Kem-Atef, the house of Ta-tenen, the city of Neith, the secret place of the primeval gods, the personified utterances of the first primeval ones, the palace of Re and the residence of the bas of Shu and Tefnut. It is the hidden netherworld,

16 J.-Fr. Champollion, *Monuments de l'Égypte et de la Nubie : Notices descriptives* I, Paris, 1844, p. 284.

17 J.-Fr. Champollion, *op. cit., Notices descriptives* I, p. 285.

18 J.G. Wilkinson, *Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt*, London, 1835, p. 425-426.

19 *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités-Planches* I, pl. 85, 1; D. Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 168-169 (with some reservations about the reconstitution made by the French scholars), p. 169, fig.115.

20 J.-B. Jollois, É. de Villiers, "Description d'Esné et de ses environs" in *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités - Descriptions,* I, 2nd édition, 1821, p. 390-392; *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités - Planches* I, 1809, pl. 87.

21 J.-B. Jollois, É. de Villiers, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

22 D. Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

23 *Esna* V, p. 316, see *supra*, n. 6.

24 S. Sauneron, *Villes et légendes d'Égypte*, p. 21.

25 For the phonetic value "m" of the sign , see *Esna* VIII, p. 130.

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that no one can see, the cave of the deceased gods far from being occupied by any small animal. If a lady approached it (= temple) disturbance would happen in the entire land.

The temple, probably destroyed at the same time as the temple of Khnum of the field,[26] is only known nowadays thanks to the description of its ruins, left by the travellers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries; it was poorly built, and its decoration was similar to that of the great temple.[27] Its general axis as well as the cultic destination of its different rooms can be deduced from its function as a station for the processions coming from the south and as a resting place for the deceased gods.[28]

The temple of el-Hilla (Contralatopolis)

This temple, located on the eastern bank of the Nile in Contralatopolis (facing Latopolis) near the modern village of el-Hilla, could still be seen at the beginning of the 19th century.[29]

None of the texts of the great temple of Esna did refer to it or to the celebrations that took place on the eastern bank of the Nile, and it is only from the descriptions made by the ancient travellers and by the scholars of the French Expedition,[30] (fig. 4) that one can get an idea of the temple (fig. 5) but already at the end of the 18th century, the interior parts of the temple were destroyed and it was not possible to draw their plan.[31]

It was built by Ptolemy IX Soter II and dedicated to the goddess Isis.[32] It was at that time a modest building about 10 m wide and has been enlarged, in the Roman period at the time of Antoninus Pius[33], by a pronaos "which contained two rows of four, nearly 7 m high sandstone columns with palm and composite capitals and Hathor-head capitals in the centre[34]" (fig. 6). It seems that the inscriptions of the temple were unfinished, since some scenes were still set in red color, and not yet carved.[35]

It should be noted that there is another temple in Esna, in the village of Kommir on the west bank of the Nile about 15 km south of the town of Esna dating back to Antoninus Pius. It has been discovered initially in the fifties of the last century and the preliminary report was published in the beginning of the eighties of the same century.[36]

26 E. Weigall, *op. cit.,* p. 305.
27 *Esna* I, p. 29.
28 *Esna* V, p. 316, p. 336, n. (d).
29 J.G. Wilkinson, *Topography of Thebes and General View of Egypt*, London, 1835, p. 428; *id.*, *Modern Egypt and Thebes* II, London, 1843, p. 269.
30 J.B. Jollois, É. de Villiers, *op. cit.*, p. 392-397; *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités-Planches* I, 1809, pl. 84,1, pl. 89-91.
31 J.B. Jollois, É. de Villiers, *op. cit.*, p. 396.
32 D. Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 206, *contra* S. Sauneron, (*Esna* I, p. 30-31) who thought that it could have been dedicated to Hathor of *ʿnḏy*.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 266-268, fig. 232-233.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
35 J.-B. Jollois, É. de Villiers, *op. cit.*, p. 393, p. 396, p. 397.
36 About Komir temple, see S. Sauneron, "Cinq années de recherches épigraphiques en Égypte", *BSFE* 24, 1957, p. 48; *id.*, *Esna* V, p. 50, n. (d); M. Es-Saghir and D. Valbelle, "The Discovery of Komir Temple: Preliminary Report", *BIFAO* 83, 1983, 149-170, D. Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

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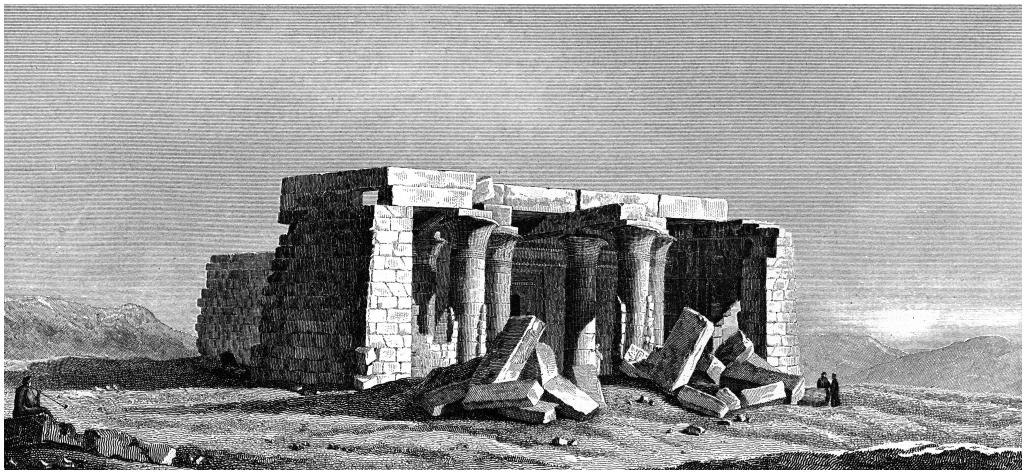


FIG. 1. The temple of Kom ed-Deir at the end of the 18th century (from *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités - Planches* I, pl. 84,2).

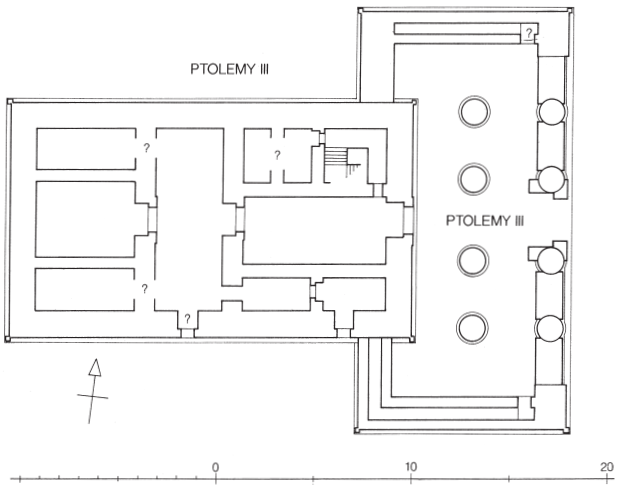


FIG. 2. Plan of the temple of Kom ed-Deir (from D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, p. 169, fig. 115, after *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquités - Planches* I, pl. 85).

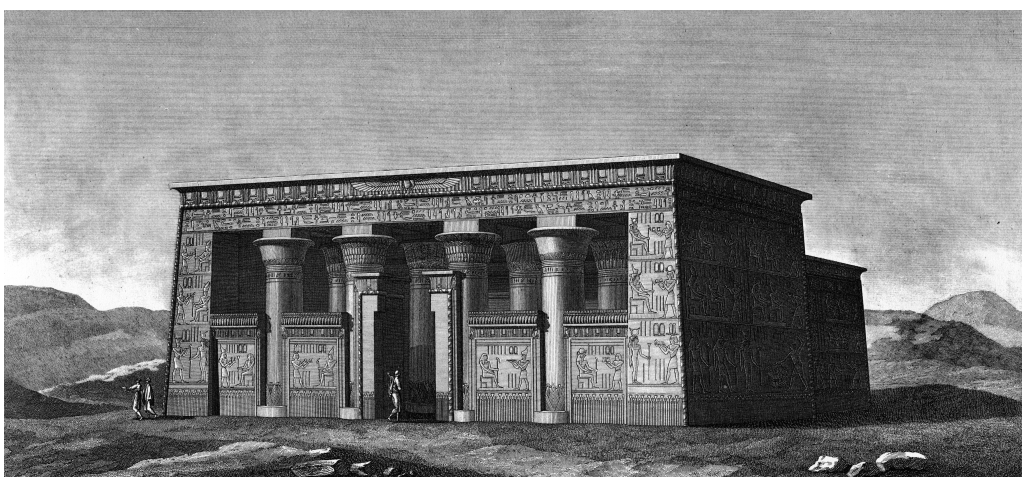


FIG. 3. Reconstitution of the façade of the temple of Kom ed-Deir (from *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités - Planches* I, pl. 88).

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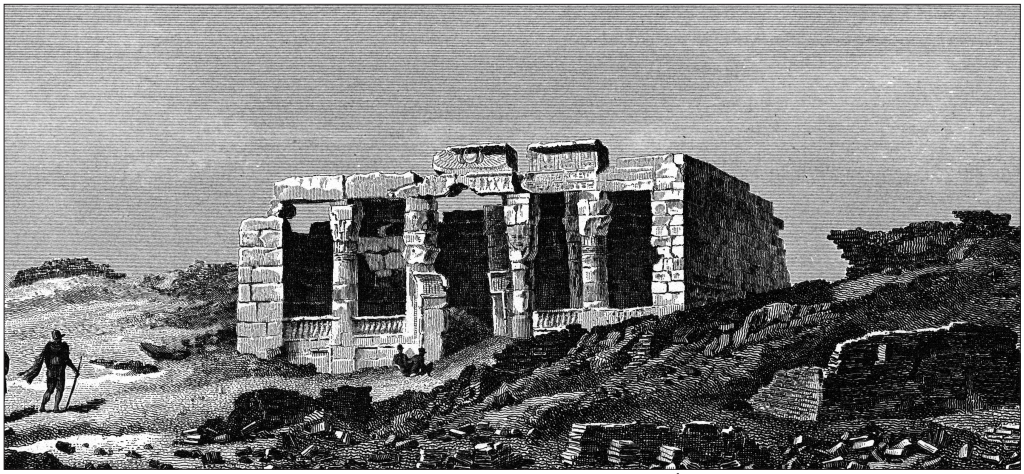


FIG. 4. The temple of el-Hilla (Contralatopolis) (from *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquités - Planches* I, pl. 84,1).

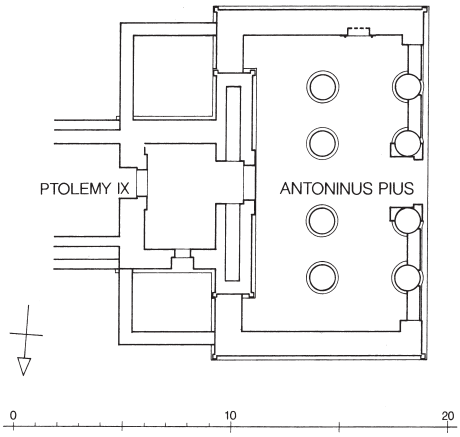


FIG. 5. Plan of the pronaos of the temple of el-Hilla (Contralatopolis) (from D. ARNOLD, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, p. 268, fig. 233, *after Description de l'Égypte, Antiquités - Planches* I, pl. 89).

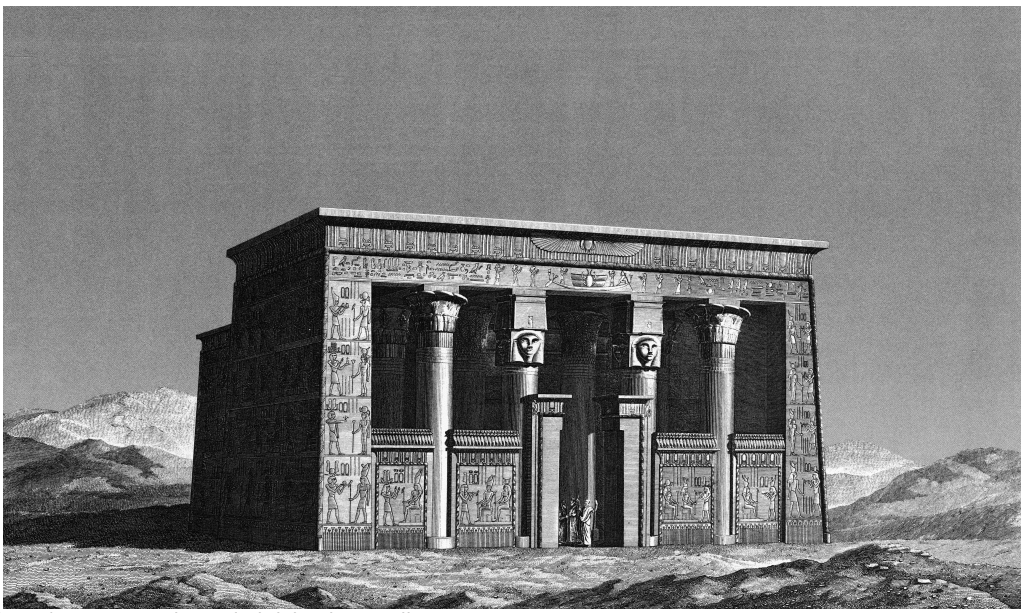


FIG. 6. Reconstitution of the façade of the temple of el-Hilla (from *Description de l'Égypte*, *Antiquités-Planches* I, pl. 90,1).

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