

**Respecting the ancestors:
Applying on some reused blocks
from the Sphinx Avenue**

**Alshymaa Mohamed Mahmoud
Mohamed (MoTA)
Prof.Dr.Mansour Elnoubi Mansour
(Luxor Uni.)
Ass.Prof.Dr. Raouf Abo Elwafa El
wardani (S. V. U.)**

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Abstract :

Reusing old materials was widespread in Ancient Egypt. Reusing building materials became a tradition in most cases for many reasons. Some can be economic reasons but others exceed this cause to become ideological reasons for reusing. This practice can be noticed in many areas in the lower parts of buildings or to hide the inscribed face of the block. On the other hand, there should be a degree of tension while reusing materials so, in addition to getting benefits from their ancestors and venerating them by reusing their material in later buildings, some kings sometimes were proud to surpass what their ancestors had done.

Keywords: Recycling, Veneration, Processional way, Karnak, Luxor, Tradition of reusing, Building material

ملخص البحث

كانت إعادة استخدام المواد القديمة منتشرة على نطاق واسع في مصر القديمة. أصبحت إعادة استخدام مواد البناء تقليدًا في معظم الحالات لأسباب عديدة. يمكن أن يكون بعضها أسبابًا اقتصادية ولكن البعض الآخر يتجاوز هذا السبب ليصبح أسبابًا أيديولوجية لإعادة الاستخدام. ويمكن ملاحظة هذه الممارسة في العديد من المناطق في الأجزاء السفلية من المباني وكذلك في إخفاء الجزء المنقوش من الكتلة داخل البناء. ومن ناحية أخرى، يجب أن يكون هناك قدر من الحرص أثناء إعادة استخدام المواد، فبالإضافة إلى الحصول على فوائد من أسلافهم وتبجيلهم من خلال إعادة استخدام موادهم في المباني اللاحقة، كان بعض الملوك يفخرون أحيانًا بتجاوز ما فعله أسلافهم.

الكلمات الدالة: إعادة التدوير ، التبجيل ، طريق الموكب ، الكرنك ، الأقصر ، تقليد إعادة الاستخدام ، مواد بناء

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The processional way between Karnak and Luxor temples has been used for many centuries as an avenue for sacred processions. The annual Opet Festival, during which the bark of Amun—and ultimately those of Mut, Khonsu, and the king as well—journeyed from Karnak to Luxor, became a central religious celebration of ancient Thebes during the 18 th Dynasty. The rituals of the Opet Festival¹ celebrated the sacred marriage of Amun—with whom the king merged—and Mut, resulting in the proper transmission of the royal Ka and thus ensuring the maintenance of kingship.² This celebration made this route look like a one-of-a-kind piece (Fig. 1).

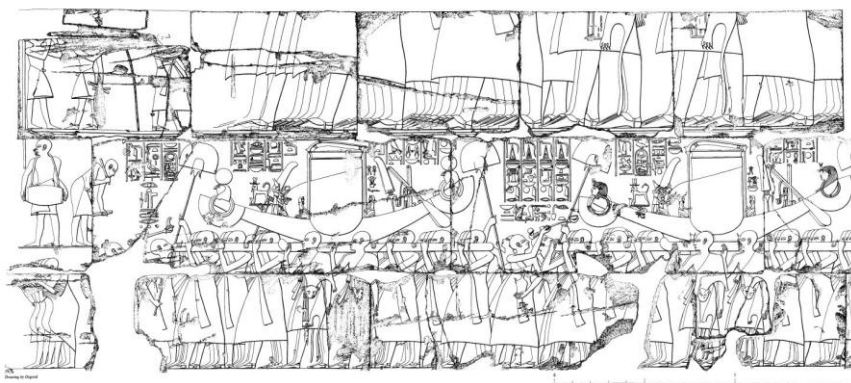


Figure 1: Opet festival, Luxor Temple. ©OIP

The excavation process carried out on the avenue began in 1948 until now. The seasons remained connected and separate by removing the debris from the southern part of it in front of Luxor temple, then heading north towards Karnak. The date and the form of the earliest processional routes south from Karnak temple remain

¹ For more about the Opet festival: Murnane, W., Opetfest. In *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Vol. 4 (columns 574 - 579), ed. Wolfgang Helck, and Wolfhard Westendorf. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1982; Schott, S., *Altägyptische Festdaten*. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Abhandlungen der Geistes-und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 10. Mainz: Steiner, 1950; Wolf, W., *Das schöne Fest von Opet: Die Festzugsdarstellung im grossen Saalengange des Tempels von Luksor*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs 1930.

² Darnell, J. C., Opet Festival. In *Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles 2010, p. 1.

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³ Sullivan, Elaine, 2010, The Development of the Temple of Karnak. On Digital Karnak, Los Angeles. <http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak>, p. 16.

⁴ Sullivan, The Development..., p. 2.

⁵ Bell, L., The New Kingdom 'Divine Temple': The Example of Luxor. In *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron Shafer, pp. 127-184; Bryan, B., The Temple of Mut: New Evidence on Hatshepsut's Building Activity. In *Hatshepsut, from queen to Pharaoh*, ed. Catharine Roehrig, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2005, pp. 181-183.

⁶ Cabrol, A., favicon-nakala « Une représentation de la tombe de Khâbekhenet et les dromos de Karnak-sud : nouvelles hypothèses. Les béliers du dromos du temple de Khonsou et l'intérieur de l'enceinte du temple de Mout », *Karnak 10*, 1995, pp. 33-63.

⁷ Boraik, M.: *Gods's way...*, p. 34.

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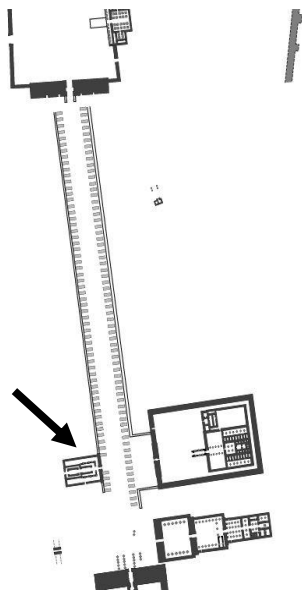


Figure 2: the place of one of Hatshepsut's shrines at the processional way between the tenth pylon and Mut temple ©UCLA

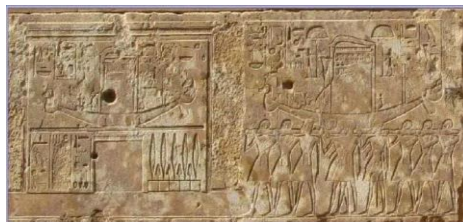


Figure 3: The third bark shrine of Hatshepsut on the processional route between Karnak and Luxor Temples, as depicted in the Red Chapel at Karnak. © Darnell 2010

The location and orientation of the temple of Khonsu, built by Ramesses III, can be best understood as related to the important southern processional routes. His temple faced south, and it seems to have had its own processional running in that direction.⁸ A powerful “high priest of Amun” during the 21st Dynasty named Pinedjem⁹ added pairs of ram-headed sphinxes (likely taken from the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III across the river) to this processional way. The image of the child god Khonsu, as son of Amun and Mut, would have been

⁸ Sullivan, *The Development...*, p.16.

⁹ Ramses XI “Menmare” was succeeded by king Khakheperre Pinuzem, who in turn was succeeded by king Herihor. The High Priest Pinuzem, son of Piankh, served under king Herihor and was a different individual from king Khakheperre Pinuzem. The scenes in the Temple of Khonsu are reinterpreted in the light of this “two Pinuzem scenario”, showing that royal scenes cut for the king were later usurped by the High Priest. More about this period:

Thijs, A., “The Scenes of the High Priest Pinuzem in the Temple of Khonsu”, *ZÄS* 134, 2007, pp. 50-63.

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(i.e. Luxor Temple) Jp.t-rsy=f. There was no road more beautiful (than it) ever existed (before)....”¹²

The avenue was still in use during the Ptolemaic period while its religious function as a processional avenue stopped during the Roman period when Luxor Temple was transferred into a roman camp. From this date onwards, many areas of the avenue were adapted to serve as industrial places for pottery and wine production.

In addition, the Christian period reflected its features not only on Luxor temple (Fresco paintings and the church) and Karnak temples (Akh-Menu, Amenhotep II temple, Khonsu temple as well as the Opet temple)¹³ but also at the processional way, the recent excavations revealed some Coptic occupation happened at the avenue (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: A gutter (basin) with a carved cross on top found at the processional way. © Alshaimaa Mandor

The forms of the statues at the avenue are divided into 3 forms. **The first** is located between the tenth pylon and the Temple of Mut. It dates back to the eighteenth dynasty, has the shape of statues in the form of a ram's head with a lion's body, and is known as the crio-sphinx. **The second** shape is located to the south of Bab el Amara gate to the south of Khonsu temple, with the form

¹² Abd-El-Raziq, M., Study on Nectanebo 1st in Luxor temple and Karnak, MDAIK 23(1968), p. 157.

¹³ Coquin, R-G, La Christianization des temples de karnak, BIFAO 72 (1972), pp. 169-178.

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- 1- The pedestals dates back to the reign of Amenhotep III and there is no monument for this king in this area.
- 2- Their pedestals are not convenient to the size of the statues themselves.
- 3- The distances between the pedestals are too narrow compared to others along the avenue.
- 4- They seem to be squeezed to each other.
- 5- It is also clear that the pedestals were previously dismantled then re-established as a mass in the scenes can be easily noted on the pedestals.

All these clues led to the result that these statues or at least only the pedestals might have been established in a certain place then they were transferred to this area and this might have happened during the time of the 21th dynasty when the pylon of Khonsu temple was inscribed. Then, the statues were squeezed to the south before building the Evergates gate.

The third shape which form the main part of the avenue is located from Luxor temple to the north where it meets the sphinxes from Mut Temple and Khonsu area. They date back to the reign of Nectanebo I. The statues at this area represent Human Sphinx shape with a human head accompanied with lion's body. Therefore, this variation in statues' shapes (Fig. 8) might lead us to name the avenue as "Processional Way" instead of "Sphinx Avenue".

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Figure 6 Crio- Shpinx

© <https://displate.com/displate/5378518>

The Avenue's construction took a long time approx. 1000 years from Hatshepsut's reign (1479–1458 BC) to Nectanebo's (379/8–361/0 BCE). Many reused blocks used at the processional way are spread everywhere. Most of the reused blocks are inscribed from previous periods but they were reused at the avenue upside down or through hiding the inscribed face inside the masonry. We can call this phenomena as the tradition of reusing.

Why did the Ancient Egyptians reuse building materials and from where did they bring those materials? Did they dismantle some previous buildings or they reused the already dismantled ones? Were there economic reasons or another ideological might be included?

Like members of all pre-modern societies, ancient Egyptians practiced various forms of recycling. The reuse of building materials by rulers is attested throughout Egyptian history and was motivated by ideological and economic concerns. Reuse of masonry from the dilapidated monuments of royal predecessors may have given legitimacy to newer constructions, but in some cases, economic considerations or even antipathy towards an earlier ruler were the decisive factors. Private individuals also made use of the tombs and burial equipment of others—often illicitly—and tomb robbing was a common phenomenon. Ultimately, many monuments were reused in the post-Pharaonic era, including tombs. Restoration of decayed or damaged

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Applying on some reused blocks from the Sphinx Avenue monuments was a pious aspiration of some rulers. In the wake of Akhenaten's iconoclastic vendetta against the god Amun and the Theban triad, his successors carried out a large-scale program of restoring vandalized reliefs and inscriptions. Restorations of Tutankhamun and Ay were often usurped by Horemheb and Sety I as part of the Commemoration of the Amarna-era pharaohs. Post-Amarna restorations were sometimes marked by a formulaic inscribed "label." Restoration inscriptions and physical repairs to damaged reliefs and buildings were also made by the Ptolemaic kings and Roman emperors.¹⁴ Applying on the processional way, there are a numerous number of reused inscribed blocks. By the reign of Nectanebo I, some previously inscribed blocks and parts of columns were reused to build the bases of statues at the avenue.¹⁵

Moreover, we should distinguish between two types of reuse. The **first** is the blocks that were reused during the main construction period of the Avenue, this type can be noticed at the pavement and the pedestals (Fig. 9) and the **second** type is the blocks reused in the later masonries inside the avenue (Fig. 10).



Figure 7: A reused block at one of the pedestals (first type of reuse). ©Alshaimaa Mandor

¹⁴ Brand, P. J., Reuse and Restoration. In Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology (UEE)*, Los Angeles 2010, P. 1.

¹⁵ Boraik, M., *The Sphinx Avenue Excavations. Second Report.* karnak 14, 2013, p.15

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Figure 8: Reusing a human-headed sphinx in a roman building (second type of reuse).

After: Boriak, Second Report, Karnak 14, 2013, p. 53.

The tradition of reusing appeared not only at the industrial areas of the avenue but it can also be noticed from the beginning of the avenue's construction. The purposes of reuse differed from the period of using the avenue for religious processions to the period when its religious function had stopped and this will be detailed later in this paper.

One of the oldest reused inscribed blocks was found built-in the pavement at the area in front of Luxor temple (Fig. 11). It is a sand stone block that might have been part of an architrave¹⁶ distinguished with cartouches of Thutmose IV. The Ankh sign in the middle and a similar text on both sides for the king's name were followed by the name of Amun. Some remarks of the chiseling can be noticed on both sides and this might have happened at the stage of preparing the block for reusing.

¹⁶ Boriak, God's..., p. 55.

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Figure 9: Reusing an architrave of Thutmose IV at the pavement. After: Boraik, *The Sphinx Avenue Excavations. Second Report, Karnak 10, 2013*, p. 55.

Not only the pavement that contained reused blocks but also some reused blocks at the pedestals themselves that the excavation process resulted. The previously inscribed faces used to be hidden inside the construction in which they were reused. Therefore, the function of the old building ended by hiding the inscription but still the sacredness of the block remains.

This block (fig. 12) was reused at one of the west side pedestals. It is in sunk relief, depicts part of the king's blue crown and a protecting bird is flying over the head. The bird is holding a "Shen" sign referring to protection while the carefully carved crown with its details may refer to the New kingdom's art style. The unfinished decoration of the

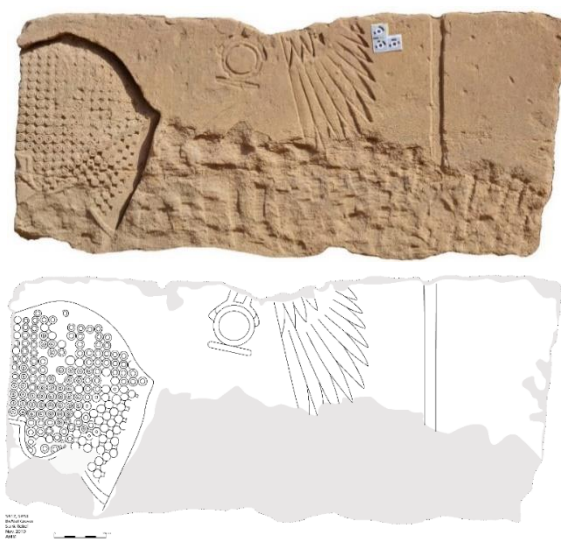


Figure 10: A blue crown depiction from one of the pedestals (above) and a facsimile (below). ©Alshaimaa Mandor

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crown, which catches the eyes, made this piece unique as it shows the method that the ancient Egyptian artist followed in carving. He seemed to start finishing the details of the crown from the center towards the sides but something happened that prevented the artist from continuing the rest of carving. The chiseling the lower part of the block may had happened as preparing of the block for the reusing stage. Another parallel of the same scene from a synchronized period can be seen from the reign of Amenhotep III at Pergamon museum in Berlin (Fig. 13).



Figure 11: Amenhotep III wearing the blue crown from Pergamon Museum, Berlin

[File:Amenhotep III wearing the blue crown, 18th dynasty, ca. 1360 BCE; Pergamon Museum, Berlin \(40190373612\).jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

This is a winged hawk depiction holding the protection sign. Looking at the detailed face of the hawk together with other details that appear in the text, the style of the new kingdom art is slightly confirmed here.

The unorganized shape of the left side leads to think that this block may have been part of a doorjamb and the unorganized shape is the place of adjunction to the sidewall nearby. Therefore, the block was then dismantled and prepared for a new stage of recycling at the processional way between karnak and Luxor (Fig. 14).

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Figure 12: A reused block in one of the pedestals (above) and a facsimile (below).
©Alshaimaa Mandor

The tradition of reusing¹⁷ was well known through the ancient Egyptians' history. The processional way between karnak and Luxor is one of the most remarkable places that witnessed a history of recycling for building material. The places of reusing were various through this avenue like the reused blocks inside the pedestals, the pavement and other later buildings that were built after the processional purpose of the avenue had stopped. The purposes of reusing were mixed between finding a cheaper easier solutions than bringing building material from quarries in addition to making a connection with their ancestors through reusing a holy material from the past as roots to their newly building. This was the case during the pharaonic times but the concept differed later when the religious beliefs moved to the Christianity. Then, the only purpose of the reuse became expediency from old material instead of bringing new material from quarries with high cost of transportation regardless any other religious benefits.

¹⁷ Brand, P. J., Reuse....., pp. 1-15.