

**The Festive and Processional Pathways in Ancient Egypt:
The Beautiful Feast of the Valley in Thebes “Case Study”**

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Egypt: The Beautiful Feast of the Valley in Thebes
“Case Study”**

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In ancient times the Egyptians enjoyed commemorating the important religious or political occasions (both local and national) with special festivals. The processions were a unique type of celebration, as the image of the god on its divine bark used to be moved from a temple to other or from a region to other. The Beautiful Feast of the Valley was one of the most famous feasts in Thebes, and seems to have been already celebrated during the Middle Kingdom and continued to be observed through the Greco-Roman period. The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi procession began at Karnak, with the portable barks of Amun-Re, Mut, and Khonsu leaving the east bank with the other royal barks, then crossed the Nile to the opposite bank (west bank of Thebes). During the Middle

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Kingdom; the destination of the procession was to the mortuary temple of Mentuhotep Nebhepetre (Ax-swṯ), while during the New Kingdom the destination was to the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut (Dsr-Dsrw). After the reign of Hatshepsut; Thutmosis III changed the destination to his temple (Hnkt-anx). Later, the procession used to make a tour in the all the mortuary temples in the west bank of Thebes as most of the kings paid attention to this feast, especially it was dedicated to god Amun.

في العصور القديمة؛ اهتم المصريون القدماء بتخليد ذكري بعض المناسبات الدينية و السياسية الهامة علي المستوي المحلي و القومي وذلك من خلال احتفالات خاصة. كانت المواكب نوع فريد من الاحتفالات، حيث تحرك المركب المقدسة بالاله من معبد الي اخر أو من منطقة الي اخري. كان عيد الوادي الجميل واحداً من أهم الاعياد في طيبة، ويبدو أن الاحتفال بهذا العيد بدأ منذ عهد الدولة الوسطي واستمر بشكل واضح حتي العصر اليوناني الروماني. يبدأ موكب عيد الوادي الجميل من الكرنك بالمراكب المقدسة لكلاً من امون، موت و خونسو تاركاً البر الشرقي لطيبة بصحبة المراكب الملكية ثم يعبر الموكب نهر النيل الي الضفة الغربية. كانت الجهة المقصودة للموكب أثناء عهد الدولة الوسطي الي المعبد الجنائزي لمنتوحتب الثاني، ثم تغيرت بعد ذلك أثناء الدولة الحديثة لتكون الي المعبد الجنائزي لحتشبسوت، ولكن بعد فترة حكم حتشبسوت غيرها مرة ثانية تحتتمس الثالث الي معبده الجنائزي، ثم أصبح الموكب فيما بعد يقوم بجولة داخل معظم المعابد الجنائزية بالبر الغربي لطيبة نظراً لاهتمام معظم الملوك بهذا العيد؛ خاصة أنه كان مخصص لاله امون.

➤ **Bibliographical Abbreviations**

- SAK: Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur.

- JNES: Journal of near eastern studies.
- BIFAO: Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.
- BACE: Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology.
- BRL: Bulletin of the John Rylands Library.
- LÄ: Lexikon der Ägyptologie.
- JEA: Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.
- CDK: Cahiers De Karnak.
- DMAIK: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts – Kairo.
- ASAE: Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte.
- CFEETK : Centre Franco-Égyptien D'Étude Des Temples De Karnak.
- UCLA: University of California, Los Angeles.
- BMSAES: British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan.
- SAOC: Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization (Univ. of Chicago).
- MÄS: Münchner Ägyptologische Studien.
- LÄ: Lexikon der Ägyptologie.

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- AAW: Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften (Maizn).
- ÄA: Ägyptologische Abhandlungen (Wiesbaden).
- NRIAG: National Research Institute of Astronomy and Geophysics.
- LGG: Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen.
- GM: Göttinger Miszellen.
- JESHO: Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient.
- MDAIK: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo.

➤ **Introduction**

In ancient times, Egyptian festivals were already described in history books, in descriptions of religion, and in literature. However, due to the vastness of the subject, comprehensive accounts of feasts and festivals in ancient Egypt are scarce, and research has tended to focus on one Egyptian feast or festival at a time. The most intensively studied feasts seem to be the New Year Festival, the Festival of Sokar, the Opet Festival, and the Beautiful Feast of the Valley.

Royal Festivals have also been considered closely, while the numerous feasts of the deified King Amenhotep I have been analyzed separately, as have feasts of the dead, feasts of purification, and feasts of circumcision. Some studies have focused on feasts celebrated in a certain temple (e.g., the temple of Horus at Edfu, the temple of Khnum at Esna, the temple of Hathor at Dendera, the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, and the Kawa Temple), whereas others have analyzed the festivals of specific site, for example, Thebes or Deir el-Medina.

Regarding to all above, in ancient times the Egyptians enjoyed commemorating days of the religious and political significance (both local and national) with special festivals. For the Egyptians, this meant a few days or weeks off from their usual labor, as well as feasting and celebrating with their family and community. Records of the endowments given to temples for the celebration of the largest, state-sponsored festivals show that huge amount of food and drink were allotted for the celebrations.

Festival processions were a unique type of celebration, as the image of the god came forth from the temple before the populace. Since regular Egyptians did not commonly have access to the interior of the temples, this was a rare chance to interact with the divine. Written records show that during these processions of the divine cult image, private people sought and received oracles and revelations from the god.

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The culmination of many Egyptian temple festivals was a procession where the statue of a god was carried around. Early references to such processions can be found in festival calendars, temple inventory lists, and on tomb walls. River and sledge processions can be traced back as far as the old Kingdom; and depictions of processions also feature on numerous later temple walls, stelae, and figured ostraca. They are also found described in papyri and ostraca. One of the Egyptian designations for a procession is *Prt*, ‘setting forth’, or ‘appearing’. Another title for a procession is *xa*, ‘appearing’, which was used of a king’s accession to the throne but also of gods ‘appearing’ during festivals. A third term for a procession is *Xnt*, ‘sailing’. This word refers to river and lake processions.

The best known processional festivals are certain Theban festivals, such as the Opet Festival and The Beautiful Feast of the Valley, and various feasts celebrated in the Greco-Roman temples. The walls of the New Kingdom temples contain reliefs showing festival processions, whereas written descriptions seem to have been preferred in the temples of the Greco-Roman period. The central item of the procession was the statue of the particular god carried by *wab*-priests. The images of other deities of the temple in question could join in the procession in the court of the temple or, alternatively, the principal deity of the festival could ‘collect’ the other gods from their sanctuaries or temples on his or her

way out. Musicians, singers, and dancers joined the god's 'entourage' while people were standing around and watching the progress of parade. In many festival depictions, the king is shown leading the procession himself.

Some of the processions seem to have taken place in the hypostyle halls in front of the sanctuaries of the temples. During such temple processions, some minor priests and possibly also selected representatives of the nobility had the opportunity to face the god. The principal processions of other major festivals included parades that came to the outer parts of the temple and even out through the front gate, and present themselves to the lay population. Once in a while, the procession would stop at a way station where rituals would be conducted by senior priests, who were accompanying the god.

Certain processions crossed the river to the other river bank. On other occasions, rather than crossing the river, a procession proceeded along the water to another temple. Some water processions led to another town altogether. During certain festivals, the procession visited several temples on the way to its final destination.

Thebes served as the backdrop for a number of unique religious, political and funerary festivals. Many of these festivals were managed through a pathway of a procession between different temples according to the type and

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circumstances of each occasion. These processional pathways are mostly described through the documentary of the scenes and texts. The study here is following these processional pathways between the Theban temples and highlighting the archaeological terraces on these routes and prominent its historical value.

1. Historical Review

In ancient times, Egyptian festivals were already described in history books, in descriptions of religion, and in literature. However, due to the vastness of the subject, comprehensive accounts of feasts and festivals in ancient Egypt are scarce, and research has tended to focus on one Egyptian feast or festival at a time. The most intensively studied feasts seem to be the New Year Festival, the Festival of Sokar, the Opet Festival, and the Beautiful Feast of the Valley.¹

Attention has also been given to other feasts, such as Wag,² Nehebkau,³ Khoiak,⁴ the Feast of the first day of the decade,⁵ the Festival of Min,⁶ the Sed-festival,⁷ the Feast of drunkenness,⁸ the Feast of Thoth,⁹ the Feasts of Nepri and Renenutet,¹⁰ the Feast of Behedet, and the Feast of Ptah of Entering the Sky.¹¹ Various feasts pertaining to certain gods and goddesses have also been under scrutiny. These include gods, such as Horus and Khnum, and goddesses such as; Hathor, Isis, and Mut; as well as various lion goddesses.¹²

Royal Festivals have also been considered closely, while the numerous feasts of the deified King Amenhotep I have been analyzed separately,¹³ as have feasts of the dead,¹⁴ feasts of purification, and feasts of circumcision.¹⁵ Some studies have focused on feasts celebrated in a certain temple (e.g., the temple of Horus at Edfu,¹⁶ the temple of Khnum at Esna,¹⁷ the temple of Hathor at Dendera, the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, and the Kawa Temple), whereas others have analysed the festivals of specific site, for example, Thebes or Deir el-Medina.¹⁸

Regarding to all above, in ancient times the Egyptians enjoyed commemorating days of the religious and political significance (both local and national) with special festivals. For the Egyptians, this meant a few days or weeks off from their usual labor, as well as feasting and celebrating with their family and community. Records of the endowments given to temples for the celebration of the largest, state-sponsored festivals show that huge amount of food and drink were allotted for the celebrations.¹⁹

Ancient Egyptian festivals were often linked to astronomical phenomena, agricultural seasons and political events. Minor celebrations took place monthly, while larger events occurred annually or sometimes only once in a pharaoh's lifetime. Some of the most interesting festivals are those that linked two temples together, with the cult image

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of one temple traveling to another temple in a ritual procession.²⁰

Festival processions were a unique type of celebration, as the image of the god came forth from the temple before the populace. Since regular Egyptians did not commonly have access to the interior of the temples, this was a rare chance to interact with the divine. Written records show that during these processions of the divine cult image, private people sought and received oracles and revelations from the god.²¹

Depictions of bark processions suggest that a variety of types of people directly participated in the parade. Troops of soldiers, priests, dancers, musicians, and singers are all shown on tomb or temple reliefs as part of the cortege. The addition of music-rhythmic clapping, the rattling of sistra, and chanting of singing – must have heightened the experience for both the viewer and the participants.²²

For the occasion, the cult statue of the god was placed in a covered wooden litter shaped like a boat. This portable “bark” was painted, gilded and equipped with long carrying poles. Temple priests used the poles to support the bark on their shoulders while moving by foot within or outside the temple. Often, processions would include a journey on the Nile and the portable bark would be placed within a river barge and ferried to the site of the next ritual. When the river

journey was over, the priests would again shoulder the portable bark and the procession would move by foot.²³

From the New Kingdom onward, processions usually began within a temple's hypostyle hall, called a "hall of appearances".²⁴ Along the processional route between temples, a series of bark shrines (small buildings with a central stone altar for the placement of the bark) were erected. Ideologically, these stations allowed the divine image to rest within a ritually protected area, while practically they gave priests a break over the long journey to another temple. In some cases, the processional pathways were lined with stone, enclosed with sidewalls and flanked by sphinx statues.²⁵

2. The Beautiful Feast of the Valley (The processional Route)

Among known festivals celebrated in ancient Thebes, many Egyptologists agree that the Beautiful Feast of the Valley is one of the most important between all. This is verified by many historical documents, which juxtapose the festival in texts and pictorial depictions on a great scale.

The most distinct feature of the Valley Festival was that it supplied not only a formal setting for the renewal of kingship and royal ancestral cult, but also a private setting for the common people to hold a banquet in their family tombs. These two dimensions were closely linked through the figure of Amun, who distributed offerings to convey his godly

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power in both spheres. According to records from the private tombs, the people received various offerings from the temples where the procession of Amun made a stop during the Valley Festival.²⁶

2.1. The Feast of the Valley: Origin, Name, and Date.

At Thebes, the wadi festival was linked to the god Amun-Re, who then traveled to the western hills across the river where Hathor was imagined to dwell.²⁷ The ritual journey began by the 11th Dynasty, as evidence shows that a mud brick temple to Amun-Re existed on the east bank of Thebes as early as the reign of king Intef II.²⁸ One of his 11th Dynasty successors, Nebhetepre Mentuhotep II (Fig. 1), constructed a terraced temple in the curve of a natural valley of cliffs directly across from Karnak (the modern Arabic name for this area is Deir el Bahri). Its lack of support buildings shows it was built as a staging ground for ceremonial events and the local point for the festival.²⁹

The name of this eponymous feast, *Hb nfr n int*, is known from various 18th Dynasty tombs.³⁰ In the Medinet Habu Festival Calendar (date attributed to the reigns of Ramesses II and Ramesses III), this particular feast is referred to as *Hb int*.³¹

Hb int appears to have been one of the names used for the Beautiful Feast of the Valley at Deir el-Medina, at least

during the 19th Dynasty. The feast is also mentioned in the text on the back support of a statue of Neferhotep (19th Dynasty) in his tomb.³² During the 20th Dynasty, the name of the Feast of the Valley may have been *pn-int* which is referred to as *II Smw*, the ninth month of the ancient Egyptian civil calendar.³³

The date; thanks to the Medinet Habu calendar lets us know that the Feast of the Valley was connected to the first day of a new lunar month (*psDntyw*) that is why different days of the month (*II Smw*) appear in texts, dependent of the phases of the moon in a given month.³⁴ Hence, since the date of the Valley Festival was determined according to the moon, no fixed civil calendar dates occur as annual work-free days associated with this feast. But; common known information about this feast is that the offerings of the feast were presented on two days.³⁵

2.2. Historical Background

The Beautiful Feast of the Valley seems to have been already celebrated during the Middle Kingdom and continued to be observed through the Greco-Roman period.³⁶ During the Valley Feast, the king crossed the river with the statue of Amon of Karnak to visit the “Temples of Millions of Years” in Western Thebes and to pour water for the royal ancestors.³⁷

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There is evidence that the festival was celebrated from the 11th Dynasty onwards with the temple of Mentuhotep II being the destination for the procession at that time (Fig. 69).³⁸ A number of graffiti on the cliffs overlooking the temple provide this early evidence. They were left by the temple priests, many of them lectors, who recorded watching for a procession leaving the east bank.³⁹ An inscription by the *wab*-priest, Nerferibed, provides a date for the procession:

***“dit iA n imn snTrt n tA nb nTrw m Hbw.f tpw (n)
Smw wbn.fhrw n Xn r int Nb-Hpt-ra in w’b Nfrabd’***

“Giving praise to Amun, kissing the ground before the Lord of the Gods on his festivals, the First Day of *shemu* shining, on the day of voyaging to the valley of Nebhepetra, by the *wab*-priest of Amun, Neferibed”⁴⁰

From the 19th Dynasty onwards, the statues of Mut, Khonsu, and Amaunet also took part in the procession. Originally, the destination of the procession appears to have been the temples at Deir el-Bahri, but during the Ramesside Period, the statue of Amon rested overnight in the “Temple of Millions of Years” of the reigning king.⁴¹

The Valley Feast, however, not only pertained to Amon of Karnak, but Hathor also had a prominent role in the festivities. This was, additionally, one of the feasts to appease the enraged Solar Eye, the daughter of Re.⁴² various officials

took part in the procession to Western Thebes and celebrated the feast in their respective family tomb chapels in the necropolis. The purpose of the family gathering at the tomb seems to have been to participate in the sun god's journey to the afterlife. And to temporarily lift the veil between the living and the dead.⁴³

The inhabitants of Deir el-Medina appear to have been familiar with the procession of the statue of Amon of Karnak to Western Thebes. There are many references dated to the month of II *Smw* which mention the crossing of the river (pA DAy) by Amon. These references may be to the processions of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley.⁴⁴

Furthermore, at the beginning of the verso of O. Berlin P 12635 (date attributed to year 4-6 of Ramesses IV), the scribe of this account of transfers wrote about the 'Coming of the gods from the east'. This passage might refer to the statues of Amon, Mut, Khonsu, and Amentet coming in procession from Karnak to Western Thebes during the Beautiful Feast of the Valley. The writer of P. Turin Cat., 2044 (date attributed to the mid-20th Dynasty) appears to describe a water procession where the people of Eastern and Western Thebes were rejoicing while Amon-Re is also mentioned. This description does bear a resemblance to the procession of the Valley Festival described in Theban tombs.⁴⁵

3. The Processional Route of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley.

The Wadi festival, like the Theban Opet festival, changed and grew more elaborate through time. From a variety of sources (archaeological, iconographic and textual), display additions or innovations to the festival have been traced. It is impossible to conclusively identify the route of the festival during each New Kingdom king's reign, but a number of interesting modifications have been documented that suggest the festival was constantly evolving.⁴⁶

3.1. The processional route during the reign of Hatshepsut.

Hatshepsut constructed a terraced temple in the sacred valley, next to that of Mentuhotep II, in what may have been an attempt to associate her reign with the glory of the 11th Dynasty kings.⁴⁷ The temple, named *Djeser-djesru* (holy of holies), had three levels, each fronted by a square pillared portico. It included a bark chamber for the portable bark of Amun-Re during the Wadi festival, as well as chapels for other deities. A walled causeway led from the temple to a landing station on the low desert plain. Here, a canal or basin would have connected the pathway to the Nile. A bark shrine stood between the temple and the landing, providing a place to rest the god's bark during the processions along the causeway (Fig. 2).⁴⁸

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi procession began at Karnak, with the portable barks of Amun-Re, Mut, and Khonsu leaving the east bank. The route of the divine images within greater Karnak is unknown, and whether they approached the river at the Amun temple's western gate, or from the quays of Mut or Khonsu, remains unclear.⁴⁹

Situated directly across the Nile from Karnak, the position of the Deir el-Bahri temples was probably influenced by the location of the Amun temple. A processional route moving directly across the Nile from the Amun precinct's western gate and quay could have accented this ritualized relationship. However, one scholar has also suggested that the procession would have exited the temple through Hatshepsut's new eighth pylon. It is almost exactly on line with the central axis of the Hatshepsut west bank temple.⁵⁰

Crossing the Nile, the riverboat ferried the divine barks and the royals to the opposite bank. After navigating through a channel or to a basin, the festival cortege stopped at the landing station and the participants disembarked. The group would have processed along the walled causeway, halting to rest within the bark shrine at the halfway point.⁵¹ The ceremonial march continued to the temple's first court, the route now lined by sandstone sphinxes of the queen. A series of ramps led up to the second and third terrace levels. Having carried the barks to the third (or upper) terrace, the priests

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would have placed it within the central sanctuary where it rested for the night.⁵²

The festival procession during the reign of Hatshepsut is depicted in relief on the eastern wall (north wing) and northern wall of the *Djeser-djeseru*'s upper terrace court (although the image of the queen was cut out and replaced with text or other features in the later part of the reign of Thutmose III). The scenes originally showed Hatshepsut and her nephew Thutmose III at the very start of the festival, praising the gods before they left the temple at Karnak.⁵³

The procession is then portrayed as moving from the temple to the river. The royal duo is represented travelling across the Nile, accompanied by priests, soldiers, members of court and ritual objects such as divine standards and royal statues. Two royal ships and two ceremonial barges are shown making the crossing. Offerings were made after landing on the west bank (presumably at the landing station), as well as within the bark shrine along the causeway. The scene of the latter shows the royal pair burning incense before the bark while dancers perform for the ceremony.⁵⁴

In the next group of scenes, set inside the temple proper, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III welcome the divine barks to the temple. The joyous procession is accompanied by singers, dancers and torch-bearers. The queen makes offerings to Amun-Re in the court and then within his private bark

chamber. When Hatshepsut emerges from the temple interior, the necessary rituals appear to have been completed, and the next stage of the festival began.⁵⁵

The queen's "Red Chapel" at Karnak also included a number of scenes (located on the north wall) commemorating the festival. Two depictions of the procession from Karnak to *Djeser-djeseru* have been preserved. The blocks show the queen and her nephew offering to the bark of Amun-Re, once on their path to the Nile from Karnak temple, and once with the bark resting in a shrine on the west bank.⁵⁶

The return route of the procession seems to have followed the same path, and relief scenes from *Djeser-djeseru* show that stops were again made (presumably at the bark shrine and landing station along the causeway) for praising and censuring to the divine barks.⁵⁷ Six blocks from the "red chapel" record the return trip to Karnak as well. These depict the procession of the bark from Deir el-Bahri on foot, the transport of the god's bark across the river and the arrival of the bark on the east bank. In another scene, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III accompany Amun's bark within the festival hall of Karnak temple.⁵⁸

3.2. The processional route's changes after the reign of Hatshepsut.

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A major change took place in the next reign, when Thutmose III came to the throne after Hatshepsut's death. A new temple, named *Djeser-akhet* (holy of the horizon), was built wedged between the temples of Mentuhotep II and Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahri. Similar to *Djeser-djeseru*, it was formed by a series of terraces with square-pillared porticoes.⁵⁹ The temple was built to function as the new home for the Wadi festival, replacing Hatshepsut's as the main destination for the procession and resting place for Amun-Re through the night.⁶⁰

Information from the 18th Dynasty shows that during the reign of Thutmose III or after, the festival procession route was altered to allow the gods to visit the mortuary temples of the kings on the west bank. Inscriptions from later in the same dynasty suggest that Hatshepsut's temple was still part of the Wadi festival, as they mention not only the *Djeser-akhet* but the *Djeser-djeseru* as well, which seems to have still functioned as a place for the worship of Amun-Re and the male Thutmose kings. Perhaps Amun-Re traveled to both temples at this time.⁶¹

The visitation of royal mortuary temples became an important part of the ceremony (Fig. 3). Tomb and temple inscriptions show that many of the kings wanted to be included in the ritual procession. An inscription from the pillared hall of the Ramesseum shows that king Ramesses II

participated in the festival when the bark of Amun-Re rested overnight within his mortuary temple.⁶²

On the south wall of Ramesses III's temple of Medinet Habu, an inscription boasts that the king built a "festival hall" within his temple for the appearance of Amun-Re during his feast days, including the Wadi festival.⁶³ Indeed, a papyrus that recounts an assassination attempt made on this same king mentions that the king was watching the bark of Amun-Re arrive for the Feast of the Wadi from somewhere high in the temple when the conspirators breached the temple's western gate.⁶⁴

The site of Medinet Habu held special religious meaning, as it was considered the burial place of Amun and the eight primeval gods who created the world. In the 18th Dynasty, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III built a small temple there, possibly over earlier cult buildings of the 18th and 11th Dynasty. The temple, enlarged and modified through the Roman period, served as a key center for the cult of Amun-Re on the Theban west bank. Ramesses III enclosed the small Thutmoside temple within the precinct walls of his larger mortuary temple, associating himself directly with the ancient holy place.⁶⁵ It is possible that the divine image of Amun-Re of Karnak paused within the 18th Dynasty temple to visit his west bank cult from during the processions for the Wadi festival.⁶⁶

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4. The End of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley Festival.

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi festival came to a spectacular end sometime in the late 20th Dynasty. An earthquake dislodged part of the limestone cliffs above the temples, and all three were smashed by falling rock. Hatshepsut’s temple fared the best, and has been almost fully reconstructed in recent years by a polish archaeological team. The temple of Thutmose III was almost completely destroyed, although bits of pillars and wall relief have been recovered and used to understand the function and decoration of the *Djeser-Akhet*.⁶⁷

➤ **Conclusion**

The Beautiful Feast of the Valley seems to have been already celebrated during the Middle Kingdom and continued to be observed through the Greco-Roman period. The name of this sacred feast is mentioned through the texts as *Hb nfr n int* or *Hb int*. During the Valley Feast, the king crossed the river with the statue of Amon of Karnak to visit the “Temples of Millions of Years” in Western Thebes and to pour water for the royal ancestors. The Wadi festival, like the Theban Opet festival, changed and grew more elaborate through time. From a variety of sources (archaeological, iconographic and textual), display additions or innovations to the festival have been traced. It is impossible to conclusively identify the route of the festival during each New Kingdom

king's reign, but a number of interesting modifications have been documented that suggest the festival was constantly evolving.

The Beautiful Feast of the Wadi procession began at Karnak, with the portable barks of Amun-Re, Mut, and Khonsu leaving the east bank. The route of the divine images within greater Karnak is unknown, and whether they approached the river at the Amun temple's western gate, or from the quays of Mut or Khonsu, remains unclear. Situated directly across the Nile from Karnak, the position of the Deir el-Bahri temples was probably influenced by the location of the Amun temple. A processional route moving directly across the Nile from the Amun precinct's western gate and quay could have accented this ritualized relationship.

Crossing the Nile, the riverboat ferried the divine barks and the royals to the opposite bank. After navigating through a channel or to a basin, the festival cortege stopped at a landing station and the participants disembarked. The group would have processed along a walled causeway, halting to rest within a bark shrine at the halfway point. The ceremonial march continued to the temple's first court, the route now lined by sandstone sphinxes of the queen Hatshepsut. A series of ramps led up to the second and third terrace levels. Having carried the barks to the third (or upper) terrace, the priests would have placed it within the central sanctuary where it rested for the night.

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The return route of the procession seems to have followed the same path, and relief scenes from *Djeser-djeseru* show that stops were again made (presumably at the bark shrine and landing station along the causeway) for praising and censuring to the divine barks. Six blocks from the “red chapel” record the return trip to Karnak as well. These depict the procession of the bark from Deir el-Bahri on foot, the transport of the god’s bark across the river and the arrival of the bark on the east bank. In another scene, Hatshepsut and Thutmose III accompany Amun’s bark within the festival hall of Karnak temple.

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➤ Appendix of Figures

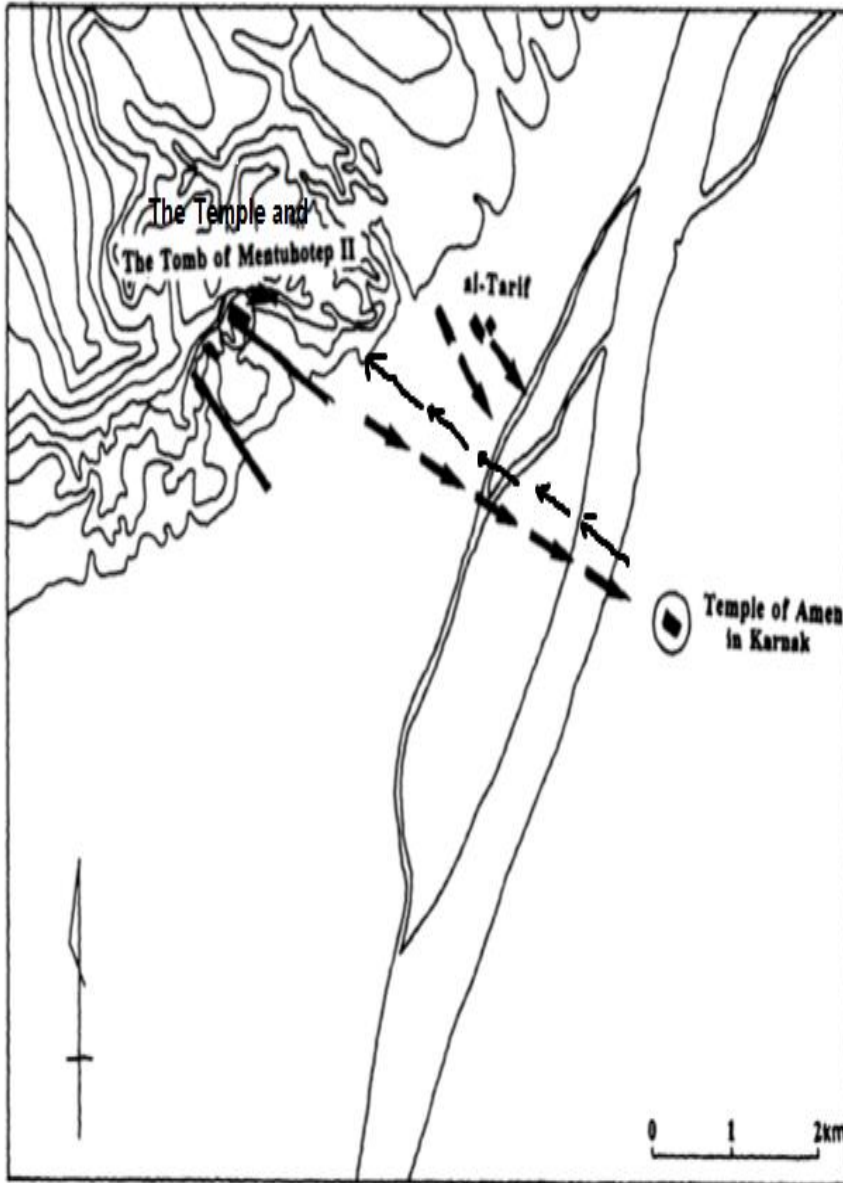


Fig. 1: Map shows the pathway of the procession during the Middle Kingdom.

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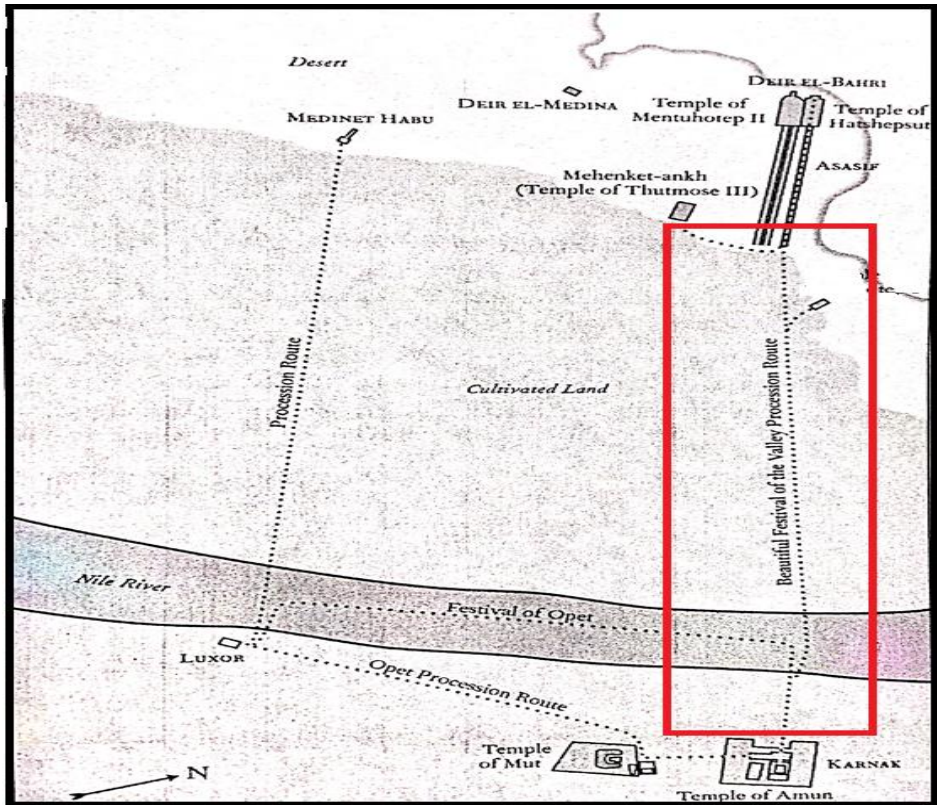


Fig. 2: Map shows the procession’s pathway of the Beautiful feast of the Valley during Hatshepsut’s reign (Remarked by the rectangular shape)

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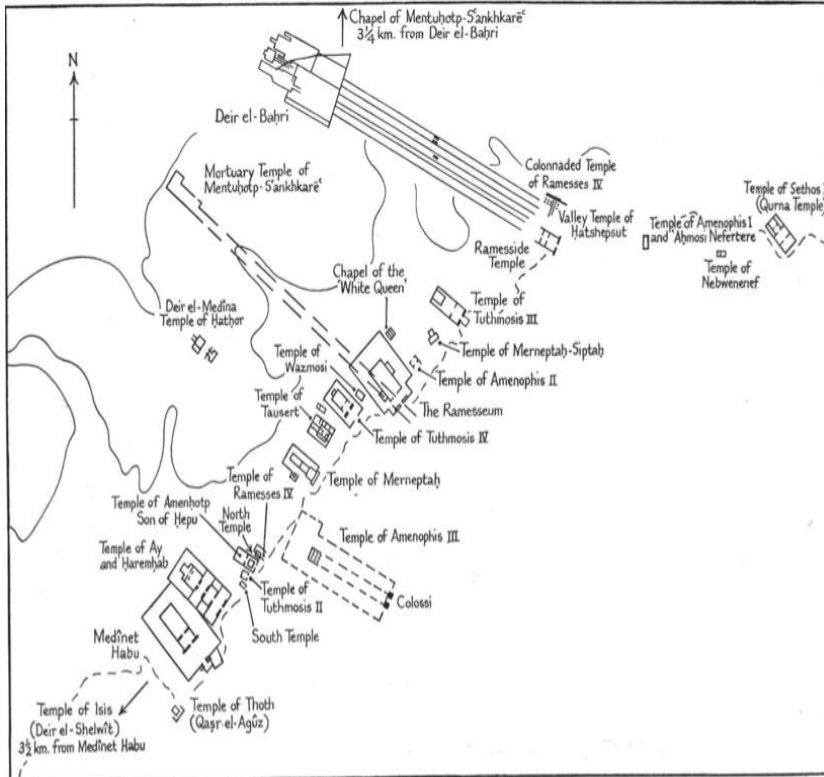


Fig. 3: Map displays the locations of the mortuary temples in the west bank of Thebes.

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