

## At the gates of heaven: The temple forecourt

### The Forecourt: On the threshold of the sacred

A temple forecourt contained depictions of the king and a few royal subjects. Our knowledge of how they were installed is better from the New Kingdom onward, around 1550 BCE, thanks to the vestiges of later temples. The data supplied by archaeological digs is complemented by texts and images.

#### **An extraordinary sentinel**

Colossal statues of the king accompanied the bas-reliefs on the massive walls at the entrance to the temple. The pharaoh was shown slaying his enemies, demonstrating that the chaos threatening the sacred precinct of the temple was prevented by the person the gods had placed on the throne to maintain worldly order. Depictions of the king also confronted anyone appearing at the gate to the temple, thereby constituting a representation, in the human sphere, of the person who was closest to the gods.

#### **Self-interested intermediaries**

Individuals sought to maintain a presence as close as possible to the gates that led to the sacred precinct, thanks to some token or monument that created an enduring link to the presiding deity. Through favor or rank, certain individuals were depicted holding the god's emblems or image; others were shown sitting on the ground. Through this visible, powerful presence, these individuals claimed—through personal accomplishment or by appeals to passersby—to act as efficient intermediaries to the king or god. In return they expected to receive, for all eternity, either special temple offerings made to the deity or simple pious tributes from visitors.



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