

At the gates of heaven: The temple forecourt

Appropriating the invisible

The temple was the point of contact between the world of gods and the world of humans, there where earth and heaven intersected in a shrine that housed a statue of the deity.

The dwelling place of a god

The land of Egypt contained a multitude of temples dedicated to deities of varying importance within the Egyptian pantheon. However, within their own temples even minor deities were considered—at least, locally—as the creator of the world and the guarantor of its perpetuation. The temple was therefore perceived as the god's abode, whether permanent or mere sleeping place. The statue was the object of a daily ritual: after the “gates of heaven” protecting the shrine were opened, the statue was brought forth, fed, dressed, and adorned. By being present in the real, created world, the deity contributed to its continued existence.

A human horizon

The temple was a sacred zone that called for purifying rituals. Access was usually forbidden to people who were not part of the personnel who performed the rites. The sanctuary was separated from the rest of the world by a wall with monumental gates; opening them was a human equivalent of the divine manifestation of the daily rising of the sun on the horizon. The gates of the temple were therefore a human version of the “gates of heaven”—being near them was a way of approaching divinity.



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