

B 500: The Great Amun Temple under the Kushites

B 500-Phases VI and VII: Piankhy

Not until the rise of the Kushites in the early 8th century BC were new renovations undertaken on B 500. By this time the old Egyptian temple was probably in need of serious repair. Certainly, early in the reign of Piankhy (ca. 747-716 BC), B 500 was heavily renewed internally, encased in a new outer wall, and provided with a throne room (B 520), with a massive black granite throne dais (**figs. 21, 22**). Ramses II's unfinished hypostyle hall (B 502), which had been planned (probably) for 60 columns, was also finally completed by Piankhy with 42 columns, set in a new arrangement, all inscribed for himself (**figs. 18, 19**), and the hall was roofed with timber, probably open to the sky along the axis (**fig. 20**).

Even before the pylon of B 502 was decorated, the king had begun construction of an even larger court (B 501), fronted by a still larger pylon (B 500-Phase VII) (**fig. 23**). This brought the temple's total length to 156 m (300 Egyptian royal cubits).

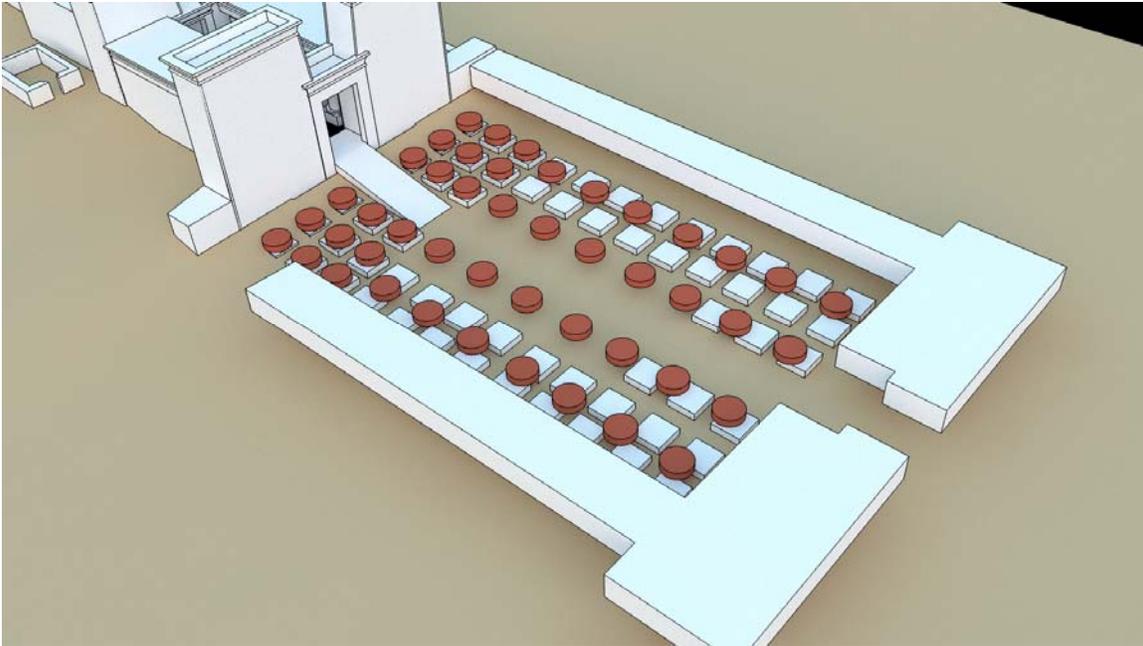


fig. 18. Court B 502, showing the unfinished columns attributed to Ramses II (white) and, over them (red), the bases of the columns actually completed by Piankhy in B 500-Phase VI.



fig. 19: *Bases for the massive unfinished columns attributed to Ramses II underlying the smaller shallower column bases of Piankhy's columns.*

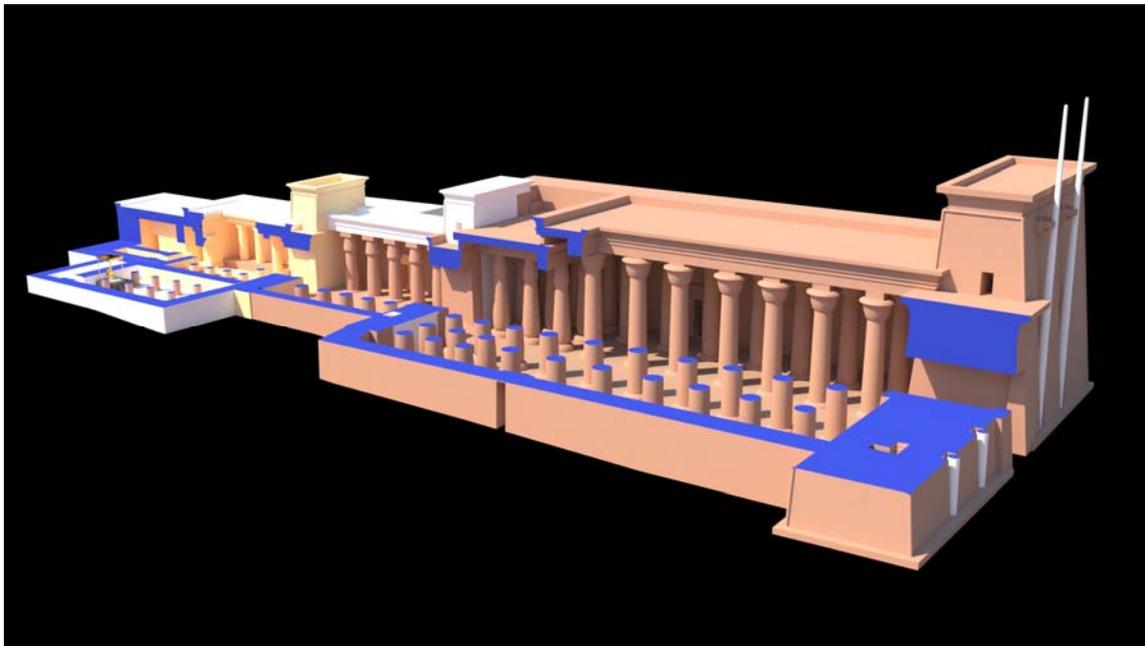


fig. fig. 20. *Cutaway view of B 500-Phase VI, showing Piankhy's completion of Ramses II's planned hypostyle hall 502..*



fig. 21. *B 520: Piankhy's new throne room, added to the northwestern corner of the temple.*



fig. 22. *B 520: Interior view of the Piankhy throne room.*

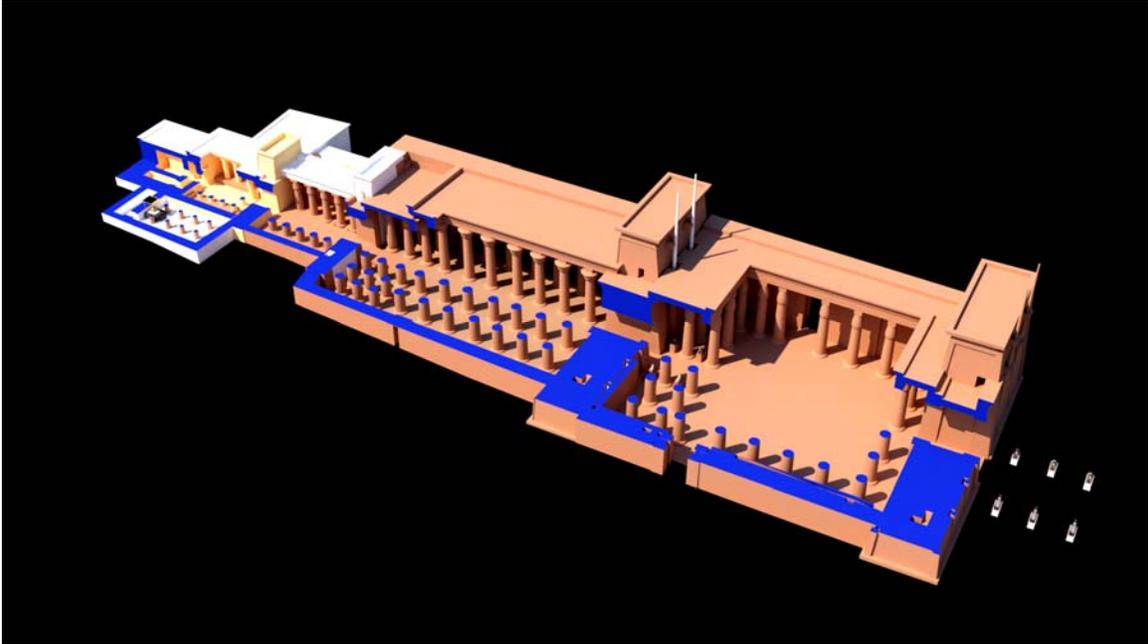


fig. 23. *Cutaway view of B 500-Phase VII. The Amun temple as it probably looked at the end of Piankhy's reign, about 716 BC.*



fig. 24. *Court B 501 as it may have appeared at the end of Piankhy's reign.*

The main purpose of Piankhy's two great courts, it seems, was to provide wall space for the reliefs which would illustrate the events of his Egyptian campaign of Year 20 (ca. 727 BC), during which he conquered virtually all of Egypt and received oaths of allegiance from all of the co-reigning kinglets of Lower Egypt. These events were described on an enormous granite stele, set up in B 501, which was recovered in 1862 and removed to the

Cairo Museum. Today, sadly, most of the reliefs are in very poor condition or have disappeared altogether, but enough remains of the fragments to permit a description of the overall decorative program (See B 500: Piankhy reliefs). The king further adorned his new additions to the temple with select statuary of Amenhotep III, brought from that king's temple at Soleb, nearly 500 km downstream. Among these were the six ram statues placed on pedestals in front of the temple (See B 551 kiosk).

Piankhy's son and third successor, Taharqa, further embellished B 500 by contributing a magnificent stand for the god's sacred bark (or boat shrine). This was originally installed in the center of room B 506, but may now be seen in the Jebel Barkal Museum. Taharqa's nephew Tanwetamani (ca. 664-653 BC) added a kiosk (or bark station) in the center of court B 502, which has now almost completely disappeared. Texts, however, state that this structure was "overlaid in gold" and had "double doors (of cedar) overlaid in electrum."

B 500: The Great Amun Temple in Meroitic Times.

Piankhy's great temple was probably badly damaged in the attack of Psamtik II on Napata in 593 BC. Its statues were smashed and the temple's wooden roofs were probably torched (See B 500 Statue cache). The temple was restored later in the sixth century BC, and would surely have been restored and re-roofed several times after that.

The temple underwent major restoration for the last time during the joint reign of Natakamani and Amanitore (mid-first century AD) (**fig. 24**). This royal couple refaced and re-carved the first and second pylons, and added their own reliefs to its interior and exterior walls. In B 501 they re-plastered and repainted Piankhy's reliefs, attempting to bring them back to their former glory, while adding images of themselves and their son with the gods to the temple's interior and exterior walls. They also erected a new kiosk or bark station in the center of B 501. Another kiosk, B 551, was built in front of the temple's entrance, probably by their predecessor Queen Amanishakheto (see B 500 Kiosks).

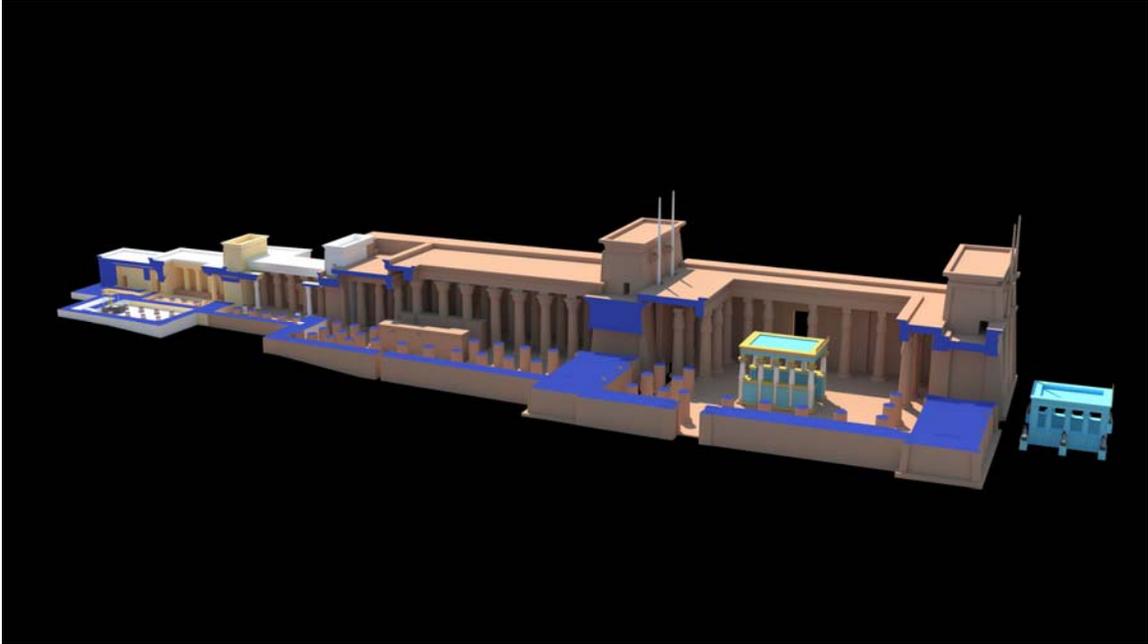


fig. 25. B 500 in later Meroitic times, with the kiosk B 551 of Amanishakheto(?) in front of the temple, and the kiosk B 501 of Natakamani and Amanitore inside B 501.

In Meroitic times B 500 remained an enduring symbol of the ancient glory of Kush and must have been a source of inspiration to all kings and ruling queens who journeyed there. The great edifice, the home of Amun of Napata, the ancient Nubian national god, was maintained as a place of royal coronations and visitations, and as a kind of treasury, where precious cultic implements, donated by long dead kings, as well as their crowns and scepters, were stored. The temple would have been an imperial museum, a source of enormous national pride, and a link with the past for future generations. As works of art, the Egyptian statues and reliefs of Piankhy must also have served as primary sources of inspiration for the sculptors of later Kushite times, during periods when external contacts were limited.