



# A major development project of the Northern area of the Amun-Re precinct at Karnak during the reign of Shabaqo

Christophe Thiers, Nadia Licitra, Pierre Zignani

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# Thebes in the First Millennium BC

Edited by

Elena Pischikova, Julia Budka  
and Kenneth Griffin

**CAMBRIDGE  
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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Elena Pischikova, Julia Budka and Kenneth Griffin

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

# A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE NORTHERN AREA OF THE AMUN-RE PRECINCT AT KARNAK DURING THE REIGN OF SHABAQO

NADIA LICITRA, CHRISTOPHE THIERS,  
& PIERRE ZIGNANI

*In memoriam Michel Azim*

Abstract: This article presents preliminary observations concerning a building programme of Shabaqo in the northern area of the Amun-Re precinct at Karnak. Through the excavations led by the CFEETK at the temple of Ptah and the Treasury of Shabaqo it is possible to define, east of the “way of Ptah”, a project of an architectural development consisting of nearly one hectare.

Since 2008, two field projects of the Centre Franco-Égyptien d’Étude des Temples de Karnak (CFEETK) have been investigating the northern area of the Amun-Re precinct, east of the “way of Ptah”. The first one focuses on the Ptah Temple and its surroundings, while the second one, to the east, aims at bringing to light the Treasury of Shabaqo.<sup>1</sup> After the epigraphic and architectural documentation, the first excavations quickly showed the need for a territorial approach. It soon became clear that the already known remains are embedded in a large modelling of the area with significant changes and alterations.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ptah Temple project is led by Christophe Thiers and Pierre Zignani (CNRS USR 3172-CFEETK, supported by Programme “Investissement d’Avenir” ANR-11-LABX-0032-01 Labex Archimede; the Treasury of Shabaqo expedition is a Paris IV-Sorbonne University project conducted in cooperation with the CFEETK and led by Nadia Licitra (CNRS UMR 8167-Paris IV-Sorbonne University).

## The Temple of Ptah

The systematic cleaning of the Ptah Temple was completed by Georges Legrain at the beginning of the twentieth century, having firstly been explored by Jean-Jacques Rifaud and later by Auguste Mariette. Georges Legrain was also responsible for restoring large parts of the temple as well as publishing some hieroglyphic texts and the five stelae he found there.<sup>2</sup> Between 1932–1934, Henri Chevrier restored the gates of the temple, finding some reused blocks that had been inserted in the foundations of the first Ptolemaic gate (Amenhotep I, Thutmose II, Seti II). Since October 2008, the study of this temple is part of the French-Egyptian work in progress at Karnak (figs. 28-1–2).

We know that the orientation of the temple of Ptah clearly differs from the axis of the temple of Amun-Re. However, two monuments of the northern area follow the orientation of the main temple of the Amun-Re precinct: a quadrangular structure, south of the Ptah Temple, and the colonnade known as the Treasury of Shabaqo.<sup>3</sup> We also have to consider that previous mud brick walls, which have almost the same orientation as the Amun-Re temple, were found below the foundation level of the temple of Ptah.<sup>4</sup> It seems that the spatial organization of this area was influenced by the orientation of the main temple before the building of the sanctuary of Ptah under Thutmose III. So from an urban development point of view, the situation of the northern area of the Amun-Re precinct is a great opportunity to study the evolution of a sacred building and its environment during more than a millennium of use.

The original part of the temple of Ptah consists of a triple-cell structure, preceded by a courtyard portico, which was dedicated by Thutmose III.<sup>5</sup> The temple functioned at least until the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (14–37 AD). One can also mention building activity and restorations undertaken by the pharaohs Ay/Horemheb, Seti I, Ramesses III, Takeloth II, Shabaqo, Ptolemy III, IV, VI, X, and XII.

The current investigations do not allow us to be sure whether the original courtyard had the same size of the final architectural phase dating to Ptolemaic Period. This work was conducted under Ptolemy III (and also partly decorated under Ptolemy IV) and consisted of a complete reconstruction of the western side of the courtyard with a structure including:

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<sup>2</sup> Legrain 1902 ; Thiers forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Thiers and Zignani 2013, 494–496.

<sup>4</sup> Thiers and Zignani 2013, 499, 512–513.

<sup>5</sup> Thiers and Zignani 2011, 20–21.

[illegible]

The motivation behind this transformation is undoubtedly the result of the enlargement of the precinct of the temple of Amun around the Thirtieth Dynasty.<sup>6</sup> Originally the sanctuary was outside the temenos of the Eighteenth Dynasty and was used as the way-station (*w3hy.t*) for the barque of Amun-Re, during his annual processions.

The Thirtieth Dynasty precinct wall was extended to enclose the temple of Ptah, and so we have to take into account that its northern annexes were destroyed during this enlargement of the temenos. The subsequent architectural works on the axis of the temple have been less substantial. A new gate with the name of Ptolemy VI was built along the route between the temple of Amun and the northern sanctuaries of Karnak. The last building stage seems to be from the reign of Ptolemy XII who added an intermediate and isolated door without lintel.



Fig. 28-2: General view of the Temple of Ptah (© CNRS-CFEETK).

Thus, before the extension of the huge enclosure wall, the major architectural changes are from the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. Like the Amun temple, which was enlarged westward, the axial way leading

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<sup>6</sup> Golvin, Jaubert, and Hegazy 1990, 910, 940–943; Golvin and Hegazy 1993, 146.

to the chapels of the Ptah sanctuary were also enlarged by the addition of several gates during Kushite and Ptolemaic Periods. Shabaqo began this programme of enlargement with two gates, [B] and [D], both of which could have led to the extension of the precinct of Ptah through the addition of new mud-brick enclosure walls. One can suppose that the gate [D] was the first to be built, as it is closer to the temple itself. It is also the smallest with a width of 1.785m. The layout of the southern part of its mud brick enclosure wall is not clearly defined, with archaeological investigations still in progress. One reused block of Ramesses III can be seen on the inner part of the northern doorjamb. This gate is dedicated to Ptah and Hathor, and, of course, Amun-Re is present on the top of the inner and outer doorjamb.

As for most of the monuments still standing during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, the names of Shabaqo and the first uraeus on the forehead of the king were defaced. The reliefs on the upper part of the passage were also completely erased and remain unpublished. On both sides, Shabaqo can be identified, offering wine to Ptah and Hathor. The titulary of the pharaoh was also totally erased. Additionally, part of the original Kushite decoration has been lost due to the addition, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, of two important texts dedicated to Imhotep on both sides of the passage.<sup>7</sup>

The second gate to be built [B] is bigger than the first one, with a width of 2.08m. Four reused blocks can be observed in the masonry, one in the name of Merenptah and the others probably dating to the New Kingdom. The lintel and all covering slabs of the gate are lost. This portal is a “Jubilee gate” (or “*Heb-sed* porch”) with well known characteristics.<sup>8</sup> This includes a set of scenes with seated deities in front of pharaoh’s name and, nearby, a column of text lined by two palm-tree branches. At the bottom, Thoth and Sefekhet-abwy/Seshat are followed by the royal-*ka*. On the façade, some fragments of the upper part of the doorjamb have been identified and virtually reconstructed on the drawing.

As part of the restoration programme of the gate, some blocks have been consolidated and placed in their original locations. On both inner doorjamb, the reliefs depict Shabaqo offering wine to Ptah and bread to Amun. The chisel marks on the walls are characteristic of the Kushite Pe-

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<sup>7</sup> Klotz 2012, 253–257.

<sup>8</sup> It should be interesting to link the presence of this kind of jubilee gate with the god Ptah himself in his temple, but as Sandman-Holmberg (1946, 87–93) pointed out, the presence of Ptah-Tatenen or Tatenen in *Sed*-festivals (especially during Ramesside and Ptolemaic times) is due to his connection with Memphis and to the role he plays as king.

riod.<sup>9</sup> The northern embrasure has also received decoration on two registers while the southern one is the door recess. On the upper register (*Ptah*, nr. 58<sup>10</sup>), Shabako is depicted offering wine to Amun and Mut, and to Ptah, Hathor, and Amunet. As usual in the Ptah temple, Amun is honoured first with Ptah second. It is usually said that the decoration of this northern passage was left unfinished, because of the absence of the *kheker*-frieze on the left upper side.<sup>11</sup> However, the lack of decoration is the result of the abrasive wear of the door leaf, which resulted in the erasure of this frieze.

The main problem of the epigraphic programme concerns the scene of the first register of the northern passage (*Ptah*, nr. 57), which is unfortunately very damaged. As it has been previously observed, this scene shows different stages of work with erased areas. If it is still difficult to propose a well established chronology of this relief, significant elements must be noted. Firstly, Shabako is seated on a throne, holding a *heqa*-sceptre in his right hand—and probably a flabellum on his left hand—while looking to the east. He is followed by the falcon-headed Montu protecting the pharaoh's crown with his right hand, the left one holding *ankh*-symbol. Montu is likely followed by Atum, who wears the double-crown. The long arm of Atum behind Montu is also well attested in coronation scenes (with Horus and Thoth, or Seth and Harsiese), as for example, on the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak or Khonsu Temple.<sup>12</sup>


Usually, in scenes of “montée royale” and the coronation, Montu and Atum are depicted leading the pharaoh towards the god, with Wadjet and Nekhbet (or Horus and Thoth) putting the crown upon the king's head.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, the four deities appear on the same scene. A third scene usually introduces the pharaoh to the main god. Shabako was thus depicted in a coronation scene, with Montu and Atum, and led to Amun. However, the scene of the gate of Shabako is unusual because Atum and Montu are both represented behind the king. Only very few hieroglyphs are preserved on

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<sup>9</sup> Leclant 1965, 227–228 (“martelage en pluie”); Arnold 1999, 45 (“stone plane with toothed blade”).

<sup>10</sup> This refers to the numbering of scenes and texts as it will be used in the final publication.

<sup>11</sup> Leclant 1965, 38–40.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Nel  1981, pl. 74 (= CFEETK Archives 55509); The Epigraphic Survey 1979, pl. 57; Brique 1992, 163–195, esp. 175–177 for the coronation scene at Edfu.

<sup>13</sup> These kinds of scenes are attested at North-Karnak in the colonnade of Taharqa: Robichon, Barguet, and Leclant 1954, pls. 61–79; Jansen-Winkel 2009, 63–76 (17). See also the Eastern colonnade of Taharqa at Karnak: Leclant 1953, 113–172; Jansen-Winkel 2009, 92–101 (35).

this scene. The reading *mn* could be linked with the sequence *smn=f n=k shm.ty/nb.ty hr tp=k* usually found in coronation scenes.<sup>14</sup>

This epigraphic programme was modified at an unknown date, without any clear reasons. To the left, the god Ptah was added after the legs of Shabaqo had been erased. As already pointed out, partial remains of a double crown attest that the god was followed by Mut, and probably Hathor. On the right side, a figure of Shabaqo was carved, acting in front of the deities. The large space between the pharaoh and Amun-Re can be easily filled with an offering table and this could fit well with a scene of the great offering (*3b.t*).

The Kushite extension of the entrance of the Ptah Temple including massive mud-bricks walls denotes important changes close to the New Kingdom temenos and possibly the one of Menkheperre.<sup>15</sup> According to a well-known stela (Cairo JE 44665) from Dendara, Shabaqo gave order to restore the enclosure walls of Upper and Lower Egyptian temples.<sup>16</sup> Despite great disruptions to the later layers of occupation, some remains strongly suggest that this development was more important than only the precinct of Ptah.

South of the sanctuary, the foundation of a huge gate [A'], preceded by two black granite column bases, opens towards the east to an area with a quite rough surface. This gate was set into the same enclosure wall as the western gate [B] of Shabaqo leading to the sanctuary. This massive wall was running to the south but was interrupted later by a quadrangular mud brick structure. Preliminary observations of the ceramic material at the foundations of this gate indicate a Twenty-fifth Dynasty date.<sup>17</sup>

The façade of the complex overlooking the “way of Ptah” was renewed during the Ptolemaic Period few metres ahead of the former enclosure wall with the Shabaqo’s gate however its southern side returns parallel to the quadrangular structure (see fig. 1). Thus, we have a chronological indication reducing the dating range of this quadrangular structure, which must have been built between Shabaqo and Ptolemy VI.

Before the beginning of our investigations no architectural remains had been associated with the southern monumental gate [A']. Further to the east, one also encounters the remains of a second gate [B'], which emphasises this idea of an important access point. The western threshold is located at a height of 75.92m while the eastern one is 76.18m. Both gates

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<sup>14</sup> Liszka 2011, 1158; e.g. Leclant 1953, 134, 137; The Epigraphic Survey 1957, pl. 290 (*smn(=j) n.k nb.ty <hr> tp=k*).

<sup>15</sup> Thiers and Zignani 2013, 495 n. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Leclant 1954, 31–42, pl. VII; Jansen-Winkel 2009, 36–37.

<sup>17</sup> Boulet and Defernez 2012, 1–2.

had double leaves, with their passages having the same width (2.63m) despite the fact that they do not have the same orientation. This is certainly the result of the surrounding features with the first gate [B] linked to the axis of the Ptah Temple.

Further excavations are necessary in order to allow for a better understanding of the spatial connection between the eastern gate [B'] and the precinct of Ptah. The second gate seems to have been built according to the main east-west axis of the Amun-Re Temple. The two gates, [A'] and [B'], are not preserved for more than two courses above their original floor level, but show the same stone work features and masonry. Their elevations were built with ashlar masonry with *talatat* blocks reused in the filling of the monument. Some of these standardised blocks of Akhenaten's time bear reliefs, including one with the name of Nefertiti. Excavations at the western gate [A'] allowed us to observe that the builders prepared a foundation raft of *talatat* blocks above the mud brick work. During the cleaning of the gate we also found a metallic plate on the granite socket, which was supporting the pivot of the right door leaf. This plate is not in bronze or copper alloy, as would be expected, but in iron. Older occupations below the work of substructure go back to the end of the Seventeenth Dynasty with the discovery of a doorjamb and part of a lintel dedicated to Amun-Re by the pharaoh Senakhtenre Ahmose.<sup>18</sup>

Although the elevations of the eastern gate [B'] are limited to two courses of stones, several ibis graffiti can be seen, and one can note that they look similar to those uncovered at the Treasury of Shabaqo. Apart from the filling of the masonry with *talatat* blocks, we have to note that ancient blocks were reused in the floor of its passage, including a drum of a column and a block with the name of Horemheb.

In front of the Ptolemaic kiosk was found a sandstone architectural element reused in the antique floor. Initially this block was an abacus (0.94 x 0.94 x 0.29m). Despite being largely destroyed (the upper part is missing) it contains cartouches on its four sides. The first half of the cartouche gives the inscription "beloved of Amun[-Re]" while the second part was completely erased. This architectural element has parallels with an abacus belonging to the colonnade of Shabaqo's House of Gold, which is located to the north of the Third Pylon,<sup>19</sup> although it is smaller in size. As it does not fit with any parts of the Ptah Temple it could be argued that this abacus belonged to the porch in front of the gate [A'].

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<sup>18</sup> Biston-Moulin 2012; Thiers and Zignani 2013, 509–510.

<sup>19</sup> Jansen-Winkel 2009, 5 (17). See also two blocks lying on the south-eastern area of the Sacred Lake; Jansen-Winkel 2009, 4 (14). Another one is lying on a mastaba north of the Sacred Lake. Thanks to J. Hourdin for this information.



Furthermore, it is still interesting to note another architectural feature that also supports the idea of an important building activity in this area during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. In the close vicinity, but outside the Graeco-Roman temenos, a lintel of Shabaqo (with erased names) was re-used in the threshold of a Ptolemaic door [C']. Its dimensions are too small to match with one of the two precedent gates while it is also worth noting that the floor in front of the gate was simply built with reused *talalat* blocks.

## The Treasury of Shabaqo

East of the precinct of Ptah, Shabaqo built a Treasury (*pr-ḥd ʿ3*) devoted to the “divine offering” of Amun. Remnants of this building were first unearthed during the nineteenth century, when colonnade remains were discovered north of the temple of Amun by unknown diggers.<sup>20</sup> This anonymous excavation brought to light two rows of six cylindrical sandstone columns, running north and south, about 2m below the modern floor level. The inscriptions carved on the columns identified this structure as *pr-ḥd ʿ3* of Shabaqo. The identification of this building as the Treasury represented the first attestation of such a feature within this part of the precinct of Amun. However, after these initial excavations, no further investigations were conducted at the site.

In 1962 Barguet briefly mentioned the colonnade in his description of the temple of Amun by presenting the text of the inscriptions and giving the translation.<sup>21</sup> Three years later, Leclant included this colonnade in his catalogue of Kushite monuments at Thebes.<sup>22</sup> The inscriptions from the columns presented here were now supplemented by the publication of the texts from the scattered drums reused in some of the Osirian chapels from the eastern area of the precinct. Leclant also referred to the presence of some sandstone benches from the sides of the colonnade. Nevertheless, the plan of the Treasury, as well as the role of the colonnade inside the build-

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<sup>20</sup> The colonnade could have been cleared by Jean-Jacques Rifaud during the period he spent in Karnak: Azim 2012, 302, pl. XXVII. Nevertheless, the lack of any documents or records relating to this dig prevents any firm conclusions to be drawn.

<sup>21</sup> Barguet 1962, 17–18, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Leclant 1965, 19–23.

ing remained unknown and the presented hypotheses could not be verified.<sup>23</sup>

When excavation started in 2008, the initial part of this project (4–5 years) consisted of two main objectives. Firstly, gathering data about the general plan and extension of the Treasury. Secondly, an understanding of the stratigraphic position of the building in order to provide the first evaluation of the phases present on the site. This preliminary stage was to collect the necessary information to evaluate the possibility of an extensive excavation of the building that could be carried out at a later date. Now, at the end of the initial part of the project, it is possible to partly answer some questions.<sup>24</sup>

The Treasury of Shabaqo (figs. 28-3–4) was a free-standing building located outside the precinct of Amun. The main axis of the building was east to west and the access had to be situated east of the precinct of Ptah. The excavation focused on the rear part of the Treasury, where a 4m wide mud brick wall marks its eastern boundary. On the main axis of the building, against the rear wall, lies a hypostyle hall of eight polygonal sandstone columns,<sup>25</sup> with a niche on its eastern side. The access to this room was through an inscribed and decorated sandstone gate lying on the main axis of the building, in front of the niche. The gate is still preserved to a height of about 1.9m, with two parallel scenes of the pharaoh offering Maat to Amun being depicted on the doorjamb. On the southern wall of the room of the niche, a doorway leads to a transversal room (north-south oriented) of about 9 x 21m surrounded by mud brick walls on each side. In the middle of this room, occupying the south-eastern corner of the building, lies the colonnade unearthed in the nineteenth century. As noticed by Leclant, sandstone benches were located along each wall; today, two benches are missing on the southern side and six in the north-western part of the room. Each bench is formed by a horizontal slab placed on two vertical supports. During the excavation, two identical sandstone

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, according to Barguet (1962, 17–18), the colonnade was the entrance of the Treasury. Leclant (1965, 20) situated the access of the room of the benches on the southern side, based on the direction of the inscriptions.

<sup>24</sup> The investigations have focused on the colonnade and on two new excavation areas north and south of the colonnade. Several Ptolemaic phases—reaching to 2.5m of stratigraphy in the northern area—lie above the Kushite level. The data presented here summarises the results of a broader research making up the PhD dissertation of the author (in preparation) at the Paris IV-Sorbonne University.

<sup>25</sup> Five columns have been discovered *in situ*: two columns are still lying buried north of the excavation area, while the one to the south-west was taken away after the building was abandoned.

doorframes bearing the titular of Shabaqo's were found fallen on the floor of the room of the niche. The first one originally decorated the niche while the second one was erected against the doorway of the room of the benches.

The hierarchical relationship existing between the gate and these two doorframes indicates that the gate marks the limit between spaces with different functions. As the presence of the niche indicates, at the east of the gate was situated the sacred area of the building. The room of the benches was closely connected with the sanctuary, but its function still remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the location of this room inside the Treasury, adjoining the room of the niche, and the presence of the columns lead to the idea that storage was not the main function of this room as the presence of the benches might suggest at first sight.<sup>26</sup>

The storage area of the Treasury is probably located west of the gate. Here, two column bases and the imprint of a third one testify to the existence of a courtyard with a portico or a hypostyle hall. In the south-eastern edge are the entrances of two rooms: their doorframes were discovered fallen on the floor in front of each access. Although the excavation of these rooms has not yet been completed, the small size of the doorframes as well as the width of the doorways indicates that these rooms were extremely narrow. We can therefore assume that these are the two most eastern storerooms of the Treasury.

As previously mentioned, the Treasury was located outside of the precinct of Amun. In fact, during the Twenty-fifth dynasty, the northern section of the enclosure wall of the temple was situated closer to the temple than the later Nectanebo's enclosure wall.<sup>27</sup> The eastern wall of the Treasury leans against the enclosure wall of the temple which, therefore, served, at the same time, as the southern enclosure wall of the Treasury. The space between the enclosure wall and the rear wall of the room of the benches was a peripheral courtyard, on the east side of which a massive rectangular structure in mud bricks supported a stairway probably leading up to the top of the enclosure wall. Some steps are still preserved as well as the first landing.

The original extension of the Treasury still remains unknown with no information known about the position of the northern boundary of the Treasury, nor the western one. It is likely, therefore, that the row of store-

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<sup>26</sup> The function of this room will be discussed in more detail in the PhD dissertation in preparation by Nadia Licitra.

<sup>27</sup> Licitra 2013, 440-441, fig. 1.

rooms continued west of the two already discovered and that maybe another row was situated on the northern side.



Fig. 28-3: General view of the Treasury of Shabaqo in 2011  
(© CNRS-CFEETK).

## The East-west Axis: An Access?

Although important areas remain unknown, the gates south of the Ptah Temple make sense if one draws an axis between them and the central niche of the Treasury of Shabaqo. As they are aligned, we can therefore suggest that the access of this economical complex was done from the west, from the “way of Ptah” (fig. 28-4). Looking at the overall plan, other remains allow some suggestions concerning the work done during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. We see that the quadrangular structure seems to have been situated against the enclosure wall (or its remains) of the New Kingdom whose trace remained later as a limit in the religious territory.

The northern side can be restored, thanks to the symmetrical arrangement of the space between the columns of the Treasury of Shabaqo. Additionally, the topography allows for including the temple of Ptah without encroaching on the complex of the temple of Montu. Of course, it is possible the original geometry of the northern side of this area could have been less regular than the proposed schematic topography. Future

excavations have the potential to enhance our understanding of this major redevelopment during the reign of Shabako comprising of one hectare of religious and economic buildings.

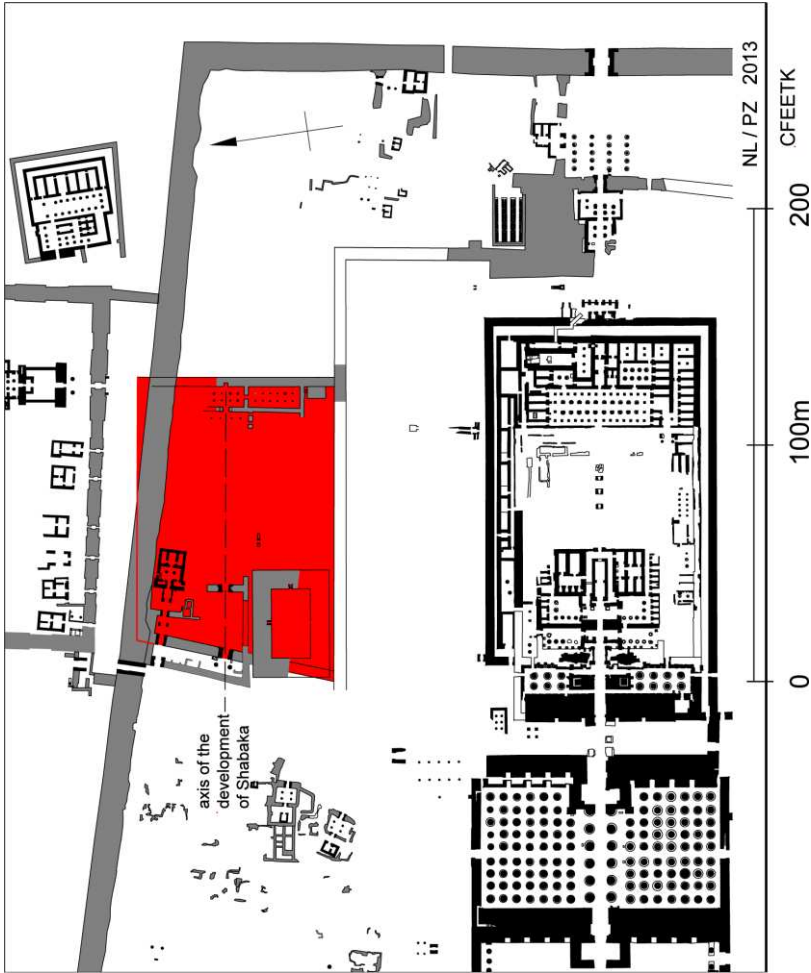


Fig. 28-4: Area of Shabako’s project, north of the Amun temple (© CNRS-CFEETK).

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