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CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK IN LUXOR

By Ray Johnson, Senior Artist

The winter is always a busy time for archaeology in Luxor, and this season is no exception. The Epigraphic Survey alone is involved in two separate projects on both sides of the river, both in full swing as this article is being written. On the east bank, at Luxor Temple, drawings are being readied for Volume Two of the new Survey series, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple*, and photographer Cecile Keefe continues to photograph decorated stone fragments from the upper registers for Volume Three. At the same time, on the west bank, our team is documenting the reliefs of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III in the painted chapels and ambulatory of the bark sanctuary at the Temple of Amun at Medinet Habu.

Although much of the *Chicago House Bulletin* has to do with the work of the Survey, we are not the only Egyptologists in town! In its ancient heyday, Luxor was the largest religious center in all of Egypt, and its substantial remains form one of the largest open-air museums in the world, most of it unpublished. In addition to Chicago House and the Luxor branch of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, there is a sizable, if seasonal, international community of Egyptologists doing extremely interesting and varied work in ancient Thebes, some of it directly related to our own. Most of these archaeological missions have shorter working seasons than Chicago House, so we experience a variety of groups coming and going throughout the course of our annual six-month stay. One of the special joys of living in Luxor is the constant interchange of ideas and information with this international community of colleagues who come by to consult our library or to join us for tea after work. The following is a very brief outline of some of the projects going on outside Chicago House, first on the east bank, then on the west.

A stone's throw away from the Colonnade Hall in Luxor Temple, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed el-Saghir and Dr. Mohammed Nasr has recently removed part of the Roman floor in the "Emperor's Chamber" at the back of Amenhotep III's sun court. In the time of Amenhotep III, it was from this room that the king emerged before the assembled populace at the completion of the Opet festival, radiant with divinity. When the Romans enclosed Luxor Temple within the walls of their great encampment, or castrum, during the third century A.D., they converted this "king's chamber" into a shrine dedicated to the deified Roman emperor and raised the floor level by adding a new layer of blocks over the existing pavement. With the removal of the Roman flooring (which consists in part of

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TRAVELS IN THE DESERT: THE THEBAN ESCARPMENT

By Debbie Darnell, Epigrapher

Temporarily on duty in India in 1928, desert explorer Ralph Bagnold longed for "what Egypt alone could give, the knowledge that the unknown lay at one's very door, that it was within one's power at any time to step right off the map" (*Libyan Sands*, London, 1935, p. 137). Could the same be said of Egypt today, more than six decades later, after years of intensive archaeological investigation of sites ranging from the Delta to Nubia, from the oases to the Red Sea, when so many monuments are paved and tidied and wholly accessible to the hordes of tourists that flood the country every year? Happily for those with a passion for exploration, the answer is yes, absolutely! What is perhaps more amazing, an unexplored world lies just above and beyond some of the most well-known and heavily visited sites in Egypt.

Some clue to this "other world" is offered by the appearance of two dark "bumps" on the northernmost of the two tall peaks across the river from modern Luxor: they are the remains of the mud-brick pylon of a Middle Kingdom temple atop the so-called "Thoth Mountain" (see Kathy Dorman's article "A Trek Up Thoth Mountain" in *Chicago House Bulletin* II, 1 [December 1990] for a description of the wonders en route and at the top). Aside from the spectacular view and the not unimpressive remains of the temple and auxiliary building, another, more subtle enticement draws the eye: the existence of ancient paths leading back into the open desert beyond.

It was the allure of those thin whitish lines which first drew me and my husband John into the desert. We knew of the existence of a major track crossing the area of land circumscribed by the bend of the Nile between Luxor and Farshût, and we assumed that the paths at which we were looking led eventually to this main route. Yet, although various subsidiary branches of the "Luxor-Farshût" desert road are indicated on detailed maps, we could find no mention of the Thoth Mountain paths. Excited by the prospect of "stepping off the map," we decided to follow the forking, twisting tracks ourselves and record our findings. The scanty but significant ancient surface remains which we encountered, apparently undocumented before this point in time, convinced us that a formal study of the ancient desert road system of this region was quite in order.

The obvious place to begin such an endeavor was the "main" Luxor-Farshût road, which ascends to the level of the desert plateau between the Gurn (the pyramidal peak above the Valley of the Kings) and the Thoth Mountain. We did not expect to encounter much in the way of pharaonic remains there, since when Georg Schweinfurth, German explorer and

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Desert Travels *(continued from p. 1)*

the first to document the Thoth Mountain temple, included the beginning of the route on his 1909 map of Luxor and the Theban Necropolis, the only features of archaeological significance which he noted were "stone piles" and palaeolithic flint work sites. Imagine our surprise when we discovered a dense concentration of potsherds and the tumbled and broken remains of dressed sandstone blocks at the very tip of the plateau! The unexpected presence of sandstone alerted us to the possibility of inscribed material, and indeed, the shattered fragments of a stela were the next wonder to greet our incredulous eyes. At first glance, these bits of stone were hardly distinguishable from the many rocks and boulders strewn around them. Yet they and the potsherds provide quite tangible evidence of a colorful range of activities hitherto unsuspected in this place. The sandstone blocks and stela fragments may have been part of a shrine at the Luxor terminus of the road, similar to the Gebel Tingar shrine at Aswan, and the Thoth Mountain temple itself.

Gazing off into the shimmering distance it was not difficult to imagine the figures, men and beasts, whose steps had worn these paths into the surface of the plateau. Did their spirits soar as they first caught a glimpse of the pylon of the Thoth Mountain temple (for even today it is visible from at least an hour's trek back on the Farshût road), heralding the return to the Nile Valley? Were they moved as we are by the magnificent panorama which unfolds as one approaches the edge of the plateau: the sinuous curve of the river flanked by lush belts of green, looking from this vantage point like no more than a slim, paradisiacal boundary line between the Eastern and Western deserts? No doubt the dusty travellers would stop at the small shrine to give thanks for a safe return, making offering alongside those about to begin a desert journey to the towns on the other side of the bend in the Nile, or perhaps beyond to Kharga and Dakhla oases. As the incense rose heavenward, so too would the prayers of the members of the departing caravans, begging the protection of the gods.

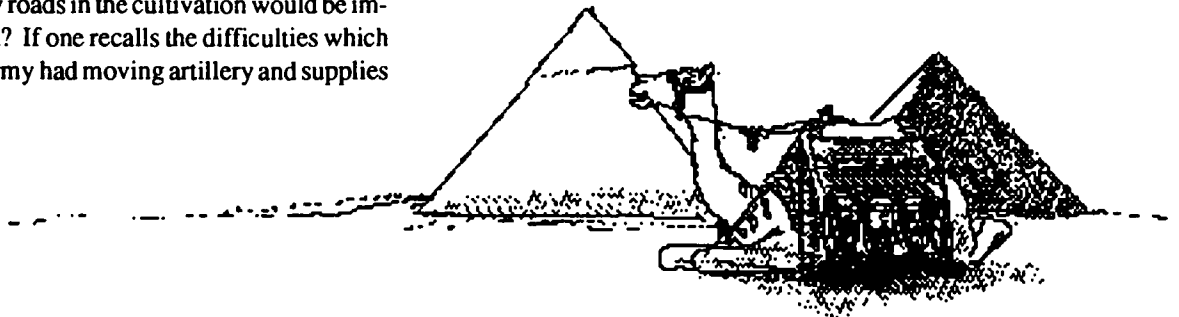
The romance of the spot is considerable, but its historical significance is equally enthralling. An intensive study of this area, and of the route in its entirety, may provide the answers to some of the questions we have concerning the nature of desert travel in pharaonic times. For instance, what sorts of goods were transported and how were they controlled? Were desert roads near the Valley used more when the Nile was low, making navigation difficult in many areas, or during the inundation, when any roads in the cultivation would be impassable due to the flood? If one recalls the difficulties which Napoleon Bonaparte's army had moving artillery and supplies

across the Delta on its way to fight the Battle of the Pyramids, one can imagine that the desert roads were always more attractive for long-range, overland travel than the narrow dyke-hopping paths of the Valley. For travellers whose trips included a lengthy desert leg, it must have been easier and quicker to keep cargo loaded on donkeys than to descend to the Nile and to switch to riverine transport midway through a journey.

It is possible that some of the ancient graffiti associated with paths up the gebel in the region of the Qena bend may shed light on the use of these roads. Unfortunately, locating graffiti is not always easy. On one occasion, accompanied by fellow Egyptologists and Survey members Richard Jasnow and Tina Di Cerbo, we drove to the edge of the desert near Armant, in search of several concentrations of graffiti. We hoped to begin our quest from a "known" point: one of the numerous "deirs" or monasteries of that region. The problem was, we had to get to the monastery before we could begin to use our maps and compasses. We stopped in a village to ask directions, and were told of an old man who, apparently, knew all about the antiquities of the area. Trying not to get our hopes up too much, we sought out the gentleman, one Fu'ad. This remarkable man was all that the villagers claimed and then some. He had worked with Oliver Myers during the excavation of the Bucheum (like the Serapeum at Saqqara, the burial place of sacred bulls) and seemed proud and genuinely touched to see that we were using a map from one of Myers' publications. He walked with us for many miles in the desert, with nary a faltering step or a moment of hesitation. His physical stamina was exceeded only by his amazing memory: he not only directed us to three Coptic monasteries (with graffiti!) and countless Coptic huts, tucked deep in the wadis at the foot of the gebel, but led us to the Bucheum and the Baqaria, the modest remains of which we had been seeking off and on for several seasons.

Whether or not we are lucky enough to find a Fu'ad to guide us to long-forgotten ruins, our hours spent exploring the Luxor-Farshût road and other paths never cease to leave us amazed at the abundance of unrecorded evidence of ancient activities at the desert's edge. As Bagnold noted, the Western Desert continues to be "a land of mystery" full of things "waiting to be discovered in some out-of-the-way place, difficult of access, if one is enterprising enough to go out and look..." We are very grateful that, by virtue of living in Luxor as members of the Epigraphic Survey, we have the opportunity to explore the Theban fringe of this yet mysterious land.

END



By Sue Osgood, Staff Artist

Archaeology *(continued from p. 1)*

column drums of the Kushite pharaoh Shabaka) part of the original Eighteenth Dynasty floor can be seen again, with marks where the original columns stood, and possibly a dais of some sort -- all quite fascinating for anyone studying the early history of the temple.

The EAO has also continued their clearance of the alleyway of sphinxes, three and a half kilometers long, that originally linked Luxor and Karnak temples. They have followed an east-west branch of the intact stone road from the northwest corner of the Mut Temple precinct, where it turns north to Khonsu Temple and south to Luxor, to the entrance of Mut Temple where it branches north to the Tenth Pylon (Karnak's southern gateway). The preservation of the road, as well as the sphinxes and tree pits which line it on either side, is nothing short of astonishing.

In a few short weeks the Brooklyn Museum Expedition to the Temple of Mut, under the directorship of Richard Fazzini, will return to take up the spade and continue to probe the secrets of Amun's consort, the Mistress of Isheru. Brooklyn shares a dig house located outside the eastern enclosure wall of Karnak with the Toronto-based Akhenaten Temple Project. ATP Director Donald Redford and his team excavate the adjacent site of Akhenaten's Karnak Aten complex during the late spring and/or late summer months, when the Brooklyn team is not in residence, but Don usually passes through Luxor at some point during our season. His group has recently discovered that the great Heb Sed or jubilee court of Akhenaten in East Karnak (the Gm-p3-'Itu) is far larger than was suspected, 210 meters wide and over 300 meters long; its eastern limit disappears under the modern village and still cannot be determined.

At Karnak itself, the Franco-Egyptian Center at Karnak continues its ongoing consolidation and reconstruction work in a number of areas within that vast precinct. The west tower of Horemheb's Ninth Pylon, long dismantled and emptied of its stuffing of talatat blocks of Akhenaten, is slowly being rebuilt and rises again, its empty insides transformed into storerooms and work space for the future. Just to the south, in the court between the Ninth and Tenth Pylons, American Charles C. Van Siclen III has been collaborating with the Center in the recording of an enigmatic structure rebuilt by Horemheb from blocks

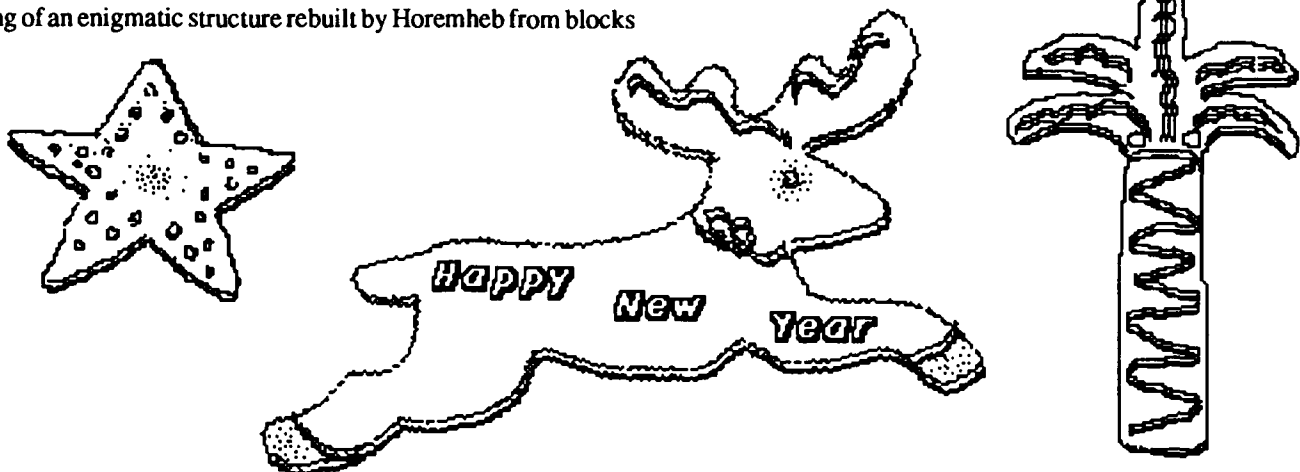
of a festival court belonging to Amenhotep II.

The director of the Karnak Center, Dr. François Larchet continues to supervise personally the re-erection of large sections of the festival court of Thutmosis IV in the Karnak Open-Air Museum. Three of four wall sections will be finished this season, with a major start on the square-pillared porticos that formed the facade for each wall. The beautifully decorated court, on which a great deal of the original paint can still be seen, was dismantled by Thutmosis' son, Amenhotep III, who used the stones as part of the stuffing for his immense Third Pylon along with other equally famous monuments, such as the exquisite "White Chapel" of Sesostris I, the alabaster chapel of Amenhotep I, and the "Chapelle Rouge" of Hatshepsut, all of which can be viewed in the Open-Air Museum. The Center is one of the few foreign expeditions that has a permanent facility similar to Chicago House, and is the only foreign expedition that has a longer season than we do (ten months!).

Two of our longstanding friends in Luxor, Helen and Jean Jacquet, work at North Karnak for the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo. American-born Helen worked as an epigrapher at Chicago House early in her career, and is now considered to be one of the foremost authorities in Egyptian pottery. They are currently living in their mud-brick dig house perched atop the northern enclosure wall of Karnak, studying and recording the pottery and other finds from previous seasons of excavating the great limestone Treasury of Thutmosis I at North Karnak. The two of them will join us for Christmas dinner (a long tradition), and in February will join the staff of Chicago House to work for us (a new tradition instituted last season). Jean's talents as field architect will be tapped at Luxor and at the small Amun temple at Medinet Habu, and Helen will work with our colleague Dr. Henry Riad on organizing and sorting the extensive Labib Habachi archives. In a short while the Jacquets will be joined at North Karnak by other members of the French Institute who will continue yet another project, the mapping of the nearby Temple of Montu, excavated many years ago by the same institute.

(Editor's Note: The second part of this article will appear in the next Bulletin.)

END



Chicago House Christmas Cookies, By Sue Osgood, Staff Artist

THE FRIENDS OF CHICAGO HOUSE DAY

FEBRUARY 13, 1993

As we announced in our last newsletter, renovations at Chicago House have made our regular weekend FOCH tour impossible. In its place you are invited to spend a DAY WITH CHICAGO HOUSE which includes:

- Tour of the Chicago House Library
- Epigraphy Demonstration at Luxor Temple
- Gala Black-Tie Dinner and Dancing

(Call us to reserve your spot in either the Jolie-Ville or the Hilton. Travel plans are up to you.)

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