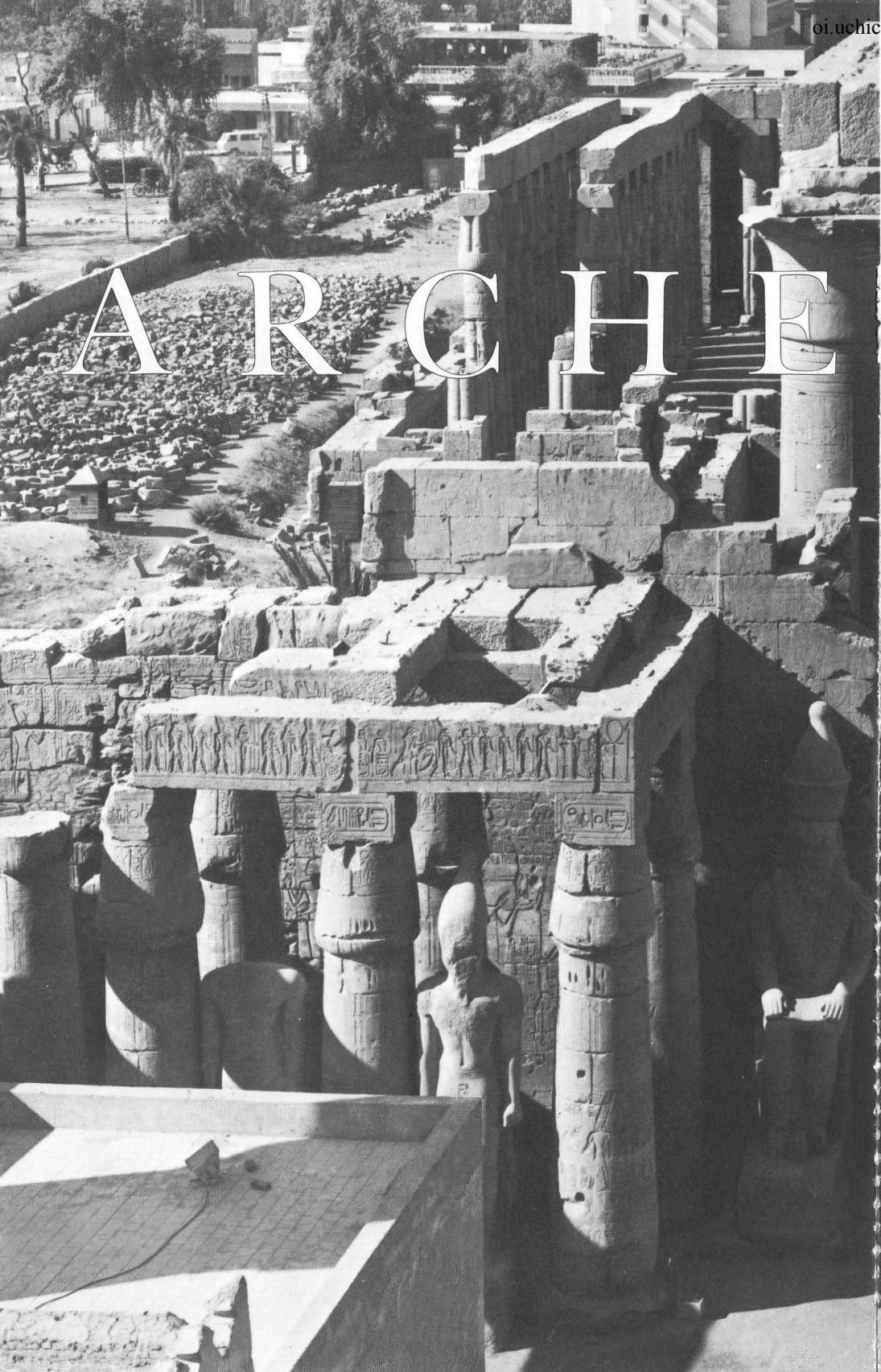
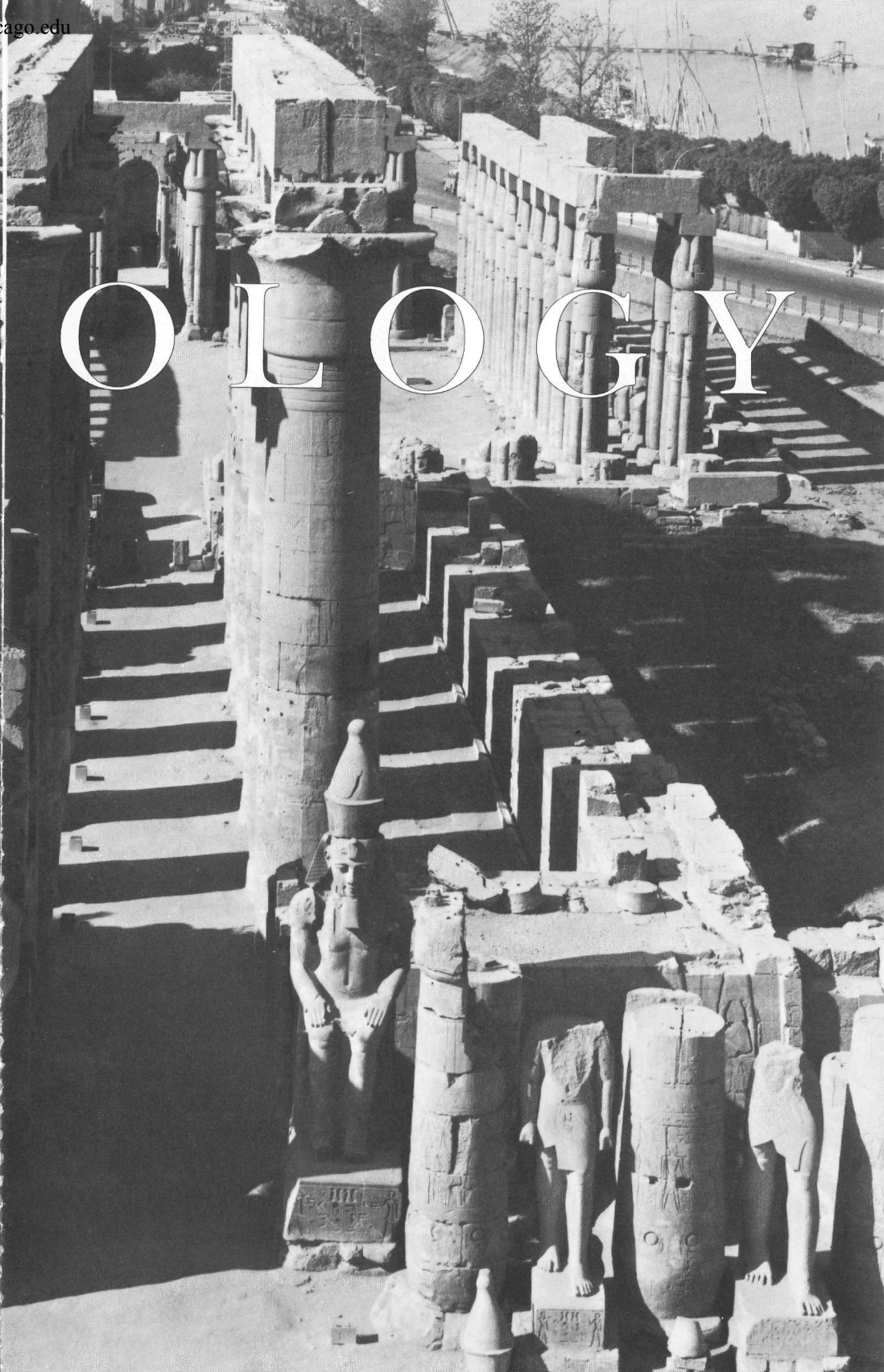


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The Epigraphic Survey

Lanny Bell

The 1978/79 season of the Epigraphic Survey was a year of crisis. The death of Hagg Ibrahim Mohammed Abd el-Rahman on December 19, at the age of nearly sixty-seven, was a truly momentous event in the history of Chicago House: suddenly we were without our *ra'is* ("foreman") of the past thirty-five years. Employed since January 1, 1928, at first as photographer's assistant, he faithfully served every one of the Survey's seven Field Directors and two Acting Field Directors, who came to rely on his judgment and experience in the day-to-day running of Chicago House. The inevitable passing of his era had been foreseen, and we had begun to prepare for it: most of the storage magazines were cleaned out last season and their contents identified with his help; and the driver's illness this fall had given me the opportunity to accompany the Hagg on his daily rounds through Luxor. During his final, brief illness it became necessary to assume personal control over every aspect of our operations, assisted enormously by our Chief Engineer, Mr. Saleh Shehat Suleiman, and our Consulting Egyptologist, Dr. Labib Habachi. The transitional period which followed his death presented an appropriate occasion to make some administrative adjustments. In fact, the management of the Epigraphic Survey's business is now so complex that Hagg Ibrahim cannot be replaced by a single individual; but responsibility for his duties will be shared by three persons, in addition to the Field Director.

We also lost our new Slingsby multi-storied ladders, the first to be acquired for the Epigraphic Survey since 1931, in a fiery collision on the highway at Samalut, a town near el-Minya in Middle Egypt; the accident took the life of the driver who was transporting them from Cairo. Having arrived safely from England, where we

had ordered them more than six months before, they were destroyed just 280 miles from Luxor. Then a few days later our last intact three-story ladder split while in use, the second of our tall ladders to break this season. These ladders must be replaced as soon as possible; without them our work is seriously handicapped.

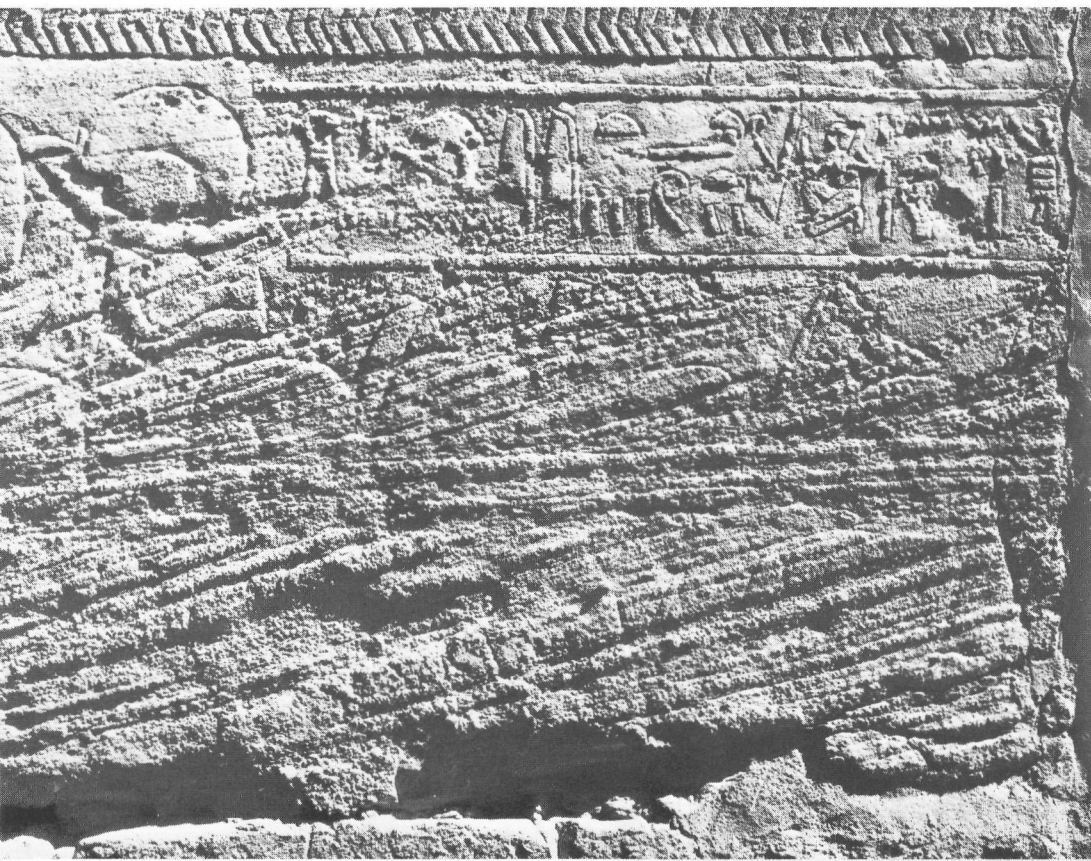
We had taken possession of our new 1978 twelve-seat Land Rover station wagon in October, which permitted us to begin rebuilding our 1963 Land Rover in preparation for transporting it to the West Bank when we resume work at Medinet Habu. After fewer than 5,000 kilometers (3,000 miles) on the new car, however, a broken gear threw us once more back onto the old Land Rover and our dependable 1950 Chevrolet. As of June, the Land Rover gearbox was in Cairo still awaiting repair.

The age of the physical plant at Chicago House, opened in 1931 and expanded in 1933, continues to be a problem. Remarkably well built, the various structures within our compound have functioned for nearly fifty years with an absolute minimum of maintenance; but now all the water pipes and electrical wiring need to be replaced at once. Just at Christmas time, with the house full, emergency repairs to a broken pipe in the heating system meant tearing up a section of the library floor; a second leak has not yet been located, so we do not know what further damage may occur. A heavy rainstorm on May 3, one of three rains at Luxor this spring, left up to two inches of water standing on our flat roofs; it took about two hours to sweep this off to prevent seepage through the ceilings below. This water also shorted out an exposed wire whose insulation had become brittle and cracked. This season we replaced the water pipes running through the garden, for which we also brought fresh topsoil. We prepared to install a new water tank, lifted the old dock (which had slipped beneath the Nile at the foot of our landing), cleaned the kitchen water-settling tanks, and repaired some of the masonry. These and other factors led to my own presence in Luxor from October 3 to June 1, well beyond our official six-month field season.

The greatest specter facing us is the prospect of the immediate loss of forty per cent of our current funding

because of the discontinuation of the PL-480 “counterpart” program, under which the Epigraphic Survey has received support since 1963. The present year’s grant came through the Smithsonian Institution’s Foreign Currency Program, and was administered in Cairo by the American Research Center in Egypt. The future looks bleakest for us at a time when American-Egyptian ties are at their closest: the “excess currency” with which we have been able to operate is now committed to other, governmental projects. The appeal for public and private funds must now occupy a good deal of the Field Director’s time. Only in this way will we be able to maintain our own work at the present level while continuing to provide basic research facilities and a great variety of other services to visiting scholars from all over the world.

Our scientific work proceeded against the background of these trials. In addition to those already mentioned, the professional staff for our fifty-fifth season included my wife Martha, responsible for the smooth running of



the house and the comfort and health of the residents and visitors; Dr. William Murnane, Mr. Mark Ciccarello, and Ms. Ann Roth, Epigraphers; Messrs. Richard Turner, Francis Howard, and Thad Rasche, Artists; Mr. Michael Langenstein, Photographer; and Miss May Trad, Librarian. Through a generous private donation we were joined for the month of December by Mr. Sidney Huttner, Assistant Head of Special Collections in the University of Chicago Libraries, who conducted a survey of the needs of the Chicago House library. Preliminary conclusions are optimistic, due in large part to the stability of temperature and humidity inside the library building. During the course of the season we prepared three hundred volumes for binding or rebinding. We have also begun copying the deteriorating negatives in our adjacent photographic archive, with 106 out of the first 1041 of the series already rescued in this way.

Though we had hoped to begin our new project in the

Procession scene in the Opet festival.





Usurped cartouches of Tutankhamun, whose names are clearly visible beneath those of Horemheb.

Eighteenth Dynasty Temple of Medinet Habu this season, we once more found all our efforts devoted to the Tutankhamun colonnade at Luxor Temple, working in the more inaccessible areas of the walls and on the gigantic columns themselves. We are collecting even the graffiti scratched onto these columns in the last century, to help document the modern history of this hall. While examining the architectural details of the southern gateway, we discovered a completely unknown inscription dating to the Ptolemaic or Roman period. Unfinished, badly faded, painted in red ink on the deteriorating pink sandstone, it had escaped all previous notice. We experimented with the use of ultraviolet light to improve its legibility, but the effect was negligible. We achieved much better results by employing the strong Sound and Light lights installed at the base of the western wall of the colonnade to collate our copy of the marginal texts under the representations of the Opet festival. The new perspective on the reliefs caused by lighting them from below helped confirm the existence of some traces which had been seen only faintly by daylight.

A final systematic search was undertaken of the thousands of stones piled up within the temple enclosure, in an attempt to identify more blocks which are certain to have come originally from the walls of the colonnade. We now have about two hundred fifty fragments to include in our final publication. In the course of this work we also located some thirty fragments representing approximately one fifth of the original version of the so-called "Bentresh stele" (Louvre C 284). Previously known only from a single late copy, the events related in this story—including an oracle of Khonsu during the time of the Opet festival, a royal marriage to a princess of the land of Bekhten, demonic possession and a miraculous cure—are attributed to the reign of Ramesses II. As the search continues for more pieces of this fascinating text, it is to be hoped that details of its orthography and paleography (the style of its hieroglyphs) will give a clear indication of the actual date of its composition.

The purpose of the Epigraphic Survey is the thorough and meticulous documentation of the decoration of deteriorating and endangered monuments. Our publications are of use to those interested in the content and style of the scenes and texts we record, showing the minute details which are difficult to see in photographs or on the original, and indicating the traces which are visible in damaged areas, giving translation and commentaries, including a history of the decoration and its modifications, and a study of orientation of the decoration and the use of space within scenes, between scenes, and as seen in the architectural and natural settings. Our unique method, based on committee consensus, assures the extreme degree of accuracy we strive for. Every finished drawing has been approved by five specialists: a photographer, an artist, two epigraphers, and finally the Field Director. Successful staff members learn to resolve their professional differences without allowing personal feelings to interfere with their objectivity. Likewise, in terms of the social conditions on the expedition, concern for the common good must be paramount. Living and working together in a small community in relative isolation for six months, each staff member shares responsibility for the smooth running of the household.

Because we must reduce three-dimensional relief to two-dimensional line-drawings, we are aware that the results represent a compromise with reality. We attempt to render every significant detail of the relief in such a way as to be faithful to the visual impression of the original, using conventions which are consistently applied and easily readable. We are willing to consider the employment of new techniques to minimize our efforts without sacrificing the high degree of accuracy and reliability which characterize our productions. On the practical side, we are always constrained by considerations of scale, drawing technique and materials, printing techniques, and costs. But satisfactory results cannot be achieved by a simple mechanical process; they depend rather on skill, judgment, and experience. We are representing an art; and our drawings are not lifeless, but an art form in their own right, reflecting the individuality of the persons who worked on them. We can now confidently look forward to the publication of our next collection of drawings in the forthcoming volume of *Khonsu I*.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge once more the generous assistance consistently extended to us by the officials of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in both Cairo and Luxor, especially Mr. Mohammed el-Sughayyir, Director of Antiquities for Southern Upper Egypt; the members of the Franco-Egyptian Center at Karnak, especially MM. J.-Cl. Golvin, Cl. Traunecker, A. Bellod, and J. Larronde; and Dr. Gerhard Haeny, Director of the Swiss Institute in Cairo. We were pleased to welcome at Chicago House this year more than a dozen Oriental Institute members travelling individually through Egypt, as well as the Oriental Institute's Egyptian tour. We encourage our friends and supporters to visit us whenever they are able.