

# LUXOR TEMPLE PROJECT

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**T**he Luxor Temple Project had a short study season in Luxor during December and January of this year. The purpose of this season was the completion of the drawing and photography of the objects discovered during the previous season. Some time was spent cleaning the coins discovered in these two trenches near Luxor Temple. Unfortunately, corrosion had effaced most features from many of these coins, though further work by an experienced conservator may recover some information from these bits of bronze. Otherwise, the broad range of history revealed in the excavation of what little is left of the Roman and medieval town mound may be determined through study of the glass and ceramics.

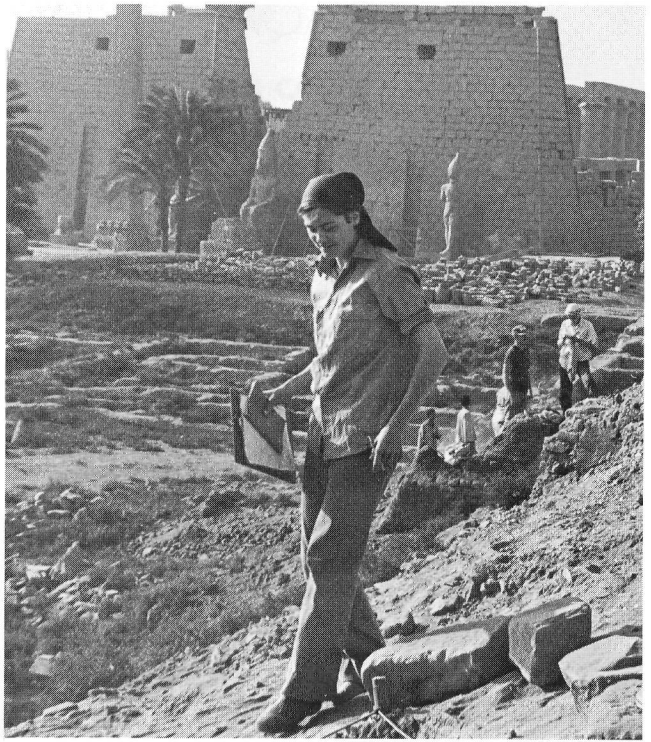
Through hundreds of careful drawings of the ceramics used in Luxor, one is able to reconstruct the forms and the assemblages of objects typical of the late Pharaonic, Ptolemaic [Hellenistic], Roman, Coptic [Byzantine], early, and medieval Islamic periods; the records of this stylistic change over 2000 years in a small but important town will be most interesting. The drawing was done by John Meloy and Don Whitcomb, while a photographic record was made by Jan Johnson. As one might expect, most of the pottery was "every-day" ware—bowls, cups, and other tableware, cooking pots, and large storage vessels, including the ever present amphorae used for storing liquids of all kinds. The corpus contains a record of chronological and functional characteristics of life in Luxor. Periodically within the stratigraphy one finds fancier Egyptian and imported pieces. Such wares are better (and more often) studied and, in association with ostraca, some of the coins, and other inscribed fragments, will provide clues to the relationship of Luxor to the other cities of Egypt. Much of this trade was no doubt associated with the continuing role of Luxor, in Pharaonic, Coptic, and Muslim cultures, as a religious center, a role which has been generally documented through archaeological (and epigraphic) research.

While the study of the history of Luxor and its functioning as a town and religious center are the broad goals of

this project, there are more specific and "special" finds from these excavations which are being prepared for publication. Perhaps the closest to the main work of the Oriental Institute at Chicago House is the analysis of the reused building blocks taken from Luxor Temple itself. These were generally found in the upper layers of each trench and give a chronology for the dismantling of the temple walls. Ray Johnson, senior artist for the Epigraphic Survey, has prepared a short report on all of these blocks, presenting not only a drawing of the blocks but an identification of the point of origin in the temple, the king under whom they were originally carved, and, to the extent that he can match them with other known fragments, what the original scene was of which they formed a part. This work has fit in perfectly with his study of the thousands of blocks which are stored in "block-yards" around the temple, a study which will eventually enable some scenes to be reconstructed and re-erected on the walls of the temple itself.

In the northern of the two trenches was found, in the Coptic levels, a room decorated with a "fresco" on the walls. Only two walls were uncovered during excavation, but both had remains of the "fresco." Not enough of the walls and the shape of the room was revealed to be able to identify the original function of the room, though preliminary analysis suggests that this is a rare instance of decoration of a secular building rather than, as was more common, Coptic churches. Though this is one of several areas which would encourage further excavation at Luxor, the problem of preservation of this simple plaster of mud brick must first be addressed. The recording and study of the frescoes so far uncovered has been undertaken by Ann Roth, who recently received her Ph.D. in Egyptology from the Oriental Institute. She has found interesting parallels for the decoration (an imitation of stone, and especially marble, paneling) within the history of Coptic decoration.

The contents of this decorated room were also extraordinary; they include several Coptic coins (identified by size and minimal decorative features), several complete or almost whole examples of Coptic pottery, a small steatite relief depicting the head of the Egypto-Greek deity Serapis, and a beautifully carved and very well preserved royal head which, on stylistic grounds, must date from the XVIIIth Dynasty. One can only speculate what the heads



● *View from the top of the mound of medieval Luxor. Trench A/D is out of view to the right, Lisa Heidorn is in the foreground.*

of an XVIIIth Dynasty king and a pre-Christian deity were doing in a Coptic context (it would be nice to think that there was a small museum here, predating the current Luxor Museum), but the corpus of material is being prepared for publication to allow scholars to discuss just such questions.

We benefitted during this season, as during all seasons in Egypt, from the kind cooperation and assistance of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, especially Dr. Mohammad Sugheir, Mr. Magdi al-Mullah, and Mrs. Somai Mohammed Labib, who worked with us on a daily basis in Luxor Temple. We stayed at Chicago House and received the usual assistance from Lanny Bell and the entire staff. We should mention specifically Tom Van Eynde's large-format photographs of the royal head and Sue Lezon's beautiful artistic rendering of the same, both of which will add immensely to the value of the publication of the piece.