

## THE LUXOR-FARSHÛT DESERT ROAD SURVEY

**John Coleman Darnell and Deborah Darnell**

The 1994/95 season was a very eventful one for the Luxor-Farshût Desert Road Survey. Extraordinarily heavy rainfall at the beginning of the season allowed us to witness the powerful effects of water flowing off the high desert and how such forces have influenced the configuration of physical remains on the ancient roads. Our work concentrated on the main Farshût Road and the nearby ‘Alamat Tal Road. After preliminary surveys during the 1993/94 season, we began formal work this season on the Darb Rayayna to the south, including the Topos of Apa Tyrannos. In addition, we continued to examine the Darb Ba‘irat and the Thoth Mountain Road. A newly discovered site of rock inscriptions has provided a wealth of exciting information about the use of desert roads in pharaonic times and has shed light on the history of the First Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Eleventh Dynasty. Yet even as we rejoiced over our discovery of that untouched area, we became engaged in an ongoing struggle to save another site that was being plundered literally before our eyes.

### **Gebel Antef**

During the third season of work on the Theban Desert Road Survey, we continued to examine the area of the Seventeenth Dynasty chapel of Antef V—apparently dedicated to the Abydene Osiris—which we discovered during our first season of work (see the *Annual Reports* for 1992/93 and 1993/94). We have now identified further ceramic evidence of Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Pe-



**Figure 1. The graffito of a man milking a cow in the Wadi el-Hôl. Thieves hacked around the scene in an attempt to remove it; failing that, they later effaced the graffito**

riod activity. The date of this pottery accords well with our discovery during the first season of a fragment of a limestone naos-stela, which can be dated palaeographically to the Thirteenth Dynasty. A summary description of the pottery from Gebel Antef and the other sites examined during the second and third seasons will appear in autumn of this year in the *Bulletin de liaison du groupe international d'étude de la céramique égyptienne* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale). Farther out on the road, we completed the mapping and planning of the area of thirteen dry stone huts to the northwest, which are surrounded by late Second Intermediate Period to early Eighteenth Dynasty as well as later pottery.

### **The Wadi el-Hôl**

Near the middle of the Farshût Road, in the cliffs behind el-Halfaya, we continued recording the abundant graffiti in the Wadi el-Hôl. As we indicated in the report of our second season, the site had recently been vandalized, and a number of inscriptions had been completely destroyed, when we first visited the site last March. When we returned in January, we surprised the thieves at work, smashing and cutting and digging their way through the inscriptions and pottery deposits. As soon as they caught sight of us emerging from the jeeps, they fled, leaving behind a horrifyingly large array of tools such as chisels, mallets, saws, picks, razor wire, and a crowbar, which had been used to extract marketable pieces of rock inscriptions, destroying countless others in the process. We collected all implements that could be used to do further damage, and with the help of the inspectors from Qena who had accompanied us, we disabled the tractor belonging to the thieves, poured out their water and fuel, and returned to the desert edge outside of Halfaya. Soon we met several local policemen who came back to the site with us and retrieved evidence, while we surveyed the damage and recorded a few more graffiti (see fig. 1). We returned the next day with many policemen, but were only allowed to work for about an hour.



**Figure 2.** The stela of Sobekhotep III, in graffiti area A of the Wadi el-Hôl—Left: as it appeared on January 29, 1995, at the time of the arrest of the thieves whom we discovered pillaging the site. Right: as it appeared on March 7, 1995. The thieves, released on bail, had returned shortly before and removed the rest of the lower portion of the stela, scorching the remaining upper portion with fire

Within several days, thirteen thieves had been arrested, and several stolen fragments were recovered. Because they have been held by the court for the arraignment and future trial, we have as yet been unable to examine these pieces.

Unfortunately, the authorities were unable to prevent the continuation of illicit activity. When we returned to the Wadi el-Hôl immediately after the end of the month of Ramadan, we found that the thieves, having been released on bail, had stolen another large piece of the Sobekhotep stela, damaged what remained of that stela with fire, and had destroyed several more graffiti (see fig. 2). Recent donkey droppings near some of the vandalized graffiti suggested that the thieves had visited the site during the ‘Eid el-Fitr. We spent the entire day at the site, copying and photographing what we could; two weeks later we returned again for another full day of work. There are many other important graffiti at the Wadi el-Hôl site, and they must be copied and studied before they are all destroyed.

One of the Wadi el-Hôl graffiti that we copied this season was made by a man Dedusobek, during the reign of Amenemhat III; in that inscription he says (fig. 3):

“He has made (it) as his monument at the time of his coming from the Abydene nome in order to perform rites (*r ṯr.t ṯḥ.t*) for king Monthuhotep”

The text is dated to the fourth month of the Peret season, day 28. This is apparently the memorial of a man from the nome of Abydos who was on his way to participate in ceremonies at the temple of Monthuhotep at Deir el-Bahari during the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, which began on the first day of the Shemu season, three days after he carved his elaborate inscription in the Wadi el-Hôl. We also discovered and copied two inscriptions written in the Proto-Sinaitic script. There are few texts in this writing, a script derived from ancient Egyptian and the ancestor ultimately of the Phoenician and Greek scripts. Most of the known texts are from

Sinai, and appear to date to the time of the latter Middle Kingdom; our discovery of two examples of this writing in association with many late Middle Kingdom Egyptian texts in the Western Desert of the Thebaïd is of considerable historical and cultural importance and shows that at least some Semitic employees of Egyptian Sinai expeditions may well have traveled and worked in Upper Egypt, perhaps as members of Egyptian expeditions to the oases and Nubia.

The hundreds of inscriptions at the Wadi el-Hôl include everything from prehistoric petroglyphs to Greek and Coptic graffiti, with innumerable hieratic, hieroglyphic, and figural inscriptions from the intervening periods. The unique nature of this collection of texts and images makes the attack on this site particularly heartbreaking to endure, because once a portion of the rock surface is destroyed, there is no way to know what may have been lost. We are committed to preserving the memories of the ancient desert travelers by recording as many of their graffiti as our resources will allow. We can only hope that the thieves and the unscrupulous purchasers of the fruits of their labors find themselves frustrated in further attempts to obliterate the historical record of the Wadi el-Hôl.

### The ‘Alamat Tal and Gebel Tjauti

We continued to follow the ‘Alamat Tal Road beyond the two rubble and mudbrick structures of the Second Intermediate Period that we described in the report of our 1993/94 season. We have now mapped and surveyed the Theban half of the road and have also mapped portions of several associated Roman and Islamic period roads in the area. Our surveys of the area have revealed that the site marked “römische Hausruine” on the old Schweinfurth map of Western Thebes is in fact the area of the two Seventeenth Dynasty towers. This suggests that the structures were better preserved in his day, and at least one of the towers retained the appearance of being a “house.”

Several Egyptian texts suggest that there once was a road from the area of Qamûla leading ultimately to the oases. The stela of the policeman Kay from Qamûla refers to a trip to the oases to arrest criminals and renegades during the early Middle Kingdom. The Egyptologist H. G. Fischer has taken the text at face value and has assumed that there must have been a road from Qamûla to the oases,

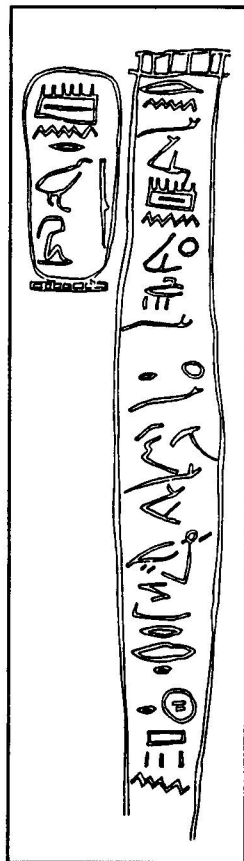


Figure 3. A portion of the inscription of Dedu-Sobek from the Wadi el-Hôl



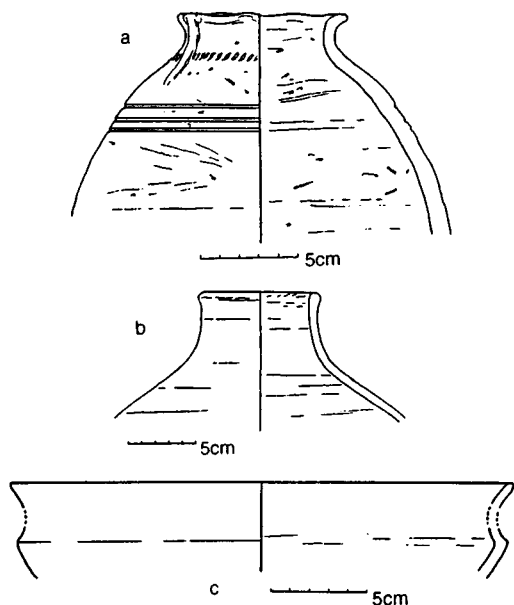
Figure 4. Examining pottery on the ‘Alamat Tal Road

but others have forced Kay to take unreasonable detours, because his road was unknown, and no one had looked for it. After following the 'Alamat Tal Road behind Ezbet 'Ababda, close to Qamûla (fig. 4), we now know we have found Kay's route. The 'Alamat Tal tracks, guarded by Second Intermediate Period towers, lead to the Gebel Qarn el-Gir caravan stop, where the routes from Thebes, Qamûla, Hu, Abydos, and Kharga Oasis all converge. On the basis of the pottery alone, which includes an abundance of Nubian sherds, we can now say that the 'Alamat Tal route was traveled during the Old Kingdom and became a major road throughout the First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom, and Second Intermediate Period, remaining in heavy use through the New Kingdom (see fig. 5a, b).

Our most important discovery on the 'Alamat Tal Road during the third season has been the location of a major concentration of graffiti. Though much less imposing and esthetically pleasing than many of those in the Wadi el-Hôl, several are of great historical significance. There are a number of Coptic graffiti (see fig. 6a) overlying the pharaonic texts, and many of the pharaonic inscriptions themselves partially or wholly obscure earlier graffiti. We have now photographed all of the texts and scenes and have made facsimile copies of all of the major pharaonic texts and several of the Coptic graffiti. There are a few Predynastic texts, including a possible reference to the king Horus Scorpion. There are several Sixth Dynasty texts, and a number of Eleventh Dynasty inscriptions. A hieratic text painted in red may

date to the Middle Kingdom, and several graffiti of policemen appear to belong to the Thirteenth Dynasty. There are no certain New Kingdom or Late Period texts (nearby there is a single Demotic name), although the pottery shows that the road remained in use until the end of the New Kingdom.

The presence of the name of Pharaoh Pepy I of the Sixth Dynasty (fig. 6a) suggests that the road was used by the late Old Kingdom "Interpreters of Yam" when they went west and south to Nubia during the late Old Kingdom (they are known from the area through a stela from Naqada). There is a soldier Wenkhu, his name written on the shield he holds before him, who may also date to the late Old Kingdom. Associated Old Kingdom pottery also shows that the track was in use then, although apparently not in heavy use. The 'Alamat Tal Road was infrequently used during the Old Kingdom because the track was not of the best quality.



**Figure 5. Samples of pottery examined during the third season of the Luxor-Farshût Desert Road Survey: (a) Gebel Tjauti: bag-shaped jar of Nile silt, with scalloped rim, incised lines, and appliqué; highly distinctive form has parallels from contexts dated to the Ninth-Eleventh Dynasties and the Twelfth Dynasty at Hu, Qurna, Elkab, and Qau; (b) 'Alamat Tal Road North: Fine Mari A3 rim to shoulder of globular vessel, Early Twelfth Dynasty; (c) Darb Rayayna, southern ascent: Red-polished "Meydum bowl," probably Fifth-Sixth Dynasties**

We owe our knowledge of this fact to another text, a badly eroded formal inscription of the late First Intermediate Period (see fig. 7), headed by the name of the nomarch Tjauti, the pro-Heracleopolitan ruler of the Coptite nome (the nome north of Thebes) at the time of the early Eleventh Dynasty at Thebes. Tjauti may in fact have been the last Heracleopolitan nomarch of the Coptite nome, and he ruled from Qamûla. After listing the titles and name of Tjauti, the stela says:

"I have made this for crossing this gebel, I being more ... than the nomarch of another nome ..."

The broken third line appears to relate some military exploit. Tjauti has thus left us perhaps the only known pharaonic road construction text (there is a Coptic text from the early Islamic period referring to roadwork near Aswan). Tjauti did not make the road where no track had been, the Old Kingdom graffiti and sherds attest to that. But he does appear to have enlarged the road, as the increased ceramic remains and greater abundance of later graffiti suggest. He had to do this because the Theban nomarch of his time, though nominally acknowledging the authority of the Heracleopolitan ruler, had taken control of the desert roads to the west. The Theban nomarch Antef had assumed the same title as Tjauti from Qamûla, "Overseer of the Narrow Door of the Desert of Upper Egypt." Tjauti could not allow this; he may have known of Theban intentions to revolt, and with the western routes in Theban hands, Antef could march through the Wadi el-Hôl on Abydos, turning the desert flanks of the Fifth and Sixth nomes. Tjauti appears desperately to have sought to maintain a direct desert link with the north. The enlargement of the Qamûla Road may have been the final provocation, however, because after Tjauti, the nomes to the north of Thebes soon fell to the Thebans. Near Tjauti's stela we have found another graffito, perhaps the name of the Theban troops who captured Tjauti's new desert highway: "the Strike Force of the Son of Re Antef," a successor of the nomarch Antef, and a predecessor of Monthuhotep Nebhepetre, reunifier of Egypt and founder of the Middle Kingdom.

A large number of inscriptions date to the Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Period, including a number of faintly preserved texts written in red ink. One of these (fig. 6b) reads:

"Regnal year 11, third month of the Shemou season, day 15: when his majesty came to the southern city (Thebes) in order to bring about ..."

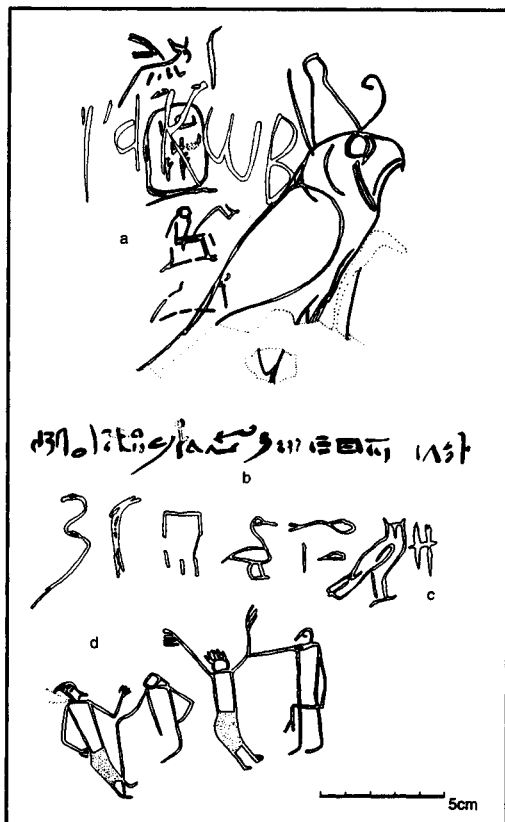
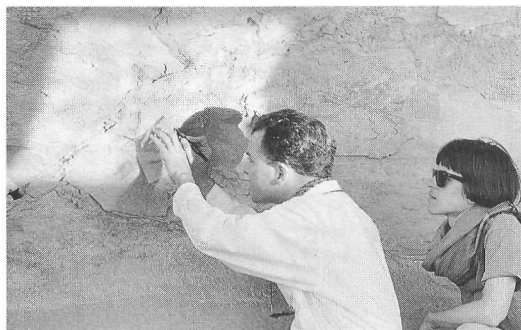


Figure 6. Samples of graffiti from Gebel Tjauti of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom date (discussions and translations appear in the body of the report)



**Figure 7. Recording the road construction inscription of the Coptite nomarch Tjauti (late First Intermediate Period) from Gebel Tjauti**

This text refers to a visit by the king to Thebes, apparently on the ‘Alamat Tal Road. The graffito suggests that the king did not reside at Thebes, and this would fit the Middle Kingdom, when the royal residence was at Itj-Tawy at the mouth of the Fayum. The palaeography also supports a Middle Kingdom date for this graffito.

Several of the Thirteenth Dynasty graffiti mention “the police official (*imy-ht-s3-pr*) Nehy’s son ‘Am,” who is known from a Boulaq papyrus (fig. 6c). The graffito in figure 6d shows a

*s3-pr*-policeman, his flail in hand, grasping another figure whose arms are raised. A third man holds a stick and is addressed by a figure wearing a beard and headcloth, who extends his hand in the gesture of speech. This appears to be a depiction of a criminal dragged into the presence of the king by one of the Thirteenth Dynasty policemen, perhaps Aam himself.

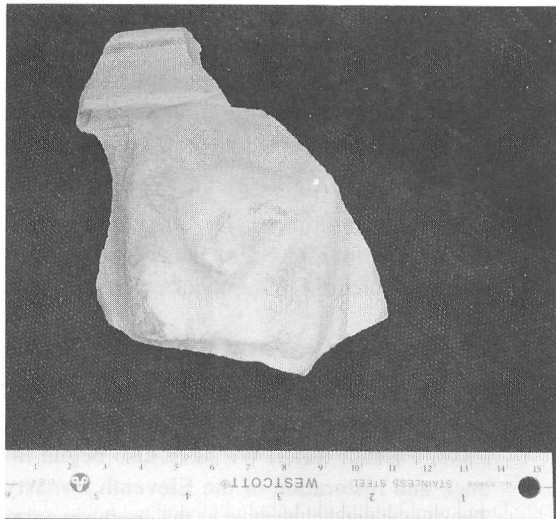
We can now say that the ‘Alamat Tal Road was an official military and police route from the Eleventh through the Seventeenth Dynasties, and a commercial route through the end of the New Kingdom, as is evidenced by the ceramic remains, which include a large number of well-executed, elaborately painted vessels (fig. 8). Deep in the desert at Gebel Tjauti (see fig. 9), the texts and associated pottery vividly depict the time of the reunification of Egypt and the rise of the Theban Eleventh Dynasty.

## The Darb Rayayna

On the Darb Rayayna we investigated several paths leading up the gebel to the west of Armant, and we can now say that the track so named on the Survey of Egypt map is a Roman to early modern road. The route of ascent preferred in earlier periods is that which leads to and joins the paved access road to the electrical power towers that follow the Darb Rayayna towards Hu. Despite the extensive disturbance, we have found along this route a great deal of Old Kingdom through New Kingdom pottery, interesting Ptolemaic evidence, as well as Roman, Coptic, and early Arab ceramic remains. Far back on the high desert, we have located a dry stone monument seen by Oliver Myers in the 1930s but never published and otherwise unknown. The feature is a square tower with bantered sides tapering to the truncated top; on the eastern side a narrow ramp leads up to the top (fig. 10).

In his letters Myers suggested that the construction was a watch post of the late Predynastic period. The structure is, however, most likely a solar altar of the later Old Kingdom. The truncated pyramidal shape and external ramp recall the solar shrines of the Sixth Dynasty, the Amarna desert altars, and the structure of Amenhotep III at Kom es-Samak beyond Malqaṭa. The ramp leads from the east, indicating that the worshipper, facing west, was directing his adoration toward the setting sun. Pottery in association with the altar suggests a date between the Second and Sixth Dynasties, and further examples of Old Kingdom pottery on the Darb Rayayna itself (see fig. 5c) indicate that a date later in this period is more likely.

Old Kingdom monuments are sparsely attested for the Armant area, a notable exception being a granite pillar of Userkaf discovered at Tôd, on the eastern bank of the Nile opposite Armant. D. Arnold has suggested that this fragment be interpreted as a freestanding solar monument, perhaps an obelisk-like representation of the Benben stone. The manner of construction of the Darb Rayayna structure recalls that of the remnants of the earliest version of the Userkaf solar complex at Abu Gurob. One may conclude that a date between the early Second Dynasty and the late Fifth Dynasty is possible, with construction under Nebre of the early Second Dynasty (see below), or Userkaf of the early Fifth Dynasty, the two more probable dates.



**Figure 8. Gebel Tjauti: Rim of blue-painted marl vessel with Hathor-head appliqué, probably late Eighteenth Dynasty. The face of the goddess was molded separately and then applied**

Not far from the beginning of the Darb Rayayna, in a wadi at the base of the escarpment, is a monastic site discovered by Oliver Myers during the Armant excavations. The extensive remains, which include brick and dry stone structures, a plastered cave, and a burned-out garbage dump containing cloth, rope, leather, metal, and organic material, have never been investigated but promise to provide a wealth of information concerning life in this and associated communities. A nearby concentration of graffiti, several photographs of which were published by Hans Winkler, include a few prehistoric carvings, serekhs of Second Dynasty Pharaoh Nebre, scenes of men and laden donkeys, and a pharaonic ship, probably of late Old Kingdom date. Several Demotic graffiti are also present, including some with dates in the reign of Darius I (the earliest dated Demotic graffiti, to be published by Richard Jasnow and Tina Di Cerbo in the journal *Enchoria*)—one mentions a man from



**Figure 9. A view of the Alamat Tal Road from the high desert over the Gebel Tjauti site**

Kharga, who says that he came to Armant to visit the temples. There are many Coptic graffiti, referring to the associated monastic ruins (which have also been attacked by treasure hunters) as the Monastery of Poseidonius (mentioned in a graffito in a tomb at Dra Abu-n-Naga) and the Topos of Apa Tyrannos. Several of the Coptic texts also record the dates of the Lenten fast and Easter (fig. 11a):

"The Pasca: Mechir 21, the loosening [of the fast = Easter Sunday] Pharmouthi 2"

Another inscription (fig. 11b) is in an unusual variation of a standard form of Coptic cryptography and reads  $\Delta$ NOK  $\Omega$ ENOYTE, "I, Shenoute." There are also several depictions of the monks who once inhabited the site (fig. 11c).

## The Darb Ba'irat and the Thoth Mountain

We continued to examine the pottery on the Darb Ba'irat to the south and on the unmapped track behind the "Thoth Mountain" to the north, both branches of the main Luxor-Farshût Road. We have also begun to plan and seek funding for the clearance and restoration of the Eleventh Dynasty Thoth Mountain temple. The Gebel Tjauti inscription, near or at the southern extent of the Coptite nome, shows that the Thoth Mountain was at the northern edge of the Theban nome. The symbolic and

political significance of this location may for the first time be fully understood in context with the evidence from the 'Alamat Tal route and Gebel Tjauti. The presence of the Se'ankhkare temple there was an assertion of Theban control over all of the roads of the Western Desert after the struggles of the First Intermediate Period.

## Acknowledgments

The members of the Luxor-Farshût Desert Road Survey during the third season were John Coleman Darnell and Deborah Darnell. We were joined again by Inspector Ramadan Ahmed Aly as our enthusiastic and helpful representative of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. We thank Dr. M. Abd el-Halim Nur el-Din, Secretary General of the Su-

preme Council of Antiquities, for his support. We also owe a debt of thanks to Dr. Ali Hassan, Supervisor of Pharaonic Antiquities. We would like to thank Dr. Mohammed es-Saghir, Supervisor of Antiquities for Upper Egypt for his unwavering assistance to our project, his commitment to the continuation of important fieldwork, and especially for giving so generously of his time in dealing with the problems in the Wadi el-Hôl. We thank Dr. Sabri Abd el-Aziz, Chief Inspector of

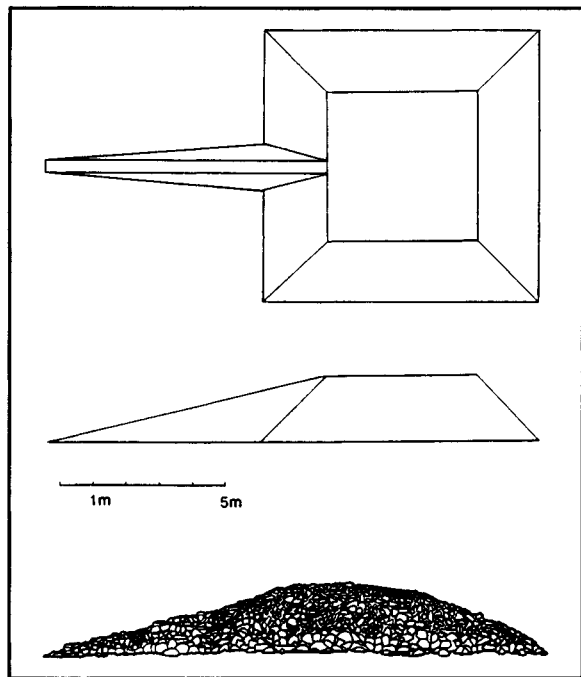


Figure 10. The Darb Rayayna altar from the north (below), with restored views

Qurna, for his invaluable assistance. We thank Chief Inspector Hussein Afiuni of Qena, and inspectors Rabia Hamdan and Mohammed Hamid, who were all introduced to the Farshût Road in an unfortunately dramatic fashion and who took on the many extra burdens that the attack on the Wadi el-Hôl entailed. We owe thanks to Professor Peter Dorman, Field Director of the Epigraphic Survey, for his assistance and especially for allowing us to use the 1963 Chicago House Land Rover, old but apparently immortal, on several trips to Gebel Tjauti. Helen and Jean Jacquet of the Karnak-Nord expedition have continued to give us expert advice on ceramic analysis, surveying, and architecture; we value their help and interest more than we can adequately express. Thanks go to Dr. Henri Riad, resident Egyptologist at Chicago House, for his continuing encouragement and support. We also thank Sitt Madeleine el-Mallah, Director of the Luxor Museum. We are very grateful to Colin Hope for sharing his extensive knowledge of ceramics, especially concerning oasis wares and New Kingdom painted pottery, and to Stan Hendrickx, for his advice on Old Kingdom material. We also benefited from the insights of Nessim Henein, Shirley Patten, and Bruce Williams. Thanks again to Anthony Leahy and Patricia Spencer for allowing us another opportunity to consult the archives of the Egypt Exploration Society in London. We are grateful for the kind hospitality of the Petrie Museum and thank Barbara Adams and Rosalind Janssen for their friendly help. We thank William Sumner and John Sanders for their suggestions on innovative ways to maximize our photographic recording capabilities through the use of digital imaging, an avenue we will be exploring. We are grateful to Steve Walker of the Ben Meadows company for his help in purchasing a GPS receiver, without which our work in the 'Alamat Tal would have proceeded much more slowly. We are truly indebted to Mark Easton, Amira Khattab, and Ibrahim Sadek of the American Research Center in Egypt.

Special thanks to Carlotta Maher, whose concern and generosity made possible an additional visit to the threatened Wadi el-Hôl. Even if they have by now been removed from the original rock surfaces, the inscriptions which Carlotta "adopted" will be preserved in the copies and photographs we were able to make on that occasion. Drew Baumann, Christina Di Cerbo, Richard Jasnow, Jerry Kobylecky, Susan Osgood, and Nan Ray have assisted us in the recording of much graffiti during the past season; we are extremely grateful for their help and enthusiasm, maintained under very demanding field conditions. The time and energy which Nan and Sue devoted to sherd sorting in the vicinity of Gebel Tjauti are very much appreciated. We cannot imagine how we would have been able to meet the challenges of the season without the steadfast reliability of Abdu Abdullah Hassan ("Abdu el-Qatt") who has been for us not only an expert driver and mechanic, but also an indispensable team member and loyal friend. We came to value Abdu's keen eye while surveying the 'Alamat Tal Road, and we learned the extent of his belief in the

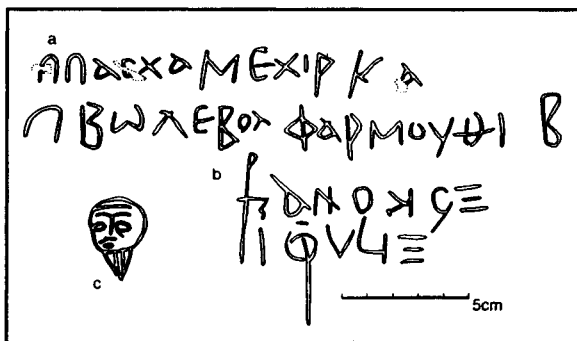


Figure 11. Graffiti from the Monastery of Poseidonius/the Topos of Apa Tyrannos, near the ascent of the Darb Rayayna

importance of our work during the Wadi el-Hôl crisis. In addition to Abdu, drivers Nadi and Abu Elyen were unhesitating in offering their services, even under extremely trying and potentially hazardous conditions; we are truly thankful for their friendship and help. Finally, we would like to reiterate that all of our colleagues in the Supreme Council of Antiquities have been helpful and supportive concerning the distressing vandalism in the Wadi el-Hôl and have shown much interest in our discovery of the desert altar and the Eleventh and Thirteenth Dynasty inscriptions, and we look forward to continuing our work with them during future seasons of our desert road survey.

---