

THE THEBAN DESERT ROAD SURVEY (THE LUXOR-FARSHÛT DESERT ROAD SURVEY)

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During the fourth season of our desert exploration we continued to work at all of the sites and along all of the desert routes within our concession. The new name for the project reflects the growing body of evidence for the significance of this system of routes to the ascendancy of Thebes at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. In light of the vandalism at the Wadi el-Ḥôl, and considering the importance of the material, the major thrust of our fourth season has been the recording of rock inscriptions and rock art in the Wadi el-Ḥôl and at Gebel Tjauti.

Gebel Antef

During the fourth season of work on the Theban Desert Road Survey, we continued work in the area of the Seventeenth Dynasty chapel of Antef V, which we discovered in 1992/93. The overwhelming majority of the ceramic material examined through random sampling in the vicinity of the chapel is of Middle Kingdom through early New Kingdom date. Analysis of pottery from the series of dry stone huts mapped last season has shown that they were originally in use in the Middle Kingdom, as were a number of similar structures on the 'Alamat Tal Road.

The Wadi el-Ḥôl

Continued recording of the wealth of graffiti in the Wadi el-Ḥôl was given top priority this season. The site had recently been vandalized, and a number of inscriptions destroyed, at the time of our first visit to the site. Last season we surprised thieves in the act of desecrating the site. Vandalism unfortunately continues. Several more inscriptions were lost during the summer of 1995 (including the only Demotic text we have thus far discovered in the Wadi el-Ḥôl—fortunately we photographed and copied this text during the 1993/94 season), and we have detected wanton scratching out of inscrip-



Figure 1. *Rock inscription in the Wadi el-Hôl, a late Middle Kingdom/ Second Intermediate Period literary text, partially effaced in antiquity, describing the feats of a Theban military ruler; photograph by D. Darnell*

tions during the course of the 1995/96 season. Nevertheless, with the assistance of our colleagues of the Supreme Council for Antiquities and the police, we were able to accomplish more work in the Wadi el-Hôl during the past season than in the previous two seasons combined. Protective measures for the site are currently under consideration, to be implemented in the near future. A full investigation of the Qarn el-Gir caravan rest stop will begin as soon as all of the endangered graffiti have been recorded.

The Wadi el-Hôl inscriptions are proving to be even more important than we believed. Among those we recorded and collated during the fourth season, several stand out due to their great significance. Next to the graffito left by a man traveling from Abydos to Deir el-Bahri late in the reign of Amenemhat III (see the *1994/95 Annual Report*) we have recorded a letter, carved on the face of the gebel. The author of the letter addresses a priest in the praise of a number of deities and asks that the priest pray to several gods on his behalf. The existence of a rock-carved letter in the middle of the desert was most unexpected and is of extraordinary interest; of even greater significance is the fact that the combination of deities who appear in this letter finds its closest

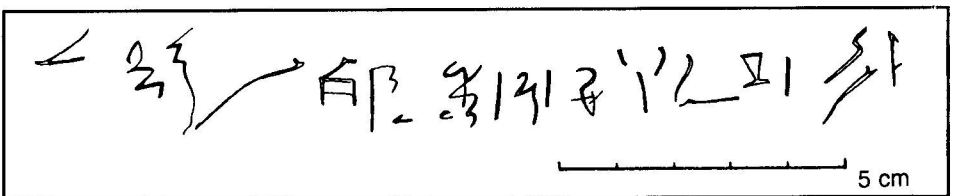


Figure 2. *A small portion of the epigraphic copy of the literary graffito shown in figure 1*

ARCHAEOLOGY

parallel in Sinuhe's letter to Sesostri I in the Story of Sinuhe. In fact, the deity Sopdu-Neferbauenra-Semseru is—before the New Kingdom—otherwise attested only in Sinuhe's letter. The Wadi el-Hôl graffito even provides important information for evaluating the quality of the surviving copies of the Story of Sinuhe. At least two readings in our graffito support variant readings from the Ashmolean Ostrakon version of the Story of Sinuhe, a late copy with variant readings that are often considered corrupt.

Perhaps the most important of the inscriptions we have documented in the Wadi el-Hôl are five lines of hieratic recording the beginning of an unknown literary text (figs. 1–2). Patterned after the opening to Sinuhe's *encomium* on the pharaoh Sesostri I in the Story of Sinuhe, the text begins:

“Oh people great and small, and the army in its entirety—behold, a man is in the City (Thebes), whose like has not been known!”

The text, partially effaced in antiquity, relates how the “foreigners fall to his pronouncements” and how “his own tongue curbs the Asiatics—he does not like the people (Egyptians) who are loyal to that enemy of his.” The text concludes by describing how intelligent and brave is the ruler, and then—in the most stark description of the “good shepherd” motif common to royalist texts from ancient Egypt—says that:

“he spends the night hungry until day breaks, and he sees heaven like a flame—his joy is the completion of the watch.”

On the bases of paleography and content, we have here a lost paeon to a Theban ruler of the Second Intermediate Period, living an ascetic and militaristic life in the

gebél, driving back the Asiatic hordes and opposing Egyptian collaborators. It truly is something marvelous and of real significance for Egyptian literature and history.

Nearby is a depiction of a statue of the king on a sledge (fig. 3), with the annotation:

“As for the one who will read these writings, he will arrive (home) in peace.”

The depiction of a statue of the king in the Wadi el-Hôl provides a concrete illustration of the statement of Ibia on the stela Cairo 20086 (late Middle Kingdom) that he “accompanied the monuments of the sovereign into the far desert lands.”

In the 1993/94 *Annual Report*, we quoted from one of a number of inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hôl referring to people “spending the day on holiday.” These inscriptions, with others, point to a veneration of Hathor in the Wadi el-Hôl.

An actual desert procession in honor of the goddess, traveling along a desert road which most likely led into the Wadi el-Hôl, is described in a Ptolemaic stela from Hou, one of the termini of the Farshût Road. In the lapidary letter and other nearby graffiti we have

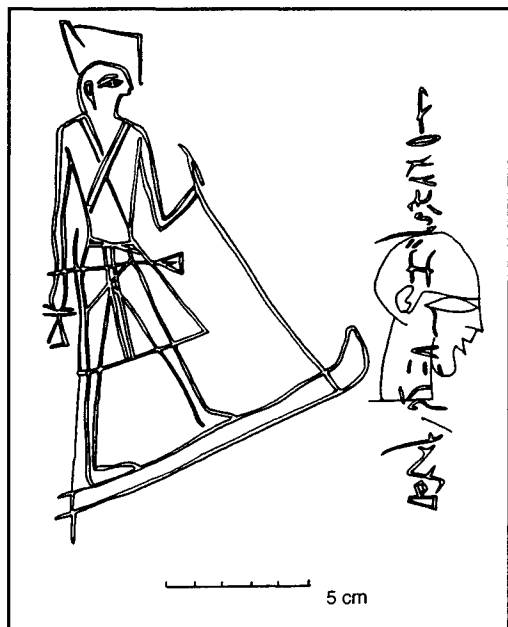


Figure 3. Image of the statue of the king with hieratic annotation, Wadi el-Hôl

several references to "Hathor mistress of Punt." Another inscription gives the name of a singer, and we have also copied the drawing of a man playing a lyre, his head thrown back and mouth open in song (fig. 4). These men appear to have been participants in the religious celebrations in the Wadi el-Hôl. The earliest representation of a lyre now known from ancient Egypt is an example played by an eastern desert-dwelling miner in a tomb at Beni Hasan dated to the reign of Amenemhat II. The first representations of Egyptians playing this instrument have thus far been known only from the Eighteenth Dynasty. The Wadi el-Hôl lyre-player, most likely of Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period date, is probably the earliest known representation of a native Egyptian playing the lyre.

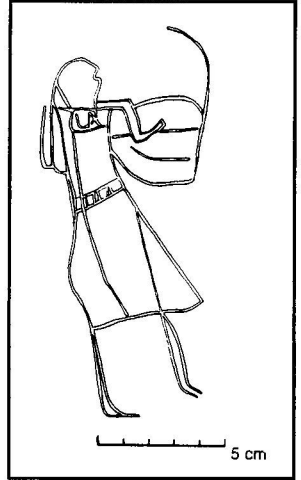


Figure 4. Drawing of a singing man playing the lyre, Wadi el-Hôl

The 'Alamat Tal Road and Gebel Tjauti

We continued to map the 'Alamat Tal Road, following it beyond the rock inscription site we discovered during the 1994/95 season. We have now mapped and surveyed all of the Theban portion of the road, and we have followed the road across the high desert to where it descends the gebel behind Hou (fig. 5). Random sampling of pottery near Gebel Tjauti and investigation of the pottery on the road and at several dumps at the northern terminus of the high desert track reveal that the date of the ceramic material coincides remarkably well with that of the rock inscriptions (fig. 6). Both ceramics and rock inscriptions attest a pharaonic use from the protodynastic period through the end of the Ramesside period. The times of heaviest use were the First Intermediate Period, the Middle Kingdom, and the Second Intermediate Period. The proportion of sherds of Middle Kingdom or earlier date was as high as 93% in samples from the area of the Tjauti inscription.

On our first visit to the site this season, we were alarmed to discover that a recent desert reclamation project has put under cultivation an extensive area of land immediately to the east of the Second Intermediate Period towers. A large aqueduct has already begun bringing water to irrigate vast areas of desert, and during the last summer a portion of the ancient road leading to the towers was lost to this farming. Over the past three seasons, we have conducted surface surveys covering all of the area to the east of the towers between the gravel



Figure 5. Following the ancient footpath, Sue Osgood and John Darnell begin the descent at the northern end of the high desert road beyond Gebel Tjauti; photograph by D. Darnell

ARCHAEOLOGY

hills bordering the 'Alamat Tal wadi. The concentrations of pottery along the northern rubble hills—now being plowed under—are less extensive than those at the southern edge of the wadi, but they include Nubian material and sherds of an Old Kingdom Meidum bowl. We hope the land reclamation will not result in the total destruction of the varied remains of this unique accumulation of sites.

During the fourth season our work on the 'Alamat Tal Road centered on documenting the graffiti of Gebel Tjauti, which we have named for the last pro-Heracleopolitan Coptite nomarch whose road construction stela we discovered last season (fig. 7). After repeatedly collating the sadly decayed inscription, we now know that the key statement of the inscription is:

"I have made this for crossing this gebel, which the ruler of another nome had sealed off, [when he came] to fight with my nome ..."

In this inscription Tjauti has provided us with important information regarding the wars of unification at the end of the First Intermediate Period. Now we know that Tjauti improved the road as a response to Theban aggression (the euphemistically termed "ruler of another nome" is most likely the Theban ruler Antef I). Several years later, Antef II, after an initial, abortive attack on Thinis in the Eighth Upper Egyptian Nome, attacked farther down the Nile, capturing the Tenth Upper Egyptian Nome before returning to mop up resistance in the Thinite nome. The Gebel Tjauti inscription shows that this strategic use of the "indirect approach"—flanking maneuvers across desert tracks—was no accident, but was part of Theban military policy during the Eleventh Dynasty. The inscription also implies that the Coptite nome retained control of the

desert routes, the "narrow door of the desert of Upper Egypt," until the time of the early Eleventh Dynasty at Thebes. As was the case during the Old Kingdom, the Coptites administered the Upper Egyptian deserts, including routes leading from the Thebaid.

One of the highlights of this season was the identification and documentation of exciting evidence for use of the road at the very beginning of Egyptian history: a large Dynasty 0 tableau at Gebel Tjauti recording an event of a military nature, and dated by the name of Horus Sekhen (one of several potential readings proposed for the name), one of the immediate predecessors of the first king of unified Egypt (fig. 8). The predynastic tableau shows a royal interest in this track at the beginning of pharaonic civilization. The numerous early dynastic serekhs and falcons, the large falcon and cartouche of Pepy, a small but finely incised falcon of about the Elev-

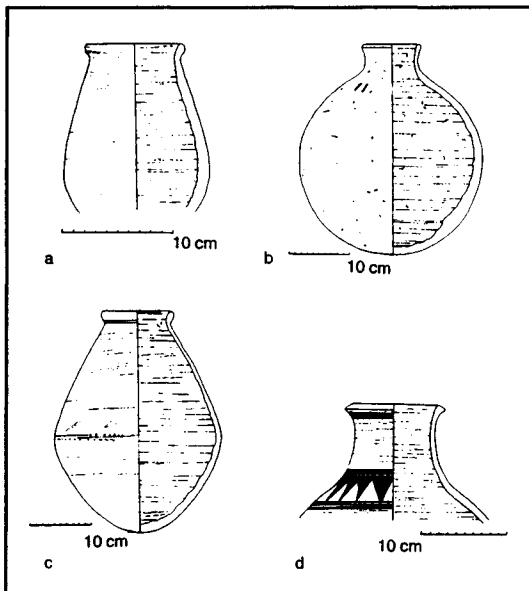


Figure 6. Pottery from Gebel Tjauti and the 'Alamat Tal Road: a) First Intermediate Period drop-shaped pot, silt; b) Middle Kingdom globular jar, silt, red-slipped exterior; c) Second Intermediate Period biconical jar, silt; d) Early Eighteenth Dynasty vessel with brown painted decoration, marl

enth Dynasty (fig. 9), the official inscription of the nomarch Tjauti, and Middle Kingdom ink inscriptions referring to the king traveling on the 'Alamat Tal Road all demonstrate a continued royal interest in this road.

The pharaonic inscriptions at Gebel Tjauti

continue to astound us in their variety and importance. One scratchy, initially unpromising graffito from Gebel Tjauti records the astronomical "observation of the rising of Sothis" during regnal year 11 of an unnamed ruler. Our inscription appears to date to July 13, 1598 B.C.—a date during the Seventeenth Dynasty. This Sothic observation should provide fuel for the further refinement of Egypt's absolute chronology and help anchor the ordering of the rulers of the important but bewildering Seventeenth Dynasty. The Gebel Tjauti astronomical inscription is also, as far as we know, the only surviving dated Sothic observation from ancient Egypt for which one knows the precise geographic location of the observation.

Some graffiti that at first appeared unrecoverable have since yielded to our continued scrutiny and collation. From amongst some of these faint scratches we were able to identify a depiction of a Canaanite god, Resheph, carrying a spear and shield in one hand, a large and peculiar mace in the other, surrounded by speared desert game. Some of the Coptic inscriptions, as at our graffiti site on the Darb Rayayna, are written in cryptography, and others give the names of travelers from towns in the Coptite nome. Several of these toponyms are known but their geographic locations remain a mystery. Our rock inscriptions suggest a location near the 'Alamat Tal for these towns.

Darb Rayayna, Darb Ba'irat, and Subsidiary Tracks

On the Darb Rayayna we made final checks and corrections to our plan of the solar altar, and we mapped the distribution of ceramics surrounding the altar. We have also undertaken examination of the heavily disturbed but extensive pottery deposit at the point where the ancient Darb Rayayna track reaches the top of the high desert (fig. 10).

The exciting result of this initial investigation has been the identification of a high proportion of pottery of the Old Kingdom, evidence that the Darb Rayayna was an important desert road heavily used during that period. The Darb Ba'irat and other subsidiary branches of the main Farshût and 'Alamat Tal Roads, such as the track on which is the



Figure 7. An excerpt from the epigraphic copy of the First Intermediate Period stela on Gebel Tjauti

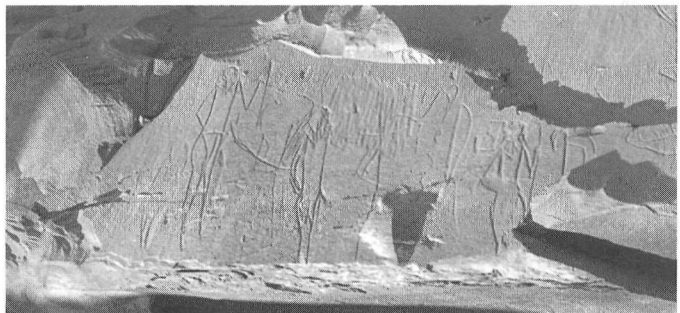


Figure 8. Portion of the Dynasty 0 tableau at Gebel Tjauti commemorating a military event during the reign of the protodynastic ruler Horus Sekhen; photograph by D. Darnell

ARCHAEOLOGY

Thoth Mountain temple, continue to yield interesting ceramic remains. On a northern tributary of the 'Alamat Tal Road we have identified Early Dynastic pottery and Nubian A-Group sherds. The latter complement the later First and Second Intermediate Period Nubian remains on the main 'Alamat Tal Road and indicate a very long-lived Nubian presence on that road (fig. 11). As the Farshût and 'Alamat Tal Roads, via the Gebel Qarn el-Gir caravansary, lead westward to Kharga Oasis and the Darb el-Arba'in road into Nubia, these Nubian sherds appear to attest to the use of this Western Desert route connecting the Thebaid and Nubia.

Our investigations of the past four seasons encourage us to expect ultimately to discover that pharaonic caravans and patrols covered a much greater area of the Western

Desert than was ever before suspected. A glimpse of the abundant pharaonic remains along the routes to Kharga and Dakhla during a trip to the oases to study pottery confirmed that there is a wealth of evidence awaiting reconnaissance. As impressive as the distances covered by ancient Egyptian desert travelers is the extent of pharaonic activity in the desert between the Nile Valley and the oases. As a result of our work, we can now identify one or more major routes in use across the Qena bend during every period from predynastic times to the present. This information has implications for understanding not only the use of the desert (for trade, military endeavors, religious purposes, etc.) but also broader topics, such as patterns of population concentration and geographical determinants of political history.

We described our discoveries in lectures in the fall of 1995 at the American Research Center in Egypt, Cairo and in Luxor as part of the Labib Habachi memorial series, sponsored by the Luxor Inspectorate and the Epigraphic Survey. In April we presented an overview of our work and a description of the 1995/96 season's finds at the British Mu-

seum. Reports on the ceramic materials examined during the first three seasons have appeared in the *Bulletin de liaison du groupe international d'étude de la céramique égyptienne* (Cairo: IFAO); a forthcoming *Bulletin* will contain the report for the fourth season. We have several manuscripts in progress and hope to begin seeing several of these through the press in the immediate future.

Acknowledgments

We thank Dr. M. Abd el-Halim Nur El-Din, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, without whose support our work would not be possible. We thank Dr. Ali Hassan, Supervisor of Pharaonic Antiquities. We are also very grateful to Dr. Mohammed es-Saghir, Supervisor of Antiquities for Upper Egypt for his interest in our work. Many thanks go to Dr. Sabri Abd el-Aziz, Chief Inspector of Qurna, in particular



Figure 9. Gebel Tjauti: graffito of a Horus falcon wearing the Double Crown; the artist used the natural coloring of the stone to accentuate the depiction; note the tilapia-fish carved below the falcon; photograph by D. Darnell

THEBAN DESERT ROAD SURVEY

for the time he has spent in making arrangements for our trips to the Wadi el-Hôl. We thank Chief Inspector Mohammed el-Bialy, who has shown great interest in our work and has been of enormous help. Inspector Ramadan Ahmed Aly was again an indispensable member of our team, and we thank him again for all his help. Ramadan suffered a serious accident in November but has thankfully recovered and was working with us again at the end of the season. We greatly value his devotion to his work, and we look forward to working with him for many seasons to come. We thank Chief Inspector Hussein Afiuni, Inspectors Yahya Abd al-Alem and Madame Nadia of Qena for their very kind and accommodating assistance in allowing us to examine the Wadi el-Hôl fragments that were recovered from the thieves.

We are grateful to the American Research Center in Egypt for providing support for our epigraphic work on the desert roads through a grant from the United States Information Agency, and we would like to thank specifically Terry Walz, Executive Director, and Mark Easton, Cairo Director. As always, we also thank Amira Khattab and Ibrahim Sadek for their essential help and encouragement. We thank Professor William Sumner, Director of the Oriental Institute, for his interest in and support of our project, and Professor Peter Dorman, Field Director of the Epigraphic Survey, for his advice. Once again, Helen and Jean Jacquet of the Karnak-Nord expedition offered valuable guidance in many ways. Dr. Colin Hope has continued to be a wellspring of information concerning pottery fabrics from the oases, and Dr. Nessim Henein has contributed to our understanding of manufacturing techniques and later ceramic remains. Dr. René Friedman has provided welcome archaeological advice and contributed substantially toward our understanding of the predynastic and early dynastic graffiti both at Gebel Tjauti and in the Wadi el-Hôl. Dr. Vivian Davies has shared with us a number of helpful comments regarding the graffiti from the Wadi el-Hôl and Gebel Tjauti. Thanks go to Dr. Henri Riad, resident Egyptologist at Chicago House, for his never-failing encouragement and support, and we offer warm thanks to Sitt Madelein el-Mallah, Director of the Luxor Museum, for her continuing interest.



Figure 10. Deborah Darnell records information on diagnostic sherds from a ceramic sample, Darb Rayayna; photograph by J. Darnell

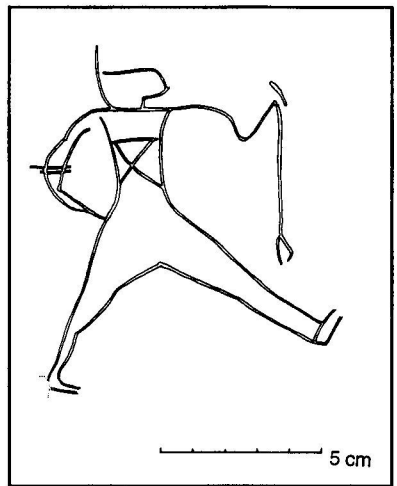


Figure 11. Striding Nubian ranger, Gebel Tjauti

ARCHAEOLOGY

Our productivity was immeasurably increased through the generous help of Photographer Yarko Kobylecky, Epigrapher Andrew Baumann, and Artists Ahmed Harfoush and Susan Osgood, whose company we greatly enjoyed on several outings. We thank Kathy, Margaret, and Emily Dorman for discovering the “pot drop” which resulted in the reconstructed vessel shown in figure 6c. We are extremely grateful for the contributions of Diana Grodzins, Jill Carlotta Maher, and Nan and David Ray and the hospitality of Jud and Deborah Doyle, and John and Joan Westley.
