Luxor Update

Preliminary Report
The E.A.O. Excavations at Abou el-Gud, Luxor

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Abou el-Gud is an ancient site some 120 metres south of the Karnak precinct of the goddess Mut, on the East Bank of the Nile at Luxor. The name probably derives from that of Sheikh Abou el-Gud to whom a mosque was dedicated during the Fatimid Period by the population of the medieval village. The area was partially excavated between 1962 and 1968 by my colleague Mahmud Abd el-Raziq. The present work, which began in 1982, was concentrated on an area covering nearly 3000 square metres, situated to the north and to the east of the area worked by Mr Raziq.

In our first season, after removing about 50 centimetres of domestic debris, the excavation team revealed a number of large domestic structures built of mudbrick, the walls of which were preserved to a height of 50 to 80 centimetres. The size of these dwellings varied, but each had a main room with a roof supported by one or two slender pillars. A number of stone column bases were found in situ.

The houses were very rich in artefactual contents with many broken and intact pottery vessels of different shapes and sizes, various amulets of differing deities, human figurines, animals and birds, whorls, balance weights, ovens, stone column drums, water basins, inscribed sandstone lintels, red bricks bearing seal-impressions of 'hm ntr mn-fpr-ra (HtPA Menkheperra)’ and some inscribed stones. The occupation level we had uncovered was datable to the Third Intermediate Period/Late Period.

Having removed the remains of this latest occupation level, the stratum beneath revealed a neatly planned series of mudbrick buildings still preserved to a height of between 80 centimetres and 1 metre, with a varying wall thickness of 60 centimetres to 1.20 metres. All the structures in this level were found to be in a fairly good state of preservation and are, in my opinion, the best examples of Theban standard-type domestic dwellings yet found on the East Bank at Luxor. As noted above, the majority of their walls were of considerable thickness and the household entrances themselves were wide, predominantly with stone door-jambs and thresholds.

Another interesting structure which came to light at this level was composed of twelve narrow rectangular ‘rooms’ with buttresses. This type of layout suggests that the building was either a series of storage magazines or a mudbrick platform built to support a large stone (?) structure which has been subsequently quarried away.

Again at the same level, a small temple, built during the reign of Ramesses II, was unearthed. This building consisted of the essential architectural elements of a standard temple of the period, namely an open court with paved way, followed by a colonnade and then the sanctuary. At the northwest corner of the temple there was a deep well which most likely supplied the temple’s daily water requirement.

A few metres away to the south, a sandstone slab was found bearing a single vertical line of text:

Inscription of the High Priest Paser. [Photo: M. el-Saghir]

An offering which the king gives ... that he may give (offerings) to the soul of the High Priest of Amun (called) Paser.

This intriguing short text appears to suggest that the famous Vizier under Ramesses II may have gained the High Priesthood. On the other hand, though perhaps less likely, we may need to identify this High Priest with a different Paser. Whichever way, it seems that we must add a new name to the list of High Priests of Amun already known from the 19th Dynasty.

Many more inscribed blocks were also found in this 19th Dynasty level and in the vicinity of the temple. One of the most interesting is a sandstone lintel, probably belonging to a double doorway, which bore a double inscription in sunk-relief. The right side is dedicated to Amun-Ra ‘who is given the epithet “the lord of the thrones of the Two Lands, who is the foremost in Karnak ...”. The left side is dedicated to Pah who is described as “south of his wall, the lord of Memphis (Ankh-tawy) ...”. The presence of Amun and Pah together in this text may indicate that these two gods represented the principal popular religious cult in Thebes at this time. Pah was also recorded on a number of stelae found at the site where he is described as “beautiful of face”.

Continuing the excavation at this second level, another interesting series of inscribed blocks were found, many of them bearing representations of both Mut and Hathor together. This discovery appears to confirm the close relationship between these two female deities.

Among the most interesting smaller objects unearthed are a collection of carvings on limestone ostraca used by the sculptors and artists as a practice medium and for the instruction of apprentices. Many show model profiles of distinguished persons and of the king’s likeness - a sort of sketch pad for instant on-site reference. These superb rough sketches (two are shown opposite) clearly show a master’s hand in the detail and attention given to the portraiture.

The excavation also yielded great quantities of painted and unpainted sherds, as well as a number of complete vessels for different everyday use. The most spectacular pottery find, however, was a collection of 15 decorated Mycenaean sherds. These sherds form an important addition to the very small number of Aegean pottery samples so far known from Luxor.

In the western sector of the site the excavation reached a third stratum and unfortunately, at the same time, the subsoil water table. Although the work is still in its early stages, the finds would indicate an 18th Dynasty occupation level, but further excavation is needed to determine a more exact date.

Mohammad el-Saghir
General Director of Antiquities for Luxor
10th September 1988
Two of the artist's sketches found at the town site of Abou el-Gud. The figure carved upon the right-hand ostracon bears a uraeus-serpent on his brow, indicating that the artist is portraying here the likeness of a king. [Photos: M. el-Saghir]

1991 Study Tour of Ancient Palestine

The Institute intends to organise a study tour of ancient Palestine for Easter 1991. The itinerary will be worked out at a later date, but the plan is to visit sites such as Jericho and the Dead Sea; Bethshan, Mount Gilboa and Megiddo; Gezer and the plain of Philistia; and, of course, Jerusalem. We will be concentrating on the Bronze and Early Iron Age periods and, in particular, the cities of the el-Amarna correspondence.

Those members who are interested in participating should write to Val Pearce at the address below so that the tour organisers can assess the interest in this venture. Further announcements will be made at a later stage when the details of the study tour have been finalised and arrangements made with the tour operators. To register your interest, please write to:

Val Pearce, 10 Whitley Green, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 8TR, UK.