West Bank Archaeological Report
Work in progress at Thebes during the excavation season of 1987/88

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The Palace of Amenophis III at Malkata
Japanese mission (Waseda University)

This mission is working at the site of the mud-brick palace of king Amenophis III (18th Dynasty) at Malkata in order to create a plan of the royal residence. Along with the palace complex at el-Amarna in Middle Egypt, established during the reign of Amenophis' son Akhenaten, Malkata represents the best-preserved and most informative remains of an Egyptian royal residence dating from the New Kingdom. Moreover, Malkata palace was an integral element in the overall funerary complex of the king. Archaeology has revealed it to have one of the most impressive funerary complexes in Egypt, also incorporating the huge harbour of Birket Habu and the mortuary temple whose site is still marked by the famous 'Colossi of Memnon'.

Malkata has long been noted for the remains of its colourful wall paintings, in particular for the exquisite free-hand drawings of bird-life [1]. Those pieces of painted plaster which still lie in situ are being reconstructed in an archaeological workshop, with the intention that they will be returned to their original provenances in due course. Reconstructed sections have so far included scenes of vultures, floral decorations, and abstract patterned designs which are in keeping with the lively informal vignettes peculiar to this site and to that of the royal residences at el-Amarna.

Season: Winter 1987 - ongoing project.

Qurna Temple
German mission (German Archaeological Institute in Cairo)

These excavations are concerned with the mortuary temple of king Seti I (19th Dynasty). The temple is the most northerly of the known New Kingdom structures arrayed along the boundary between the cultivated fields and the desert cliffs of the royal necropolis. This season has seen the completion of the rebuilding of the north side of the enclosure wall around the temple compound, followed by the same on the west side. Excavations inside the compound, in this case on the eastern side near to the pylon gateway, have uncovered foundations dating to the Late Period (26th to 30th Dynasties). Included amongst these buildings was a workshop apparently for smelting copper. Restoration work is being carried out on the reliefs decorating the walls of the temple proper, in particular those in the shrine of Thutmose III (18th Dynasty).

Four royal stelae of the New Kingdom have been discovered whilst clearing the west side of the pylon gateway:

Limestone block of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertiry

The king is depicted holding a staff up before the god Amun, the major deity at Thebes and the patron of the royal family during the early New Kingdom; behind the king, and facing in the opposite direction, stands his mother Ahmose-Nefertiry, who herself became a deity closely associated with the West Bank at Thebes. The block appears to be part of a balanced pair of scenes with the two propitiates back to back and making offerings to deities. It is most likely that this block came originally from the small joint temple.

View looking north from the ruins of Malkata (in the foreground) towards the mountains of the west. [Photo: D. Rohl]
Deir el-Medina
French mission (French Institute of Oriental Archaeology)

A study is being made of objects recovered by previous French excavations from the site of Deir el-Medina, the village of the workmen of the great necropolis of Thebes. Included amongst these objects are ostraca, pottery from the site of the town itself, and blocks from the tombs of the inhabitants which lie in the hills immediately above the village. From this work it is hoped to extend further our knowledge about the working life of the village and about the genealogies of its inhabitants, both of which are already sufficiently well-studied as to give Deir el-Medina a pre-eminent place in our understanding of the working life of an urban site of ancient Egypt.


The Egyptian Antiquities Organisation

Apart from those excavations which have already been mentioned, the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation has undertaken a number of other projects on the West Bank at Luxor:

a) Major reconstruction work is being carried out in the tomb of Montuemhat, the principal figure in the political and administrative life of this area during the period of Nubian domination (late-25th Dynasty) and the subsequent rise to power throughout Egypt of the Saite 26th Dynasty. The contemporary Assyrian king Ashurbanipal appears to

The Tomb of Tausret and Setnakht
German mission (Heidelberg Univ.)

In the Valley of the Kings Dr Allenmüller is continuing the task of clearing the joint tomb of Tausret (a female pharaoh and co-regent of Siptah) and Setnakht, father of Ramesses III. Their reigns were part of the transition from the end of the 19th Dynasty to the 20th Dynasty, a period of some considerable confusion for the royal succession. Setnakht himself would appear to have been the figure who ultimately restored order. The presence of inscriptions from both these rulers and Seti II in the same tomb is one of the more intriguing conundrums this period has thrown up.


Dr Mohammed Nasr reconstructing wall fragments in the tomb of Montuemhat during the 1988 season. [Photo: D. Rohl]
of these two famous royal figures which lies a short distance to the west of the temple of Seti I.

Three stone of Seti I, each made of sandstone

On two of this group Seti is also shown before the god Amun; on one offering maat (the image of cosmic order) and on the other presenting a table of offerings. The third stela depicts the king kneeling before the god Horus (an image of the sun and of legitimacy in royal office); the representation is accompanied by lengthy segments of text.


The Valley of the Queens

Egyptian/French mission

The so-called 'Valley of the Queens' represents the necropolis both of the major royal women and also of many important members of the administration connected with the kings of the New Kingdom from the time of Ramesses II (19th Dynasty) onwards. It is situated in a wadi south of the Valley of the Kings, a kilometre to the north-west of Medinet Habu.

Those tombs which were originally excavated by Schiaparelli during the first decade of the 20th century are being re-excavated for the purpose of creating a new plan of this entire wadi. Thus far seventy-four of the tombs have been entered, in addition to which a seventy-fifth and completely new tomb has been excavated. Although several items of interest have been recovered, they are inevitably mostly small items of a specifically funerary nature such as pottery and canopic vessels for the storage of the viscera of the deceased (including examples which are of alabaster), as well as the ubiquitous ostraca.

Season: Winter 1987/88 - ongoing project, leading to future publications.

The Tomb of Queen Nefertari

Egyptian mission (Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, in association with the J. P. Getty Conservation Institute) [2]

The tomb of queen Nefertari, the principal wife (hmt nsw wrt) of Ramesses II, is one of the earliest and most splendid of the tombs in the Valley of the Queens, and one of the most celebrated of all Theban monuments. The paintings adorning its walls are frequently reproduced in publications on the art of Egypt during the New Kingdom, especially the scenes of the queen in the presence of Theban gods such as 'Amun-Ra-Nefertari. However, over the years the ancient plaster and pigment have become very friable, and the walls require a concerted conservation effort. This season's work represents the second stage of a rescue project designed to consolidate the damaged portions of the walls and preserve the beautiful decoration contained upon them.

The following technique is being pursued: Firstly the conservators apply muslin to the surface of the plaster using a special adhesive which is unlikely to damage the ancient paint. After this the plaster surface is removed from the rock in sections and the contaminating salt cleared off the back of the plaster. Research has revealed that the walls had become saturated with salt permeating through the rock and hence the process of contamination had been naturally arrested (the salt now present is approximately sixty years old). Unfortunately we can expect that the salination will begin to reoccur in the immediate future. After the salt has been cleared, the pieces of plaster, still held in muslin covers, can be restored to their original positions, and glued there by injecting behind them a (7.5% dilute) solution of primer. The cover of each section is then removed by the action of a suitable solvent. With the surface re-exposed, the surface salt, which does great damage to the pigments utilised in the decoration, can be carefully cleaned away. To fill the cracks which have developed in the plaster the work-team have prepared a special mortar from gypsum, a little primer, and the dust present in the tomb (having of course already washed the salt away from the latter).
have referred to this Montuemhat (Ass. Mantemani) as 'king of Thebes' [3], although the actual title he held, including 'Fourth Prophet of Amun' (hm-ntr 4-nw n inn), do not sound particularly impressive to modern minds. The tomb is being cleaned and the thousands of pieces of broken relief thereby recovered are being reconstituted in their original positions. This will be a mammoth undertaking and should take a number of years to complete. During the course of the clearing the sarcophagus of Montuemhat's son Nesphah was discovered (see p. 82 of this Journal).

b) Major restoration work is also being carried out on the mortuary temple of Seti I at Qurna (which was mentioned above in connection with the German mission also currently engaged there in restoration work), and the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The latter is not only the site of Ramesses' temple but also of what had become the main administrative centre for the whole area of the Theban necropolis during the 20th Dynasty (and thus had strong connections with the daily life of Deir el-Medina). The site seems to have remained continuously occupied at least until the Christian era of Egyptian history. 

Ismail el-Masy

The Epigraphic Survey on the West Bank [4]
American mission (University of Chicago Oriental Institute)

In addition to its work on the colonnade of the temple of Amun-Ra' at Luxor, the Epigraphic Survey concentrated its major work upon the decoration in the Small Temple at Medinet Habu. This involved, on the one hand, checking the preliminary hand-copies which had been made of these decorations in previous seasons; on the other, the remarkable and distinctive recording techniques developed by the Epigraphic Survey were extended to the inner walls of the chapels at the temple decorated by the kings Hatshepsut and Thutmose III of the Eighteenth Dynasty. These walls have recently been cleaned, and much of the original colour applied to them still remains. Large format (8" x 10") negatives were prepared, and these will be utilised as the basis for creating facsimile drawings of the decoration on which the subtest details of line and colour can be recorded.

Conservation work continued in the Small Temple with the laying of a floor in one of the chapels (room N) in order to facilitate the safe evaporation of groundwater and to provide a level working surface. The ancient flooring blocks were cleaned and planned before ultimately being covered up; during this work, scraps amounting to two grams of alloyed gold foil were recovered from between the ancient flooring blocks. In another chapel (room P) the foundations for such a floor were laid in spite of the problems associated with possibly undermining a heavy red granite shrine in situ against the west wall. An inscribed granite offering table, probably originating from one of the adjacent chapels of the Saiite princesses, was recovered but completely saturated with salt: hence it had to be returned to the dump ground before it crumbled completely.

Between 1930 and 1970, in eight remarkable folios, the Epigraphic Survey at Medinet Habu recorded and published the decoration of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III in extenso, but there still remain unrecorded a few isolated elements at the site dating to this reign. The year this season involved photographing the unrecorded decoration on two subterranean staircase walls located one each to the north and south of the main temple area. Since the lower reaches of both of these walls are flooded, and since the process of salination has led to their becoming dangerously friable throughout, the work was both extremely urgent and extremely perilous.


Notes and References
4. The information contained in this section is extracted from The Oriental Institute Annual Report 1986-1987 (University of Chicago, 1987) with the prior permission of Prof. Larry Bell, the director of the Epigraphic Survey during this season.

The small 18th Dynasty temple at Medinet Habu was begun in the reign of Hatshepsut. However, it seems that an earlier structure, possibly of the Middle Kingdom, once stood at this site. This temple, dedicated to Amun, was known as 'the Mound of Djaju' (the ancient name for Medinet Habu). Thutmose III completed the 18th Dynasty temple by adding the bark shrine and ambulatory porch. Later, a 25th Dynasty king, whose name has been erased, built the forecourt, pylon and portico; the Egyptian scheme was later modified by Ptolemy X who erected columns along the axis of the forecourt. [ilustration: D. Rohl, after U. Holscher: Medinet Habu Vol. II (Chicago, 1939), pl. 32]