In This Issue ...

The Tausert Temple Project: 2004 and 2005 Seasons
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Tausert, the powerful queen who ruled briefly as a king at the end of the 19th Dynasty, remains one of the most enigmatic of Egypt’s pharaohs. Although her tomb – KV14 in the Valley of the Kings – is known, and the queen’s sarcophagus and perhaps even her mummy have been found, very little is known of the life and reign of this intriguing monarch.

However, one remaining structure may provide information on this queen: her funerary monument. The unfinished Memorial Temple of Tausert is located on the west bank at Luxor between the recently restored Temple of Merenptah and the small Temple of Khonsuirdis, south of the Ramesseum. The site was briefly examined by W.M. Flinders Petrie in 1896. For the past 100 years, the site has been largely ignored because the temple was never completed in antiquity, there are no walls standing above the ground surface to attract any attention, and it has been presumed that Petrie’s examination of the site was thorough.

But Petrie’s records indicate that only a few days were spent working on the site. The University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition (UAEE) decided that a reexamination of the site—aimed at clearing, recording, publishing, and conserving the temple remains—might be of significant value. As a result, the Supreme Council of Antiquities granted the UAEE permission to begin this project, and the Expedition completed its first field season in May and June of 2004, and a second season in May and June of 2005. This article describes what has been accomplished during the first two seasons of work on this long-overlooked yet fascinating site.

SURFACE SURVEY

At the beginning of the 2004 season a surface survey of the site was carried out. In the course of this survey, we found several interesting artifacts—including what may be part of a workman’s sketch, on a sandstone ostracon, of trenches or sections of the temple. More importantly, the surface survey revealed the presence of large...
numbers of mud bricks and pieces of worked stone showing clear chisel marks and smoothing.

The distribution of both the mud brick (Fig. 2) and worked stone (Fig. 3) follows distinct patterns and is far from random. The surface mud brick remains are concentrated in and around areas where walls might be expected to have been built, and the worked stone pieces also show concentrations in areas where foundation blocks and perhaps column bases, door thresholds, and other stone features might be expected to have been prepared.

These facts are important as they would appear to suggest a greater development of the temple than has previously been thought and would seem to contradict Petrie, who believed that little was accomplished in the building of the temple other than the digging of foundation trenches and the laying of some stone blocks at the rear of the site.

FEATURES

After the surface survey was conducted, we developed a system of designation for the various foundation trenches and surface areas of the temple which would allow the optimum analysis of the distribution of artifacts and features found at the site. Once this system of designation had been established, we began to clean the accumulated debris from the foundation trenches at the southeast corner of the site where a small section of the trenches was somewhat exposed. We found that the trenches range from about 1.5 – 1.75m in depth and are cut into the rocky conglomerate lying beneath the surface soil. Despite Petrie's specific assertion that the temple trenches were “all cleared” by his workmen, many parts of the foundation trenches were found to contain a surface layer of mixed debris over a layer of clean, undisturbed sand which extended to the bottom of the trench and which the ancient Egyptians used as the foundation for their building blocks. Even in areas where there was evidence that Petrie's men had worked, the apparent hit-and-miss methodology employed in their digging may be seen in the fact that we found no sand in a number of excavation units where trenches crossed, although it was present and undisturbed a little farther along the same trenches—showing that Petrie's men had often dug down only at the major trench interstices, merely looking in those areas for foundation deposit pits and their contents.

In many of the foundation trenches that we have now cleared, we have found small lateral walls constructed of mud brick, sometimes mixed with rough-hewn stones, crossing the trenches (Fig. 4). At first we thought that these walls might be intrusive, but we soon realized that this could not be the case because the sand filling the trenches between the walls was almost always undisturbed. It is possible that these features were constructed as retaining walls to somehow stabilize the sand beneath the foundations, but they remain interesting as we are not aware of any other foundation trench walls of this type.
During the 2005 season, a number of large (over 1 meter in length and/or width) dressed-stone blocks were discovered in the bottoms of some of the foundation trench sections, contradicting Petrie’s assertion that “…only a few stones of the foundation remained, between the deposits marked II and VIII” on his plan of the temple. This fact meshes with the results of our surface survey of the site described above, but it remains unclear how many stone blocks were completed and placed in the temple’s foundation trenches and how many of these blocks were then robbed in ancient times to provide stone for other monuments. Hopefully, our continued work will give us a better understanding of this aspect of Tausert’s monument.

In two areas where Petrie’s men had clearly worked (our sections TA1:5/6 and TA14:9/10), in roughly parallel positions on opposite sides of the temple courtyard, we also found in 2005 the remains of foundation deposit pits which are not included in Petrie’s publication of the temple. Both pits had been damaged when they were discovered but were still more than half intact. They had doubtlessly been robbed by Petrie’s workmen, although we found a small shabti and several broken offering jars in association with one of the pits. Petrie’s report shows that he was aware of three other pits on the site that had been robbed by his workmen, but he was evidently unaware of these two.

ARTIFACTS
In the course of clearing the trenches and surface areas that were excavated in the 2004 and 2005 seasons, a great number of small artifacts such as beads, amulets, and partial pots were uncovered, as well as pigment blocks, statue parts and shabtis. We also found inscribed objects such as hieratic ostraca, fragments of stelae, cartonnage, and part of a faience ring with royal cartouche bezel. A number of mud bricks with royal cartouche stamp seals were also recovered, although the seal inscriptions are not clear on the examples found so far. Even in areas where it was clear that Petrie’s men had dug, we found small and fragmentary artifacts, although areas which were undisturbed naturally produced more finds.

The study of these objects and their distribution has revealed several things previously not known about the construction of this and perhaps other memorial temples. For example, the faience beads found in our clearing of the temple’s foundation trenches demonstrate that the ancient Egyptians scattered these beads throughout the trenches as part of the foundation ceremony and not just around foundation deposit pits as Petrie presumed. Also, in several undisturbed sections, we found artifacts in small clusters positioned about every five meters or so in the areas where they occur. The clusters consisted of a shabti, an ostracon or decorated sherd, and a small fragment of a stela, cartonnage or even linen. These small artifact clusters seem to have been individual deposits placed between the major deposit pits and were not found or recorded by Petrie, and have not yet been found in other temple sites as far as we are aware. Because we have only discovered such clusters in the area surrounding the so-called “Osiris Suite” commonly found in the inner, left hand quadrant of Theban memorial temples, it is tempting to see these
shabti clusters as being symbolically connected with the Osiride region of the temple. It is interesting that the shabtis are almost entirely small blue faience figures, about 6 cm in height, and that the ratio in which we have found these figures—two overseer-type shabtis for every one worker-type shabti—is different from the usual ratio of ten workers to each overseer.

A fascinating discovery of a different kind was also made in 2005 regarding artifacts from the Tausert site. Egyptologist Cathleen Keller of the University of California, Berkeley, has recently been working with some of the previously unresearched items in Berkeley's Hearst Museum collection. In the course of her work, Dr. Keller photographed a number of artifacts inscribed with the name of Queen Tausert, and Museum registrar Joan Knudsen pointed these artifacts out to UAEE member Karin Kroenke who is currently completing her Ph.D. at Berkeley. In a continuing “chain reaction”, Ms. Kroenke alerted the Expedition to the existence of these pieces and enabled an important possible reconstruction of events relating to the Tausert Temple. It seems that the artifacts were obtained by George A. Reisner on behalf of Mrs. Phoebe Hearst, the mother of the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, and that the items were purchased during a visit by Mrs. Hearst to Luxor in early 1899—less than three years after Petrie’s exploration of the Tausert temple site. Given the nature of the artifacts (faience foundation plaques, scarabs and amulets of the same type found by Petrie and in our own excavations) these artifacts are almost certainly the objects that Petrie knew had been robbed from three of the temple’s foundation pits by his workmen, and from the two other foundation deposit pits that we discovered in our 2005 season. With a remarkable coincidence of timing, the previously unknown foundation deposit pits and their lost contents may have come to light within a month of each other, providing an extraordinary example of how the pieces of Tausert’s temple are finally being put back together again!

MAPPING AND PRESERVING THE TEMPLE

One of the major goals of the Tausert Temple Project is the creation of a modern, scientifically and archaeologically accurate map of the site. This is because all existing plans of the temple are based
on Petrie's sketch plan of 1897 (Fig. 9) which we have already discovered is inaccurate in many areas where it attempts to plot sections in which his workmen did not actually dig. As a result, Petrie's plan misinterpreted a number of the site's features and missed or inaccurately recorded others. For example, in the southeast corner of the temple site, the plan records a single, large surface area between the foundation trenches behind the first pylon or wall area (Fig. 10). Our excavation of this area showed that there are, in fact, three separate surface areas in this location (Fig. 11) divided by trenches not shown on Petrie's plan.

In our first two seasons, we have made good progress toward creating an accurate map of the temple. In addition to a standard architectural drawing of the temple remains, we have begun production of an AutoCAD model of the overall site and the areas worked so far (Fig. 12). Eventually, we plan to incorporate all of our excavation data from the Tausert Temple Project into a computerized Geographic Information Systems (GIS) model which will enable the viewing of any area of the site with details of its stratigraphy, archaeological features, associated artifacts and excavation data.

A final goal of the Tausert Temple Project is to conserve Queen/ King Tausert's monument. Toward this goal, we have devised a system to record the physical condition of the site's features in a computerized database. In the process of cleaning the temple's foundation trenches and surface areas, we have carefully assessed each 2-meter unit in terms of the condition of the walls and floor of each trench and the condition of the surfaces between the trenches. Every unit has been given a rating based on the percentage of damage the unit exhibits. These data have been entered into the database program which enables us not only to record the level of preservation for each 2-meter section, but also to group units of similar levels of preservation together for parallel assessment and treatment. Although most of the planned conservation will be done after all clearing has been completed, we hope to begin some conservation work in our next season and we have already commenced work on site protection by constructing a protective fence around the exposed sides of the site.

**FUTURE WORK**

The Tausert Temple concession is almost exactly 2 hectares (5 acres) in size (although the temple itself is smaller), and considering the many thousands of cubic meters of debris that will have to be removed from the site it is expected that the project will require at least another three or four seasons to complete. However, excellent progress has been made toward the goals of cleaning, recording, conserving and making an accurate plan of the temple in the project's first two seasons. The trenches and surface areas that have been cleared have already yielded much information regarding the site and the history of its investigation. It has become increasingly clear that Petrie's 1896 examination of the temple was not at all thorough, and that construction of the monument may have progressed considerably further than he assumed. New facts have also been obtained about Tausert's temple and, by extension, about the queen herself. We have already begun to better understand the ways in which the queen patterned her memorial temple after that of Ramesses II, the great king whose cartouches are emulated by those of Tausert. There is no doubt that the continuation of this project should be of value not only for our understanding of this site and its successful preservation but also for our understanding of the temple's enigmatic builder—Tausert herself.

**ENDNOTES**


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3. The UAEE staff for the 2004 and 2005 seasons consisted of Dr. Richard Wilkinson (University of Arizona), Director; Richard Harwood (Colorado); Karin Kroenke (University of California, Berkeley); Dr. Teresa Moore (University of California, Berkeley); Dr. Suzanne Onstine (University of Toronto); Damian Greenwell (University of Arizona); Ashleigh Goodwin (University of Liverpool); Jennifer Harshman (University College London); Heather Kelly (University of Arizona); Katie Kulhavy (Arizona State University); and Max Farrar (London).

4. The system we adopted was one of numbering the foundation trenches running east-west as TA1 through TA18 (to date) and the trenches running south-north as TB1—. Each trench was divided into numbered 2-meter units, e.g., TA1:1,2,3, etc. Surface areas between trenches were assigned numerical designations S1—.

Dr. Richard H. Wilkinson is a professor of Egyptian Archaeology at the University of Arizona, the Director of the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition, and the author of a number of important books about Egyptology including The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt and The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt.