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The Tausert Temple Project

2007 Season

By Richard H. Wilkinson

The University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition (UAEE) began excavation of the unfinished temple of Queen Tausert in Western Thebes in 2004. Reports on the first three seasons' work at the site were published in previous issues of the *The Ostracon*.¹ This article summarizes the fourth field season, conducted throughout May 2007.²
Archaeology has not always been as systematic as it at least attempts to be today. Because only limited parts of the Tausert Temple site were briefly examined by W.M.F. Petrie in 1896 and the site has since been ignored, specific goals have been set for the UAEE project:

1) To properly clear the temple site and to publish the results.
2) To produce a detailed archaeological plan of the temple site and its surrounding area.
3) To conserve the scant remains of the temple as much as possible.

EXCAVATION

Over time a large amount of debris has been deposited across the whole temple site by floods from the Theban massif. In addition, thousands of meters of the temple's exposed foundation trenches (all of which are c. 2 meters wide by c. 2 meters deep) are full of the sand originally placed in them as well as accumulated fill—all of which must be removed for full cleaning of the site. In our 2007 season we continued our work to the west of the temple's courtyard—moving farther into the inner part of the temple area—and were able to clear a number of trench and surface units across the entire width of the temple.

Some of the sections of the trenches we cleaned this season contained mixed sand and dirt but virtually no artifacts. These sections were clearly areas where Petrie's men had probed when they examined parts of the site. For example, several units along the trench they designate as TB10 were disturbed and produced no finds—but other units, farther to the north in the same trench, were undisturbed and contained a number of features and artifacts including a large number of mud bricks with cartouche stamp impressions. A number of these bricks bore the clear cartouche of Thutmose IV indicating that building materials from that king's monument—located just a little to the north of our site—were frequently used in the construction of Tausert's memorial temple.

Our latest season was marked, in fact, by the discovery of a number of inscriptions and features of the temple including a stela or statue niche in the gebel wall of trench TB10, an intriguing hieratic niche painted on the gebel wall suggesting the location of a foundation deposit pit (doubtless removed by Petrie's men without his knowledge), an intact offering pit with the remains of a meat and plant offering, several superstructure walls, and a row of megalithic foundation blocks—two of which revealed hieratic inscriptions.

Of particular interest because of what it suggests was the small hieratic niche painted onto a stela on the east side wall of unit 7 of trench TB10. This hieratic niche simply records the name "User-maat-ra" but is of interest both because it points to the association that we find Tausert constantly made with her illustrious forebear, Ramesses II (this association will be fully documented in our final site report), and also because it probably indicates the location of a foundation deposit pit that was unknown to Petrie and likely

Fig. 2. Petrie's plan of the Temple of Tausert (1897) showing the areas cleaned, recorded, and mapped in the University of Arizona Expedition's 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 seasons.
robbed by his men. The location of the graffito on the central axis of the temple at exactly the spot where foundation deposits were found in parallel south-north foundation trenches makes this extremely likely. This area of trench TB10 is one of the few on the site that we have found so far that was completely disturbed, yet this hieratic note and the rock-cut niche only a few meters away were both unnoted by Petrie and were clearly unknown to him.

The rock-cut niche appears to be an anomalous feature as we have found nothing else like it in our excavation to date. Measuring some 43 cm across its top and 41 cm across its base, the niche narrows to c. 33 cm across its back interior. Its depth in the gebel wall is about 48 cm. The purpose of the niche is unknown as it was found empty (doubtless robbed of any contents by Petrie's men), and its very existence was apparently unknown to Petrie.
who does not note it in his publication. If the contents of the niche were indeed stolen and sold by Petrie's workers, then the existence of this feature would naturally not have been mentioned by them and the niche would simply have been hastily re-covered by backfilling. The charred and totally disturbed nature of the trench fill at this point leaves no doubt that the feature was indeed discovered even if it was not reported to Petrie. The examination of trench TB10 by Petrie's men seems to have stopped about this point, however, as the trench fill soon reverted to undisturbed strata. Although there were relatively few artifacts found in this area, the trench and its surrounding gebel surfaces revealed a number of undisturbed features unknown to either Petrie or his men.

For example, an intact offering pit that we found farther along this same trench clearly showed that Petrie's men had not continued their cursory examination of this area of the temple. The pit was cut into the gebel surface of unit S28—one of the temple's rooms. It measured some 30 cm wide and 35 cm deep and contained the remains of a haunch of beef (probably a young calf) set in very fine sand and covered with what may have been a plant wreath. Many of the leaves, stems and seed pods we found were in good enough condition that we have tentatively identified the plant as a species of *Persia*—a tree of particular religious and mythological significance to the ancient Egyptians.

Only a few centimeters from this offering pit we found a broken—though largely intact—jar embedded in what appears to be a shallow trough-like depression bisecting the surface of this unit. Although undecorated and of plain Nile silt, it is possible that the jar served some function in foundation ceremonies—as we believe the decorated Blue-Ware jar did that we discovered in 2006 a few meters away on another surface area adjacent to this trench.

The northern units of trench TB10 also revealed a row of
megalithic foundation blocks in this undisturbed area. The blocks are much larger than any we have previously found; they measure between 1.40 m and 1.80 m in length, about 1.20 m in width, and have an impressive thickness of between 60 and 70 cm. The blocks must each weigh a number of tons and most were carefully cut.

These massive blocks were positioned in an area of particular interest. The trench that we designate as TB10 seems to have been the interface between an inner, probably earlier, part of the temple and the outer area of expansion, which we believe was begun late in the queen's reign. The massive foundation could have been intended to receive a particularly large wall or pylon, and the liminal nature of this area is perhaps indicated by the numerous foundation-related features that we have discovered along its length and on its immediately adjacent surface areas: the gebe1 inscription, offering pits, extra-large foundation blocks, foundation block inscription, and apparently surface-smashed offering pots—all features that we have not discovered elsewhere on the site.

The foundation blocks themselves are regular in shape, but each has a semi-circular notch cut away on one top edge (usually on one end of the block) that must have been utilized in the building techniques employed in the temple's construction.

One of the foundation blocks that we discovered in our excavation last season, which bore an important hieratic inscription on its upper surface, revealed yet another text this season. Because the temple's foundation blocks overlay undisturbed sand, we recorded the exact position of the block, and then slid it to one side (a task that required a team of specially equipped workmen) to excavate the area beneath it. After this area was excavated, we returned the block to its exact previous location in order to preserve the original appearance of the temple remains. When we moved the inscribed block that we

Fig. 7. The first five foundation blocks (still half-buried) beginning to appear in the excavation of trench TB10. Several inscriptions were found on the blocks discovered so far.

Fig. 8. Example of the large foundation blocks discovered in the 2007 season—each with a distinctive semi-circular builder's notch cut into one end.
found last year, another text—this time on the western edge of the block—came into view.

While the first inscription discovered on the block designated FB:1 names the temple and gives a regnal date formula from Tausert's eighth year (including her regency with Siptah and likely marking the date of the temple's expansion), the newly found text seems to be a quarrying notation listing year seven (doubtless when the block was cut) and the number of the block (129), showing that a great number of such stones had already been quarried for the temple.

Another foundation block (FB:7) revealed yet another inscription, though this text is poorly preserved and is still being studied. The inscription is written in very small characters on one of the block's long sides and is quite different in appearance from both the formal foundation inscription discovered on the top surface of FB:1 and the large quarrying text newly discovered on that block's end surface.

In addition to these megalithic blocks, we also continued to find a number of what we have called "Type A" walls (built from the bottom of the foundation trenches to the top of the sand level) and "Type B" walls (built from the sand level to the top of the trenches). The latter seem to be associated with foundation deposit pits as they are usually found near them or their probable locations. These walls appear to be unique to our site and the purpose of both types remains unclear. It is also clear that we now also have at least two "Type C" walls next to trench TB10 which, unlike the other types, reach above the level of the trenches or surface areas and represent superstructures of some type. Whether these "Type C" walls represent the walls of rooms or other features of the original, inner area of the temple is presently unknown. Certainly their location indicates that this might well be likely.

In total, this season's work enabled us to clear an area of many hundred square meters using
a somewhat smaller team of thirty-five workmen. Considering the many thousands of cubic meters of debris still remaining to be excavated, it is expected that the site will require at least two more seasons of clearing.

MAPPING
In our first four seasons we have made good progress toward creating a modern, archaeologically and scientifically accurate map of the temple. In our second season we began production of an AutoCAD model of the site and the areas worked, and this model was updated and further developed in our 2006 and 2007 seasons.

Eventually we plan to incorporate all our data for the site into a three-dimensional GIS model based on the completed AutoCAD file. One of our new team members this season is an experienced computer specialist, and he has begun the initial work for this total matrix GIS model. The completed model will give full and immediate access to all excavation and survey data from our project. In the finished program, clicking on any area of the map of the temple site will show excavation, artifact, feature, unit, and conservation details for that locus. The GIS model will incorporate textual and photographic evidence as well as statistical analysis of the site's data.

This interactive, computer-based plan will be much more valuable than the existing limited and inaccurate plans of the Tausert Temple site, especially as we have already discovered that the plan of the temple made by Petrie (on which all others have been based) is not accurate in many—if not most—areas. Petrie’s plan misinterpreted many features and missed or inaccurately recorded others. Examples of this inaccuracy have already been given in our previous reports, and other examples became apparent in our current season. Our final site report is expected to change the presumed plan of the temple considerably.

PRESERVATION
In clearing the temple’s foundation trench areas we have continued to carefully assess each 2-meter unit in terms of the condition of the walls and floor of each trench. Every unit was assessed as being intact, good, fair, poor, or destroyed (using a percentage range breakdown). We have also used this method to assess all the mud brick walls and other features uncovered in the trenches so far in this manner. This season we also began to assess the condition of the surface units that represent the courtyards and rooms of the temple site. We utilized the same range of assessment criteria to keep all our data consistent and fully searchable. The data is being entered into a digital database in which we record the level of preservation needed for each section of the temple and group units of similar level of preservation needs together for parallel assessment and treatment.

Two areas need special consideration. The first is that of the foundation trenches and surface areas of the site. Although they are intact in many areas, the trenches and surface areas are broken down and weathered in other areas—especially in the outer area of the temple. It would seem preferable to preserve the original configuration of the temple wherever possible, and toward this goal we began this season to move beyond the simple recording of the condition of trench and surface units and have now drawn up a prioritized list of areas needing specific consolidation and preservation—which we hope to begin next season.

Also needing special consideration are the mud brick walls in the temple’s foundation trenches as well as those that we are beginning to find above ground level. These walls are important remaining features of the temple’s design and architecture, but many are partly broken down. Accordingly, we began to preserve these walls in this year’s season and were able to stabilize and reconstruct a number of them.

RETROSPECT
Overall, our fourth season of work on the Tausert Temple Project was extremely successful. Not only did we clear another large area of the temple site, but we also recovered a number of artifacts and features of the monument not previously found or recorded. Most notable was our discovery of a further hieratic text on an important foundation block dating the temple foundation or expansion to Tausert’s eighth regnal year—and now showing that (contrary to Petrie’s assessment) a great many blocks had been prepared and placed in the temple’s trenches. We were thus able to continue to gain a greater understanding of the temple’s design and structure and the history of its development. Our further recording of the condition of the features of the monument will aid in its preservation, and our mapping of the newly cleared area has advanced our goal of producing the first accurate plan of this long-neglected temple.

It is sometimes said that archaeology is the clearest example of a profession where one never knows what will come up at work. Our fourth season at the Tausert Temple site recovered fewer artifacts than our preceding seasons—due to the disturbed nature of some of the areas on which we concentrated—yet the features and inscriptions discovered this season have amply rewarded us for our work.

NOTES
2. We thank the Director General and the members of the Permanent Committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities for granting us permission to continue this project. We would also like to thank Mr. Magdy El-Ghandour, Director of Foreign Missions, for his continued help in arranging our work in Egypt. In Luxor, the Director of Upper Egypt, Mr. Manouar Borai, was of great help and we thank him particularly. We also thank Mr. Ali El-Afafi, Director of West Bank Antiquities, as well as our assigned inspectors, Mme. Zanz Ali Mohammed and Mme. Asma Kamel El-Amin Ahmed, for their help, along with Reis Ali Farouk Sayed El-Qaftawi, Assistant Reis Omar Farouk Sayed El-Qaftawi and our workmen. As before, our thanks are also due to Dr. Gerry Scott and the staff of the American Research Center in Egypt, which facilitated our expedition—and most especially to Shari Saunders and Mme. Amira Khattab. Finally, and certainly not least, we gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Stephanie Denkowitz, Donald Kunz, Kathryn Michel, Dr. Bonnie Sampell, Ted Snook, and The Amarna Research Foundation, whose kind help made our season possible.
3. Petrie’s work at the site of the Tausert temple is recorded in his book: W. M. Flinders Petrie, Six Temples at Thebes (London: 1897), pp. 13–16. Other publications deal with the site only

4. Our project staff for the 2007 season consisted of Dr. Richard Wilkinson (director), Ashleigh Goodwin (assistant director for mapping), Damian Greenwell (assistant director for excavation), Danielle Phelps (object registrar), Stephanie Ratcliffe (field assistant), Linda Regan-Gosner (field assistant), and Christopher Schafer (photographer and data matrix specialist). We employed thirty-five Egyptian workmen as well as a reis, an assistant reis, a driver and boatmen for the season. Several team members were not able to participate this season, but they were available for consultation and communication throughout our work.

5. The numeration employed in our designation of trench and surface units in the Tausert site is documented in our reports and publications but may be briefly explained here as follows: The temple's foundation trenches were assigned designations TA1–14 for east-west trenches and TB1–9 for south-north trenches (with 2 meter sub-units) in the areas cleared so far. This system makes possible a better analysis of artifact distribution than a regular grid system would allow. Surface units defined, studied or cleaned so far have been designated S1–S34.

6. We are grateful to Professor Eugene Cruz-Uribe for his kind help in translating the hieratic texts that we found, and to Dr. Teresa Moore, who also provided input on one of the texts.


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**Erratum**

Figure 8, page 12, of *The Ostraca*, volume 17, no. 2 (Fall 2006) was incorrectly published in the printed copies but corrected in the on-line edition. We apologise to Dr. Wilkinson for the error. The correct figure is:

![Hieratic inscription drawing](image)

**Fig. 8.** Drawing of the hieratic inscription with regnal date formula.