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Egyptian Study Society, Inc.
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The Tausert Temple Project
2008 Season

By Richard H. Wilkinson

The Memorial Temple of Queen Tausert in Western Thebes was briefly examined by William Flinders Petrie in 1896, but after preliminary study the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition decided that it would be worthwhile to fully clear, record, plan, conserve and publish the remains of this temple. The Supreme Council of Antiquities granted the Expedition permission to begin this project in 2004, and we have completed five field seasons since then with important results. This article details our latest field season, which was conducted throughout January 2008.
NEW AREAS, NEW QUESTIONS

Rather than attempting to clear a single arbitrary area in our 2008 season, we chose to run a test sondage along each side of the inner temple area (Fig. 1) to try to determine its remaining length and better plan the completion of our project in coming seasons. These sondages were dug at half the width of the temple’s north and south foundation trenches at a depth sufficient to determine the line of their gebel walls. (Gebel walls are the sides of the trench formed by the gebel where it is present.) We also continued our work to the west of the temple’s courtyard area and were able to clear a narrow band of trench and surface units across the entire width of the temple, essentially excavating a narrow U-shaped area around three sides of the inner core of the temple (Fig. 2).

Work in these carefully delimited areas proved very profitable. The precise extent of the temple on its western side has always been unclear, as Petrie’s men stopped their selective digging at the point where the temple runs into—or under—the embankment along the western edge of the site. By means of our sondage cut along the remaining length of foundation trench TA1, we were able to determine the approximate location of the inner temple area.

As in earlier years, some of the sections of the trenches we cleaned this season contained mixed sand and dirt, but virtually no artifacts. We believe these sections were areas where Petrie’s men probed when they briefly examined the site. Yet other units were undisturbed and contained a number of features and artifacts. Few features were found in the Trench TA1 units on the southern side. Petrie’s men seem to have destroyed cross-trench walls and founda-
tion pits in this area, judging by the scattered mud bricks which remained on the southern side. In the TA14 units on the northern side, however, we found no evidence of previous digging, and cross-trench walls were intact. Also, in cleaning this trench we uncovered the edge of a large surface area (designated S30) and found very large, protruding mud bricks, over 40 cm in length. These bricks appear to be part of a room or wall running along the edge of this surface unit, and we plan to clear this part of the temple core in our next season.

TEMPLE TOMBS

Our progress in proceeding into the inner temple area this season was slowed considerably, however, by the discovery of mummified human remains and other associated funerary objects in the TA14 area. These remains are probably associated with one of a number of tombs noted (but not all excavated) by Petrie on the temple’s western edge. One or more of these tombs may well have been robbed in antiquity, and it appears that some of the tomb contents were broken up and divided by the robbers on the adjacent area at the northwest corner of the temple site.

Among the artifacts, apparently from the remains of this transported burial assemblage, we collected a number of large sherds of red and white pottery (Fig. 4) unlike any others found on the temple site, but which are typical of Third Intermediate Period types and which would seem to date the assemblage to that period.

The sherds are from fairly large storage vessels. A large number of clay jar seals (Fig. 5) were also found, which indicates that more of these smashed storage vessels will likely be found as we continue our excavation.

We also found, in this same area, sherds with a highly distinctive incised and painted triangular decoration (Fig. 6). These sherds are unlike anything we have seen in Egypt. Our own ceramicist, Rexine Hummel, and experts at the British Museum and elsewhere have concluded that the pottery is perhaps a Nubian import. We hope to confirm this in our next season if more diagnostic sherds are found.

Many fragments of mummy cloth were found in this area, along with chunks of unpainted and painted wood which appear to be pieces of the smashed sarcophagus or sarcophagi from the plundered tomb(s). None of the fragments of wood found so far was larger than a few centimeters, but several bore decoration (and in one case, hieratic characters) which appeared to be from the Third Intermediate Period, which strengthens our belief regarding the date of the first pottery type discussed above.
Among the fragmentary human remains we collected in this area were partial upper and lower mandibles (Fig. 7), sections of cranium, a number of vertebrae, several long bones—including a humerus, radius, and an ulna—and parts of a pelvis, a hand, and a foot. We are grateful for the examination of images of these remains by Expedition member Dr. Gonzalo Sanchez. According to Dr. Sanchez’s report, the cranial fragments seem to be those of a young individual, perhaps pre-teen, based on the lack of fusion of the suture processes. Likewise, examination of one of the mandibles shows the teeth are still well embedded, suggesting this person was relatively young, as there does not appear to be any bone resorption around the roots. Another mandible exhibits bony resorption and appears to be from an older person. The epiphyseal lines on the recovered humerus are not visible, so the person was doubtless post-pubertal. Likewise, our examination of the vertebrae indicates that they are from two different individuals. One series shows bony proliferation which has fused the vertebral bodies across the disc space. There is also a cavity which appears to represent loss of bone. Loss of bone integrity and the reactive proliferation of bone are most characteristic of inflammatory lesions which might be due to tuberculosis or an abscess from some other cause such as staphylococcus or streptococcus.

Thus, the human remains found so far seem to represent at least two individuals—one young and one older. We plan to continue the medical examination of these remains next season and hope to gain more information regarding the age, sex, and health of the individuals.

All of the human remains and artifacts found during the 2008 season were catalogued and placed in storage in the SCA magazine behind the Carter House on Luxor’s West Bank.
CONSERVATION ISSUES
Conservation of discovered features is an important aspect of careful excavation, and this is an aspect of our project which is given a good deal of attention. In the process of cleaning the temple’s surface areas, foundation trenches, walls and pits, we have continued to carefully assess each unit in terms of its condition. Every excavated unit is assessed as being intact, good, fair, poor, or destroyed (using a percentage range breakdown). Units are then coded in terms of needed treatment as follows:
1 = Very unstable, needs treatment soon; 2 = Somewhat unstable, should get treatment in near future; 3 = Fairly stable, might need treatment in the future; and 4 = Stable.

Fortunately, most sections of the foundation trenches we have excavated are quite stable though some units have been given immediate stabilization, and a number have been noted for conservation treatment in our future seasons. The condition of each of the site’s surface units—the courtyards and rooms of the temple, the walls, the pits, and the other features—is recorded utilizing the same range of assessment categories applied to the trench sections in order to keep all our conservation data consistent and fully searchable. This enables us to record the level of preservation needed for every section and feature and then to group units of similar level of preservation need together for parallel treatment according to need.

REASSESSMENTS
Another important aspect of successful excavation is the practice of constant reassessment of evidence as new data are discovered. The smaller area of excavation attempted this season allowed us to re-examine some of our previous data and to produce improved interpretations. For example, the many shabtis found in the foundation trenches surrounding surface area S11 were initially thought to be symbolic offerings associated with the Osiride suite of rooms traditionally found at the southwest corner of royal memorial temples of the New Kingdom. After reexamination of the location data, we now believe that the area in which our shabtis were found is too far east of the traditional Osiride area for that interpretation to be correct; instead, they may represent symbolic offerings associated with the shrine of the ancestors. Similar offerings occur in other nearby memorial temples (e.g., the Temple of Sety I shrine for Ramesses I, and the Medinet Habu shrine for Ramesses II).

Although no new inscriptions were found this season, the inclusion in our team of an expert hieraticist, Dr. Robert Demarée of the Department of Egyptology at the University of Leiden, enabled the re-examination and reassessment of some of the texts we found last season. This led to two improvements in translation. The small hieratic note we found painted onto a stone on the east side wall of the unit 7 of trench TB10 was initially believed to record the name wr-m3’t ‘r, but Dr. Demarée has corrected this reading with r ‘Wxr-b3, t—“Section of Userhat (with determinative of the sitting man).” Similar notes are known from the Valley of Kings, Deir el-Bahri, etc., and indicate either the section of work under supervision by someone, or sometimes an amount of stones or other materials delivered by someone. In this case, the former meaning certainly applies.

We also now realize that the hieratic inscription found last season on the western edge of a foundation block from Unit TA13:5–6 does not read “Regnal year 7” with the number “129,” but rather: r np.t-sp 7 3bd I 3xc I sw 23; i.e., “Regnal year 7, first month of Akhet, day 23.” We are very grateful for these improved translations. We are also pleased to report that Dr. Demarée has confirmed that our preliminary translation of the historically important inscription found on the top surface of this same stone, which mentions Tausert’s eighth year, is correct.

New assessments were also made regarding the original extent of the building of Tausert’s temple. Based on his limited examination, Petrie presumed that very little building was conducted on the site and that, apart from some mud brick structures, only a few stone foundation blocks were laid down at the very rear of the temple. Our work has shown that the temple was actually much more developed. Not only were foundation trenches dug over the whole site, but also we can already state the following:

1) Clean sand was placed in all the foundation trenches to receive foundation stones.
2) We have found more foundation blocks, over a much more widespread area than Petrie was aware of, including a number in the front part of the temple.
3) Dekka (that is, gypsum-mud flooring) found on many of the surface units we have uncovered indicates that walls were already built around these areas, as the dekka surfaces would be destroyed in the building process if put in first.
4) Stone fragments have been found over the whole site. Most of these fragments were clearly broken rather than cut, which indicates that stone features were demolished throughout the site.
5) Plaster found on many of the stone chunks we have uncovered indicates that walls and other features were built and plastered before being later demolished for their stone. The
quantity, size, and damaged nature of the plastered stone pieces (and fragments of plaster) indicate this scenario to be much more probable than one in which plastered stones were taken to the site.

All these facts point to the probability that Tausert’s temple was far more developed than previously believed. They indicate that not only were foundation blocks placed throughout the foundation trenches, but also that a considerable amount of building was accomplished upon the foundations and that these stone-built features were demolished for their stone by one of Tausert’s successors, perhaps Setnakht, or by another king of some subsequent dynasty.

NOTES
1. Petrie’s cursory exploration of the site of the Tausert Temple is recorded in his book: Petrie, W. M. Flinders, Six Temples At Thebes (London, 1897), pp. 13–16. The plan and many of the statements included in his account are inaccurate, however.


3. We would like to thank Director General Dr. Zahi Hawass 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 kind and continued help in arranging our work in Egypt. In Luxor, the Director of Upper Egypt, Mr. Mansour Boraik was of great help—as always—and we thank him particularly. We also thank Mr. Ali El-Asfar, Director of West Bank Antiquities, as well as our assigned inspector, Zahara Ragab Mahmoud, and Reis Ali Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi, along with Reis Omar Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi and Assistant Reis Kamal Helmy, who were all a great help to us. It was a pleasure to work with our Egyptian colleagues and we thank them all. As before, our thanks are also due to the American Research Center in Egypt, which facilitated our Expedition—and especially to Shari Saunders and Amira Khattab whose kind and able help we greatly appreciate.

4. Our project staff for the 2008 season consisted of Dr. Richard Wilkinson (director), Ashleigh Goodwin (assistant director for mapping), Damian Greenwell (assistant director for excavation and section leader), Richard Harwood (associate director for photography and section leader), Kehaulani Kerr (photographic assistant), Danielle Phelps (object registrar), and Linda Regan-Gosner (excavation assistant and section leader). We employed 35 Egyptian workmen as well as reis, associate and assistant reis, drivers, and boatmen for the season.

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. The temple’s foundation trenches were assigned designations TA1–14 for east-west trenches and TB1–12 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 are designated S1–S40.