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TAUSERT TEMPLE PROJECT
2010-11 SEASON

By Richard H. Wilkinson

The 2010-11 Winter Season, our final one of excavation planned currently for the Tausert temple site in western Thebes was particularly profitable. This article summarizes the results of our last season of excavation at the temple before the publication of the final site report. An additional season to conduct remote sensing at the site to confirm and map features that were not selected for excavation is in the planning stages.

As readers of this journal are aware, pharaoh Tausert’s memorial temple was examined briefly by William Flinders Petrie in 1896 and ignored mostly since that time because it was assumed that the temple was never completed in antiquity.¹ Our own research and subsequent excavation of the site² shows that Petrie’s assessment was based on very limited and faulty data, and that the Temple of Tausert was, in fact, completed or nearly completed, but torn down very soon afterward during the time of dynastic change from the 19th to 20th Dynasties.

Our final excavation season was conducted from November 2010 through January 2011. It consisted of two complementary sessions: a special study session focusing on the ceramic materials found during the project’s previous field seasons, followed by a session of excavation in which most of the final clearance planned for the site was accomplished.³ The results of these two sessions are summarized below.⁴

The Ceramic Study Session

Ceramicist Rexine Hummel and artist Lyla Pinch-Brock worked on the ceramic collection from the Mortuary Temple of Queen Tausert from November 8 to December 14, 2010. The pottery analyzed came from all seasons of clearance and from all areas of the excavation.

This study proved to be very valuable and resulted in a better understanding of certain aspects of the site’s history. The full results will be given in our final site report, but the following is a very brief synopsis of the material prepared by Rexine Hummel. This abridged version summarizes the ceramic material found in the temple’s trenches and surface areas dating from modern times back through the Roman Period, Late Period, and finally the 19th Dynasty when the temple was constructed (Fig. 1).

MODERN PERIOD – Eleven fragments of modern qullal jars were found in the temple trenches and must date to the time of Petrie’s investigation. An excellent indicator of where his workmen kept their water jars (and thus where they worked), it reveals their primary interest: the temple’s foundation deposits.

ROMAN ERA – Amphorae bases, cooking pots and shallow fineware plates reflect a Roman presence on the site. Although many of the forty-four fragments dating to this period cluster in Loci S-30 and S-41, the remaining Roman sherds appear randomly over the site.

LATE PERIOD – A large assemblage of Late Period pottery (25th–27th Dynasties) was excavated. Storage jars manufactured in both marl and silt characterize this period.

NINETEENTH DYNASTY – The pottery found in the sealed strata of the temple that date to the 19th Dynasty is very important, for it represents one of the only extant sealed corpora from that period. Rims from thirteen different blueware vessels were found: six in the sealed strata and seven in the fill above it. Excluding the rims, forty-four fragments of blue-ware vessels came from the sealed strata,
while twenty-three fragments came from the fill above.

**IMPORTS** – Fragments of amphorae imported from the Levantine coast dominate the list of imports. Eighteen fragments were found in Stratum II and thirty more were found in the fill above. Levantine amphorae are found on temple sites since they were used to carry pistachio resin, olive oil and wine to the temple storerooms. Two small fragments from Mycenaean stirrup jars were found in the fill. These vessels were a popular import to Egypt. They were prized for their fine workmanship as well as their precious contents of perfumed oils, herbs and unguents. The fragments were found in Trench TB-10, Unit 7 and Surface S-30, Unit 2A. Two fragments from amphorae from the Western Oases were found in the fill in Trench TA-14, Unit 16, and Trench TA-14, Unit 17. Wine from the Oases was considered a luxury. Ten fragments of amphorae from Phoenicia were found with the Late Period sherds.

**Site Mapping**

In previous seasons, all of our work concentrated on the temple’s foundation trenches and smaller surface units (the temple’s rooms). For this work, we utilized a dedicated mapping system which followed the exact contours of the trenches and divided them into two-meter units which were split further into single meter areas. This dedicated system was used to allow detailed database entry and analysis of find locations relevant to the actual structure of the temple, rather than one that merely
identified finds scattered across arbitrary grid squares containing both trench and surface units.

In this season, however, we cut several test trenches in the area of the temple’s great courtyard, along with other test trenches outside of the temple core. In addition, we prepared for a remote sensing survey of several areas which we did not plan to clear. For these larger areas, we applied a standard alpha-numeric 10/5 meter grid to the whole site so we may utilize these grid notations in future discussion of our work (Fig. 2). The grid is a floating one based on the site itself. Our primary datum point, however (the northwest corner of the Merenptah Temple wall), will be tied to the Theban Mapping Project’s survey of the West Bank. As a result, it will be possible to locate any point on our site in reference to that larger grid.

During every season we worked on the Tausert site, we found and mapped areas which were considerably different from Petrie’s, whose details were frequently not the results of excavation or even probing, but his speculations as he looked at the mounds of debris covering the site.

![Fig. 2. The 10/5 meter grid applied to the temple site and its surrounding area.](image)

**Clearing and Cleaning**

This season, our clearing and cleaning of the temple remained concentrated on selected areas in the southwestern and northwestern quadrants of the site (the grey areas in Figure 3). In addition, we cleared trench TB15 that connected these areas. In the southwestern quadrant, we corrected Petrie’s plan significantly in a number of areas, while in the northwestern area, we concentrated on further analysis of the features associated with intrusive burials at the back of the temple site (See p. 7).

A number of artifactual finds were made during the course of this clearing work, but apart from the foundation block inscription discussed (See p. 8), the most significant finds were the ceramic ones that were found after the close of our ceramic study session. This additional material will be incorporated into our ceramic database as soon as possible.
All the artifacts found in the course of the 2010-11 season were cataloged and stored in the SCA magazine behind the Carter House on Luxor’s West Bank. The most important items will be documented in our forthcoming report.

Fig. 3. Plan of the Tausert Temple showing the areas cleared, recorded, and mapped in the University of Arizona Expedition’s eight seasons on the site. Areas cleared in the 2010-11 season are highlighted in grey. The three narrow units on Surface 2 are test trenches 1-3. The three units on the northeastern (right) side of the plan are: adjacent to S19, test trench 4; adjacent to S30, test trench 5; and across the top of S41, test trench 6.

Test Trenches

Three sondages (TT1-3) were cut to bisect the large mud brick mass that runs along the western edge of the temple’s courtyard (S2). It was not clear if this undulating mass represented the remains of a collapsed mud brick wall or pylon, or merely bricks thrown up from the great trench (TB8) which bounds the western side of the court. The test trenches we excavated indicate that the mounds are composed mainly of bricks and stone fragments from Trench TB8 - thrown here when the temple trenches were emptied of their stones in ancient times, in recent times by Petrie’s men, or both. There is a complex of wall stubs evident at ground level, moreover, which indicate the remains of small rooms beneath the accumulated mud brick mass. While this whole area could not be cleared during our examination of the temple site, the ground-level walls seem to run most of the width of the court. They are composed of New Kingdom bricks and are built directly on the gebel bedrock surface. The bricks may be reused however, and the wall stubs are partial and broken and do not indicate when they were built. There was no artifactual evidence or any sign of habitation on the floor areas around these walls, so their purpose cannot be presumed. They may possibly have been part of an early mud brick temple structure, if such existed, or features built in the area at some later point.

Another two test trenches (TT4 and TT5) were made along the northern edge of the temple core, directly north of trench units TA14:22-23 and 29-30 in an area which, based on our analysis of satellite images of the site, we suspected that mud brick magazines were constructed. Both trenches revealed the bases of walls beneath a crumbled mass of mud brick residue. It is doubtless that they are the remains of temple storage magazines (they are in the same location relative to the temple as those in the temple of Merenptah and the Ramesseum) or other administrative buildings. No ancillary structures were shown on Petrie’s
inaccurate plan of the temple. This is the first confirmation we have found of other structures which we believe also to have been present as part of the larger site. A final test trench (TT6) will be discussed below.

**Intrusive burial areas**

A number of intrusive tombs were cut in the escarpment at the western end of the temple and, in the northwest part of the site that we studied this season, we found more evidence of these intrusive structures. In addition to additional human remains (to be discussed in our final report) and fragmentary artifactual remains associated with the burial structures, we cleared more of surface unit S41 and exposed more of the low mud brick wall which we interpreted as a tomb surround for one of the burials. A comparison of this feature with a Late Period parallel in the Temple of Amenhotep II, kindly made possible by Professor Angelo Sesana, indicates that the structure forms a courtyard fronting a smaller tomb chapel now lying under the modern embankment. Further clearance reveals that this is likely the situation, although in this case the tomb entrance probably leads forward into the gebel rather than being constructed as a vertical shaft tomb. In earlier reports, we dated this feature and its associated human remains to the Third Intermediate Period. This was based on our consideration of some ceramic and other evidence of a confusing nature. After our most recent season, it is now clear that the burial is to be dated to the Late Period.

As we cleaned a number of surface areas in this part of the temple last season, we found the evidence of walls built of large New Kingdom bricks, although these walls were broken down and only stood to the height of four or five courses in one area (S30). We were unsure of the nature of these walls due to a stratigraphic situation that we did not understand then, but we feel we are able to explain now. The stratigraphic puzzle was difficult, especially on the surface area enumerated by us as S35. Unlike most surface areas of the temple that we investigated which bore damaged *dekka* (mud-gypsum) flooring, S35 was notable for having an extremely well-preserved *dekka* floor. Above this 19th Dynasty surface we found a stratum of pure sand topped by several centimeters of sandstone chips, then a layer of mud upon which walls of New Kingdom bricks were built. This sequence was difficult to interpret because there seemed to be no reason to build up the surface to construct the walls instead of using the flooring already in place.

In our latest season we found that the same stratigraphic profile extant on S35 is present also on surfaces S30 and S41 – all of which are in the region of the intrusive burials at the back of the temple, and all of which have the same mud brick features. We realize now that this situation is probably the result of redeposition of the sand from the foundation trenches when the temple stone was taken at some point after the monument’s completion. While building blocks could be taken down and carried without significant resultant stratigraphic evidence beyond the damaged floorings we have found across the site, the massive foundation blocks set in beds of sand would have had to be dug out, and the sand likely thrown onto surface areas next to the trenches in the process. If, as we suspect, much of the stone was taken by Ramesses III for his own funerary temple at Medinet Habu, there may have been no need for foundation blocks which may have been already set in place. There would be a need for great quantities of smaller building blocks, however, and once these were stripped from Tausert’s Temple, the foundation blocks from that monument were likely cut into building block sizes on site before being removed. This would have resulted in the stratum of sandstone chips and chunks lying above the sand that was found on these units and elsewhere in the site. It would have left an uneven surface that needed to be sealed and leveled later with a layer of mud upon which later brick structures found at the rear of the site could be erected. Such is probably the history of the stratigraphy evident in the area where the brick features were erected in association with the Late Period tombs at the
back of the temple. The mud brick magazines of Tausert’s Temple which we believe were constructed immediately nearby would have provided a convenient source for the mud layer and for the whole bricks used in building the Late Period chapels or tomb features.

Fig. 4. Hieratic inscription found on Foundation Block FB2.

A New Foundation Block Inscription

In the course of the season’s work another inscription was discovered on one of the massive foundation blocks (FB2) in Trench TB8 (Fig. 4). The inscription was examined by our expedition Hieraticist, Dr. Robert Demerée of Leiden University, who stressed that the first line reads clearly: "Year 8, 2nd month of shemu, day 29". This has particular significance, for it provides confirmation for the text we discovered in 2006 on an adjacent foundation block (FB1) which was dated also to the eighth year of the queen’s reign.

Although Tausert’s reign (including her regency for Siptah) has been understood commonly as being seven years (as stated by Manetho in his History), or eight at the most, the inscriptions on the foundation blocks show otherwise. Because they were made when the temple was begun, and we now have archaeological evidence that the temple was completed or nearly so (it must have taken a couple of years), these texts indicate clearly that Tausert must have reigned nine, or perhaps, even ten years.

According to Dr. Demaree, the second line of the inscription most likely says: "the gang/crew (is.t) (named) Kka-em-mesha=f". The first word (is.t) is a little difficult palaeographically, but he sees no other solution for the moment. The name of this gang is also unusual (yet very clear) - "who appears in his army". The third line is very clear also (despite the termite markings on the stone!): "on the right side" (hr wnmy). This continuation of the text is significant, for it paints a clear picture of the temple being constructed by two separate work gangs (as we know was the practice for royal tombs). The fact that the foundation block FB2 was dedicated to the right hand gang in an area near where we believe a foundation ritual was performed (based on the evidence of a ritually smashed decorated blue ware dedication vessel) makes it seem more than likely that another block with a parallel inscription was dedicated to the left hand gang at the other side of the temple. Although the foundation stones from that part of the monument were
robbed at the temple’s destruction, there is, perhaps, indication of a dedication based on the concentration of sherds from a similarly decorated blue ware vessel we found in the area where the “left hand gang” dedication stone would have been located.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

Although the Tausert Temple site is large, to date we have cleared a great deal of its total area. It appears that little, if any, further work beyond the planned remote-sensing survey needs to be conducted to understand the history of the temple. In the interest of good archaeological method, it will be wise to leave part of the site uncleared so that future researchers may examine sections with methods that are not currently available. As it is, at this point we have been able to demonstrate conclusively that the site was not excavated by Petrie, but only probed in limited areas. Our excavations have led also to a number of important new understandings:

1) Tausert reigned longer than previously suspected.
2) The temple of this regnant queen was actually completed, or nearly completed.
3) The temple was torn down shortly after its completion.
4) The site reveals considerable evidence of later building activity associated with intrusive Late Period burials.

These findings will be elaborated in our final report which is now being produced and which should be published in book form in late 2011, or very early 2012.

**NOTES:**


2. The reports of our own work have been published in *The Ostracon: The Journal of the Egyptian Study Society* and elsewhere. A full bibliography will be published in our final site report.

3. We would like to 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 Dr. Mohamed Ismail Khaled, 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, encouraged us, as always, and we thank him particularly. We also thank Mr. Mostafa Waziri, Director of West Bank Antiquities for his help, and Mr. Mohamed Hamdan, Director of the West Bank Missions Office. We particularly thank our assigned inspector, Mr. Yasser Youssef Ahmed who was a great help throughout our work both on site and in the magazine. Reis Omar Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi, Reis Ali Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi, and Assistant Reis Kamal Helmy were exceptionally helpful in making arrangements for all aspects of our work and directing the workmen. As always, our thanks are also due to the American Research Center in Egypt which facilitated our Expedition - and most especially to Amira Khattab and Jane Smythe whose kind and able help we appreciate greatly.

4. Our project staff for the season consisted of Dr. Richard Wilkinson (director), Rexine Hummel (co-director, ceramicist), Lyla Pinch-Brock (artist), Dr. Robert Demarée (hieraticist), Richard Harwood (section leader), Damian Greenwell (section leader), Danielle Phelps (object registrar), Ashley Goodwin (mapping specialist), Linda Regan Gosner
(section leader), Dr. Gonzalo Sanchez (medical consultant), Suzanne Vucobratovich (photographer), Matei Tischindlein (excavation assistant), and Stephanie Denkowicz (project recorder). We employed some sixty Egyptian workmen during the course of the season as well as drivers and boatmen.

5. The temple’s foundation trenches were assigned designations TA1-14 for East-West trenches and TB1-19 for South-North trenches. 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 – S56.

6. Note that “north” and other cardinal points mentioned in this article are based on local north as utilized by the ancient Egyptians. Local north on the Tausert site lies at 40 degrees east of magnetic north.

7. The final report for the Tausert Temple Project, including full excavation results and digital reconstructions of the temple, will be published by the University of Arizona. Copies may be reserved in advance, or requests for further information may be placed, by sending an email with “Temple Volume” in the subject line to: egypt@u.arizona.edu.

About the author:

Dr. Richard Wilkinson is professor of Egyptian archaeology at the University of Arizona and director of the University’s Egyptian Expedition, which has conducted research and excavation in Egypt since 1989. He is the author of many articles and books on ancient Egypt and editor of Egyptology Today, published by Cambridge University Press.