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Egyptian Study Society, Inc.
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Tausret Temple Project: The 2013 Season and Other Notes

By Pearce Paul Creasman,
University of Arizona

Since our last report in *The Ostracon*,¹ the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition (UAEE) has undertaken two archaeological field seasons and significant changes have occurred within the UAEE itself. This report summarizes these events.

First and foremost, it is my duty to inform the loyal readers of our reports that Richard H. Wilkinson retired from teaching at the University of Arizona in 2012. Consequently, as the new Director of the Expedition, I now have the privilege of bringing you news from the field. After nearly a quarter of a century at the helm of the UAEE, Professor Wilkinson now advises the Expedition in his new capacity as “Founding Director.” Rest easily, however, as Professor Wilkinson is still active, fully committed to research, and has several books forthcoming.² Please see the conclusion of this report with regard to the new and forthcoming publications from the UAEE.

**PHARAOH/QUEEN TAUSRET’S THEBAN TEMPLE**

As regular readers of this journal will recall, the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition has been excavating at the site of Pharaoh/Queen Tausret’s “temple of millions of years” in Western Thebes since 2004. W. M. Flinders Petrie visited and excavated the site very briefly in 1896.³ While he recovered numerous small objects, the understanding of the temple, its construction, and the queen whom it served was left incomplete. The UAEE’s work has focused on developing a greater understanding of the monument, the woman, and the occupation of the surrounding site.

The 2012 season took place between 23 May – 29 June, and a comprehensive report is in press.⁴ The season’s work focused primarily on the excavation of the temple sanctuary, which, to a large degree, escaped investigation by Petrie’s teams. Because the sanctuary was perceived as the “center of movement” in the temple during the New Kingdom,⁵ making it critical to modern interpretation of the site, the fact that Petrie’s team worked only around its edges is fortunate. Excavations here improved both our understanding of the site’s stratigraphy and the temple’s degree of completion before its presumed destruction at the beginning of the 20th Dynasty.

The 2013 season took place between 21 May – 21 June.⁶ The primary goals were to excavate additional areas of the temple (e.g., the first courtyard, where evidence of columns was expected), but more importantly, to investigate later features in and around the temple. We found no distinct evidence of columns in the first courtyard, and even suggestive evidence was minimal. While it is not uncommon for smaller temples to lack columns in the courtyards, it came as a surprise, nonetheless, because the design here was based on the inner temple of the Ramesseum, which has numerous columns. Next year, we will expand excavation in the first courtyard in order to clarify further this curious situation.

During these excavations, we made interesting and somewhat disconcerting discoveries with regard to the recent historic activity at the site. In first courtyard, in the lowest stratum of the mud-brick mounds that are presumed to be from the destruction of the temple and not investigated by Petrie, there were several items of modern material culture, including bits of newspaper and a tag from a T-shirt stating that it had been made in “A.R.E.” (“Arab Republic of Egypt,” established after the Revolution of 1952). Elsewhere on the site, an historic Egyptian bus ticket was found (Fig. 1, next page) several meters deep in an area that had been looted, suggesting a timeframe. Such items support a conclusion that portions of the temple and surrounding area were unofficially dug at least twice (and probably three times) since Petrie’s work: ca. 1920, the mid-1980s, and early 1990s.
SITE, TRENCH, AND FOUNDATION PRESERVATION

As more of the ancient site is revealed by removing mounds of decayed mud brick and fill that has washed down from the Theban hills, it appears more like a monument now than it has at any other time in perhaps the past 3,000 years. Accordingly, it requires greater protection. Unfortunately, multiple attempts to fence in the temple proper have been negated by local interference between seasons. Portions of the temple and all of its peripheral areas are used locally as roads or social spaces (e.g., sporting fields). In lieu of a fence, we routinely rebury temple foundation-related features in sand after they have been photographed and mapped, leaving only traces of the top surfaces showing. The fragmentary remains of superstructure walls are more difficult to preserve. To this end, in 2012 we filled the superstructure and temple foundation trenches with sand and built protective mud-brick walls to support and isolate the above-ground remains (Fig. 2).

In previous seasons, we stabilized trench walls and reinforced weaker areas where necessary. In 2012, we backfilled all previously excavated or exposed foundation trenches to within 30 cm of capacity. The reinforced walls are now more secure and stable than if left free-standing. Filling these trenches is critical to preserving the temple and is not a small undertaking. The remaining temple areas are still clearly distinguishable, for enough of each surface area remains exposed to reveal the temple’s long-obscured floor plan. This is now visible from the road between the Theban ticket office and prominent sites such as the Valley of the Kings and Deir el-Bahri.
With most of the temple foundations now excavated and stabilized where needed, in 2013 we took an additional step to define the temple. We deposited several tons of clean, light-colored sand into the foundation trenches (Fig. 3) at the surface in order to provide a clear differentiation between trenches (denoting where the temple’s stone walls would have been) and temple rooms (dark spaces, composed of the original dekka floors). Following the work scheduled for next season (2014), the temple should be clearly visible from the road and the air, having regained some of its former, if brief, prominence along “temple row.”

Fig. 3. Temple trenches after topping with clean sand to display the floor plan.

OTHER FEATURES AT THE TEMPLE SITE

At least since Petrie’s time,\(^8\) the presence of features post-dating Tausret’s use of the site have been noted. According to local rumors, one such feature—a rock-cut tomb—was used successively by Petrie, Howard Carter, an unknown German team, and the Egyptian Antiquities Organization as a storehouse. Although said to have been located about 25 m north and west of the temple, the precise location of this tomb is unknown today. No maps or publications of which I am aware record anything more than a passing reference to any such features east of the modern road within the concession (Fig. 4).\(^9\) Nonetheless, for many years the UAEE has recovered evidence of later burials (often termed “intrusive” burials)\(^10\) and made more such finds in 2013.

In order to understand the use of the site after the temple was destroyed, understanding how the site was formed is necessary. Simple empirical observation at the site today reveals that the topography surrounding the temple was artificially squared and leveled before construction of the temple began. The area was probably lowered 3–7 m over the approximately 2 ha (4 acres) that include the temple and adjacent spaces. As Petrie noted, the leveling event occurred most likely prior to Tausret’s reign, since the temple itself was not set squared within the leveled space.\(^11\) It is believed that the leveling event was conducted during Amenhotep III’s reign, creating the scarp that defines the western and northern boundaries of the Tausret site (see Fig. 4, next page).\(^12\)

Since Amenhotep III’s temple at Kom el Hettan (a few hundred meters south of Tausret’s temple) was the largest temple in Thebes, it is hard to imagine that it was intended to be even larger, extended severalfold to encompass the area up to the northern scarp of the Tausret site. Equally difficult to accept is the possibility that the area in question was leveled to improve the view. Arielle Kozloff
describes a far more reasonable circumstance for the leveling event. She states that Amenhotep III built a processional route from his temple at Kom el Hettan, north to that of his ancestor Amenhotep II, and then on to the Valley of the Kings. Such a route cut through the area now occupied by Merenptah’s temple (and possibly Tausret’s, although Kozloff does not state so directly). This would provide a good reason for a leveling event of such massive scale while simultaneously explaining the general lack of evidence for pre-18th Dynasty occupation at the Tausret site, while similar sites farther north (and thus not subject to the leveling event) have such remains.

Fig. 4. Modified satellite image showing the scarps and related features at the site.

**LATER FEATURES IN THE WESTERN SCARP**

As in our previous seasons (especially 2009–2012), we continued to clear the northwestern area of the temple, which produced more artifacts and small finds demonstrating the presence of one or more significant burials, probably of the 25th or 26th Dynasty. After more than a week of excavating fill (in addition to two weeks in 2012), we were asked to discontinue our work in this area because of concerns for the security of the tourist road. While a geologist has confirmed the stability of this area, we will no longer pursue excavation directly behind (west of) the temple. We refilled the area, built several retaining walls, and moved northward to where the scarp prompted no such concerns, being several meters farther away from the road (Fig. 5, next page).

To the north, we found disarticulated mummified human remains that, although looted, had evidently been buried with not insubstantial grave goods. These remains are possibly associated with the same feature(s) that yielded previous evidence behind the temple. In 2013, the discovery of several fragments of Bes jars, incense bowls with soot, and beaded nets, suggests strongly a 25th or 26th Dynasty date for whatever burial feature or features are in the area. The architectural remains appear to be based on the short cubit (ca. 45 cm) often associated with the Third Intermediate and Saite
Periods, including the 25th and 26th Dynasties, but more architecture in better condition is needed to confirm whether this is indeed the case.

NEW DISCOVERIES: FEATURES IN THE NORTHERN SCARP

Each year, the UAEE invests time cleaning portions of the temple and its surrounding areas. As the site is downslope from the road and the Theban hills, modern and historic garbage and debris have tended to collect around the edges. While clearing such debris from the northern scarp this past season (from a ca. 40 x 2 x 2 m area), we discovered a series of cave-like features, some of which contained ancient human remains. At least one of these features (“feature 1”) was, with little doubt, an ancient burial place (“tomb” being too generous a word in this instance), and very likely a second (“feature 2”) was, also. While tombs post-dating Tausret’s temple found in this area (of the 25th or 26th Dynasty, discussed above) were noted in passing by Petrie, these features are probably contemporary with the New Kingdom or early Third Intermediate Period. The features have been disturbed heavily, although whether by human activity or nature is unclear. More excavation and analysis is required to piece together the history of the northern scarp.
Compared to the archaeological remains from the western scarp, those from the northern appear to be sparser and in a worse state of preservation. The primary features are caves roughly carved into the conglomerate and sandstone strata. These lack the large, thick, mud-brick walls of those in the western scarp. A suggestion may be made that these northern features were perhaps some combination of lower-quality, regularly reused, or heavily looted burials that have been subjected to degradation by human and natural forces (e.g., floods).

As feature 1 is the best preserved of the three found in 2013, it is noted here. Feature 1 (Fig. 6, previous page) can best be described as a roughly hewn and irregularly shaped cave. The presence of one remaining layer of mud bricks stacked four wide at the threshold suggests that the cave was once bricked shut (see Fig. 6, right-center). In addition to the remains of at least two adults, the following items were found inside or immediately outside of feature 1, likely strewn from looting: fragments of three funerary cones, a small fragment of finished pink granite likely from a statue, seashells (bivalve molluscs), two broken and incomplete Mycenaean globular stirrup jars (Fig. 7), a variety of shabti fragments, a fragmented female figurine (“concubine figure”), several ostraca (including one on animal bone, likely a bovine rib), ringstands, bread trays, fragments of pilgrim flasks, jar fragments with horizontal blue bands on a cream slipped background, broken bread moulds, and hundreds of sherds of beer jars and red-rimmed bowls. These items have parallels as early as the 19th Dynasty but could have been reused at any later point in time.

As of this writing, I have been unable to identify any passing references in the literature to burials, tombs, finds, or any other such feature(s) associated with the northern scarp. Given the immense amount of archaeological and other digging activity in Thebes during the past 200 years, it is likely that I have overlooked such a reference. At present, however, it appears that these features in the northern scarp are new to the archaeological record.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

We are again glad to report that our latest season of work on the Tausret Temple Project was engaging and educational. The prospect of having discovered undocumented burial features is, of course, very exciting. Most importantly, however, we continue to develop our understanding of the form and history of the temple and other occupations at the site and we continue to record and publish our findings. We hope to return next year with additional specialists and a larger team in order to address the host of new questions presented by our work in 2013.
NEW AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

As a directly related development, it is with great pleasure that I announce the publication of *Archaeological Research in the Valley of the Kings and Ancient Thebes: Papers Presented in Honor of Richard H. Wilkinson* (University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition, 2013; Fig. 8).

The book is divided into three sections: Part I follows a dedication (by Prof. David Soren) and foreword (by Prof. Kent R. Weeks) and describes the published and presented works of Professor Wilkinson, as well as honors and awards he has amassed during an exceptionally productive career. Part II reviews institutions he has founded and places their histories in context with their contributions to Egyptology (e.g., a history of the UAEE is provided). This section also includes summaries of the major fieldwork initiatives directed by Professor Wilkinson. Part III features sixteen manuscripts by an assembly of international scholars who present new research in honor of Professor Wilkinson’s retirement. The volume can be purchased directly from the UAEE (http://egypt.arizona.edu) or via Amazon.com.
In the hope of honoring Professor Wilkinson further, this tome serves as the inaugural volume in the Wilkinson Egyptology Series, published by the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition. The peer-reviewed series is open to all scholars to publish monographs, comprehensive site reports, conference proceedings, and other edited works. The goal of the Wilkinson Egyptology Series is to help scholars bring high-quality work to print quickly through a scholarly review process akin to those of most major journals. After a period not to exceed five years, each volume will be made available online, free of charge. The series is designed to reflect Professor Wilkinson’s prolific academic career by producing only the highest quality work in a timely manner. Financial contributions to the UAEE in honor of Professor Wilkinson will be marked to support the Series specifically and are most welcome (http://tinyurl.com/UAEE2013).

NOTES

5 This work would not have been possible without the kind permission of the Ministry of State for Antiquities and Supreme Council of Antiquities; support from the members of the SCA Permanent Committee; and the kind and continued help of Dr. Mohamed Ismael, SCA Director of Foreign Missions, in arranging our work in Egypt. From the Luxor and Theban offices Mansour Boraik, Dr. Mohammed Abdel-Aziz, Nour Abd Gafar, Gazafi Ali elAzib, Fahti Hassin, Hekmat Araby, and Mr. Azadin were, as always, supportive of our work and we are thankful. Shaimma Abdel Kareem Gadelrab served as our inspector and greatly facilitated our work. The American Research Center in Egypt, especially Mme. Amira Khattab and the Luxor office further supported our fieldwork. Finally, Reis Omar Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi and Reis Ali Farouk Sayed El-Quftawi managed our team of workmen with excellence, as usual. The field team consisted of: Pearce Paul Creasman, Director; Theresa Musacchio, Epigrapher; Rexine Hummel, Ceramicist; Rebecca Caroli, Photographer; Stephanie Denkowicz, Field Assistant; Richard Harwood, Section Leader; Sharad N. Pandhi, Human Remains Analyst (dental specialty); Danielle Phelps, Manager of Field Operations; Mariel Watt, Assistant Registrar; Suzanne Vukobratovich, Ceramicist Assistant & Registrar. Richard H. Wilkinson (Egyptologist) and Robert Demarée (Egyptologist) consulted with the mission remotely.
6 The temple was so thoroughly destroyed in antiquity that little other than deep foundation trenches, the occasional foundation stone, and masses of mud-brick piles that formerly constituted the upper structures remains.
7 Petrie (Six Temples, 1897, 13) states that the back portion of the temple at the sanctuary was left unexcavated due to the excessive amount of “accumulated dust and chips from tombs cut in the scarp above it.” However, as he did not record these tombs, this could be in reference to those on the opposite side of the road (west), labeled by F. Kampp (Die Thebanische Nekropole. Zum Wandel des Grabgedankens von der XVIII. bis zur XX. Dynastie [Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1996]) as “-438-” through “-446-.”
8 There are, however, several records of tombs or burials found behind (west) other major temples in the vicinity, such as the Ramesseum and temple of Amenhotep III (e.g., see D.


14 Special thanks to Richard Wilkinson for discussing this leveling event and framing this suggestion.


About the Author

Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman
Director, Egyptian Expedition
Curator, Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research
University of Arizona

Pearce Paul Creasman has been conducting archaeological research in Egypt for a decade. Since 2009 he has been at the University of Arizona, where he serves in several capacities, including: Curator of the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, Assistant Research Professor of Dendrochronology, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Associate Editor of the peer-reviewed Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections, and as president of the Arizona Chapter of ARCE. In 2012, upon the retirement of Dr. Richard H. Wilkinson, he was appointed Director of the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition. Dr. Creasman earned his doctorate from the Nautical Archaeology Program at Texas A&M University. His primary research interests are maritime life in ancient Egypt, Egyptian archaeology, and human/environment interactions.