

THEBAN DESERT ROAD SURVEY

John Coleman Darnell and Deborah Darnell

Our efforts during the fifth season were focused mainly on the recording of rock inscriptions and rock art at the Wadi el-Ḥôl and Gebel Tjauti. In addition to the completion of photographic documentation of all of the primary concentrations of inscriptions, we are pleased to report the discovery of three important new sites.

Gebel Antef

We continued to examine the area of the Seventeenth Dynasty chapel and studied intensively the ceramic remains along the ascent (cf. fig. 17b, e) and in the area of stone huts far behind the chapel. In addition to many Middle Kingdom forms, the huts yielded pottery of Nubian manufacture, perhaps associated with the policemen and soldiers whom we know — thanks to the Wadi el-Ḥôl graffiti — to have frequented this road. A surprisingly large number of Middle Kingdom camping installations were identified this season on virtually all of the roads we have mapped; the Gebel Antef huts are among the best preserved examples of such structures.

Wadi el-Ḥôl

We have now made facsimile copies of over 250 separate scenes and inscriptions in the four major sectors of this site. This season we completed full photographic documentation of the main areas of inscriptions (fig. 1), work made possible by grants from the American and Swiss branches of the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation, which provided us with funds with which to hire the Epigraphic Survey's photographer Yarko Kobylecky for several days of field photography.

These inscriptions continue to provide unique glimpses of pharaonic civilization. Several demonstrate that many people of the late Middle Kingdom with rather humble titles, including apparently low ranking soldiers (compare the "soldier of the city, Bebi's son Mery," fig. 2), had attained a certain level of literacy. This fits what we know of the high efficiency of the late Middle Kingdom bureaucracy, which must have required literacy of a fairly large proportion of the population.

One of the soldiers whose inscription we copied this season has the otherwise unattested title "warrior of Hou" (fig. 3). We also have a new title "scribe of Hou," and another inscription tells us that there was a "house of life" at Hou. As the an-



Figure 1. Wadi el-Ḥôl. Photographer Yarko Kobylecky and Egyptologist John Darnell document rock inscriptions from precarious perches

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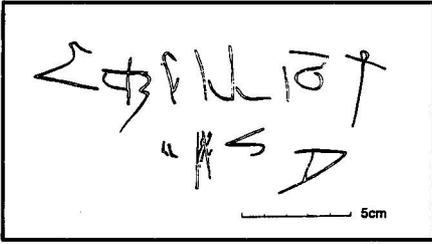


Figure 2. Wadi el-Hôl. Signature of the "soldier of the city, Bebi's son Mery"

ations, is unique, and searches have yielded no parallels from later papyri or ostraca. The text is thus remarkable not only for its content, but also for the fact that it appears to be the spontaneous literary effusion of a visitor to the Wadi el-Hôl; it tells us much about late Middle Kingdom education and literary composition.

A survey of the road as it ascends the gebel over the Wadi el-Hôl was immensely rewarding, because it led to the discovery of not only another concentration of huts

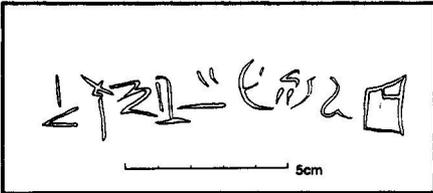


Figure 3. Wadi el-Hôl. Unique Middle Kingdom title, "warrior of Hou-Sekhem"

quite remarkable. A preliminary stratigraphic study suggests most of the remains are of Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, and early New Kingdom date. We noted many pieces of rope in Middle Kingdom levels and discovered a bronze arrowhead (fig. 5) protruding from the Second Intermediate Period/early Eighteenth Dynasty level. As metal tips were used for warfare rather than hunting, this bronze

point is probably a relic of the very policemen and soldiers who carved their names in the Wadi el-Hôl. There are concentrations of animal dung in the deposit; in several areas someone appears to have collected this material in the form of patties, probably for use as fuel.

Study of the stratified deposits in



Figure 4. Gebel Roma. Debbie Darnell examines pottery and organic remains within a robber's trench in the mound of caravan debris

cient city of Hou — Diospolis parva — has virtually disappeared, and much of what we know about that site is of a relatively late date, the inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hôl are helping us to form some idea of the importance of Hou during the late Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period.

The Wadi el-Hôl literary text (see the 1995/96 Annual Report), with its allusions to many known Middle Egyptian literary crea-

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with Middle Kingdom ceramic remains but also, more spectacularly, of the largest area of caravan debris that we have thus far located in the Theban Western Desert. The site is a stratified mound of pottery (fig. 17c), animal

dung, straw, and other archaeological material, covering nearly 3,000 m² of the gebel (fig. 4); the fact that this incredible amount of organic material sits atop the high desert is

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and over the Wadi el-Hôl and at Gebel Qarn el-Gir will likely yield exciting information regarding the men and beasts who traveled through the desert northwest of Thebes. Priority had been given to work on the Wadi el-Hôl inscriptions, which were in danger of disappearing after being attacked by thieves in 1995. Now that the level of illicit activity has dropped and primary photographic documentation is complete, we can turn our attention to the stratified pottery deposits. A new threat — this time from a canal and plans for extensive cultivation near Gebel Qarn el-Gir and close to the Wadi el-Hôl — has made excavation of the Gebel Qarn el-Gir site our number one priority for the first part of next season. We have learned we can never relax our efforts, because any site can face destruction at any time.

Our most unexpected and satisfying discovery at the Wadi el-Hôl this season was on the fringe of the mound of ancient debris atop the gebel. Near the caravanary are several square and horseshoe-shaped huts, formed of boulders collected from the desert surface. Scratched in hieroglyphs on a rough boulder forming part of one of these windbreaks on top of the gebel we found an inscription (figs. 6–7):

Made by the second prophet of Amun, Roma^c

The well-known Roma^c, called Roy, carved this when he was second prophet of Amun. We have here a visitor's note left by an important clergyman of the Ramesside period. Apparently Roma^c once rested in this rough stone shelter, and thus we have called the site Gebel Roma^c. The Gebel Roma^c graffito supports Roma^c's autobiographical claims in at least two specifics. In carving as nicely as he did on the unfriendly surface of the boulder, Roma^c demonstrates a remarkable skill. He was in charge of the craftsmen at Karnak, whom he says that he himself instructed, because of his own ability. After becoming Second Priest of Amun, he took charge of the treasury and the granary of Amun; Roma^c further states that Ramesses II rewarded him with the high-priesthood because of the prosperity of the treasury and granary. At the time of the graffito Roma^c was Second Priest of Amun, diligently taking care of the financial affairs of the temple of Karnak. The Chronicle of Osorkon at Karnak tells us that the temple of Amun possessed fields in the district of Hou, one of the termini of the ancient track from Thebes passing through the Wadi el-Hôl. In the Wadi el-Hôl we have the graffito of a grain accounting scribe of Amun named May (fig. 8), a man known

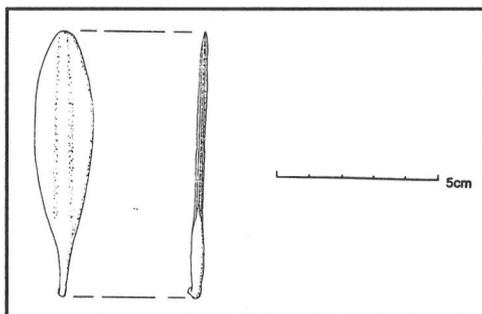


Figure 5. Gebel Roma^c. Bronze arrowhead of Seventeenth/Eighteenth Dynasty date from debris deposit

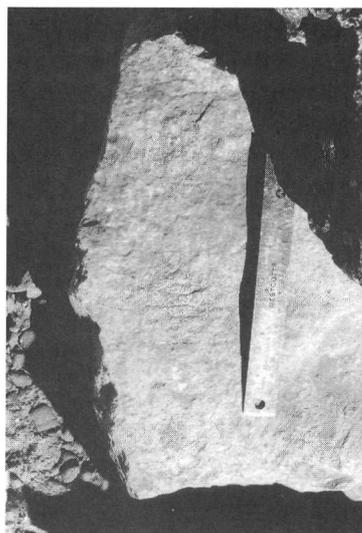


Figure 6. Photograph of the inscription of the second prophet of Amun, Roma^c

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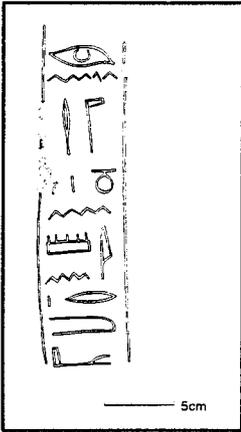


Figure 7. Epigraphic copy of the inscription of the second prophet of Amun, Roma

from the reign of Thutmosis III, and one may reasonably suggest that May was on his way to or from inspecting the grain of the domains of Amun at Hou. Roma was probably traveling the Farshût Road on his way to take care of matters in Hou — priestly, economic, or both. This personal involvement is consistent with his Gebel Silsilah stela, recording his supervision of work there. On the basis of the Gebel Roma graffito, the priest Roma appears in fact to have been as diligent and personally concerned with the affairs of Amun as he stresses in his inscriptions.

Roma-Roy appears to have been the Third Priest of Amun in Ramesses II's forty-sixth regnal year, appointed to the office of High Priest of Amun near the end of the reign of Ramesses II. One may thus suggest that the Gebel Roma graffito dates from between the forty-seventh regnal year of Ramesses II at the earliest, and about regnal year 66 at the latest, that is roughly between 1233 and 1213 BC. We cannot know what prompted Roma to write his title and name on the boulder. One may not be wrong in

suggesting that he enjoyed writing and seeing his proud new title, in which case the date would be earlier in the possible range, around the end of the third quarter of the thirteenth century BC.

On the statue CGC 42186, Roma says that he is acquainted with the "lay of the Abydene nome." Rather than referring only to the religious topography of Abydos, Roma's travels may have given him the personal acquaintance with the nome and its hinterland which Roma's statement implies.

Alamat Tal Road and Gebel Tjauti

Work on the Alamat Tal Road continued to concentrate on the documentation of the graffiti of Gebel Tjauti. As in the Wadi el-Hôl, grants from the Schiff Giorgini Foundation have enabled us to carry out a complete photographic documentation at the site (fig. 9), and we continue to make facsimile copies of the graffiti as well, with over 140 separate texts and scenes copied to date.

We copied a number of hieratic and Coptic inscriptions and with the indispensable help of Dr. Renée Friedman we studied and made final copies of the large protodynastic inscription identified last season. We can now report that this tableau is a memorial of the Naqada IId/IIIa ruler Horus Scorpion, apparently the Scorpion of tomb U-j at Abydos. The scene appears to record the Abydene conquest of the region of Naqada at the dawn of pharaonic history. The tableau incorporates both images and early hieroglyphic groups, juxtaposing a stork pulling up a

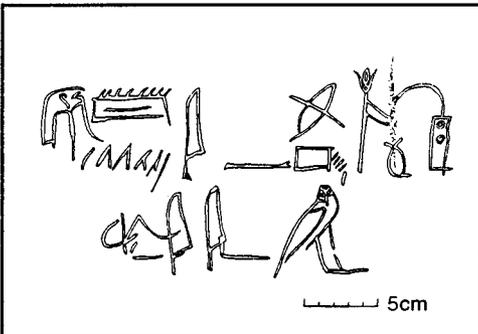


Figure 8. Wadi el-Hôl. Signature of the Eighteenth Dynasty "grain accounting scribe of Amun, May"

serpent, a group meaning “victory,” with a depiction of an armed man leading a bound captive on a rope. The figure of the ruler is identified by a falcon above his head, the earliest attestation of the use of the Horus title without the serekh as a reference to the ruler. The Gebel Tjauti protodynastic tableau is thus one of the earliest certain historical documents from ancient Egypt, a record of a military expedition at least as informative as the later Narmer palette. The tableau increases in interest when one realizes that it is a document relating to the earliest unification of Egypt, predating the famous palette of Narmer by at least a century.

The Scorpion tableau’s record of an Abydene army’s use of the ‘Alamat Tal Road to outflank Naqada during the initial unification of Egypt meshes well with what the late First Intermediate Period graffiti from Gebel Tjauti tell us about the Theban army’s use of the same road to attack the area of Abydos. Together with the red ink inscription of late Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period date referring to the king traveling along the ‘Alamat Tal Road on his way to Thebes (see the *1995/96 Annual Report*), these inscriptions show important royal and military activity on the road over at least 1,500 years, a remarkable continuity of use.

Another inscription connects the name of a royal domain, otherwise known from inscriptions originating in the cemetery of Abydos, with the serekh of Narmer (fig. 10). Nearby is a protodynastic depiction of the strange animal of the god Seth (fig. 11), the earliest certain depiction of this beast from the vicinity of Seth’s cult center at Ombos.

On a branch of the ‘Alamat Tal Road with a marked late predynastic/early dynastic ceramic presence, including Nubian A-Group pottery, we discovered a concentration of well-built huts, surrounded by sherds of protodynastic vessels, and a predynastic Egyptian campsite. At the latter site there are also a number of figural graffiti, including two large and well-drawn crocodiles (fig. 12), paralleling several graffiti of crocodiles at Gebel Tjauti (cf. fig. 13), and two falcons on serekhs (for one of which see fig. 14). Graffiti of crocodiles and fish at many of our graffiti sites allude to the Nile, and specifically — through the associations of the tilapia-fish and the Sobek crocodile — to the inundation. Graffiti of stars at a number of these sites, and the record of the observation of the heliacal rising of Sothis in an inscription at Gebel Tjauti (see the *1995/96 Annual Report*), suggest observations of the rising of Sothis, herald of the Inundation, at a number of desert sites. These fit well with inscriptions from the Wadi el-Ḥôl and elsewhere referring to the worship of the goddess Hathor. These seemingly disparate graffiti point towards a widespread desert worship of the returning goddess of the eye of the sun, Hathor-Bastet as the star Sothis, returning



Figure 9. Gebel Tjauti. Enhanced photograph of a late Middle Kingdom inscription; the vertical text reads “the weapons-carrying policeman Horemhat’s son, the officer of the royal bodyguard Amunaa.” Photograph gives some idea of the difficulties caused by the many palimpsests at the site. Photograph by Yarko Kobylecky

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atop the head of her father Re and signaling the coming of the flood waters, the rejuvenation of the world.



Figure 10. Gebel Tjauti. Name of a royal domain incorporating the serekh of Narmer

The serekhs and early kings' names at the two 'Alamat Tal Road graffiti sites show a close connection with names and serekhs known from the early tombs at Abydos. They support the implications of early cylinder seal art regarding a true established iconography for Egyptian art at a very early date. This encourages us to hope that we shall be able increasingly to understand and even read many pre- and protodynastic Egyptian representations and combinations of images. Correspondingly, the uniformity of late predynastic utilitarian vessels which we have been finding on the northernmost and southernmost routes under study suggests that the politically independent areas of the Qena Bend were already economically integrated or at least interdependent prior to the First Dynasty.

The gap between the protodynastic scenes and the Scorpion tableau and the abundance of Sixth through Seventeenth Dynasty graffiti is bridged by a number of Archaic inscriptions and an inscription datable palaeographically to the Second or Third Dynasty (fig. 15):

the royal acquaintance Iif

Our latest calculations on the date of the Gebel Tjauti Sothic observation suggest the morning of July 11, 1593–1590 BC. We are happy to report that no less an authority on Egyptian chronology than Professor Jürgen von Beckerath agrees with this dating, which fits the eleventh year of king Seweserenre of the Seventeenth Dynasty in a study he has prepared on that important but obscure dynasty.

We examined the ceramic remains associated with a string of twenty-five dry stone wind breaks in an elevated area just east of where the road drops down into the great Wadi Imran (fig. 16). These sherds support a Middle Kingdom date for the campsite and show a considerable uniformity of pottery forms. In fact, at most of the many Middle Kingdom campsites identified this season on various routes, certain forms occur with remarkable regularity — tall-necked silt jars with ovoid bodies, smaller globular jars of both silt and fine marl clay, and small red-slipped silt drinking cups. They may perhaps be the government issue equipment of the police patrols for which we have epigraphic evidence at Gebel Tjauti. Remains of enormous vessels (fig. 17d) at several spots may relate to the provisioning of patrols. Together with the graffiti, the huts and associated pottery are evidence for a wide-ranging and concerted Middle Kingdom effort to control the desert roads. They may be humble components of a system of desert surveillance, the linchpins of which were the great fortresses of the Second Cataract region. In fact, a close parallel

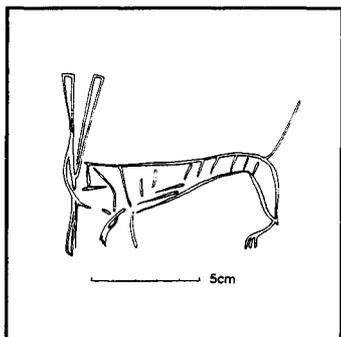


Figure 11. Gebel Tjauti. Early image of the Seth animal

to the twenty-five Middle Kingdom huts on the 'Alamat Tal Road is a similar string of contiguous huts with associated Middle Kingdom pottery on a spur of Gebel Sula in Nubia, part of the chain of patrols and communication between the fortresses of Mirgissa and Semna.

The profiles of robbers' trenches through the two towers near the beginning of the 'Alamat Tal tracks show that the structures were built of mudbricks (each approximately $8 \times 15 \times 32$ cm) laid in headers facing perpendicular to the line of the wall on each side. Each course of headers was stepped back along the outer edge of the wall, to create a tapering mudbrick base. The use of all headers, and the presence of a thick layer of mud mortar atop the desert surface as a base for the first course of bricks, are features characteristic of monumental mudbrick structures (the mud foundation would smooth out uneven areas on the rocky desert surface, and thereby prevent the lowest bricks from breaking over these irregularities under the weight of a heavy superstructure). Stones piled up around the bottoms of the tapering bases form a glacis. Considering the road leading to these remains, and comparing depictions from the tomb of Mahu at Amarna, we feel increasingly confident that these are the bases of twin towers, probably constructed in the Middle Kingdom and heavily used during the Thirteenth through Seventeenth Dynasties, which once guarded the caravan tracks, on or within a few meters of the nome boundary between Thebes and Koptos (as we know from the presence of the road inscription of Tjauti; see the *1995/96 Annual Report*). The closest parallel to the 'Alamat Tal towers — solid walls of brick with a buttressing dry stone glacis — is the east tower of the north gate of the fortress of Semna. We hope to salvage further details about the towers through excavation next season.

Darb Rayayna, Darb Ba'irat, and Subsidiary Tracks

On the Darb Rayayna we continued to examine the pottery associated with the dry stone altar mapped during previous seasons. The forms most closely associated with the altar belong to the late predynastic period (fig. 17a) and are thus perhaps to be associated with the serekhs of Horus Sekhen located at the graffiti site near the base of the Darb Rayayna. Together with the tableau of Horus Scorpion from Gebel Tjauti, this pro-

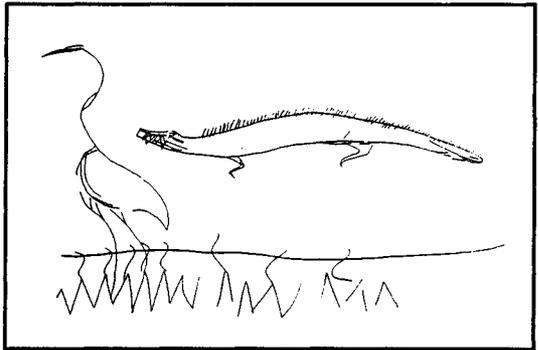


Figure 12. Branch of 'Alamat Tal Road. Inscription of large bird, crocodile, and range of smaller fowl

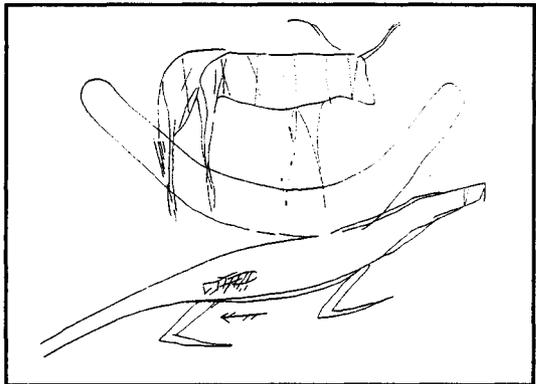


Figure 13. Gebel Tjauti. Image of a cow in a boat on the back of a crocodile, part of a large scene incorporating the serekh of Narmer at (note the fish in the crocodile's belly and the Min-symbol below)

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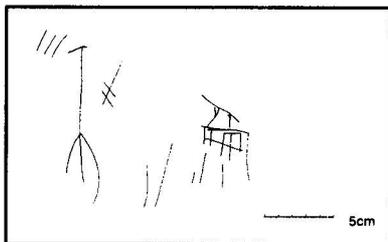


Figure 14. 'Alamat Tal Road. Falcon and serekh, with other symbols

vides evidence for early attempts at bringing the Western Desert under the control of Nile Valley rulers at the dawn of Egyptian history. An investigation of nearby branches of the Darb Rayayna reveal that during the pharaonic period there was one main ascent. We have also identified a protodynastic flint atelier near the desert altar and have continued to record the Coptic inscriptions near the beginning of the Darb Rayayna.

On a satellite track of the Darb Rayayna, we found a route in use during the pharaonic period, with particularly heavy use during pre- and protodynastic times — evidenced by Egyptian as well as imported Early Bronze Age I Palestinian pottery — and during the Middle Kingdom. Near the ascent of this road, we discovered a small “hut city” of more than forty rough stone structures, many originating during the Middle Kingdom. Along this and other southern routes we have found a number of campsites with very early pottery of Nubian origin. On another subsidiary track of the Darb Rayayna we located two cave-like shelters, with stone walls added in front, each containing early predynastic rock carvings, many of cattle. In one area these carvings are pecked, a technique more common and successful in sandstone graffiti. This pecking suggests that the artist may have been more accustomed to the use of sandstone and implies that he came from the south, perhaps a Nubian cattle herder. Clearance of the sanded floors of these shelters may reveal habitation levels and allow one to say more about this very ancient traveling rock artist. Further examination of ceramic remains on the Darb Ba'irat has revealed a not inconsiderable Middle Kingdom presence on that road. Next season, we hope to follow this route to the point where it joins the road beyond Gebel Antef.



Figure 15. Gebel Tjauti. Second or Third Dynasty signature of “the royal acquaintance jif”

We can honestly say that this season has been our most productive yet. Thanks to the support of the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation, every inscription in the Wadi el-Hôl and at Gebel Tjauti is now recorded photographically in some form. This is an extremely important milestone to have reached, especially in light of increased activities in the desert near the Wadi el-Hôl. The full documentation of inscriptions and scenes is far from complete, but we have continued to make good progress with our facsimile copies. We continue to identify evidence that is ever more tantalizing in age and distribution. The



Figure 16. 'Alamat Tal Road. Niva “Natasha” near a group of twenty-five stone huts, apparently the base of Middle Kingdom patrolmen

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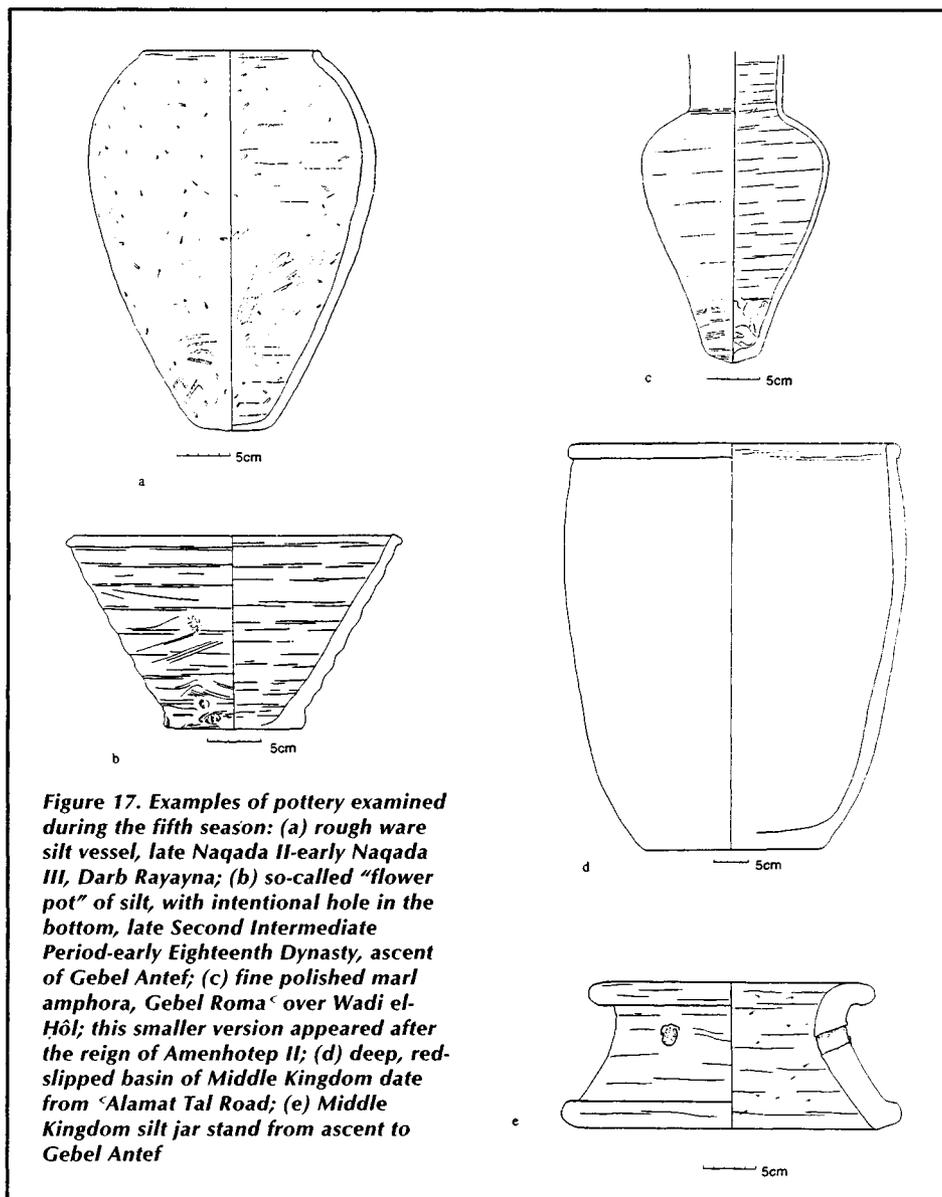


Figure 17. Examples of pottery examined during the fifth season: (a) rough ware silt vessel, late Naqada II-early Naqada III, Darb Rayayna; (b) so-called "flower pot" of silt, with intentional hole in the bottom, late Second Intermediate Period-early Eighteenth Dynasty, ascent of Gebel Antef; (c) fine polished marl amphora, Gebel Roma over Wadi el-Hôl; this smaller version appeared after the reign of Amenhotep II; (d) deep, red-slipped basin of Middle Kingdom date from 'Alamat Tal Road; (e) Middle Kingdom silt jar stand from ascent to Gebel Antef

ancient presence on the desert routes of the Qena Bend began earlier and was more widespread and of greater significance than has been recognized; there is a great deal to be learned from this stimulating area of study.

We have continued to describe our discoveries in lectures, and publications of important inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hôl and Gebel Tjauti are now in press (see John Coleman Darnell, *Individual Research*).

The members of the Theban Desert Road Survey during the fifth season were John Coleman Darnell, Director, and Deborah Darnell, Egyptologist. We were

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joined again by Mr. Ramadan Ahmed Aly as representative of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and we thank him again for his good humor and companionship. We thank Dr. Ali Hassan, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, without whose interest and support our work would not be possible. We are also very grateful to Dr. Mohammed es-Saghir, Supervisor of Antiquities for Upper Egypt, and we appreciate the assistance and encouragement he continues to offer. Many thanks go to Dr. Mohammed Nasr, Director of Antiquities for Qurna, for his support. We thank Chief Inspector of Qurna Ibrahim Suleiman and Chief Inspector Mr. Bakhit for their help. We offer special thanks to Mr. Abu el-Qasem and Mr. Hosni, Mr. Hafiz, and officer Madawan from Dendera, and all of the many policemen of Qurna, for their patience and assistance when they have accompanied us on our more far-flung expeditions. Again, Helen and Jean Jacquet of the Karnak-Nord expedition offered valuable advice on ceramic analysis, surveying, and architecture. Thanks go to Dr. Henri Riad, resident Egyptologist at Chicago House, and to Sitt Madelein el-Mallah, Director of the Luxor Museum, for continuing encouragement and interest in our work. We thank Hatem el Koury, General Manager, Just Egypt for his help in the purchase of the ladder shown in fig. 1.

We thank Terry Walz, Executive Director, and Mark Easton, Cairo Director of the American Research Center in Egypt, which supported our epigraphic work through a grant from the United States Information Agency. As always, we thank Amira Khattab and Ibrahim Sadek of the American Research Center in Egypt for their friendship and essential help. We are grateful to Professor William Sumner, Director of the Oriental Institute, and Dr. Raymond Johnson, Field Director of the Epigraphic Survey, for their encouragement, and to Thomas Urban for his advice on publication preparation. We thank Dr. Pamela Rose for generously sharing information on pottery fabrics and Dr. Renée Friedman, Dr. Irmgard Hein, and Dr. Colin Hope for continuing to offer expert comments on a number of sherds and vessels. Dr. Stan Hendrickx has provided fascinating commentary on the Horus Scorpion tableau, of which artist William Schenck produced the excellent preliminary drawing. Dr. Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, Dr. Stephen Quirke, and Dr. Richard Parkinson have offered observations on the Wadi el-Ḥōl literary graffito. Dr. Lisa Giddy has provided welcome archaeological advice and guidance for which we are very grateful. We will ever be thinking of ways to repay the debt of gratitude we owe to Dr. Renée Friedman for contributing her extensive knowledge of early iconography to the Gebel Tjauti publication and sharing the excitement as the full significance of the material became apparent.

Our work could not continue without the private support of the following individuals, for whose thoughtfulness and generosity we are extremely grateful: Ms. Marjorie Fisher-Aronow, Barbara Mertz, Carlotta Maher, Crennan Ray, Alexandra Varga, Justin and Deborah Doyle, and John and Joan Westley.