

MARTHA HOPE RHOADS BELL

APRIL 27, 1941–NOVEMBER 12, 1991

Martha Hope Rhoads Bell, independent scholar and wife of Oriental Institute Egyptologist Lanny Bell, was killed outright shortly after midnight on November 12, 1991, in a fiery car crash on I-78 in New Jersey. Born in Philadelphia on April 27, 1941, she was half a century, half a year, and half a month old when she died. Her funeral was attended by friends and colleagues from all over the Northeast; and she was buried with fresh flowers from the Chicago House garden strewn over her coffin—her sister Mary had been traveling in Luxor at the time of Martha’s death. Killed with Martha was good friend Dr. Gerald M. Quinn, Classical Greek scholar and Dean of Fordham University’s College at Lincoln Center in New York City. After attending a performance of *Così fan tutte* in New York, they were driving to Center Valley, Pennsylvania, where they were to help celebrate Martha’s mother’s eighty-first birthday that very day. Gerry and Martha had become fast friends in 1966, while they were attending the American School of Classical Studies in Athens; he visited Chicago House in 1983 and again in 1989 and had helped identify some graffiti high up on the Eighteenth Dynasty facade of Luxor Temple. Martha’s mother, Oriental Institute member Elsie Teetsel Rhoads, entered the hospital on the evening of November 13th, and she died there just over a month later on December 14th.

Martha had just been awarded her Ph.D. in Classical Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania on May 21, 1991; the title of her dissertation is “The Tutankhamun Burnt Group from Gurob, Egypt: Bases for the Absolute Chronology of LH III A and B.” Martha’s unique ability to handle both Aegean and Egyptian evidence in her extensive work with Mycenaean imported pottery and imitations found in Egypt and Nubia, and her research on Egyptian-Mycenaean interconnections in the New Kingdom and their implications for chronology have long been familiar to Egyptologists; e.g., Keeper Vivian Davies’ acknowledgment in his preface to Stephen Quirke and Jeffrey Spencer, eds., *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1992), p. 9: “Other participants include ... the late Dr Martha Bell, who provided advice and information on Aegean connections” Martha had submitted a three-year grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the completion and publication of her life’s work, the documentation of Mycenaean pottery from Egypt; the project had received very good preliminary reviews from the referees, before the application had to

be withdrawn. Martha is receiving excellent notices of her major article, “An Armchair Excavation of KV 55,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1990): 97–137; e.g., Jim Allen, “Akhenaten’s ‘Mystery’ Coregent and Successor,” in *Amarna Letters: Essays on Ancient Egypt, c. 1390–1310 BC*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: KMT Communications, Fall 1991), p. 79: “Despite the tomb’s undisturbed state, however, its contents were in poor condition (fig. 7) and the excavation was not well recorded. As a result, Egyptologists have spent years trying to reconstruct the history of this tomb and the identity of its occupants. Martha Bell’s recent ‘armchair excavation’ now seems to have settled the first question once and for all.” The results of her study of a jeweler’s hoard excavated at Amarna, containing a silver Hittite divine figurine, published as “A Hittite Pendant from Amarna,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 90 (1986): 145–51, are featured in Barry Kemp’s *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 244–46. As she developed into a mature scholar, she turned more and more to Egyptologically oriented research—the conclusions of her still incompletely published study on the iconographic signification of the floral collar, the *wšḥ ny mꜣꜥ-ḥrw*, for instance, are utilized in the exhibition catalogue, *Egypt’s Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and His World*, edited by Arielle Kozloff, Betsy Bryan, and Lawrence Berman (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 411, 435.

Lanny and Martha both entered the University of Pennsylvania as graduate students in the fall of 1963, and they were married on September 22, 1968. More than half of their married life of twenty-three years was spent focused on the Epigraphic Survey and Chicago House, its rambling Egyptian headquarters in Luxor—its reorganization, its refurbishing, its maintenance, its running, its future, the welfare of its staff, its public face, and its finances—during Lanny’s twelve-year tenure as Field Director (1977–89), stressful years characterized by a constant stream of visitors, capped by the massive and successful fundraising effort of their last few years there. Martha’s role in the operation, and the respect which she gained from the Egyptian staff, is measured in part by her colloquial Arabic title *el-Sitt el-Mudira*, “The Lady Directress” (rather than *sitt el-Mudir*, “the director’s wife”). Only the second wife of a Field Director also to be a professional in the field of archaeology, Martha was naturally included in the expression of gratitude of the international community which was published in Tony Leahy’s editorial foreword to the *British Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 75 (1989): x, at the time of Lanny’s “retirement” from Chicago House: “Change has also come to Chicago House in Luxor. After a long, successful and, no doubt, exhausting period as Director of its Epigraphic Survey, Dr Lanny Bell has ‘retired’ to a professorship at the Oriental Institute, Chicago. Scholars visiting Chicago House were sure of a generous reception from Lanny and Martha, however

trying the times" Somewhat imprecisely, Colin Osman in a footnote to his article on "Antonio Beato, Photographer of the Nile," in *History of Photography: An International Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1 (January–March 1990; London, New York, Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis, Ltd.): 111, also speaks of "Directors Lanny and Martha Bell of The Epigraphic Society, Luxor." A paragraph on Martha's life and work will appear in the forthcoming third edition of *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, revised and edited by Morris Bierbrier.

Besides a tremendous international outpouring of grief, sympathy, and personal remembrances of Martha, masses were performed for the repose of her soul, and crystal pendulums were swung to clear her energies; Gideon Bibles have also been placed in hotel rooms for her, and trees have been planted in Israel. Lectures were dedicated to her at the Southern California and Washington, D.C., chapters of the American Research Center in Egypt. Many other gifts have been presented in her name: among them contributions to the Salvation Army and to Lindsey Wilson College in Columbia, Kentucky; contributions have been made to the Epigraphic Survey, the Giza Project, and the Demotic Dictionary Project at the Oriental Institute; in addition, donations have been made to a special memorial fund established at the Oriental Institute which Lanny will use to help defray the costs of publishing Martha's dissertation and her other research.

The forthcoming *Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne*, vol. 3, edited by Pascale Ballet (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale), will be dedicated to Martha; and a memorial volume, which will contain articles by many of her closest friends, is being prepared by Dr. Jacke Phillips of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, with the assistance of Dr. Bruce Williams of Chicago. Many tributes to Martha have already been published. The *Oriental Institute Research Archives Acquisition List*, No. 1, for August, September, and October 1991, was "Dedicated to the Memory of our Friend and Colleague, Martha Rhoads Bell," by editors Charles E. Jones, Terry Wilfong, and Paul Cobb. Kozloff, Bryan, and Berman (eds.) relate in the acknowledgments to *Egypt's Dazzling Sun*, p. xix: "Visits to Amenhotep III's favorite city and ours, Luxor, were always made even more fruitful and happier thanks to the scholarship, hospitality, and friendship of the directors and staff of Chicago House. Above all, we think of Lanny Bell and the late Martha Bell, whom we greatly miss" Renée Friedman and Barbara Adams (eds.) also include Martha in their preface and acknowledgments to *The Followers of Horus: Studies Dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman 1944–1990* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1992), p. ii: "One particular contributor, Michael's distant relative [they shared a Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, and both are buried in Allentown, Pennsylvania], Martha Bell, was unable to finish her paper before her own untimely death in November, 1991. She and her

husband, Lanny Bell, often provided hospitality and good cheer to Mike and members of the expedition in their capacity as former directors of Chicago House, Luxor. She mourned Michael deeply, and we in turn mourn her and the absence of both of them in our lives and work. With their passing, the world has become an infinitely less interesting and less exciting place.” And once more in the editorial foreword to the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992): x–xi, Tony Leahy offers the following appreciation: “Saddest, because least expected, was the death at only 50 in a traffic accident on 12 November 1991 of Dr Martha Bell, a specialist in the New Kingdom and especially Egypt’s relations with Mycenae. Many will remember with affection the warmth and vivacity with which she and her husband, Professor Lanny Bell, made Chicago House in Luxor such a welcoming place for so many years.”

Lanny Bell