

## THEBAN DESERT ROAD SURVEY

**John Coleman Darnell and Deborah Darnell**

During the sixth season we continued to work at all of the sites within our concession and are pleased to report the discovery of another major ancient track, unknown until now, with three concentrations of rock inscriptions and rock art (one of these sites stretches for over one kilometer across the gebel). In addition, we discovered four additional inscription sites and several occupation areas at other locations in the northern portion of the Qena Bend. These finds support a number of important historical conclusions we have made on the basis of the inscriptions we discovered in 1995 at Gebel Tjauti. Three weeks of excavations (fig. 1) at caravan stops on the main Farshût Road produced a wealth of data and material, including two hieratic ostraca from the Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> site on the high plateau over the Wadi el-Ḥôl, one in situ in an Eighteenth Dynasty stratum. The tremendous amount of new and varied evidence encountered this season demonstrates ever more strongly the importance of continuing this exciting research into ancient Egyptian activity in the desert west of the Nile.

### **Gebel Antef**

We continued to examine the area of the Seventeenth Dynasty chapel of Antef V, dedicated to the Abydene Osiris. Thorough surface survey of the area of cairns and dry stone huts on the west end of the Gebel Antef promontory revealed considerable amounts of Nubian Pan-Grave pottery (cf. fig. 16c: Pan-Grave bowl from Darb Rayayna) and Seventeenth Dynasty Egyptian storage jars. As we suspected earlier, these results strongly imply that the area was a provisioning site for Medjay patrols.

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*Figure 1. Last day of season, 130° Fahrenheit in shade at Gebel Qarn el-Gir base camp. Back row (left to right): four policemen, Abdu Abdullah Hassan, Deborah Darnell, John Darnell, policeman, and Yarko Kobylecky; middle row: two policemen; front row: three policemen, Aly Mahmoud Ibrahim (holding tea), and Ahmed el-Tayyib Abd el-Basat*

The Medjay were operating in the Theban area during the Second Intermediate Period and appear to have had cattle herds in the area of Gebelein during the Thirteenth Dynasty. The Thirteenth Dynasty Papyrus Boulaq 18 tells us that the Theban court was granting Egyptian provisions to visiting Medjay and we appear now to have sherds from these shipments.

### Wadi el-Ḥôl Inscriptions

We continued to document and study the rock inscriptions and rock art in the Wadi el-Ḥôl and have now made facsimile copies of over 275 separate scenes and inscriptions in the four major sectors of this site. During the fifth season we were able to carry out complete photographic documentation with the support of grants from the American and Swiss branches of the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation. We also discovered another area of rock inscriptions near the Wadi el-Ḥôl and identified one of the earliest pharaonic inscriptions in the Wadi el-Ḥôl, nothing less than the signature of Monthuhotep III as a prince (fig. 2):

Beloved of the good god, Nebhepetreˁ:  
the son of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Monthuhotep;  
the retainer Monthuhotep

The orthography of *hp.t* shows that this inscription was executed before or around the time of the final unification of Egypt. The title “son of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt” for the usual “king’s son” is unusual, although “daughter of the

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king of Upper and Lower Egypt” is well attested; in his depiction from the mortuary temple of his father at Deir el-Bahari, only the word “son” of prince Monthuhotep’s title survives. The prince may here be insisting on his father’s claim to rule over the entire

land. The similar title “mother of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt” was employed in reference to kings who ascended the throne after a period of disunity. By calling himself “son of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt” the prince Monthuhotep elevates his own position and reinforces his status by emphasizing his father’s rule over the Two Lands.

On the basis of our discovery of a stela of the high-priest king Menkheperre at Gebel Antef in 1992, we know that the main Farshût Road was known as “the road of horses.” This was augmented by our third season discovery in the Wadi el-Hôl of the pharaonic graffito of a man riding a horse. During the sixth season we recorded the signature of a stable master (fig. 3):

Chief of the Stable “Its-Fetchings-Are-Frequent,”  
Pa-n-Any

Taken together these bits of information strongly support the conclusion that the main Farshût Road was, in antiquity, a major postal “pony express” route.

Another inscription discovered this season depicts and labels an unfortunately unnamed “chief superintendent of the scales of Amun.” During our second season we recorded the name of a Thutmocide grain accounting scribe of Amun in the Wadi el-Hôl; the presence of the chief of the scales at the same location suggests that these men may not have been passing through the Wadi el-Hôl on their way to work, but that they may perhaps have been exercising their offices in or near the Wadi el-Hôl itself.

### Caravan Debris Deposit

In front of a rock inscription at section A we made an emergency excavation into a large mound of organic materials and pottery. The deposit was heavily vandalized by some sort of earthmover during summer 1997. Though thinner than those at Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> and Gebel Qarn el-Gir, this deposit is similar to the larger deposits in composition (pottery, dung, organic remains), and date range: debris appears to have begun to accumulate significantly during the Seventeenth/early Eighteenth Dynasty, continuing into the late Ramesside period/Twentieth Dynasty, over more sparse Middle Kingdom remains.

Figure 2. Signature of Prince Monthuhotep and follower; Wadi el-Hôl

Figure 3. Inscription of Chief of the Stable at Wadi el-Hôl

## ARCHAEOLOGY

### Burial and Storage Caves

At the entrance to the primary pharaonic branch of the Wadi el-Hôl, overlooking the ancient caravan tracks, we examined several caves used at various times during antiquity. Although they had been repeatedly robbed (a fragment of newspaper in robbers' debris dated one of these desecrations to 1976), we recovered much interesting information.

The caves appear to have been used initially for predynastic burials. From debris remaining in the caves, and from material recovered from our sifting of an old robbers' spoil heap, we can say that at least one adult and a juvenile were buried in the caves. There were also dog bones, having a patina and state of preservation identical to those of the human remains. They were interred with a number of leather garments of varying thicknesses, several of the fragments preserving the threads with which various pieces were stitched together, some pieces preserving a folded rim of leather. We found fragments of a quartz palette, retaining the green stain of the malachite for eye makeup once ground there; a portion of a large shell probably originally contained a quantity of malachite for the deceased (compare Junker's discoveries at Kubaniya south). A number of white feathers also appear to have belonged to the initial burials, along with many fragments of black, handmade pottery, one fragment of a bottle neck preserving white filled, incised triangles as decoration. These features suggest a predynastic or Nubian origin for the burials, and the shape of the black pottery most closely resembles that known as Tasian. The Tasian culture, unlike the contemporary predynastic Egyptian culture, made use of stones other than slate for palettes. As a preliminary conclusion we can suggest that we have here a Tasian burial, at a point on a Western Desert Road suggesting that the Tasian culture entered the Nile Valley from elsewhere. The use of quartz for our Tasian palette suggests a Nubian connection to the Tasians, or at least to the Tasians buried in the caves on the Farshût Road. The probable presence of a dog buried with the people would also be consistent with Nubian desert dwellers (compare the canine burials associated with the Nubian Pan Graves of Hou). The location of the burials and the use of quartz for the palette lends support to Renée Friedman's hypothesis that the "Tasians" were not a chronologically distinct culture, but rather a nomadic people with whom Badarian and Amratan cultures interacted, just as later Egyptians did with desert-dwelling Nubians.

At a later date the southernmost cave was used for pottery storage. That cave has a second, narrower opening towards the southeast, and even when the noonday heat in the wadi surpassed 130° Fahrenheit, a cool breeze could be felt blowing through this cave. This appears to have suggested the use of this branch of the caves as a cooling area, and here we found fragments of Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom pots, and many well-preserved mud jar sealings.

There were also a few later sherds in the caves. In the robbers' spoils that we excavated outside and below the southern cave, the various strata through which the despoilers had dug were preserved, there in an inverted order. On the basis of the excavation and sifting of this debris we can suggest that the burials, though perhaps robbed, were basically intact at least into the Roman period, as the Roman sherds underlay the burial remains in the robbers' heap. The horrible crushing of the bodies and grave goods, and their dispersal throughout the caves, is most likely a result of modern desecrations of the site.

## Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup>

During the fifth season we discovered an enormous, stratified deposit of pottery and organic material on the main Thebes to Hou route, on the high desert over the Wadi el-Ḥôl. We named the site Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup>, on the basis of a neatly cut hieroglyphic inscription we found on a large boulder built into one of the dry stone huts at the site: "Made by the second prophet of Amun, Roma<sup>c</sup>."

At some time in the recent past the site was heavily dug through in several places. This season we made a preliminary plan of the occupation area and opened a trench in the northeast portion of the main stratified deposit. Our initial excavation at Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> revealed sixteen distinct strata, most of New Kingdom through Twenty-first Dynasty date. Levels ten to fifteen date to the early Eighteenth Dynasty; in level sixteen, true Second Intermediate forms appear, and at least one more layer of organic material and potsherds exists between this level and the gebel surface. Based on what we can see from the numerous thieves' cuttings, the main deposit probably began during the Seventeenth/early Eighteenth Dynasty, overlaying a thin Middle Kingdom level. This coincides with our finds at section A in the Wadi el-Ḥôl and at Gebel Qarn el-Gir. As at those sites, the deposit consists of organic matter and sherds, usually in mixed layers differentiated by rain and sand lenses, with occasional layers of densely packed, finely crushed sherds. In addition, the Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> deposit enjoys the distinction of several gypsum plaster floors, at least two of Eighteenth Dynasty date, and one from the Ramesside period.

The plaster floors are composed of greater and lesser amounts of plaster, with small stones and pieces of ground pottery, forming a sort of *opus mixtum*. The largest plaster layer on the east ends on the north without any trace of a wall or plaster structure. This implies that the main purpose of the floor was to provide a level and sealed surface. As the floor itself, and not an associated structure, appears to have been the goal of the construction, the gypsum layers may be seen to complement other strata. Several layers are composed almost wholly of finely ground and densely packed sherds, apparently a floor level. The gypsum layers and dense sherd strata are perhaps two different means of attaining the same goal — a hard and relatively dry floor.

The excavation produced two ostraca: one a sherd of a marl vessel (no earlier than late Seventeenth/early Eighteenth Dynasty in date) from a spoil heap, the other a piece of limestone in situ in an Eighteenth Dynasty stratum. The longer, ceramic ostrakon appears to be a grain account; the shorter limestone ostrakon, though badly faded, appears to give the name of a royal functionary. Further work on these ostraca may, we hope, yield additional evidence regarding the activities at Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup>. We know that letters were almost certainly sent along the road of horses (see above), but notations on pottery and stone suggest notes sent no great distance, if not in fact personal memoranda. In both cases the conclusion one draws is that the area of Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> and the Wadi el-Ḥôl was home to a staff of officials tracking at least particular shipments of grain along the road.

At the site we also found a small portion of a sandstone monument, with fragments of two vertical columns of hieroglyphs, mentioning "for your *ka*" and "Amun-Re." This suggests the presence of votive monuments at the Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> terminus of the high desert portion of the road, comparable to those we discovered at Gebel Antef, the other, Theban terminus of the high desert stretch of the route.

## ARCHAEOLOGY



Figure 4. John Darnell recording rock inscriptions at Gebel Qarn el-Gir outpost

### Gebel Qarn el-Gir

Near the northern tip of Gebel Qarn el-Gir is another large deposit of pottery and organic remains, similar to those on Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> and in front of section A in the Wadi el-Hôl. When we discovered the site in 1994 the central area had been gouged out by an earthmover; since then additional thieves' diggings have appeared. Two seasons ago small palm stumps were planted next to the site and signs were erected nearby, claiming the area as part of a farm. After completing photography and basic initial copies of the inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hôl, now badly damaged and many completely destroyed as a result of continued vandalism, we were able to devote more attention to the Qarn el-Gir deposit this season. We took an emergency column down through the mound in November to preserve a representative sample of each strata. The deposit consists of seventeen easily identifiable strata, each level composed of organic material and pottery, the ratios of each often varying markedly between one level and the next. An initial analysis of the material by archaeobotanist René Cappers has revealed plant remains including (but not restricted to):

Emmer wheat (*Triticum dicocum*); barley (hulled) (*Hordeum vulgare*); lentil (*lens culinaris*); cucumber (*Cucumis sp.*); watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*); date (*Phoenix dactylifera*); fig (*Ficus sp.*); Acacia (*Acacia sp. Gramineae*); Colocynth (*Citrullus colocynthus*).

Many of the levels preserved large quantities of wheat and barley, which were by far the most prevalent of the plant remains.

During the extended period of work in May, we made a plan of the site and opened a larger test excavation. We were able to study and clear this section down through the upper thirteen strata, reaching early Eighteenth Dynasty levels. As at Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> and the site in front of Wadi el-Hôl section A, the late Ramesside period/Twenty-first Dynasty was well represented in strata alternately composed of

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debris discarded in an apparently natural fashion, with sherds of various types and sizes, and layers of huge quantities of (primarily silt) potsherds crushed to a small, relatively uniform size. These thick pottery layers might have been laid down intentionally to seal off fills of organic trash. Alternatively, they may represent the shoveled “bedding” upon which animals stood (some sherds in these levels show evidence of having received a coating of dung still in its moist state). The contour lines we recorded suggest that the mound grew naturally through deposition of debris, and there is no evidence of leveling and formal plaster floors as at Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup>.

In light of the inscriptions from the Wadi el-Ḥôl and Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup>, one may suggest an interpretation of the remains at Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup> and Gebel Qarn el-Gir. The grain accounting scribe in the Wadi el-Ḥôl and the presence of Roma<sup>ϕ</sup> at Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup> suggest the shipment of grain from the fields of Amun at Hou for the divine offerings of Amun at Karnak. The presence of the chief of the scales of Amun in the Wadi el-Ḥôl also suggests that some weighing of grain might have taken place at some point(s) along the road. The ostracon from Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup> further supports the image of a permanent or semi-permanent staff tracking grain shipments at Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup>, and perhaps in the Wadi el-Ḥôl. We continue to amass a huge collection of oasis pottery from the main Hou-Luxor road, suggesting that this was the preferred, perhaps even officially sanctioned, Theban route for long distance travel and commerce to the west. These facts suggest that some form of customs center and weighing station(s) might have existed at Qarn el-Gir, the junction of the Theban route and the oasis roads, and at Gebel Roma<sup>ϕ</sup>/the Wadi el-Ḥôl, the back door of Thebes, the last point of easy control of traffic on the road before reaching Gebel Antef, overlooking Western Thebes (fig. 4).

North of the caravan stop we discovered yet another concentration of rock inscriptions, both predynastic and pharaonic. The latter were of early Middle Kingdom date and included several names and titles (fig. 5) as well as two longer compositions in vertical columns of text. The longest and perhaps most important inscription is an offering formula for a scribe Mereritef, in the two vertical columns of which a number of deities are invoked. Mereritef also employs an otherwise untested toponym to refer to the desert filling the Qena Bend. In a short wadi near the graffiti shelf we located a pharaonic campsite, yielding a wide range of pottery, including Sixth Dynasty forms.

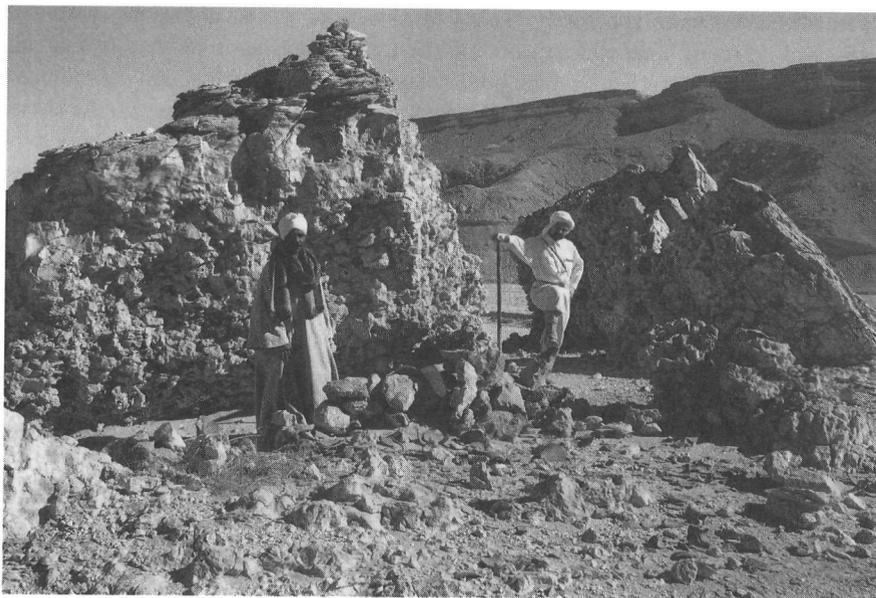
### ϕAlamat Tal Road and Gebel Tjauti

The ϕAlamat Tal Road continues to be a fruitful route to study in terms of archaeological evidence of ancient use (fig. 6). Highlights of this season’s surveys include more clusters of dry stone huts, constructed at strategic points along the road where the topography allows passage to be controlled. The most dramatic group of instal-



Figure 5. Inscriptions of “w<sup>ϕ</sup>b-priest Renseneb” and his “fa[ther] Antef” at Gebel Qarn el-Gir

## ARCHAEOLOGY



**Figure 6. Huts at ancient campsite near middle of route connecting Gebel Tjauti and Dominion Behind Thebes**

lations occurs just south and east of Gebel Tjauti, where the narrowing wadi is flanked by moderately high bluffs, atop one of which a low but impressive dry stone bastioned fortification was built (fig. 7). On either side of the wadi, “hut” semicircles (with highest portion built against the northwest wind) occur in low wadi arms, but on high points are “shooting” semicircles (with highest portion built towards the southeast, facing the mouth of the wadi), from behind which a seated archer could observe passing caravans — or shoot at advancing soldiers — with safety.

Often, the huts we encounter are completely deflated, with surface remains of varying dates. In the hope of exposing living floors contemporaneous with the hut walls, a series of sanded-up huts in the middle desert portion of the road were cleared. The results confirmed the perception that many of these huts were constructed in the Middle Kingdom: a number of ceramic vessels of that date were found in situ, in some cases along with their mud-stoppers. In one hut, many fragments of ostrich egg shell were found — perhaps belonging to a Nubian ostrich-egg “canteen.”

This season we discovered a number of pot drops on what must have been one of the earliest paths of the ‘Alamat Tal Road. These late predynastic vessels (cf. fig. 16a) are the earliest ceramic evidence we have yet found in the immediate vicinity of ancient Thebes. They are paralleled only by finds at el-Tarif, together with which they comprise the first archaeological record of the post-Neolithic inhabitants of Thebes.

Excavations during the sixth season at fortification towers near the beginning of the road revealed important details regarding the construction of the towers (figs. 8–9). The structures were roughly circular, with diameters of ca. 11 m, built of mudbrick, the lower courses surrounded by stones. Such construction recalls certain

features of the Second Cataract fortresses in Nubia. The interiors of the existing mounds, much disturbed by water erosion and modern vandalism, reveal bricks occasionally intermingled with large, rough stones, a form of construction suggestive of the rubble-filled brick chambers in the buildings at Deir el-Ballas, and the much later and larger, though similar, Palace of Apries at Memphis.

The inner masses of the two towers were laid in at times slightly overlapping courses of headers. The inner bulk of the internal headers rests on the bare gebel surface, but towards the outside the bricks lie atop a level of mud plaster. The brickwork appears to have been laid with some care around the perimeters of the structures, with the interior of these girdle walls at times filled with apparently already-damaged bricks and larger stones and small boulders from the desert surface. The sides of the square cores received an added brickwork in the form of a conical slice, to give the brickwork its final form of a round base with sides sloping in to the top. The exterior of the brick structures then received a coating of mud plaster, mixed in an area to the east of the north tower, with large admixtures of limestone, sand, and gebel surface pebbles and flints. Over this coating of the glacis, two layers of large desert boulders were piled. A close parallel for the construction of the 'Alamat Tal towers — solidly built walls of brick with a buttressing dry stone glacis — is the east tower of the north gate of the fortress of Semna.

The bricks of the two towers frequently contain a considerable amount of pottery. We have examined several bricks and found many to contain fragments of late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period/early New Kingdom pottery; there is every reason to believe that the pottery in the bricks should date essentially from about the time of the making of the bricks. The ancient gebel surface beneath the outer bricks of the southern tower yielded sherds of many periods, the latest being pieces of large Seventeenth Dynasty storage jars. These findings are supported by the presence on the surface of the gebel around the bases of the towers of large quantities of sherds belonging to Seventeenth Dynasty storage jars.

The mud plaster coating covering the brick structures and underlying the stone glacis is extremely hard, stronger, and more difficult to cut through than the mudbricks themselves. This coating contained a large proportion of limestone and

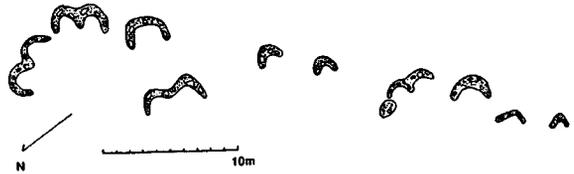


Figure 7. Hill fortress at narrowing of wadi before Gebel Tjauti

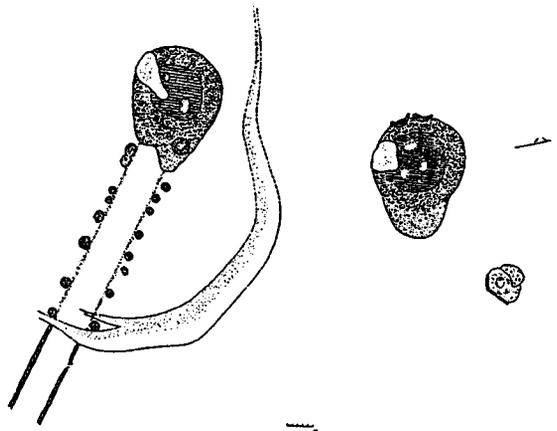
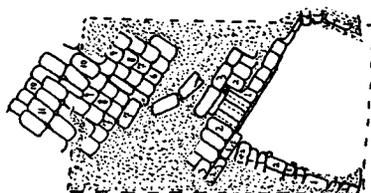


Figure 8. Plan of two towers and military road; Seventeenth Dynasty

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**Figure 9. Overhead view of cutting through outer portion of north tower, showing overlap of levels and some basics of construction techniques (numbers on bricks indicate courses with 1 being lowest)**

flint, some of the latter of considerable size. These admixtures suggest a local source for the mud plaster coating. This source appears in fact to be the area of mud and broken mudbricks to the northeast of the north tower. In this area the ancient builders appear to have reduced broken bricks to silt, and to have mixed this with eroded limestone from the gebel surface, with the inevitable stone inclusions. The L-shaped line of stones to the east and south of this area was apparently intended to prevent the silt from blowing away in the prevailing north wind. The in-

clusion of limestone powder with the alluvial mud made a strong mortar suitable for the outer layer of bricks. A similar mud mixing area, there a brick pit, was discovered along the boat hauling road near the fortress of Mirgissa.

If these towers were constructed in a manner similar to the two models cited above, and the Beni Hasan forts, one might suggest that they were entered by ladders which gave access to second floors. The interiors below the upper door might have been basements for storage, if not solid mudbrick. The tops probably had overhanging battlements of wood, perhaps with protective crenellations at the tops, and murder holes through the overhang. A rough stone glacis provided a modicum of protection from sappers. Most of the superstructures has disappeared, and the erosion of wind and water, much in evidence on the surviving bricks, would account for much of this loss. The mining away of the bricks for reuse could easily account for the loss of the rest, possibly even at an early date. As it is, the ground to the east and north of the northernmost structure appears to be covered by the melted remains of mudbricks.

Roughly contemporary representations of the descendants of these towers survive in the tomb of Mahu at Amarna, where they are shown filled with the supplies and arms of the desert city's patrols. The closest parallel for the surviving remains of these two towers appears to be a site at Abkenissa, near Amara West in Nubia, a fortified post with associated Middle Nubian and New Kingdom Egyptian remains atop a natural hill, approximating the glacis of the 'Alamat Tal towers.

Towers were common in later, Ptolemaic Egypt, a standard feature in farm house complexes. These towers were of both square and round shapes, with high interiors, and often elevated entrances. These features suggest that the *πύργοι* of the Hellenistic and Roman periods are the direct descendants of the earlier fortification towers. At the time of the Napoleonic expedition into Egypt, such towers were yet in use. In the *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, vol. 1 (2nd ed.; Paris, 1822), fig. 74, no. 6, there are shown two "tourelles contre les arabes." The towers are round, the height approximately one and one-half times the diameter of the base. Like the Old Kingdom towers they have external ladders, entering the towers near the top, and like the Old Kingdom towers have a projecting battlement at top. In addition, the round towers in the *Description de l'Égypte* appear as a pair. When one tower came under attack, the other tower could repulse the assailants. A pair of towers would thus suffice to discourage small robber bands and would require an attacking force

to be large enough to attack both towers simultaneously. The towers in the Napoleonic publication are meant to provide protection for settled Egyptian farmers against marauding Bedouin out of the desert. The ‘Alamat Tal towers, considering the date of their construction, might have been intended both as supply depots for Theban desert patrols and as sanctuaries for those escaping the roving Hyksos thugs.

In the small wadi separating the two towers we discovered the sadly smashed fragments of a limestone monument, epigraphically datable to the Seventeenth Dynasty, referring to a seal bearer and a king’s son, one of whom (the latter?) was named Ahmose. The monument stood for some time, as indicated by the presence of a late Eighteenth Dynasty/early Ramesside graffito of the ram headed aegis of Amun, a fan rising behind the deity’s head.

At Gebel Tjauti, we made final location checks for the first volume of inscriptions (now in press), collated and checked existing entries for the second volume, and copied several new inscriptions.

### “Dominion Behind Thebes”

A major discovery of the sixth season was the identification of an ancient track connecting the main Western Theban routes with the ‘Alamat Tal Road. At the southern ascent of this ancient track we discovered an enormous concentration of rock art and rock inscriptions, stretching for over a kilometer across the face of the gebel. In two heraldic graffiti the site has preserved that rarity, an ancient desert toponym (figs. 10–11): Dominion Behind Thebes. The *w3s*-scepter writing the name of Thebes has been grafted on to the *h3*-plant (meaning “behind”), the right prong of the *w3s* taking the place of the leftmost shoot of the plant, the left prong of the *w3s* omitted, forming an abutted composite sign, the scepter grow-

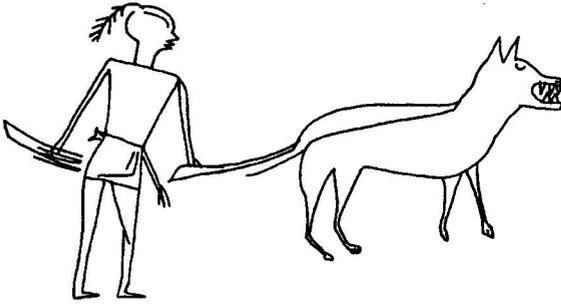


Figure 10. Deborah Darnell preparing to copy representations of hunters (Naqada II period) at Dominion Behind Thebes



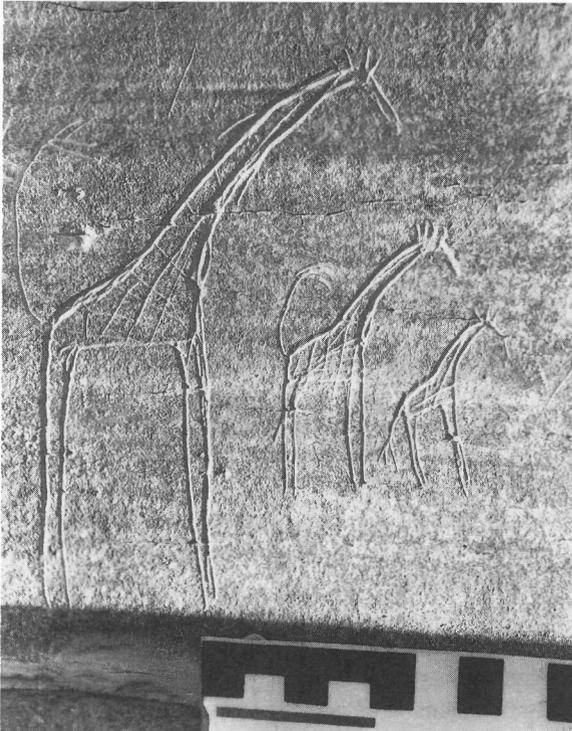
Figure 11. Two occurrences of toponym *W3s h3 W3s.t* “Dominion Behind Thebes”

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**Figure 12. Nubian patrolman and his dog; First Intermediate Period/Eleventh Dynasty**

the name of a police outpost near the connecting route's ascent to the high desert behind Thebes. Such a position would control access to the final narrowing of the plateau before the high desert fans out with spurs towards Tarif and the Qurn. Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup> and the Wadi el-Hôl probably made up the Thebaïd's *rꜥ-ꜥꜣ wr* "Great Desert Pass," but there were surely several smaller strong points, of which the Dominion Behind Thebes track's ascent is one. According to Wahankh Antef I, Abydos and its strongholds are behind him — thus behind Thebes — and they are at the northern Nile Valley terminus of roads from the Thebaïd linked together by the Dominion Behind Thebes track.



**Figure 13. Carving of group of giraffes (predynastic) at Dominion Behind Thebes**

ing out of the plant and being both the first element in the inscription and an allusion to the human head often appearing in writings of *hꜥ* "around, behind." The term *hꜥ* may also be a geographic designation of the "periphery" of an area, in which case it would curiously foreshadow the much later Περὶ Θήβας.

This might have been the

At Dominion Behind Thebes we found the rock cut stela of an early Middle Kingdom Theban *imy-r iꜥꜣ.w* "overseer of Nubian auxiliaries." We even have an elaborate depiction of an Eleventh Dynasty/early Middle Kingdom Nubian and his growling patrol dog (fig. 12). The man appears to be somewhat prognathous and wears the uniform of the Nubian soldiers of the First Intermediate Period: a feather in the hair and a short kilt with ribbon sporan/penis sheath in front, the tie for this element appearing at the back. The kilt is carved out in a rough sort of sunk relief, with the fold of the outer edge indicated both by sketchy lines and an actual level change, again approximating raised relief detail within an area of sunk relief.

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These details show the kilt to have been wrapped right over left, as one would expect for a non-royal personage. The man appears to carry a bundle of arrows in the left hand; with the right hand he holds a bow and the leash of his dog. The snarling dog has a curled tail and upright ears, essentially the shape of an Old Kingdom *ism*, a breed of dog surviving throughout pharaonic history.

At a later date, the head of the dog was turned into that of a

hippopotamus goddess by the addition of a goddess body, and a larger hippopotamus goddess was partly carved over the figure of the Nubian as well.

This graffito also has significance for understanding the usual attire of the Nubian mercenaries of the First Intermediate Period. The carving of the kilt suggests that the sash is actually a penis sheath, over which the kilt is wrapped, the sheath sticking out over the kilt in front, the tie dropping over the top of the kilt in the back.

Dominion Behind Thebes is home to an incredible array of predynastic and protodynastic graffiti, including many depictions of boats and giraffes (fig. 13). There is also an apparently Naqada II tableau of strange hunters, the most elaborately executed graffiti thus far discovered of a type called by Winkler the “Eastern Invaders.” The closest later parallels for these helmeted, tail-wearing figures are the hunters on the lion-hunt palette, whom Helck identifies as later representatives of Naqada II-period *h:ty.w-ꜥ* of *Tjhnw* “ancestors of Tjehenu,” desert hunters sharing a common ancestry with the Nile dwelling Naqada II folk. With the Eastern Desert rock carvings and the lion-hunt palette’s hunters, we appear to have a pre-/protodynastic hunting attire. Other helmet-wearing figures appear on the Brooklyn palette fragment, on the Narmer palette, and the Scorpion mace-head. The caps are decorated with feathers, usually pointing up, but on at least one figure downturned. Leather caps are not infrequent in A-Group graves; in the A-Group grave no. 601 near Abka, just south of Wadi Halfa, Oric Bates found an actual cloth cap — extending “down to the nape of the neck and over the cheeks to the jawbones” — to which feathers, tips down, had been attached through the agency of a resinous substance.

Two of the men wear a pair of facing hippopotami on their chests, presumably some sort of painting, embroidery, or appliqué on their clothing. A hippopotamus appears on the chest of a female figure in the British Museum (BM 58064), but this, along with the other patterns on the image, is perhaps intended to represent tattooing, if it is not simply part of the overall “annotation” to the figure.

Of Archaic date is the representation of an Upper Egyptian shrine (fig. 14), its forecourt occupied by a sacrificial animal hanging on end from a forked pole, to the left of which is the representation of a flint knife above the sign for *nm.t* “slaughtering place.” The ceremonial complex at Hierakonpolis location Hk29A appears to have consisted of a gateway, a mud paved slaughtering place of roughly oval shape

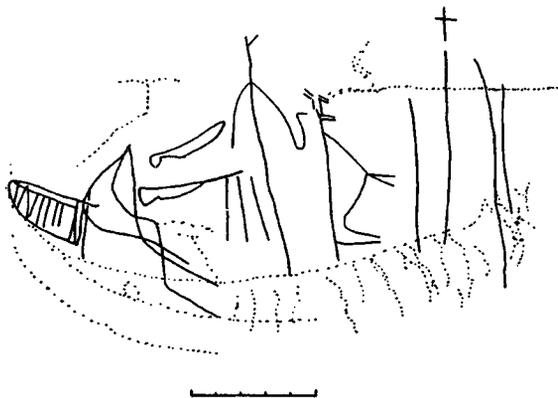


Figure 14. Representation of shrine and court of offerings (Archaic period) at Dominion Behind Thebes

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surrounded by a sinusoidal wall, a tall pole of some sort at the southern apex of the paved floor, and a *pr-wr*-shrine. All of these elements appear to be present in our depiction, and the parallels are too striking to be coincidental.

In addition to the large rock inscription site at Dominion Behind Thebes, we also discovered two smaller concentrations of rock inscriptions and rock art near the midpoint of this same north-south connecting road. At the larger of these two additional graffiti sites we have the signature of an Old Kingdom metalworker (fig. 15):



**Figure 15.** Signature of metalworker Kem

Metalworker Kem

This small inscription gains a greater significance when one remembers that we have discovered the signature of a Thirteenth Dynasty metalworker (“the police official Aam’s son the overseer of metalworkers Renseneb”) at Gebel Tjauti on the ‘Alamat Tal

Road. There was no metal mining in the area, and one may suggest that these men were here to maintain the weapons of the police patrols and armies we know to have used these routes.

### Darb Rayayna, Darb Ba‘irat, and Subsidiary Tracks

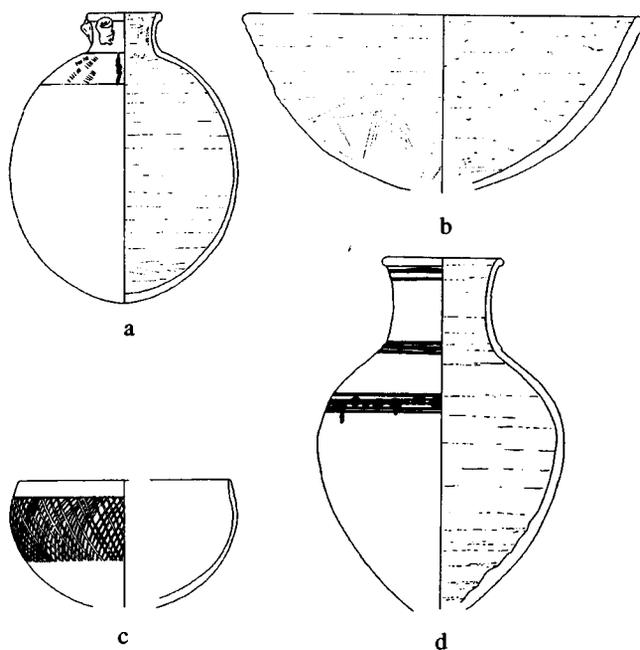
Continued study of the ceramic remains on the southern roads supports our earlier conclusions regarding the great importance of these tracks during the protodynastic period and the Old Kingdom. In November we discovered, mapped, and collected a deposit of protodynastic pottery to the east of the solar altar and its immediately associated ceramic remains. We have begun the reconstruction of these vessels; they prove to be of Naqada IIc–IIIb date, a period when regional variations in ceramic types disappear and are well paralleled by settlement ceramics from Hierakonpolis. On the Darb Rayayna we also have further evidence for the presence of Pan-Grave Nubians on the desert roads west of the Thebaïd (fig. 16c).

### Conclusion and Summary

The members of the Theban Desert Road Survey during the sixth season were: Dr. John Coleman Darnell, director; Deborah Darnell, Egyptologist; Yarko Kobylecky, photographer; and Hiroko Kariya, conservator. We were joined again by Mr. Ramadan Ahmed Aly as representative of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Our discoveries of the sixth season have far surpassed our expectations and have provided important new evidence for a wealth of topics, as wide-ranging as the origins of the Tasian culture and the sign forms of Ramesside lapidary hieratic.

We have described some of our recent discoveries in a lecture at the American Research Center in Egypt, Cairo (in early October 1997). Two articles appeared during the sixth season, publishing several important inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hôl and Gebel Tjauti: J. C. Darnell and D. Darnell, “New Inscriptions of the Late First Intermediate Period from the Theban Western Desert, and the Beginnings of the Northern Expansion of the Eleventh Dynasty,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (1997): 241–58; J. C. Darnell, “A New Middle Egyptian Literary Text from the Wadi el-Hôl,” *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 85–100. In addition, a related study, derived from and supporting conclusions derived from

study of the Gebel Tjauti inscriptions, appeared as: J. C. Darnell, "The Message of King Wahankh Antef II to Khety, Ruler of Heracleopolis," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 124 (1997): 101–08. In June, 1997 we submitted the manuscript of our first monograph on the Gebel Tjauti inscriptions and depictions, for publication by the Oriental Institute, and this monograph is now in press as: J. C. Darnell and



**Figure 16. Samples of pottery from sixth season: (a) jar; marl A3; incised and applied decoration; descent from inscription area at Gebel Tjauti; Middle Kingdom (Eleventh/Twelth Dynasty); (b) large open bowl; silt; near line of boulders along caravan tracks south of main inscription area at  $W_3s \text{ } h_3 \text{ } W_3s.t$ ; First Intermediate Period/early Middle Kingdom; (c) bowl; silt; incised decoration, blackened rim and interior; stone hut on ascent of Darb Rayayna; Nubian Pan-Grave; Second Intermediate Period; (d) jar; marl A2/A4; dark brown and red painted decoration; approach to Gebel Tjauti; New Kingdom (early Eighteenth Dynasty). Scales (a–c) ca. 1:4; (d) ca. 1:8**

(Chicago, forthcoming). The first monograph on the Wadi el-Hôl inscriptions is undergoing final editing, the photographic prints are in hand, and this should be submitted by the end of 1998, as: J. C. Darnell, *Theban Desert Road Survey, Vol. 1: The Rock Inscriptions of the Wadi el-Hôl, Part 1*. We shall both be speaking on various aspects of our work at the colloquium "Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert" at the British Museum in late July 1998.

Vandalism continues in the Wadi el-Hôl, at Gebel Roma<sup>c</sup>, and at Gebel Qarn el-Gir. As we reported two years ago, farming in the 'Alamat Tal wadi has destroyed the first portion of the ancient road leading to the twin fortress towers. During this past season gravel quarrying has begun at the beginning of the caravan tracks proper, and there were rumors of a "Safari Park" to be built over the towers on the 'Alamat Tal Road. These sites are unique, and require study. Thieves, quarrying operations, and land developers continue to move ever more quickly to destroy the ancient sites.

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We thank Professor Gene Gragg, Director of the Oriental Institute, for his sincere encouragement. The extraordinary success of our work this season would not have been possible without the support of Raymond Johnson, Field Director of the Epigraphic Survey, to whom we offer warm thanks. The unrestricted availability of a Chicago House vehicle, as well as the opportunity to remain in the field for an additional month after the close of the Epigraphic Survey's season, allowed us to achieve more than in any previous year — we will be ever grateful. Thanks go to the scholarly colleagues who provided expert advice: René Cappers, Renée Friedman, Stan Hendrickx, Colin Hope, Dirk Huyge, Helen Jacquet, Jean Jacquet, and Willeke Wendrich. For their camaraderie and valuable help with the production of facsimile copies, often under extreme conditions, we thank Mark Chickering, Tina Di Cerbo, Susan Osgood, Dany Roy, and Elinor Smith.

The abundance of exciting discoveries we made this season were in part a result of working intensively in ever more remote areas, and our project expenditures were correspondingly much higher than ever before. Those soaring expenses were eased to a great extent by continued private donations. For this financial support, we thank Marion Cowan and the John Nuveen Company, Di Grodzins, Carlotta Maher, Nan and David Ray, John and Joan Westley, and Alexandra Varga.