



CHICAGO HOUSE BULLETIN

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Gulf Crisis and Chicago House

By Carlotta Maher, Assistant to the Director

One serious problem in attempting to write about the ways in which the crisis in the Gulf has affected our life at Chicago House is that every version I begin seems to become obsolete in about ten days. During the first part of the season, the crisis was newer and more worrying; then it felt as if the confrontation had reached a steady state; and now (early December) new events will be changing the overall picture once again. We follow breaking news during the early morning BBC World Service radio broadcasts; otherwise, the English-language newspapers we receive (mostly the *Egyptian Gazette* and the *International Herald Tribune*) are three to four days late reaching us, and their headlines have lost their power over our minds! Old news is simply not exciting.

The reality is that Egypt is completely calm. As far as the work of the Survey is concerned, the crisis has had no negative effects at all. As far as Egypt's economy, however, the loss of tourism, revenues from the Suez Canal, and salaries from Egyptian workers abroad is extremely serious. Dr. Henri Riad, our distinguished resident Egyptian colleague, reads to me from his newspapers that Egypt expects to lose three and one-half billion dollars revenue this season because of the crisis. We sympathize with the shopkeepers who have befriended us through the years and now sit waiting in empty shops for customers who do not come.

There are actually two positive aspects to the crisis as far as Chicago House is concerned. First, the monuments are getting a rest from the inevitable damage done by the floods of tourists who visit Egypt during the more normal years. This damage is not necessarily caused by deliberate vandalism; camera bags are inadvertently brushed against fragile sandstone and plaster walls, and even breathing in an ancient tomb, if done by a sufficient number of people, creates hazardous levels of humidity.

Second, the staff of the Epigraphic Survey

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The Chicago House Archive of Glass Plate Negatives

By Susan Lezon, Photographer

Chicago House is a place where the modern, the ancient, and the merely old constantly intermingle—and nowhere more dramatically than in the photographers' studio. Photographic technology improves almost daily, and several years ago the Epigraphic Survey photographers realized that, in order to keep up with the times, several pieces of darkroom equipment that had served the Survey for well over 50 years had to be permanently retired. Through the generous contributions of Calumet in Chicago and the Amoco Corporation, our darkroom in recent years has acquired a new 8 x 10 print enlarger, as well as a large format camera, which has revolutionized our procedures in the field and saved hours of time producing prints. Several other photographic conveniences were installed, and our darkroom seemed almost modern. At this stage fate intervened suddenly to give us a reminder of our photographic roots!

On this occasion fate took the form of a quiet knock on our front door in 1985. A native of Luxor had found a group of old glass negatives in
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his attic. Were we interested in seeing them? OH YES! And thus began a project that has proven to be as fascinating and complex as any in the Survey's photographic history.

One sticking point was the asking price of the collection, which was far higher than the Survey could afford. To our dismay, the glass plates began to disappear one by one, as single images were sold to individuals, and we saw the archive begin to slip out of our hands. In the spring of 1987, by a timely coincidence, the Egyptian pound was suddenly devalued, and overnight our dollars proved sufficient to purchase the remaining collection all at once.

When the archive arrived at Chicago House, we found over 800 glass negatives packed in their original wooden crates. It proved to be a treasure trove worthy of careful conservation. Slowly, several decades of dust and grime came off the plates to reveal a magnificent collection of images, many predating the founding of the Survey. These images—of monuments all over Egypt—reveal architectural and relief details that, in some cases, no longer exist. In addition, a large number of the plates are beautifully composed portraits and landscapes of an Egypt that has long since vanished. We realized immediately that the images

hold enormous interest for both Egyptologists and scholars of early photography.

In the last three years almost all of the glass plates have been cleaned and archivally housed. Prints of the negatives have been turned over to staff epigrapher John Darnell for identification and bibliographic references, and in many cases he has been able to assign approximate dates to the images as well. At this time, we have plates ranging from 1880 through 1930. We have also taken advantage of volunteer Ellie Smith's invaluable organizational skills (and unflinching good humor) to see that the plates have been catalogued correctly. Both Ellie and John have been instrumental in helping this project reach a very exciting final stage.

Our next goal? We plan to circulate the finer images internationally, in a traveling exhibition, accompanied by a catalogue describing the collection and its preservation. Concurrently, a series of limited edition portfolios will be produced using photographic printing techniques from the turn of the century. The original glass plates will be exposed (in Luxor sunlight) on printing-out paper (POP) and toned in gold. Handmade, leatherbound portfolio boxes will house the final mounted prints. Final print selections for a series of three portfolios, each containing ten prints, are now being made, and preliminary printing has already begun. We look forward to sharing these exquisite images with a large audience in 1992. END

Gulf Crisis *(continued from p. 1)*

is getting a rest as well! In times past, our artists and Egyptologists were occasionally accosted by tourists who shook the ladders and climbed the scaffolding to demand an explanation of what they were doing. Most visitors assume that these khaki-clad people on ladders are engaged in some kind of restoration work, rather than documentation. Now, however, we work for hours in almost perfect solitude, and Luxor Temple is more often filled with Egyptian schoolchildren learning about their ancient heritage. A Valley of the Kings update: for the first time since its discovery, the tomb of Tutankhamun has been closed for restoration due to the formation of bacterial growth on its painted walls.

In the last few years so many tour groups have requested a "library tour," a 45-minute ex-

planation of the work by the Director or me, that staff members sometimes had trouble getting at the books with the crowds of interested tourists standing in the library. This year, the few tour groups coming through Luxor have been very serious about their visit, having braved the uncertainties of the Gulf crisis in pursuit of ancient Egypt. When these travelers stop at Chicago House they seem especially fascinated by our mission here, and we have found them to be extraordinarily responsive to the Survey's work. If they are Americans, of course, we load them up with mail to carry home—but these couriers have been precious few this year. We were particularly delighted by the Oriental Institute tour, which visited Chicago House in October and included four members of the family of James Henry Breasted, founder of both the Oriental Institute and the Epigraphic Survey.

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A Trek Up Thoth Mountain

By Kathryn Dorman

There are numerous outings to make when staying in Luxor. My favorite is not in the guide books, although it's right there for all to see. A few kilometers north of the famous "Gurn" in western Thebes, the great pyramidal mountain that towers over the Valley of the Kings, rises another formidable hill. Looking west from Chicago House on a clear day, you can just make out two bumps on the top. These bumps, unlike the fascinating rock formation that tops the Gurn, are not provided by nature. They are the crumbling pylons of an Eleventh Dynasty mud brick temple, presumably once dedicated to Thoth, the ancient god of writing.

Hiking to the temple is a bit of an effort. Just to reach the base of the mountain requires driving overland, across stony desert for several kilometers, and then it's about a one and a half hour clamber uphill. But surely part of the great charm of this journey is that the trek is totally deserted, with no tourists, no donkeys, no flies, and (perhaps most refreshing) no one hawking fresh antiquities.

For the first half-hour you climb steadily uphill along a barren shoulder of rock. Just when the sport of noting how the parked Land Rover is shrinking to a green dot begins to pale, you come across a bed of seawater fossils. Interspersed among hundreds of fossilized clamshells are masses of flints worked to varying degrees into tools. The limestone shale in which the fossils were preserved is studded with large flint nodules, and the flint was so plentiful and workable that the hillside was used as a factory. Actually, few finished tools can be found; these must have been carried off and

used by the toolmakers. But the rough blades, cores, and reject tools lying around among the still more ancient clams are great fun to examine, and they make you think about the peoples who made (and still make) stone tools.

Once sufficient water is drunk, and the fossils carefully perused, the climb to the top continues. The view of the Nile valley becomes breathtaking as you ascend the slope, with great vistas encompassing the great sweep of the river bending around the region of ancient Thebes. To the south you can make out the parked buses outside the Valley of the Kings, and snaking around the shoulders of the nearer foothills is the ancient stone wall marking the boundary of the royal necropolis.

And now another surprise: near the summit of the hill the ground takes on a distinctive sparkle. It isn't oxygen deprivation, but rather an enormous quartz vein. Just off the path the ground becomes pure crystal, crumbling and glinting in the sun. Bits of fractured crystal that have been exposed to the sun have acquired a translucent orange patina; but the living quartz within the hill is almost transparent white. It's most impressive.

Before the dazzle wears off you're at the top where the ruined temple beckons you to come inside and speculate more about the past. Mudbrick walls define the outline of an ancient court and several inner chambers, and to the east stretch more dark flint beds and the plateau of the Libyan desert. Photo opportunities abound.

By this time the box lunches are opened and consumed, with wind in your hair and sun in your eyes. The view is phenomenal. The historical/geological soup of the day is quite heady—and the best news is that the trip back to the car is all downhill. END



Gulf Crisis *(continued from p. 2)*

The Gulf crisis impinged on our lives dramatically during President Bush's visit to Egypt the day after Thanksgiving. Peter and Kathy Dorman and I were invited to an early-morning Embassy reception held in honor of the President, at which the American community was introduced to President and Mrs. Bush by Ambassador Frank Wisner. A jovial crowd greeted the President, who spoke of his recent visit with American troops in Saudi Arabia, and the mood was friendly and down-home. All the children in the crowd had their picture taken with the President and First Lady by the White House photographer. Later that day Peter was among the few Americans invited to a luncheon given by President Hosni Mubarak in honor of the presidential visit at the Presidential

Palace in Heliopolis (in the northeast suburbs of Cairo). Considerably more formal in atmosphere, the occasion was highlighted by a reception line for all guests, as well as prepared statements made to the press by both heads of state before luncheon was served.

Before this newsletter appears in print, the situation in the Gulf will no doubt have gone through many more permutations, but our local routine of work, meals, and more work will, we trust, proceed more predictably. It is comforting to know that whatever may happen in the world outside, at Chicago House the Land Rover will be transporting artists and epigraphers to Luxor Temple and dinner will always be served at precisely seven o'clock. END

ADDRESSES OF THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY:**October through March:**

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