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News & Notes

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EGYPTOLOGISTS RACE RAVAGES OF TIME IN LUXOR

Lanny Bell

Field Director, Chicago House, Luxor



Main gate at Chicago House, with the avenue of palms leading to the arcade between the residence and library wings. Photo L. Bell.

The 1981-82 season of the Epigraphic Survey was our fifty-eighth. It also was the year we celebrated the golden anniversary of the present Chicago House in Luxor, which was opened in October, 1931. In this regard, we welcomed some timely international newspaper coverage of the Epigraphic Survey, and the National Geographic television special "Egypt: Quest for Eternity." The television documentary is being related into a twenty-three minute educational film entitled "Preserving Egypt's Past." This media coverage brought the Epigraphic Survey to the attention of a whole new audience, many of whom were anxious to find out more about our work and eager to see the inside of Chicago House. We accommodated as many as our professional work would permit.

Our concrete contribution to the golden anniversary celebration was the continuation of our major renovation pro-



Residence wing at Chicago House, where most of the staff members of the Epigraphic Survey live. Photo L. Bell.

gram at Chicago House, which although extremely well planned and constructed half a century ago, needed attention to ensure its functioning for another half century. This season we replaced buried electric cables; laid a 487.5 square meter tile sidewalk along the front of the house, which not only improved appearance and safety, but also provided a way to keep down wind-blown dust and sand. We made repairs in the masonry of stone and brick walls, and our walks. We installed a new water tank for the out-buildings, and prepared a new floating dock for our landing. We straightened and reinforced a bent leg on our aluminum scaffolding. We rewound the coil of our electric generator; rewired the house water heater; and installed a new oil burner in the library. We also finally put back in service our treadle-operated sewing machine with spare parts which we obtained in Luxor or brought specially from America. Our painfully out-of-key piano was tuned to enliven



Central court of the residence wing of Chicago House. Photo L. Bell.

the festive occasions of the season. And a big milestone was reached by our 1950 Chevrolet—the odometer recorded 40,000 miles! In the library, offices, and studios, installations and improvements of equipment necessary to maintain the quality of our work were made on schedule. We need to cast about for new funding with which to carry on this work since unfortunately, our generous contributions from the Smithsonian Institution are scheduled to come to an end in 1985.

The work proceeded this year under weather conditions—some most unusual for Egypt—which merit mention. While most of you were enduring a hard winter at home, we experienced a low temperature of 42 degrees (Fahrenheit) during January and February; by early April it was already 99 degrees; and on April 21, the thermometer registered a high of 104 degrees. We felt rain on six days from late January until

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early May, when the showers were accompanied by thunder and lightning. The recent increase in cloudiness at Luxor is quite remarkable, with substantial cloud cover for periods as long as a week this year, and the sky was completely overcast up to four days at a time. The Aswan region, 150 miles to the south, was rocked by a series of earthquakes this fall. We felt tremors in Chicago House and in Luxor Temple during November. Fortunately, no serious damage was reported anywhere.

Encounters with potentially hazardous wildlife were restricted to three small snakes, each about 80 cm. long, sighted in the Chicago House garden, with one basking in the stone yard of Luxor Temple on a sunny December day. A young scorpion was found hiding in a box of conservation equipment at Medinet Habu. Quick action dealt with each of these menaces without injury to the staff. We are fairly complacent about the large fruit bats frolicking through our trees every evening, but have made plans to repair our river landing to control the rats that find shelter there and occasionally stray onto our grounds. The fox and wild cats that inhabit the garden after dark have somehow accommodated themselves to our guard dog who also roams the compound at night.

Our library facilities continued to serve the needs of scholars, and our limited housing facilities were made available to expedition members and to individual scholars. This year we had visiting scholars and guests representing not only the United States and Egypt, but also Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

Publications made available this year include Bill Murnane's detailed guidebook to Medinet Habu, "United with Eternity"; his edition of Volume I of Harold H. Nelson's Hypostyle Hall appeared in June, with work on Volume II well under way; and Khonsu II appeared in January. Our next publication after The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I will be Khonsu III, an architectural study of that temple by Mme. Françoise Trau-necker of the Franco-Egyptian Center at Karnak. Our two previous publications were Khonsu I and Kheruef, and reviews spoke highly of the accuracy of the Epigraphic Survey.

Our own scientific work revolved as usual around preservation. Our well-known epigraphic technique focuses on the team approach to the problem of preserving ancient records, where the separate skills of several individual staff members—Egyptologists, artists, and photographer—are combined in the production of every completed facsimile drawing. But we are



Lanny Bell (on ladder) and Bill Murnane checking a detail of a drawing in the Colonnade at Luxor Temple. Photo K. Krause.

concerned for the total needs of the monuments entrusted to our care, and we were pleased to be able to include two archaeological conservators on our team this season.

These interrelated interests were combined in an unanticipated way this year. We were requested by representatives of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization to help place plaster breaks between the architrave blocks of the columns in the Court of Amenhotep III at Luxor. Given the fragile condition of much of the ancient sandstone there, the recent earthquakes, the possible settling of the ground under the columns by infiltration from the high water table, and the armies of tourists marching past daily, we were all anxious to determine whether any shifting was occurring which might destabilize the columns. We shall return to check the results next fall.



Ray Johnson checks the traces on the recut facade of the Eighteenth Dynasty Temple at Luxor. Photo K. Krause.

While positioned on the columns, walking 13 m. above the ground level on stone paths about 1.5 m. wide, we took advantage of the opportunity to make the first complete photographic record of the inscriptions on the sides of the architraves of Amenhotep III, collating older copies of them and recording the eleven not published previously.

Tourists were either fascinated by this activity—some even trying to climb up the scaffolding behind us— or annoyed that our presence spoiled the pictures they wanted to take of the unencumbered architectural features of the temple in the limited time they had set aside to visit it. A distraught tourist tried to take one of our short ladders to use as a stretcher for the transport of a fellow tour member who had collapsed in the heat. On another occasion, our laddermen literally carried a tourist out to a waiting taxi to be rushed back to her air-conditioned hotel.

Conservation has been a problem in the Luxor Temple since its excavation before the turn of the century. Consolidation of columns had to be carried out practically in the footsteps of the excavators. The flood waters of the Nile were deliberately

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conducted into the temple shortly thereafter, in the hope of leaching out some of the destructive salts from the stone. At Medinet Habu, the high water table is a major problem, and it was necessary this year to impregnate one particularly fragile block, crumbling to sand in a wall of the Eighteenth Dynasty Temple, with a 15% PVA (Polyvinylacetate=Vinovyl) solution.

The walls and ceilings of the chapels behind the barque shrine in the Amun Temple at Medinet Habu, where nearly all the roof is still in place, were blackened with smoke from domestic fires when the whole temple area was inhabited in post-pharaonic times. Later ages added further encrustations of dust and dirt, completely obscuring the wealth of painted detail in the reliefs of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. After experimentation, cotton swabs dipped in a 5% solution of nitric acid in water were gently rolled across the decorated surfaces (the operators wore rubber gloves), dissolving the sooty layers and revealing the brilliant colors of the underlying paint layer. The most spectacular results were achieved in the left innermost room (Q) of the plan published in fig. 61 of Bill Murnane's *"United with Eternity."* Completely cleaned this season, this room now gives the appearance of a practical new monument. Photographing the newly exposed decoration will provide a vastly improved base for the facsimile drawings to be made here.

In Luxor Temple we collaborated with the local Egyptian Antiquities Organization restorers, and also received welcome advice on materials and techniques from Dr. Abd el-Latif Arfani, Director of the Cairo Museum's restoration section.



Smoke-blackened relief in the Eighteenth Dynasty Temple at Medinet Habu, before cleaning. Photo from the Chicago House archives.

This season six loose fragments in danger of falling from the columns and walls of the Colonnade were reattached by the Antiquities Organization restorers at our request; these specialists also assisted in the removal of modern pencil, ink, and chalk graffiti. In return, we made our ladders and adjustable aluminum scaffolding available to them as needed elsewhere in Luxor Temple. Our conservators strengthened twenty-seven crumbling sandstone fragments which we had included in our special study, by application to their surface of 15-50% solutions of PVA in water.

As our study of Luxor Temple progresses, we are making increasing use of early photographs (supplemented by the information available from older drawings), not only to confirm details of the history of the latest stages of the modern

occupation of the Colonnade, its excavation and consolidation, but also to document its rapid deterioration. The earliest photographic record of the interior decoration of the walls of the Colonnade was published by Georges Daressy in 1894. Despite their small scale and the bad quality of their reproduction, these photographs, made shortly after the completion of the excavations, are the only source for many important details of decoration which have vanished from large areas of the Colonnade's walls since that time. We have so far identified some thirty discrete areas where the stone surfaces have eroded so badly that even the faintest traces of the



Reliefs at Medinet Habu after cleaning: compare the "before" photo of the same wall elsewhere on this page. Photo L. Bell.

decoration which are sometimes left are often intelligible only by reference to these old photographs.

Our ongoing study of the graffiti in the Luxor Colonnade has now revealed the existence of a single demotic graffito, discovered by Richard Jasnow, on the east side of the Philip Arrhidaeus gateway, as well as several additional graffiti written in a form of archaic Greek script atop the roof of the portico of Ramesses II. The graffiti in our concession number more than ninety, including pharaonic, demotic, ancient Greek, and Coptic, modern European, and Arabic.

We now have modern graffiti firmly dated from 1804 to 1884, bringing us almost up to the time of the removal of the house of Mustafa Agha Ayat from the Colonnade in 1889. With the assistance of information kindly made available to us from the extensive files of Mr. Roger de Keersmaecker of the Belgian Elkab Mission, we have made some progress in the identification of the early visitors to the Colonnade.

The most colorful character known to us up to now is the Italian Giovanni Finati, who lived from 1787 to at least 1829. Serving in the army of Mohammed Aly in his youth, this soldier of fortune participated in the capture of Mecca and Medina from the Wahhabis in 1811-13. From 1815 to 1829 he acted as dragoman for several European travelers and antiquities collectors in Egypt, Nubia, Syria, and Palestine, including W.J. Bankes, Sir Frederick Henniker, and Lord Prudhoe. He went as far up the Nile as Abu Simbel before returning to Cairo to open a hotel.

The work of the photographer this season was primarily archival, with most of the negatives from our Luxor project being described and registered, prints of each made for our files, and duplicates prepared for sending to the Oriental Institute. In November and December, we were able to begin solving some long-standing problems, gathering together stacks of dusty prints from various cabinets and file drawers, identifying them, salvaging genuinely valuable records, and disposing of the rejects.

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Among the collections we organized and made available this year are the unpublished photographs of Theban tombs made by Charles F. Nims and Keith C. Seele. As most of these tombs are normally inaccessible, and many have suffered damage, natural or man-made, since being photographed, these prints represent an important addition to our documentation on the ancient monuments of the Theban area. We continued the duplication of our disintegrating nitrate-based negatives, preserving several more precious images. Able to spread the disease from which they suffer to adjacent negatives, and highly flammable, the brittle originals are burnt after they have been copied satisfactorily.



Construction of the "new" Chicago House in 1930-31. This historic image was printed from a decomposing nitrate negative. Photo from the Chicago House archives.

These few highlights and observations covering our season in Egypt present such an incomplete picture that we would like to repeat once more, our invitation to our friends to come "to see for yourselves." We do request, however, that you let us know your plans as far ahead as you can, so that we will be able to prepare the best possible welcome for you.

MEMBERS' DAY

Sunday – October 31, 1982

12:00 - 4:00 P.M.

The Institute opens its doors to the Membership
This is a wonderful opportunity to meet Faculty and Staff
There will be tours of the Basement Laboratories
The Membership and Museum offices will be open
Children's Activities - Movies - Halloween Refreshments

AND MUCH MORE

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October	3	The Human Adventure
	10	Rivers of Time
	17	Megiddo: City of Destruction
	24	Egypt: Gift of the Nile
	31	Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
November	7	The Human Adventure
	14	Iran: Landmarks in the Desert
	21	The Egyptologists
	28	Turkey: Crossroads of the Ancient World
December	5	The Human Adventure
	12	Megiddo: City of Destruction
	19	Egypt: Gift of the Nile
	26	Iraq: Stairway to the Gods

OCTOBER EVENT

The opening lecture, "Horses on the Citadel, A Bronze Breastplate and the Archaeology of Hasanlu" will be presented on October 11 by Irene Winter of the University of Pennsylvania. 8:00 PM, Mandel Hall, 57th St. and University Ave. RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY. Please call the Membership Office, 753-2389.

NOVEMBER EVENT

The opening of the new prehistoric exhibit, *THE QUEST FOR PREHISTORY: THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE AND THE ORIGINS OF CIVILIZATION IN THE NEAR EAST*, will take place Monday, November 15, from 5:00 to 8:00 PM in the Museum. This will be followed at 8:00 PM by a lecture, *Jarmo's Legacy: The Worldwide Search for Early Food Production*, by Kent Flannery, Museum of Anthropology, The University of Michigan. The lecture will take place in Breasted Hall and will be followed by a reception in the Museum.

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ORIENTAL INSTITUTE 1983 ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS

EGYPT FEBRUARY 22 – MARCH 8, 1983

Our tour of Egypt will be led by the Oriental Institute's Professor Janet H. Johnson and Dr. Donald Whitcomb, excavators of Quseir al-Qadim on the Red Sea Coast, and will provide a fascinating look at the history, art and culture which originated in the Nile Valley over 5,000 years ago. We will start in Cairo, spending time with the collections of the Egyptian Museum and making day trips to Saqqara, Giza and Memphis. We then go to Minya and on to Luxor where we will tour the temples and visit Chicago House, the Oriental Institute's permanent home for its Epigraphic Survey. A five day Nile cruise on the Sheraton ship MS ANNI visiting the temples of Esna, Edfu, and Kom Ombo, a flying trip to Abu Simbe, and a return to Cairo for further sightseeing will complete this tour.

The cost of the trip from Chicago is:

\$3130

\$300 single supplement (Hotels only)

plus a \$350 tax-deductible contribution to the Oriental Institute. This includes round trip air transportation from Chicago, and all land arrangements including deluxe accommodations, Nile cruise and all meals. \$300 will hold a place for you if we receive it by December 1, 1982.

SICILY APRIL 22 – MAY 7

Our Sicily tour will be led by Professor Paolo Cherchi, Department of Romance Languages and Literature, The University of Chicago. Since Paleolithic times Sicily has been the home of successive waves of people, each of whom has left behind a rich artistic legacy. Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Norman ruins abound on the island. This tour will concentrate on the outstanding Greek sanctuaries of Sicily, the splendid monuments of the Norman conquest of the island, the scenic

beauty of the panorama at Palazzolo Acreide and the seaside at Taormina, as well as the sumptuously appointed Roman villas at the sites of Stabiae, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, each buried under the debris caused by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. The unparalleled mosaics in the villa at Casale outside of Piazza Aremerina, the recently discovered monumental Greek bronzes of Riace, and the Egyptianizing monuments in the Museo del Sannio in Beneventum are just a few of the extraordinary highlights of this tour.

The cost of the trip from Chicago is:

\$2655

\$255 Single room supplement

plus a \$350 tax-deductible contribution to the Oriental Institute. This includes round trip air transportation from Chicago and all land arrangements except for five meals. \$300 will hold a place for you if we receive it by January 31, 1983.

CHINA JUNE 8 – JUNE 25, 1983

Yang Zhi, a graduate student in Assyriology at the Oriental Institute and a citizen of the People's Republic of China, will lead our tour to China. We will spend 16 days touring the sites, monuments and museums of Beijing, Luoyang, Xian, Hangchou and Shanghai.

The cost of the trip from Chicago is:

\$3634

plus a \$350 tax-deductible contribution to the Oriental Institute. This includes round trip air transportation from Chicago and all land arrangements, accommodations and meals. \$400 will hold a place for you if we receive it by March 1, 1983.

Please enroll me/us in the Institute's 1983 Archaeological Tour to:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Egypt | <input type="checkbox"/> Share room (with?) |
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Enclosed is \$ _____ (\$300 per person, \$400 per person for China) as a deposit to hold my/our place, payable to ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS, INC.

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We now offer a lecture series by mail. You will receive ten one hour lectures on cassette tapes and a study guide with an outline of each lecture (including the spelling of difficult names) and a short reading list for those who want to do more than listen. The first offering in this series is:

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Lecturer: Peter Piccione

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South Suburbanites interested in archaeology are invited to the monthly meetings of the Biblical Archaeology Society in Park Forest. For information please contact Harold Rantz, 2 Thomas Court, Richton Park, IL 60471.



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