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Publication of The Ostracon is supported by a grant from THE PETTY FOUNDATION

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P.O. Box 40754
Denver, Colorado 80204-0754
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CALL FOR ARTICLES
The Tausret Temple Project: 2014 Season
University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition

By Pearce Paul Creasman, Rebecca Caroli, Tori Finlayson and Bethany Becktell

As regular readers of this journal are aware, the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition (the “UAEE”)1 has been excavating at the site of the 19th Dynasty female pharaoh Tausret’s memorial temple in Western Thebes since 2004. While work on the temple proper was largely completed in 2012 (while reserving some areas for future archaeologists, with the expectation that excavation methodologies will advance), there are numerous other structures and features around the temple in need of investigation. For the last several years, these have been our primary focus. When W. M. Flinders Petrie visited and excavated at the site briefly in 1896,2 he reported some of these other features in passing, often in a single sentence or less. The UAEE’s recent work has focused on developing a greater understanding of the temple and the occupation of the surrounding site.

Permission to conduct excavation was granted kindly by the Ministry of Antiquities and Heritage (formerly the Ministry of State for Antiquities) and its Permanent Committee in March 2014.3 The fieldwork was conducted between May 21 and June 19, 2014, including excavation from May 25 until June 17. This article summarizes the findings from our most recent season.4

2014 GOALS

The goals for the 2014 field season were to continue to clean, map, record, and publish the limited remains of the Tausret temple; to uncover and document the tombs in and around the temple complex; and to continue to explore the anciently used cave features (now termed “tombs” with high confidence) uncovered in 2012 in the scarp on the north side of the temple complex.5 In addition, we continued our previous efforts to improve the safety and appearance of the site.

CONTEMPORARY TEMPLE STRUCTURES

The purpose of our investigation in the northwestern corner of the temple was to evaluate whether any supplemental structures, similar to those found at contemporary temples such as the Ramesseum, existed outside the main walls of the temple. Indeed, we found mud-brick features consistent in both alignment and construction with the temple. We also uncovered a series of later mud-brick walls, courtyards, and tombs, all of which had been entered in antiquity and seemed to have been inspected by Petrie’s workmen. It is certain that these later features postdate the construction of Tausret’s temple in the 19th Dynasty and its destruction in the 20th Dynasty, having been built over the temple...
rubble and in an alignment and construction different from those of the temple. Based on the associated artifacts found in and around them, we suspect that these features date to the Third Intermediate or Late Period.

Fig. 2. Google Map of northern portion of the concession with 2013 and 2014 excavations (2 m² grids) superimposed and Features in escarpments (west at left, the “TC” area; north at right, the “TD” area) labeled.

Immediately above the gebel (bedrock) level reached by our excavations in the northwest corner of the temple and seemingly adjoined to the outside of the northern wall of the temple, we found what appeared to be a series of mud-brick chambers or rooms (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Mud-brick ancillary temple structure; northwest corner of Tausret’s temple. (Photograph from the north).
Their purpose and complete forms are not yet fully understood, but it is possible that these were intended to serve as storerooms for Tausret’s temple, similar to those found on the north side of the Ramesseum. The contemporary relationship to Tausret’s temple is clear from their orientation (aligned with the walls of the temple), their location (abutting the temple’s northern wall), and their use of New Kingdom mud bricks, many of which were stamped with royal cartouches from the New Kingdom. These factors indicate a likely date for their construction during the 19th Dynasty. Furthermore, these features were found under the remains of later structures (see below), separated by almost one meter of nearly sterile sand and fill, accumulated probably during the temple’s ancient destruction and subsequent neglect.

Feature 5 was excavated in TC units 29, 36, 40, and 44. The feature is comprised of at least seven layers of mud brick. The mud bricks that compose this feature average 40 x 13 x 20 cm, with several bearing the cartouche of Thutmose IV; many of the mud bricks associated with the construction of Tausret’s temple also feature this king’s cartouche. The organized layers of mud brick are broken by two rubble piles of additional mud bricks. One pile is between the eastern face of the gebel scarp and the western side of the feature, probably representing a collapsed superstructure. The second pile is situated 2.74 m west of the eastern extent of the feature. The eastern side of the feature is broken by a mud-brick wall presumed to date to the Third Intermediate or Late Period, and that wall delimits the eastern edge of the TC area. Beyond the eastern side of this wall, more organized mud bricks were uncovered, but further work is needed to fully understand the purpose and extent of this feature.

As contemporary temples were known to have priests’ houses, granaries, and other ancillary buildings around them, it is possible that Feature 5 might have been associated with one of those purposes. Careful screening of the fill in and around it, however, has not yielded any artifacts or organic materials that might suggest its use. Consequently, it is possible that Feature 5 was never completed, was never used, or may have been used for a purpose that did not leave an archaeological signature. The structure extends to the east (Fig. 4), and some evidence of its use may be discovered in the future as we pursue it in that direction.

Fig. 4. Eastern portion of “Feature 5” (R. Caroli).
THIRD INTERMEDIATE OR LATE PERIOD TOMBS IN THE TEMPLE COMPLEX

Cave-like features that appear on the site postdate Tausret’s temple construction and have been known at least since Petrie’s work there. According to local rumors, one such feature—a rock-cut tomb—was used as a storehouse successively by Petrie, Howard Carter, an unknown German team, and the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. Although said to have been located about 25 m north of the temple in the western scarp, the precise location of this “tomb” is unknown. No maps or publications of which we are aware record anything more than a passing reference to any such features east of (or beneath) the modern road within our Tausret concession.

Nonetheless, during the last three years the UAEE has recovered evidence of later burials at the base of the western scarp. We made more such finds in 2014. During the past two years, we have revealed at least four caves cut from the poor-quality alluvium deposits in the scarp (see Features 1, 2, 3, possibly 4 and 6 in Fig. 2), and our evidence indicates that additional, similar features may still exist in both the western and northern scarps.

Specifically with regard to the area to the east of the western scarp and the modern road, we dug two test trenches (“TTC 4” and “TTC 5” in Fig. 2) to the north of the known mud-brick walls related to construction in the western scarp and discovered still another mud-brick wall more than 20 m north of our current excavations. It is unknown at this time whether the newly discovered wall is a continuation of those previously found to the south, or if it represents an entirely separate structure. It is likely that at least one and probably more features remain concealed under the wash and rubble that form part of the embankment of the modern road. It is equally likely that these features may have been entered by Petrie’s workmen, since the oppressive volume of rubble did not exist at that time.

The discovery and excavation of Feature 6 (see Fig. 2) proved to be a substantial endeavor. In 2013, we discovered mud-brick walls that seemed to indicate a feature, possibly a tomb chapel, not associated with Tausret’s temple. While following that wall this year to determine its extent, we discovered other mud-brick walls oriented perpendicular to the face of the western scarp, as opposed to Tausret’s New Kingdom temple which is set at an acute angle from the scarp. The two sets of later walls run approximately parallel to one another and perpendicular to the gebel cliff corner (Fig. 2). The northernmost of these two walls turns 90 degrees to the north, suggesting another or an extended courtyard in that direction.

Within the bounds of the walls and the face of the scarp, we discovered a moderately sized opening, leading to an artificial “cave.” The feature is at least 5.20 m deep (east-west) and 4.82 m wide (north-south). It is about 2.55 m high in the center of the cave. The entrance has stairs cut into the gebel leading down into the cavity. It is likely the same feature described by Petrie as:

... three or four chambers with an outer court wall. ... had a long flight of steps, going 171 inches horizontally, and steeply inclined, a doorway at the bottom opened into a chamber 114 x 86 inches, from which opened out another chamber 104 x 92 inches. We cleared out nearly all of these tombs, but found only a few amulets and a poor set of canopic jars of about the XXIIIrd dynasty. One tomb was filled with bones of oxen.

As noted above, Feature 6 contains a flight of stairs inside its entrance. In addition, we recovered the remains of at least ten individual oxen, animals not otherwise found at the site. The remains were concentrated near the entrance and in the inner walled area of the cavity. The bones were disarticulated, and there was no evidence that the animals had been mummified. These similarities make us fairly certain this is the same tomb Petrie noted briefly in his report. To date, we have not been able to locate the canopic jars Petrie excavated from this feature to confirm that their style be dated to the 23rd Dynasty, as he suggested. If they can be, Feature 6 would represent a significant construction for that time period in Thebes.

The interior of the tomb contained modern refuse from the 1920s to the 1980s (including a letter envelope addressed to or from “L. Borchardt” and an unknown person, dated c. 1923–4 based on the
stamp), suggesting the tomb had been entered multiple times since Petrie’s work there in 1895, or perhaps had been left open. The feature is almost devoid of cultural material apart from the animal remains, a few human bones, and refuse. However, we discovered the partial remains of at least five mummified humans just outside the entrance to the tomb, presumably from disturbed ancient burials within. We hope to include a specialist on our team during a future field season to evaluate both the human and animal remains.

Most of Feature 6 is cut primarily into tuffla, a soft sedimentary layer that is susceptible to collapse, and is in close proximity to the gebel scarp and the modern road above it. Because of the potential danger to the road, we consulted with local government officials, our inspector, and our engineer, and opted to excavate the feature only partially (enough to note the similarities to Petrie’s description). Then we protected it with steel beams at the entry (Fig. 5) and with fired bricks to support the four primary interior walls (Fig. 6).

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Fig. 5. Protection of the entry to Feature 6 with steel frame and fired bricks.

Fig. 6. Construction of interior support walls in Feature 6.
NORTHERN SCARP TOMBS

In 2012, we removed over 1 m of modern refuse that accumulated at the base of the high gebel scarp on the northern edge of the Tausret temple site. During that clearance, we discovered a series of cave-like features. At least three of these cavities certainly had been used as ancient tombs and contained remnants of funerary cones and other burial items. At least one of the tombs (“Feature 1”) had a sealed entry in antiquity, using mud bricks consistent in construction with those used in Tausret’s temple itself, probably placing its use after the destruction of the temple. We recovered heavily disturbed and disarticulated mummified human remains from in front of and within Features 1 and 2. A small selection of prestige items were found in relation to Feature 1, including: parts of several Mycenaean stirrup jars,10 large sea shells (still to be identified, but not otherwise found in other burials in the immediate area), and enigmatic ostraca (including what may be a poor-quality “magic wand”).

Our research indicates that Petrie knew of at least one of these features (probably our “Feature 1”) and identified it as belonging to one or more persons connected with the Assyrian occupation of Thebes at the end of the 25th Dynasty (c. 665–657 BCE). Our understanding of the materials found in and around Feature 1, which had been disturbed significantly both before and after Petrie, is consistent with his conclusion. It is probable, however, that Feature 1 was reused several times (e.g., as a shelter, although seemingly only once for burial), and we cannot assign dates or dynasties conclusively yet to any of the individuals who were buried in these crude tombs.

Fig. 7. Northern scarp (photograph from southeast).

Flanking Feature 1 at the base of the northern scarp are two similar cave/tombs, designated Features 2 and 3, that were also discovered during the 2012 season.11 The partially disarticulated mummies of several juveniles were found in front of Feature 2, though little else in the way of diagnostic material culture accompanied them apart from fragments of Canaanite amphorae. During the 2014 season, we continued to clear and map the areas in and around all three features. Little
additional diagnostic material was discovered, although we were able to determine what we believe to be the western extent of the features along this scarp. Plate 1 (see page 13) shows the distribution of the artifacts found in association with all three features.

As can be seen in Fig. 7, at the top of the northern scarp is a mud-brick pillar commonly referred to as part of the so-called temple of Khonsuardis.\textsuperscript{12} There remains a significant question as to whether or not the features we found at the base of the northern scarp, and thus underneath the temple that was used in the 22\textsuperscript{nd}–23\textsuperscript{rd} Dynasty and again in the late 25\textsuperscript{th} or 26\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty, bear any relationship to that temple or its builders. We hope to obtain approval to investigate this possibility at some time in the future.

**OTHER INTERESTING FINDS IN THE NORTHERN SCARP**

*Cache of New Kingdom offering sherds*

Thousands of sherds from hundreds (or more) of broken offerings vessels (beer jars, ring base stands and red-rimmed bowls typical of the New Kingdom) were found outside the burial features in the northern scarp, also. None of the sherds were found inside the features (except where modern disturbance can be attributed) and all appear to have been underneath several layers of thin mud floors associated with crude chapels for the cave/tombs. The location and volume of these sherds suggest strongly their deposition at a time prior to the use of the cave/tombs and during a short interval (possibly a singular event). The sheer volume of these relatively consistent kinds of ceramics is interesting unto itself, as it is unusual at this site. They are under continued study.

*A jar seal/stopper with the cartouche of Ramesses II*

Discovered in the lower stratum at the western edge of the northern scarp (near Feature 3), this stopper (Fig. 8) was found in what appears to be a small midden of broken ceramics, as noted directly above. Given Tausret’s intentional and direct efforts to associate with her ancestor,\textsuperscript{13} it should not be surprising to find some such examples of his “presence” at the site. Nevertheless, until the ceramics found near the northern scarp are understood better, interpretation of this find remains elusive.

*A set of sun-baked offering stands and small dishes*

A cluster of sun-baked dishes and fragments of small stands was found in 2013 at the base of the northern scarp, near the entrance of Feature 1. Since these are extremely rare anywhere in Egypt during any period, we continued studying them this season. Most were broken, but their general shape
could be ascertained. Small, flat-based dishes are found frequently in deposits dated to the New Kingdom. Stands are found less often. Finding them together, unfired, is highly unusual. Sun-baked mud vessels are rare in the literature and, when they are mentioned, they usually appear in contexts associated with the embalming process. Why these vessels were not fired is a mystery. They all are wheel-made and coarsely finished. A few of the dishes have traces of black on their inner surfaces. They appear ready to have been put into a kiln, but no kilns have been found near the Tausret site.

The collection of vessels was found in association with several disarticulated human remains (including at least four juveniles) in a one square meter area at the base of the northern scarp, about 1 m east of the entrance to Feature 1 and about 1 m above the bedrock surface. It appears as though they may have been part of an offering cache. The vessels will be the subject of a manuscript to be published soon. The apparent absence of such vessels in the literature to date invites further investigation.

Fig. 9. Drawings of the sun-baked offering stands (R. Hummel).

Fig. 10. Photograph of select pieces of the sun-baked offering stands.
This season we conducted a large-scale series of tasks designed to improve the longevity, safety and appearance of the site. With the expert guidance of our engineer, and in consultation with our inspector and other members of the local archaeological administration, we undertook the following:

1) We removed the weeds from the southernmost side of the Tausret site near the wall of Merenptah’s temple. This was done at the request of the Merenptah temple inspector and other government officials.

2) We stabilized the modern road embankment near the northwest corner of Tausret’s temple with mud-brick retaining walls constructed with more than 7,000 bricks and clean fill.

3) We replaced and cemented the fence beside the road above the site (Fig. 11).

4) We inserted more than thirty plaster architectural test patches (seen at right in Fig. 11) into the cracks and fissures of all exposed areas of the northern and western gebel scarps. These were monitored at least daily to observe cracks that might suggest instability. Similar patches inserted during our 2013 season show no signs of instability, but we will continue to monitor them for any environmental changes.

5) We spread sterile sand in the temple’s foundation trenches and other recently excavated areas to protect the edges of the trenches and temple rooms, and to highlight the temple outline with a color similar to the sandstone from which the original walls of the temple would have been constructed. Sand was not spread on top of surface areas, which represent the area of rooms in the temple. As a result, the floor plan of the temple is now discernible from elevated views.

6) With the approval and in the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Antiquities, we removed over seventy-five truckloads of flood debris and modern refuse that accumulated near the base of the western scarp during the last 100 years.

7) We stabilized the interior walls of Feature 5 with fired brick and plaster, and sealed the entrance to protect it.
PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

We are pleased to report that our latest season of work on the Tausret Temple Project proved very valuable. With the assistance of local workmen, we were able to successfully clear two large areas of the temple site. We continue to develop our understanding of the form and history of the temple, including its extent of completion, and the later occupations at the site. In addition, we revealed at least one previously unmapped Theban tomb, albeit one that is unpainted, undecorated, and now nearly devoid of cultural material. We will continue to study the material culture and context of the site, and publish additional information and conclusions beyond those that are possible in this report. As always, we thank the Ministry of Antiquities and Heritage for the opportunity to work with our colleagues in Egypt who were most helpful and are acknowledged above, and we look forward to working with them again in a future season.

NOTES

3.  We would like to acknowledge the kind permission of the Ministry of Antiquities and Heritage to work in Egypt, as well as long-standing support from the members of the Permanent Committee. In addition, we would like to thank Hany Abu El-Azm, Director of Foreign Missions, for his kind and continued help in arranging our work in Egypt; Dr. Hazim Karrar, Director of Upper Egypt; Talat Abdel Aziz, Director of the West Bank at Luxor; Fahiti Yaseen, Director of Middle Thebes; Hekmat Araby and Ezz Adin, Chief Inspectors of Middle Thebes; the American Research Center in Egypt, especially Mme Amira Khattab, and their many colleagues. Osama Saad Alla Hamdoun Abdella served as our inspector, for whom we are extremely grateful. Finally, Reis Omar Farouk Sayed el-Quftawi and Reis Ali Farouk Sayed el-Quftawi managed our team of workmen with excellence, as usual. Certainly not least, we are immensely grateful to the benefactors of the UAEE, who truly make all of our efforts possible. Finally, we thank the editorial board of The Ostracon for assisting in bringing this work to press and improving it along the way.
4.  The 2014 field team (Plate II) consisted of: Pearce Paul Creasman, Director; Nancy Ackelson, Field Assistant; Rebecca Caroli, Photographer and Field Archaeologist; Clinton Creasman, Engineer; Stephanie Denkowicz, Field Assistant; Ayad Barliary Hessein, Ceramics Illustrator; Richard Harwood, Associate Director and Section Leader; Rexine Hummel, Ceramicist; James Van Arsdel, Field Assistant; Suzanne Vukobratovich, Object Registrar; Mariel Watt, Assistant Registrar; Jessica Sue Wiles, Assistant Ceramicist; and graduate student participants Bethany Becktell, Erin Denbaars, Benjamin Denton, Tori Finlayson, Leah Guillaume, and Kelli Williams.
5.  Throughout the following discussion, “north” and other cardinal points are based on local north as utilized by the ancient Egyptians of the New Kingdom. Local north on the Tausret site lies at 40 degrees east of magnetic north. Other structures, especially of later periods, appear to be oriented in relation to the gebel scarps on the west and north sides of the temple site.
6.  The UAEE uses “TC” to denote the area in the northwest corner of the temple and immediately east of the western scarp, “TA” and “TB” to denote units in the temple proper, and “TD” to denote the area immediately south of northern scarp.
7.  Thutmose IV’s memorial temple lies to the north of Tausret’s temple, between her temple and the Ramesseum, and incorporated thousands of mud bricks in its construction. It was not uncommon for later kings to pillage resources from their predecessors’ monuments.
11. The Features were labeled in order of discovery. Since we were initially unsure of their use (as tombs) we have opted to keep their field labels here as they correspond to our excavation records and field notes.
12. Petrie believed that this site belonged to “Khonsuardus, goldsmith of the temple of Amen” of the 25th or 26th Dynasty (Petrie 1897, 18). Later excavations by Edda Bresciani determined that it had belonged previously.
to a vizier named Nebneteru, son of the vizier Hor, and dated to the 22nd or 23rd Dynasty [Bresciani “L’attività archeologica in Egitto (1966–1976) dell’Istituto di Papirologia dell’Università di Milano” and Un decennio di ricerche archeologiche/Quaderni de ‘La ricerca scientifica 100 (1978), 243–258]. Nevertheless, it is still commonly referred to in most publications as the temple of Khonsuuardis.


About the Authors

Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman has been conducting archaeological research in Egypt for more than a decade. Since 2009 he has been at the University of Arizona, where he serves in several capacities, including Director of the Egyptian Expedition, Curator of the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research, Assistant Research Professor of Dendrochronology, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, and Associate Editor of the peer-reviewed Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections.

Rebecca Caroli, Tori Finlayson, and Bethany Becktell are graduate students who participated in the 2014 season and made significant contributions both in the field and to this report.

Plate I. The distribution of the artifacts found in association with Features 1, 2, and 3.

Plate II. The 2014 field team.