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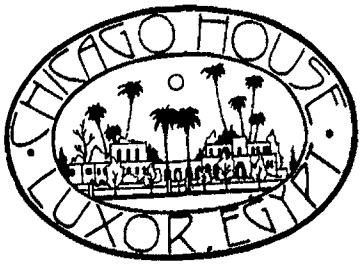

CHICAGO HOUSE BULLETIN

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THE GULF CRISIS REVISITED

By Peter Dorman, Field Director

The momentous events that shook the Gulf region this winter are merely the last in a long series of struggles that have taken place in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers since the birth of civilization in the Middle East. Even in ancient times, the repercussions of those conflicts were often felt beyond the lands of Mesopotamia, and 1991 was no exception to an age-old rule.

In the aftermath of the Gulf war, we have been besieged so often by the same question—"how were you able to continue work in Luxor?"—that a further account of local events, as a followup to the article by Carlotta Maher in the previous issue of our *Bulletin*, should satisfy a good deal of curiosity among our readers.

Through the month of November, as international reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait solidified, we noticed a steady decrease in the number and size of tour groups arriving in Luxor. But visitors who persevered with their travel plans discovered a little bit of tourists' paradise: empty tombs and temples, no waiting lines at the museums, and prime photo opportunities without the usual human hordes clustered in the foreground. Huge Nile steamers would set sail for Aswan with only fifteen passengers on board; buses would arrive by twos (rather than twenties) to park at the Valley of the Kings. On the other hand, local businesses and the tourist industry in general suffered badly. Felucca boys and caleche drivers became more and more insistent in their cries for clients. Our mail in the fall was full of letters reluctantly announcing the cancellation of travel plans by individuals and groups who had planned to visit the Chicago House library.

We celebrated the Christmas and New Year's holidays, and several family members flew to Luxor from the States for the year-end festivities. Friends from Cairo dropped in at Chicago House for tea or for dinner, and until January 1st all seemed quite normal. Soon after that things changed.

The United Nations had approved the date of January 15 for military action in case of Iraqi noncompliance with the demand for complete withdrawal, and as this deadline approached the trickle of westerners through Luxor dried up completely. Usually drowned in the flood of sunburned tourists being loaded on to the passenger ferry to the west bank, we instead found ourselves to be almost the only foreigners in town—and highly conspicuous walking along the corniche at the height of tourist season.

Americans learned of the onset of the war on the evening of January 16, several hours before Chicago House woke to the same news on the BBC the morning of the 17th. From that moment on, we felt that friends and relatives at home were far more informed of current developments than we were. We had no access to live broadcasts from Baghdad and Tel Aviv to show us exploding warheads or rooms sealed against poison gas. Despite our physical proximity, the shock of developments was filtered through the BBC (best received in the early morning and at night) or else, through the English-language

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THE FESTIVAL OF SAINT GEORGE

By John Darnell, Epigrapher

The village El-Rizeiqât lies on the west bank of the Nile, about 16 1/2 miles southwest of Luxor. Already before the middle of this century, Baikie noted the destruction of the Middle Kingdom tombs which Baedeker mentioned in connection with El-Rizeiqât. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired the burial chamber of Sobekmose there, and at that time William Hayes commented on the vandalism which eventually robbed the village of its visible pharaonic past. El-Rizeiqât is ignored by most tourists, and sleeps away above the town of Armant, beneath the smoke of the latter's sugar factory.

In late fall, around the middle of November, the pall of insignificance is lifted a bit from El-Rizeiqât and pilgrims—Christian and Moslem alike—stream towards the village from Luxor and other parts of Upper Egypt. Peugeot taxis pass by, packed so full one thinks the rivets must pop; small trucks piled impossibly high teeter down the street, their colossal pompadours of bedding and crates of live and fluttering poultry yearning to collapse. For days, these vehicles form long lines at the Luxor car ferry, and the pedestrian traffic increases at the passenger ferry as well. The goal of this flood of humanity is the festival of Saint George at the church of Mar Girgis at El-Rizeiqât. All around the church of Saint George the pilgrims camp, and during the height of the festival a huge tent and lean-to city envelops the church. The sights and sounds and smells (excluding those produced by the automobiles, which are considerable) could be those of a millennium ago; little El-Rizeiqât, which has forgotten its pharaonic past, becomes for a few days a living reminder of the Middle Ages.

Many Chicago House staff members visit the festival each year; for others, once is enough to acquire memories for a lifetime. The usual visit begins at the gate of a large compound, which contains the church itself as well as a warren of small houses and souvenir stores. After passing through the sensory assault of the medieval town around the enclosure, one sees to the left a huge American fire engine, with enough water pressure to flatten every house in town; to the right, a gaily caparisoned wooden horse, so all can play at St. George. Often a designated tourist guardian will appear at the gate; he will be your companion during the visit. Walking past avenues of shops selling all sorts of things—toys, silver tiaras, electric triptyches, shrines that glow in the dark, 3-D images of Pope Shenuda—the church is reached and visited, and one may light a candle before St. George.

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Gulf Crisis *(continued from p. 1)*

newspapers that arrived from Cairo a couple of days late. For this reason, Americans at home felt an intimacy with fast-breaking events that we did not.

Although we felt safe in Luxor by reason of our relative obscurity, the first few weeks of the war were perhaps the most insecure. To enhance our anonymity, the brass plaques at the gates of Chicago House were removed until April 1st. Concerned by the presence of Americans in an open compound in the middle of town, the local tourist police stationed security guards at our gate to enhance the ferociousness of our watchmen, and they remained for the duration—and our Egyptian staff enjoyed a few extra dominos players.

On January 17, all tombs and temples in the Theban area were officially closed for security reasons—although our own access was not at all restricted. War coincided, however, with the beginning of Egyptian university vacations, and within two days we found that the monuments had reopened to accommodate the great numbers of disappointed Egyptians that had flown to Luxor on holiday with their families.

We, too, suffered some disappointments. The first was the cancellation of the FOCH tour, scheduled for Valentine's weekend. By the time a decision had to be made to continue or to cancel (February 1), the uncertainties were still too great for Chicago House to undertake the reponsibility of hosting a group of American tourists in Luxor. An announcement of the new itinerary for the FOCH tour appears elsewhere in this *Bulletin*.

Second, two of our photographers, including Danny Lanka who had spent the fall with us, had to cancel their January plans to come to Egypt. Our hopes for the completion of theplanning photography at the small temple of Amun at Medinet Habu were curtailed, and Sue Lezon set aside many of her goals for conservation in the photo archives just to keep up with the bleaching and blueprinting of drawings needed by the artists and epigraphers.

The great advantage to the epigraphic work was the privilege of working in almost complete isolation in Luxor Temple. The penciling of enlargements, the work of collation, and the frequent joint conferences could take place at the wall with no distractions whatsoever, and this season must be counted among the most productive that we have enjoyed. Entire days would pass without a single tourist; the ghaffirs would sit disconsolately in glum groups, waiting for visitors who would need advice on that perfect camera angle in

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A TOMB PROJECT IN WESTERN THEBES

By Peter Piccione, Administrator

Working as an Egyptologist at Chicago House is a valuable professional experience, not only in regard to the work of the Epigraphic Survey, but also for the opportunity that Chicago House affords its staff for personal research and outside study. While the pre-doctoral Egyptologists on staff usually use their personal time for dissertation research and writing, the post-doctoral staff will often engage in research for the publishing of monographs and papers.

Occasionally, staff Egyptologists will also engage in significant field projects distinct from the field work of Chicago House. Personal side-projects are as old as the Survey itself, and past staff members such as Harold Nelson, Keith Seele, and Siegfried Schott (to name but a few) have had their own epigraphic projects in the temples and tombs of Thebes while working for the Survey. Normally, these projects occur on personal time, and they do not impinge on Survey working time.

It is in this tradition, while working as administrative assistant to the director, that I have embarked on the Theban Tombs Publication Project. This project is a long-term epigraphic undertaking to document and publish as many as possible of the New Kingdom tombs in the necropolis of Western Thebes.

February 1990 marked the first official field season of the project, when we began work in Theban Tombs no. 72 and 121, which belonged respectively to the high priest, Ra, and his father, Ahmose. Project staff consisted of Daniel Lanka, a Chicago House photographer who has generously donated his personal services to the effort, and myself as epigrapher and project director. Chicago House provided logistical support by lending equipment, while the Egyptian Antiquities Organization provided its official approval.

On all counts including location, architecture, history, decoration and archaeology, the tomb of Ra is quite dramatic. It is located atop the hill of Sheikh Abd el-Gurna with a stunning view below of the noblemen's tombs, temples, and the east and west banks of the Theban Nile.

In a striking departure from the usual styles of Theban private tombs, the tomb of Ra is constructed on three levels. On the ground are two colonnades of square-cut pillars divided by a central ramp rising over them and accessing a terrace above. At the rear of this terrace are the remnants of a mud-brick platform, forming an upper terrace, and centered in the wall slightly above this platform is the doorway opening into the tomb. A second central ramp leads up to that door from the first terrace. In the walls on either side of the platform, two niches contain the remains of false doors, the elements of which are molded out of mud plaster. Impressive is the tympanum of the northern door in which the molded details of a *djed*-pillar grating are still well preserved. Architecturally, this tomb is unique among all the private tombs in Thebes, since, with its system of colonnades, terraces and inter-connecting ramps, it emulates the style of a royal terrace-temple, such as the temples of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari and the mortuary temple of Tuthmosis III at Gurna.

The architectural style of the tomb is probably related to the fact that Ra was the high priest of the two aforementioned temples of Tuthmosis III during the reign of the latter's son, Amenhotep II. Indeed, in texts inside his tomb, Ra holds the titles of high priest in four temples of Western Thebes, including the mortuary temple of Tuthmosis III, the temple at Deir el-Bahari, the small temple at Medinet Habu, and the temple of Amenhotep I. He also holds the significant title of Overseer of the Mansion of Gold of Amun (the gold workshop of the temple). Interestingly, in the same texts, his brothers also hold the titles of High Priest of Amun in other Theban temples, while his father, Ahmose, in his own tomb inscriptions, claims the title of Second Prophet in the mortuary temple of Tuthmosis III in the reign of that king. Therefore, this family of priests was closely allied to the Egyptian royal family, and it held most of

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340-2739

in the U.S.: **The Epigraphic Survey**
1155 East 58th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
tel. no. 312/702-9524

Tomb Project *(continued from p. 2)*

the key sacerdotal positions in Western Thebes. Clearly, an important part of the tomb project is an historical study of the family, its origins and social position, and its relationship to the Eighteenth Dynasty royal family.

Other significant considerations in the study of the tomb of Ra are its decoration, physical condition and patterns of re-use. The inscribed decoration is painted on plaster. Unfortunately, about sixty-five percent of the plastered walls are destroyed, while half of the remaining decorated surface is covered with a thick black soot or is damaged by burning, cracking and peeling. However, the fine artwork that does survive reveals a style and quality nearly identical to that of the famous (and nearly contemporary) tomb of Rekhmire. Thus, before those walls are properly copied, the plaster surface must be reconsolidated and cleaned.

The tomb contains two representations of King Amenhotep II, one as a young man enthroned with his mother, Merytre-Hatshepsut, the other in his chariot hunting in the desert. While by no means unique, such scenes occur only rarely in private tombs, and their presence here bespeaks the tomb owner's high position and prerogatives.

Scattered debris inside the tomb reveals that it was also used for burials in the Late Period. However, even earlier in the Twentieth Dynasty, Ra's coffin was usurped for the reburial of Ramesses VI in the royal cache at Deir el-Bahari. This indicates that by that time, the tomb had been robbed and the coffin emptied of its first contents. Later in the Coptic period, the tomb was reused as a house or hermitage, from which use the walls came to be blackened and burned. The archaeological clearance of the tomb and its burial chambers, which we plan for the coming seasons, will clarify its later history.

In two seasons of work, 1990 and 1991, we have completed the first phase of the photography, including black and white and color photos of all wall areas, and I have started making handcopies of the inscriptions. In addition we have made detailed measurements of all interior and exterior surfaces in preparation of a formal architectural survey. In the next season I look forward to beginning the facsimile drawings, as well as a condition survey of the walls and perhaps clearance of the outer courts. **END**

Saint George *(continued from p. 1)*

Faithful Christians and visiting Moslems come here to pray for intercession from the warrior Saint George, who is depicted slaying the dragon in a painting above the altar of the church. Many expect miracles here, and from the tales we have heard, at least a few are not disappointed. A steady flow of people continues daily through the church, slowing in front of the icon of Saint George, where prayers are said, the image is adored, even touched and kissed. Clouds of dust stirred by the feet of so many faithful pilgrims add an aura of mystery to the semi-gloom within.

In the figure of Saint George, one may think to catch a glimpse of a pre-Christian origin of the festival. The motif of the armored equestrian saint spearing a dragon as the embodiment of evil may have entered Coptic and Western Christian art ultimately (via Late Roman imperial iconography) through depictions of the god Horus spearing the evil Seth, who sometimes assumed the guise of a crocodile. Warrior saints were popular in Coptic art, and it is interesting to note that the legends of warrior saints so popular along the Rhine, tales of Roman soldiers killed for their religion, refer to the victorious martyrs as members of a Theban legion, Egyptians from Upper Egypt. In some Late Period depictions, Horus is shown as a mounted, falcon-headed man in Roman armor, running through the crocodile Seth. One could conjecture a festival of Horus occurring here in the last days of paganism in Egypt, a festival which ultimately became the celebration of Saint George at El-Rizeiqât. This would, however, remain conjecture.

Leaving the church to the right of the altar, we approach the slaughter house. Many of the pilgrims who visit El-Rizeiqât bring goats as an offering to the martial saint; near the church they are slaughtered and their flesh auctioned to the crowds. Working on the scenes of the Opet festival in Luxor Temple, we are by now well acquainted with the scenes of butchering accompanying the arrival of the barks of the gods at Luxor. In these Opet scenes, small soldiers run about barking orders, and tiny butchers saw and hack and twist at bull parts. It is one thing to see this on the wall, and another to see it in person. The squeamish often remain outside (this has its disadvantages, however, since there one must take care not to

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Gulf Crisis *(continued from p. 2)*

exchange for a little baksheesh.

Several hotels and most restaurants were closed in Luxor, including the Winter Palace, which inadvertently chose a very good year to carry out large-scale renovations. The Hilton had six guests one week, and two the next, but stayed open throughout. The Old Cataract in Aswan kept only five rooms open. Luxor acquired the aspect it must have had decades before, when people traveled individually to Egypt on their doctors' advice, or to pursue in leisurely manner an amateur's interest in archaeology.

This "ghost-town" aspect disappeared promptly with the end of hostilities and the regularization of air service to Egypt. Tour groups again appeared on our horizon—mostly from Germany and Italy, but none from the United States. It may well be that next year will see a resurgence in tourism that will put things back to normal, but those of us who remember the season of 1990-1991 will recall it as a series of contradictions: a time that was fairly dull, slightly tense, very productive, and unique in our experience. **END**

Saint George *(continued from p. 3)*

be bumped or splattered by the animal bits being taken out of the slaughtering hall). The slaughtering house is, however, surprisingly clean and orderly; the activity is constant and well organized, and the bidding for goat parts is brisk.

Late in the day a procession forms just inside the gate, and proceeds towards the church. Icons of Saint George are held aloft, as palm branches sway, bells tinkle, and incense rises. This chanting and singing throng swaying towards the church had predecessors who once visited Luxor for a great festival. In the scenes of musicians following the Opet procession on land in the Colonnade Hall, there are people whom accompanying hieroglyphic annotations refer to as the "musicians of Khepeshyet." The town of Khepeshyet was apparently located in the area of Egypt between Nag Awlad in the south and El-Rizeiqât in the north. These "musicians of Khepeshyet" no longer come to Luxor, but their spiritual descendants still celebrate with as much vigor at the festival of Saint George at El-Rizeiqât.

END

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