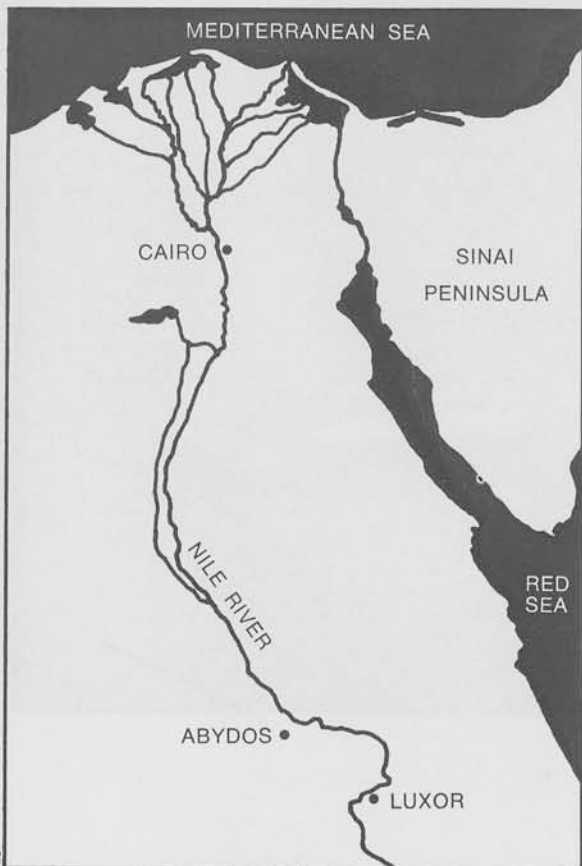


# THE EXCAVATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM AKHENATEN TEMPLE PROJECT AT KARNAK

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1 Scene reconstructed from some of the disassembled blocks. Akhenaten's wife, Nefertiti, makes an offering to the sun-disc, the rays of which (ending in hands) fill the upper part of the scene. Behind Nefertiti is one of her daughters. By Leslie Greener.

2 Map of Egypt.

The largest single ruin-site in Egypt is located at modern Luxor on the Nile 450 miles south of the Mediterranean Coast. Called in ancient times, "Victorious Wese" or simply the "Southern City," and dubbed "Thebes" by the Greeks, Luxor comprises three great complexes of ruins intersected by the river. On the east bank stand two temples, that of Amun at Karnak ("Most Select of Places") and Amun's southern temple at Luxor ("Southern select [place]"), which provided anciently the foci for domestic settlement; while on the west bank the sprawling series of royal mortuary temples stretches for over three miles along the base of the Sahara cliffs.

All temples at Thebes were conceived on the monumental scale to be expected in ancient Egypt, and employed in the main large masonry blocks weighing much more than a single worker could carry; but already 150 years ago or more another type of masonry had been observed in the rubbish heaps and collapsing walls of Karnak. This was a type of small, sandstone block of standard dimensions (ca 52 x 25 x 22 cm.), many examples of which bore on one side part of a relief scene. Not even two blocks were found in contiguous position—all were in fact re-used

as filling material—and so no relief scene was ever complete. But all showed a consistent style and were clearly to be dated by theme and text to the reign of the monotheist pharaoh Amenophis IV or Akhenaten as he chose to call himself (ca 1375-1358 B.C.). As clearance and restoration progressed at Karnak and later at Luxor, more and more of these small blocks, or *talatat* as the Egyptian workmen early called them, came to light from inside the massifs of gates and under foundations, until today we possess over 40,000 inscribed blocks. These are distributed, much in the haphazard order in which they were recovered, in eight storehouses (seven at Karnak, one at Luxor) in the Theban area, while a few of the best have, sadly, been spirited away to European and American collections.

Attempts to reconstruct and study the shattered reliefs were undertaken in a desultory fashion until 1966, when a distinguished retired diplomat, Mr. Ray Winfield Smith, a Research Associate of the University Museum, founded the Akhenaten Temple Project, one of whose purposes is to reconstruct by means of photographs taken to scale, together with supplemental line drawings, the scenes depicted on these blocks. Hundreds of scenes have been or are now being matched from such photographs; and our knowledge of Akhenaten's Temples and the early years of his reign has been increased immeasurably.

We know now that during the first five years of his reign Akhenaten erected at Karnak a number of buildings, mainly for cultic purposes. Eight names are attested for these structures, but to judge from the frequency of occurrence, the size of each building varied. The largest by far was called *Gem-pa-aten* "the sun-disc is found," which was decorated throughout with scenes depicting the king's jubilee. Slightly smaller perhaps, but said to be "in the *Gem-pa-aten*," was the "Mansion of the Benben stone," involving *inter alia* a piersed court or peristyle (see *National Geographic*, September 1970). One type of scene only, it seems, was used in the decoration of the Mansion of the Benben stone, viz. an offering scene in which the queen and not the king officiated. In fact, Akhenaten is never found in scenes identified as coming from this shrine. Two buildings of slightly smaller proportions, based on the same relative frequency of textual reference, are the *Rewd-menuw* ("Sturdy are the Monuments [of the Sun-disc for ever]") and the *Teni-menuw* ("Exalted are the Monuments [of the Sun-disc for ever]"). *Rewd-menuw* scenes show vast numbers of outdoor braziers of great height, chariot processions, soldiers, attendants and palace scenes. *Teni-menuw*'s decoration is a little more varied, involving domestic scenes. The names of four additional



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buildings are attested, but so infrequently that their decoration or purpose cannot now be ascertained.

All the relief decoration was executed in the new, "expressionist" style which Akhenaten introduced in the first year of his reign. The king, and after him his family and court, are depicted in the exaggerated form inspired by the curious appearance of the monarch who is thought by some to have suffered from Froehlich's Syndrome, an abnormality of the pituitary gland. No anthropomorphic deity is shown; only one god is tolerated, Reharakhty the sun-god, and his icon is the simple, many-armed sun-disc.

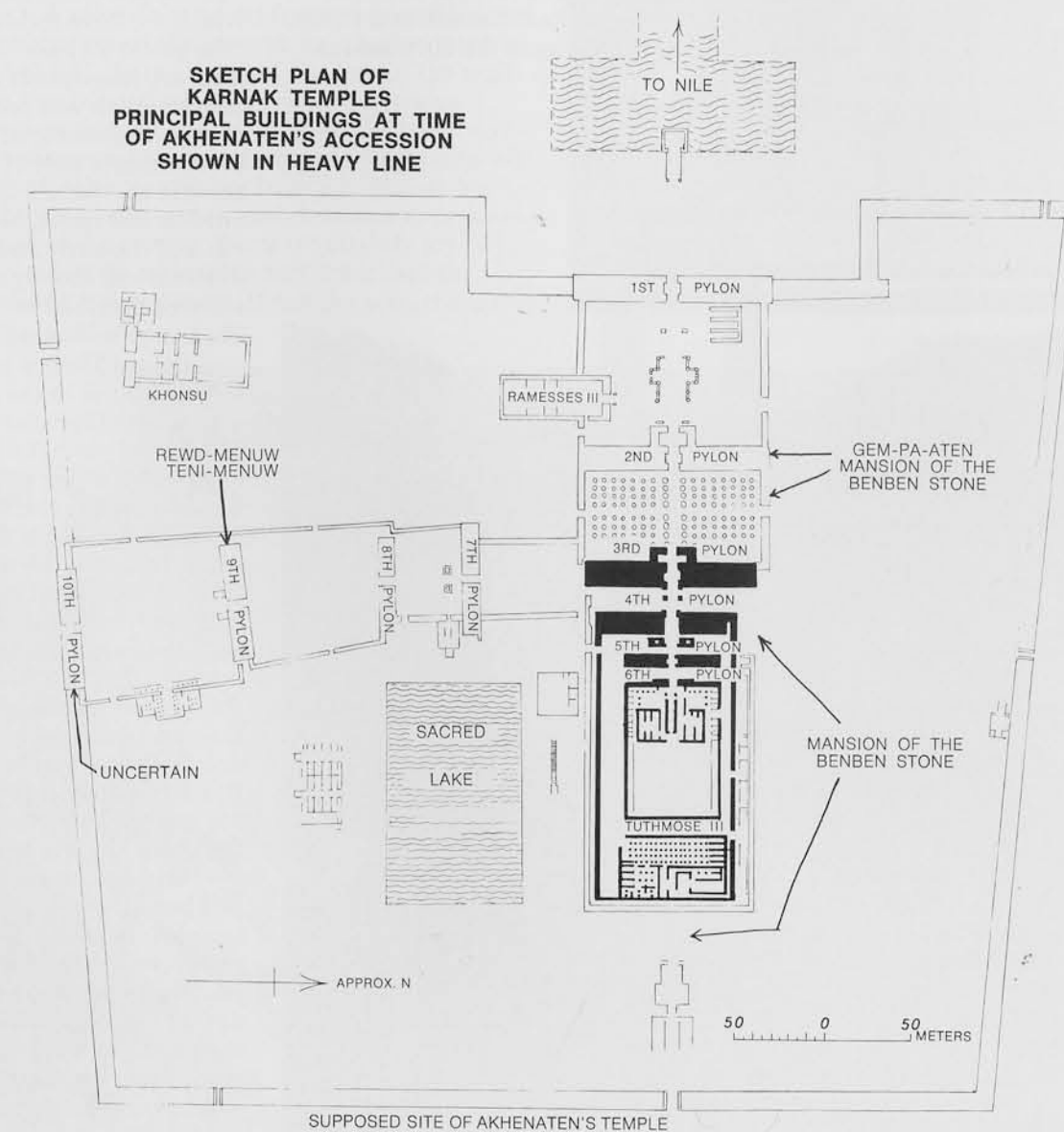
A decade after its formation, the Akhenaten Temple Project had progressed beyond all initial expectation; but ironically, while much could be said about relief decoration, both thematically and stylistically, the architecture

and even the sites of the eight named structures were still unknown. Excavation was now clearly called for, and so request was made to the Department of Antiquity for a concession. The area selected was the undulating, pock-marked terrain due east of the enclosure wall of the Temple of Amun, where in 1925 the excavation of a drainage ditch by the Luxor municipality had resulted in the chance discovery of a line of colossi of Akhenaten. In subsequent years the inspector of antiquities, Henri Chevrier, had tried to trace the row of statues east and west with only moderate success, and the exact nature of the remains in this quarter had remained in doubt. This being the only area to date known to have been the site of something Akhenaten had constructed, it was obvious that we should begin here.

In April 1975 two squares, A to the south,

3 East Karnak. The undulating ground east of the Temple of Amun is today capped by the spoil heaps of many early excavators. In ancient times it was the site of the eastern quarter of Thebes and Akhenaten's *Gem-pa-aten* temple.

4 Plan of the Karnak Temple of Amun. The find-spots of re-used *talatat* are noted, together with the temples from which the predominant number of blocks in that location originally came.



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B to the north, were laid out on the slopes of Chevrier's old excavation, the purpose being to provide a cross-section of the strata through which he had cut. (Chevrier was a notoriously bad recorder and published virtually nothing by way of reports.) In the 1976 season the A-square was continued toward the east gate of the Karnak complex by three additional squares, while B was continued west by the addition of one square.

Almost immediately we began to rue the paucity of Chevrier's reports, for like all early archaeologists he had taken no pains to dump his debris off the site, but had piled it right beside his trench. The result was that for a depth of three meters from the surface we found ourselves unexpectedly digging through M. Chevrier's dump. It was not, however, an unmitigated disaster, as excavating a dump is good training for the novice in stratigraphy, and in this dump a good deal of material had been discarded which turned out to be valuable. Chevrier had, moreover, not been the only excavator to use East Karnak as a dump. Much of the area we dug in the 1976 season

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Remains of pier bases at the southwest corner of the *Gem-pa-aten* courtyard. These piers, originally some six to seven meters in height, were set around the perimeter of the court at intervals of two meters. A colossus of the king adorned the face of each pier.



produced a dump containing vast quantities of *terra sigillata* and Roman glass, both of which are completely absent from the original, underlying strata. We can only conclude that earlier inspectors of antiquities had dumped debris here during the course of their clearing operations within the Amun Temple enclosure.

In A-square immediately beneath the original surface of 1925, we encountered a layer of ash and house walls. Three phases of occupation were in evidence, as represented by rebuilds and floor levels, and in the latest phase numerous circular and elliptical ovens had been inserted into the corners of rooms and denuded walls. A little ash lay in corners, but for the most part the ovens were remarkably clean: the inhabitants had apparently had time to evacuate themselves in good order, and the ruins were windswept for some time. Unlike the southern side of Chevrier's trench, the northern side (B-square) proved to contain a substantial house which we have dubbed (probably wrongly) "the priest's house" on the basis of a fragmentary inscription mentioning a priest of Amun which was recovered in one of the rooms. The whole of this level, both in A and B, represents part of the eastern quarter of the city of Thebes, dated on the basis of pottery and coins, between approximately the 7th and the early 2nd century B.C. Its violent destruction, shortly after 200 B.C., may possibly be ascribed to the suppression of a Theban rebellion under Ptolemy V (186 B.C.).

Before Thebes had expanded into this eastern sector in the 7th century B.C., the area where Chevrier had uncovered the line of colossal statues of Akhenaten had been marked by a depression used as a rubbish tip. Bones, pottery, and discarded bricks had been thrown down the slope for over three centuries, until the accumulated depth of rubbish amounted to over a meter. Five fragments of fired bricks were found stamped with the name and title of Menkheperre, high-priest of Amun at the end of the 11th century B.C., giving us a *terminus a quo* for the rubbish heap. Significantly, no occupational debris of any sort has been found dating to Dynasties 19 and 20 (ca 1317-1085 B.C.), and we can only conclude that for nearly seven centuries the site was shunned.

The reason soon became apparent: this had been the site of one of Akhenaten's temples. Beneath the rubbish tip lay the sad remains of the south side of a peristyle court, exactly as the spoilers had left it on the last day of their demolition work. In front (i.e. to the north) of a two meters wide wall ran a row of piers, apparently supporting the roof of a colonnade. Against each pier, facing north into an open court, had stood one of the colossal statues of the king unearthed by

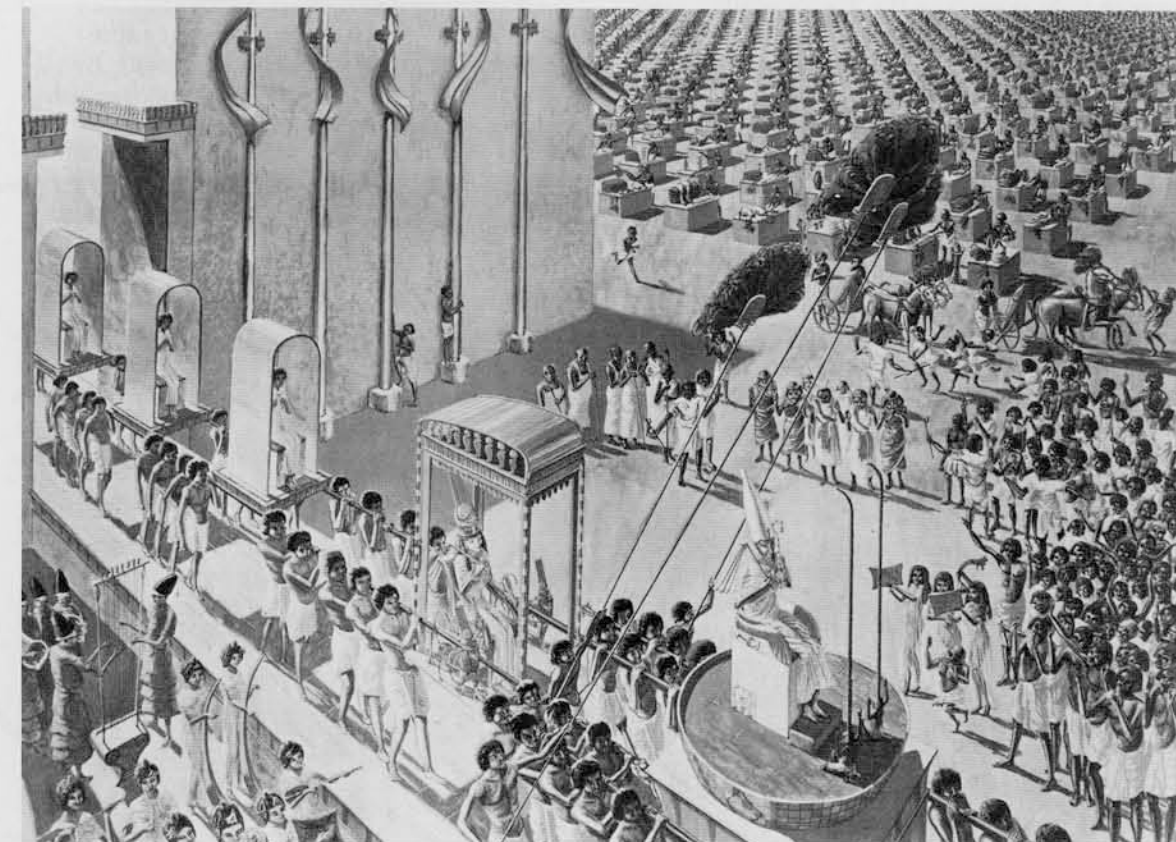
Chevrier. One such pier had been placed every two meters for a stretch of colonnade ca 200 meters in length, so the total complement of sculpture on the south side alone was very impressive. Each pier, however, had been dismantled by Akhenaten's enemies who destroyed the temple after his death, and every colossus smashed and thrown face down into the open court. Likewise the back wall had been torn down to its very foundations and most of its masonry removed to be used as fill in the core of the 2nd pylon or beneath the hypostyle hall.

A pile of shattered fragments still littered the surface of the ground, as it had existed in 1340 B.C., to the south of the line of the wall. In this pile, of which a stretch of twelve meters was recovered in A-square, we recovered over a hundred decorated fragments, all identifiable as coming from a jubilee scene showing king, queen and courtiers in procession to the temple. Since we already knew from our photographic matching that the jubilee was the main, if not the sole, theme



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The bottom course of the east wall of the courtyard. The entire wall had been robbed out in antiquity.

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Artist's impression of the Processional at the great jubilee of Akhenaten. The king, in white crown of Upper Egypt and seated on his palanquin, is followed by the queen, Nefertiti, in her sedan-chair, and the royal children. To the left, musicians, both Asiatic and Egyptian, play a variety of instruments, while in the background priests make offerings at hundreds of tables. Although collocation of some elements is doubtful, most details can be corroborated. By Leslie Greener.





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shrines, a great dais with altar, among other temporary structures. It would seem that it is what elsewhere would have been called the "Court of the Great Ones" within the *Gem-pa-aten* that we have discovered.

A-square turns out to be laid out athwart the south wall of this court, about thirty meters from the southwest corner. B-square must be within the court, but because of the substantial nature of the "Priest's House" at a higher level, our excavation has not yet penetrated to the surface of the court. The main axis of the court is east-west, and this dimension may have exceeded two hundred meters. The north-south width is not as yet established with certainty, but a magnetometer survey begun by us in December 1976 suggests that it may be in the neighborhood of ninety meters.

Akhenaten had not built on virgin ground. Beneath the packed earth surface of his temple lay the mud-brick walls of an earlier settlement, dating to the 2nd Intermediate period (ca 1775-1560 B.C.) and possibly surviving into the early 18th Dynasty. It had been destroyed in a conflagration, but how long before Akhenaten is impossible to say. When the water table was reached the walls and stratified occupation levels were still descending, and it is impossible to estimate the thickness of the debris which is beyond recovery.

Dumps and the water table point up the difficulties of excavation in East Karnak. A modern excavation, with facilities for flotation, faunal and soil analysis, usually has little difficulty in reconstructing in some detail the life of an ancient settlement. But if one's predecessor has left his dump behind, precious days and financial resources can be wasted in removing it; and if the water table should prove unexpectedly high and the pressure great, it is often impracticable and too costly to continue digging. Nevertheless, East Karnak offers a rare opportunity to the archaeologist of recovering almost half of an ancient city, a capital city in fact, and of examining its town planning, its distribution of economy, and its subsistence base. 2

depicted in the *Gem-pa-aten*, we assumed that the temple whose south colonnade we had uncovered was, in fact, the *Gem-pa-aten*. This was shortly confirmed, when a block came to light depicting the king's white crown, and preserving that part of the caption text which referred to the temple, and the name was *Gem-pa-aten*.

It is unclear why Akhenaten, as early as the second or third year of his reign, decided to celebrate a jubilee; but the evidence is unanimous in suggesting that this "first *sed*-festival of H.M." (as the jubilee was called) was the first gala performance of his reign. In traditional fashion the grounds for the jubilee were laid out, and the requisite buildings constructed: a ceremonial palace, a "court of the great ones" filled with small

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Talatat fragment found in the excavations, identifying the temple as *Gem-pa-aten*.

#### Suggested Reading

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*The Akhenaten Temple Project, Vol. 1, Initial Discoveries*, Aris and Phillips Ltd., Warminster, England.

**Donald B. Redford** received his MA from the Department of Oriental Languages in the University of Toronto in 1958, his Ph.D. from Brown University in 1965, the title of his dissertation being, "A Study of the Chronology of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty." He is a professor in the Department of Near Eastern Studies of the University of Toronto, having been a member of the staff since 1961. He has done considerable field work in Palestine and Egypt, was consultant for the Akhenaten Temple Project in 1971 and has directed that Project since 1972. With David O'Connor of the University Museum, he organized the International Congress on Egyptology held at Cairo in January 1975. Dr. Redford is the author of numerous articles in scientific publications on the archaeology of Egypt and other areas of the Near East.