Field Work in Egypt

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The University Museum has at present three field expeditions active in Egypt, continuing a tradition of Egyptianological research begun by the Museum in 1906. The current expeditions cover a wide range of interests: excavation, epigraphy, the cleaning and restoration of damaged monuments, and research into the application of computers to the study and storage and analysis of archaeological and epigraphic data.

The success of our Egyptian expeditions has been due in large part to the design of these expeditions. Three have been under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Kitchen, who was an ancient Egypt specialist and a generous supporter of the Museum's research program.

The first expedition is the Egypt Exploration Fund, which has been in existence since 1881. This expedition is directed by Professor John L. Myres, who has been a member of the University Museum faculty since 1964.

The second expedition is the University of Pennsylvania Archaeological Institute, which was founded in 1896. This expedition is directed by Professor William F. Abell, who has been a member of the University Museum faculty since 1962.

The third expedition is the University of California, Los Angeles, Archaeological Institute, which was founded in 1958. This expedition is directed by Professor Donald B. Redford, who has been a member of the University Museum faculty since 1965.

In summary, these expeditions have contributed significantly to the study of ancient Egypt. They have produced a wealth of data and have helped to advance our understanding of the ancient world.

FALL, 1968
Excavations at Abydos: the same structure in foreground is Ramesses II temple, and the brick wall at rear is that of the main temple enclosure.

Two recent study have shown to be conceptually linked with the Royal Tombs, situated outside our concession.

Two seasons have already been completed (January to May, 1967 and February to April, 1968) and a minimum of four more is planned. Part of this time was devoted to building an expedition house, but already a large part of a structure called the “Portal of Ramessus II” (1304–1237 B.C.) has been excavated. It is now seen to be not a ceremonial gateway, as once thought, but a temple which was subsequently largely demolished; numerous and later mud-brick tombs surround it. Some eight hundred objects, many inscribed, have been discovered, including well preserved funerary stelae, fragments of a royal colossus, large numbers of hieratic and demotic ostraca, and a variety of other objects.

The problems of data-retrieval and data-analysis presented by the continually accumulating records of any long-term excavation have made it necessary for us to develop, in conjunction with the Near Eastern Section of the Museum, a computer retrieval program which will enable us not only to obtain information on an object in a matter of seconds, but also to arrange our data in possibly significant patterns of material, shape, provenance, etc. The program itself is now complete and the Abydos records are currently being prepared for storage and analysis.

Another of the University Museum’s interests is preparing and completing previous Museum work in Egypt for final publication. It was for this reason as well as the intrinsic interest of the material that the Dra Abu el-Naga project was organized by myself and Mr. Lanny Bell of the Egyptian Section. The epigraphic work is being supervised by Professor Cerny, Visiting Professor of Egyptology at the University of Pennsylvania, and the actual field work (now covering two seasons, February–April, 1967 and January–April, 1968) has been directed by Lanny Bell. Due to his efforts the project is now firmly established (see Expedition, Vol. 10, No. 2).

At Dra Abu el-Naga in 1921–23 a Museum expedition under Clarence S. Fisher cleared and planned twenty-two decorated tombs, mostly Ramesside in date (Nineteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, about 1314–1085 B.C.). Very few tombs of this period have been fully published. This particular group contains tombs of high officials, including three High Priests of Amun and two Viceroy of Kush, whose inscriptions are of historical interest. The archaeological record of Fisher’s expedition was good, but as the ceilings and walls of many tombs had been obscured by smoke and dirt centuries ago the epigraphic record was very incomplete. Mr. Bell and his assistants have now almost completed the copying and collating of the texts in the tomb of Bekenkhons, High Priest of Amun (Tomb 35), and many of its wall and ceiling surfaces have been cleaned, increasing the legibility of the texts and revealing formerly hidden patterned decoration and elaborately painted scenes. Debris has been cleared from the tomb of Nebwenenef, High Priest of Amun (Tomb 157), in preparation for its study, and the entrances of the tombs of Seton (Tomb 289) and Aminetep (Tomb 300), Viceroy of Kush, have been prepared for metal doors which will make them accessible for study as well as assuring their safety. Electricity has been laid on to illuminate the work and a number of other strengthening and conserving tasks have been undertaken.

In the Akhenaten Temple project Mr. Ray Smith has undertaken an interesting and challenging task, involving a sophisticated use of computers (see Expedition, Vol. 10, No. 1). A great temple was built in Thebes, near the temple complex of Karnak, by the “heretic” king Akhenaten (1367–1350 B.C.). The scenes and texts on the temple walls, and probably its plan, reflected the effort of this pharaoh to emphasize the worship of a single god, symbolized by the “Atum” (Sundisc), in opposition to the multiplicity of cults and gods which characterized Egyptian religion. This monument is therefore very important for the study of religion and art at an unusual moment.
in "walls" with the decorated face outwards, and Mr. Smith conceived the idea of photographing each block, preparing detailed descriptions based on the photographs, and processing the data through a computer program which brings the number of possible joining blocks down to a mere handful. This enormous comparative effort, virtually impossible for an individual scholar, is done with great speed by the machine. The ultimate purpose is to restore the scenes and texts in the form of photographic mosaics and line drawings; actual reconstruction is not proposed as it is unlikely that sufficient blocks have yet been discovered to justify this.

The Akhenaten Temple project commenced in October, 1966 under Mr. Smith’s direction, and has been working continuously since then. Excellent photographs, taken largely by James Delorme, have been studied by a staff of capable young Egyptian Egyptologists in Cairo, and International Business Machines in Cairo has generously donated computer time and services. To date some 25,000 blocks have been photographed and described and although the process of analyzing the data has only begun, one hundred and fifty groups of adjoining blocks have already been assembled. Several noted Egyptologists have agreed to study the final results and the processing of further blocks will continue. By the end of 1968 our knowledge of this unusual building will be greatly extended.

Since 1964 field research in the British Solomon Islands has been primarily concerned with ethnographic studies. Last winter’s special exhibition ‘Sculpture from the Eastern Solomon Islands’ (see Expedition, Vol. 10, No. 2) was one result of these. However, as the contemporary cultural picture in this part of Oceania has become much clearer in the past two decades, we have become increasingly more interested in the history of the peoples and cultures. Because this is an area of the world where non-literate peoples survived in the present century, history here is only the history of European discovery and political annexation. The history of the local peoples is prehistory—archaeology, that is. Consequently, when I found a number of promising archaeological sites during my last ethnographic field trip (1965-66), I excavated some of them as a preliminary step in what is hoped will be a larger archaeological program in the years to come. In all, three small, shallow limestone caves and a midden were excavated on Santa Ana Island in the Eastern Solomons and another cave was dug on Guadalcanal Island in the Central Solomons.

The Santa Ana excavations revealed that this small island has been continuously occupied by man since before A.D. 140. The cave sites, which were probably used only as temporary shelters for fishing and marine collecting along the extensive reefs that ring the island, revealed increasing numbers of artifacts and shells and bones from edible seafood during this period.

This may be an indication of a gradually increasing population. Pig bones were found throughout, indicating that the occupants had that domestic animal. The artifacts most frequently encountered were small blades of chalcedony (a flint-like stone) which had to be imported from the neighboring island of San Cristobal. These blades are clearly related to those from New Britain Island described in Expedition, Vol. 8, No. 3, by Dr. Jane Goodale. The other artifacts found in large numbers were volcanic stones fractured by fire. These stones are the same as are used today by the local people to heat their earth ovens in which most of their food is cooked. Other objects included blades of giant clam shell for grating coconuts, whetstones of imported rock, and other objects of shell that are similar or identical to objects still made and used today.

The midden site yielded the same array of objects as were found in caves, plus a few more personal and household artifacts more closely associated with settled life in a hamlet (as contrasted with the specialized, temporary use of the caves). There are many more middens still to be excavated at some future date.

One of the most rewarding results of these small excavations was the discovery of a coarse, friable red pottery in the cave sites that dates between A.D. 140 and A.D. 675. Pottery is unknown on this island today; the people did not even recognize it as something man-made. However, pottery is known ethnographically some