

SITE MANAGEMENT AT DEIR EL-BALLAS

As both one of the few substantially preserved ancient Egyptian townsites as well as the forward capital for the Theban kings during the Hyksos expulsion, Deir el-Ballas is of great archaeological and historic importance.¹ Today however the site is at extreme risk from both looting and even more importantly from the uncontrolled expansion of the modern town of Deir el-Gharbi. Like many archaeological sites in Egypt, Deir el-Ballas is located on the desert edge of the Nile floodplain, and population pressure resulting in the urban expansion, transportation, manufacturing and agricultural infrastructure makes this zone particularly vulnerable as the need for space grows. The situation at Deir el-Ballas is particularly dire as the construction of the Western Desert road from Aswan to Cairo has now squeezed the site between the old river road putting it in path of connecting routes between the two with concomitant new facilities.

Deir el-Ballas was originally excavated by the Phoebe A. Hearst Expedition of the University of California under the direction of George A. Reisner in the years 1900 to 1901.² During the season's work he uncovered the remains of a large royal palace, called the North Palace and a massive watchtower at the Theban end of the site known as the "South Palace," along with a

¹ Peter Lacovara, "Deir el-Ballas," in Manfred Bietak and Silvia Prell, eds., *Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern Palaces. Volume I. Proceedings of the Conference on Palaces in Ancient Egypt, held in London 12th – 14th June 2013*, Contributions to the Archaeology of Egypt, Nubia and the Levant" (CAENL) 2017, pp. 291-299.

² P. Lacovara, "The Hearst Excavations at Deir el-Ballas: The Eighteenth Dynasty Town," in W. K. Simpson and W. M. Davis, eds. *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean and the Sudan: Essays in Honor of Dows Dunham* (Boston, 1981). pp. 120-124; Lacovara, Peter. "The riddle of Egypt's ancient settlements" *Archaeology* 41 (4) 1988, 62-66.

series of cemeteries, villas, and a workmen's settlement. Unfortunately, the excavations were never published and the field notes were so brief that any in depth study of the excavation was impossible. To understand the site better four seasons of survey and clearance were undertaken in 1980, 1983, 1984 and 1986 under the sponsorship of the American Research Center and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.³

Site Preservation Plan

Unfortunately, since that time many features of the site have been damaged or destroyed. While serving as Chief Inspector of Qena, Mustafa Waziri requested our help in protecting the site. With that aim The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund in concert with the American University in Cairo has begun a program of work with the Antiquities Inspectorate in Qena to define those areas threatened by urban expansion, and devise strategies to protect them from encroachment and undertake the stabilisation, protection and preservation of the standing monuments.

In several seasons we have undertaken a theodolite survey, photography and planning to assess the condition of the site, the perimeter of the antiquities area and possible ways to protect and conserve the site. At the "South Palace" looters digging holes at the base of the eastern façade of the stair platform has collapsed significant portions of the outer wall and threatens the integrity of the entire structure.

³ Peter Lacovara, *Deir el-Ballas: Preliminary Report on the Deir el-Ballas Expedition 1980-1986* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990)

1. Cleaning the 'South Palace' before conservation 2018.



We are replacing the tumbled brick with modern unbaked mud brick of the same size, stamped with the logo of the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund and American University In Cairo to indicate modern interventions and secure the façade to prevent further deterioration (fig. 2). We also intend to clean and cap the staircase leading to the top of the platform to protect that from trampling by visitors. We have constructed a guard house at the request of the Inspectorate to discourage looting.

2. The 'South Palace' undergoing conservation.



At the North Palace are we have been cleaning the casemate foundations emptied by Reisner and re-filling them with clean sand and stone chip to prevent collapse, deposition of trash and for safety concerns. We are also rebuilding losses in the walls with modern unbaked mud brick of the same size, stamped and bounded by geotextile to indicate modern interventions to secure the casemates and surviving walls of the Palace to prevent further deterioration (fig. 3). We would also seek to define and delimit the archaeological area with brick and/or fencing around the North Palace to prevent further encroachment of the modern town and associated cemetery.

3. Conserving some of the casemate foundations in the North Palace



In the stretch between the North Palace and “South Palace” we would identify those archaeological remains, both excavated by Reisner and remaining un-excavated and work with the Qena inspectorate on ways to protect and preserve them.

We are also developing a long-term site management plan which will include the construction of an additional guard house at the North Palace, additional reconstruction of some of the houses near the North Palace and the installation of signage at important points at the site. We will also develop a site visitation plan and access routes for visitors that will include the pottery workshops as well. This will also include a mural to be painted on the new wall being

constructed between the local school and the North Palace. This mural will be painted by famed Egyptian artist Alaa Awad and depict the important role the site played in the history of Egypt with explanatory text in Arabic and English. Long term site development projects could also include the installation of lighting and shops to help boost the local economy.