

# RECORDING THE TEMPLE OF SETHOS I AT ABYDOS IN EGYPT

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## Introduction: Construction, Decoration and Publication of the Temple

Work on the temple of Sethos I (1290-1279 BC) at Abydos was probably begun soon after the beginning of the king's reign and came to a temporary halt around a decade later, at its end. Under Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC) large areas were decorated in relief, and under his successor Merneptah (1213-1204 BC) some paintings that had by then stood in the temple and its associated cenotaph for about 70 years were carved in relief. By the seventh century BC<sup>(1)</sup> substantial parts of the temple had been torn down for their limestone, but it continued to be a sacred area, and was the site of a local oracle of the god Bes in Graeco-Roman times<sup>(2)</sup> and a dwelling for early Christians<sup>(3)</sup>. After more than a millennium of neglect, the temple was rediscovered by the Frenchman N. Granger in 1731<sup>(4)</sup>, and about 130 years later still Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) excavated the structure and began the publication of selected parts in 1869. Since then, more than a century has passed, and excavations have revealed new features of the structure on all except its north side. The temple has been consolidated and reroofed by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization and is now one of the country's most beautiful monuments, as well as a prime tourist attraction.

The inner parts of the main temple, as opposed to the cenotaph or the south-eastern area of magazines, have received a definitive publication in four outstanding volumes, which were chiefly the work of Amice M. Calverley (1896-1959), under the editorship of Sir Alan Gardiner (1879-1963)<sup>(5)</sup>. The fieldwork for these volumes was a joint enterprise of the Egypt Exploration Society and the Oriental Institute of the University of

Chicago, and was undertaken at intervals from 1925 to 1949. It is interesting to note the disparity between the time involved in constructing and decorating this part of the temple — perhaps a decade, with individual scenes being painted very fast — and the work of recording, which has lasted five times as long. This, however, is a normal feature of scholarly endeavour, of which an extreme example may be a papyrus that took a minute or two to write and several years of intermittent study to decipher and interpret — and after publication another scholar will often appear in print to say that the first reading is wrong.

It may then be no surprise that it is fifteen years since I agreed to see through the press the fifth volume of Calverley's publication, which had been begun shortly before her sudden death, and was later worked on by Gigi Richter Crompton, under the editorship of H. W. Fairman. In the course of organizing the material, it became clear that I would need to return to the temple in order to record some elements that were absent from the material I had received, and to make a general check on the copies of the reliefs and inscriptions. We have now had four short seasons of work in the temple, and a final visit will be needed for checking the completed work. This fieldwork has been carried out under the auspices of the Egypt Exploration Society, with the very great assistance of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt, whose house at Abydos we have been privileged to share<sup>(6)</sup>.

I present here the background to our fieldwork, its methods, and some preliminary results.

### Volume V of *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*

The fifth volume of *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos* is planned to present almost all the reliefs in the southern extension of the temple (Fig. 1). In contrast with the earlier volumes in the series, it will include descriptions of the architecture and decoration, and translations of the texts with commentaries.

The extension is an unparalleled feature of the temple's general design. In addition, some areas we have recorded contain paintings of Sethos I, in

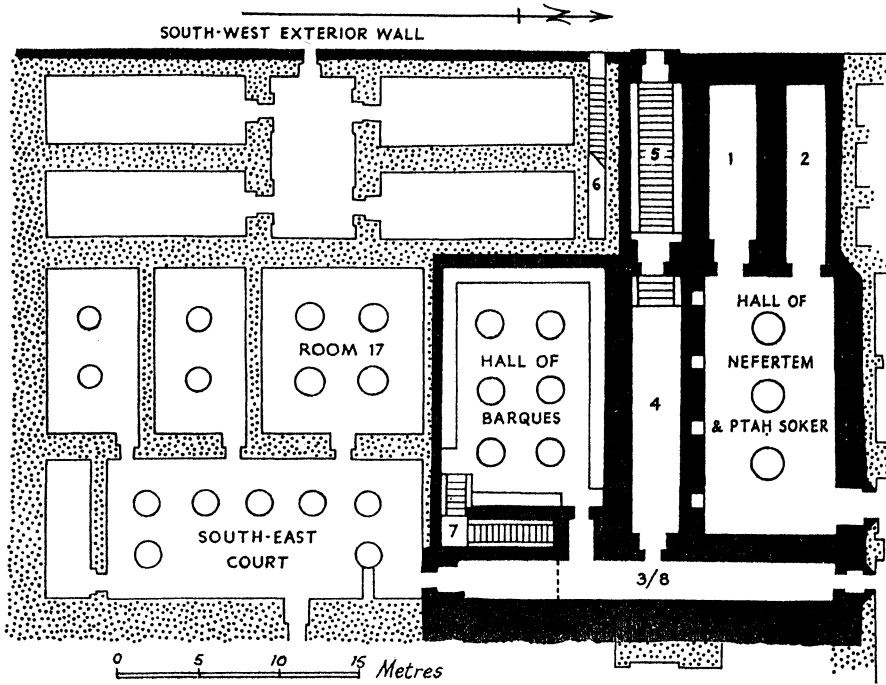


Fig. 1 Temple of Sethos I, southern extension, general plan. Redrawn by Marion Cox from A.M. Calverley *et al.*, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, I pl. IA.

Walls in solid black are to be published in Vol. V.

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|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Chapel of Nefertem   | 6. Upper Staircase                                 |
| 2. Chapel of Ptaḥ-Sokar | 7. Staircase from Hall of Barques to upper Gallery |
| 3. Gallery of Lists     | 8. Upper Gallery (north of dotted line)            |
| 4. Corridor             |  |
| 5. Stairway Passage     |  |

part reworked in relief under Ramesses II, which are unique in the information that can be extracted from them.

When Volume V has been completed, there will remain the material for three or four further volumes in the rest of the southern extension and in the outer parts of the temple. It is impossible to say when the record of these areas will be published. There is a photographic archive of about 2000 glass negatives of the temple taken by Calverley and Herbert Felton between 1925 and 1949. We have been conserving this invaluable record

and creating a computerized database of photographs<sup>(7)</sup>. Some of the photographs can be used in future volumes, but for the southern half of the southern extension in particular, there is no record of any kind. For certain areas, the photographs show the reliefs and paintings in a better state of preservation than they now enjoy, but in general the temple has not deteriorated recently as much as might be feared; it may well outlast the records that are being created for publication.

### Recording Methods

Since I concentrate here on the recording of the temple, I present in some detail the methods which we and our predecessors have used in our attempts to produce a satisfactory version on paper of the images in stone and paint on the walls of the temple, and then on the more general significance of the areas where we have worked. As one of the finest, most unusually and revealingly organized and most complete New Kingdom temples, the overall importance of the monument is clear in any case.

The construction and architecture of the temple is an object of study at least as worthy as any single part of its decoration. We have been concerned with the architecture more than our predecessors and our publication will record many of its features, but our prime purpose is to publish the decoration, and a full record and interpretation of the architecture would be a separate and most valuable exercise.

Mariette published three folio volumes on his work throughout Abydos. Two of these dealt with the temples, more than half of the space being devoted to the temple of Sethos I<sup>(8)</sup>.

In Mariette's time no one had planned a complete record of any monument; selections of what were considered the most interesting elements were the norm. Many nineteenth century records were of a very high standard, notably the publication of the Prussian expedition of the 1840s under Richard Lepsius (1810-1884)<sup>(9)</sup>. Mariette, whose achievements in other areas were enormous, did not have the resources, or perhaps the inclination, to make facsimiles on site. In his publication he recorded that he had



a rather low opinion of the temple, seeing it as inferior to Graeco-Roman structures such as the temples of Edfu and Dendara<sup>(10)</sup>. Instead of creating facsimiles or other artistic copies, he recorded the texts in hand-copies and made sketches of the reliefs. This material served as the basis for lithographic originals by artists who worked on the books back in Europe. Mariette was fortunate to secure the services of Ernst Weidenbach (1818-1882), who had been a member of Lepsius' expedition. Mariette wrote that he copied scenes as line sketches and then sent them back to Weidenbach in Berlin. According to Mariette, Weidenbach's sense of Egyptian style was so sure that his resulting finished drawings looked exactly like the originals (Weidenbach had not been to Egypt in twenty years).

Any method of publication that proceeds in this way can answer only the questions put to the monument by whoever made it. The 'Egyptian' style which it reproduces is that of Weidenbach, not of Sethos I, or even of Mariette. Within these limits, Mariette's and Weidenbach's achievement was impressive. Their publication made available generally accurate copies of the hieroglyphic texts of the areas included, as well as basic information about the figures shown in the scenes and their iconography. But the form of the record of iconography was unsuitable for detailed study, and this aspect of the material has been largely ignored. In the last twenty years, during which iconography has become a more important field of research than before, iconology has been practised mainly on the basis of facsimile copies and photographs. Much of the vast corpus of Egyptian temple relief is inaccessible to this type of research.

Since the complete recording of monuments began in the 1890s, its aim has been in principle not to decide what information on a monument is worthy of recording — although such decisions must in reality be made all the time — but to record as much as is humanly possible of what is left on the walls, or can be discovered from old copies and other records to have been there when the earliest records were made. Two approaches have been used: schematic drawings of wall areas together with printed hieroglyphic copies of texts, used chiefly for Graeco-Roman temples; and facsimile drawings, photographs, or records mixing facsimile and photograph,

of the walls themselves.

In the 1920s, the Egypt Exploration Society began to plan a complete publication of the temple of Sethos I at Abydos. This project evolved from relatively modest beginnings to become the most ambitious such undertaking up to that time, especially in the amount of colour to be presented. The general standard of recording was similar to that of the University of Chicago Oriental Institute publications of major Theban monuments, for which work started at about the same time. Calverley did not rest content with the methods she had devised for Volume I (published in 1933)<sup>(11)</sup>, but continued to enhance and perfect them in Volumes II-IV (1935-59).

Until the 1920s, most facsimile copies in line (as opposed to painted copies) had been made on tracing paper at full scale on the walls themselves. It is difficult to comprehend how this was done, because tracing paper is far from transparent, but it was done nonetheless. The only other widespread technique was to create a paper impression of the original, either by squeezing (a wet-moulded paper impression, used in particular by the Lepsius expedition, and suited only to reliefs) or by rubbing (a carbon impression created by rubbing wax, pencil or typewriter carbon over the surface). These techniques have become rare; latex squeezes have proved valuable in some contexts, but do not last well.

Calverley's project and those of the Chicago expedition confronted altogether different problems of scale from those that had been approached by making tracings. Both the new expeditions used photographic reductions of the original wall surfaces as the point of departure for a record. The photographs were made the basis for copies in line, or for reinforced photographs on which all the detail which the copyist, or for the Chicago Oriental Institute the team of copyists, could read was noted in addition to the retained photographic image. Calverley traced in reverse on the back of photographic prints, and then printed the tracings reversed in order to give the orientation of the originals. The Chicago artists drew on the surface of photographic prints and subsequently bleached away the prints, leaving line drawings<sup>(12)</sup>. Their technique is used to this day and has been adopted by some other epigraphers.

Calverley's later reinforced photographs (e.g. Fig. 7) were made in a similar way to the Chicago drawings. She picked out the significant features in pencil and in white on low-contrast photographic prints, but she did not bleach the photographs, so that the result looks rather like a heavily retouched photographic studio portrait, except that its aim is not to disguise unevennesses on the surface but to reveal them — the unevennesses being the delicate and lightly carved ancient reliefs and inscriptions.

The aim of these elaborate procedures is to show in a single record all relevant features of a relief (paintings without relief present rather different problems); especially when an original is badly damaged, it can be impossible to see all significant features on one photograph, if only because different features show up in different lighting. This search for significant features is an instance of how any copy tells something about the copyist or copyists and his or her expertise, knowledge and style, as well as about what is being copied. The line drawings of the Chicago publications are of very limited use for studying artistic style; here Calverley's reinforced copies have more to offer. Since the temple of Sethos I is one of the premier New Kingdom works of art, whose reliefs are among the finest known, this is a great advantage of her method. A still more objective artistic copy, however, is an unretouched photograph — provided that all signs or other features can be identified on it, or that it is supplemented by a line copy for areas that cannot be read on the photograph. No one would want to look at retouched photographs of major works of art from other traditions if unretouched ones were available — and no one should look at photographs at all in preference to originals. For the temple of Sethos I too, a straight photograph is the best artistic copy, but no copy can replace the original.

Calverley and Myrtle Broome, the artist who worked with her, devised new methods of recording colour. They made monochrome color photographs of the painted reliefs which recorded only the reds of the originals. They then took prints of these to the walls themselves and painted onto them everything that needed adding. This method had the advantage that it guaranteed a high degree of proportional accuracy both in the

dimensions of the reliefs and in the details of the copy. In the published volumes, these paintings were reproduced in colour to an extremely high standard, using as many as seven or eight process colours (as against the modern number of four). The remarkable resulting plates in Volumes I-IV include a high proportion of the completed painted reliefs of Sethos I in the temple. Despite the rather artificial appearance of these painted photographs, it is doubtful whether they could be improved upon significantly as records of the decorated walls.

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I have recounted the history of this project and the techniques used at some length in order to give an impression of the problems encountered in the apparently simple task of publishing the standing monuments of Egypt, and of how techniques and solutions have evolved. As I have implied, records necessarily reflect the interests of those who have made them, and the history of recording is partly a history of general changes in scholarship and of continuing efforts to overcome these biases. The significance of the task of recording the monuments cannot be overemphasized: only a minority of the vast and endangered legacy of Egyptian relief and painting is published in satisfactory form.

### Current Fieldwork

I now turn to the recent fieldwork, which continues that of Calverley, and describe our recording methods before reviewing areas we have covered and some of our findings. We have replaced problematic elements in Calverley's record and made new copies for all areas originally planned for inclusion in Volume V of *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, and have recorded some further parts that form an architectural whole with them but had been excluded from the project. We now have a complete record of the northern half of the southern extension of the temple. The southern half of the extension was not a cult area. One section of it was probably

used primarily for storage of temple equipment; the purpose of others is uncertain, but a number of features show that they had a less ‘sacred’ status than the core of the temple.

Our methods of work are different from those of Calverley. In some cases they offer advances, and in others they are devised in order to permit a record to be made of features that have no parallel in the reliefs presented in earlier volumes. In some cases Calverley’s techniques are no longer feasible with the resources and time at our disposal. Calverley was perhaps the most inventive recorder of Egyptian standing monuments, many of her new techniques deriving from her training as a photographer and artist. Much of the stimulus to her invention was the need for economy — within the context of having John D. Rockefeller as patron — and the same applies with greater force to our work. We are able to spend no more than a month at a time on site, and our expedition has a very modest budget.

Our basic method of recording is shared with a number of other expeditions, and involves making full-scale tracings on the walls themselves<sup>(13)</sup>. The change as against the 1920s and 1930s is in the materials available. We use transparent acetate sheet, on which we draw with artists’ felt pens. Even a transparent cover to a wall is not so good as no covering, but the acetate and pens make it much easier than before to see what is there and to record it. For reliefs, a single colour of drawing is adequate, but for more complicated work, including painting in many colours, it is desirable to make a record in colour. We use several colours, but the coloured copy is an analogy for the original, not a representation of its colours or shades. The main part of our record of colours is in notes on our copies indicating the polychrome shades — not more than five including black and white in this area of the temple — for which we have discovered evidence on the walls. Because of poor preservation, hardly any of the areas where we have worked can be photographed in colour by conventional means. In using colours for recording, it is necessary to adopt arbitrary conventions to denote lines that are visible not as colours but as variations in the patina of the stone. Thus, the coloured copy is intended primarily to show the nature of the evidence for a line on the copy, not to record colour directly — which we do in our notes.

Unlike some copies, which aim to record all that remains of the finished

work, our copies of paintings note all surviving traces from any stage of execution that is still visible. In paintings there were eight or more such stages, and in reliefs more than twice as many (the carving obliterating many previous stages). No two stages necessarily correspond in their treatment of any feature or line, and a poorly preserved painting in which several preparatory stages are visible is full of inconsistencies. It is tempting to try to record each major stage on a separate copy, so that a fusion of several copies would show what is now visible, but this turns out to be impracticable, because too little of any one stage is visible for it to be intelligible without reference to others. It would also be difficult to decide to which stage each line belonged. It would, however, be worth considering multiple copies of this sort where the original's state of preservation allowed it, or the techniques employed allowed multiple stages to be recovered. On better preserved surfaces, image enhancement might bring out the underlayers of paint, in addition to what can be identified by the naked eye. Such a method, which has long been widespread in the study of Western art, would be an ideal for studying artists' methods of work.

As epigraphers, we are not artists, and our acetate copies are not objects of beauty; one of the advantages of working at full scale is that the reduction for publication eliminates many aesthetic shortcomings in the copy. The full-scale acetate copies are valuable as a record and as a first stage in the interpretation of what we find on the wall surfaces, but they are not suitable for publication. We therefore copy them immediately, by tracing at full scale, this time on polyester tracing film (which is not transparent enough or strong enough to use directly on the walls). Before the acetate is removed from the wall, it is checked by a second member of the expedition, but the immediate tracing allows further checking, because all lines have to be worked over again. Discrepancies and problems are taken back to the original for further verification. The tracing on polyester film is made in a pencil which gives a very black line and will allow these drawings to be reduced photographically for further work at a smaller scale. This later work is done by artists away from the site, and consists in inking in the lines for photolithographic reproduction. When this is done, line weights have to be chosen that will allow details to be seen and will reproduce properly at a small scale. The nature of relief is often indicated schematically by

contrasting line weights. Since the areas to be copied are up to 3 metres high, only details can be published at much more than 10 percent of their original size.

The technique I have described has the advantages of being in principle simple, of preserving the proportions of the original with full dimensional accuracy, and of allowing very meticulous copies of damaged and problematic reliefs and paintings. But, as will be clear, its use on very large surfaces is extremely laborious. The cost of materials is high, and much work has to be done on site, involving greater expense than working at home. Such a procedure is justifiable only if no more economical technique can produce an adequate record. There are, however, difficulties in using other techniques, all of which involve photography, notably that of lighting large areas carved in very low raised relief. Most of the temple is roofed and quite dark, so that one cannot rely on natural light, which in any case brings problems of its own, even on walls that appear to catch the sun well (the Egyptians seldom used raised relief in areas that would be in full sun, probably because it does not appear to advantage in strong direct light). We have used high power lamps set at a raking angle; several of these are needed to cover areas of any size. We have recorded substantial areas in photographs, because they give the truest possible artistic record of the reliefs, and we intend to use these photographs, together with line copies and Calverley's reinforced photographs, in the publication.

Even when it is possible to photograph these walls and convey their artistic quality, there is some risk of dimensional distortion, which is a difficulty in most photography. Since scholars now ask more and more refined and detailed questions about compositional procedures, it is vital to be accurate in this respect as in others. In recording reliefs, stereo photogrammetry would in theory allow a solution to these problems, but the experience of others suggests that much adaptation is necessary before its methods can be applied successfully to the very individual conditions of Egyptian temples, with their extremely low relief.

Instead of pursuing this approach, we have introduced a second type of recording based on conventional surveying<sup>(14)</sup>. New elevations are made for all the walls, at a scale of 1:50 — between those of normal plans and of full architectural records. To these are added detail plans of each room. On the elevations we mark all the defining lines and mouldings that separate the decorated

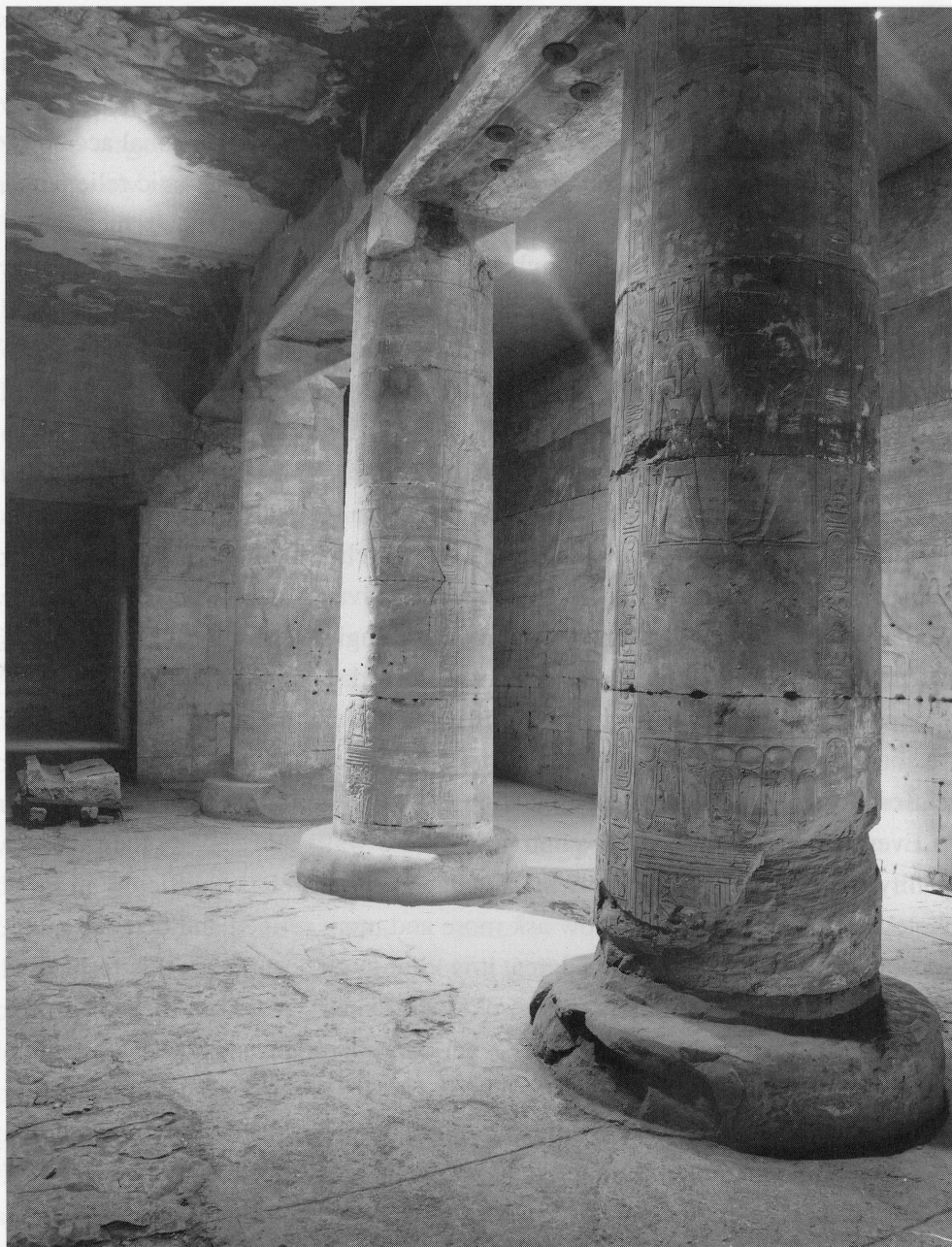


Fig. 2 Hall of Soker and Nefertem: View of interior facing north-west; the entrance to the Chapel of Nefertem is visible on the left. Photograph by Christopher Eyre.



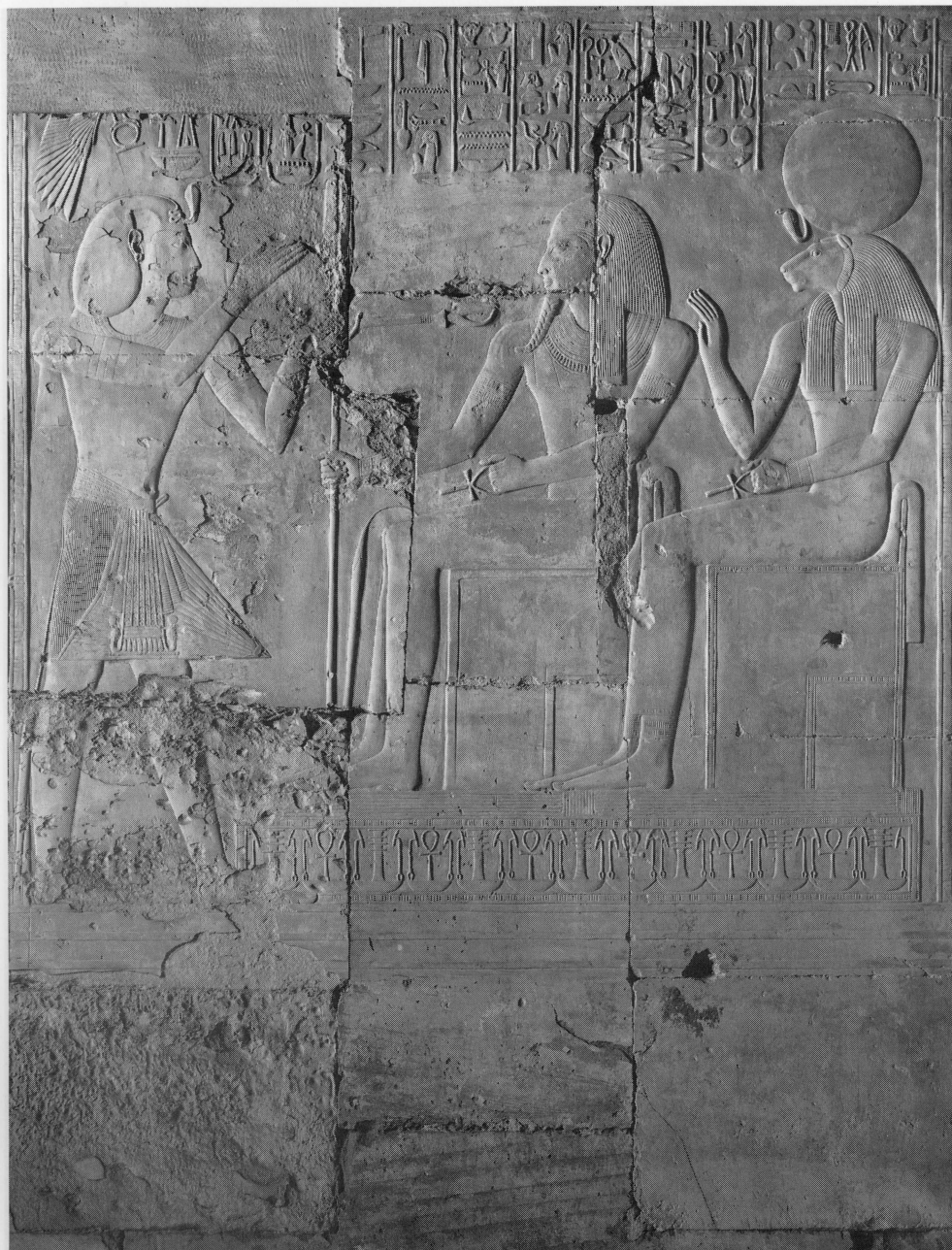


Fig. 3 Sethos I offers to Nefertem and Sekhmet: relief at the west end of the south wall of the Hall of Soker and Nefertem. Photograph by Christopher Eyre.



Fig. 4. Sethos I offers to Soker: relief on the west wall of Niche 1, south wall of the Hall of Soker and Nefertem. Photograph by Christopher Eyre.

areas from the dado beneath, the outline of the broken masonry at the tops of walls, as well as divisions between registers within the walls and between scenes along each wall. These elevations have a number of advantages. Apart from their use for dimensional checking, they make it possible to appreciate at a glance the composition of entire areas of decoration, and they can be used to study the proportions of the building and to organize the publication of each area.

### The Southern Extension

I now review the parts of the southern extension of the temple in which we have worked and comment on particular problems of recording.

### The Complex of Soker and Nefertem

The Hall of Soker and Nefertem, which is entered from the south-west corner of the Second Hypostyle Hall, is our first concern (Fig. 2). The hypostyle hall was published in Calverley's Volume IV, and probably provided the architectural model for the smaller southern hall. The reliefs in the two areas are very similar in style. Like the hypostyle hall, the Hall of Soker and Nefertem served as the vestibule to chapels, in this case two dedicated to the Memphite gods Soker or (Ptah)-Soker and Nefertem, from which fact comes its modern name. The chapels are similar in form to the seven principal chapels reached from the larger hall, but in detailed proportions and in decoration there are many differences. The hall and the chapels are well preserved to about two-thirds of the height of the walls (the Chapel of Nefertem is almost complete), and considerable fragments of the ceilings and other higher architectural elements are also present. A certain amount of stonework has been robbed away, perhaps in order to make lime in antiquity. This has been replaced with modern fill, and the area has been roofed roughly as it was in antiquity.

The reliefs in this area probably date to the later years of Sethos I, and are the earliest to be published in Volume V. Most of them are in good

condition, and their quality is in general exceptionally fine (e.g. Fig. 3), although some parts that could not easily be seen, such as the interiors of the niches in the south wall of the hall, are inferior to the rest and perhaps executed by assistants or apprentices (Fig. 4). The distinctive relief style includes some features that derive ultimately from the reforms of Akhenaten. Notable among these is a detail, seen here and occasionally elsewhere in the temple, of the king's hand held open in dedication over offerings with the lines of the palm indicated. An earlier study could not incorporate these examples and suggested that this was extremely rare and seen chiefly on secular monuments<sup>(15)</sup>. Re-examination shows that it is not quite so rare; a high proportion of preserved examples date to Sethos I.

The painters never reached this part of the temple, so that the reliefs can be admired unadorned. The painting of reliefs was often the least careful stage in decoration, and although the colour enriched the general appearance and added a wealth of meaning, modern taste often prefers the more austere intermediate product. Since very little was completed in Egypt, some Egyptians might have agreed with this view, because those who had access to works of art would have been able to see much fine, unpainted relief. In sculpture in the round, sparing use was made of unpainted stone<sup>(16)</sup>.

The subject matter of these reliefs is exceptional, including a list of the gods of the Memphite area and a number of unusual forms of the deities of the chapels. It is possible to show that the core of this list, of which there are two copies, in the hall and in the Chapel of Soker, dates back very early, possibly to the 3rd or 4th dynasty (c. 2600 BC). This makes it one of the most ancient preserved Egyptian texts<sup>(17)</sup>. This section of the temple contains a number of lists, several of them not otherwise known; one or two of these may also be very ancient.

The best known scene here is the earliest pair of preserved representations of the resurrection of Osiris (here Soker-Osiris) in the chapel of Ptaḥ-Soker (Fig. 5); this episode of mythology is renowned from the narrative of the Greek writer Plutarch. One of the scenes forms part of a composition adapted from the Book of the Dead, which is otherwise hardly attested



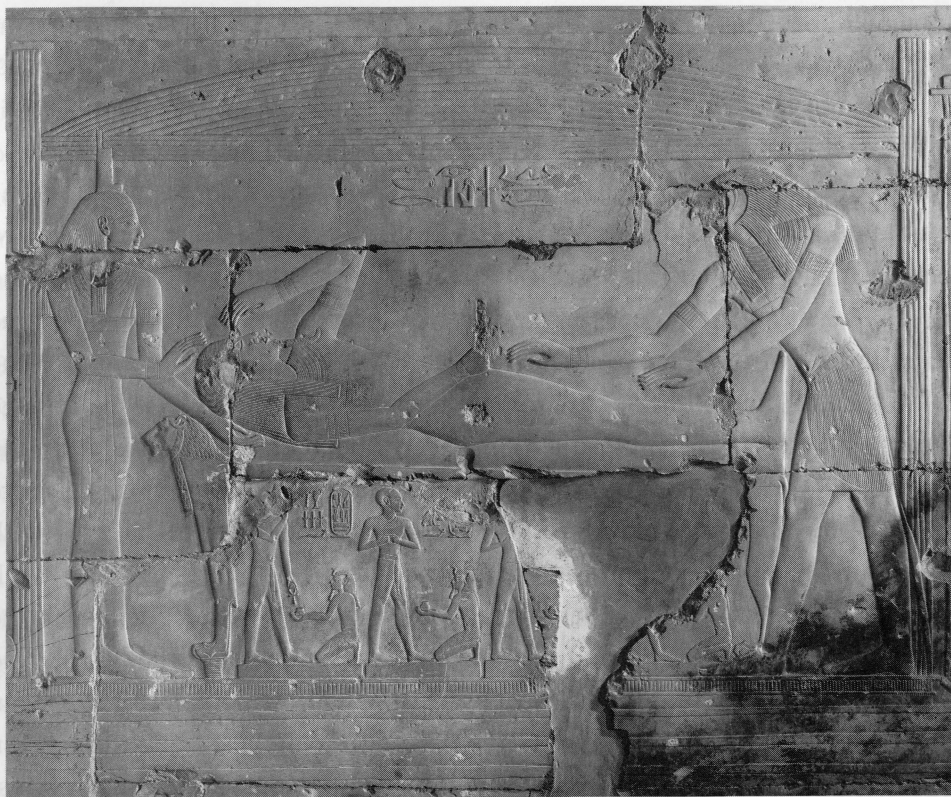


Fig. 5 The resurrecting Soker-Osiris: relief on the north wall of the Chapel of Soker. Photograph by Christopher Eyre.

as a source for temple relief. Much else is unusual, notably in the Chapel of Nefertem. The upper registers in the chapels contain many rare figures of deities which are shown by details to be pictures of cult images, rather than the conventional figures of deities, whose relationship to any visual reality is quite indefinite. Representations of varied cult images are normally absent from temple reliefs, but can be paralleled in late and Graeco-Roman period temples<sup>(18)</sup>.

The Chapel of Nefertem is almost completely dark. It is necessary to bear in mind that, once carved, most of the decoration in a temple was virtually invisible in antiquity because of the small amount of available light; in this respect, our position is more fortunate than that of the ancient Egyptians. In antiquity, lamps were used for many temple ceremonies and cast

some light on the walls, but the decoration was not the focus of attention during rituals, just as the frescoes in a mediaeval Western church were not the centre of rituals.

The south wall of the Hall of Soker and Nefertem shows evidence of a change of plan<sup>(19)</sup>. Originally the hall had two rows of three free-standing columns defining three bays which led to three chapels. The southern row was then incorporated into a wall to create the present form of the hall and one chapel was eliminated. When this was done, the architecture became closer to that of the Second Hypostyle Hall, while the angle of sight of the south wall of the southern hall came closer to the hypostyle. The change in plan was expertly disguised and must have been almost invisible. In the present partly destroyed state of the hall, it can be seen that columns were built before much of the masonry of walls, so that their full height, with the architraves they supported, was incorporated into the new south wall. The change seems to have been made in order to allow direct access to the desert west of the temple and a more convenient route to the roof. The major architectural feature of the new south wall which may have been absent from the original design is the set of four niches, which are given architectural relief by subtle mouldings around them. These are almost identical in design to niches on the west wall of the Second Hypostyle Hall.

### The Gallery of Lists, Corridor and Stairway

A second, small doorway in the south wall of the Second Hypostyle Hall leads to the Gallery of Lists, which is an unusually shaped upward-sloping passageway. From its south side a corridor and staircase are reached; in the original design, these were part of the Nefertem and Ptah-Soker complex. Farther south are the Hall of Barques and associated upper area above the Gallery of Lists, and the South-east Court, which gives onto several other halls. The famous feature of the Gallery of Lists is the king list on its west side<sup>(20)</sup>, a composition in which Sethos I and the crown prince Ramesses (later King Ramesses II) offer, with a selective king-list

in front of them, to figures of the Memphite deities Ptah and Sakhmet. Prince Ramesses, who is absent from all the inner areas, is shown with a titulary which anticipates his assumption of the throne. The scene probably dates to the end of the reign of Sethos, later than other reliefs of his reign in the temple, although it may replace a painted version that would have left appropriate space for an heir. All that can be noted about the list here is that, although it is unique on preserved monuments, it had an abbreviated parallel in the nearby temple of Ramesses II at Abydos (now in the British Museum in London)<sup>(21)</sup>, and may have been a more widespread feature of temples than now appears (apart from which, such lists may have formed part of some rituals and hence could have been regularly recited). In formal terms, what is shown in this composition is that in offering to the gods Sethos I associates himself and his heir with the generality of kings. The list might have implications of propaganda, if only in the choice of which kings were listed, but its message is directed to the gods rather than to humanity, and only priests could have seen it where it was carved.

The relief work here, both in the king list and in an elaborate, somewhat eroded offering list on the east wall, is again of very high quality. The southern part of the gallery, which had a much higher ceiling than the rest, is uninscribed but probably had two registers of paintings. On the west side, the frieze at the top of the lower decorated area runs past the relief below it and as far as the edge of the lower ceiling. This detail suggests that everything which could easily be reached from ground was decorated at one time, except where it formed a unity with a higher composition, as with the scene below this frieze. The higher parts would then have been decorated when a suitable scaffold had been erected<sup>(22)</sup>.

The Corridor west of the Gallery of Lists has striking, bold sunk relief scenes carved under Ramesses II. These are associated with the cult of Soker, and should therefore be taken together with the complex of hall and chapels to the north. The reliefs again show an heir in the scene on the north wall of the king lassoing a bull; the heir is named Amonhirkhopshef, which dates the carving to the early years of Ramesses II. But although

the sunk relief carving dates to Ramesses II, the frieze at the top of the wall was carved in raised relief under Sethos I. In the lassoing scene there are faint traces of the preparatory grid for a painting which preceded the relief. As can be shown from parallels, particularly in the Hall of Barques, this was not simply a preparatory draft, but was a fully worked composition, and will have dated to Sethos I. Traces such as these are hardly ever preserved, because relief surfaces were normally resmoothed before final painting (that painting normally involved covering the surface with new grids).

The register above the lassoing scene contained a list, now reduced to tiny fragments, of religious entities organized under the headings of the two basic Egyptian words for king, *nisut* and *bity*. Like the list of Memphite gods, one copy of which is on the other face of the same wall, this is not known from anywhere except this temple; it too may be very old in origin.

My explanation that carving work may have been organized according to the availability of scaffolding can account for the sequence of decoration in this area, because the relatively low west doorway of the corridor was decorated in relief under Sethos I, as was the Stairway, although the latter contains one relief cartouche of Ramesses II (and thus probably spans the death of Sethos I). It seems as if the carvers worked first in the more accessible parts and would then have moved to the higher ones; evidence elsewhere shows that when they decorated higher areas, they worked from the top down. The relief frieze of Sethos I at the top of the Corridor should, however, be explained in a different way. This surface was originally the line of architraves above the free-standing columns, and was evidently carved when the columns were constructed, quite separately from the decoration of the surfaces of the wall that was later constructed between the columns.

The Stairway has two long texts spoken by the deities Thoth and Seshat and relating to the building of the temple and the gods' reception of it. The striking feature of this composition is the way it rises up the passage at an angle, gradually moving farther onto the vaulting of the ceiling. This





Fig. 6 Hall of Barques, south wall, east section. Field photograph by Amice M. Calverley, taken about 1930.



Fig. 7 Hall of Barques, south entrance reveal: relief of Ramesses II offering to Osiris and the deified Sethos I. Reinforced photograph by Amice M. Calverley.

distribution, which was constrained by the space available in this converted chapel, posed one of the worst problems in recording. Previously, a rubbing was made of the curved sections of the texts so that they could be flattened out for copying. The rubbing was photographed and reproduced at reduced scale to fit on the tops of drawings of the vertical lower areas that had been prepared from montages of photographic prints. The result of this combination was not quite satisfactory, and the curved parts have now been traced onto acetate at full scale; here new materials have allowed a more satisfactory solution to a problem than had previously been possible. The hieroglyphs in the lower parts of these inscriptions, which could have been carved by someone standing on the ground, are among the most detailed anywhere in the temple. Higher up, the treatment is more schematic. The reason for this discrepancy may be that the carvers knew

that the upper sections of their work would not be inspected like the lower sections, which were conveniently accessible for virtuoso demonstrations of the carver's art (this area also received much more light than most).

Over the entrance to the Stairway is a relief which is almost never noticed. I thought that it was not in Calverley's material and recorded it in facsimile. It contains a very rare scene, showing Sethos I rowing a boat before the gods, a composition possibly derived from the Book of the Dead<sup>(23)</sup>. I later identified a copy of the scene by Calverley, who had worked, surprisingly, from a photograph. This is not the only such copy I have found among Calverley's material, and they are testimony to Calverley's wonderful ability to read reliefs and inscriptions from the faintest of traces. At the same time, the present invisibility of the scene may suggest that the lintel has deteriorated seriously in the last fifty years, providing a counter-example to the general stability of the temple's fabric.

The Stairway leads out onto the desert behind the temple; the Corridor and Stairway were probably introduced into the plan in order to provide this access. From the outside wall it was possible to climb an additional staircase onto the temple roof, or to enter the vestibule to a group of storage rooms that fills the south-western corner of the temple structure. Farther away, the eye is led westward to the mounds of Umm el-Qa<sup>c</sup>ab, the site of the royal tombs of the first two dynasties, which was in this period a cult place associated with Osiris<sup>(24)</sup>. The destination of the users of the staircase is uncertain. Under Ramesses II the layout of the area was changed. The door at the top of the Stairway may have been redesigned, while the entrance to the upper staircase was blocked and a new way to it carved from inside the Stairway, destroying part of the decoration of its south wall in the process. Along the south-western outside wall of the temple, which the doorway from the Stairway pierces, bold reliefs of Ramesses II (now very fragmentary) were carved. These ignored two entrances and must have been completed by paintings on the doors in the doorways.

### The Hall of Barques Area

Returning to the Gallery of Lists, the next entrance to the south in the gallery's west wall leads into the Hall of Barques. This doorway is low with very deep reveals, because it has above it the vestibule to another gallery. The architecture of the Hall of Barques itself is unusual, containing a roof line that incorporates a raised window in a sloping section rather like the fresh air scoops seen in many Egyptian buildings, and at ground level a bench running round most of all four walls. In its south-west corner is a staircase which begins within the hall and has no precisely demarcated line for a doorway — a piece of 'open' planning reminiscent of quite different architectural traditions. The hall was originally decorated throughout with paintings of the reign of Sethos I. Most of these were used under Ramesses II as the outline drafts for carving sunk reliefs. In the entrance reveals is a pair of sunk reliefs showing Ramesses II offering to Osiris and to his deified, deceased father Sethos I (Fig. 7). Although these could have been planned to show Sethos offering to his father Ramesses I, they are more probably a new composition, demonstrating that the changes introduced under the son were a pious rededication rather than a usurpation.

The relief carvers never reached the south-east part of the hall, where paintings of Sethos I remain. These show how much was lost in the carving process, for they contain altogether more detail than the reliefs can have done. These details, and the complexity of the compositions, have caused us our greatest difficulties in recording, and will do the same in reproduction for publication. The paintings were made with a complete disregard for visibility; much of the detail can only be made out from very close in very good light. The reliefs, by contrast, are relatively bold and simple, and produce their effect from a distance. If the reliefs had been painted in their turn, they would have acquired extra detail, but I doubt whether there could have been as much as in the original paintings.

On the south wall it is almost as if the carvers had laid down their tools before our eyes (Fig. 6). The next scene to the west of Fig. 6 is devoid of

any traces of paint, and had evidently received the final resmoothing which obliterated them. In creating the reliefs, the sculptors cut very slightly within the outlines of the paintings, working from right to left and from top to bottom. As a result of this procedure, there is a single figure of the king on the south wall which is Ramesses II in outline as far down as waist level and Sethos I below, except that the painted face which remains is still that of Sethos I. The face was probably left for completion in relief by a master sculptor.

The carving process itself was multiple. Its simplest stages can be seen in an inscription above the same figure of the king on the south wall. The signs have been outlined, but their inner areas have not been modelled. In this text, the inexpert carver was evidently uncertain how to cut some hieroglyphs and omitted them (Fig. 6, upper part). They are the more unusual ones, and faint traces of their original painted forms are visible. An experienced craftsman would probably have carved them in a later stage.

There are many traces of preparatory work in the painting. In the first stage, the white plastered wall was covered with a squared grid by snapping cords dipped in red paint; extra lines defined where the columns of hieroglyphs were to go at the top. The grid lines conform to the canon of proportion which governs all normal representations of the human figure<sup>(2-5)</sup>, but they also allowed the entire composition to be set out in a single process; it may have been enlarged from a small-scale draft. Next, the scenes were sketched in red. The hieroglyphs were drafted in simplified form and all small detail was omitted, but in principle everything was defined in the sketch. From sketch to finished painting was a multiple process, in which the work was gone over again and again, each new stage often departing considerably from the last. The results were magnificent, but can now be seen only in relics. The sureness of touch of the painting is remarkable, with single strokes of the brush outlining large sections of over-life-size figures.

In the 1988 season of fieldwork, our expedition conserved and cleaned the south-east wall and recopied its paintings, improving greatly on our

previous understanding of the scenes in this area. Much of the decoration on the columns in particular is almost invisible, but can be recovered with careful study of the surfaces. The detailed work on copying and conservation has given an excellent opportunity to study the techniques of painting employed. These are not fully in accord with normal conceptions of how Egyptian artists worked<sup>(26)</sup>. Here as elsewhere, artists worked in groups of varying levels of skill. Much of the organization of painting was conducive to speed of execution, particularly of the vital stage of painting the main outlines (after which details and patches of colour were filled in more slowly). The outlines were painted onto a fresh and still damp layer of thin plaster brushed onto the figure areas, but not over the whole wall surface.

It is assumed that the portable barques of the gods were kept on the benches which run along the bases of all the hall's four walls. The hall has none of the scenes normal in temples and is oriented in the reverse direction, with figures of the king facing toward the entrance, through which offerings or the barques would presumably have been carried for use in the main cult areas. All the principal wall scenes show the king offering to barques, except for one where he offers to the ithyphallic god Min, whose image is displayed upon a plinth.

The staircase out of the hall also has many rare features. Its decoration consists mainly of fat offering bearers, or fecundity figures, descending toward the hall. On them the same stages of work can be seen as in the hall, and there are marked changes between drafts. The figures lean forward and are placed irregularly in relation to the framing lines beneath them. This non-vertical composition seems to have led to resittings of figures and of columns of inscription. The ornamental frieze above shows vividly how a first draft in red was overlaid with a more complex shape in black. The canon of proportion was employed, but, probably because of the slope, no grids were drawn. Instead, a line of check marks was painted behind the placement of each figure. This detail has not been noted in this form on other Egyptian monuments. As a procedure it has much in common with the use of grids elsewhere in the Hall of Barques complex, where

they were laid out from series of check marks at the edges of compositions. On the staircase, the check marks were left as points of reference without their connecting lines or any vertical guides. The vertical components of grids are normally very accurate and were evidently made with plumb-lines; vertical lines would have been meaningless in compositions, like this one, where the figures sloped.

The most tantalizing area in which we have worked is that reached from the staircase and sited above the Gallery of Lists. We term this the Upper Gallery<sup>(27)</sup>. This upper storey has no close parallel in New Kingdom temples. It is difficult to interpret its function and meaning, because almost all its paintings have vanished. It appears to have contained fairly long hieroglyphic texts and large figures of the king offering to male and female deities; all this is now reduced to minute traces of paint. We assume that the gallery was roofed. It had an enigmatic doorway in its north-east corner leading, so it seems, into empty space along the side of the temple. From the general context of the Gallery and the decoration of the staircase leading out of it, offerings should have been carried down the stairs and through the Hall of Barques into the main temple, so that it could have been a storage area. In view of its remoteness, it may have contained particularly precious offerings or equipment. It has close analogies with the 'crypts' in Graeco-Roman temples, notably that of Hathor at Dendara<sup>(28)</sup>. The Gallery is architecturally interesting because it was higher and wider than the Gallery of Lists below, so that the lesser load it carried was exploited to increase space. More generous upper storeys are well known in Western architecture but hardly in Egypt, while such an exploitation of structural properties seems to be very rare.

The taller southern part of the Gallery of Lists was immediately south of the Upper Gallery and probably rose to about a third of the latter's height.

The final area on which our expedition has worked is the doorway at the south end of the Gallery of Lists, which leads from the South-east Court into the temple proper. This has paintings in the reveals, on one of which the relief cutting had been begun by drilling out some details of a necklace, an interesting departure from normal procedures. The south face of the



doorway is carved in sunk relief of Sethos I, which is, together with other walls in the South-East Court, the only such relief in the temple. It is markedly inferior to the raised relief in the interior, which suggests either that sculptors received their training on this less important work or, perhaps more plausibly, that different groups executed the different types. I suspect that the sunk relief of the reign of Ramesses II inherited this lesser artistic tradition.

### Conclusion

In this paper I have sketched how Calverley worked and the Egypt Exploration Society's current expedition works at Abydos and what is being recorded and studied. I have spent several months on site copying a small part of the temple every day, and the working-up of the material for publication will take a number of years. The fascination of the temple is not exhausted by such a concentration on its structure and decoration, and it is clear that the material has not yet yielded more than a few of the insights into Egyptian art and religion that it will bring. I hope to have conveyed some of the interest of this unique structure, which it is the Egypt Exploration Society's privilege to be recording.

### Acknowledgements

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## Bibliography

The references given in the notes are very selective. A full list of publications on the temple of Sethos I to 1939 is presented in Bertha PORTER and Rosalind L. B. MOSS, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings* VI (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1939) 1-27, with detail plan of the southern extension p. 22. A general treatment of the temple is Rosalie DAVID, *A Guide to Religious Ritual at Abydos* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1981). Articles arising from the recent fieldwork are cited in the notes. These give additional references to relevant publications.

## Notes

- (1) This date is suggested by the placing of a graffito in the Upper Gallery.
- (2) Paul PERDRIZET and Gustave LEFEBVRE, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos* (Nancy, Paris and Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault 1919) xix-xxiii.
- (3) Shown by Coptic graffiti in the southern part of the Gallery of Lists and indications of habitation in the Hall of Barques. In many parts of the temple there are signs of temporary structures keyed into the wall; these can seldom be dated.
- (4) Jean-Marie CARRÉ, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Égypte*, 2nd ed. I (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale 1956) 53-4.
- (5) *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, copied by Amice M. CALVERLEY, with the assistance of Myrtle F. BROOME and edited by Alan H. GARDINER. Joint Publication of the Egypt Exploration Society (Archaeological Survey) and of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 4 vols. London: Egypt Exploration Society. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1933-59.
- (6) Members of the expedition have been John Baines and Christopher Eyre, with Stephen Matthews, Jeff George, Winfried Weiser and Richard Jaeschke. We are very grateful to the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, its inspectors on site, and Mr Mutawwa Balboush, for all the facilities they have accorded us to work on the temple.
- (7) John BAINES, 'Abydos, Temple of Sethos I: Preliminary Report,' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984) 21-2.
- (8) Auguste MARIETTE-BEY, *Abydos, Description des fouilles exécutées sur l'emplacement de cette ville*. 2 vols. Paris: Franck 1869 (vol. I); Imprimerie Nationale 1880 (vol. II).

- (9) *Denkmaeler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien ... 6 Abtheilungen* in 12 vols. Berlin: Nicolai n.d. [c. 1849-60].
- (10) See *Abydos* I, p. 6.
- (11) History recounted by Gardiner, Vol. I, pp. vii-viii.
- (12) The Chicago expedition has published many volumes, all in the series Oriental Institute Publications and Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930- ).
- (13) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984) 14-15.
- (14) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984) 15-16.
- (15) Elizabeth RIEFSTAHL, 'An Egyptian portrait of an old man,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 10 (1951) 68-9.
- (16) See in general Patrik REUTERSWÄRD, *Studien zur Polychromie der Plastik I Ägypten*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm Studies in History of Art III: 1, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1958.
- (17) John BAINES, 'An Abydos list of gods and an Old Kingdom use of texts,' in *Pyramid studies and other essays presented to I. E. S. Edwards*, John Baines *et al.* eds. (Egypt Exploration Society, Occasional Publication 7, London: Egypt Exploration Society 1988) 124-33.
- (18) For example, Norman DE GARIS DAVIES, *The temple of Hibis in el Khāreh Oasis III The decoration*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition 11, New York 1953; Emile CHASSINAT and François DAUMAS, *Le temple de Dendara V-VI*, Publications de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale, Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale 1947-65.
- (19) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984) 16-18.
- (20) For bibliography and description, see Donald B. REDFORD, *Pharaonic king-lists, annals and day-books: a contribution to the study of the Egyptian sense of history* (SSEA Publication 4, Mississauga Ont.: Benben 1986) 18-20.
- (21) REDFORD, *Pharaonic king-lists*, 20-1.
- (22) Pictures of scaffolding around statues are known, but there are none of work on reliefs. Curiously, few traces of scaffolding have been reported from the masonry of temple walls — one would have expected the scaffolding to have been keyed into them. Despite this paucity of evidence, most decoration was probably carved or painted from scaffolding or, for smaller areas, from ladders. See Somers CLARKE and R. ENGELBACH, *Ancient Egyptian masonry: the building craft* (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press 1930) 194-6.
- (23) A remote parallel is a scene in the mortuary area of the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, where the king is shown rowing in a variant of the vignette Book

of the Dead 110: The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu VI The temple proper 2* (The University of Chicago, Oriental Institute Publications 84, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1963) pl. 469.

- (24) See, for example, Barry J. KEMP, 'Abydos,' in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* I, Wolfgang HELCK and Eberhard OTTO eds. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1975) 36-7.
- (25) For a good brief presentation of the canon, see Gay ROBINS, *Egyptian painting and relief* (Shire Egyptology, Princes Risborough: Shire Publications 1986) 27-52.
- (26) John BAINES, with appendices by Richard L. JAESCHKE and Julian HENDERSON, 'Techniques of decoration in the Hall of Barques in the temple of Sethos I at Abydos,' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 75 (1989) 13-30, with references to writings on Egyptian techniques of decoration.
- (27) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984) 18-21.
- (28) See n. (18) above.