

Sameh Iskander (ed.)

Archaeological Discoveries at the Temple of Ramesses II in Abydos

Volume 1

Magazines, Animal Burials, and Miscellanea



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edited by

Sameh Iskander



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To Sylvia, Mona, and Joyce

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Preface

The Significance of the Recent Excavations within the Temple Precinct

This book is the first of a three-volume study of the structures and objects discovered during nine seasons of excavations (2017–2025) within the Ramesses II temple precinct conducted under my direction. These excavations were preceded by nine seasons of comprehensive documentation, translation, and analysis under the direction of Ogden Goelet and myself of a multidisciplinary project initiated by both of us in 2008 which resulted in the publication of three volumes, while the fourth is currently in preparation. The entire project since its inception is sponsored by the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University. The excavation and restoration work were supported by partial funding from the American Research Center's Archeological Egyptian Fund (AEF).

First a brief background. The temple was excavated by Auguste Mariette between 1861 and 1869, and has been a focal point for scholars interested in ancient Egyptian inscriptions and architecture. As such, Mariette's excavation primarily focused on the stone temple only, neglecting the surrounding mud-brick structures and archeological objects that are typically integral to the understanding of the layout and function of ancient Egyptian temple precincts. By overlooking these items, Mariette's work presents an incomplete picture of the temple's original context and function.

As such, we felt it necessary to undertake a comprehensive excavation initiative of the entire precinct area around the stone temple. The excavation revealed that the precinct was occupied almost continuously from the thirteenth century BCE—when it was constructed—until the eighth century CE. This extensive occupation timeline, spanning approximately two millennia, is characterized by intermittent brief periods of partial abandonment followed by subsequent reoccupation.

The results of the multifaceted abundant material recovered from the excavation contain a rich range of data that shed light on the site's significance during these various phases of occupation, both while the temple was operational and after it ceased to function. By employing a multidisciplinary approach, we aim to uncover evidence that highlights the temple's role in Abydos and ancient Egyptian society, its economic activities, and its evolution over time. Additionally, understanding the site's posttemple functionality will shed light on its lasting impact on the region.

This volume contains five chapters organized in two parts; the first attempts to present in three chapters a clear understanding of the precinct site, its extant architectural mud-brick structures outside the stone temple, and a careful investigation of the archeological objects and ceramic data obtained from the excavation. The second part focuses on the data obtained from the excavation of a mysterious mixed deposit of materials that were brought from unknown locations and dumped in one of the temple's magazines (S15). This deposit offers new insights into our understanding of Abydos, a site rich in historical and archaeological significance. Given the extensive corpus of data collected, we have decided to present our findings in (1) two chapters within the present publication, and (2) additional chapters to be included in a forthcoming volume. This approach provides a thorough examination of the materials and their implications without overwhelming the reader with excessive detail at once. Moreover, we are planning a third

volume to present further remaining archeological topics, temple restoration techniques, conservation methods, and site management strategies.

Chapter 1 (Sameh Iskander) outlines a clear understanding to the reader of the original layout of the mud-brick structures as initially built by Ramesses II, along with later modifications made over various phases of occupation. Also included in this chapter is restoration work that was immediately crucial in preserving the historical integrity and understanding of the site.

The aim of chapter 2 (Mohamed Naguib Reda) is to investigate the historical phases of the temple through careful analysis of the data gleaned from the recovered pottery material in order to place the precinct in its historical and archaeological context.

Chapter 3 (Sameh Iskander) catalogs the large number of objects yielded from the stratified features that included statuary, stelae, cosmetic jars, jewelry, amulets, glass, and terracotta fragments.

Chapter 4 (Salima Ikram with colleagues) provides a careful analysis of the unusual large assemblage of rams' skulls and other animal deposits found in one of the magazines at the northwest area of the precinct, which adds to our knowledge of the flourishing of animal cults, and a desire to respectfully dispose of them.

Chapter 5 (Zeinab Hashish) presents a comprehensive account of the osteological examination conducted on disarticulated human remains recovered during the cleaning of a reused storage magazine associated with the temple palace.

The enormous effort to excavate, preserve, restore, and study the finds of the entire precinct, and to grasp its historic implication was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of archeologists, ceramicists, conservators, zoologists, and demoticians, along with surveyors, archivists, masons, manual workers, and their foremen, to all of whom I am greatly indebted.

Our field work and this volume could not have been accomplished without the generous contribution of many institutions and individuals. I would like to express my deep appreciation for the privilege bestowed on us by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Supreme Council of Antiquities for granting us the permission to work in Abydos since 2008. The generous cooperation of the members of the Sohag Department of Antiquities under its dynamic General Director Dr. Mohamed Naguib, his predecessors, and the inspectors over the years who were crucial to the production of this work.

I would like to recognize the generous academic support of NYU-ISAW to which we are indebted under the directorship of Professor Alexander Jones; his predecessor Professor Roger Bagnal; Dr. Diane Bennet, associate director for administration; Dr. Marc LeBlanc, assistant director for academic affairs for facilitating our work at the institute; Dr. Tom Elliott and Kristen Soule for support and assistance in connection with IT services and programs; Dr. David Ratzan and Mr. Gabriel McKee for the generous library services.

The scholarship and expertise of the participants in this volume is greatly appreciated in providing an enormous contribution to the understanding of the multifaceted finds excavated within the precinct. Thanks to Dr. Mohamed Naguib, General Director of the General Administration of Egyptian, Greek and Roman Antiquities in Sohag; Dr. Salima Ikram Distinguished University Professor, Egyptology Unit Head, American University in Cairo; Dr. Louise Bertitni of the American Foundation for Cultural Research; Dr. Zeinab Hashish, associate professor, Department of Egyptology, Beni-Suef University, Faculty of Arts.

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Also, many thanks must go to our excavation and surveying team Essam Shehab, Mansour Badry, Napolian Elai, Amira Fawzi, surveyors Amr Zakaria, and Mohamed Moustafa, conservators Mohamed Ibrahim, Moataz AlShahawy, Ahmed Tarek, and Sara AlAshmawy for their superb restoration work.

Needless to say, all our fieldwork operations at the site could not have been possible without Ahmed Ragab and his tireless dig-house staff; Gufties foremen the late Raiss Mohamed Ibrahim and Raiss Ashraf Zedan; and their experienced Gufti team together with the energetic Abydos workforce, where no task is impossible, and to all of whom I am indebted.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Dr. Briana Jackson for her thorough review and edit of the manuscript with valuable suggestions, and to Dr. Billie Jean Collins of Lockwood Press and her dedicated team for their efforts and attention in producing this volume.

Sameh Iskander
February 2025

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Abbreviations

Bibliographic

ÄA	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AeL	Ägypten und Levante/ <i>Egypt and the Levant</i>
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BdE	Bibliothèque d'Étude
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale au Caire</i>
CCE	<i>Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne</i>
CDD	Johnson, Janet H., ed. <i>The Demotic Dictionary of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001–. https://isac.uchicago.edu/research/publications/chicago-demotic-dictionary .
CdE	<i>Chronique d'Égypte: Bulletin périodique de la Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth</i>
CNI Publications	Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications
CRIPEL	<i>Les Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille</i>
Demot. Nb.	Lüddeckens, Erich, et al. <i>Demotisches Namenbuch</i> . Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1980–2000.
DLE	Lesko, Leonard H., and Barbara S. Lesko. <i>A Dictionary of Late Egyptian</i> . 5 volumes. Berkeley, 1982–1990.
Glossar	Erichsen, W. <i>Demotisches Glossar</i> . Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1954.
GM	<i>Göttinger Miszellen: Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion</i>
HP	Möller, Georg. <i>Hieratische Paläographie: Die ägyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der fünften Dynastie bis zur römischen Kaiserzeit</i> . 3 volumes. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909–1912.
IFAO	Institut français d'archéologie orientale
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
KHWB	Westendorf, Wilhelm. <i>Koptisches Handwörterbuch</i> . Heidelberg: Winter, 1977.
LÄ	Helck, Wolfgang, Eberhard Otto, and Wolfhart Westendorf, eds. <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> . 7 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972–1992.
LGG	Leitz, Christian, et al. <i>Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen</i> . 8 vols. OLA 110–116, 129. Leuven, 2002–2003.
Lexikon	Wilson, Penelope. <i>A Ptolemaic Lexikon: A Lexicographical Study of the Texts in the Temple of Edfu</i> . OLA 78. Leuven: Peeters, 1997.
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i>
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
P. L. Bat.	<i>Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava</i>
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
RdE	<i>Revue d'égyptologie</i>
SAK	<i>Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur</i>
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SSR	Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion
Wb.	Erman, Adolf, and Hermann Grapow, eds., <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> , 7 vols. plus 5 vols. Berlin: Akademie, 1926–1963.
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>

General Abbreviations

act.	active
adj.	adjective
BCE	Before the Common Era
ca.	circa, about, approximately
CE	Common Era
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
circ.	circumstantial
cm	centimeter
col(s).	column(s)
det.	determinative
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
esp.	especially
fem.	feminine
fn(s).	footnote(s)
frag(s).	fragment(s)
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place
MNI	Minimum number of individuals
N.B.	nota bene, note well
NISP	Number of identified specimens
part.	participle
pf.	perfect
pl(s).	plate(s)
p(p).	page(s)
prep.	preposition
prob.	probably
rel.	relative
s.v.	<i>sub voce</i> , under the word
var.	variant
vb.	verb
vol(s).	volume(s)
vs.	versus
vso.	verso

Symbols

∏	encloses partly damaged text
[]	encloses text lost in break
...	damaged or unread text
< >	encloses reconstruction due to scribal omission

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