

*Shaft group 7:632 A-D showing a well-preserved coping wall outlining the shafts. Part of the original vault can be seen over shaft A (right), preserved by a later mastaba.*

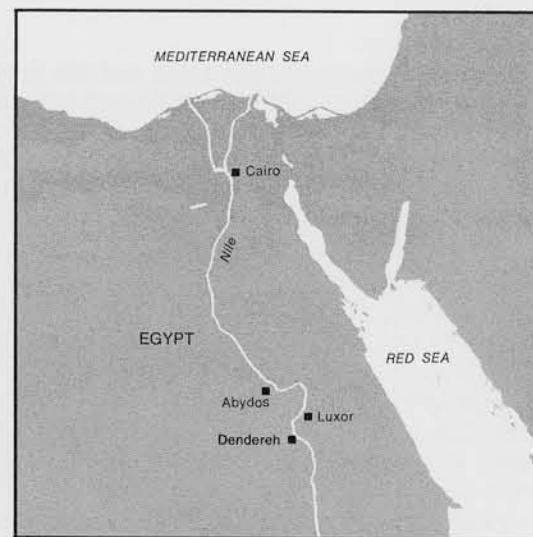
## DENDEREH AND THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM 1898-1970

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The recent publication of Henry G. Fischer's book on Denderah, more than seventy years after the first excavations at that site, provides an appropriate occasion to review the history of Denderah and its relationship with the University Museum.

Denderah is situated on the western edge of the Nile Valley, about 375 miles south of Cairo. It is included in all the guided tours of Egypt because of the well-preserved Graeco-Roman temple, but archaeologists are primarily interested in the large cemetery stretching along the desert behind the temple. On a barren stretch of gravel and sand gradually ascending from the cultivated flood-plain of the Nile to the limestone cliffs that form the western boundary of the Nile Valley, were buried the inhabitants of the ancient town which adjoined an earlier temple on the same spot. Only a few low mounds of mud-brick indicated the ancient use of the site before excavation began. Although burials were made in the cemetery at all periods it flourished particularly from the late Sixth Dynasty down into the Middle Kingdom. During this period of about 450 years many thousands of burials were made. They can be divided into two types, depending on the wealth of the owner. Wealthy

officials were interred in a chamber cut out of the bed-rock at the bottom of a deep shaft. The body was placed in a wooden coffin, and with it were buried jewelry, stone unguent jars, pots of food, everything considered necessary for the future life. Over the shaft was built a mud-brick "mastaba," consisting of four massive walls of mud-brick enclosing a rectangle as large as 140 feet by 80 feet which was filled with gravel. One corner was set apart as an offering chamber for the funerary cult. In it was placed the inscribed stone "false-door" through which the owner was thought to enter and leave the afterworld. The eastern face of the mastaba was decorated with recesses, over each of which was placed an inscribed stela, with a figure of the owner, his names and titles, and a funerary prayer. This facade was protected by a fender wall forming a narrow corridor in front of the mastaba. The shafts of the poor were not so deep and their chambers were hollowed out of the overlying gravel. Their equipment depended on their means—sometimes only a few pots if they were very poor. Access to the chamber was prevented by a wall of bricks, and a brick vault covering the shaft protected it from robbers. Usually such shafts were built in groups of four or more.



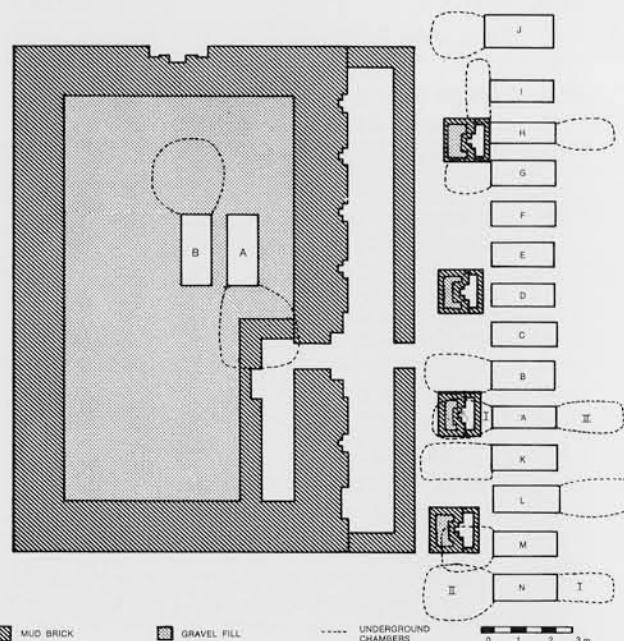
13:483 and 13:484 partially excavated. Traces of the denuded mud-brick coping of group 13:483 can be seen west of shafts A and E to H. In the center background is the temple of Hathor within its massive enclosure wall. Beyond it, palm trees mark the cultivated land along the river and the faint line of cliffs indicates the eastern boundary of the Nile Valley.

CHRONOLOGY	
Early Dynastic Period: Dynasties I and II	c. 3100-2686 B.C.
Old Kingdom: Dynasties III-VI (Pepi II)	c. 2686-2181 B.C.
First Intermediate Period: Dynasties VII-XI (Mentuhotep)	c. 2181-1991 B.C.
Middle Kingdom: Dynasty XII (Sesostris I)	1991-1787 B.C.

Each would be outlined with a low wall of brick. Sometimes a miniature mastaba, only a couple of feet long, would be placed beside the shaft in imitation of the mastabas of the wealthy.

The cemetery has suffered greatly over the past 4000 years. Robbers have ransacked most of the burials, breaking the vaults and letting the shafts fill up with sand. The rising water-table and white ants have destroyed the wood of the coffins and the flesh of the bodies. Wind-blown sand and rain have reduced even the largest mastabas to shapeless mounds, and the smaller ones have often been completely erased. When the brick of the mastabas crumbled the stelae fell from their positions. In a country like Egypt stone is valuable, so many of the stelae were taken for reuse or burnt for lime. Even in its ruined condition however, there is much to reward excavation and study. This is especially true because the cemetery spans a period about which very little is known. The Old and Middle Kingdoms are well documented from a variety of sources, archaeological and inscriptional. It is possible to reconstruct their history in some detail, and such monuments as the pyramids bear

Complete ground plan of the partially excavated mastaba shown above. Shafts E and F were never sunk.



witness to the power of the kings and the prosperity of the country. No such evidence has survived from the period between them, the First Intermediate Period. Even its length can only be estimated (one to two hundred years). Its kings are known only from later lists. Hardly a scarab survives to testify that they really existed. This is not an accident of preservation, but a reflection of the decline in the power of the monarchy which is evident from the end of Pepi II's ninety-four-year reign. The country seems to have fallen into a period of social and political upheaval, when the kingship was divided between at least two rulers, neither of whom could muster enough power to defeat the other until King Mentuhotep of Thebes unified the country and established the Middle Kingdom. With such a dearth of information, the importance of a series of hundreds of tombs covering the period, such as exists at Denderah, is obvious.

Work on the site was initiated in 1898 by Flinders Petrie for the Egypt Exploration Fund. He concentrated on uncovering the most productive areas of the large mastabas—the offering chamber and facade with their inscribed stelae, and the burial chamber. Rarely did he spend the time required to completely excavate an entire mastaba, let alone the entire cemetery. As a result, his plans are incomplete and inaccurate. He sank a few test pits at various points in the cemetery and uncovered a few of the group shafts, often only one of a group. After thus sampling the site for a few months he left it. Two years later the publication appeared, which naturally shared all the faults of the excavations. The description of the tombs was not complete, and many tombs were not even marked on the



Mud-brick wall closing the entrance to the burial chamber of shaft 8:934 A.

Niche stela of the nomarch Adu I (U.M. 29-66-594). The inscription invokes mortuary offerings for him and enumerates some of his many titles. Servants present him with various food offerings.





Burial 7:840.2 B.

small map. The information in it is very difficult to use, so in some respects the excavations were not successful. However, the University Museum profited from its contribution to the work by receiving a number of fine objects for the collection.

During the last two weeks of Petrie's season and for a few weeks thereafter, Charles Rosher excavated at Denderah on behalf of the American Exploration Society. There are no records of this expedition, and the results were never published, but the objects found came to the University Museum which had helped to finance the work.

Petrie and Rosher left the cemetery far from exhausted after their one season. In 1915 it was chosen by Clarence Fisher, curator of the Egyptian Section of the University Museum, as the site of an expedition to be financed by Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. In 1898 scientific excavation had been in its infancy. By 1915 such men as George Reisner, with whom Fisher had worked, had established standards for excavation and recording. Fisher applied these to his Denderah excavations. Unlike Petrie, he began with the intention of clearing the cemetery (which measures one-third by two-thirds of a mile) completely and systematically. He divided it into "areas," each 200 meters by 180 meters, numbered 1, 2, etc. Each area was divided into ninety 20-meter squares, numbered from 010 to 990. The first tomb uncovered in square 480 of area 13 would be numbered 13:481, thus indicating its exact location. Although only a foot or so of sand had accumulated over the ancient surface, the task of clearing

thousands of shafts, some as much as ten feet deep, was an immense one, impossible to complete with the time and money available. In three seasons' work less than one-third of the cemetery was cleared, but what was done was done thoroughly and recorded completely. Each burial was registered on a 5" by 8" card, on which were a sketch of the burial, a list of the contents, with a scale drawing and description of each object, and information about the size and depth of the shaft and chamber. The objects which were thought worth bringing back to Philadelphia were entered in a separate register, while duplicate or broken objects were recorded only on the tomb cards, which were thus the only complete record of the burial. About 1800 photographs were taken of interesting details, and a field diary was kept describing the progress of the work. Most of the artifacts found were pottery—partly because that had been plentiful in the original burials, and partly because it had been ignored by the thieves who robbed the graves. Hundreds of examples of similar shape were found, so a selection of typical examples was sent to the Museum at Cairo, and another kept for the University Museum, while the rest was buried at the site. Most of the jewelry, stone vessels, and inscriptions were brought to the Museum after the authorities at Cairo had selected those objects which interested them.

After three seasons at Denderah, Fisher went on to excavate at other sites and eventually turned his attention to Palestine. He took the Denderah records with him to Jerusalem so that he could prepare them for publication, but the pressure of field-work prevented him from doing so. He died in 1948. Due to the confusion in which his papers were left, the American School of Oriental Research, where his notes were stored, was unable to locate the map and the tomb cards when they were returning his material to the University Museum. Without these basic sources it was impossible to consider publishing the excavations. An unpublished excavation is worse than none, so it is fortunate that research has been done on Denderah by several students of the Egyptian Section since the time of Fisher's death.

Henry Fischer, formerly of the University Museum staff, now Lila Acheson Wallace Curator of Egyptology at the Metropolitan Museum, became interested in the Denderah inscriptions, many of which, of course, are in our Museum collection. In 1955 he submitted a dissertation entitled *Denderah in the Old Kingdom and its aftermath*. It has now been published in revised and augmented form as *Dendera in the Third*

*Millennium B.C. down to the Theban Domination of Upper Egypt*. In his preface, Dr. Fischer outlines his intention as follows: "The principal aim of this study is to assemble and discuss whatever is known of Dendera from the beginning of Egyptian history up to the point, in the Eleventh Dynasty, when the succession of nomarchs and overseers of priests can no longer be followed." Before the Sixth Dynasty references to Denderah are very rare. The few graves of Early Dynastic date at the site contained only one inscription—a seal with a woman's name. The earliest references come from the cemetery of the ancient capital of Egypt near Cairo. Two officials of the Fourth Dynasty mention in their tomb inscriptions that they were nomarch (chief administrator) of the Crocodile nome in which Denderah was situated. A number of other men and women who were buried at the capital claim to have belonged to the priesthood of Hathor, Mistress of Denderah, the goddess to whom the Graeco-Roman temple was dedicated. From Denderah itself, there is a group of tombs of the Fifth Dynasty, one at least belonging to a priest of Hathor, then nothing until the end of the Sixth Dynasty. By that time Denderah had become a town of some importance, the capital of the Crocodile nome, the seat of the nomarch. The temple flourished under the patronage of the kings of the Sixth Dynasty, and the general prosperity is reflected in a number of large mastabas, many of them belonging to the nomarchs who now chose to be buried in their own district instead of at court. The first of these was Adu I, whose mastaba was built during the first half of the reign of Pepi II. He was followed by three other nomarchs. In his book, Dr. Fischer discusses the inscriptions of each—their titles, date, and contemporary minor officials. These four officials form a group with similar hieroglyphic and stylistic features in their inscriptions and reliefs, which can be dated to the end of the Sixth Dynasty. They are followed by a transitional group of inscriptions probably of the Seventh to Eighth Dynasties, combining the characteristics of the Adu group with those of the third, later, group. These later officials bear no higher title than that of overseer of priests. Dr. Fischer considers them to be contemporary with the Ninth Dynasty when Denderah was administered by men from outside the nome. In the Tenth Dynasty Denderah came under the control of the Theban rulers whose capital was only 80 miles away. By this time the succession of nomarchs and chief priests can no longer be followed, and the whole picture is confused by a great increase in the stelae of private persons.



Carnelian and amethyst beads from the body of a female, the five large beads inscribed with the name of Sesostris I (1991-1962 B.C.)

It was not Dr. Fischer's intention to deal with these inscriptions which can contribute little to the history of the site, so there is still much to be done on this facet of the material.

Dr. Fischer instigated a further search for the Denderah map, and it was finally located and returned. The tomb cards were still missing. This was not important to Dr. Fischer's work—the burials could not be of much help in dating the inscriptions since the latter were always placed above the surface, not in association with the grave goods. However, when in 1969 I selected the archaeological material at Denderah as the subject of my dissertation, the situation changed. I became aware of the existence of the tomb cards only when reading through the field diary. A search of the Museum turned up correspondence referring to their assumed location in Jerusalem. When inquiries there were unsuccessful, I tried to reconstruct the cards from the information in the map, diary, photos, and object register. This was impossible, as I soon found out, because of the number of unregistered objects, of no importance in themselves, but necessary to complete the picture of the burial. The situation looked very depressing, when I heard that a fellow student, Barry Gittlan, was going to Jerusalem to do some research. I gave him a description of the missing cards in case he should come across them, but I was not optimistic. However, the cards did turn up, stored with some unrelated material from Fisher's Palestinian excavations! The American School immediately sent them to the Museum and I was able to go on with my research secure in the knowledge that I had all the available information.

The fundamental problem with the material is how to date it. Dr. Fischer's stelae cannot be used for that purpose since they were not found in association with the archaeological material. In town sites, where levels build up over the years as houses are torn down and rebuilt, it is obvious that the lowest levels are the earliest. In a cemetery it is very unusual for one grave to be dug over another, so the order has to be

established by other means using only the internal evidence. In many periods it is common for graves to contain objects inscribed with the name of the reigning king. In the First Intermediate Period even that help fails.

Petrie, when faced with the same problems, evolved a method called "sequence dating" for establishing the sequence, though not the absolute date, of graves. This is based on the association of the pot types. Pottery was chosen as a more reliable dating criterion than jewelry or stone vessels. The latter were sometimes handed down from one generation to another, so are apt to be much older than the burial in which they were placed. The pottery, on the other hand, being made of Nile mud in simple shapes and undecorated, had no intrinsic value and is likely to be contemporary with the burial. For the same reason it is plentiful in even the poorest graves, and not apt to be taken by robbers when they removed the more valuable objects. Gradual changes in shape distinguish the pottery of different periods. Types did not change abruptly, however, but overlapped those before and after. This is the basis of the theory of sequence dating. In simplified terms it works as follows: The pottery is sorted into types, and the tombs are grouped according to the types they contain. A pattern should emerge, with group 1 containing types A and B, group 2 types B and C, group 3 types C and D, etc. From the overlap of types it is clear that the sequence of types can be reconstructed A B C D, and the sequence of groups 1 2 3.

Dr. Werner Kaiser, Director of the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo, has suggested

another method of sequence dating called "horizontal stratigraphy" from its resemblance to the vertical stratigraphy of town sites. When the distribution of the various pottery types is plotted on a map of the cemetery, individual types are found to concentrate in certain areas, again overlapping with neighboring types to form a pattern which reflects the growth of the cemetery (e.g. from north to south, or from the center outward). The problem of absolute dating still remains whichever method is used. It should be possible to determine the beginning of the sequence from the burials associated with the Sixth Dynasty mastabas. The other end is fixed in the Middle Kingdom by some beads inscribed with the name of Sesostris I. For the First Intermediate Period, however, a sequence of graves is the most that can be expected.

It remains to be seen whether these methods can be successfully applied to the Denderah material. In any case, the dating of the tombs is only the means to an end—the reconstruction of the archaeological history of Denderah and its relationship with other contemporary sites of the First Intermediate Period. My study will thus be complementary to Dr. Fischer's inscripational history of Denderah. But even after three expeditions and two dissertations Denderah is not yet exhausted. At least two-thirds of the cemetery remains to be cleared, and the study and publication of the material from past expeditions is not completed. It is our hope that the University Museum will be as involved in this future work as it has been in the past. 2

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#### SUGGESTED READING

HENRY G. FISCHER, *Dendera in the Third Millennium B. C. down to the Theban Domination of Upper Egypt*. 1968.

Review by John Wilson in *American Journal of Archaeology* 74, 1970.

CLARENCE S. FISHER, "The Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. Egyptian Expedition," *Museum Journal* VIII, Philadelphia, 1917.

W. M. F. PETRIE, *Denderah 1898. 1900*.

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RAY ANITA SLATER majored in Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto. After graduation she studied for two years at University College London, where she received a Diploma in Egyptology. Since 1966 she has been enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School. She spent the winter of 1968 in Egypt with the University Museum Expedition to Dra Abu el-Naga, where this photograph was taken. With her are (left to right) Geoffrey Pearce, conservator, George Abd is-Sayid, carpenter, with his little daughter standing in front of Taiya Hasaan, guard. Behind them is the doorway to the tomb of Bekenkhons.

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