

A HABITATION SITE AT KARNAK NORTH PRIOR TO THE NEW KINGDOM

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The imposing remains of the temples situated at Karnak in Upper Egypt, vast and complex as they are, do not include any buildings still standing *in situ* which can be dated earlier than the reign of Thutmosis I at the beginning of the XVIIIth dynasty. That such earlier temples did however exist is of course copiously attested by the presence of architectural elements from their dismantled walls reused in later structures. There can be no doubt that an important temple complex existed here from at least as early as the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. But where, we may ask, are the remains of the town in whose midst it stood? Where did the people of that remote time whose lives were passed in the shadow of these imposing monuments live and work? We know the tombs of the more prosperous among them but we know practically nothing about their dwellings. Has the great city of Thebes which was to become the capital of all Egypt, and in which was situated this important religious center, irretrievably disappeared under the hotels and souvenir bazaars of the modern town of Luxor?

An unexpected light was thrown on this problem when the scattered remains of a habitation site covering an extensive area to the north of Karnak temple was brought to light during the excavations carried out at Karnak-North on behalf of the IFAO from 1968 until 1992. The development of the site could be followed from the early Middle Kingdom through the 2nd Intermediate Period to the beginning of the XVIIIth dynasty.

Karnak-North designates the area outside and to the north of the main Amon temple complex where the ruins of the so-called temple of Montu,¹ built by Amenhotep III, stand within a spacious temenos wall dating to a much later period. Our predecessors on

the site, C. Robichon and his associates, who excavated there for the IFAO until 1956, were mainly interested in the Montu temple itself and in the reused blocks of earlier buildings with which it was in great part constructed.² However, the remains of a stone gateway attributed to Tuthmosis I³ situated just outside and to the west of the Montu enclosure wall but at a somewhat lower level, led them to clear the area behind the gateway in order to ascertain to what it gave access. During one season's work, excavation in the axis of the gateway and north along the outer face of the Montu enclosure disclosed a densely constructed area the continuation of which could be traced eastwards underneath and inside the north-west angle of the temenos wall. The discovery of a stela dating to the year 16 of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III erected in a small chapel just north of the gateway led the excavators to identify this agglomeration as being of New Kingdom date.⁴

It was recognized at the time that earlier remains lay below these New Kingdom structures, but no further investigation of them was undertaken.⁵ It is difficult at present to distinguish between the earlier and the later building periods represented on the plans included in the publication of the excavations⁶ (Fig. 1) as no levels are indicated on them. Moreover, the pottery from these different levels was not recorded, with the significant exception of one Tell el-Yahudieh juglet still preserved in the magazines at Karnak North. Nevertheless, one thing is clear. Differences of orientation visible in photographs of the excavated area support the hypothesis that at least two distinct periods are to be distinguished in the maze of walls there visible: an early XVIIIth dynasty level contemporaneous with the gateway and an earlier underlying one⁷ (Fig. 2).

¹ It has recently been shown that this temple was originally dedicated to Amon. It was only during the XXVth dynasty that it was rededicated to Montu (GABOLDE and RONDOT, *BSFE* 136 (1996) 27–41). For convenience sake we will continue to call it the Montu temple in order to differentiate it from the great Amon temple.

² P. BARGUET et J. LECLANT, *Karnak-Nord IV*, FIFAO 21, 1954.

³ Recent investigation has shown it to be in fact the work of Hatshepsut. Cf. C. VAN SICLEN, *GM* 80 (1984) 83.

⁴ L. CHRISTOPHE, *Karnak-Nord III*, FIFAO 23 (1951), 71–91.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 81–82.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pl. VI.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pls. VII and VIII.

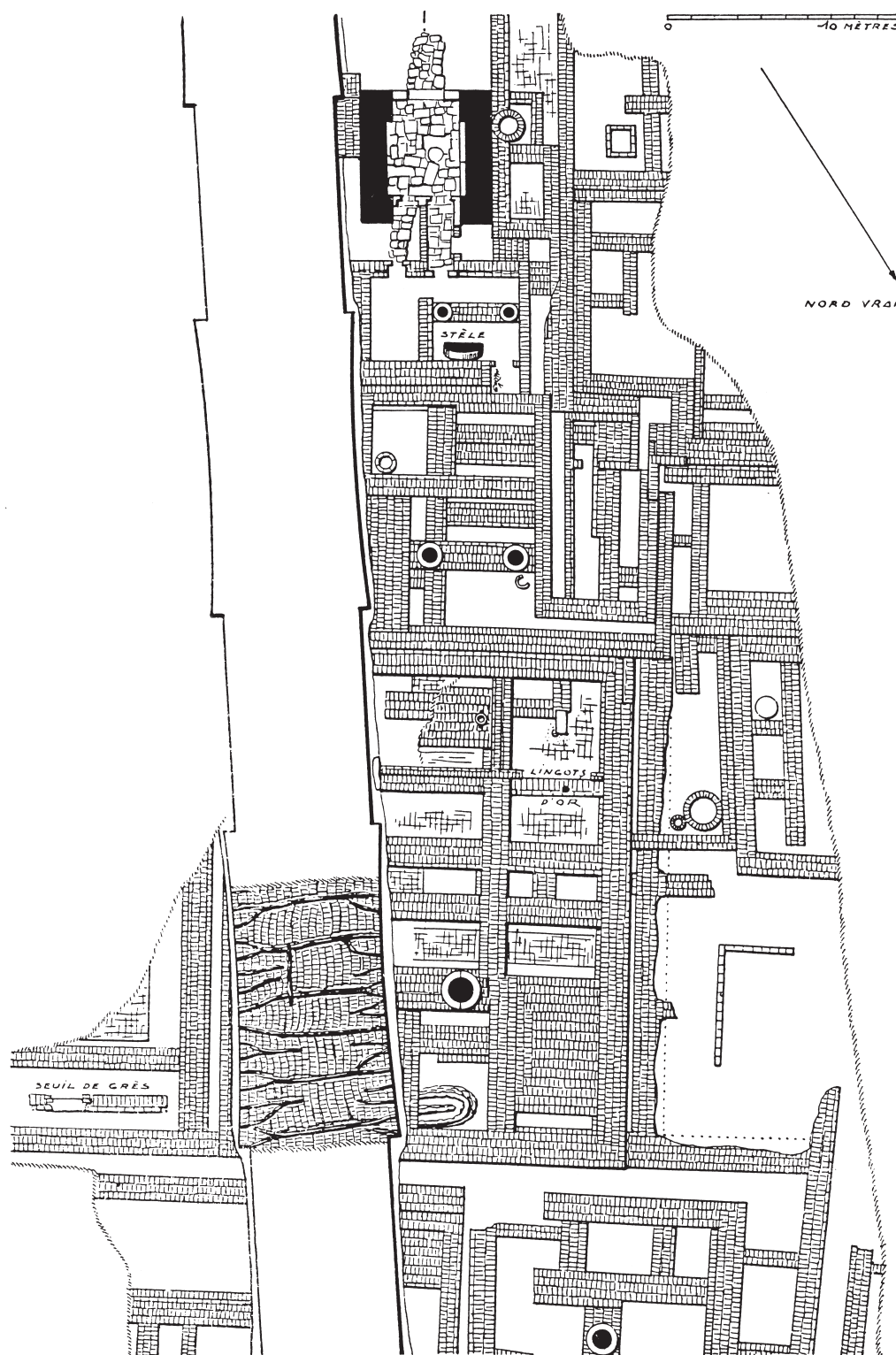


Fig. 1 Plan of the excavations north of the gateway of Hatshepsut.
 Reproduction of pl. VI from: L. CHRISTOPHE, *Karnak-Nord III*, FIFAO 23, IFAO, Cairo, 1951

That these earlier strata extended eastwards under the Montu temple itself was demonstrated in their subsequent work. The colonnades which had been added in front of the temple of Montu, first by Taharka and later in the Ptolemaic period, were no

longer standing but their foundations, constructed entirely of reused blocks from earlier buildings, remained *in situ*. These blocks were almost all decorated and inscribed. In order to be able to document them in detail, the excavators completely dismantled



Fig. 2 Photograph of the excavations north of the gateway of Hatshepsut. Reproduction of pl. VII from: L. CHRISTOPHE, *Karnak- Nord III*, FIFAO 23, IFAO, Cairo, 1951

the foundations. The removal of these structures disclosed the fact that the strata at the base of the foundation trenches contained the remains of walls, silos and small column bases, the eastward continuation of the earlier strata uncovered outside as well as inside the north-west angle of the temenos wall.

When excavation was resumed at Karnak-North for the IFAO by Jean Jacquet in 1968, a first objective was the recognition of the original ground level surrounding the Montu temple at the time of its construction and if possible the identification of its original enclosure wall. Two seasons' work made it possible to recognize the former, characterized by its white-washed surface, adjoining the temple on the east and to identify the latter parallel to the eastern

side of the temple as far as its south-east corner. It was ascertained that this wall, like the temple itself, rested on earlier strata belonging to the inhabited area already recognized elsewhere.

It was then decided to investigate the traces of a rectangular form, apparently indicating the emplacement of a building whose outlines, though invisible at ground level, could be traced on the surface in aerial photographs. It lay to the east of the present-day Montu enclosure, in the outer angle formed by the junction of the enclosure walls of the Amun and Montu complexes, but differed in orientation from both. By comparison with the orientations observed in the above mentioned excavations west of the Montu enclosure and underneath the colonnades of the temple we surmised that the building here adumbrated probably dated, like the upper stratum exposed there, to a period preceding the construction of Amenhotep III's temple. Subsequent excavation confirmed this hypothesis. The building, eventually identified as a treasury of Thutmose I, was indeed older than the Montu temple of Amenhotep III.⁸

Apart from the intrinsic interest of Thutmose I's treasury building, unique of its kind, its excavation helped us to a clearer interpretation of the earlier strata that lay around and underneath it and enabled us to attach their evolution to that of the early strata identified around and below the Montu complex. It became evident that the leveled area which had been prepared for the construction of the Treasury⁹ had taken the form of a cut made into the northern face of the then existing mound of Karnak whose surface descended gradually towards the north. As a result of this configuration, the southern part of the ground level on which the Treasury was built lay more than a metre below the surface of the older strata visible in the section exposed on its eastern side. This means that more than a metre of the archaeological strata over an area of at least 50 metres square had been removed in order to prepare a flat surface for the building, thus destroying the early XVIIIth dynasty strata that had certainly existed here. Investigation of the subsoil lying directly below the Treasury floor at points where that floor had been destroyed in ancient times confirmed the fact that the pottery found in the strata directly below the Treasury was of Second Intermediate Period date.

⁸ J. JACQUET, *Karnak-Nord V*, FIFAO 23 (1983) 3-4.

⁹ Or possibly for an even earlier brick building whose remains could be identified just below the floor of the Treasury.

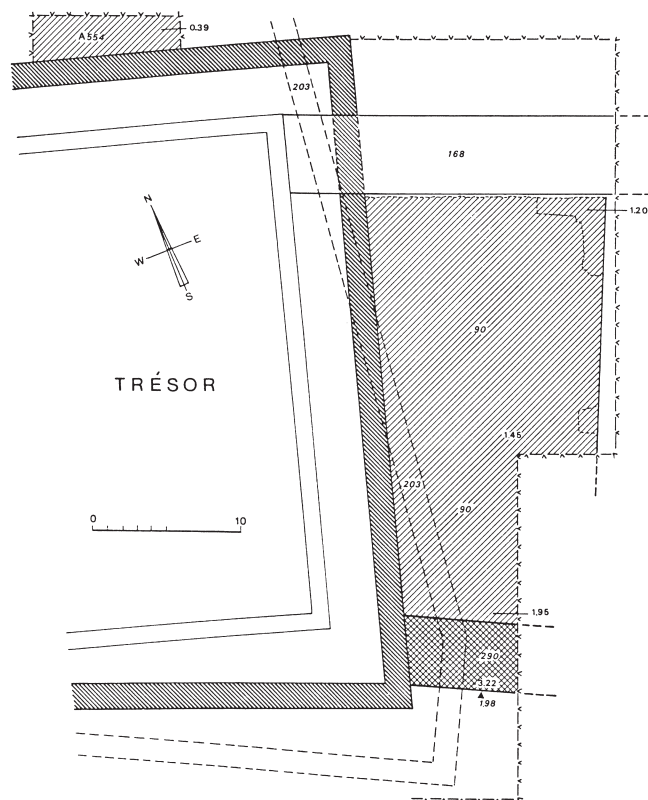


Fig. 3 Hatshepsut's brick terrace (n° 90) east of the temenos wall of the treasury of Thutmose I. Reproduction of fig. 35 from: J. JACQUET, *Karnak-Nord IX*, FIFAO 44, IFAO, Cairo, 2001

When the excavation of the Treasury was completed, a new excavation was planned directly to the east of the Treasury enclosure wall in order to investigate what remained of these earlier strata where they were still preserved above ground and where they extended towards the west under the temenos wall and under the Treasury itself. The temenos wall had been built by Hatshepsut¹⁰ after her father's early death and, approximately at the same time that the wall was built, a mud brick floor was laid down covering the entire area (about 15 metres in width) which remained between the wall and the cutting in the eastern face of the mound (Fig. 3). This floor effectively sealed off the earlier strata beneath and created a sort of terrace around the Treasury.

In order to reach the older strata it was necessary to remove Hatshepsut's floor. This was done at first by removing alternate squares of 5 metres square over the whole area. In the glimpses thus provided of the underlying stratum a new world was revealed in which the nature of the terrain had changed radically. Whereas in the strata above the floor the pottery had been typically XVIIIth dynasty or later, here we came upon an area where Second Intermediate Period pottery was omnipresent in a context of small brick enclosures, granaries and large storage jars imbedded



Fig. 4 Second Intermediate Period strata revealed under the terrace of Hatshepsut

¹⁰ A foundation stone in her name was found in association with the north-east angle of the wall as well as a scarab ring

in the name of Thutmose III which had been inserted into one of the bricks.



Fig. 5 Handle of a Camares bowl (K.N. P.2491) from the excavations east of the treasury of Thutmosis I

in the ground, a work space of some sort located on the periphery of a settled area (Fig. 4). This level could be attached to the lower part of the early stratum visible in the face of the cutting. The upper part, destroyed by the leveling operations preliminary to the building of the Treasury, was here occupied by Hatshepsut's floor. It was in this upper level of the Second Intermediate Period stratum still visible in the cut just beyond the eastern limit of Hatshepsut's brick terrace that an unexpected potsherd came to light. It was the twisted handle of a Minoan Camares ware bowl, black polished with white splashes (Fig. 5). A second Minoan fragment was found during the excavation, but unfortunately in a later mixed context which can provide no indication of its date.

Continuing to descend below Hatshepsut's floor, always in the same area between the temenos wall of the Treasury and the cutting on the east, an entirely new feature appeared. This was a wall about 1.5m wide the south-east angle of which was located slightly outside the south-east angle of the Treasury temenos wall but at a lower level. It could be followed in a northerly direction for more than fifty metres passing under the temenos of the Treasury and continuing beyond the limit of the excavation (Fig. 6). On the south side also it was traced westwards for at least forty metres without attaining its south-west corner. It was possible to date this installation to the thirteenth dynasty by the pottery discovered in a dump heap deposited outside the wall (Fig. 7). The contents of this dump consisted mainly of about sixty large Nile silt storage jars which must originally have contained some commodity such as grain (Fig. 8). These jars, stoppered and



Fig. 6 Area east of the treasury of Thutmosis I looking north. On the left: the outer stone wall of the treasury; in the center the brick temenos wall of the treasury; on the right: the XIIIth dynasty brick wall (n° 203) as it passes north under the temenos wall of the treasury

sealed, had apparently been emptied by breaking the necks of the jars which were then thrown away. On the other hand, the seal impressions on their stoppers had been carefully gathered together and placed in the bottom of one of the broken vessels before it was abandoned on the heap. Among other seal impressions included in the lot are several apparently in the form of a rectangular, round-topped stela containing the inscription *šm n pr-ḥd* "seal of the treasury", similar to specimens found in the Middle Kingdom Nubian fortresses.¹¹ It is probable that the inhabitants of the village enclosed by this wall were closely connected in one capacity or another with the temple administra-

¹¹ Cf. GEOFFREY MARTIN, *Egyptian Administrative and Private-Name Seals*, Oxford 1971, pls. 43, 44.

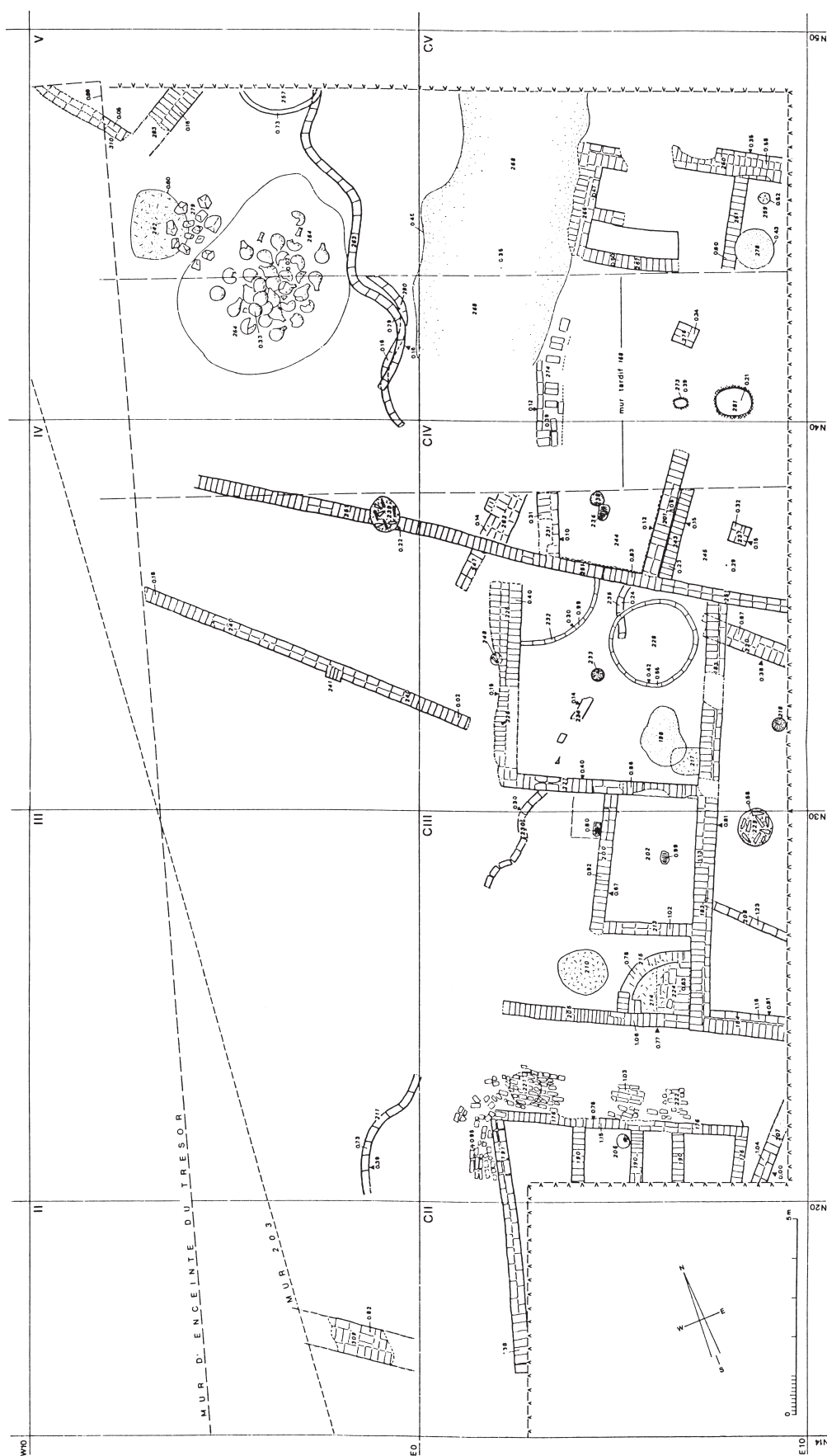


Fig. 7 In the upper left-hand corner: position of the pottery dump n° 264 east of the XIIIth dynasty brick wall (n° 203).
Reproduction of pl. 3 from: J. JACQUET, *Karnak-Nord IX*, FIFAO 44, IFAO, Cairo, 2001



Fig. 8 Pottery dump n° 264

tion: servants, lay priests, artisans, etc. It is significant perhaps of their favored status that a considerable amount of imported Palestinian pottery, mainly amphorae, can be identified intermingled with the indigenous pottery found in these strata.

A sounding of about 4.5 meters square made on the east side of these installations and reaching down to the level of the present-day underground water table indicated that in this area no further inhabited strata were to be found below the XIIIth dynasty level. The contents of this sounding was almost wholly composed of mud-brick rubble, sand and ashes mixed with a surprising number of nodules of red ochre but with very few potsherds and gave the impression of being an intentional fill of a low-lying perhaps humid area.

Proof that still older strata did nevertheless exist elsewhere on the site was found farther to the west under the southern wing of Hatshepsut's temenos wall. Her wall, on this side, had been founded on the destroyed XIIIth dynasty wall mentioned above and on a second still older wall running parallel to it. When the southern wing of her wall in its turn was demolished in Ramesside times, the remains of the older walls were again exposed to view. In the space of about two meters which separated these two walls

there were to be seen the remains of a room belonging to a preceding level of construction. It had been cut through and partly demolished when the two walls were constructed. This room about 4m long, was found to be entirely filled with pottery apparently stored there intentionally. Although very much broken, it was possible to restore entirely or partially more than sixty vessels forming a homogeneous ensemble which could be dated to the early XIIth dynasty. The majority of these pieces was composed of large, thin walled, marl clay storage jars whose round bases were formed by hand in a mould to which the upper parts, turned on the wheel, were attached. They were of excellent workmanship and many were elaborately decorated with a variety of combed motives as well as with flattened beads and small cup-like objects attached around the neck. They had been standing along the wall of the room on heavy Nile silt cylindrical supports. A particularly attractive jar decorated in this style was further provided with breasts, these being embraced by small arms descending from the neck. The breasts are hollow so that when the jar was filled with milk the breasts also were filled. A large spout is attached between the arms. I know of only one other similar vessel but it lacks the spout.¹² None of the vessels in

¹² D. DOWNES, *The Excavations at Esna 1905–1906*, 1974, 48, Liverpool inventory number E6393.

this room seems to have been used as the interiors were clean without any trace of a possible content. Several smaller, very highly polished white jars with flat rims appear to imitate alabaster vessels.

Fine table wares in Nile silt: plates, hemispherical bowls and deeper bowls with slightly pointed bases as well as carinated bowls with an annular base, were also present. Several large vats provided with spouts apparently belong to the apparatus used in the preparation of beer.

A small number of objects was found together with the pottery in this room: a tall alabaster (calcite) bottle, and a small limestone unguent jar; a limestone plumb-bob; a small, round, black granite grinding stone with its pebble grinder; a faience amulet and several seal impressions. To what kind of establishment did all these objects belong?

To sum up: the evidence here presented although very fragmentary, seems sufficient to lead to the conclusion that from the early Middle Kingdom a habita-

tion site was situated to the north of Karnak temple. It appears to have evolved without drastic interruption until the end of the 2nd Intermediate period. With the growing importance of Thebes and the expansion of the temple of Amon at the beginning of the XVII-1st dynasty, the area of the village was transformed into a royal enclave including perhaps a building erected by Ahmose of which a door-jamb and other fragments were found during the excavation. It may also have included the palace of Thutmosis I known to have been situated north of the temple as well as his treasury, and the chapel of Hatshepsut in which the stela of the year 16 was found. The whole appears to have been enclosed in a temenos wall built by the Queen, since the southern wing of the Treasury enclosure wall, which we found to have continued westward beyond the limits of the dig, may possibly have stretched as far as the stone gateway recently identified as being the work of Hatshepsut. It is an intriguing hypothesis which needs investigation in the future.