


ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY, TEMPLE OF SETI I. ABYDOS
EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY
AND
THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

Jan 2nd 1929. 1930

EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY'S CAMP
ARABAH EL MADFUNAH
BALIANA. UPPER EGYPT.

Dear Mother.

Your letter with the second piece of fine sand paper arrived today. I think we will have enough to last us the rest of the time now.

Yesterday we went to a "Zar." it was the weirdest thing I have ever seen. I do not understand exactly what it was all about but I will do my best to describe all I saw. The Zar was held in the house of our water carrier, we were invited to attend by his wife. Miss C & I went directly after dinner, Sardic & two others escorting us as far as the door. The ceremony was held in a sort of courtyard. In the centre was a little low table piled with bread & other sorts of food. The women were all grouped round squatting on the ground. The old witch doctor was in the centre. She was an aged crone of about 90, toothless, scrawny arms & claw like hands, she had a large drum like a tambourine without bells on which she beat a sort of rhythmic accompaniment to the chants they were singing; beside her sat a man with another sort of drum shaped like this . We were very puzzled at seeing a man sitting among a lot of unveiled women who were not relations. We got Nannie to question Sardic about this & learnt that he was one of these unfortunate sexless creatures (or rather bisexual) they are often associated with these ceremonies & this one was a professional Zar master. We were shown to a divan which had been prepared for us, & after we had greeted the various women we knew, the ritual continued. It simply consisted of the rhythmic drumming & singing of chants which seemed to be constant repetition of certain phrases, then one of the women began to sway & twist herself about, tossing from side to side till she fell exhausted, then another joined in & several others kept up the swaying motions, clapping their hands in time with the drums. After a while the Zar Master stepped into the circle & began to sway & twist. He went through extraordinary contortions


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uttering short sharp cries, he flung himself on the ground, twisting his body & rolling from side to side, he then called for water & when a bowl was brought he buried his face in it & drank like an animal making rapid shuddering motions all the time. Then, when the drumming & chanting stopped he suddenly became quite normal again, rearranged his headdress & cloak which he had torn off, & took his place in the circle again. Several of the women did the same sort of thing, one woman in her frenzy tore off all her clothes except a long white undergarment like a nightie. We stayed watching this until past 10 o'clock & then in a lull in the proceedings we made our adieus, dropping a few piastres into the witch's bowl as we passed. Sardic & Co were waiting to escort us ~~home~~ ^{back}, & we walked home across the desert feeling that we must be creatures belonging to quite a different world.

As far as we can gather from the explanations given us, there are certain underground spirits called Sheikha's who enter into people & possess them until certain demands are satisfied, the curious thing is that women are possessed by male spirits & men by female. These zar's are held to find out what the spirits want & the frenzy & contortions of the women is the spirits way of manifesting itself. It is very akin to spiritualism & mediumistic practices. It is very primitive & in a way rather beastly, but all the same intensely interesting.

We have had lots of tourists in the Temple, usually on Fridays, we are beginning to look on them as one of the plagues of Egypt, perhaps they have the same opinion of us.

Sheikh Abdu Wahid's daughter has had bronchitis rather badly, she is such a sweet girl about 19 or 20, the old man came to us in great distress, he said she had a bad cough. Miss C. sent one of the men back to the house for cinnamon, aspirins & a dose of Eppy & we both went round to see her. She was on her bed, which was simply a mat of dried grass on the packed earth floor & a very hard pillow. She looked very ill & could hardly speak, we got one of the women to heat water & gave her hot cinnamon & sugar straight away. & instead of the dose of Epsom Salts we gave her Syrup of Figs. gave instructions that she was to be kept warm & not to go out of the room for any purpose what ever & only one woman was to be with her

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2

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sprinkled with Vapex, & a great bundle of eucalyptus leaves to be
put in boiling water for her to inhale, explicit instructions not
to drink it. All these ministrations had a wonderful effect, in
two days she was ever so much better. since then Sheikh Abdu etc
has been going round singing our praises with the result that
several members of his family have been coming round expecting
to be cured of the most extraordinary diseases.

Sardic's wife has now got the flu, we sent him off with the usual
remedies & instructions to dose the whole family with cinnamon.
I am afraid Sardic is not too attentive to his husbandly duties,

his house is in the village about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from here. but he
prefers to sleep with our cook. all the same he is very fond & proud
of his wife & family & sees that they have everything they require.

I hope you will like the snaps I am enclosing
with this letter. Please Thank Sallie for me for the book she
sent me, you had better open it & read it any time you dont
want to go into Watford to change the library book, let me know
the title of it. I dont think I shall need any more reading
matter out here.

New Year

Lots of love & messages to wish every one a Happy

Your affectionate daughter

Myrtle.

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