

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

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

Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 1930.

Dear Mother & Father.

I am going to try to describe our day in the oasis.

I told you how we got as far as Kharga but were too tired to attempt the extra 5 kilos to the rest house. In the morning we did not rise as early as we did on the trail. It was past seven when we crawled out of our rugs, we made a hasty toilet, had breakfast, saw the camels loaded & set off. The Government Rest House is built on a little hill close to an old Coptic burial place; the guards were looking out for us & they showed us all the accommodation, a living room, table & chairs, 2 bed rooms, each with two beds, chairs & washstand & pegs to hang clothes on. Table appointments of a solid nature were also provided. Our camels all sat down out side & our goods were carried in. Our first demand was for hot water, we had a glorious wash all over, & got into real clean clothes & felt like giants refreshed. Our first expedition was to a Coptic Monastery, it was built of mud bricks, & inside was a mass of tiny cells, each with a vaulted roof; it was on a high hill, & the view from it was superb. When we looked across the plain & sand dunes to the distant mountains it was difficult to believe we had made such a journey in one day. After the Monastery we visited the Coptic Tombs, they were like tiny chapels, square with a dome. The inside was painted with conventional designs & some biblical subjects, there was Eve sitting next to St Peter, & a few other dignified old gentlemen, & there were very strange pictures of the Ark & the flood etc. We explored several of these

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Tombs, & then came down the hill & walked a short distance to a fine temple built by Darius the Persian. It was in the usual Egyptian style of architecture, but the walls were decorated with several strange gods, besides the usual groups of Osiris, Isis, & Horus, etc. We decided to pay a polite call on the Governor of Kharga next, so donkeys were procured, & off we trotted, back over the 5 kilos we had come in the morning. The Governor received us most politely & regaled us with coffee, inquired about our journey & expressed regret at the shortness of our stay in his domain. He said we must be sure to visit the ancient part of Kharga, & he kindly gave one of the guards instructions to show us everything of interest. So, after a decent interval we made our adieus & set off sight seeing once more. The guard took us down lots of quaint old streets & along curious dark tunnels that twisted & turned with other dark tunnels leading off from them, only here & there a shaft cut in the roof to admit a faint gleam of light. The whole place is like a rabbit warren. The walls built of mud & roofed over with the trunks of palm trees & houses built above them. The place was built in this curious way as a protection against invading bands of Dervishes, Senusi etc, the people could take refuge in these underground places & block them against their enemies. The last raid took place in 1914. since then it has been fairly peaceable, & the underground streets are used more for ~~prote~~ protection from the heat than anything else. Our guard took us to see a mat weaver, a most primitive affair of ropes & sticks. I bought a jolly rush praying mat for 11 PT, it looks so ~~jolly~~ <sup>fine</sup> hanging on the wall of my room here. We reached the outskirts of the old village, & here the guard showed us one of the springs. It was a large pool with the water bubbling up in the centre, they call it the eye of the Sheikh.

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The guard who was showing us round invited us into his house we went up stairs (outside) to a room where his wife & another woman were sitting, there were just rush mats on the floor, & we were invited to occupy the finest of these, so down we squatted, & had a very pleasant conversation, we admired their dresses & ornaments & they politely replied that ours were much nicer, they offered us dates & oranges, & what we did not eat then we were obliged to take away with us.

We made inquiries about the weekly train which was due to leave Kharga the following morning, we had timed our visit so as to be able to return that way, as we could not spare the time from our work to make the journey by camel both ways, the station was over three miles from our Rest House, but the rail passed close by it, & our guide said perhaps they would stop the train specially for us, so on our return ride we stopped to see the station master, we asked if it could be arranged for us to get on the train near the rest house, he said at first that it was quite impossible to stop the train, he inquired when we came to Kharga as he had not seen us the previous week when the train came in, we explained that we had arrived the previous night by camels from Bahariya, he held up his hands in amazement & said, "Oh then certainly the train shall be stopped for you" so we bought our tickets then & there & arranged to be waiting by the rail a little before 7 o'clock the following morning.

We had a very nice supper of scrambled eggs, biscuits, oranges & dates, & went to bed early, it was strange to be in a real bed again but I didn't sleep half as well as out on the desert. (I forgot to tell you in my last letter how my nice old camel man used to sing Arabic songs to me by moonlight

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& judging by the twinkle in his eye I fancy they were love songs, but he was so very nice & respectful that I am sure they were quite proper & all they ought to be. He had a beautiful deep voice & sang very softly as he walked along. Some of the men made up songs as they went along, like this. Oh the way is long. The desert is hot & thirsty & we are far from our homes. They use the same words over & over again but vary the ways of singing - but to continue my story -

We were up & packed in time to catch our train which stopped with many snorts & puffs. It was a funny little affair more like a tram than a train & had 3 engines to get it up to the high desert. The pass we went up by was a more gradual ascent & had been blasted out of the rocks in places to make way for the rail, the scenery was lovely, but did not compare in any way with the gorgeous pass we came in by. The rest of the journey was dull & uneventful. At 3:30 we left the train & continued by trolley car. The line ended a little way from Nag Hammadi, & our friends the Ellisons had sent a car to meet us, so we paid them a visit for a belated tea, & continued on by car to Baliana arriving about 10 o'clock at night.

At breakfast the next day we had a visit from Ahmad Ibrahim to congratulate us on our safe return, & in the evening the Omdah & several others called, the village had evidently been in a great state of anxiety during our absence. The following Tuesday our camels came back & the men all came for their money, we gave them 21 PT a day for 10 days & 50 PT as backsheesh. The old guide had 25 PT a day & 100 PT (£1) as his backsheesh. He made long calculations & looked his extra 100 PT note over carefully & remarked. "This will not go very far, as I have to entertain the Omdah & all my village to celebrate my return." We were amused at this. but didn't stump up any more, he was really very pleased with his pay. It's not very often he gets the chance

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The old guide was a wonderful character. he knows all the ancient names & folk lore of the desert. we got him to tell us all the different names for the places we went through & Sardinia wrote them down in Arabic, & then we got Nannie to translate into English. As we went along this old guide used to relate thrilling fairy tales to the men. Miss C got a sort of idea of what he was telling, but the arabic the old tales are told in is rather different to that used in ordinary discourse & not easy for an European to follow. One day he was remarkably busy, we saw him squat down & begin scratching about in the sand & then come running with a bundle of something in his scarf. he did this several times. & we finally discovered he was collecting ancient dried camel dung. he used this to make a fire when we camped at night. it made a splendid blaze, & the embers lasted a long time afterwards, it was a wonderful picture, the group round the fire & the flames lighting up the circle of sitting camels & the strange ~~background~~ background of tumbled rocks. it didn't seem like real life at all, we seemed to be living some wonderful romance in another planet

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Thank you so much for the nice little slumber cap & birthday wishes. I think I would like to wait until I get home for the real celebration.

I am not in need of note paper or envelopes really, as there is always a good supply of this paper for every body. I found my block handy as it was ruled, & I could write with it on my knee in any old place.

My new boots are very comfortable & look nice & strong. I hope they have nailed right through into the uppers as I asked.

We are to entertain royalty next week. The Queen of Romania is visiting Abydos, & we shall have to assist in entertaining her, showing the drawings etc. We have been practising our courtseys, not easy in high boots.

The Queen of the Belgians is ~~due~~ to come in March. date not yet fixed.

I must be off to bed now

lots of love to you both.

Your affectionate daughter

Myrtle.

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