

Monumental Destruction

On April 20, 2004, Peter Brand, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Memphis, Tennessee and Director of the Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project in Egypt, presented an illustrated lecture entitled: *Preserving Egypt's Threatened Past: the Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project*. Dr. Brand was a research assistant for the Akhenaten Temple Project and served as the epigrapher, staff artist and is currently the director of the Karnak Hypostyle Hall Project. He was the first visiting scholar to lecture in the newly renovated lecture room at the new Horn Archaeological Museum. In addition, he served as the external examiner for a dissertation presented for scholarly review on April 21, 2004.

Within the last decade, the work of preserving the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak has become more pressing. The Aswan high dam, which was built in the 1960s, created lake Nasser, and has affected the local climate. Steady rains throughout the winter months, rising ground-water level

and increasing humidity levels are having a negative effect on the monuments.

Many of the reliefs carved on the walls are flaking off in large chunks as water is drawn up through the stone like a sponge and evaporates on the surface leaving the salts behind. As the salt crystallizes and expands, the surface of the monuments resembles “peeling paint.” Although efforts have been made to protect the surface, the destruction is coming from the inside of the monuments where water has seeped into the sandstone. Dr. Brand believes that only a careful recording of these reliefs can preserve them for future study.

Among the reliefs that may be threatened is the Merenptah wall found just outside the Great Hypostyle Hall. Many scholars have equated the reliefs of this wall with the names mentioned on the Merenptah stele, including the name of Israel. The question remains as to which section of the relief depicts the Israelites.

Some scholars, including Redford, dispute the dating of this wall to the reign of Merenptah, claiming that Ramses II's name had been erased and two successive names were written in its place.

Dr. Brand believes that he has found



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evidence for assigning the wall to Merenptah instead of Rameses II. He suggests that although other names were written on the monument, its surface was not erased deeply enough to allow for the name of Rameses II, and that the first name written on the wall was actually that of his son Merenptah. There is simply not enough depth on the surface inside this cartouche to account for three names instead of two. (Robert D. Bates)

