

## Malkata/Malqata

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One of the best-preserved and best-documented of all the royal palace-cities of ancient Egypt is that of Amenhotep III in Western Thebes (see AMENHOTEP (AMENOPHIS) I–III; THEBES, WEST). Located on the sandy edge of the cultivation at the southern end of the great necropolis, the site was known by the locals as El-Malqata, or “the place where things are picked up,” no doubt for the many faience ring bezels and other small objects that were found in abundance throughout the site.

The first archaeological investigation of the site was conducted by the Egyptian Antiquities Service in 1888 under the direction of Georges Daressy. He found one of the decorated throne platforms in the open courts at the north end of the main royal palace and removed some of the paintings of bound prisoners that decorated the stairs to the Cairo Museum.

In 1901–2 Robb de Peyster Tytus continued working in “the Palace of the King” and uncovered much more of the structure. The most thorough exploration of the site was conducted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art expedition, which excavated the site off and on for five seasons beginning in 1910 and ending in 1921. They exposed the remainder of the palace and its enclosure and support buildings, including what was probably an administrative complex known as the West Villas, a possible royal *harim* designated as the North Palace, workmen’s villages to the north and south, and kitchens, store rooms, workshops, and trash pits running up to the edge of the modern cultivation and undoubtedly hidden beneath it. A large mud-brick platform known as the Festival Hall to the north of the palace complex may have served as a setting for some of the jubilee ceremonies.

Among the numerous finds from the site were a large number of inscribed potsherds,

principally from wine jars imported for the king’s Sed festivals (see FESTIVALS, PHARAONIC EGYPT). Since there were a number of structures at the site built expressly for the king’s jubilee ceremonies, Malkata must have functioned principally as a temporary residence for the king and his court during the series of Sed festivals celebrated by the king in the latter years of his long reign.

Marking the northern end of the site was a large mud-brick temple designated as “the Mansion of Amun in the [Estate of] Neb-maat-Ra is in the house of rejoicing” and built by the king to celebrate his second Sed festival in the thirty-fourth year of his rule.

With growing interest in settlement archaeology in Egypt, the University of Pennsylvania conducted a reexamination of the site under the direction of David O’Connor and Barry J. Kemp. They conducted five seasons of work at the site between 1971 and 1977. They were able to determine that the town associated with the palace was far larger than originally thought and that the great artificial lake, the Birket Habu, was created as part of the overall design of the complex. They concluded that the great mounds of dirt that had been dug from the lake bed were laid out and landscaped to create a waterfront and harbor for the palace-city.

A Japanese team from Waseda University continued its research in the Malkata area and concentrated on the recording and preservation of the numerous wall painting fragments from both the Palace of the King and a raised platform, probably for a throne emplacement, at Kom el-Samek, at the desert edge to the south of the palace.

The settlement may have reached even further to the south and incorporated another mud-brick platform known as the Kom el-‘Abd some 3.5 km from the palace. This platform was much larger than the Kom el-Samek and reached a height of 4 m. The top of the platform had been paved with mud brick and had a small square structure on

top reached by a long ramp running up the side of the building. The whole construction was bordered on one side by a series of buildings with columned halls, and on the other it was landscaped with a row of trees. Kemp has proposed that it may have functioned as a “royal rest house,” although Oliver H. Myers, the original excavator, thought it may have served as a sort of “grandstand” for watching chariot races, for he did indeed discover a long straight strip of ancient roadway nearby. What this enigmatic construction was for remains a question.

Most recently, a joint expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University has revisited the site with the goals of systematically mapping and publishing the earlier excavations, which involves clearing and reexamining the structures to record them better and more fully understand them, along with surveying the site for unexcavated and unnoticed features, as well as determining a long-term strategy for the protection and management of the site in partnership with the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt.

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