

RECENT WORK AT MALQATA PALACE

by Peter Lacovara (Director the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund)

The King's Palace at Malqata, built by Amenhotep III for his *heb-sed* celebrations, is among the best preserved ancient Egyptian palace structures. As such, it is of tremendous importance to Egyptology, but also of great potential interest to the public at large.¹ Although the site has been excavated by a number of expeditions since the 1880s, little of the archaeological work has been published, and none of the missions took care to backfill or preserve what was uncovered. As a result, the palace has suffered severe deterioration from groundwater, rainwater, and physical destruction of exposed brickwork from unregulated tourist visits.

At the suggestion of Egyptian and American colleagues in Luxor who were alarmed about the on-going damage to the site, the Joint Expedition to Malqata (JEM) co-directed by Diana Craig Patch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and myself, began work in 2007-8 to identify the immediate threats to the area, and to devise and implement a plan for short- and long-term conservation, interpretation, and eventual public display of the various sections of the palace-city of Amenhotep III that make up Malqata. Subsequent seasons of survey and clearance were undertaken in 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The complex at Malqata contains a number of support buildings and features that could be considered indicative of a royal residential palace. The palace proper covers an area of approximately 50 by 125 meters and is more or less symmetrical in plan with a long, narrow hall running along the central axis of the structure. At the southern end of this hall was located the throne room and behind it the private apartments of the King, which included a bedroom, antechamber and bath. At the northern end of the palace was another series of courts, many with a raised dais opposite the entrance. The palace itself was situated at the southwestern corner of a vast enclosure wall at least 155 by 103 meters wide. The enclosure also contained a number of magazines, courts, and smaller structures. At least half of the area bounded by the enclosure wall

is under modern cultivation and settlement and remains un-excavated. The complex appears to have gone through several stages of rebuilding, not only with additions, but even a complete re-orientation.² The southern wall of the enclosure appears to be skewed, as it conformed to the original orientation of the complex, which was later changed to align with the construction of the Amen Temple and North Palace (Fig. 1).

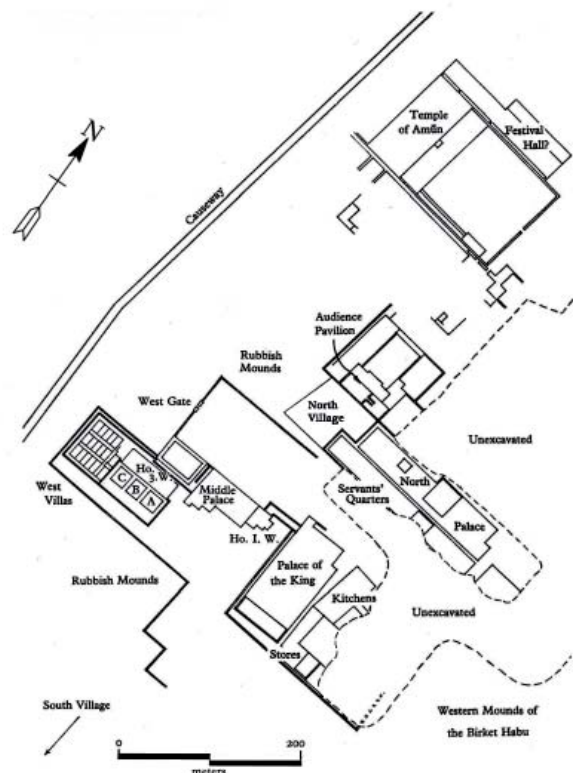


Fig. 1 Map of the Palace of the King and surrounding structures at Malqata (drawing by Andrew Boyce).

Entrance to the palace of the King was through a ramp-way cutting the western face of the enclosure wall and via a series of off-axis corridors and a large court (Fig. 2). From these, one was led into an antechamber that opened into the long central hall. The mural paintings at Malqata are by far the most complete of any surviving palace, and they are of

¹ Cf. LACOVARA 1994, 6–21.

² On the chronology of the settlement see especially: HAYES 1951, 35–37.

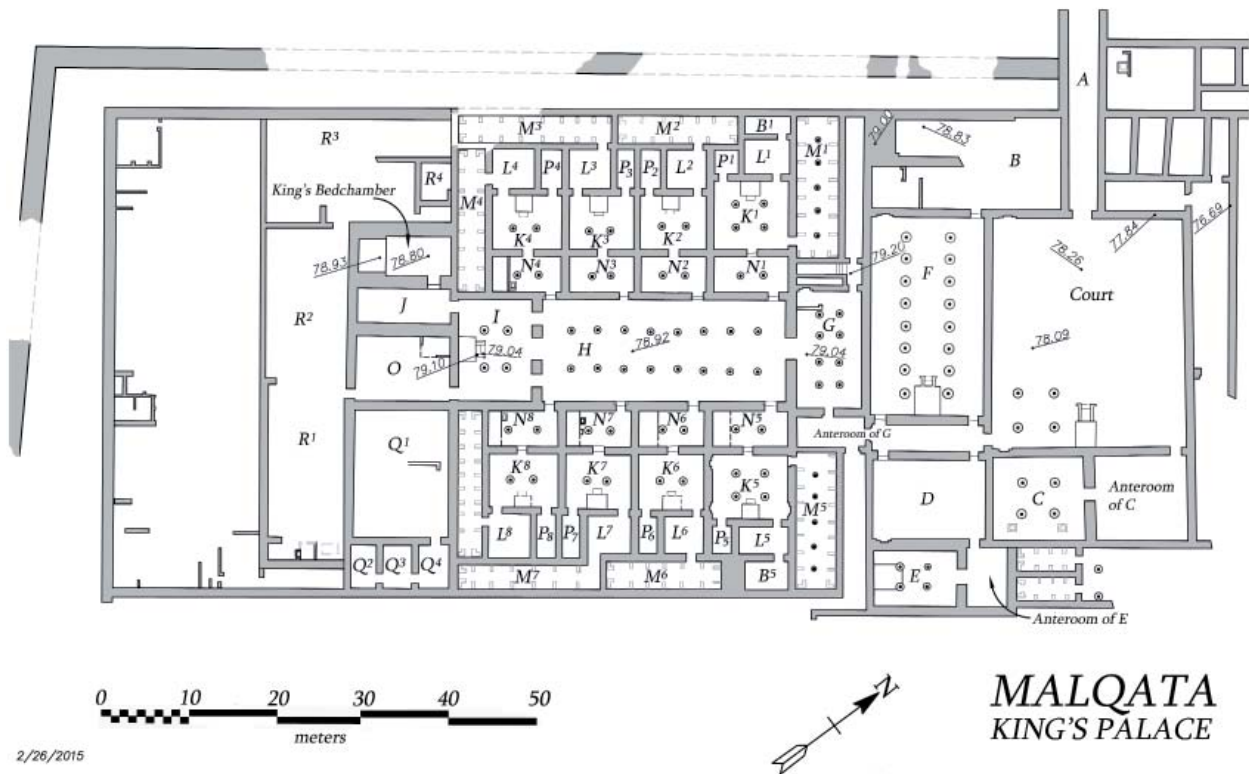


Fig. 2 Plan of the Palace of the King at Malqata (drawing by Andrew Boyce).

importance in determining the spatial arrangement of the palace activities as, for example, in Assyrian palaces, where the relief scenes were fitted to the purpose of each room.³ The Tytus Expedition attempted to assign functions to the rooms they uncovered,⁴ beginning with the entrance corridor [A]. Opposite this was a large “court” with a raised dais and flanked by tree pits and behind the dais was another suite of rooms [C-E] taken to be an “audience chamber” and its “ante-room”. To the south of this was a small chamber with a raised floor not unlike the “bedrooms” at Tell el-Amarna [B].⁵ This room is associated with the remains of a large court or hall with a decorated throne base at its far end [F]. A room to the south of this had a painted false-door niche and fronted a small stairway that

³ Cf. RUSSELL 1987, 520–539.

⁴ While many of these attributions seem whimsical at first, they are perhaps worth note, TYTUS 1903, 14–25.

⁵ TYTUS 1903, 15, refers to PETRIE 1894, 21. While clearly not one of the residential parts of the palace, one might suggest that this could have been a “porter’s lodge” as in the private houses at Amarna. TYTUS alternatively suggests that it may have been a statue base for a shrine. This also would have parallels in domestic architecture such as the courtyard shrines at Deir el-Medina.

appears to have given access to the roof [G]. At the center of the building was a long, central hall [H] that the original excavators compared with a “feudal banqueting hall”. To the east of the central hall was a series of reduplicated suites of rooms [K¹⁻⁴-N¹⁻⁴]. In one of the areas suggested to have been “bathrooms” [N¹⁻⁴ south end] a sandstone stone tub still remained *in situ* and fragments of others have been found in the same locations. The central room of each suite [K¹⁻⁴] had a pair of columns flanking a raised dais with a pair of private rooms located behind [L¹⁻⁴ & P¹⁻⁴]. A room west of the stairwell had a line of pillars running down the center and a wood shelf supported on brick piers running along both long walls of the room at a height of 80 cm above the floor [M¹]. The Tytus report suggested that this room “was a waiting room used by the palace attendants”.⁶ The later excavations of the Metropolitan Museum exposed much more of the palace area and called into question some of the interpretations of the Tytus Expedition. At least eight other rooms similar to the “waiting room” were found placed bordering all the suites of rooms

⁶ *Op. cit.*

[M²⁻⁸]. Their position and design suggest they may have been storage magazines for palace goods.

An additional set of suites mirroring those discovered by Tytus, were found by the Metropolitan Expedition to the east of the central hall [K⁵⁻⁸–N⁵⁻⁸] making a total of eight groups. William Stevenson Smith suggested that these were chambers set aside for the royal harem.⁷ They do resemble, on a smaller scale, the “King’s bedchamber” and its associated rooms in the southwest corner of the palace [I, O and J]. While some scholars have dismissed the term ‘harem’ because of its orientalist and putatively sexist connotations, there is nonetheless ample archaeological and philological evidence for a discrete section of women’s quarters as part of the architectural program in elite pharaonic buildings.⁸ A recent suggestion that these rooms were instead symbolic shrines associated with the *heb sed*, like the chapels of the north and south in the Step Pyramid complex of Djoser, would seem highly improbable.⁹ The interior of the palace was a restricted space and not one for a public ceremony and the suites of rooms more or less mirror each other and are not distinguished architecturally, as are the chapels of the north and south at Saqqara.¹⁰ Moreover, the ceiling decoration noted in some of these rooms consisting of images of pigeons, songbirds and butterflies are those generally associated with women, and not the king. Also one would have expected that the magazines that surrounded them, if they were for cultic equipment used in the ceremony, would have depictions of that equipment, much as in some of the storage shelves in the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings.¹¹ Instead here we have baskets of fruit on stands and images of a cow and calf. In contrast to this, David O’Connor has argued persuasively for the traditional interpretation of these suites.¹² One can also posit that these were only ceremonial quarters and the royal women were actually housed in the North Palace at Malqata.¹³

Another recent suggestion the room that has been interpreted as the “king’s bedchamber”, was not intended for him, also seems unlikely.¹⁴ Again, the ceiling decoration consisting of flying vultures along with the royal titulary would seem

to confirm this, as would the juxtaposition of the master bedroom with the women’s quarters as seen in the typical Amarna villa design.¹⁵ In both cases the principal bedchamber is furthest removed from the entrance, for security reasons. The alternative suggestion, that the king’s bedchamber was “Room B”, right beside the main entrance to the palace would make little sense. It also is actually smaller in size than the room that has been identified as the “king’s bedchamber”, and no trace of decoration in that area has survived. The suggestion that it was of greater importance because it has a deeper prepared foundation for its brick flooring is explained not because it was of higher status, but since the ground level at the northern end of the palace sloped downward, it had to be built up. Indeed, the northern perimeter of the site was built up on casemate foundations to level off the slope down to the wadi to the north.¹⁶

This wadi may have served as a main crossroad for the site linking up with the great West Gate found by the Metropolitan Museum of Art Expedition¹⁷ and forming what O’Connor has called an axis mundi¹⁸ with the raised road running from north to south through the site. The uneven terrain of this part of southwestern Thebes was adapted and utilized quite effectively in laying out the constructions, a detail obscured by the lack of published topographic maps of the site. The areas between the Palace of the King and the North Palace and Village, as well as that between the West Villas, Middle Palace and the Palace of the King, were all cut by wadis that served to define and isolate these structures.

The building known as House West 1 (Ho. 1 W) lay beside a small gully, now used as a road, dividing it from the Palace of the King. Although it is similar to a number of large domestic structures at the site and is designed around a large central hall, like the “standard Amarna villa” plan, it has an off-axis entryway. However, here the entry is actually a connection via a ramp leading down to the walled entryway to the Palace of the King [A]. Many of the features of the building, as well as its location, are unusual. It is set on a small hillock immediately west of the palace entrance and connected to it by

7 STEVENSON SMITH 1999, 285.

8 Cf. REISER 1972; O’CONNOR 2005, 439–454.

9 ARNOLD 2002, 277, 289–295.

10 LAUER 1936, pls. LV–CVIII.

11 HORNING 1990, 166–167.

12 O’CONNOR 2010, 55–80.

13 EVELYN-WHITE 1925, 253–256.

14 EMERY 2014, 192–194.

15 RICKE 1932.

16 Recent investigation of this area has revealed that the long walls running perpendicular to the northern edge are casemates and not corridors and the suggestion that they led to further rooms to the north is impossible. See EMERY 2014, 195–199. This was already suggested as a possibility by KEMP and O’CONNOR 1974, 101–136, esp. 118.

17 WINLOCK 1912, 185–187.

18 O’CONNOR 1989, 73–87.

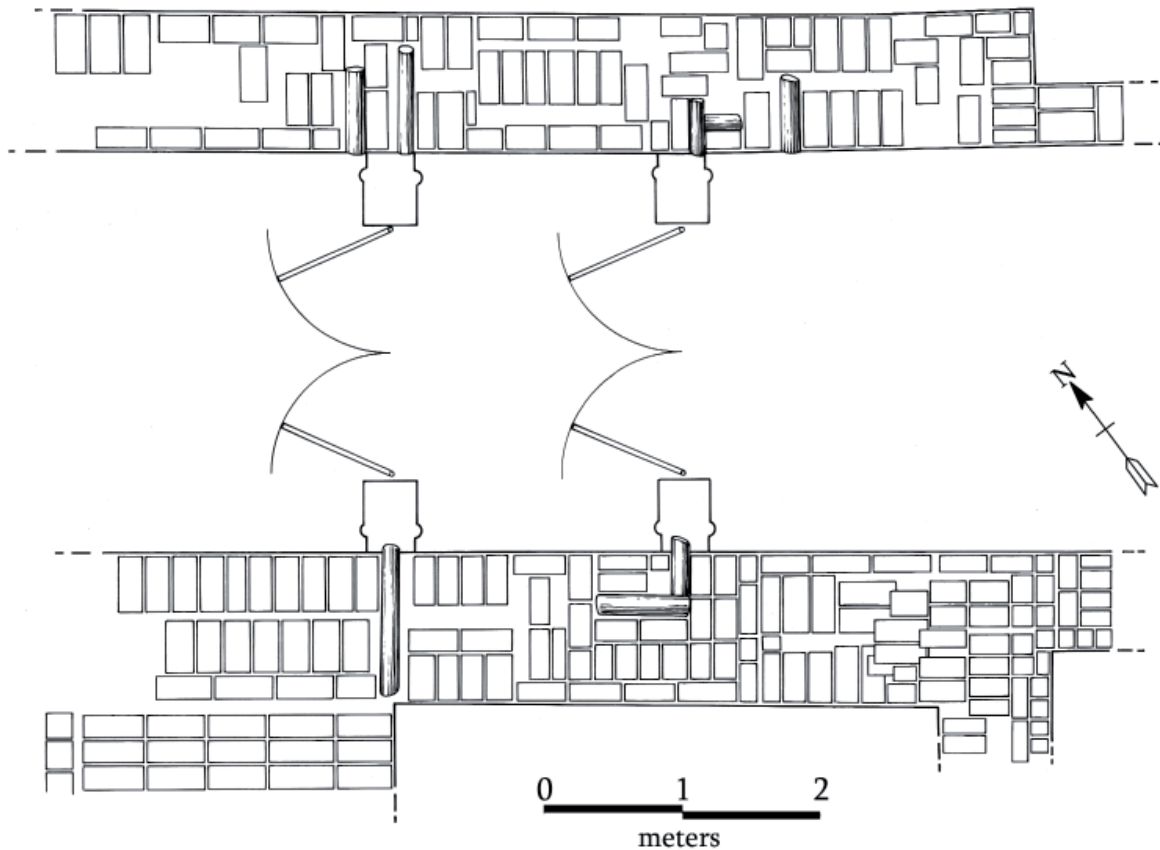


Fig. 3 Plan of the entrance corridor to the Palace of the King at Malqata showing the bracing for the doorways (drawing by Andrew Boyce).

a long, brick corridor. The main entrance to the building was through that long hall from the palace and then proceeding to a ramp which led up to the main hall of the structure proper and from which one had access to two suites of private rooms.

Ho. 1 W was clearly designed as part of, rather than simply bordering, the palace. Although similar to a private house in the core of its design, this building is much larger than most of the private residences known from the period and associated with very grand constructions grouped around it. In design and situation, then, it offers us a parallel to the “King’s House” at Tell el-Amarna.¹⁹ Although here it is not connected to the palace by a bridge as was the case at Amarna, it does appear that the corridor connecting the two was elevated above the level of the ground.

In re-clearing and recording the mud brick walls of the entrance corridor [A] we found two sets of parallel wooden braces running out perpendicular from the wall and set about half width distance apart (Fig. 3). These would seem to be braces for

doorjambs set in exactly the same way as in the entrance corridor to the Step Pyramid Complex of Djoser at Sakkara.²⁰ In all probability these are the *rwty wrty*, the “double doors” of the palace as mentioned in the Duties of the Vizier (Fig. 4).²¹

Fragments of other sculptural elements in mud plaster used as architectural decoration such as torus moldings and cavetto cornices were found throughout the palace, but the use of wood is quite rare, except for the roof.²² Fragments of an elaborate wooden grillwork window however were found by the Tytus and Waseda expeditions in association with “Room F” (Fig. 5).²³

Those missions, as well as our own, found a great many wooden model dates from what must have been the canopy of a kiosk which maybe covered a throne base set in one of the open courts that appear to have been situated at the northern end of the

²⁰ LAUER 1936, pls. XLI–XLIII.

²¹ VAN DEN BOORN 1988, 55–76. And not the West Gate: EMERY 2014, 38.

²² *Op. cit.*, 23–25; additional fragments have also been found during the recent fieldwork of Waseda University, Shinichi Nishimoto, personal communication.

²³ TYTUS 1903, 14, 23; IDA 1993, 224–233.

¹⁹ LACOVARA 1997, 28.

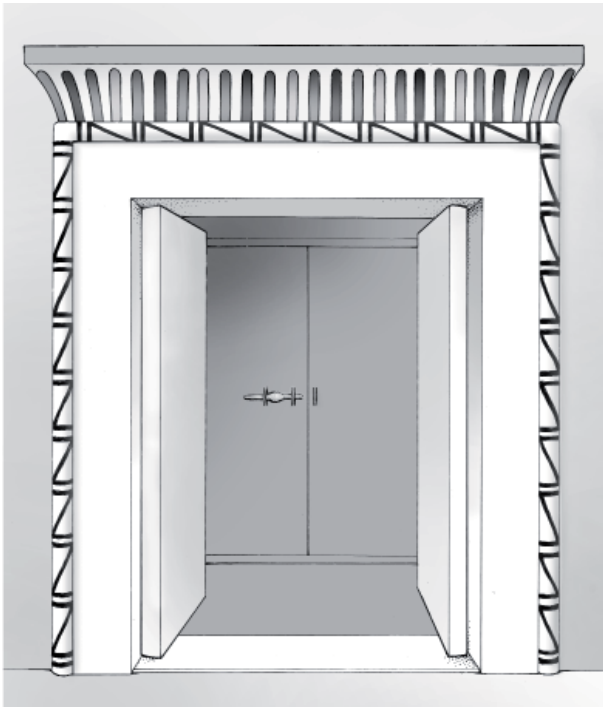


Fig. 4 Reconstruction of the doorways in the entrance corridor to Palace of the King at Malqata (drawing by Andrew Boyce).

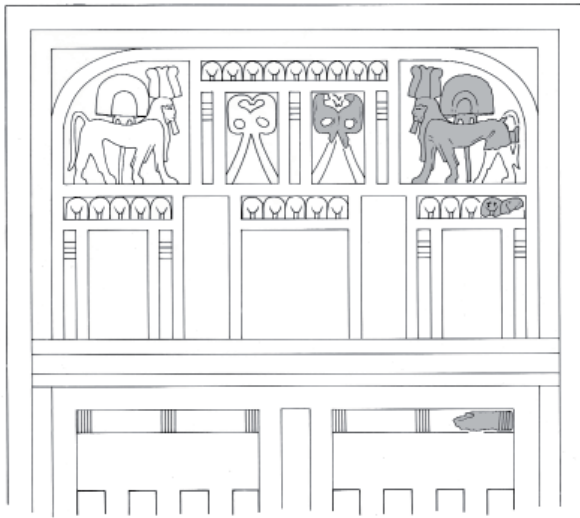


Fig. 5 Reconstruction of a wooden grillwork window in the Palace of the King at Malqata (drawing by Andrew Boyce).

palace. Both ends of the palace enclosure appear to have had large areas of flat, open space with the bulk of the structure situated in the middle. The northern, or front, courts seem to have probably been for reception and viewings of the king while the southern, or back courts may have been for household activities such as laundry and food preparation. Large pits in this area were used as

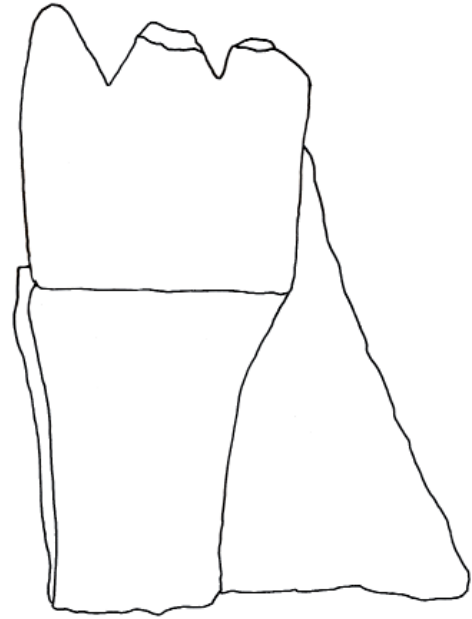


Fig. 6 Fragment of a pottery model crenellated tower (drawing by William Raymond Johnson).

dumps for palace rubbish.²⁴

Stairways gave access to the roof and possibly a window of appearance at the northern end of the palace, but they are small and narrow and do not suggest an extensive second story. It would seem that the great central hall [H] would have had a roof slightly higher to accommodate clerestory windows.

The outer enclosure wall had an exterior face that was battered to a slope of about 8 degrees. The height of the wall is difficult to determine but in all probability it would have been low enough to view the structure behind it. Both the enclosure wall and the roofline of the palace may have had a crenellated top giving the structure an appearance like a Syrian Migdol fortress as in the entrance to the Temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. Fragments of what have may have been a model of the palace, were noted by a member of the University of Pennsylvania Mission that had worked at the site in the 1970's (Fig. 6).²⁵

²⁴ Similar trash pits have been found in the North Village, though smaller but similarly roughly cut into the marl substrate in a deep and irregular fashion. They are quite distinct from the shallow, round, regular tree pits found elsewhere (Cf. WILKINSON 1998, 69, 76–78 and 86) and their irregular spacing as well as lack of any soil or root remnants also suggests they were never used for landscaping contrary to EMERY 2014, 260.

²⁵ Charles Evers, personal communication. Cf. O'CONNOR 1979, 52–53.

The work of the Joint Expedition to Malqata represents in many ways what the future of archaeology in Egypt must be. Such sites are a rare and non-renewable resource and it is our obligation to preserve and protect them for future generations. In so doing, however, as we have seen much new information can be gleaned that adds to our knowledge of ancient Egyptian civilization. Much of the recent restoration is due to grants from The American Research Center in Egypt's Antiquities Endowment Fund (AEF), and we are most grateful to them and to donors to the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund that, along with our colleagues in the Ministry of State for Antiquities and Heritage of the Government of Egypt have enabled us to make significant progress in developing and implementing a conservation program for the King's Palace (Plate 1).²⁶ We hope in future to continue our restoration efforts and work with our colleagues in the area towards a comprehensive site management plan to safeguard and interpret the entire southwestern Theban region.

Bibliography

- ARNOLD, D.
2002 *The Royal Palace. Architecture, Decoration and Furnishings*, 289–295, in: C. ZIEGLER (ed.), *The Pharaohs*, New York.
- BOORN, G.P.F. VAN DEN
1988 *The Duties of the Vizier: Civil Administration in the early New Kingdom*, London.
- EMERY, G.
2014 *The House of Rejoicing: Malqata as the Festival Palace of Amenhotep III*, Ph.D. Diss. Chicago.
- EVELYN-WHITE, H.G.
1925 The Egyptian Expedition, *BMMA* 10, 253–256.
- HAYES, W.C.
1951 Inscriptions from the Palace of Amenhotep III, *JNES* 10 (1), 169–176.
- HORNUNG, E.
1990 *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*, New York.
- IIDA, K. *et al.*
1993 *Studies on the Palace of Malqata 1985–1988*, 224–233, ANONYMOUS (ed.), *Papers in Honor of Professor Watanabe Yasutada on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, Tokyo.
- KEMP, B. J. and O'CONNOR, D.
1974 An ancient Nile Harbour. University Museum Excavations at the 'Birket Habu', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 3/1, 101–136.
- LACOVARA, P.
1994 In the Realm of the Sun King: Malkata, Palace-City of Amenhotep III, *Amarna Letters* 3, 6–21.
1997 *The New Kingdom Royal City*, London and New York.
2014 Preservation and Interpretation of the Palace of Amenhotep III at Malqata in Western Thebes, *ARCE Bulletin* 204, 28–33.
- LAUER, J.P.
1936 *La pyramide à degrés. Tome I: L'architecture. Tome II: Planches*, Cairo.

²⁶ LACOVARA 2014, 28–33.

O'CONNOR, D.

- 1979 The University Museum Excavations at the Palace-City of Malkata, *Expedition* 21 (2), 52–53.
- 1989 City and Palace in New Kingdom Egypt, *CRIPEL* 11, 73–87.
- 2005 *The Eastern High Gate: Sexualized Architecture at Medinet Habu?*, 439–454, in: P. JANOSI (ed.), *Structure and Significance: Thoughts on Ancient Egyptian Architecture*, Vienna.
- 2010 *The King's Palace at Malkata and the Purpose of the Royal Harem*, 55–80, in: Z. HAWASS and J. HOUSER WEGNER (eds.), *Millions of Jubilees: Studies in Honor of David P. Silverman, Volume 2*, Cairo.

PETRIE, W.M.F.

- 1894 *Tell el Amarna*, London.

REISER, E.

- 1972 *Der königliche Harim im alten Ägypten und seine Verwaltung*, Wien.

RICKE, H.

- 1932 *Der Grundriss des Amarna-Wohnhauses*, Leipzig.

RUSSELL, J.M.

- 1987 Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire: The Sculptural Program of Sennacherib's Court VI at Nineveh, *The Art Bulletin* 69/4, 520-539.

STEVENSON SMITH, W.

- 1999 *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, revised by W.K. SIMPSON, New Haven.

TYTUS, R. DEP.

- 1903 *A Preliminary Report on the re-excavation of the Palace of Amenhetep III*, New York.

WILKINSON, A.

- 1998 *The Garden in Ancient Egypt*, London.

WINLOCK, H.E.

- 1912 Excavation of the Palace of Amenhotep III, *BMMA* 7, 185–187.



Plate 1
Reconstructed entrance corridor to the Palace of the King at Malqata and the wadi bordering the north end of the Palace (photograph by the author).