

WADI EL-HOL  
وادي الحول

*John Coleman Darnell*

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# WADI EL-HOL

## وادي الحول

*John Coleman Darnell*

Wadi el-Hôl  
Ouadi el-Hôl

*The Wadi el-Hol is an ensemble of rock inscription sites and caravansary deposits near the mid-point of the Farshut Road, roughly equidistant between ancient Thebes and Hiw. The rock inscriptions range in date between the Predynastic and Coptic Periods, with the majority belonging to the Middle Kingdom. Most inscriptions record names and titles, but others are longer and of more unusual content, including literary texts and references to religious celebrations in the deep desert. Archaeological remains include Predynastic burials of the Tasian culture and debris mounds that represent the detritus of caravans and travelers along the Farshut Road. The largest deposit includes a continuous stratigraphic record of ceramic and organic material from the late Middle Kingdom through the Persian Period.*

إن وادي الحول يحتوي على مجموعة من مواقع النقوش الصخرية وبقايا خانات القوافل (الكرفانسرايات) بالقرب من منتصف طريق فرشوط، وتقربياً على نفس المسافة ما بين طبيعة القديمة وهيئه. إن تاريخ هذه النقوش الصخرية يتراوح ما بين ما قبل الأسرات وحتى العصر القبطي، وأكثرها ترجع إلى عصر الدولة الوسطى. تسجل أغلب النقوش أسماء وألقاب، ولكن البعض منها أطول ومحتواه غير تقليدي، مثل بعض النصوص الأدبية وإشارات إلى احتفالات دينية في قلب الصحراء. أما بالنسبة إلى البقايا الأثرية، فتشمل دفونات من عصر ما قبل الأسرات تعود إلى حضارة دير تاسا وأكوم من الحطام الذي يمثل نفايات القوافل والمسافرين على طول طريق فرشوط. إن أكبر مجموعة من المخلفات تشمل استمرارية التتابع الطبيعي من الفخار والمواد العضوية بدءاً من الدولة الوسطى وحتى العصر الفارسي.

**T**he southern branch of the main desert road crossing the Qena Bend between western Thebes and the area of Hiw is the Farshut Road, ascending the high plateau along the northern ridge of the Valley of the Kings. Near the middle of the Qena Bend, the route descends into the Wadi el-Hol, continuing toward the northwest until it reaches the caravansary remains at the base of Gebel Qarn el-Gir, where the Wadi Alamat Road—leading northwest from the northern fringe of Thebes

and ascending at Gebel Tjauti—joins the Farshut Road (fig. 1). From Qarn el-Gir, branches lead toward Hiw, Abydos, and the oases of the Western Desert. The site may also be accessed from the southern Theban Darb Baiyrat (Winkler 1938: 8). Although archaeological material is plentiful at many points along the Farshut Road, notably at Gebel Antef atop the Theban ascent (Darnell 2002a: 132; Eder 2002: 143; Polz 2007: 34 - 37, 86 - 87, and 305 - 306) and at the Qarn el-Gir outpost, the greatest concentration of

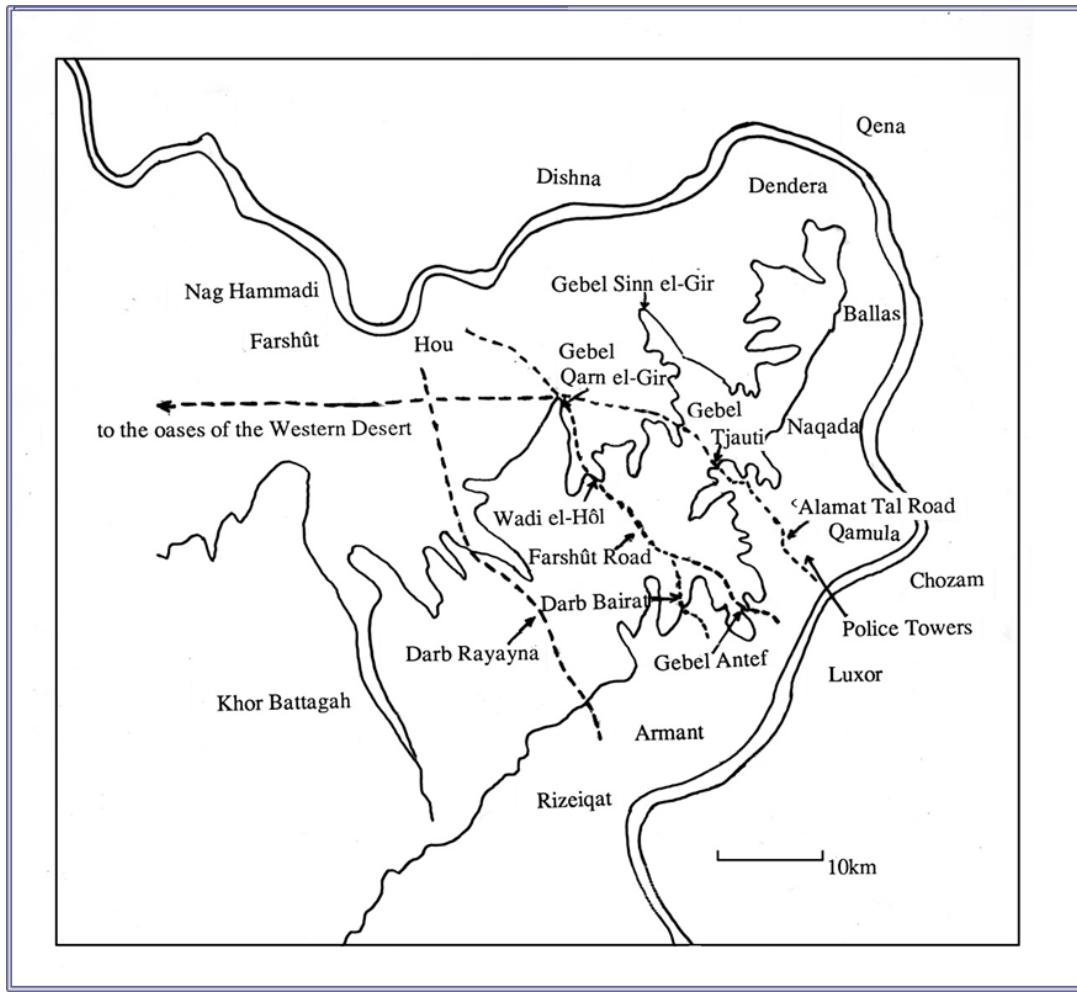


Figure 1. Map of sites and roads of the Theban Western Desert.

ancient material on the Farshut Road—and one of the most extensive Pharaonic sites in the Western Desert—is the Wadi el-Hol site, where the road ascends and descends the high plateau near the middle of the Qena Bend of the Nile. The Wadi el-Hol site comprises two extensive caravansary deposits and four major concentrations of rock inscriptions, with several subsidiary sites in the vicinity, such as Winkler's site 31 (Winkler 1938: 9, pls. 30 - 31), a Predynastic rock art site to the north of the Wadi el-Hol sites proper.

#### *Etymology*

No ancient name survives at the site, although an identification with *Tmbw* or *‘z-b3w*, two Medjay outposts known from the reign of

Thutmose III, is possible (see Darnell 2002b: 90). The modern name, when written, is generally Wadi el-Hol, the “narrow wadi,” although the most common pronunciation, and that adopted by the author, is Wadi el-Hol, the “wadi of terror.”

#### *Location and Layout of the Site*

The rock inscription concentrations (Sections A, B, C, and D) are at the base of the *aqaba* (ascent/descent of the road; figs. 2 and 3). Section A is opposite the *aqaba*, B and C are the two sides of the prong of gebel on which the *aqaba* is located, section D is somewhat more distant to the southwest, though in sight of the road. The Gebel Roma caravansary is atop the plateau where the *aqaba* reaches the

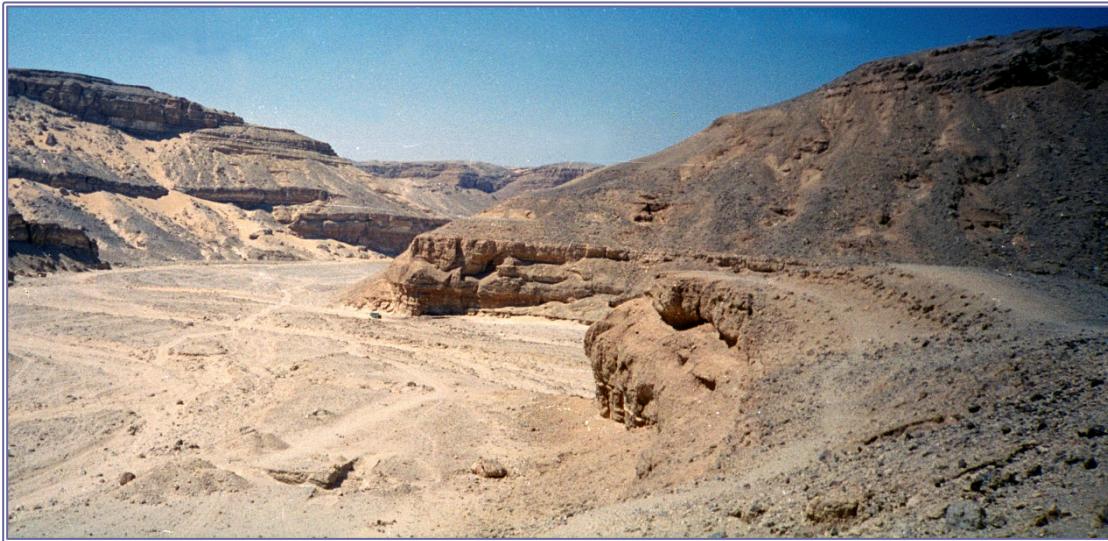


Figure 2. A view from the *aqaba* of the Farshut Road, with rock inscription Section C in the middle right and Section A visible across the wadi.



Figure 3. View of the *aqaba* of the Farshut Road at the Wadi el-Hol site, on the prong of gebel in the center of the photograph are rock inscription Section B (to the left) and Section C (to the right); the ascent to Gebel Roma is in the upper right.

high plateau; the Wadi el-Hol caravansary is at the base of the Section A concentration of inscriptions. Another caravansary is located at the end of a long prong of the gebel by which the northwest portion of the Farshut Road passes, roughly halfway between the Wadi el-Hol and the edge of cultivation.

#### *Historical Context/Significance*

The numerous rock inscriptions at the Wadi el-Hol range in date from the early Predynastic through the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (see Darnell 2002b [and note the reviews of Franke 2006, and Grajetzki

2008, amongst others]). The majority of the inscriptions are hieratic and lapidary hieratic texts, most dating to the Middle Kingdom. Later inscriptions are rare, with but one Demotic inscription (Darnell 2002b: 151 [WHRI 36]). A few Coptic inscriptions appear, including one mentioning the rarely attested ἡπατητής official of a monastery (fig. 4; Darnell 2002b: 153 - 154 [WHRI 38]).

Archaeological material similarly spans the fifth millennium BCE through the Coptic Period, with some ceramic material continuing into the Islamic Era. The large caravan deposits at Gebel Roma, the Wadi el-Hol, and

Gebel Qarn el-Gir provide a nearly continuous ceramic sequence from the late Middle Kingdom through the late New Kingdom, in one portion of the Gebel Roma

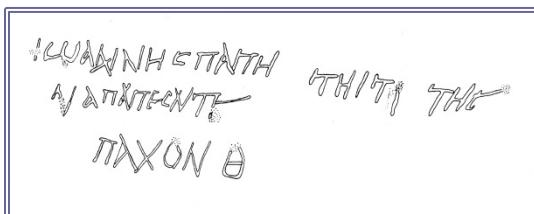


Figure 4. WHRI 38 (no scale available), a Coptic text with name, title, and date.

caravansary extending through the Persian Period. Several kilometers northwest of the Wadi el-Hol, overlooking the Farshut Road, is a three-chambered cave, preserving evidence of use for several millennia. Four intact burials and the associated leather and ceramic objects provide an important assemblage for the Tasian culture—known from the Nile Valley, the Eastern Desert (Friedman 2002), and other Western Desert sites.

The Wadi el-Hol inscriptions provide titles and personal names (cf. figs. 5 and 6, fig. 7, Mentuhotep III as a prince; see Darnell 2002b: 128 - 129 [WHRI 16]), transmit names of institutions and individuals of Middle Kingdom Hiw (cf. Darnell 2002b: 107 - 119 [WHRI 8], 136 - 137 [WHRI 19]; Darnell et al. 2005: 106), and indicate the presence of a number of military men at the site—and perhaps the presence of a garrison at this “back door” to Thebes (cf. Darnell 2002b: 141 and 143; Darnell et al. 2005: 87 - 90, 102 - 103). The Middle Kingdom rock inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hol also provide unique information on religious and literary activities in the Western Desert, as well as evidence for the origin of the alphabet.

#### *Epigraphic Evidence for Religious Activity*

Some rock inscriptions attest to the functioning of rituals infrequently and incompletely verified elsewhere (Darnell 2002b: 66 - 67, 126 - 127, and 129 - 138; Darnell 2002c: 112 - 114; Friedman 1999;

Friedman et al. 1999: 20 - 23 and 27 - 29). Several Middle Kingdom visitors to the Wadi el-Hol vividly describe their visit as “spending the day beneath this mountain on holiday” (*wrš hr dw pn hr hrw nfr*; figs. 8 and 9; Darnell 2002b: 129 - 138 [WHRI 17 - 20]). In combination with other inscriptions depicting singers and the goddess in her bovine form (Darnell 2002b: 93 - 94 [WHRI 3], 126 - 127 [WHRI 15], and note also 120 [WHRI 10], a priest of Hathor), the “spending the day” inscriptions provide some of the only evidence of Hathoric worship in the remote desert (for Hathoric *hrw nfr*, see Darnell 2002b: 130 - 132; Depauw and Smith 2004: 81 - 82, 86 - 89; Husson 1977: 222, n. 14; Kessler 1988: 171 - 196; von Lieven 2003; Manniche 2003: 44; see also Darnell 2010: 99 - 101 *et passim*, and Schneider 2007), perhaps an early manifestation of the Ptolemaic desert procession in honor of the goddess described in a Ptolemaic stela from Hiw (Collombert 1995: 63 - 70). A group depicting an Egyptian in festal garb, a feather-wearing foreigner (Libyan?), and Hathoric cow (fig. 10; Darnell 2002b: 126 - 127 [WHRI 15]) may serve as a visual annotation to physical evidence at Hierakonpolis for the interaction of Egyptians and denizens of the Western Desert in the worship of the wandering goddess of the solar eye (for site Hk64, see Friedman 1999; Friedman et al. 1999). The Wadi el-Hol site would also have been a stopping point for those traveling between Thebes and the sacred sites of Hiw and Abydos; a priest of Sobek named Dedusobek—a contemporary of Amenemhat III—left a record of his visit to the Wadi el-Hol “at the time of his coming from the Abydene nome in order to perform rituals for Mentuhotep,” probably in the temple of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri (fig. 11; Baines 2007: 25 n. 14; Darnell 2002b: 97 - 98 [WHRI 5 left vertical lines]).

A depiction of a portable royal statue has an accompanying hieratic annotation promising a safe return to the “one who will read these writings/images” (*šd.tj.jf mn <nj> sh3w*; fig. 11). The statue may represent an apotropaic royal image (cf. Drioton 1939; Goyon 1971) at least temporarily present in the Wadi el-Hol.

During Winkler's visit to the site, he photographed the now-missing base of a stone Osiride statue, evidence for the former presence of at least one monumental statue in the Wadi el-Hol.

#### *Lapidary Literature*

Alongside texts of religious import, the Wadi el-Hol rock inscriptions also include literary

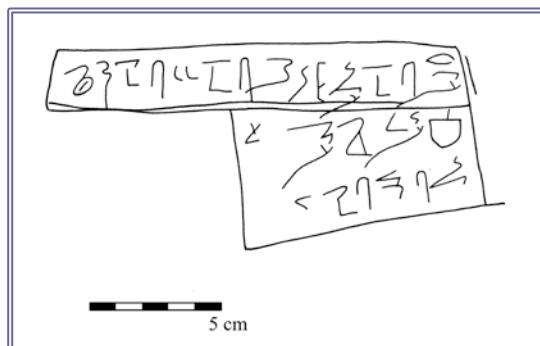


Figure 5. WHRI 25, a late Middle Kingdom inscription with names and filiation.

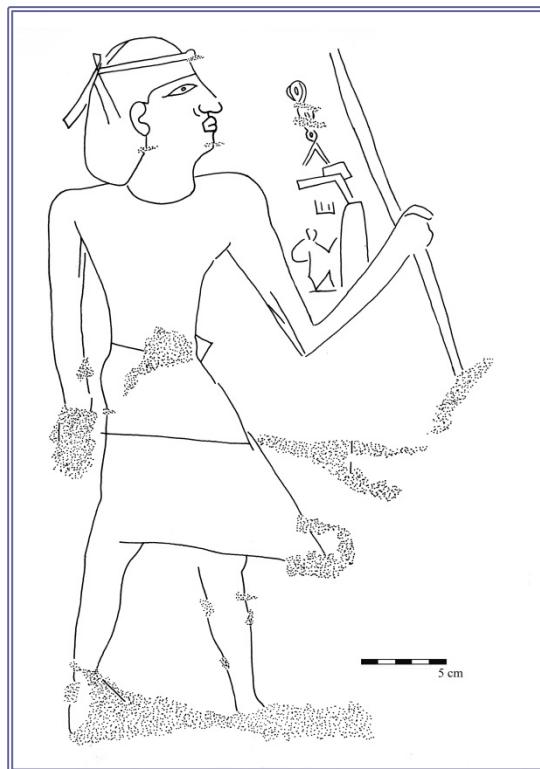


Figure 6. WHRI 42, labeled depiction of a man Hepi from the early Middle Kingdom.

compositions. In the reign of Amenemhat III, a priest Dedusobek carved an inscription in epistolary style addressed to the author of a nearby rock inscription (fig. 11; Darnell 2002b: 99 - 101 [WHRI 5 right vertical lines]). The lapidary letter opens with an address to several deities, closely parallel to the list in Sinuhe's letter to Senusret I.

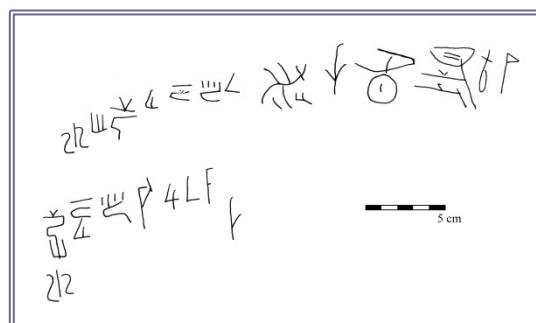


Figure 7. WHRI 16, text containing the name and title of Mentuhotep III as a prince.

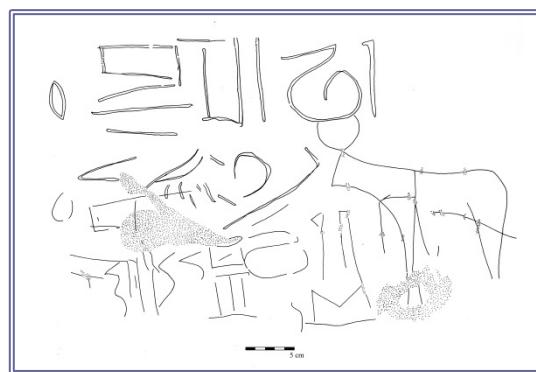


Figure 8. WHRI 18, spending-the-day text with a depiction of a cow.

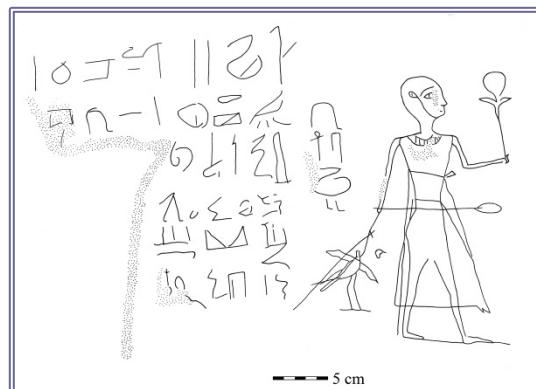


Figure 9. WHRI 19, spending-the-day text with depiction of a striding man bearing offerings.

The Wadi el-Hol inscription presents Middle Kingdom antecedents for several readings in the Ashmolean Ostracon version of the story (unlikely coincidental, *pace* Parkinson 2009: 125, n. 27). Literary texts at the site suggest its use as “an enforced social space for entertainment” (Parkinson 2009: 125 - 126; note also Darnell 2002b: 93 - 94 [WHRI 3], a singing man playing an asymmetrical lyre) and reveal the mental literary associations of travel and the desert for an educated Middle Kingdom traveler (see also Parkinson 2002: 73).

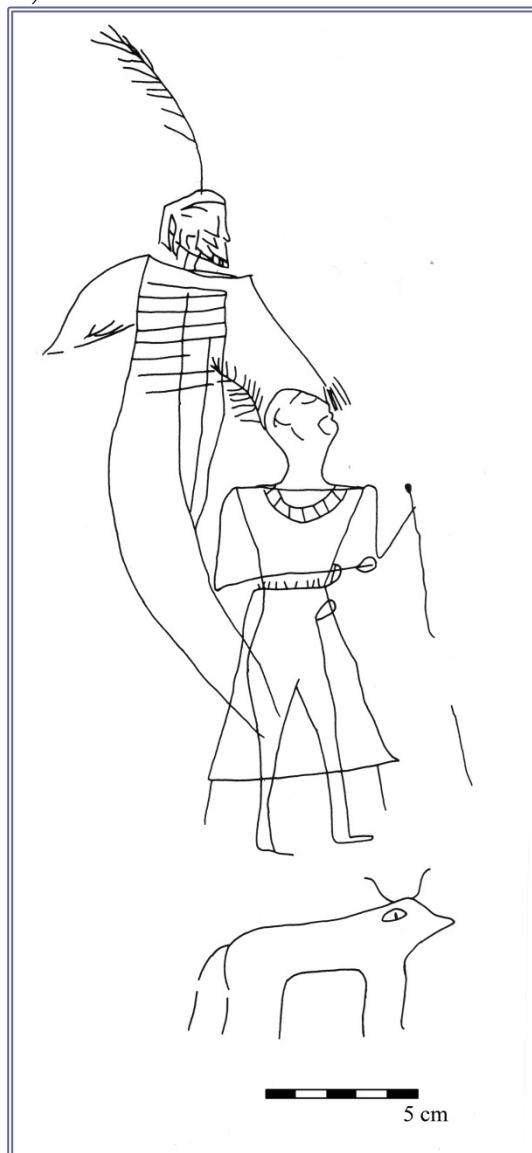


Figure 10. WHRI 15, depiction of a singing man, Libyan, and cow.

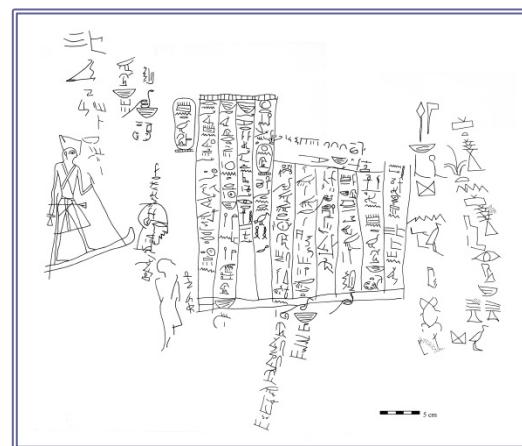


Figure 11. WHRI 4 - 6, from right to left, an offering formula for the priest Kheperka, the letter by Dedusobek, and depiction of a striding statue of a king with texts.

The longest hieroglyphic inscription at the Wadi el-Hol site is a five line literary text (fig. 12; Darnell 1997, 2002b: 107 - 119 [WHRI 8]), carved below Dedusobek’s inscriptions. Patterned after the opening to Sinuhe’s encomium on Senusret I—possibly the record of an improvised song of loyalist praise uttered at the desert site (Parkinson 2002: 61)—the text describes “a man in the City (Thebes),” relates how “foreigners fall to his pronouncements,” and concludes by describing the ruler’s bravery and intelligence. In a description of the “good shepherd” motif common to loyalist texts, the inscription states that “he goes to sleep hungry, and at dawn he sees the sky like a flame—his joy is the successful completion of the watch.” Paleography and content suggest that this is a literary paean to a Theban ruler of the Second Intermediate Period.

#### *Early Alphabetic Inscriptions*

Also present in the Wadi el-Hol are two short Early Alphabetic inscriptions (figs. 13 and 14; Darnell 2003; Darnell et al. 2005; Hamilton 2006: 324 - 330 [disregard his recopying of the inscriptions from photographs, which introduces inaccuracies]; Tropper 2003: 173 - 175; speculative translation attempts in Wimmer and Wimmer-Dweikat 2001; and Altschuler 2002; popular accounts in Man

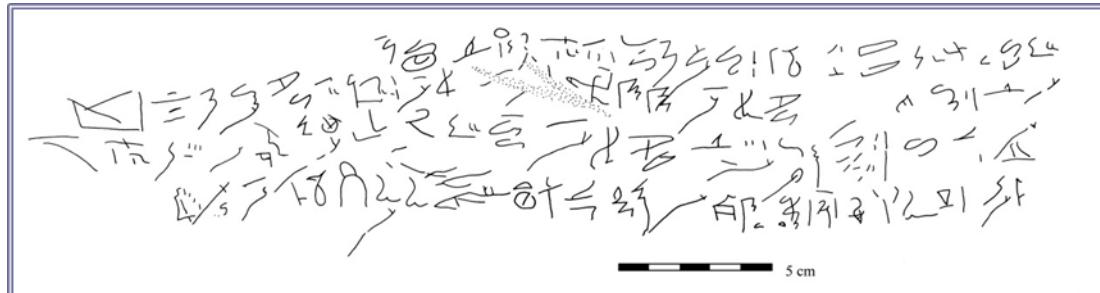


Figure 12. WHRI 8, a literary text from the terminal Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period.

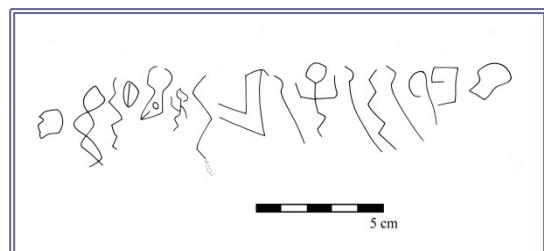


Figure 13. Wadi el-Hol Early Alphabetic Text No. 1.

2001: 69 - 90; and Sacks 2003: 34 - 40), which are paleographically more archaic than previously discovered “Proto-Sinaitic” inscriptions (Hamilton 2006; Sass 1988, 2005). Unlike the roughly drawn and hieroglyphicizing signs of the Sinai inscriptions, the Wadi el-Hol texts reveal a derivation from lapidary hieratic (Darnell 2003; Darnell et al. 2005), a hybrid hieratic and hieroglyphic script attested already during the Old Kingdom (Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann 2001: 347 - 349). Ideally suited to carving rock inscriptions, the lapidary cursive enjoyed a floruit in Middle Kingdom rock inscriptions (Ali 2002: 12 - 22) and freestanding monuments (cf. Reisner 1932: 161, fig. 59) in both Egypt and Nubia. Non-Egyptians occasionally accompanied Middle Kingdom Egyptian missions, and Western Asiatics appear as armed auxiliaries with Egyptian mining expeditions in Sinai (Gardiner et al. 1952, 1955: 19 and 206; Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: 34 - 35 and 147). Interaction of such Semitic-speaking groups with Egyptian military/expedition scribes led to the invention of an alphabetic script found in two inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hol and the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions (Darnell 2003;

Darnell et al. 2005; Sass 2004 - 2005 [albeit with incorrect dating of the inscriptions]). Employing signs derived from lapidary hieratic Egyptian shapes, and assigning to this limited number of signs acrophonic values based on the Semitic-language names of the objects depicted, the melting pot of Egyptian expeditionary forces gave rise to the alphabet during the Middle Kingdom.

A hieratic inscription in the Wadi el-Hol, assignable to the reign of Amenemhat III on the basis of prosopographic and genealogical evidence, names one Bebi, *jmj-r3 m3c n 3mw Bbj*, “General of the (Semitic language speaking) Asiatics” (fig. 15; Darnell et al. 2005: 85 - 90 and 102 - 106). Although the Wadi el-Hol texts were probably written by Bebi’s Asiatic charges, the paleographic features of the signs indicate that the shapes of the Wadi el-Hol Early Alphabetic signs left the living tradition of Egyptian hieratic during the early Middle Kingdom. Rather than being the random creation of unlettered “barbarians” confronted with hieroglyphic inscriptions they could not comprehend (so Goldwasser 2006), the alphabet originated in an interaction of Egyptians and foreigners at sites like the Wadi el-Hol, a border area of potential friction, constant interaction, improvisation, and innovation.

#### *Courier Route*

Middle Kingdom (late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) hieratic inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hol indicate the presence of men bearing the titles “royal messenger” (*wpwtj-nswt*) and “express courier” (*swnw*, see Posener 1987: 41 - 42) in the area (Darnell et al. 2005: 87 - 90, 102 -

105). Archaeological and epigraphic evidence indicates that the Farshut Road was a postal “pony express” route during the New Kingdom and suggests that the Wadi el-Hol was the site of a mounted relay post (Darnell 2002a: 135 - 138, 143 - 144, 2002b: 139), at least some of whose riders may have been mounted Medjay (Darnell 2002a: 143 - 144,

Gebel Antef, on the plateau behind Gebel Roma, and in the vicinity of the Wadi el-Hol—preserve fragmentary but parallel texts that refer to the Farshut Road (figs. 18 and 19; Darnell 2002a: 132 - 135). Belonging to the pontificate of Menkheperra—whose interest in the desert is apparent from his forts at the Nile Valley termini of routes through the

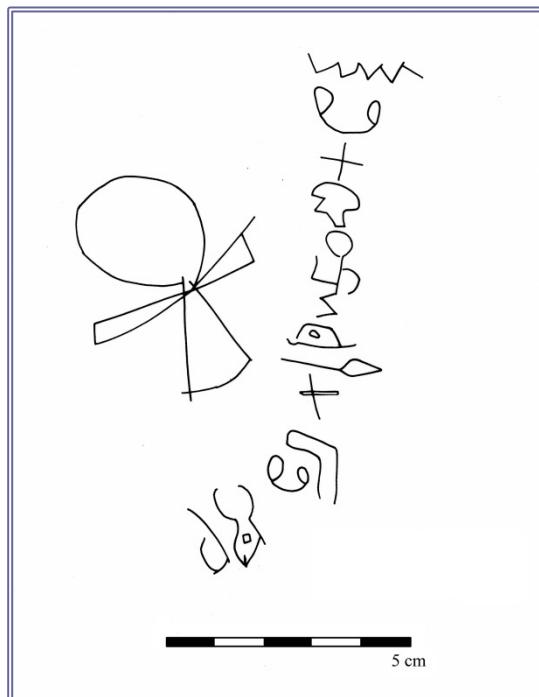


Figure 14. Wadi el-Hol Early Alphabetic Text No. 2.

152 n. 8; Zivie 1985). In Section C of the Wadi el-Hol, near a Pharaonic depiction of a horse and rider (fig. 16; Darnell 2002a: 137; compare the groom Hekanakht [*mnjw ssmt Hk3-nht*] from the Marsa Alam to Edfu road in Üaba 1974: 230 - 231 and fig. 394), is the hieratic title of a stable master and the name of his stable, probably at or near the Gebel Roma or Wadi el-Hol caravansary (fig. 17; Darnell 2002b: 139 [WHRI 22]; compare the name of the “census house” in Üaba 1974: 151): “Chief of the Stable ‘Its-Fetchings-Are-Frequent,’ Paseany” (*hrj jh T3y.f.jnt-šš P3-s3-3ny*).

Three 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty stelae erected along the Farshut Road—at the Theban terminus atop

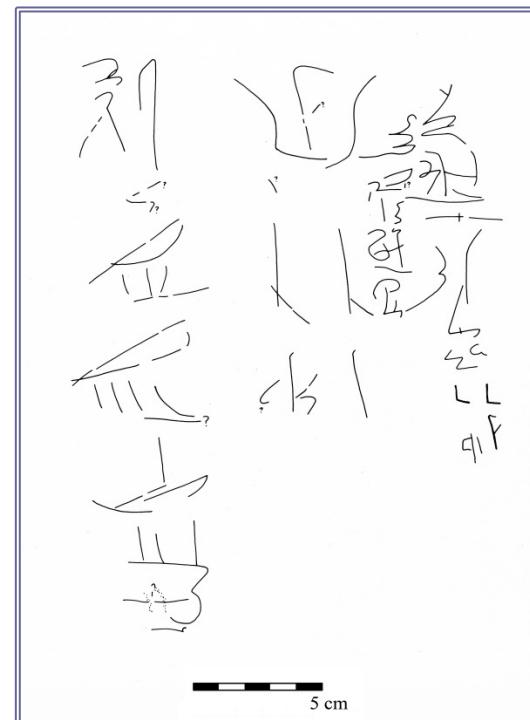


Figure 15. Inscription of Bebi and associates from the Wadi el-Hol.

Western and Eastern Deserts (cf. Kitchen 1986: 249 and 269 - 270)—the Farshut Road stelae, on a route accessing the Girga Road to Kharga oasis, may relate to the return of exiles from the oases as related on Menkheperra’s Stela of the Exiles (von Beckerath 1968). The stelae refer to the track as the “Road of Horses” (*w3t ssmwt*)—a name similar to “the way of cattle” (*t3 mjt n jhw*) in three inscriptions of Taharqa’s year 19 from Bab Kalabsha (Hintze 1959 - 1960)—suggesting mounted activity (for similarly formed road names, see Fischer 1991).

Horsemen on the Farshut Road were more likely engaged in communication and

patrolling than trade (compare Dixon and Southern 1992: 234 - 238; Alexander's cavalry covered approximately 22.5 miles per day on the route to Siwa oasis, see Engels 1978: 153). According to Diodorus Siculus (Bk. I, ch. 45.7), one hundred horse relay stations were once positioned between Memphis and the "Libyan mountains" of Western Thebes. The letter Berlin 10463, written by Sennefer, mayor of Thebes under Amenhotep II, to the

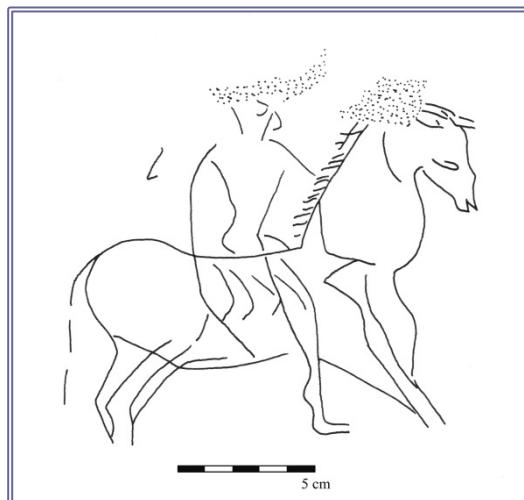


Figure 16. New Kingdom depiction of horse and rider from the Wadi el-Hol.

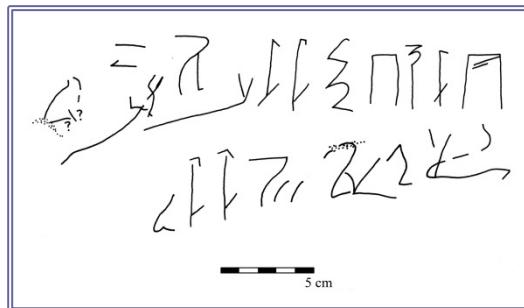


Figure 17. WHRI 22, Ramesside text of the stable master Paseany.

farmer Baki of Hiw, may be physical evidence for a courier route across the Farshut Road. In the letter, Sennefer warns the farmer of a royal visit to Hiw by river within three days and instructs Baki to perform several tasks before the king arrives. In order to allow Baki sufficient time to fulfill the directives, Sennefer's letter probably traveled by land

along the Farshut Road (Caminos 1963: 32 and 36).

The presence of debris mounds (Gebel Antef, Gebel Roma, Wadi el-Hol, and Gebel Qarn el-Gir) and evidence for the activities of couriers along the route distinguish the main Farshut Road from the other Pharaonic roads of the Theban Western Desert. Only the Farshut Road has epigraphic evidence for the presence of horses, and only the Farshut Road preserves enormous organic debris mounds



Figure 18. The remains of a 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty stela from the Farshut Road.

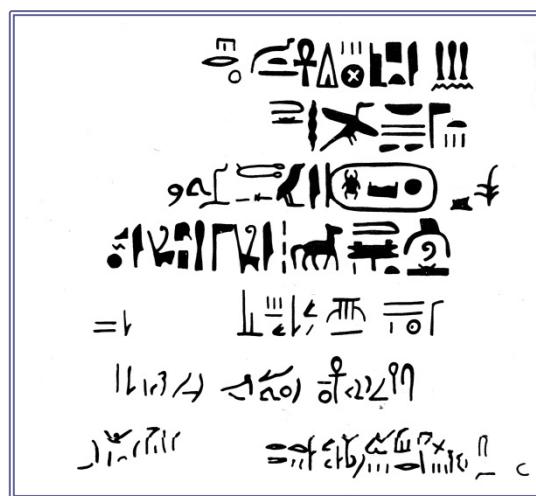


Figure 19. Text from a 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty stela from the Farshut Road.

with a significant dung component; those debris mounds begin to grow dramatically during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasties, the time of the introduction of horsemanship into Egypt. The earliest of the debris mounds,

Gebel Roma, began to accumulate at the time of the presence of the late Middle Kingdom couriers and expanded when mounted couriers began to travel the road (much of the dung no doubt belonged to donkeys, the primary beasts of burden, cf. Förster 2007). The increased amounts of animal droppings led to sanitation measures, and during the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty a series of gypsum floors sealed off the debris. Beginning with the early Ramesside Period, many layers reveal purposefully pulverized sherds, apparently employed as animal bedding.

#### *Economic Hub*

The presence in the Wadi el-Hol of the name of an 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty grain accounting scribe May (fig. 20; Darnell 2002b: 92 [WHRI 1]) and the depiction and title of an unnamed chief of the scales of Amun (Darnell 2002b: 155 [WHRI 40]) nearby—along with the botanical evidence for grain shipments along the Farshut Road—are consistent with the shipment of grain from fields of Amun in the region of Hiw (Caminos 1958: 126 - 127 and 132 - 133; Helck 1960: 32; Sauneron 1974: 29 - 31; Vleeming 1991: 8, 21, 37; compare priestly duties at Thebes and Hiw in Haikal 1970: 1 and 13 - 16) for the *htp-ntr* of Amun at Karnak (Darnell 2002b: 154 [WHRI 39])—a mention of the *htp-ntr nj Jmn*). Epigraphic evidence also suggests that some weighing of grain may have occurred along the road. The inscription of the second prophet of Amun of Karnak, Roma-Roy, future high priest of Amun of Karnak under Ramesses II, at the Gebel Roma deposit (Darnell 2002b: 159 - 160 [WHRI 44]) supports the idea of official Theban oversight of the demesnes of Amun—and the products thereof—in the area of the Wadi el-Hol. Additionally, a grain accounting ostraca from Gebel Roma supports the image of accountants tracking grain shipments in the vicinity of the Wadi el-Hol. Some form of customs center may have existed at Qarn el-Gir (the junction of the Theban route and the oasis roads) and at Gebel Roma/the Wadi el-Hol.

The stratified remains in the caravanserais of the Wadi el-Hol, Gebel Roma, and Gebel Qarn el-Gir preserve evidence of the economic crisis that accompanied the fall of the Ramesside state (Darnell 2007: 43 - 45). Earlier layers at the site reveal relatively constant traffic—somewhat disrupted during the late 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty—with a variety of ceramic fabrics and forms, barley and emmer dominating the considerable botanical remains (figs. 21 and 22). During the late Ramesside Period, the caravanserais reveal periods of intermittent use, sand lenses accumulating between thin sherd and organic layers, the remains of what appear to be less frequent visits by large caravans, equipped with a more limited corpus of ceramic shapes and fabrics than that present in earlier strata of the deposits. The late Ramesside levels of the caravansaries attest to the occasional passage of more than usually massive shipments of grain, the limited and consistent ceramic corpus implying the “government issue” of official sponsorship.

The shipments in evidence in the late Ramesside levels were predominately grains, probably traveling from the fields of Amun in the region of Hiw, filling the treasuries of the domain of Amun during a time of famine and impending civil war (Jansen-Winkel 1992, 1995). Whereas barley is more prevalent than wheat in the earlier caravanserai levels, an abrupt inversion of the relative ratios of wheat and barley occurs in late Ramesside levels in the Farshut Road deposits, corresponding to a period of sharp increases in grain prices (Janssen 1975: 551 - 552 *et passim*).

#### *Features*

1. Rock art/inscription sites. The four concentrations of rock inscriptions at the Wadi el-Hol contain several hundred inscriptions. As Winkler (1938: 8) noted, “rarely has such a mass of hieroglyphic (*st*) inscriptions been found at one site.”
2. Burial and storage caves. Overlooking the Farshut Road near the mouth of the Wadi el-Hol is a shallow, three-pronged cave (fig. 23). Initially a burial site for the Tasian culture, the

cave became a storage area during the Middle Kingdom (Darnell 2002: 162 - 165). The four surviving burials in the Wadi el-Hol cave support other evidence that the Tasians were a cultural group that participated in desert trade and adopted traits of the groups at the termini of desert roads; recent identification of a unified Tasian culture of the Rayayna Desert and Kurkur oasis—linked by the Darb Gallaba and Darb Bitan—further support such a theory (Darnell fc.).

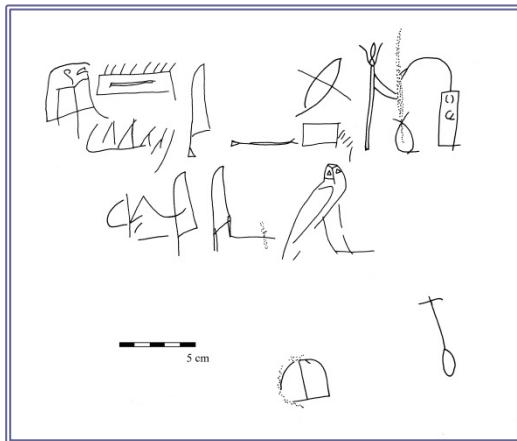


Figure 20. WHRI 1, inscription of the grain-accounting scribe of Amun, May.

3. Gebel Roma, Wadi el-Hol, and Gebel Qarn el-Gir caravansary deposits. Stratified accumulations of ancient remains, primarily ceramic and botanical material bound together with a considerable amount of animal dung, occur at Gebel Roma on the high plateau overlooking the Wadi el-Hol, near the main rock inscription sites of the Wadi el-Hol, and at the base of Gebel Qarn el-Gir to the northwest (fig. 24; Darnell 2002a: 138 - 139, 2002b: 91). Occurring only on the Farshut Road in the network of Theban Western Desert routes, these debris mounds—the refuse of caravans traveling the Farshut Road—began to accumulate during the Middle Kingdom, expanded dramatically during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasties, and continued in use through the end of the Ramesside Period (figs. 25 and 26). Only the Gebel Roma deposit, the largest of the mounds, reveals any considerable post-Ramesside activity.

The dominant botanical remains in all three deposits (Cappers et al. 2007; Sikking and Cappers 2002) are hulled 6-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* ssp. *vulgare*) and emmer wheat (*Triticum turgidum* ssp. *dicoccum*), with modest amounts of hard wheat (*Triticum turgidum* ssp. *durum*) present at the Gebel Roma and Qarn el-Gir caravansaries. Pulses are rare, and earth-almonds are present, as are seeds of melons, watermelon, and cucumber; garlic occurs at Gebel Roma and in the Wadi el-Hol deposit. Sycamore figs, dates, and sugar dates (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) appear in some quantities, while pomegranates and grapes are rare; spices are notably coriander and black cumin. Wild plants also occur, including acacia and weeds, including *Lupinus digitatus* in the Gebel Roma deposit, the latter probably representing lupins that took root in fallow fields and were ultimately harvested with grain.

Most of the grain shows no sign of digestion by animals and was probably intended for human consumption. The presence of considerable numbers of rachis nodes indicates that much of the grain shipped along the Farshut Road and through the Wadi el-Hol had undergone an initial threshing, but not the final separation of the grains. The Temple of Karnak possessed fields at Hiw (see above), and the route may have witnessed the transportation of considerable grain shipments for the divine offerings of Amun. The grains and rachis nodes present at the site, along with fragments of coarse cloth in the deposits, suggest some transshipment of the grain, and the presence of a chief of the scales and a grain accounting scribe are consistent with the checking of deliveries in the Wadi el-Hol and at Gebel Roma.

#### *Excavation/Research History*

In the 1930s Terence Gray and Hans Winkler discovered rock art and inscriptions at the site, which Winkler designated by the name of the nearby Wadi el-Hol. Only two photographs of inscriptions at the site appeared in Winkler (1938: 8, pls. 9 [fig. 2] and 10 [fig. 1]—Winkler's site 30); Macadam

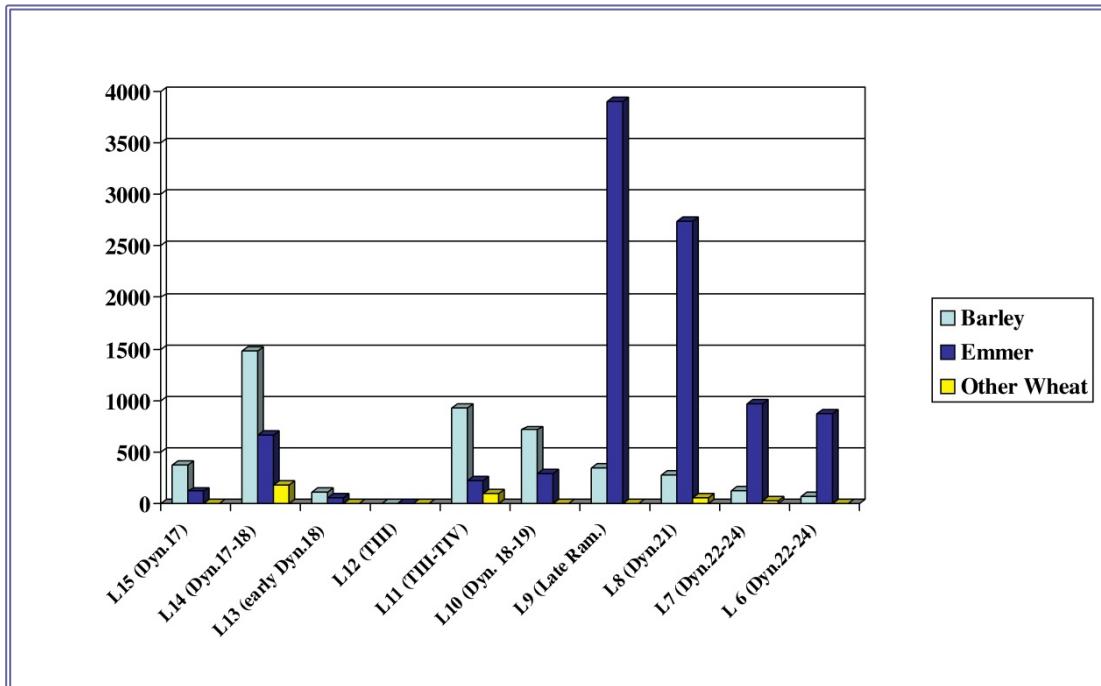


Figure 21. Grain distribution at Gebel Roma, amounts of wheat and barley in one liter samples of the central portion of the caravansary deposit.

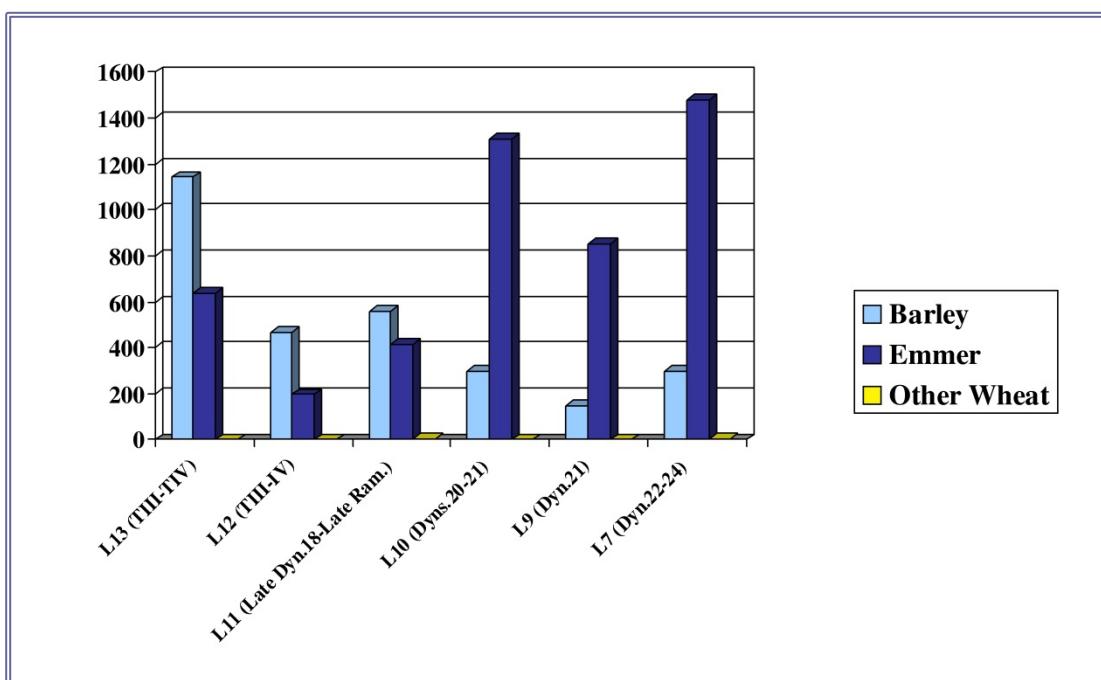


Figure 22. Grain distribution at Gebel Qarn el-Gir, amounts of wheat and barley in one liter samples of the caravansary deposit.

(1951)—based on a photograph and notes by Newberry—published the most “monumental” of the inscriptions in the Wadi el-Hol, the stela of Sobekhotep III. Sometime after Grey and Winkler examined the major rock inscription concentrations at the site, inhabitants of el-Halfaya Bahari became aware of the ancient remains; vandalism has occurred at the site over a considerable period of time and continues, local legends of gold in the mountains of the area (cf. Senn 1969) contributing to the vandalism. In 1994 the Theban Desert Road Survey began work at the site, both recording the rock inscriptions and rock art and identifying and clearing several important deposits of ceramic and organic material (much bibliography in Darnell 2002b).



Figure 23. View of the Farshut Road in the vicinity of the Wadi el-Hol cave.



Figure 24. View of the caravansary deposit at the base of Gebel Qarn el-Gir.

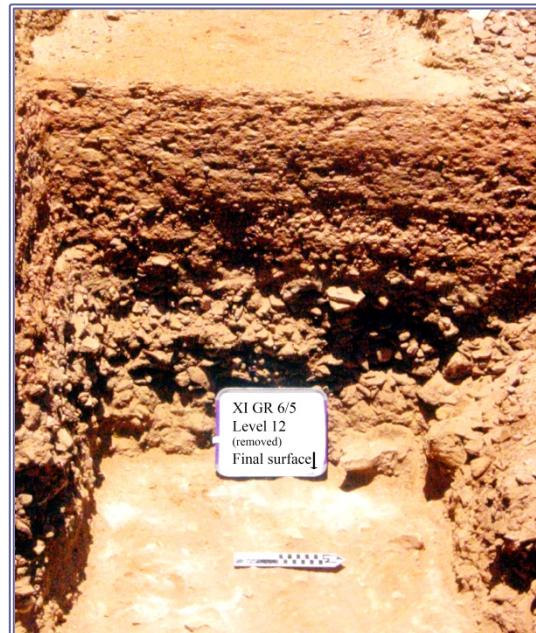


Figure 25. Section of the Gebel Roma caravansary deposit.



Figure 26. Section of the Gebel Roma caravansary deposit, showing the density of ceramic remains in a New Kingdom level (the levels in West Trench extension do not correspond numerically to those of the central deposit in Figure 21).

#### *Availability of Data*

The main publication of the Wadi el-Hol rock inscriptions (Darnell 2002b) is available [here](#). Additional material and announcements of further publications will appear at the [project website](#).

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## External Links

Yale Egyptological Institute in Egypt <http://www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae.htm>

Wadi el-Hol/Gebel Roma: [http://www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae\\_wadi.htm](http://www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae_wadi.htm).

Wadi el-Hol rock art publication: <http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/catalog/oip/oip119.html>

## Image Credits

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Figure 1. Map of sites and roads of the Theban Western Desert.

Figure 2. A view from the *aqaba* of the Farshut Road, with rock inscription Section C in the middle right and Section A visible across the wadi.

Figure 3. View of the *aqaba* of the Farshut Road at the Wadi el-Hol site, on the prong of gebel in the center of the photograph are rock inscription Section B (to the left) and Section C (to the right); the ascent to Gebel Roma is in the upper right.

Figure 4. WHRI 38 (no scale available), a Coptic text with name, title, and date.

Figure 5. WHRI 25, a late Middle Kingdom inscription with names and filiation.

Figure 6. WHRI 42, labeled depiction of a man Hepi from the early Middle Kingdom.

Figure 7. WHRI 16, text containing the name and title of Mentuhotep III as a prince.

Figure 8. WHRI 18, spending-the-day text with a depiction of a cow.

Figure 9. WHRI 19, spending-the-day text with depiction of a striding man bearing offerings.

Figure 10. WHRI 15, depiction of a singing man, Libyan, and cow.

Figure 11. WHRI 4 - 6, from right to left, an offering formula for the priest Kheperka, the letter by Dedusobek, and depiction of a striding statue of a king with texts.

Figure 12. WHRI 8, a literary text from the terminal Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period.

Figure 13. Wadi el-Hol Early Alphabetic Text No. 1.

Figure 14. Wadi el-Hol Early Alphabetic Text No. 2.

Figure 15. Inscription of Bebi and associates from the Wadi el-Hol.

Figure 16. New Kingdom depiction of horse and rider from the Wadi el-Hol.

Figure 17. WHRI 22, Ramesside text of the stable master Paseany.

Figure 18. The remains of a 21st Dynasty stela from the Farshut Road.

Figure 19. Text from a 21st Dynasty stela from the Farshut Road.

Figure 20. WHRI 1, inscription of the grain-accounting scribe of Amun, May.

Figure 21. Grain distribution at Gebel Roma, amounts of wheat and barley in one liter samples of the central portion of the caravansary deposit.

Figure 22. Grain distribution at Gebel Qarn el-Gir, amounts of wheat and barley in one liter samples of the caravansary deposit.

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Figure 24. View of the caravansary deposit at the base of Gebel Qarn el-Gir.

Figure 25. Section of the Gebel Roma caravansary deposit.

Figure 26. Section of the Gebel Roma caravansary deposit, showing the density of ceramic remains in a New Kingdom level (the levels in West Trench extension do not correspond numerically to those of the central deposit in Figure 21).