

~~Belzoni~~ Killjoy woz ere

Standing here looking at Unas' Causeway, viewing the few remaining reliefs that adhere to the walls, Ricardo Caminos' words ring hollow in my ears: "Let a thousand years pass by, and scholars will be in raptures over ghafir Abdul Rahman's signed arabesques incised on blocks of the Kumba temple."ⁱ



Figure 1 Graffiti on Unas' Causeway

While agreeing with Caminos, that both ancient and modern graffiti can be of historical and philological significance, and that both should be recorded by the epigraphist, the writing of modern graffiti on ancient monuments must be discouraged. The vulgar scribbles proclaiming their author's 15 minutes of infamy, may be part of the monument's history, but this does not necessarily make them good or even wanted. There are many periods of history that humanity would rather forget, and this modern graffiti is a period in the history of Unas' causeway that should be erased. Gaston Maspero said of the graffiti on the walls of monuments "Ils sont trop près de nous encore pour nous sembler autres que ridicules, mais laissez couler une centaine d'années seulement, et le recul leur prêtera déjà un certain prestige." Graffiti may testify to a segment of modern history, but

at the same time, it defaces a monument, it does not give the monument any prestige, the monuments have enough of their own dignity.

Graffiti is not a new phenomenon, it has been around as long as Egyptian civilizationⁱⁱ. Ancient graffiti can be found near Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahari, in the Great Pyramid of Khufu, Djoser's funerary enclosure at Saqqara and on many different monuments and locations throughout Egypt.

Graffiti can help trace the wanderings of early travellers and early Egyptologist, especially those of the Nineteenth Centuryⁱⁱⁱ, who left their mark on many of Egypt's monuments. One of the most prolific was Belzoni, whose mark can be found up and down Egypt, not least in the Ramesseum at Thebes (Luxor), where he inscribed his name not once, but twice, in the main temple and on a statue of Ramesses II. Why he felt the need to write his name at all, defacing the very monument he was supposedly studying, is strange. However, the wanting to be famous through association is a well-known psychological association. Mark Chapman, a hitherto nobody, only got his name in the papers in December 1980 by murdering the most famous man on the planet – John Lennon.



Table 2 Belzoni graffiti on the Ramesseum

The graffiti on Unas' Causeway does not enhance it, does not tell us anything about modern society we do not already know, and will probably not enlighten our descendants about our society further

than our disrespect for history and the rights of the individual. Who cares who Ewas 2000 is or who he loves now or in the future, certainly not Unas, whose funerary monument he or she has desecrated by their act of vandalism. It certainly bears witness to the vicissitudes of a monument, showing at which times the monument and its owner were respected and at which times the cultural heritage was disrespected. However, not only is it monumental buildings that are being defaced with these modern scribblings, but ancient and rare rock art in remote locations in the Western and Eastern deserts. On a recent survey of the Red Sea Hills conducted by Professor Fekri Hassan, he noted many such defacings on rock art that had been free of any graffiti only two years ago when David Rohl made his recent survey of the area^{iv}.

The ancient Kings, Queens, and commoners should be treated with the respect due to them, not used to fulfil someone's 15 minutes of infamy. Just because a monument is 5,000 years old, it does not make it any less sacred than a 50 year old monument or a 5 year old monument. If Princess Diane's tomb were defiled, there would be a public outcry, if not a public lynching of the culprit if they were caught. The same may also be said if Nasser's, JFK's or other great leaders tomb were defiled. In Belzoni's day it may have been socially acceptable to deface monuments by hacking pieces out and taking them back to Europe, while at the same time leaving your calling card. In the Twenty-First Century graffiti may be seen as an art form, however, it is only socially acceptable in certain places, and these places are not on the monuments of our ancestors. The defiling of monuments should be seen as a crime against humanity and an insult to the present custodians of that heritage.

ⁱ See page 22 in Caminos. R. A. (1976) 'The Recording of Inscriptions and Scenes in Tombs and Temples', in *Ancient Egyptian Epigraphy and Palaeography*. New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Press: 3-25.

ⁱⁱ LD II, Pl 1 (a-e).

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example Goyon, G.1944. *Les Inscriptions et Graffiti des Voyageurs sur la Grande Pyramide*. Cairo.

^{iv} See David Rohl (2000) *Followers of Horus*.