

Martha Hope Rhoads Bell
27 April 1941 - 12 November 1991

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to know Martha Bell while she was alive. But I have come to know her a little through family and close friends, and by the scholarship she left behind. Martha was born on 27 April 1941 in Philadelphia, PA, and was raised by her parents, Dr. Donald Ziegler Rhoads and Elsie Teetsel Rhoads, RN, in Allentown and Center Valley, PA (Figure 1). She attended Cedar Crest College in Allentown (1959-1961) and Barnard College in New York City (1961-1963); and it was from Barnard that she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ancient History. While at Cedar Crest College, one of her professors was Burr C. Brundage, who had received a Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Chicago before World War II. Unable to find a job as a professional Egyptologist, he turned to Meso American and South American Archaeology. Nevertheless, it was through Brundage that Martha was first introduced to Egyptology. At Barnard, Martha's mentor was Morton Smith. He taught her how to think critically and logically about issues concerning the ancient world.

From there her studies turned toward graduate work, and by now she was interested in Aegean Bronze Age (Minoan) religion. She attended classes at the University of Pennsylvania (1963-1968), and received a Ph.D. from its Department of Classical Archaeology in 1991. At Pennsylvania her scholarly horizons were greatly expanded. One of the greatest influences on Martha during her years at Pennsylvania was the chairman of her department, Rodney Young. He was extremely supportive of her studies and work. Martha spent a year abroad at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1966-1967). While there, she attended all of the field trips — visiting sites from all ages throughout Greece — as well as taking advantage of her presence in the region for further exploration of Athens, the rest of Greece, and especially Crete, on her own. During her stay at the American School she met the classicist Gerald M. Quinn; they immediately

became fast friends, remaining so until their deaths. As a result of her time in Greece, Martha developed an interest in Mycenaean pottery. While in the midst of her studies, she met Lanny Bell, who was also studying at the University of Pennsylvania, and was well on the way to receiving a Ph.D. in Egyptology in the Department of Oriental Studies (1976); on 22 September 1968, she and Lanny married (Figure 1).

Another of Martha's great supporters, David O'Connor (Egyptologist at the University of Pennsylvania), helped her develop the topic which would eventually become the focus of most of her work. In 1968 Robert Merrillees' book *The Cypriote Bronze Age Pottery Found in Egypt* had just appeared. It was O'Connor's opinion that such a book on the Mycenaean pottery from Egypt would be an extremely useful research project. O'Connor introduced Martha to Merrillees, and they discussed the possibilities of such an undertaking. Thus a cross fertilization between Egypt and the Aegean was born which led simultaneously to the combining and focusing of her interests. Now the course of Martha's future was set — the cataloguing, dating, and interpretation of the contexts of Mycenaean pottery in Egypt. Martha's dissertation was entitled *The Tutankhamun Burnt Group from Gurob, Egypt: Bases for the Absolute Chronology of LH IIIA and B*; her degree was awarded just six months before her death.

On 12 November 1991, Martha and her friend, Gerry Quinn, attended an opera performance in New York City. Quinn at that time was serving as a Dean at Fordham University. After the performance they set out to drive from New York to Center Valley, where they were both looking forward to celebrating Martha's mother's birthday the next day. As they drove along I-78 in New Jersey, at almost midnight, their failing car was struck from behind by a large tractor-trailer truck, and both were killed instantly.

During her lifetime, Martha made significant contributions to both Mycenaean and Egyptian archaeology. Her excavation experience began in historic Bethlehem, PA, at the site of an 18th century water pumping station (1964). From there, at the end of her year in Athens, she excavated with the University of Pennsylvania at Gordion in Turkey under the directorship of Rodney Young (1967). Subsequently, she assisted her husband, Lanny, in his project at the Ramesside tombs of

Dira Abu el-Naga, another University of Pennsylvania site, located on the west bank of the Nile in Luxor, Egypt. She was the chief archaeologist for this expedition, and participated in all three seasons of excavation (1970, 1972, and 1974). Her work there was acknowledged as innovative in design and exemplary in technique. In 1982 she took part in Barry Kemp's excavations at the city of Tell el-Amarna in Middle Egypt, under the sponsorship of the Egypt Exploration Society, London. By the time she came to excavate at Amarna, Martha's knowledge of both Mycenaean pottery and Egyptian archaeology was already extensive, and she was able to associate, compare, and connect her theories to the archaeological record. Martha was also an active and valuable presence in Egypt throughout the twelve years that Lanny served as Field

Director of the University of Chicago's Epigraphic Survey, based in Luxor, Egypt (1977-1989). However, she was not simply "the director's wife"; rather, she was an active scholar in her own right and made her own unique scholarly contributions to the intellectual life of Chicago House. In fact, in the nearly seventy-five year history of Chicago House (since 1924), there has been only one other season in which the field director's spouse was a scholar. Over the years, Martha's advice was sought by many international scholars, some of whom visited Chicago House primarily to see her. During their tenure together in Luxor, Martha and Lanny made Chicago House a warm and inviting residence, where scholars and other visitors alike always felt welcome, where they could stay as guests and pursue their research in the extensive library which Martha tended for years. Her scholarship, intellectual integrity, and outgoing personality helped the two of them develop strong personal and professional relationships with local neighbors and members of other expeditions working at Thebes, as well as winning the respect of the authorities of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. Martha also acted as coordinator for the five Friends of Chicago House Tours in Egypt organized as part of the extensive fund-raising activities conducted on behalf of the Epigraphic Survey during their final years in Luxor.

While living in Egypt, Martha took the opportunity to visit local sites, museums, and colleagues who were at work in the country. In this way she was able to see first-hand and discuss with the excavators the Mycenaean pottery discovered by them. Some of the sites she visited, and

contributed her expertise to, were Qantir, Tell el-Daba, Gurob, Amarna, Deir el-Medina, Karnak North, and Abu Goud. As a result of these visits she collected data on numerous new and unknown, or badly known, Mycenaean materials, as she assembled the data for her catalogue of the Mycenaean pottery in the Cairo Museum. On her way home from Egypt at the end of numerous seasons, she deliberately routed her journey so that she could visit museums in Europe, studying both published and unpublished excavated materials from Egypt. She spent up to nine weeks at a time going from museum to museum collecting information and meeting colleagues, as well as attending opera performances and enjoying the local cuisine. The countries she worked in include Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, Hungary, and Poland. From all of this first-hand experience and observation, Martha was developing an in-depth understanding of the Late Bronze Age Mycenaean and New Kingdom Egyptian interrelationships. She was invited to join the International Group for the Study of Ancient Egyptian Ceramics, wrote the section on Mycenaean pottery for its proposed *Handbook* (still unpublished), and presented papers at its 5th and 6th workshops (held in San Francisco and Boston in 1990 and 1991).

It is an undisputed fact that Mycenaean pottery chronology is less than absolute, and scholars are always looking for ways to make this chronology more precise. Most of Martha's published work was aimed precisely at the goal of helping to elucidate some of the mystery surrounding the dating of Late Helladic pottery.

Already in 1977 she lectured in Detroit on "Mycenaean Pottery and Amarna" at the annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt — a brief abstract is published in the *Newsletter of the American Research Center in Egypt* 99/100 (1977):10. Based on her collaboration with Egyptologist Angela Milward, Martha presented and discussed Egyptian evidence for the date of the transition from Mycenaean LH IIIA to LH IIIB. Most Aegean scholars, at this time, placed this transition in Dynasty 18, based primarily on the site of Amarna, where a great quantity of Mycenaean pottery had been discovered. Ever since the work of J.D.S. Pendlebury (a British Aegeanist who also conducted excavations for the Egypt Exploration Society at Amarna), it had

been assumed that the finds from Amarna constituted a tightly-dated closed deposit. According to this view, when Akhenaten died near the end of Dynasty 18, Amarna was immediately abandoned. This theory and the resulting chronology were commonly accepted almost without question and without independent testing. For a long time, only LH IIIA pieces were reported at this site. Now, however, a few LH IIIB fragments had been identified, so some scholars assumed that the transition between LH IIIA and IIIB must have occurred during the reign of Akhenaten (Dynasty 18); and they quickly took the presence of both LH IIIA and LH IIIB at Amarna as evidence for a “fixed point” in Aegean chronology.

Martha and Angela suggested that this “fixed point” was actually more than a little shaky, and that the transition probably really took place during the 19th Dynasty. They pointed out that the lifetime of the site must have been longer than originally thought, citing evidence that even though Tutankhamun (one of Akhenaten’s immediate successors in Dynasty 18) had abandoned Amarna as his capital and residence, there was evidence for sporadic activities and occupation which continued into the reigns of Horemheb (Dynasty 18), as well as later activities of Ramesses II (Dynasty 19), and perhaps even Ramesses III (Dynasty 20). This would then leave no serious obstacle to the theory that the transition could have occurred early in the 19th Dynasty, which is, in fact, consistent with the evidence available from elsewhere in Egypt and in Syria-Palestine. Originally Amarna was excavated by W.M.F. Petrie, who found numerous Mycenaean shards in the “Palace Dump.” Later German and British excavations uncovered more of these shards, as has the most recent systematic excavation under Barry Kemp. In fact, Martha’s own excavation area at Amarna included a trash pit, at the very bottom of which a ring-bezel of Tutankhamun was discovered. This and other evidence suggest that Martha was on the right track; the occupation of the site lasted longer than anyone had ever thought possible. Other contributions that she made to the study of Amarna include a paper on “The Mycenaean Pottery from Tell el-Amarna” at the 1987 International Symposium to Celebrate the Centennial Anniversary of the Discovery of Tell el-Amarna, organized by the Middle West Branch of the American Oriental Society; she also called attention to a fragment of a coarse ware stirrup jar from Amarna in the Museum of Classical

Archaeology in Cambridge, the first such piece to be specifically identified from all of Egypt; and in 1986 she published an article entitled “A Hittite Pendant from Amarna,” in the *American Journal of Archaeology* 90:145-151.

From this point onward, Martha’s most important contributions involved the reexamination of the chronological footings of Mycenaean pottery at various New Kingdom Egyptian sites. She called attention to its quantity and the range of its distribution in Egypt, and underscored the necessity of carefully determining its Egyptian context; she also expanded the known find-spots of Mycenaean pottery from purely royal contexts (tombs) to non-royal contexts (tombs and habitation sites). In her 1982 article entitled “Preliminary Report on the Mycenaean Pottery from Deir el-Medina (1979-1980),” in *Annales du Service des Antiquites de l’Egypte* 68:142-6, Martha focused on a non-royal site whose inhabitants were employees of the state. Deir el-Medina had been excavated extensively by the French Institute in Cairo, but very little of the imported pottery had ever been published, and even less had been published accurately or completely, according to modern standards. After beginning to making sense of this material, she was able to apply what she had learned to the question of commercial links between Mycenae and Egypt and the determination of the dates which bracketed these activities. She concluded that Mycenaean pottery may be found in Egypt as early as the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (Dynasty 18) — but it is actually known from only a few early sites down through the reign of Amenhotep III. It gained great popularity under Akhenaten and in Dynasty 19 (Ramesses II). Later its “supplies diminished when the Aegean production centers were disrupted at the end of the Late Bronze Age” (MRB 1982), and its importation had stopped completely by the time of Ramesses III. Most of the pottery types discovered at Deir el-Medina are closed vessels such as stirrup jars, flasks, juglets, and jars. Martha’s contention was that these vessels contained an important commodity, such as perfumed oil, and the two (vessel and commodity) were traded together. She further argued that this item must have been relatively inexpensive, since ordinary people, as well as royalty and the ruling elite, were in possession of it. Other larger vases may have contained olive oil, honey, wine, aromatic essences, dried fruit, and/or grain. Martha’s continued study of the pottery from this period

eventually might have helped to document the change from LH IIIA to LH IIIB styles during the Late Bronze Age.

In addition to detailing imported vessel forms, Martha identified vessels which clearly were made domestically (in Egypt), but imitated styles which were common to the Aegean area. In examining the ware of certain pieces from Deir el-Medina, she characterizes them as Egyptian imitations of LH IIIB Simple Style forms. In her 1983 article entitled “‘Egyptian Imitations of Aegean Vases’: Some Additional Notes,” in *Gottinger Miszellen: Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion* 63:13-24, Martha added numerous valuable observations to the descriptions of pieces which had appeared in the recent catalog *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558-1085 B.C.* (published by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1982). Her comments deal with dating, vessel type, origin, possible vessel contents, distribution, and distinguishing between domestic and imported wares. It was because of her extensive exposure to, her familiarity with, and her unique knowledge of, the material from Egypt, that she was able to correct and refine some of the statements made in this catalog. It is work like this that stresses the need for the specialist's first-hand examination of objects prior to their publication.

Another site which is crucial to Aegean Bronze Age chronology is that of Gurob, which is located near the mouth of the Fayum. Pottery from this site was confidently dated by Petrie, on the basis of royal names found on scarabs and other small finds, to the reigns of Amenhotep III, Tutankhamun, Ramesses II, and Seti II (Dynasty 19). It is to Petrie's great credit that he accurately identified numerous shards from this site as Helladic, for they were the first ones to be so identified in all of Egypt. Aegeanists have been using this site as a bench mark for chronology ever since, tending to accept Petrie's dating as accurate and precise. However, this is a site whose complex stratigraphy is badly confused in the literature; it was one of Petrie's first excavations in Egypt (1888), and, unfortunately, he left its supervision in the hands of an inexperienced junior assistant. It was Martha who discovered that most of the Mycenaean material from Gurob was intrusive in its alleged context, and that the chronology of this site was in shambles. In her article “Gurob Tomb 605 and Mycenaean Chronology,” in *Melanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar, Bibliothéque d'Etude*

97/1(1985):61-86, Martha set about the task of demonstrating that the “Burnt Groups” from this site, objects and pottery alike, consistently indicate a date in the 19th Dynasty, rather than being contemporary with the 18th Dynasty. In her 1985 exhaustive re-analysis of the finds at Gurob, Martha confined most of her remarks to a relatively undisturbed tomb containing Mycenaean pottery, and discussed its value as evidence for establishing LH III chronology. She stressed that all of the objects found within the tomb, not only the pottery, had to be considered together, as a whole; the pottery should not be isolated, or put into a vacuum, when attempting to establish its dates. Martha concluded that the site of Gurob, an important center of the 18th Dynasty, was actually abandoned at the time of Horemheb. During the 19th Dynasty, it was encroached upon by an older cemetery, still in use, which was located nearby.

One by-product of her study of the Egyptian material from Tomb 605 was that she came to realize that there were regional differences which could be detected in the forms and decoration of New Kingdom Egyptian pottery. Her 1987 article entitled “Regional Variation in Polychrome Pottery of the 19th Dynasty,” in *Cahiers de la Ceramique Egyptienne* 1:49-76, reported the results of her investigation of a decorated Egyptian piece from this tomb. She concluded that there seemed to be a “tenuous connection, materially and probably also conceptually, between Gurob and Deir el-Medina” and a “slight indication of similarity in popular cults, as “ancestors busts” have been found at Gurob” (MRB 1987 p. 58-59). Because of her field experience at Dira Abu el-Naga, and the necessity of working with Egyptian materials to help calibrate Aegean chronology, Martha, by now, had become essentially a self-taught Egyptian archaeologist, and an acknowledged expert on New Kingdom Egyptian small finds. A skilled draftsman, and a critical and logical thinker, with an ability to visualize the spacial relationships which existed between architectural structures and artifacts, Martha was able to reevaluate old publications and suggest solutions to problems which had been confronted by the original excavators.

As she developed as a scholar, her later publications indicate that more and more of her interests became purely Egyptian. She applied all of these various skills in her article “An Armchair Excavation of KV 55,” in the *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27

(1990):97-137. Excavated by Theodore Davis in 1907, the contents of this tomb included material originally from several different royal burials of the late 18th Dynasty. It is the most controversial tomb in all of Egypt, and because of the way it was excavated and published, more questions were generated by the work than were answered. Already in the New Kingdom this tomb had been disturbed, as its contents, and the body it contained, were apparently mixed up when they were being relocated. The ancients' restoration of the burial was haphazard, and the tomb seems to have been left in a state of near chaos. Therefore, its interpretation presented serious problems right from the very beginning. Numerous items from the tomb had been misidentified by subsequent scholars trying to reconstruct the placement of grave goods, leading to the serious skewing of architectural relationships and the reduplication of single objects. Martha sought to re-evaluate the original condition of this tomb, and Davis' excavation and publication of it, in order to straighten out the major discrepancies. Based on her examination of collotype photographs and various nearly contemporary descriptions of the excavation, she was able to wade through the confusion and suggest a plausible situation. She made her own line drawings based upon the known photographs of the artifacts in situ, and placed them in the tomb plan, labeling each one according to her new interpretation, as she produced a catalogue of the contents of the tomb (Figures 2,3,4,5). As a result of her careful study, she was able to reconstruct some of the events which had led to the building and use of this tomb. The findings are quite involved and one must read this fascinating little article in order to appreciate the full complexity of this project.

Her dissertation was a methodical and comprehensive study of the Tutankhamun Burnt Group at Gurob and its implications for Mycenaean Chronology.

She took more than five hundred pages to try to establish the dates of only 12 Mycenaean shards, concluding that the site should be dated to the 18th Dynasty "with some 19th Dynasty intrusions, a temple, and perhaps some houses" (MRB 1991, dissertation p. 275). After her reexamination of the material, she concluded that the Burnt Group of Tutankhamun should not be used as evidence for the "early arrival of LH IIIB pottery" in Egypt (MRB 1991, dissertation p. 275). LH IIIB pottery did not appear in Egypt before the end of the 18th Dynasty, and should be placed in the 19th

Dynasty. In her dissertation, she was not able to satisfactorily answer numerous chronological questions pertaining to Mycenaean pottery and Egypt. Thus in 1991, Martha won a grant from the American Philosophical Society, in order to continue her research in the British collections toward the publication of Mycenaean pottery from Egypt and she presented an application to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a three year grant to fund a project which would have been a monumental work. If carried out, this work would have represented the culmination of over twenty years of research; it would have included information on all the artifacts she had studied and handled, and the first-hand observations that she had made and included in the extensive archives which she had accumulated over the years. It would have pulled together the results of all of her articles and gone well beyond the work of her dissertation. During her studies in Aegean and Egyptian ceramics, she realized that there was a nearly total lack of reliably published material on the Mycenaean pottery which had been excavated in Egypt to date. This pottery is crucial to Aegeanists, and she knew that some existing chronologies, typologies, and historical conclusions were seriously flawed. It was her desire to produce a work which would comprehensively describe, define, catalogue, and otherwise document all of the Late Bronze Age Mycenaean pottery excavated, and known, from Egypt.

This extensive work was to be presented in a three volume set which would be “user friendly” to Egyptian as well as non-Egyptian archaeologists, ceramicists, and other scholars involved in related fields. The material would have come from both published and unpublished collections. She had every intention of visiting museums the world over, sitting in storage rooms, re-visiting the relevant sites, reading old excavation notes and reports, and studying and drawing vessels, in order to fill whatever gaps existed in her own carefully assembled documentation. The corpus of material was to be so comprehensive that it would “finally allow researchers to resolve questions requiring quantification,” and it would have been “basic to any attempted review of the historical chronology that has been built on the Mycenaean pottery from Egypt.” Her “ultimate goal [was] to understand the Mycenaean pottery as a ‘component(s) of a diffusion of knowledge (information), beliefs, objects, and individuals’,” and to give “access to accurate and complete

data.” This book would have been like no other work on the subject: a complete survey of the Mycenaean Late Bronze Age pottery of Egypt, both imported and domestic, thus providing a catalogue, and a definitive chronology (at least far as Egypt is concerned); and it would have documented the interaction between Egypt and the Aegean. As an scholar in both fields, Martha was in a unique position to accomplish this project. This proposed work was deemed so important by the reviewers of the grant proposal that they rated it very highly and were enthusiastic about recommending it for funding. Unfortunately, the application had to be withdrawn, and the project would never be completed, because Martha died before ever having the opportunity to begin.

As an Aegeanist, Martha realized that the conventional view of chronology based on the existence of Aegean material in the Egyptian archaeological record was skewed. Numerous sites in Egypt were excavated in such a way that pottery was not assigned the importance it should have been given, and normally only intact vessels were saved. Very few foreign shards were recognized; only at Amarna and Deir el-Medina were large numbers of Mycenaean shards saved. Over the years, Martha systematically tracked down and identified an enormous number of excavated Aegean vessels and shards which could be associated with Egyptian archaeological contexts. In fact, in December of 1990, when she presented a paper for a Workshop on Mycenaean Commerce at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in San Francisco, she impressed the moderator, Jeremy Rutter, with how widespread Mycenaean material actually is in Egypt. Because of Martha’s diligent and painstaking work, the number of Mycenaean vessels from Egypt now available for further study by Aegean specialists has nearly doubled. She predicted that with new scientific excavation of New Kingdom sites, more and more Aegean ware would be discovered; and she has been proven right!

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