

EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY WITH THE BEDOUIN OF EGYPT

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I first did fieldwork as a geographer in 1979. I traveled to archaeological sites throughout Egypt to do research for my University of Texas master's thesis on the interaction between people and wildlife in ancient Egypt. To visit the highly decorated tombs of Beni Hassan in Middle Egypt, I based myself in a cheap hotel in the provincial city of Minya. Settling into my room, I opened the wardrobe and saw scrawled inside a graffito announcing that "The Age of Exploration Is Over!" My initial reaction was disappointment that I had been born at the wrong time. But in twenty years of explorations since then I've looked back on that inscription of wardrobe wisdom with a happy certainty that the author was wholly wrong.

Every journey of exploration in the field is accompanied by setbacks and periods of idleness. Some expeditions are bound to fail altogether. But fieldwork also brings serendipity and triumph, with opportunities to establish friendships and make discoveries that yield personal and professional rewards beyond measure. Each field trip requires the proper equipment and techniques to yield the most productive results. And each journey is followed by an empty time, postpartum, when the thrill of being in the field wanes and is replaced by the grimmer challenge of paying the piper and publishing.

In this essay I address three aspects of how I go about doing, recording, and writing up the experience of exploration. These involve the origins of a research journey itself, the fieldwork tool kit, and the postfield process of preparing information for publication. This is not an instruction manual on how things are to be done; each researcher's context and methods are unique. But for a dozen years at the University of Missouri, my graduate and undergraduate students have asked specific questions about why and how I do certain things in and outside the field. The answers have inspired some to take productively to the field themselves. In the hope that they may be useful to others, here are some of those answers.

GETTING THERE

For two decades my fieldwork has focused on interactions between indigenous peoples and challenging environments in the deserts of Egypt. It is a rare privilege to do research where little has been done, and I've always perceived it as my responsibility to record as much as possible of the human and physical geographies of those places. The urgency of collecting all kinds of information is that much greater because few of the indigenous inhabitants are literate. Most of the knowledge about the region exists only in the collective memories of the older generations of indigenous bedouin. The young people work in tourism and other enterprises unrelated

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