

# THE TELL BASTA TREASURE

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In the course of railroad construction carried on in the Delta in 1906 workmen came upon one of the most important treasures of Egyptian gold and silver vases found in modern times. Before this discovery our knowledge of vessels in precious metals was largely dependent upon wall paintings in tombs and a few examples scattered in various museums. Seeing an opportunity, the workmen hid their find as best they could with the intention of selling the pieces to the antiquities dealers in the neighborhood.

But the news spread and the entire vicinity was thoroughly searched by the police, who succeeded in finding several objects behind rafters and in other makeshift hiding places including, as the story goes, the mouth of one of the Arab workmen. A band of robbers saw a means of profiting from the general excitement by setting an ambush for a dealer with whom they had made an appointment on the pretext of possessing part of the treasure. The man who carried the dealer's money was waylaid and beaten without seeing any of the treasure. The success of the venture led the robbers to repeat their trick, but this time they were caught. A careful search by the police failed, however, to turn up either the treasure or the recently stolen money.

These various tales concerning the cache were recorded at the time by Sir Gaston Maspero, the Director of Antiquities, and his able assistant, C. C. Edgar, who recovered for the Cairo Museum the chief pieces of the treasure, including a silver jug with a gold goat for its handle and a gold cup of Queen Ta-Wosret. They were further rewarded by the subsequent discovery in the same vicinity of another hoard

with a gold bracelet of Ramesses II and other gold and silver vessels.

A large number of the vases and fragments that turned up on the market were acquired for the Metropolitan Museum in 1907 by Albert M. Lythgoe, the first curator of the newly established Department of Egyptian Art, who was in Egypt at the time to supervise the first year of the Museum's excavations. The various fragments were sent to New York, where the cleaning and fitting together of the badly tarnished

pieces became a major problem. The matter was postponed until the end of the first World War, when the pieces were sent to an outstanding repairer in France, and he completed his work in 1921.

The penultimate chapter of their history took place in 1930, when three important objects of gold and a large fragment of the decorated repoussé

silver bowl, all previously on loan, became the property of the Museum as part of the Theodore M. Davis bequest.

The various pieces have recently been re-examined with interesting results. Another fragment has been added to the bowl, the cartouche on a piece of rim is now read as that of Queen Ta-Wosret instead of Ramesses II, and two engraved pieces from the neck of a silver vase have been found to fit two pieces now in Berlin. These last fragments belong to a vase in Cairo which has an inscription of an official named Tem-em-to-neb, a Royal Butler and Royal Ambassador to Every Foreign Land, whose name also appears on the goat-handle vessel in Cairo and a silver vase in the Metropolitan.

The objects were found at Zakāzīk (Tell



*Detail of the bowl on the next page, showing a desert scene. The illustrations in this article are from a famous hoard of XIX Dynasty gold and silver. Rogers Fund and Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1907, 1930*



ABOVE: Silver bowl with scenes of swamp, river, desert, and vineyard in repoussé decoration. In spite of its fragmentary state the skill of the ancient silversmith is evident. BELOW: Detail of a silver vase with engraved decoration, a scene showing the chantress Mery-Ptah holding a sistrum before the enthroned goddess Bastet, patron of Bubastis. Silver jug with a strip of gold on the rim. Gold was frequently used in this manner on vessels of alabaster and obsidian.

Basta) in the Delta, the site of the ancient city of Bubastis, a busy cosmopolitan center with a sizable foreign admixture in its population. The exact location of the find is unknown, but it seems to have been within a hundred yards of the temple precincts. Foreign craftsmen were very likely drawn to this city to satisfy the demand for precious objects for royal, temple, and private use, and it is possible that some of these had a hand in fashioning our gold and silver.

The date of the objects in the first hoard is

fairly well determined by the cup of Queen Ta-Wosret in Cairo, the fragment of silver with her cartouches in this Museum, and a gold vessel in Berlin similar to that illustrated on page 65 bearing the cartouches of Sēthy II, whom Ta-Wosret married after serving for a while as sole ruler. The similarity of the engraved lotus design on the Cairo cup with that on the Tem-em-to-neb vessels and the fact that the titles of Tem-em-to-neb are borne by other officials of this time make it likely that all the pieces of the first hoard, including the repoussé bowl with its



ABOVE: Silver statuette of a king as Horus the child, possibly a pendant. BELOW: Part of the neck of a silver vase and a conical boss for the center of a bowl.



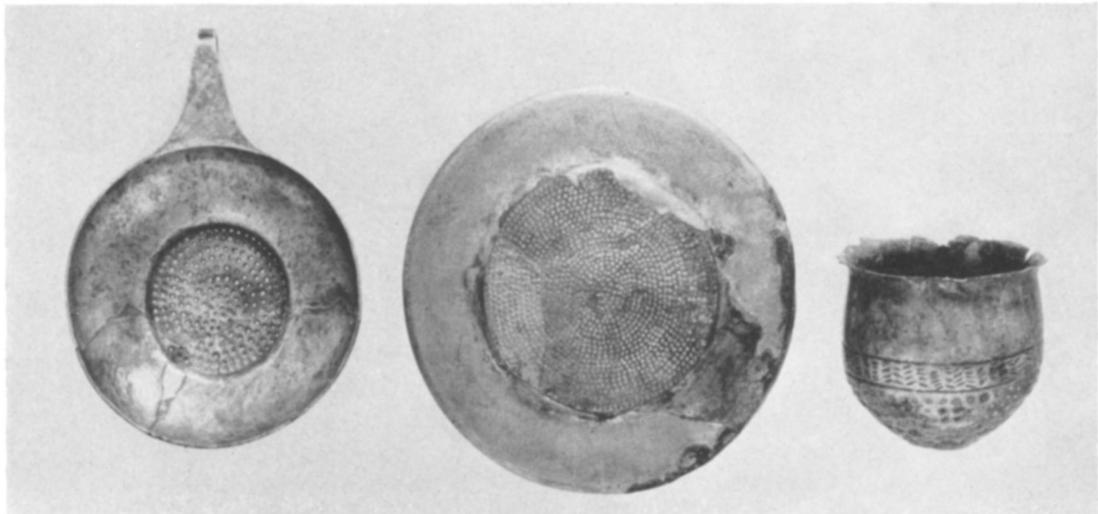
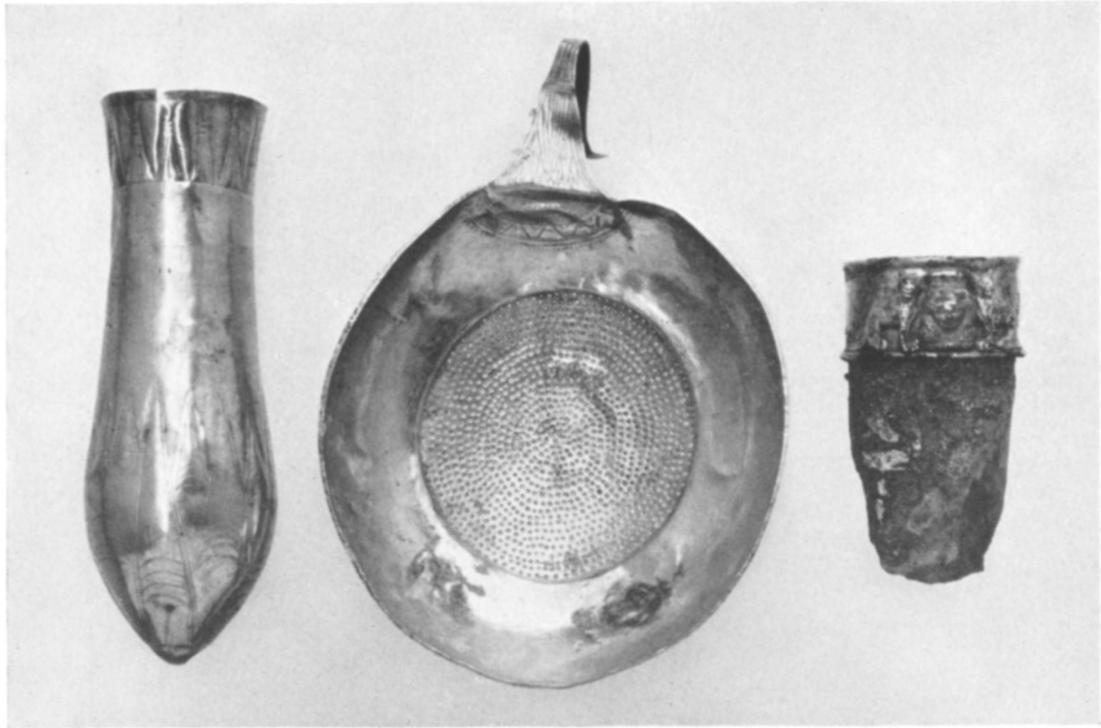
ABOVE: Four silver vases. BELOW: Detail of the neck of a vase bearing the titles of the Royal Butler *Tem-em-to-neb*. Silver jewelry box. It contained a mesh chain when it was found.

similar scenes, were made in the reigns of Sēthy II and Queen Ta-Wosret (1223-1211 B.C.).

This queen, according to a tradition known to the Greek historian Manetho, was acting as ruler of Egypt at the time of the fall of Troy. The situation in Egypt was insecure owing to the uncertainty of succession. It is likely that Ta-Wosret, like *Het-shepswet* of the XVIII Dynasty, seized control of the government, since her name occurs as ruler on foundation deposit plaques at the site of her extensive building operations at Thebes. The apparently unfinished condition of some of the vessels associated with her name led C. C. Edgar to believe that

they might have come from a goldsmith's workshop. It is more probable that the majority of the vessels formed part of a temple service hidden by an anxious priest or a successful robber who did not live to recover them and that they were damaged rather than unfinished. The gold strainers in New York and Berlin together with the tall silver and gold vessels seem appropriate for such use as well as for royal or private table service. The vessels might have been donated to the temple, inscribed with names in much the same manner as altar services presented to churches since medieval times.

Several of the pieces in the treasure will re-



ABOVE: *A gold vase similar to the Sēthy II vessel in Berlin, a gold strainer, and a silver vase with a decorated gold band on the neck. BELOW: Three kinds of silver strainers*

quire a detailed discussion, particularly in view of the fact that an eminent modern scholar has asserted that the companion pieces in Cairo are really of Syrian origin. On the face of the evidence of the Museum's pieces, this hypothesis now seems far-fetched, and for the present it

seems appropriate to illustrate the major objects from the treasure without detailed commentary, pending a future publication.

*For the other vessels see Musée égyptien II, Annales xxv, and Berliner Museen LI (1930).*