EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY

J. BRETT McCLAIN

On November 18, 2024, the Epigraphic Survey marked the one hundredth anniversary of its fieldwork in Egypt, one century to the day since the expedition's first field director, Harold Nelson, cabled James Henry Breasted the news that the Survey's work at Medinet Habu had begun (fig. 1). At a gala reception in the Winter Palace garden in Luxor, our staff joined an illustrious gathering of colleagues, friends, and supporters in celebrating this auspicious occasion, and a keynote address by US Ambassador to Egypt Herro Mustafa, along with other tributes by distinguished guests, highlighted the Survey's longstanding mission and field-defining achievements in scientific documentation (fig. 2). This remarkable evening was the culmination of a series of events throughout the summer and fall of 2024 that included the ISAC Museum's special exhibition *Chicago on the Nile*, which commemorated the Survey's first century of fieldwork; a gala fundraising dinner and other events on campus in September; a series of public and ISAC member lectures; and a special excursion to Egypt for supporters of our expedition, including ISAC and University of Chicago leadership (fig. 3). We are truly grateful to all who took part in the centennial celebrations, as well as to the indefatigable ISAC staff whose planning and guidance made these events possible.

Figure 1. Harold Nelson and James Henry Breasted at Old Chicago House. Photo by Caroline Ransom Williams.

Now the Epigraphic Survey enters a new century. Although a hundred years of extraordinarily successful fieldwork, research, and publications are behind us, the amount of unpublished material contained in Luxor's monuments is vast, and decades of work remain to be done. Our core mission remains the same as that established by Breasted: the facsimile recording and publication of the hieroglyphic inscriptions and relief scenes in these monuments via accurate photographs, facsimile drawings, and critical editions of the texts, thereby preserving them for future generations. In the years to come, we will continue this epigraphic work within the areas of our current concession from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) / Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA): Medinet Habu, Luxor Temple, the temple of Khonsu in Karnak, and the tomb of Nefersekheru (Theban Tomb 107). In addition, and to the

Figure 2. ISAC director Timothy Harrison commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor on November 18, 2024.

extent that our resources allow, we will continue to conserve and restore these monuments as necessitated by ongoing physical deterioration.

During our 2024–25 field season in Luxor, alongside our numerous celebratory activities, the Survey staff continued to make progress toward these objectives. Current events, however, created a challenging environment for our work in Egypt. Particularly impactful has been the dissolution of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which provided significant funding for our conservation and restoration projects since the mid-1990s, with the result that we must now seek other sources of support to continue these programs. The political situation in the Middle East also remained challenging, and consequent operational headwinds included a delay in the renewal of our Government of Egypt security clearance, which prevented our staff from working on the antiquities sites from January through March 2025. As a result of this delay, we were obliged to reorient our efforts during the second half of our field season, with a focus on processing and organizing the results of on-site work from the last two months of 2024, as well as initiating significant new archival projects in the Chicago House library and photographic archives to maximize our field time while waiting for the bureaucratic obstacles to clear. Nevertheless, we were able to make substantial progress toward our core objectives, both at the temple sites and in the archives, during our six-month season. Our progress in each of these areas, carried out with permission from the MoTA/SCA, is summarized below.

Figure 3. Jennifer Kimpton explaining the Chicago House method of epigraphic documentation to VIP tour participants at Medinet Habu. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.

MEDINET HABU

Since the publication of *Medinet Habu* X in June 2024, our epigraphic team has concentrated on the inscribed material added to the temple of Amun after the Eighteenth Dynasty, to be published in *Medinet Habu* XI. This group of scenes and texts includes partially cryptographic inscriptions of the high priest of Amun Painedjem added around the base of the temple at the beginning of the Twenty-First Dynasty (fig. 4), ritual panels carved on the hitherto-uninscribed exterior walls of the monument during the reign of Ramesses III (fig. 5), and architectural additions inscribed for Achoris during the Twenty-Ninth Dynasty. Our photographic record for *Medinet Habu* XI is now complete, and the images are being finalized for publication. In addition, we continued to collate and correct drawings of the multiphase ritual scenes and Ptolemaic theological texts in the interior of the central bark shrine, slated for publication in *Medinet Habu* XII (fig. 6). Also this season, after a two-year hiatus, we were permitted to resume our photographic survey of the Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasty tomb chapels of the god's wives of Amun (fig. 7). Our photographers were able to complete all the negatives for the chapel of Nitocris during this year's campaign (fig. 8), leaving only the chapels of Shepenwepet II and Mehetenweskhet to be recorded next year.

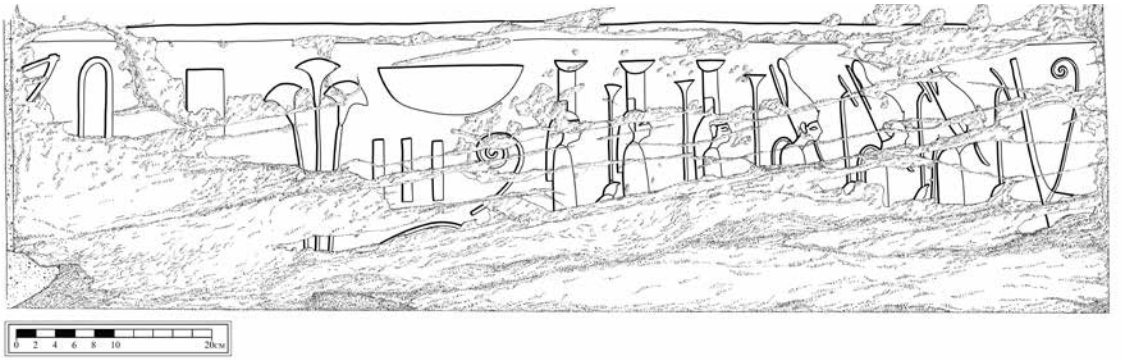

Figure 4. In-progress facsimile drawing of part of the inscription of the high priest Painedjem in the Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Amun at Medinet Habu. Drawing by Keli Alberts.

In November and December 2024, we also continued to improve and expand the Medinet Habu blockyard, which houses more than 5,000 inscribed fragments originating from the temple complex and surrounding areas of the Theban necropolis. We initiated a much-needed revision and upgrade of our Medinet Habu fragment database, which had been in hiatus for several seasons, that included conducting a new survey and renumbering the fragments stored in the facility, as well as assigning numbers to new

Figure 5. Emmanuelle Arnaudiès collating a drawing in the Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Amun at Medinet Habu from a foil impression. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 6. Keli Alberts recording a Ptolemaic dedicatory text in the bark shrine of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Amun at Medinet Habu. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 7. Amanda Tetreault and Yarko Kobylecky preparing photographic equipment in the tomb chapel of the god's wife Nitocris at Medinet Habu. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 8. Large-format photograph of relief scenes in the tomb chapel showing Nitocris offering to Anubis and Hathor. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky and Amanda Tetreault.

fragments recently added to the corpus (fig. 9). In concert with this registration project, we continued expanding the Medinet Habu blockyard open-air museum by adding three rows of new storage platforms outside the northeastern side of the enclosure (fig. 10). Our goal is to assemble the most significant rejoined fragment groups in an area outside the enclosed blockyard, accessible to the public and with designated pathways and explanatory signage, and we will continue this project during the 2025–26 season.

At the beginning of December 2024, we renewed our collaborative venture with the Zamani Project, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the University of Cape Town that specializes in 3D scanning and imaging of historic monuments. Since 2022, we have worked with the Zamani team

Figure 9. Pia Kobylecky measuring fragments in the Medinet Habu blockyard. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 10. Epigraphic Survey restoration team constructing new display platforms for the open-air museum at Medinet Habu. Photo by Brett McClain.

Figure 11. Zamani Project team members Christoph Held and Werner Stempfhuber conducting a 3D scan of the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.

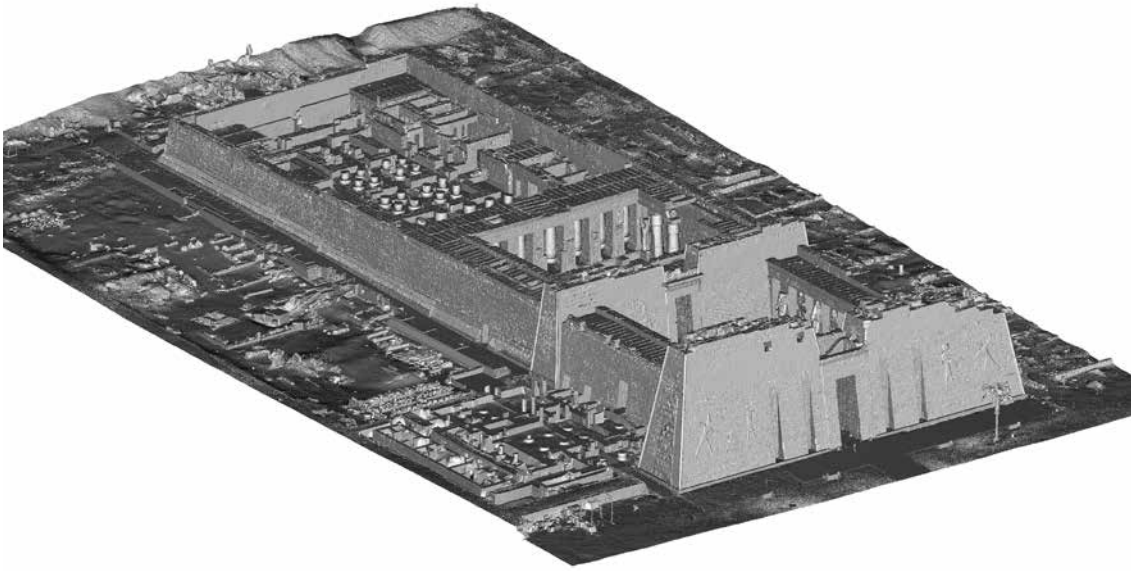

Figure 12. Preliminary 3D model of the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. Image by the Zamani Project.

to produce high-resolution laser scans of the architectural features of Luxor Temple and Medinet Habu. During a one-week campaign, the Zamani specialists were able to complete their overall 3D model of the Luxor Temple precinct, begun two years earlier, and to initiate a total laser scan of the Medinet Habu enclosure (fig. 11). The available time was sufficient to complete the 3D model for the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, and we plan to continue the project in the fall of 2025 (fig. 12). Total 3D coverage of both sites will allow their architectural and landscape features to be mapped at an unprecedented level of detail and will provide a spatial framework to guide future conservation, site management, and archaeological research initiatives.

Alongside our epigraphic documentation program, we continued several conservation and restoration projects started during previous seasons. In December, our stonemasonry team completed the reconstruction of the Taharqa Gate, begun in 2019 with funding from USAID, and our conservation team began the final in situ treatment of the gate's stone blocks, to be completed next year (fig. 13). We also resumed our restoration of the King's Chamber in the Eighteenth Dynasty temple, where we made significant progress in treating the deteriorated lower walls and the floor's paving stones and completed a 3D photogrammetric survey that will assist in planning the consolidation measures required in future seasons (fig. 14). Our objective, as requested by the MoTA/SCA, is to prepare this

Figure 13. Epigraphic Survey restoration team completing the reconstruction of the Taharqa Gate at Medinet Habu. Photo by Frank Helmholz.

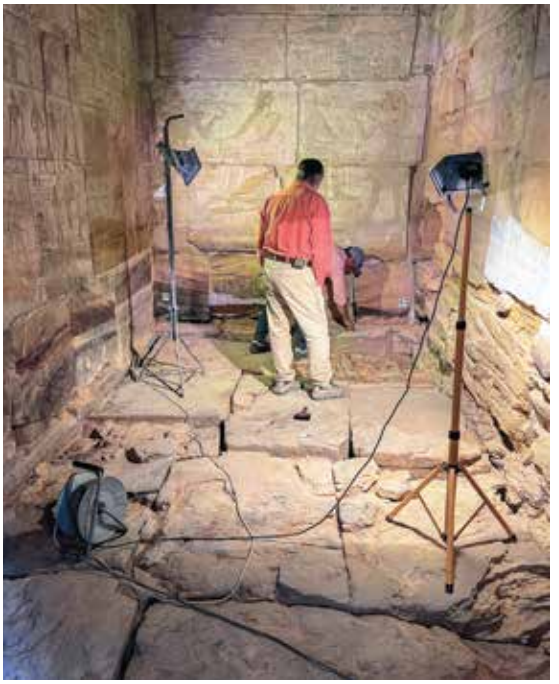

Figure 14. Frank Helmholz and Mahmoud Abd el-Haris assessing the condition of ancient floor blocks in the King's Chamber of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple at Medinet Habu. Photo by Ahmed Bozghol.

decorated chamber, with its well-preserved offering reliefs of Thutmose III, for public access. Aside from these discrete projects, our conservation team carried out regular sitewide cleaning and maintenance of at-risk areas throughout the Medinet Habu enclosure, as well as general site management measures where needed. All these conservation and restoration projects were undertaken in tandem with our annual training programs for early-career conservators and apprentice stonemasons; both programs engaged several new participants this year, imparting valuable knowledge and experience to the next generation of local professionals in the conservation and restoration sectors (fig. 15).

LUXOR TEMPLE

At Luxor Temple this season, our team concentrated on the main blockyard and open-air museum areas to the east of the temple (fig. 16). From October through the end of December 2024, we made significant progress in numbering, tagging, and registering the inscribed fragments stored on the

Figure 15. Conservation assistants Adel Ahmed Taya and Hala Ali Handaqa treating a fragment in the Medinet Habu blockyard. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 16. Luxor Temple blockyard and open-air museum in November 2024. Photo by Hiroko Kariya.

platforms in this sector; of the 149 platforms in the blockyard, 121 have now been completely registered and tagged, with each fragment photographed and entered into the Luxor Temple fragment database. More than 20,700 fragments have now been numbered and registered, and our preliminary documentation phase in the eastern blockyard is nearing completion. It has, however, been necessary to recheck our records from earlier seasons, in many cases painstakingly cross-examining our current information with old film photographs showing inscribed fragments that have subsequently deteriorated or been moved to other locations. Our long-term objective is to establish a complete and accurate database for all the fragments stored throughout the Luxor Temple enclosure, and we aim to complete our registry for the eastern blockyard in 2025–26 before expanding to the outlying storage areas in the western, northern, and northwestern sectors of the precinct. In the meantime, we continued to carry out focused research on a wide range of fragment groups identified in the Luxor Temple corpus (fig. 17).

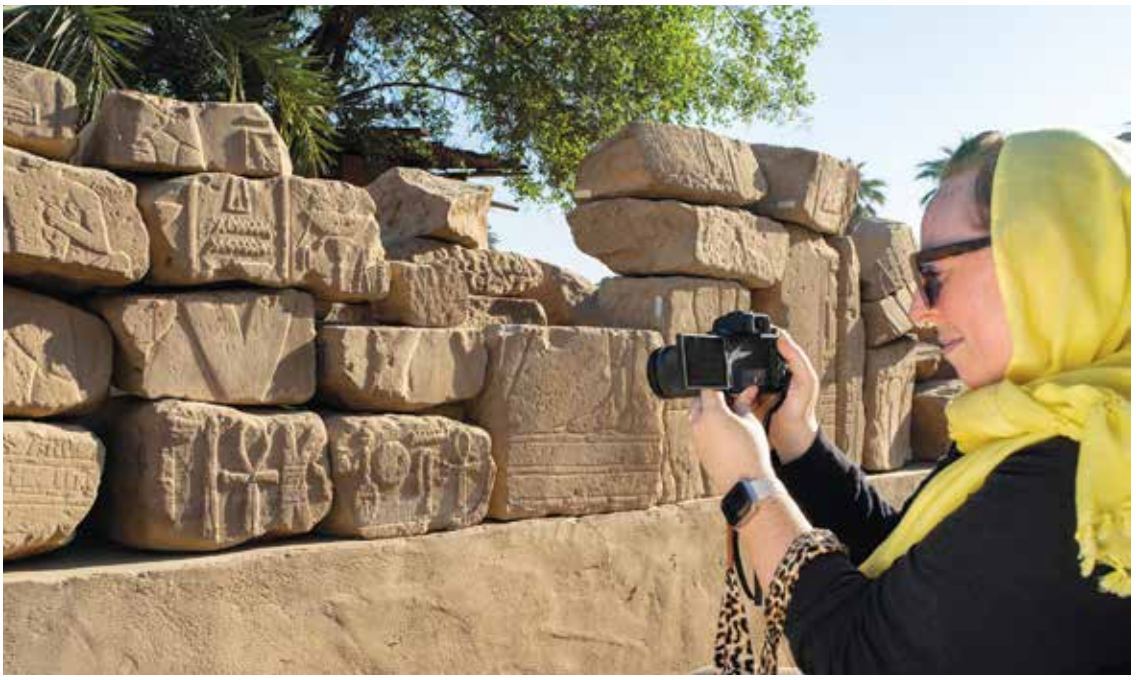

Figure 17. Catie Witt photographing Twenty-Sixth Dynasty fragments in the Luxor Temple blockyard. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Figure 18. Fragment group from the reign of Amenhotep III being assembled in the open-air museum at Luxor Temple. Photo by Hiroko Kariya.

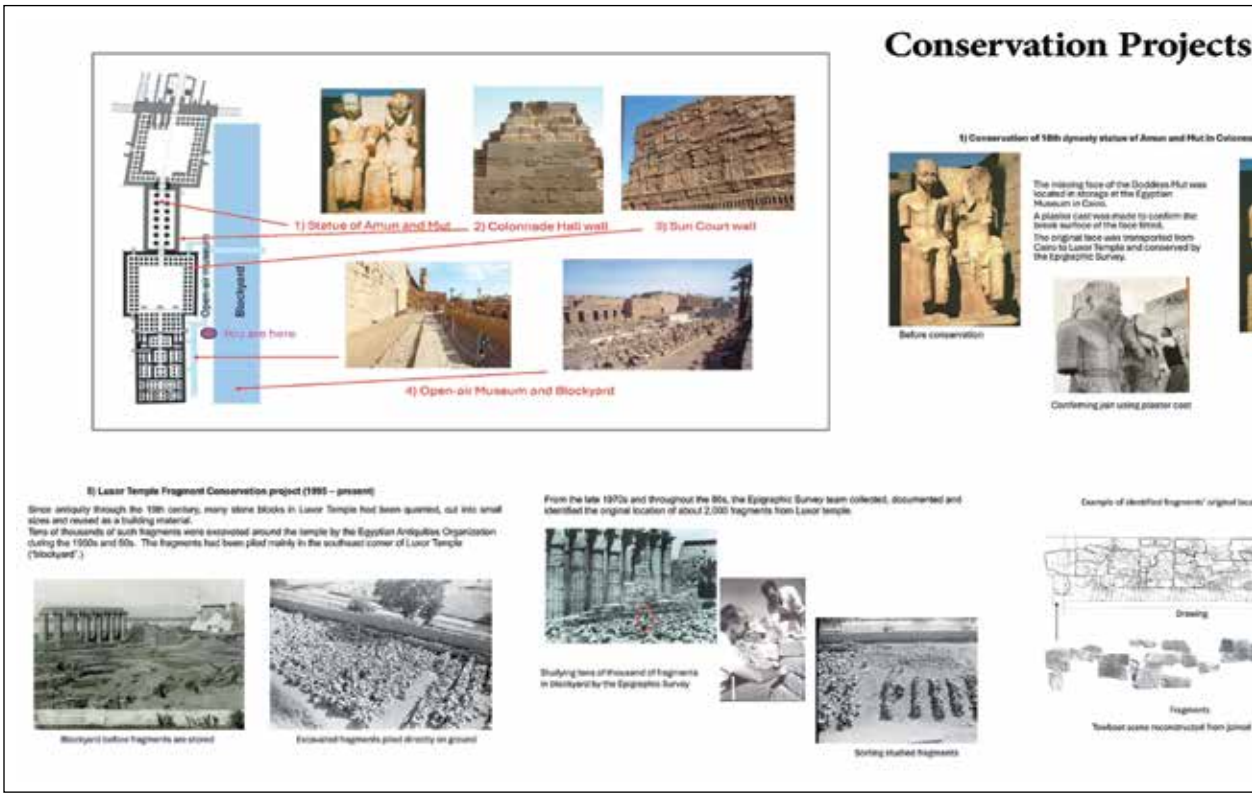

Figure 19. New panel installed in November 2024 explaining Epigraphic Survey conservation and restoration projects at Luxor Temple. Illustration by Hiroko Kariya, Gina Salama, and Catie Witt.

In conjunction with the registration project, our conservation team continued long-term monitoring and assessment of deteriorating pieces in the fragment corpus. We now have condition and treatment records for a core group of several hundred fragments going back to the late 1990s, an almost-unprecedented time span for stone conservation techniques in this specific context, and we have begun the process of assembling, analyzing, and synthesizing this dataset for publication. Our team also undertook regular maintenance and improvement measures as needed in the Luxor Temple open-air museum, particularly in preparation for site visits by our colleagues and guests during the centennial events in November (fig. 18). Signage in the display areas is being upgraded, and several temporary signs and posters were added to present the history and content of the displays to our visitors (fig. 19). We plan to complete the open-air museum upgrades next season, as well as to continue and expand the conservation and treatment measures for the fragment groups in the collection.

We are also continuing with our long-standing commitment to record and publish the wall reliefs and decoration in Luxor Temple. Over the past decade, Epigraphic Survey artist Krisztián Vértes carefully recorded the late Roman frescoes in the Imperial Chamber, creating facsimile drawings to complement the Survey's color photographs of these historically significant polychrome tableaux (fig. 20). Since his untimely death in May 2025, we have had to move forward with the publication of these copies without the benefit of his unique insight into the frescoes' composition and details. These rare surviving examples of Roman imperial court painting adorned a chamber for the cult of the deified Tetrarchs that was an integral component of the legionary encampment constructed within and around Luxor Temple during Diocletian's reign. The frescoes will form the subject of our next volume to be published, part 1 of *Reliefs and Inscriptions at*

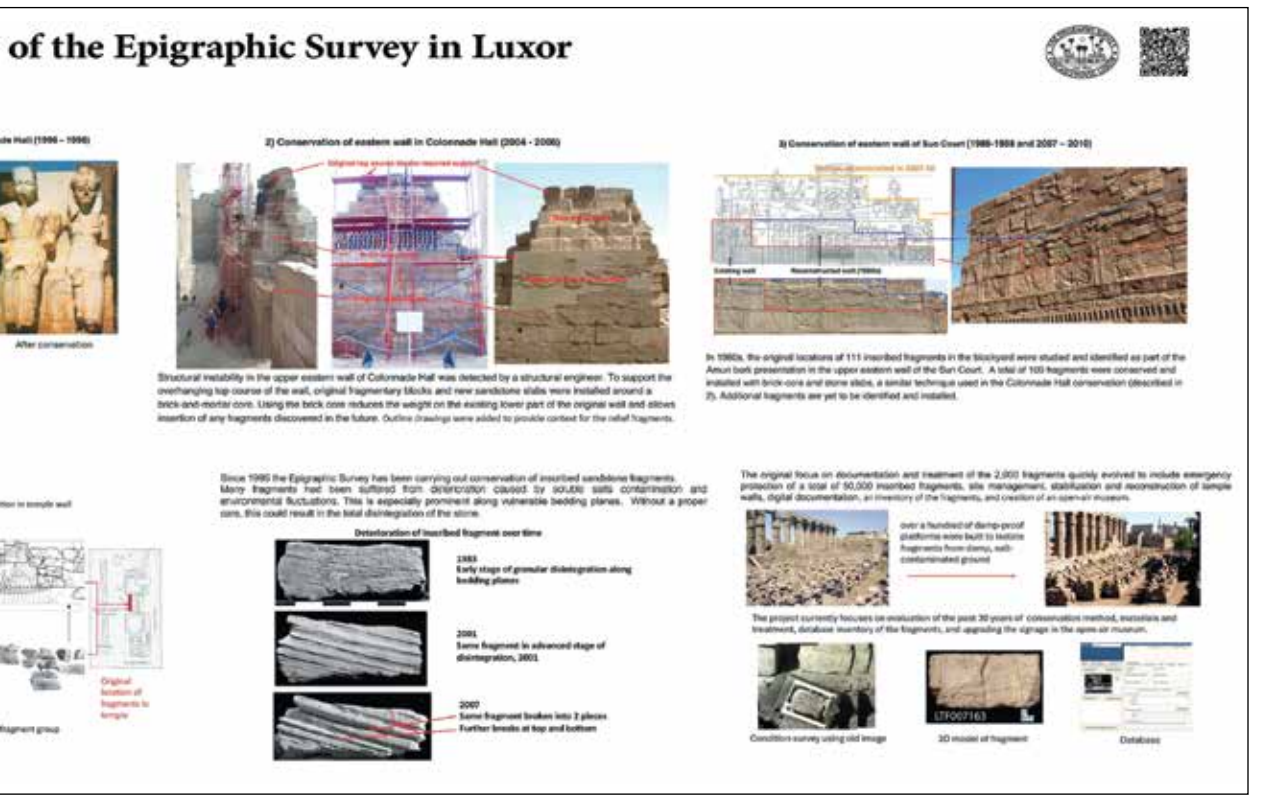

Figure 20. Krisztián Vértes recording Roman frescoes in the Imperial Chamber at Luxor Temple in 2017. Photo by Susan Lezon.

Luxor Temple III, while the underlying reliefs from the reign of Amenhotep III, the epigraphic documentation of which is still in progress, will be presented as part 2 of the same volume.

THE TEMPLE OF KHONSU IN KARNAK

In November and December 2024, we resumed our cooperative program with the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) at the temple of Khonsu in Karnak. Since 2007, we have worked in tandem with the ARCE team, which is undertaking a major conservation, restoration, and site management program in and around the temple. This monument, built in the Twentieth Dynasty, was constructed primarily of sandstone blocks reused from dismantled older monuments, and the Epigraphic Survey's role is to provide facsimile documentation of the inscribed surfaces of these blocks as they are revealed in the cracks and interstices of the structure during the conservation process. With its limited time frame, the conservation work presents a brief opportunity for us to capture this information from each block before it is permanently hidden from view by new mortar infill, so we strive to ensure that no inscribed decoration is missed before it is covered over once more. In addition, several hundred loose fragments related to the temple of Khonsu are stored on platforms outside the monument, and we worked this season to create facsimile drawings of the inscriptions on them, including a group forming

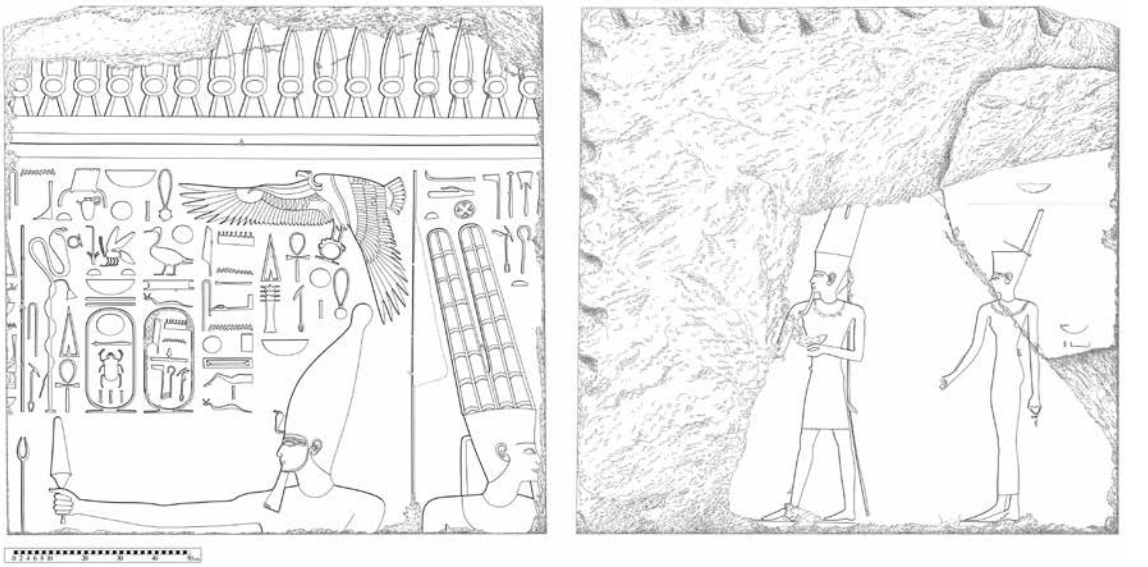

Figure 21. Two-sided granite bark shrine fragment showing decoration from the reigns of Amenhotep II (left) and Ramesses IV (right) from the temple of Khonsu in Karnak. Drawings by Dominique Navarro.

part of a reused granite bark shrine of Amenhotep II, later inscribed for Ramesses IV (fig. 21). Both components of this collaborative project will be resumed when the ARCE and Epigraphic Survey teams return to Luxor in October 2025.

CHICAGO HOUSE

Our research headquarters and residence at Chicago House serve as the Epigraphic Survey's base of operations during our annual six-month season, with our administration and finance team, technicians, and skilled workmen being responsible for the day-to-day management of the facility. The library and archives are essential resources for the local archaeological community, including members of the MoTA/SCA, faculty and students from local universities, and researchers from the many international expeditions working in Upper Egypt each year. Our library staff maintain the collections and assist patrons with their research requirements, and our photographic archives staff oversee and curate our ever-growing collection of large-format film negatives, digital and 3D images, and other documents, making them available to our professional colleagues both in Egypt and abroad.

At the beginning of January 2025, our archives team initiated a new project related to the archive of Labib Habachi, the leading Egyptian archaeologist and Egyptologist of his generation (fig. 22). Dr. Habachi's career with the Egyptian Antiquities Service spanned a critical period from the 1930s through the 1970s, and his wide-ranging fieldwork and publications during this period made a profound contribution to our knowledge of antiquities sites from the Delta to Nubia, many of which were obscure or inaccessible to foreign researchers. From the 1950s, he worked closely with the Epigraphic Survey on a range of projects, and after his retirement he joined the expedition as a resident scholar who lived and worked with the team at Chicago House during its field season each year. When he died in 1984, his vast collection of papers, including a large quantity of unpublished field notes and other material, along with a priceless archive of

Figure 22. Labib Habachi in the 1960s. Photo from the Labib Habachi Archive.

Figure 23. Epigraphic Survey staff cataloging facsimile paintings of wall decoration from the tomb of ʾIp at El-Saff in the Labib Habachi Archive. Photo by Emmanuelle Arnaudiès.

thousands of photographs, were left to Chicago House as a permanent bequest. Since that time, our staff have managed the Habachi Archive and frequently assisted researchers with access to the material on an ad hoc basis. Now, however, we have reached the point where complete digitization of the photographs and other records and a comprehensive catalog for this unique and valuable archive can be envisioned. Accordingly, from January through April 2025, our photographic archives team carried out a thorough assessment of the Habachi papers and photographs and formulated a long-term plan for developing this resource, with the goal of fully integrating the material into the larger Chicago House archival management system and ultimately making the archive available via ISAC's new Data Research Center (fig. 23). Our multiyear plan for the Habachi Archive represents a significant commitment for our photographic and digital archives staff in 2025–26 and beyond.

STAFF AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Epigraphic Survey professional staff for 2024–25 consisted of J. Brett McClain as field director; epigraphers Jennifer L. Kimpton, Emmanuelle Arnaudiès, and Aleksandra Hallmann; senior artists Margaret De Jong† and Susan Osgood; artists Krisztián Vértes†, Keli Alberts, and Dominique Navarro; senior photographer Yarko Kobylecky; photographer/photo archivist Susan Lezon; assistant photographer/photo archivist Amanda Tetreault; digital photographer Owen Murray; Medinet Habu blockyard assistant Pia Kobylecky; digital archivist Alain Arnaudiès; Luxor Temple project manager/data engineer Gina Salama; senior conservators Hiroko Kariya and Mohamed Abo el-Makarem; master stonemason Frank Helmholz; Zamani Project team members Heinz Rüther, Christoph Held, and Werner Stempfhuber; head librarian Anait Helmholz; assistant librarians Martina Roshdy Maher and Mira Salama; Chicago House general manager Essam el-Sayed; senior administrator Samir Guindy; and administrator Samwell Maher. Our team of forty-one skilled workmen and twenty-eight seasonal workmen was supervised by foreman Rais Badawy Mohammed Abd el-Rahman. University of Chicago graduate student Catie Witt also returned to Chicago House to continue her dissertation research at Luxor Temple during our field season.

We are very grateful to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Supreme Council of Antiquities, particularly to Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Mr. Sherif Fathy Attiya; SCA Secretary General Dr. Mohamed Ismail Khaled; General Director of the Pharaonic Sector Dr. Ayman Ashmawy; General Director of Foreign Missions Dr. Hany Abdullah El-Tayeb; General Director of Antiquities in Luxor Dr. Abd el-Ghaffar Wagdy; Gurnah Inspectorate General Director Dr. Bahaa Gabr; Gurnah Inspectorate Assistant Director Dr. Mahmoud Moussa; Gurnah Inspectorate Director of Foreign Missions Mr. Ramadan Ahmed Ali; Gurnah South Area Director Mr. Ahmed Nazir; Medinet Habu Chief Inspectors Mrs. Fatma Ahmed Salem and Mr. Hassan Youssef Mohammed, as well as Luxor Temple Director Mr. Ahmed Araby; General Director of Karnak Dr. Abd el-Khalek; and Karnak Director of Foreign Missions Mrs. Ghada Ibrahim Fouad, along with all our other friends and colleagues in Egypt, for granting permission to work on the antiquities sites and for facilitating the work of our mission this year.

We also extend our sincere thanks to the many friends of ISAC and Chicago House whose generous contributions have made it possible to continue our research program during this centennial year. We are grateful to Dr. Marjorie M. Fisher; David and Carlotta Maher†; Andrea Dudek; Kelley and Susan Anderson; Ward and Diane Zumsteg; Nassef Sawiris; Kitty Picken; Ellen and Tom Granger; David and Allison Harley; Tom Van Eynde; Susan and Kevin Geschwender; Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb†; Marjorie B. Kiewit; Tom and Linda Heagy; Shafik Gabr, ARTOC Group, Cairo; Holly J. Mulvey; Judge and Mrs. Warren Siegel; Walter and Annette Vandaele; Barbara Breasted Whitesides and George Whitesides; Miriam Reitz Baer†; Beth Noujaim; James Lichtenstein; Priscilla (Peppy) Bath; Charlie Secchia; Emily Fine; Nan Ray; Anna White; Willard White; Janet and Karim Mostafa; Elisabeth R. French; Waheeb (Ricky) and

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Once again, we express our profound gratitude to USAID for supporting our documentation, conservation, restoration, and site management projects at Medinet Habu. For three decades, USAID-sponsored grant programs were vital to the success of our endeavors in preserving Egypt's heritage for future generations, and the impactful legacy of this cultural partnership between Egypt and the United States will long be remembered.