

EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY

J. BRETT McCLAIN

This year's field season of the Epigraphic Survey in Egypt took place from October 15, 2023, through April 15, 2024. Based at Chicago House in Luxor, our team continued an array of documentation, conservation, and restoration projects at the sites of Medinet Habu, Luxor Temple, and Khonsu Temple in Karnak, along with the excavation and documentation of Theban Tomb 107. Our work on each of these sites, carried out with permission from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), is summarized below.

MEDINET HABU

At Medinet Habu, our staff continued the epigraphic documentation of inscribed material in various parts of the temple complex. In the Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Amun, we focused on facsimile drawing and collation of scenes to be published in *Medinet Habu XI*, including inscriptions of the Twentieth, Twenty-First, and Twenty-Ninth Dynasties on the exterior of the monument (fig. 1), as well as drawings for *Medinet Habu XII*, the New Kingdom and Ptolemaic reliefs in the central bark shrine. Another area of focus was the north annex of the temple, constructed during the Ptolemaic period, where we carried out documentation and multispectral imaging of graffiti and paintings on the interior walls of this chamber (fig. 2). Concurrently, our staff photographers produced large-format photographs for each of these components of our publication series, with a focus this year on the four polyhedral pillars, consisting of reused Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth Dynasty column drums, added to the Thutmosid ambulatory during the Twenty-Ninth Dynasty (fig. 3). On the west side of the Medinet Habu enclosure, we also continued the photographic and epigraphic recording of blocks from the destroyed Western High Gate of Ramesses III.

During the winter and spring, our staff worked with the ISAC publications office to finalize and print our latest folio volume, *Medinet Habu X: The Eighteenth Dynasty Temple, Part II: The Façade, Pillars, and Architrave Inscriptions of the Thutmosid Peripteros* (fig. 4). A milestone in our long-term program to record and publish the Small Temple of Amun *Djeser-set*, this volume presents the reliefs, inscriptions, and graffiti from the facade and peripteral ambulatory of the Eighteenth Dynasty monument in photographs, facsimile drawings, and



Figure 1. Jennifer Kimpton (left) and Emmanuelle Arnaudès (right) collating an inscription of the high priest Painedjem on the north side of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple. Photo by Susan Lezon.



Figure 2. Painted inscription of Mut on the Achoris lintel in normal light (left) and with visible light-induced luminescence (right). Photos by Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede.



Figure 3. Amanda Tetreault photographing with a large-format camera in the ambulatory of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.

color illustrations, accompanied by complete translations and detailed epigraphic commentary. *Medinet Habu X* was released in both print and online formats in June 2024.

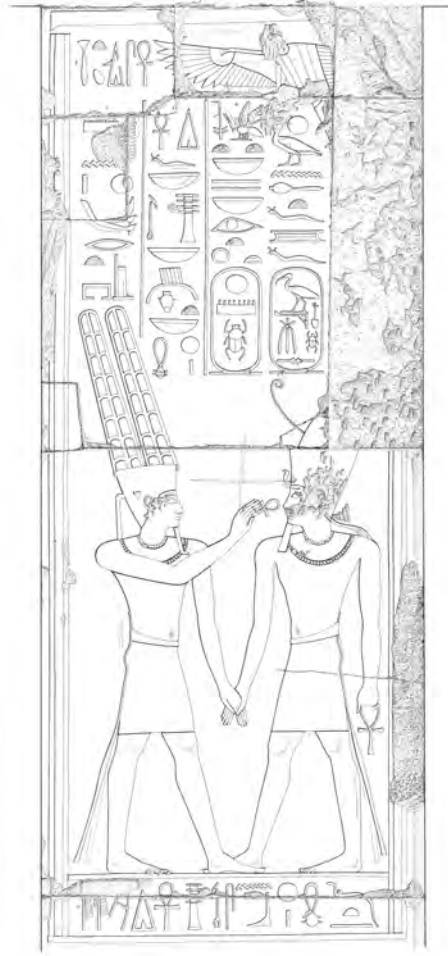
Also at Medinet Habu, the Survey's conservation and restoration teams continued our USAID-funded site management and development program within the temple precinct. Final adjustments were made to the restored Twentieth Dynasty stone pavement surrounding the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, along with the adjoining mudbrick structures, completing the visitor circuit around the central monument of the complex. To the north of the Eighteenth Dynasty temple, our stonemasonry team continued the restoration of the Taharqa Gate, also part of our USAID grant program (fig. 5). Reconstruction of this sandstone monument is nearly complete and will be finalized in 2025. Final cleaning and conservation measures were carried out at the Claudius Gate, located at the southeast exterior corner of the temple enclosure (fig. 6). Our conservation and restoration teams also initiated a new project this year: expansion of the open-air museum surrounding the Medinet Habu blockyard (figs. 7 and 8). An additional component of our USAID-supported site management plan, enhancement of this facility will permit the assembly of numerous fragments and joined fragment groups for public display, with visitor access pathways and explanatory signage, to be completed next year. In conjunction with each of these restoration projects, we continued our training program for early-career Egyptian conservation professionals, providing instruction and hands-on practical experience in a wide range of conservation methods and techniques (fig. 9). We will continue this annual training program, now in its twentieth year, as a core component of our field operations next season and in the years to come.

LUXOR TEMPLE

On the east side of the Nile, we continued our long-term conservation and epigraphic documentation programs at Luxor Temple (fig. 10). Tagging, registration, and preliminary photography of the decorated and



Photograph by Lanka and Lezon



Drawing by De Jong and Schenck

THUTMOSE III GIVEN LIFE BY AMUN-RE
FAÇADE, NORTH JAMB OF ENTRANCE

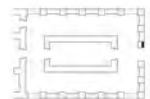


Figure 4. *Medinet Habu X*, plate 159, published in June 2024. Photo by Danny Lanka and Susan Lezon; drawing by Margaret De Jong and Will Schenck.



Figure 5. Stonemasonry team rebuilding the jambs of the Taharqa Gate. Photo by Frank Helmholz.



Figure 6. Conservation team finalizing restoration of the Claudius Gate. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.



Figure 7. Rais Badawy Mohammed Abd el-Rahman and temple workmen moving an inscribed block into position in the Medinet Habu open-air museum. Photo by Brett McClain.



Figure 8. Conservators Hala Ali Handaqa (left) and Magda Hassan Abu el-Haggag (right) testing samples in the Medinet Habu blockyard. Photo by Mohammed Abo el-Makarem.

architectural fragments in the temple blockyards continued this year, with nearly 23,000 blocks now entered into our ever-growing database (fig. 11). As this information is generated in the field, it is incorporated into our electronic archives at Chicago House, along with photographic and epigraphic documentation of individual blocks and joined groups. Our conservation team resumed condition monitoring and assessment of core elements of the corpus, including two large joined groups that were reassembled in situ on the walls of the Colonnade Hall and the Sun Court of Amenhotep III more than twenty years ago. During February and March, our team initiated a series of enhancements to the Luxor Temple blockyard open-air museum.

Figure 9. Conservation training program participants assessing and treating inscribed fragments at Medinet Habu. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.



Figure 10. ISAC visit to Luxor Temple, November 2023. Foreground, left to right: Essam el-Sayed, Sheheryar Hasnain, Bill Cosper, Brett McClain, Gina Salama, and ISAC director Tim Harrison. Photo by Yarko Kobylecky.

Inaugurated in 2010 with support from the World Monuments Fund, the installation is being refurbished and expanded, with new signage and additional fragment groups added to the display platforms, and will be finalized in fall 2024 (fig. 12). Inside Luxor Temple itself, we carried out targeted photographic and epigraphic recording of the Amenhotep III-era reliefs as part of our comprehensive publication plan for the Eighteenth Dynasty portions of the monument. The late Roman imperial frescos in the central chamber,



Figure 11. SCA inspector Esraa Ahmed el-Taher (left) and blockyard assistant Hala Mohammed Ahmed (right) registering fragments at Luxor Temple. Photo by Brett McClain.



Figure 12. Left to right: Rais Badawy Mohammed Abd el-Rahman, Mustafa Mohammed, and Mohammed Selim installing a new fragment group in the Luxor Temple open-air museum. Photo by Hiroko Kariya.

now fully recorded in photographs and facsimile drawings, will be the focus of our next publication, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple 3*.

KHONSU TEMPLE

At the temple of Khonsu in Karnak, we resumed our documentation of the inscribed blocks and fragments from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties that were reused within the structure of the Twentieth Dynasty monument. A collaboration with the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), our documentation program is part of a larger USAID-funded conservation and restoration initiative for the temple site. Existing cracks in the walls and ceilings of the temple, which allow access to the decorated surfaces of hundreds of blocks taken from older monuments by Ramesses III's stonemasons, will be filled in as part of the restoration plan, so it is essential that we copy the inscribed material before it is permanently hidden from view. During our field season, we recorded more than thirty of these fragments using the foil-impression method, which is the most effective approach to capturing the relief decoration on these hidden stones (fig. 13). We will continue our cooperative research effort with ARCE in 2024–25, and our publication of the rich and heterogeneous corpus of reused blocks from Khonsu Temple is planned for inclusion as a volume in our *Temple of Khonsu* series.

Figure 13. Dominique Navarro tracing reliefs from a reused block at Khonsu Temple. Photo by Nicholas Warner.





Figure 14. Brett McClain checking a facsimile drawing at TT 107. Photo by Susan Osgood.

THEBAN TOMB 107

During January and February, we resumed the archaeological clearance of TT 107, the tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty official Nefersekheru, in ongoing collaboration with our colleagues from Macquarie University, Sydney. The Australian team expanded the excavation of the tomb's interior, which remains mostly full of flood debris, and a large number of new ceramics and other finds were retrieved from the stratified layers inside the broad pillared hall. Newly recovered fragments of inscribed limestone from the tomb's facade were conserved, photographed, and drawn by Epigraphic Survey staff, and we also continued our epigraphic documentation of the in situ funerary scenes, with several drawings finalized this year (fig. 14). We plan to continue the excavation and recording of this beautifully decorated but badly damaged tomb next season, with full clearance and publication as our long-term objectives.

CHICAGO HOUSE

Our research facility and residence at Chicago House provide the base of operations for all our field projects during the annual six-month season. The day-to-day management of the facility is overseen by our capable administration and finance team, our experienced house manager and technicians, and our permanent cadre of skilled workmen. Our library and archives offer comprehensive research resources for the local archaeological community, including members of the MoTA and SCA, scholars and students from local universities, and researchers from the many foreign expeditions that work in the region of Luxor each fall and winter. Our library staff not only organize and maintain the collections but also provide assistance to patrons when needed, and our photographic archives staff oversee and curate our ever-growing collection of large-format film negatives, digital and 3D images, and other documents, providing essential research



Figure 15. Mahmoud Abdellahi (center) discussing historic photographs with Brett McClain (left) and Alain and Emmanuelle Arnaudès (right) at Chicago House. Photo by Susan Lezon.

assistance to many colleagues each year. In preparation for the Epigraphic Survey's centennial anniversary in November 2024, we contributed an extensive dossier of photographs and archival documents (fig. 15) for a history of our expedition by Emily Teeter, as well as material for a special exhibition in the ISAC Museum and other celebratory events taking place this fall.

STAFF AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Epigraphic Survey professional staff for 2023–24 consisted of J. Brett McClain as field director; epigraphers Jennifer L. Kimpton, Emmanuelle Arnaudès, and Aleksandra Hallmann; Egyptologist/house manager Christina Di Cerbo; senior artists Margaret De Jong and Susan Osgood; artists Krisztián Vértés, Keli Alberts, and Dominique Navarro; senior photographer Yarko Kobylecky; photographer/photo archivist Susan Lezon; assistant photographer/photo archivist Amanda Tetreault; digital archivist Alain Arnaudès; archaeologists Boyo Ockinga, Susanne Binder, and Kim McCorquodale (Macquarie University); project manager/data engineer Gina Salama; senior conservators Hiroko Kariya and Mohamed Abo el-Makarem; consultant conservators Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede; master stonemason Frank Helmholz; head librarian Anait Helmholz; assistant librarian Martina Roshdy Maher; finance manager Essam el-Sayed; administrator Samir Guindy; and assistant administrator Samwell Maher. Our team of forty full-time skilled workmen and several dozen seasonal workmen was supervised by our experienced foreman, Rais Badawy Mohammed Abd el-Rahman. We had the pleasure to welcome Catie Witt, a graduate student in the

University of Chicago's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, back to Chicago House as an intern for the second part of 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; former Ministers of Tourism and Antiquities Mr. Ahmed Issa and Dr. Khaled el-Enany; SCA Secretary General Dr. Mohamed Ismail; former SCA Secretary General Dr. Mostafa Waziri; General Director of the Pharaonic Sector Dr. Ayman Ashmawy; General Director of Foreign Missions Dr. Nashwa Gaber; General Director of Antiquities in Luxor Dr. Fathy Yaseen; Gurna Inspectorate General Director Bahaa ed-Din; Gurna Inspectorate Assistant Director Ezz ed-Din Kamal en-Nouby; Gurna Inspectorate Director of Foreign Missions Ramadan Ahmed Ali; Luxor Temple Director Ahmed Araby; Karnak Temple Director Dr. Mustafa el-Saghir; Karnak Temple Director of Foreign Missions Mme. Ghada Ibrahim Fouad; and all our friends and colleagues in Egypt for another fruitful collaboration this year.

We also extend our sincere thanks to the many friends of ISAC and Chicago House whose generous support has funded our preservation programs in Luxor. We are grateful to USAID mission director Sean Jones, former USAID mission director Leslie Reed, and USAID representatives Steven Sunderland Jr., Theresa Youssef, Xavier Preciado, and Lydia Abebe; 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; Jan 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 Christine Kamil; Caroline Lynch; Polly Kelly; Louise Grunwald; Lowri Lee Sprung; Andrew Nourse and Patty Hardy; Kate Pitcairn; Dr. Lorna Straus; Dr. Ben Harer; Dr. Roxie Walker; Tony and Lawrie Dean; Kelley and Susan Anderson; and Charles L. Michod Jr. We also thank Dr. Louise Bertini, Mary Sadek, and Nicholas Warner of ARCE for their helpful collaboration. Most of all, we are very grateful to ISAC director Timothy P. Harrison and to all our colleagues at ISAC and the University of Chicago for their continuing support of our research program in Egypt.

Our enduring thanks go to USAID Egypt for support of our documentation, conservation, restoration, and site management programs at Medinet Habu. For more than two decades, USAID-sponsored grant programs have been vital to the success of our fieldwork in the monumental sites of ancient Thebes.