

THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, ORIENTAL INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO (CHICAGO HOUSE)

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Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions, and since 1924 the primary goal of the Epigraphic Survey based at Chicago House has been the meticulous documentation of the texts and reliefs of temples and tombs in the area of Luxor, Egypt. During eighty years of work, the Survey has set the standard for such documentation and has produced numerous publications of ancient Egyptian monuments (see bibliography below). Its records represent the only reliable scientific documentation of a large number of endangered and deteriorating monuments of pharaonic Egypt. Recently Chicago House has incorporated physical conservation into its program in an effort to address rapidly changing climatic and demographic conditions in Egypt which have resulted in the accelerated decay of its ancient monuments. The preservation of Egypt's ancient cultural heritage through documentation, and now conservation, is the mandate of the Survey, and Chicago House is currently seeking additional funding which will allow it to continue and expand its conservation activities at this most critical time.

BACKGROUND

The steady degradation of ancient Egyptian monuments has been generally acknowledged ever since the creation of the Service des Antiquités in 1857, when Auguste Mariette was named as its first director in the first concerted effort to protect the antiquities of Egypt from the depredations of nature and man. The Epigraphic Survey of the Oriental Institute was founded by James Henry Breasted in 1924 out of the same concern for a vanishing past. At the turn of the century

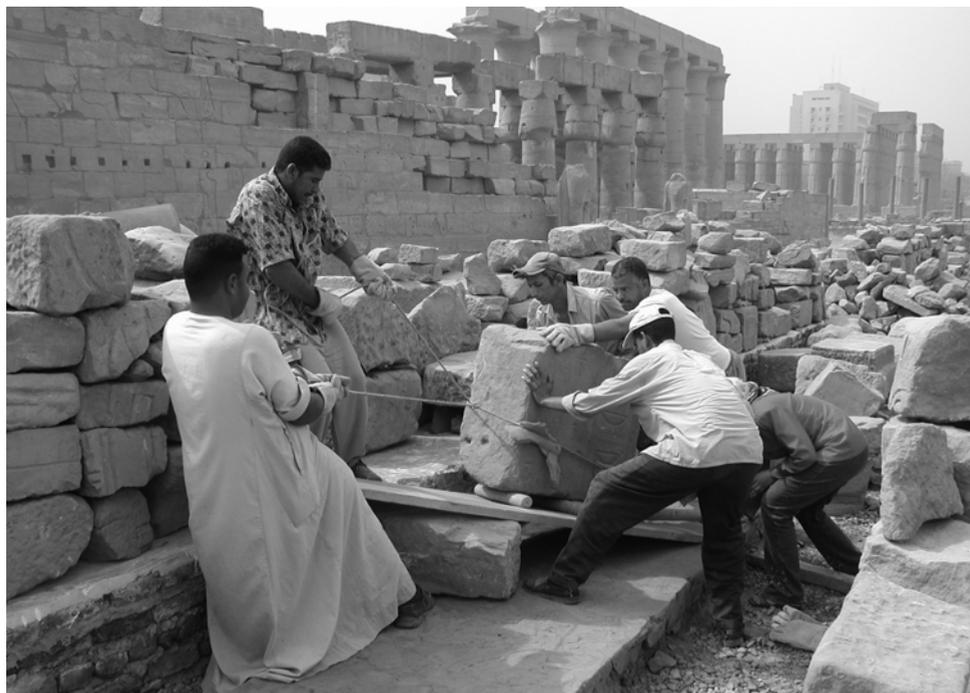
Breasted had visited Egypt to record the inscriptions visible on the standing monuments, and he was appalled by the «distressing amount of damage suffered by the monuments since the early recording expeditions had worked on them». He concluded that «it was a supreme obligation of the present generation of orientalists to make a comprehensive effort to save for posterity the enormous body . . . of fast-perishing written records . . . still surviving in Egypt». Recognizing the essentially destructive nature of archaeology in exposing monuments and artifacts to weathering by natural and manmade causes, Breasted committed the Epigraphic Survey to the rescue of the pharaonic civilization by non-destructive means: through scientific documentation so precise that it could stand alone as a virtual replacement in the absence of the original monument.

The location chosen for the field headquarters of the Epigraphic Survey, known as Chicago House, is the modern town of Luxor, site of ancient Thebes, which is 400 miles south of Cairo and site of the largest collection of standing ancient remains in the world. The home of the only American research expedition operating regularly in Egypt, Chicago House has long been an international research center, open to scholars of all nations. In the last eighty years the destructive forces recognized by Breasted have increased dramatically, and even today monuments are vanishing before they have been adequately studied. In recent years the changing climate, the building of the High Dam at Aswan, the rising ground water throughout the Nile valley, the ever-increasing demands of a burgeoning population, and even the expanding tourist industry have combined to place Egypt's pharaonic remains in jeopardy.

In response to the rapidly changing demographic and climatic conditions in Egypt, the Epigraphic Survey has expanded its program within the last decade to include increasingly vital conservation measures as well as documentation. This is an exciting new arm of our operation which we are committed to continue. In addition, the use of the Chicago House library (with its holding of 18,000 volumes) and photographic archive facilities at Chicago House in Luxor is offered to Egyptian and foreign colleagues as a gesture of American goodwill, to assist other missions in their field research, documentation, conservation, and logistics, and to promote the dissemination and preservation of information within the scholarly and general communities.

THE CHICAGO HOUSE DRAWING METHOD

Breasted understood that photographs alone cannot capture all the details of the often damaged wall scenes of individual monuments; the light source that illuminates also casts shadows which obscure details. To supplement and clarify the photographic record, precise line drawings are produced at Chicago House which combine the talents of the photographer, artist, and Egyptologist. First the wall surface is carefully photographed, with a large-format camera whose lens is positioned exactly parallel to the wall to eliminate distortion. From these negatives



photographic enlargements up to 20 by 24 inches are produced, printed on a special matt-surface paper with an emulsion coating that can take pencil and ink lines.

An artist takes this enlarged photographic print mounted on a drawing board to the wall itself, and pencils directly onto the photograph all of the carved detail that is visible on the wall surface, adding those details that are not visible or clear on the photograph. Back at the house the penciled lines are carefully inked with a series of weighted line conventions to show the three dimensions of the relief, and damage that interrupts the carved line is rendered with thin, broken lines that imitate the nature of the break. When the inking is complete, the entire photograph is immersed in an iodine bath that dissolves away the photographic image, leaving just the ink drawing. The drawing is then blueprinted, the blueprint is cut into sections and each section is mounted on a sheet of stiff white paper. These 'collation sheets' are taken back to the wall where the inked details on the blueprint are thoroughly examined by two Egyptologist epigraphers, one after the other. These epigraphers pencil corrections and refinements on the blueprint itself with explanations and instructions to the artist written in the margins. The collation sheets are then returned to the artist, who in turn takes them back to the wall and carefully checks the epigraphers' corrections, one by one. When everyone is in agreement, the corrections are added to the inked drawing back in the studio, the transferred corrections are checked for accuracy by the epigraphers, and the drawing receives a final review by the field director.

Consultations between artist, epigraphers, and field director, the consensus of all talents combined, ensures a scientific, 'facsimile' drawing that is faithful to what is preserved on the wall in every detail; this is the essence of what is generally referred to as the 'Chicago House Method.' The corrected ink drawings, photographs, text translations, commentary, and glossaries are then taken back to Chicago for processing and publication in large folio volumes for distribution worldwide. New digital scanning of the photographic archives negatives and increasing use of computers and digital photography in our recording program are exciting new adjuncts of our documentation program.

CHICAGO HOUSE PROJECTS

MEDINET HABU

Background

The first concession given to the Epigraphic Survey in 1924 when it began work in Egypt was the great town and temple complex of Medinet Habu, a site that includes not only the large mortuary temple of Ramesses III but also the ruined Coptic village of Djeme, the chapels of the divine votaresses of the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties, and the Eighteenth Dynasty small temple of Amun. After thirty years of work on the temple of Ramesses III and the monumental High Gate, the Survey published its initial findings in the series Medinet Habu I-VIII and in

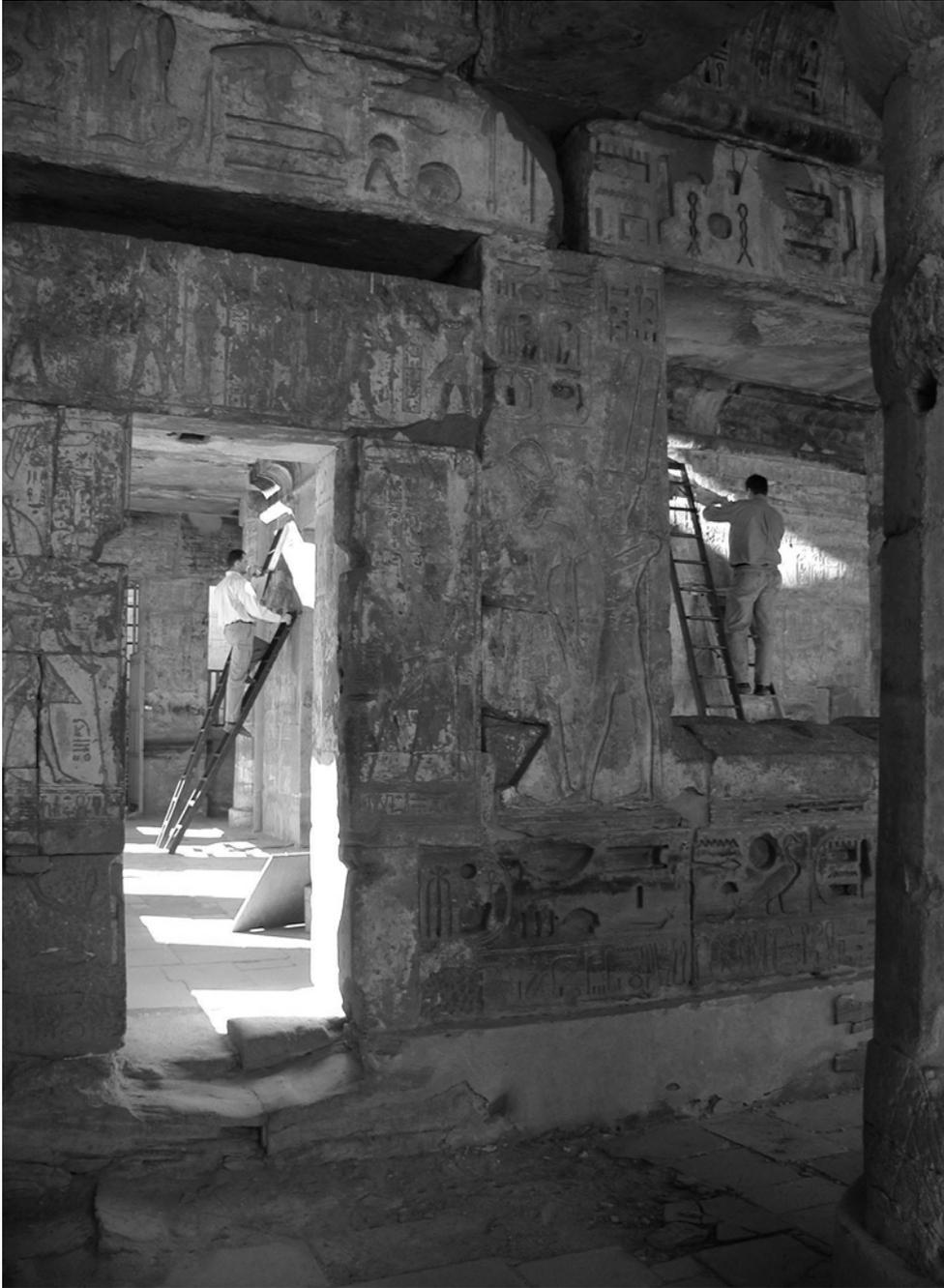
The Excavation of Medinet Habu I-V. At that time the work at Medinet Habu was suspended in order for the Survey to record other temples of Ramesses III in the area of Karnak, on the east bank of the Nile, to provide comparative material for his funerary temple. During that time two complete temples from the time of Ramesses III were documented at that site, plus half of another (Khonsu Temple). Work was also accomplished at the Bubastite Portal on the southern side of the first court, the north side of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, and at Luxor Temple (see below).

The current documentation project of the ES is the Eighteenth Dynasty small Amun temple at Medinet Habu built by Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III (1500 B. C.) in honor of Amun-Re, the chief god of ancient Thebes. Considered to be the burial place of this creator god (the flip side of Luxor Temple, where Amun-Re was born) and later, seven other primeval gods of Egypt, this small temple served as one of the major cult centers of the Theban area for over two thousand years, and experienced five surviving building phases. The Chicago House documentation and conservation teams are presently working in all parts of this temple complex. Publication objectives include documenting each phase, from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmosis III through the Roman Period (ca. 200 AD). The production of the first volume of the small Amun temple series will begin this summer (2004)

Conservation

Since 1996 vital documentation, conservation, and restoration work has been generously funded by a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Egyptian Antiquities Project (EAP) and the American Research Center (ARCE). The current funding has allowed us to do wonderful things to ensure the preservation of this unique monument for future generations: seal the roof against rainwater; clean, desalinate, and document the painted reliefs in the sanctuary below; restore the ancient sandstone flooring in the first two rooms; replace deteriorating wall blocks in the sanctuary; and reassemble in the first chamber a colossal, three-meter high granodiorite statue of king Thutmosis III seated beside the god Amun found in fragments in the floor debris, the original centerpiece of the room. When we are finished next year there will be a new skylight, interior lighting, and a security-glass door, which will allow the cleaning, and restoration work to be appreciated by all who pass by. The fruits of this work will be enjoyed by many generations to come.

But there is much more to do at that temple site and within the Medinet Habu complex, for which Chicago House is currently seeking funding. Future conservation objectives include cleaning the star-painted ceilings in the sanctuary rooms; continuing the cleaning of the painted reliefs in the front of the temple; doing stabilization work where necessary on the temple structure, particularly its base; raising fragmentary wall material up off the ground in the adjacent blockyard onto protected storage platforms; and doing any physical consolidation work necessary on



that fragmentary material. Our long-term objectives at Medinet Habu include finishing the documentation-for-publication of the later additions to the small Amun temple and all the other monuments in the precinct, which include decorated wells, gates, and elaborate funerary chapels of the divine votaries of the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties.

LUXOR TEMPLE

Background

Luxor Temple was believed to be the birthplace of Amun-Re, and as such, was one of the most significant, and largest, religious centers in all of Egypt. The Survey recently completed the publication Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple Volumes I - II - of all the standing wall remains in the Great Colonnade Hall at Luxor Temple, a colossal structure almost two hundred feet long and preserving two rows of fourteen columns almost eighty feet high. The decoration of this hall was largely accomplished by Tutankhamun (c. 1360 B.C.), but later pharaohs added their own inscriptions to the walls, occasionally appropriating those of their predecessors. The sequence of these changes and the history of the temple can be reconstructed only through careful recording techniques such as those used by the Chicago House team of artists and Egyptologist epigraphers. The documentation and publication objectives for Luxor Temple include the standing walls of the magnificent papyrus-columned sun court and extraordinarily well-preserved back sanctuaries of the temple, never before published, as well as fragmentary material from the largely missing upper walls.

Conservation

Luxor Temple is one of the largest, most visible, and most visited antiquities sites in Egypt, and it has very serious conservation needs, all ground water related. Four fundamental areas need to be addressed:

- 1) The side walls of most of Luxor Temple were torn down after the time of the Pharaohs and recycled for building material. Fragments of decorated blocks have come to light in excavations around Luxor Temple, and thousands now lie stacked around the temple precinct. For years the Epigraphic Survey has been engaged in photographing these fragments, drawing them, reassembling on paper (like huge jigsaw puzzles) the vanished decoration of the upper registers, and inserting them into the publication of the standing wall remains. There have been surprises: amongst the fragments from Luxor Temple are many from other temple sites. Some fragments have proven to come from monuments whose existence was unknown, such as a group showing the young king Tutankhamun in his chariot charging against a host of Asiatic foes, which may have come from his dismantled funerary temple.

With the support of USAID and EAP/ARCE since 1995 Chicago House began vital protective and conservation measures for the stone wall fragments excavated within the precinct which have been negatively impacted by ground water salts. While we have - with EAP and USAID's invaluable assistance - documented, monitored, and consolidated a core group of roughly 2000 wall fragments, there are well over 500,000 more in the precinct which require the same attention, and perhaps as much as 5% of that number require consolidation, an enormous amount. World Monuments Fund support (a Robert Wilson Challenge grant) has allowed us to continue to move the bulk of the block fragments up off the ground onto protected storage platforms this and last season, a tremendous first step, but an expanded consolidation program needs to be implemented as well. Our ultimate goal is to restore as many joined wall-fragment groups whenever possible back on the walls they CAME from. In situ reassembly restores context and informational value, and is also the best way to preserve the material. The rest will be reassembled on display platforms in a designated 'open-air museum' east of the temple, accompanied by educational signage. At the same time we will document each fragment (photographically and digitally) and will enter each on a database where each fragment is numbered, tracked, and identified as to period and subject matter. While our major efforts have been spent on protective storage lately, preliminary analysis of several reconstructable fragment groups from Luxor and Karnak temples indicates tremendous potential for the restoration of entire wall and gateway sections, some of them with exquisite carved scenes, with much more to come.

- 2) The temple walls themselves, particularly in the lower-lying parts of the temple, also require attention. Water-lowering measures will slow down the decay due to migrating salts, but many sections of the lower wall courses already require an intensive desalination and consolidation program.
- 3) And then there is the structural stability of the temple itself. During the last few years, supported by WMF and Chicago House, structural engineer Connor Power has monitored the condition of the Luxor Temple structure, and reports that the pylons are displaying new signs of structural instability. It is hoped that ground water lowering measures will result in the stabilization of the structure, but he tells us that it must be closely monitored in the meantime, and that continued signs of instability will have to be addressed.
- 4) The largest issue is the physical lowering of the ground water, something that is beyond the scope of Chicago House. But I am pleased to report that, with our encouragement, the Swedish government, USAID, and Egypt will be collaborating on an engineering project this year (2004) which will divert groundwater away from Luxor and Karnak temples, thus slowing down the decay and ensuring the longevity of those monuments.

So there is hope! But we can only succeed in the long-term preservation of Egypt's pharaonic cultural heritage by working together. Thank you.

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