



# CHICAGO HOUSE BULLETIN

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## CONSERVATION PROJECTS AT CHICAGO HOUSE

By Peter F. Dorman, Field Director

As many recent visitors to Egypt can attest, the physical condition of the Egyptian monuments continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. This is increasingly obvious to those of us involved in recording the Theban temples and tombs: not only can we see incremental destruction on an annual basis, but the photographs left by earlier scholars can show enormous discrepancies between the past and present condition of the monuments. In fact, this inevitable decay validates the essential long-term goal of Chicago House: to capture definitive copies of the ancient texts and reliefs before the surfaces of the walls erode away.

Most visitors to Egypt assume that the vast pyramids and temples of pharaonic times, having already withstood the ravages of 3,000 to 5,000 years, are virtually indestructible, and that they will last for additional thousands of years. Nothing is further from the truth. Physical preservation can never be assured, and conservation efforts are by their nature temporary measures. "Modern" buildings—mosques, cathedrals, palaces, and countless other architectural treasures—may be authentically renovated by the piecemeal replacement of stone. But an ancient Egyptian monument, whose outer skin is covered with carved relief and hieroglyphic inscriptions, is uniquely vulnerable. Once its fabric has worn away, the historical and religious record is gone as well. Published documentation is the only chance of preserving monumental inscriptions for the future.

Having said all this, however, I now wish to recant a bit and emphasize the importance of conservation and its vital contribution to the preservation of physical artifacts. The careful examination and recording of monuments is, after all, only one aspect of conservation—the essential first phase—but it is best done in conjunction with efforts to protect ancient remains in situ. The Survey has been very fortunate in having had two major conservation proposals approved by the Egyptian Antiquities Projects of the American Research Center. Both are five-year pro-

(continued on page 2)

## A FAREWELL LETTER TO THE FRIENDS OF CHICAGO HOUSE

By Peter F. Dorman, Field Director

Dear Friends,

With this issue of the *Chicago House Bulletin*, now entering its eighth year, I wish to add a note of grateful thanks to the hundreds of friends who have passed through our front gates and into our lives, as supporters of the Epigraphic Survey. Collectively you are a very mixed bag of private individuals, corporations, foundations, government representatives, professional colleagues, and volunteers; you come from most states in the Union and from many countries around the world. And you have all magnanimously put up with periodic letters from me, asking for continued support for the Epigraphic Survey.

Your generosity and your interest in our field work have made a great difference to Chicago House, and it is with a sense of great indebtedness to all of you that I will be stepping down as Field Director of the Epigraphic Survey at the end of February next year, in order to return to the University of Chicago and take up full-time teaching duties at the Oriental Institute. My replacement is Dr. Ray Johnson, an 18-year veteran of Chicago House who has served as senior artist during my entire tenure in Luxor and more recently as Assistant Director; his thorough knowledge of the Survey, its working methods, its myriad daily rituals—and its friends—greatly enhances the outlook for our epigraphic commitments at Medinet Habu and Luxor. Many of you know him, either having met him personally at a Chicago House tea or a FOCH tour, or through the pages of this *Bulletin*, where he has expounded his interests in late 18th-Dynasty sculpture and relief. I am confident that Ray will experience the same enormous interest and generosity that, during the last several years, you have demonstrated toward the work of Chicago House.

The last eight years have been momentous for all of us at the Survey. In addition to the continuing field work at Luxor Temple, our focus of interest now includes the 18th Dynasty temple at Medinet Habu, which constantly surprises us with new avenues of

(continued on page 4)

grams that are aimed at very different conditions, at Luxor Temple and Medinet Habu.

### THE CONSOLIDATION OF SANDSTONE FRAGMENTS AT LUXOR TEMPLE

One of the scattered treasures of Luxor Temple are the thousands of decorated relief sandstone blocks that are gathered in piles around it. These are the remnants of the vanished upper registers of the temple walls, dismantled in Coptic and medieval times, when the temple had fallen into disuse and was quarried as a convenient source for building stone. These random blocks were long neglected; in fact, early restorers of Luxor Temple routinely incorporated the fragments into their own reconstruction efforts. Even today, the names of Akhenaton and Nefertiti can be read on the podium of Amenhotep III's sun court, peeking through modern cement and turned every which way.

But these smashed blocks contain irreplaceable clues to the decoration of the various parts of Luxor Temple from which they were quarried, whether it be the first court of Ramesses II, the Colonnade Hall, the sun court, or the rear sanctuaries. The challenge is to be able to pinpoint the original context of the fragments—a task aided by relief style, the scale of the carving, the subject matter, and even the original size and disposition of the blocks and architectural courses.

At the same time, many of the sandstone blocks are in desperate condition. Buried for centuries in town debris and affected by ground water and sewage, they are now stored in the open air, subject to the desiccating effects of the desert environment as well as occasional rainstorms, a disastrous combination of extremes. Some are crumbling back into loose piles of sand, the impact of raindrops clearly visible on their surface. Others are degrading at a slower pace, but the decay is progressive and alarmingly visible year to year.

In 1995 Chicago House received funding from the Egyptian Antiquities Project (EAP) for the consolidation of these fragments, which would not only halt the insidious damage to the blocks but that could serve as a model for similar problems at all pharaonic sites. In December 1995 we were pleased to welcome John Stewart to Luxor, a British conservator with experience at the British Museum and the National Trust, who had undertaken consolidation on these blocks in the mid-1980s. John made a detailed condition report of how the fragments (both treated and untreated) had fared during the last decade—some very well, others quite poorly—and mapped out a long-term program for conservation.

This season we commenced four full years of consolidation at Luxor under the guidance of John, but much of the actual work will be completed by a new

member of our team, conservator Hiroko Kariya, who has recently worked at The Brooklyn Museum and the Freer Gallery in Washington. The procedures involve successive applications of Wacker OH (a powerful and poisonous consolidant) onto the surfaces of unstable fragments; desalinization can be achieved through the immersion of fragments in distilled water, or by the application of exterior poultices. A workshop will be erected at Luxor to facilitate these procedures, and attention will also be given to the construction of a shelter over part or all of our blockyard, to minimize the damaging effects of sporadic cloudbursts. Although the mass of endangered fragments is great, we trust that the lifetime of many blocks can be significantly extended.

### THE 18TH DYNASTY TEMPLE OF AMUN AT MEDINET HABU

Presently the venue for our documentary efforts, the 18th Dynasty temple suffers a number of conservation problems that must be treated as a complement to our epigraphic task. In the fall of 1994, heavy rains in Luxor poured through the roof blocks of the painted sanctuaries, smearing the reliefs with fine, water-washed silt; not only is cleaning a priority, but the roof itself must be surveyed and non-intrusive methods found to waterproof it. In addition, the side walls of one area of the temple (the Ptolemaic court) subsided at some point in the past, and a structural engineer was needed on site to determine the stability of the temple. The foundations of these walls had been constructed of reused blocks from the Kushite (Dynasty 25) period—critical evidence for one the vanished stages of temple expansion, and we wanted to extract those stones for proper documentation. A great granite false-door stela of Tuthmosis III, presently re-erected in the Roman court, needs protection against ground water infiltration with a new insulated mount, as well as poultices to leech away surface salts. Due to the existing slopes of the area, ground water still tends to drain toward the Roman court—which turned into an enormous lake during the latest heavy rains—and regrading the site would effectively halt this problem. The rear of the Ptolemaic pylon has long been smeared with droppings left by pigeons nesting along the block courses, and these need to be cleaned of the acidic residue; birds can be discouraged from returning by installing Nixalite wire with stainless screws along the edges of prominent blocks. Finally, to prepare the temple for tourists, new flooring must be laid in the interior chapels of the temple and lights installed at the corners of the floor in channels already prepared for them. New signs will be posted to provide current information to visitors on the history, architectural development, and significance of the temple. A scheme to

delineate the vanished features of the temple precinct will be devised, perhaps using low courses of brick or crushed rock or laid stone to show where the mud brick enclosure walls once stood.

Once again, the EAP offered us the means by which to carry out an ambitious five-year program to incorporate all of these conservation efforts. In addition, funds have been granted to assist us in the task of epigraphy itself: full support for an artist and an epigrapher, which is the very heart of our mission.

This fall we were able to initiate the first season of the conservation program, by bringing to Luxor a Canadian stone-cutter, Dany Roy, to help with what we imagined to be the subsiding foundations at Medinet Habu and the removal of the Kushite reliefs blocks. Also present on a brief consultation visit was Dr. Conor Power, an engineer whose advice radically altered our approach to this thorny problem. Although we had envisioned removing most or all of the Kushite foundation blocks to bolster the walls and to enhance our own research goals, Conor pointed out that the walls themselves were not in danger of further subsidence; he suggested instead that the simplest solution to the further deterioration of the foundation courses would be to rebury them with no further disturbance. The major problem with extracting a large number of blocks is that we would permanently expose them to weathering in the open air: essentially the same problems we already know so well with the Luxor Temple fragments. We would be creating a permanent, long-term commitment to the consolidation and monitoring of those blocks, one that would surely continue long after we have finished our work at Medinet Habu.

Instead, we opted for Conor's solution. Dany first went to work exposing as many blocks as possible, for photography and eventual drawing by our artists, after which the trenches will be filled in to protect the subterranean stones. Our experience with Luxor fragments is that scenes can be largely reconstructed on the basis of only a few clues, so that it is not necessary to find all missing blocks from one scene to understand its content. For example, the foundations already contain five blocks from a single relief showing the king running with a bird in his hand—the relatively rare *Vogellauf* ritual—that is the only such scene known from this period.

Another surprise occurred at the end of October: One of Dany's workmen came running up to me one day, announcing that they had found something in the trench they were clearing, an area (we presumed) that had been excavated in the 1920s by the Oriental Institute's own Uvo Hölscher. That presumption was wrong—for under the careful hands of our diggers emerged a beautiful basalt statuette of a Ptolemaic

priest wearing a long, full gown reaching to the ankles. Although the head and feet are lost, the statue still bears a long inscription, announcing the owner's name as Tjanefer. He held priestly offices at several temples on the west bank: the cult of Amun at the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu itself; the cult of Amun at the Ramesseum; the temple of Hathor-Maat at Deir el Medina; and the cult of Amenhotep, son of Hapu, a deified official of the 18th Dynasty revered, at this late date, at Deir el Bahri. We were delighted to find a local boy in our own digs.

Please stay tuned: we look forward to the surprises new seasons will surely bring.

### THE THREE GODDESSES: LUXOR AND KARNAK TEMPLES

Ray Johnson's work on the rediscovery of the marvelous face and body fragments of three 18th-Dynasty statues of the goddess Mut has been described in an earlier issue of this *Bulletin* (Vol. VI, no. 1, December 15, 1995). As exciting as such finds are, even more unusual is the opportunity to reunite such fragments with statues that are still standing in situ, in the places they have stood since antiquity. Through the kind cooperation of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Dr. Mohammed Saleh of the Cairo Museum, and Dr. Mohammed Saghir, Supervisor of Antiquities for Upper Egypt, we have a priceless chance to restore three dyad statues of Mut at Luxor and Karnak. I am especially grateful to Jack Josephson, who has generously contributed toward the funding of this restoration project.

Dr. Ellen Pearlstein, conservator at The Brooklyn Museum, will be joining us in January to reattach the largest of the heads: the colossal face of Mut on the western dyad on the Colonnade Hall in Luxor Temple. This single addition will result in a stunning improvement to the beauty of the statue. If Ellen has time, she will then proceed to a torso of Mut that will be re-joined to a second statue at Khonsu Temple at Karnak. Ellen's third task (rather more complicated) involves the eastern dyad at Luxor—fragments of a head and torso that are themselves late repairs (perhaps Ptolemaic) to a much earlier sculpture. The fragments are of a much softer limestone than the original statue, made of indurated limestone, and the jury is still out whether they can be reliably left out in the open air, or if more durable casts must be made for this purpose. These questions will be resolved in time, and some may have to be deferred for a future field season.

Nonetheless, it is a pleasure to anticipate—quite literally—that the face of Luxor Temple will shortly be changing for tourists passing through the Colonnade Hall.

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*Farewell Letter ... (continued from page 1)*

research; our mammoth publication of the Festival of Opet will soon be followed by the decoration of the facade, portals, and columns of the great Colonnade Hall; our priceless photographic archives have been conserved and archivally housed; and Chicago House itself has been expanded and thoroughly renovated.

It may seem to outside visitors that life in Luxor flows at a more sedate and relaxed pace than the frenzied schedules we normally keep in the western world, but the events that do happen to us at Chicago House are far more unpredictable, delightful, and maddening—often all at the same time—than those back home. A single month with the Epigraphic Survey is frequently packed with more memorable occasions than a year elsewhere, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have enjoyed so many of them with you—they in fact add up to a short lifetime!

I especially wish to thank my extraordinary staff for sharing (for better or worse) both my professional work and my private life at Chicago House. They are dedicated individuals with unique talents, who have made lasting scholarly contributions to the present and future publications of the Survey, as well as to the daily routine we all share in common. Their knowledge has enriched my life and their kindness and humor have sustained me through many seasons. Most of all I thank my wife, Kathy, and my daughters, Margaret and Emily, for their understanding, their profound patience, and for other gifts too numerous to mention.

With my appreciation to all,

Peter F. Dorman  
Field Director

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**ADDRESSES OF THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY:**
**October through March:**

Chicago House  
Luxor  
Arab Republic of EGYPT  
tel. (011) (20) (95) 372525; FAX 381620

**April through September:**

The Oriental Institute  
1155 E. 58th Street  
Chicago, IL 60637  
tel. (773) 702-9524; FAX (773) 702-9853

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**THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY  
THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
1155 EAST 58TH STREET  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637**

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