



THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY FUND NEWSLETTER

Issue 11

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This special anniversary edition of the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund's Newsletter commemorates 125 years since the Hearst Excavations at Deir el-Ballas in 1900-1901, and 45 years since I began renewed fieldwork at the site in the winter of 1980. I am happy to announce that the fieldwork will henceforward be directed by Dr. Nicholas R. Brown. He received his MA in Egyptology from the American University in Cairo in 2016, and his PhD from UCLA in 2024. His dissertation research focused on royal funerary rituals and burial rites in the Valley of the Kings. His research also focuses on settlement archaeology and the use and perception of ancient Egypt within modern contexts. Nicholas first started excavating in Egypt in 2011, and his excavation experience includes working at Elephantine Island and Wadi el-Hudi in Aswan, the Valley of the Kings, Tell el-Amarna, Tombos (Sudan), as well as at Deir el-Ballas since 2019.

Peter Lacovara



Nicholas Brown at Deir el-Ballas.

History of the Deir el-Ballas Excavations



Building Reisner's dig house at Deir el-Ballas, January 1900. Photo: MMA.

After months of archival research at the MFA, Boston, and preparations for several publication projects that are underway, Nicholas Brown summarizes the early years of exploration at Deir el-Ballas 125 years later, as follows:

In December 1899, the Phoebe A. Hearst Expedition was granted an excavation concession by the *Service des Antiquités* that included the areas surrounding Quft, Shurafa, and Deir el-Ballas. Due to the rate at which the sites of Quft and Shurafa were being plundered and falling victim to the *sebakhin* (locals who would mine the archaeological remains for ancient mud brick to use as fertilizer), the Antiquities Service stipulated that the excavation works at those two sites should be prioritized by the Hearst Expedition before they began work at Deir el-Ballas.

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George Reisner's original team consisted of two archaeologists: first was Fredrick W. Green, who had previous excavation experience in Egypt with James E. Quibell at Hierakonpolis and was affiliated with Cambridge University. Second, was Albert M. Lythgoe, Reisner's former student at Harvard. Lythgoe left his position as professor at Harvard in 1899 for this fieldwork opportunity in Egypt. The 1899-1900 season in Egypt would be Lythgoe's first time excavating there, and Reisner wrote to Phoebe Hearst that, "Our man Lythgoe, who is a newcomer in Egypt, has made a good impression on everybody." Lythgoe would become known for his positions as the head curator of Egyptian antiquities at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (amongst many other accomplishments in the field).

Hearst Expedition Season 1

The first excavation season for the Hearst Expedition ran from December 1899 to August 1900, where the team worked in the desert area around Quft, excavating the cemeteries at Shurafa, Coptos, and Ballas, and at Deir el-Ballas. Because of the immediate work that needed to be carried out at Quft and Shurafa, Reisner's team did not begin work at Deir el-Ballas until a few months after the start of the excavation season. In the interim, on December 20th 1899, Reisner visited Deir el-Ballas and placed three watchmen over the site. A few weeks later, on January 2nd 1900, Reisner visited Deir el-Ballas again, this time with Green and Lythgoe, where he moved the three guards to the South Cemetery (Cemetery 1-200) to keep watch there. For two days Green, assisted by Lythgoe, began work on the topographical map of the area for their future excavation work.



A team of workmen at excavating cemetery 1-200, 1900. Photo: MFA Boston.

This first season of work at Deir el-Ballas saw excavations taking place with Reisner at the Workmen's Village and Cemetery 1-200, Green at the North Palace and North Palace Suburb, and Lythgoe at the North Hill suburb and Cemetery 1200-1300. In April 1900, excavation work started at the "South Palace" structure, which became one of the focal points of excavation and investigation for the rest of the Expedition's time at the site.

Hearst Expedition Season 2

After the promising finds and results of the first excavation season, Reisner ran a second season of work at Deir el-Ballas from November 1900 to August 1901, with mostly Lythgoe left to supervise work on site while Reisner was intermittently running projects in other parts of Egypt, such as at El-Ahaiwah and Naga el-Deir.

In February 1901, Reisner continued with his second season of excavation work at Al-Ahaiwah and left Lythgoe to finish up the excavation work at Deir el-Ballas. Lythgoe was at Deir el-Ballas from February to August 1901, and his work not only included wrapping up the excavations, but also packing the artifacts for shipment to Berkeley, California, and final photography of the excavated areas. In November and December of 1901, Lythgoe was sent one last time to the site to take further photographs of the excavated monuments, including the "South Palace," and to close up the dig house.

Although the Hearst Expedition's work at Deir el-Ballas had ended, Reisner's enthusiasm for the site is apparent in the correspondence he wrote to the excavation's patroness, Phoebe A. Hearst. In several letters he assured her that the excavations would be published; he even started a hand-written draft of an article on the Hearst Expedition's formation and their early years of excavation work. However, this planned publication never came to fruition, as Reisner became preoccupied with other excavation projects and publications, including the excavations at the Giza necropolis.

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Pictures from Reisner's excavations

Frederick Green and team taking photographs at the dig house courtyard, Deir el-Ballas.

Photo: MMA Dept. of Egyptian Art Archives.



A team of workmen excavating at the "South Palace", Deir el-Ballas in 1900.

Photo: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



The "South Palace" after the Hearst Expedition excavations in 1901.

Photo: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



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Recent Work at Deir el-Ballas

It was only with Peter Lacovara's return to the site in 1980 that renewed fieldwork and publication of the archive began. He conducted four seasons of survey and excavation in 1980, 1983, 1985 and 1986.

During the course of the 1980s fieldwork detailed maps were made of the overall site, as well as plans of the North Palace, the "South Palace," and several of the houses excavated by Reisner. Looking over the site, the team realized that there were many areas which Reisner had only partially excavated or not cleared at all. In addition to the large number of houses and other domestic structures, a group of memorial chapels were discovered, which are similar to those at Tell el-Amarna. Additionally, what could have been an administrative quarter was identified by the expedition. The work was funded through the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the American Research Center in Cairo, which also published a preliminary report on those excavations.

In more recent years, the growth of the modern village, the construction of a number of roads along the desert edge and looting that had occurred during the revolution in 2011 threatened to destroy a significant part of Deir el-Ballas. As a result, the Antiquities Inspectorate Office of the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities at Qena requested in 2016 that Peter Lacovara and a team of specialists return to the site to protect and restore it.

In 2017 a new campaign of fieldwork was begun under the auspices of The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund and the American University in Cairo; this has now run for eight seasons. We have already been able to document and largely repair the damage done to the "South Palace" by looters. We also began work to restore the North Palace and have re-excavated and started restoration on a number of domestic structures located near the North Palace. In addition, we are working with the Inspectorate to devise means to safeguard the site, as well as to provide infrastructure and interpretive signs for visitors, both Egyptians and foreign tourists.

Peter Lacovara surveying & mapping, 1985.



The Valley of the Kings Fieldwork



In May 2025, the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund partnered for the first time with the "Tomb of Thutmose IV (KV43) Research Project" in Luxor, which is led by Dr. Nicholas Brown. The project was founded in 2022 in order to reexamine this important monument in the Valley of the Kings. The main research goal of the project is to explore the "untold history" of Thutmose IV's Tomb, via a study of the Deir el-Medina crew's work in the tomb. Additionally, the team is re-examining this previously excavated tomb in order to update the study of this monument, its associated artifacts, and to put everything together in its archaeological context. Finally, the project has the long-term goal of updating the measures to protect the tomb and its decoration, as well as undertaking much needed conservation work throughout the monument. Due to Egyptology's limited understanding of 18th Dynasty royal burial practice, Thutmose IV's tomb with its decoration, workmen's graffiti, and remaining artifacts gives us a unique opportunity to re-evaluate what was previously excavated and overlooked by early archaeologists. **The team is composed of specialists** in a variety of subjects, such as animal bones, wood analysis, pottery, and digital recording; the team is holistically studying the tomb as well as the remaining artifacts stored within it. Our end goal is to publish the tomb as well as provide a study and catalogue of the unpublished artifacts.

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Top: the KV43 Research Project team, May 2025.

Right: Salima Ikram working in KV43 to study the victual mummies (animal food offerings).



Deir el-Ballas Public Engagement Initiative

During our last season of excavation work at Deir el-Ballas (2025), the Expedition took time to engage with the local population of El-Deir el-Gharbi, also to provide outreach activities for the local children. Sara Ahmed Aziz shares the team's work and her experience of participating in these events:

In January 2025, during our excavation season at Deir el-Ballas, our community outreach efforts led to surprising and meaningful conversations with the people of El-Deir el-Gharbi, the nearby village to the site. As we spoke with locals about the history of Deir el-Ballas and explained the work our team carries out, they responded with concerns of their own. Some asked whether we planned to bulldoze the mudbrick ovens they had built on archaeological land. While we emphasized the importance of preserving Deir el-Ballas as a part of Egypt's cultural heritage and the need to protect it from looting, they questioned how heritage could be prioritized when they were unsure how to manage the garbage dumped near their homes.



Sara Ahmed Aziz discusses our work with a group in the village.

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Our outreach activities were designed to promote the protection of cultural sites and to create a sense of shared responsibility, ownership, and stewardship. This was especially relevant in light of the occasional looting that has occurred at the site. We distributed Arabic-language pamphlets about Deir el-Ballas, which were very popular. During our focus groups, the locals listened closely as we spoke about the site's excavation history and key discoveries. At the same time, we learned that effective engagement meant listening to their concerns just as much as presenting our own information.

Our approach to engagement had two components: we held focus groups (separately for men and women), and we hosted a community day for children. For the children's outreach, we visited a local school where we gave presentations on our excavation work at Deir el-Ballas and taught the children how to write their names in hieroglyphs. I led the women's outreach, held at a nearby community center, where I showed them images of the site, past and present, and explained the work our team does each year. The women, ranging in age, responded well and expressed interest in seeing similar outreach programs introduced in village schools. They felt this would help both the next generation and local teachers better understand the significance of the site.

While our outreach was met with enthusiasm, we came to understand that our goals may not always align with the immediate needs of the community. This is a reality in public engagement work, where competing priorities and complex dynamics often emerge. We learned that subsistence looting had claimed the lives of several locals, some of whom were buried alive while searching for antiquities. In addition, the lack of sanitation infrastructure and the unclear boundaries of the archaeological area were sources of frustration.

Despite these challenges, we were deeply encouraged by the community's interest in our work. The men's focus group, led by Hassan Elzawy, showed a strong desire to learn more about the site, while the women expressed their willingness to help us expand our outreach. Both the men and the women shared our hope of protecting the archaeological remains near their homes, and their support reminded us why this work is so important.



Schoolchildren display their colouring activities.



Meeting with men from El-Deir el-Gharbi on site.

In Memoriam: Pieter Johannes Collet (October 1963 to June 2025)

It is with great sadness we must note the passing of our irreplaceable friend and colleague Pieter (Piet) Collet in Cairo this past June. He was an essential part of the Fund's work both at Malqata and then Deir el-Ballas. He was much more than a surveyor and draftsman, his archeological knowledge was boundless, and he was extraordinarily generous in sharing it. Piet was both diligent and talented, which made him invaluable to many expeditions; they will miss him deeply, as we all will.



Exhibition and Publication Projects



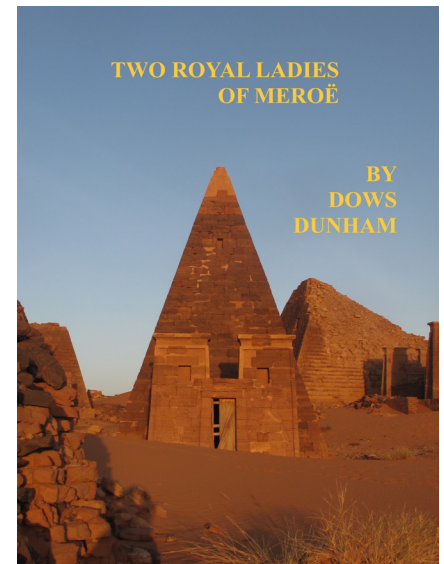
**From the Hudson to the Nile:
Dows Dunham and the archaeology
of Egypt and Sudan**

The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund has partnered with the *Albany Institute of History and Art* (Albany, NY) to host an exhibition entitled, “From the Hudson to the Nile: Dows Dunham and the Archaeology of Egypt and Sudan.” The exhibition will only be on view in Albany, and the show runs from November 8, 2025, to March 29, 2026. We are publishing not only a catalog for the exhibition, but also re-publishing Dunham’s “Two Royal Ladies of Meroë”, available for purchase through Amazon.

We also hope to publish the first volume of the Hearst Expedition at Deir el-Ballas series in the coming year (2026): *The Cemeteries*. This publication project is funded by a grant from the “Shelby White and Leon Leavy Fund for Archaeological Publications” and will be printed by Lockwood Press.

Left: Catalogue of the Dows Dunham exhibition.

Right: reprint of Dunham’s “Two Royal Ladies of Meroë”.



*Left: Objects from the exhibition
“From the Hudson to the Nile: Dows
Dunham and the Archaeology of Egypt
and Sudan” at the Albany Institute of
History and Art.*

Oral History Project

This coming year as an outgrowth of our Oral History of American Egyptology Program, we are expanding into the archaeology of ancient Nubia, including interviews with Janice Yellin, Stuart Tyson Smith, Solange Ashby, Pearce Paul Creasman, and Geoffrey Emberling.

Social Media

The Fund’s website (<https://www.ancientegyptarchaeologyfund.com>) is expertly maintained by Emma Montross, who regularly updates it with news and information about the Fund’s activities and the excavation season. In addition to our website, we also have an Instagram account (@deir_elballas expedition), and a YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@theancientegyptianheritage1368>). Through these we promote the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund in order to highlight the initiatives of the Fund. We also regularly post Arabic content so that they can then be used by our Egyptian colleagues and the local communities.

Acknowledgements

The success of the season was due to the skill and hard work of many individuals. It was our pleasure to work with our colleagues from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities as well as the Qena Antiquities Inspectorate. From the Cairo Office, we would like to thank the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Sherif Fathi; the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Mohamed Ismail Khaled; the Supervisor of the Permanent Committee of the Antiquities Department, Hani Abdullah el-Tayeb; the General Director for the Egyptian Committee, Mostafa Hussein Abdelrahman; and the Head of the Egyptian Antiquities Sector, Mohammed Abdel el-Badiya. From the Qena Inspectorate, we would like to thank the General Director of Qena Antiquities, Sayed Gad el-Rab; the Supervisor of Conservation for Qena, Abdelrahman Kanawy Hussein Mabrook; the Head of Foreign Missions and Excavations of Qena, Amr Gad el-Karim; and our on-site inspectors, Esma Gaber Mourad, Mohammed Ahmed Hussein Ahmed, and Mohammed Mohammed Shahat Shamroukh.

We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of the Deir el-Ballas Expedition staff: Peter Lacovara, Nicholas R. Brown, Bettina Bader, Piet Collet, Claire Malleson, Matei Tichindelean, Sarah Ahmed Aziz, Hassan Elzawy, Ana Oliveira, Victoria Shakespeare, Ahmed Abdelgawad, Karim el-Eita, Waleed Hawatky, and Gillian Pyke. Their efforts were greatly facilitated in every way by Hassaan Mohamed Ali, our project's field manager.

We would also like to thank Dr. Salima Ikram, Mr. Magdy Aly and the American University in Cairo for their help and support, and to Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman and the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition for their kind and generous hospitality at the Wilkinson Dig House in Luxor.

Support

The Fund has received generous support from the American Research Center in Egypt, the Archaeological Institute of America, the Shelby White and Leon Levy Fund for Archaeological Publications, the Society for the Study of Aegean Prehistory, and the Austrian Science Foundation. However, most importantly, we rely on private donations to continue this critical work – now more than ever!

You can donate using this QR Code

We thank you all for your generous support of our work for the past 10 years!



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The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund is a private nonprofit organization with a mission to support the research and conservation of Egyptian history and culture. It seeks to safeguard, record and publish sites and monuments at risk from agricultural and urban expansion, looting, vandalism and climate change.

The organization will also work to foster a greater awareness of the risks to Egypt's archaeological heritage and to promote education and training in site management and protection.

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