



# THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY FUND NEWSLETTER

Issue 10

2024



*Franck Monnier's reconstruction of the throne room at Malqata Palace.*

This expanded newsletter celebrates the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund. We registered as a charitable organization with the New York State Department of Law in October of 2014. As a non-profit making body, we have been fortunate in having received very generous contributions from individuals and foundations to support our work, including from the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA), the Austrian Science Foundation, and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP). Our goals from the outset have been to support research and conservation of Egyptian history and culture, in particular, to record and publish sites and monuments at risk from agricultural and urban expansion, looting and vandalism.



# Fieldwork



*Malqata: central core of the King's Palace, view from the west.*

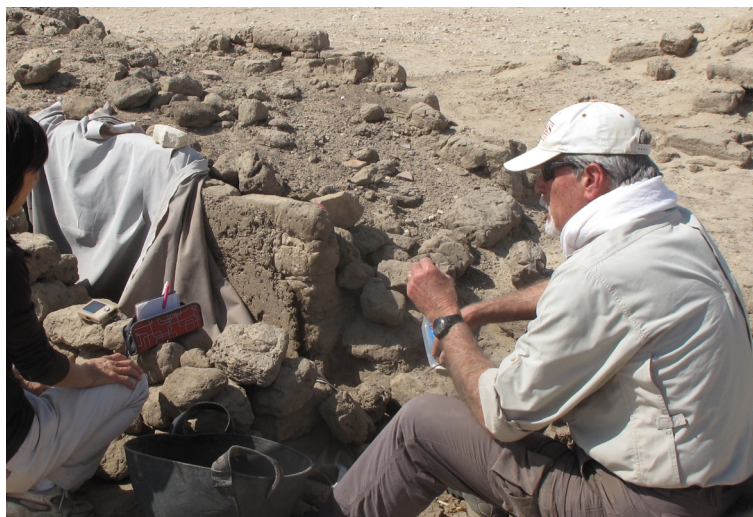
## Malqata

Our initial work in Egypt was at the Palace City of Amenhotep III at Malqata, undertaken from 2015 to 2017. The project was suggested by William Raymond Johnson, Director of The University of Chicago Epigraphic Survey, and Holeil Ghaly, then Chief Inspector of Luxor, both of whom were concerned about threats to the site. We had decided to offer to partner with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, since their 1910-20 excavations at the site were never published, and thought it was an opportunity to prepare them for publication along with our site preservation efforts.

We were fortunate to collaborate with earthen architecture expert Anthony Crosby on the restoration and stabilizing of the Palace of Amenhotep III, and with Franck Monnier, who produced some extraordinary reconstructions of the palace (see page 1). Keli Alberts created replicas of some of the mural paintings that adorned the structure. There is still much work left to do, in order to protect the site and to publish the original excavations; we hope this work will be continued in the future.

*Top: Anthony Crosby and Hiroko Kariya discuss the preservation of the mural paintings at Malqata Palace.*

*Lower: Keli Alberts recreating a mural painting from the Palace.*





## Deir el-Ballas

From 2017, at the invitation of the Antiquities Inspectorate of Qena and in affiliation with the American University of Cairo, we have been conducting surveys, excavations, and conservation work at another palace city, Deir el-Ballas. This is located on the western bank of the Nile, approximately 40 km north of Luxor and 20 km south of Dendera, situated in the center of a wide opening in the limestone cliffs along the west bank of the Nile. It occupies a strategic position opposite the important city of Coptos and the route to the Red Sea. As the forward capital for the Theban kings during the Hyksos expulsion (ca. 1575-1550 BC), Deir el-Ballas is of great archaeological and historical importance, but the site is at extreme risk from both looting and the uncontrolled expansion of the neighboring modern town. The site was originally excavated by the Phoebe A. Hearst Expedition of the University of California under the direction of the great American archaeologist George A. Reisner, in the years 1900 to 1901.

During Reisner's work he uncovered the remains of a vast royal palace, the **North Palace**, and a massive watchtower he called the "**South Palace**." Along with these, he excavated a series of cemeteries, private houses and a workmen's settlement. This proved to be the Campaign Palace and associated settlement of the Egyptian pharaohs at a time (ca. 1575 BC) when Egypt was being invaded by foreign enemies from both the North and the South. It was from here that these kings launched their campaign to free Egypt and lay the foundation for the great age of the New Kingdom. Despite the importance of this site to history, Reisner's excavations were never published. To understand the records better, Peter Lacovara undertook four seasons of work at Deir el-Ballas in 1980, 1983, 1984, and 1986, sponsored by the American Research Center in Egypt and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Since then, many features of the site have been damaged or destroyed.

Beginning in 2016, the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund was asked by the Egyptian Antiquities Ministry to define those areas of the site that were threatened, devise strategies to protect them and undertake the stabilization and preservation of the standing monuments.

The settlement at Deir el-Ballas was centered on the **North Palace**. Grouped west of the Palace and to the north and south were a number of private **houses**, which ranged in size from small, two-room structures to larger elite residences, or "villas." To the south, Reisner excavated a group of contiguous houses that were very similar in appearance to the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina. As at Amarna and Deir el-Medina, the workmen's village at Deir el-Ballas was situated apart from the main settled area, beside a large hill. Survey of the western slope of this hill revealed traces of roughly built structures built of stones and mudbrick partially cut into the hillside, which appeared to consist of one or more courts connected by short flights of stairs. These structures resemble quite closely in plan private **chapels**; one still contained a small votive figure of Hathor in a ceramic bowl. They are similar to the chapels at the workmen's village at Amarna.



Map of Deir el-Ballas.

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The earliest written evidence known from the site is a lintel inscribed with the name of King Seqenenre Taa of the 17th Dynasty. It was found reused in the nearby village of El-Deir el-Gharbi, immediately adjacent to the North Palace. The latest date found for the use of the Palace is a jar sealing with the name of Ahmose. As the complex was constructed for the Theban king's liberation of Egypt, once that task was completed, the site was abandoned, although a small group of people must have lived on and buried their dead in a series of cemeteries dating from the early Eighteenth Dynasty into the Nineteenth Dynasty.

## The “South Palace”

The southern extent of the settlement at Deir el-Ballas is marked by the so-called “South Palace”, a rectangular mudbrick platform placed high up on a natural hill. This structure was of similar size and design to the Kom el-‘Abd at Malqata. It was not a royal residence, but instead a sort of watchtower built on a high hill overlooking the Nile. The structure is impressive, but it actually is more earth sculpture than building. It is constructed of a series of casemates – brick cells filled in with rubble and sand that were used to square off the top of the hill to give it the appearance of a built structure. The top was reached by a broad staircase which seems to have led to a flat observation platform that had a commanding view of the river and surrounding countryside. It was from here that the Theban fleet was launched to expel the Hyksos, and remarkably, during our work we found in the construction reused cedar timbers from a vessel.

The “South Palace” was one of the first projects we tackled at Deir el-Ballas. Sadly, the structure had been looted during the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and soon thereafter, and holes dug by treasure hunters had undermined the façade and caused a partial collapse. Under the expert guidance of Anthony Crosby we were able to stabilize the façade and restore it to its appearance when Reisner first excavated it.

*Right: The “South Palace” in 2017, it had been tunnelled into by looters, causing part of the façade to collapse. We have been able to stabilize and restore the structure to its appearance when first excavated in 1900.*



*The “South Palace” in 2023 with restoration largely concluded.*



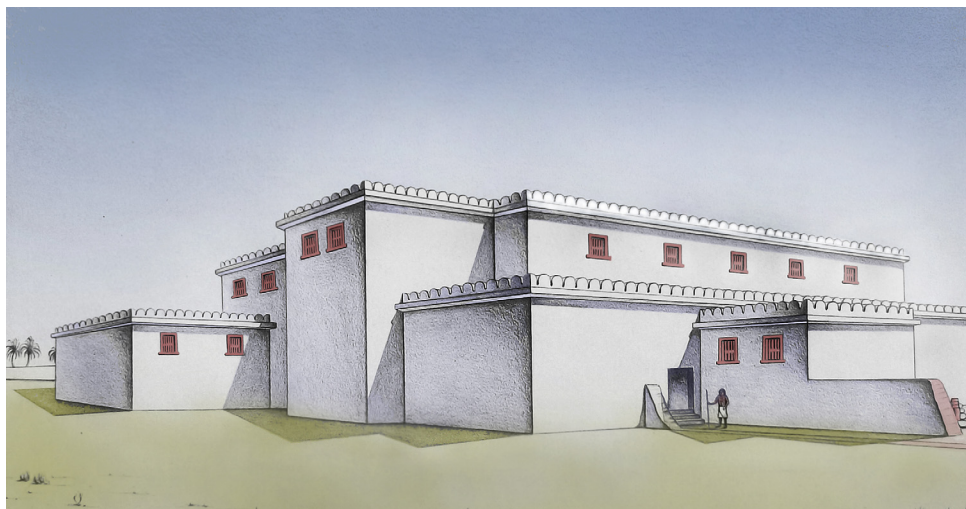
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## The North Palace

As in the other royal cities, the central focus of the settlement at Deir el-Ballas was the royal palace. The North Palace and its enclosures cover an area of 45,000+ square meters, the eastern end of the main enclosure never having been traced. The Palace itself was built of unusually large mudbricks averaging 54 x 27 x 18 cm, the longest measurement being a royal cubit. The building was made up of a series of columned courts and a long entrance corridor grouped around an elevated central platform, which was constructed on casemate foundations. Some of these casemates are still preserved to a height of approximately five meters in places, and since the Hearst Expedition found remains of the original pavement capping them, this must have been their original height. Presumably this core supported the raised private apartments of the Palace, which are not preserved. The Palace was decorated with wall paintings of armed men carrying battleaxes; also faience tiles, fragments of which were recovered by the Hearst Expedition.

*A hypothetical reconstruction of the North Palace by Fran Weatherhead.*



The North Palace was later built over in the Roman Period, but unfortunately Reisner appears to have removed the original upper parts of the original structure when he cleared the later additions. A preliminary survey undertaken by Gillian Pyke, the Expedition's Late Antique archaeologist and expert, suggests that part of the Palace was converted into a house during the Roman Period. The massive brickwork suggests that this was possibly a tower house, only the lowermost parts of which now survive. Preliminary comparison with the Roman tower houses of Karanis backs up this suggestion, and the presence of pieces of late Byzantine (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century AD) pottery included in the mortar used for the patching the brickwork (also in the loose material), may show that the North Palace was remodelled at this time.

We are currently working on the protection, stabilization and restoration of the North Palace. Reisner, unfamiliar with its type of architecture, emptied the casemate foundations, which now pose a hazard for local people. We are refilling them with the sand and gravel they originally contained, so they will again serve as a platform, but this time for people visiting the site.

*Gillian Pyke investigating the later occupation of the North Palace.*



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## The Settlement

The site of Deir el-Ballas occupies some 50 hectares that runs 2 kilometers north to south, along the Nile floodplain in Upper Egypt. Within this area, previous excavations revealed six urban or domestic areas/neighborhoods. Our current Expedition to the site has named these neighborhoods (from north to south): Houses by Cemetery 1200-1300; the North Site Neighborhood; the North Wadi Settlement; the North Palace Suburb; the Workmen's Village and Chapels, and the South Wadi Settlement/Administrative Area.

The original expedition to the site in 1900-1901 noted that they had discovered about 70 houses at the site. Unfortunately, only a fraction of these were recorded within the excavation notes, and fewer still were mapped and planned. Several photos of excavated domestic structures from the excavations are preserved in the archives of the Egyptian Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, but many of these are unlabeled and it is not known which buildings they record. One of the AEHAF's projects is to study and publish these archives in order to learn more about the settlement areas.



*George A. Reisner at the North Palace.*

Some of these **houses** are situated around the North Palace to the west, north and south. Sadly, a number were destroyed during the expansion of the modern cemetery, and we have made studying and preserving the ones that remain a priority. During the field seasons of 1983 and 1985, part of the surface deposit over a structure called "House E" was cleared, in order to delineate its walls as well as to explore a selection of rooms. Following these excavations, we have been able to add significantly more information to the building's history, and its overall plan. In addition to the textile workshop that was previously found in the southern part of the building, our team discovered large amounts of domestic material, including cooking ceramics, clay figurines, and animal and plant remains from cooking. We also noted areas outside the



house to the east and west which revealed evidence of home industry, such as an agate bead production site to the west. The western courtyard area, enclosed in a small mudbrick wall, contained a series of storage silos, probably used to hold the household's supply of grain.

More direct information concerning activity in the Deir el-Ballas community was obtained from a structure located immediately north of House E. Excavated by Reisner and designated "House D", this building consisted of a large rectangular court, ca. 25 meters square, surrounded by smaller rooms. There were two grain silos within the court, a large semi-circular oven on the northern side of the building and raised grinding emplacements with fragments of quartzite querns and grindstones. These features, as well as the great quantity of bread tray sherds, indicate that this structure could have been a bakery built to serve the North Palace.

In an attempt to prevent further destruction, we have begun a campaign to re-excavate and partially restore the structures that remain, particularly those smaller houses most vulnerable to encroachment. Our work includes capping the ancient mud brick walls with new mud bricks, which are made to the same size and laid in the same pattern as the ancient ones. We have completed this work with House D and look forward to continuing it with a number of the other structures.

*Nicholas Brown working on House E.*



*House D after restoration.*





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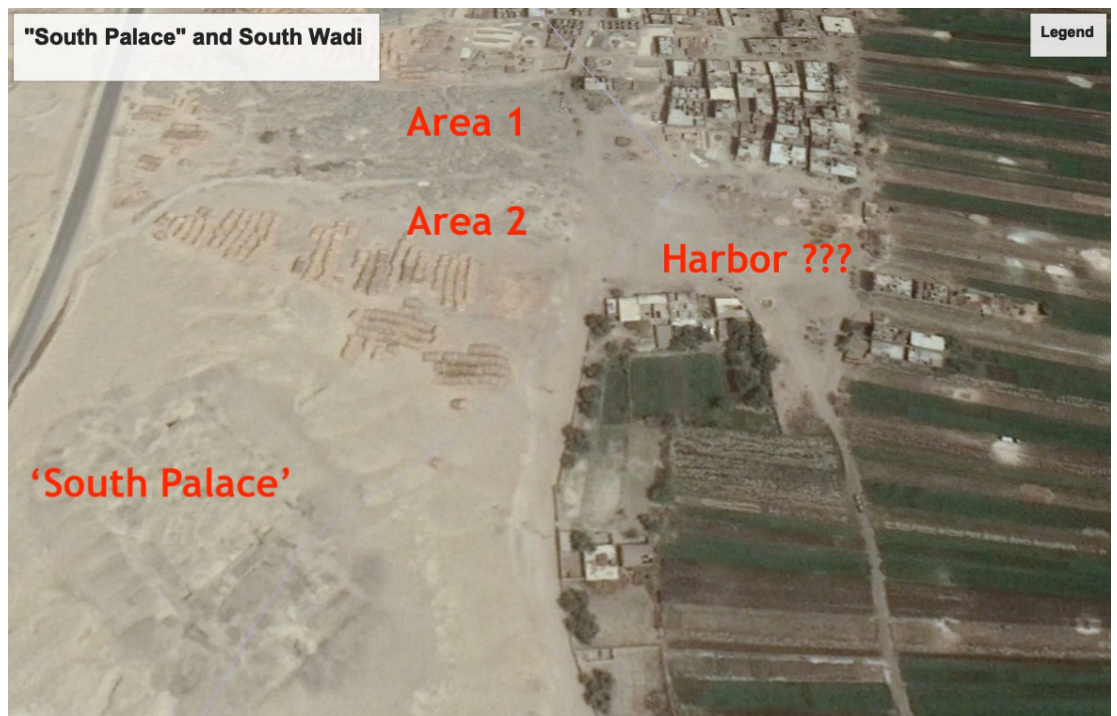
Directly north of the North Palace Suburb, a small area of houses was built in a shallow wadi runoff from the desert. The Expedition has named this area the North Wadi Settlement and it is another area of the site where very little has been excavated. Because of this, not much is known about the ancient residents of this neighborhood and its relationship to the larger site. Between April 2003 and June of 2016, about two thirds of the settlement was lost to modern encroachment and the expansion of agricultural fields. We believed that there were four houses, or partial remnants of houses, left in the unexcavated area of the site. In 2023 we began to survey the area and conduct preliminary investigations into the remaining archaeological features. We identified two houses that had been preliminarily explored by Reisner and discovered a third house that was completely unexcavated. This latter house proves to be a promising excavation. Covering the house walls are large areas of mudbrick wall collapse; these are very likely protecting underlying archaeological deposits that can tell us more about the structure's life and history.

Settlement remains were discovered by the Hearst Expedition to the south of the South Hill. Some of these were quite large, with columned halls, grain silos, mangers and associated outbuildings. During the 1983 season, it was possible to infer a pattern of structures at the eastern end of the South Wadi by mapping sherd scatters, wall traces and slight topographic changes. Unlike the northern and southern habitation areas, where house remains are more or less loosely scattered in a random fashion over the plain and in wadi beds, traces of unusually large buildings (ca. 40 by 60 meters) were found here, which appear to be tightly grouped in an orderly pattern, bordered by long narrow structures (ca. 70+ by 10 meters). The layout suggests an administrative complex analogous to that found in the Central City at Amarna. It does not appear to have been explored by Reisner.



Victoria Shakespeare recording the North Wadi Settlement Area.

The South Wadi Settlement/  
Administrative Area.





During the 2021 season we began clearing debris from part of the South Wadi. We exposed two large areas here, tentatively designated Areas 1 and 2. In just cleaning the debris off the surface we could see two very different patterns of construction: in Area 2, a very long, large building made up of a number of small rooms; and in Area 1, a cluster of large and small structures extending over a broad area. The location of the latter at the mouth of a wadi running down to the river, may signal that this was the location of the port for the settlement. Large limestone blocks positioned at the eastern edge of this area extending into the cultivation suggest a harbor installation, which would also correspond to the design of the Central City at Amarna. We are eager to explore this exciting possibility further.

## Analysis

We are fortunate to have experts on the team to analyze the finds discovered in the course of our work. Ceramics are central to the understanding of any historical site and Bettina Bader of the Austrian Institute of Archaeology has undertaken the study of the enormous amount of pottery we recover every season. Because the preservation at the site is so good, we have a wealth of botanical material that is being classified by Claire Malleson and Amr Shahat.

*Top right : Bettina Bader working on the pottery from the site.*

*Below: Hassan Elzawy analyzing sherds.*

*Lower right: Claire Malleson studying the botanical remains.*





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# Site Protection

While controversial, the building of walls to demarcate and protect the ancient monuments provide an effective barrier to encroachment, as examples from Amarna and Malqata Palace in Luxor have proven in recent years. This is often a difficult task where the modern community is integrated into the archaeological site. Our plans include building lower demarcation walls with pedestrian entry points to make the area visually and physically accessible to the local residents. These modern walls are being built at the request of the Antiquities Inspectorate and will be decorated with a mural by famed Egyptian artist Alaa Awad celebrating the importance of the site in the liberation of Egypt. Signage in Arabic and English is also being prepared for the site to facilitate on-site tourism and to explain the history and archaeological features of the site to the local community.

**Deir el-Ballas: The North Palace**

The site was first excavated in 1903-1904 by George Andrew Reisner and the Hurst Expedition of the University of California. It has been re-excavated by the American University in Cairo and the American Research Center in Egypt.

For additional information about the North Palace

## دير البلاس

تم إعادة استخدام الموقع لاحقاً خلال العصر القديم المتأخر لاستضافة مجتمع مسيحي محلي من الزهراء الأقباط وقاموا ببناء دير فوق بقايا القصر القديم ومن ثم أطلقوا اسم «دير» على القرى الحديثة المجاورة.

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Signage in Arabic and English for the North Palace (left) and the Expedition's outreach brochure for local communities (right).

For these sites restoration is imperative, not only to safeguard the monuments, but also to promote tourism, which in turn would help to make them economically viable for the local community. Starting in 2023, we created literature in Arabic to distribute to the local communities of Ed-Deir and Ed-Deir el-Gharbi to explain the history of the site, our work there, and the importance of preserving the archaeological remains for the future of the surrounding communities. It is critical to have the support and understanding of the local population in our preservation efforts as partners and team mates in our work to protect this site.



Drawing for the mural by Alaa Awad.

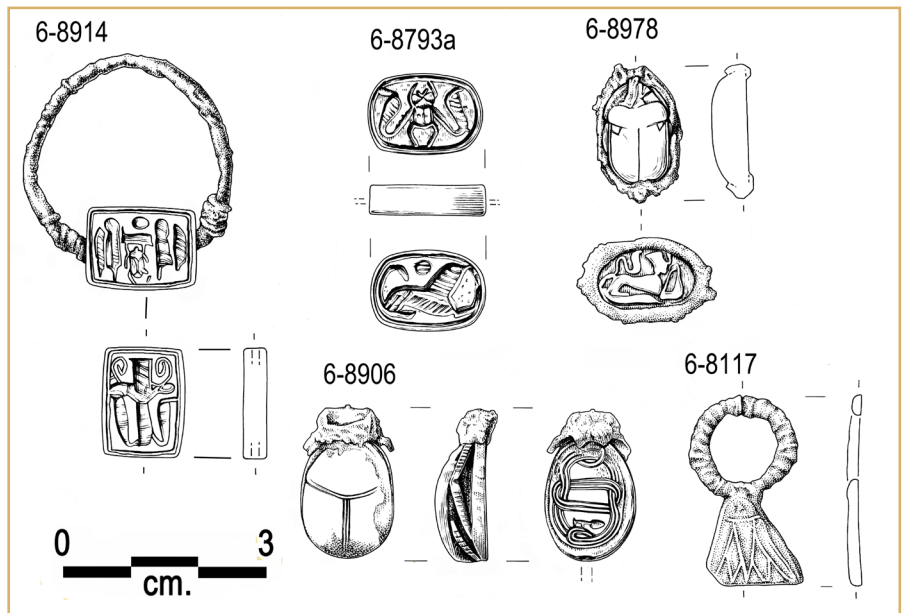
As work is progressing at Deir el-Ballas, the Fund has been trying to think through ways to create a responsible and sustainable archaeology within Egypt. Some of our research goals as Egyptian archaeologists are to publish unpublished archives, study already excavated material (in museums or out in the field), and to revisit archaeological sites in order to preserve and protect what was previously excavated but then abandoned. A site like Deir el-Ballas is an excellent candidate for such research and work in Egypt, particularly regarding the integrity of the archaeological monuments, the efficient use of resources, and partnerships with the local community.



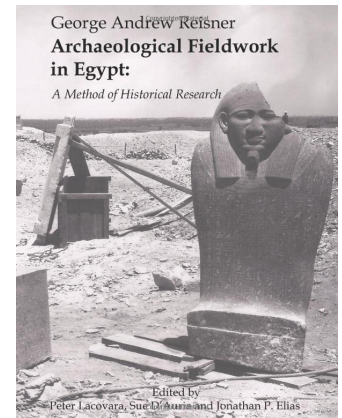
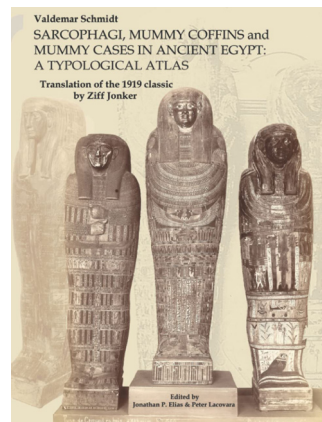
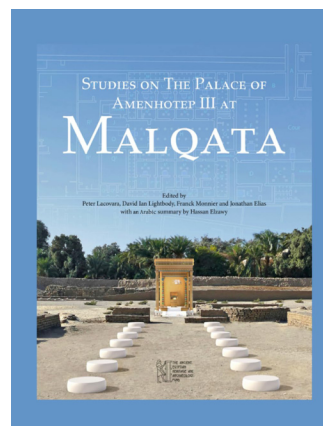
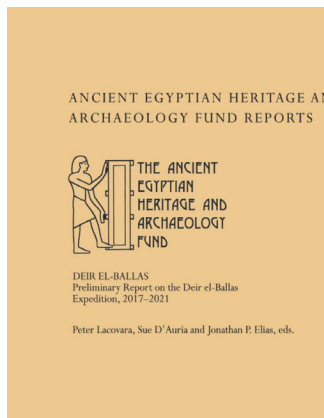
## Publications

Our fieldwork at Deir el-Ballas dovetails with a grant we received from the Shelby White and Leon Levy Program for Archaeological Publications. This is to prepare the results of the original expedition conducted at the site in 1900-1901 by George A. Reisner, who was working for the Phoebe A. Hearst Expedition of the University of California.

*Illustrations of some of the Hearst Expedition finds for publication.  
Drawn by Andrew Boyce.*



In addition, the Fund has undertaken other publication projects, such as preparing an unpublished manuscript on archaeological technique by pioneering American Egyptologist, George A. Reisner, and an English translation of Valdemar Schmidt's, 'Sarkofager, Mumiekister og Mumiehylstre i det gamle Aegypten', the most comprehensive work written on ancient Egyptian funerary art, but until now only available in the original Danish edition, as well as preliminary reports on the excavations at Malqata and Deir el-Ballas. These publications are available for purchase from Amazon; proceeds from the sale are directed back into the Fund.



*Some of our publications available on the Amazon website.*

## An Oral History of American Egyptology

We have also taken on a project to document the history of American Egyptology through the recording of oral histories of some of the most important scholars working in the field. So far, we have conducted interviews with David O'Connor, Kent Weeks, Jack Josephson, Christine Lilyquist, Donald Redford, Elizabeth Bollman, Leslie Anne Warden, Betsy Bryan, and Renée Friedman. These are available on our website and on our YouTube channel.

## Social Media

The Fund has a website (<https://www.ancientegyptarchaeologyfund.com>) that it regularly updates with news and information about its activities and the excavation season. Check out our blog throughout our upcoming season with weekly updates on the progress of our time in the field! In addition to our website, we run a Facebook page and YouTube channel. Both are platforms where we promote the Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund in order to raise money for future projects, as well as highlighting initiatives of the Fund. On both platforms we are upping our Arabic content as well. These websites can then be used by our Egyptian colleagues and the local communities.



## Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Supreme Council of Antiquities for their support; in particular, we would like to thank Iyman Hindy, General Director of Qena Antiquities, for all his encouragement, help, and support over the years. We would also like to thank Maryanne Danielle, Director of Qena Area; Abdullah Mohammed Abdullah, Director of West Bank Antiquities of Qena; Amr Gad el Rab, Head of Foreign Missions and Excavations of Qena, and the staff of the Inspectorate. Our work would not be possible without the kind assistance of Dr. Salima Ikram, Mr. Magdy Aly, the American University in Cairo and the American Research Center in Egypt. We are grateful to Hassan Mohamed Ali for his expert organization of the workforce and all aspects of the fieldwork. We are indebted to Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman and the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition for their kind and generous hospitality. Last but not least, we have to thank our hardworking and dedicated team members.

*The Expedition Team in 2022.*



## Support

As already noted on the first page, 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. Most importantly, we rely on private donations to continue this critical work – thank you all for your generous support of our work for the past 10 years!



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.

*To subscribe to this newsletter and help support the Fund’s work, please make a tax-deductible contribution to:*

**The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund**

**326 Hudson Avenue, Albany, NY 12210 U.S.A.**

*email: lacovara.peter@gmail.com*

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