CHICAGO ON THE NILE

A CENTURY OF WORK BY THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

EMILY TEETER



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
ISAC MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS • NUMBER 2

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Thutmose III embraced by Amun
(*Medinet Habu* X, pl. 158)

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For Joe

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Notes to Readers

Dates of Field Seasons

Field seasons of the Epigraphic Survey generally run from October to the following April, so the 1967 season began in October 1967 and ended in April 1968. In this book, "the 1970 season" refers to fall 1970 to spring 1971. "The 1967–1968 seasons" refers to two consecutive seasons, from October 1967 to April 1969.

Transcriptions and Spelling

Spelling errors and other obvious typos in the source documents have been corrected. Paragraph breaks may not reflect those in the original document. Some sentences have been truncated for clarity.

Alternative Spellings and Names

Aye/Eye
Amen/Amon/Amun
Assuan/Aswan
barks/barques
drafting/draughting
draftsman/artist
Egyptologist/epigrapher
enclosure/inclosure
Fostat/Fustat
Gourna/Gurna/Gurnah/Kurna
Gufti/Kufti/Qufti
Harmhab/Horemheb
Hoelscher/Hölscher
rais/reis
Ramesses/Ramses
Ramessid/Ramesside
Sakkara/Sakkarah/Saqqara
Seti/Sety
Tutankhamon/Tutankhamun

Usage

"First floor" is used in the American sense as the ground floor; the "second floor" is one level above the ground.

The name of the Egyptian ministry that oversees the country's cultural heritage and excavations has changed several times over its more than 160 years:

Egyptian Antiquities Service / Service des Antiquités / Department of Antiquities	1858–1971
Egyptian Antiquities Organization	1971–1993
Supreme Council of Antiquities	1993–2017
Ministry of State Antiquities	2017–2021
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	2021–present

Abbreviations

Abydos	Amice M. Calverley, with Myrtle F. Broome and Alan H. Gardiner, *The Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, 4 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Society and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933–58)
AJSLL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
AR	*Annual Report of the Oriental Institute*; since 2023, *Annual Report of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures*
ARCE	American Research Center in Egypt
Archeological Newsletter	*Oriental Institute Archeological Newsletter*, "issued confidentially to members and friends," dated October 15, 1950–March 11, 1973
ASAE	*Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*
AUB	American University of Beirut
BASP	*Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*
Battle Reliefs	The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak—Volume IV: The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I* (OIP 107) (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986)
Beit el-Wali	Herbert Ricke, George R. Hughes, and Edward F. Wente, *Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition—Volume 1: The Beit el-Wali Temple of Ramesses II* (OINE 1) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967)
CEDAE	Centre d'Étude et de Documentation sur l'ancienne Égypte
CHB	*Chicago House Bulletin*, 1990–present
CHP	Chicago House Paper, internal inventory number of the Chicago House Archive, Luxor
EAP	Egyptian Antiquities Project (grants awarded by ARCE)
EES	Egypt Exploration Society
Excavation	Uvo Hölscher, *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934–54)
FOCH	Friends of Chicago House
IFAO	Institut français d'archéologie orientale
ISAC	Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures at the University of Chicago (known as the Oriental Institute until 2023)
ISACM	ISAC Museum
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JdE	Journal d'entrée (Cairo Museum)
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
Key Plans	Harold Hayden Nelson, *Key Plans Showing Locations of Theban Temple Decorations* (OIP 56) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941)
Kheruef	The Epigraphic Survey in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Egypt, *The Tomb of Kheruef: Theban Tomb 192* (OIP 102) (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980)

Khonsu	The Epigraphic Survey / Helen Jacquet-Gordon, *The Temple of Khonsu*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1979–2003)
KV	Kings' Valley (Valley of the Kings)
LFC	large-format collection (photo)
Medinet Habu	The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu*, 10 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press / Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago / Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago, 1930–2024)
Mereruka	The Sakkarah Expedition, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, 2 parts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938)
MMA	Metropolitan Museum of Art
n.d.	no date
OI/O.I.	Oriental Institute (known since April 2023 as the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures)
OIC	Oriental Institute Communications
OINE	Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
personal comm.	personal communication
PL	Public Law
Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak	The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press / Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1936–86)
Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple	The Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Luxor Temple*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1994–98)
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
Tb.	*Tagebuch*; excavation diaries of Uvo Hölscher, 1927–31
Topographical Bibliography	Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, vol. II, *Theban Temples* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929; 2nd ed. 1972); vol. VI, *Upper Egypt: Chief Temples* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1939)
TT	Theban tomb
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Foreword

Timothy P. Harrison
Director, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures—West Asia & North Africa

The Epigraphic Survey of Egypt stands as one of the truly monumental field expeditions of North Africa and West Asia. From its inception, the Survey has been guided by an outsized vision and determination: to document the extraordinary written and pictorial records of pharaonic Egypt, and to conduct this epigraphic mission with the finest documentary methods and highest standards. As conceived by James Henry Breasted, now more than a century ago, the Epigraphic Survey has achieved and maintained an unsurpassed standard of excellence that has become synonymous with the discipline. This sustained commitment to documenting ancient Egypt's civilizational monuments has produced a prodigious and foundational record of its history and culture.

It is also a remarkable and compelling story. Drawing on the extensive archival records of the expedition itself, Emily Teeter has assembled a rich and detailed narrative of this colorful and eventful history. It is a story of struggle, endurance, and perseverance, and ultimately of an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value and importance of the epigraphic mission. Over the course of a century, as Teeter observes, the Epigraphic Survey and its physical counterpart, Chicago House, have achieved near-mythical status. Their bold vision required courage and a tenacious determination to succeed, and, invariably, a sustained scholarly brilliance that is manifest in the distinguished lineage of epigraphers, illustrators, and documentarians who have served on the Survey, each with their own unique and interesting personal stories, preserved in the voluminous correspondence they produced. In the early years, the manifold challenges also included often-daunting working and living conditions, now a distant memory in the quiet halls and on the grounds of the wonderful facility that is the Survey's current home. Teeter faithfully yet sensitively narrates these extraordinary stories, while highlighting the vital contribution the Epigraphic Survey has made since 1924 to preserving and documenting the rich civilizational history of ancient Egypt.

Teeter's history also accentuates the critical importance of the Epigraphic Survey's ongoing work, providing a valuable frame of reference for the vital tasks that remain as the Survey enters its second century. Today, the Chicago House Method remains the epigraphic standard, and the Survey's active and uncompromising commitment to preserving cultural heritage confirms the considerable importance and relevance of its continuing work and mission. In the face of the accelerating destruction of Egypt's irreplaceable cultural heritage, this mission is more urgent than ever. The Survey's active engagement with national and local community partners in preserving these monuments further underscores its deep respect and value for their priceless cultural heritage.

In short, the Epigraphic Survey's enduring commitment to its mission, community engagement, and cultural preservation, together with its long and distinguished history of unsurpassed epigraphic excellence, bodes well for the success of its next century of exploration and discovery.

Preface

J. Brett McClain
Field Director, Epigraphic Survey

"*It is now a century since the work of recording the written monuments of Egypt in modern facsimiles began. . . .*" With these words, Professor James Henry Breasted, founder of the Oriental Institute (now Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures) at the University of Chicago, introduced the Epigraphic Survey's first publication, *Medinet Habu* I, to the scholarly world. His magisterial foreword retrospectively evaluated the development of Egyptian epigraphy as a scientific endeavor from Champollion's day until his own. Acknowledging the decipherer's great achievements and those of his successors over the course of the nineteenth century, Breasted also evaluated their shortcomings, leading to his transformative conclusion: even after a hundred years of pioneering epigraphic work, the bulk of ancient Egypt's hieroglyphic inscriptions remained inadequately recorded, because the technical methods and resources hitherto available were insufficient. Further, the rapid deterioration of written records that had survived for millennia would lead inevitably to permanent and irreplaceable loss.

Having convincingly established the need for action to save Egypt's ancient history from oblivion, Breasted then outlined his vision for a new survey of the monuments, an ambitious undertaking that would command not only the latest and most accurate methods of scientific recording but also the resources and organizational capabilities of a modern university, enabling a program of comprehensive epigraphic documentation both systematic and precise. In autumn 1924, after years of experimentation, planning, and gathering the necessary financial and institutional support, the Epigraphic Survey, Breasted's solution for rescuing the past and preserving it for the future, arrived in Egypt, and its work among the ancient temples and tombs began.

Of course, by the time he completed his foreword in 1929, Breasted could be confident at least of the initial success of his endeavor, the realization of which was the magnificent folio volume of photographs and facsimile drawings then in hand. The academic grandeur of his prose, however, only hints at the years of hard work, problem solving, innovation, and (at times) sacrifice required of Breasted himself; of Harold H. Nelson, the Epigraphic Survey's first field director; and of the intrepid team of artists, photographers, Egyptologists, and support staff who, in the first years of the expedition, made this ambitious vision into a functioning reality. The story of how the Epigraphic Survey came into being, engagingly recounted here by Emily Teeter and richly illuminated with selections from Breasted's and Nelson's official correspondence, archival photographs, and other documents, forms the first part of this book.

Yet *Medinet Habu* I was only a beginning. A full century has passed since the Epigraphic Survey began its work in Luxor. Could our founder have imagined that, despite the Great Depression, World War II, revolutions, a pandemic, and other vicissitudes of Egypt's modern history, the expedition would still be working after 100 years? If so, he would have been both astonished at the expedition's durability and gratified by its long-term success in achieving its intended purpose. As Breasted would well have appreciated, this ongoing achievement, though soundly based on a clearly articulated and scientifically valid set of objectives, has primarily arisen from the expertise, professionalism, and tireless dedication of the expedition staff themselves. This book also tells their story, and because of the exacting, systematic nature of the Epigraphic Survey's approach, it is a tale of endurance, of persistent, detailed study of the inscriptions and the rigorous and consistent application of sound methodology. Year after year, in the early autumn, the team has returned to Chicago House,

the University's permanent headquarters in Luxor by the Nile, for another six-month campaign of photography, drawing, and epigraphic analysis of the monumental sites. Because this is a story about people, many of whom spent large portions of their lives in the field, it is not without dramatic moments, crises, and personal tragedies and triumphs, many of which are related here. Through it all, however, the Epigraphic Survey staff have maintained an unwavering commitment to the project's core objectives of accurate documentation and publications of the highest standard, earning universal recognition for the unsurpassed quality of their work.

Now the Epigraphic Survey will begin a new century. Since Breasted's time, Egypt has been profoundly transformed, and the working environment of the expedition is unlike anything he could have envisioned, necessitating continual adaptation to political, economic, and environmental changes that have profoundly affected not only the nature of fieldwork but also the preservation of the monuments themselves. The threat of losing their records to deterioration was his most important realization, and history has proven his foresight: the decay of the ancient structures has greatly accelerated over time, and the need to copy and publish the inscriptions accurately is far greater now than it was in 1924. Although a range of modern tools and techniques has greatly expanded the capabilities of the Epigraphic Survey, its mission remains both critically important and fundamentally straightforward: to document and publish the ancient inscriptions on Egypt's pharaonic monuments at the highest level of accuracy and quality, ensuring that the written records of this great civilization will survive for future generations. Our work is well begun, but much remains to be done, and the story of the Epigraphic Survey will continue.

Introduction

Emily Teeter

I was inspired to write this book primarily by my admiration for the work and publications of the Epigraphic Survey. To me, as a student at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute (now the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, or ISAC), the Survey was a magical thing. Select graduate students would be anointed and whisked off to Luxor; faculty members would puff on their pipe or cigarette and tell stories of who did what; and retired field directors, especially Charles Nims, were regarded as repositories of very special knowledge about Luxor. I (along with my fellow graduate students) was enthralled. The oversized volumes of *Medinet Habu*, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, and *Temple of Khonsu* (of which I of course obtained my own copies) were all parts of my life as I researched my dissertation. I even unsuccessfully competed for a typically nerdy University of Chicago graduate student prize for book collectors, confident that the sheer size and heft of my collection would win. It didn't. Probably bested by someone with an "everything Saul Bellow" collection.

More recently, and more germane to actually taking on this project, I was inspired by Eric Cline's book *Digging Up Armageddon: The Search for the Lost City of Solomon* (Princeton University Press, 2020), which recounts the often-colorful history of the University of Chicago's excavations at Megiddo. I was fascinated by the portraits of the people and their work, and I thought somebody should produce a similar account for the Epigraphic Survey. I talked with Ray Johnson, then its field director, who said it was good timing because they were discussing what sort of publication to issue in conjunction with the Survey's 2024 centennial. At that time, he was thinking about a picture book on Chicago House. I suggested that because the centennial was really for the Survey itself, this would be an opportunity—perhaps the only one for many years—to write a thorough history, not only of the Survey in Luxor but also its offshoots in Nubia and Saqqara, as well as its often-fraught relationship with the Abydos Expedition, to explore how politics and funding, personalities and accidents of fate, had formed and directed the work.

As I read hundreds of archival documents in Chicago and Luxor, and others that started to pour in from other sources as the project got underway, the Survey—especially its field directors, but also some of the epigraphers and artists (also called "draftsmen" or "draughtsmen," a distinction that even they failed to understand*)—took on new life. Though I knew so many of the names, I had at first no idea of their character or behavior, but the letters began to create images. Soon, the style and character of the letter writers became very familiar to me, especially those of Charles Breasted, with his self-importance and unmistakably colonial attitude toward Egyptians and their officials. The number of letters sent between Chicago and Luxor is astounding. They were augmented by personal recollections of many past (and present) field directors and staff members who shared their stories.

Researching this book made me think hard about how so much has changed. Things that were common concerns in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s now seem so distant, such as how dangerous the Nile could be in the inundation season. Its strong current made crossing the river hazardous. The uncontrolled waters flooded

* In 1932, Epigraphic Survey field director Harold Nelson wrote to Survey founder James Henry Breasted: "Our men who do the drawings are inquiring anxiously what is the distinction between 'draughtsman' and 'artist' as appears in the list of the staff of this expedition in new Commemoration circular. They want to know just why the distinction. Can you help me out?" (Nelson to Breasted, 26 January 1932, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 1274).

houses and gardens, so vegetables could not be planted until the waters receded; the diet of Survey staff was different in the late summer than in the winter. Even work at the temple of Medinet Habu could not start until the water started to recede.

As recently as the mid-1980s, life in Luxor was very different. Food staples were rationed or simply not available. Most packaged goods had to be ordered and shipped from Cairo. Even into the 1990s, visitors to Chicago House were asked to bring peanut butter, unsweetened chocolate, Grape-Nuts, Tang (really!), cans of cranberry sauce, boxes of photo paper, and (if you were strong and unlucky) a fuel pump for one of the cars. Alcohol and chocolate were always welcome—and still are.

Another difference was how such close and constant communication was maintained before phones, faxes, and email became common. Telegrams were reserved for the most urgent business, both for their cost and because everyone in the telegraph office would know Chicago House's business—and news traveled fast in Luxor. For the most urgent and most confidential matters, codes were used. Letters also flew back and forth between Cairo and Chicago (literally, with the advent of TWA's direct New York–Cairo service in 1946). Sometimes two missives departed from the field director's or James Breasted's office in a single day, some running three or four typed pages. The speed at which the mail traveled was striking. In April 1946, one letter took only five days to reach its destination—"the fastest I have yet known," Harold Nelson remarked—its speed attributed to the new direct air route to Cairo.[1]

Well before the dawn of email came the sad demise of the information-packed letters. The documentation is very uneven from 1973 onward, and sparser still from 1977 to 1988, during Lanny Bell's time as field director. For those years I had to rely on sanitized annual reports, but luckily, longtime staff member Carol ("Cairo") Meyer was an old-fashioned correspondent who wrote frequent letters to her family—and even more fortunately, the family kept the archive. Much of the "color" for Bell's term is thanks to Carol's letters.

Peter Dorman is not only a living resource who was happy to recount so many details of the work and the house; he also instituted the *Chicago House Bulletin*, which contains much information—again, much of it formal, but also including stories about Friends of Chicago House (FOCH) tours and parties at the house. Kathy C. Dorman, a teacher before she was the *mudira** of the house, wrote a book (the as-yet-unpublished "Crocodile in the Playground") about her experiences in Luxor with her daughters, Margaret and Emily. Ray Johnson, too, was an invaluable source with very special insights from his years at the house as staff (artist and senior artist), then another twenty-five years as field director. The current field director, J. Brett McClain, who also came up "through the ranks," was generous in sharing his memories.

One cannot escape, or ignore, the colonial attitude of the "scientific" (non-Egyptian) staff toward the Egyptian staff and even many of their colleagues. Few of the field directors or staff spoke more than "kitchen Arabic." The house staff were, until very recent days, called "servants," and one has to dig to find the names of many of the individuals who worked at Chicago House for decades, sons often succeeding their fathers. For years, fraternizing with the locals was often frowned upon. A notable exception was longtime Chicago House engineer John "Tim" Healey, who apparently had admiration for and a true friendship with the Survey's Hagg† Ibrahim Mohammed Abd el-Rahman. They appear together in many photos, including a very touching formal studio portrait of the Healey family (see photo opposite). However, things have changed since the late 1990s with the addition of many Egyptians to the professional and administrative staff.

Most of this book is based on two groups of correspondence. The first is in the ISAC Museum Archives at the University of Chicago, and I thank Anne Flannery, ISAC archivist, for facilitating my many requests.

* Arabic for (female) "manager."

† Arabic honorific for an individual who has visited Mecca.



Hagg Ibrahim Mohammed Abd el-Rahman (top right) with Tim and Doris Healey and their sons, Derek John and Valentine, 1964. Photo: Healey Collection, Epigraphic Survey.

John Larson, former archivist at the (then) Oriental Institute, scanned much of Nelson's correspondence and supervised Robert Wagner's enormous project of transcribing and translating the Hölscher correspondence.

The second archive is at Chicago House, much of it recovered from dusty storage areas by Tina Di Cerbo. Many "new" documents have appeared in Luxor over the years as Tina continues to find files tucked away in corners of the magazines (storerooms). Since 2006, this material has been scanned and organized by Alain and Emmanuelle Arnaudiès, and I thank them many times over. This project could not have been done without their admirable CHP (Chicago House Paper) system and index, their eye for accuracy, and their patience with my many questions.

Researching the illustrations for the book was an enormous undertaking that involved most of the Chicago House staff. We held a series of meetings in Luxor, each person armed with a laptop of images, and in some cases also with vague memories of the perfect image that we needed to track down. Photographer/archivist Sue Lezon was able to retrieve important photos that she recalled from her many years of cataloging them. With her characteristic desire for photographic perfection, she undertook the enormous task of reviewing and editing each one. It was daunting—and fun—to be presented with one subsection of the Chicago House archive after another. The glass slides? The Burton photos? The autochromes? Oh, and then there are the contact sheets from the Habachi Archive, and the next day a stack of fascinating financial ledgers to peruse. Some of the images used here were taken by current staff members who generously allowed their personal work to be reproduced. One of my own fond memories was discussing the early boats used by the Survey and then scrambling over the Chicago House garage with Alain to triumphantly identify the boat on its roof as the *Ramesses III*. I also thank Susan Allison, associate registrar of the ISAC Museum, for retrieving photos from the labyrinth of ISAC's database.

Families of former staff members have donated important records to ISAC or to Chicago House, especially David Woolman, whose parents, Laurence and Janet Woolman, played large roles in the design of the excavation houses in Luxor and Memphis; Laurence was also a draftsman for the Architectural Survey at Medinet Habu. The Woolman Collection is full of photos, letters, and Laurence's elegant (but apparently forgotten) renderings of the Eastern High Gate at Medinet Habu. I thank Eric Cline for bringing that material—sitting, unbeknownst to me, in the ISAC archive—to my attention. David Woolman himself has provided direction and needed corrections to some of my interpretations. Valentine Healey, son of Tim and Doris Healey, donated an invaluable photo album that documents Luxor and activities at Chicago House

from the early 1930s through Tim Healey's retirement in 1970, including many candid images of the staff. The Abdellahi family in Gourna graciously loaned their family photo album to Chicago House so that some of the images could be rephotographed and used in this book. A collection of forty-six snapshot prints from Caroline Ransom Williams in the Chicago House archive, a gift from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, did much to bring the social life of the mid-1920s into today. The family of the first field director, Harold Nelson, who deserves credit for the success of the Survey, has been very helpful (and hopefully intrigued). I thank the Krewson, Weideman, and Young families for photos and memorabilia. I hope this book reminds them of the extraordinary lives of Harold and Libbie Nelson and their daughter, Irene.

As this project progressed, groups of archival material came on the market. One quite remarkable one, with a complicated journey back to Luxor, is the photo album of J. Anthony Chubb (artist for the 1927–35 seasons), which was purchased in an Edinburgh shop in 2000 by Mrs. Yoshi Funaki and presented to Chicago House. Several of the images published here for the first time are from the Chubb album. I thank Dr. Anthony Marks, Tom Hardwick, and Ray Johnson for making a series of letters and other valuable documents available. Peter Der Manuelian, who is researching Prentice Duell of the Sakkarah Expedition, shared Duell's illuminating photo album of the Saqqara expedition house, and Stephanie Boonstra of the Egypt Exploration Society shared a charming, hand-drawn map of Luxor that allowed us to pinpoint the location of the house occupied by photographers John Hartman and, later, Henry Leichter.

Among the people who contributed to this project in the form of conversations are former field directors Edward F. Wente, Kent Weeks, Peter Dorman, Ray Johnson, and the late Charles C. Van Siclen, as well as former Oriental Institute directors John Brinkman and Janet H. Johnson.

Members of the Chicago House staff helped with this project. Among the many, I give special thanks to Brett McClain, Tina Di Cerbo, Sue Lezon, Susan Osgood, Yarko Kobylecky, Jen Kimpton, Keli Alberts, Dominique Navarro, and of course Alain and Emmanuelle Arnaudiès. I only wish that I could have had enough time to speak to each and every one of the staff. I also thank colleagues who at one time worked at Chicago House or knew it well: Jim and Susan Allen, Thad and Diana (née Olson) Rasche, Peter Der Manuelian, and Ann M. Roth, as well as William H. Peck, Kathleen and Gerry Scott, and other colleagues, including Peter Brand, Janice Kamrin, Kevin Cahail, W. Benson Harer Jr., John Baines, and Naguib Kanawati. I thank Lee Cain for his genealogical research to locate the Nelson family, and Margaret Schmid for her invaluable proofreading. I also thank James Fraleigh and Connie Tappy for their careful reading (and improvement) of the text, and Andrew Baumann, managing editor of ISAC Publications (and himself a Survey epigrapher and artist for four seasons), for his meticulous checking of the text and notes and for seeing the project through to print. I must also thank my husband, Joe Cain, who endured periods of neglect while I immersed myself in this project, for his patience, confidence, and enthusiasm.

What follows is the story of the University of Chicago's century-long effort to document, conserve, publish, and interpret Egypt's pharaonic cultural legacy. It is organized by project, because each site—be it Medinet Habu, Karnak, Luxor Temple, the Old Kingdom tombs at Saqqara, or another—has its own origin story: why Breasted and his successors thought it needed to be documented, what the plan was for the work and its publication, and what ultimately was achieved. The section on the work starts with Medinet Habu because that enormous site was the Survey's first project, and after a century its documentation is ongoing. Virtually all field directors and their staff worked there, so it provides the main story of how the Survey was organized and who was involved. Most of the later projects were chosen, in part, for how they related to Medinet Habu chronologically or thematically, and all the "other" projects were undertaken with consideration of what they meant for the ongoing work at the original site.

This text places its emphasis on the publications for each site and how they reflected—or did not reflect—the original plan, the differences often being the result of financial or political factors. Such factors are also leitmotifs that run through the book, because fieldwork does not exist in blissful academic paradise but is buffeted by budget cuts, academic politics, and political change, most notably the decolonization of Egypt starting in the 1950s.

This account of a century of work by the Epigraphic Survey intertwines academic policies and national politics, changing economies, and a whole lot of good stories about interesting people, all working toward the same goal of documenting ancient reliefs and inscriptions—a mission that continues today.



1

James Henry Breasted's Vision: "It is the texts that matter"

The story of the earlier life of James Breasted (1865–1935) (fig. 1.1) and his founding of the Oriental Institute has been told elsewhere,[1] but the story of his Epigraphic Survey—now a hundred years old—bears examination.

Breasted's doctoral research and work on the Berlin Egyptian dictionary entailed making accurate facsimile copies of texts in museums. That experience exposed him to what was possible, and with the unbounded enthusiasm of Americans at the turn of the century, he wrote, "I am now laying plans to copy not merely the historical, but *all* the inscriptions of Egypt and publish them."[2] And only a few years later, with his 1905–7 epigraphic expedition to Nubia, he set out to do just that. He devised a process that integrated photography and collation, establishing the basic process that, to a large degree, is still followed today (see appendix B).

It is one thing to have bright and ambitious ideas. It is another entirely to be persistent and ingenious enough to fund and implement them. Breasted was especially gifted, for he had the rare combination of intellect and the ability to communicate the importance of his academic undertakings with clarity and enthusiasm to people who could help him reach his outsized goals. Inspiration was not the problem—as Breasted wrote in 1899, "The only possible thing which could interfere [with achieving my goals] would be the lack of money."[3] Breasted was extremely fortunate to have formed a strong and lasting bond with John D. Rockefeller Jr., who, personally and through his foundations, was responsible for making possible most of Breasted's plans in Egypt, throughout the Middle East, and in Chicago. As Rockefeller wrote, "The contributions which I have made to the Oriental Institute have been based partly on my interest in the field which it covers—largely because of my belief in you."[4]

Breasted made no small plans. His first expedition, launched in 1905 on the occasion of only his second visit to the Nile Valley, set the goal of publishing all the historical texts on the monuments. It was followed by his 1922 collaboration with Alan H. Gardiner to make a "concerted attack" on copying the Coffin Texts in the Egyptian Museum with an international team that included Pierre

James Henry Breasted with his son, Charles, and wife, Frances, at the temple of Amada in Nubia, 1906. During this expedition, Breasted developed his method of epigraphy. Photo: F. Koch, ISAC Museum Archives.



Figure 1.1. Breasted in his office in Haskell Hall at the University of Chicago, surrounded by publications, antiquities, and a plaster cast, ca. 1929. Photo: ISAC Museum Archives.

Lacau,* Ludlow Bull, Norman and Nina de Garis Davies, and Adriaan de Buck (fig. 1.2).[5]

According to Breasted, he formulated his move to an even larger-scale undertaking of copying inscriptions in Thebes in 1923. As he recalled (in third person) about his involvement with the events a dozen years later,

> it was at this time, while sitting in a wheel chair in the beautiful gardens of the Winter Palace [Hotel at Luxor], that he dictated a plan of campaign for the development of an epigraphic survey of the temples of Egypt, to begin with the great Medinet Habu temple opposite Luxor. This preliminary draft he sent to his former pupil and old friend, Dr. Harold H. Nelson, then head of the department of history in the American University of Beirut. The correspondence thus opened led shortly to a conference with Dr. Nelson in Cairo, on the Director's invitation; and in the course of a few weeks the project was more definitely developed and Dr. Nelson's adherence secured.†

* Lacau (see fig. 4.3 in chapter 4) had already published several studies on the Coffin Texts, including *Sarcophages antérieurs au Nouvel Empire* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1904–6), and "Textes religieux écrits sur les sarcophages," in J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1906–1907)* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1908). He declined to be directly associated with the Breasted Coffin Texts Project.

† J. H. Breasted, *The Oriental Institute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 69. Nelson's participation was not assured until May 1924. See chapter 2, "Harold Hayden Nelson: The First Field Director."



Figure 1.2. The Coffin Texts Project copying texts in the Egyptian Museum, 1922. Photo: J. Hartman, ISAC Museum Archives. Left to right: Nina de Garis Davies, Alan Gardiner, James Breasted, Ludlow Bull(?).

Breasted presented Nelson with a proposal to be part of a grand project:

> Let me explain more specifically what I have in mind. As you know, I have long been distressed at the gradual disappearance of the hieroglyphic documents in situ in the Egyptian temples. I want to put into the field an epigraphic expedition. Its publication should be exhaustive and include the temples of Thebes, at least the temples of Karnak, Luxor, Medinet Habu, and the Ramesseum. Of these, you will remember, Medinet Habu is still as a whole practically unpublished. I do not know how many volumes this would make, but hazarding a guess, I should say from seven to ten volumes. That would be a block of scientific work of incalculable value and one of which any orientalist might be proud. The Institute is now in a position to furnish the means, the men, and the equipment for doing this job. The situation here is very favorable for its accomplishment, and I have now definitely decided to go ahead with it.[6]

A few months later, he added with supreme confidence, "Our enterprises are far more extensive than anything I had ever hoped would be actually realized in my lifetime."[7]

In May 1924, Nelson signed a contract with the University of Chicago to be the first field director of its new Epigraphic Survey (see chapter 2, "Harold Hayden Nelson: The First Field Director," and chapter 3, "Medinet Habu, 1924–"). And so the Epigraphic Survey was born.

Although the Survey was the fulfillment of Breasted's dream, he envisioned at first that he would not be overly involved. On October 4, 1924, he wrote to his mentor, Adolph Erman, "I do not personally expect to spend very much time on this task. What I am trying to do is to get such enterprises well started and then keep a controlling hand upon them, to see that the work is carefully done."[8]

Why Medinet Habu?

But where to start in Luxor? Breasted selected Medinet Habu (fig. 1.3; plan 1), the great complex



Figure 1.3. Aerial view of Medinet Habu, the temple complex of Ramesses III (ca. 1184–1153 BC), looking southwest. The Great Temple with its two pylons is in the center; the Small Temple of Amun and the Eastern High Gate are to the left. The ruins of the temple of Aye and Horemheb are in the lower right. Photo: E. Teeter.

of Ramesses III (ca. 1184–1153 BC), because, in his estimation, its wall reliefs were "of outstanding historical importance"; they included "the earliest known representations of European peoples," which, along with the historical sources in cuneiform that record the same events, could be used to create a comprehensive and accurate history.[9] The reliefs on the temple's walls provided a perfect example of how accurately documenting them and their texts could add to the historical record. More pragmatically, Breasted noted to Nelson, "The reason we are attacking Medinet Habu is the very fact that so few of its texts are published."[10] Work began there in fall 1924 and continues to this day.

As will be related throughout this volume, Breasted had a vision for ambitious work throughout the Nile Valley. This vision was most expansive in the years following World War I when the European powers, whose economies had been so damaged in the war, had to curtail some of their activities, thus giving Breasted the opportunity to enact some of his plans. He declared his intent to publish the entire Karnak complex, Luxor Temple, the Ramesseum, the tomb of Ramesses III in the Valley of the Kings, and the Roman temple at Deir el-Shaweit. Further afield, in 1930, he mused about documenting Amarna,[11] and in 1931, the temple of Behbeit el-Hagar in the Delta. Initially, the planned

work at Saqqara included at least nine Old Kingdom mastaba tombs, and he discussed expanding that work to include Middle Kingdom paintings and reliefs, starting at Beni Hasan.

The University of Chicago's foray into excavation and resulting architectural documentation at Medinet Habu inspired Breasted to consider an architectural survey throughout the *entire* Nile Valley. As he wrote in 1927, "Eventually I hope we can organize an architectural survey of Egypt. It is one of the most needed projects on the Nile. . . . Such a survey would make an invaluable series of volumes and I have had it in mind for years."[12]

Breasted planned that his life's work would continue long after he was gone. In 1924, he wrote that he had made

> a definite decision regarding the future work of the Oriental Institute. You will be interested to know that on my way through New York last month, while I was stopping at Mr. Rockefeller's house, he assured me of his cordial support of the work I was endeavoring to carry out, and that he would furnish its maintenance for another five-year period at double the present annual budget. This means that the work of the Institute is definitely assured on a much-expanded scale until the summer of 1929. It means further that its future is morally assured as permanent, not only during my working lifetime, but also afterward, because even if Mr. Rockefeller should withdraw his support after my retirement (he will certainly not do it before), the work of the Institute will be already so established and recognized as an indispensable department of research that the University of Chicago will be inevitably bound to go on with it.[13]

What follows is the astounding story of how Breasted's vision for the Epigraphic and Architectural Surveys was implemented and expanded over the next century by their field directors, the staff of Chicago House, and the University of Chicago.



2

Harold Hayden Nelson: The First Field Director

Harold Nelson (1878–1954) was essential to the formation and success of the Epigraphic Survey and Chicago House. His association with James Breasted dated to his college days at the University of Chicago. In 1913, he received his PhD under Breasted with a thesis on the Battle of Megiddo. Well before he received his degree, he had begun teaching in the history department at the American University of Beirut (AUB), where he also served as the curator of the university's museum (fig. 2.1).

Letters between Nelson and Breasted in 1922 concern academic matters, especially Nelson's efforts to place promising AUB students (including John A. Wilson) at the University of Chicago,* and the French excavations at Byblos of Pierre Montet (who was to discover the royal tombs at Tanis in 1939). Nelson also followed the news from Chicago and commented on the careers of his former colleagues David Luckenbill, William Edgerton, and Ludlow Bull. In August 1922, he wrote to Breasted, saying how impressed he was with his description of the then-new Oriental Institute and wistfully comparing that vision to his own situation at AUB. He likened his lot to "riding two horses," as he was required to teach a broad range of classes from the history of the ancient Near East to "the Origin and Settlement of the Great War," commenting, "Either is a man's size job, and to try to do both at the same time is killing me and very hard on the students."[1] Such comments may have given Breasted the idea that Nelson could be persuaded to leave AUB.

In late January 1924, less than a year before the Epigraphic Survey started operating, Breasted began discussing with Nelson the possibility of his becoming its field director. In a long letter, he outlined the Rockefeller funding and the commitment of the University of Chicago to work in Egypt, summarizing, "The

Harold H. Nelson, the first field director (1924–46), in formal dress, ca. 1937. Photo: Epigraphic Survey.

* Many letters from 1922 concern arranging a fellowship in Chicago for Asad Jibrail Rustum. In 1923, Rustum received his PhD in history from the University of Chicago, and from 1927 to 1943 he taught in the history department of AUB.



Figure 2.1. Harold Nelson (back center) in Beirut, ca. 1906. Front left: Daniel Bliss, first president of the American University of Beirut. Back left: Harry G. Dorman, first dean of medicine at AUB and grandfather of Peter Dorman, Epigraphic Survey field director 1989–96. Men at front and back right are unidentified. Photo: Nelson family.

Institute is now in a position to furnish the means, the men, and the equipment for doing this job."[2]

The early talks involved Nelson maintaining his employment with AUB but working for the University of Chicago in Luxor from October to May. Breasted envisioned a University of Chicago–AUB collaborative effort, combining forces to form a "Beirut headquarters which . . . might eventually develop into an Asiatic headquarters for the Oriental Institute." He pointed out the mutual advantages: "[this] . . . would be something of a personal union resulting from the fact that you are Curator of the Museum, and I should hope that you would continue in this office. Your annual sojourn in Egypt could only contribute to the enlargement of the collections at Beirut. All this raises the further question whether there would be any further space available at the university or in the

Museum building where the Beirut headquarters of the Oriental Institute might be housed."[3] He even suggested that Chicago would be willing to rent the space from AUB.[4] Breasted proposed that they take a research trip through the Sinai during which details could be worked out. Although the trip fell through, the discussions continued. By February 14, Nelson reported that the AUB senate had approved his seasonal absence to work in Thebes, writing, "It is the kind of field work that I would rather do than any other and the kind which I believe is the most necessary to be done. You may be sure that I will do my best to make the enterprise a success and to hasten the work along as fast as possible."[5]

In May, Nelson signed an "informal contract" for five years at an annual salary of $3,500 (plus travel and housing expenses). His relationship with AUB continued to be a point of discussion. Nelson was torn between the two institutions, and Breasted tried to adjust Nelson's schedule to ensure that he could return to Beirut in the spring with enough time to teach a course. This would work to Breasted's advantage for achieving his "personal dream" of a "permanent headquarters for archaeological work in western Asia, situated at Beirut." Although he admitted that he had "no official authorization from the University of Chicago in the matter," he was enthusiastic, for he had "seen a number of such dreams actually realized in the last few months."[6]

Things moved fast. On September 24, 1924, Nelson arrived in Luxor to assume his position as field director of the Epigraphic Survey—ten days before he was even officially on the University of Chicago payroll. Multiple letters arrived each week from Breasted, often combining discussions of the length of Nelson's contract (changed to three years), furniture, water systems, and stationery for the new headquarters, Chicago House.[7]

Nelson continued to maintain his position at AUB, expressing misgivings about leaving Beirut because he both loved the environment of Lebanon and had worked hard to build up the history department, the future of which in his absence worried him.* On May 2, 1926, he proposed to Breasted that he officially split his time, going to Luxor in early October, then working at AUB from mid-February to mid-March, and then returning to Egypt to finish the season at the end of April. His letter couched it in terms of family obligations ("It is going to be the very greatest of disappointments to Mrs. Nelson, and a serious drawback to Irene's† proper education, if I leave here for Luxor"), but it also betrayed his preference: "I cannot face the possibility of giving up my connection with the Luxor work, the opportunity for which I have been hoping all my life. If I give that up it will mean a moral letdown, in so far as it will mean a voluntary giving up of opportunity." Nelson admitted that the plan might not be palatable to either side: "The combination plan, beside other drawbacks, means a division of interest which is serious. Either way lie serious consequences from the decision I must make."[8]

Breasted's May 26, 1926, response reflects a change of heart, for he seems to have abandoned his "dream" of an "Asiatic headquarters" in the Levant. He no longer supported Nelson's retaining his position in Beirut, which Breasted had previously thought to be a key to that earlier goal. This shift may have been a result of the disastrous collapse of the Egyptian Museum plan of 1925 and a realignment of Breasted's priorities.[9] As he wrote to Nelson, "We are going forward in our development of scientific work in the Orient, to a great future. Unless the Egyptians themselves approached me on the Cairo Museum matter, I shall make no efforts on their behalf involving such an expense of time and strength as I suffered last winter," suggesting that Breasted had decided to focus entirely on developing the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor. He was quite

* To add to Nelson's sense of guilt, in 1926 Philip K. Hitti resigned from the department to take a post at Princeton, leaving only a single faculty member: Rustum (Nelson to Breasted, 4 July 1926, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 676).

† His daughter, who was eight years old at the time.



Figure 2.2. Harold, Irene, and Libbie Nelson, ca. 1925. Photo: Epigraphic Survey.

blunt in his assessment of Nelson's time-splitting suggestion:

> It will be a grievous disappointment to me if you are unable to remain in full and executive charge of the Luxor work. I have serious doubts whether you can carry the burden of this responsibility and continue to function for the American University at Beirut. . . . It does not seem to me, from our point of view, at all a practical plan. Nor from the University point of view can I understand how such a plan could be made of great value to our Beirut friends. You are too useful a man to be wasted endeavoring to pick up broken threads, tie them together for a month and then decamp again.[10]

By July, it was apparently clear that the best path for Nelson and his family was for him to resign from Beirut. Nelson described the decision as a "real wrench"[11] and his letter of resignation to AUB president Bayard Dodge that month as "one of the most difficult letters I have ever written."[12] He continued to negotiate with Breasted on such details as the terms of the Chicago appointment (permanent and removable only for "academic or moral cause"), the amount and types of pensions, a higher salary ($5,000), and support for his daughter Irene's education. By the end of 1926, all was settled, and Nelson, as research professor at the University of Chicago and field director of the Epigraphic Survey, settled into a post that he was to

hold for twenty-three years. For all those years, he was accompanied by his wife, Libbie (fig. 2.2), who made enormous contributions to the Epigraphic Survey in establishing and managing the old and new Chicago Houses and by entertaining—and placating—countless guests. Irene lived with her parents in Luxor from 1924 (when she was six years old) until 1935, when she left Egypt for school in the United States.* For many years, the Nelsons returned during summers to their house at Shweir in the mountains of Lebanon.

* Irene Louise Nelson attended two years of high school at Schutz in Alexandria, and then the Holmquist School for Girls in New Hope, Pennsylvania (since 1949 named Solebury School), starting the latter in fall 1935 (Nelson to Mrs. Holmquist, 28 February 1935, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 1886).



3 Medinet Habu, 1924–

Harold Nelson and the Early Years, 1924-1940

The First Years, 1924-1926

For its first season, the staff of the Epigraphic Survey in 1924 consisted of Harold Nelson as field director and epigrapher; artist Alfred Bollacher from Berlin, who had illustrated catalogs for the Königliche Museen collection;* and photographer John Hartman, who conveniently lived in Luxor and had worked with Breasted on the Coffin Texts Project. Breasted offered to help with the epigraphic side, and they anticipated assistance from Alan Gardiner (fig. 3.1), then one of the preeminent philologists with whom Breasted had worked on the Coffin Texts Project two years before. The budget also included Egyptian support staff consisting of a darkroom assistant, two additional photographic assistants for positioning the camera, and at least three men to move the ladders and scaffolds. The *reis*† would be selected from among the ladder men.[1]

The Egyptologist/epigrapher side of the staffing was admittedly thin considering that Nelson was consumed with administering the Survey and overseeing the construction of the field headquarters. An additional problem was that Chicago House initially had no library, so the most essential bibliographic resources needed to be sent to Luxor—especially copies of any Medinet Habu texts or reliefs previously recorded and translated, which were particularly important for restoring damaged or missing sections of text. Breasted, with the help of Gardiner and Hermann Grapow (the coeditor of the *Wörterbuch*, the Berlin Egyptian dictionary), arranged for copies of the *Zettel*, the Berlin dictionary slips that recorded vocabulary used in the Medinet Habu texts, to be sent to Luxor.[2]

Epigraphers and artists on ladders, supported by assistants, documenting the north wall of Medinet Habu, ca. 1927. Foreground: William Edgerton, John Wilson, or J. Anthony Chubb. Background: Alfred Bollacher and Harold Nelson. Photo: Epigraphic Survey.

* Bollacher and Breasted had been in contact for many years. A letter in the collection of the University of Bremen from Günther Roeder to Adolph Erman, dated 17 July 1902, refers to Bollacher doing work for Breasted. I thank Tina Di Cerbo for bringing this letter to my attention.

† The chief of the workmen (also spelled *rais* in the correspondence).



Figure 3.1. Sir Alan Gardiner (right) with James H. Breasted at Medinet Habu, ca. 1933. Photo: ISAC Museum Archives.

Breasted and Nelson (fig. 3.2) planned to go carefully through the bibliography on the temple "before we can ourselves publish a single plate. . . . We must in every case be thoroughly convinced by exhaustive examination that there are no old writings hidden away in earlier volumes which might be available for completing the lacunae of the present day." In doing so, they wished to avoid repeating what they saw as a major flaw in Edouard Naville's publication of Deir el-Bahari, in which the key scene of the Queen of Punt was not included because it had been transferred to the Egyptian Museum. They resolved that "it will be necessary to settle upon a systematic plan of procedure in this matter which will involve sending every plate, when the field work on it is finished, either to Europe or America, for it will be impossible for us to set up a complete library at Medinet Habu."[3]

In December 1925, blueprints of texts and reliefs made by Nelson and his staff were sent to Egyptologist T. George Allen in Chicago and Alan Gardiner in London for their comments and to check for any earlier publications of the scenes.[4]

Nelson's lack of rigorous training in the Egyptian language (he had been a professor of history) was a problem. As he wrote to Allen the summer before the first season, "I am trying to learn a little about hieroglyphic, about which I find that I know very little. . . . I am trying to get some sort of feel for the Ramses III style. I believe that Medinet Habu, as far as difficulty of the text goes, is the hardest piece of work that the Expedition will have to undertake. It makes me quake to think of beginning with it. But I suppose Breasted is the one who ought to worry, and not I."[5] In the first two seasons, Breasted relied on Gardiner for help with the texts. Nelson acknowledged that "we ought not to publish without such assistance,"[6] to which Breasted replied, "You are quite right that we ought not to publish without careful collation by some such critical eye as his."[7]

Breasted trusted Nelson's abilities, but he admitted that putting in Gardiner's hands so much of the collation process, which entailed careful comparison of the drawing with the original, created a difficult dynamic: "It would be important, of course, to see to



Figure 3.2. Harold Nelson and James H. Breasted at the beginning of their long collaboration, 1927. Photo: C. Ransom Williams, Ransom Williams Collection, Epigraphic Survey.

it that the collations to be made by Gardiner are duly in hand, so that you can test the new readings from the wall itself."[8] Further, Breasted asked Gardiner to do the bibliographic research on the temple reliefs in European libraries and museums, although he did request of Nelson that, if he had "any degree of disappointment at all in view of Gardiner's offer to do this work, please tell me frankly and I am sure that this matter can be adjusted. In the interests of expediting the work I take it Gardiner's assistance would be useful."[9] Indeed, Nelson had been looking forward to the change of routine afforded by doing bibliographic work in European libraries. Although he initially agreed to Gardiner's assistance,[10] a couple of days later he expressed himself with unusual frankness: "I have not had the opportunity to use a library at all in connection with the work, and that ought to be done, and ought to be done by me, for I know the temple better than anyone who has not worked here."[11] The next day, he sent Breasted a more contrite note, again putting the interests of the project over his own: "With regard to Gardiner's cooperation in the matter of collation with the British Museum manuscripts, I think it by far the best idea. I naturally would like to do some of it myself, but, in the interests of the work, I believe that Gardiner would be far the better man and he could do that while I am doing work here or am working on the photographs in Beirut in the summer."[12] And so, as Nelson was consumed with running all aspects of the expedition, blueprints of the texts were sent to Gardiner in London and to Allen in Chicago for collation.[13]

Nelson's relationship with Gardiner, who was known for being exacting and judgmental, continued to be a problem. In 1925 (and again in 1926), Gardiner pressed Breasted and Nelson to add Egyptologist Adriaan de Buck to the staff, a move that Nelson was not eager to make, writing, a bit defensively, "I should be very happy to have de Buck here for a time this winter, but I should prefer it to be as late in the season as possible. I have had no opportunity as yet to do much work at the Temple, and I do not want to hand over my present copies of the inscriptions to a stranger to criticize. I can have a large mass of stuff ready for him later; now it is not ready." Nelson later deferred de Buck's visit partially on the basis of there being no room for him at the house and, still later, advocated for John Wilson on the basis of making the staff more American.[14]

One gets the impression that Nelson often felt the shadow of Gardiner over his shoulder, and at the end of the second season, he wrote frankly to Breasted: "I was also anxious to find out whether my surmise that he [Gardiner] does not entirely approve of my being in charge of this important work is correct."[15] It did not help matters that early in the second season, Gardiner was sent ten photographs with Nelson's collations to check, work that Nelson admitted contained "a number of careless mistakes."[16]

The format of the planned publications was also a topic of early discussion, because it would dictate photography and how to divide the vast areas of text and reliefs. In August 1924, Nelson queried Breasted:

> Have you reached any decision regarding the size of the publication we are going to get out? Will it be the same as the Oriental Institute Series?* I am anxious to know definitely about this before we reach Luxor for we can do no work till this point is settled. Of course, it may be possible to get most of the material on pages of that size, but some will undoubtedly have to be printed on larger pages if we are not to split up columns. How would it do to use the size of the OIS, printing single pages where this is possible, double pages where necessary and, in the case of the longest columns, folded pages of whatever length may be required. The objections to this method are, I suppose, that double and folded pages in time tear where they are folded. If, however, we are to use that size of publication, it is the only way that I see of avoiding the very unhappy method of cutting up the columns. Please let me know your decision on this matter as soon as possible, as the time is passing rapidly and I am anxious to have your instructions fully in hand before we reach Luxor.[17]

The two were also concerned about setting up a system for recording and correlating the negatives and drawings and their location in the temple. Breasted instructed Nelson:

> Be sure, when you have once begun, to follow a system of consecutive numbering of negatives very slavishly, and insist that Hartman set up his numbers, insofar as it is physically possible, where they will be photographed on the negative. I know that this may involve serious difficulties at points where Hartman himself is on a high platform and the scene to be photographed can only be reached by a ladder, but I believe he could train one of the native boys to insert a couple of wooden pegs in a joint in the masonry, and set the numbers on these pegs or perhaps on a strip of tin plate. Of course, the numbers will have to be on little blocks of wood, for if on cards they will of course blow away, unless Hartman can make a slotted block for holding them. You will find him a fairly handy man in such matters, and quite able to meet such situations.[18]

Although placing small numbers in the field of the photo was followed, and some photos show a numbered card on a meter stick or seemingly balanced on the edges of blocks, the suggested procedure turned out to be impractical for several reasons—not only the prospect of a young boy balancing himself stories above the ground, but also Nelson's objection that if "the number . . . is a part of the negative itself, it cannot be erased without spoiling the negative."[19]

Nelson also argued that adding the numbers to the margin of the negative rather than in the image was a better procedure because

> when the plates are finally published, the number of the negative will appear on the printed plate and will in many cases not correspond at all to the number of the plate in the publication. . . . Also, if you desire to use these photographs at any time for publication elsewhere, the number stands out like a sore thumb. It is the very disfiguring character of such numbers that make me dislike to use them in our work. If I carefully numbered the negatives as soon as they were dry, using India ink and protecting the same with a varnish, I believe, with care, that the series could be kept in order. There are going to be times when we shall probably be obliged to skip a small portion of wall for some reason or other,—such as difference between morning and evening lighting,—and return to it

* Oriental Institute Series (OIS) may have been the projected name of the series that became Oriental Institute Publications (OIP). Oriental Institute Publications no. 1 (*Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting,* 1924) and no. 2 (*The Annals of Sennacherib*, 1924) both measured 12″ × 9½″, much smaller than the eventual Epigraphic Survey volumes.

later. In that case, the numbers photographed will not correspond to the logical order on the walls. Any system has its difficulties, but the system of photographing the numbers seems to me to have less in favor of it than that of numbering by ink on the margin. However, you are the Director of the Institute and I shall follow instructions unless I hear to the contrary from you.[20]

Luckily for the future, Nelson's recommendation was followed, although there are negatives that include a number card.*

On November 18, 1924, the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago began work at Medinet Habu. The small group lived nearby at the newly completed Chicago House (see chapter 11, "Old Chicago House, 1924–1940"). Chicago Egyptologist T. G. Allen stayed at the house for several weeks to advise Nelson on the best way to start their work.[21]

The first question, when the group was confronted with the enormous temple complex, was where to start. Breasted left it largely up to Nelson, but he suggested that the northeast side would be "the most feasible."[22]

Needing a plan of the Great Temple to plot out the location of the texts and reliefs,[23] Nelson contacted James Quibell, then the secretary general of the Service des Antiquités, who responded that only a very old one without details was available. Nelson asked Breasted whether copies could be made of the plans in the old publications of Lepsius and de Rougé, which were available in Chicago, and sent out to Luxor.[24] He commented that he would postpone commissioning a new one until he received the copies from Chicago. Turning to another resource, Nelson asked Bollacher to draw a new plan, but Bollacher demurred, saying he did not have the experience. Nelson finally took it upon himself to make a "complete plan of the temple," done on tracing cloth for durability.†

Hartman began photographing the exterior of the temple, positioning himself on mounds around the structure because delivery of the ladders and scaffolding was delayed until the end of November (fig. 3.3). He then started on the rooms in the back of the temple—images that would be filed away until they began seriously working in that area. He also started the enlargements of the images of the



Figure 3.3. John Hartman photographing the south exterior of Medinet Habu, using mounds of debris as a scaffold, ca. 1925. Photo: Epigraphic Survey.

* See, for example, photos LFC 1, 94, 624, and 845. Oriental Institute large-format negatives nos. 1–845 include a number card in the image. I thank Alain Arnaudiès for this information.

† It was not until 1939 that Nelson completed, with the assistance of Charles Nims and Richard Parker, a final plan of the Great Temple at Medinet Habu (Parker to Wilson, 16 February 1939, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 1850). See also Nelson to Allen, 9 October 1925, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 543.

Calendar. Although initially an effort was made to take all the photographs at the same scale, this approach was abandoned and meter sticks of different lengths were included in each negative.

Work started on the south exterior wall with the Calendar, because "it was the hardest."[25] By December 1924, the entire exterior of the temple had been photographed. But in the process, the team discovered that the 5″ × 7″ film Hartman had used was unsuitable, for when the negatives were enlarged on 16″ × 20″ paper, the "signs were too small to be usable." As a result, the entire Calendar was rephotographed using 8″ × 10″ film. But the earlier effort was not wasted, as the smaller negatives could be used for the large-scale hieroglyphs and reliefs at the top and bottom of the wall. Nelson projected that the two sizes of text would be presented separately, thus eliminating issues with matching them. He concluded that the entire exterior should have been shot with 8″ × 10″ film.

The team quickly amassed an enormous number of photographs and drawings that needed to be organized and cross-referenced. In 1925, Nelson switched from maintaining a book in which the documents were listed to a card catalog, because the book did "not allow of all the information I would like to have available for each photograph."[26]

The first two seasons were a time of experimentation. Nevertheless, the Survey staff managed to accomplish much, considering that they were still working out details of the epigraphic method and photography while settling into their new house.

They worked according to a procedure that Breasted had established from his work on the First Epigraphic Expedition to Egypt and Sudan (1905–7), which also consisted of just three men: Breasted as the Egyptologist/epigrapher, an artist, and a photographer. Following the earlier procedure, Nelson and Hartman conferred at the wall to "determine just about how many square meters of wall we can include in a given photograph, and have it ultimately come out the right size on the printed page."[27] Nelson then told Hartman what size enlargement was required, took that print to the wall, and, as he described, followed these steps:

> Then I work over the enlargement, placing a piece of tracing paper over the photo and drawing in on the tracing paper such signs as are difficult to make out or which are broken. I also put in such signs as are missing that I can restore with certainty, taking into account the physical factors, such as size of the lacunae, traces on the wall, parallel passages and idioms from elsewhere on the Temple. Then Bollacher draws on the enlargement with a pencil, using my data and notes.[28]

Nelson then checked that drawing against any older photographs or publications. Breasted or Gardiner made a third check before the drawing was inked.*

The conventions Bollacher was to follow also took some working out, especially whether block lines should be indicated. In the early discussions, the team decided to simply leave "gaps in the inscriptions and sculpture."[29] Another issue concerned lacunae not due to losses at the joins of blocks. Nelson decided to use an "ordinary black line" for what was visible on the stone and dotted lines for all restorations.

Then there was the question of how to record the reliefs. Bollacher asked whether he was to record "lines running perpendicularly on a curved cornice freehand and parallel or diverging at the top as they appear in the photograph." Nelson directed him to reproduce the lines as they would appear in a photograph. A further question related to damaged areas of the wall. Should they restore the missing parts of human bodies or horses, or should they record only what was actually on the wall? Nelson opted to indicate restorations with dotted lines, and decided

* This is the reverse of the order followed later. See appendix B and Breasted to Nelson, 19 December 1924, ISAC Museum Archives.

that restorations based on older publications were to be enclosed in brackets.[30]

Nelson further queried Breasted, "Shall we remove the photograph after drawing in what we can do here, or shall we wait till you or the people at Chicago have gone over the work and can supplement our efforts here?" Fortunately, Nelson had access to the library at the nearby Metropolitan Museum excavation house, where he could "refresh [his] memory on how others have met these problems."[31] Of great help was a draft bibliography of Medinet Habu that Bertha Porter—later the coeditor of the magisterial 1929 *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*—forwarded to Nelson in August 1924.

By December 1924, just months after beginning work, Nelson reported that he and Bollacher had finished the west wall (Bollacher's drawings in pencil only) and three scenes on the north wall, and that they had started on the scenes of the king recounting gifts to Amun on the west end of the south wall, which Nelson judged to be "easy going." Then they would begin the Calendar, which Nelson predicted would be "where our troubles will really begin."[32] They waited for warmer weather to complete the north exterior wall.

The enormous scale of the temple (the exterior walls rise 79 feet) necessitated the use of "Strilback" ladders and "Rip-Rig" scaffolds ordered from Slingsby in London.* The scaffolds presented challenges because the walls were battered, so the upper levels of the scaffolds were not close enough to the wall surface for the epigraphers and artists to see the reliefs (fig. 3.4). They experimented with field glasses, but overall they relied on bosun's chairs that dangled from the top of the pylon (fig. 3.5) or the equally dangerous multistory ladders propped against the walls (fig. 3.6). Nelson recalled, "One feels rather exalted on the top of three of the stagings of scaffolds, and as I am not very agile, I do not make a graceful figure ascending or descending. But I am becoming more expert." The ladder and scaffold men were essential members of the team who, Nelson recalled, "work with little supervision."[33] This essential equipment was stored in a little movable shed made of packing crates chained to the wall behind the *gaffir*'s (watchman's) house at the temple.



Figure 3.4. Workmen erecting a precarious scaffold in the First Court at Medinet Habu, ca. 1928. Photo: J. A. Chubb, Chubb Collection, Epigraphic Survey.

Acquiring photo paper was a challenge. Initially, Hartman recommended the use of Belgian-made, double-weight paper that could be purchased more cheaply in Cairo than in the United States, although the quality was not quite as good. An additional problem was that any paper (and film) stored over

* Some of the multistory Strilback ladders from 1925 are still in use.

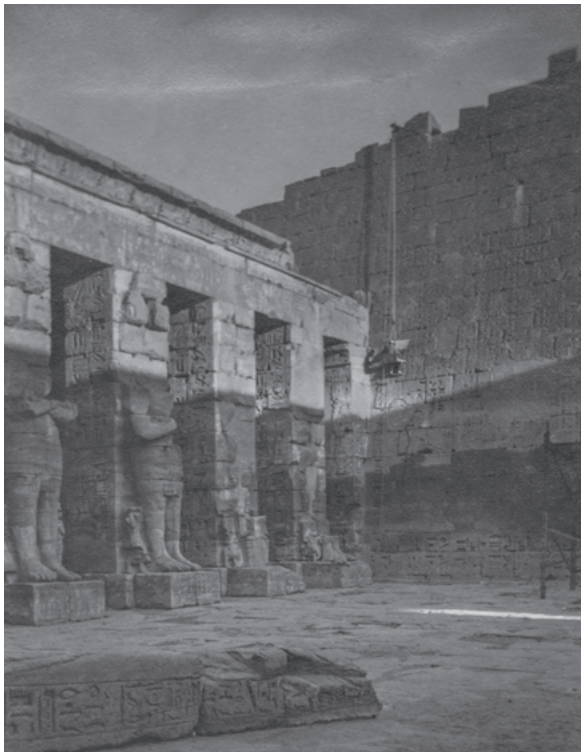


Figure 3.5. J. Anthony Chubb in a bosun's chair checking texts in the First Court at Medinet Habu, 1927. Photo: Chubb Collection, Epigraphic Survey.



Figure 3.6. Alfred Bollacher working on a tall ladder on the north wall of Medinet Habu, ca. 1930. Photo: E. DeLoach, Chubb Collection, Epigraphic Survey.

the summer would deteriorate, so the stock had to be reordered each season.[34] By 1927, they began to purchase photographic supplies from Kodak in London or Cairo. The artists' supplies were imported from Stanley in London.[35]

By the end of December 1925, the team had finished recording the long "Blessing of Ptah" text on the facade of the First Pylon and had begun a second collation of the Calendar.[36] Nelson, who admitted that his grasp of the Egyptian language and scripts was not of the highest caliber, reached out for additional help with the long and very difficult text. That December, he wrote Breasted that he wanted to send British Egyptologist Battiscombe Gunn blueprints of the Calendar text, while Alan Gardiner continued to give his advice on collation.[37]

As soon as the first season, Nelson realized they were understaffed, writing that "we could keep three draughtsmen employed on the work very easily," and he asked that John Wilson be sent out as an epigrapher. The next season, Nelson reported optimistically that artist "Bollacher is now going along faster than he did last season. In the first place the most difficult scenes are now completed, and in the second place he is on to the hang of the work as he was not last year."[38]

Bollacher's skills were greatly admired, but early on he developed a reputation for being "difficult," a trait that grew over the years (see "Life at the Old Chicago House" in chapter 11). Nelson noted that it would be very hard to have another artist work with Bollacher on the same plate because "I believe he would resent the idea very strongly." But more positively, he remarked that Bollacher's work was so good "that anyone else's would be a bad contrast."[39]

It did not help matters that when Bollacher arrived in Luxor he spoke no English, while Nelson's German was not very proficient and Libbie Nelson spoke none at all.

Photographer Hartman was also making progress. In December 1925, Nelson reported: "Hartman is working in the back of the temple and is piling up negatives rapidly. He said he will have completed the whole temple by some time in January, if not before the end of the month."[40]

The sequence of their labors and the coordination of the steps took some working out. As they began documenting the huge temple calendar on the south external wall, Nelson wrote to Breasted, "There is no need of waiting till all the collation is finished before beginning the draughting of the inscriptions. For instance, most of the Calendar could be done at any time now without waiting for the collation. So could the long inscriptions in the First Court and the two long inscriptions on the First Pylon between the flagstaff recesses. I have already, this last summer, prepared my tracings of these as far as they could be made out from the photographs. It only remains to go over the doubtful passages."[41]

At the end of two seasons, the Survey, and Nelson personally, continued to face criticism from Gardiner. In early August 1926, Nelson wrote, "I took dinner with Gardiner and enjoyed a very pleasant chat with him. He was very cordial and offered to do all that he could to help along our enterprise. It was evident, however, that he felt more than doubtful of the scientific accuracy of our work if it is left to our staff alone. That did not include yourself." Gardiner was still "very anxious" to add de Buck to the staff for six weeks. In the meantime, he made a helpful but condescending offer that Nelson spend May in London "when he and de Buck and myself could get together and read through carefully the material for our first volume, studying it philologically. I could then, the following autumn, look up any suggestions on the wall and we would be ready to print that winter."[42] Nelson exhibited his usual calm demeanor and dedication to the project, commenting that "six weeks with Gardiner would be of great advantage to me and to the work also." But he asked Breasted to work on other solutions that did not include so much well-meaning but critical outside help: "It is obvious we shall have to do our own collating as Gardiner will not have time. I was hoping that you and I, this coming season while you are at Kurna, could read through our material for a certain stated period each day. I am preparing a translation as I go along, but it has not been very systematically done in the more or less distracted conditions in which I have so far worked. I hope you will be able to do this reading with me."[43]

By the end of the 1925 season, the operations were reevaluated. First, Nelson realized that the scale of the photographs was much too small to record the detail on the wall, concluding that "we must scrap the work of the first two seasons and redraw the plates on a larger and more adequate scale which would make them paleographically, archaeologically, and artistically as final and complete a record of the entire original wall as human fallibility could reasonably expect to attain."[44]

On November 24, 1925, Breasted advised Nelson that he was "seriously looking at additions to our staff."[45] This pattern of Breasted (and later his son Charles) sending staff to Chicago projects without consulting the field director was unfortunately common—the field directors of the Megiddo Expedition and Luxor's Architectural Survey both received unsolicited staff members. Gardiner's criticism about the quality of the epigraphy may have been a factor in Breasted's increasing the staff of Egyptologists in order to have the collations more rigorously cross-checked, which in turn meant engaging more artists.

A New Start, 1926

Two years of experimentation proved that the university's commitment to "making our facsimiles a complete and final record of the original wall, including both reliefs and inscriptions," would

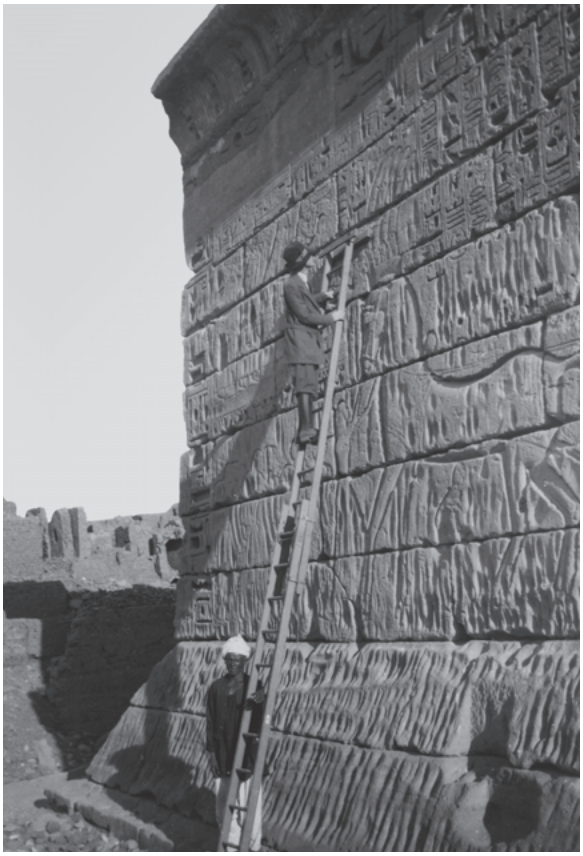


Figure 3.7. Caroline Ransom Williams at work at Medinet Habu, 1926. Photo: Ransom Williams Collection, Epigraphic Survey.



Figure 3.8. John Wilson holding the drawings for what would be published as *Medinet Habu* I, April 17, 1928. Photo: Edgerton Archive, Epigraphic Survey.

require essentially starting over with a larger staff and new procedures.

The epigraphic staff for 1926 consisted of Caroline Ransom Williams (fig. 3.7), John Wilson (fig. 3.8), and William Edgerton, all former students of Breasted's. The addition of three epigraphers was a mixed blessing for Nelson: it gave him the staff needed to ensure the accuracy of the facsimiles, but it removed him further from the scientific work that had attracted him to the project in the first place. Yet even the additional epigraphers did not mollify Gardiner, who voiced a "gloomy expectation" over Edgerton's appointment.[46] He again advocated for de Buck to be appointed.

John Hartman, the Epigraphic Survey's Austrian photographer, who had worked with Breasted since the start of the Coffin Texts Project in 1922, died in Cairo in December 1926. He had played an indispensable role in the logistics of the Chicago House expansion, and he was well liked by Nelson.*

* Nelson wrote, "I miss him very much all the time, both in the work and personally, for I have become very much attached to him" (Nelson to Breasted, 7 December 1926, ISAC Museum Archives = CHP 704). Hartman died of liver disease brought on by drinking Nile water. He left a widow and three children, the youngest a three-year-old boy. The Nelsons paid tuition for Hartman's daughter to attend the American Mission School in Cairo for the next year. The Hartman family lived in Luxor in a house on the corniche road near the site of today's hospital. Hartman's successor, Leichter, later lived in the same house. The location of the house is known from a hand-drawn map of Luxor in the possession of the Egypt Exploration