UPDATE FROM ARCE
CURRENT RESEARCH, EXCAVATION AND CONSERVATION PROJECTS IN EGYPT

“From the beginning of the discussions... there has been agreement that any new American school in Egypt should open its doors at all times to qualified students of every country—above all to Egyptians...”
Sterling Dow, Co-founder of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), Archaeology Magazine, Autumn 1948

Looking back, the Club of Odd Volumes in Boston seems a fitting site for ARCE’s “Big Bang”—its founding meeting in 1948. The Club’s intention was to foster a love for literature and scholarship, and it was here, on a damp, foggy Friday in May 1948 that some of America’s most distinguished Egyptological scholars and institutional leaders got together after lunch with a similarly enlightened purpose.

ARCE’s first meeting was presided over by Harvard’s Edward W. Forbes and Archaeological Institute of America President Sterling Dow. Their vision was to support research in all areas of the history and culture of Egypt.

At the Temple of Khonsu within the Karnak Temple complex, conservation field school trainees under the ARCE directorship of John Shearman are cleaning the walls in several chapels. The slow and careful work is revealing colours which haven’t seen the light of day for well over a thousand years.

In the top image, the architrave over the doorway to Chapel 2 (see map on page 8) is being meticulously cleaned. The bottom photo showcases the finished work bearing the cartouches of King Ramesses IV—the man who became king after his father was (likely) murdered in a harem conspiracy.
This 1936 photo from the ARCE archives features co-founder and artist Joseph Lindon Smith, and behind him (from left to right), archaeologist George Reisner's daughter Mary, Smith's wife Corinna, and Reisner's wife, also named Mary. The group is at a picnic lunch by the Unas pyramid at Saqqara. It was probably Reisner who took the photo.

George Reisner spent almost four decades excavating the Old Kingdom cemeteries adjacent to the three great pyramids of Giza. His phenomenal output of photographs, diagrams and reports today form the foundation of Harvard University’s Giza Project. From page 48 you can read about their impressive goal of digitizing and providing access to all archaeological records of Giza from institutions around the world.

Joseph Lindon Smith had first travelled to Egypt—on a whim—in 1898. He was at Abu Simbel, painting the colossal statues carved for Ramesses II, when his work caught the eye of Phoebe Hearst, mother of newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst—also travelling in Egypt for the first time. Later, at a dinner party given by Mrs. Hearst, Smith met George Reisner, who was her field agent in Egypt. In 1905, when Reisner became Director of the Harvard-Boston Egyptian Expedition at Giza, Smith was invited to join the expedition team as staff-artist.

A founder of ARCE in her own right, Corinna Smith spent winters in Egypt for decades and mastered classical Arabic, which was no mean feat. In his 1948 report on the beginnings of ARCE, Sterling Dow, president of the Archaeological Institute of America, noted that “Classical Arabic is not easy, in fact, for many modern Arabs, who laughingly say that the angels in heaven speak classical Arabic—adding that only an angel could do it.”

A supporter of ARCE to the end (and beyond), before she died, Corinna asked that donations be made to ARCE in lieu of flowers at her funeral.

During the early part of the 20th century, American archaeological institutions had conducted major excavations in Egypt (see photo caption above), but there was no central office in Cairo serving these institutions in their fieldwork or associated research. And so, the American Research Center in Egypt was born. Within three years the Center was up and running in Cairo.

Today, the vision of those present at the Club of Odd Volumes is alive and well, and in 2018, ARCE celebrates 70 years committed to Egypt’s cultural heritage.

**ARCE Field Schools**

British author Amelia Edwards visited Egypt only once, in 1873–74, but it changed the course of her life: “Such is the fate of every Egyptian monument…. The tourist carves it over with names and dates…. The ‘Collector’ buys and carries off everything of value that he can…. The work of destruction, meanwhile, goes on apace.”

Distressed at the plight of Egypt’s ancient monuments, it became her calling to raise awareness and funds for their study and conservation. Between then and now, the natural and human pressures on ancient Egypt have grown alarmingly, and the need for help has never been greater: from both sides of the Atlantic, and particularly, from the Egyptians themselves.

The American Research Center In Egypt offers training programs, largely for the benefit of Egyptian colleagues, in
Throughout Khonsu Temple, the faces of many figures—both statuary and inscription—were defaced by Egypt’s early Christians. One place that has escaped willful damage is in the heavily-sooted side-chapels.

It may well be that the very smoke (from cooking fires and incense burners) that smothered the bright colours on the reliefs paid a big part in protecting them by making the scenes less of a target. Today, after cleaning by the ARCE field school, the face of pharaoh is again shining brightly.

This before-and-after comparison of Ramesses III wearing the khepresh crown was taken in Chapel 6.

field archaeology, conservation techniques, salvage archaeology, and site management. One of those programs is run by John Shearman, ARCE’s Associate Director for Luxor. Since 2007, ARCE has been conducting a field school at the Temple of Khonsu, on the southern side of the great Amun Temple complex at Karnak.

Khonsu Temple was begun by 20th-Dynasty kings Ramesses III and IV, and continued by later rulers, and provides an excellent example of a small but complete Late New Kingdom temple. Here, conservation field school trainees, under Shearman’s direction, are cleaning the walls in several chapels, and replacing old cement with lime mortar on the temple walls to ensure stabilisation.

Cement had been used in the past to patch and reinforce walls. As John Shearman explained to NILE Magazine, the problem with cement is that it retains moisture much more than the native sandstone from which much of Khonsu Temple is constructed. This means that it expands and contracts differently to the surrounding stone, and, being much stronger, can cause the sandstone to crack. In contrast, lime mortar is more porous and behaves similarly to the temple’s sandstone.

To support the Egyptians’ capacity in caring for the monuments, ARCE provided local conservators with their first purpose-built, onsite conservation laboratory, located within the Karnak Temple precinct, near Khonsu Temple. While the interior is hi-tech, the exterior is clad with brick that is very similar to the Roman wall surrounding the complex, allowing the lab to blend into the area.

The ARCE field schools have been an important source of employment income for the Luxor region—particularly during the lean period following the Egyptian revolution. Financial help is shared around to as many families as possible by ensuring that only one person per household is involved in excavation work or in the field school.

**New Discovery at the Temple of Khonsu**

The cleaning and conservation work at the Temple of Khonsu has led to some important discoveries. It’s long been known that the entire Temple of Khonsu was made from reused material; monuments from around Luxor that Ramesses III took down and reemployed for quick construction of the temple complex. Parts of the Memorial Temple of the 18th Dynasty’s Amenhotep III were reused...
The original goal for the ARCE Khonsu Temple field school was to clean and consolidate the reliefs on the walls and columns of the building’s main court. The results were so impressive that the work expanded into the temple’s side chapels, seven of which have now received attention.

Khonsu was a lunar deity and considered to be the son of Amun and Mut in the Theban theology. As a sky-deity, Khonsu was generally depicted with a hawk’s head. Alternately, he was shown as a mumified young man with a side lock of hair and holding a flail and a was-scepter.

This recently-restored scene comes from the Temple of Khonsu’s Chapel 11. Here the goddess Wadjet, in the form of a winged cobra and wearing a sun-disk, confers the shen ring (symbolising eternity) onto an aspect of Khonsu referred to as Khonsu-Neferhotep.

Wadjet was the tutelary goddess of Lower Egypt. Her name means “green one”, which can refer both to the cobra’s colour and to the lush Delta marshes which teemed with life and became synonymous with fertility and creation.

Seated on the hieroglyph for maat, Khonsu’s lunar role is evident from the symbols of the moon disk and crescent on his head. He holds the ankh and was-scepter, divine symbols of eternal life and dominion.

The ARCE field school is currently preparing some of the restored chapels to be opened to the public, so that visitors can be wowed by the spectacular colours that have been released from beneath the centuries of soot and grime.
Margaret Benson was the first woman to be granted permission to lead her own excavation in Egypt, which ran for three highly-successful seasons at the Temple of Mut at Karnak between 1895 and 1897.

Benson first visited Egypt in 1894, seeking relief from England’s soggy weather, and came across the overgrown ruins of the Mut Temple: “Having heard no more of it than that there were granite statues with cats’ heads to be seen there… Yet it was a place to seize upon the imagination.”

In 2013 the American Research Center in Egypt conducted a conservation-restoration field school on the royal statue. ARCE removed the old cement patches, and disassembled and cleaned the separate pieces. The parts were then reassembled, with the missing sections replaced with new fabrications made from artificial stone. The restored statue was placed on a new damp-coursed base which will prevent groundwater seepage and salt-induced decay—a growing problem in the Luxor area due to the rising water table.

An information panel provided by ARCE for visitors explains that the statue was originally made for Amenhotep III. The face and abdomen had been recarved twice after Amenhotep III’s reign, first in the later New Kingdom (perhaps by Ramesses II or Merenptah), and then in the Third Intermediate Period, perhaps by the High Priest (and defacto ruler of Upper Egypt) Pinedjem in the 21st Dynasty.

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“Egypt has sat for her likeness longer than any other country. Nothing disturbs her composure. Financial ruin may stare her in the face, armies may come and go, but each year the Nile rises and all traces of disturbances are gone.”—Charles Dana Gibson, Sketches in Egypt, 1899.

It’s no surprise that Charles Gibson chose to populate his sketch of Sekhmet statues at the Temple of Mut with two fashionable women. This was, after all, the artist who had created the vision of American beauty—the “Gibson Girl”.

This scene was sketched on January 2, 1898 while Gibson enjoyed a Dahabiya cruise up and down the Nile. The Sekhmet statue in the foreground was unearthed by Margaret Benson (see opposite) in 1896. She described it as “Sekhet of Sheshanq I”. ARCE’s onsite information panel tells visitors that the statue was originally one of the hundreds made by the 18th Dynasty’s Amenhotep III, “but a significant number of them were never inscribed for him and were later given hieroglyphic texts identifying other rulers. This one is named by Sheshonk I of the 22nd Dynasty, a time some 500 years after the statue had been first dedicated. In this way, Sheshonk partook of Mut’s care for the world.”

In a similar fashion to the royal statue opposite, this Sekhmet sculpture received attention from the 2013 ARCE conservation and restoration field school. The statue (which had originally been consolidated from fragments) was falling apart, so the separate pieces were cleaned and reconstructed. Old cement patches were removed and missing parts replaced with modern artificial stone.

here, as were parts of the Ay and Horemheb memorial temple, just north of Medinet Habu, and other monuments belonging to the 19th Dynasty’s Seti I and Ramesses II.

In fact, it appears that Ramesses III’s 20th-Dynasty Khonsu temple was built upon an earlier Khonsu Temple that was begun in the 18th Dynasty, perhaps by Thutmose III, before being dismantled some 250 years later and used in the new temple’s foundation and flooring.

When Ramesses III ran out of stone from the original monument—which was much smaller than his new temple—he then quarried additional monuments to build up the upper walls and roof areas.

Judging from the remnants that have been found, it appears that Ramesses III’s new Khonsu temple is an enlarged version of the original one on the same site.

But that’s not all. Mixed in with the reused material from the 18th-Dynasty temple and later additions were limestone blocks that seem to be from an even earlier (possibly Middle Kingdom) complex that were reused in the 18th-Dynasty temple. This represents an entirely new chapter in the history of the Karnak Temple complex.

**Temple of Mut**

On top of ARCE’s own conservation and excavation projects throughout Egypt, with decades of local experience and established relationships, ARCE provides logistical
One of the important projects ARCE is supporting is at the Luxor Temple Blockyard. The upper walls of the Temple’s Colonnade Hall are mostly missing—quarried away in the medieval period when stone was needed for house, church, or mosque construction. With such a convenient quarry of cut stone, we are fortunate that more of the temple hasn’t similarly disappeared over the centuries.

Excavations in the 1950s and ’60s, which revealed the southern end of the sphinx-lined processional avenue linking Luxor and Karnak temples, also exposed hundreds of buried reused block fragments used as stone foundations. Excavators stacked the decorated blocks in dozens of rows on the ground around the temple for future study.

The next level of care began in 1999 when raised platforms were created (see above) to lift the sandstone fragments off the ground and away from groundwater and salts which are particularly damaging to this type of stone.

Today, under the direction of Ray Johnson of Chicago House—the Egypt headquarters for the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute—a team is creating a database of blocks and fragments in the blockyard from the time of Ptolemy I. Next in line are the rows of blocks dating to the reigns of Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten.

In time, Chicago House aims to create a complete digital documentation of all 50,000+ inscribed pieces in the Luxor Temple blockyard. Following the massive job of documentation and conservation treatment, the plan is to restore as many blocks as possible back into their original positions.

The above photo shows local team members preparing blocks for photography. Pictured (from left to right), are Saoud, Sayid, Mohamed, Chicago House architect Jay Heidel and head conservator Hiroko Kariya.
Zahi Hawass supervising the transportation of Tutankhamun’s mummy from his sarcophagus in the tomb’s burial chamber, to a climate-controlled glass display case in the antechamber. The move, designed to help preserve the fragile mummy, was made on November 4, 2007: the 85th anniversary of Howard Carter’s discovery of the young king’s tomb.

Up until this point, Hawass estimated that only 60 people had seen the king’s remains firsthand—most recently in 2005 when his body was brought out from the tomb to be CT-scanned. These were the scans that revealed the young king likely died from a severe infection following a thigh fracture—and put to bed the more melodramatic theories surrounding Tutankhamun’s demise, such as a hippopotamus attack or an assassin’s blow to the head.

Part of Hawass’ keynote lecture at the ARCE annual meeting in Tucson will address Nicholas Reeves’ bold but insightful hypothesis regarding the tomb of Tutankhamun/Nefertiti. Hawass is head of the latest scanning project, and we are hoping that details will emerge from the most recent radar scans of the walls of Tutankhamun’s tomb. In February, the Ministry of Antiquities quashed rumours of a 15-metre-void detected behind the burial chamber’s west wall.

It’s a busy time of year for the worldwide cult of Tutankhamun: the 4th International Tutankhamun Conference will be held at the Grand Egyptian Museum from 5–7 May in Cairo, and the latest Tutankhamun blockbuster exhibition—King Tut: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh—is now showing to massive crowds at the California Science Center.

support to more than a dozen archaeological teams sponsored by U.S. universities.

Several missions are ongoing at the temple of the goddess Mut. Under the direction of Dr. Richard Fazzini and Mary McKercher, the Brooklyn Museum’s expedition conducted a study season to document and repair the site’s Sekhmet statues. It also built retaining walls and stairways around the Thutmoside Gateway—one of the earliest standing structures in the temple—to make the area accessible to visitors for the first time.

In previous seasons, ARCE field schools have rescued and repaired larger-than-life granodiorite seated statues of Amenhotep III and the goddess Sekhmet, first discovered over 120 years ago (see pages 10 and 11).

2018 Annual Meeting
The 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt is in Tucson, Arizona, April 20–22, 2018, at the Tucson University Park Hotel. This is one of the largest gatherings of Egyptologists and enthusiasts in the world, where scholars and expedition leaders present their latest discoveries and project updates.

The special keynote speaker at this year’s meeting is Egypt’s renowned and colourful former antiquities chief, Dr. Zahi Hawass (see photo caption, above). Aside from the new theories on Tutankhamun’s tomb, Hawass will also discuss the other “hot topics” in Egyptology today: his recent excavations in Luxor’s Western Valley (where foundation deposits and radar scans appear to have led to the remains of an 18th-Dynasty high-status tomb (robbed but with remnants of burial equipment remaining), the Egyptian Mummy project (whose DNA testing we’ll explore in the next article) and that void in the Great Pyramid at Giza.

The Opportunity
In 1950 the American Journal of Archaeology reported that an “announcement is hereby made that early in 1951 the American Research Center will open in Cairo, Egypt. . . . The fee for membership is five dollars. . . but larger amounts are welcome particularly at the present stage.”

Today, as then, support for Egypt’s cultural heritage is—to put it mildly—“welcome.” To register for the 2018 Annual Meeting, or learn more about the difference your membership makes, visit the website: www.arce.org.

NILE Magazine thanks ARCE’s new Director for Egypt, Dr. Louise Bertini, for information on some of ARCE’s many excavation and conservation projects across Egypt. We look forward to reporting on more in the next issue.