

bulletin

# of the American Research Center in Egypt

NUMBER 197 — FALL 2010  
2008-2009 ANNUAL REPORT

## The British Museum Expedition to Hagr Edfu 2010: Conservation through Documentation Project<sup>1</sup>

E. R. O'Connell

Today, Edfu is best known for its Ptolemaic period temple. Less well-known is Hagr Edfu, a set of low sandstone hills located 3.5 km to the west (fig. 1). Rock-cut tomb architecture, decoration, inscriptions, pottery and other material culture indicate that the site became an important necropolis of Tell Edfu from as early as the Middle Kingdom through, perhaps, the early Roman period. From the New Kingdom or earlier, Hagr Edfu served as the likely location of Behdet, an important stopping place on the annual journey of the cult images of Hathor of Dendera and Horus



Pyramid tomb (photo: J. Rossiter)

of Edfu. In Late Antiquity, some of the most prominent rock-cut tombs were reused, probably by Christian monks, and, by the tenth- and eleventh-century, Medieval Christian manuscripts now in the British Library suggest that the site was the location of a Monastery of Saint Mercurios and other Christian institutions (Gabra 1985). An early nineteenth-century church testifies to the site's continuous or period Christian character (Clarke 1912). In 1980, a modern monastery, Deir Anba Bakhum, was established and it is now a popular pilgrimage destination, hosting thousands of visitors each year. Today, Hagr Edfu is

under threat from encroaching settlement and water distribution systems.

With the support of an Antiquities Endowment Fund (AEF) grant from the American Research Center in Egypt, The British Museum Expedition dedicated its 2010 season to a program of conservation through documentation. As modern settlement wraps around the site, the water table is rising and some of the tombs along the lowest terraces of the desert escarpment are now flooded; others are used to dispose of trash from adjacent villages. While it

*continued on page 3*

# Bulletin of the American Research Center in Egypt

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Color separations and printing by PressWorks, Columbus, Ohio

The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the American Research Center in Egypt, Inc., its member institutions, or its sources of support.

The *Bulletin* is published by the American Research Center in Egypt  
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# from the director

Dear Members,

Recently, I attended a very special graduation ceremony at Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) building in Zamalek. The Master of Ceremonies for the graduation was Dr. Hisham El-Leithy of the SCA and Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the SCA, addressed the graduates and audience, as did Dr. Janice Kamrin and I. The occasion was the graduation of Egypt's first museum registrars after almost four years of training, both in the classroom and in the galleries of the venerable Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Training sessions were conducted by Dr. Kamrin, ARCE's Project Director for the initiative, and by Rachel Mauldin, ARCE's Archivist and head of ARCE's U.S. office, and also a former museum registrar.

ARCE's Registrar Training Program began in the summer of 2006 with a sub-grant from ARCE's United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Egyptian Antiquities Conservation Project (EAC). The program had two major goals, both now largely realized. The first was to provide the Egyptian Museum in Cairo with a staff of professionally trained registrars who had learned the skills necessary to properly register, accession, move, document, and track the Museum's invaluable collection of Egyptian antiquities, including the famous funerary treasures of King Tutankhamen. The second goal was to create a reliable, easy-to-use collection data base. This latter goal was — and is — especially important as parts of the Egyptian Museum's priceless collection are transferred to new museums throughout Egypt, including the planned Grand Egyptian Museum, to be located in Giza near the Pyramids.



The success of the program has been astonishing, and with the enthusiastic support of Dr. Hawass, as well as that of the Egyptian Museum's Director Dr. Wafaa El-Seddik, the Museum's new Registrar's Office has grown from an originally planned staff of four to a total of ten registrars. In addition to the financial support of USAID, the project also received two generous grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which were crucial in determining what software was necessary for the Museum's collection data base, and then acquiring the software and necessary hardware for the museum team.

Thanks to ARCE, the SCA, USAID, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Egyptian Museum's incomparable collection is now being better cared for and scholarly access to the collection records has increased dramatically. ARCE, very much your organization, continues to make substantial contributions to preserving Egypt's treasured heritage for current and future generations.

Gerry D. Scott, III  
Director

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