

# IN SITU

Fall Semester 2024

NEWS AND EVENTS OF THE HARVARD STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON ARCHAEOLOGY



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### *In Situ Fall 2024:*

Edited, typeset, and designed by Andrea V. Lanza Aliaga  
Produced by Peter Der Manuelian

*Cover Photo:* Xiaoge He working on a suspended platform during the excavation of pit K8 at Sanxingdui Site. Photo by Jia Yu.

Courtesy of the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. (see pg. 19).

*Back Photo:* A dog scavenging for trash after the site closes. Photo by Julia Viani Puglisi (see pg. 27).

## *A Message from the Chair*

Welcome to another issue of *In Situ*, expertly typeset and designed by Andrea Lanza Aliaga, '25. Once again we present archaeological articles and updates spanning the globe, from Jordan to Peru, from Egypt to China and back again to Kenya. Faculty, staff, and students report on recent excavations, museum and archival work with ancient papyri, teaching with collections, and even the acquisition of a documentary oil painting of a subterranean tomb chapel. As we get busy preparing new articles for the spring 2025 issue (submissions welcome!), please enjoy reading in these pages about the exciting activities and impressive talents of our Harvard archaeologists.

Peter Der Manuelian  
*Barbara Bell Professor of Egyptology*  
*Chair, Standing Committee on Archaeology*





Fig. 1. Aerial photo of Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, view to the northwest. (Image courtesy of APAAME, photo by Rebecca Repper)

## **INTRODUCING THE TOWN OF NEBO/KHIRBAT AL-MUKHAYYAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT**

**ANDREW JOEL DANIELSON**

*Assistant Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations*

As of autumn, 2024, the Town of Nebo/ Khirbat al-Mukhayyat Archaeological Project (TNAP/ KMAP) is a new archaeological project affiliated with the Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations Department at Harvard, co-directed by Andrew Danielson (Harvard University) and Debra Foran (Wilfrid Laurier University). TNAP is focused on the archaeological excavation of the site of Khirbat al-Mukhayyat in the west-central portion of the present-day Kingdom of Jordan. The site is located on the western edge of the west-Jordanian highland plateau, overlooking the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea to the west, and other noteworthy ancient sites such as Jericho and Jerusalem (fig. 1 and 2). For much of

its history, Khirbat al-Mukhayyat monitored access between the Jordan Valley and the west-Jordanian highlands, serving as an effective gateway between sub-regions of the eastern Mediterranean littoral and the semi-arid and arid regions to the east.

At Mukhayyat, excavations are currently targeting the period of the Iron Age (ca. 12th–6th cents. BCE), focusing on questions relating to borderland processes, including cross-cultural interaction and the intersections of conflicting political programs. The site of Mukhayyat (ancient Nebo) features in several ancient inscriptions and texts of the Iron Age that allude to its location as within a conflict zone between competing kingdoms.

Significant remains from the late Hellenistic period (2nd–1st cents. BCE) and the Byzantine period (5th–7th cents. CE) have also been the focus of recent work, addressing questions related to agro-economics, ritual, and pilgrimage (fig. 3 and 4).

In tandem with the excavations at Mukhayyat, the regional survey component of the project seeks to address similar questions, together with a focus on subsistence economies over the longue durée, investigating the surrounding landscape and the myriad sites in it that range from the Neolithic through the Ottoman period. Currently, the survey component of the project has focused on reconnaissance and relocation of previously identified but unexcavated sites from legacy macro-regional surveys of the early and

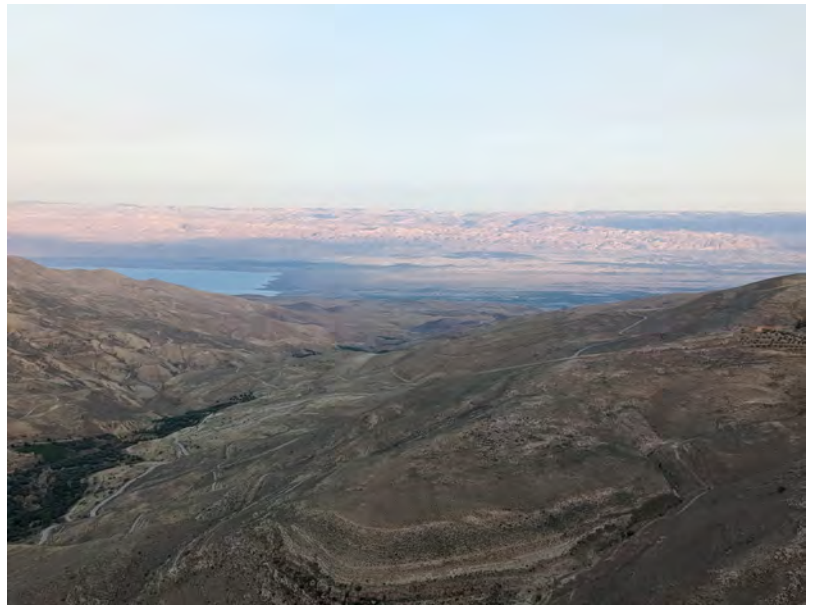


Fig. 2. View from Khirbat al-Mukhayyat to the west. Visible are the Dead Sea, Jordan Valley, Jericho and Jerusalem.



Fig 3. Excavation of a portion of the Iron Age fortification wall at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat.

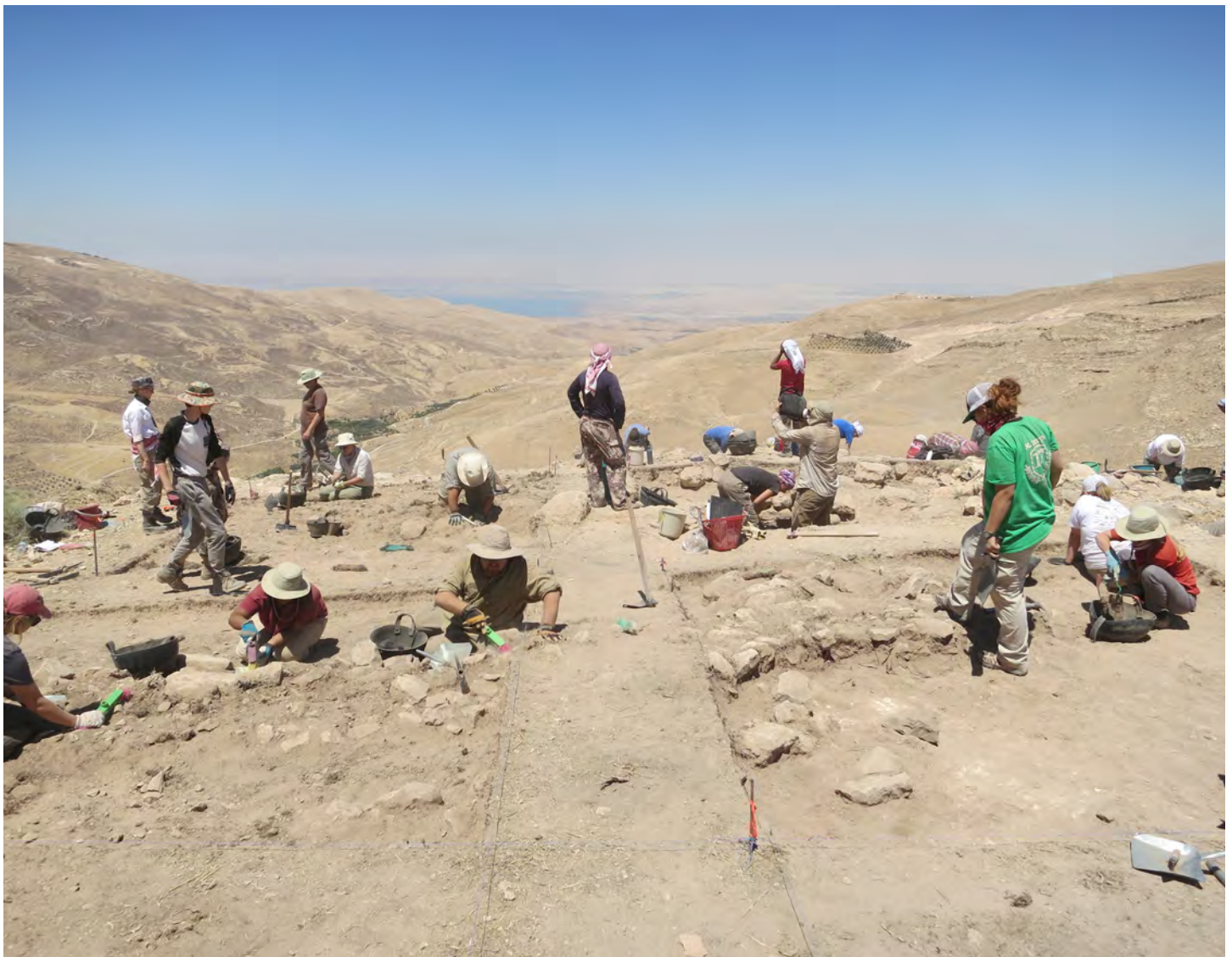


Fig. 4. Excavations in Field B at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat; view to the west.

late 20th century, intensive site surveys of selected sites, and salvage excavations in collaboration with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. Further, a Community Based Archaeological Program has been established with the goal of continued engagement with the local community that resides near the archaeological site.

The past several seasons of archaeological work at Mukhayyat have consisted of an excavation and survey season at the site during the summer of 2023 and a research and analysis season during the summer of 2024. During the 2023 season, excavations at Mukhayyat were aimed toward further elucidating the stratigraphic sequence at the southern end of the site during the first millennium BCE (fig. 5). Analyses of a previously conducted intensive site survey had

revealed the major chronological horizons of activity and areas of intensified material culture remains by period, which are informing current excavation strategy toward less invasive and intensive excavation (fig. 6). The survey component of the project focused on preliminary site surveys at nearby Khirbat Yusra, Khirbat al-Fayha, and 'Ayun adh-Dhib, with occupations identified for the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age, and the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic periods.

The 2024 season focused on analysis and the preparation of materials and previous work for preliminary publication. In particular, this work has focused on integrating newly surveyed material culture with legacy data from previous surveys in the region. This data, acquired in collaborations with the



Fig. 5. The excavation team from the 2023 season.

University of Toronto are now under renewed analysis, integrated within the framework of TNAP. Continued and future work involves the further analysis of these and additional legacy survey datasets, integrated with new excavation results from Mukhayyat to better inform our understanding of the region.

Excavations at Mukhayyat will continue with a summer excavation and survey season in 2025. Students or scholars interested in volunteering or collaborating are encouraged to reach out to Andrew Danielson ([adanielson@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:adanielson@fas.harvard.edu)).

Fig. 6. Pottery sherd distribution at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat by period.

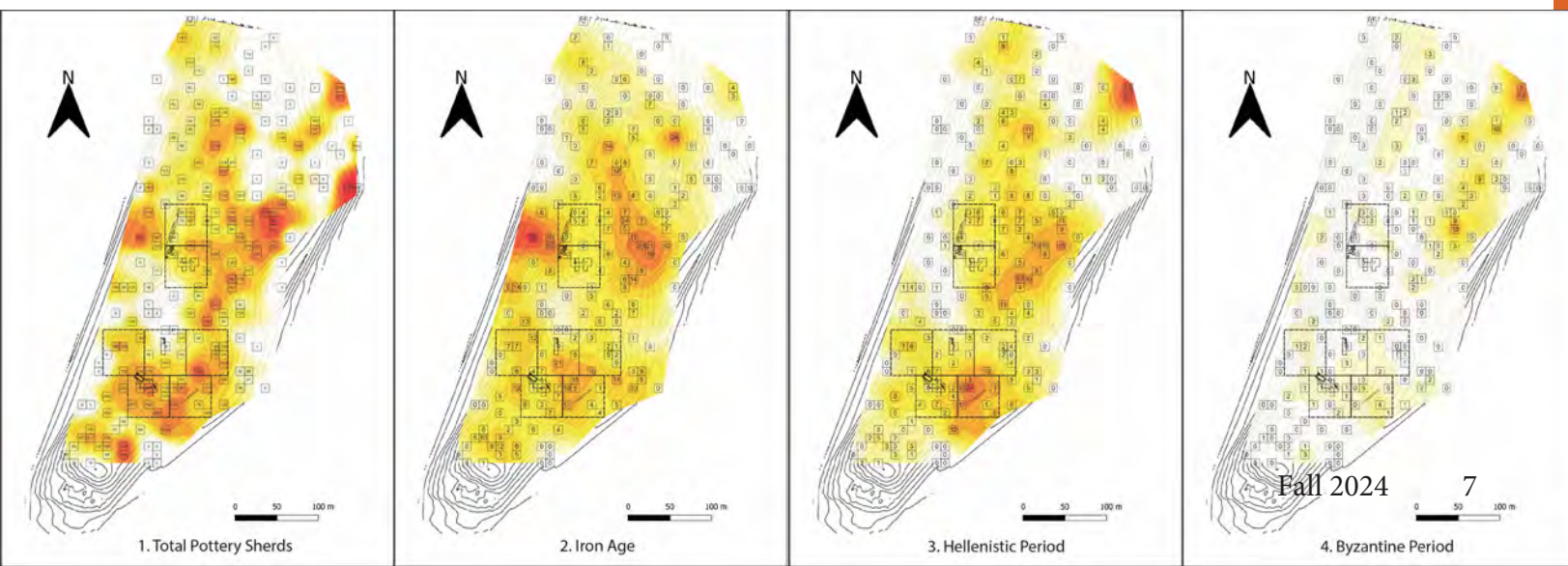




Fig. 1. Mackinley works on recording a khipu in his workspace in Museo Leymebamba.

## THE DAILY LIFE OF A KHIPOLOGO

**MACKINLEY FITZPATRICK**

*Archaeology Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Anthropology*

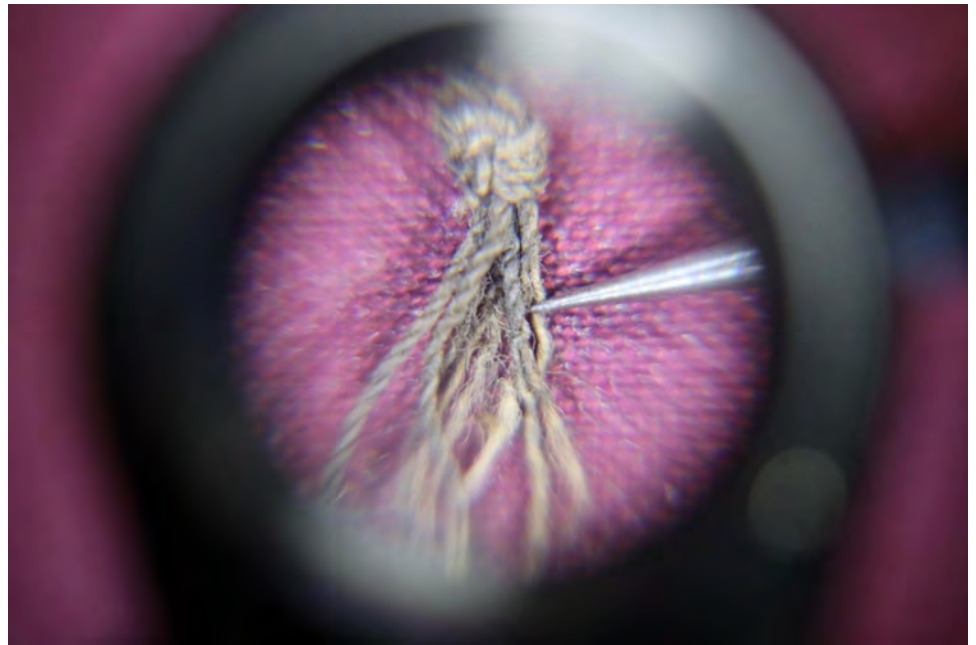
For students of the Andean khipu—knotted cord record-keeping devices—collecting cord and knot data can be one of the most exciting yet grueling parts of the research process. While previously recorded khipu data is available for more than 600 khipus in databases such as the Open Khipu Repository and the Khipu Field Guide, a survey of museums published by Manuel Medrano in 2021 demonstrated that at least double that number exists in museums and collections around the world.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, while a standard method for recording khipu data exists—primarily developed by Marcia and Robert Ascher in the 70s and 80s—this method

has been expanded and refined by scholars over time to better suit their needs and to account for newly recognized data types. Thus, while data for previously recorded khipus exists, there is much more yet to be collected and understood, even from previously examined khipus. When you combine this fact with the hundreds of completely unrecorded khipus, it becomes clear that there is still a significant amount of work required if we are ever to truly elucidate the greater khipu corpus.

For my dissertation, I have undertaken khipu research at Museo Leymebamba, which stewards 33 Inka-style khipus. These khipus come from two sites around the highland lake of Laguna de los Cóndores in Peru, with the majority originating from several

<sup>1</sup> See Medrano (2021) *Quipus: mil años de historia anudada en los Andes y su futuro digital*.

Fig. 2. Mackinley's daily view as he peers through his loupe to record khipu data, such as cord structure, in fine detail.



cliffside tombs overlooking the lake. These khipus are remarkable for several reasons. They constitute some of the largest and best-preserved khipus known to date and are among the few khipus with a known place of origin. Many khipus housed in museums worldwide today were first looted and then sold, making it difficult to know their original provenience and further obscuring the context behind the data recorded in them.

My work at Museo Leymebamba involves a mix of encounters with the old and the new. While

20 of the khipus in the collection were previously examined by Carrie Brezine, Alejo Rojas, and Gary Urton, the rest remained unrecorded. I took on the mission of recording the remaining khipus, while also re-recording those previously studied. Although several of my data collection methods are based on those used by the previous researchers, I have also introduced my own methods, expanding what these previously studied khipus have to offer.

In fact, one of the many privileges of studying museum collections is that well-preserved



Fig. 3. Mackinley next the tombs at Laguna de los Cóndores where many of the khipus he is studying were found.

artifacts can theoretically be studied infinitely many times. This is, of course, is very different from an archaeological excavation, which can only be conducted once. Kent Flannery (1982) perhaps put it best in his famed article, “The Golden Marshalltown,” where he remarked, “archaeology is the only branch of anthropology where we kill our informants in the process of studying them.” However, unlike the apparent destructive act of excavation, museums are tasked with quite the opposite—keeping our informants alive in perpetuity. With each researcher bringing new ideas, new questions, and new methods, no artifact tells the same story twice. Ultimately, recording data is just as much an act of observation as it is an act of interpretation. This is not to say that reliable and reproducible data cannot be collected; on the contrary. However, the observations one researcher makes may differ from those another would make, and vice versa.

Knowing all this, I asked myself earlier this year: How does one actually go about recording 30+ khipus, which collectively consist of over 5,500 individual cords? Using my data collection methods, each cord carries on average around 20 data points that must be collected. This means the 5,500 cords should amount to over 100,000 individual data points that need to be examined and recorded by hand. The sheer magnitude of this task is overwhelming,

even before attempting it. Adding to the challenge, I only have limited windows of time I can stay in Peru to record the khipus. Fortunately, last summer I managed to record just over 1,000 cords over the course of a month, leaving about 4,000+ cords remaining.

To achieve my data collection goals, I knew I needed to create a system to track my work, serving both as a practical progress reminder and as a motivational tool. I love spreadsheets and making graphs, so I devised a line graph that could be updated daily to reflect my progress. Knowing the approximate total number of cords I needed to record and the amount of time I had this summer, the graph became both a practical and gamified motivator.

Creating this graph helped me better visualize the work ahead and provided daily goals and feedback on my recording journey. Despite having spent hours studying khipus at Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and a month last year in Museo Leymebamba, you can literally see my “learning curve” in the initial portion of this graph. Part of this initial lag in data collection was also due to setting up my lab space at the museum and undertaking the three-day trek to the Laguna de los Cóndores where the khipus were found. This meant I was immediately playing catch-up, and so, I got to work recording.

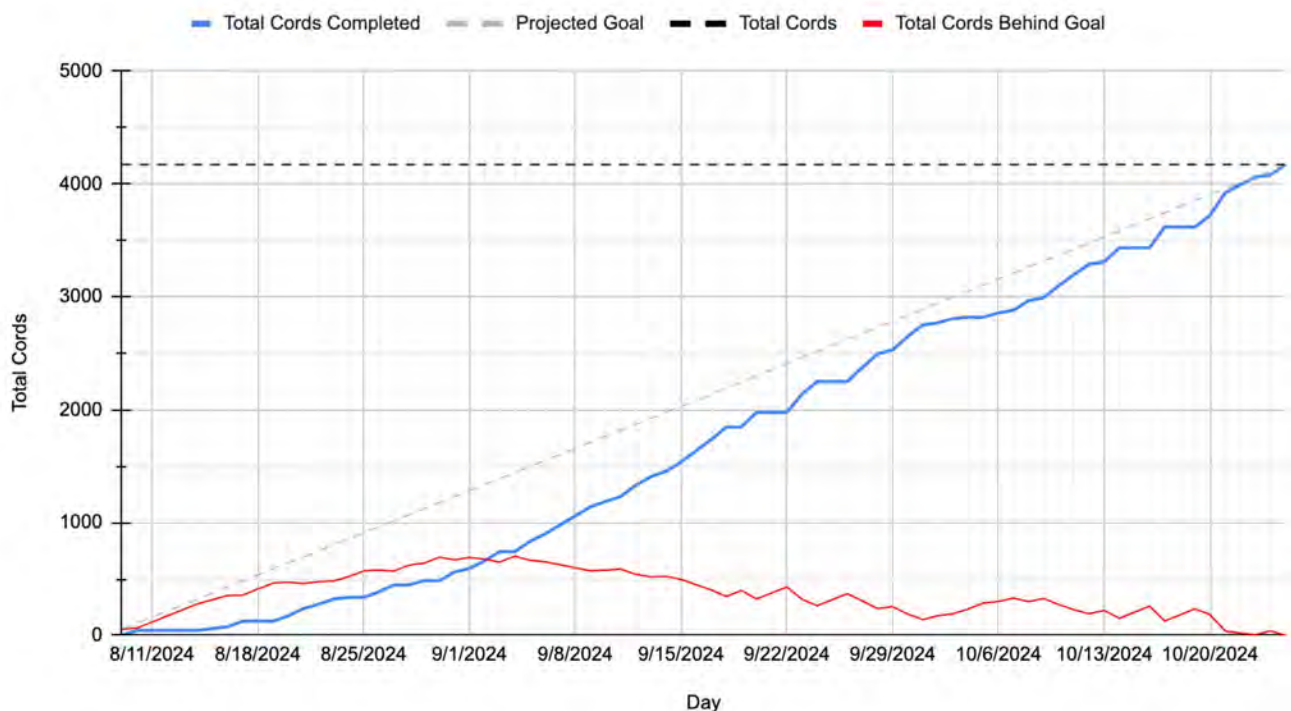


Fig. 4. The line graph created by Mackinley to track his data collection progress.

Barring random interruptions like spontaneous trips to Chachapoyas—the region’s largest city—or various other archaeological site visits, most of my days followed a routine similar to the following:

**7:00 AM:** Wake up. One of three things usually wakes me: the sun coming through my room’s windows, my phone alarm, or, more likely, the restless dogs who sleep in my room. While I aim to sleep until 7 AM, I often end up waking around 6:30 AM because of the dogs.

**7:00-7:45 AM:** Run. I usually run along the road up the Atuén river valley, taking two dogs, Cone (“Co-nay”) and Chiri (“Cheer-y”), with me (fig. 5). The road can get monotonous, so I frequently explore the trails used by local farmers. While the dogs and I enjoy this, it means we sometimes end up very muddy.

**7:45-8:00 AM:** Shower.

**8:00-8:30 AM:** Breakfast. Typically, I have oatmeal with granola, a banana (or some other fruit), and the essential part of any breakfast: a cup of coffee.

**8:30-12:00 PM:** Record. I head into my lab space, turn on all the lights, press play on whatever Spotify playlist I haven’t grown sick of yet, and settle into several hours of recording khipu data. Most days, I leave the lab door open, inviting museum-goers to look in and see what I’m up to. I often invite them in, giving impromptu mini-seminars about khipus, which also provides a much-needed break from recording.

**12:00-1:00 PM:** Lunch.

**1:00-2:00 PM:** Miscellaneous Work Time. I usually spend this time either at the museum’s café or at Kenti Café, just across the street from the museum. My daily order is a cappuccino, and on special days, I treat myself to a small pastry. With coffee in hand, I spend this time answering emails, editing article drafts, working on grant and fellowship applications, or writing what you are currently reading.

**2:00-5:00 PM:** Record. Hopefully re-energized from lunch and coffee, I head back into the lab to spend the next few hours recording more cords.

**5:00-5:30 PM:** Short Break. I usually take a small break around 5 PM to get a cup of tea and sometimes use this time to call my partner, family, or friends to catch up.

**5:30-8:00 PM:** Record. I return to recording until I am too hungry to focus, knowing it’s time for dinner.

**8:00-9:00 PM:** Dinner.

**9:00-10:00 PM:** Relax. I try to spend this time reading or watching YouTube videos, but in all honesty, some days it turns into another work session where I answer more emails and work on writing or editing drafts.

**10:00 PM:** Sleep.

That’s the daily cycle: rinse and repeat until all khipus and cords are finished or until exhaustion sets in, whichever comes first.

Fig. 5. The museum dogs Cone (left) and Chri (right).



## Community Ties

These days, “community engagement” seems to be quite the buzzword among archaeologists. It is undoubtedly a vital aspect of our work, one that I believe should be embraced by everyone in the field. Yet, discussing and planning community engagement can sometimes feel insincere—a box to check rather than a meaningful mission. I grapple with how we can ensure our engagement with communities is genuine, driven by its inherent value rather than by grant-writing trends.

Personally, I still have a long way to go in my community engagement efforts. In Leymebamba, Peru, where I conduct my dissertation research, I am working to build trust, and trust takes time. Although I offer workshops and seminars for both children and adults when I am in Leymebamba, these feel like just the beginning, the bare minimum. Yet, to

me, the short story presented below is evidence that even something as simple as a workshop can have a profound impact, and it has energized me to continue to work towards greater engagement. What is the goal of an archaeologist, if not to reanimate the past and, in doing so, hopefully capture the public’s imagination?

The following short story was written by Brenda Valentina Bolaños Rodríguez, a 10-year-old student from Leymebamba who attended one of my khipu workshops last summer. While I can not deny my desire for the traditional accolades academics often seek—peer recognition, citations, prestigious grants—reading Brenda’s story is truly rewarding. It serves as a reminder to me that you never know which of your words or actions might resonate with someone else. I think we sometimes underestimate children, forgetting just how much they absorb and how powerful their imaginations are.



From “Los Cuentos de ANCOA”

Category: Story

Author: Brenda Valentina Bolaños Rodríguez

Age: 10 years

Localidad: Leymebamba

### MACK AND THE KHIPUS

Mack was a 9-year-old Chachapoya boy. He loved making khipus. His parents collected the wool used to make the wonderful khipus. Mack’s parents went to the field to shear the wool from the sheep, while the boy stayed at home tying the cords. Mack’s parents were very loving toward him because he was an obedient and very respectful child.

One day, his parents took him to the fields to observe nature. They gathered the wool, Mack walked, and as he walked, he heard voices calling him, “Mack! Mack!” He started following those voices, and when he arrived, he saw that there was gold all around him.

He had discovered the Kingdom of Gold. He continued looking around when suddenly a large, muscular man appeared. He quickly realized it was a king, as he wore a spectacular golden crown and other beautiful jewels.

Seeing the king, Mack, surprised, thought a lot and said, “The king!”

The king said, “Hello, who are you?”

Mack replied, “I’m Mack, and your house is enormous and beautiful.” That was the beginning of a pleasant conversation. Mack told the king that he liked making khipus and that when he grew up, he would like to be a Khipucamayoc. The king, noticing Mack’s passion, decided to appoint him as an apprentice Khipucamayoc of that kingdom.

Mack served and grew for many years in the Kingdom of Gold. When he became an adult, he became the best Khipucamayoc in the entire Kingdom. He was highly recognized for his excellent work. Today, we can observe 33 khipus in the Leymebamba Museum, where surely one of them was made by Mack, the Khipucamayoc.





Fig. 1. Dancing at Il Motiok. Photo by Clara Alexander

## REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST SEASON OF THE HARVARD SUMMER PROGRAM IN KENYA

**CLARA ALEXANDER**  
*American School of Prehistoric Research Staff Assistant*

In the summer of 2024, Harvard University piloted a new summer field program in Kenya. Over the course of 6 weeks, its goal was to teach students about topics including ecology, climate change, paleontology, archaeology, and geology, the study of which would be enriched by the many hands-on field opportunities that the course provided. I was given the opportunity to participate in the Harvard Summer Program in Kenya through my role as Staff Assistant at the American School of Prehistoric Research, which helped organize and fund the field school. The program was led by the talented Dr. Daniel Green, and two TAs, Emmanuel Aaron and Medina Lubisia, also helped out with instruction and organization. There were 15 students total: 9 were Harvard University

undergraduates, 5 were Kenyan students at various stages in their academic careers, and 1 was a graduate student from China.

I arrived in Kenya about a week into the program. At that point, the group was staying at the Mpala Research Center, which is located just north of the Equator in Laikipia County. The curriculum was at that point focused mainly on ecology—a topic that was well-suited for Mpala Research Center, where we were constantly surrounded by animals. Inside the fenced area, dik-diks are common, and outside of camp, one may encounter rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, elephants, and giraffes, to name a few. The unit on ecology was greatly enriched by the presence of Dr. Jon Epstein, an infectious disease specialist who works

Fig. 2. Group picture at the base of Mount Kenya. Photo by Clara Alexander



at EcoHealth Alliance in New York City. Outside of lectures, we went on excursions to local villages, and most mornings, students learned Swahili from instructor Duncan Keshole. Some of the highlights of our time at the Mpala Research Center included game drives, opportunities to meet and speak with local villagers, a hike up Mount Kenya, a soccer game, and a visit to Ngare Ndare forest.

After about two weeks at the Mpala Research Center, we packed our bags and began the transition to Turkana Basin Institute's Turkwel Facility, located in northwestern Kenya near Nakechichok village on the Turkwel River. We first took a bus down to Nairobi, and then boarded a plane to the city of Lodwar. Once

everyone was settled in at camp, the program began its module on geology, which was led by Dr. Craig Feibel, who was also staying at TBI. He led us on a number of walks around the campus and told us about the geological history of the area and how it came to look like it currently does. During this first module, we also had the opportunity to dance with locals, and we attended a goat roast, where a sheep and a goat were ceremonially speared. The geology section of class also included a three-day trip to Lothagam: a geological formation about 30 kilometers southeast of TBI's Turkwel Facility that contains deposits spanning millions of years, from the Miocene to the Holocene, making it a rich research destination for geologists,



Fig. 3. Dancing at Nakechichok Village. Photo by Daniel Green

paleontologists, and archaeologists alike. We stayed in tents while we were there, and we were lucky to be accompanied by TBI staff who cooked for us. Mornings at Lothagam were spent working on geology projects (students were divided into three groups and tasked with making observations and interpretations about a feature's geological history), and then we went back to the camp for lunch before heading out again to explore various parts of the site with Dr. Feibel. Dinner was served around 7:30pm, and the nighttime view of the stars was incredible.

After the geology module, the class shifted its attention to paleontology, with the help of visiting professor Dr. Indrė Žliobaitė, a Finnish paleontologist who uses computation and machine learning to answer questions about prehistoric environmental conditions, both in Kenya and further afield. The unit culminated in a data project where students attempted to predict environmental conditions using the dental traits of large herbivores which had been documented in the New and Old World (NOW) Fossil Mammal Database. They had the options of considering one fossil locality and how the dental characteristics of large mammals that inhabited it changed over time, comparing fossil localities over space, or using multiple models on a single fossil locality, and at the end of the week, each group presented their findings. The weekend was spent visiting Central Island and relaxing at Eliye Springs, a nearby resort, before the final module on human evolution began, led by Dr. Daniel Lieberman. The course retraced the story of early humans and their hominid ancestors. These topics were further illuminated by course TAs



Fig. 4. The night sky from Lothagam. Photo by Daniel Green

Emmanuel Aaron and Medina Lubisia, both of whom conduct research that is related to the topic of human evolution. The group also enjoyed a visit to the nearby site of Locheragan, where Emmanuel had previously worked.

Many students in the program shared that the experience had been wonderful and transformative for them. Some said that their time in Kenya gave them a new outlook on their lives in the U.S. and made them more appreciative of what they have, while others said that the hands-on skills they picked up in the course have given them a more concrete idea of how they want to shape their careers going forward. When I asked students what advice they had for students joining the program, most advised that they go in with an open mind, and be ready to learn about new people, places, and experiences.

Fig. 5. Program TA Medina Lubisia discussing an archaeological site at Lothagam. Photo by Daniel Green.

Fig. 6. Dr. Daniel Lieberman discussing human evolution. Photo by Daniel Green.





Fig. 1. Members of the Kenya Field Program pose together by a geologic fault in Lothagam.

## A SUMMER AT THE KENIA FIELD PROGRAM

**DANIEL R. GREEN**

*Field Program Director of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology*

**ELISABETH NGO**

*Archaeology and Earth & Planetary Sciences concentrator, Junior.*

Harvard's inaugural Kenya Field Program launched in 2024, bringing together 16 Harvard and Kenyan students to study human prehistory, contemporary Kenyan health and ecology, and to promote cultural exchange. The program hosted students through June and July, taking them from Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to Lake Naivasha, then to the Mpala Research Station near Mount Kenya, and lastly to the Turkana Basin Institute next to Lake Turkana.

Students began the program by meeting with officers of National Museums of Kenya and the Kenya Wildlife Service, and by delving deeply into Darwin's

"On the Origin of Species." From there they studied savannah ecology, infectious disease biology, and climate science. In Turkana, intense field excursions introduced students to sedimentary geology, paleoanthropology, and archaeology. Students also studied evolutionary and paleoecological processes by employing new computer science methods. The rigor and success of the program were supported by Harvard faculty including Daniel Lieberman, Kevin Uno, and Rowan Flad, support staff including Clara Alexander and Catherine Cezeaux, and visiting professors including Dino Martins of Stony Brook



Fig. 2. Students watch as ants swarm out of whistling thorn acacia trees to protect against herbivory.



Fig. 3. Students and Turkana community members come together for a ceremonial goat roast beneath the tamarind tree.

University, Jon Epstein of Eco Health Alliance, Craig Feibel of Rutgers University, and Indrė Žliobaitė of the University of Helsinki. Whether in the classroom, in the field, or in casual conversation around the dinner table, students were surrounded by chances to learn from instructors, researchers at the institutes, and each other.

The program included repeated opportunities for cultural exchange. Students took courses in Swahili language and Turkana culture, danced with Masai

villagers near Mpala, and participated in several welcoming ceremonies with Nekichechok villagers in Turkana. Helped by teaching fellows Eipa Emmanuel Aoron and Medina Lubisia, students also played soccer, volleyball, and organized singing and dancing with local elementary and high school students.

These experiences were made yet more special through immersion in the very landscapes of study; among other incredible excursions, it was amazing to



Fig. 4. Ben LeBuhn, Tom Zeerow, and Francis Ekai rest in the shade in Lothagam.



Tom Odeyo, Uzma Issa, Sylvie Wurmser, and Asher Montgomery take photographs in a crater on Central Island.

walk through Lothagam surrounded by geological formations that told of past climates and to lean up against a steep rock face, dramatically uplifted as a result of ongoing yet imperceptible faulting. The natural world proved both a vibrant backdrop for and a central feature of the program. Giraffes towered above and hyenas filled the night with the sounds of their whooping; ants swarmed from whistling thorn acacia trees and grasshoppers quietly engineered their ecosystems. Even the bright sun that bleached bones and fractured stones sank down each day beyond the horizon, reflecting off the Turkwel river as the colors faded into a sky full of stars.

On our first day together, we were urged not to come away from our time in Kenya unchanged. Indeed, the program was profoundly academically and personally impactful, leaving us with precious memories and wonderful friendships.

A second program is scheduled for 2025. Harvard's program marks its first organized field program in Kenya since the 1990s.



Sunset at the Turkana Basin Institute.

# RE-EXCAVATING AND REEXAMINING RITUAL ARTIFACTS FROM THE SANXINGDUI SITE: INSIGHTS INTO BRONZE AGE SOUTHWEST CHINA

XIAOGE HE

Post-doctoral fellow in Anthropology

The Sanxingdui Site, approximately 25 miles northwest of Chengdu City in Sichuan Province, stands as one of southwest China's most significant archaeological sites. Nearly 100 years of research have provided a basic chronological sequence for the Chengdu Plain, spanning from the late Neolithic to the early Bronze Age (c. 1700-1000 BC). Researchers

have also discerned the general layout of what appears to be a capital city for an early kingdom, complete with walls and divisions serving political and religious functions. The Sanxingdui Culture is often believed to have been the center of the *Ancient Shu* 古蜀 kingdom as recorded in later textual sources.

Sanxingdui gained worldwide attention in 1986



Fig. 1. Location and layout of the Sanxingdui Site

with the discovery of two rectangular pits containing thousands of unique artifacts made of bronze, gold, jade, stone, pottery, shell and ivory. These artifacts include vessels, human head models, masks, figurines, statues, and ornaments, many of which are unprecedented and indicative of a regional Bronze Age center in the southwest, distinct from the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1000 BC) core in the Central Plain. Based on the ritual scenes depicted and burial traits

observed in these pits, excavators initially categorized them as “sacrificial pits”. Despite differences of opinion, scholars generally agree that the artifacts buried in these pits are special accoutrements related to ritual practices.

In 2019, six new pits were discovered near the two initially found in 1986. Subsequent excavations, conducted between 2020 and 2022, were led by the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics

and Archaeology in collaboration with several universities, during which several universities, during which I participated in the entire process of excavating the largest one (Pit K8) as a PhD student at Peking University. This excavation has yielded even more finds, significantly enhancing our understanding of the artifact assemblages and the ritual behaviors of the Sanxingdui Culture. Following the completion of fieldwork in November 2022, archaeologists have turned their focus to the restoration and analysis of samples and artifacts.

With these new findings, a more comprehensive picture of the ritual scenes attributed to Sanxingdui Culture is emerging. Yet at this point, several questions remain unresolved.

My PhD dissertation investigated all the ritual remains from the Sanxingdui and its successor, the Jinsha Site. After joining the Department of Anthropology at Harvard as a post-doctoral fellow, I resumed my research on Sanxingdui.

One of my recent focuses is the analysis of bronze artifacts from the eight pits. Bronze artifacts

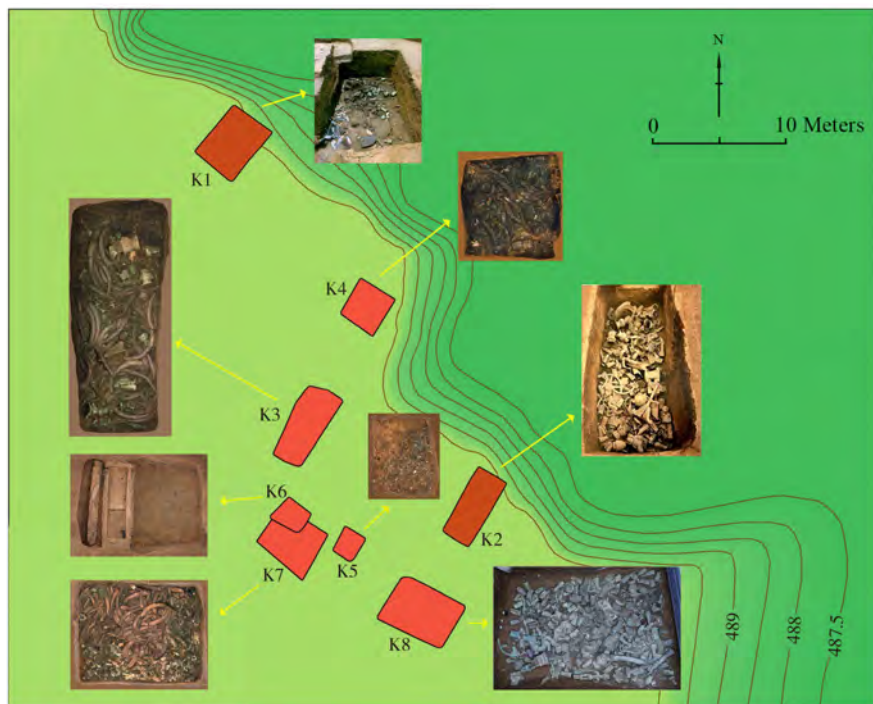


Fig. 2. Layout and images of the eight pits.



Fig. 3. Xiaoge He working on a suspended platform during the excavation of pit K8 at Sanxingdui in 2022. (Photo by Jia Yu. Courtesy of the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.)

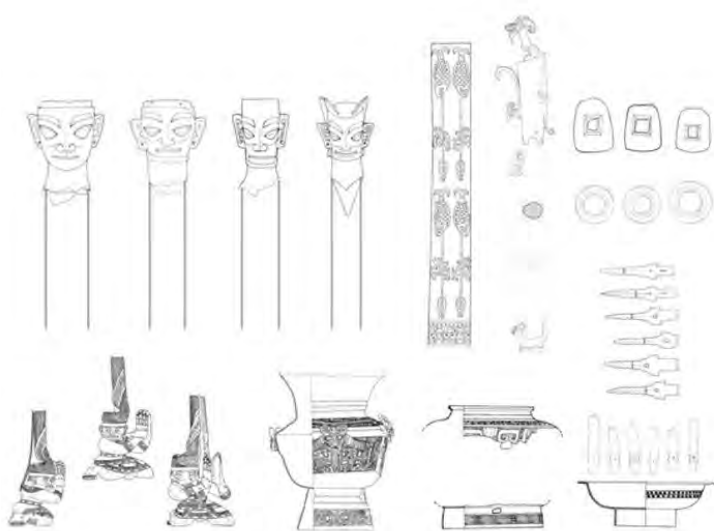
constitute the largest material category from the pits, with over 1,000 items varying significantly in design and function. This offers a rich field for studying the diverse ritual activities of the Sanxingdui Culture. Given the importance of bronze in Sanxingdui society, the use and distribution of these resources were closely linked to the power and ideology of the kingdom, thereby reflecting the social and metaphysical structures of the Sanxingdui Culture.

I am currently working on a project aimed at distinguishing the eight pits into different groups by examining the cross-pit artifact fitting phenomena and the geological distribution patterns of the pits. By summarizing all the newly discovered materials and those published earlier, I find that four of the eight pits (K2, K3, K7, and K8) contained artifacts that were originally unified, indicating that these four pits should be classified into one group with a homogeneous source. The other four pits, which do not contain cross-pit fitting artifacts, can be classified into two separate groups. The group consisting of K1 and K4 contains artifact genres similar to those in the first group. However, the group comprising K5 and K6 exhibits significantly heterogeneous content, suggesting that their ritual functions might differ from those of the other two groups.

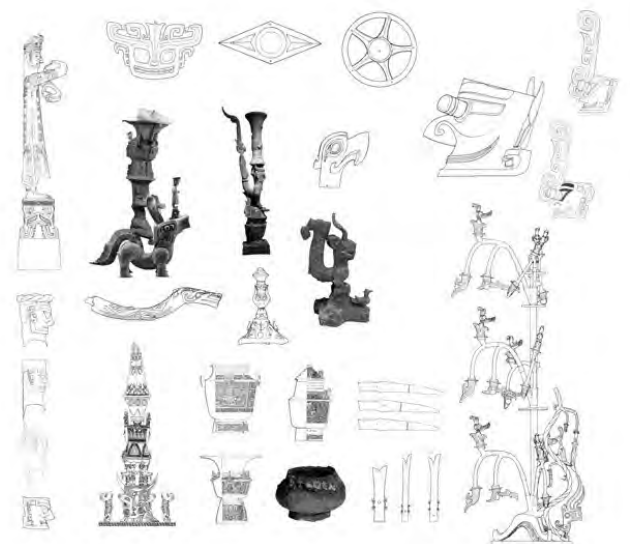
I pay special attention to the former two groups of pits, which contain a large number of bronze artifacts manifesting ritual participants and scenes. By introducing a five-element system of classifying

a ritual program, I examine the artifact assemblages from these two groups in accordance with this system. The results reveal that while both groups share **subjects** and **offerings** necessary for ritual practice, the group consisting of K1 and K4 lacks artifacts representative of **objects**, **assistants**, and **furnishings**, as well as the complex scenes portraying the communication process between heavenly and earthly worlds. Based on this observation, I propose that the two groups of pits and their artifact assemblages correspond to two distinct ritual types: the secular ritual and the sacred ritual, respectively. This approach aims to establish a link between material records and spiritual spheres from an archaeological perspective.

Further on, I will continue my research on Sanxingdui Culture, with a particular focus on comparative studies with early cultures from different regions of the world, such as Southeast and South Asia, Central and West Asia, and Mesoamerica. This approach aims to trace significant similarities and variations between different civilizations from a broader perspective. Additionally, I plan to investigate the technological aspects of bronze, lithic, and skeletal remains from the pits to gain a more nuanced understanding of the economic and technological background of this “exotic” culture. Last but not least, I will deepen my knowledge in cultural anthropology to build a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the ideological world of the Sanxingdui people.



GROUP I



GROUP II

Fig. 4. Artifact assemblages from the two groups.



Fig. 1. View of the Giza Necropolis with the location of the Central Field on the left (White Star Publishers, 2002).

## A HIDDEN HISTORY BENEATH THE GIZA PLATEAU

JULIA VIANI PUGLISI

*PhD Candidate in Egyptology, Harvard University*

Dear Reader,

I am standing in an area of the Giza Necropolis that conceals a dynamic, yet little-known history. Near the steadfast gaze of the Sphinx lies the “Central Field,” a quarry-turned-cemetery that stretches far across the southern side of the long road that leads to the pyramid of king Khafre (fig. 1). The site is a labyrinth of solid rock in which undulating fields of mastabas—rectangular-shaped burial structures—lie alongside some of the earliest rock-cut tombs in pharaonic Egypt. This area was once a bustling hub of activity during Egypt’s Old Kingdom (c. 2500–2100 BCE), simultaneously serving as a quarry for the Great Pyramid of Khufu, a necropolis for both royal

and non-royal individuals, and a throughway for the inhabitants of the settlements near the necropolis.

My work at the pyramids lies in understanding and documenting the Central Field cemetery during the four centuries in which it was active in the late third millennium BCE. This area holds a unique significance since it offers insights into a time of great transformation on the Giza Plateau. As part of my ongoing dissertation research, I am exploring the rich history of this site during the Old Kingdom. Here, new documentation not only reveals how human activity has shaped this landscape, but also how the ancient cemetery preserves stories that span millennia, joining memories of the past in the present.

Excavated and published by Selim Hassan

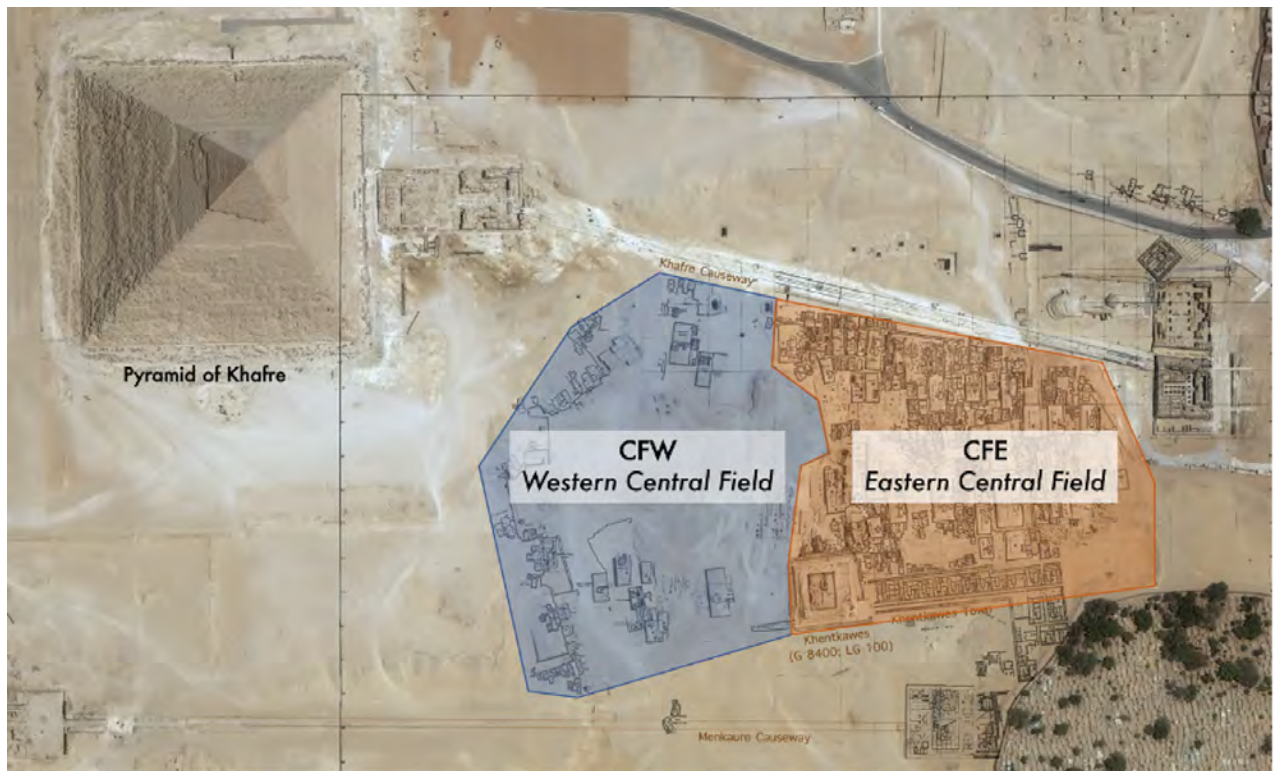


Fig. 2. Divisions of the Central Field over published plan (Hassan 1960) and an aerial photo (Emissive).

(1886–1961) between 1929 and 1938, the Central Field is often overshadowed by the more famous cemeteries to the east and west of Khufu’s pyramid, excavated by the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Before Hassan, exploration of the Giza Necropolis had largely been a Western endeavor, so his initiative in the Central Field marked the first large-scale excavation directed by an Egyptian on the Giza Plateau.

### A Quarry-Turned-Cemetery

The Central Field is best understood as a product of two cohesive dualities: first, its original function as a limestone quarry for the construction of Khufu’s pyramid and later as a burial ground. The landscape here is unlike other necropolises at Giza, where tombs are neatly arranged in rows, reflecting the organizational program under Khufu. In contrast, the Central Field is divided into two distinct sections—the Central Field West (CFW) and the Central Field East (CFE)—which reflect different intensities of quarrying and burial practices (fig. 2).

The CFW, bounded by a deeply quarried western cliff-face, contains rock-cut tombs and few

large mastabas partially carved in the limestone. These tombs may be understood as “hybrid” mastabas, where quarried bedrock was integrated into the tomb architecture (fig. 3). A by-product of quarrying, hybrid tombs were a popular type of construction throughout the Central Field. The CFE, which was less intensely quarried, preserves a Fourth Dynasty quarry grid that was reused throughout the Old Kingdom for both stone extraction and tomb construction. This intricate network of quarry channels and pathways created a unique funerary landscape where tomb builders ingeniously adapted the terrain to suit their needs.

### Challenges of Time and Documentation

The Central Field offers a fascinating glimpse into the changing landscape of the Giza Necropolis, but studying this area comes with its challenges. One major problem is the lack of comprehensive documentation. While Selim Hassan uncovered hundreds of tombs here in the early 20th century, many of his records have been lost to time. Only a fraction of the tombs was ever published, and much of the site, excavated by both Hassan and later archaeologists, still remains unmapped and unknown.

Archaeological initiatives are not merely exercises in documentation, but also acts of destruction. Losses of information (e.g., loss of “context” over the course of an excavation) are products of change, simultaneously producing new data through acts of oblivion. So, despite the termination of quarrying and burial activities in the cemetery, the Central Field continues to change today. The landscape is subject to environmental forces such as sandstorms and flash floods, which erode the ancient tombs and threaten to erase much of the remaining evidence of its past. Additionally, human and animal activities—both modern and ancient—continue to leave their mark on the area. As I wander the cemetery, dogs dig holes into mudbrick superstructures, camels consume desert plants as they step over fragile limestone tombs, and horse riders produce paths over the unexcavated areas of the cemetery.

### New Tools, New Discoveries

Within this slowly eroding and shifting environment, new technologies are helping us preserve the Central

Field for future generations. Part of my work relies on 3D laser scanning (Leica BLK 360) to create detailed digital maps of the cemetery, allowing us to better understand the relationship between the quarry and the tombs. This technology provides high-precision images of the site, capturing every nuance of the landscape, from the depths of the rock-cut tombs to the elevations of the ancient quarry faces (fig. 4). Never properly documented, this information explains, for instance, why the massive tomb complex of Rawer in the Central Field includes several ramps, reflecting the sloping bedding plane of the Giza Plateau.

One of the most significant contributions made through laser scanning is the capture of a large quarry grid consisting of narrow trenches that extend several hundred meters across the CFE. This grid, which was initially used to quarry monumental blocks of limestone, was later repurposed by tomb builders in diverse ways. Scholars have observed these trenches previously, but their uses have never been properly studied. Walking across the tallest surfaces of the Central Field east, I observed that these channels were



Fig. 3. Hybrid mastaba (G 8260) of an anonymous individual (photo taken by author).

deepened to create mastaba faces or even concealed for aesthetic reasons. One peculiar pattern is the location of numerous burial shafts along former quarry channels. We may imagine an orthogonal matrix of trenches, as the one near the Khafre pyramid (fig. 5), but the Central Field quarry did not only consist of a cardinal grid. Often, trenches

followed natural fissures in the rock consisting of softer minerals, which both quarrymen and tomb builders used because the vertical plane was easier to cut into.

In the rock-cut tomb of Debehen, a large natural crack in the limestone dictated the placement of the burial chamber, demonstrating

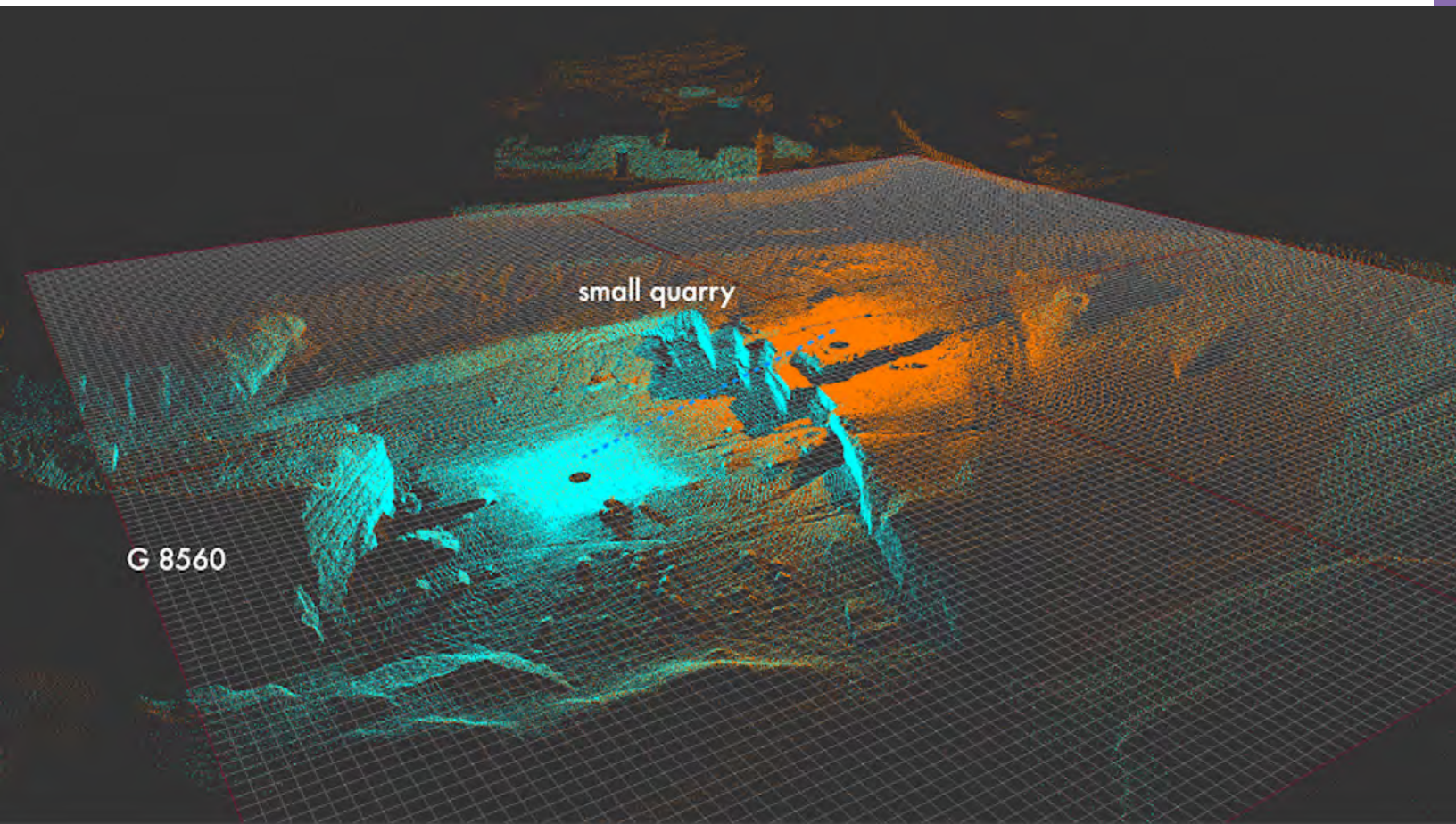


Fig. 4. Two overlapping scans (blue and orange) from the laser scanner taken in a small quarry with the anonymous mastaba G 8260 on the left.

how intimately the builders were connected to the landscape they were working in. This integration of tombs into the quarry landscape shows a deep understanding of the site's geology and a practical approach to tomb construction.

These technological advancements are crucial for re-documenting areas of the cemetery that were poorly mapped or overlooked by earlier archaeologists. For example, Hassan's original excavation map of the Central Field does not include many of the quarry features that we now know were integral to the construction of the tombs.

By combining new data from our laser scans with historical records, we can piece together a more complete picture of how this cemetery evolved over time.

### The Changing Landscape of Giza

The Central Field's unique history and location on the Giza Plateau made it a dynamic and ever-evolving space. One of the most interesting aspects of this cemetery is the way its accessibility changed over time. Flanked by the Khafre Valley Temple and the recently re-discovered ports near the monumental tomb of



Fig. 5. Photo of the Khafre quarry-grid in 1923 taken by the HU-MFA mission photographer, Badawi Ahmed (HUMFA\_A3201\_NS).

Queen Khentkawes, excavated under the directorship of Dr. Mark Lehner (Ancient Egypt Research Associates), the Central Field possibly played a key role in connecting the lives of working Egyptians to the rest of Giza Necropolis. Even today, Egyptians working on the plateau continue to use the Central Field as a throughway.

Over time, this area transformed, reflecting the broader changes in the landscape of Giza. While the Great Pyramid and its surrounding cemeteries were more meticulously organized, the Central Field appears to represent a more organic evolution. However, my research reveals a pattern of construction that intimately repurposed the organization of a royal quarry, a grid system, which tomb builders adapted to their needs in unique ways. Almost functioning as a mnemonic device in stone, the channels across the Central Field continued to be used for quarrying limestone, even after the pyramids were completed, and for building tombs. As the cemetery expanded, the orientation of tomb entrances and the layout of major pathways shifted, reflecting the ongoing use of the area for both quarrying and burials.

This transformation from a quarry to a cemetery exemplifies how landscapes evolve. The Egyptians did not just abandon the quarry when

it was no longer needed. Instead, they repurposed it, integrating their funerary architecture into the existing landscape. It is a striking example of how these craftsmen adapted to their environment, reusing the quarry channels and outcrops to create new burial spaces. In the Central Field, the quarry and the cemetery are in constant dialogue. The tombs may seem static, but they are actually the result of ongoing transformations, shaped by the physical environment and the choices of those who shape it.

### The Social Networks of the Living and Dead

The Central Field is more than just a physical space. Many of the tombs in this area belong to individuals who held prominent titles during the reigns of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. For example, members of Khafre's royal family were buried at the far edges of both the CFW and CFE, marking the ongoing quarrying activities within each area during the mid-to-late Fourth Dynasty. After Menkaure, kings left Giza to build their funerary monuments near southern Saqqara necropolis. Meanwhile, many non-royal individuals continued to bury their dead in the Central Field (and the rest of the plateau) despite this southward shift of the royal necropolis.

The spatial arrangement of tombs reveals that individuals of similar professions and family

connections were often buried close to one another, forming clusters within the cemetery. Titles like “Overseer of the Pyramid of Khafre” or “Lector priest of Menkaure” paint a picture of choice, where their professions explain the proximity of their burial places to the royal pyramid complexes. Even individuals, such as Mersuankh, built their tombs close to non-royal individuals on whom they were dependent in life. Mersuankh, buried against the complex of the sem-priest Rawer, bore the title “Companion of Rawer” and “Overseer of all his [Rawer’s] properties.”

This ancient site remained important to Egyptians millennia following its abandonment. Just before Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, a French artist named Louis-François Cassas (1756–1827) visited an area humming with activity in the Central Field cemetery (fig. 6). The tomb of Debehen had become the home of a dervish figure later known as Hammed es-Semman. Following his death in the mid-19th century, pilgrimages and Sufi rites were popular activities in this Old Kingdom tomb. The famous British woman, Dorothy Eady (1904–1981,

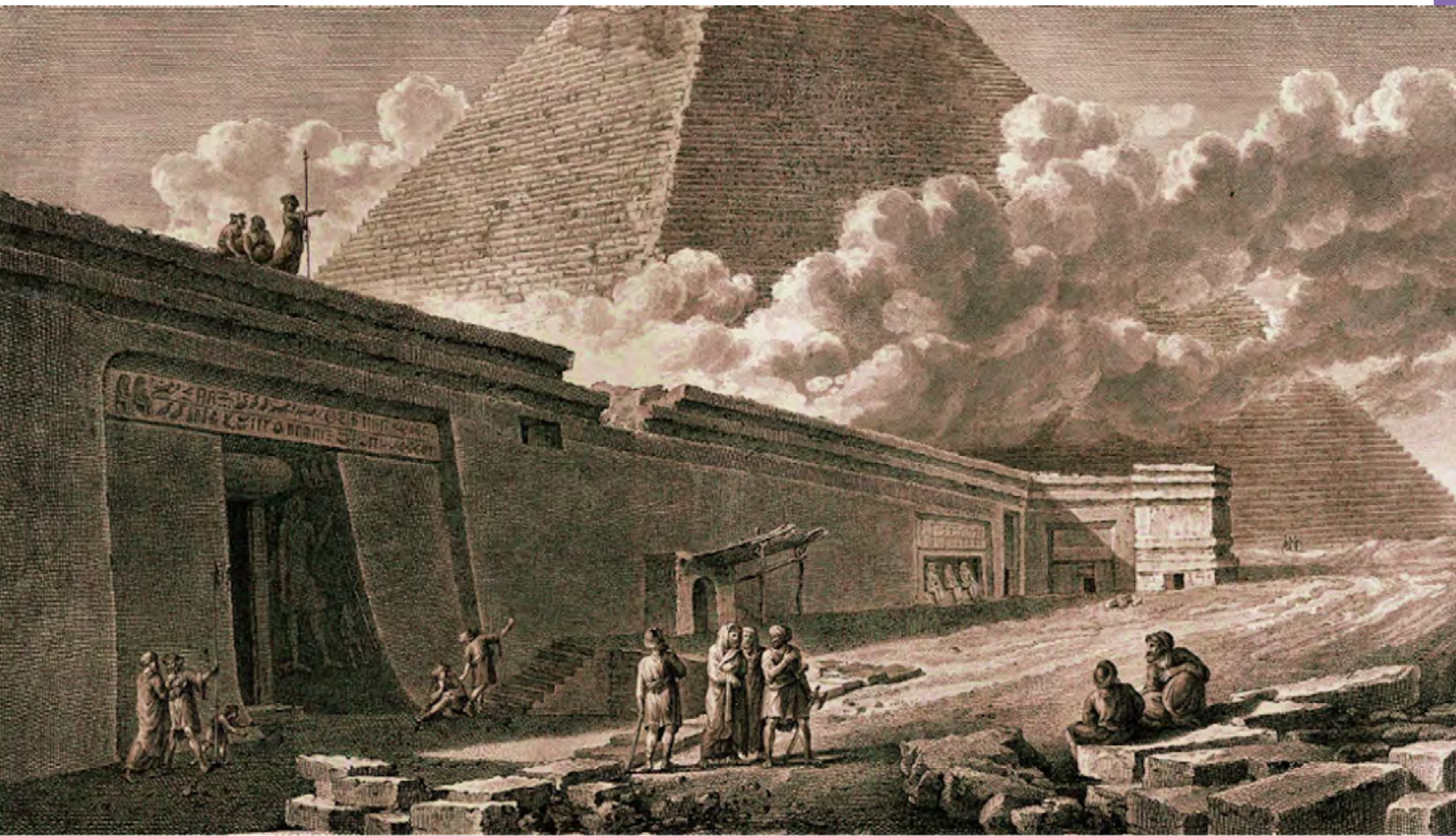


Fig. 6. Lithograph of the tomb of Debehen (G 8090) with the dervish surrounded by visitors in the center and the pyramid of Khafre in the background (© Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg).

also known as Omm Sety), who had worked with Selim Hassan in the Central Field, observed the weekly cleaning of the tomb on Thursdays for the *zikir* (“remembrance”), a religious event where men recite Quranic verses, on Friday. Until recently, the *moulid* (holy birthday) of the dervish was performed every year in the city neighboring the Giza Plateau, Nazlet es-Semman.

### Conclusion: A Living Cemetery

The Central Field is a testament to the complex and ever-changing history of the Giza Plateau. Its layered past—first as a quarry, then as a cemetery—offers valuable insights into how the ancient Egyptians re-envision environments. As the Giza Inspectorate and I continue our work in the Central Field, we are

reminded that this place is not static. It continues to evolve, shaped by both natural forces and human intervention.

Even as we uncover the tombs of individuals who lived and died more than 4,000 years ago, we are part of an ongoing history. The Giza Plateau, with its towering pyramids and sprawling cemeteries, is a living landscape—one that continues to draw in new stories and new discoveries. As the sun sets behind the pyramids, casting long shadows over the

Central Field, my inspector and I walk down the Khafre causeway and discuss the following workday. A dog peaks his head out of a metal barrel (fig. 7) and the sprawling city of al-Haram conceals the former floodplain, each a small reminder that all entities exact change in space. I glance over to my right, observing the darkened corridors of the cemetery, carved in living rock, and look forward to rediscovering those memories recorded in matter.

Sincerely, Julia



Fig. 7. A dog scavenging for trash after the site closes (photo by the author).

# THE FRUITS OF EXTRACTION: HIGHLIGHTING STUDENT RESEARCH INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND HARVARD'S PEABODY MUSEUM

**DIANA LOREN**

*Senior Curator of the Harvard Peabody Museum and Lecturer of Anthropology*

**JENNIFER CARBALLO**

*Research Scholar of the Harvard Peabody Museum and Lecturer of Anthropology*

In Spring 2024, anthropology concentrators Abigail Cusick (Harvard '24) and Sarah Faber (Harvard '24) worked with Diana Loren and Jennifer Carballo of the Peabody Museum and Department of Anthropology to explore the complex relationship between the United Fruit Company, Harvard's Peabody Museum and Department of Anthropology. Over the semester, the group examined cultural items, archives, and photographs at the Peabody Museum to find links between the United Fruit Company and Harvard's collecting practices in Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. Their research also led them to the Baker Library at Harvard Business School, where the United Fruit Company donated archival material documenting the company's operations and holdings in Central and South America, the West Indies, and the United States.

The number of connections between the United Fruit Company and Peabody collections revealed in just one semester's worth of research were surprising, including the Costa Rican monumental stone sphere that currently sits outside on public display between the Tozzer Library and Peabody Museum, additional items from Costa Rica and Honduras donated by archaeologists Doris Stone, Samuel Lothrop, and Dorothy Popenoe after conducting excavations on United Fruit Company property, as well as the company's close relationship to the sites of Quirigua and Zaculeu in Guatemala and Bonampak in Mexico.

One goal of the project was to examine this history through the lens of ethical stewardship, which is a guiding principle of the Peabody today and involves in-depth research into past collecting relationships and practices to better document and assess provenance histories and the individuals who helped shape the Peabody and its legacies.

What we found in the research was not surprising. The appropriation of land, commodification of plants, and funding of

archaeological research by the United Fruit Company directly contributed to the commodification of Indigenous cultures by academic institutions in its network, including Harvard University and the Peabody Museum. It is clear these practices harmed Indigenous communities and extracted cultural heritage from countries of origin.

You can read a summary of the findings in the Story Map titled "The Fruits of Extraction: United Fruit Company, Archaeology, and Harvard's Peabody Museum," available on the Peabody's Museum's website. [<https://peabody.harvard.edu/united-fruit-company>] This work adds to a growing body of provenance research being conducted by Harvard students and Peabody Museum curators and staff, with the goal of making the history of collecting at the Peabody Museum more transparent and accessible.

If you are interested in getting involved in research on the history of the Peabody, please contact Diana Loren ([dloren@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:dloren@fas.harvard.edu))



Eleanor Lothrop and Samuel Kirkland Lothrop sitting against stone sphere eating bananas, Palmar Sur, Costa Rica, 1949. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 2004.1.391.1

# “THE LORDS OF THE CATARACTS” RECONSTRUCTING AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PAPYRUS ARCHIVE FROM THE PYRAMID AGE WITH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE MILTON FUND

VICTORIA ALMANSA-VILLATORO

*Junior Research Fellow at Harvard Society of Fellows*

Back when I was a first-year PhD student at Brown University, I had the pleasure of visiting the impressive papyrological collection at the Brooklyn Museum. My professor of Demotic at the time, Leo Depuydt, had arranged this visit as an opportunity for me to see firsthand some of its beautiful and rare examples of religious, magical, and administrative texts, mostly dated between the first millennium BCE and the beginning of the CE, as well as some documents from the mid-second millennium BCE.

What I certainly did not expect to find there, stored in boxes in the basement, was one of the largest collections of Old Kingdom (3rd millennium BCE) papyri preserved to us. And they had never been published or read! These turned out to be part of the Old Kingdom archive(s) from the Island of Elephantine, right at the border between ancient Egypt and Nubia, and they are the oldest papyri in North America. Other fragments of the Old Kingdom archive of Elephantine are distributed across museums in Berlin, Strasbourg, and Turin, but most of them have been published and read to some extent.

Indeed, of all the papyri known from ancient Egypt, only a very tiny percentage is dated in the Old Kingdom, and all of them are either published or in the process of being published. Most importantly, the only other published archive from the Old Kingdom, which comes from the funerary complexes of



Map showing the locations of Abusir and Elephantine, courtesy Peter Der Manuelian.

Abusir, is royal and was found in the Capital area, thus perpetuating the elite narrative that is so pervasive in Egyptology.

Coming from a provincial area in the far south and containing personal letters and administrative accounts, the Brooklyn papyri could reveal a surprising side of the Pyramid Age, quite different from what we are used to. Thus, the Brooklyn Old Kingdom fragments stand as a hidden gem with so much potential to expand our understanding of a period still full of unknowns.

I knew at the time that the Old Kingdom was the period I wanted to focus on as part of my PhD research, and I knew I wanted to use textual corpora as my main sources. Therefore, I immediately requested permission to study and publish those

documents, which were highly fragmentary and in a very poor state of preservation. I was very fortunate to obtain these permissions and spent the following year traveling from Providence to New York to produce the first photographic record of the fragments and inspect each one of them in person. The curator of the collection, Katya Barbash, devoted several hours of her time to patiently open the 15 boxes of fragments, extract, and handle the approximately 2,000 fragments inscribed with hieratic—the non-monumental equivalent script of hieroglyphs—so that I could study the texts.

The study of the archive, however, presented several challenges. Most fragments were small enough to enable the reading of just one word, and yet others were folded upon themselves and thus unreadable.



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*The first step in editing a hieratic text is to transcribe the writing into hieroglyphs. Hieratic is a “cursive” very variable form of handwritten script used by Egyptians on papyri. Because hieratic is heterogeneous and varies a lot from hand to hand, Egyptological publications include hieroglyphic transcriptions of hieratic to enable peer-reading and standardization. Above is an example of one of the archive’s hieratic fragments, and below is my hieroglyphic transcription. It reads “your scribe” and it is used as a polite replacement of second person pronouns in letters.*

©Almansa-Villatoro

As a PhD student, I also had other more pressing obligations (like writing a dissertation!) that took most of my time. And this was clearly going to be a very time-consuming project. To get a better picture of the archive, it was paramount to find bigger fragments with more information. A conservator had to be hired to open up the bigger fragments.

Despite the difficulties, the study of the archive also yielded some pleasant surprises and opened

intriguing questions. The fragments are mostly part of personal letters and accounts, but they interestingly mix up private matters with temple affairs. The question is whether the temples in Elephantine were controlling people’s lives or important families were managing the temple. A similar situation is seen in the famous Aramaic papyri from Elephantine written by a 5th-4th century BCE early Jewish community which also encompass family and temple archives. The

importance of temple documents in Old Kingdom Elephantine is seen also in the prominent mention of gods in the Brooklyn fragments, including previously unattested divine epithets and obscure religious formulae. It is possible, although it cannot be proven at this point, that the papyri contain religious texts as well. In such a case, the Brooklyn archive could be our only direct textual evidence of non-royal religious traditions from the Old Kingdom. Moreover, the lack of royal participation in the archive, and frequent mention of Nubian contact, could suggest that life around the cataract border of Egypt was highly independent from the Capital, south oriented, and largely led by the local lords controlling the region. Of course, this is all speculation until the entirety of the archive is completely read and understood.

Fast forward to the summer of 2024, I received the fantastic news that my project to reconstruct and publish the Brooklyn Old Kingdom archive had been awarded a grant by Harvard's William F. Milton Fund of \$60,629. The grant would allow the

Brooklyn Museum to hire a conservator to unfold the fragments, as well as other necessary research tasks. One of the exciting developments that the grant will bring about is the preparation of the largest fragments for its permanent display in the Egyptian galleries of the Brooklyn Museum, as well as a temporary touring exhibit along with other Old Kingdom objects. Egyptian history should not be only for academics, but also the diverse audiences who are interested in approaching it at museums. Because ultimately, the goal of this project is to bring to life the voices of the ancient Egyptians who wrote these texts, and make sure that their side of history is told too.

With the help of Harvard's Egyptology G4 Gaia Bencini, whom the Milton funds have allowed me to hire as a research assistant, I set out to reconstruct not only a fragmentary papyrus archive, but also the lived experiences and everyday realities of the people living and writing in the Old Kingdom border town of Elephantine.



One of the 15 boxes ©Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum

# UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH ANCIENT EGYPT AT THE HARVARD ART MUSEUMS

JEN THUM

*Associate Director of Academic Engagement and Campus Partnerships and Research Curator*

This year I'm partnering with my colleague Ana Barros (our Manager of Campus Partnerships) to kick off a new initiative at the Harvard Art Museums called First/Hand Fridays. These programs will take place on the first Friday of every month and will be led by a different member of museum staff each time. The staff member facilitating the session is asked to bring an artwork out of storage—something they are studying, something they love, maybe even something that puzzles them—and engage students in casual conversation about it in our Art Study Center. The goal of these gatherings is to allow students to experience works of art in new and exciting ways: to get up close and personal with objects they can't see in the galleries, get to know a wide range of friendly museums staff, and explore the collections through informal discussion and open inquiry. Perhaps they will even lead some students' academic or personal interests in unexpected directions.

I am both a museum educator and an Egyptologist, and it is a delight when these two roles intertwine. This October I had the distinct pleasure of kicking off our inaugural First/Hand Fridays event, "Hands-On Ancient Egypt." Following a model I often use for classes about the ancient world, provenance, writing, and other topics, I selected a series of ushabtis (Egyptian funerary figurines) for the group to handle. For many students, putting on the latex gloves and sitting before a 3,000-year-old artifact seemed daunting



A student handles ushabtis in the museums' Art Study Center.

at first—it's quite a big thing to know that you've been trusted with the well-being of these objects—but everyone seemed to warm up to it nicely, and then their curiosity took over. As students engaged in this tactile exploration, we chatted about the personhood of the ancient people the ushabtis belonged to, how these artifacts arrived at our museum, and the ethics of caring for ancient collections. They had great questions, and several told me that they were scratching that childhood itch many of us know so well, to be fascinated by ancient Egypt.

I look forward to the next First/Hand Fridays event, and especially the one this coming December, which will see students handling ancient coins with my colleague Laure Marest!

# PAINTING ANCIENT EGYPT: JOSEPH LINDON SMITH AND THE HARVARD MFA EXPEDITION AT THE HMANE

PETER DER MANUELIAN

Barbara Bell Professor of Egyptology (NELC and Anthropology)

*“You’ve accomplished the impossible. Each painting is an archaeological record correct in details, but beautiful as a picture.”<sup>1</sup>*

So spoke Harvard Egyptologist and archaeologist George Reisner (1867–1942) to Joseph Lindon Smith. Two of George and his wife Mary (1870–1950) Reisner’s closest friends were the American painter, Joseph Lindon Smith (1863–1950) and his fluent-Arabic-speaking wife Corinna (1876–1965). After training at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and in Paris at the Académie Julian, Smith abandoned a career as a portraitist and found his calling in painting ancient sites and monuments. These images became an important source of documentation, since back then there was no color photography in archaeology.

Although Smith painted at archaeological sites all over the Old and New Worlds over a long career, almost every year he returned to Egypt, joining Reisner at the “Harvard Camp” dig house headquarters just west of the famous Giza Pyramids,

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Lindon Smith, *Temples, Tombs, and Ancient Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), p. 4.



Fig. 1. Joseph Lindon Smith paints the embrace of King Thutmose III and the god Amun-Ra in the temple of Karnak. Archives of American Art.



Fig. 2. Joseph Lindon Smith painting atop Pyramid Beg. N 4 at Meroe, Sudan, February 20, 1921. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 3. Cars parked at Harvard Camp, Giza, for the annual exhibition of Joseph Lindon Smith's paintings, looking southeast, April 18, 1939. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

or indeed wherever Reisner happened to be excavating. Reisner's Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition ran successfully on the Giza Plateau and elsewhere in Egypt and Sudan from 1905 through 1947. In the 1930s, Reisner annually put on a show at Harvard Camp of Smith's recent work, with a reception for well over 100 guests.

Reisner also made sure the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), acquired as many of Smith's paintings as possible. These artworks adorned many of the MFA's gallery walls, to enhance the collection of antiquities Reisner was sending, with the Egyptian Government's excavation contract

permission, back to Boston (the other half of Reisner's Egyptian finds went to the Cairo Museum; Nubian finds went to Khartoum). Today the MFA owns more than a hundred of Smith's paintings, and many of them can currently be seen on long-term loan at the Fitchburg Art Museum, northwest of Boston.<sup>2</sup> The Harvard Art Museums also have a rich collection of more than 100 Smith drawings and paintings, but only a few of these show ancient Egyptian subjects.<sup>3</sup> Many other collectors, such as Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardiner (1840–1924), have acquired Smith's

<sup>2</sup> <https://fitchburgartmuseum.org/discover-ancient-egypt/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://harvardartmuseums.org>

Fig 4. Joseph Lindon Smith paintings on view in the Fitchburg Art Museum. Photo by the author.



paintings over the years.<sup>4</sup>

### The Tomb of Idu at Giza (G 7102)

In January of 1925, the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition discovered a small underground tomb chapel (the superstructure was missing), just east of the Great Pyramid at Giza. A series of black-and-white, large-format photographs, shot on glass plate negatives by Expedition photographer Mohammedani Ibrahim, documents every stage of the excavation, as well as the wall decoration. Over the entrance was a magnificent architrave, inscribed with nine lines of detailed hieroglyphs and a standing figure of the tomb owner at the right. The text lists his name and titles, a brief biography, and an offering formula to make sure he

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gardnermuseum.org>

had everything needed for a successful afterlife.

Tomb G 7102 belonged to a high official named Idu and dated to the Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, or Pyramid Age, in the reign of King Pepi I or later (about 2390–2361 BCE). The superstructure (the parts of the tomb above ground) had long since disappeared, but the underground chapel, carved in the limestone bedrock, preserved many scenes on its four walls. There was plenty of surviving color, and the ancient artists even carved six statues into niches on the east wall. On the west wall, the upper half of Idu’s seems to rise up out of a “false door” niche that magically connected to the Netherworld. Idu stretches his arms outwards to receive food and drink offerings for his spirit from the (ancient Egyptian) visitors to his tomb. The hieroglyphs list offering spells, his

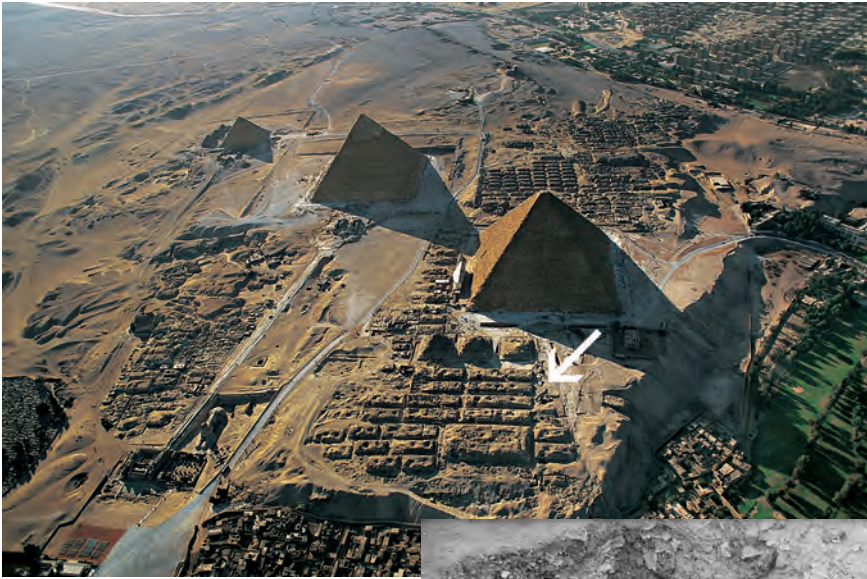


Fig. 5. Aerial view of the Giza Pyramids, looking west, with the tomb of Idu marked with an arrow. Courtesy White Star Publishers.

Fig. 6. Entrance to the tomb of Idu, looking south, January 12, 1935. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





Fig. 7. Underground tomb chapel of Idu, looking south. Courtesy White Star Publishers.

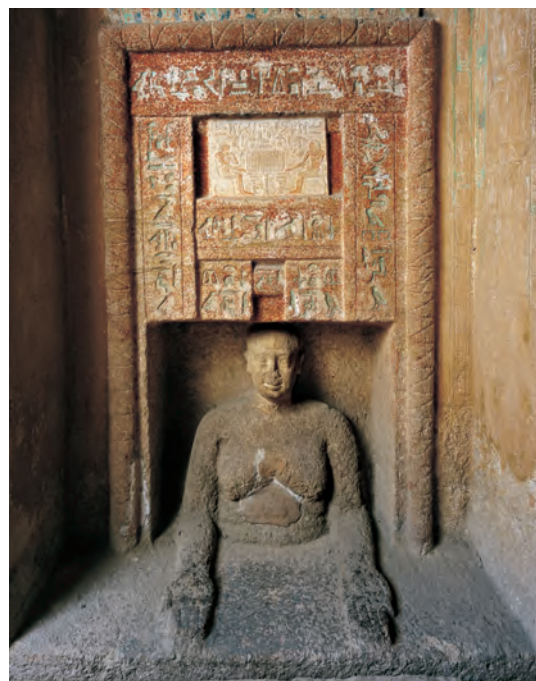


Fig. 8. Image of Idu emerging from his "false door," looking west. Courtesy White Star Publishers.

name, and his job titles, such as "royal document scribe."

By the time Joseph Lindon Smith and his daughter Frances arrived at Giza, two months after the discovery of Idu's tomb, they were ready to document the wonderful scenes and colors with oil-on-canvas paintings. There are even references to this work in Smith's unpublished diary notebook called "1925. Tiney and Pops. Egypt," now in the Dublin Historical Society, Dublin, New Hampshire (Smith referred to daughter Frances as "Tiney").

### The HMANE's New Acquisition

Smith created at least five Idu paintings in March–April 1925, while Frances contributed two of her own. One of his canvases recently came up for sale at auction in April of 2024. Because of its connection to the HU–MFA Expedition, I was keen to acquire it for the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (HMANE). Alas, someone else prevailed at auction, and I never expected to see the painting again.

In July 2024 my wife and I were driving up to Maine, and she suggested during our stop in Rockland that we say hello to Peter Clarke, the art dealer who



Fig. 9. Egyptian tourists visit the underground tomb chapel of Idu, May 15, 2021. Courtesy Marleen De Meyer.

recently sold the HMANE the 1929 reproduction of Tutankhamun's throne.<sup>5</sup> Imagine our surprise, therefore, when Clarke opened a storage door and pulled out Smith's painting of Idu. He was the one who acquired it at auction, and we resolved not to lose the painting twice in one year! It now bears the museum accession number HMANE 2024.1.1.

Smith's painting shows the west wall "false door" with Idu's statue emerging. This is the painting Smith refers to in the final diary entry above as the "Bachsheesh" man. "Baksheesh" in Arabic means a "tip" or "bribe," and Smith must have felt that Idu's statue, with his arms outstretched, was asking for something (which he was! He wanted offerings and prayers from the living). The year 2025 will mark the 100th anniversary of Smith's creation of this painting.

Although they are not as well-known as paintings by other "Egyptological artists" such as Nina and Norman de Garis Davies, or Charles K. Wilkinson (whose paintings are on view in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Smith's paintings have proven valuable to scholars for preserving the colors, look, and feel of these Egyptian monuments as they appeared in the first half of the twentieth century. Since that time, many colors have faded, inscriptions are no longer legible, or climate change has taken its toll on the ancient Egyptian monuments. Although sometimes impressionistic in his brushstrokes, Smith nevertheless produced accurate and aesthetic works of art, all freehand, that capture the essence of Egyptian two- and three-dimensional works of art.

### The Modern Documentation of the Tomb

Long after the deaths of George Reisner at the Giza Pyramids in 1942, and of Joseph Lindon Smith in Dublin, New Hampshire in 1950, curators at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, returned to Giza to produce excavation reports on the tombs that Reisner himself left unpublished. MFA curator William Kelly Simpson (1928–2017) published the tomb of Idu in the MFA's "Giza Mastabas Series" in 1976.<sup>6</sup> This traditional academic publication describes the tomb, its owner and his family, presents the wall decoration, translates all the texts, and summarizes Reisner's original excavation.

Nowadays we have many new approaches

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/10/replica-of-king-tuts-throne-comes-to-harvard/>.

<sup>6</sup> [https://gizamedia.rc.fas.harvard.edu/images/MFA-images/Giza/GizaImage/full/library/giza\\_mastabas/giza\\_mastabas\\_2/giza\\_mastabas\\_2.pdf](https://gizamedia.rc.fas.harvard.edu/images/MFA-images/Giza/GizaImage/full/library/giza_mastabas/giza_mastabas_2/giza_mastabas_2.pdf)

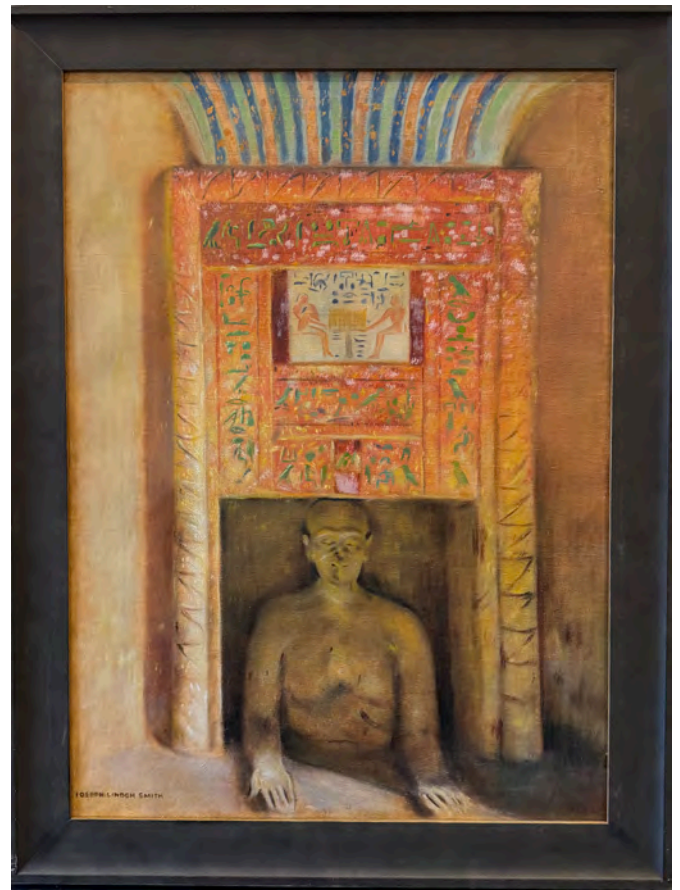


Fig. 10. "False door" and statue from the tomb of Idu, 1925, oil on canvas painting by Joseph Lindon Smith; HMANE 2024.1.1.

to creating documentation of ancient Egyptian monuments, both for scholarly study and a wider audience. Due to a successful collaboration between the Giza Project at Harvard<sup>7</sup> and the Epigraphic Survey of the Oriental Institute<sup>8</sup>, a digital version of the Simpson book is available now here for the first time<sup>9</sup>, re-structured as an online publication. Far more than a simple pdf scan of the original 1976 publication, this experiment in digital scholarship includes the tight integration of image and text. While respecting the book's structure, we supplemented the written material with as many visuals as possible, even beyond what appeared in the original book. There are previously unpublished archival photographs, 3D renderings, clickable maps, zoomable drawings, and several wall plans embedded in the text that were explicitly created for the digital re-release.

Orthophotos—digital images that combine the characteristics of a photograph with the geometric

<sup>7</sup> <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://oi.uchicago.edu/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.digital-epigraphy.com/publications/the-mastabas-of-qar-and-idu-g-7101-and-7102-digitally-revised-and-enhanced-edition>

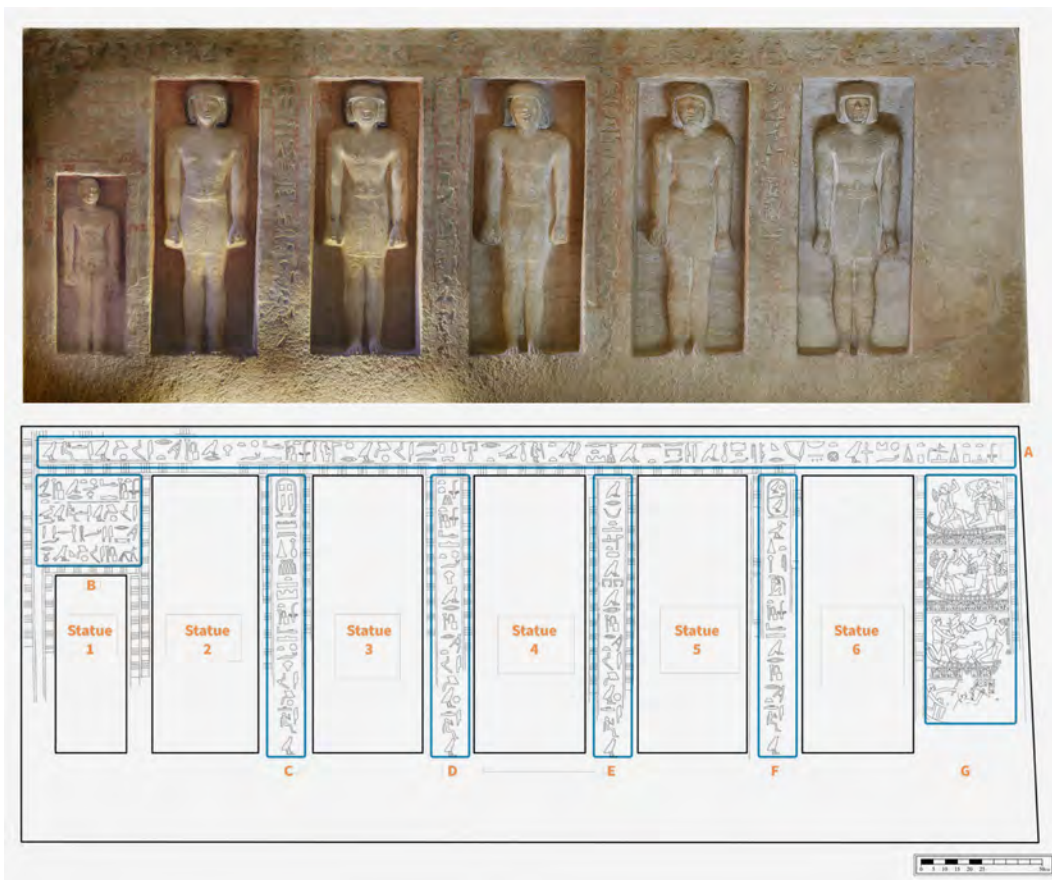


Fig. 11. Orthophoto, with line drawing, of the east wall of the tomb of Idu, by Owen Murray, based on photos by Marleen De Meyer.

qualities of a map—can help us visualize entire stretches of long walls, and even measure them accurately.

Virtual visitors to the tomb of Idu can also consult the archaeological documentation gathered on Harvard’s Giza Project website.<sup>10</sup> An interactive 3D model of the tomb chapel is also online.<sup>11</sup> And finally, there is a guided, narrated tour of some

<sup>10</sup> <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/sites/1517/full/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://giza.mused.com/en/tours/165/the-tomb-of-idu-g-7102>

highlights within the tomb, restoring some of the original wall colors.<sup>12</sup> This three-minute video was generously provided by the makers of the iPad app “The Pyramids,” available for purchase (with much more Giza content) on the Apple App Store.

Epigraphy is the creation of facsimile line drawings of scenes and inscriptions. A simple line drawing example of Idu’s false door texts, the same scene painted in oil by Joseph Lindon Smith, was

<sup>12</sup> <https://youtu.be/e0j81JAuCEE?si=N0r9KPH4QdFA1jjI>

Fig. 12. Orthophoto of the west wall of the tomb of Idu, by Owen Murray, based on photos by Marleen De Meyer.



produced for the 1976 scholarly publication.

In recent years, epigraphy has moved from pen-and-ink tracing and inking to “digital epigraphy,” with the help of drawing tablets, iPads, and graphics apps such as Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and Procreate. The best website to explore these technologies is “Digital Epigraphy.”<sup>13</sup>

Throughout his life, Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (HMANE) founder David Gordon Lyon (1852–1935) advocated archaeological exploration and documentation as a way to gain new knowledge about ancient cultures, as well as objects for exhibition. We are pleased to be able to add this new Joseph Lindon Smith painting of Idu to our collection for all visitors to enjoy, both in our gallery and via our website (<https://hmane.harvard.edu>).

13 <https://www.digital-epigraphy.com/>.

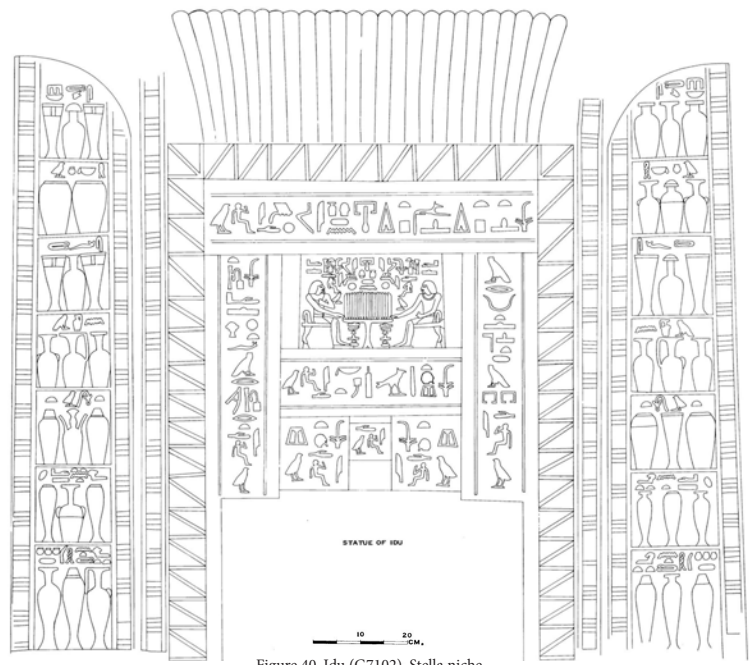


Figure 40. Idu (G7102). Stella niche

Fig. 13. Single line weight drawing of the west wall false door inscriptions, from Simpson, *Mastabas of Qar and Idu* (Boston, 1976), fig. 40.

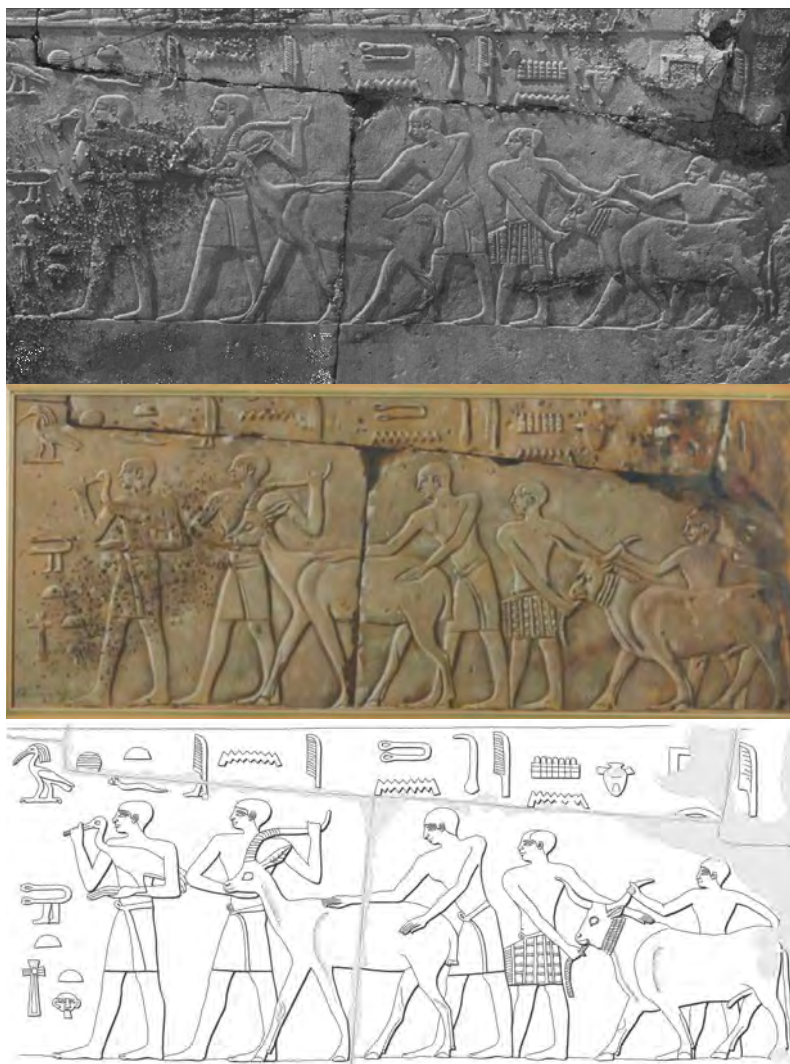


Fig. 14. Comparison of different documentation methods, tomb of Khnumnefer and Nedju, G 2175. Top: HU–MFA Expedition photo B1454 NS (April 1912); Center: oil on canvas painting by Joseph Lindon Smith, private collection; Bottom: digital drawing by Peter Der Manuelian.

# PANLONGCHENG 2024 FIELD SCHOOL

XIN SU

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The Panlongcheng 2024 Field School was co-hosted by the School of History at Wuhan University, the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University, the Hubei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, and the Panlongcheng Site Museum. This program lasted for 35 days, based in the Panlongcheng site in Huangpi, Wuhan, Hubei. It aimed to provide archaeology training through various forms such as lectures, fieldwork, and laboratory teaching, to promote Sino-foreign academic exchange

and cooperation, and to enrich international exchange models in archaeology.

The Panlongcheng site, located in the northwest suburbs of Wuhan, Hubei Province (fig. 1), is one of the most important large-scale sites from the early Bronze Age in China. Since its discovery in the 1950s, extensive systematic archaeological work at the Panlongcheng site has unearthed significant relics such as city walls, palace foundations, elite tombs, and craft workshops, along with numerous precious

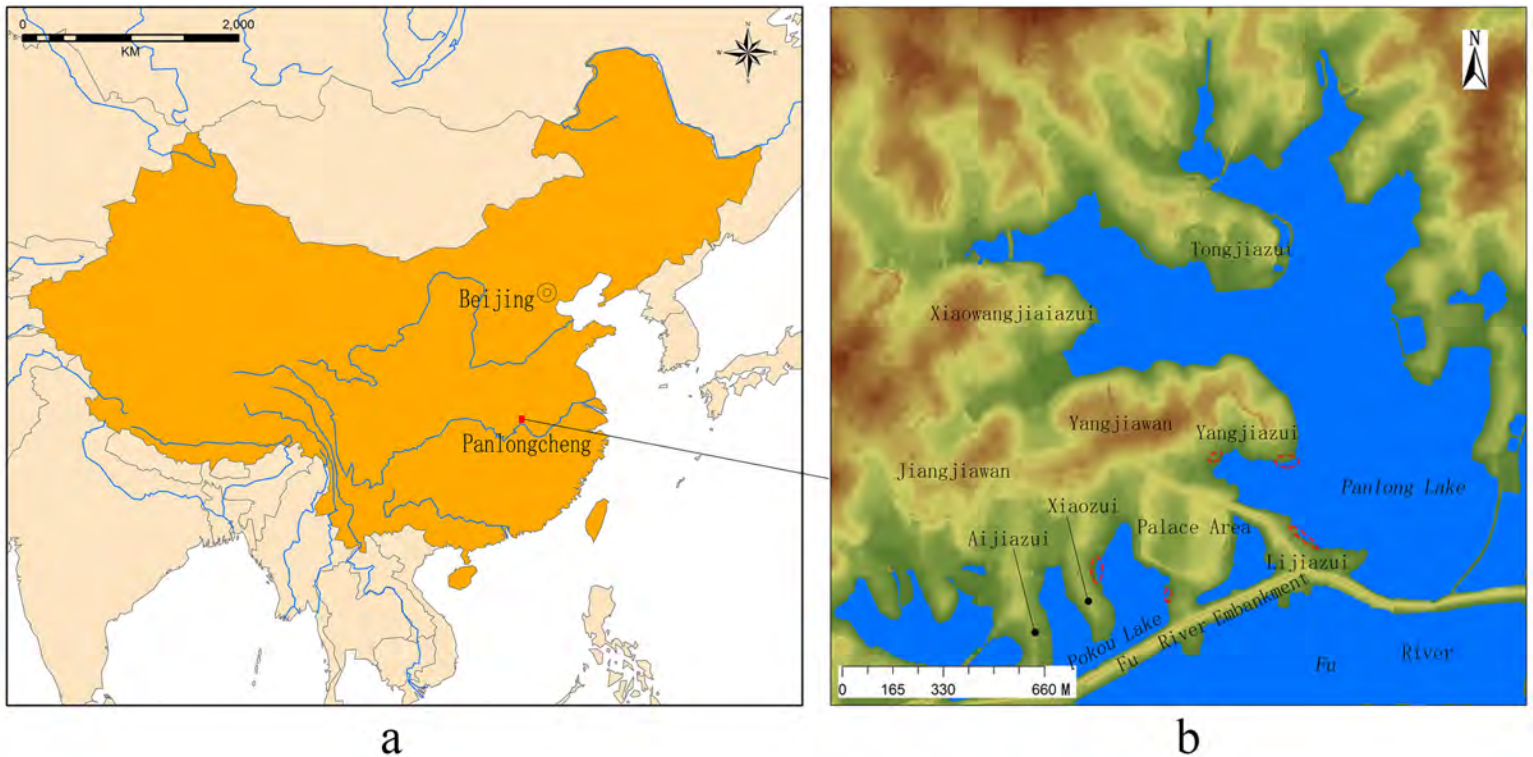


Fig. 1. A map demonstrates the location of the Panlongcheng site (a) and its landscape (b).

artifacts including bronzes, jades, and pottery. These findings not only display a high level of social hierarchy but also show close ties with the Central Plains region. Based on this work, studies over the years on the Panlongcheng site have covered many aspects, including the site's chronology and nature, settlement layout, landscape and function, and craft production, providing an excellent research sample for exploring the development of early Bronze Age society in the Yangtze River Valley and understanding

the early expansion and management strategies of dynasties from the Central Plains toward the south.

In recent years, the School of History at Wuhan University has focused on systematic archaeological excavations at locations such as Xiaozui, Wangjiazui, and Yangjiawan at the Panlongcheng site. In 2023, large-scale relics with paved stones, house foundations (fig. 2), and a large number of densely arranged complete pottery jars (fig. 3) were discovered on the northern slope of



Fig. 2. A drone photo showing one of house foundations at Yangjiawan.

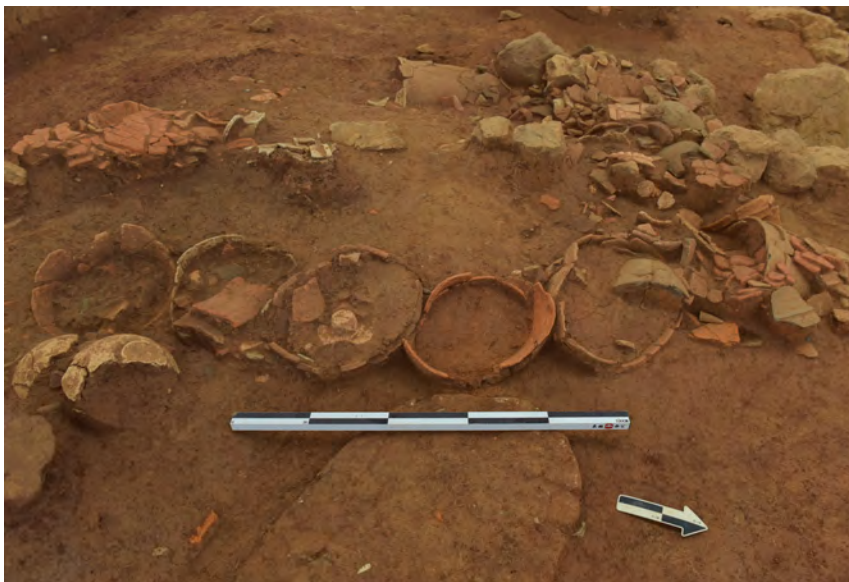


Fig. 3. A photo demonstrating pottery jars in an organized manner.

Yangjiawan. Consequently, the current 2024 field school continued to select the northern slope of the Yangjiawan excavation area as the fieldwork site, aiming to explore the extent of the relics and settlement layout in this area.

During this fieldwork, the field school participants revealed many important archaeological phenomena, including a square house with post holes, two large pits yielding numerous complete pottery, stone tools, and bronze arrowheads, and a suspected stone structure. These discoveries not only significantly increased the quantity and types of artifacts unearthed at the northern slope of Yangjiawan but also revealed the settlement patterns and structure of a common residential area, along with the ancient geomorphological features of this location, characterized by being higher in the south and lower in the north with intermittent steep escarpments. This provides important material support for our ongoing exploration of the settlement patterns, social organization, and craft production at the Yangjiawan area during the late stage of the Panlongcheng site, as well as the social relationships and production interactions between elites and common people.

In addition, the fieldwork component included a comprehensive set of systematic field archaeology processes and technologies, such as archaeological drilling work, soil texture and color identification, stratigraphy and relic cleaning, artifact collection, photography and drawing, soil sample collection, data recording, and organizing, along with advanced archaeological techniques like drone aerial photography, 3D modeling, RTK using, and digital drawing (fig. 4 and 5). This was focused on developing students' procedural awareness and clear thinking during archaeological excavations, as well as equipping them with the ability to scientifically address basic issues found during excavations.



Fig. 4. Students are excavating in their trench. From right to left: Julianna Watson (The Ohio State University) and Dylan Lee (Yale-NUS College)

During rainy days or downtime, courses were offered to help students fully understand the basic information of various artifacts unearthed over the years at the Panlongcheng site, such as names, shapes, decorations, and textures, to assist them in identifying the types and periods of excavated artifacts during fieldwork. Students also organized, cataloged, and recorded multiple relic units excavated from the Panlongcheng site in previous years, experiencing firsthand how to scientifically organize and publish excavated archaeological materials.

Lectures and laboratory work are covered in this field school as well. The lecture component emphasized interdisciplinary learning by inviting scholars from various institutions both domestically and abroad, such as Wuhan University, Peking University, and Harvard University, etc. Course content covered diverse fields including archaeology, geology, history, biology, and zoology, enabling students to understand the current research status and academic significance of sites, and to analyze archaeological sites from multiple perspectives, thereby broadening their academic horizons.

The laboratory segment involved guiding students to the Zooarchaeology Laboratory at Wuhan University (fig. 6), where they systematically learned how to identify basic information such as species, location, age, and gender of animal bones unearthed at sites. Using animal bone materials from the Mulintou site as examples, students conducted identification and statistical analysis, effectively learning and mastering various archaeological operational procedures through practice.

The archaeological work of the field school also attracted public attention and had a certain social impact. Throughout the excavation process, the students, instructors, and directors of the field school were interviewed by various media outlets, including Changjiang Daily, Wuhan TV, CCTV-9, China Cultural Relics News, and Xinhua News Agency. These interactions not only promoted the international collaboration project at the Panlongcheng site to the public but also demonstrated the participants' perseverance in hot weather, pursuit of knowledge, and profound passion for archaeology. Related reports are available through

Fig. 5. Students are using a drone for photography. From left to right: ZHOU Lin (Wuhan University), Dylan Lee (Yale-NUS College), and LEI Sha (Fudan University)



various media publications and online platforms such as journals, videos, and some public accounts.

In conclusion, the Panlongcheng 2024 Field School served as a vital platform for fostering academic exchange and enhancing the understanding of archaeological practices among participants. By integrating rigorous fieldwork with interdisciplinary lectures and laboratory training, the program not only enriched the participants' knowledge of archaeological methods but also provided a deeper appreciation of the rich cultural heritage represented at the Panlongcheng site. The discoveries made during the field school have significantly contributed to the ongoing discourse surrounding the social organization

and craft production in early Bronze Age China, illuminating settlement patterns and community dynamics that resonate with the broader context of Chinese history. Furthermore, the media coverage surrounding the excavation activities highlighted the importance of public engagement in archaeology and showcased the dedication and enthusiasm of the students and faculty involved. Overall, the successful collaboration among various institutions has reinforced the significance of international partnerships in advancing archaeological research and education, paving the way for future explorations and discoveries in this field.



Fig. 6. Prof Liu is guiding a student to identify animal bones. From left to right: ZHANG Zirui (Wesleyan University) and Prof. LIU Yiting (Wuhan University).

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Matt Liebmann  
Diana Loren  
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Administrative Director, Archaeological Exploration of Sardis (HAM)

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Isabella McMillen	Junior	Émilie Blondin	Senior
Elisabeth Ngo	Junior	Kaity Greenwald	Senior
Adelaide Parker	Junior	Charlotte Hannan	Senior
Eli Visio	Junior	Andrea Lanza Aliaga	Senior
Sneha Yelamanchili	Junior	Kade McGovern	Senior
Rachel Beard	Senior	Shane Rice	Senior
		Tejas Vadali	Senior

## Graduate Students

Marlena Billings	Graduate year 1
Yufei Deng	Graduate Year 1
Jacob Kalodner	Graduate Year 1
Gokce Ozturk	Graduate Year 1
Claire Adams	Graduated
Marina Haworth	Graduated
Emily Conlogue	Graduate Year 2
Erica Robles Cortés	Graduate Year 2
Keri Burge	Graduate Year 3
Joyce Wing In Ho	Graduate Year 3
Percy Hei Chun Ho	Graduate Year 3
Jack Bishop	Graduate Year 5
Samantha Richter	Graduate Year 5
Mack FitzPatrick	Graduate Year 5
Andrew Bair	Graduate Year 6
Veronica Peterson	Graduate Year 6
Kristen Pearson	Graduate Year 6
Leonardo Valdez Ordonez	Graduate Year 6
Melina Seabrook	Graduate Year 7
Aurora Allshouse	Graduate Year 8
Sarah Eisen	Graduate Year 8
Juliana Ramirez Herrera	Graduate Year 8
Luan Ribeiro	Graduate Year 8
Jonathan Thumas	Graduate Year 8
Sarah Loomis	Graduate Year 9
Jessica McNeil	Graduate Year 9
Julia Judge Mulhall	Graduate Year 9



Students watch as ants swarm out of whistling thorn acacia trees to protect against herbivory (see pg. 16).

## The Standing Committee on Archaeology

The Standing Committee on Archaeology is a multidisciplinary group of scholars appointed to promote the teaching of archaeology at Harvard and advance knowledge of archaeological activity, research, fieldwork, and techniques in the many and varied fields where archaeology is employed as an approach to past cultures and histories around the world. As promoters of Archaeology, we are in charge of the secondary field, both for undergraduate students and graduate students. Our role is to guide and help all secondary students to take the most out of what the secondary field can offer both at Harvard and beyond, aiming to help expand the student's knowledge and practice in Archaeology.

Archaeology can be seen as the study of past human societies through the recovery, analysis, and interpretation of material remains. Those who practice archaeology employ a wide range of methods, techniques, and theoretical orientations drawn from across the spectrum of academic disciplines to further their specific intellectual goals. Likewise, scholars of many disciplines who do not consider themselves to be practicing archaeologists nevertheless use the results of archaeological work in their teaching and research. Our members and students work with and in a wide range of museums and departments on Harvard's campus.



<https://archaeology.harvard.edu/>

A dog scavenging for trash after the site closes (taken by the author).