

The Abydos Middle Cemetery Project Enters Its Fifteenth Year

University of Michigan teams, with the gracious consent of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt, have worked at Abydos for fourteen years now. As of 2008 we had conducted four survey seasons and three full-scale excavation seasons, accumulating a great deal of ceramic, skeletal, and artifactual material as study collections at the dig house.

Confronting this mass of material in a systematic way was an important component of our fourth excavation season at Abydos in February–March 2009. We not only continued our excavations and magnetometric work in the Middle Cemetery, but thanks to a grant from the Antiquities Endowment Fund of the American Research Center in Egypt, our Kelsey conservators also launched a survey of previously excavated material stored at the Pennsylvania–Yale–Institute of Fine Arts/New York University house used by a consortium of North American projects of which the U-M mission is a member (fig. 1). The survey methodology and database were jointly developed



Fig. 1. The Pennsylvania–Yale–Institute of Fine Arts/New York University expedition house compound in the desert at Abydos.

by Suzanne Davis and Claudia Chemello; this first round in the field was staffed by Claudia Chemello. Claudia was without doubt one of the busiest crew members on the ground this year: alongside her work on the database she was also continually engaged in field conservation, stabilizing fragile contexts in the Middle Cemetery including an undisturbed but badly deteriorated statue deposit (*serdab*)

and the remains of a painted chapel, both of the late Old Kingdom; and in cleaning and stabilizing smaller artifacts excavated during the season. Thanks to her tireless efforts we successfully excavated one of the earliest *serdabs* known from Abydos and also made great strides toward organizing the results of now eight seasons of work.

Janet Richards

Conservation at Abydos

As in previous seasons, ongoing conservation goals focused on the preservation of specific important finds excavated during the season (fig. 2). Major finds included two painted limestone walls in situ, as well as a sealed *serdab* deposit containing numerous painted wooden statues, along with plaster and textile elements (fig. 3).

A new and crucial goal for conservation in the 2009 field season was the implementation of a conservation condition survey of Abydos Middle Cemetery (AMC) excavated artifacts. Although important finds from the project are registered with the Supreme Council of Antiquities and transported to a central

storage facility in the local province, all other finds from this excavation are stored on site, at the dig house.

The goal of the survey is to investi-

gate artifact condition and to recommend storage improvements for artifacts that are stored at the dig house. The survey, designed and built by the author



Fig. 2. Painted wood coffin fragment, after treatment (left) and packed in a custom-fitted container (right).

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and Suzanne Davis, conservators for the AMC project, utilizes a Criterion Anchored Rating Scale (CARS) to quickly assess the condition of each object. The survey has a rating scale of 1 to 5 for condition, based on a visual examination of each object. Various check boxes indicate the current housing of the artifact and whether the object requires improved storage to prevent deterioration and/or loss. The survey records what materials are recommended to provide improved storage in order to calculate the quantity of materials required and to facilitate the future purchase of supplies for rehousing (fig. 4).

During the 2009 season, a total of 357 artifacts were surveyed (fig. 5). Of these, the vast majority require rehousing in future seasons. Most need rehousing in smaller, rigid, lidded containers to protect fragile material. These small containers, available locally, can be placed back into the large wood storage boxes that already house this material. All of the objects that are currently housed in open wood or plastic trays, or on wooden boards, should be rehoused into rigid containers and then into lidded wood boxes. Wood boxes are available locally and can be made to order for any size required.

A very strong recommendation that emerged from the conservation survey is that a unique number should be assigned to each artifact (currently linked to individual excavation seasons only) and that a database be used to organize and formally record all



Fig. 5. Claudia Chemello at work in one of the Abydos storerooms.



Fig. 3. Kelsey Conservator Claudia Chemello excavates the late Old Kingdom serdab deposit.

excavation information associated with that artifact. It is hoped that, when this database is developed, it will be possible to integrate it with the existing conservation survey and treatment database, both of which run in FileMaker.

Conservation priorities for future seasons in the Middle Cemetery will naturally continue to be architectural features and excavated finds for the current season. A further high priority is conservation of the lifted objects from the serdab excavated this season. This

material was consolidated with cyclododecane, a temporary treatment method, and requires further treatment and secure, custom housing for long-term storage and access.

Finally, it is essential that we continue the conservation survey initiated this year. The survey has identified a large number of objects that require rehousing for support and long-term preservation. Priority should be given to the most fragile materials during the rehousing, particularly arti-

facts made from textile, cartonnage, and unfired clay. Such careful management of excavated artifacts not only ensures their long-term viability but also renders them more readily accessible to study by interested scholars.

Claudia Chemello

For more information on conservation activities at Abydos and other excavation projects, visit the Kelsey conservators' blog at <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/kelseymuseum.digdiary/>.

ABYDOS MIDDLE CEMETERY PROJECT CONSERVATION CONDITION SURVEY			
AMC Inventory #	AMC 07-01		Date
Storage Location			Feb 27, 2009
Object Type	architectural fragment	Inscribed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Primary material	stone: limestone		Surveyor
Secondary material			Claudia Chemello
Other Materials	possibly pigment, difficult to see		
Condition Ranking	4		
Object/Condition Notes	carved hieroglyphs on one side		
Storage Housing at Time of Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> zip lock bag <input type="checkbox"/> wood box <input type="checkbox"/> basket <input type="checkbox"/> wood tray <input type="checkbox"/> plastic container, lid	<input type="checkbox"/> plastic container, no lid <input type="checkbox"/> open shelf <input type="checkbox"/> wood pallet <input type="checkbox"/> cotton sheet cover <input type="checkbox"/> tyvek cover	<input type="checkbox"/> no housing <input type="checkbox"/> other, see notes at right
Storage Housing Needed	No		Storage Housing Completed
<input type="checkbox"/> ziplock bag <input type="checkbox"/> tupperware container <input type="checkbox"/> muslin bag <input type="checkbox"/> wooden box <input type="checkbox"/> archival box <input type="checkbox"/> archival board	<input type="checkbox"/> polyurethane foam <input type="checkbox"/> ethafoam <input type="checkbox"/> volara <input type="checkbox"/> soft tyvek <input type="checkbox"/> hard tyvek <input type="checkbox"/> tissue interleave	<input type="checkbox"/> tissue padding <input type="checkbox"/> twill tape <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> muslin <input type="checkbox"/> see notes	
Storage Notes & Measurements		Housed on open wooden shelving. H - 50cm, W - 28cm, D - 16cm	
Condition Ranking 1: High priority for treatment; actively deteriorating. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> major structural problems mold/mildew active corrosion on more than 25% of surface flaking/lifting/powdering/spalling or friable surface, more than 25% active tearing/breaking major insect damage/ live bugs 			
Condition Ranking 2: Needs remedial treatment; condition may worsen quickly over time. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> active corrosion less than 25% of surface broken due to failed adhesive old restorations/failing restorations deteriorated coatings flaking/lifting/powdering/spalling or friable surface, less than 25% needs new housing 			
Condition Ranking 3: May benefit from or require treatment to improve appearance; condition is stable with little potential for active deterioration. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> accretions dirt losses old restorations 			
Condition Ranking 4: No treatment necessary; condition is stable.			
Condition Ranking 5: No treatment is possible; deterioration is irreversible/irreparable, and/or object is disintegrated/unsalvageable.			

Fig. 4. An example of a FileMaker record from the 2009 conservation survey.