

A CENTURY of EXCAVATION at the PALACE-CITY of AMENHOTEP III

*The Work of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1910-1920)
& the Joint Expedition to Malqata (2008-2012)*

by Diana Craig Patch, Catharine Roehrig & Peter Lacovara

One of the best preserved of Egypt's settlements is the palace-city of Amenhotep III (1390-1353 B.C.) on the west bank at Luxor. Lying south of his immense mortuary temple at Kom el Hettan¹ and on the sandy edge of the cultivation bordering the Nile River, this great site is composed of an extensive complex of structures extending upwards of seven kilometers. All of this was created to showcase the festivities marking the king's Jubilee or *Heb-Sed*.² This thirty-year festival was an important milestone in the reign of a pharaoh and marked a renewal of his rule. As in everything else, Amenhotep III was not to be outdone, and he elevated this ceremony to a major spectacle. He also celebrated not just one, but three of these events — all at Malqata — in the thirtieth, thirty-fourth and thirty-sixth years of his reign.

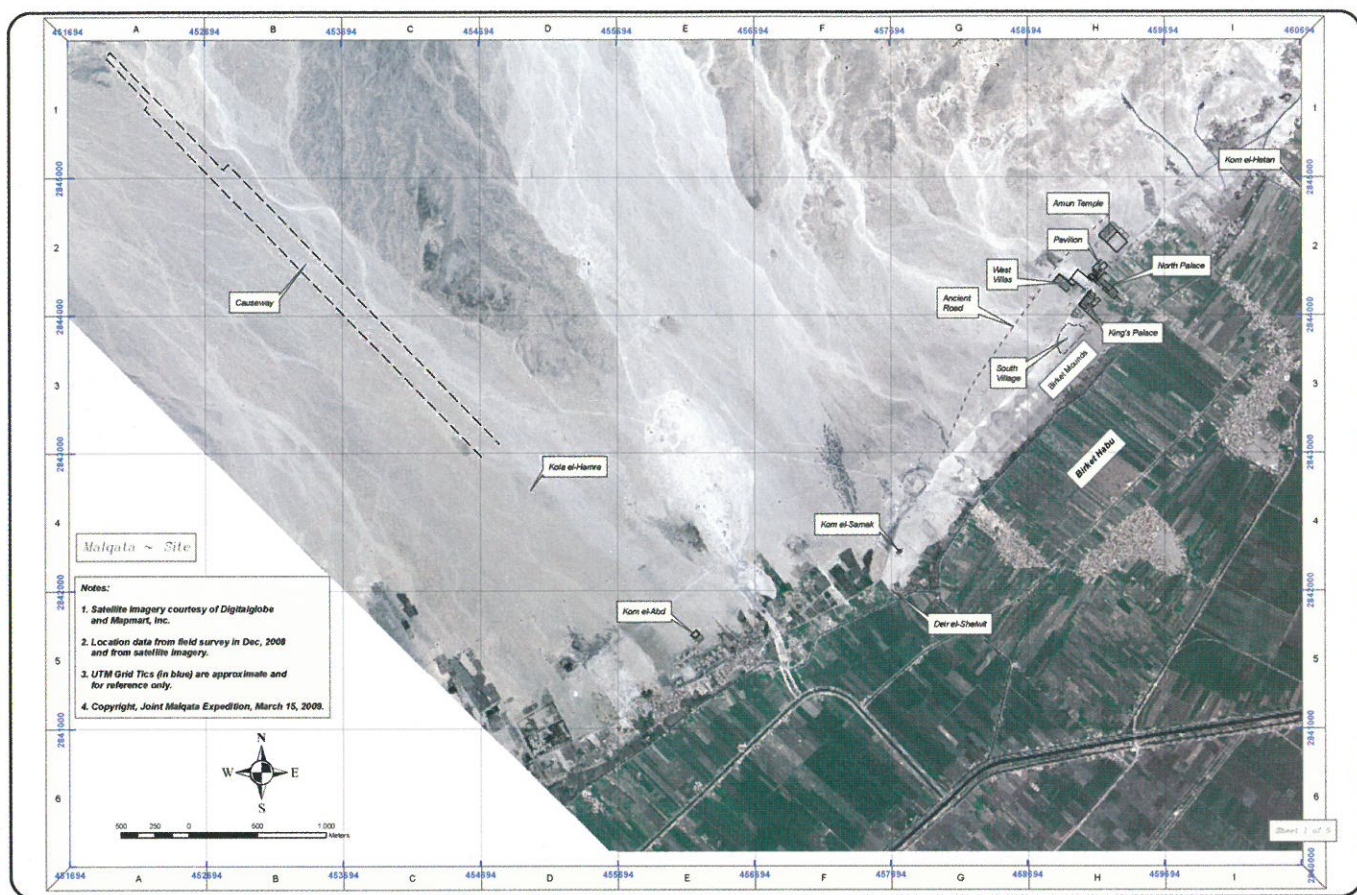
The buildings, which were made almost entirely of mud brick, included a temple dedicated to Amen, several palaces, administrative buildings, storerooms, housing for officials, and settlements of the artisans, servants and other persons needed to sustain

Above, View of the Malqata North Village, as it appears today. P. Lacovara photo
Opposite, Ceiling painting from the Malqata palace of Amenhotep III, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Rogers Fund 11.215.415, 1911).

Courtesy the MMA



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Above, Overall plan showing the site of Malqata by Joel Paulson, utilizing satellite imagery courtesy of Digitalglobe and Mapmark, Inc.

Right, 1910-1911 photograph of the Metropolitan Museum camp & work underway on the site of the king's palace at Malqata.

Photo courtesy of the MMA



the royal court. The structures also included a vast harbor (the Birket Habu), two isolated platforms along the desert edge (Kom el Samak and Kom el Abd) and an immense, five kilometer-long causeway that runs east to west in the desert,

up to the edge of the high cliffs.

The site became known by the locals as *el Malqata* (the place where things are picked up or found) for the many faience ornaments, jewelry fragments and decorated

pot sherds that littered the ground there. The first archaeological excavations at Malqata were conducted by Georges Daressy, on behalf of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, in March 1888, and again the following year. During these two brief seasons, he exposed rooms in the principal royal-residence, known as “The Palace of the King.” Here he discovered fragments of the painted plaster that had once decorated those rooms. He also found the remains of a painted throne-dais. Some of these paintings were eventually removed and taken to the Giza Museum, a precursor of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.³

A broader campaign was undertaken at the site in January and February 1902, by Percy Newberry and Robb De Peyster Tytus. While Tytus worked on the palace under Newberry’s supervision, Newberry himself seems to have excavated the area to the south, near the Birket Habu mounds. A preliminary report on the palace was published by Tytus with admirable rapidity the following year.⁴ At the end is a brief mention of workmen’s houses to the south and a nearby factory for glazed objects, that produced a quantity of molds and fragments of faience and glass, all of which would be published in a final report at a later date. Unfortunately, neither Newberry nor Tytus returned to the site and this re-

1910-1911 photograph showing painted-plaster ceiling fragments in situ, the king’s palace at Malqata. Courtesy the MMA

port never appeared.

A far more extensive exploration of Malqata was undertaken by the Egyptian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art during six seasons between December 1910 and February 1920. This campaign eventually included the entire expanse of the ancient city. The work of the first two seasons was undertaken by Herbert E. Winlock and Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Plans of the buildings and facsimiles of the paintings were done by William J. Palmer-Jones.⁵ Between 1910 and 1912, the expedition worked primarily on the King’s Palace, but also extended the excavations into the adjacent settlement areas, including a group of large, carefully laid-out buildings to the west (dubbed the West Villas); some isolated houses to the east, clustered around the largest of the Birket Habu mounds, designated Houses A-C; and a rambling settlement area to the south — consisting mostly of small structures — that was identified as the South Village.

Carefully re-clearing parts of the palace that had been investigated by earlier expeditions, and excavating sections that had not been disturbed, Winlock and Evelyn-White found many remarkably well-preserved sections of beautifully decorated walls, as well as paintings that had fallen from the ceiling. These fallen fragments of fragile





Above, Photo of the Malqata North Village, as it appeared in 1915, during Metropolitan Museum of Art excavations at the site. Courtesy the MMA Below, The North Village in 2008. D.C. Patch photo



mud-plaster were lifted, face down, onto panels of glass, where they could then be reconstruct into large sections of what had been painted ceiling. The best-preserved sections of the remaining wall paintings were also removed, and all

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of this palace decoration was divided between the museums in Cairo and New York.

During the Metropolitan's 1910-1911 season, in addition to the work in the King's Palace, extensive excavation

was done around the nearby Birket Habu mounds and in the South Village. The ancient garbage dumps in this area were also thoroughly investigated.⁶ Work in the South Village continued in the 1911-1912 season, and excavation was extended west of the Palace, into the West Villas.

The third MMA season at Malqata was conducted by Hugh Evelyn-White, who began work in February of 1915 and excavated a strip of land that extended east between two areas of cultivation just north of the King's Palace. There he uncovered a large royal-residence, now known as the North Palace.⁷

The First World War had prevented most of the Museum's staff from working in Egypt, but — in order to provide employment to Egyptian workmen — a fourth Malqata season was conducted by Ambrose Lansing, from January to May of 1917. Lansing excavated a mud-brick temple, with a huge enclosed courtyard at the front. In the temple rooms, he found sandstone doorsills, column bases, and fragments of inscribed jambs and lintels. There were also bits of painted plaster from the ceilings and walls. Stamped bricks identified the structure as "The House of Amen in the House of Rejoicing"⁸ — "House of Rejoicing" being the name given to the palace-city itself.

Lansing returned for the 1917-1918 season and, working south of the temple, uncovered a platform, which he called the Belvidere (marked Pavilion on the modern plan of the site). He also found a second settlement-area that became known as the North Village and continued Evelyn-White's work on the North Palace.

The sixth and final season was conducted by Winlock in February 1920. During the course of the work, Winlock studied the outbuildings east of the North Palace and oversaw the final plans of the "Belvidere" (or "Audience Pavilion") and the West Villas, while Walter Hauser began a 1/1000 survey that tied together the various plans, with the exception of the South Village.⁹

Some fifty years later, with growing interest in settlement archaeology in Egypt, a reexamination of the site was undertaken by the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania under the direction of David O'Connor (University Museum) and Barry Kemp (University of Cambridge, Faculty of Oriental Studies).¹⁰ After a detailed survey of the area, O'Connor and Kemp conducted five seasons of work at the site between 1971 and 1977, and were able to determine that the town associated with the palace was far larger than originally thought and that the great artificial lake, the Birket Habu, was created as part of the overall design of the complex. They also concluded that the great mounds of dirt that had been dug from the lakebed were laid out and landscaped to create a waterfront and harbor for the palace-city.

In December 1971 a team from Waseda University (Japan) began working in an area near the small Isis temple of Deir el Shalwit. They called this site Malqata South. Dur-

ing eight field seasons (ending January 1979), they excavated a Roman-Byzantine settlement near the temple and cleared the Kom el Samak, a platform dating to the time of Amenhotep III.¹¹ Moving to the central area of Malqata, from 1985-1988, the Waseda team, under the direction of Professor Yasutada Watanabe, conducted work in the King's Palace, where they concentrated on recording and analyzing the numerous fragments of wall and ceiling paintings that remained.¹²

In 2008 the Metropolitan Museum returned to the site, in collaboration with the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University, Atlanta.¹³ The goals of the new Joint Expedition to Malqata (JEM) are to document fully the site and develop strategies for its long-term preservation, in cooperation with the Ministry of State for Antiquities.¹⁴ The new expedition — under co-directors Dr. Diana Craig Patch (from The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and Dr. Peter Lacovara (of the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta), along with Dr. Catharine H. Roehrig, (also of the Metropolitan Museum), surveyor Joel Paulson and other specialists — has spent three seasons surveying and studying the site.

The area of investigation includes the entire site, as described above: an area beginning just south of the Mortuary Temple of Rameses III at Medinet Habu and ending at Kom el Abd, and the southern edge of the cleared strip in the desert. The long-term goal is to look at the numerous structures that make up Malqata as a whole, in order to better understand the pattern of the ancient town-plan and the purpose of the various outlying components. Although parts of the original city have disappeared under cultivated land and modern settlement, the areas that remain were never built on in later periods and thus provide an almost unique opportunity to study details of urban design and function.¹⁵ It is also, of course, essential for developing a plan to protect the site to know its full extent and the geophysical features upon which it was built.

Overall Map of the Site

An important aspect of the current work has been to create an overall map of the site, including plans of the individual buildings and settlement areas that have been investigated in the past. During the first season, in December 2008, we were able to determine that most of the plans from the Egyptian Expedition archives were accurate, and Joel Paulson was able to produce the overall site-map, incorporating most of the old plans onto a satellite photograph showing local topography.

One area that could not be located with accuracy in 2008 was the South Village. The old plan of this area has no north arrow or scale, and overlaps none of the major structures in the central part of the site. In other words it was vaguely located somewhere south of the King's Palace and west of the Birket Habu mounds. One goal during the 2012 season was to locate preserved features on the ground corre-



Above, Pottery sherd with image of Hathor. Below, Fragment of ceiling painting with star on blue background, from the Malqata Amen temple. Right, Fragment of inscribed sandstone, also from the Amen temple. C. Roehrig photos



sponding to features on the old plan. A careful search along the western edge of the Birket Habu mounds turned up the corner and two adjoining walls of one of the larger structures documented on the 1911 plan, and from this Roehrig and Paulson were able to locate the original datum point from which all the measurements on the plan had been made. Although it appears that — after a century of wind erosion and periodic, heavy rains — little architecture in the South Village remains. Future work will verify this impression.

Magnetometer Survey

To begin to understand poorly documented areas of the site, Tomasz Herbich — from the Polish Center for Mediterranean

Archaeology — carried out a magnetic survey in four areas: the Amen temple, the North Village, the Middle Palace and the South Village. We were hoping that magnetometry might help us relocate the lost walls in the South Village and reveal unexcavated structures buried below the desert surface.

For the most part, the results were not encouraging. The mud brick at Malqata has a very high iron content, which is excellent for identifying buried walls. Unfortunately the erosion of exposed mud-brick in the area creates a situation where the soil has almost the same magnetic qualities as the surviving walls. As a result it is difficult for a magnetometer to distinguish preserved walls from the surrounding desert. No clear evidence for unknown walls was found in most of the surveyed areas.



The North Village

Another area we found problematic in 2008 was the North Village. The old plans did not correspond to visible architectural remains, so we decided that it would be necessary to re-clear the apparently poorly preserved settlement in order to determine how much more information could be garnered in a fresh look at the remains. The only record from the original excavation was a rather schematic plan of small houses; based on the similarity to other so called “workmen’s village” plans, these were thought to house the craftsmen and artisans supplying the needs of Amenhotep’s court.

The remaining buildings are now heavily denuded, compared to photographs from the earlier excavations, which show that many structures had at least fifty centimeters of standing wall. This state of preservation is no longer the case, and in most places only the foundation brick remains,

and often only to the height of a few centimeters, or even just a trace. This erosion makes our work of the utmost importance, both in recording the traces that are left and in trying to protect them for the future.

Our close inspection of this area has shown that the plans of the original Metropolitan expedition were not entirely accurate, and the site appears to have had two phases of occupation. It is most likely that the original village was established during the initial phase at Malqata, that is, preparations for Amenhotep III's initial *Heb-Sed* in Year 30. Then perhaps these houses were left unoccupied until the planning for the second Jubilee in Year 34, or when the third *Heb-Sed* was under way.

As is the case with many early settlement explorations in Egypt, often the initial excavators did not always clear down to the floor level of a structure. We have been fortunate to find a few intact surfaces in some of the houses not heavily denuded by the wind. These surfaces aid in understanding how the village was built. Interestingly, little remains on these surfaces; they appear largely clean, suggesting the inhabitants took their possessions with them when they left. Occasionally a bead or a fragment of glass vessel or glass cane was recovered, but in general little remained. The sherds from pottery vessels, animal bones, plant remains and other small finds come from fill used in leveling the area prior to building.

The pottery is typical of the fine, beautifully finished wares of the late Eighteenth Dynasty, including blue-painted and polychrome vessels similar to those known from El Amarna. Much of this pottery would have been used as food containers for the palaces during the king's Jubilee festival, based on a deposit of broken vessels discovered in 1916-17 season.¹⁶ Many of these sherds had inscriptions identifying their contents. Because fragments from containers for food originally destined for the palace's occupants are now found

in fill under houses in the North Village, it means that some structures in the village were built after the first *Heb-Sed* was over and broken containers were easily available for reuse.

The North Village was the one location where the magnetometer survey recorded previously unknown structures. Considering the information that we were able to record from the 2010 excavations, where the houses had already been cleared, an undisturbed section should provide important data into the village's history of use.

The Amen Temple

During the 2010 season, we explored the state of the Temple of Amen, previously identified under the name of Festival Hall. The first stage began a careful cleaning of the surviving walls and brick floors — largely found at the back of the structure — in order to record the temple's mud-brick architecture. Lansing mapped the walls, but their brickwork had never been planned.¹⁷ The cleaning brought to light small pieces of the painted mud-plaster ceiling decoration — a blue background covered with yellow stars — that paralleled a description found in the report for that season's work.¹⁸

We also began collecting, sorting and recording fragments of worked stone found in the temple precinct. Numerous chips of black granodiorite have been assigned to a statue of the god Amen, based on the recovery of a portion of the feathers from an Amen crown during the 1917 excavations. There are also many scattered chips of sandstone that once belonged to column bases, door sills, jambs and cornices. These architectural elements enhanced the temple's basic mud-brick construction. Some fragments retain portions of inscriptions, and the bulk indicates that the sandstone bits largely come from two jambs and lintel.

The Cleared Strip

The MAA/MCC team also investigated an enigmatic "road-

MAA/MCC workmen covering the king's palace walls with protective sand at the end of the 2012 season.

C.Roehrig photo



way" at the southernmost end of the site, a strip of cleared sand and gravel stretching far out into the desert, to the west of the Kom el Abd. The strip appears to date to the time of Amenhotep III, as indicated by the Eighteenth Dynasty potsherds that had been used in the laborious scraping away of the desert surface. Interpreting the meaning of this large installation will be difficult, due to its clearly unfinished state.

The King' Palace

The palace itself was the centerpiece of Malqata and it was there that the king and important members of his court resided and received high-ranking guests in the audience halls. Surrounding the palace was a vast series of courtyards, storerooms, stables, offices, courts, chapels, kitchens and bakeries, gardens, and pools. This past season we began a systematic program of recording the remains of the palace, by drawing and photographing the mud-brick walls, floors and stone architectural-elements and, in particular, the remaining mural painting still *in situ*. In addition we were able to protect the surviving stone column-bases, already suffering greatly from both vandalism and groundwater, through the use of clean sand.

While carrying out this work, we have discovered small areas within the King's Palace that were overlooked by earlier excavators. These places preserve the original stratigraphy of the construction, occupation and abandonment levels of the site. They also confirm the suggestion made by Tytus that there was a catastrophic collapse of the roof, which effectively ended the life of the palace — if it was not already abandoned. In addition we discovered wood ties still *in situ*, that had been used to secure the double doors which led into the main entrance to the palace. This part of the site, first exposed by Daressy, has deteriorated significantly; and there are no published records to show the limits and design of this portion of the structure, so it will be important work of future seasons to define this area of the palace.

The work of the Joint Expedition to Malqata will increase our understanding of the palace-city. Planning, in co-operation with the Ministry of State for Antiquities, will facilitate the long-term preservation of Malqata's various buildings, so that future visitors will also have an opportunity to view this amazing site.

Notes

1. This temple, and its great array of sculpture, is currently being excavated by Dr. Hourig Sourouzian (<http://www.wmf.org/project/mortuary-temple-amenhotep-iii>).
2. Lacovara, P., "Realm of the Sun King: The Palace City of Amenhotep III at Malkata," *Amarna Letters* 3 (1994), 6-21.
3. Daressy, Georges, "Le Palais d'Aménophis III et le Birket Habou," *Annales du Service des Antiquités d'Égypte* IV (1903), 165-170; "Voyage d'inspection de M. Grébaut en 1899," *ASAE* XXVI (1926), 12.
4. Tytus, Robb deP., *A Preliminary Report on the Re-excavation of the Palace of Amenhotep III* (New York, 1903); reprinted by Van Siclen Books (San Antonio, TX, 1994).
5. Winlock, Herbert E., "The Work of the Egyptian Expedition," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* [hereafter *BMMA*] 7

(1912), 184-190.

6. Regrettably, although the huge mounds of pottery that are visible today undoubtedly contain much of the original refuse from the palace and nearby settlements, for the most part they are not untouched ancient garbage dumps, but rather spoil heaps from the early 20th Century excavations.
7. Evelyn-White, H.G., "The Egyptian Expedition 1914-15," *BMMA* 10 (1915), 253-256.
8. Lansing, Ambrose, "Excavations at the Palace of Amenhotep III at Thebes," Supplement to the *BMMA* 13, March (1918), 8-14.
9. Winlock, "Excavations at Thebes, 1919-1920," Supplement to the *BMMA* 15 (1920), 12.
10. Kemp, Barry, and David O'Connor, "An ancient Nile Harbour: University Museum Excavations at the 'Birket Habu,'" *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* 3.1 (March 1974), 101-136; O'Connor, David, "The University Museum Excavations at the Palace-City of Malkata," *Expedition* 22.1 (winter, 1979), 52-53.
11. See the website of the Institute of Egyptology, Waseda University, on Malqata South at <http://www.egyptpro.sci.waseda.ac.jp/e-msouth.html>. A photograph of the unexcavated Kom el Samak mound in the Egyptian Expedition archives identifies it as a small sun-temple in the desert.
12. Watanabe, Y., and Seki K., 1986 *Studies in Egyptian Culture* 5: "The Architecture of "Kom el Samak" (Tokyo, 1990); "Restoration of the Hieroglyphic Inscriptions on the Ceiling of Room H at Malkata Palace," *Bulletin of Science and Engineering Research Laboratory Waseda University* 129 (Tokyo) 58-79; see also <http://www.egyptpro.sci.waseda.ac.jp/e-mp.html>
13. We would like to acknowledge the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Michael C. Carlos Museum, whose support made the 2008, 2010 and 2012 seasons possible. The following people provided essential assistance and we are most grateful for their dedicated help: 2008 — Virginia Emery, Joel Paulson; 2010 — Virginia Emery, Charles Evers, Salima Ikram, Joel Paulson, Robert Paulson; 2012 — Joel Paulson, Pamela Paulson, Wojciech Kasprzyk, Dawid Swiech, Tomasz Herbich. We also want to express our deepest thanks to Dr. Ray Johnson and the staff of Chicago House for the support they give our project.
14. We are most grateful for the help and support of the Ministry of State for Antiquities in Cairo during the past three seasons and many people have ably assisted our work. For the 2012 season, we want to acknowledge in particular the Minister of State for Antiquities Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim Ali, Mr. Mohamed Ismail, Mr. Mansur Boraik, Mr. Mohamed Abdel Aziz, and the talented members of the West Bank Inspectorate.
15. Only at El Amarna is such a vast area of settlement preserved from a single reign.
16. Lansing, Ambrose "Excavations at the Palace of Amenhotep III at Thebes," *BMMA* XIII, 3 Supplement, March 1918, 8-9.
17. Charles Evers (1952-2010) was the architect who worked with us during the 2010 season. We will always be grateful for his superbly drawn plans of the mud brick.
18. Lansing, Ambrose "Excavations at the Palace of Amenhotep III at Thebes," *BMMA* XIII, 3 Supplement March 1918, 10.

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