

Eight years at the Giza Archives Project: past experiences and future plans for the Giza digital archive

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(PLATES LXVII–LXIX)

In quarant'anni di scavi meticolosi e di documentazione in ventitré siti diversi, la missione dell'Harvard University - Museum of Fine Arts di Boston, diretta da George A. Reisner (1867–1942), ha lasciato un enorme archivio archeologico alla posterità egittologica. A partire dal 2000, il Giza Archives Project al MFA, con il supporto finanziario della Fondazione Andrew W. Mellon, sta convertendo gli archivi della missione di Giza in formato elettronico e, fatto ancora più importante, sta creando dei legami e dei riferimenti incrociati tra i diversi documenti per facilitarne l'accesso tramite Internet (gizapyramids.org). Questo contributo illustra la storia del Giza Archives Project, alcune delle decisioni strategiche adottate per sostenere la ricerca egittologica, i problemi risolti e i progetti futuri relativi alle sfide della gestione delle informazioni archeologiche.

1. Background history

George A. Reisner, director of the Harvard University - Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, passed away at « Harvard Camp », just west of the Khafre pyramid, in June 1942. One of the leading pioneers of his generation in archaeological method, he left behind an immense archaeological archive gained over forty years from twenty-three different sites in Egypt and Nubia. While thousands of ancient objects had already been transferred over the years to the museums of Cairo, Khartoum and Boston, the excavators' archival documentation of the work remained largely in the mud-brick cluster of buildings at Harvard Camp, Giza. Owing to the logistical challenges of the Second World War, Museum of Fine Arts officials were not able to reach the site until 1946. At that time William Stevenson Smith and Dows Dunham left Boston for Cairo to assess the status of the Harvard - MFA Expedition. Their decision to formally close the dig and ship the archives to Boston ended one of the longest-running and most successful expeditions in all of Egyptian archaeology (pl. LXVII, 1).¹

Among the principal contents of the crates (aside from the actual antiquities) that eventually reached Boston were (numbers are in some cases approximate):

1. Although the Harvard-MFA Expedition was shut down in 1946–47, the desire to continue some sort of American archaeological presence in Egypt remained strong. Debates ensued about moving the Expedition headquarters from Giza to Cairo, creating a field school, or forming an umbrella organization to supervise American digs. These talks eventually resulted in the creation of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), founded in Boston on May 14, 1948. While that is a subject for another paper, there is a direct legacy from Harvard Camp at Giza to the creation of ARCE; see < <http://www.arce.org/main/about/historyandmission> >.