

News & Notes

MEMBERS MAGAZINE

ISSUE 262 | WINTER/SPRING 2026



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News & Notes is a quarterly publication of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, printed exclusively as one of the privileges of membership.

ON THE COVER: Furniture leg in the shape of a lion. Reign of Aspelta (593–568 BCE). Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 37.42E.



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



I write from Luxor, where I am visiting our Epigraphic Survey colleagues at Chicago House. It has been a wonderful experience, spending time with the team and observing their extraordinary ongoing work at Karnak (Khonsu Temple), Luxor (blockyard project), Medinet Habu (Temple of Amun and blockyard projects), and Theban Tomb 107. Witnessing the warm, collegial relationships and deep mutual respect that pervade this remarkable community of scholars, technical specialists, cultural-heritage professionals, and local staff has been especially meaningful. In a time of retrenchment and disengagement, the dedication to field research and engagement with the colleagues, partners, and communities where we work is more important than ever, affirming our enduring commitment to the values and concerns we share.

This issue's feature story, by ISAC Museum director and chief curator Marc Maillot, highlights the special exhibition *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, which celebrates the extraordinary African art of ancient Sudan in the ISAC Museum collections. Scheduled to run between April 16 and August 16, 2026, the exhibit presents a unique visual history of ancient Nubian civilization, from the A-Group culture to the medieval period (3,800 BCE–900 CE), seen through its rich engagement with the fauna of the Nile Valley and Eastern Desert. As Marc observes, the collection provides vivid insight into the deep knowledge of these ancient Nubian communities and their intimate symbiosis with the natural world. Long overdue, *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia* finally brings these “lost” cultures to light and public view. Masterfully produced under Marc's meticulous curatorship, the exhibit presents a beautiful introduction to one of the great civilizations of ancient West Asia and North Africa.

In “A Rising Phoenix,” my colleague Zeynep Kuşdil Sak and I share an update on the work of the Tayinat Archaeological Project in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes that hit southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria on February 6, 2023. Our experience is a deeply personal story about profound loss, but also about the remarkable resilience of the colleagues, friends, and families we have lived and worked with during almost thirty years of fieldwork on the Amuq Plain. In my more than forty years of experience in the Middle East, the vital role of cultural heritage in providing meaning and identity, especially in times of difficulty and crisis, has never been more evident, and the powerfully unifying symbolism of archaeological discovery has never felt more gratifying.

This issue's faculty profile features Brian Muhs, associate professor of Egyptology. Brian joined ISAC in 2011, but his involvement with the Institute began many years before, during his graduate studies, when he was invited to join a study of Demotic ostraca in the ISAC Museum collections. These documents consisted of tax receipts and were part of an archive of an extended family of Theban mortuary priests from the Ptolemaic period (ca. 305–205 BCE). The documents provide a richly textured view into the complex and sophisticated financial world of ancient Egyptians during that time, and they have proven a productive source of research over the ensuing years, including Brian's recent monograph, *Lending in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Demotic Loan-Account Papyri of Panas, Son of Espmetis*.

In our Education and Outreach department, Shirlee Hoffman interviews Kate Ayres, assistant director of Programs and Education, and Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, Youth and Family Program coordinator, eliciting interesting accounts about what drew them into museum education, how their own experiences have influenced their approaches and vision for ISAC's education and outreach programs, and, of course, what they most enjoy about working at ISAC. ISAC Museum docent Roger Ferlo, meanwhile, shares one of his favorite ISAC Museum objects: Michael Rakowitz's relief sculpture on display in the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery.

Finally, I wish to welcome two new members to the ISAC community: Tommy Thomas, who has joined ISAC's Data Research Center as web application developer to support and advance the Institute's digital research platforms, collections data services, and public-facing web applications, and Nuttita Pophet, who has joined ISAC's AI Pillar initiative as postdoctoral fellow and AI and geospatial developer for archaeology and cultural heritage.

TIMOTHY P. HARRISON
Director

A BESTIARY OF ANCIENT NUBIA

AN ISAC SPECIAL EXHIBITION

by Marc Maillot

The inhabitants of ancient Nubia, a region located along the Nile in what is today southern Egypt and northern Sudan, lived in symbiosis with animals. The Kushites were renowned throughout West Asia and North Africa as suppliers of animals and animal by-products such as skins and ivory. They were also represented as such, whether in the context of bearing tribute or in scenes of presenting diplomatic gifts. Wild or domesticated, fantastic or realistic, hunted or feared, animals were depicted in temples and tombs, on the walls of palaces, on ceramics, and in the niches of houses. Companions of daily life, sources of artistic and religious inspiration, subjects of trade, familiar even in the afterlife, animals in the ancient world had their place at the top of society and power.

ISAC's spring 2026 special exhibition (fig. 1) and its accompanying monograph, both titled *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, present a scholarly and engaging account of animals in ancient Nubia from the A-Group culture to the medieval period (3800 BCE–900 CE). From the lion to the crocodile, from the ibis to the ibex, from cattle to insects, the exhibition and catalog are an original take on the history of the Nubian civilization, with unparalleled information and a keen sense of storytelling.

The exhibition itself is structured in four sections exploring

different categories of animals and the larger ecosystem:

1. Animals as an exploited resource (swine, bovids, birds, fish)
2. Wild and dangerous animals (savanna and river animals, insects and invertebrates, reptiles, felines)
3. Humans' best companions (canids, equids, monkeys)
4. The Nubian landscape and ecosystem (climate evolution and faunal change; the pressure of farmers, pastoralists, and hunters; cryptic creatures)

AN EXPLOITED RESOURCE

The long-standing relationship between humans and domesticated animals—swine, cattle, bovids, fish, and others—played a crucial role in ancient Nubia's economy, culture, and symbolism. However, this relationship is still poorly understood because of a scarcity of excavations and modern studies devoted to fauna. From an archaeo-zoological standpoint, only a few species of African fauna are present in Nubia, and in most cases the low ratio of wild animals to domesticated animals is remarkable. From the Late Neolithic period (ca. 4500 BCE) forward, hunting wild animals was no longer a priority for humans, even if predation still played a minor role in

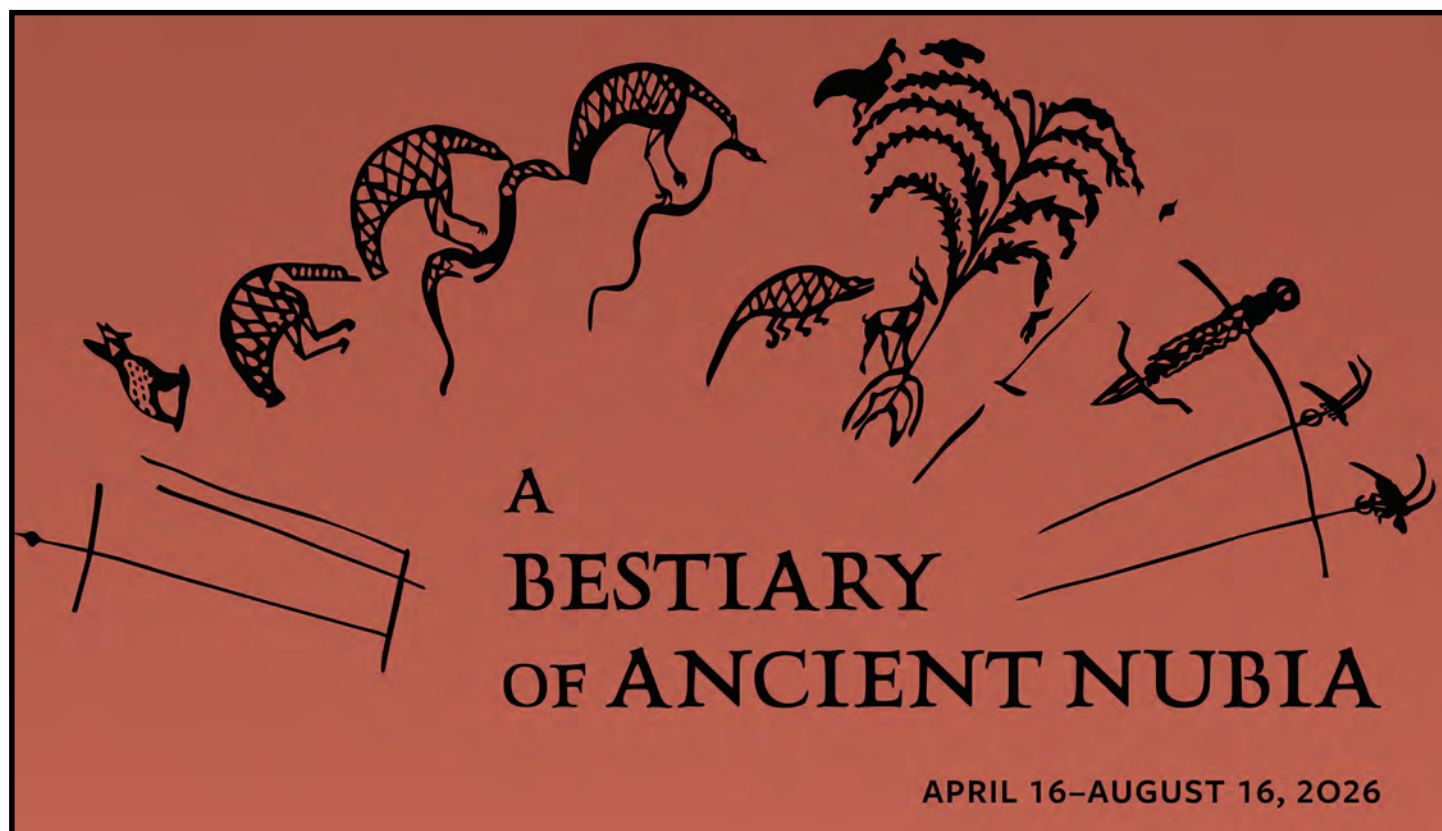


Figure 1. Special exhibition promotional graphic.

the economy. A clear break occurred at the end of this period: extensive crops testify to the almost-absolute importance of domestic animals, of which livestock species formed the majority. The presence of domestic animals, mainly cattle and goats, in or near a given habitat freed its human inhabitants from the random and laborious search for wild proteins, such that hunting became a prestige activity or one with rare products as its prize.

One highlight of this section of the exhibition is a bowl on loan from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (fig. 2). The pastoral scene that adorns it illustrates the importance granted to cattle herds in seminomadic contexts. In front of a thatched hut appears a family, composed of a couple and their daughter. They receive a vessel of milk from a herdsman. The sun disk surmounting the hut identifies the shelter as a shrine. The variations in the shape of the cattle's horns reflect East African shepherds' common practice of purposely deforming them to mark ownership and signal the herdsmen's prestige. This practice is also illustrated on the ISAC Adindan bowl (E23452), which is decorated with three registers of cattle, some of them with their calves. Each animal is set apart by the shape of its horns, the pattern of its hide, and the position of its tail. We created a separate exhibition area for the sandstone stelae of the C-Group period depicting cows and their calves, since the very shallow depth of the stelae's incisions requires reinforced lighting (fig. 3).

Birds are notable for their symbolic functions, as demonstrated by *ba* statues, guinea fowl stelae, and the magnificent Wizz vase (fig. 4). Named after the site of Qasr el-Wizz ("Castle of the Flying Geese"), where it was excavated, the Wizz vase presents a frieze of six panels separated by bands of vertical guilloche. The frieze includes an antelope with large ears and twisted horns, a bird with feathers painted frontally but with head, body, and claws oriented to the right, and a central panel with a bird in profile, wings deployed. This masterfully executed frieze exemplifies the artistic skill of the medieval painters at the monastery of el-Wizz. Certainly associated with the diocese of Faras, the master painter was probably part of a workshop that executed several works of art for the clergy, as demonstrated by similar jars and manuscripts discovered in religious complexes in the vicinity.



TOP RIGHT: Figure 2. Bowl with cattle and herdsmen. Bronze electrotype reproduction of the original in Cairo (JE 41017). Nubia, Karanog, tomb G187. Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE). Original excavated in 1908. Penn Museum E7156.

CENTER: Figure 3. Stela with incised cow and calf. Sandstone. Nubia, Adindan, tomb 39. C-Group period (1900–1750 BCE). Excavated in 1964. ISAC Museum E23303 A-C.

BOTTOM: Figure 4. Jar with three birds and a guinea fowl(?). Baked clay, paint. Nubia, Qasr el-Wizz, Area II-UU. Medieval period (ca. 900 CE). Excavated in 1965. ISAC Museum E42001.

Fish in ancient Nubia were an important part of daily life as a key source of food. The Nile and its seasonal tributaries provided a wide variety of fish, including tilapia, catfish, Nile perch, and the *Bagrid* and *Alestes* species. Fish remains found in settlement sites and graves show that they were roasted, dried, and possibly salted and brined. Fishing tools such as hooks, nets, and harpoons have been uncovered in archaeological excavations (e.g., at Kerma and Meroe). Fish played notable roles in Nubian art and religion, particularly in connection with the Nile River, which was central to Nubian life both spiritually and economically. Fish are represented in the exhibition in the form of amulets and painted on Meroitic pottery, with designs ranging from stylized geometric fish to naturalistic profiles. Fish were both sacred and practical, crossing the line between ritual offering and subsistence.

WILD AND DANGEROUS

A gold ram's-head amulet on loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 1989.281.98) opens the next section on wild and dangerous animals, alongside a caprine skull from Adindan (ISACM E23196) and a magnificent bronze antelope figurine on loan from the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM 912.4.24). Savanna animals, such as hippopotami and giraffes, are also part of this section, which features an incised ostrich eggshell fragment depicting a giraffe dated to 3200 BCE (ISACM E30288). Displaying this fragment in the show was challenging because a specific intensity of light was needed to illuminate the shallow incisions.

Insects are present, of course, and not only in the form of scarabs and scaraboid amulets. An insect-shaped leather ornament excavated at Qustul is particularly interesting (fig. 5); it presents a tooled rosette pattern on the “abdomen” part of the object and another tooled design on the “thorax.” The “legs” consist of strips of leather joined under the thorax and twisted to form the underbody. Flies, represented in the exhibition by pendants and faience



Figure 5. Ornament. Leather. Nubia, Qustul, tomb Q74. Unknown date. Excavated in 1962–1963. ISAC Museum E20186.



amulets, were particularly widespread in collars and necklaces, where they were grouped in a row of three. In Egypt and Nubia, flies often made of precious materials, such as gold, have been discovered in tombs dedicated to high-ranking military officials. This association reinforces the interpretation of the fly as persistent and brave, relentlessly harassing the opponent.

Reptiles have a prominent place in the show, including depictions on the ISAC Meroitic fine-ware collection from Ballana, such as the famous *ankh*-spitting cobra jar (E22563) and the jar with a human-headed frog and a winged goddess (fig. 6). The frieze on the latter example groups two hybrid (animal/human) representations. The frog's human face has been interpreted as a reference to the god Bes, protector of the household, who is regularly associated with the lion and the uraeus in the Meroitic period. It could also refer to the frog goddess Heqat, associated with fertility and abundance. The winged goddess has a spike-shaped body, a capped head, and wings bent downward.

Felines are represented by artifacts from ISAC's collection as well as two loaned objects: the *menat* of King Taharqo from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 7), previously exhibited at the Institut du Monde Arabe in 1997, and a very elegant furniture leg from the Brooklyn Museum (fig. 8). This leg is carved in the form of a lion seated on a base. An inscription running down the front of the mane contains the titles and name of Aspelta, one of the most renowned Napatan kings. The piece seems to have been coated with plaster and then possibly painted. As for the *menat*, it is a necklace counterpoise decorated with a relief scene showing Taharqo as a child nursed by the feline goddess Bastet. The Double Crown worn by the king and the inscription on the reverse identify Taharqo as the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the son of Re, and “beloved of Bastet,” the latter two epithets reflecting his divine status. The scene in the lower part of the *menat* represents the king in the shape of a falcon wearing the same crown and flanked by two guardian figures—the vulture goddess Nekhbet and the snake goddess Uto.



TOP: Figure 6. Jar with a winged goddess, a human-headed frog, and flowers. Baked clay, paint. Nubia, Ballana, tomb B66A. Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE). Excavated in 1963. ISAC Museum E22480.

BOTTOM LEFT: Figure 7. *Menat* of King Taharqo. Faience. Egypt/Sudan. Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty 25 (747–656 BCE). Bequest of W. Gedney Beatty, 1941. Metropolitan Museum of Art 41.160.104.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Figure 8. Lion-shaped furniture leg. Wood (sycamore fig, *Ficus sycomorus*). Egypt/Sudan. Dynasty 26 (664–525 BCE). Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 1948. Brooklyn Museum 37.42E.



HUMANS' BEST COMPANIONS

A limited number of species were welcomed by the ancient Nubians as part of their household. Dogs and cats were particularly favored, and monkeys were a source of entertainment. Through careful observation of their behavior, artists often represented these companions as mimicking human poses and attitudes, demonstrating that the iconography of such animals should be understood as reflecting human traits. The monkey is the most subject to this treatment, to the point where it can substitute for humans in certain activities, such as brushing the hair of its master, setting the course of a boat, or pressing grapes for making wine.

The dog was domesticated as early as the sixth millennium BCE. Several species of dog exist in the Nile Valley. The oldest ones, with erect, pointed ears and a curled tail, are similar to the basenji. One of the most popular was the saluki, with floppy ears and a thin muzzle, slender body, and long tail. It is renowned for its speed in hunting, which explains the numerous representations of canids in Nubian rock art. Dogs are often represented wearing a collar and on a leash, signs of domestication since prehistoric times. Dogs were also used for security, barking to warn of intruders when guarding a house. They were ideal companions, sitting next to their master or under a chair. They also guarded prisoners, as demonstrated on a British Museum jar from Faras (EA51562), or replaced the lion as an embodiment of the king's strength, a specific Nubian feature. We therefore opened the third section of the show, Humans' Best Companions, with a resin replica of a sandstone plaque in the Worcester Art Museum (fig. 9). The plaque has an unusual feature: it replaces

the expected lion at the feet of Arikankharor, shown in the traditional posture of "smiting the enemies," with a dog. Arikankharor was a crown prince of Kush. The raised-relief plaque depicts him as a conqueror holding his enemies by the hair. Behind him floats a female winged victory, the goddess Taleya, who brushes flies away. Between Arikankharor's legs, a dog mutilates a fallen enemy. Ritual scenes showing the smiting of enemies are a traditional theme of Egyptian military iconography. One of the most famous examples of this theme is carved on the facade of the Lion Temple in Naga, Sudan, featuring the brother of Arikankharor, King Natakamani, and their mother, Queen Amanitore. Taleya occurs only twice in Sudanese mythology, the other example being an inscription at the necropolis of Sedeinga.

Horses and monkeys complete the animals in the Humans' Best Companions section of the exhibition, with a bowl fragment displaying a horse rider and ISAC's famous leather quiver and saddle from Qustul Cemetery Q. These objects allow us to reflect on the introduction of horses into Nubia through Egypt around 1650 BCE. Saddles were usually made of a wood frame covered with leather. The legs of the frame were inserted into the pockets at each corner of the leather cover. The ISAC saddle (E20374A) was discovered in a pit with the remains of horses, donkeys, and camels.

Two pieces in the exhibition exemplify the popular motif of a Nubian figure wearing a cheetah skin and accompanied by an antelope and a monkey. A bronze plaque on loan from the Brooklyn Museum (fig. 10) and a print of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's similar ivory figurine from Assyria (MMA 60.145.11) underline the permanence of the ancient topos of Nubians as providers of exotic



animals and animal products. Originally, the Met statuette was attached to long, ivory plinths and perhaps arranged within a procession of foreigners bringing animal skins as tribute to the Assyrian king. This interpretation would seem to be confirmed by another parallel in the Louvre Museum (E8879), a copper-alloy plaque depicting a Syrian foreigner as a tribute bearer, also part of a furniture plinth. A gazelle represented at the feet of the Syrian tribute bearer symbolizes the submission of the desert to the pharaoh's power.

This section concludes with a tempera-on-paper copy by Nina de Garis Davies of a scene from the Theban tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100; fig. 11). In addition to acknowledging Davies's exquisite work in recording the Theban tombs over the course of several decades

in the early twentieth century, the facsimile is a good way to shine a spotlight on two topics: (1) the African green monkey, native to sub-Saharan Africa, and (2) the question of scale, since the giraffe's size has been reduced to favor compositional harmony over realism. The painting is representative of the identification of Nubians as providers of exotic animals in tribute processions. The giraffe's legs are tied, and the monkey, whose facetious character is emphasized here, is represented as climbing the giraffe's neck. This motif is a variation of a more common scene, where the monkey climbs the trunk of a doum palm. As noted earlier, monkeys were particularly popular among the Egyptian and Nubian elite; like dogs and antelope, they were often depicted alongside their owner or substituting for

OPPOSITE LEFT: Figure 9. Prince Arikankharor slaying his enemies. Sandstone (exhibition replica in resin). Unknown location (Meroe?). Meroitic period (270–350 CE). Purchased in 1922. Worcester Art Museum 1922.145.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Figure 10. Plaque for attachment. Bronze. Egypt/Sudan. Ptolemaic period (300–250 BCE). Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 1955. Brooklyn Museum 56.101.

THIS PAGE: Figure 11. Facsimile of Nubians with a giraffe and a monkey. Nina de Garis Davies (1881–1965). Tempera on paper. Original from Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100). Original New Kingdom, Dynasty 18 (ca. 1504–1425 BCE). Rogers Fund, 1931. Metropolitan Museum of Art 31.6.40.

humans in certain chores, such as grooming their master's hair. In this painting, the species chosen is the vervet monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaenus*), native to sub-Saharan Africa and renowned for its green fur.

THE NUBIAN LANDSCAPE AND ECOSYSTEM

The exhibition closes with a fourth section dedicated to the Nubian landscape and ecosystem. Here, we reflect on the gradual shift toward aridity at the end of the Neolithic period and its impact on fauna. Human pressure on the distribution of fauna is also addressed, as widespread pastoralism led to conflict with wild animals and farmers, a particularly acute phenomenon in today's troubled times in Sudan. Indeed, the expansion of pastoralism in the Butana region of east-central Sudan intensified competition with wild species traditionally living in this area, which progressively became inaccessible to antelope because of excessive loads of domestic stock and thinning vegetation. Hunting on a massive scale, as demonstrated by elephant tusks discovered at Wad Ben Naga or the possible founding of Ptolemais Theron ("Ptolemais of the Hunt") on the Red Sea shore for the capture and export of elephants and other exotic animals, also explains the migration of savanna animals toward the south (fig. 12).

Three objects illustrate how the Nubian animal world was represented by human contemporaries as symbolic embodiments of the landscape and prevailing political structure. The Qustul incense burner (ISACM E24069; fig. 13), whose representation of a palace facade is among the first evidence of a centralized power in the Nile Valley, displays a complete menagerie impersonating the power of the king. The fact that the same animals are mobilized until the medieval period demonstrates the exceptional permanence of these motifs in

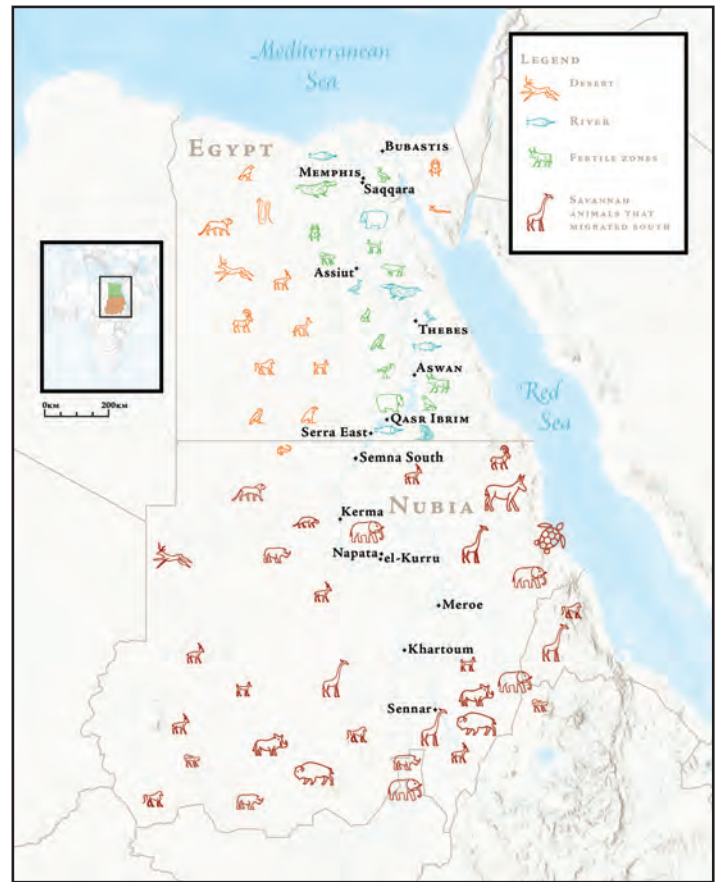


Figure 12. Map showing the distribution of fauna in the Nile Valley.



Figure 13. Incense burner. Limestone (with modern restoration). Nubia, Qustul, tomb L24. A-Group period (3200–3100 BCE). Excavated in 1964. ISAC Museum E24069.

royal pageantry. They are all aboard boats in a procession floating on the Nile toward the house of the pharaoh, thereby underlining his control over the land.

The bowl with a tree and another animal procession (ISACM E24119; fig. 14), also discovered in a funerary context, is particularly rich in symbolic significance. The animals represented are literal metaphors of the landscape within which victory against the enemies of the state and the evil forces of nature is ensured by the unifying power of the king over the land. The focal point of the bowl's decoration is a shrine, represented by vertical poles surmounted by emblems, which places the restoration of order under the patronage of the divine. The bowl was meant to be displayed in public before its transfer to the deceased's viaticum, thereby reinforcing the eloquent messaging evoked by the animal world in ancient Nubia.

To conclude, allow me to focus on a fable. ISAC's so-called "Hyena Jar" (E35579; fig. 15), excavated from a Meroitic cemetery at Semna South, also illustrates the evocative power of fauna in Nubia, but through a different lens. The jar features a procession with a hare, two hyenas, and two guinea fowl—all animals that are

indigenous to East Africa—within a frieze whose central design is a rocky landscape, possibly a cave or a cataract of the Nile River.

Although the significance of the animals is unclear, they may refer to a lost tale or fable. The hare and hyena feature in numerous African folktales, the former often outwitting the latter through its legendary cunning. Such fables occur among the Shilluk (South Sudan), the Tiv (Cameroon and Nigeria), the Mande peoples in West Africa, and the Wasukuma in the region of Lake Victoria. Among the Maasai and the Wakamba of Kenya, numerous tales involve a hare and a hyena in a cave, which often contains meat. It is possible that the two guinea fowl and the two hyenas represent the same bird and hyena depicted at two different moments in the narrative.

Given that literary motifs must have evolved greatly since the Meroitic period, caution is advisable regarding the seeming survival of ancient narratives in modern oral literature. Nevertheless, the motif of wit triumphing over strength, represented by animals that seem to be natural opposites, is common in Kushite art. The fact that the jar was discovered in an elite funerary context suggests it was important to its owner.

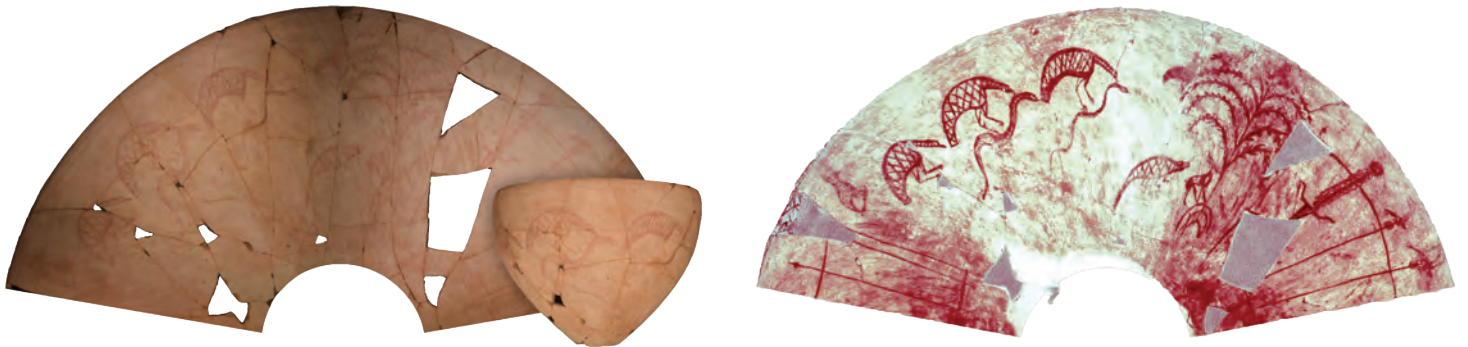


Figure 14. Bowl with animal procession and tree. Baked clay, paint. Nubia, Qustul, tomb L23. A-group period (3200–3100 BCE). Excavated in 1964. ISAC Museum E24119.



Figure 15. Jar with animal procession. Baked clay, paint. Sudan, Semna South Cemetery, tomb N224. Meroitic period (270 BCE–350 CE). Excavated in 1966–1968. ISAC Museum E35579.

A RISING PHOENIX

THE TAYINAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT'S POST-EARTHQUAKE RECOVERY

by Timothy P. Harrison and Zeynep Kuşdil Sak



Figure 1. View of the Syrian-Hittite Expedition's excavations at Tell Tayinat.

On February 6, 2023, at approximately 4:17 a.m. local time, a succession of devastating earthquakes hit southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria. The destruction throughout the region was extensive—and nearly total in the city of Antakya, an urban center with a population of more than one million. Tens of thousands of people were killed, and many more were grievously wounded; more than 90 percent of the city's housing and infrastructure was eventually condemned. Sadly, the 2023 earthquakes were only the latest disaster to hit this region, compounding more than a decade of devastation and suffering, most notably that caused by the ongoing civil conflict in Syria.

ISAC has a long and distinguished history of archaeological exploration in Türkiye, and southeastern Anatolia more specifically, beginning with the pioneering field research of the Syrian-Hittite Expedition in the 1920s and 1930s. The Expedition included Robert Braidwood's groundbreaking survey of the Amuq Plain (*Amik Ovası* in Turkish, and perhaps better known as the Plain of Antioch, the rich hinterland of the great classical metropolis), as well as excavations at a series of mounded settlements on the plain that resulted in one of the foundational cultural-historical sequences for the ancient Near East—the so-called Amuq Sequence, which continues to shape the field to this day.

Tell Tayinat was the largest of the mounded sites investigated by the Expedition, which conducted both targeted, “telephone booth”–

sized soundings directed by Braidwood and enormous, sprawling exposures, largely of the Iron Age settlement, involving hundreds of workmen and directed by Richard C. Haines over four field seasons between 1935 and 1938 (fig. 1). The Haines-led excavations uncovered one of the best-preserved Neo-Hittite citadels in Syro-Anatolia—part of the elite zone of the royal city of Kunulua, capital of the Kingdom of Patina, or Unqi as it was alternatively known. Kunulua and its neighboring sister site of Alalakh (modern-day Tell Atchana), as the principal settlements in the region, together represent the Bronze and Iron Age precursors to classical Antioch.

In 1999, after a sixty-year hiatus, field investigations resumed at Tayinat as part of the Institute's Amuq Valley Regional Project survey, and they have continued on an annual basis as the Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP), with surface and topographic surveys in 2000–2003 and the resumption of excavations in 2004. The TAP excavations have largely continued to uncover the remarkably well-preserved remains of the Neo-Hittite royal city first discovered by the Syrian-Hittite Expedition, including a temple and other large structures that formed part of the elite citadel zone and, perhaps most spectacularly, a series of monumental sculptures.

The response in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes both within Türkiye and from the international community was remarkable—indeed inspiring—yet also complex and uneven. Our response was deeply personal, focused on supporting the colleagues



Figures 2–3. The Tayinat Archaeological Project excavation house before the earthquakes.



Figures 4–5. The excavation house after the earthquake of February 20.

and local community we had lived and worked with for more than two decades, but it was also pragmatic. Once the immediate physical needs of the community had been addressed (the three principal archaeological projects in the Amuq Plain joined together to provide food and housing support for hundreds of individuals and families), our efforts shifted to the preservation of Tayinat's vast archaeological collections, the restoration of the site, and the daunting task of rebuilding our research facilities.

The TAP excavation compound was located very close to the center of Antakya, in the neighborhood of Küçükdalyan, which experienced some of the city's worst destruction and loss of life (including entire families), as well as subsequent widespread homelessness. The TAP excavation house (Turkish *kazı evi*) was a five-story building in which the project depots were located on the ground floor and

our research and living facilities on the upper floors (figs. 2–3). The building was damaged during the initial earthquake on February 6, but none of the outside walls collapsed. The structure sustained heavier damage in the earthquake of February 20, however, with the upper floors of the building settling on the ground floor, causing extensive damage to our depots and creating a need for immediate action to protect the extraordinary archaeological collections they contained (figs. 4–5).

Due to the heroic efforts of members of our team, all of the collections housed in the Tayinat depots were salvaged, removed from the complex, and temporarily stored in containers at the nearby Hatay Archaeological Museum and on the grounds of both the Hippodrome Expedition and the Alalakh Expedition excavation compounds, thanks to the generosity of our Turkish colleagues,



Figures 6–7. Artifacts from the Tayinat Archaeological Project depots after they were moved to safety.

most especially Mustafa Kemal University professors Hatice Pamir and Murat Akar. Accomplished over two days, this remarkable achievement ensured that the artifacts were safely and securely stored until the immediate crisis had abated, local conditions had stabilized, and new arrangements for a depot and excavation compound could be made.

Fortunately, there was no evidence of extensive damage to the archaeological site of Tayinat, including our excavation areas. However, a dilapidated cotton factory, built directly on top of the Neo-Assyrian palace uncovered during the Syrian-Hittite excavations, was irreversibly damaged and had to be demolished—perhaps the only positive outcome of the devastation wrought by the earthquakes.

As the local community has moved to rebuild, we have been invited to engage and participate in multiple ways, including the resumption of fieldwork at Tayinat and involvement in the ongoing restoration of the Hatay Archaeological Museum and its collections. In the spring of 2023, Prof. Akar, director of the Alalakh Expedition, generously invited our team to live at that expedition's excavation compound while we worked on the restoration of the Tayinat collections (figs. 6–7). Two 12-meter-long shipping containers were placed in the courtyard of the Alalakh *kazı evi* to facilitate this effort, which involved a comprehensive assessment and inventory of the collection, totaling approximately a million artifacts and archaeological samples from twenty-five years of fieldwork (figs. 8–10). After almost two months of painstaking work, our team was able to restore the complete inventory with the exception of only two bags containing a few hundred untraceable ceramic body sherds—a virtually miraculous outcome.

In 2024, we were invited to resume our investigations at Tell Tayinat. The 2024 summer excavation season was made possible thanks to Dr. Rana Özbal, professor of archaeology at Koç University and director of the Tell Kurdu Expedition, who very generously invited us to construct our excavation compound adjacent to that expedition's *kazı evi* at the base of Tell Kurdu, coincidentally first investigated by the Braidwood-led Syrian-Hittite Expedition in the 1930s. The field season was certainly a logistical challenge, requiring

the construction of a temporary compound comprising a dozen portables, initially without running water, a sewage system, or a dependable source of electricity (not to mention internet access), but it did provide a renewed appreciation for the challenges faced by an earlier generation of ISAC field archaeologists, and perhaps of the simpler lifestyle of this earlier era (fig. 11). Although we are ever more mindful that the future is uncertain, we have been invited to stay at Tell Kurdu for as long as we may need, and during the past year (2025), we were able to add a few more creature comforts to our compound, including a kitchen and dining space, as well as lab and work rooms, while completing another successful excavation season at Tayinat.

In the midst of the destruction and devastation, there have been many powerful stories of resilience and restoration. Prior to the 2023 earthquakes, TAP initiated a project to restore the monumental sculptures that our excavations had uncovered and that had begun to gain considerable national and international attention, and shortly before the pandemic we were invited to continue this project in the conservation laboratory facilities at the Hatay Archaeological Museum (fig. 12). Perhaps not surprisingly, we discovered as part of this project that sculptural fragments recovered during the Syrian-Hittite Expedition's excavations in the 1930s join with our newly discovered statues.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquakes, news quickly spread that the Hatay Archaeological Museum and its world-renowned collections had sustained extensive damage. The ensuing news coverage included images of the Neo-Hittite king Suppiluliuma, the most famous of the Tayinat sculptures, seemingly standing in defiance of the earthquakes (fig. 13). Later that summer, once the museum building had been deemed structurally safe, we were invited to resume work on this important restoration project as part of the larger effort to rebuild and restore the museum and its collections. As deeply meaningful and powerful symbols of the resilience of the local community, the Tayinat sculptures are now being prepared for a special exhibition to celebrate the Hatay Archaeological Museum's reopening, anticipated later this year.



Figures 8–9. Tayinat Archaeological Project team members working to restore the Tayinat collections.



LEFT: Figure 10. A Tayinat Archaeological Project team member working inside one of the shipping containers.

RIGHT: Figure 11. The newly constructed Tayinat Archaeological Project compound at Tell Kurdu.



LEFT: Figure 12. 3D scanning of Tayinat sculptural fragments.

RIGHT: Figure 13. The Tayinat statue of Suppiluliuma that was featured in news reports.



FACULTY UPDATE

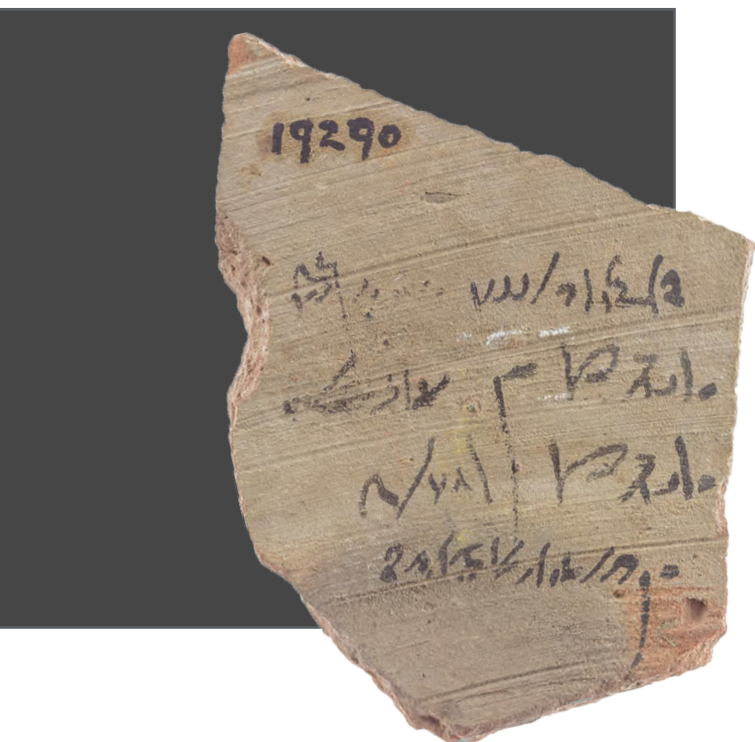
BRIAN MUHS

I was involved with ISAC long before I became a professor here. I first studied ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs at the University of California, Berkeley, and I was so fascinated that I switched my major from chemical engineering to Egyptology. I went on to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, where a visiting professor, Ursula Kaplony-Heckel of Marburg University in Germany, invited me to join her in the summers of 1989 and 1990 to study Demotic ostraca in the ISAC (then the Oriental Institute) Museum. At ISAC, I met professor emeritus George Hughes, professor Jan Johnson, and the future professor Robert Ritner, who all encouraged my interest in Demotic, a form of ancient Egyptian written in a cursive script between 644 BCE and 453 CE.

I also discovered a trove of unpublished Greek and Demotic tax receipts written on ostraca in the ISAC Museum, collected by Harold Nelson when he was director of the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in Luxor. My excitement grew as I repeatedly encountered the same taxpayers' names, which I also found in published and unpublished Demotic papyri from the Theban necropolis from the early Ptolemaic Period (ca. 305–205 BCE). Both the ostraca and the papyri turned out to belong to several interrelated families of mortuary priests, whose records had been dispersed by antiquities dealers. Their archives became the subject of my University of Pennsylvania dissertation (1996); my first book, *Tax Receipts, Taxpayers and Taxes in Early Ptolemaic Thebes* (Oriental Institute, 2005) (fig. 1); and my second book, *Receipts, Scribes and Collectors in Early Ptolemaic Thebes* (Peeters, 2011).



I joined ISAC as an associate professor of Egyptology in 2011, after serving as a researcher and instructor at the Papyrological Institute of Leiden University in the Netherlands from 1997 to 2011 (figs. 2–3). At Leiden and then Chicago, I developed an interest in the relationship between law and economy in the ancient world. I was particularly inspired by the theories of New Institutional Economics (NIE), which argues, among other things, that the ability to prove and defend ownership of property greatly enhances its value—think how much more your car or house is worth if you have a title document to it! And indeed, research for my book *The Ancient Egyptian Economy, 3000–30 BCE* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) showed that the ancient Egyptian private-property market expanded after the fall of the New Kingdom (ca. 1000 BCE), when royal authority was weak and Egyptian temples introduced a system of notary contracts for documenting the inheritance and sale of temple properties. This system was separate from the system of land surveys and censuses for royal taxation until the Ptolemaic kings gradually took control of the temple notaries and the sales taxes in money that they collected.



LEFT: Figure 1. Demotic ostrakon ISACM E19290, a salt-tax receipt from Thebes dated to July 5, 251 BCE, published in *Tax Receipts, Taxpayers and Taxes in Early Ptolemaic Thebes* (Oriental Institute, 2005), 136, cat. no. 2.

ABOVE: Figure 2. A younger Brian Muhs attempts to hide behind a papyrus at the Papyrological Institute in Leiden. Photo courtesy of the Leiden student newspaper *Forum*.

OPPOSITE TOP: Figure 3. Brian Muhs attempts to grill bratwurst in the ISAC courtyard. Photo by Mariana Perlinac.



Conversely, NIE also implies that there is less incentive to write expensive notary contracts for low-value transactions, which will therefore be underrepresented in the historical record relative to high-value transactions. I found evidence for this pattern while preparing a publication of six Demotic papyri in the British Museum with the loan accounts of a Theban mortuary priest, Panas son of Espmetis, which recorded almost five hundred loans of money and grain in around 180–158 BCE. I was shocked by the number of loans in these papyri until I realized that they were relatively low-value loans that did not merit the cost of expensive loan contracts (see fig. 4 for a loan contract). However, this large number of low-value loans in turn implied that the total volume of moneylending in Ptolemaic Egypt was far greater than previously suspected from loan contracts, a thesis I developed in my book *Lending in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Demotic Loan-Accounts of Panas, Son of Espmetis* (Lockwood, 2025).

I have now become interested in how accounting shapes economic behavior, and I am preparing a publication of about 180 Demotic ostraca from the temple of the goddess Mehit at Nag' el-Mesheikh, Egypt, dating to around 227–206 BCE. These ostraca include internal receipts for inpayments and orders for outpayments, which were used to compile running daybook accounts and summary accounts. I have argued that these accounting techniques were already present in Egypt in the Persian period and probably inspired those used in Greek royal banks in Ptolemaic Egypt. I am also working on publishing about 150 Demotic and Greek ostraca from a prison or police station at Philadelphia in the Egyptian Fayum, dating to the late third or early second century BCE. These running daybook accounts record people being arrested and put in prison, often for debt, and then being released on bail, often on the same day, and

thus shed light on both the rate of incarceration in Ptolemaic Egypt and the rates of lending, debt, and default.

I am currently helping prepare the Chicago Demotic Dictionary (CDD) for analog publication, since Jan Johnson promoted me to codirector of that project in 2022. All the dictionary entries have been compiled, but the manuscript needs to be checked and some corrupted image files replaced. I am also collaborating with Dr. Sandra Lippert of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in France on a project to publish some of the thirty thousand ostraca recently excavated at Athribis in Upper Egypt.

In the future, I would like to prepare a monograph on the evolution of money in ancient Egypt from the early dynastic period through the Ptolemaic period, as well as a monograph on ancient Egyptian law similar to my previous work on the ancient Egyptian economy. I would also like to facilitate an interactive online version of the CDD, using the digital files that already exist and gradually adding additional material and links to other resources. I also want to facilitate the methodical publication of the thousands of ostraca excavated by ISAC at Medinet Habu—I have no shortage of projects to do!

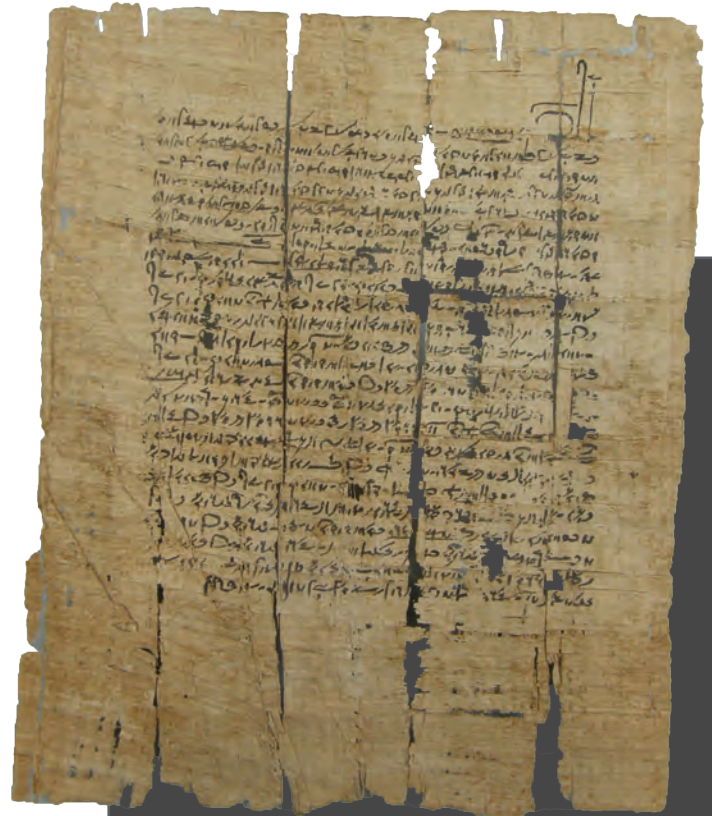


Figure 4. Demotic papyrus FMNH 31323, a loan contract from Thebes dated to November 26, 109 BCE, published in Brian P. Muhs, “A Loan Contract in Chicago from the Archive of the Theban Choachytes (Second Century BCE),” in *Essays for the Library of Seshat: Studies Presented to Janet H. Johnson on the Occasion of Her 70th Birthday*, edited by Robert K. Ritner, 205–26 (Oriental Institute, 2017). Photo by Brian Muhs, courtesy of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

YOUTH & FAMILY PROGRAM

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATE AYRES & MADELEINE ROBERTS-GANIM

by Shirlee Hoffman

Dr. Kate Ayres, assistant director of Programs and Education, and Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, Youth and Family Program coordinator, are the two people who are directly responsible for the Youth and Family Program in ISAC's Education department.

Both Kate and Madeleine bring considerable experience to their current responsibilities. For more than sixteen years, Kate directed museums in both England and the United Arab Emirates. Madeleine, a University of Chicago graduate, was an ISAC Museum educator before starting her current position in 2024.

News & Notes asked Kate and Madeleine to respond to the same set of questions. Their answers, shared here, provide insight into an important ISAC program that educates not only the youngest ISAC members and visitors who participate in our offerings but also the adults who bring them to the programs.

What drew you to museum education as a field?

Kate: Nothing. Wait, let me explain! From a young age, I loved history and was drawn to archaeology (the subject of my bachelor's degree). Like Indiana Jones, I realized "it belongs in a museum" (which, I might add, had nothing to do with how much it rains in the United Kingdom and me not wanting to dig in a bog), and I received my master's in museum and artifact studies in 2002. I fully anticipated working my way up from collections assistant but somehow began my career in my dream role at the age of twenty-two: as the manager/curator of a small, independent local-history museum. Over a decade and four museums later, I undertook a professional doctorate in heritage focusing on heritage management.

In 2018, I came full circle when I started lecturing in museum and heritage studies to undergraduate and graduate students at Durham University in the United Kingdom, where I had completed my bachelor's and master's degrees. Mostly, I taught a course titled Museum Principles and Practice as part of the Museum and Artefact Studies master's program, and it was a unique experience to be able to say to the students that I had been in their shoes and could bring my lived experiences to the lectures.

Therefore, in a long-winded answer to your question, whilst I wasn't drawn to museum education per se, the purpose of a museum (if we delve into official definitions) is a place of education and enjoyment, and museum education should not be thought of in a silo. It was only when I began to lecture that I appreciated the wider role of education in the museum and that I realized every decision I've made was ultimately to educate—whether that was teaching volunteers and interns how to catalog and care for the collection to preserve the lifespan of objects for future generations, creating exciting exhibitions and guidebooks for visitors that told

stories about the artifacts and the people who owned them, or even coauthoring a popular history book on archaeology. The trick is to see the whole museum as an educational space that promotes knowledge sharing, reflection, and discussion, even if some topics may be uncomfortable.

Madeleine: I was always a museum kid. On any family vacation, the first stop in a new city was a museum. Since I grew up in Iowa, the closest major city was Chicago, and I never got tired of visiting the fantastic museums this city has to offer. There was always something new to learn and explore!

As I grew older, I fell in love with teaching. When I became an ISAC Museum educator during my undergraduate career at the University of Chicago, I realized I could blend my love of both teaching and museums by pursuing a path in museum education. There is something very special about using artifacts to teach. To connect students with objects that actual people used in the past makes history feel real, visceral, and relevant in a way that paper documents, books, and presentations can't always replicate. When an American student in the present examines a clay tablet that a Mesopotamian student wrote on thousands of years ago, a deep empathy is created across time and space. I am passionate about using museum education both to connect students with the past and, in the process, to help students learn more about the present.

How did your past experiences affect your approach and vision for your new roles at ISAC?

Kate: I've spent most of my career directing predominantly independent, volunteer-run museums, where I have been responsible for strategic development, housekeeping, and everything in between. Something I learned early in my career is that, for an organization to be successful, you need a happy team, especially when most of the people undertaking the work are volunteers and there for the love of it.

As a manager, I apply four golden rules, which I also teach my students:

1. Never ask anyone to do something that you're not prepared to do yourself.
2. Keep staff informed, consult them, and listen to them.
3. Know what you want to achieve but understand that there may be a better way to achieve it, and you're not always right.
4. You spend more time at work than at home, so try to make the workplace positive and fun.



Kate Ayres, director of Programs and Education.

I wanted to bring that philosophy to my role here. In addition, it's important to have an education strategy for the department to provide oversight and goals to work toward, but I didn't want to jump in straightaway. I have now been here for over a year, long enough to know how things work and to feel comfortable developing an education strategy that is not only appropriate but also achievable for us going forward.

Madeleine: Having worked as an ISAC Museum educator while an undergraduate, I had already seen how successful the Youth and Family Program was under my predecessor, Kate Hodge. This past experience was very motivating as I entered my new role as Youth and Family Program coordinator, as it encouraged me to find ways to build on the already-strong program and help it grow even more. Because I already understood how the program ran in the past, I was able to hit the ground running during a period of transition for the Education Department.

Now that I've been in this position for a year, I'm excited to experiment with new youth programs and events. In the past, I've worked for arts and cultural-history organizations, so I am motivated to bolster our arts programming, including creative writing, art mak-



Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, Youth and Family Program coordinator.

ing, and theater, as well as to create programs that promote primary-source literacy and object-based inquiry. Having taught English in France after college, I am also passionate about languages in their broadest sense and hope to revive our hieroglyphs and cuneiform workshops.

What are your favorite aspects about working at ISAC?

Kate: The people! I have been very fortunate that my colleagues (and I include all our wonderful docents, volunteers, and museum educators in this) are a joy to work with—it makes a huge difference. I love feeling like I'm part of something worthwhile, and it doesn't hurt that the collections are fabulous.

Madeleine: I must echo Kate in saying that one of the best parts about working at ISAC has been my wonderful colleagues! It has also been incredible to work with the fantastic ISAC Museum educators and docents who create such meaningful educational experiences for the K–12 students who visit the museum on field trips. They are the boots on the ground, the ones who create lasting impressions of ISAC for K–12 students. Their commitment to the students is beyond admirable, and I'm grateful to have such a strong team.

What have been your biggest successes or most exciting projects at ISAC so far?

Kate: I'm very proud of the revised docent program that I created alongside ISAC docent liaison Marilyn Murray with input from Madeleine, Continuing Education Program manager Tasha Vorderstrasse, and volunteer Margaret Schmid. This intense, three-month process culminated in a two-part training plan: four days in March with workshops, gallery tours with staff, and pop quizzes to test the prospective docents' knowledge and devise K–12 field-trip tours based on the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Nubian galleries, and a further day in November with faculty and staff providing tours of the Syro-Anatolian, Megiddo, and Persian galleries along with the Islamic cases. From the 2025 cohort, we had ten newly certified docents by August. A further eight trainee docents were recruited in October for the 2026 cohort and joined in the November training—the idea being that we will have twenty newly certified docents by July 2026, allowing us to offer more K–12 field trips and other tour opportunities.

Madeleine: Perhaps the most exciting project I've worked on thus far has been our annual Halloween event, which this past year was called the Haunted Museum. It required a massive amount of preparation, which included coordinating the event's staffing, advertising the event, designing activities, and preparing take-home goody bags. Guests had a fantastic time going on demon hunts throughout the galleries, attending mummification demonstrations in the auditorium, making creepy crafts, getting their faces painted, listening to spooky storytelling, and more! We spent a lot of time decorating the lobby, galleries, and classrooms to bring the place alive with Halloween spirit, and I think it really paid off.

How do you see the Youth and Family Program fitting into the overall ISAC education program?

Kate: Education programs are integral to museums. For me, the Youth and Family Program is just one of the two pillars of education that we offer, alongside the Continuing Education Program managed by Tasha Vorderstrasse. The Youth and Family Program fosters a love of ancient history in our youngest visitors that can ignite a lifelong passion, whilst the Continuing Education Program allows our older visitors to either develop their knowledge or explore the subject for the first time. Both are essential.

Madeleine: The Youth and Family Program is essential to getting K–12 students and their families excited about ancient cultures, archaeology, and the ISAC Museum in general. We are so lucky to collaborate with the Continuing Education Program on offerings such as teacher workshops led by Tasha and other professional development opportunities for teachers. For example, we were excited to help out with a professional development session hosted by the Open Educational Resources Project, a project founded by the Gates Ventures to supply free educational resources to teachers, particularly ones related to history curricula, in tandem with the Continuing Education Program this past December. This is all to say that the two

pillars of education here at ISAC often work together to ensure the public has access to high-quality educational experiences.

How do you want to see the Youth and Family Program expand? What are your goals for the Program's next one to three years?

Kate: The four K–12 field trips are well established and form the core of ISAC's Youth and Family Program offerings. One has been running for a decade, and it would be good to explore ways we can update all our field trips to better serve the needs of teachers. The classes have almost been running themselves, and now Madeleine and I have been here long enough that we're better able to see which areas need tweaking and what other classes we can offer, such as courses focused on a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) curriculum. This forms part of the wider education strategy we plan to develop in 2026. Madeleine has a few ideas that she'd like to explore further, and I'm very keen for her to put her stamp on it.

Madeleine: In addition to updating the field trips to better serve the needs of teachers and align with state curriculum standards, one of my major goals is to diversify the geographic makeup of the schools that visit ISAC for field trips. While schools from all over the city of Chicago and the Midwest visit ISAC (some coming from as far away as Ohio), I would like to make a concerted effort to increase the number of schools from Chicago's south and west sides visiting the museum.

Perhaps my biggest goal is to create a youth summer camp at ISAC. I have created and led summer camps for K–12 students before, and it is no easy task! However, we have a great opportunity to strengthen our summer programming with weeklong summer camps that explore themes such as archaeology, ancient history, art making, and museum curation. While the programming we host throughout the academic year is strong, we tend to see fewer people turn up for K–12 programs in the summer. Camps would be a great way to make sure that K–12 students can access enriching experiences at ISAC all year round.

How can people, both ISAC members and the general public, be involved in strengthening the Youth and Family Program?

Kate: Simply by getting involved. Offer suggestions or improvements for future events, support our events by participating or even donating, and join the docent program!

Madeleine: I agree with Kate! We are so grateful for whatever time or resources anyone can donate to the Youth and Family Program. Several youth events throughout the year need help from volunteers, the main two being our annual Halloween event in October and our Persian Nowruz celebration in March. We have an influx of K–12 tours that need docents to lead them, so becoming a docent is a fantastic way to support our program as well.

How does one become a docent?

To apply to become a docent, please fill in a form on the ISAC website at <https://bit.ly/ISACVolunteer>.

MY FAVORITE OBJECT

MICHAEL RAKOWITZ SCULPTURE

by Roger Ferlo

Several years ago, I visited the Michael Rakowitz exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: *Michael Rakowitz: Backstroke of the West* (September 2017–March 2018). A Jewish Iraqi-American artist who teaches at Northwestern University, Rakowitz has devoted much of his career to reimagining lost and irreplaceable archaeological objects from Iraq, such as those looted from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad during the American invasion of 2003. Rakowitz has worked closely with ISAC over the years. Early on in that groundbreaking relationship, he produced a short stop-action film, *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody* (2017), which is partially set inside the vitrine displaying the powerful Mesopotamian votive statuettes that figure among the highlights of the ISAC collections. Seeing that film on YouTube, I was hooked by both the beauty of these ancient artifacts and ISAC's support of important artists like Rakowitz. So, I applied to become a volunteer.

As a literary scholar and an Episcopal priest, I had early training in biblical languages and literature and their relationship to other ancient West Asian literary cultures. Volunteering at ISAC feels a bit like coming home intellectually. As a lifelong teacher, I love the looks of astonishment on the faces of longtime Chicagoans who had no idea that cultural and historical wonders like those at ISAC are, for most of them, just a bus ride away. I especially enjoy guiding people toward the Neo-Assyrian *lamassu*, visible at a distance from the entry foyer. I tell people that as we pass down the long aisle toward the *lamassu*, we will experience four thousand years of human history. I ask them to imagine that the Tigris River is flowing just outside the windows to the right of us, and the Euphrates just to the left. To get to the *lamassu*, it's as though you are walking northward between the two great rivers, traversing Mesopotamia in both time and space.

But once you've arrived at the foot of the *lamassu* and admired the splendid bas-reliefs over which he holds watch, the trek is not over. Turning to the right, peering into a second gallery, you see yet another relief. This one depicts the Assyrian king and an attendant. But the only thing ancient about this relief is the king's head. That ancient fragment—part of the ISAC collection—is embedded in an extraordinarily beautiful work of recuperative art, one of Rakowitz's most eloquent creations. Its brilliant wash of color invites you to reimagine the ancient reliefs in their original technicolor splendor. But as you draw closer, you realize that the relief is sculpted not in ancient gypsum but in contemporary papier-mâché, fashioned from scraps of Middle Eastern food wrappings and newspaper cuttings.

In 2015, ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) destroyed what remained of the original relief in situ at present-day Nimrud (ancient Kalhu). The fragility of the papier-mâché and of the discarded scraps of material used in making it is crucial to the work's impact. Rakowitz calls this and other pieces like it “reappearances” rather than reconstructions of an endangered cultural heritage—“spectral presences” that underscore the fragility of historical memory in times of ideological violence, whether in ancient times or in our own. The Rakowitz relief is my favorite piece in the museum, and (I like to think) the most radically instructive.



TOP: Michael Rakowitz, *The invisible enemy should not exist* (Northwest Palace of Nimrud, Room G, G-13), 2019, on loan from the artist.

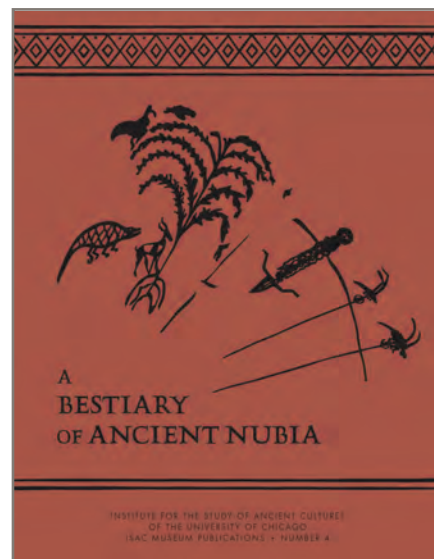
BOTTOM: Relief fragment showing the Assyrian king, Neo-Assyrian period, reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE), excavated by Austen Henry Layard in 1846 and received by exchange in 1974, ISACM A34979.

SPECIAL EXHIBITION CATALOG

A BESTIARY OF ANCIENT NUBIA

Published in conjunction with the ISAC special exhibition *A Bestiary of Ancient Nubia*, this sumptuously illustrated volume examines the many roles animals played in Nubian life, art, religion, and economy from prehistory through late antiquity. Ten scholarly essays, each focused on a different category of animals and the ways the ancient Nubians observed, depicted, and exploited them, illuminate the close and complex relationship between humans and the fauna and landscape of the Middle Nile Valley. The detailed catalog presents all the objects displayed in the exhibition. Together, the essays and catalog offer both a thematic study and a visual record of Nubia's rich animal world.

For a free PDF download and information about ordering a print copy, visit <https://bit.ly/ISACMP4>.



ADULT EDUCATION CLASS

ISAC April and May Teacher Workshops

Join us for a one-hour session that will include an interactive overview of lesson plans plus suggestions for tying lessons into ISAC's online and virtual program resources. Using the concepts of observation, inference, and evidence, we will explore how to use primary and secondary sources to learn about the ancient environment and the animals and plants that inhabited it.

Session one: April 22, 4:00–5:00 p.m.: Ancient Earth Day: The Green Sahara

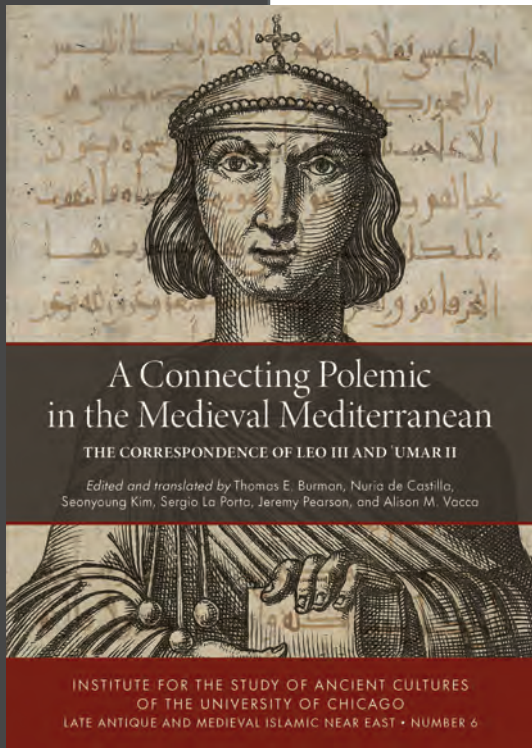
Session two: May 15, 4:00–5:00 p.m.: Endangered Species Day: Ostriches in Mesopotamia, Elephants in Syria, and Rare Plants in Libya

Instructors: Tasha Vorderstrasse, PhD, Continuing Education Program manager, and Madeleine Roberts-Ganim, Youth and Family Program coordinator

Register here: bit.ly/ISACSpringTeacherWorkshop2026



NEW ISAC PUBLICATIONS

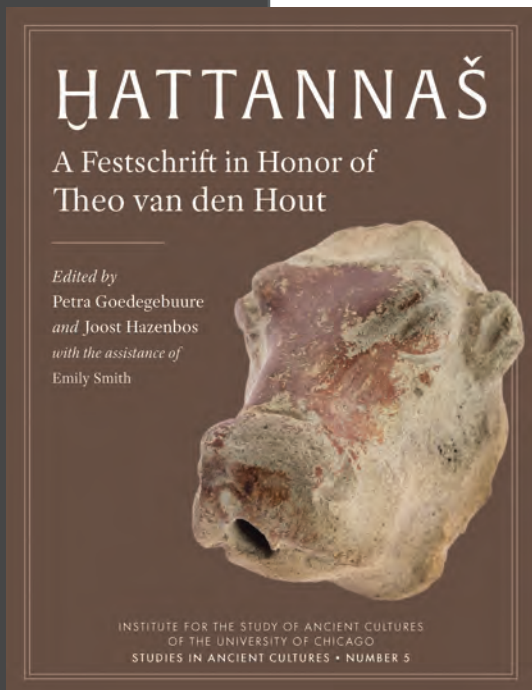


A Connecting Polemic in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Correspondence of Leo III and 'Umar II

Edited and translated by Thomas E. Burman, Nuria de Castilla, Seonyoung Kim, Sergio La Porta, Jeremy Pearson, and Alison M. Vacca

Late Antique and Medieval Islamic Near East 6

This book offers the first comprehensive edition and translation of all surviving versions—Latin, Armenian, Arabic, and Aljamiado—of the polemical correspondence attributed to the Byzantine emperor Leo III and the Umayyad caliph 'Umar II. Far from simple diplomatic communication, these letters form part of a centuries-long Christian-Muslim exchange, rooted in fictional authorship but widely circulated across the Mediterranean from the eighth to the sixteenth century. The book explores their multilingual transmission and textual fluidity, as well as the evolution of their arguments, especially regarding scriptural reliability and Christology, to demonstrate how diverse communities adapted the texts to local polemical contexts. It identifies three main textual groupings and traces recurring argumentative strands, many of which derive from specific Qur'anic passages, suggesting their origins in an oral, cross-confessional polemical milieu. The correspondence not only reflects shared themes of religious disputation but also continuously imagines itself as one episode in a larger, unending dialogue between Christianity and Islam. By situating these texts within vibrant Mediterranean networks, the book provides crucial insights into the construction, adaptation, and transmission of polemical literature in the premodern world. For a free PDF download and information about ordering a print copy, visit <https://bit.ly/LAMINE6>.



Hattannaš: A Festschrift in Honor of Theo van den Hout

Edited by Petra Goedegebuure and Joost Hazenbos, with the assistance of Emily Smith

Studies in Ancient Cultures 5

This volume honors Theo van den Hout, the Arthur and Joann Rasmussen Professor Emeritus of Hittite and Anatolian Languages at the University of Chicago's Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures and a preeminent philologist, linguist, and historian. The thirty-six essays offered here reflect the wide range of Professor van den Hout's research interests and include text editions, studies on religion and writing, and investigations into diverse lexical, linguistic, and literary topics. Contributors include Alfonso Archi, Richard H. Beal, Gary Beckman, James Michael Burgin, Dennis R. M. Campbell, Billie Jean Collins, Paola Cotticelli Kurras, Irene J. F. de Jong, Martien Dillo, Amir Gilan, Petra M. Goedegebuure, Detlev Groddek, Albertine Hagenbuchner-Dresel, Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee, J. David Hawkins, Suzanne Herbordt, Virginia R. Herrmann, Fumi Karahashi, Alwin Kloekhorst, Robert Marineau, H. Craig Melchert, Clelia Mora, Alice Mouton, Peter Raulwing, Elisabeth Rieken, Jürgen Seeher, Oğuz Soysal, Matthew W. Stolper, Ada Taggar Cohen, Piotr Taracha, Oya Topçuoğlu, Giulia Torri, Wilfred H. van Soldt, Willemijn Waal, Gernot Wilhelm, Ilya Yakubovich, and Kazuhiko Yoshida. For a free PDF download and information about ordering a print copy, visit <https://bit.ly/Hattannas>.



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