

The sacred landscape of Thebes: layers of memory, heritage and community

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The Theban Necropolis on Luxor's West Bank represents a site of unparalleled world-historical significance. Since 1983, the Hungarian Archaeological Mission in Thebes has conducted systematic field research within the "Tombs of the Nobles," focusing on the excavation and restoration of a complex funerary ensemble dating primarily to the New Kingdom (16th–11th centuries BC).

The site's history is a spacial palimpsest of continuous reuse and transformation. Following the Roman era, the tombs faced centuries of neglect and looting until the 19th-century birth of modern Egyptology. By the early 20th century, the village of Gurna had organically integrated into the necropolis, with vernacular structures built directly atop ancient tombs and burial shafts. This unique vernacular coexistence became the catalyst for Hassan Fathy's word famous "New Gurna" project—a pioneering effort in community-led planning and vernacular architecture. Despite Fathy's intervention, the original village persisted until its final relocation in 2008, which finally allowed for comprehensive archaeological access.

Parallel to the excavations, our mission (2015–2025) has documented Fathy's Egyptian oeuvre, with a specific focus on the evolution of New Gurna. Today, a profound spiritual and social connection remains; our excavation teams consist of the descendants of Gurna's former inhabitants. This presentation analyzes the spatial dynamics of the Theban Sacred Landscape, the intersection of Fathy's architectural legacy with the ancient site, and the theoretical challenges of restoration. Ultimately, we explore how memory and the "architecture of reuse" define the current preservation strategy in this complex heritage environment..