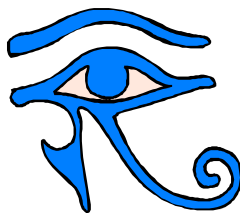


ESSEX
EGYPTOLOGY GROUP



Newsletter 56
February 2010

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 7th Feb Excavating the Dead (Part 2) – Joyce Filer
- 7th Mar From Hollywood to Thebes: in search of Natacha Rambova – Rosalind Janssen
- 4th April The end of the 18th Dynasty – Sue Moseley
- 2nd May The Petrie Museum and the Birth of Egyptian Archaeology – Jan Picton

FEBRUARY MEETING

This month we welcome back Joyce Filer BA, DipArch, MSc, former curator of human and animal remains at the British Museum and author of many books. Joyce visited us last February when we spent an enjoyable afternoon understanding how she excavated the dead – this is part 2.

CHRISTMAS FUND RAISING

Following our Christmas Fund Raising efforts on behalf of the Egypt Exploration Society we received the following letter:

“On behalf of the Society I would like to thank you and the Essex Egyptology Group for your most generous donation of £155 for the Lucy Gura Archive Fund.

This fundraising campaign is one of the Society's most important ventures as the Lucy Gura Archive represents a resource of huge historical value and it is through the generosity of members such as yourself that we will be able to give the Archive the care and attention it deserves and ensure its long-term preservation.

Over the next few months we will be keeping you informed of progress through our regular paper and electronic newsletter and in articles published in *Egyptian Archaeology*. We hope that you enjoy reading about the improvements to the Archive that you and the Essex Egyptology Group have helped to make possible.

Thank you once again for your generosity and support.

Yours sincerely

Dr Patricia Spencer – Director”

REVIEW OF LAST MEETING

Our January meeting was a talk by Joseph Clayton entitled *An Introduction to Egyptian Language*. Joseph teaches Egyptian language and literature at Birkbeck, University of London. Joseph began by informing us that the first hieroglyphs appeared at around 3,800-3,500 BC and the last were carved at around 310 AD. Once established, the Egyptians did not change or seek to improve the hieroglyphic writing system. They believed that these '*Medew Netjer*', divine words, were given to them by the god Thoth. To attempt to improve the system, therefore, would be to assume to know better than the gods.

Hieroglyphs were not for day to day use. They were carved into the stone and could be found in tombs, stelae and monumental inscriptions. In Temples they recorded prayers, calendars and events such as battles, the King's coronation and the King's birthday. Hieroglyphs were also carved into commemorative stelae, particularly found in Sinai at the copper and turquoise mines. In these stelae, officials would boast of their exploits, "*..... never had the like been done since the time of king Sneferu*". (Joseph admitted that he had, on occasion, inadvertently used this phrase himself, outside the world of Egyptology!)

In the tomb of the Egyptian elite, hieroglyphs recorded the achievements of the deceased, to benefit him in the afterlife and gain brownie points with the gods. It was important to add captions to tomb paintings. In the afterlife the tomb paintings would come alive. Correct labels would avoid any nasty surprises in the hereafter! It was also very important that the name of the deceased was recorded, assisting in his immortality and identification in the afterlife. As many craftsmen could not read, mistakes were often made in tomb inscriptions.

For recording daily matters the Egyptians used hieratic, the cursive form of hieroglyphs, written on papyrus or potsherds. Many letters survive from Ancient Egypt, providing an interesting insight into the lives of the people. Joseph spoke of a letter from a man to his friend, advising that he had been fired for telling a joke to his Overseer, inadvertently insulting the boss's wife! Letters were often written on potsherds, many of which survive. Joseph recommended reading *Wente's book, Letters from Ancient Egypt*, (translations of most of the surviving letters from the Old Kingdom to the Twenty-first Dynasty).

There are many surviving papyri that cover a multitude of topics. These include accounting, medicine, magic, dream interpretations, love recipes (...*smash up a dormouse and put it in the lady's drink so that she will fall for you!*), mathematics, love poetry and wisdom literature. Stories survive in the form of the Middle Kingdom literature 'The Eloquent Peasant', 'The Shipwrecked Sailor' and 'Sinuhe'. The 1954 film "The Egyptian" starring Jean Simmons and Victor Mature is based on the tale of Sinuhe. Joseph challenged us to think of any modern written source that would not have existed in ancient Egypt. We couldn't provide any! In Ancient Egypt there were shipping rosters (equivalent to our airline schedules), the outcome of a wrestling match, (equivalent to our sports results), the commemorative scarabs of Amenhotep III, (the equivalent of a newspaper).

During the second half of the talk Joseph introduced the basic principles of the writing system. The signs are usually written from right to left, but can be written from left to right or from top to bottom. The reader can determine the direction of the

text by the direction that the animal and human signs face - they look towards the beginning of the line. The language is composed of *ideograms* (symbols that portray their meaning, for example a picture of the sun = sun), *determinatives* (signs at the end of words to assist in determining their meaning) and *phonograms* or *sound signs*, (used to spell out words). This is based on the Rebus Principle. An English example would be a picture of a bee and a leaf used together to write the word 'belief'. Joseph talked us through the mono-consonantal sign list that includes all the sounds within the Egyptian language.

Joseph finished by saying that he couldn't teach us hieroglyphs during the meeting, but if we would like to get a group together or if anybody was interested in lessons, we should contact him by email. [joe-clayton@lineone.net]

Joseph's talk was not only interesting but extremely amusing. His passion for his subject was clearly evident as he spoke, bringing to life the 'everyday' world of ancient Egypt. Listening to him refer to the individuals, whose lives we glimpse through their ancient records, was to feel that Joseph knew them all personally and often spent an evening in the pub with them!

Joseph's recommended reading:

Egyptian Grammar

Gardiner, A H - Griffith Institute
(Useful for the sign list at the back of the book)

How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs: A step-by-step guide to teach yourself

Collier, M & Manley, B - British Museum Press
(For the beginner)

Letters from Ancient Egypt (Writings from the ancient world)

Edward F Wente, Edmund S Meltzer - Scholars Press

Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs

Allen, J P - Cambridge University Press
(For the serious student)

Sherrill Margalit

LECTURES AT THE EGYPTIAN CULTURAL BUREAU

The lectures begin at 6.45pm (75 minutes, followed by refreshment), held at the Bureau, 4 Chesterfield Gardens, London W1 (020 7491 7720). They are free of charge.

- 11th February – Charlotte Booth – The Myth of Cleopatra
- 25th February – Ian Shaw – Egypt as a satrapy in the Persian Empire, stone vessels and stelae
- 11th March – Stephen Quirke – Eternal holiday? Middle Kingdom concepts of burial
- 13th May – Lucia Gahlin – How much do we really know about Akhenaten?

AROMATICS IN ANCIENT EGYPT (Part One)

Introduction

The ancient Egyptians were lavish users of aromatics for personal adornment and in their burial rituals. Incense, perfumes, healing and magic were all very closely related and very much a part of everyday life.

One of the most enduring images of the copious amount of aromatics used in ancient Egypt is in Shakespeare's play, *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra apparently used perfume to seduce Mark Anthony, and Shakespeare describes their first meeting in glowing aromatic terms.

*The barge she (Cleopatra) sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burned in the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them
'Anthony & Cleopatra', Act II Scene II*

Still reeling from the aromatics carried upon the sails, Anthony had further delights in store when he was welcomed into Cleopatra's private apartment. The room was reputedly strewn knee deep in roses, and no doubt by then Anthony was totally infatuated with the captivating queen, so the story goes.

A testimony to the enduring nature of aromatics used in ancient Egypt derives from the faint whiff of perfume exuded from the alabaster unguent containers when Howard Carter entered the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922. Thirty-five alabaster vases containing residues of perfume were found in the storeroom of Tutankhamen's tomb. A thorough analysis at the British Museum and Kew of the largest jar concluded that it consisted of 90% animal fat and about 10% of some resin or balm (1). A great quantity of perfumed oils had been poured over the king's mummy so that it was almost impossible to lift the body from its sarcophagus and extract it from the mass of solidified unguents. Quantities of black resin fragments found in Tutankhamen's tomb when tested were found to resemble acacia gum in an altered state due to age (2).

Early Beginnings

Almost from the dawn of civilisation, Egypt has been famous for its botanical gardens in which were collected rare and varied plants from India, Africa and Arabia. A school of herbalists was established at Heliopolis circa 2800 BC where plants were studied (3). The Egyptian skilled use of aromatics attracted many from afar who came to Egypt to study perfumery, as well as medicine. There was an extensive trade in aromatics from the Arabian peninsula and one Minaean trader from Arabia who died in Egypt some time between the years 262 and 50BC had inscribed on his sarcophagus that 'he imported myrrh and calamus for the temples of the gods of Egypt' (4).

Credit for the first use of aromatic oils in Egypt 5,000 BC goes to Imhotep, whose name means '*he who cometh in peace*' the grand vizier, architect, and perhaps astrologer, to Pharaoh Djoser of the Old Kingdom (2686-2613 III Dynasty). As we

know, Imhotep built the first pyramid at Saqqara, known as the step pyramid. Later Imhotep was deified a god of healing.

Certainly, from earliest times the ancient Egyptian women were prolific users of cosmetics and perfumes to enhance beauty and promote health. The early cosmetics were made from animal fats or plant oils, heavily scented with aromatic substances. Creams or rather unguents and oils were kept in cool alabaster containers - heat spoils the aroma. Onyx, glass and shells were used as containers as well.

Herbal remedies, perfumes and incense were interchangeable: the aroma had a purpose. It was not just for beautification or aestheticism. Aromatics were used to stimulate emotions for different occasions, aggressive activity for war, or for peace, tranquillity and meditation, to set the mood for processions, bloodless sacrifice and create an atmosphere of reverence when anointing the gods (5).

By 2500 BC, oils were pressed from various fruits in Egypt, using a simple bag press. This method was used to extract olive oil and the aromatic oils or flavourings and scents (6).

Sacred Perfumes

The Egyptians believed aromatic medicines were effective because the gods exuded a sweet odour and therefore, rubbed the mummified body with aromatic oils so that it would be more acceptable to the gods. Perfumes therefore, had a sacred function. Believing that the soul of man would be reborn, the Egyptians believed that death was but a transition before eventual rebirth. Preserving the mortal remains therefore, was of great importance so that the soul could inhabit the body again. Embalmers certainly had a great knowledge of anatomy, which may well have been passed on to physicians. Traces of galbanum, myrrh, clove, cinnamon and nutmeg have been isolated from the bandages of mummies. These acted as preservatives of the organs. Cavities in the mummies were filled with cassia and myrrh (7). Frankincense gum in the form of incense was burnt in censers during the embalming processes, since it symbolically represented the interaction between the human and divine spheres.

Frankincense also had a pragmatic use since it was useful for fumigation purposes, helping to ward off fleas and rodents. The gum was not indigenous to Egypt. It came from a rather scrubby tree that grew in Southern Arabia and Somalia, which when cut exuded a resin/gum. These globules of resin were greatly sought after in the ancient world, not only for their aroma but also for their therapeutic properties.

Aromatics, albeit faintly, are noticeable in the unwrapping of mummies. Cedarwood and myrrh were two common aromatics used in embalming. Certainly, cedarwood was an important ingredient in the mummifying process, since the ancient Egyptians believed that the wood was imperishable, and therefore symbolic of the afterlife. This may have been the reason for its use in making sarcophagi and funeral boats. Much cedarwood was used in antiquity and there are only small areas of cedarwood forest remaining in Lebanon, where it had once grown plentifully (8).

In the 18th Dynasty, myrrh resin was brought back from the Land of Punt – possibly present day Somalia or the Yemen, South Arabia, though this is uncertain - by the

female Pharaoh Hatshepsut (c1490-1468BC). A depiction of this journey is shown in relief on her temple at Deir-el-Bahri, Luxor, ancient Thebes, as many have seen and wondered at.

The myrrh trees planted as a result of this expedition did not thrive in the Egyptian climate apparently. In the three decades of his rule it appears that King Rameses III burned almost two million blocks of incense (9). Nefertiti, wife to the heretic Akhenaten (c.1352-1336 BC) and Nefertari wife to the great Ramesses II (c.1279-1213 BC) were very fond of perfumed materials it is rumoured using copious perfumes, unguents, and aromatic powders. A typical bathing ritual involved rubbing the body with fragrant oils after bathing. Certainly, the dry desert climate made it necessary to moisturize the skin and massage with oils to keep it supple and elastic.

Dried herbs and fruits were discovered in 12th Dynasty town of Kahun which were ground down for use in cosmetics and one small wooden box contained juniper berries. Minerals were also ground down to produce the colours in cosmetics with a stone pestle and mortar and then mixed with animal fats to make face colouring and eye shadow. These included red and yellow ochres and blue and green copper ores. At Kahun, rectangular trays of syenite, granite and basalt were discovered for grinding paint and ink; there were also rubbers – pebbles flattened at one broad end and stained with red paint – and the colours included haematite or red colouring, yellow ochre and blue pigment. Other toilet articles included bronze mirrors one of which had a beautiful ivory handle in the form of a lotus flower, another representing the head of the goddess Hathor (10).

(This article will conclude in next month's Newsletter)

Acknowledgements

1. Hopper F.N. 'Pharaoh's Flowers', London:HMSO 1990, p.19
- 2.Hopper F.N. 'Pharaoh's Flowers', London:HMSO 1990, p.19
- 3.Lauti R. D.Sc and Passebecq A. MD, 'Aromatherapy', Thorsons 1979,p.9
4. Hoyland R.G. 'Arabia and the Arabs', Routledge, 2001, p.41
- 5.Dr Lis-Balchin M. BSc PhD, 'Aroma Science, The Chemistry & Bioactivity of Essential Oils, Amberwood Publishing Ltd 1995,p.21. Le Guerer A. 'Scent', Chatto & Windus, p.135.1993
6. David R. 'The Pyramid Builders', Rosalie David, Guild Publishing, 1986, p.158
7. Tisserand R. 'Aromatherapy for Everyone', Robert Tisserand, Penguin Books, 1988, p.21
8. Lake M. 'Scents and Sensuality', Max Lake, John Murray, 1989,p.203
9. Steve Van Toller and George H. Dodd, editors, Chapman & Hall, 'Perfumery', 1988, p.13
10. David R. 'The Pyramid Builders', Rosalie David, Guild Publishing 1986, p.158

Wanda Sellar

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CALENDAR

The Ancient Egyptian festivals centred on procession by land and river, and celebrated specific days or series of days in the official year. The official year (365 days) was just short of the solar year and as a result, the official year steadily moved back, with the official 'winter' months and their festivals falling into the summer. They, it seems, did not attempt to move the festivals, even those relating to *agricultural events* in the solar year for instance flood, or the low-river sowing season. Such fixed reference to the official year reveal the remarkable power of the centralised *kingship*, in determining the timing of festivals that would have been celebrated by large numbers of people across the entire country. The function of festivals in daily life is

indicated by the *names of months* that also derive from names of festivals, often with a prefix 'Paen-', meaning; 'festival/month of'.

There is patchy evidence for festivals, there are more inscriptions recording funerary and royal festivals, and far more data from Thebes than from the rest of Egypt. One of the most important sources is the hieroglyphic inscription recording a great festival list in the temple for *Ramesses III* at Medinet Habu.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions on Old Kingdom tomb-chapels include lists of important festivals with an emphasis on the beginning of the year;

- The late summer flood:
- Opening of the Year
- Thoth festival
- First of the Year
- Wag festival
- Sokar festival
- Great Festival
- Flame festival
- Procession of *Min*
- Sadj festival

There seem to be no manuscripts of the period with information on the procedures that follow in any of these festivals during the Old Kingdom (about 2686-2181 BCE).

According to Siegfried Schott in his survey of festival dates, each month is introduced by its number in the sequence of 12 months, split into three seasons, in the Egyptian *calendar*, with the ancient Egyptian name of the month in an early New Kingdom list, the late New Kingdom month name, its early medieval equivalent in Coptic (Christian) Egypt, and the rough equivalent in the modern calendar in the ideal official year when it matched more or less the solar year. Each month had 30 days, some festivals moved or grew, and others are identified only from one period of history. Every year, five days were added to the 12 months of 30 days to bring the total to 365, as close as integrally possible to the 365 1/4 days of the solar year; each 'extra' day and was celebrated as the birthday of a specific deity.

In addition to the seasonal festivals, there would have been festivals specific to each reign, such as the accession day of the reigning King. Many of the festival were fixed to a day, or to a moveable event such as a phase of the Moon.

- Season of flood: Opening of the Year, Month 1, August, Month 2 September, Month 3 October, Month 4 November
- Season of Sowing: Month 1 December, Month 2 January, Month 3 February, Month 4 March
- Season of Summer: Month 1 April, Month 2 May, Month 3 June, Month 4 July

'The five days over the year' (days 361-365 of the official year, are added to the 12 months; day 1 birthday of Osiris; day 2 birthday of Horus; day 3 birthday of Seth; day 4 birthday of Isis; day 5 birthday of Nephthys).

Festival of the Valley celebrated at the new Moon is in the second month of the Season of Summer, or May; this was the greatest festival of the Theban necropolis,

when the image of Amun of Karnak on the east bank at Thebes was brought to the temples for the cult of individual kings on the west bank, a distinctive feature of this festival was the presentation of great quantities of flowers, this would have been a time for each family to feast with their dead, and the architecture and decoration of tomb-chapels at Thebes reflect such festive banquets.

From the forthcoming book: Mystic Moon by Linda Louisa Dell Published by Capall Bann.

Linda Louise Dell via Wanda Sellar

LITTLE GARDEN HOTEL, LUXOR, EGYPT

We recently received the following “advert” – I have included it in the Newsletter in case anyone would like to contact them and find out more details for themselves.

“The Little Garden Hotel, Luxor, Egypt is a small, friendly family run hotel on a quiet street in the centre of the city. Close to the main shopping area and historical sites.

25 rooms all with private bathroom, balcony and air conditioning. Two rooms are suites which have a private terrace overlooking the garden with seating area and sun beds. Two oriental style rooms decorated in the Nubian style with 4 poster.

The hotel has 3 restaurants serving a selection of Egyptian and European foods. One is in the beautiful little garden, a small oasis in the centre of the city. The second is on the first floor and is fully air conditioned and the third is a rooftop oriental restaurant where guests can enjoy traditional Egyptian food in an authentic Egyptian atmosphere.

They can arrange excursions, transportation to and from the airport or train station and even bicycle hire.”

website : www.littlegardenhotel.com

EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY – BOOK SALE

The latest batch of second-hand books for sale has now been added to the Society’s page at eBay (<http://myworld.ebay.co.uk/ees1882/>). All proceeds will be put towards the acquisition of new books for the Society’s London library. Please take a look, and get bidding!

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

This month thanks go to Sherrill Margalit, Linda Louise Dell and Wanda Sellar.

The Newsletter Editor, Janet Brewer, welcomes all articles, letters, reviews and quizzes.

Please e-mail to eeg_newsletter@btinternet.com

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