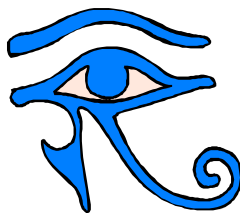


ESSEX  
EGYPTOLOGY GROUP



Newsletter 57  
March 2010

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- 7<sup>th</sup> Mar From Hollywood to Thebes: in search of Natacha Rambova – Rosalind Janssen
- 4<sup>th</sup> April The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty – Sue Moseley
- 2<sup>nd</sup> May The Petrie Museum and the Birth of Egyptian Archaeology – Jan Picton
- 6<sup>th</sup> June Going to God's Land: Egypt's trade with Punt – Lucia Gahlin
- 4<sup>th</sup> July Recreating an Ancient Egyptian Market Place - Members

### **MARCH MEETING**

This month we welcome back Rosalind Janssen, past Curator in the Petrie Museum, author and lecturer at Birkbeck, University College London.

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

Congratulations to Sherrill Margalite for graduating from Birkbeck, University College London, with a Diploma in Egyptology.

### **MALQATA**

The palace of Amenhotep III, Malqata, is currently being re-excavated. The team have a blog, see <http://imalqata.wordpress.com>

### **SPHINX AVENUE**

The sphinx avenue between Karnak and Luxor temples will soon be open. It is likely that a walkway, higher level than the avenue, will be opened this month.

### **VALLEY OF THE KINGS**

I understand that a new rule means that no cameras are allowed into the Valley at all - they have to be left in the Visitor Centre.

## REVIEW OF LAST MEETING

This month we were fortunate to enjoy a return visit from Joyce Filer, who entertained us with the second part of her talk on excavating the dead. In the earlier talk Joyce had introduced us to some of the problems associated with the retrieval of bodies and the sorts of information such bodies might provide. Her present talk was to focus more specifically on what excavated skeletons and grave goods are able to tell us about health and disease in Ancient Egypt.

The starting point is to recognise the difficulties in interpreting the data before you. For example, Christian burials in Ancient Egypt are easier to retrieve than earlier burials - but they cover a large time-span (6<sup>th</sup>C-13<sup>th</sup>C AD), so precise dating has to be established if useful information is to be gathered from grave goods.

It is essential to rely on evidence not assumption. So in the case of mummified children you cannot assume that there is a body inside; X-rays or CT scans are needed, and in most cases the cause of death will remain unknown. Where you have unwrapped mummies, possibly the result of disturbance by tomb robbers looking for jewellery, you cannot assume a death from old age because of appearance - the person should be X-rayed to discover health problems. Similarly, it is not unusual for the bottom teeth to fall out, but you cannot assume a major dental disease. The loss may have occurred following mummification when some front teeth, having only single roots, fall out - so you have to check dental bones.

Joyce showed a slide of the grave of a woman with a foetus at her feet. It cannot be assumed that the woman died of childbirth complications, or that they both died together. The woman's position may be the result of being laid or thrown in the grave, the child may not even be hers, it could be a nephew or niece. Again, the grave may have been reopened and the child added later.

Joyce cited the case of the body found in Tomb KV55 in the Valley of the Kings where a false assumption may have led to a possible misidentification. Theodore Davies, was convinced he had found the body of Queen Tiye, the wife of Amenhotep III and mother of Akhenaten. But expert opinion on the gender was divided. When Joyce examined what was purported to be the body she found it to be that of a young man.

Referring to Akhenaten, Joyce pointed out that without a body there is no reliable evidence as to the person's medical history. If the only evidence comes from statues and art work then nothing can be said as to the health of the person - for these may be intended to make a statement or express held beliefs rather than to reveal actual health conditions.

One difficulty in assessing the health of the Ancient Egyptians is that discolouration of bones can hide the evidence of disease. The colour of bones changes according to climate. Normally bones are creamy-yellow in colour, but bones sticking up through the ground become bleached. In Egypt oil may seep through the clothes wrappings onto the bones, so a purple or bluish colour on bones may be a result of using vegetable dyed clothing. The skull of the body in Tomb KV55 was a blue-brown colour, darkened by resin staining.

Joyce told us that in Ancient Egypt health was a constant concern, with arthritis and dental problems the most common conditions of ill-health. Some infectious diseases affected everyone. The Ancient Egyptians experienced plague but the type of plague is unknown - plague kills so quickly it leaves no evidence on the bones. The same can be said for death from mosquitoes, but Egypt had pools of stagnant water so malaria may have been a serious problem. Malarial victims also develop joint problems, so arthritis may be wrongly attributed as the cause of the malady. Another persistent insect was the house fly, a carrier of intestinal diseases. There are also many references to and scenes of blind harpists.

Green eye make-up, of copper and anti-bacterial, may have been used both to cover up and to protect against eye infection.

Another disease known to be prevalent in Ancient Egypt was Bilharzia (Schistosomiasis). The infection was caught when bathing in contaminated water and coming into contact with a worm released by a freshwater snail. The worm penetrated the skin, entered the veins and travelled through the body. It caused anaemia and other symptoms, the person became lethargic and unable to work.

Turning from unseen causes, Joyce identified three obvious health conditions in which disease might be misdiagnosed: brittle bone disease, dwarfism and polio. Brittle bone disease is rare to find because the bones tend to shatter. If a child has it as a foetus the brittle bones are unable to survive childbirth. But the condition may develop up to a year after birth. It is due to inadequate formation of bone tissue, which results in a distortion of the bones and the limbs becoming curved. The British Museum has a mummified body with this rare condition. Originally it was erroneously identified as a monkey and put into a baboon cemetery.

Dwarfism is the most commonly represented health condition in Ancient Egypt. There are numerous types of dwarfism - the most common is achondroplasia. This is an inherited condition in which the person has a normal-sized body, and normal intelligence, but the bones of the arms and legs fail to grow to normal size. A condition found throughout history, it affects both males and females, but is more representative in men. Many Old Kingdom statues depict dwarfism, and often dwarfs were members of the royal household.

Before concluding, Joyce spoke of an 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty funerary stele which shows a royal door keeper with a leg and foot deformity. Is this a case of polio or is it a variety of club foot? The ambiguity in the question seems to articulate the main thrust of this engrossing talk, that when considering the lives of the Ancient Egyptians there are no final answers in the absence of real evidence.

Margaret Mumford and Malcolm Smith

## **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.

- 11<sup>th</sup> March – Stephen Quirke – Eternal holiday? Middle Kingdom concepts of burial
- 13<sup>th</sup> May – Lucia Gahlin – How much do we really know about Akhenaten?
- 27<sup>th</sup> May – Bob Partridge – News from Egypt

## **THE FORGOTTEN TEMPLE**

Whilst doing my homework prior to my last trip to Egypt I was “flying” over Luxor using Google Earth, when a brown smudge caught my eye. It was about 8 km North East of Luxor, just south of the main road going north. When I zoomed in, to my surprise I found a small temple. I tried to identify the temple, but as it was the day before my departure for Egypt I did not have much luck. No problem, just go to Luxor and ask. Oh! If life were only that simple!

On my arrival in Luxor I popped into the place I always go when I want some local information, the local pub. This time, The Kings Head (Akhenaten), where to my surprise I found that no one knew what I was talking about. After a lot of discussion and a couple of

beers someone said that they had an internet corner. So I looked, and I saw and a voice said, "I live there!". He said that it was a temple to Hathor and that it had been built by Rameses II. After a couple more beers and a lot of haggling I arranged with the local Del Boy (Mahmoud) to have a car and a driver the next day.

The next afternoon as arranged my driver dutifully turned up in an ancient Renault. Off we went to the village of Almdamod (as the locals called it) to seek out the mystery temple. The drive should only have taken about fifteen minutes but we took the scenic route. Down country lanes, through little villages and over the sugar railway lines several times until I thought my driver was lost. Actually he was just trying to avoid the Antiquities Police! When we arrived in the village I could see why the temple was not on the usual tourist itineraries. The only road through the village to the temple winds around the houses and is only wide enough for a car. Eventually I reached the temple only to be told that I should have bought a ticket in Luxor or so my driver told me. But this is Egypt, and after crossing a little man's palm with silver I was allowed to have a look around. The first thing that I wanted to see was what looked on Google Earth like a square building to the west of the temple. It turned out to be a quay. A bit of a surprise as the temple is approximately 5 km from the Nile! I was absolutely fascinated now. Time being short and with no camera or note book I made my mind up to come back. After a quick look around I took my leave. The return journey to my hotel was again by a roundabout route.

The next day I had previously arranged to go with my driver to Dendera. A slight detour and on the way back, after a really good visit to Hathor's temple in Dendera, I stopped at my mystery temple. Yes, you guessed it! I crossed the little man's palm with silver, but this time he had a friend, who also had a friend! Getting a bit expensive now. Still, it was worth it. I had the place to myself, not surprising really as I found out when I got home it was closed to tourists!! Then again I don't consider myself a tourist, more a time traveller!! So off I set, camera and note book in hand to find some clues as to the identity of the temple, as I was a little bit dubious about who had built it. Wherever you go in Upper Egypt a little man is only too willing to inform the uninformed visitor to the temples, for a few LE, that it was built by Rameses the Great. Rameses being the only King he thinks we know apart from Tutankhamun of course. On my first visit I had not seen anything of Rameses and that had surprised me as Rameses was very good at promoting himself. Not a sign of Hathor either.

I started where I started on my first visit, at the quay. This is in a very good state of preservation. On the water side it stands eight feet high and is quite impressive. The surface area is 17 x 15 metres. The edges are slightly raised. From here a 150 metre avenue of ten sphinxes (7 in-situ) leads to the pylons. Parts of the processional way road surface appear to be original. The pylons are a shadow of their former selves. The inscriptions on what remains of the lower part are protected by a small wall on each side.

At this point I felt like the pied piper, as my presence had attracted half the children of the village. Not to worry. This is all part of the rich pageant that is Egypt. I gave them a little money and my escort sent them packing. One of the guardians had followed close on my heels every step of the way.

My escort pointed to the field of blocks, so I went over to see if could see a cartouche or two. There were plenty of good inscriptions but a bit more care could have been taken when setting out the blocks. They were on their side, upside down and even face down in some cases. I did manage to find one cartouche that I could photograph. Well, I didn't find it. My escort turned guide pointed it out to me, saying Rameses. He was right. Of course a tip was called for. I usually have a pocket full of small change but the children had cleaned me out, so I ended up having to go to my wallet. You should have seen his face light up. Sometimes it really is a pleasure to give away what to us is a pittance but to them is obviously a lot. There are a lot of really good engravings. I found a block with what was obviously a king with a very unusual crown. Foolishly I didn't take any notes or photographs of it thinking that I

would easily identify it when I got home. WRONG!! I still haven't seen it in any of my books or on the web. My memory of exactly what it looked like is fading, as it was a year ago. It looked a bit like the Atef crown but a bit more elaborate.

From here my guide (escort) took me back to the main temple pointing out the sacred lake on the way. Nothing to see really. Just the raised edges showing above the ground.

The temple is only small. You get a real impression of the intimacy of the temple in the second court which you enter through the only remaining standing columns. It is approx 28 x 23 metres square with 12 column bases in two rows of 6 on each side. With a little imagination you can see the walls rising all around you and the court gets even more intimate. It is a long way from the grandeur of Karnak and Medinet Habu. Passing into the inner temple the bubble burst. Not much to see really, a few walls and column bases and the remains of the external wall. I poked around for bit (not literally) then headed to the little open air museum that I had noticed as we parked the car when we arrived, my ever watchful escort in tow.

What a gold mine! All kinds of things. Statues, pots, even what looked like a bath were lying as if they just been dragged in from a dig. Two rather fine statues, not on the scale of Rameses of course, had some fine cartouches engraved on them. One also had a serekh. I photographed them for future research when I got home. I asked my escort/guide who they were and he just pointed at me. As if to say, "You tell me." I had no idea! I would love to have been able to say "Oh yes, that's so and so." But alas my knowledge of hieroglyphs is sorely lacking. I must do something about that.

The time was getting on and I wanted to get back before dark. After giving my escort/guide another tip I bid him farewell, took one last long look at the temple and left. We set off on our magical mystery tour again, over the sugar railway a couple of times, through numerous villages and past the airport and we were on our way home. My driver dropped me off at the hotel, saying, "Salaam. Bukra. Tomorrow. We go to Abydos?" I said "Yes. We go to Abydos." But that's another story.

Some of you may already have realised that the temple was the temple of Montu at Medamud. The statues were of Sensuret III. This is a really nice little temple, well worth a visit, if you can find a driver who knows how to avoid the Antiquities Police!! BUT don't say that I sent you.

A good site to research Serekhs and Cartouches is:  
[www.ancient-egypt.co.uk/people/cartouche/index.htm](http://www.ancient-egypt.co.uk/people/cartouche/index.htm)

A good book on temples is:  
"The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt." R H Wilkinson ISBN 0-500-05100-3

David Poulson

## **AROMATICS IN ANCIENT EGYPT (Part Two)**

### **Extraction of Perfume**

The Egyptians apparently extracted the perfume (essential oils responsible for the aroma) from herbs and flowers by heating them in water in clay vessels, an early form of distillation. The plant material in the clay vessel was covered with a thick layer of wool, which gradually became saturated with the oil from the wood and condensed steam. It was then squeezed and the two substances were left to separate out (11).

Egyptian temple oils may have included the following:

Castor (*Ricinus communis*) – lighting

Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) - foods

Olive (*Olea europaea*) - food and unguents

Balanos (*Balanites aegyptica*) - massage and perfumes

Ben (*Moringa oleifera*) - perfumes being clear and odourless

Colocynth (*Colocynthis vulgaris*) - unguents and medicines.

Other oils available included balanos oil (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) safflower oil (*Carthamus tinctorius*) linseed oil (*Linum usitatissimum*) almond oil (*Prunus dulcis*).

There were three principal uses for aromatics: for offering in religious ceremonies, for embalming and in personal toiletry, and three methods used to produce perfumed oils in Egypt.

*Enfleurage*: flowers and other aromatics were steeped in animal fats (hippopotamus for instance!) left out in the sun until the scent from the materials were imparted to the fat, which was then moulded into cosmetic cones for perfuming hair wigs.

*Maceration*: chopped up aromatic materials were placed into hot oils, and then once the fragrance was imparted, the oil was strained and put into amphora jars or alabaster containers. This method was used principally for skin creams and perfumes.

*Expression*: involved putting flowers into presses which extracted the aromatic oils. Wine was often included in the process and the resulting liquid was stored in jars or pots and used subsequently as perfume.

### **Popular Perfumes**

A very popular perfume in ancient Egypt was the famous Kyphi, a rather heady brew it seems, consisting of many ingredients, although the precise ingredients are unknown, and recipes vary. Saffron, spikenard, calamus, cinnamon, juniper, honey and raisins are purported to be some of the ingredients. Kyphi was burnt after sunset, not only to ensure the safe return of the Sun God Ra, but also because its effects were intoxicating, and possibly lulled the congregation in the temple into a hypnotic affect, which aided communication with the gods apparently. The perfume may well have had soporific and narcotic properties. Kyphi became common in Egyptian homes, and was later used as a liquid perfume by Greeks and Romans. One recipe for 'Kyphi', is shown on the inner temple walls at Edfu. Many authorities agree that the ingredient calamus in Kyphi, is a powerful sedative but can produce hallucinations, and thought to be carcinogenic.

Plutarch (c.AD46-c.121), Greek historian, said of Kyphi: 'Its aromatic substances lull to sleep, allay anxieties, and brighten dreams. It is made of things that delight most in the night', and Pedanus Dioscorides (c70 AD), Greek physician who travelled with the Emperor Nero's army also gives it a mention: 'Kyphi is the composition of a perfume, welcome to ye gods: the priests in Egypt do use it abundantly. It is mixed also with antidotes and is given to the asthmatically in drinks.' (12)

Kyphi may be forerunner of the 'Chypre' family of perfumes. Perfumes in the retail trade are classified in one of seven family groups, called Perfume Families or Fragrance Families, such as Floral, Green, Oriental and so on. The family group Chypre comprise floral, green and mossy notes. The basic techniques of today's

perfumers are essentially the same as those of their Egyptian predecessors 4000 years ago (13).

Another popular aromatic perfume was Theriaque comprising a great many ingredients including it seems myrrh, cinnamon, rush, sweet flag and a little serpent skin and spittle – interesting! It was said to banish anxiety (14).

The perfumed Cones worn on wigs, often depicted on dancing girls, (15) may have been a form of deodorant as well as a beguiling perfume. Apparently, they were made from myrrh and frankincense as well as rosemary and thyme. Although perfumes today are designed to allure and delight, the line of demarcation between therapeutic effects and aestheticism were in the past not so well defined. Also the plant ingredients used in perfumes were natural (if not always safe), so were designed to have an effect on the mind, body and spirit, whereas today the chemical synthesis of odour molecules has meant perfumes are purely for aesthetic delight with no therapeutic effect.

### **Ancient Perfumers**

Making perfumes was the province of the temple priests, since aromatics were associated with religion. They had their 'laboratories' in the temple precinct (16). When the priests prepared the perfumes, they did so in accordance with holy texts, since they believed that the recipes were transmitted through the god Thoth. The ingredients of various perfumes have been preserved on temple walls, as well as directions for their use.

Statues of gods in the temples were washed and anointed with aromatic oils, and it was thought that they ensured the welfare of the living and the dead. Aromatic oils were burned to the gods to solicit favours as well as in gratitude. Nerfertum was the god of fragrance who is often shown rising out of a blue lotus. The lotus is the familiar symbol in Egypt today, and of course appears in many hieroglyphics on tombs and temples as well as in papyrus records. It is a symbol of rebirth and the plant reputedly had a heavenly perfume. Sekhmet, the goddess of healing and alchemy, was Nerfertum's consort, and was known as 'the lady of every herb'. Great religious feast days called for the huge consumption of odoriferous substances. The perfumes were carried in solemn processions, sometimes in golden vases, as described in the annals of Thothmes III, Ramesses II and Senusret. These included, myrrh, saffron, cinnamon and orris root.

Incense is described in the Book of the Dead for use in many rites to purify and protect the soul in the after life and to ensure a safe passage. In many temple murals the king is often seen standing holding a smoking censer. Incense was burnt during coronation ceremonies, to celebrate a military victory and before the opening of a shrine containing a deity.

It seems that the preparation and specific purpose of incense had already been established at the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BC). Aromatics burnt, as incense was popular in most of the ancient civilisations such as Greece and Rome, and the 'smoking effect' of incense has given us the word 'perfume' derived from Latin that is 'through smoke'.

## Aromatics and Healing

Herodotus reports that next to the Libyans, the Egyptians were the healthiest in the world (Scroll 230:1130). Certainly Egyptian medicine was highly revered. The Egyptian medical papyri discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were probably the first systematic classification of medicine. Sayings of magical formulas are evident in almost all of the papyrus since medicine and healing were combined with religion and magic. The London Papyrus (c.1350) contains a great deal of medical and magic formulae. Medical practitioners would not have recognised that there was a distinction between practical help and the spoken word (17). Illness was influenced by the gods especially the fierce god Sekhmet, as well as demons and the dead.

The Ebers papyrus (854a) makes it quite clear that doctors (*swnw*), priests (*wab*) and magicians (*sau*) were all involved in healing (18). The Papyrus of Ebers shows the widespread use of aromatic mixes designed to treat a variety of illnesses. Papyrus Edwin Smith, gives formulas for restoring youth! Formulations included caraway seeds, roots of angelica, cedarwood bark, resins of frankincense and myrrh and were usually a closely guarded secret. They were put into wine or oil and the aromatic substances would slowly permeate the liquids, which were also burned in religious ceremonies or imbibed.

It was thought that evil spirits consumed the body's vital substance through the body's orifices, especially on the left side of the body which was the 'dead' side. The Ebers and Berlin Papyri refer to ducts in the body, *metu* (*met* singular), which besides carrying blood, air, mucous, urine and semen, could also transport disease-bearing entities, as well as malignant or benign spirits. It appears that the favoured place for these malign entities to enter were the bowels since one quarter of all medicines was prescribed for the gastro-intestinal system. Herodotus (II,76) mentions that the Egyptians had a penchant for emetics. Another exit place for evil spirits was the head and there is evidence of Trepanning (boring a hole in the skull).

Great insight into the management of the estates, hunting, food production and certain aspects of medicine, came from the wall paintings in the tombs. Since tomb robbery was rife, such paintings of the deceased and their servants on the tomb walls, could substitute for the body when the time came for rebirth. This was part of the process of sympathetic magic as it was thought that by reciting the hieroglyphic texts, which accompanied the drawings, the paintings could be "brought to life" and the deceased was therefore, ensured a place in eternity. The deceased incidentally were painted with their infirmities and deformities, which has helped in recording particular types of disease.

Over the last few centuries, powdered mummy has been prescribed for a variety of ailments (19) perhaps because the wrappings had been drenched in plant oils, believed to have therapeutic properties.

Selecting a healing plant was based on its similarity to the part of the body or organ under affliction, following the principle of *similia similibus*, a doctrine later espoused by both Paracelsus and Hahneman, both influential in the founding of homoeopathy. Animal products were also used on this basis as it was hoped that the medication would impart the distinguishing characteristics of the donor animal. In the same way, remedies from minerals were used so that qualities of strength and tenacity might be imparted (20).

Sanatoria dedicated to the various gods became popular healing places. One such sanatorium was at the temple at Dendera, on the west bank of the River Nile. This was dedicated to Hathor, the cow-eared goddess. The waters in which the sick bathed were potentised by flowing over one of the healing statues. Other healing customs involved the incubation dream; a cure was affected usually by the appearance of a snake in the dream.

Magic and religion was the cornerstone of Egyptian civilisations. Life revolved around the temple and the gods and goddesses. The temple was the image of the universe and it was believed that religious observance and ritual would ensure the well-being, stability and health of the nation. Since both earthly and supernatural forces were implicated in health and disease, many priests, though not all, were physicians.

An early hieroglyphic carving now in the Louvre shows women gathering lilies and placing them in a device which extracted oil from them (21). An aromatic ointment with lilies was used for 'female complaints' (22.) Lilies may have been grown in special gardens since they originate in moist eastern Mediterranean countries, and it was not possible to transport plants and flowers over long distances, as it was roots and resins. No doubt, the latter a pragmatic reason for the popularity of roots and resins in worship as well as healing.

#### **Acknowledgements**

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Wanda Sellar

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

This month thanks go to Margaret Mumford, David Poulson, Wanda Sellar and Malcolm Smith.

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

All articles express the views and opinions of their authors

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