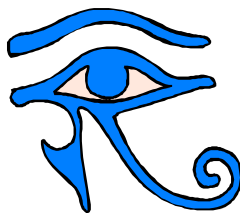


ESSEX
EGYPTOLOGY GROUP



Newsletter 52
October 2009

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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|---------------------|--|
| 4 th Oct | Nubia - Lorna Oakes |
| 1 st Nov | New Kingdom Pharaohs and the Mediterranean - George Hart |
| 6 th Dec | Christmas Fund Raising Event |
| 3 rd Jan | To be advised |
| 7 th Feb | Excavating the Dead (Part 2) – Joyce Filer |

OCTOBER MEETING

This month we welcome back Lorna Oakes as our speaker on the subject of Nubia. Lorna is a published author with many books on Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, she is currently lecturing at Birkbeck, University College London.

FORENSIC ASPECTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Joyce Filer, BA; DipArch; M.Sc; will be holding a study day on Saturday 31st October 2009 at the University of London, Connaught Hall, Tavistock Square, WC1. Cost £30. If you would like a copy of the e-mail advert, please contact me on janet.brewer@btopenworld.com

DR ZAHY HAWASS TO RETIRE

During an interview in Indianapolis in August, Dr Hawass announced that he has plans to retire from the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 2010. However he will still be excavating in the Valley of the Kings, writing books and giving lectures. He made no mention about a potential replacement.

REVIEW OF THE SEPTEMBER MEETING

Our September meeting was a talk by Carol Andrews entitled The Ancient Egyptian Sense of Humour. Alison Woollard introduced Carol who currently teaches at Birkbeck, University College London and was previously at the British Museum in the Egyptian Antiquities Department for twenty eight years. She has lectured in many countries and is the author of numerous publications. Carol has visited Egypt, impressively, more than sixty times.

Carol began her talk to us by mentioning humorous and comedy programmes shown on television over recent years: Monty Python, The Simpsons, South Park, Mash, Absolutely Fabulous, Frasier, to name but a few, and said she enjoyed them all whatever the humour.

Therefore she could see humour in many aspects of Ancient Egyptian life depicted in tomb paintings, papyri, ostraca and hieroglyphic writings.

What did make the ancient Egyptians laugh? Humour is subjective and what we find amusing in ancient Egyptian culture might not have been considered so by the Egyptians themselves and they perhaps found amusement in things we would not. There followed an amusing, interesting and very fast moving slide show and talk with examples of every kind of humour: satire, irony, parody, caricature, sexual, lavatorial and ridicule. I now attempt to describe some of the slide scenes and Carol's stories below.

A high official to the king, as a special favour, was permitted to kiss the king's foot rather than the ground in front of the king, which he thought was a great honour.

A trainee had obviously been practicing drawing on an ostrakon showing the head of a New Kingdom king (with hand and fist on either side which show it is of correct proportion) - the chin has a definite five o'clock shadow added. Was this intended to be humorous or subversive?

Drunkenness is depicted and described; both men and women were known to get intoxicated. In one tomb picture a woman is seen turning backwards and vomiting, her maid servant coming up behind with a 'pail' for her use. In Paheri's tomb at el Kab a man is depicted saying "Give me eighteen jugs of wine - I want to get drunk".

A mythological story tells of Ra becoming angry because mankind was not following his rules and preserving Maat, so the world was out of balance. He sent Sekhmet, the lion goddess, who rampaged over the earth and the fields ran with human blood. Ra's anger diminished at the sight of the carnage and he ordered Sekhmet to stop but she would not listen. So Ra mixed beer with pomegranate juice, to stain the beer red, and poured 7,000 jugs of this mixture in the path of Sekhmet. She, thinking it was blood, drank so much that she became drunk and slept for three days. When she awoke her blood lust had dissipated and thus mankind was saved.

The ancient Egyptians had proverbs: Do not tell your heart to your wife – or all will be known by the street. A man bitten by a snake will henceforth be frightened of a coiled rope. Perhaps this could be translated as "Once bitten twice shy".

Foreigners were also the butt of Egyptian humour: in the temple at Luxor a Syrian is depicted escaping up into a tree with a bear pulling at the man's leg to get him down from the tree. The people of Kush (from the ancient kingdom of Nubia) were always referred to as "wretched Kush" not just "Kush".

On a tomb wall near Hatshepsut's temple is pictured the 'king' having sex with his/her favourite – was this intended as smutty humour or was it subversive? A queen depicted in a chariot firing arrows at the enemy: a parody of man into woman, who would not be in that position, or possibly referring to Hatshepsut?

The people in antiquity seem to have enjoyed the little misfortunes that happen to others in paintings of accidents that have happened or waiting to happen: a workman dislocates his elbow and then drops a hammer on his foot.

Animals were much used as substitutes for humans in paintings and drawings; they were often cute, humorous or even political satire:

A rat, depicting a king, complete with crown, sceptre and flail, with cats as servants.

A papyrus picture shows a rat, as king, in a chariot, and rat archers shooting arrows at their enemies, who are cats.

Monkeys, cats and dogs are depicted variously under the chairs of the nobles in tomb paintings and were by way of diversion. Baboons were very much admired in Egypt not only for their religious connotations but also for their intelligence and sexual lustfulness.

Cats were not trained to hunt as may occasionally be assumed from depictions of them in hunting scenes; in one memorable painting a cat reaches out to catch a bird but is being knocked off its 'perch' by another bird.

Dogs were not pets or lap dogs those seen in paintings under chairs and with their owners would have been hunting dogs. A slide of a small ivory statue of a puppy at play suggests that some of these animal carvings were executed purely to give pleasure to others.

A papyrus, in the British Museum, satirises society during the reigns of the last Ramesside kings and shows animals parodying human activities and in role reversals of the natural order. A lion and an antelope play senet at the left hand side of the picture and the possible outcome of the game is suggestively depicted to the right hand side. In between these: wolves are flute players driving goats and a cat herds geese.

During our break for refreshment I asked Carol how she came to choose humour as a subject on which to give talks. Apparently as Curator at the British Museum she gave a gallery lecture on the subject, and included were some of the sexual humorous bits; this was somehow picked up by the media and she was asked to give interviews but declined as was due to go abroad. On her return the British Museum (officials) asked if she had been giving interviews as they were inundated with enquiries from as far afield as the United States and Australia! And so she started lecturing on the subject all over the world.

Carol's talk gave a fascinating insight to the humour of the ancient Egyptians and/or our interpretation of it. I think it will make us all look at tomb paintings and papyri in a new light for those odd little quirks.

Rosemary Banks

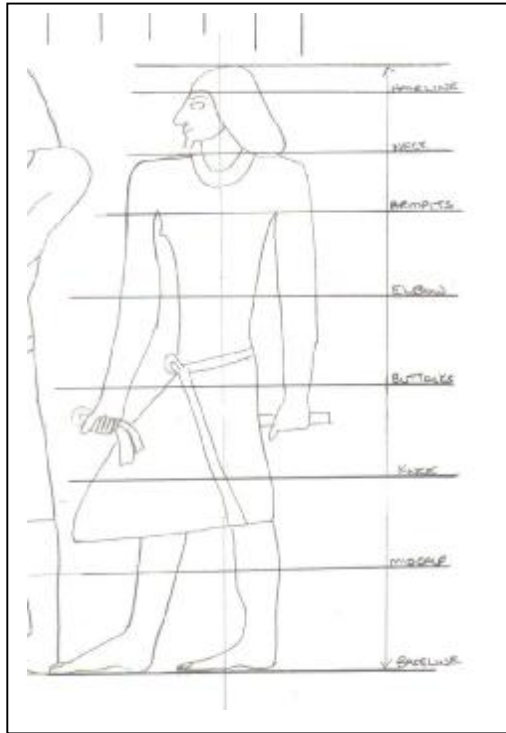


Scene from a satirical papyrus

Picture from British Museum website

Ancient Egyptian artistic conventions (Conclusion)

Scene 3 continued



Guidelines were used to aid the artist in composition and were designed to mark the levels of key points of the body. In the Old Kingdom the system included:

- Vertical axial line that passed through the ear and divided the torso in half.
- Horizontal lines (although not always all present) to the levels of the:
 - Knees
 - Middle of the lower leg
 - Lower border of the buttocks
 - Elbow of the hanging arm
 - Arm pits
 - Junction of the neck and shoulders
 - Hairline
 - Top of the head

According to Robins (1994, p64-66) the guidelines are only approximately placed and appear not to have been drawn with any great accuracy. Since the

specified parts of the body do not always coincide exactly with the guidelines it can be assumed that they were a compositional aid, and that the artists were not slavishly tied to follow them.

Measurements given in Table 1 have been made on the figure of Neferbaupthah (The illustration, part of Scene 3 is a partial rendering after Weeks 1994: Fig 15) between the artificially applied horizontals of the guideline system and the baseline.

Table 1 Analysis of the guidelines.

Horizontal Line	Distance from Baseline (mm)
Hairline	154
Neck	138
Armpits	122
Elbow	100
Buttocks	76
Knee	51
Baseline	0

The approximate relationships determined using the data in Table 1 are in agreement with the values proposed by Robins (1994, p.65):

- The knee is roughly half the height of the elbow line.
- The knee is one-third of the height of the hairline horizontal.
- Line marking the lower horizontal of the buttocks is half the height of the hairline horizontal.
- Distance from the elbow to the junction of the neck and shoulders is approximately two-thirds the distance from the elbow to the hairline.
- The armpit is four-fifths the hairline height.

Conclusion

The wall scenes in the mastaba of Neferbaupthah illustrate that the ancient Egyptian artists possessed a keen eye for detail. This skill, combined with a sophisticated series of established conventions to encode spatial and hierarchical relationships, ensured that the essential and identifying characteristics of the subject were fully conveyed in an aesthetically pleasing composition.

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Barry Burnett

A SHORT WALK IN THE THEBAN HILLS

Arriving on the West Bank we were met by Jane Akshar (www.luxornews.net) a college friend of Barry Burnett, who has her own tour company in Luxor. We went by minibus – donkeys were offered as an alternative – to meet our walking guide Mohamed Ismail.



We started near Deir el-Medina, upward. Hats on and cameras at the ready our first view was over towards Malkata and the Coptic Monastery, then we caught our first glimpse of the Valley of the Queens. Having only been to QV by road, I wasn't aware how close it was to the workers village. We walked on, continuing upwards, passing by one of the guards posts. The views by this time were quite breathtaking (and breathless, and hot). We starting walking the ridge that you see from the East Bank above Hatshepsut's Temple. This ridge and the whole mountain range were under water millennia ago and we saw fossilized clams from fist size to pinhead size. We saw where ochre was mined and we saw many open tombs down in the Assassif area. One, half-way up the sheer mountainside was amazing, how did they dig it and then bring the remains of 23 family members?

We walked past the crack in the rock that lead to the royal mummy cache – Mohamed leaned down and photographed it for us, we admit to being too scared! We saw the ruins of the accommodation that the workers used when digging in the Kings Valley, and their graffiti (unfortunately also lots of modern graffiti). We continued along the ridge, looking down onto the temples of Mentuhotep and Hatshepsut – the visitors looked like little ants. We eventually came down a very sharp incline just to the right of Hatshepsut's temple. The walk took us a couple of hours and that included a stop in the shade and lots of photo opps. Not for the fainthearted but wow!

Janet Brewer

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

This month thanks go to Rosemary Banks. Janet Brewer and Barry Burnett.

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

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