



The Egypt Society of Bristol

NEWS UPDATE

Issue 21

May 2007

Chairman's Dig

First, an abject apology for the inordinate gap between newsletters. My only excuse is that we seem to have been travelling every other week since before Christmas, and have only now apparently stopped in Bristol for more than a couple of weeks.

So since the last issue the Chairman and Treasurer have been to Egypt three times leading tours, most recently a 'special' for the Bristol Magpies, the 'friends' organisation for the City Museum, which I know a number of you are members of. Almost all were Egypt virgins (with the notable exceptions of the President, Chairman and Treasurer), and it was actually rather nice to do a 'basic' tour again, as most of our trips are aimed more at the less-visited sites. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves: for one traveller's view of the trip you may wish to visit his web-site (http://uk.geocities.com/bruin.bear@btinternet.com/Bruin_Blog.html).

The Magpies have raised a lot of money towards the new Egyptian gallery (**due to open at the end of May**); they have an extensive programme of trips and visits, and ESB members are very much encouraged to join!

The 2007/08 lecture programme is included with this newsletter. A couple of slots have not been firmed up at the time of writing, but details will be put on the website as soon as they are available – and of course in the next mailing. We have a wide variety of topics covered, and speakers include not only those from the UK, but also from the USA and the Netherlands. Indeed, with the advent of easyJet, the travel costs of European speakers are sometimes lower than those of 'local' ones!

Look forward to seeing every one soon, *inshallah!*



Tales from the Treasury

A copy of the 2006 accounts, as presented at the AGM, is included at the end of this newsletter.

A reminder to those who have Standing Orders taken out prior to the change in subscription rates that they should now return new ones to their banks in readiness for next year's payments. These will give you a discount on 'cash' rates: anyone else who wishes to take advantage of this should let us know to info@EgyptSocietyBristol.org.uk.



Lecture reports

by Margaret Curtis

14 November 2006

Egypt in the third dimension: Stereophotography in Egyptology and Archaeology

Dr Paul Nicholson, University of Cardiff

No report as such on this one – but this picture gives the flavour of what it involved!



12 December 2006

Art and the Myth of Kingship in Ancient Egypt

George Hart, lately of the British Museum

Without television or newspapers, how were the ancient Egyptians aware of their rulers and the right of that person to rule?

It started with Osiris, God of the Underworld, whose parents were Geb and Nut, the earth and the sky. Always depicted with green skin as a sign of rebirth, Osiris carries the crook and flail, the sign of a ruler. Osiris and his consort Isis ruled in a golden, mythical time, introducing music and art.

Into this peaceful picture comes Seth, a bringer of storm and chaos, who is jealous of Osiris and plans to take his throne from him. Seth tempts Osiris into a chest and slams the lid shut, casting the chest out to sea. Isis, his wife, hears of this and, together with her sister Nephthys, rescues the body of Osiris and brings him back to life long enough to conceive a child, Horus. Horus is closely guarded and brought up out of Seth's reach until he comes of age when he challenges Seth to regain the throne. Horus is successful but despite this, Seth survives to live on as a god until much later in Egypt's history.

The living Pharaohs identified with Horus the ruler, this being the earliest name for the King. In this way they could show they were authorised to rule with the Gods' blessing. In death, the God Osiris is most prominent as, in death, the King is fused with Osiris 'Foremost of the Westerners'.

The regalia carried by the King confirms his right to rule. He wore the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt and the ceremonial beard which was even worn by female rulers, and he carried the crook and flail. The King's names were even protected in the cartouche. One of the King's most prominent names being 'Son of Re', which again connects him with the Gods.

In statues and wall carvings, the King is shown being kissed or embraced by the Gods giving their protection. In many cases the Gods take on the features of the King.

Hathor is also a protector of the King as his wife and mother. She protects Egypt's interests in other lands. Queens often take Hathor as their Goddess.

The peoples of ancient Egypt were probably in no doubt at all about who ruled them or that person's right to rule. The artwork and statues of the day, some of which were on a gigantic scale, perpetuated the myth of the ancient right to rule passed down from the Gods to their representative on Earth, the King.

13 February 2007

Tomb of Osiris at Abydos

Dr Aidan Dodson, Chairman ESB

The god Osiris is perhaps the most familiar figure in the Egyptian pantheon. Through his later association with the Hellenistic god, Serapis, he joined his sister-wife, Isis, in being worshipped throughout the Western antique world, and by his suffering and raising from death, clearly influenced the Christian Passion.

His cult first appears in the latter part of the Fifth Dynasty, when the divine name is to be found in certain private tombs and, most importantly, in the Pyramid Texts of King Unas. Although the basic details of his legend are refined throughout his 'career', the central element was Osiris' murder by his brother Seth and final resurrection as ruler of the dead, before whom souls had to plead and establish their innocence of wrongdoing in their life on earth.

All Egyptian gods were felt to be susceptible to death, but it was only Osiris whose circumstances made the existence of a 'tomb' particularly important. Osiris was associated with a number of different centers, however, the key locations soon become Busiris, in the Delta, and Abydos in Upper Egypt.

The Abydene 'tomb' of Osiris was rediscovered on New Year's Day 1898 AD, by Émile Amélineau, a French Egyptologist carrying out his first (and last) field-project. Born in 1850, he had begun his career in the French Church, before studying Egyptology and going to Cairo at the age of 32 to work for four years at the French Archaeological Mission. In November 1895 he went out to begin excavations at Abydos. After initial work near the modern villages near the site, he had moved to the part of necropolis known as Umm el-Qaab ('the Mother of Pots') in

1896. The area, some two kilometers out into the desert, derived its name from the huge quantities of potsherds and other fragments found there.

There, he uncovered a number of tombs and graves which represent the tombs and subsidiaries of the earliest kings of Egypt. Beginning on the side of the site furthest from the cultivation, in late 1897 he had reached the highest point of the area, which marked the centre of the distribution of the potsherds, inscribed examples of which were clearly connected with Osiris. On Boxing Day, a statuette of Osiris was found, and on 30 December the outline of the tomb's mud brick chambers became visible.

The sepulchre revealed was approximately square, with a wooden central chamber, surrounded on three sides by store-rooms. The latter still contained remains of the former funerary equipment. The whole tomb had suffered from a great fire in remote times, certainly before the late Middle Kingdom.

Amélineau's most impressive discovery came to light on 2 January 1898. Clearing the debris from the south-west corner of the tomb, his workmen uncovered a black basalt sculpture, lying on its left side. This depicted Osiris lying on a bier, the two sides of which are formed of the bodies of lions - like one from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Hawks, representing Horus, guard each corner and another, representing Isis, straddles the god's loins, impregnating herself in order to bear Horus.

Full-scale clearance of the tomb occupied 5 to 12 January, during which a skull was found in one chamber. Influenced by the votive ostraca from above the tomb, the 'bed' and a belief that the entrance-stairway to the sepulchre was 'the staircase of the Great God' mentioned in texts referring to the Osiris-cult, Amélineau promptly proclaimed the skull to be that of Osiris himself. He maintained this belief even after professional examination had shown it to be small and probably that of a woman.

Not only did Amélineau believe Osiris was an historic figure, but a huge tomb cleared in 1896-7 was considered the last resting place of Horus and Seth, his son and brother! That this conclusion was met with academic scepticism is an understatement!

Amélineau's historical interpretation left room for improvement and his excavation technique was also totally unacceptable, being carried out on an 'industrial' scale wholly out of keeping with such a sensitive site. Where tombs are described, crude plans are supplemented by verbose listings of dimensions, with wholly inadequate listings of objects found. As a source of information, it is a wholly frustrating confection.

Flinders Petrie, a wholly different kind of excavator from Amélineau, had long had his eye on Abydos, but had been frustrated by Amélineau's possession of a five-year permit. The then-Director, Victor Loret, had been unwilling to overturn this in favour of an application made by Egypt Exploration Fund on Petrie's behalf. Now, Maspero, who was also Vice-President of the E.E.F., happily gave the permit to the Englishman. Amélineau was only to find out in March 1900 when he made enquiries regarding

his resuming work after events had detained him for twelve months in France.

Petrie's seasons in 1899-1900 and 1900-1901 were occupied with the complete re-excavation of the tombs supposedly cleared by Amélineau. Much was recovered from the spoil-heaps, while the tombs themselves revealed large quantities of items overlooked or discarded by the Frenchman who was interested only in complete items. The re-excavation clearly showed the tomb had been modified at a later date to act as the tomb of Osiris, having had the 'Osiris bed' installed in it, and an entrance-staircase added for the convenience of pilgrims.

Through hundreds of years, the tomb was added to and altered by Kings right through to the 26th Dynasty. Due to the continuing royal sponsorship many Nobles and people of substance aimed to possess a tomb or cenotaph in the sacred vicinity of Osiris' tomb. Cenotaphs dating to the New Kingdom are not uncommon. Eventually, following the Persian invasion, interest in Umm el-Qaab receded, with only a few scraps of Roman pottery and glass coming from the site.

Thus came to an end the three millennia of the ancient history of what had once been the tomb of the Horus Djer and then the tomb of Osiris, making it one of the most hallowed spots in Egypt. The worship of Osiris continued until the end of paganism, when his role as saviour was taken over by Christ, whose cult was to share many of his features. The devotees of the new religion had little truck with their predecessors, and were responsible for many acts of vandalism in the places sacred to the old gods, including Umm el-Qaab. Then, ransacked and abandoned, the ancient tombs slumbered until their rude awakening under Amélineau's hoes, and then Petrie's more gentle sifting, in a time when more people know Osiris' name than at any time when his cult lived.

6 March 2007

The Wall-Paintings from the Tomb of Nebamun at Thebes

Dr Richard Parkinson, British Museum



Richard's talk this evening told of the work being undertaken in Gallery 61 of the British Museum and the conservation work being carried out on the tomb paintings of the 18th Dynasty official Nebamun (c.1325 BC). He mentioned a TV programme about the work will be shown in the near future and is something to look out for.

The paintings themselves are very well known due to their beauty and skill of execution. Displayed

in the museum in frames like old masters, they depict scenes of daily life.

It is believed the tomb itself was open during the Armana period. When this era ended, any reference to Akenhaten and his time as ruler was hacked from the wall paintings.

Sadly, the origin of the paintings is not known. Sold to the British Museum by Henry Salt, he only explains they were 'discovered by my man?', but no detail of where they were found was given. They are thought to come from a small, intact Theban tomb chapel probably discovered around 1820. The museum decided to take paintings depicting subjects they thought would be most popular with visitors showing food, fluffy animals and naked dancing women! In a photograph of the paintings taken in 1872 the dancers no longer appear. They were 'removed' as they were probably too much for Victorian sensibilities.

In 1898 the paintings were inspected by the Marquis of Northampton who mentioned they were from Dra Abu'l-Naga. Although the imprint of the tomb wall remains on the back of the pictures, it is impossible to match this against known tomb walls. It is thought the material may come from the upper part of the site at Dra Abu'l-Naga because of the poor quality of the stone.

When it was decided the paintings were in need of conservation, the museum found the plaster of Paris in which the segments of paintings were set in 1832 was itself the cause of a lot of the damage. When the plaster was wet, the only way for the moisture to escape was up through the surface of the painting, bringing with it discolouration from the layer of ancient mud beneath and lifting the painted colours. The plaster is now being painstakingly removed with dentist drills. It was first thought the work would take one conservator 2 years, but has already taken much longer with a group of conservators.

Today, the plan for the gallery is that it will give visitors an impression of how the paintings looked on the walls of the tomb. Other items will be displayed within the context of the paintings to show what life was like in Egypt in contrast with the idealised version appearing in the paintings. A visit to the museum when the work is complete will be a must.

The free and fluid style of the paintings differs from the usual more formal style of tomb painting. The cattle are similar to prehistoric cave drawings which are alive with movement and there is a texture and freedom of form not seen elsewhere. Famous for their beauty, they were obviously created by a master craftsman whose masterpiece will always be unsigned.

An Egyptian Night Out

El Tanbura

St George's, 22 February 2007

On a rather wet and miserable evening, several ESB members attended a concert at St George's.

'El Tanbura' is a group of veteran master musicians, singers, fishermen and Sufi philosophers. For the past 17 years they have

been custodians to some of Egypt's oldest folk traditions in their home of Port Said, the gateway to the Suez Canal. Their music is driven by the seductive call of the *Simsimiyya* – an ancient lyre dating back to the times of the Pharaohs.

The origins of the *Simsimiyya* are lost in the mist of time and legend, but its modern history came to life in the 1930s, when café owners in Port Said often employed a player to entertain the customers in the old smoking dens. Using influences from other styles of local folk music and local Sufi beliefs, the instrument quickly became popular, eventually drawing large audiences. A new repertoire known simply as *Simsimiyya* was born. Popularity was followed by a downturn after the war. Economic difficulties and commercialisation led to a decline of the tradition in the late 1970s and many of the old masters simply stopped performing, disillusioned and tired.

'El Tanbura's founder Zakaria Ibrahim first heard the *Simsimiyya* in Port Said as a young boy

in the 1950s. The sound stayed in his memory and in 1980 he decided to dedicate himself to seeking out the old masters to convince them to perform once again. In 1989 a small group of veteran performers came together to form the El Tanbura Group. At first they were laughed at, but the infectious atmosphere of their performances soon convinced others to join, and the band grew to include not only folk singers drawn from local fishermen, market traders and builders alongside master instrumentalists.

Band members dress in an eclectic mix of *gallabayehs*, jeans, *tarbush* (fez) and baseball caps and the performance was very informal and full of energy. We felt we were looking through a window at a really good party. The music was very atmospheric and carried everyone off to the alleys of Port Said and the smell of the spice market. An excellent show and highly recommended should they return to Bristol.

EGYPT SOCIETY OF BRISTOL

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

	2006		2005	
INCOME				
Membership fees	£1,075.00		£1,152.50	
Events: Meetings	£32.00		£20.00	
Parties:	£435.00		£420.00	
Raffle	£69.64		£77.00	
Trips:	£119.00		£0.00	
	£655.64		£517.00	
Sundries	£19.20		£5.95	
	£1,749.84		£1,675.45	
EXPENDITURE				
Speakers' costs: travel & hospitality	£624.16		£359.50	
Events: refreshments	£473.47		£535.37	
portorage	£92.58		£172.05	
Mailings:	£233.98		£135.47	
Donations out			£1,500.00	
Raffle prizes			£11.40	
Sundries (refunds)	£119.00		£31.16	
	£1,543.19		£2,744.95	
NET INCOME	£206.65		-£1,069.50	

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