ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 103 August / September 2016

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7th August	**The South Abydos Excavation Project: Yaser Mahmoud Hussein (Ministry of Antiquities, Egypt), Book Auction and Annual General Meeting**
4th September	**Pyramid evolution and construction in ancient Egypt: Stuart Baldwin**
2nd October	**Textile technology (with practical session): Rosalind Janssen**
6th November	**Inside the Step Pyramid**
4th December	**From here to eternity – walking from Deir el-Medina to the Valley of the Kings: Stephen Cross**

We are very pleased to announce that Yaser Mahmoud Hussein from the Ministry of Antiquities, Egypt, will be joining us at our AGM to present the excavations at South Abydos, (he is the field director). We will be supporting the South Abydos Excavation Project in the book auction.

Would you please, look through your Egyptology book collection (and others!) and see if there is anything that could benefit from a new loving home and bring them with you to the meeting.

In September our own member, Stuart Baldwin will be talking about pyramid evolution; starting with the Nile from six million years ago to the Aswan Dam; some burial customs and beliefs of the Ancient Egyptians leading to the concept of a pyramid will then be examined.

In the Old Kingdom, a period of about a hundred years will be discussed which was unsurpassed in the development of tombs from the mastaba to the perfect pyramid as exemplified by the Great Pyramid of Giza.

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 10th December, 10am-5.30pm, Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT.

Ancient Records, Ancient Lives? The History of Ancient Egypt from the Time of the Great Pyramid to the ending of the Middle Kingdom; a study day with John Romer.

Tickets: £40
Further information: http://www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury/study_days.htm

SEEKING SENENMUT : STATUES, STATUS & SCANDAL

At the beginning of June, Campbell Price, the curator of Egypt and Sudan at Manchester Museum, came to talk to us about one of the senior officials in Pharaoh Hatshepsut's court: Senenmut. Hatshepsut ruled Egypt from 1473-1458 BCE, and she generally seemed to do things

differently to her predecessors and successors. Technically she was ruling first as regent for, then alongside, Tutmosis III - but in reality she was the sole ruler of Egypt, surrounded by a small group of male advisors. Price made the comparison a couple of times in his talk to Elizabeth I (of England) - single woman as the ruler taking a traditionally male role, with a small collection of highly trusted male courtiers none of whom mention their wives terribly often when in the presence of their ruler.

In autobiographical texts Senenmut claims to be a rags-to-riches story, but Price pointed out that we need to take this with a pinch of salt. An Ancient Egyptian's autobiography is always written so as to make himself look particularly special and saying that you were promoted from obscurity to a high rank is a very good way to claim to be good at your job. But there is some corroborating evidence. He comes from Armant near Thebes, so near the religious centre of Egypt at the time. His parents' tomb was discovered almost intact (and the contents are now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York). His father Ramose probably wasn't part of the elite - he never seems to be referred to by high status titles. When Senenmut's mother Hatnofer died Ramose was reburied in her tomb - and she was buried with impressive grave goods. It seems likely that Hatnofer died after Senenmut had gained wealth and status and so he buried both his parents more lavishly than Ramose's original burial had been.

Senenmut may have had some military background prior to his entering the historical record. But Price noted that this is based on a single scene in one of Senenmut's tombs which might be there for symbolic reasons rather than autobiographical ones, so we can't be sure. Senenmut's first known job is as a tutor to Neferure, the daughter of Hatshepsut and her husband Tutmosis II (perhaps their only child). Being a tutor to royalty indicated that you were highly trusted, and gave you power through the close relationship with your charge. Senenmut references this job frequently in both texts and statues. One particularly unusual statue, which is now in the British Museum, shows Senenmut hugging the Princess protectively. This is an extremely unusual pose - it's unusual to see a commoner touching royalty at all, in fact it was a privilege to be allowed to be depicted kissing the Pharaoh's feet rather than the ground in front of his feet. So this statue shows that Senenmut is now very trusted and close to the royal family. The statue dates to a period before Hatshepsut becomes Pharaoh - when she's still using the title God's Wife of Amun instead. Senenmut is clearly trusted from early in Hatshepsut's reign.

Senenmut rises to high status at an interesting time. When Hatshepsut's husband Tutmosis II died, his heir Tutmosis III, was an infant and Hatshepsut (Tutmosis III's step mother) was in her late teens. There was nothing unusual in an older female relative becoming regent for an infant Pharaoh, but Hatshepsut took more power into her own hands than was usual. She also never remarried, so Price said there was a sort of male power vacuum at the top which Senenmut stepped in to fill. He was older than Hatshepsut, and clearly trusted, so it seems she felt she could rely on him. Although he started as tutor to Neferure he gained many more titles over his lifetime, including several which refer to him as a steward of one thing or another and several which refer to him as overseer of works for various things. These include titles that give him oversight of the wealth of the Pharaoh - he's connected with the treasury, with the gardens, with cattle, all of which are a part of wealth in this non-monetary society.

Senenmut may have been an architect as well, in particular he is credited as the creative mind behind Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri. Part of the evidence for this is that foundation deposits from some buildings from Hatshepsut's time contain name beads which have the names of both Hatshepsut and of Senenmut. In texts about himself Senenmut boasts about being an innovator, and about doing things that are new. This is unusual for an Ancient Egyptian, as they are generally very keen to talk about how they are upholding the proper order by doing things exactly as their forefathers did (regardless of the truth of that statement!). An example that Price gave us of this was Senenmut combining hieroglyphs into new cryptographic symbols - for instance one of Hatshepsut's names was Ma'atkare and there's a frieze decoration of repeated units of a snake (a form of Ma'at) sitting on a ka hieroglyph wearing a sun disk (Re). So Hatshepsut's name is therefore embedded into the decoration. There's also a statue of Senenmut protectively embracing this cryptographic form of Ma'atkare. Senenmut had more than one tomb built for himself. As with other contemporary tombs of the elite the decoration boasts about his possession or access to fashionable exotic luxury goods

and people. The decoration also boasts about his knowledge. In the interior of one of the tombs there is a star clock on the ceiling, which is intended to show that he's a man who has access to knowledge and to learning. Interestingly this is not a room that any living person would have access to - it's intended to demonstrate to the gods that Senenmut is a wise man. His sarcophagus is now in the Met Museum displayed near his parents' tomb contents. It has been badly damaged, but it's still easy to see that it was an oval shape. This is a case of him (a private individual) usurping a royal prerogative - sarcophagi of this shape were supposed to be just for the Pharaohs. Another indication of the high status he had achieved.

There are a lot of surviving statues of Senenmut, which means there must have been even more made. He says, in texts, that he wants to commission a lot of statues so that he will be remembered after his death. He had no wife or children, so if there weren't images of him in the temples then who would remember his name? But sadly for Senenmut his name and image were defaced after his death, along with those of Hatshepsut. There is only one surviving full writing of his name left in his tombs (next to a curse on anyone who damages his tomb!). It's clear from the sorts of damage (like a line through an image of him that separates his head from his body) that he was deliberately attacked posthumously but it's not entirely clear why. It may be because he was personally disliked; or perhaps his closeness to royalty was thought inappropriate. Or maybe he was just caught up in the posthumous destruction of Hatshepsut's name - as her closest advisor he too was attacked.

His memory did survive for a few hundred years in some form or another. There is a statue fragment (in Geneva now) which Price believes to be a 22nd Dynasty piece which makes a reference to Senenmut. And in modern times there have been a variety of fictional treatments of Senenmut, and in particular his relationship with Hatshepsut with "torrid love affair" being a favourite way to portray this. Price pointed out that there's actually no real evidence for this - even the famous graffiti in a cave near the temple at Deir el-Bahri that is often described as a satirical representation of Hatshepsut and Senenmut having sex isn't actually labelled with names. And in the larger context of the wall it's on, there are other doodles and so on that would seem to have nothing to do with Senenmut and Hatshepsut. There are also even weirder modern associations - like a US college fraternity named after him!

After this overview of the life of Senenmut, Price returned to the subject of Senenmut's statues. Senenmut has the highest number of surviving statues for a non-royal Egyptian, and he also appears to have invented or popularised some of the later standard poses. For instance he popularised the statues where a person kneels presenting a god. As Price mentioned nearer the start of the talk Senenmut also had some very unusual statues like the one of him protectively hugging Neferure. The point of a statue in Ancient Egyptian times was to stand in a temple and receive offerings and attention from the living to keep the deceased happy in the afterlife - and so having an unusual statue would draw attention to itself.

This was a really interesting talk - Price is a good speaker, and he closed with a very intriguing piece of detective work about a statue held in the Manchester Museum store.

Margaret Patterson

Howard Carter: An Alternative View of the Man Through His Art: Lee Young

At the beginning of July Lee Young came to talk to us about Howard Carter as an artist (rather than as an archaeologist). She is an independent researcher associated with the Griffith Institute in Oxford where the bulk of Carter's notes and archives are kept. Although she was talking to us today about Carter she said that her real research interest is in the female artists whose works are represented in the Griffith Institute collections.

She began by sketching us a quick verbal picture of Howard Carter's character: he was contrary, stubborn, opinionated and sometimes rude. He was short-tempered and didn't suffer fools gladly. He also had a chip on his shoulder about his humble origins - going so far in later

years as to re-write his background into something that he felt was more "suitable". But to offset this picture of a proud man, Young pointed out that Carter's work recording the Egyptian reliefs required a great degree of artistic humility as he had to bury his own skill and artistic style in the service of accurately recording the ancient artists' skills.

Howard Carter was born on 9th May 1874 in London, as the youngest son of a large family. His parents, Samuel Carter and Martha Joyce Carter were both originally from Swaffham in Norfolk. His grandfather (Carter) was a gamekeeper there, and parts of the family still lived there. Samuel Carter had moved to London to work as an artist, and the whole family were very artistic. Samuel Carter painted in a high Victorian style and his work was well regarded at the time. He mostly painted animal portraits for the gentry but he also worked as the principal animal illustrator for the London Illustrated News for 20 years.

Howard was a sickly child, and as a result of this was poorly educated. What schooling he did get was in a day school rather than a public school, which caused friction in his dealings with the Victorian elite in later life (and contributed to his embarrassment at his origins). As an older child he was sent to live in Norfolk with some of his aunts and he learnt to love nature there, spending a lot of time painting the wildlife; he was particularly interested in birds. However he wasn't able to follow up on this interest, instead returning to London to work in the family business painting pets. Apparently despite generally liking animals he loathed lapdogs, which were often the subjects he was hired to paint.

In 1890 the Egypt Exploration Fund (precursor of the Egypt Exploration Society) were setting up a project to archaeologically survey the monuments in Egypt because there were fears that they would also soon be so damaged there would be nothing left. The first season a team headed by Percy Newberry went to Beni Hassan to begin work there, and initially it was hoped they'd finish that site in a season and move on the following year. However the work took much longer than anticipated and it was decided to spend the following year there as well, and take along another artist. Howard Carter got the job - through the recommendation of Lord Amherst, who Carter had painted pictures for and who had encouraged Carter's interest in Amherst's Egyptian collection. Carter was considered particularly suitable for the job as he was not a gentleman - the job was unpaid but expenses were covered and the EEF thought a gentleman might run up larger bills than they wanted to pay!

Before Carter went to Egypt he was given time to study for his role - he had a permit to allow him to draw in the British Museum and he also studied the work of Robert Hay. Hay had recorded several monuments and inscriptions in the early 19thC, and after studying those records Carter regarded Hay as better than many of Carter's contemporaries. In 1891, at the age of only 17, Carter travelled to Egypt for the first time. He first stayed in Cairo for a while; visiting the Pyramids of course, and the Museum and also spent a lot of time drawing and painting animals in the zoo. He also met Petrie for the first time in Cairo, and liked him and his attitude.

Once in Beni Hassan Carter was put to work by Percy Newberry on recording the reliefs in the Oryx Nomarch tombs. Young told us that Carter liked the views at Beni Hassan, and the archaeological site, but the accommodation was just "good enough for those who aren't too fussy"! However Carter didn't approve of the methods used by Newberry to record the reliefs - the technique he was using involved tracing the reliefs then sending them back to England to be inked in, in black, by people who had never seen the originals and weren't trained artists. The drawings were then reproduced at a much smaller scale for publication and so fine details that he had managed to record were lost. At first Carter did as he was told, and impressed Newberry with his diligence and the speed with which he worked. As the work was progressing quickly Carter was also instructed to paint watercolour facsimiles of parts of the scenes. Young showed us several examples of these, including many birds and animals. The photo below is one I took when the EEG visited the Egypt Exploration Society a couple of years ago - during that visit we saw several of Carter's drawings that the EES have in their archives.

The next site Carter went to was Deir el Bersha, which is near Beni Hassan - one of the scenes at this site is the famous one that shows an extremely large (6.8m tall) statue being moved by a large team of Egyptian workers. While working on recording the reliefs here he was able to exercise more control over the finished product. The figures were no longer blacked in as they had previously been, and Carter managed to arrange for the published drawings to be a larger scale so the fine details were more visible. His paintings and drawings from this site are still very useful to archaeologists today as they show details that no longer exist - the site at Deir el Bersha has suffered a lot of damage over time from rock falls to vandalism.

In the late 19th Century the big goal of Egyptologists was to find Akhenaten's tomb. When it was found, Petrie went to see it and took Carter with him. Young said that one of the drawings that Carter made at the site was his first published archaeological drawing. After this trip Carter went to Amarna with Petrie to work as his apprentice. He got the job by accident - the original candidate, Marcus Blackden, had been sent home in disgrace and Carter was the available person. Petrie was, famously, initially unimpressed with Carter - too much an artist, too little an archaeologist. But Carter turned out to be more useful than that initial impression.

In 1893 Carter was assigned by the EEF to Deir el-Bahri as the principle epigrapher. Young reminded us at this point of how little time had passed - Carter is still only 19 years old. But as principle epigrapher he had a lot more control over how the work was done. He used his artistic abilities to draw the scenes freehand, and was able over the 6 years he was at the site to employ assistants who were also artistic enough to work in the same fashion (including one of his brothers). The EEF eventually published 6 volumes of plates from Carter and his team's work at Deir el-Bahri, to great acclaim, and the standard of work was much better than previous expeditions had produced.

After his time at Deir el-Bahri Carter was appointed as the Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt - a prestigious appointment that served to reinforce his liking for archaeology. During these years he was still working as an artist - in particular he did the drawings for Theodore Davis's publication of Yuya and Tuya's tomb. Carter was regarded as very efficient and capable in his position as Inspector, but after he was transferred to Lower Egypt he famously fell out with the authorities. Young told us the story briefly, as it's so well known - some French tourists went on a rampage damaging both monuments and their Egyptian guardians. Carter took the side of the Egyptians, feeling that they were doing their jobs and the tourists were undeniably causing damage. However, permitting the guardians to defend themselves was regarded as insulting to French dignity. When Carter refused to apologise he was transferred to a less prestigious post and then subsequently resigned feeling humiliated.

From his resignation in late 1905 to 1909 (when he started work for Lord Carnarvon) Carter lived off his wits and through selling paintings. Young showed us several examples of the sort of work he did. This ranged from landscapes and the major monuments for tourists, through to work destined for archaeological publications. She told us that a lot of the information about Carter during these years comes from his correspondence with Mrs Mars, a wealthy client of his for whom he painted several paintings.

Carter joined Lord Carnarvon's third season in Egypt, although for some time initially he was working doing drawings for a project of Alan Gardiner's. This didn't suit Carter, as he was not fond of Gardiner - Young explained that Carter thought Gardiner had been making insinuations against Carter's friends. Gardiner's project was never finished, but he kept the drawings and

they are now in the Griffith Institute. Young said that not only are they still a useful reference for modern archaeologists but they also showcase Carter's maturity and skill as an artist.

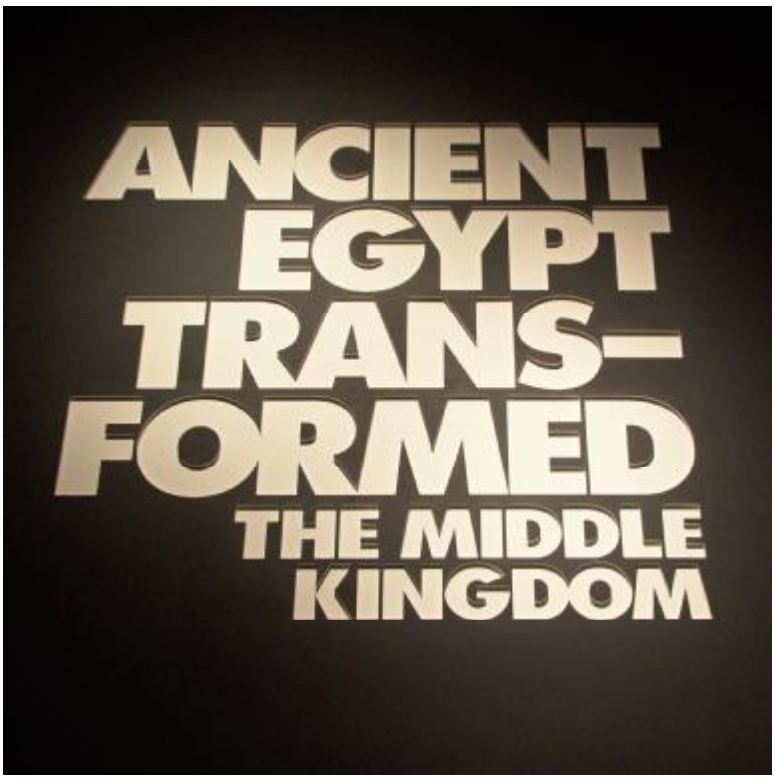
In 1922 Carter made the discovery that made him famous - that of Tutankhamun's tomb. Young said that Carter drew everything during the excavations. His record cards for every object have little sketches of said object, carefully annotated and also beautiful. As well as showing us several of these cards Young also showed us some of the newly colourised versions of Burton's photos of the excavation - a little tangential but interesting to see!

Young finished her talk by telling us Carter's own thoughts on the copying of reliefs. In later life he wrote several essays with a view to a possible autobiography. These included his firm opinion that the epigraphy work needed to be done by a proper artist - that this was the only way to not only capture all the detail but also give a proper appreciation of and respect for the skill of the ancient artists. As Young pointed out, it's not clear that he would approve of modern techniques - which are a return to the tracing of reliefs that he'd so disapproved of when he first went to Egypt.

This was an interesting talk - often one hears about Carter as archaeologist with a footnote that he was an accomplished artist, but here Young showed that you can tell the story of his life with the opposite emphasis with just as much justification.

Margaret Patterson

Ancient Egypt Transformed: The Middle Kingdom (exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art)



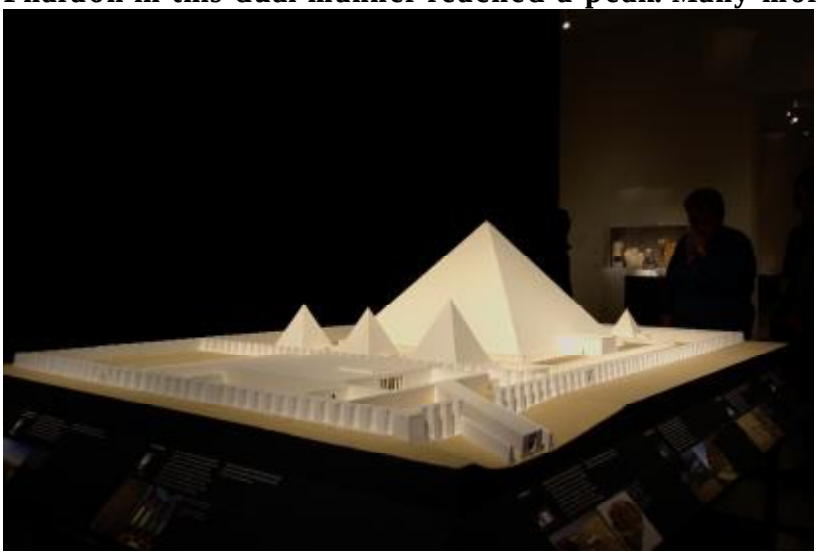
The Middle Kingdom was regarded by later Ancient Egyptians as their "classical" age - for instance one of the teaching texts from the New Kingdom is about this era. It was probably composed in the 18th Dynasty, but it tells of a vision that Senwosret I has of his father Amenemhat I after Amenemhat's death. In that vision Amenemhat I talks about the proper ways to be a king. We often almost overlook the Middle Kingdom, as being "just" that bit between the Giza Pyramids and the time of the Valley of the Kings.

They let us take photos inside the exhibition, so I have a small set up on flickr: https://flic.kr/s/aHskwUPtRm

The exhibition opened with a room that looked at the history of the early Middle Kingdom, and at the broad sweep of the development of artistic styles over this period. After the end of the Old Kingdom centralised government had broken down and although there were Pharaohs in name they didn't rule the whole country in practice. The reunification of Egypt took place during the 11th Dynasty, in the reign of Montuhotep II. Before reunification Montuhotep II's power base was in Thebes, and he ruled the southern part of the country. The art style associated with Montuhotep II is initially a local Theban style, but once he's conquered the northern part of the country there is a change to incorporate Old Kingdom styles and themes into the art. The key features of art from his reign are crisp outlines, thick lips and muscular limbs. In the 12th Dynasty Amenemhat I moved the capital north to modern day Lisht, which is about 20 miles south of Memphis. This is when

the Pharaohs restarted building pyramids for their tombs. The art from his reign was generally in low relief, and had much more delicate moulding.

The next room of the exhibition covered the later Middle Kingdom, with a particular emphasis on statuary of the Pharaoh. The Ancient Egyptians were fond of seeing the world as made up of dualities, and their theories of kingship were no exception to this. The Pharaoh had a dual nature, and was both divine and human. During the Middle Kingdom the representation of the Pharaoh in this dual manner reached a peak. Many more statues of the Pharaoh were made as compared to earlier periods (which can be seen as a manifestation of the power of the Pharaoh). In these statues the Pharaoh was represented both as a divinity and as a worshipper. During the 12th Dynasty there was a change in representation of the Pharaoh from youthful features to more mature and careworn features (a visual reflection of a change in their ideas about kingship) - for instance statues of Senwosret III display this new style. The last great Pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom was Senwosret III's son Amenemhat III (who ruled as a co-regent with his father for 20 years). After this the 13th Dynasty was composed of several Pharaohs with short reigns, and often not related to their predecessor. And the art changes again, gone are the individualised representations of mature Pharaohs and back are youthful features this time coupled with a more stylised image which doesn't seem to be of an individual.



Having established the chronology and the broad changes in the art, the exhibition next looked at how we know about this period. Or rather, specifically how the Met Museum comes to have so many Middle Kingdom artefacts. The Museum has been involved in many excavations in Egypt, of note in this context are their work at Middle Kingdom pyramid complexes at both Lisht and Dahshur. In this room there was a video showing some of the excavations, and a large (modern) model of the pyramid complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur. Evidence from graffiti found, showed that the complex remained standing until the late New Kingdom; and secondly that despite having this pyramid complex built and a sarcophagus put in it Senwosret III wasn't buried there, he was buried in Abydos. Which seems like an awful lot of effort to go to "just" for the symbolism (I assume), but that does seem a constant of Egyptian culture.

The next couple of rooms looked at the representations and roles of the elite other than the Pharaoh - starting with the royal women. It's noticeable that these women are all defined by their relationship to the Pharaoh - they are all titled things like "King's Wife" or "King's Daughter". Egypt sometimes gets held up as being a "more egalitarian" society by ancient standards, and it was compared to the later Athenian Greeks for instance, but that's a pretty low bar by modern standards. The women acted as the glue that bound the elite to the king (particularly in the 13th Dynasty) as the Pharaoh's wives frequently came from the elite families. They also had a religious role - the mythology of kingship held that the king is the son of his actual mother and a god, so she was an important part of this narrative (if a rather passive one). Royal women were also linked with Hathor, who brings up Horus in various of the myths (and the Pharaoh is an embodiment of Horus). Of the jewellery in this section I was particularly struck by the similarity in styles/motifs between this and some jewellery we had seen earlier on our visits to the Met belonging to minor wives of Tutmosis III who lived some five centuries after these Middle Kingdom women.

The level of power and the roles of the Pharaoh's officials varied across the time period of the Middle Kingdom. At first the country was still fairly decentralised, much as it had been in the First Intermediate Period. Control was brought more and more into the hands of a centralised government over the 12th Dynasty. Then in the 13th Dynasty the Pharaohs were weak and the elite effectively ran the country. This section of the exhibition had quite a few statues & stelae from the Pharaoh's non-royal subjects - including relatively low ranking officials. The Middle Kingdom was a time when even lower ranking officials and the non-elite were more likely to be able to commission relatively good quality statues.

In the iconography of Egyptian art how the country interacts with foreigners is clear: they are defeated, and then the Pharaoh smites them. Of course the truth is more nuanced and complicated than that. Some conquest (and colonisation) does take place - Nubia is conquered in Senwosret I's time, for instance. But there's also a lot of evidence of co-existence with other peoples. The Egyptians traded with Greece and with the Levant, and foreigners lived within Egyptian borders. One of the pieces in this section was a stela with the Tale of Sinhue carved on it, which is one of the great pieces of Egyptian literature and is set at the time of Senwosret I's accession. The protagonist flees into self-imposed exile outside of Egypt for much of the story, making it particularly relevant for another look at how the ancient Egyptians regarded the outside world.

The next section was about life in the Middle Kingdom - illustrated using objects from burials, including tomb models. The Egyptians put them in their tombs to provide themselves with food and other necessities for their eternal afterlife. But from a modern persons' perspective they're useful to tell us what the life of an Egyptian was really like, and how they organised the various production systems - like slaughterhouses, granaries and so on. Burials might also include animal figurines - some to provide food, some for symbolic reasons and some to provide pets in the afterlife. They noted in the labelling that cats weren't yet fully domesticated at this point, although were definitely on the road towards it. Family and community were clearly important to the Middle Kingdom Egyptians - given the way that figurines and stelae generally depict not just the primary tomb owner but also their spouse and children.

Having used tomb goods to look at what they tell us about life the next section was about death - and I was particularly struck by the coffin with a mummy in it. I knew already that they laid the dead on their sides during the Middle Kingdom period & it was still striking to see it. Death for the Egyptians was a journey between two worlds and although ideas changed during the Middle Kingdom they stayed within that framework of the deceased going to somewhere else. During the early Middle Kingdom the emphasis was on offerings and providing an eternal supply of food. Later on in the Middle Kingdom the emphasis shifts to the rebirth of the dead (and this is when the Coffin Texts start to appear). This period is also when the

first shabtis are made, and when the heart scarab becomes important. Royal symbols start to appear in the tombs of non-royal individuals, as part of linking the deceased with Osiris.

By the Middle Kingdom the Egyptians had come to believe that the god Osiris was buried in one of the tombs at Abydos - we now know that the tomb they picked was the tomb of Djer who was the 3rd Pharaoh of the 1st Dynasty. Abydos therefore became an important cult site during this period, and many people made pilgrimages there. They often left stelae as offerings, or statues, so that they would be a permanent spectator or part of the processions there. This pilgrimage was also represented in the tomb with model boats so that they could continue to undertake it in the afterlife.

The next to last part of the exhibition was about temples. It's always important to remember that temples in the ancient Egyptian religion didn't have the same function as a Christian church - very much not a place where the public worshipped. Instead temples were secluded places where the god resided, and where the king could go and perform the appropriate and necessary rituals. The king was always the "true actor" in temple rituals, even though, in practice, the priests stand in for him. In some ways it was a mutual appreciation society: the king worshipped the god and in return the god blessed the king. In the Middle Kingdom temples were commissioned by the Pharaoh, for instance the White Chapel of Senwosret I at Karnak, in earlier periods it was less centralised and more down to the local communities. Right near the end of this section was one of my favourite pieces of statuary from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, on loan to the exhibition - a head of the god Sobek!

The exhibition finished by considering what happened to the Middle Kingdom monuments and statuary in later years. The statues might be buried once they were superfluous - they were sacred objects so you couldn't destroy them. But there's only space for so many statues of Pharaohs in any given space so after a while you need to move the old ones out to make space for the new Pharaoh. And temples and statues alike might be usurped by a later Pharaoh (particularly Ramesses II) chiselling off the original name and writing his own name in its place. This wasn't just a case of thrift - it was also because the Egyptians looked back to the Middle Kingdom (and the 12th Dynasty in particular) with pride. Claiming its monuments as your own, would link you with this cultural high point.

Margaret Patterson

MAGIC BRICKS – WHAT ARE THEY?

We have all heard of magic bricks and know they come from burial chambers; but what are they and what were they for?

Made from unfired mud, their magical significance came from that medium, mud; plants grew in mud so it symbolised birth and rebirth.

Mothers were placed on mud bricks for childbirth and the infant was placed on bricks immediately after birth whilst the gods decided its destiny.

Found in tombs dating from the New Kingdom only about 100 persons are known to have used the ritual, elite and royalty. They were placed in niches on the four sides of the burial chamber and plastered over, or as the spell indicates "cover its face", or on the floor of the chamber. They were intended to protect the deceased against the enemies of Osiris and symbolised rebirth.

Each brick and associated amuletic figure (or drawing of the figure) was inscribed with a short text from Spell 151 of the Book of the Dead. The inscription is either incised or written on the top. The bricks were placed at the four cardinal points and their purpose was to prevent the deceased's enemies approaching.

North: wooden mummiform figure (identified as a shabti in the spell) "casts down the caster down and pushes aside the pusher aide", it also offers to do agricultural work on behalf of the deceased.

South: reed with wick representing a torch "to burn the path of those who wish the deceased harm" and it "prevents sand from choking the secret chamber".

East: unbaked clay recumbent jackal on shrine (Anubis) who "repels the anger and rage of an inimical being".

West: faience djed pillar "keeps off the one whose steps are backwards and whose face is hidden".

Some bricks are now little more than lumps of mud, but these from the British Museum from the tomb of Henutmehyt (19th dyn) at Thebes are in excellent condition.

King Tutankhamun had five bricks, four in the walls of the burial chamber and another one (the torch) on the ground of the store room, by the large Anubis figure. He also had an unusual one, of Osiris on the brick base, inscribed with the text associated with the Anubis amulet from the east wall.

Janet Brewer

Thanks this month to Margaret Patterson and Janet Brewer

The Essex Egyptology Group Committee