



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 1st June Music and Dance in Ancient Egypt
Suzanne Lax-Bojtos
- 6th July Amelia Edwards: the artist
Clive Barham Carter
- 3rd August Members' 10-minutes presentations, book auction and AGM
- 7th September Kings Valley in the Amarna Period
Dylan Bickerstaff
- 5th October Beyond Indiana Jones: The Ark of the Covenant and Egyptian
ritual processional furniture
David Falk

JUNE MEETING

Our June speaker, Suzanne Lax-Bojtos was born in the Czech Republic but has been living in the UK since the late 70's where she obtained an MPhil from University College London in Egyptology.

She has been working in adult education for many years and has been teaching Egyptology at Birkbeck College for some 17 years. She is very passionate about educating adults and has seen quite extraordinary changes in people's lives when they took up courses after retirement.

Besides lecturing she organises and runs specialized Study Tours to the interesting and unusual sites of Ancient Egypt and its neighbours and short trips to the many Egyptological collections that are located in various European cities and the USA.

JULY MEETING

Our July speaker, Clive Barham Carter studied history and Egyptology at Cambridge, he taught history at Charterhouse, becoming Housemaster, deputy head and acting Head. Since retirement he lectures at Guildford Institute, U3A and is a NADFAS lecturer. He will be talking to us about "Amelia Edwards: the artist", she was the founder of the Egypt Exploration Society.

AUGUST MEETING

This is notice of the Essex Egyptology Group Annual General Meeting which will be held on Sunday 3rd August 2014. Any items for the agenda should be forwarded to the Secretary (janet.brewer@btinternet.com) . At that meeting we will also be holding our Members' event; 10-minute talks on any Egyptological subject, please volunteer.

Our famous book auction will also be held, so scan your bookshelves and donate any Egyptology books you can part with; it will clear the way to buy others at the auction. Please bring your books and Dick Sellicks will store them until August. We need to decide which good cause should benefit from the auction and a vote will be taken at the June and July meetings;

our three suggestions are "Friends of the Petrie Museum" (to donate towards their ongoing conservation projects), "Egypt Exploration Society Library" (for conservation purposes), and the "Friends of Nekhen" (excavation at Hierakonpolis; Dr Renee Friedman is our November speaker).

REVIEW OF MAY MEETING

"The Eloquent Peasant" Linda Steynor

On May 11 Linda Steynor came to talk to us about a Middle Kingdom Egyptian poem called "The Eloquent Peasant". She started her talk by telling us the plot of the story. This poem follows an Egyptian small market trader, Khunanup, who travels from his home on the outskirts of Egypt to the capital. The journey is not easy, and on his way there he has to travel along a very narrow path between the Nile and the farmlands. Partway along he meets a bully who has hung his washing across the path - in order to get past, Khunanup accidentally walks on the washing (and his donkey eats a small amount of grain). The bully beats him, and confiscates his donkey and goods, an over the top response to such a minor transgression. Khunanup continues on to the capital where he petitions Rensi, the Chief Justice, to put right the wrong he was done. But Rensi gives no answer. 9 times Khunanup petitions him, and 9 times he is met with silence. Unbeknownst to him the Pharaoh is so entertained by Khunanup's eloquence that he has told Rensi not to answer and to have scribes write down what Khunanup says so it can be read to the Pharaoh. Pharaoh also tells Rensi to organise food for not just Khunanup but also for his family back home in the provinces. But Khunanup doesn't know any of this and is in despair by the end, even considering suicide; which so appals Rensi that he breaks his silence and passes judgement in favour of Khunanup, giving him back not only his own goods but also the goods of the bully (and the bully himself to be a slave).

The poem was re-discovered in modern times by agents of Henry Salt, the British consul in Egypt, around 1880. Sadly there is no provenance for the first copies of it that were found. I think she told us there are six surviving papyri with this poem written on them, and when we know their provenance it is generally from a noble's tomb. This is quite a lot of surviving copies for a 4,000 year old poem, so it must have been a popular work, which people wanted to take with them as part of their library for eternity. It is believed to have been composed in the 12th Dynasty, around the reign of Amenemhat III or Senusret III. The story is set in the 10th Dynasty, in a fairly obscure Pharaoh's time. But this is thought to be a device to stop the author getting into trouble for criticising the current ruler - quite likely the themes of corruption in justice and bureaucracy were still relevant in the contemporary time of the author. Early 20th century Egyptologists and translators of the poem into English weren't particularly impressed with it - calling it things like "turgid" and "perverted" (!?). Steynor was quite clear that this said more about those critics than it does about the poem - it is actually a sophisticated piece of literature.

Steynor then moved on to talk about the structure of the poem, and its use of metaphor. The story is not told in a strictly linear fashion. The bulk of the poem is the nine petitions that Khunanup makes to Rensi, and each of these tells the same story and makes the same plea in a different way. As well as this repetition of the narrative there are also cross references between the various petitions which enhance the cyclical nature of the structure. Steynor's own work is on the metaphors used in the poem - this was the subject of her PhD thesis. She showed us a section of how she had tracked the metaphors in each line of the poem in a rather fascinating colour coded chart. She has broken the metaphors into three broad groups - water metaphors, grain

metaphors and justice metaphors. Then within these large groups she identified sub-themes and looked at how all of these interweave and reinforce themselves and each other throughout the poem.

The water metaphors are often based on the destructive and chaotic nature of water and water dwelling creatures. So Khunanup was saying things to Rensi like "Don't be like the crocodile which pounces on the unwary", or exhorting him to follow Ma'at (or order) rather than being like the chaos of water. Other uses of water imagery invoke ships and sailing - for instance Khunanup telling Rensi that he is the helmsman of the state and needs to steer a straight course. Grain metaphors are about sustenance, and the themes these are intended to evoke are both the literal (as Khunanup believes his family to be beginning to starve in his long absence) and the spiritual (by refusing justice Rensi is failing to nourish the state). Some of the justice metaphors are still familiar to us today - the scales of justice for instance. Of course to an Ancient Egyptian that would first make one think of the weighing of the heart after death, and Khunanup invokes that directly in a variety of ways during his petitions.

Steynor finished by talking about resonances with the Eloquent Peasant in modern literature. She gave us several examples, but the one that stuck with me most was that it is a poem of social criticism and satire so similar in genre to George Orwell's "1984". And that one possible reason for its popularity across Ancient Egyptian history might have been that the themes of corruption in the state were always relevant for each new generation.

This was a fascinating talk, and it was clear that in the hour and a half we had only been given a small taste of what could be learnt about, and from, this poem.

Margaret Patterson

Ancient Lives, New Discoveries

The British Museum has a new Egyptian related exhibition that opened on 22 May and will continue till 30 November. John and I visited on 23rd May and we first went to the curator's introduction talk (given by John Taylor) and then visited the exhibition itself. I had been going to write about the talk and the exhibition separately, but the talk really was an introduction, overview and some additional context for the exhibition rather than something separate. Taylor was a good speaker, so I am glad we went to the talk first, but I am not sure there was much in it that wasn't in the exhibition itself (although that in part is because the exhibition is so well organised and clearly labelled). So if you decide to go to one of the other Curator's Introduction talks (I think there are another 4 across the run of the exhibition) then I would suggest doing it before, rather than after, you see the exhibition.

The subjects of the exhibition are 8 of the mummies from the British Museum's collection (which totals about 120 mummies) and the Museum has used new technology and software to look at the bodies (and other objects) within the mummies. In the past the only way of investigating this was to unwrap the mummies, which is a destructive and irreversible process. The British Museum never unwrapped any of its mummies, and from the 1960s onwards has tried to use new technology to look inside the mummies in a non-invasive fashion. Taylor showed us some old imagery of one of the mummies (that of Tamut) - the X-rays from the 60s, CT scans from 2004, and the new CT scans from 2012. The improvement in the imagery was very clear - the modern ones are very detailed even compared to 2004 and the new software that lets them peel back layers or slice through the image means that much more can be discovered than was previously possible.

The exhibition was organised around the 8 people - so each mummy was displayed with a nearby screen showing the imagery that has been obtained. These screens weren't interactive, instead it cycled through what could be seen peeling back the layers from the wrappings down to the skeleton and back, rotating as it went. Parts of each mummy were highlighted with false colour, and labelled to explain particular items of interest. There were also interactive screens for some of the mummies. These weren't like the virtual autopsy table that they had briefly had set up in the permanent gallery with the predynastic natural mummy last year. That had let you control a lot of different aspects of what you were seeing - peel back layers, rotate, press icons to get labels and so on. These were much more streamlined - effectively you could move forwards or backwards through predetermined sequence. The right choice for the exhibition, I think, because it meant that while you could spend some time looking at details that interested you, you didn't end up overwhelmed with fiddly controls (or have to wait ages while someone fuffed ineffectually at the screen without ever looking at something interesting!). As well as the imagery (which was obviously the bulk of the exhibition) they had some key objects to illustrate things of note about the lives or deaths of these individuals.

The mummies were chosen to represent a wide spread of dates and types of individuals. Taylor explained that they were also partly chosen by picking mummies that had looked interesting in previous investigations. The first person was Gebelein Man B who is one of the naturally mummified bodies discovered in the pre-dynastic cemetery at Gebelein. He was not the same man that they had previously scanned and discovered met a violent death, he's another from roughly the same era - 5,500 years ago. The particularly notable feature here is that as he was naturally mummified his internal organs remain, and there are signs of his last meal still in his gut. Technology isn't yet at the point where you can figure out what that was, not without damaging the mummy to take a sample anyway.

Gebelein Man B was followed by a short display about food in Ancient Egypt, including a model brewery from a Middle Kingdom tomb. They didn't just have pictures of the food they also had some actual foodstuffs found in tombs.

They don't have any mummies from the next couple of thousand years in the exhibition (so no Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom or New Kingdom), which seemed an odd choice. But perhaps their more intact and interesting mummies are either older or newer? And so the second person was a linen-wrapped mummy from the 26th Dynasty. This man had two interesting features pointed out - the first was that they had expected a female skeleton because the coffin he was purchased in, back in the 19th Century, was that of a woman. Sadly quite often in the earlier days of Egyptology people would dig up mummies and coffins then recombine them to make more "attractive" packages for sale to museums, and this seems to have been the case here. The other notable feature was that during the brain removal part of his mummification, the embalmer had had a bit of a disaster - one of the tools had snapped off, and so there is a part of this tool inside the man's skull. This is very exciting from the perspective of archaeologists because here is an actual demonstration that these sorts of tools were actually used for brain removal rather than just speculation from the shapes of the objects and written sources. In another really cool bit of new technology they had used the CT scan data for that tool as the input for a 3D printer, and so had an exact replica (in plastic) of the tool on display.

Just after his mummy was a little display about medicine, and organ removal during mummification. They have CT scanned one of the still sealed canopic jars from the Museum collection, and saw that inside it there wasn't just the wrapped up organs, but

also a protective (in a magical sense) coffinette for the package. I had no idea there was more than the tissue itself in some of these jars. This section of the exhibition also pointed out the signs of pathologies to watch out for on the mummies. Most things don't show up in the bones or dessicated flesh of the mummies, so most of what can be seen about these people is that they suffered from awful tooth problems. Most of the adult mummies had signs of abscesses (an in the case of the 26th Dynasty man he might well have been killed by them, they were that bad). Interestingly two of the mummies (Tamut and Pediamenet) also show signs of atherosclerosis - the calcified plaque in their arteries shows up in the CT scan. Taylor was asked about this in the talk, and said that in Tamut's case it might be because her rank meant she would have a much more meat based diet than the average Egyptian. And so her diet would be rich in the sorts of fats that would lead to atherosclerosis.

The next three mummies were still in their original cartonage wrappings, and so we know their names. First was Tamut (full name: Tayesmutengebtiu) who was a high-ranking priest's daughter during the 22nd Dynasty. Her mummy case is one of my favourites in the museum (it's normally on display in the permanent galleries) so it was nice to see the person inside it. She was covered with amulets inside her wrappings - they had created replicas using a 3D printer of several large ones. There were also little wax figures inside her representing the four sons of Horus (who are also the shapes that canopic jars are made in) in the places where her organs would have been before mummification.

Pediamenet was a doorkeeper in a temple who lived during the 25th Dynasty. The inner sanctuaries of temples in Egypt were restricted access for priests only and Pediamenet would have guarded a door separating the restricted areas from the more public ones. Taylor showed us a couple of examples of how doorkeepers were represented in Egyptian reliefs - generally as lazy! Pediamenet's mummification had clearly been a bit more slapdash than the other examples in the exhibition. His head had fallen off during the process, and had been put back on using a couple of sticks, clearly visible in the scan images. And when it came time to put him into the cartonage case, they discovered it was a bit small, so he had an undecorated extension at the end to cover his feet!

Tjayasetimu was one of two children in the exhibition, and despite her young age she had already had a job; she was a temple singer (perhaps also a musician). She had died between the age of 7 and 9, which they could tell because which adult teeth were present in her jaw waiting to erupt. Interestingly her mummy case represents her as an adult woman, which might reflect Egyptian afterlife beliefs for children. They had surrounded her body in the exhibition with examples of the instruments she might have played. As her hair was particularly well preserved they next had a small display of Egyptian hair care implements, plus some actual hair. The most spectacular bit was an actual New Kingdom era wig, which had clearly seen some use because the top layer is bleached from exposure to the sun. They also had some locks of hair that had been buried with people.

Next was a rather unusual looking mummy - sadly not enough is known about where he was found to know who he was or why he was wrapped as he was. The body is wrapped to mimic a stylised version of what he may have looked like in life. A face and other decoration was painted on the finished wrappings. Notably his wrapped body appears to have some feminine and some masculine features, and this was one reason this mummy was chosen for the exhibition. The skeleton had unambiguously male structures, and the bits that look like breasts are very clearly padding in the wrappings.

Taylor said that other features of the mummified body suggest that this is supposed to represent an overweight man's chest rather than female breasts.

The last of the artificially mummified bodies was that of a 2 year old boy who lived during the Roman era. Prior to that time there haven't been many mummified children discovered - Tjayasetimu is a rare example. This might be because so many children died young that the costly and extensive process of mummification would be too much for most families to pay for each time or perhaps because they had different beliefs about children and the afterlife. As the Egyptian and Roman cultures merged after the conquest of Egypt this starts to change. There are no obvious signs why this toddler died, but he has been given the full mummification process. His wrappings include pictures of him as an adult worshipping the gods.

The last body in the exhibition is that of a Sudanese woman who lived around 700AD – she is another example of natural mummification like Gebelein Man B. She was a Christian, and one of the exciting things about her body is the survival on her skin of a tattoo - this has a cross and a monogram that spells out the name Michael (in Greek letters), representing the Archangel Michael who was a patron of the Sudanese Christian Kingdoms of the time.

They finished the exhibition with two contrasting displays of "faces of ancient Egypt" - the first was three gold mummy masks, which presented the idealised view of the Egyptians that we normally see. And the second was video screens of the faces of Tamut, Pediamenet and Tjayasetimu set at the height they would be if they were alive and standing in front of us. A very striking way of visualising the theme of the exhibition; we were seeing the real Egyptians behind the masks.

A very interesting and thoroughly enjoyable exhibition to visit. The British Museum are controlling the numbers of people who can go into the exhibition much more than usual, so there was plenty of space to get a close look at all the displays and a respectful atmosphere around the bodies, who were real people, after all. Definitely recommend a visit, and I rather suspect we will be going back again before the end of November.

Margaret Patterson

This month thanks go to Margaret Patterson for two articles

The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

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