



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP



Newsletter

February/March 2016

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th February	The Falcon Necropolis at Quesna: Dr Jo Rowland
6 th March	Living in a liminal zone: the “town” of Queen Khentkawes at Giza: Ana Taveras
3 rd April	Tomb Robbery: Dr Nigel Strudwick
8 th May	Historical Egypt in Photographs: Marcel Maessen
5 th June	Seeking Senenmut: Statues, Status and Scandal: Dr Campbell Price
18 th June	Art in Ancient Egypt Study Day: Essex Egyptology Group

Essex Egyptology Group Study Day 2016

Saturday 18th June 10.30am-4.30pm

The Barn, Spring Lodge Community Centre, Witham

Art in Ancient Egypt

The main speaker will be Dr Christina Riggs of the University of East Anglia. This is a date for your diary; details to follow soon.

In February we welcome Dr Joanne Rowland. Her research interests lie predominantly in the archaeology of the Nile Delta and in prehistoric Egypt. She graduated from University College London with a PhD in Egyptian Archaeology in 2004, and having worked on a number of survey and excavation projects in the Nile Delta since 1998 began her own project in the central Delta (the Egypt Exploration Society Minufiyeh Archaeological Survey) in 2005. Joanne has also begun (spring 2013) a new prehistoric survey project (archaeological and environmental) in the region between Khatabah and Merimde Beni Salama (Egypt Exploration Society Imbaba Governate Prehistoric Survey), along the western edge of the Nile Delta. This project is related to her TOPOI II research project “The Neolithic in the Nile Delta’ (A-2-4). Joanne is also currently directing excavations at the Ptolemaic-Roman site of Quesna, which involves the investigation of a sacred animal necropolis as well as a cemetery. She is currently Jun. Prof. in Egyptian Archaeology at the Freie Universität, Berlin.

In March we welcome Ana Tavares. She is co-Field Director of Ancient Egypt Research Associates (AERA), working mainly on the Heit el-Ghurab settlement and Khentkawes site at Giza. She has worked extensively in Egypt, in sites from Alexandria to Aswan, spanning the Early Dynastic to Islamic periods. Her main work has been settlement excavation in the Memphite area, and her interests are settlement, landscape and daily life.

Recent archaeological work at the 4th dynasty funerary complex of Queen Khentkawes, at Giza, has provided a new understanding of her priests' 'town' and revealed a basin and valley complex. The architectural layout of the 'town', and new information on its occupation, abandonment and formal re-occupation, indicate a site at the interface of sacred and secular, settlement and institution, desert and cultivation – hence 'liminal'. The houses in the Khentkawes site are large, but all the same size, so showing no social hierarchy, which is very different (if we consider textual evidence) from 'pyramid towns'. Further the administration of royal funerary cults, elsewhere, was carried out by a rotation of priests, probably occupying small houses on a temporary basis. In contrast at the Khentkawes site the architectural layout suggests that the houses were occupied permanently by a priesthood of the same rank.

Reflections on the Dendara Zodiac: Addressing the What, When and Why Rosalind Park

In December Rosalind Park talked to us about the Dendara Zodiac ceiling, and astrology in Ancient Egypt. The Dendara Zodiac was originally in one of the chapels on the roof of the Hathor Temple at Dendara. When discovered by Napoleon's expedition in 1799 it was removed from the temple (with gunpowder!) and brought back to France. It's now on display in the Louvre (see picture below). And in its place in Dendara is a plaster cast (which has been painted black to mimic the original). It's a pretty big visitor attraction in the Louvre but it has been largely ignored by Egyptologists.



When the ceiling was discovered hieroglyphs hadn't been deciphered, but some of the astronomical/astrological symbols on the ceiling were recognisable as ones that have been passed down to Western culture via the Greeks (like a crab, which I think you should be able to (just) see in the photo above). A lot of previous work on the Zodiac has interpreted it as a purely astronomical depiction of the heavens, without much serious consideration. The "definitive" book on the astronomy of the Ancient

Egyptians published in the 1960s has a lot of oddities in the description and identification of the symbols on the Zodiac. For instance it identifies one male figure with the planet we now call Venus, but on other astronomical scenes the authors identify the same figure as the planet we call Mercury. Park's own research shows that the whole thing makes more sense if this

figure is indeed Mercury as he is elsewhere. This rather casts into doubt the authors' conclusions about what the scenes mean!

Parks believes that it's a "fear of astrology" that has hindered the study of the Dendara Zodiac. Academic archaeologists and historians want to distance themselves from any accusations of believing in that sort of mysticism (I imagine in large part because Egyptology does attract a lot of cranks - while writing this article I looked for line drawings of the Dendara Zodiac on the internet and I ran into more than one site explaining earnestly how this all proves that aliens built the pyramids!). But it's important to remember that in antiquity (and even closer to the modern day) there wasn't such a hard line dividing the science of astronomy from the mysticism of astrology. And it's also important to think about objects from the perspective of the culture that created the object if you want to understand what the object meant and what its original purpose might have been.

One of the striking features of the Zodiac that one notices immediately is that it doesn't fit the standard rectangular grid that "all" Egyptian art is based upon. If you're expecting squares and straight lines of figures in rows it looks like a bit of a mess. Parks proposes an alternate canon for art in Egypt based on circles, of which the Dendara Zodiac is an example. You can draw an evenly spaced series of concentric rings from the centre outward that contain the figures (equivalent to registers on a rectangular wall painting), and these can be divided into evenly spaced segments with radial lines from the centre. Once you superimpose this sort of grid on the Dendara Zodiac it is clear that it is an ordered design. Parks next showed us a horoscope from 16th Century CE Europe, with the same circular grid drawn on it - and it was strikingly similar to the Dendara Zodiac. This is because the toolkit of astrologers has not actually changed much since Hellenistic times, even though the details have (like what the planets are called and what the constellations are).

After our coffee and cake break there was a brief interlude about astronomy and how it relates to astrology, presented by Park's husband Gordon Falconer. He started by showing us a star map and pointing out that if it only has stars on it then it is accurate over multiple days (at a specific time of day and place). However as soon as you put on the positions of the planets and moon it is tied to one specific date as well. This is important for Park's research on the Dendara Zodiac as it is how she has been able to date it. Falconer's next point was that stars and planets are real, whereas constellations* are imagined. We create these patterns and there are many different ways the dots can be joined up - which he illustrated by comparing "our" (Greek) constellations with those of a Tang Dynasty China star map. Again this is important for Park's research as it makes it much harder for her to figure out which Egyptian constellations match up with which stars, it's not just a case of the names having changed.

*Technically the term is "asterism" because the word "constellation" has a different definition within the field of astronomy. But probably no-one outside professional astronomers uses asterism.

Falconer then moved on to tell us about some other features of the star map that can be used to help date and geographically locate horoscopes. One of these are the circumpolar stars. These are the stars that don't rise and set, whatever time of night you look they are there (and during the day too, just you can't see them because of the sun). Which stars are circumpolar and how many there are of them depends on your latitude and on the date. If you are near the pole, more stars are always visible, if you are near the equator fewer are. Which stars these are changes over the millennia - the Earth does not just rotate around its axis it also wobbles a bit (like a spinning top does). This is called precession of the Earth's axis, and it has a period of 25,800 years. One effect of this is that whilst Polaris is directly at the North Pole now, it wasn't before our time and won't be after (until 25,800 years have gone by). If you look at star or constellation maps from even as recently as 500 years ago (Falconer illustrated this with one drawn by Dürer) then Polaris is not on the pole.

Another concept that can be used for dating is the Vernal Equinox. This is the point when the ecliptic crosses the celestial equator. The ecliptic is the apparent path of the sun (at noon?) on the celestial sphere over a year, the celestial equator is the line you get if you mirror the earth's

equator on the celestial sphere. The celestial sphere itself is an old idea that the stars (and planets and sun) are in effect stuck on the inside of a massive globe around the earth. It's (obviously) been shown to be wrong, but it's still a useful concept in astronomy as it lets you give stars co-ordinates (and it's still used in astrology for similar purposes). The Vernal Equinox changes over time, and this changes which constellation of the zodiac it occurs in. About 3,500 years ago the Vernal Equinox was in Taurus, 2,000 years ago it was in Aries and now it is in Pisces - and nearly in Aquarius, hence the Age of Aquarius stuff.

The rest of the talk was Park explaining some of the work she has done to identify the date and time of the Dendara Zodiac. To do this she had to figure out what the various constellations were, and also which symbols were being used to represent which planets (and the moon and sun). She talked about a few examples, including one that is not only a representation of a constellation but also a piece of political satire on the part of the horoscope creator. One of the constellations is a lion, standing on an altar - in our constellation schema those stars are part of Centaurus. This lion is probably the Lion of Judah (and she showed us representations of the Lion of Judah from other sources that look similar to the one on the Dendara Zodiac). It looks like it's turning round and sticking its tongue out at the constellation behind it - a beast with a pot-belly, a scorpion tail, canine legs wearing one of the royal crowns of Egypt. Park has identified this as Ptolemy VIII, who was a thoroughly unpleasant piece of work even for a Ptolemy - for instance he murdered his 12 year old son and sent the dismembered bits to the boy's mother as a "birthday present" for her! Notably he was also anti-intellectual (including disliking astronomers/astrologers) and anti-Semitic (in part because the Jewish community was on the side of his wife). And so showing the Lion of Judah on a horoscope taunting Ptolemy VIII the beast would have been a topical reference to (relatively) recent history.

As a result of her detailed study of the Dendara Zodiac Park has come to the conclusion that it was originally made for the date of the conception of Cleopatra and Caesar's son Caesarion. This original design missed off the Horus planets (which I think she said were the ones that are associated with masculinity in Egyptian astrology) and also misses off constellations associated with dangerous creatures (like the crocodile). I think Park said this was for two reasons - firstly it would be protective of the subject of the horoscope (Caesarion), and secondly the Hathor temple is generally associated with feminine attributes (conception, birth, motherhood and so on) so it was appropriate in that context. Later, the horoscope was usurped and altered by Caesar Augustus - he had the Horus planets added which adjusts the date to a significant one in his life.

Margaret Patterson

At the Gate of the Ancestors: Saint Cults and the Politics of the Past at Abydos Janet Richards (Sackler Lecture at the British Museum)

The 2015 Raymond and Beverly Sackler Foundation Distinguished Lecture in Egyptology was given by Janet Richards last July, on the subject of saint cults in general and specifically the one of Idy at Abydos and how that fits into the wider sacred landscape there. The lecture was part of a 2-day colloquium about Abydos in general.

Richards is interested in saint cults in ancient Egypt, but in the introductory part of her talk she contextualised them for us in more modern terms (which was very useful for me!). There are saint cults all over the world - generally they are place bound, there is some supernatural element (they bless the living) and they are transactional in nature (you worship, the saint blesses). The focuses of them are not just saints as we think of them in a Christian tradition, but also local heroes and local gods. In modern Egypt there are small saint shrines that give charity to the local population - they are apolitical and small scale, rather than being tied to the big picture cultural narrative. This is another general feature of saint cults, but they can also be co-opted by the elite to link the large scale politics/religion of the country with the local population's concerns. She gave us an example of a modern saint cult from the US, I think

chosen to remind us that we're not talking about official religion here. At the University of Michigan a(n American) football coach is the focus of a saint cult - he's invoked in some way by home fans to try to ensure victory, or his memorial is desecrated by the away fans to ritually ensure their own victory. In a speech President Obama gave when he visited the University of Michigan he linked this football coach (the local saint) with JFK (a national saint) in a way that linked himself with these two icons (thus co-option by the elite for their own political advancement).

In ancient Egypt in late Old Kingdom times there is evidence of several saint cults starting up. At this period in Egyptian history the religion is in transition. It used to be that just the King had access to the gods, but during this time more "normal" people felt they were able to do things like write letters to the gods. I put quotes around normal, because obviously if they are writing letters then they are literate and educated which puts them into a different category than the bulk of the population. However these are people who are not part of the true elite hierarchy. And during this time saint cults begin to spring up around the periphery of the nation. One example she gave was of Heqaib at Elephantine, who was the Governor of the Nome. His saint cult is one of the best documented - it begins in the Old Kingdom and continues for several hundred years. His powers as a saint are related to his work during life (organising protection of expeditions) and his long-life itself. He was venerated both at his grave and in a hall built in the town. At the end of the First Intermediate Period the cult begins to receive royal attention, which continues throughout the Middle Kingdom. In each case the Pharaoh in question emphasises how he brought order out of chaos by restoring the shrine of the saint to its former glory - thus linking himself with the saint, which is part of legitimising his authority as Pharaoh. There is also mention in the inscriptions of a quid pro quo - the saint in return will bless the Pharaoh with a long life and smooth his eventual passage into the afterlife.

Richards' own work has been on the tomb and cult of Idy, who was an Old Kingdom official buried at Abydos. The cult hall for Idy must have been excavated by Henry Salt in the 19th Century - Richards has identified some objects in the British Museum's collection that came from the site via Salt. However she didn't know this when she first started excavating it! Her work on the tomb and the hall has uncovered an outline of how the cult of Idy developed over the centuries.

He was a local official, who married into a more senior family and subsequently rose through the ranks of the central government. He was one of the last officials of that era to be buried in that part of Abydos, and was deified before the end of the Old Kingdom. There was a cult hall built near his tomb, and his cult survived for centuries after his death. As central authority began to break down in the early First Intermediate Period there begin to be surface burials of lower status individuals near Idy's tomb - associating themselves with the saint in death. There is then a gap in the pottery chronology of the site between the early and late First Intermediate Period. This may well be a true gap in the cult - a text of this period mentions a "desecration event": burning in the town and burning in the cemetery. This matches well with the burnt limestone statue of Idy in the British Museum's collection.

When Richards excavated Idy's tomb there were several oddities. The name on the outside lintel was not Idy, and there were limestone blocks covering the name on the inner lintel. The floor was also oddly high, and the coffin was not of a similar quality to the decoration on the walls. It became clear that a late First Intermediate Period burial had usurped Idy's tomb, probably after Idy's tomb had been robbed. The usurping individual was an official in Intef III's government called Nekhty. He says that he "restored the tomb and set up his house in the entrance". This is similar to the ruin to restoration rhetoric associated with Heqaib's cult. And it's now clear that the "house in the entrance" is a reference to usurping the tomb! Which he states he did to be "near Idy and to follow him". He also says that he bought a boat for Idy so that he could join processions - a textual reference to the statue of Idy going on ritual processions, just as other gods do.

Later votive chapels are built around Idy's tomb, and other people are buried nearby with their tombs aligned towards his. As with Heqaib there are references to Pharaohs using Idy's cult to legitimise themselves - for instance Senwosret III. By the time of the Pharaoh Tutmosis III in the

18th Dynasty the cult has faded away sometime before and the limestone chapels are dismantled. In one of these dismantled chapels there is an 18th Dynasty era burial of an infant, next to a block with a scene of a cow and calf. Richards speculates that this burial was done by one of the people doing the dismantling, and that an 18th Dynasty figurine found in the main temple of the Idy saint cult is linked to this. She believes that it's evidence that even though the cult was long gone there were still echoes of it remembered locally.

An interesting talk about a side of the Egyptian religion I don't really know much about - the aspects of it that aren't linked with the state and the major gods of their pantheon. It was also fascinating to think about saint cults in our own modern era as having similar underpinnings to these Egyptian ones - despite us thinking of that celebrity/hero worship as secular and very distinct from religion.

Margaret Patterson

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAYS

Magic and Medicine in Ancient Mesopotamia

A study day with Dr Irving Finkel

Saturday 5th March, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1

Cost: £40

This study day will investigate magical and medical activity in ancient Mesopotamia on the basis of written evidence, archaeological objects and ancient representations.

Unique Discoveries and New Ideas: Exciting Times at Hierakonpolis

Saturday 11th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1

Cost: £40 (discount for Friends of Nekhen)

The ancient site of Hierakonpolis is one of the earliest sites in Egypt to see Pharaonic culture blossom. It is the largest site of the Predynastic Period still extant and accessible. The study day draws together members of the Hierakonpolis archaeological and research team, headed by Dr Renee Friedman.

Further information and booking: www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY SEMINARS

Showcasing the Society: The Annual Exhibitions of the EES (1884-1939)

Alice Williams

Tuesday 23rd February, 6pm-7pm

Tickets: Free (but place must be booked in advance)

My Dear Friend: Tales, Gossip and Scandals from the EES Correspondence Archive

Dr Brigitte Balanda

Monday 14th March, 6pm-7pm

Tickets: Free (but place must be booked in advance)

Rome – City of Obelisks: Ancient Egypt in the Eternal City

Steven Gregory, Katharine Hoare, Chris Elliott, Edward Chaney

Saturday 27th February, 10.45am-4.30pm

Tickets: £25 (EES members), £30 (non-members)

Rhetoric and Education in Graeco-Roman Egypt

Dr Daniela Colomo

Saturday 14th May, 10.30am-4.30pm

Tickets: £25 (EES members), £30 (non-members)

An Introduction to Ceramic Manufacture in Ancient Egypt and Sudan

Dr Sarah Doherty and Anna Garnett

Saturday 11th June, 10.30am-4.30pm

Tickets: £18 (EES members), £22 (non-members)

Evening Class: An Introduction to the Hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt

Christelle Alvarez

Thursday evenings (4, 11, 18, 25 February and 3, 10, 17, 24 March), 6pm-8pm

Textbook for the course is Collier and Manley: How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs (BM Press)

Fee: £208 (EES members), £260 (non-members)

Further information and to book: <http://www.ees.ac.uk/events/index.html>

All events take place at the Egypt Exploration Society, 3 Doughty Mews, London WC1

OBITUARY

On 12th January one of our founder members died at age 96. Douglas (Doug) Pike became interested in Egyptology during WWII when he served in the North African campaign. At one of our meetings he brought along a photograph album from his time in Egypt. Condolences to his family; he was a true gentleman.

This month thanks go to Margaret Patterson

The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Rosemary Ackland - (Treasurer) – Janet Brewer BEM (Secretary/Membership) –
Tilly Burton (Programme) - Dick Sellicks (Publicity/Facebook)

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

All articles express the views and opinions of their authors

Please e-mail to eeg_newsletter@btinternet.com

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