



# ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 111

December 2017/January 2018

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> December      Illuminating the path of darkness, artificial light in ancient Egyptian ritual: Meghan Strong
- 7<sup>th</sup> January 2018      Lunch at Crofters
- 4<sup>th</sup> February      Saite Tombs at Saqqara: Dr Ramadan Hussein
- 4<sup>th</sup> March      Flies, lions and oysters, military awards or tea for two: Taneash Sidpura
- 8<sup>th</sup> April      The Valley of the Kings: Dr Susanne Bickel

Our speaker in December, Meghan Strong is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. She has trained as both an Egyptologist and an art historian and elements of both disciplines impact on her research. Meghan has lectured on archaeology and Egyptology throughout the UK and United States and has worked in Egypt for over a decade as a writer, photographer and archaeologist. Her photographic work has been featured on the websites of National Geographic, NBC, CNN and LiveScience.

This presentation will employ archaeological, textual and art historical sources to discuss the type of light sources used in ancient Egypt, the rites with which light was associated, and the significance of providing illumination in the afterlife.

## **"Ancient Egyptian Justice" Alexandre Loktionov**

At the beginning of September Alexandre Loktionov visited to talk to us about his work on the Ancient Egyptian justice system. In his introductory remarks he was keen to stress a couple of points - first that he is himself more interested in the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom eras, not just the New Kingdom (which receives rather more attention in general). And also that law in Ancient Egypt is not something isolated from the rest of the world, the legal systems of both the Middle East and of sub-Saharan Africa have influences on how the Egyptians practised law.

He started his talk by discussing the history of the study of Ancient Egyptian law. It was first studied by Spiegelberg in the 1890s - which is rather late in the history of Egyptology. It's not just that it took a while for people to consider Egyptian law as worthy of study, but the language needed to be well understood as law in Egypt is like law everywhere - full of jargon and dense technical language. The first phase of the study of Egyptian law was the translation of the documents. After this the legal institutions were investigated. The current state of the field is to analyse the socio-economic impact of the law, but Loktionov thinks it's time for the field to move on from this and start to investigate the way that the majority illiterate segment of society experienced law.

So what was justice in Ancient Egypt? Loktionov isn't sure that even the Ancient Egyptians had a proper answer to this. The concept of Ma'at was clearly important - but what precisely is Ma'at? One answer is that she's a goddess, but it's not as simple as that - Ma'at is also a complicated concept of order and truth. There is also the concept of Hp, which appears to be an Ancient Egyptian technical term but it is difficult to be sure what it means. It may be a code of law, but the Egyptians didn't appear to go in for codes of law in the same way that (for instance) the Middle Eastern peoples did. Alternatively it may be a custom. However one thing that is clear is that conflict resolution is key to their concept of justice. Loktionov read us an instructional text that talks about impartiality being important for legal officials - which we recognise from our modern perspective. But the text also goes on to talk about how the petitioner wants to be heard even more than he or she wants to get what they're asking for, which doesn't feel so familiar. Both parties going away happy is the ideal situation, and key to their idea of justice.

One of the difficulties in studying Ancient Egyptian justice, particularly before the New Kingdom, is the paucity of texts that set out what the system is and what the laws are. As I mentioned above the Egyptians didn't produce codified lists of laws like the Code of Hammurabi etc. One source of information is the titles that people record in their tombs. In the Old Kingdom these title strings can be up to 40-50 titles, and these let you know not just what people were doing but also the ways the jobs link together. During this period tomb autobiographies can also be useful sources - although the evidence they provide is limited. While they may discuss specific trials that a noble wished to have remembered they generally don't go into much detail. There are also some decrees that have survived, such as the Abydos decree of Neferirkare. This states that if the priests are called for corvee duty then the responsible person will be punished, and tried in the *ḥwt-wrt* (which from context must be some sort of court).

Throughout the talk Loktionov was showing us translations of actual legal texts from the period he was talking about. His purpose in doing this was partly to demonstrate how dense and how full of jargon they are. There is a suggestion that the justice system was primarily an oral process, and so the texts might just be notes of the key points rather than fully fleshed out records. But it's still possible to glean information from these texts despite their impenetrability. For instance the phrase "divide the words" is a key phrase that shows up in both legal and religious texts about justice.

Loktionov summed up what we know about the Old Kingdom justice system as follows: There's little known overall, but it's clear that organised judging is happening. The institution where this happens is the *ḥwt-wrt* and priests of Ma'at may be involved in the process.

There are no sources for the First Intermediate Period, so the next period Loktionov considered was the Middle Kingdom. There are a variety of sources for this period - title strings for the nobles are again important, and are shorter than those of the Old Kingdom. Seals have been found with these titles on them, which shows that they are in use rather than just ceremonial. Papyri found at El-Lahun (including some of the oldest wills in the world) also provide evidence, as do stelae and literary texts like the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant (which Linda Steynor gave a talk to the us about back in 2014

<http://ninecats.org/margaret/blog/2014/05/13/eloquent-peasant-linda-steynor-eeg-meeting-talk>).

Loktionov showed us an example of an intact will. The first point to note was that it was dated, which was a new development during this period of Egyptian history. The writer of the will leaves his stuff to his wife, on the condition that she subsequently passes it on to her children by him. This reminded me of some of the translation exercises I've done recently on my Akkadian course - where a contract or will specifies that a woman may leave her share of a property to "the one among their sons whom she loves, and not to a stranger". The Egyptian will also gave instructions about the writer's tomb, in what Loktionov said was a formulaic fashion - akin to medieval English wills starting by leaving their soul to God. The Egyptian will writer followed his formula with an instruction about who is to be the guardian of his son, and then finishes with a long list of witnesses - 3-7 of them. (Which also reminds me of Akkadian documents.)

That was an example of a Middle Kingdom legal document at one of the lower levels of society. Loktionov also discussed an example of documentation of Pharaonic interaction with the law - the Semna Stela from Year 8 of the reign of Senwosret III. The subject of the stela is the southern boundary of Egypt with Nubia and it stipulates that no Nubian should be permitted to cross the border unless they are coming to trade in Egypt; and even in those cases the Nubians are only permitted to travel a certain distance into Egypt. This is Pharaoh micro-managing how the border garrisons are to treat those who wish to cross.

The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant is also a useful source. It is the story of a peasant who petitions the state for the return of stolen goods. The arguments the peasant makes give us insight into how the legal system was expected to operate - for instance precedent was clearly important. However the text hasn't yet been studied properly from this perspective, the emphasis is generally on the Tale as a work of literature (which was Steynor's perspective in her talk in 2014).

Loktionov summed up our knowledge of the Middle Kingdom period as: In general a time of greater specialisation of officials. There were local officials who gave judgement, and formal structures were less noticeable than in the Old Kingdom (no mention of *ḥwt-wrt* in Middle Kingdom texts, for instance). The Pharaoh can still intervene and issue decrees.

For the New Kingdom period there are many more sources. Title strings (and seals) still provide us with information; these are much shorter than in preceding periods. Excavations at Deir el Medina have provided Egyptologists with a wealth of letters and administrative documents. There are also papyri detailing trials. Tomb reliefs also provide information, and of course there are also Pharaonic decrees. It's not surprising that most work on the legal system of Ancient Egypt focuses on the New Kingdom, given the relative quantity of information available.

The documents from Deir el Medina talk about the *ḫnbt*. From context this is a court, and it is a new institution for the New Kingdom era. It seems more informal than the other structures we have seen documented, and much more dependent on conflict resolution rather than police action. Loktionov thinks that this is down to a lack of power to enforce their decisions. Trying to force an unwelcome resolution on one party to the dispute would demonstrate that the court had no power, which would then undermine the ability of the court to adjudicate anything. Far better to reach a solution that everyone was at least able to live with.

The Tomb Robbery Papyri illustrate a more formal justice system that ran alongside the informal one. These texts include details on how the confessions were obtained, generally brutally by our standards I think. And they say who the investigators were: people of high rank. So there were two justice systems that co-existed, an informal one and a formal one. They are not entirely separate - Loktionov gave us an example of a local official called Paneb at Deir el Medina who was reported to the Vizier for poor behaviour - thus moving the justice problem from the informal court to a more formal one.

At this point Loktionov had finished his overview of the justice system of Ancient Egypt and what sources our knowledge comes from. After a break for coffee and cake Loktionov resumed his talk by discussing the system that can be drawn out from across the chronological overview.

At the "top" of law in Ancient Egypt was Kingdom Law - this consisted of the Pharaoh's decrees, and Pharaoh as ultimate judge. Important to this aspect is the symbolic personification of justice: Ma'at. The reliefs that depict Pharaoh offering Ma'at symbolise him dispensing justice, and there is also the idea that Ma'at sustains the king (which was most famously said by Akhenaten). Also involving the Pharaoh are oaths - often sworn in the name of the king and in the names of gods. This meant that if you broke the oath (or the terms of justice or the contract) then you had also committed treason.

Just underneath the Pharaoh was the Vizier. The main source of information that we have about the role of the Vizier are the reliefs in the tomb of Rekhmire. These give the duties of the Vizier and list everything that he should be doing on behalf of his Pharaoh. Clearly it is not

entirely literal. He wouldn't be actually carrying out every investigation himself, he would delegate that further down the chain of officials but he would be where the reports came to.

There were two types of court held in Ancient Egypt. One sort were Extraordinary Courts - these were convened as and when required and did not sit all of the time. They were composed of high officials, and were involved with matters such as tomb robberies and attempts on the life of the king. The other were Ordinary Courts. These sat on a daily basis and handled matters such as dead donkeys or un-retuned jars - the everyday disputes of ordinary people. The Sr (magistrate) was not a profession; he would also have other roles in society. There was also some sort of oracular component to justice, which shows evidence of Mesopotamian legal ideas. It's not known precisely how it worked - the records are things such as "the god was asked if such and such had stolen a donkey and the god said yes". But there are no details, perhaps the god's statue was asked during a procession and the priests carrying it were inspired to answer?

There were a variety of punishments that could be meted out. At the most severe end was death, probably by impalement. There was also mutilation - noses or ears cut off, or severe whipping. On the more benign end of the spectrum were things such as forced labour, or restitution of goods. Loktionov also talked about something called supra-practical punishment, which sounds ridiculous in our modern cultural context but was presumably more efficacious in Ancient Egyptian times. The basic idea is that instead of a punishment literally being applied, it would be symbolically applied via a curse. So instead of someone's nose actually being cut off, perhaps they would be induced to believe it had been prevented from working by a curse. I wasn't sure I followed the evidence that Loktionov was talking about for this - it seemed to be heavily based on the idea that if someone continued to flout the law after mutilation then they cannot have really been mutilated (as then they would either be dead or traumatised).

The last two aspects of justice that Loktionov talked about were ones that are hard to study as they were kept secret at the time. The first of these is corruption, which is obviously hidden by the perpetrators. Some evidence comes from texts like that of a prayer for a poor man to be vindicated and not have to pay more bribes to the court. The other subject is torture - there is evidence that there was a role of "torturer" but what he did was not often explicitly referenced.

The very last part of Loktionov's talk was in essence a separate talk, about his recent research done at the Library of Congress. This is not an institution that springs to mind when thinking of Egyptological resources and Loktionov said he was the first Egyptologist to actually work there - but it has a lot of relevant documents that should be studied. This part of the talk was in part a repeat in brief of the first talk as context, and in part ongoing unpublished research so I'm just going to summarise it briefly rather than go through it in detail. In essence he was looking at foreign influences on Ancient Egyptian justice in the 2nd Millennium BCE - a period when Egypt was a very large state (for the time). This meant that the justice system differed across the state with the southern areas showing influences from Nubia, and the northern areas showing influences from the Middle East. He has been approaching the subject from two perspectives, by looking at the people involved in the justice system (using statistical analysis of title strings) and by looking at the institutions and processes (in part by doing ethnographic studies of informal local courts in modern Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa).

I found this a really interesting talk, and it was fascinating to see how much information could be gleaned from references here and there in impenetrable texts!

Margaret Patterson

## **“Ancient Egyptian Furniture: from the earliest to those “wonderful things” of the New Kingdom” Dr Geoffrey Killen – October 2017**

With a background in design and technology as well as Egyptology, Geoffrey Killen is well equipped to explore Ancient Egyptian furniture design and construction. The first part of his talk was a survey of the development of furniture and woodworking tools across the dynasties and then after tea we got practical – and I seemed to spend a lot of time on the floor...

The large number of furniture items in collections across the world as well as the inclusion of furniture in wall paintings means that there is lots of evidence and examples to consider. We started with legs: the simple straight bed legs from the First Dynasty site of Tarkhan. However after the unification of Egypt more practical copper tools were available such as the adze, saw and chisel which enabled the shaping of bovine legs on furniture. The joints were simple holes into which the legs fitted but they were made strong by the use of strips of wet animal hide which shrank as it dried and held the joint together firmly.

We then looked at early stools and coffins. Early coffins were rough and irregular as the trees available to the Egyptians, such as sycamore fig and acacia, were all small, yielding small planks which had to be assembled like a jigsaw. Without effective saws early Egyptians would make planks by cleaving trunks along the grain with wedges.

The fourth Dynasty furniture of Queen Hetepheres demonstrates how much more sophisticated the workmanship became with the availability of better tools. Geoffrey focussed on how the furniture was reconstructed using plaster to create models for the wooden shapes which were then covered with the thousands of gold fragments found in the tomb. He also told the story of how the American restorer had hired his Egyptian carpenters by setting all the applicants a practical test. One man, who had produced beautiful work, explained that he had learnt his skills in prison. What had he been in prison for? “I killed the man who killed my father.”

A less well known reconstruction is the cosmetics casket of Sithathoryunet which was assembled in the Metropolitan Museum in New York based on the detailed notes of the excavator, Guy Brunton. The materials used included ebony, ivory, gold, carnelian, blue faience and silver. Although the boxes discovered in the tombs of ordinary people were made of simpler materials they still included dovetail joints and mushroom handles. Boxes could also be very ingenious: one with a sliding lid had an internal latch which closed when the lid was slid shut and could only be opened by turning the box upside down.



We moved onto stools which were often frameworks with rush or woven seating. Three legged stools were popular among workmen as they would be more stable on an uneven workshop floor. Folding stools were practical and had leather seats attached with animal glue. Folding headrests would have had a leather ‘sling’ which fitted over the two arms. Larger folding furniture, such as beds, was found in the tomb of Tutankhamen, complete with hinges and legs which also folded in order to make the item as portable as possible. The portability of items was also increased by including little hooks through which rope could be threaded to make items easier to carry with poles



Geoffrey focussed on the beautiful goose head legs of some folding stools where the tongue of the goose becomes the tenon which joins the leg to the rest of the frame. This example comes from the tomb of Tutankhamun and shows just how elaborate the decoration had become: the starry

'cowhide' covering is made from solid wood. He surveyed the other beautiful items from the tomb including the throne which might have been made during the time of Akhenaten as it included a sun disk with rays ending in hands. Other chairs in the tomb were made from cedar wood which would have been imported. There is also a small chair of ebony made for a very young Tutankhamun. This luxury item is true ebony but more everyday items which are often described as being made of ebony are, in fact, made of African blackwood. However, the Egyptians themselves were not above painting ordinary wood to make it look like a more expensive variety.

Even where the furniture, or wall paintings of it, is no longer in existence we can still know what it looked like. Wall paintings in the furniture treasury of the tomb of Rameses III have disappeared but explorers from Napoleon's Egyptian expedition made careful records of them in beautifully detailed and coloured drawings. These can even be matched up with carved representations of the same furniture on the walls of Medinet Habu. Ostraca from Deir el Medina show that the workmen living there made their own furniture for everyday use which was then placed in their tombs. The ostraca also show a grading system with 3, 4 or even 5 strokes indicating the quality of each item.

After tea we gathered round the impressive display of working tools which Geoffrey has made and he gave us a demonstration of their uses. He had also made a workbench with 'steps' which allowed wood to be held securely as the Egyptians had never developed a vice. Early tools were made of flint and stone but by the end of the first dynasty small copper chisels were being used with mallets. A large cache of woodworking tools from Saqqara includes saws, adzes and chisels. The adze was particularly effective at cutting and shaping wood and it has clearly stood the test of time; google 'adze' and Amazon comes up with some really sharp looking implements for woodworking and dealing with pesky roots in the garden. As with early joints in furniture, the wood and metal of the adze were held together with strips of wet cow hide which had shrunk as it dried. This made for a very strong tool which could easily cut wood. Tools were probably heat treated and sharpened with stones on a daily basis if they were being used regularly in a workshop.

Egyptian saws were based on the shapes of knives. The cutting of their teeth had developed over time as workmen realised that cutting the teeth from different sides of the saw blade resulted in a saw which did not drift in one direction when being used. He demonstrated the use of a bow drill, chisels of different sizes and mallets and showed us examples of tri-squares. He also pointed out that any roughness in the finished wood would have been sanded down with pieces of sandstone. The finished furniture could also be covered with a layer of plaster and painted to give a very fine finish.

The 'big kit' was kept till last: a reciprocating lathe. This large frame held the piece of wood being worked on in place while a poor workman (me - on the floor) rotated it by pulling at ropes. As the wood turned, Geoffrey was able to shape it with a chisel held in place on the frame. All great fun - but not for eight hours a day.

We came away knowing so much more about furniture and woodworking in Ancient Egypt and ready to appreciate examples in museums in detail. Perhaps even some of us decided to look out those tools in the shed, sharpen them up and have a go at making something. IKEA - start getting worried!

Alison Woollard



## Figure of Amun-Ra



This beautiful figure of Amun-Ra may have been a cult statue in the temple of Amun at Karnak. Very few such statues made of precious metals have survived from ancient Egypt; the key examples are a solid gold Amun statue now in New York and a seated silver falcon-headed deity now in Kyoto, along with this figurine.

The figure is 21.3cm tall and cast in silver, with an overlay of gold leaf on parts of the crown, collar and kilt. The curled divine beard shows it is a god, and the two feather plumes along with the sun disc on top of the crown identify it as Amun-Ra

It was discovered in a buried cache of disused statues in the temple of Amun, Karnak. Probably from the third intermediate period, dating seems to be an open question, with suggestions ranging from the 19th to the 26th dynasty.

Unfortunately it is not on permanent display at the British Museum, but there have recently been chances to see it as part of the travelling exhibition "Pharaoh of Egypt". If you were part of our group's recent behind-the-scenes tour, you may even have caught a glimpse of it resting in a drawer!

(British Museum, EA60006 - photo by Margaret Patterson)

John Patterson

## Season's Greetings from Luxor

Our arrival here was, as always, the weekly Monday afternoon flight from Heathrow which arrives at 10.15 pm. Mahmoud, our driver, is always there on time to meet and greet us like long lost friends, he protects us from the onslaught of taxi drivers hassling for our business, and whisks us away through Luxor, past the Old Winter Palace – which in another life was not a hotel, but the "des res" of King Farouk, lights ablaze and red carpeted stairs ready for the arrival of expected guests.

We cross the Nile and soon turn into our familiar High Street, no Waitrose here, but a jumble of donkey carts and Chinese motor bikes, bustling vegetable shops piled high with mango, courgettes, aubergines and huge cabbages that could win a prize at a local horticultural show in the U.K. There are tiny grocery stores with local cheese and pickled veg, carrot, turnip, olives and lemons in big plastic tubs, oh and from the sublime to the almost unbelievable - the foie gras shop, also offering rillettes or duck with orange; they appear to do a good trade.

Back at our apartment in the White House after seven months away, it is very calm, all seems well, a cold beer from the fridge, a walk in the garden, palm trees still standing, tall, dark and majestic, the roses are blooming.

We learn during the next few days that many archaeological missions who have worked on excavation sites for decades are still waiting for Government permission to continue their work. Lumbering bureaucracy here is a constant barrier to seamless plans. It would appear that already four Chinese teams have permission to excavate. There is no academic tradition of Egyptology in China, however rumour has it that many students are now at London universities studying the subject ..... The subtle financial influence by China has begun, mineral resources, road and rail building, Egyptology, all on their radar.

We visited Edfu temple, approx sixty miles south of Luxor, it boasts the best preserved cult temple in Egypt, dedicated to the Falcon headed God Horus. Though actually built in the Ptolemaic period (Greco/Roman) this mammoth building gives an excellent idea of how most temples once looked and ranks alongside Karnak and Deir-el-Bahri as one of the best sites in the Nile Valley. The Temple of Horus was buried up to its lintels until the 1860's when the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette cleared the main building of debris and rubbish. There was a village on top of the sand filled temple, captured in a drawing by David Roberts (worth checking him out on Google for an idea how the temples looked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century).



The construction of the building outlasted many Ptolemaic Kings and was finally completed by the twelfth Ptolemy of the dynasty. The walls of the temple are adorned with texts of the king adoring and giving offerings to Horus. Outside, the length of the western wall is dedicated to the Triumph of Horus over Seth, his evil uncle depicted as a hippopotamus who killed Osiris, Father to Horus.

The Hypostyle Hall with its towering, decorated columns dates from the reign of Ptolemy VII (145-116) BC. Try to imagine the shadowy halls during the annual festivals, decorated with precious objects from the treasury, the floor strewn with flowers and herbs, perfumed with myrrh; incense and perfumes blended according to the recipes inscribed on the walls of the laboratory, wafting through the building.

The highlight of this temple is the Sanctuary of Horus, dimly lit and still containing a model of the bark (a boat like structure) with the model head of Horus carved both ends of the bark - the original would have been made in solid gold.

All Pharaohs claimed to be a reincarnation of Horus as the "living king" and reaffirmed their oneness with Horus at the annual "Festival of the Coronation" when a live falcon was taken from the sacred aviary, crowned in the sacred court, placed in an inner chamber where it reigned in the dark for a year - a symbol of the living king.

Sue and John Robinson

Thanks go to Alison Woollard, Sue and John Robinson and Margaret and John Patterson



*Merry Christmas*



## **The Essex Egyptology Group Committee**

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