



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 112 February / March 2018

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

4 th February	Saite Tombs at Saqqara: Dr Ramadan Hussein
4 th March	Flies, lions and oysters, military awards or tea for two: Taneash Sidpura
8 th April	The Valley of the Kings: Dr Susanne Bickel
21 st April	Study Day - see below
13 th May	Kings from Kush: Egypt's 25 th dynasty: Dr Robert Morkot

Our speaker in February is Dr. Ramadan Hussein from the Universität Tübingen, Germany. In the ancient Egyptians' minds, death was a transitional stage toward immortality, and life after death was achievable through a set of rites that was performed for the deceased person.

Funerary rites, including purification, mummification and presentation of food offerings, were accompanied by recitation of religious texts. All were considered requirements for the resurrection of the deceased and for their transformation into an equipped spirit. For millennia, Egyptians maintained a tradition of performing funerary rituals at their tombs and cemeteries.

The Saqqara Saite Tombs Project, launched in March 2016 at the University of Tübingen, Germany, focuses on the documentation and publication of tombs dating to the 7th BCE. They are located to the south of the Pyramid of King Unas at Saqqara and belong to high ranking Egyptian officials and military personnel. The tombs of the Saite Dynasty (Dynasty 26, ca. 664-525 BCE), including those at Saqqara, represent a period of Egyptian history that is rightly characterized as one of rebirth and archaism. This dynasty was established by Egyptian patriots who regained Egypt's independence after the first Persian invasion. They fostered a movement of nostalgia for and revivification of old cultural traditions, running the gamut from architectural styles of tombs, themes of reliefs and funerary texts. The Saite tombs of Saqqara stand out because of their large compositions of religious texts that were revived after remaining obsolete for over a millennium. Therefore, they are of particular interest for scholars who study the mechanics of text transmission through space and time. The work of the University of Tübingen Mission in Saqqara has also uncovered an embalming workshop as well as embalmer's cachettes of vessels used during the mummification processes. There is a plethora of evidence to show that this embalming workshop was connected to the burials of a number of the higher echelon of the Egyptian society during the Saite Dynasty.

This lecture offers a detailed report on the excavation and conservation of a group of tomb complexes and an attached Embalming Workshop at Saqqara.

Annual Study Day – Deir El-Medina: A Never Ending Story

Our fifth annual study day will take place on Saturday 21st April with Dr Cédric Gobeil, the Director of the Egypt Exploration Society and Director of the French archaeological mission at Deir el-Medina. Tickets, which must be purchased in advance, cost £35 adult members and £37 adult non-members. Tickets and information: info@essexegyptology.co.uk

"Delta Myths and Legends" Penny Wilson

At the beginning of November Penny Wilson visited to talk to us about myths and legends of the Delta region of Egypt. Wilson is involved in archaeological work in the Delta, and is currently writing a book about the region. One of her areas of interest is whether there is a distinct Delta culture during the Ancient Egyptian period.

She began her talk by giving us some geographical context for the region. The first and most obvious difference between the Delta and the Nile Valley is the scale - in most of Egypt there's only a narrow strip of land that it's possible to live on, but the Delta is very broad. There is also more variety of environments in the Delta - the marshy interior is different to the desert edges and both are different to the Mediterranean coastline. The Delta was also different in ancient times to the way it is now - the natural flooding of the Nile deposited a lot of sediment so the coastline was further out, and the soil was even more fertile.

The Delta marshes are very rich in natural resources - which makes agriculture less appealing here than in the Nile Valley and so the population remained hunter/gatherers for longer. The land is also better for farming - it is very fertile and there is more space. There are more trees, which provide building materials for things such as boats. And the less marshy areas along the desert edges are good for cattle rearing. But the Delta also spends a lot of time flooded and it's hard to find places to put permanent settlements. This is even more the case than in Nile Valley, as at least there you can retreat to the desert edge, but if you are in the middle of the Delta then there are river channels on all sides. There are some options though, including large sand banks that rise high above the flood plain. Over the millennia these have been mined for their sand, so only one still survives and Wilson showed us a photo of this pretty large body of sand standing 20 foot higher than the surrounding land.

Wilson is interested in how this diverse and rich environment, which is distinct from the Nile Valley environment, has affected the belief systems of the people who lived there. But first she needs to figure out what the belief systems of the Delta region actually are, which is not as straightforward as one might expect. The bulk of Wilson's talk was a chronological look at what we know about Delta myths and legends, and how we know it (or how we don't!).

She started with a look at the Narmer Palette as one of the most well-known pieces of iconography to do with the unification of Egypt. The traditional explanation of the scenes is that they show the defeat of Lower Egypt (the Delta) at the hands of the King (Narmer) of Upper Egypt (the Nile Valley). But more recently there have been suggestions that it may not be that straightforward. For instance, is the Red Crown really the crown of Lower Egypt? If you go with the traditional interpretation of the Narmer Palette then it must be, but the first archaeological evidence for that shape/symbol is found on pottery from Upper Egypt. And if we can't be sure which parts of the palette definitely refer to the Delta it's not a very good starting place for looking at their beliefs.

Another piece of iconography relating to the unification of Egypt is a scene that is carved on the side of many seated statues' thrones - Horus and Seth tying together two plants symbolising the joining of Lower and Upper Egypt respectively. Which only serves to confuse even further our knowledge of Delta iconography, as the two gods were assigned the other way round in earlier artefacts (like the Narmer Palette). And this illustrates one of the big problems with working out what's Delta specific and what's not - the beliefs and associations of myths change over time, as well as being explicitly re-written to suit the propaganda needs of the Pharaoh of whichever time period the evidence comes from.

Wilson next discussed the Osiris and Isis myth and what that tells us about Delta mythology. She first noted that the best account of the myth that still exists today is in the writings of Plutarch (a Roman historian from the 1st Century CE). So that's significantly after its initial appearance, and the myth as he records it is likely to be different from earlier incarnations of the tale. It's one of the Heliopolitan myths, it was associated with the city later known as Heliopolis on the eastern edge of the Delta (under a modern suburb of Cairo). This myth cycle is one of the creation stories of the Egyptians and includes gods such as Atum, Nun, Geb as well as the Osiris and Isis stories. The myth is another piece of kingly propaganda which legitimises the king's lineage by equating the ruler with Horus the son of Osiris.

Is Osiris originally a northern or southern god? Much of the evidence points towards a northern origin. His iconography is all about fertility which suggests the Delta. Also his main title is "Lord of Djedu" - which is a city in the north of Egypt later known as Busiris. However the remains of Djedu are under a modern town so there's been no archaeology done there, and it's hard to know what connection Osiris had to the town early in its existence. Complicating matters is that again his iconography changes from place to place and over time. Wilson said that he was probably thought of differently in different places (i.e. not just a change of representation but a change of concept). He also gets merged with other gods. For instance Abydos was originally not associated with Osiris, but by the 12th Dynasty he's replaced Khentimentu as the primary deity there and uses Khentimentu's name as a title. This fluid nature of the myths is part of what Wilson finds so interesting about Egyptian religion (as do I - it feels such an odd mind-set to get one's modern post-Enlightenment brain around).

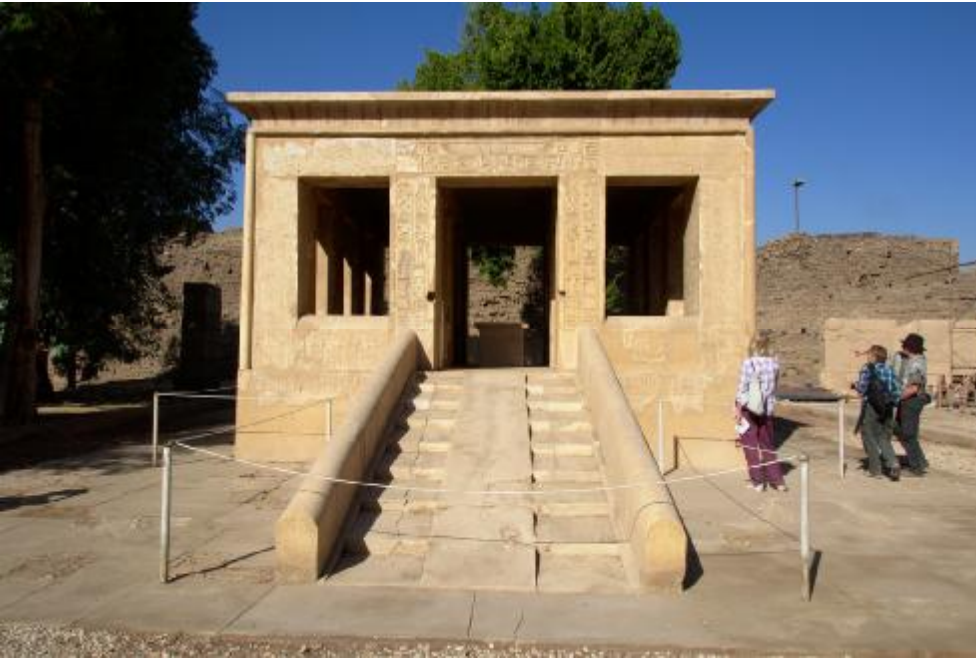
Like Osiris there are different ideas about Horus in different places and at different times. For instance there is Horus the Elder (who is one of the gods that the temple at Kom Ombo is dedicated to), and there is Horus the Child who is depicted on stelae called cippi (which were protective against snake bites and other such things). Horus is associated with falcon imagery which is important throughout time in the Delta, so one can place Horus in the Delta in later periods but the archaeological evidence is more complex.

There are few early sites in the north of Egypt, one of them is Tell el Farkha which shows evidence of habitation during the state formation period. Artefacts found here include curly pins that look a lot like the one shown as part of the Red Crown. Another find is a statue of a man, made of gold covered wood. He is depicted as naked except for a penis sheath and the art style is like that of the more southern Naqada culture - so Wilson suggested it may be evidence of an external elite installed in the Delta to run the trade routes (which again raises questions about where the Red Crown comes from originally). Other finds include vessels and ivory objects. These include iconography that isn't seen later in Egyptian history, but also child figurines that had similarities to later depictions of Horus the Child. But once again this is not a smoking gun - the figurines are also found in the south around this same period so it's not clear where they originated.

The origins of and the original Delta myths are thus difficult to pin down, and Wilson moved on to later evidence of specifically Delta myths. During the 1st and 2nd Dynasties there is evidence that there were definitely cult centres in the Delta region. Labels discovered in Abydos dating to the 1st Dynasty name both Sais and Buto. During the same period there are carvings that name a Cattle Nome in the Delta, which doesn't survive into later times. There is also a 1st Dynasty label that shows King Den fighting a hippo wearing a giraffe tail hair scarf that is associated with the Delta and this iconography survives into the Middle Kingdom.

An Old Kingdom shrine in Tell Ibrahim Awad includes iconography of hedgehogs that appears unique to the Delta and to this time period - boats in the shape of hedgehogs curled into a ball. Hedgehogs do actually float, and quite possibly enjoy it as this youtube video shows (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoZiZE2Zcng>). Wilson speculated that the ancient Egyptians in the Delta would have seen hedgehogs floating down the river on their back curled up in a protective ball and seen this as a good protective symbol. After this time period hedgehogs are still depicted but not as boats any more.

Later in the Old Kingdom there is evidence for differently shaped shrines in Upper and Lower Egypt. The evidence comes from Djoser's Step Pyramid complex at Saqqara where there are dummy shrines made out of stone in the courtyard with two different shapes for Upper and



Lower Egypt. This is not likely to be the first time these shrine shapes were used - just that Saqqara is the first time they were built in stone. The originals would have been made from reeds, which wouldn't survive well in the archaeological record. Wilson showed us some pictures of reed structures in the Euphrates region where the technology survived into the modern photographic era to show us how large and complex such structures can be.

The White Chapel of Senwosret is a Middle Kingdom structure that was discovered at Karnak and rebuilt (it's now in the Open Air Museum at Karnak Temple, above). Around the walls it lists all of the Nomes of Egypt (the administrative districts) with their associated gods. Wilson pointed out that the names of the gods are not what we expect - the "standard" associations of gods actually come from later texts. For instance on the White Chapel the cattle god Hapy is associated with a region in the Western Delta, but in later periods he's associated with Memphis. And given they change between the Middle Kingdom and later on they are also probably different in earlier periods - which leads to the sort of uncertainty that Wilson was explaining earlier in her talk when she discussed the associations of Horus and Osiris.

In the New Kingdom there is a Temple of Seth in Pi-Ramesses (Ramesses II's capital in the Delta) which dates to the time of Ramesses II - which is again not quite the geographical association we expect from later texts where Horus is the one of the pair who is associated with the Delta. Ramesses II also provides examples of the King's propaganda machine altering the stories to fit with local sensibilities. A stela from his reign in the Delta traces his lineage back to the Hyksos, and shows him offering to the Near Eastern god Baal - neither of those being things we would expect an Egyptian Pharaoh to do! In fact quite a lot of iconography from the Ramesside period doesn't match our expectations from later texts - and is sometimes altered by later Egyptians, for instance statues of the king protected by Seth tend to be altered to be a more "suitable" god for later tastes when Seth was demonised.

From the later periods there are cult centres in the Delta which have distinctive flavours that are not the same as the more southern cult centres. One example is Bubastis, where Bastet is the main god and there is a cemetery of cat offerings to her. Another example is Mendes, which has a sacred ram cemetery of offerings to Ba-nebdjed, and where the fish goddess Ha-Mehyt is also worshipped. The shrines to Ba-nebdjed that have been discovered are enormous and were built in the Late Period. There is a big emphasis on fertility and on the rising of the flood waters. Inside the temples were shrines to Ra (fire), Shu (air), Geb (earth), Osiris (flood) and Ba-nebdjed (the totality of all of these).

Another example of a distinctive Delta cult centre is Sais, where the goddess Neith is worshipped. She is a very old goddess referenced well back into Egyptian history. In her mythology she is the female creator at the centre of the universe. She is also the mother of Sobek, the crocodile god, and is often depicted suckling baby crocodiles. Sais is also mentioned in Herodotus who references the "Festival of Lamps" that occurred there but doesn't write down the story.

There are some texts from the 26th Dynasty which are about myths, and are largely the Delta Heliopolitan myths. They are difficult to fully understand - the myths are written in an often cryptic format more concerned with explaining why something must be done in a particular way during a ritual rather than providing a narrative. They are also more aide memoires for people who already should know what the meanings and stories are, rather than teaching tools for the uninformed. There's also the difficulty that we don't share a cultural context with the writers (unlike for the Greek myths) so some things are more cryptic than even the author of the text intended. Wilson read us a few examples to give a flavour for how hard they are to understand.

Wilson finished up her talk by saying that this is still very much research in progress - she has currently got a lot of questions, a lot of examples but only tentative conclusions. Ancient Egyptian mythology is complex and changes over time, so picking out the Delta specific threads is a complicated task. Egyptian mythology is also not particularly concerned with enforcing a global narrative structure on the myths - Wilson said they were in essence local solutions (myths/rituals) to local problems.

I found this talk fascinating, but difficult to write up as Wilson doesn't yet have a handle on any coherent structure. A useful reminder that as Egyptian civilisation covered a reasonable geographical area and a long time period then it's foolish to expect that there should be one "Egyptian mythology".

Margaret Patterson

EEG Trip Behind the Scenes at the British Museum (Plus a Visit to the Sir John Soane Museum)

In November a group of us had the chance to visit parts of the British Museum that aren't generally open to the public - some of the storerooms where the 95% of the Egyptian artefacts that aren't on display are held. I'd been on one of these trips before several years ago, so was pleased at the chance to go again - partly because it's a chance to see items you don't normally see, and partly because it would be someone different showing us round so we would see different things. When we arrived we were split into two groups, the one I was in was shown round by Adrienn Almásy.

Almásy took us to the Papyrus room first - this is her speciality, she works on Demotic and Coptic texts. There are around 3,300 papyri that belong to the museum - some of which are fakes. She showed us a few of these, mostly pieces of linen wrapped round sticks to fool 19th Century tourists. The real papyri mostly arrive at the museum as a collection of fragments which are then carefully pieced back together and mounted in glass frames. The collection is currently being scanned so that the texts can go online and be available to more people. The texts that the British Museum has are in Hieratic (a script used in parallel with hieroglyphs), Demotic (a later script that took over from Hieratic as the script of bureaucracy) and Coptic (a Greek derived script which took over from Demotic). The museum holds no Greek texts - these went to the British Library when the two collections were split. Which tells you something about the way the Egyptian texts were regarded - Greek=literature, but an Egyptian script=archaeology, regardless of age or literary merit!

We looked at a few examples of texts, with a bias towards the later period as that's Almásy's speciality. One was a text that's in Egyptian and written with Greek letters, that predates the development of the Coptic script, which was pretty cool. Another text was one that she's working on to publish - on one side it has a letter in Coptic, on the other side is a completely unrelated text in Arabic showing that the papyrus was reused long after the first letter was sent. She also talked a bit about the status of Greek and Egyptian as languages during the Ptolemaic era. The higher levels of bureaucrats spoke and wrote Greek, and the lower administration spoke Egyptian and wrote in Demotic script - and you can see on official documents that a Demotic document will be glossed in Greek to make sure the meaning is

clear. Almásy said that in modern Egypt speaking French or English is a status symbol and so high society speaks in a mixture of English, French and Arabic when talking amongst themselves. She speculated that perhaps in the Ptolemaic period the elites amongst Egyptian society mixed Egyptian with Greek in a similar fashion.

The next room we went to see was the pottery room, and here one of Almásy's colleagues (Valentina Gasperini) spoke to us briefly - she is a specialist in ceramics, and is working on those from the New Kingdom period at Amara West. The pottery room is laid out in chronological order starting with pre-dynastic Naqada III era pots, some of which are decorated with boats and other motifs that will become typical of later Egyptian art. Apart from a couple of exceptions the pots in this room are those that don't have inscriptions, the ostraca etc are stored elsewhere (that we didn't see). Someone asked about pottery techniques during Ancient Egyptian history and Gasperini told us that the pottery wheel dates back to at least the Old Kingdom. There are depictions in 4th Dynasty mastaba tombs of a type of wheel that she referred to as a "slow" wheel. But the kick wheel (which is more what we'd think of as a pottery wheel, I think) isn't seen depicted until the Late Period during the time when the Persian Darius ruled Egypt. We'd spent quite a lot of time in these first two rooms so we had to be rather more brisk through the next two.

We next went into the metal objects room, where a large amount of the artefacts in there is jewellery and Almásy opened several drawers for us to have a look. There is little, if any, of the British Museum's Egyptian jewellery that's out on display as it doesn't fit with the current concept for the galleries, so it was a real treat to see what they have. There were a lot of exquisite necklaces and beads, and in one of the drawers there was also a smallish (20cm) silver statue of Amun. This is one of John's favourite artefacts so he was delighted to have the chance to see it in person!

The last of the rooms we visited was the organics storeroom. In here they keep a lot of smaller wooden pieces like scribal palettes and statuettes, but the most noticeable contents are the mummies and coffins. They store the mummies and coffins on racks organised in chronological order starting with some naturally mummified pre-dynastic bodies. Each mummy that has a coffin is kept near to it, so the entire assemblage is in one area. On the day we visited there was a coffin down on a table near the racks being studied. And then all too soon we were finished with our tour - it had been an hour and a half, but I think you could spend days there and not see a significant fraction of the fascinating objects.

Before meeting up with the others at the British Museum John and I had visited the Sir John Soane Museum. This museum is an Enlightenment gentleman's cabinet (house) of curiosities as he left it when he died (as stipulated in his will). We'd visited it once before and done the whole museum properly, but on this occasion we were there for the Ancient Egypt related temporary exhibition - Egypt Uncovered: Belzoni and the Tomb of Pharaoh Seti I (which is still running till 15 April 2018). One of the items in the museum's permanent collection is the alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I, which was brought back to London by Belzoni 200 years ago.

We began our visit with a look at that, down in the basement of the museum. The whole piece is covered in texts and imagery from the Book of Gates, which is an ancient Egyptian funerary text. The scene that particularly caught my eye was inside the coffin and from near the end of the text where the great snake Apophis is bound in fetters. There's also a bit of near modern graffiti - Belzoni carved his name in the sarcophagus at the foot end near the lip of it. Which was standard practice at the time (for instance many of the fine statues in the Turin Museum have Salt's name carved into them), but it still makes me wince.



The temporary exhibition was quite small, just a couple of rooms. The first of these had an explanation of who the Great Belzoni was - circus strongman, engineer, adventurer and early archaeologist. He discovered the tomb of Seti I in 1817 - although it had been robbed in antiquity it was still exquisitely decorated and contained some small objects and the great sarcophagus. This room of the exhibition also included water-colours of the decoration done by Belzoni and his assistant (which in some places let us see detail that's since been damaged in the original).

It also included photos of pieces of the relief that were chiselled out and sent to European museums - one now in the Louvre (see my photo above which I took when I visited Paris in 2011), and a matching one now in Florence. Both show the goddess Hathor and Seti I. The second room of the exhibition had a few fragments of the lid of the sarcophagus (it was broken in antiquity, probably when the tomb was robbed) which are not usually on display; so that was pretty cool to see. There was also a video of high-res imagery that's been made of the sarcophagus. There is a plan to make a replica of Seti I's tomb so that more people can see the beautiful reliefs without risking the original, and there will be a replica of the sarcophagus made to go with that. It's a pretty small exhibition, but worth popping into if you're interested in Egypt - and the rest of the museum is also worth a look for the sheer over-the-topness of it all!

Margaret Patterson

"Illuminating the Path of Darkness: Artificial Light in Ancient Egyptian Ritual" Meghan Strong

In December Meghan Strong, a PhD student (about to submit her thesis!) at Cambridge, came to talk to us about the use of artificial light in Ancient Egyptian ritual. Light in ritual is something we're still familiar with in the modern world - think of Divali, Advent (or the Easter Vigil service), Hannukah and many other examples. Strong's argument is that the Ancient Egyptians were no different from modern people in this respect.

She began by giving us context for both artificial light in pre-history and in the ancient world, and for the study of light in an archaeological context. Fire is the basis of ancient artificial light. The first evidence of its use as a tool is around 1 million years ago, and Strong said that it can be argued that this is part of what makes us human (as distinct from animals). The first evidence of lamps dates to around 15,000 BCE and the earliest example has been found in the Lascaux Caves (which are famous for the pre-historic paintings on the walls). The lamp has been specifically carved to serve as a light source - most obviously to light the way into the cave, to let the artist see to paint. But it also creates the environment which you're supposed to see the paintings in - the dim flickering light source makes the paintings seem to move.

Strong told us that the study of light in an archaeological context is called Lyknology. It has generally focused on Greek and Roman lamps, with Ancient Egyptian lamps only featuring from the Roman period. While there are many studies of how the Ancient Egyptians used natural light (for instance in the design of the temple at Abu Simbel) there are only 10 papers on artificial light use and they are quite short. (In fact the whole subject seems somewhat obscure - Google and Wikipedia let me down when I was trying to check if I had the terminology correct, so apologies if I've got it wrong!) Even Petrie didn't publish on Pharaonic Egyptian

lamps - he wrote about them in later Ancient Egyptian history, and about lamps from Palestine and the Levant.

One of the reasons that Ancient Egyptian lamps are overlooked is that they don't look like one expects an ancient lamp to look - they didn't use oil wick lamps that burnt olive oil as in Greece or Rome, as they didn't have a ready source of olives for fuel. The fuel sources they did have were vegetable oils (which produce a lot of smoke) and animal fats. The latter are smelly when being made but odourless and smokeless when burnt so were the preferred fuel type.

The less familiar shapes mean that not only is there little archaeological evidence of lamps but it can also be hard to interpret. So Strong has needed to combine the evidence from archaeology, texts, iconography plus some experimental archaeology. One of the things that she has been doing as part of her PhD is constructing a typology of lamp types used in Ancient Egypt from 3000 BCE to 400 BCE and she has identified four groups. The first of these are spouted vessel lamps, and she talked about a 4000 BCE example that has burnt fat residue still in it - however this vessel shape can also be used for other purposes (like libation offerings), so it's hard to tell the purpose of any given archaeological object. The second vessel type she discussed was open vessel lamps, one very ornate example of which comes from Tutankhamun's tomb but other more practical ones have also been found at Deir el Medina. The last groups were what she calls "Wick on Stick" devices and "Wick in Stick" devices. An example of the former is also found in Tutankhamun's tomb and would be fat soaked linen wrapped around a stick. The example she showed us of the latter was a magic brick (which would have been placed in someone's tomb).

Having talked a bit about what sorts of lamps there were Strong moved on to talk about how they might have been used. A very important piece of evidence comes from a 12th Dynasty tomb of Hepdjefa, which is at Asyut. There is a text inside the tomb which details how two workers are supposed to glorify his tomb with gmḥt at New Year's Eve. From context these are lamps, this text is the only one that gives them a name although there are other texts that reference the same festival. They were to be obtained from the Keeper of the Wardrobe, which perhaps means that they were made of linen. They must be portable - the workers are instructed to carry them at night. And they are to be used to light a tk3 - from context this must be another type of light source.



Strong believes she has identified these light sources in reliefs from a variety of sources (such as one from the tomb of Nefersekeru in the photo - which John took of our calendar in December). The ones that look like tapers in the man's hands and on the structure are the gmḥt and the larger structure that he's lighting must be the tk3. Strong argues that the depictions of the gmḥt often show them lit - her experiments have shown that the lamp bends as it burns, and then the red paint at the top represents the burning and light. The experimental archaeology has also shown that the lights handle well - they produce a lot of light, they don't drip as they burn (much better than a candle!) and a 19cm wick will last for about 45 minutes. All in all they seem to be nice to use in a procession.

Having covered the "what" and the "how", Strong next discussed why the Egyptians were using light and what purpose it was playing in their rituals. Her evidence all comes from New Kingdom texts, but as the texts correlate with texts from the Middle Kingdom she thinks that her conclusions probably apply earlier as well as in the New Kingdom. The current state of the literature is that in Ancient Egyptian ritual light is

used for protective purposes only, and there are texts that back this up as a use for light (for instance in a funerary context). However Strong's research shows that this is not the only reason.

In texts that talk about the New Year's Eve ritual (which is described in Hepdjefa's tomb) the phrase "light to illuminate the path" shows up frequently and Strong thinks this is key to understanding the role of light in this context - that it facilitates movement (in a ritual sense, not just a pragmatic sense of being able to see one's feet in procession). In New Kingdom tombs light offerings are represented in scenes in liminal spaces (such as doorways) - again facilitating movement. And they are also painted at places where the natural light will no longer penetrate the tomb space, "illuminating" the path in and out of the tomb. These motifs are particularly seen at Deir el Medina.

Light is also implied to be involved in the rebirth of the deceased in a funerary context. And this ties into the New Year's Eve ritual as well - as that is a ritual for the birth of a new year. Tying both these concepts together, light is also seen as facilitating the movement of the soul between living and dead (in a very similar fashion to the Day of the Dead festival in Mexico).

There is a lot of evidence that artificial light was used in funerals in the New Kingdom, and for the last part of her talk Strong focused on a particular spell from the Book of the Dead (137a) which details a ritual called "Spell to transform into an Akh". In this ritual four priests are each to present a tk₃ (made of red linen coated in high quality oil) to the deceased. The tk₃ are then doused in milk and the ritual words are spoken. The text itself is very dense and jargon-y, so in order to figure out what's going on Strong has turned to other evidence including contextual clues within the text.

When was this ritual done? The texts for the Opening of the Mouth ceremony say that is done with the mummy set up in full sunlight, but the Akh ritual talks about the onset of night and the presence of Osiris the god (rather than the deceased as associated with Osiris). So this implies a ritual done at sunset as a point of transition - which fits with "illuminating the path". Also scenes in tombs where light offerings are presented to Osiris are all in the west of the tombs - which fits with sunset. Another important question is what is an Akh? It's a form of the deceased that is associated with light & illumination. Traditionally Egyptologists have assumed it was associated with the sun, but Strong disagrees. As well as the evidence of the text, any time the deceased is depicted becoming the Akh there is artificial light present in the scene.

Strong also did an experiment to see how the pigments used on coffins look when you have the light sources available to the Ancient Egyptians. She took four boards and painted them with the yellowy pigments that we know the Egyptians used - including orpiniol and yellow ochre, and with different varnishes. Then she put the boards up in the garden at the Fitzwilliam Museum with wick on a stick lamps in front of them, and both videoed them and asked people to record their changing perceptions of the boards as the sun set and the artificial light took over from natural light. Varnished yellow ochre in particular undergoes a transformation - it looks like gold under the artificial light, having looked like mud in sunlight. The flickering of the lights enhances the effect.

So taking all the evidence together Strong's suggestion is that the ritual for turning into an Akh provides the mourners with a representation of the event taking place. As the ritual takes place the sun sets and the coffin becomes illuminated only with the flickering light of the tk₃ and so it comes to life, transforming from the mundane reality of a painted coffin to a golden being.

I found this a really interesting talk. It's easy to forget when you look at objects in museums that the fluorescent light we see them under is far from their original context. It was also another great example of how you can take several obscure and insufficient sources of evidence and build up from them a plausible picture of customs of Ancient Egypt - the other recent example I'm thinking of is the talk we had from Alexandre Loktionov, another Cambridge PhD student, about Ancient Egyptian Justice.

Margaret Patterson

The Apis Bull



This limestone statue represents the Apis bull, probably the most important sacred animal in Egypt, and was carved during the reign of Nectanebo I, 379 - 361 BCE.

The Apis Bull was thought to be a living incarnation of the god Ptah, in a tradition dating back to the earliest dynasties. There was only one living Apis bull at a time, identified by a distinctive set of colouring and markings, and once found it was brought to the Apis sanctuary at Memphis where it was pampered and worshipped.

After death the Apis was mummified, equipped with a stone sarcophagus and canopic jars scaled to a suitable size for a bull, and buried in a sacred catacomb, the Serapeum at Saqqara, at least between the reigns of Amenhotep III and the Ptolemies. Mariette found this statue in a chapel there, on the processional way leading to the Serapeum.

(Louvre Museum, Paris - N390)

Bloomsbury Summer School 2018

The 2018 Bloomsbury Summer school programme has been announced. Each course is 5-days and takes place at UCL in London. Each week two courses run concurrently

2-6 July

Reading Coptic: the early texts: Dr Bill Manley

Kings, courtiers, creatures and commoners: three millennia of funerary practice at Saqqara: Dr Lidija McKnight and Dr Iwona Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin

9-13 July

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