



# ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 113      April / May 2018

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

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|------------------------|---|
| 8 <sup>th</sup> April  | New Research in the Kings' Valley: Tombs for the family of Amenhotep III:<br>Dr Susanne Bickel        |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> April | Annual Study Day – see below  |
| 13 <sup>th</sup> May   | Kings from Kush: Egypt's 25 <sup>th</sup> dynasty: Dr Robert Morkot                                   |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> June   | The Tomb of Tatia at Saqqara: Vincent Oeters  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> July   | Papyrus Berlin P10480-82: a Middle Kingdom mortuary ritual reflected in<br>writing: Dr Ilona Regulski |

This month we welcome Dr Susanne Bickel, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Basel, Switzerland, and Director of the University of Basel Kings' Valley Project.

For ten years, the University of Basel Kings' Valley Project has been exploring a number of undecorated tombs in the Theban royal necropolis. This research led to the discovery of the so far unknown tomb KV 64 which illustrates the long and manifold use and history of the Valley of the Kings. Investigations in the heavily looted tomb KV 40 yield important new insight into the community of people who were allowed a burial in this particularly sacred area.

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

Our fifth annual study day will take place on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> 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](mailto:info@essexegyptology.co.uk)

## **"Saite Tombs at Saqqara" Ramadan Hussein**

At the beginning of February Ramadan Hussein came to talk to us about the work he is doing at Saqqara. He works for Tübingen University, and is leading a joint German/Egyptian team who are investigating some of the Saite Period (26th Dynasty) tombs at Saqqara. Although best known for the Old Kingdom monuments, Saqqara also has the most Saite Period tombs known anywhere - there are several clustered around the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Pyramid of Unas, plus another 2 near the opposite corner of the Step Pyramid complex, two more near the 6th Dynasty Pyramid of Teti and yet another at the end of the causeway of Unas. There are also several un-mapped and undocumented tombs to the east of the Step Pyramid complex.

Hussein is working on three of the tombs that are near the Pyramid of Unas, which were initially discovered 117 years ago. These are the tombs of three officials by the names of Djenhebu,

Psamtik and Pediese. The three tombs are linked together - the main way in for all of them is via a single large shaft that's 9m by 8m in cross-section and 30m deep. The shaft splits into three at the bottom and there are also other smaller vertical shafts. The burial chambers are large, and built out of limestone (rather than just cut into the rock). They have vaulted ceilings, and niches in the side walls. As they each look like a giant sarcophagus he prefers to refer to them as "sarcophagus tombs" rather than the older name of "shaft tombs". They date to the end of the 26th Dynasty, and all three tomb occupants had many titles - clearly important officials. Their burials were rich, and some of their grave goods were found in the original excavation and are now in the Cairo Museum (and will be moved to the Grand Egyptian Museum).

He initially planned to republish the texts based on the original excavation and drawing on current knowledge, but subsequently got permission to re-excavate them using modern techniques. His study has several goals: to do a proper survey of the area; to re-excavate the shaft to see if there are any signs of a superstructure; to conserve the burial chambers; and to document and study the texts on the walls of the burial chambers. The first of these goals - to do a modern survey - surprised me, but despite Saqqara being a significant site it hasn't ever been mapped or surveyed with modern techniques, and in particular the tombs he's working on haven't been surveyed in any detail.

The previous excavation of the tombs took 10 days to investigate the whole shaft and chambers, and then they backfilled it all. So the backfill has stuff from around the area that got swept up into the spoil heaps and into the shaft. This includes pieces of text that look like part of the inscription that Prince Khaemwaset (a son of Ramesses II) left on the side of the Pyramid of Unas when he restored it. But Hussein said that on closer examination the glyphs are not the right size to fit into any of the spaces, and so it's perhaps evidence of another previously unknown inscription. There were also shabtis, mummified scarabs, sandals and pots. And more concerningly there were a lot of large rocks that were putting pressure on the chapel roofs, which was another reason that the shaft needed re-excavated.

The first evidence that they found for a superstructure was a limestone platform built adjacent to the shaft on the south side. On top of the platform were deposits containing bits of animals, seashells and burnt material. These may have been offerings which would make this a place of ritual. Around this platform and the shaft were large walls, but there's no sign of a ceiling over the shaft. To the south of the platform there was evidence of a chapel. This included something that might have been an altar - blocks marked with a  $\text{h}\text{t}\text{p}$  symbol (which is part of the offering formula) with ashes on top. This rather basic superstructure to the tomb is similar to that found at Saite tombs at Abusir, and seems that tomb owners in this period concentrated their resources on tomb decoration rather than the external area of the tomb.

Hussein's team have thoroughly documented the tomb decoration. They are making use of both analogue and digital techniques to make sure all possible details are recorded. On the analogue side of it they are using record sheets to document the colours of the hieroglyphs - both before and after conservation. This can then be used to colour the digital model they're making. 3D modelling is a technique that they are using extensively to record pretty much everything, for instance later in the talk he showed us models of parts of the site during excavation. One of its uses is to make proper reproductions of the texts from the walls and he spent a bit of time explaining the stages of the process. The big problem that needs to be overcome is the distortion you get when taking photos of the walls, and so the first step is to put small markers spaced out on the wall. The distance between these is measured very accurately, either digitally or with an old-fashioned tape measure, to give known points in 3D space. Then they take lots of overlapping photographs and use some software to stitch these together into a first approximation of a digital model. Another software package is used to combine this model with the measurements of the known points which produces a very accurate and high resolution model.

The team are also working on conserving the tomb decoration. It has been deteriorating due to dust, humidity and the fluorescent lighting that was installed for visitors. It's not just visitors that have been the problem; there was also a poorly done and undocumented conservation job.

The problem was previously "fixed" by closing the site to visitors, which slowed down but didn't halt the deterioration. Hussein was keen to tell us that the team members working on the conservation now are all young local Egyptians who are being trained by the Ministry. The team as a whole have discussed each step of the conservation before they do anything, working with a guiding principle of "the best conservation technique is the most minimal one". The first question they had to answer was how to deal with the humidity, and they decided that stabilisation and gradual reduction was the key. If they just installed air conditioning or pumped out the air then sudden change in humidity would draw the salt out of the limestone which would damage the inscriptions even more. So instead they are using one of the side shafts to provide a natural ventilation system - at the top they have built a structure over it with windows high up in the walls. These generate air-flow which gradually replaces the air in the tomb with drier air from outside.

They are also cleaning up the background to the hieroglyphs - again simplicity is the key, and so they are using water and alcohol in a 1:2 ratio. This is a non-invasive technique that makes a lot of difference, and he showed us some very striking before and after photos. They haven't touched the colours yet as that's a more complicated problem. Before any work is done on the colours they will have a chemical analysis done so that they can make suitable decisions based on the materials they are conserving. One of the problems with the previous conservation job is that no-one knows what was actually done, so they are also documenting the work very thoroughly - who did the work, what they did, on which day, and so on.

Hussein next moved on to discuss the texts that are found on the tomb walls. One of the things he's interested in is what tradition was followed to choose the texts. They are spells that are found in the Pyramid Texts, but did they follow on from the way that the Middle Kingdom used parts of the Pyramid Texts or did the Saite Period officials effectively copy their texts direct from the Old Kingdom example that they were buried next to? To explain what he concluded Hussein began by talking about how the texts were chosen and laid out in a tomb in the Old Kingdom. The spells map out a path for the deceased to follow to leave the tomb and journey to the afterlife. In the burial chamber there are spells of resurrection and to do with the netherworld. Then in through the passage into the antechamber are texts relating to the gates that the deceased must pass through, and in the antechamber itself are spells of transformation and for passing through the horizon. There is also an added layer of meaning in that taken as a whole the layout of the texts mimics the cosmos. This theory of decoration was originally proposed for the Dynasty 6 pyramids, but it also holds up for the mastaba tombs of private individuals in the Old Kingdom.

That layout of texts does not apply in the Middle Kingdom. The texts are now on a coffin instead of on the tomb walls, and so there's only one box rather than several rooms. There is some commonality though - the coffin itself is identified with Nut, and so is the cosmos, just like the whole tomb was in the Old Kingdom. The new reference point for laying out the texts is the body of the deceased (as opposed to the journey of the deceased) - on one side of the box are texts relating to offerings, on the other side are resurrection texts.

Having explained the two different models Hussein turned to the texts in these tombs that his team are excavating. The texts are on the walls, which is like the Old Kingdom pattern but they don't follow that layout scheme at all. Instead the whole burial chamber is laid out like a coffin, even down to having Nut or stars on the ceiling as would be on the lid of a coffin. Offering spells are the most common, then serpent spells and then resurrection spells. The east wall has a sequence of spells that are important for the process whereby the deceased turns into an Akh (a glorified version of the self). These include various spells, and also insignia and regalia. These last appear in part because these texts were originally for kings (back in the Old Kingdom), but by the time of these tombs the regalia is an important part of becoming an Akh for a private individual as well. The west wall is primarily resurrection texts - so the selections on these two walls are much like the texts on Middle Kingdom coffins in theme.

Most of the spells date back to the Old Kingdom originally, but not all of them. For instance on the foot wall there is a text at the top about Isis protecting the deceased from drowning (the wall has a water theme). This text is first known in the 25th Dynasty so a much more recent

addition to the canon. Underneath this text are spells to do with serpents - the text dates to the Old Kingdom but it has been titled by Middle Kingdom editors. Hussein pointed out that titling something is editing even though you haven't changed the text - as you are setting up the reader to interpret the text in a particular way, and this might not have been the intent of the original author.

Hussein has concluded that the texts on these 26th Dynasty tombs were transmitted via the Middle Kingdom, and not copied directly from the Old Kingdom. His reasons are two-fold: firstly the texts used are (mostly) a subset of the texts that were used in the Middle Kingdom. And secondly the layout of the texts in the tombs is that of a Middle Kingdom coffin rather than an Old Kingdom tomb.

Margaret Patterson

[The next Newsletter will have the second part of this talk.]

## **Bloomsbury Summer School Study Day**

Tombs and Temples of El Kab: current fieldwork and research

A study day with members of the Oxford University Expedition: Dr Vivian Davies, Dr Luigi Prada, Dr Susanne Woodhouse and Dr Liam McNamara

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2018, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London

Tickets £40

Further information: <http://www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury/study-days.htm>

## **Joint Friends of the Petrie Museum/Egypt Exploration Society Study Day**

Professor Harry S Smith's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday

A study day with Lucia Gahlin, Dr Cedric Gobeil, Prof Geoffrey Martin, Dr David Jeffreys, Dr Robert Morkot, Prof Paul Nicholson, Prof Stephen Quirke and Dr Elsbeth van der Wilt

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2018, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London

Tickets £35 Friends of the Petrie Museum/EES members, £40 guests

Further information: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/FriendsofPetrie/pdfs/Harry-Smith-Study-Day-16062018.pdf>

# **The Essex Egyptology Group Committee**

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