



# ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 116

October/November 2018

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

- 7<sup>th</sup> October            Exploring Egypt through woodcraft: Gersande Eschenbrenner-Dieme
- 4<sup>th</sup> November        An introduction to papyrology: Dr Margaret Mountford
- 2<sup>nd</sup> December        The coffins of Nespawershefyt & Pakepu at the Fitzwilliam Museum:  
Helen Strudwick
- 13<sup>th</sup> January         Lunch at Crofter's Wine Bar – see below for booking

This month we welcome Gersande Eschenbrenner-Dieme. Indigenous and imported wood species were extensively used in Ancient Egypt for manufacturing objects of daily life and equipment for the afterlife, notably statuary and coffins. Despite the abundance and use throughout the Pharaonic history, no global study has been carried out on this material. The TRACER project continues at the Institute of Archaeology of UCL until the autumn 2018. It will lay the foundations of a global project dedicated to wood in Ancient Egypt. This Marie Curie Fellowship project is entitled “Tree Roots: an analytical ‘culture’ of economy and religion – case-study Egypt 2050-1550 BC”.

With an innovative double methodology combining archaeometric and theoretical approaches, the project analyses woodcraft as a societal “tracer” in Ancient Egypt during a key period of its history: the Middle Bronze Age. Combining stylistic and technical analysis, archaeobotany, analytical chemistry, 3D scanner for the study of tool marks and dendrochronology, the main objective of TRACER is to highlight how the specialized production in one material, carpentry, correlates with the other dimensions of its historical context (religious, political, cultural). Beyond the purely stylistic aspects, the archaeometric analyses carried out on this furniture made it possible to identify workshops, methods of manufacture and to specify a chronology.

## **JANUARY 2019 LUNCH**

Alison Woollard will be organising our January lunch for Sunday 13th January 2019 at Crofter's Wine Bar in Witham. £5 deposit per person to reserve your place(s). Deposit to Alison as soon as possible. Members may bring a guest.

## **2019 STUDY DAYS – KEEP THE DATES**

We are very pleased to announce two Essex Egyptology Group Study Days in 2019. The first will be held on Saturday 27th April with Dylan Bickerstaffe talking about Queens of Egypt and the second will be held on Saturday 12th October featuring Dr Joann Fletcher and Dr Stephen Buckley on human bio-archaeology. Further details to follow; all members will have the opportunity to buy tickets in advance of general publicity.

## Chairman's Corner: Drink me, Eat me, Paint me!



18<sup>th</sup> century jar for mummy powder at Deutsches Apothekenmuseum Heidelberg, Germany. (Andreas Franzkowiak, Wikimedia commons)

When archaeologists found a large black granite sarcophagus in Alexandria in 2018 there was great speculation about what might be inside. When it was opened to reveal 3 decomposed mummies floating in an unholy mixture of sewage and liquidised mummy, the internet was not deterred. Cheated of revived mummies, ancient curses and Alexander the Great, newspapers and twitter reported that 'thousands had signed a petition to drink the 'mummy juice' from the sarcophagus'!

Hopefully those signing the petition did so in jest and no-one in the 21st century really believes that drinking 'mummy juice', 'coffin liquor' or sewage is good for you. But this modern humour harks back to the very real use of mummies as medicine in the early modern period (roughly the 16th-18th centuries). Through convoluted medieval mistranslation embalmed ancient Egyptians were confused for the black bitumen 'mumiya' from Persia, used as a medicine in the ancient and medieval world. This confusion was compounded by the mystical, orientalist aura that surrounded ancient Egypt as Renaissance learning discovered the Greco-Roman texts on Egypt and explorers brought back tales of treasure, mummies and exotica. With a strong association

between Egypt, mysticism and ancient wisdom, it probably seemed reasonable to assume that ground up mummy would make an excellent cure for a

multitude of ailments. As a result, 'Mumia' mummy powder was sold as a standard remedy in many apothecaries across Europe and several different types of container survive in museums around the continent.

Even while ingesting ground up mummies, early modern Europeans found plenty of other uses for them. As well as fertiliser, there is a long history of using mummies for making paint. Ground up mummy, mixed with a binding agent, produced an excellent brown pigment, much admired by European painters and known as 'mummy brown'. This pigment is easily identifiable by close examination under a microscope because of the many small bone fragments present on the surface of the painting. One hopes the painters didn't lick their brushes too often.

Hannah Pethen



A painting with extensive use of mummy brown. Interior of a Kitchen by Martin Drolling (Public Domain), Wikimedia commons

## THE EGYPTIAN HOUSE IN PENZANCE



At the recommendation of one of our speakers, we recently spent a week at the Egyptian House in Penzance, a Georgian building with an Egyptianizing façade. Built around 1835 for John Lanvin to house his geological shop and museum, it is now owned by the Landmark Trust. The architect may have been John Foulston of Plymouth. Stylistic peculiarities include strange winged and scrolled fruits (instead of sun disks), and the goddesses above the door are clearly modelled on ship's figures. Other details, like the eagle or the decoration of the cornetto coving aren't Egyptian at all. Nevertheless, the lotus columns, covings and sloped scroll surrounds create a distinctly Egyptian impression, with the overall arrangement of the façade well-proportioned and in the shape of a pylon. The exuberant colour scheme calls to mind the colourful illustrations of 18th and 19th century travellers to Egypt.

Although slightly sloped doorframes aren't unusual for the 18th and 19th century, we found another building in a side street with Egyptian-seeming doors – although we don't know whether this is deliberate or coincidence.



The building has three self-catering flats, and on the ground floor a shop and workshop of natural lotions and potions permeates it with a lovely scent. The flats, although furnished to evoke an unfussy 19th-century feel, also contain Egyptian accents, such as a little curiosity cabinet and wall hangings. The third floor flat has a window seat with stunning views over the roofs of Penzance to St Michael's Mount. However, you do need to be fit – the spiral stairs to the flats are steep and narrow!

We thoroughly enjoyed our stay and having the keys to such an amazing front door was certainly a thrill.

### Further reading:

[www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk);

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_House,\\_Penzance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_House,_Penzance)

Humber, J M and Price, C (eds). 2003. *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture*. London: UCL Press

Tilly and Paul Burton

## STUDY DAY

The friends of the Petrie Museum will be holding a study day in London, on Saturday 20th October. "Amenhotep III and his funerary temple: a House for Millions of Years". Cost £35 for Friends and £45 for guests.

See [www.ucl.ac.uk/FriendsofPetrie](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/FriendsofPetrie) for further details.

## STUDY DAY

Ta-wer Egyptology will be holding a study day, in London, on 27th October 2018. "Aspects of Abydos". Cost £55 and £65 to include buffet lunch.

See [www.ta-wer.org](http://www.ta-wer.org) for further details.

## STUDY DAY

The Egypt Exploration Society will be holding a study day, in London, on Saturday 24th November. "Egypt's Shifting Capital". Cost £28 for Members and £33 for guests. See [www.ees.ac.uk/Pages/Events/Category/events](http://www.ees.ac.uk/Pages/Events/Category/events) for further details.

## The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

**Chairman:** Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)  
**Treasurer:** Rosemary Ackland ([treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk](mailto:treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk))  
**Secretary/Membership:** Janet Brewer BEM ([secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk](mailto:secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk))  
**Programme:** Tilly Burton ([programme@essexegyptology.co.uk](mailto:programme@essexegyptology.co.uk))  
**Publicity/Facebook:** Dick Sellicks

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

All articles express the views and opinions of their authors

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