



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 119 April/May 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th April	Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt – Dr Reg Clark
27 th April	Study Day – Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom – Dylan Bickerstaffe – entry by ticket only, see below
12 th May	Shalfak: A Middle Kingdom Fortress in Lake Nubia – Dr Claudia Näser
2 nd June	Authenticating Egyptian artefacts: techniques - Marcel Maree
7 th July	Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
4 th August	Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes Annual General Meeting

CONTENTS

1	Annual subscriptions due
2	April EEG Study Day
3	Chairman's Corner
4	Then and Now
5	Bloomsbury Summer School Day
6	Then and Now
7	Contact us

This month we welcome Dr Reg Clark who holds a PhD from Swansea University. Egyptians went to great lengths to protect their dead from the omnipresent threat of robbery by incorporating specially developed architectural features in their tombs. However, the architecture of tomb security has rarely been studied as a subject in its own right and is usually treated as a secondary topic in publications of a scholarly nature, which tend to regard its role as incidental to the design of the tomb rather than perhaps being the driving force behind it.

In May we welcome Dr Claudia Näser who will be reporting on the archaeological project at Shalfak, one of two surviving Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. After the site had seen a summary investigation by the Harvard University and Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition in a single season in 1931, it remained untouched until it was thought to have been drowned in the waters of Lake Nasser/Nubia in the 1960s. Only in 2002 was it discovered that Shalfak, and the neighbouring fortress of Uronarti, had survived on small islands in the reservoir lake, some fifty kilometres south of the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Funding of the Egypt Exploration Society was instrumental to set up the Shalfak Archaeological Mission (SAM) in the harsh conditions of this environment in 2017. The talk will introduce both the site and the current fieldwork.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are due at the meeting on 12th May. They remain at £33 adult and £10 student/child. Cheques payable “Essex Egyptology Group” or ask for bank account details to pay direct. If you would like to pay at the meeting on 7th April or at the Study Day on 27th April, that would be appreciated.

ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP APRIL STUDY DAY

There are a few tickets remaining for our study day on Saturday 27th April. “Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom” with Dylan Bickerstaffe. Lunch and refreshments are included.

Tickets are priced at £36 members (£40 non-members). Please contact info@essexegyptology.co.uk for programme and order form.

Chairman’s Corner: ‘Red land, black land’: What the valley/desert divide means for Egyptian archaeology

In my previous column I considered how far the stereotypical ‘Tombs, Mummies and Pyramids’ perception of ancient Egypt results from the nature of the evidence. Here I’d like to dig into that a bit further and look at one facet of it; the archaeological implications of the stark division of Egypt into fertile green Nile valley floodplain and dry desert. The divide between the desert and the valley is so stark that it’s immediately obvious to anyone who has visited Egypt. It’s become something of a cliché, taught in all ‘Egypt 101’ modules and referenced regularly by students in essays about ancient Egyptian dualism, environment and landscape. But apart from its influence upon ancient Egyptian society, mythology and religion, the sharp desert versus valley divide has an invisible but important influence on archaeology.

Most archaeological evidence from Egypt comes from the desert. Remains from the valley floodplain are relatively limited and often restricted to temple structures such as Karnak or Edfu. This is the inevitable result of different site formation processes that take place in the desert and the valley.

Archaeological evidence in the desert has a higher probability of escaping or surviving the natural processes of decay and is also less likely to be removed by subsequent human activity. The desert has traditionally been less intensively exploited (note that ‘exploitation’ is used in its anthropological sense of ‘made use of’ and does not carry any negative connotation) than the Nile valley. And, since the desert has traditionally been much easier for archaeologists to access because it is still less intensively exploited, archaeological evidence in the desert is also more likely to be excavated. Overall archaeological evidence in the desert has a threefold



The stark divide between the fertile Nile valley floodplain and the dry desert on the west bank at Luxor, view from El Qurn towards Birket Habu.

advantage over that in the valley in terms of how likely we are to know of it and incorporate its existence into our interpretations of ancient Egypt.

This wouldn't matter if valley and desert contained the same types of archaeological evidence, because the desert would then provide us with a reasonable sample of the total archaeological remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. But because of their different characteristics the ancient Egyptians naturally exploited the valley and desert for different purposes. We have already discussed how the Egyptians use of the desert for funerary purposes has skewed public perception of ancient Egypt as an exotic society obsessed with death, but this is not the only aspect of ancient Egypt that suffers from the valley/desert divide. Settlement archaeology is another victim. Most Egyptian settlements were in the valley or on the edge of it and are therefore either buried under alluvial fields or modern settlements. The few settlements that have been excavated extensively are located on the edge of the desert and are exceptional in some way; pyramid towns; workmen's villages; the socio-religious experiment that was Amarna. We can learn a lot from them, but there is always the question of how representative they are of the typical Nile valley town or village.



The small Aten temple at Amarna: Although it has been extensively excavated, some have questioned how far Akhenaten's capital is representative of Egyptian urbanism.

Over the last 20 years some brilliant excavators have been working to counteract this bias in the evidence through thorough, extensive excavation of various settlements up and down the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the evidence from the desert is so pervasive and so strong that you can still find people (e.g. <https://www.mikeanderson.biz/2010/02/civilization-without-cities.html>) repeating the now discredited idea that ancient Egypt was a 'civilisation without cities' (Wilson 1958). The valley/desert divide, the undue prominence of archaeological evidence from the desert and the limited visibility of the Nile valley in archaeological terms continues to affect Egyptology, just as it skews the public perception of ancient Egypt.

References:

Wilson, J. A. 1958. Egypt through the New Kingdom: Civilization without Cities, in C.H. Kraeling and R. AcC. Adams (eds.) City Invincible ed. Chicago, 124-136.

Hannah Pethen

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 8th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

"Of Caravans and Crossroads: Cultures of Central Asia and the Silk Road in Antiquity."

Tickets: £40

Further information www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

THEN AND NOW from Dick Sellicks

KV6 in 1988 on the left with entrance huts to the Valley and on the right as it is today.



The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Chairman: Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)
(chair@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Treasurer: Rosemary Ackland (treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Secretary/Membership: Janet Brewer BEM (secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Programme: Tilly Burton (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

Please e-mail to newsletter@essexegyptology.co.uk

You can visit our web site at www.essexegyptology.co.uk

or join us on  Essex Egyptology Group uk



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 119 April/May 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th April	Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt – Dr Reg Clark
27 th April	Study Day – Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom – Dylan Bickerstaffe – entry by ticket only, see below
12 th May	Shalfak: A Middle Kingdom Fortress in Lake Nubia – Dr Claudia Näser
2 nd June	Authenticating Egyptian artefacts: techniques - Marcel Maree
7 th July	Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
4 th August	Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes Annual General Meeting

CONTENTS

1	Annual subscriptions due
2	April EEG Study Day
3	Chairman's Corner
4	Then and Now
5	Bloomsbury Summer School Day
6	Then and Now
7	Contact us

This month we welcome Dr Reg Clark who holds a PhD from Swansea University. Egyptians went to great lengths to protect their dead from the omnipresent threat of robbery by incorporating specially developed architectural features in their tombs. However, the architecture of tomb security has rarely been studied as a subject in its own right and is usually treated as a secondary topic in publications of a scholarly nature, which tend to regard its role as incidental to the design of the tomb rather than perhaps being the driving force behind it.

In May we welcome Dr Claudia Näser who will be reporting on the archaeological project at Shalfak, one of two surviving Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. After the site had seen a summary investigation by the Harvard University and Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition in a single season in 1931, it remained untouched until it was thought to have been drowned in the waters of Lake Nasser/Nubia in the 1960s. Only in 2002 was it discovered that Shalfak, and the neighbouring fortress of Uronarti, had survived on small islands in the reservoir lake, some fifty kilometres south of the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Funding of the Egypt Exploration Society was instrumental to set up the Shalfak Archaeological Mission (SAM) in the harsh conditions of this environment in 2017. The talk will introduce both the site and the current fieldwork.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are due at the meeting on 12th May. They remain at £33 adult and £10 student/child. Cheques payable “Essex Egyptology Group” or ask for bank account details to pay direct. If you would like to pay at the meeting on 7th April or at the Study Day on 27th April, that would be appreciated.

ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP APRIL STUDY DAY

There are a few tickets remaining for our study day on Saturday 27th April. “Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom” with Dylan Bickerstaffe. Lunch and refreshments are included.

Tickets are priced at £36 members (£40 non-members). Please contact info@essexegyptology.co.uk for programme and order form.

Chairman’s Corner: ‘Red land, black land’: What the valley/desert divide means for Egyptian archaeology

In my previous column I considered how far the stereotypical ‘Tombs, Mummies and Pyramids’ perception of ancient Egypt results from the nature of the evidence. Here I’d like to dig into that a bit further and look at one facet of it; the archaeological implications of the stark division of Egypt into fertile green Nile valley floodplain and dry desert. The divide between the desert and the valley is so stark that it’s immediately obvious to anyone who has visited Egypt. It’s become something of a cliché, taught in all ‘Egypt 101’ modules and referenced regularly by students in essays about ancient Egyptian dualism, environment and landscape. But apart from its influence upon ancient Egyptian society, mythology and religion, the sharp desert versus valley divide has an invisible but important influence on archaeology.

Most archaeological evidence from Egypt comes from the desert. Remains from the valley floodplain are relatively limited and often restricted to temple structures such as Karnak or Edfu. This is the inevitable result of different site formation processes that take place in the desert and the valley.

Archaeological evidence in the desert has a higher probability of escaping or surviving the natural processes of decay and is also less likely to be removed by subsequent human activity. The desert has traditionally been less intensively exploited (note that ‘exploitation’ is used in its anthropological sense of ‘made use of’ and does not carry any negative connotation) than the Nile valley. And, since the desert has traditionally been much easier for archaeologists to access because it is still less intensively exploited, archaeological evidence in the desert is also more likely to be excavated. Overall archaeological evidence in the desert has a threefold



The stark divide between the fertile Nile valley floodplain and the dry desert on the west bank at Luxor, view from El Qurn towards Birket Habu.

advantage over that in the valley in terms of how likely we are to know of it and incorporate its existence into our interpretations of ancient Egypt.

This wouldn't matter if valley and desert contained the same types of archaeological evidence, because the desert would then provide us with a reasonable sample of the total archaeological remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. But because of their different characteristics the ancient Egyptians naturally exploited the valley and desert for different purposes. We have already discussed how the Egyptians use of the desert for funerary purposes has skewed public perception of ancient Egypt as an exotic society obsessed with death, but this is not the only aspect of ancient Egypt that suffers from the valley/desert divide. Settlement archaeology is another victim. Most Egyptian settlements were in the valley or on the edge of it and are therefore either buried under alluvial fields or modern settlements. The few settlements that have been excavated extensively are located on the edge of the desert and are exceptional in some way; pyramid towns; workmen's villages; the socio-religious experiment that was Amarna. We can learn a lot from them, but there is always the question of how representative they are of the typical Nile valley town or village.



The small Aten temple at Amarna: Although it has been extensively excavated, some have questioned how far Akhenaten's capital is representative of Egyptian urbanism.

Over the last 20 years some brilliant excavators have been working to counteract this bias in the evidence through thorough, extensive excavation of various settlements up and down the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the evidence from the desert is so pervasive and so strong that you can still find people (e.g. <https://www.mikeanderson.biz/2010/02/civilization-without-cities.html>) repeating the now discredited idea that ancient Egypt was a 'civilisation without cities' (Wilson 1958). The valley/desert divide, the undue prominence of archaeological evidence from the desert and the limited visibility of the Nile valley in archaeological terms continues to affect Egyptology, just as it skews the public perception of ancient Egypt.

References:

Wilson, J. A. 1958. Egypt through the New Kingdom: Civilization without Cities, in C.H. Kraeling and R. AcC. Adams (eds.) *City Invincible* ed. Chicago, 124-136.

Hannah Pethen

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 8th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

"Of Caravans and Crossroads: Cultures of Central Asia and the Silk Road in Antiquity."

Tickets: £40

Further information www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

THEN AND NOW from Dick Sellicks

KV6 in 1988 on the left with entrance huts to the Valley and on the right as it is today.



The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Chairman: Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)
(chair@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Treasurer: Rosemary Ackland (treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Secretary/Membership: Janet Brewer BEM (secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Programme: Tilly Burton (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

Please e-mail to newsletter@essexegyptology.co.uk

You can visit our web site at www.essexegyptology.co.uk

or join us on  Essex Egyptology Group uk



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 119 April/May 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th April	Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt – Dr Reg Clark
27 th April	Study Day – Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom – Dylan Bickerstaffe – entry by ticket only, see below
12 th May	Shalfak: A Middle Kingdom Fortress in Lake Nubia – Dr Claudia Näser
2 nd June	Authenticating Egyptian artefacts: techniques - Marcel Maree
7 th July	Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
4 th August	Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes Annual General Meeting

CONTENTS

1	Annual subscriptions due
2	April EEG Study Day
3	Chairman's Corner
4	Then and Now
5	Bloomsbury Summer School Day
6	Then and Now
7	Contact us

This month we welcome Dr Reg Clark who holds a PhD from Swansea University. Egyptians went to great lengths to protect their dead from the omnipresent threat of robbery by incorporating specially developed architectural features in their tombs. However, the architecture of tomb security has rarely been studied as a subject in its own right and is usually treated as a secondary topic in publications of a scholarly nature, which tend to regard its role as incidental to the design of the tomb rather than perhaps being the driving force behind it.

In May we welcome Dr Claudia Näser who will be reporting on the archaeological project at Shalfak, one of two surviving Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. After the site had seen a summary investigation by the Harvard University and Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition in a single season in 1931, it remained untouched until it was thought to have been drowned in the waters of Lake Nasser/Nubia in the 1960s. Only in 2002 was it discovered that Shalfak, and the neighbouring fortress of Uronarti, had survived on small islands in the reservoir lake, some fifty kilometres south of the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Funding of the Egypt Exploration Society was instrumental to set up the Shalfak Archaeological Mission (SAM) in the harsh conditions of this environment in 2017. The talk will introduce both the site and the current fieldwork.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are due at the meeting on 12th May. They remain at £33 adult and £10 student/child. Cheques payable “Essex Egyptology Group” or ask for bank account details to pay direct. If you would like to pay at the meeting on 7th April or at the Study Day on 27th April, that would be appreciated.

ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP APRIL STUDY DAY

There are a few tickets remaining for our study day on Saturday 27th April. “Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom” with Dylan Bickerstaffe. Lunch and refreshments are included.

Tickets are priced at £36 members (£40 non-members). Please contact info@essexegyptology.co.uk for programme and order form.

Chairman’s Corner: ‘Red land, black land’: What the valley/desert divide means for Egyptian archaeology

In my previous column I considered how far the stereotypical ‘Tombs, Mummies and Pyramids’ perception of ancient Egypt results from the nature of the evidence. Here I’d like to dig into that a bit further and look at one facet of it; the archaeological implications of the stark division of Egypt into fertile green Nile valley floodplain and dry desert. The divide between the desert and the valley is so stark that it’s immediately obvious to anyone who has visited Egypt. It’s become something of a cliché, taught in all ‘Egypt 101’ modules and referenced regularly by students in essays about ancient Egyptian dualism, environment and landscape. But apart from its influence upon ancient Egyptian society, mythology and religion, the sharp desert versus valley divide has an invisible but important influence on archaeology.

Most archaeological evidence from Egypt comes from the desert. Remains from the valley floodplain are relatively limited and often restricted to temple structures such as Karnak or Edfu. This is the inevitable result of different site formation processes that take place in the desert and the valley.

Archaeological evidence in the desert has a higher probability of escaping or surviving the natural processes of decay and is also less likely to be removed by subsequent human activity. The desert has traditionally been less intensively exploited (note that ‘exploitation’ is used in its anthropological sense of ‘made use of’ and does not carry any negative connotation) than the Nile valley. And, since the desert has traditionally been much easier for archaeologists to access because it is still less intensively exploited, archaeological evidence in the desert is also more likely to be excavated. Overall archaeological evidence in the desert has a threefold



The stark divide between the fertile Nile valley floodplain and the dry desert on the west bank at Luxor, view from El Qurn towards Birket Habu.

advantage over that in the valley in terms of how likely we are to know of it and incorporate its existence into our interpretations of ancient Egypt.

This wouldn't matter if valley and desert contained the same types of archaeological evidence, because the desert would then provide us with a reasonable sample of the total archaeological remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. But because of their different characteristics the ancient Egyptians naturally exploited the valley and desert for different purposes. We have already discussed how the Egyptians use of the desert for funerary purposes has skewed public perception of ancient Egypt as an exotic society obsessed with death, but this is not the only aspect of ancient Egypt that suffers from the valley/desert divide. Settlement archaeology is another victim. Most Egyptian settlements were in the valley or on the edge of it and are therefore either buried under alluvial fields or modern settlements. The few settlements that have been excavated extensively are located on the edge of the desert and are exceptional in some way; pyramid towns; workmen's villages; the socio-religious experiment that was Amarna. We can learn a lot from them, but there is always the question of how representative they are of the typical Nile valley town or village.



The small Aten temple at Amarna: Although it has been extensively excavated, some have questioned how far Akhenaten's capital is representative of Egyptian urbanism.

Over the last 20 years some brilliant excavators have been working to counteract this bias in the evidence through thorough, extensive excavation of various settlements up and down the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the evidence from the desert is so pervasive and so strong that you can still find people (e.g. <https://www.mikeanderson.biz/2010/02/civilization-without-cities.html>) repeating the now discredited idea that ancient Egypt was a 'civilisation without cities' (Wilson 1958). The valley/desert divide, the undue prominence of archaeological evidence from the desert and the limited visibility of the Nile valley in archaeological terms continues to affect Egyptology, just as it skews the public perception of ancient Egypt.

References:

Wilson, J. A. 1958. Egypt through the New Kingdom: Civilization without Cities, in C.H. Kraeling and R. AcC. Adams (eds.) City Invincible ed. Chicago, 124-136.

Hannah Pethen

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 8th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

"Of Caravans and Crossroads: Cultures of Central Asia and the Silk Road in Antiquity."

Tickets: £40

Further information www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

THEN AND NOW from Dick Sellicks

KV6 in 1988 on the left with entrance huts to the Valley and on the right as it is today.



The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Chairman: Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)
(chair@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Treasurer: Rosemary Ackland (treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Secretary/Membership: Janet Brewer BEM (secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Programme: Tilly Burton (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

Please e-mail to newsletter@essexegyptology.co.uk

You can visit our web site at www.essexegyptology.co.uk

or join us on  Essex Egyptology Group uk



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 119 April/May 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th April	Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt – Dr Reg Clark
27 th April	Study Day – Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom – Dylan Bickerstaffe – entry by ticket only, see below
12 th May	Shalfak: A Middle Kingdom Fortress in Lake Nubia – Dr Claudia Näser
2 nd June	Authenticating Egyptian artefacts: techniques - Marcel Maree
7 th July	Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
4 th August	Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes Annual General Meeting

CONTENTS

1	Annual subscriptions due
2	April EEG Study Day
3	Chairman's Corner
4	Then and Now
5	Bloomsbury Summer School Day
6	Then and Now
7	Contact us

This month we welcome Dr Reg Clark who holds a PhD from Swansea University. Egyptians went to great lengths to protect their dead from the omnipresent threat of robbery by incorporating specially developed architectural features in their tombs. However, the architecture of tomb security has rarely been studied as a subject in its own right and is usually treated as a secondary topic in publications of a scholarly nature, which tend to regard its role as incidental to the design of the tomb rather than perhaps being the driving force behind it.

In May we welcome Dr Claudia Näser who will be reporting on the archaeological project at Shalfak, one of two surviving Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. After the site had seen a summary investigation by the Harvard University and Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition in a single season in 1931, it remained untouched until it was thought to have been drowned in the waters of Lake Nasser/Nubia in the 1960s. Only in 2002 was it discovered that Shalfak, and the neighbouring fortress of Uronarti, had survived on small islands in the reservoir lake, some fifty kilometres south of the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Funding of the Egypt Exploration Society was instrumental to set up the Shalfak Archaeological Mission (SAM) in the harsh conditions of this environment in 2017. The talk will introduce both the site and the current fieldwork.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are due at the meeting on 12th May. They remain at £33 adult and £10 student/child. Cheques payable “Essex Egyptology Group” or ask for bank account details to pay direct. If you would like to pay at the meeting on 7th April or at the Study Day on 27th April, that would be appreciated.

ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP APRIL STUDY DAY

There are a few tickets remaining for our study day on Saturday 27th April. “Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom” with Dylan Bickerstaffe. Lunch and refreshments are included.

Tickets are priced at £36 members (£40 non-members). Please contact info@essexegyptology.co.uk for programme and order form.

Chairman’s Corner: ‘Red land, black land’: What the valley/desert divide means for Egyptian archaeology

In my previous column I considered how far the stereotypical ‘Tombs, Mummies and Pyramids’ perception of ancient Egypt results from the nature of the evidence. Here I’d like to dig into that a bit further and look at one facet of it; the archaeological implications of the stark division of Egypt into fertile green Nile valley floodplain and dry desert. The divide between the desert and the valley is so stark that it’s immediately obvious to anyone who has visited Egypt. It’s become something of a cliché, taught in all ‘Egypt 101’ modules and referenced regularly by students in essays about ancient Egyptian dualism, environment and landscape. But apart from its influence upon ancient Egyptian society, mythology and religion, the sharp desert versus valley divide has an invisible but important influence on archaeology.

Most archaeological evidence from Egypt comes from the desert. Remains from the valley floodplain are relatively limited and often restricted to temple structures such as Karnak or Edfu. This is the inevitable result of different site formation processes that take place in the desert and the valley.

Archaeological evidence in the desert has a higher probability of escaping or surviving the natural processes of decay and is also less likely to be removed by subsequent human activity. The desert has traditionally been less intensively exploited (note that ‘exploitation’ is used in its anthropological sense of ‘made use of’ and does not carry any negative connotation) than the Nile valley. And, since the desert has traditionally been much easier for archaeologists to access because it is still less intensively exploited, archaeological evidence in the desert is also more likely to be excavated. Overall archaeological evidence in the desert has a threefold



The stark divide between the fertile Nile valley floodplain and the dry desert on the west bank at Luxor, view from El Qurn towards Birket Habu.

advantage over that in the valley in terms of how likely we are to know of it and incorporate its existence into our interpretations of ancient Egypt.

This wouldn't matter if valley and desert contained the same types of archaeological evidence, because the desert would then provide us with a reasonable sample of the total archaeological remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. But because of their different characteristics the ancient Egyptians naturally exploited the valley and desert for different purposes. We have already discussed how the Egyptians use of the desert for funerary purposes has skewed public perception of ancient Egypt as an exotic society obsessed with death, but this is not the only aspect of ancient Egypt that suffers from the valley/desert divide. Settlement archaeology is another victim. Most Egyptian settlements were in the valley or on the edge of it and are therefore either buried under alluvial fields or modern settlements. The few settlements that have been excavated extensively are located on the edge of the desert and are exceptional in some way; pyramid towns; workmen's villages; the socio-religious experiment that was Amarna. We can learn a lot from them, but there is always the question of how representative they are of the typical Nile valley town or village.



The small Aten temple at Amarna: Although it has been extensively excavated, some have questioned how far Akhenaten's capital is representative of Egyptian urbanism.

Over the last 20 years some brilliant excavators have been working to counteract this bias in the evidence through thorough, extensive excavation of various settlements up and down the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the evidence from the desert is so pervasive and so strong that you can still find people (e.g. <https://www.mikeanderson.biz/2010/02/civilization-without-cities.html>) repeating the now discredited idea that ancient Egypt was a 'civilisation without cities' (Wilson 1958). The valley/desert divide, the undue prominence of archaeological evidence from the desert and the limited visibility of the Nile valley in archaeological terms continues to affect Egyptology, just as it skews the public perception of ancient Egypt.

References:

Wilson, J. A. 1958. Egypt through the New Kingdom: Civilization without Cities, in C.H. Kraeling and R. AcC. Adams (eds.) *City Invincible* ed. Chicago, 124-136.

Hannah Pethen

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 8th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

"Of Caravans and Crossroads: Cultures of Central Asia and the Silk Road in Antiquity."

Tickets: £40

Further information www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

THEN AND NOW from Dick Sellicks

KV6 in 1988 on the left with entrance huts to the Valley and on the right as it is today.



The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Chairman: Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)
(chair@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Treasurer: Rosemary Ackland (treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Secretary/Membership: Janet Brewer BEM (secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Programme: Tilly Burton (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

Please e-mail to newsletter@essexegyptology.co.uk

You can visit our web site at www.essexegyptology.co.uk

or join us on  Essex Egyptology Group uk



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 119 April/May 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

7 th April	Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt – Dr Reg Clark
27 th April	Study Day – Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom – Dylan Bickerstaffe – entry by ticket only, see below
12 th May	Shalfak: A Middle Kingdom Fortress in Lake Nubia – Dr Claudia Näser
2 nd June	Authenticating Egyptian artefacts: techniques - Marcel Maree
7 th July	Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
4 th August	Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes Annual General Meeting

CONTENTS

1	Annual subscriptions due
2	April EEG Study Day
3	Chairman's Corner
4	Then and Now
5	Bloomsbury Summer School Day
6	Then and Now
7	Contact us

This month we welcome Dr Reg Clark who holds a PhD from Swansea University. Egyptians went to great lengths to protect their dead from the omnipresent threat of robbery by incorporating specially developed architectural features in their tombs. However, the architecture of tomb security has rarely been studied as a subject in its own right and is usually treated as a secondary topic in publications of a scholarly nature, which tend to regard its role as incidental to the design of the tomb rather than perhaps being the driving force behind it.

In May we welcome Dr Claudia Näser who will be reporting on the archaeological project at Shalfak, one of two surviving Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. After the site had seen a summary investigation by the Harvard University and Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition in a single season in 1931, it remained untouched until it was thought to have been drowned in the waters of Lake Nasser/Nubia in the 1960s. Only in 2002 was it discovered that Shalfak, and the neighbouring fortress of Uronarti, had survived on small islands in the reservoir lake, some fifty kilometres south of the Egyptian-Sudanese border. Funding of the Egypt Exploration Society was instrumental to set up the Shalfak Archaeological Mission (SAM) in the harsh conditions of this environment in 2017. The talk will introduce both the site and the current fieldwork.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are due at the meeting on 12th May. They remain at £33 adult and £10 student/child. Cheques payable “Essex Egyptology Group” or ask for bank account details to pay direct. If you would like to pay at the meeting on 7th April or at the Study Day on 27th April, that would be appreciated.

ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP APRIL STUDY DAY

There are a few tickets remaining for our study day on Saturday 27th April. “Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom” with Dylan Bickerstaffe. Lunch and refreshments are included.

Tickets are priced at £36 members (£40 non-members). Please contact info@essexegyptology.co.uk for programme and order form.

Chairman’s Corner: ‘Red land, black land’: What the valley/desert divide means for Egyptian archaeology

In my previous column I considered how far the stereotypical ‘Tombs, Mummies and Pyramids’ perception of ancient Egypt results from the nature of the evidence. Here I’d like to dig into that a bit further and look at one facet of it; the archaeological implications of the stark division of Egypt into fertile green Nile valley floodplain and dry desert. The divide between the desert and the valley is so stark that it’s immediately obvious to anyone who has visited Egypt. It’s become something of a cliché, taught in all ‘Egypt 101’ modules and referenced regularly by students in essays about ancient Egyptian dualism, environment and landscape. But apart from its influence upon ancient Egyptian society, mythology and religion, the sharp desert versus valley divide has an invisible but important influence on archaeology.

Most archaeological evidence from Egypt comes from the desert. Remains from the valley floodplain are relatively limited and often restricted to temple structures such as Karnak or Edfu. This is the inevitable result of different site formation processes that take place in the desert and the valley.

Archaeological evidence in the desert has a higher probability of escaping or surviving the natural processes of decay and is also less likely to be removed by subsequent human activity. The desert has traditionally been less intensively exploited (note that ‘exploitation’ is used in its anthropological sense of ‘made use of’ and does not carry any negative connotation) than the Nile valley. And, since the desert has traditionally been much easier for archaeologists to access because it is still less intensively exploited, archaeological evidence in the desert is also more likely to be excavated. Overall archaeological evidence in the desert has a threefold



The stark divide between the fertile Nile valley floodplain and the dry desert on the west bank at Luxor, view from El Qurn towards Birket Habu.

advantage over that in the valley in terms of how likely we are to know of it and incorporate its existence into our interpretations of ancient Egypt.

This wouldn't matter if valley and desert contained the same types of archaeological evidence, because the desert would then provide us with a reasonable sample of the total archaeological remains of ancient Egyptian civilisation. But because of their different characteristics the ancient Egyptians naturally exploited the valley and desert for different purposes. We have already discussed how the Egyptians use of the desert for funerary purposes has skewed public perception of ancient Egypt as an exotic society obsessed with death, but this is not the only aspect of ancient Egypt that suffers from the valley/desert divide. Settlement archaeology is another victim. Most Egyptian settlements were in the valley or on the edge of it and are therefore either buried under alluvial fields or modern settlements. The few settlements that have been excavated extensively are located on the edge of the desert and are exceptional in some way; pyramid towns; workmen's villages; the socio-religious experiment that was Amarna. We can learn a lot from them, but there is always the question of how representative they are of the typical Nile valley town or village.



The small Aten temple at Amarna: Although it has been extensively excavated, some have questioned how far Akhenaten's capital is representative of Egyptian urbanism.

Over the last 20 years some brilliant excavators have been working to counteract this bias in the evidence through thorough, extensive excavation of various settlements up and down the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the evidence from the desert is so pervasive and so strong that you can still find people (e.g. <https://www.mikeanderson.biz/2010/02/civilization-without-cities.html>) repeating the now discredited idea that ancient Egypt was a 'civilisation without cities' (Wilson 1958). The valley/desert divide, the undue prominence of archaeological evidence from the desert and the limited visibility of the Nile valley in archaeological terms continues to affect Egyptology, just as it skews the public perception of ancient Egypt.

References:

Wilson, J. A. 1958. Egypt through the New Kingdom: Civilization without Cities, in C.H. Kraeling and R. AcC. Adams (eds.) City Invincible ed. Chicago, 124-136.

Hannah Pethen

BLOOMSBURY SUMMER SCHOOL STUDY DAY

Saturday 8th June, 10am-5.30pm

Cruciform Lecture Theatre, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

"Of Caravans and Crossroads: Cultures of Central Asia and the Silk Road in Antiquity."

Tickets: £40

Further information www.egyptology-uk.com/bloomsbury

THEN AND NOW from Dick Sellicks

KV6 in 1988 on the left with entrance huts to the Valley and on the right as it is today.



The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

Chairman: Dr Hannah Pethen (Honorary Fellow, University of Liverpool)
(chair@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Treasurer: Rosemary Ackland (treasurer@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Secretary/Membership: Janet Brewer BEM (secretary@essexegyptology.co.uk)

Programme: Tilly Burton (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

Please e-mail to newsletter@essexegyptology.co.uk

You can visit our web site at www.essexegyptology.co.uk

or join us on  Essex Egyptology Group uk