



ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP

Newsletter 120

June/July 2019

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 7th July Excavations in the Theban Necropolis – Prof Antonio J Morales
- 4th August Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament – Lorna Oakes
Annual General Meeting
- 1st September Pharaonic Purification Scenes in the Greco-Roman Period – Konstantin
Ivanov
- 6th October Graffiti at el Kab – Dr Luigi Prada

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In July we welcome Prof. Dr Antonio J Morales, the dig Director of the Middle Kingdom Theban Project. The Project involves the archaeological excavation, conservation and epigraphic work in the tombs of Henenu (TT 313) and Ipi (TT 315), both located in the area of Deir el-Bahari in Luxor. The outstanding position of both monuments, first excavated in 1921-1922 by the NY Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the fundamental role of their owners in the construction of the Egyptian state and the social and cultural transformations that gave shape to the pharaonic culture makes this project relevant and necessary for the understanding of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt. As a matter of fact, most of the religious, social and cultural aspects known to the pharaonic culture in the later periods emerged in this period of social concord after civil conflicts and intellectual and religious progress.

In August we will be holding our AGM and we also welcome Lorna Oakes who is a past lecturer at Birkbeck College and the British Museum. She has published a number of books, including *Ancient Egypt: an Illustrated History and Mysteries of Ancient Egypt*, she will be talking to us about Ancient Egyptian Thought in the Old Testament.

FRIENDS OF SAQQARA

Over the past few months the books donated by the daughter of the late Mr Nichols have been sold to benefit "The Friends of Saqqara"; adding to it with a small donation from the proceeds of our recent study day, you will be pleased to learn that a cheque for 300 euros has been sent to them.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE NOW

Annual subs are now outstanding and were 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.

CHAIRMAN’S CORNER: Notre Dame and the ‘building site’ temple



The façade of Notre-Dame.
(Hannah Pethen 2011).

Two days prior to writing, the great 800-year-old cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris suffered a devastating fire. The roof and spire were destroyed and the interior damaged. The terrible damage to an irreplaceable cultural heritage asset and a symbol of Paris and France, prompted collective grief from the French people. But in the last two days this has turned to a determination to rescue what can be retrieved, restore what survives and rebuild what has been lost. At the time of writing a fund of over £800 million Euros has already been collected for the restoration and President Macron has promised that it will be completed within five years. But what does the sad loss of a medieval European cathedral have to do with Egyptology? Well it might not be ancient Egyptian, but the reconstruction will offer Egyptologists an opportunity to experience the kind of bustle and activity that once filled the courts of Karnak.

We experience ancient Egyptian sites as complete and unchanging, carefully laid out for the tourist. But this is only possible because these sites are for the most part ‘dormant’.

They are no longer ‘active’ temples, pyramids or necropoli. No offerings are made, no priests chant, no burials are inhumed, and no builders build. The famous mudbrick ramp at the rear of the first pylon of Karnak temple feels exceptional to us: A rare trace of incomplete ancient building work. But to most ancient Egyptians, it would have been completely normal to navigate around almost continuous building works at most of the major sites. Temples were constantly modified, improved and enhanced. Pyramids took decades to complete and were often subject to modification and/or encroachment afterwards. Cemeteries were in constant use as tombs were built, enlarged, modified, usurped and modified again.



The remains of the mud-brick builder's ramp at the rear of the First Pylon of Karnak temple. (Hannah Pethen 2011)

It’s almost impossible for us to get a true sense of the ‘living’ activity at ancient Egyptian sites. Even bustling modern tourism isn’t quite the same. Tourists traverse, look, photograph, and discuss a site. They may buy souvenirs, refreshments or experiences from vendors. But the site is a passive recipient of their action. They look

but (ideally) do not touch. They photograph but do not leave offerings. They read hieroglyphs but do not chant hymns or prayers. They observe but do not engage.

But for the next five years, Notre-Dame will be the antithesis of this. Builders, stone masons and restorers will crawl all over its structure, repairing and rebuilding. It will once again be filled with the bustle and activity of people working on its fabric. I do not know when Mass will next be held there, but once religious services resume both secular and sacred activity will compete for attention. Although likely restricted from visiting certain areas due to Health and Safety concerns, tourists will have the opportunity to experience something like the situation during the construction of this cathedral, or any other large religious or secular building across many civilisations. And since many ancient Egyptian sites were under almost constant construction, a visit to Notre-Dame will be a real eye-opener for anyone interested in what ancient Egyptian sites really felt like.

References:

It would be almost impossible to list all the references to construction at Egyptian temples, without turning this into a full journal article, but *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Wilkinson 2000) provides a good introduction and a summary of the development of major temples like Karnak.

For an overview of pyramids, including changes and use over time see *The Complete Pyramids* (Lehner 1997), the discussion of the Menkaure Valley Temple settlement in *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilisation* (Kemp 2006, 206–9) and research into the Teti Pyramid Cemetery.

Bibliography

Kemp, Barry J. 2006. *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilisation*. Second. London and New York: Routledge.

Lehner, Mark. 1997. *The Complete Pyramids*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Wilkinson, Richard H. 2000. *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Hannah Pethen

STUDY DAY – 12TH OCTOBER 2019

This study day will examine the various forms of mummification practiced throughout the ancient Egyptian world. Focussing on their own research over the last 30 years, Prof Joann Fletcher and Dr Stephen Buckley will discuss the true beginnings of mummification and the techniques and materials employed.

Tickets on sale July 2019, £30 members and £35 non-members.

The Essex Egyptology Group Committee

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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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