ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP-REVIEW

June 2020 Meeting

by Margaret Patterson

"Sethy I - King of Egypt"
Aidan Dodson

During this time of COVID-19 in person meetings of the Essex Egyptology Group are, of course, impossible. A couple of meetings were cancelled outright, but technology has come to the rescue and Aidan Dodson (https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/persons/aidan-m-dodson) was able to give us the talk we had scheduled for June 2020 via Zoom. The subject of his talk was the Pharaoh Sethy I* (who was also the subject of a book Dodson published in 2019, this is in effect the talk of the book), one of Egypt's more important kings but one who is often overshadowed by his son Rameses II.

***I intend to use Dodson's preferred spellings throughout this article, some of which are not quite the same as you might be used to seeing - like Sethy instead of Seti.**

Dodson began by giving us some context for the reign of Sethy I, starting with where he fits into the history of Egypt. Sethy I is near the beginning of the 19th Dynasty, in the New Kingdom - this puts his reign pretty much in the middle of the sweep of Pharaonic Egyptian history. He takes the throne at an interesting point in this history - following on from the Amarna period. During the Amarna period everything changed - Dodson described it as being a period where everything was flung up into the air and fell down into a different configuration. The art changes, the capital moves, and the religion moves to something like monotheism. For about a decade this austere religion of Akhenaten holds sway, but then after his death there is a return to normality - probably very rapidly after his death.

With the death of Tutankhamun, the royal line of the 18th Dynasty comes to an end, and he's succeeded by 3 army generals. The first of these is Ay, who is shown in Tutankhamun's tomb performing the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. The fact that this scene is there naming Ay shows how significant it was to Ay that he'd done this ceremony as it made him a legitimate successor to Tutankhamun. Ay is succeeded by Horemheb, another army general. The transition here may have been less smooth as there's evidence for a struggle between Horemheb and another general who was son of Ay.

Horemheb had no son to succeed him and so his successor was the last of these army generals, who had also served as Horemheb's Vizier. This man's name was Paramessu and he was to reign as Rameses I. He had no links at all to the old royal family - both Ay and Horemheb had some sort of link whether by blood or marriage, but Paramessu was completely disconnected. Dodson told us that he

wasn't even from any of the old centres of power in Egypt - not from Thebes, nor Memphis, not even from Akhmim where quite a few important non-royal figures had come from. Instead his family came from a more provincial region in the north-east of the Delta which Dodson referred to as "well on the way to being a foreign country". And Dodson suggests that much of what is seen over the first few years of how this new line presented themselves can be explained by them feeling a need to present themselves as legitimate rulers and "proper Egyptians" rather than country bumpkins.

Paramessu's background was in the military, and he was probably contemporary of Horemheb - a speculation given added weight by his death within a couple of years of Horemheb. The scenario here appears to be that Horemheb promoted a close friend or ally as Vizier, and then turned to him as an heir when it was clear that he would not have one himself. And despite his age he was an attractive option as an heir because he would break this cycle of Pharaohs with no obvious heir - he definitely had a living adult son by the end of Horemheb's reign and his grandson may also have been born at this point.

Dodson told us that we know a bit about Paramessu's family background too, partly from a funerary stela now in Chicago plus some other sources. He was the son of a man called Sethy (Egyptologists refer to him as Sethy A), and he had an uncle called Khaemwaset (B) who was married to a woman called Taemwadjy. The names of both these male relatives are to crop up in Paramessu's descendents. Paramessu's wife was called Sitre, and they had at least one child - Sethy I, who was the subject of this talk.

Relief from Chapel of Rameses I at Abydos, now in the Met

Because Paramessu only reigned as Rameses I for a couple of years very little building work survives from his time - and most of the memorials to him are

actually commissioned by Sethy I. One building associated with Rameses I was a small chapel at Abydos just outside the much larger Sethy I temple there. The site is now buried, and the blocks that have been salvaged are in poor condition due to salt. Dodson showed us one section of these blocks (which I sadly don't have a photo of) which has a procession of men - which given the context are probably relatives of Rameses I, perhaps even sons. Unfortunately, the upper registers of that section of wall are missing and so we don't have any names or titles for these men. In fact the only names that survive from the chapel are those of Rameses I himself.

**There are also a handful of other artefacts linked to Rameses I including a stela from Tell Hebua which is now in the Cairo Museum. This gives us another important piece of background for the 19th Dynasty as it shows Rameses I worshipping Seth. Seth is an ambiguous figure in the Egyptian belief system - on the one hand he's the murderer of Osiris, on the other hand he's the protector of those in deserts and is a local patron god in some areas including the north-eastern part of the Delta that Rameses I's family came from. So defining him as "good" or "bad" is difficult, and this sort of ambiguity is common in Egyptian beliefs. His violent nature is even a positive under some circumstances - for instance he's the only god with the power to slay the serpent Apophis who threatens the journey of Re through the night. It's really only in the Greek and Roman periods that he starts to be a definitely "bad" god - as those cultures were more black and white in their thinking about the gods in general. (For more on Seth see my writeup of Ian Taylor's talk to the EEG in December 2019: "Perceptions of Seth".
https://ninecats.org/margaret/blog/2019/12/12/perceptions-seth-ian-taylor)**

Even with this ambiguity Seth is still not an appropriate god to represent in a funerary context - this is the domain of Osiris, so his murderer is not welcome. This means that when Sethy I was buried (and in his temple at Abydos) the spelling of his name is changed - instead of having a Seth animal in his cartouche it's replaced with a figure of Osiris or the tjet knot. This caused a bit of confusion to early Egyptologists because it wasn't entirely clear that this was the same person in different contexts!

The short reign of Rameses I is also reflected in his tomb in the Valley of the Kings - it's small and not finished. The sarcophagus is also not finished - the decoration isn't all carved because they didn't have time, instead it's painted on. The decoration that is on the walls is beautifully done, in a similar style to the tomb of Horemheb - almost certainly the same artisans given how soon after it was made. There are also some similarities going forward, but Sethy I's tomb is also a fresh start on "how to decorate a tomb".

Having given us context Dodson now moved on to the main subject of the talk - Sethy I himself. He began with Sethy I's names and titles. Like most Egyptian kings Sethy I had five of these and Dodson discussed four of them in detail. The titulary of a king is chosen at the accession of the king, and so these names can be a kind of manifesto and say something about how the king sees themselves in the broader context of Egyptian history. Before the 18th Dynasty the names are fairly fixed but during the 18th Dynasty it became common to vary the Horus, Nebti and Golden Falcon names depending on the particular temple context where they were written - and Sethy I does this a lot, including adding epithets to his names as he felt appropriate.

Dodson characterised the Horus name of Sethy I ("Strong bull, who appears in Thebes and makes the Two Lands live") as fairly banal - in particular the first part, but the addition of "makes the Two Lands live" to this otherwise standard title may be more interesting. It may reflect how the 19th Dynasty saw themselves as re-founding Egypt in a return to normality after the Amarna Period. The Nebti name ("Repeater of births, who repels the Nine Bows") also emphasises this - "repeater of births" is a literal translation of the Egyptian, it means something like our word "renaissance". This name also harks back to a much earlier king; Amenemhat I who also saw himself as re-founding and renewing Egyptian culture, used a similar phrase in his Horus name. Later, long after Sethy I, the other time this phrase is used is by Rameses XI who names a period of his reign using this phrase - after he's reasserted his control over the whole of Egypt events are dated to Year N of the Renaissance rather than Year N of Rameses XI. (For more about Rameses XI's Renaissance see my writeup of Jennifer Palmer's talk to the EEG in December 2014: "Times of Transition: Herihor and the High Priests of Amun at the End of the New Kingdom".
https://ninecats.org/margaret/blog/2014/12/09/times-transition-herihor-and-high-priests-amun-end-new-kingdom-jennifer-palmer-eeg)
So this is a rarely used phrase in Egyptian royal titularies, and thus makes a strong statement about how Sethy I sees himself.

Sethy I's prenomen (Menmaatre) also links him to the past and in a way to new beginnings. The "maatre" part of the name reflects Nebmaatre, the prenomen of Amenhotep III - the last acknowledged Pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty now that the Amarna Period was anathema, and ruler over a Golden Age of Egyptian culture. The Men part of the name is a reflection of Rameses I's prenomen (Menpehtyre) - so Sethy I is linking himself both to the past golden age and the new beginning of the 19th Dynasty, another powerful statement. The last of Sethy I's names that Dodson discussed was his nomen ("Sethy-merenptah") which doesn't make a grand thematic statement but does consist of two family names that we see coming back again in the 19th Dynasty.

One feature of the new dynasty is that they're very expansive in explaining who is part of the royal family. Before the Amarna Period the royal family were not found on reliefs - other than the king, the queen and the occasional princess. This was particularly true for the king's sons - unless they had other responsibilities relevant to the monument in question, for instance if they held a priestly office in the specific temple a relief was carved in. This begins to change during the Amarna period, when royal daughters show up more often. During the 19th Dynasty it changes completely - there are several examples of princes being shown on temple reliefs even when they don't work at the temple and people like the king's in-laws may be depicted. This lets us flesh out Sethy I's family tree a bit more. His wife was a woman called Tuy - she doesn't actually show up on any monuments dating to Sethy I's time, but she's known from monuments during her son Rameses II's reign as she significantly outlived her husband. Her parents were a couple called Ruia and Raia.

Dodson showed us a picture of a statue here with Tuy's name on it - it was originally of Tiye but was usurped for Tuy. In antiquity it was taken to Rome, and it was also damaged towards the base. On the back of the statue was an inscription and an image of Tuy's daughter Henutmire - giving us more genealogical data. Rather amusingly this piece was restored in Early Modern times, when they didn't really know what they were doing. As the restorers couldn't read hieroglyphs they didn't know that this figure on the back was a

woman, so when they carved the figure's legs on their repair they attempted to carve a standard Egyptian kilt for a man. They didn't do a particularly good job at it, either, so Henutmire looks a bit like she's wearing a 1960's style miniskirt!

Another wife of Tuy was a woman called Baketwernel - once again there is no reference to her during Sethy I's reign, instead her name only shows up much later during the time of Rameses XI. There is a papyrus called Mayer A which gives details of some tomb robberies and this is where we find evidence of Baketwernel.

Continuing with Sethy I's children his son Rameses II married the previously mentioned daughter Henutmire. There was another girl (perhaps older than the other two) called Tia C who married a treasury official called Tjia - probably during Horemheb's reign when she wasn't yet royal. The tomb of these two is in Saqqara, near the tomb built for Horemheb there before he was king.

Before moving on from Sethy I's family Dodson also talked about the divine birth scene for Rameses II. This was found among blocks used at Medinet Habu when the small temple was extended in the Late Period and Roman times. Some of the blocks came from the Ramesseum and the decoration of them is of a divine birth scene like that of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri or Amenhotep III in Luxor. In scenes of this type the king is shown as literally being the child of the god Amun and his (or her) own actual mother. The first of these scenes found by modern Egyptologists was Hatshepsut's and so some scholars argue that this was something she invented to justify her reign as female Pharaoh - and then this is extrapolated to cast doubt on Amenhotep III's own legitimacy or Rameses II's once this scene was found at Medinet Habu. However Dodson said that this is probably not the case - instead he thinks it much more likely that this was a scene that every king might have on his temple walls. All kings were notionally the offspring of Amun and the king's mother - it's just that only some of these scenes have survived.

Whilst there's a lot of information on Sethy I's family to be found on tomb and temple reliefs there's not a lot of information on who the officials were during his reign. This is probably because he had quite a short reign - only about a decade - so many officials might have lived into the reign of Rameses II and been shown on their tombs or statues as officials of the later king. One surviving example of an official comes from a stela that is now in Turin that shows Sethy I worshipping Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari, accompanied by a vizier. The name is sadly missing so it's not clear which individual it was - Dodson said it was likely to be either a man called Nebamun or a man called Paser. In Paser's own tomb he depicts a scene of receiving rewards from Sethy I - even though Paser also served under Rameses II he clearly wanted to commemorate this occasion, and this was carved after Sethy I's death. There are a few other scattered scenes of this type or other evidence that an official of Rameses II might have also served under Sethy I but not many.

One thing that can be traced during Sethy I's reign is the restoration of monuments that had been damaged during Akhenaten's reign in the frenzy of iconoclasm against Amun that characterised the later portion of that reign. The restoration started under Tutankhamun and Horemheb but it became more systematic under Sethy I. So much so that there was a formulaic inscription developed to put on the parts of the monuments he restored to tell people that he'd done this. Unusually in this formula he makes a big deal about leaving the names of the original owners rather than usurp the monuments wholesale - which is what happens much more often (in particular this was the approach of Sethy I's

son, Rameses II!). One of the examples Dodson gave us was of the Speos Artimidorus at Beni Hasan, which I remember visiting and having that inscription pointed out.

Caption: Base for a Votive Model of a Temple Gateway, now in Brooklyn Museum

There are also some original monuments built or extended during Sethy I's reign. For instance in the 1950s a chapel of Ptah dating to Sethy I's reign was found in Memphis. At Heliopolis there was quite a lot of work done by Sethy I but little remains of it - one piece of evidence is a votive model of a gateway (see the image above) which is now in the Brooklyn Museum. They also have a modern replica of this model:
https://photos.talesfromthetwolands.org/picture.php?/133/categories .
The temple this is a model for has not been located on the ground, but this is not surprising as the modern suburbs of Cairo cover the site of ancient Heliopolis. One thing that has survived from there is an obelisk which was taken to Rome in Imperial times. There's also a fragment of an obelisk from Heliopolis now in Alexandria that dates to Sethy I's time, as well as an obelisk intended for there that never made it out of the quarry at Aswan.

So in northern Egypt we mostly find fragments of architecture of Sethy I, but Dodson went on to tell us about more substantial monuments further south. The most well known of these is at Abydos, where Sethy I was one of several kings to construct a royal cenotaph - his is by far the most impressive. It's in part a standard New Kingdom temple, with courtyards and a hypostyle hall with sanctuaries behind. But there are differences to the normal layout - for instance instead of 1 or 3 sanctuaries there are 7 in this temple. Plus subsidiary chapels for one of these sanctuaries - the sanctuary of Osiris is extended into a suite of rooms, emphasising his importance in this temple that is in effect in his "home town". Dodson told us that only the core of the temple was completed in Sethy I's time. The first hypostyle hall was completely decorated by him, and the decoration

done in his reign is of a much higher quality than the way that Rameses II finished the rest of the temple (a common theme where Sethy I and Rameses II have both overseen the decoration of a temple space). The raised relief of Sethy I's decoration is considered some of the finest work carried out in Egypt.

The overall plan of the temple is also unusual as it has an L-shaped layout. At the back of this temple next to the sanctuaries is another part of the complex that juts off to the side - including a slaughter court (which we heard about from Mohammed Abu el-Yezid in August 2015, see my writeup: "The Slaughter Court in Sety I Temple, Abydos" https://ninecats.org/margaret/blog/2015/08/07/slaughter-court-sety-i-temple-abydos-mohammed-abu-el-yezid-eeg-meeting-talk).
Linking these two parts of the complex is a corridor that we now call the "corridor of lists" because on the western wall of it is the great king list. Dodson explained that it's actually an offering list with Rameses II and Sethy I reading a prayer to the ancestors who are placed in chronological order. So when it was found in the 1860s by Mariette it helped Egyptologists figure out the chronology of periods like the Old Kingdom. It's one of several known kings lists from this period (in the Q&A session Dodson told us that they are all clearly working off one master list with minor variations to do with space where the inscription is carved). Dodson thinks that these lists were part of establishing Sethy I and the 19th Dynasty as part of the overall sweep of Egyptian history, positioning them as legitimate heirs to Egyptian kingship despite their lack of blood link to their predecessors.

Out the back of the temple is the Osireon which is unique with no known parallel elsewhere in Egypt and it's very interesting. It was originally buried and possibly covered by a tumulus, although it is now open to the air. In the centre was an emplacement for a dummy sarcophagus and canopic chest. These are effectively on an artificial island surrounded by water. Dodson told us that this is linked with the idea of the primeval mound. It was once thought to be dated to the Old Kingdom but all the archaeological evidence suggests it's work by Sethy I, with perhaps some archaising features to the architecture. In fact Dodson said it wasn't even finished at the time of Sethy I's death, and Rameses II didn't complete it either - it wasn't completed until the reign of Merenptah some 70 years after his grandfather Sethy I died.

Sethy I also built at Karnak, as so many New Kingdom kings did. At the time of Sethy I's accession the temple ended at the second pylon. Dodson explained that during the Middle Kingdom the core of Karnak temple was an island in the Nile (which was something I don't think I'd heard before, it puts the temple into a very different context!). Over time the Nile has been moving westwards from that extreme to much further out. So there never was that much space to expand the temple in that direction, which Dodson said goes some way to explain the architectural choices of builders on this axis of the temple. So Sethy I erected the great hypostyle hall between the second and third pylons - still a monumentally impressive building. As with his temple at Abydos this was only partly finished by Sethy I - the structure seems to have been complete but only the northern part was decorated, and most was completed in a lower quality style by Rameses II. The part that Sethy I decorated is in beautiful raised relief, and there is evidence to show how much attention was being paid to the details of the scenes. For instance Dodson showed us an example where on close inspection Sethy I has traces of 3 buttocks (one final, and 2 ghost) because the scene has been recut twice. In all his scenes with gods in this temple he is shown bowing slightly (unlike other kings who are happy to stand upright before the gods). The angle of the

bow has clearly been subject to an evolution of ideas, hence the recutting - this scene seems to have been the prototype that others were then modelled from. Dodson said that this level of care and attention to detail is presumably why it wasn't finished by the time of Sethy I's death.

The external wall of the hypostyle hall is dedicated to Sethy I's military campaigns - this is a less exclusive part of the temple so decoration here is propaganda for a wider group of people. Sethy I appears to have been successful in his military campaigns. The lowest register of the relief details campaigns in the Levant (corroborated by a stela found at Beth Shan) - these were the sort of campaigns that often seem to happen in the early years of a king's reign when local chiefs flex their muscles to see if they can take advantage of the new king, and Sethy I shows that they cannot.

Moving up the wall you can see that this representation of the campaigns follows a formula as the next register has a very similar set of scenes. First there are scenes of fighting, then of taking prisoners back to Egypt, then the presentation of these prisoners to Amun (whose temple these scenes are part of). Timing of campaigns is indicated by position on the wall - earliest in the reign are at the bottom and time goes forward as you go up the wall.

The next set of campaigns are further from Egypt and closer to the Hittites. Dodson explained that the context for these is the Hittite prince incident at the end of the Amarna Period. After Akhenaten's death a queen wrote to the Hittite king asking him to send a son to be her husband as she doesn't wish to marry one of her subjects. But when the Hittites do send a prince he gets killed en route - and the Hittites blame the Egyptians and use it as a reason for military harassment. So by the time Sethy I is on the throne clashes have been going on for decades. This register of the wall shows Sethy I winning a battle at Kadesh (where his son was to later fight a much more well known but less successful battle). Further up there is a campaign in Libya and further up still is another Kadesh campaign which was probably towards the end of Sethy I's reign (but most of this relief is gone now).

Before returning to Luxor for Sethy I's funerary monuments Dodson talked us through the building works and inscriptions surviving from further south in Egypt and into Nubia. These include a chapel and a well at Kanais for those working in the gold mines there. He also built the first of a series of chapels at Gebel el Silsila where the stone for his monuments was quarried. At Kom Ombo and further south into Nubia stelae have been found showing that he was active there. And at Gebel Barkal he built a hall as part of the temple of Amun.

Returning to Luxor Dodson moved on to what he described as the finest mortuary temple and tomb constructed. The temple is out of the run of temples on the West Bank - it's at Qurna and appears to have been aligned with Karnak, the site of his impressive hypostyle hall. The temple is now quite badly damaged, the pylons are gone and much of the rear of it as well. Once again it was largely decorated by Rameses II after Sethy I's death, with the inner parts Sethy I and the outer Rameses II. Dodson told us that this constant theme of dual decoration of temples had once led Egyptologists to think that there was a co-regency between Sethy I and his son, but this idea no longer holds sway. Instead it's now thought that this is a case of a son finishing off his father's monuments after death. One of the inner parts of the complex is decorated as a mortuary cult space for Rameses I - this may be Sethy I insuring his father has a cult within his own funerary complex because he respects his father that much, or it may be a sign that this temple was

begun by Rameses I and then taken over by Sethy I. Sethy I's own cult place is now heavily damaged.

The tomb of Sethy I is KV17 in the Valley of the Kings is one of the most important in the history of the valley. It's also one of the largest, Dodson showed us a diagram of the underground passages - half of it is a conventional tomb and the rest is an extension which he said is without parallel. This extension goes steeply down and ends up in a dead end, it's clearly unfinished. Because it's not finished the function isn't clear - Dodson said he thinks they were digging for the water table to create a burial chamber like the dummy one in the Osireon where the sarcophagus would have been placed on an island in the waters like the primeval mound. But Sethy I died too soon, and so his actual burial chamber was in a more conventional place in the main body of the tomb.

The main body of the tomb is much like that of Horemheb or Amenhotep III in layout. The big innovation is in the decoration. Earlier tombs had decoration in the burial chamber and maybe one or two other chambers but not in the corridors. In Sethy I's tomb the whole thing is decorated throughout, which increases the chances of it being unfinished at the time of the king's death - but remarkably despite all the other unfinished monuments from Sethy I's reign this was actually pretty much complete. There's one chamber that's not quite done, and a few other bits and pieces in other rooms, but otherwise it's finished. Dodson told us that it seems the decision to decorate all the walls was made towards the end, as it looks like they were filling in gaps as the craftsmen worked their way back out. He showed us some pictures of the decoration and pointed out some of the interesting features (including the first astronomical ceiling in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings) but didn't have time to go through everything. I have seen this tomb – I would recommend it if you get the chance, despite the water damage in modern times it's spectacular to see!

Sethy I was buried in a great alabaster coffin, which is now in the Sir John Soane Museum (because the British Museum didn't think it was worth the price Belzoni was asking!). Unlike other kings he didn't have a granite sarcophagus - Dodson speculated that such a large stone box would have been impossible to get down to the primeval mound if that was indeed the original burial plan. Instead he probably had a wooden sarcophagus when he was laid to rest in the tomb.

Belzoni rediscovered the tomb in 1817 and recognised it as one of the finest monuments every found. And so he made sure to make copies of all the decoration - some of it he drew himself, some was done by an artist he hired. This was actually the first ever complete copying of an Egyptian tomb's decoration and was to be the last for several more decades. And he made good use of these drawings - he had a scale model made to accompany his finds when he exhibited them in the early 1820s, and also some full scale casts.

Although the tomb had been robbed in antiquity a large number of shabtis belonging to Sethy I were found. They were of various types - although there were a relatively small number of large presentations shabtis. Dodson showed us pictures of some of these, plus some examples of smaller ones. Interestingly no fragments were found of the larger figures of the gods that are seen in other New Kingdom tombs.

Dodson now finished up his talk by telling us about what happened to the mummy through the millennia after his burial - in effect the afterlife of Sethy I. The tomb was robbed at least once by the middle of the 20th Dynasty, in the later

"Renaissance" phase of Rameses XI's reign Sethy I's burial was "repeated". By this it's meant that it was restored - the king re-wrapped and perhaps in a new coffin. Later his son Rameses II was moved into the tomb with him, and then they are joined by Rameses I's mummy. All three are then moved from KV17 into the tomb of Queen Inhapi (perhaps at Dra Abu el Naga), and they eventually ended up in the Deir el Bahri cache of royal mummies (in TT320 which may have originally been the tomb of Ahmose-Nefertari). There they rested until the 1870s - with Sethy I probably the fourth coffin in the outer corridor of the tomb (counting from outside in). The cache was cleared by archaeologists in 1881, and the mummy of Sethy I was unwrapped in 1886 in front of dignitaries. He currently lies in the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square in Cairo, but is presumably to be moved with the rest of the royal mummies once lockdown is over.

This was a fascinating and information dense talk - I had some idea of who Sethy I was before, and have visited some of the monuments associated with him, but I'm much better informed now! And it was interesting to get more of the context for the 19th Dynasty, as I knew very little about Ramese.