

## Essex Egyptology Group - The Afterlives of Senenmut - Dr Campbell Price.

In October, Campbell spoke to the group via Zoom about 'The Afterlives of Senenmut'. He had last talked to us at Witham in 2016 - also about Senenmut, but this time his inextinguishable enthusiasm for Senenmut gave us some tantalising snippets of fresh information that will be more fully explored in his forthcoming book to be published by the American University in Cairo Press during 2026.

Rather than talk about Senenmut's two tombs (TT71 & TT353) at Deir el-Bahri, the focus this time was more on Senenmut's legacy - what did the ancient Egyptians know of Senenmut well after his death? It is considered that around 99% of ancient Egyptian burials have not survived - neither their mortal remains nor their burial goods.

In TT71, its ruined state is due to the poor quality rock as well as deliberate damage. Even so, on the brightly decorated ceiling, the inscription 'Overseer of all works of the king', has Senenmut's name chiselled out but still detectable. On another inscription, the names of Senenmut's parents - Ramose and Hatnefer - plus Senenmut's title 'Overseer of the Double Granary of Amun' are untouched and pristine, but Amun's and Senenmut's names have been expunged.



Image credit © Campbell Price



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Perversely, alongside this is the 'damnatio memoriae': "As for any man, who will cause damage to my image, he may not follow the king of his time; he may not be buried in the western cemetery; he may not be given any lifetime on earth."

A stone fragment bearing a clear, incised inscription is another rare survivor which includes the undamaged names Ma'atkare (Hatshepsut's throne name), Senenmut, and her daughter, Neferure. Campbell described how this fragment in Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum has seemingly created a longstanding spiritual connection between him and Senenmut.

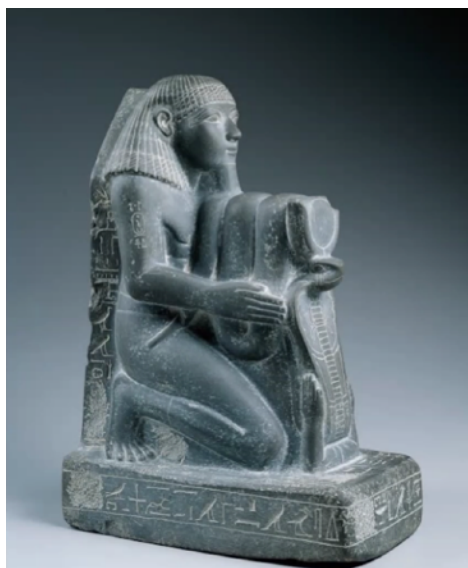


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In her own inscriptions, Hatshepsut makes a great play of how she speaks to the future, though her legacy was later attacked. Senenmut, with no recorded wife or children, played a game of power moves towards ensuring his own legacy. He knew that he would need many statues in order to maximise his eternal presence. There is an exceptionally large number of surviving statues of Senenmut (26) that were commissioned by him. These have meant that his level of 'damnatio memoriae' is only partial when compared to Hatshepsut's. The move to eradicate her legacy may only have come at the end of Thutmose III's reign to strengthen the legitimacy of male succession for his heir - Amenhotep II.

Senenmut is regarded as being 'leagues ahead' in trying to protect his own legacy from future destruction,

compared with other courtiers such as Amenhotep, son of Hapu or Paramessu (who became Rameses I). Statues of Senenmut were among those later found buried in the Karnak Cachette, so were protected from Atenist attack. They provide evidence that Senenmut and indeed Hatshepsut were known about during the Ramesside and Late Periods. A Late Period gathering of statues was suggested by Wallis Budge but was dismissed as a modern dealer's rouse, as Budge was considered an unreliable source. We now have evidence that such statues, having escaped the earlier expunging, were both read and curated during the Late Period, so people knew who Senenmut was. Campbell showed us a succession of statuary of Senenmut that have survived to emphasise this point.

All his statues are innovative in some way. This is recognised before archaizing became fashionable during the Late Period, when one of the block statues of Senenmut - the royal tutor to Neferure - shown enveloping her within his garments, was copied in a statue of Benermerut, (reign of Thutmose III), even though he did not hold that position. This may suggest that Senenmut's name was not only defended but actually celebrated. A fragment (Geneva 23438) with text style more consistent with

the Third Intermediate Period, includes the Ma'atkare cartouche plus Senenmut's name - an archaizing fake or a devoted fan's homage?

At Karnak, a pink granite statue of Senenmut, greatly weathered by water over a long period of time, was evidently in public view throughout that time. Other statues have parts which may appear to have been defaced, have actually been worn away by being touched many thousands of times, suggesting he may have been considered to some as a venerated ancestor. His statues were exposed for centuries, so they were known about for a long time - touched, restored, and copied.



Image credit © Campbell Price



Image credit © Cairo Museum

What do we know of Senenmut's character? Even allowing for the Egyptians' liberal use of hyperbole, he hardly comes across as modest or humble. An inscription on a kneeling block statue of Senenmut bearing an image of Hathor at the front, says:

"A modest (lit. small) man, humble (lit. capable of bowing) .... one who has entered into all the writings of the priests, ignorant of nothing that has happened since the beginning of time."

Campbell views Senenmut as a man who was very ambitious, who had 'his fingers in so many pies', but without getting involved in any priestly roles. There are also 70 graffiti images that show that Senenmut had integrated himself into the very fabric of Deir el-Bahri in contravention of royal protocol.

Did Senenmut die or just fall from grace? If the latter, may it have been connected with the cracking of the 'Unfinished obelisk' that Hatshepsut was expecting to use?

Nonetheless, Senenmut was celebrated as great intellectual - a sort of Michaelangelo of his era, but unlike Amenhotep, son of Hapu, he was not venerated as a sage, as no one wanted to be buried near him.

With marriage and producing children being considered of prime importance in ancient Egypt, the modern perspective concerning Senenmut is that he may have been homosexual, though there is no evidence for this either way. Nevertheless, he may be viewed as a gay icon to some - someone who designed his own deification is definitely in diva territory! He may have been viewed as such to Dodo Benson, while showing Alfred Lord Douglas around the Temple of Mut during its excavation.



Campbell's new book on Senenmut will include a full translation of all the texts on the statues. So did Senenmut use Hatshepsut to get to the divine sphere without being a priest? Is this the punchline of book? You'll have to buy the book to find out!

Campbell is currently offering a 6 week course for Kemet Klub: 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes: The Human Body in Ancient Egyptian Art', Monday evenings, 6 October - 10 November 2025. <https://kemetklub.co.uk>

Nicky Nielsen & Campbell Price are also doing a course entitled 'Murder, Mayhem and Scandals in Ancient Egypt' on Saturday 1st November, 9:30am - 3:30pm GMT. Tickets on Eventbrite, £35.

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