

Essex Egyptology Group - March 2026

Report by Alison Woollard

Dr Kathryn Piquette has shared her work on the Narmer palette with the Essex Egyptology Group previously on three occasions. For this meeting she was joined by Mick Oakey who is a stone carver and they shared their practical experience of copying some of the palette in order to understand more about how it was made.



Kathryn first talked to us in 2015, just as she was starting to use Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) to reveal details about the palette which are not visible to the naked eye. You can find a report of this talk at: <https://writeups.talesfromthetwolands.org/2015/11/06/new-light-on-the-narmer-palette-with-advanced-digital-imaging-kathryn-e-piquette-eeeg-meeting-talk/>. The use of lights in different positions arranged in a dome over an object while it is being photographed creates shadows which reveals marks which are not otherwise visible.

She then returned in May 2022 and March 2024 (reports of both these meetings are on the EEG website) with more information about what her work had revealed. It is possible to see tool marks which show where changes were made to the palette and which also suggest how tools were used.

Previous studies of the Narmer palette have focussed on its meaning and use but Kathryn is studying how it was made. Mick's experience of stone carving enables him to experience the techniques which might have been used by the palette's creators. He showed us videos of the different kinds of movement which were used: percussion where the stone is hit with another stone, incisions by sharp metal instruments or flints and shaving where fine layers of stone are removed by using instruments or flints at an angle. Flints can be very sharp and do not require sharpening.

Percussive movements were used to create the rough shape of the palette while incising was used to create the outline of the figures and shaving removed the background to make the figures stand proud of the surface.

Mick and Kathryn have visited Wadi Hammamat, where the greywacke stone for the palette came from. There are places where thin slabs of stone had clearly been quarried which could be the source of the palette's stone. Mick has used Welsh slate for his experiments as this is also a type of greywacke which is very

similar to the type found in Wadi Hammamat. For tools Mick used flints and phosphor bronze which is similar to the copper which the Egyptians used.

While working on the stone Mick became aware of a number of techniques which were necessary. He needed to push the tools away from him, otherwise he could not see what he was doing. When shaving stone, he had to blow the dust away. Flints are very sharp and they cut fingers very easily. The person carving the palette was probably right-handed though the palette was small enough to move around so a left-handed person could have worked on it. Lines close to the hawk's head and the ears of Hathor suggest that alterations were made to the work. Other mysterious small lines close to the figures of the palette could be the result of 'tool chatter', the lines made when tools make tiny movements as they are being moved across a surface.

Mick noticed the importance of lighting to his work as well as differences in the hardness of stones and the effects of humidity. Copper needs regular sharpening but was often easier to work with in very small areas as the very narrow flints needed for small areas broke very easily. He thought that the palette would have taken one person about a year to create.

Members enjoyed hearing about the practical side of stone carving and having the opportunity to examine tools and the marks which they make.



Tools and experimental work on stone