WELCOME DR YANN TRISTANT

On the 4th July the Department of Ancient History welcomed Dr Yann Tristant, our new specialist of the Egyptian Pre-dynastic and early Dynastic period, who is taking up the post vacated by Associate Professor Christiana Köhler following her appointment to the Chair of Egyptology at the University of Vienna.

Prior to his appointment at Macquarie University Dr Tristant was Scientific Member of the French Institute of Archaeology in Cairo (IFAO) from 2006 to 2010. Dr Tristant has outstanding qualifications having graduated B.A. from the University of Bordeaux and gaining a Diploma in Art from the Ecole du Louvre. This was followed by two Master of Arts degrees, one in Egyptian Archaeology from the Sorbonne and the other in prehistory from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHSS – School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences) in Paris where Dr Tristant also obtained his doctorate in 2006. Throughout his studies Dr Tristant was involved in teaching various aspects of Egyptian civilization.

Dr Tristant’s research interest lies in the Pre-dynastic and early Dynastic period with special emphasis on settlement excavation and geoarchaeology. He has worked on a number of sites in various parts of Upper and Lower Egypt as well as at oases. Currently he is in charge of excavations at Abu Rawash and Wadi Araba, where he is undertaking an archaeological survey, as well as at Tel el-Eswed in the Delta.

Before coming to Macquarie Dr Tristant finished his season of excavation at Abu Rawash. The aim of the project is to re-excavate tombs, originally excavated by Pierre Montet in 1913 to 1914, belonging to the middle of the First Dynasty (reign of King Den). Montet had reported on the presence of eighteen mastabas, four of which have already been re-cleared and re-recorded in the last season. The project aims at a detailed architectural study of the mastabas belonging to this important formative period in the development of Egyptian architecture. The work has resulted in the discovery of new parts of the superstructures of mudbrick mastabas and various architectural features not identified by Montet, plus two portcullises intended to protect the burial chambers but, as is frequent, tomb robbers had accessed the rooms from other directions.

However, in the recent excavations a number of secondary tombs around the main mastabas were discovered intact. In them were found complete skeletal remains in a contracted position surrounded by pottery with remains of animal offerings. The main objective of the project is to study both the mastabas and subsidiary burials at this elite cemetery in order to re-examine Egyptian society of this early period. Dr Tristant will continue his work at Abu Rawash with an annual season in June and July.

Naguib Kanawati

BRIEF REPORT ON THE THIRTEENTH SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS IN THE EARLY DYNASTY CEMETERY AT HELWAN

The season, conducted between November 9, 2009 and February 28, 2010 started with a study period of three weeks. This entailed analysis of ceramics and other artefacts from tombs Op.4/1-50 of previous years and their preparation for the forthcoming publication volume Helwan III – Excavations in Operation 4 Tombs 1-50. This activity also continued throughout the duration of this year’s season with special attention to the botanical and human remains from these tombs. Archaeological excavations continued in Operation 4, where 26 new tomb structures were uncovered. As usual, the majority of these tombs had been severely plundered and consequently contained mostly disturbed burials and contexts. On the other hand, even the disturbed tombs provided us with a wealth of information, including the use-life of graves as well as the methods of tomb robbing. One interesting detail was the discovery of a highly fragmentary pottery juglet with lattice-burnished surface of Early Bronze II-III style, which by its shape and clay fabric clearly points to the Levant as its place of origin. Further, this season was particularly exciting as we were able to record the unusual number of six intact burials dating between 1st and 4th Dynasties. We believe that most of these burials escaped the attention of robbers because they did not belong to wealthy individuals, but were equipped with only few grave goods of little material value, such as pottery and stone vessels.
nevertheless, one of these intact burials (Op. 4/190) provided valuable archaeological information. It is a medium sized pit grave measuring c. 160 cm in length, 120 in width and 130 cm in depth (Fig. 1). The upper fill material consisted of loose sand and pebbles and at less than 50 cm below the surface the fill consisted of large quantities of bread mould fragments as well as a deposit of six sealed pottery jars and a ceramic bowl upon a layer of thick mud slabs with reed and wood impression, probably the capping of the lower pit. Below that a series of ceramic vessels was placed on top of the coffin consisting of more bread mould fragments, a ceramic wine jar broken in two pieces, two beer jars and a small barrel-shaped pottery jar. Further below, two fragments of a siltstone bowl were found on either side of the wooden coffin and a small ceramic bowl was found in the north-western corner of the pit. The burial of the adult female owner was found within the coffin at a depth of about 110 cm below the surface. Due to the earth pressure, however, the bones were badly preserved and highly fragmentary. The skeleton was contracted, lying on the left side, head north, facing east. Fragments of a calcite cylindrical vessel were found outside the coffin area to the north-east and north. The tomb’s date can be narrowed down to between late Dynasty 1 and early Dynasty 2. This tomb not only provided us with valuable contextual information, but also with evidence for an unusual funerary ritual that involved the deliberate destruction of grave goods, in this case a wine jar as well as a beautiful silt stone bowl with spout (Fig. 2) that was broken into two pieces, placed on either side of the coffin. It is not known exactly what this ritual signified and why it was performed, but similar rituals are also known from later periods of Pharaonic history and suggest complex funerary symbolism which therefore seem to have been in existence during this early period.

The unusually high number of intact burials and wealth of archaeological information attained were an appropriate result for a field season that was bound to be the last of Macquarie University’s main institutional affiliation with the Helwan Project. With the appointment of the writer by the University of Vienna in Austria, the Helwan Project will in the future be primarily supported by Austrian institutions, but this does not mean that cooperation with Macquarie University will entirely cease. On the contrary, the coming season of fieldwork at Helwan will benefit from a well mixed team of Australian and Austrian participants and we are looking forward to future productive collaboration.

The writer would like to thank the following team members for their contribution to the success of the season: Dr. Ahmed Fahmy, Jane Smythe, Christine Marshall, Amanda Kiely, Amber Hood, Adel Ali, Anna Honeywood Cartwright, Aaron de Souza, Tracey Pilgrim, Kent Burgin, Melissa Grima, the inspectors of antiquities Moafak Mahmoud Maher, Mohammed Ahmed Zayed, the conservator Dr. Hany Hana, the trainee inspectors Amira Feki Mohammed and Zeinab Thabet Khalil as well as Macquarie University, the Australian Research Council and the Institute for Bioarchaeology in San Francisco for their financial support.

E. Christiana Köhler

Recording the Old Kingdom Tombs at Tehna: the work continues

The first report in nearly 90 years on the unique archaeological site at Tehna appeared in the April, 2007 Rundle Newsletter.

This Old Kingdom cemetery had been originally explored in 1887 by Flinders Petrie and Francis Llewellyn Griffiths. Griffiths made their notes available to George Fraser, a young engineer who had earlier worked with Petrie. Fraser visited the site in 1893 and spent four months restoring and cleaning the tombs, making hand copies of the inscriptions and scenes. His short article appeared in 1902, four months restoring and cleaning the tombs, making hand copies of the inscriptions and scenes. His short article appeared in 1902, with brief descriptions of 14 of the tombs and hand copies of some of the wall scenes, inscriptions and architectural diagrams. A further tomb, given the number 15, was cleared in the early 1900s by Gustave Lefebre who, with Alexander Moret, reported on it in Revue Égyptologique in 1919.

This information provided an insight into the administration of one of the earliest provincial sites of the Old Kingdom. Inscriptions, architecture and decoration provide evidence that these tombs date from the end of the Fourth and the early Fifth Dynasties. The importance of this information led the writer to apply to the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt for permission to re-record the cemetery, which was granted in 2007. Four seasons each of one month’s duration undertaken between 2007 and 2010 have seen most of the tombs recorded with wall scenes and inscriptions in facsimile, architectural diagrams and photography.

The cemetery is situated along the cliffs on the east bank of the Nile, 250 kms south of Cairo and some 12 kms north of Minya. It lies within the 16th nome of Upper Egypt, the Oryx nome, and is one of two Old Kingdom cemeteries in that province, the other being at Zawiyet el-Maiyetin to the south. The continued importance of the province is evidenced in the great Middle Kingdom tombs at Beni Hassan to the south and the Graeco-Roman necropolis of Akoris to the north.

The tombs at Tehna are cut into the lower part of the eastern escarpment, a little above the cultivated land. The majority are found on three levels, and positioned in a north-south orientation adjacent to one another. Each tomb consists of a single narrow chapel, oriented N-S. Tombs 13 and 15, whose owners are both named Nika-ankh I as ‘steward of the great estate’ and ‘overseer of new settlements’, the most senior administrative position often held by provincial governors, and ‘overseer of priests of the temple of Hathor’. Decoration in tombs numbers 10 and 12 is retained only on false doors. No name is present on the false door of tomb 10, but the owner of tomb 12 is the ‘superintendent of the scribes of the royal archives’ Ka-hep. The owner of Tomb 3 is identified as Inkaef, a priest of Hathor. As well as a decorated false door, fragmentary inscriptions and a partially preserved offering list before the tomb owner seated at his offering table remain on the west wall. Tomb 14 of Khenuka, which is cut at a higher level and slightly further south, appears to have been badly damaged by an earthquake resulting in the loss of the lower part of most walls although the upper parts retain fragments of the figures and 'overseer of priests of the temple of Hathor'. Decoration in tombs numbers 10 and 12 is retained only on false doors. No name is present on the false door of tomb 10, but the owner of tomb 12 is the 'superintendent of the scribes of the royal archives' Ka-hep. The owner of Tomb 3 is identified as Inkaef, a priest of Hathor. As well as a decorated false door, fragmentary inscriptions and a partially preserved offering list before the tomb owner seated at his offering table remain on the west wall. Tomb 14 of Khenuka, which is cut at a higher level and slightly further south, appears to have been badly damaged by an earthquake resulting in the loss of the lower part of most walls although the upper parts retain fragments of the figures...
of the tomb owner, family members and servants bringing offerings. The tomb of Nika-ankh I provides valuable information about the owner who was appointed to administer the temple of Hathor, the major cult temple of this province, and its estates by King Userkaf in the early Fifth Dynasty. References to another tomb owner, Khenuka, possibly the father of Nika-ankh I, state that he was appointed earlier as the temple administrator by King Menkaure in the Fourth Dynasty. These references to the last king of the Fourth Dynasty and the first ruler of the Fifth indicate that the cemetery of Tehna was one of the earliest, if not the earliest, provincial cemeteries in the Old Kingdom.

The carved inscriptions in tombs 13 and 15 provide us with a rich history of their tomb owners through texts, titles and lists of family members and dependants. Both tomb owners are named Nika-ankh but their relationship is not indicated in either tomb.

Nika-ankh I (tomb 13) provides the reason for his presence at Tehna in a long text carved into the east wall of his chapel, and names the king under whose orders he was appointed. Opposite the Tehna in a long text carved into the east wall of his chapel, and Nika-ankh I (tomb 13) provides the reason for his presence at but their relationship is not indicated in either tomb.

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Both tombs are formed by cutting a passage around a mass of rock to separate it from the mountain then shaping it into a rectangular mastaba form. The external walls are cut with an inclination or batter inward from the base to the top, a feature usual in the stone-built mastabas, which were usual in the cemeteries Giza and Saqqara. This form is clearly seen in the tomb design of Nika-ankh II (no. 15) and the neighbouring tomb of Nika-ankh II (no. 14). Both tombs are formed by cutting a passage around a mass of rock to separate it from the mountain then shaping it into a rectangular mastaba form. The external walls are cut with an inclination or batter inward from the base to the top, a feature usual in the stone-built mastabas of the capital.

This type of tomb is extremely rare in the provinces, however similar burials are found at El-Hammamiya, in the early Fifth Dynasty tombs of Kai-khent (A2) and (A3) and, to a lesser extent, in the tomb of Min-ankh (G84) at El-Hawawish although the latter did not totally separate the ‘mastaba’ from the cliff.

Certain stylistic details and features of the wall decoration also indicate the influence of artistic trends in the capital. Among these, and particularly notable in the tomb of Nika-ankh I, is the shape of the offering table with its pedestal supporting a separate tray holding the bread loaves, the simple form of the loaves, the unusually tall stands beneath the table holding jars and bowls, the type of chair on which Nika-ankh is seated with its bull’s legs, low cushion and seat ending in a large papyrus umbel, all of which are features typical of Memphite examples dated to the Fourth and first half of the Fifth Dynasties.

Recording the cemetery is still not complete and research into the connections between tomb owners is ongoing. The repetition of names provides a tentative indication of family links as follows:

- according to inscriptions in the tomb of Nika-ankh I, his father, or grandfather, Khenuka, was appointed to the province in the late Fourth Dynasty;
- the owner of tomb no. 14 is named Khenuka, who may be the same man named in the text in the tomb of Nika-ankh I;
- in the tomb of Khenuka, his father, Mery, is named and a son, Kahep, and a daughter, Debet;
- no tomb has existing texts identifying the owner as Mery, but in tomb 15 of Nika-ankh II, an engaged statue of a female identifies this woman as the tomb owner’s mother, Debet;
- the small tomb numbered 12, is owned by an official named Kahep.

Could this Kahep and Debet be the son and daughter of Khenuka named in Khenuka’s tomb? There appears to be evidence here for three generations residing at Tehna but connections between other tomb owners in the cemetery are as yet unclear.

The repetition of family names makes the tomb of Khenuka pivotal for further research into family relationships. This tomb is yet to be fully examined and recorded. This is planned for the coming January-February 2011 season at Tehna. The archaeological recording to date has been funded through monies available through my student research funds and donations kindly given by supportive friends and members of the Rundle Foundation. With the completion of my doctoral thesis no further student funds will be available to me and work in the cemetery, in particular in the tomb of Khenuka, will be dependent upon similar donations. It is hoped that these will allow the completion of recording of this important Old Kingdom cemetery at Tehna within the next two years. 

Beth Thompson

Bibliography


New Publications for Sale at the Annual Conference

Two exciting new publications are being offered for sale at the Annual Conference on August 7, 2010.


Special Event

Wednesday, October 6, 2010 at 7 pm for 7.15 start
The Heritage Function Centre
Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club

The German Consulate is generously organising a lecture tour for two internationally renowned Egyptologists who will each present a lecture for members and guests in October. Prof. Dr Dietrich Wildung, the former Director of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrus-Sammlung, Berlin, will talk about Statuary and Dr Sylvia Schoske, Director of the Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich, will discuss Queenship.

A booking form is included with this Newsletter.
Cost $25 includes a light supper

Rundle Foundation Subscriptions

Members are reminded that subscriptions were due for renewal on June 30, 2010. A Renewal Form is included with this Newsletter, or it may be downloaded from the ACE website, for members whose subscriptions are now due.

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