



The Rundle Foundation for Egyptian Archaeology Newsletter

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Issue 115

WHY BENI HASSAN?



Above: FOREIGNERS IN THE TOMB OF KHNUMHOTEP II
Left: FOWLING SCENE IN THE TOMB OF KNUMHOTEP II

For the greater part of my career I have concentrated on the study of the Old Kingdom, recording tombs at various sites, examining their structure, analyzing their scenes and inscriptions and above all studying the life of the officials who governed the country both in the capital and in the Upper Egyptian provinces. I felt that the Old Kingdom had received less scholarly attention than it deserved. It is true that our knowledge of royal events during this period is less well documented than that of the New Kingdom, but the Old Kingdom with its unequalled number of decorated private tombs offers a better opportunity for the study of the daily life of Egyptians, a topic of particular interest.

With Dr Alex Woods I produced in 2009 a book "Artists in the Old Kingdom: Techniques and Achievements", which was published by the then Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, and as a result was invited to produce a follow-up book on art in the Middle Kingdom. Despite my interest in all Egyptian history, this was my first occasion to venture into research outside the Old Kingdom. We decided to focus on one site, Beni Hassan, probably the best preserved and richest of the Middle Kingdom. Application for photography of a selection of scenes from the site was approved by the S.C.A., which also published the result of the work by the same two authors and photography by Effy Alexakis in 2010.

This was a major turning point in my career. Photographing different themes at Beni Hassan gave me the opportunity and sufficient time to examine them under proper lighting conditions. The similarities with the scenes from the Old Kingdom were striking, but so were the differences. It became clear to me that anyone who wishes to study the Middle Kingdom must first have an extensive familiarity

with the Old Kingdom decoration, that would allow him/her to study both continuity and change.

With the well-known conservatism of the ancient Egyptians, it was expected that many aspects of life would continue from the Old to the Middle Kingdom unaffected by the short period of the break in government known as the First Intermediate Period. However, gone was the time when the provincial governor was a mere official appointed by a central government and could theoretically be replaced. It is true that provincial governors of the Old Kingdom took root in their provinces and gradually became powerful, perhaps too powerful to challenge. But the majority remained at least on the surface loyal servants of the king. The collapse of the central authority in the Intermediate Period allowed some provincial governors to become so powerful as to regard their province almost their private property and considered they themselves much more independent than their Old Kingdom counterparts.

While this change might have disadvantages in governing a unified country and might have resulted in periodical changes in the attitude of the kings towards the provincial governors, it led to the governors representing in their tombs aspects of life not directly related to their administrative functions. Scenes portrayed all aspects of the life of the province: how people really lived, their various sports, entertainments, games, festivities, even personal grooming such as hairdressing, not just of the tomb owner but of the ordinary people, and equally the types of punishments that were administered when they erred. The provinces became almost mini kingdoms, maintaining a small army. Scenes of warfare and military training are also depicted.

Under the auspices of the A.C.E., one Macquarie University team will in the next few years focus on the study of the Middle Kingdom site of Beni Hassan. At the same time we will continue our work on the Middle Kingdom tombs at Meir in Assiut, for which the Australian Research Council has awarded a four-year grant to Naguib Kanawati, Linda Evans, Alex Woods and Gay Robins of Emory University, U.S.A., to document, analyse and publish this rich material.

Naguib Kanawati

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Left: YOUNG FEMALE ACROBATS (KHETY)

Above: BOYS PLAYING GAMES (KHETY)

Right: ARTIST PAINTING A DOUBLE STATUE (BAQET III)

Below Left: WOMAN, HOLDING AN INFANT, ABOUT TO BE STRUCK WITH A STICK (BAQET III)



Above: EGYPTIANS, WITH SPEARS, BOWS AND ARROWS ATTACKING A FORTRESS, SOME ARE USING THE PROTECTION OF A TESTUDO (AMENEMHAT)

ALL BENI HASSAN PHOTOS: EFFY ALEXAKIS.

THE CEMETERY OF MEIR: Macquarie University's Recent Excavation and Evacuation

Meir is situated in Middle Egypt, on the west bank of the Nile within the ancient province of the Nedjefet tree (the 14th Province of Upper Egypt), approximately 350 km south of Cairo. Meir was a major economic and administrative centre in Upper Egypt during the Old and Middle Kingdoms and the region is acclaimed for the richness of its agricultural land, which may have led to a strong association with Egypt's goddess of fertility and nourishment, Hathor. The necropolis of Meir extends about 1.6 kilometers north to south, along the high limestone ridge of the Western Desert and contains the rock-cut tombs of local rulers from the Sixth to the Twelfth Dynasties, as well as those of administrative and religious officials (especially overseers of the priests of Hathor).

The cemetery of Meir was excavated by members of the Egyptian Antiquities Service during the late 1880's and from 1910 to 1915 Sayed Khashaba held the official government concession for excavations in the area. During that time Ahmed Kamal conducted excavations for Khashaba, and published preliminary reports in the *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* after each season. The reports document the discovery of numerous funerary objects at Meir, such as coffins, canopic chests, statuettes, and models, which are dispersed in numerous Egyptian and foreign museums, including The Egyptian Museum in Cairo and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

However, most of our knowledge of the tombs at Meir derives from the well-documented work of Aylward M. Blackman, who systematically excavated the site over five seasons between 1912 and 1950 under the auspices of the Archaeological Survey of the

Egyptian Exploration Fund (EEF), later Society (EES). In his 1912 survey, Blackman divided the necropolis into five groups of rock-cut tombs, each series separated by a wadi. The five groups, labeled A to E from north to south, comprise fifteen decorated chapels: A 1-4, B 1-4, C 1, D 1-2, and E 1-4. Blackman uncovered a range of well preserved and beautifully decorated tombs dating from the Old and Middle Kingdom periods, which he published in a series comprising six volumes. Blackman described the architecture as well as the colour conventions employed by the Egyptian artist/painter and recorded the scenes and inscriptions on the walls of the decorated tomb chapels of the middle terrace.

Since 2006 and under the directorship of Professor Naguib Kanawati, Macquarie University has held the concession to excavate, record and publish the tombs at Meir. The ARC grant, mentioned above by Prof. Kanawati will enable fieldwork and current research to continue uninterrupted. The focus of the expedition has thus far been to record the known Old Kingdom tombs belonging to the powerful provincial administrators Pepyankh-heryib (D2), Pepi (D1), Niankh-Pepy (A1), Pepyankh-heny-kem (A2). The work included the recording in photographs, line drawings and architectural plans and sections with a view to publication as well as restoration and conservation of the walls of the decorated tombs. November 2009, saw the re-discovery of the late Old Kingdom tomb of Hepi-Kem (A4), which was originally uncovered and partially recorded by Blackman, in addition to several tombs and shafts dating to the First Intermediate Period. The entrance to the tomb of Hepi-Kem (A4) is located to the west of that of Niankh-Pepy (A1) and was blocked by a massive amount of drifted sand. The chapel of A4, one of the largest Old Kingdom rock-cut tombs known and extending 25 metres into the mountain, contains a fully decorated burial chamber similar to many other Sixth Dynasty tombs at Meir such as those of Pepyankh-heryib (D2) and Pepyankh-heny-kem (A2). These recent

findings establish Meir as one of only a few Egyptian cemeteries with evidence of continuous use over successive historical periods.

The Macquarie University expedition began working at Meir on January 11th 2011 and the team was comprised of Professor Naguib Kanawati (Director), Dr. Alexandra Woods (Assistant Director), Mr. Naguib Victor (Architect), Miss Miral Lashien (Epigrapher) as well as Macquarie University students Mr. Steven Darlow, Mr. John Burn, Miss Belinda Balhatchet and Miss Emma Magro. The January/February 2011 season had four main objectives, which was to first check the architectural record and line-drawings of the tomb of Pepyankh-heryib (D2), which is due to be published by the Australian Centre for Egyptology in 2011. The second goal was to locate several of the Old Kingdom tombs in Group E such as Nenki and Meniu mentioned by Blackman in preparation for recording in a future season. The third objective was to continue the cleaning and conservation of the coloured scenes and inscriptions in the decorated burial chamber of Hepi-kem (A4), and begin such work on the un-recorded chamber of Pepyankh-heny-kem (A2). In this regard our expedition was fortunate to be joined by an experienced conservator, Mr. Gamal Abd el-Malek, from the Conservation Department of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, who succeeded in cleaning the walls and enhancing the colours of scenes. As a result, in the 2012 season the expedition will be able to produce an almost complete record in line-drawings of all the scenes and inscriptions in these two burial chambers and to obtain a clear photographic record. The final objective of the expedition was to begin the epigraphic record of the first of the B group of tombs at Meir. Following Blackman's sequence of tombs in the group, the fully decorated chapel of Senbi (B1), who held the hereditary position of Nomarch and Overseer of Priests during the reign of Amenemhet I of the Twelfth Dynasty, was chosen. Although some walls are badly damaged, Senbi's (B1) tomb is decorated with finely carved painted reliefs and depicts a variety of scenes such as the tomb owner engaged in desert hunt as well as fishing and fowling in the marshlands. Additional scenes include minor figures represented wrestling, presenting food or livestock as offerings to the tomb owner, scenes involving animal husbandry as well as agricultural pursuits and the manufacture of stone vases.

Throughout January the work on site progressed as planned, although the political situation in Egypt was changing with huge street demonstrations staged in different locations throughout Egypt and the installation of a temporary military command in late January 2011. The police in charge of the expedition's safety were monitoring the situation closely and at no point did we feel in danger. However, the main roads north to Cairo as well as in and around Assuit were restricted, the train had stopped running, the banks were closed for several days and there was significant disruption to the phone and internet services making communication difficult. With the understanding and support of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, we decided to finish the season 2 weeks early and make our way home. On January 31st we began our evacuation and travelled south to Luxor, as the main highway north to Cairo was closed, and managed to pool all our funds to catch the last Egypt Air flight to Cairo. The team arrived in Cairo after curfew, which meant we could not leave the airport precinct, and spent a delightful night on the marble floor of a nearby airport hotel! The Australian Embassy officials on duty at Terminal 2 at the Cairo International Airport were extremely helpful and advised us to go to Terminal 1 to arrange flights as soon as possible. Once we arrived, we were greeted with massive queues of Egyptians and foreigners trying to flee the country and were extremely fortunate in securing six seats on flights to different cities in Europe where we could re-direct our long haul flights back to Australia. Belinda Balhatchet spent several days in Athens, Greece, while Emma Magro flew to meet family in Malta. The remainder of the team spent two days in Rome and,



EXCAVATING THE E GROUP TOMB OF MENIU AT MEIR (PHOTO: JOHN BURN)

although we were completely exhausted from being in transit for 3 full days, we took advantage of our short stay in Rome. We visited a few of the city's famous sites such as the Vatican Museum, St. Peter's Square and Basilica, the Colosseum as well as Trevi Fountain (where of course we threw in a coin to make sure we would all return to Rome!). We finally managed to catch an Emirates flight to Sydney and, much to the delight of our family, friends and colleagues, we arrived home on February 5th 2011 a full six days after having left our hotel in Assuit.

Although the season did not go as we had initially planned, the team completed all the required work on site and was extremely lucky in making the connections throughout the evacuation. We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to many Egyptian colleagues for their help, hospitality and friendship. The expedition plans to resume archaeological fieldwork at Meir in January/February in 2012 and despite the difficulties we faced last season we will never forget that we witnessed first hand a chapter of Egyptian history.

Alexandra Woods

Faces that keep The Rundle Foundation going



OFFICE VOLUNTEERS AND STALWARTS: CARMEL AMOS (LEFT) AND CAROL ALLEN AT THE RECENT MINI CONFERENCE (PHOTO: JOHN DEAN)

2011 Annual Conference

NEW VIEWS ON THE ANCIENT PAST
POLISH AND HUNGARIAN EXCAVATIONS IN MEMPHIS
AND THEBES

Saturday August 13, 2011
Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club Auditorium
9.30 for 10 am sharp

For this year's conference we have invited two very well known scholars from Eastern Europe. There will be four very interesting lectures on topics that we haven't heard about before.

Prof. Karol Myśliwiec, University of Warsaw, Poland has had a long career as a field archaeologist on a wide range of sites in Egypt and is currently excavating in Saqqara, hence his interests overlap with those of Macquarie. Prof. Myśliwiec will discuss:

A double necropolis in a quarry: Polish-Egyptian excavations in Saqqara
Two posthumous neighbours (Mer-ef-neb-ef and Ny-ankh-Nefertem)
from the Old Kingdom in Saqqara

Prof. Tamás Bács, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest Hungary, and his team work in Thebes at Sheikh Abd el Gurna in a complex of tombs that has a wealth of material from the New Kingdom to the Coptic Period. TT65, in particular, has an interesting range of officials, periods, art, architecture and decoration programs and texts. Prof. Bács also has a personal connection with Australia which he will no doubt tell us about. He will talk about:

Scribes and Secretaries, High Priests and Viceroy: Some mid Eighteenth Dynasty tomb-complexes on Sheikh Abd el-Qurna
An Intriguing Mind: The chief temple archivist Imiseba and his mortuary monument

This year the conference price will include morning tea, a light lunch and afternoon tea. As this is a catered function, tickets will be pre-sold and only a very limited number will be for sale at the door. Last year the conference was a sell out so book early!

Cost: Members \$70, Non-Members \$80

Students and Pensioners \$50

School Groups with a minimum of 5 students \$40 per student

Teacher with 5 students FREE

A booking form is included with this Newsletter

Diary Dates

Annual Dinner

Saturday June 4 2011

Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club Function Centre
6.30 for 7 pm

Annual Conference

Saturday August 13 2011

Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club Auditorium
10 am sharp

Young Egyptology Forum No. 1

Sunday September 11 2011

Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club Auditorium
1.15 for 1.30 pm start

2011 Annual Dinner

Saturday June 4, 2011 at 6.30 for 7 pm
The Heritage Function Centre
Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club

This year's after dinner speaker will be Dr Yann Tristant who will talk about *Frogs and Kangaroos. Journey to the origins of Egypt*.

Dr Tristant was appointed by Macquarie University last year as our specialist in the Egyptian Predynastic and early Dynastic periods. Prior to his appointment 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 École 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 École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHSS – School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences) in Paris where he 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 has a 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, Wadi Araba, where he is undertaking an archaeological survey, and at Tel el-Eswed in the Delta. He is also Deputy Director of the Helwan project which has been a Macquarie University concession for a number of years.

Cost \$55 per person

A booking form is included with this Newsletter

Young Egyptology Forum No. 1

Sunday, September 11 2011 at 1.15 for 1.30
Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club Auditorium

We are holding a forum to celebrate and demonstrate the talent of our young or upcoming Egyptologists. Come and share in their enthusiasm for their research topics. Get to know the names before they are famous! Further details will be announced in the next Newsletter.

Cost: \$25, Students \$15, including afternoon tea

A booking form is included with this Newsletter

New Publications for Sale

N. Kanawati et al (2010) *Mereruka and his Family, Part III: I: The Tomb of Mereruka*, ACE Reports 29

N. Kanawati et al (2011) *Mereruka and his Family, Part III: II: The Tomb of Mereruka*, ACE Reports 30

Price: \$66 each

All Cheques should be made to MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY and all prices quoted include GST

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