

CyberScribe 163 - March 2009

Let's start off this month's column with the results of a project reported to us here during a lecture by Dr. Cheryl Ward. Those who were present remember that she was the leader of a project to reconstruct and sail a full sized ship of the type common during the time of Hatshepsut. The project is complete, and the ship has been tested. The story below (abbreviated) from 'Physorg' (<http://www.physorg.com/news/55399472.html>) is fascinating:



"'Min' is 20 meters (66 feet) long and could have carried a cargo of about 15 tons in addition to crew and supplies. The modern reconstruction was built in only six months at an Egyptian shipyard.

"Ancient Egyptians may be best known for building pyramids, but internationally renowned maritime archaeologist Cheryl Ward wants the world to know that they were pretty good sailors, too.

"She ought to know. Ward and an international team of archaeologists, shipwrights and sailors recently built a full-scale replica of a 3,800-year-old ship and sailed it on the Red Sea to re-create a voyage to a place the ancient Egyptians called God's Land, or Punt. Their expedition was financed and filmed as part of a French documentary that will air internationally and on an upcoming episode of "Nova."

"“This project has demonstrated the extraordinary capability of the Egyptians at sea,” Ward said. “Many people, including my fellow archaeologists, think of the Egyptians as tied to the Nile River and lacking in the ability to go to sea. For 25 years, my research has been dedicated to showing the scope of their ability and now, to proving their independently invented approach to ship construction worked magnificently at sea.”

"The project grew out of the 2006 discovery of the oldest remains of seafaring ships in the world in manmade caves at Wadi Gawasis, on the edge of the Egyptian desert. The Egyptians used the site to assemble and disassemble ships built of cedar planks and to store the planks, stone anchors and coils of rope until the next expedition -- one that obviously never came. Civil unrest and political instability after the Middle Kingdom period (2040-1640 BC) likely put a halt to further exploration, and the caves were long forgotten, Ward said.

"By October 2008, the 66-foot-long by 16-foot-wide ship, which Ward dubbed the 'Min of the Desert', was completed using the techniques of the ancient Egyptians -- no frames, no nails and planks that were designed to fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. After immersing the ship in the Nile to permit the timbers to swell closed around the wood fastenings, mounting the rigging and testing the steering system, they transported the complete ship to the Red Sea.

"In late December, the 24-person international crew set sail on the Red Sea with Florida State Assistant Professor of English David Vann serving as captain. The voyage ended after seven days and about 150 miles into what would have been a 1,000-mile trip to Punt. The weeklong voyage provided a new appreciation for the skills and ingenuity of the ancient Egyptians, Ward said, noting that the crew was surprised at how fast the ship was able to travel -- approximately 6 knots, or 7 mph.

"“The ship’s speed means that journeys would be made in much less time than Egyptologists had calculated, making the whole voyage simpler and more feasible for the ancients,” she said, adding that it probably took about a month to sail to Punt and two months to return. “The technology we used had not been applied to shipbuilding for more than 3,500 years, and it still works as well today as it did then.””

Dr. Zahi Hawass has his own website where he details his current projects ('Zahi Hawass', <http://drhawass.com/blog/>). Recently, he put together a review of the current state of the project that is investigating that strange tunnel that descends from the burial chamber of Seti I's tomb in the Valley of the Kings. This story has been visited a couple of times early in this column (CYBERSCRIBE-152 and 153 (2008)), but much new progress has been made. The story below (abbreviated) brings us up to date:

"Sheikh Ali Abdel-Rassoul decided to take me to the tomb of Seti I, one of the most beautiful in the entire Valley of the Kings, and tell me about its greatest secret. He took me to a tunnel that extends downward from the king's burial chamber, and explained to me how he had explored it to a depth of around 136 meters, farther than any archaeologist had gone up to that point. He had been excavating with the permission of the Antiquities Service, but this permission was revoked after only a few months, and he was unable to go any farther. Sheikh Ali told me that when I became a great archaeologist, I should come back to the tomb and find out what lay at the end of this tunnel - he believed that it would be the true burial chamber of the king, hidden away behind a false burial chamber to protect it from robbers.



Steel reinforcement structure supporting the ceiling of the tunnel. (Photo by Sandro Vannini)

"I did not really believe Sheikh Ali at the time when he said that there might be a hidden chamber at the end of the tunnel. I knew that we had no artifacts from the burial of Seti I, which could mean that his real resting place had not been found. There was no evidence, however, that the tunnel led to anything significant. Over the years, however, I came to think that regardless of what we may find at the end of the tunnel, it would be good to explore it to determine its real function. It has been suggested that the tunnel serves the same function as the Osireion in the temple of Seti I at Abydos - a symbolic burial for the god Osiris below the level of the water table, and thus connected with the primeval waters of creation.

"My team and I began clearing the tunnel in 2007. It is very unsound structurally, and the rock of the ceiling is very fragile. It crumbles easily and there is always a risk that a chunk of stone will fall from it. I knew that we had to shore it up as we worked. I brought in an expert in soil mechanics to work with my team, as well as engineers to construct steel reinforcement structures at appropriate intervals to reinforce the walls and ceilings. We are now able to work in relative safety in this challenging space. Interestingly, we have found a few small artifacts in the rubble filling the shaft, including two 19th Dynasty shabtis, and fragments of stone inscribed with the king's name.



Dr. Tarek El-Awady and a member of the archaeological team inspecting wooden beams installed by Sheikh Ali to support the ceiling of his tunnel. The original tunnel is visible below. (Photo by Sandro Vannini)

We have constructed a wooden staircase to make it easier for us to work inside the tunnel, but in the floor, we are able to see the original limestone stairs that descend into the cliff. What is truly amazing is that we have now reached a point where we can see that after a depth of 65 meters, Sheikh Ali lost the real path of the tunnel. He began to dig through the bedrock itself, roughly parallel to the original structure but about 2.5 meters above it. The worst thing about what Sheikh Ali did is that it destroyed the passage's original ceiling. When the tunnel was first excavated, it was about 4 meters high. For the first 65 meters, we only had to worry about reinforcing the ceiling to this height. Now that we have met with Sheikh Ali's diversion, however, we have to contend with a ceiling some 6.5 meters above our head, making the task of clearing and shoring up the tunnel much more challenging. I am very glad to have an excellent assistant, Dr. Tarek El-Awady, to supervise this work. We have so far cleared and reinforced the tunnel to about 90 meters, and we will continue to press on, slowly and carefully.



Part of the scene from the second corridor showing the passage or way of Sokar. (Photo by Sandro Vannini)

Because of the way the tunnel descends, I believe that it may be intended to represent the path to the hidden cave of the god Sokar, which the Egyptians believed the deceased king would find in the afterlife. The path to this cave is represented on the wall of the second descending passage of the tomb of Seti I. We must proceed carefully, with the preservation of the tomb and the safety of the team at the front of our minds. Perhaps Sheikh Ali was correct, and there is something truly amazing yet to be discovered in this beautiful tomb!

As usual, there are always new discoveries in Egypt, and recently there was an announcement of the opening of the tomb of an 18th Dynasty noblewoman named Isisnofret, possibly the granddaughter of Ramesses II. There have been many news items on this find, but they mainly are all the same, the best seems to be this one from the 'National Geographic Society' (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/57264792.html>), shortened here for space reasons.

Hieroglyphics on a sarcophagus in the tomb identify Isisnofret as a 'spst', or noblewoman—an honorific reserved for women of the royal family or of otherwise exceptional status.

Long hidden by sand and rubble on a rocky outcrop on the outskirts the ancient royal burial city of Saqqara, the complex measures 89 by 34 feet (27 by 10 meters).

The tomb complex includes the base of a pyramid, a monumental gateway, a colonnaded courtyard, and an antechamber with three cult chapels, according to the team from Japan's Waseda University that has been excavating the site since 1991.



Common in New Kingdom (1539 to 1075 B.C.) tomb complexes, cult chapels frequently hosted the deceased's family on feast days. Relatives would often eat and make offerings of food and other items to be used by the dead, according to Ray Johnson, director of the University of Chicago Oriental Institute's Epigraphic Survey, who was not involved in the project.

Though Isisnofret's chapels are in ruins, partly due to looting, archaeologists have found fragments decorated with hieroglyphics. In general, cult chapels were painted with scenes of daily life and offerings—in case the family failed to provide the real thing.



Inside Isisnofret's tomb building, a limestone sarcophagus was found holding three skeletons—degraded mummies whose ages and sexes have yet to be determined, according to the preliminary Waseda University report.

The team is unsure why the sarcophagus holds three bodies, or even what the original state was. The sarcophagus is missing its internal, wooden coffin—perhaps stolen during the ancient pillaging that seems to have stripped the tomb of funerary objects.



Isisnofret's identity remains a mystery, though Egyptologists see clues in the tomb's close proximity to a monument for Pharaoh Ramesses II's son Prince Khaemwaset. The prince had a daughter named Isisnofret—a granddaughter of the pharaoh—though the name was common at the time.

Or this Isisnofret may have been one of Ramesses II's daughters or one of his approximately 200 wives, the archaeologists said.

Khaemwaset's "mummy is at the Egyptian Museum, and Ramesses II's mummy is also at the Egyptian Museum" in Cairo, El Ashry said—making both readily available for DNA testing.

The University of Chicago's Johnson believes Khaemwaset built tombs for his whole family in the area and expects the Japanese team to find other family members.

Speaking of noble women, Queen Nefertiti is in the news again. This time due to the apparent discovery of a potentially incriminating piece of paper detailing how the famous stone bust was taken out of Egypt. An article appeared in Al Ahrām Weekly Online (<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/935/hel.htm>) giving an interesting overview of the current fuss (abbreviated for space reasons):

"The latest edition of the German magazine Der Spiegel, published last week, contains a report that the German Oriental Association (DOG) had discovered a 1924 document claiming that Ludwig Borchardt, the discoverer of the Nefertiti bust, used a trick to smuggle the bust to Germany. According to the magazine, the document's authenticity is currently being analyzed by experts.



"The newspaper also said that the document was written by an eyewitness who claimed that Borchardt, who was keen on reserving the bust for Germany, intentionally disguised it by covering it with a layer of gypsum to ensure that the committee charged with supervising the distribution of new discoveries between Egypt and foreign mission would not see how beautiful the bust was or realize that it was actually made of exquisitely painted limestone.

"The secretary of the German Oriental Association reported in 1924 on a 1913 meeting between Borchardt and a senior Egyptian official. Egypt and Germany had an agreement to split antiquities found by Borchardt's team, but the secretary reported in his memo that Borchardt "wanted to save the bust for us".

"The bust lay wrapped in a box in a dim room when the Egyptian official, chief antiquities inspector, Gustave Lefévre, looked over the artifacts from the Borchardt dig. The secretary wrote that Borchardt had presented Lefévre with an unflattering photograph of the bust and claimed it was made of gypsum, when in fact it had a limestone core under a layer of stucco. Whether Lefévre went to the trouble of lifting the bust out of the box is not clear. However, the secretary who witnessed the meeting claimed there was "cheating" involved, since the Germans misrepresented the material.

"In response to the article in Der Spiegel, Hawass wrote to the German Oriental Association asking for a copy of the document. "If it is authentic, we will work with all our efforts and power with the German government to recover the bust," Hawass told Al-Ahram Weekly.

"The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which has possession of the bust, rejects any charge of cheating. The idea that the antiquities were not divided according to the rules in 1913 is "false", the foundation has claimed in a statement. Lefévre, in other words, overlooked the importance of the piece.

"The German Oriental Association admits the existence of the document, but also maintains there was no serious breach of the rules. "Nefertiti was at the top of the exchange list," a spokesman for the company told Der Spiegel. "The inspector could have looked at everything closely... It's not admissible to complain about the deal reached at the time."

"Nefertiti's bust in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, perhaps the best-known work of art from ancient Egypt, was unearthed in 1912. Hawass says that Borchardt, anxious to preserve the bust for Germany, took advantage of the practice at the time of splitting the spoils of any new discovery between the Egyptian antiquities authority and the foreign mission concerned. Back then, the law required discoveries to be brought to what was called the Antiquities Service, where a special committee supervised the distribution.

"Borchardt, who discovered the head at Tel Al-Amarna, either did not declare the bust, or hid it under less important objects. Either that, or the Egyptian authorities failed to recognize its beauty and importance. According to Borchardt himself, he did not clean the bust but left it covered in mud when he took it to the Egyptian Museum for the usual division of spoils. The service, on that occasion, took the limestone statues of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and gave the head of Queen Nefertiti to the expedition because it was made of gypsum -- or so it was thought.

"Whatever happened, the antiquities authorities did not know about the bust until it was put on show in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin in 1923, and they had certainly never expressly agreed that this piece should be included in the German share of the Tel Al-Amarna finds."

The CyberScribe has to be even and balanced, and so must point out that everything in Egypt wasn't happy this past month. There has been a new terrorist bomb event...this

time in Cairo's Khan el-Khalili (from 'The Guardian',
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/23/cairo-bomb-blast>):

"At least one tourist was killed and 21 people injured when a bomb exploded in a crowded Cairo marketplace yesterday, Egyptian police said. The explosion happened in the Khan el-Khalili bazaar, which is popular with tourists, in the centre of the capital. Last night, the Egyptian health ministry reported that a 17-year-old French girl had been killed. Officials said at least 21 people were hurt, including 13 French, one German and three Saudi tourists, and four Egyptians.



"The blast happened shortly after 5.30pm last night. Around an hour after the first explosion, police found a second explosive device and detonated it safely. Security officials said three people were in custody. Different sources reported variously that the bomb had been thrown from a passing motorcycle or a hotel window, but a government statement said the attack involved a homemade device placed under a bench in the main plaza.

"A police colonel at the scene said the bomb went off outside a cafe, sending stone fragments into the air, wounding bystanders.

"Montasser el-Zayat, a lawyer who has represented Islamic extremists, told the Arabic news channel al-Jazeera that the attack might be linked to popular anger over the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip last month. "The nature of the explosion looks like an act carried out by young, inexperienced amateurs whose emotions were inflamed by the events of Gaza."

"One of the country's highest religious officials, Sheikh of Al-Azhar Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi, said of the attack: "Those who carried out this criminal act are traitors to their religion and country and are distorting the image of Islam, which rejects terrorism and prohibits the killing of innocents.""

Otto Schaden's team are hard at work again ('KV-63' <http://www.kv-63.com/>), and reports are being issued from time to time. They are unpacking the last of those huge stone jars, and have found a few surprises. Otto Schaden tells us that:

"In January, as the conservation work began in earnest on the coffins, the KV-63 team began opening some of the remaining storage jars. Jar number 13 was the first to be examined and proved to contain some of the most interesting items...including a wooden bed. The bed had been broken into many pieces to fit inside the jar, but is now completely restored. The bed features the customary lion head decorations at the head end and the raised footboard on the other; its length is 170 cm. There are no "feet" to speak of, so it may have been used simply to hold a coffin or mummy "off" the ground during the embalming process. Some strange boards covered with linen and adorned with possible "feet" were also in Jar 13. When these items are conserved, we will see if they have any possible connection with the bed as supports.

"To add to the bedtime theme of the preceding paragraph, we also found an intact pillow (the 10th from KV-63). Though pushed in at one end from the confined space of the storage jar, it appears to be quite intact and in excellent condition.

"Among other finds are more miniature vessels, bowls with hieratic texts, linen, jar lids and reed tubes (containing a powdery substance). One of the jars emptied this season had what must be a whole storage jar within it --- in many fragments, of course. A rough estimate is that the tomb and coffins may have contained nearly forty of these large storage jars, all virtually identical to those found by Theodore Davis in KV-54."

Because the CyberScribe is a geologist, he was unable to resist this next little item, an unusual amuletic stone called chrysocolla. MSNBC (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29035229/>) (abbreviated below):

"A rare mummified child from the early period of Egyptian history was discovered buried with a bright green amulet stone once believed to hold magical powers, according to a new study. The finds help to explain why hieroglyphics and historical texts record that Egyptian

children wore green eye makeup. It also adds to the growing body of evidence that ancient Egyptians thought color itself held sacred energy that could help or hurt individuals.



"Raffaella Bianucci explained that the first Egyptian colored amulets occurred as early as the Predynastic Badarian period, from 4500 to 3800 B.C. The recently analyzed child mummy, containing the remains of a 15- to 18-month-old toddler, dates to 4,700 years ago. "Even in limited forms and materials, these earliest amulets give a good indication of the dangerous forces that the early Egyptians felt were present in their world and needed to be harnessed by magical means," said Bianucci.

"The researchers turned their attention to a fossilized leather bag tied with linen twine, which was wrapped in the bandages with the mummy. Two stones were found within the bag. The researchers focused on a bright green one, found poking through the leather. X-rays, as well as scanning electron microscope analysis, revealed that the stone was chrysocolla, or hydrated copper silica. Chrysocolla is valued as an ornamental stone that, in its bluer forms, is sometimes confused with turquoise.

"Chrysocolla may have been special for children, as archaeologists previously unearthed a small figure of a child made of the green material in another grave. "In ancient Egypt, color was an integral part of the substance and being of everything in life," she said, explaining that green — the color of new vegetation and growing crops, including the treasured papyrus plant — was linked to health and "flourishing."

"Bianucci continued that, based on such records, red was the color of life and victory, white suggested omnipotence and purity, black was a symbol of death and the night, blue symbolized life and rebirth and yellow was thought to be eternal and indestructible, like the sun and gold.

"The fact that the child was buried with a chrysocolla bead is very interesting as it is rare to have such an identification," Salima Ikram added. "Clearly this was an amulet that was interred with the child in an effort to ensure its safety in the afterworld — a pity it did not protect the infant in this one.""

Much more modern jewels are also items of interest in modern Egypt. The Egyptian Crown Jewels from the family of Mohamed Ali to the time of the last king, Farouk, are

being examined and displayed after being hidden for decades. Placed in storage inside stout wooden crates, stashed in the Central Bank of Egypt, some of them can now be seen again. A short item in 'Al Ahram Weekly Online' (<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/936/he3.htm>) describes them and the palace converted into their museum:

"The jewelry, preserved in 45 wooden crates since the 1952 Revolution, will be handed over to a committee of experts from the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), which in turn will inspect and if necessary restore it.



"The Royal Jewelry Museum is housed in a two-storey palace built in 1923 in an Italian architectural style for Princess Fatma El-Zahraa, a member of the Mohamed Ali family. The foyer is a grandiose affair with soft, deep burgundy, carpets and carved and gilded ceilings. A marble staircase sweeps up to the first floor.

"The ceilings of each room are painted by Egyptian, Italian and French artists and depict tales from Greek mythology, while the ceilings on the second floor depict details of famous French and Italian love stories.

"The highlight of the museum is the wonderful stained glass panels in the main hall of the first floor, in the stairwell, and in the first-floor bathroom. The most famous French artists of the time were commissioned to create these masterpieces, which recount more tales from European love stories.

"The most important pieces in the collection are the royal crowns and tiaras. The most beautiful of all is the tiara that belonged to the wife of King Fouad and is set with 2,159 first grade diamonds and priceless white pearls. King Farouk's personal toilet set, also a masterpiece, replicates crystal bottles capped with pure gold lids embossed with the royal coat of arms, all gracefully perched on a gold tray."

To finish off this month's column, the CyberScribe wishes to suggest that the ancient Egyptians would have loved the tradition of Mardi Gras carnival parades with their extravagant costumes, headdresses and amazing color. This year two of these carnival parades chose to use Egyptian themes for at least one unit in each parade.

"The Telegraph
(http://www.thetelegraph.com/news/mardi_23757___article.html/krewe_float.html),
discussing one of the floats in Saint Louis noted:

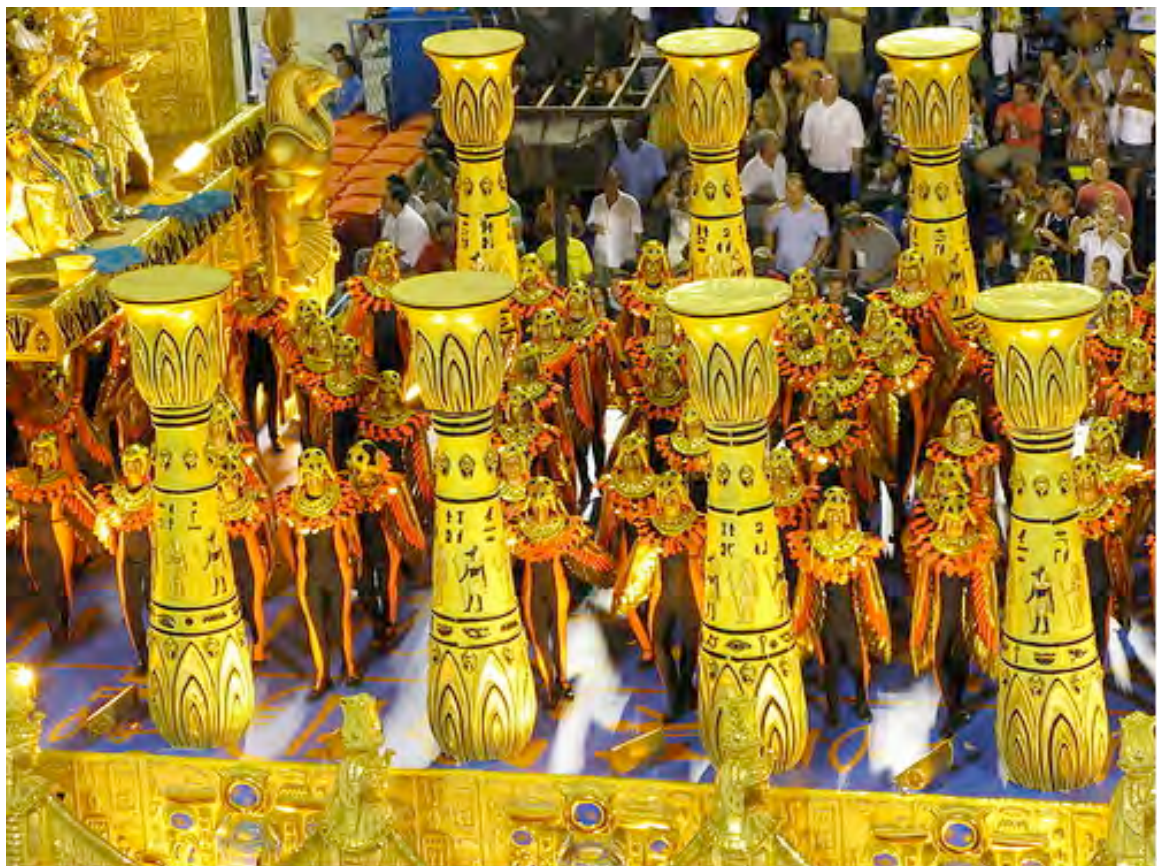
"The award-winning Riverbend Krewe of Mardi Krawlers is bringing the Nile to the Mississippi for this year's Souldard Mardi Gras Parade. The Krawlers are building an Egyptian float called "King Tut: The Restoration of the Deities" to reflect this year's parade theme, "Souldard Mardi Gras' Parade of History." The Souldard Mardi Gras Parade is one of the largest in the Midwest.



"The striking float incorporates giant golden columns and pyramids. A golden mannequin will seem to levitate out of one of the pyramids. A towering bust of King Tut faces back, flanked by deities and jackals on both sides.

"More than 60 people will attend the float, wearing black garb accented with gold accessories. Krewe members also will don colorful King Tut headdresses. A few women will dress as Cleopatra, the Queen of the Nile."

Not to demean the above efforts, but the annual Carnival in Rio presents itself in a way that blows away all other contenders. Color, costumes, size, presentation...the Rio de Janeiro, Brazil parade is dazzling, and this year they had an Egyptian entry. Sorry that there are so few photos here, but the Rio carnival also has lots of nudity...and it was hard to get inoffensive photos. Here are a few photos to show you what the CyberScribe means:



And with that, dear readers, muses the CyberScribe...its time to close this column.

If you would like to contact the CyberScribe (also known as Clair Ossian) to ask a question or to suggest an item for a future column, please send an e-mail to clastic@verizon.net or call (972) 416-5211. Don't forget to look up the North Texas Chapter of ARCE's Internet Homepage located at this address: <http://www.arce-ntexas.org/>.