

CyberScribe 165 - May 2009

Perhaps the most interesting...accompanied by the most silly...news item this past month is the story about CAT scanning the famous bust of Nefertiti. A wonderful article appeared in 'Radiology': Volume 251: Number 1—April 2009, pp 233-240, the paper entitled: 'Nondestructive Insights into Composition of the Sculpture of Egyptian Queen Nefertiti with CT' by Alexander Huppertz, Dietrich Wildung, Barry J. Kemp, Tanja Nentwig, Patrick Asbach, Franz Maximilian Rasche, Bernd Hamm.

The CyberScribe regrets that he cannot reprint the main article, but the abstract data below give the gist of the study:

“Purpose: To assess the conservation status of, to gain information on the creation of, and to provide surface reformations of the core and the surface of the bust of the pharaoh-queen Nefertiti, considered to be one of the greatest treasures of ancient Egyptian art, with computed tomography (CT).

“Materials and Methods: Multisection CT was performed with 0.6-mm section thickness. Two- and three-dimensional reformations were made to depict the core and the surface separately.

“Results: The stucco layer on the face and the ears was very thin, a maximum of 1–2 mm thick. The rear part of the reconstructed crown showed two thick stucco layers of different attenuation values, indicating that a multistep process was used to create the sculpture. Within the stucco, a great number of air-equivalent hypoattenuating areas, filamentous fissures parallel to the surface, and an inhomogeneous bonding between the layers were delineated. Nefertiti's inner face was not anonymous, but rather delicately sculpted by the royal sculptor Thutmose. The comparison to the outer face revealed differences, including the angles of the eyelids, creases around the corners of the mouth on the limestone surface, and a slight bump on the ridge of the nose. According to the beauty ideals of the Amarna period, the differences had positive and negative effects and can be read as signs of individualization of the sculpture. The potential material-related weaknesses of the sculpture that were revealed at imaging necessitate careful handling, with the avoidance of any focal pressure and shearing forces in the crown and the shoulders.

“Conclusion: CT imaging revealed construction techniques in Nefertiti’s bust that had implications for conservation, as well as for an understanding of the artistic methods used in the creation of this masterpiece of art of the 18th dynasty.”

Another article, written for the press (‘Yahoo News’ http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090331/ap_on_re_eu/eu_germany_nefertiti_face) stated (in part) that:

“Researchers in Germany have used a modern medical procedure to uncover a secret within one of ancient Egypt’s most treasured artworks — the bust of Nefertiti has two faces. A team discovered a detailed stone carving that differs from the external stucco face when they performed a computed tomography, or CT, scan on the bust. The findings, published Tuesday in the monthly journal *Radiology*, are the first to show that the stone core of the statue is a highly detailed sculpture of the queen, Huppertz said.

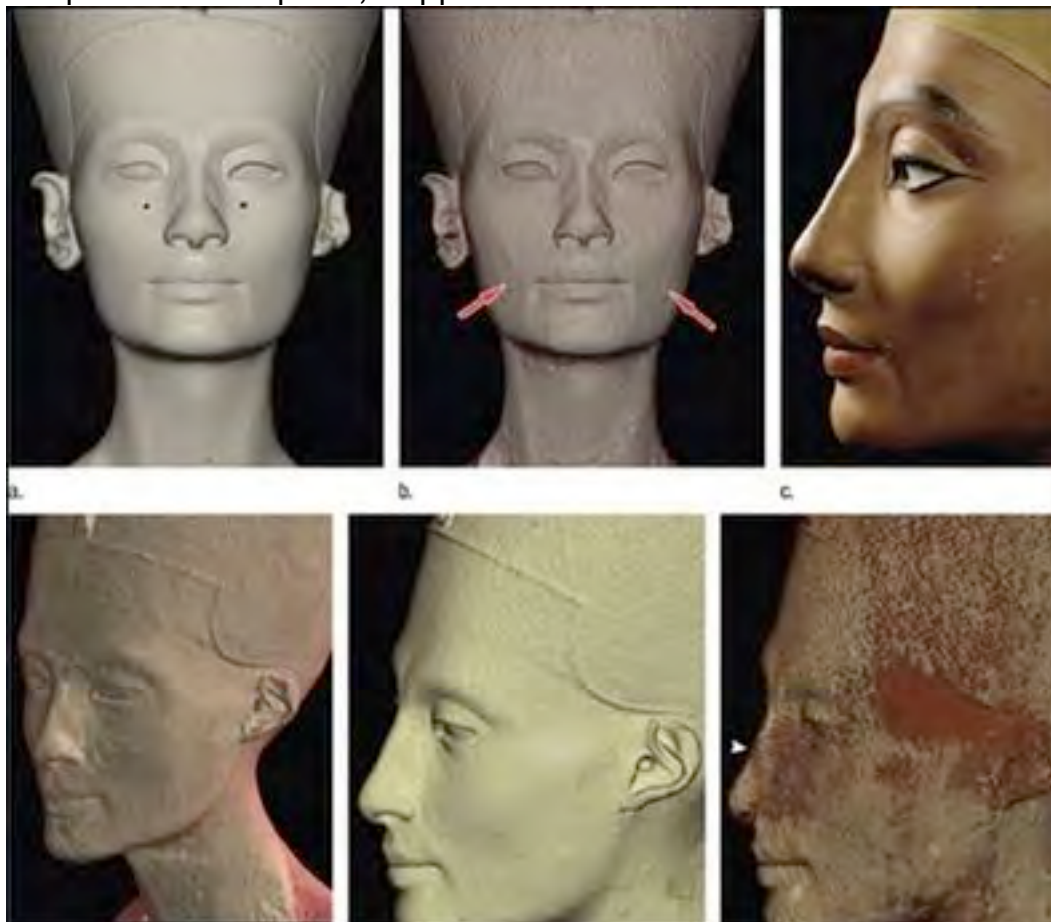
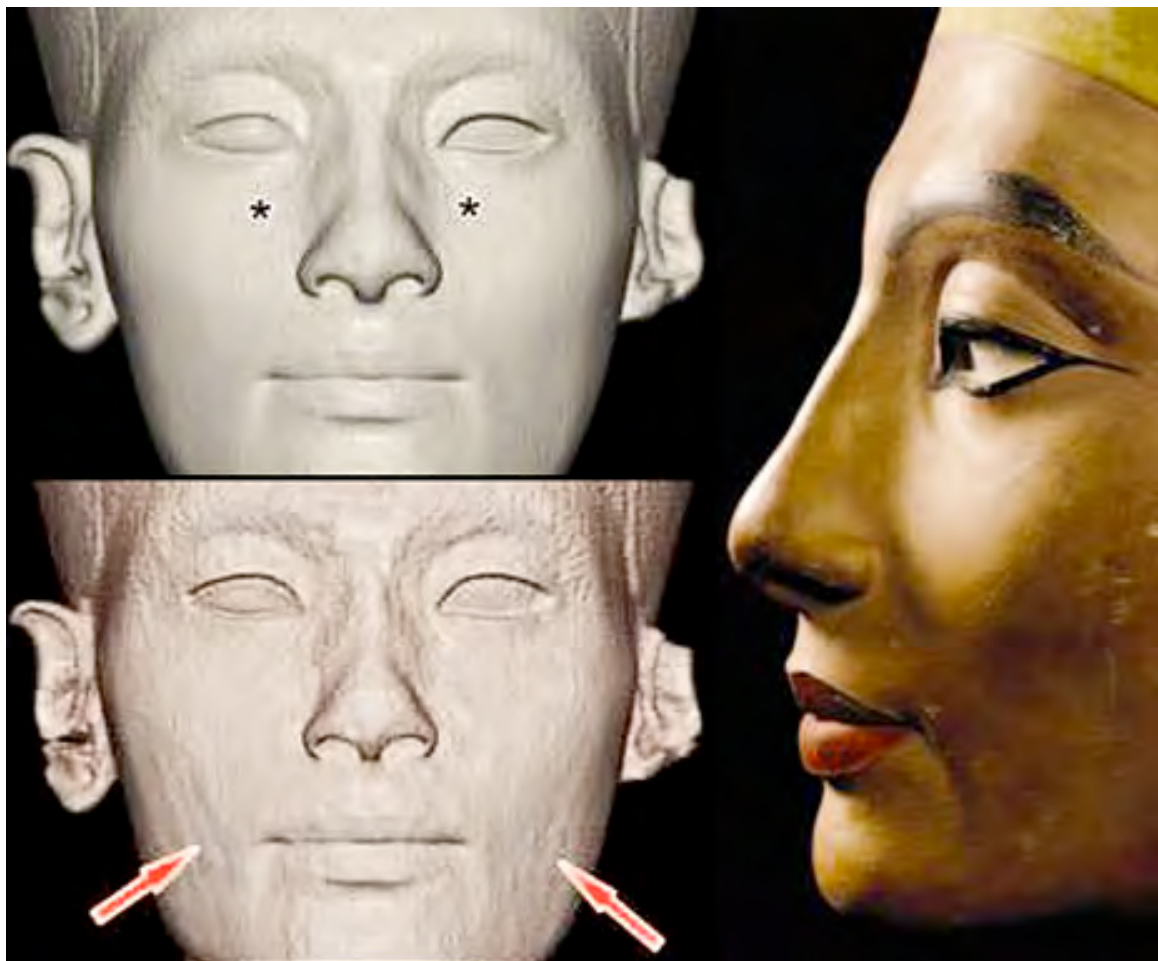


Photo composite of the scans

"Until we did this scan, how deep the stucco was and whether a second face was underneath it was unknown," he said. "The hypothesis was that the stone underneath was just a support."

"The differences between the faces, though slight — creases at the corners of the mouth, a bump on the nose of the stone version — suggest that someone expressly ordered the adjustments between stone and stucco when royal sculptors immortalized the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten 3,300 years ago."



"John H. Taylor, a curator at the British Museum in London, said the scan raises interesting questions about why the features were adjusted. "One could deduce that the final version was considered in some way more acceptable than the 'hidden' one, though caution is needed in attempting to explain the significance of these changes," Taylor wrote in an e-mail.

"Taylor said the better understanding of the bust's structure will also help preserve it. "The findings are particularly significant for the information they shed on the constructional process and the

subsurface condition of the bust, which will be of value in ensuring its long-term survival in good condition" Taylor said."

A slightly frivolous article in the 'Daily Mail' (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1165893/Why-legendary/index.html>) summarized some of the findings:

- compared to the outer stucco face, the inner face had less prominent cheekbones, a slight bump on the ridge of the nose, creases around the corner of mouth and cheeks, and less depth at the corners of the eyelids
- the inner face had less prominent cheekbones, a bump on the nose and wrinkles around the mouth
- fissures parallel to the surface were found in the shoulders, the lower surfaces of the bust, and the rear of the crown

With wonderfully bad timing, a self-proclaimed 'expert' declared that the bust was a total fake. Yes, he has written a book 'proving' his idea. There were numerous articles in the world press, but the most complete one seemed to be the one in 'The Australian' (<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25436791-12377,00.html>), which stated (abbreviated here):

"Swiss art historian Henri Stierlin, says in a just-released book that the bust currently in Berlin's Altes Museum was made on the orders of Germany archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt on site at the digs by an artist named Gerardt Marks.

"He said he believed it was made to test pigments used by the ancient Egyptians. The historian said the archaeologist had hoped to produce a new portrait of the queen wearing a necklace he knew she had owned and also carry out a color test with ancient pigments found at the digs.

"But on December 6, 1912, the copy was much admired as an original work by a German prince and the archaeologist "couldn't sum up the courage to ridicule" his guests, Mr. Stierlin said."

Stierlin based his claims on these 'facts':

"The bust has no left eye and was never crafted to have one. This is an insult for an ancient Egyptian who believed the statue was the person themselves."

"He also said the shoulders were cut vertically in the style practiced since the 19th century while "Egyptians cut shoulders horizontally" and that the features were accentuated in a manner recalling that of Art Nouveau.

"The pigments, which can be dated, are really ancient," he added.

"French archaeologists present at the site never mentioned the finding and neither did written accounts of the digs.

"The earliest detailed scientific report appeared in 1923, 11 years after the discovery.

"The archaeologist "didn't even bother to supply a description, which is amazing for an exceptional work found intact".

"Mr. Borchardt left the piece for 10 years in his sponsor's sitting-room. It's as if he'd left Tutankhamen's mask in his own sitting-room."

Needless to say this is all nonsense, and Zahi Hawass said so, in his typically no-nonsense terms.

It has been a great month for discoveries accompanied by great photographs. Space limitations will not allow for full treatment of each of these, but the brief summaries below will give some feel for the excitement. The first of these comes from the areas around the Illahun pyramid complex. A story in <http://au.news.yahoo.com/a/-/world/5493613> stated:

"Archaeologists working in an Egyptian oasis have found a necropolis containing dozens of the brightly painted mummies dating back as far as 4,000 years, the country's antiquities chief said on Sunday.



“Archaeologists working in an Egyptian oasis have found a necropolis containing dozens of brightly painted mummies dating back as far as 4,000 years, the country's antiquities chief said on Sunday.

"The mission found dozens of mummies in 53 rock-hewn tombs dating to the Middle Kingdom" from 2061-1786 BC, said Zahi Hawass. "Four of the mummies date back to the 22nd Dynasty (931 to 725 BC)." The linen-wrapped mummies are painted in the still-bright traditional ancient Egyptian colors of turquoise, terracotta and gold.

Google News added a number of details and several more of these wonderful photographs, relating (abbreviated here):

“The 53 tombs — some as old as 4,000 years — were discovered recently on a sandy plateau overlooking farming fields in the village Illahun, located in the Fayum oasis about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southwest of the Egyptian capital.



“Three slim wooden sarcophagi believed to be holding female mummies were laid out in one of the tombs. The innermost coffins were painted to resemble the deceased using blue, yellow, rust and black dyes.

“In another tomb, workers slowly removed the lid of one inscribed with hieroglyphic prayers to reveal a colorful mummy case that Abdel-Rahman el-Ayedi, the deputy secretary of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, said belonged to a woman named Isis Her Ib, the daughter of one of Illahun's mayors nearly 4,000 years ago.





“Not much was known about who used the ancient necropolis. El-Ayedi said some of the tombs were just 2,800 years old, while others were from the Middle Kingdom, which dates back 2061-1786 B.C. Some had a single burial shaft, while others had upper and lower chambers. A funerary chapel with an offering table, painted masks, pottery, statues and protection charms known as amulets were also found at the site, el-Ayedi said.”

Zahi Hawass still believes that he is on the trail of the tombs of Cleopatra and Marc Antony, though few believe he will be successful. He has, as reported in earlier CyberScribe columns, found stone heads, coins of the time of Cleopatra and a few other objects that he interprets as hers, the project must remain unproven at the moment. Hawass and his teams are working at the site of the temple of Taposiris Magna, and (abbreviated) here is what Hawass has to say about their work (<http://www.drhawass.com/blog/press-release-news-temple-taposiris-magna>):

“A radar survey of the temple of Taposiris Magna, west of Alexandria, Egypt, was completed last month as part of the search for the tomb of Cleopatra and Mark Antony.



[A view of the temple of Taposiris Magna. (Photo: Supreme Council of Antiquities)]

“The radar revealed 3 possible spots of interest where a tomb may be located. The expedition has received the results of the survey, and will begin excavating each of these three spots next week.

“The most important recent development at Taposiris Magna has been the discovery of a large, previously unknown cemetery outside the temple enclosure. The expedition has found 27 tombs. 20 of them shaped like vaulted sarcophagi, partly underground and partly aboveground. The remaining 7 consist of staircases leading to simple burial chambers. Inside these tombs, the team has found a total of 10 mummies, 2 of them gilded. The discovery of this cemetery indicates that an important person, likely of royal status, could be buried inside the temple. It was common for officials and other high-status individuals in Egypt to construct their tombs close to those of their rulers throughout the Pharaonic period. The style of the newly discovered tombs indicates that they were constructed during the Greco-Roman period.



[Mummies in one of the newly discovered tombs outside the temple. (Photo: Supreme Council of Antiquities)]

“They have found a number of deep shafts inside the temple, three of which seem to have been used for burials. It is possible that these shafts were the tombs of important people, and the team’s leaders believe that Cleopatra and Mark Antony could have been buried in a deep shaft similar to those already discovered inside the temple.

“Dr. Hawass said that the expedition has so far found a beautiful head of Cleopatra, along with 22 coins bearing her image. The team has also found many amulets, along with a headless statue dating to the Ptolemaic Period. Among the most interesting finds is a unique mask depicting a man with a cleft chin. The face bears some similarity to known portraits of Mark Antony himself.”

A new temple in the Sinai has been announced. This structure from the time of Thutmose III is rather well preserved in part, and is surprising for the area where it was built. The earlier reports stated that four temples had been discovered, but in fact, the find is one

temple with four chapels. The best report is probably the one from Zahi Hawass himself (<http://www.drhawass.com/blog/press-release-new-kingdom-temple-discovered-sinai>) (abbreviated somewhat here):

“An archaeological mission has discovered the remains of a large New Kingdom temple in the area of Tell Hebua in the Sinai. Excavators found inscriptions in the temple dating to the reign of Thutmose II (ca. 1516-1504 BC) through that of Ramesses II (1304-1237 BC).



Inscription with cartouches of Thutmose II found at the newly discovered Temple.

“It is the largest temple known in the region, which was heavily fortified in ancient times because of its strategic location on Egypt’s eastern border. The temple covers an area of 80 by 70 meters. It is built of mud brick, and surrounded by a 4 meter-thick wall. It consists of four rectangular halls containing a total of 34 columns decorated with images of ancient Egyptian deities, including Horus, Hathor,

Tefnut, Montu, and Renenutet. The temple also contains images of Thutmose II and Ramesses II.



Thutmose II and Ra-Horakhty at the Tell Hebua archaeological site.

“Its walls were brightly painted, and it housed three limestone purification basins along with a number of chapels. Dr. Mohamed Abdel Maqsood, the SCA director in charge of the region, said that to the east and west of the temple, the team found two groups of storehouses consisting of 13 rooms each. These storehouses probably date to the reigns of kings Seti I (ca. 1314-1304 BC), Ramesses II and Seti II (ca. 1315-1215 BC). Inside, the team found thousands of inscriptions and seal impressions of Seti I, Ramesses II, and Seti II. One particularly important example depicts Ramesses I (ca. 1315-1314 BC) before the god Set, the patron deity of the Hyksos capital of Avaris, now known as Tell El-Dab’a, in the eastern Nile Delta some 50 kilometers from Tell Hebua.”

The CyberScribe has repeatedly made note of two very interesting exploration and conservation efforts personally supervised by Zahi Hawass...the clearing of the strange tunnel in the burial chamber of the tomb of Seti I...and the clearance, stabilization and preservation of the Step Pyramid of Zoser at Saqqara. Both of the projects are exciting

and dramatic, and both have recently been showcased by Hawass with videos. In the videos, Hawass takes us into the Seti I tunnel, and under the mass of the Step Pyramid. The film images could be sharper, but the scenes are wonderful. The CyberScribe urges each of his readers to watch these films. You will not be disappointed!

Video 1. Zahi Hawass In the Mysterious Tunnel in the Tomb of Seti I

“For the last two years, Zahi Hawass has led an all-Egyptian team that is excavating and restoring the mysterious tunnel leading from the burial chamber of King Seti I deep into the Theban cliffs. The reason for the tunnel's existence is unknown.



“As the excavation proceeds, engineers are shoring up the fragile walls and ceiling of the tunnel and adding a wooden stairway that allows the team to move about more easily inside. This work is challenging and dangerous, but it is essential to the preservation of the tomb of Seti I, KV17, widely considered one of the most beautiful in the Valley of the Kings.

(<http://www.drhawass.com/blog/video-join-zahi-hawass-inside-mysterious-tunnel-tomb-seti-i>)

Video 2. Exploring the Step Pyramid

“For the last year, an all-Egyptian team has been working to conserve and restore this precious part of the legacy of ancient Egypt.

The team's latest achievement has been to clear a deep layer of debris covering the king's sarcophagus. The surface of the sarcophagus is now visible for the first time in recent memory. In addition, the team has located a passage leading underneath the sarcophagus, allowing scholars to examine it from all sides. Scaffolding will soon be installed in the central shaft to support the fragile walls and ceiling and prevent debris from falling into the burial chamber. This work is challenging and dangerous, and poses many tough issues for conservators.

(<http://www.drhawass.com/blog/video-exploring-step-pyramid-ancient-egypts-stairway-heaven>)





Looking down into burial chamber of Djoser, at bottom of the 30-meter central shaft under step Pyramid. (Sandro Vannini)



Step Pyramid conservation team clearing the massive, red granite sarcophagus of King Djoser. (Sandro Vannini)

While not exactly a video, Vassar has put a continuous jpg of the Book of the Dead funerary papyrus of Ani online:

<http://projects.vassar.edu/bookofthedead/>

Widely regarded as one of the most beautiful examples of such a document, it is hard to appreciate in vignette photos, such as the one below, that appear in general publications. The original papyrus has been divided into short sections, sealed inside glass plates and even if you were able to visit the British Museum, this papyrus cannot even be appreciated as it was intended to be seen.



The Vassar site has united the entire papyrus, and displayed it with a slider bar. This allows the viewer to scan smoothly from one end to the other, and to gain a real appreciation for this wonderful artwork.

Before reading this next bit, the CyberScribe suggests you open a nice bottle of wine, pour a glass...and add a dollop or two of savory, balm, senna, coriander, mint, sage, and thyme.

Well, this is what at least one ancient Egyptian Pharaoh might have done. An article, one of many, in 'ScienceNow' (<http://sciencenow.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/2009/414/2?rss> =)

details a fascinating story of the reconstruction of wine varieties, plus offers some rather surprising new discoveries. Abbreviated somewhat, for space reasons, the article tells us:

“New archaeological research suggests that the ancient Egyptians infused wine with herbal medicines as early as 3150 B.C.E, pushing back the earliest known date for this practice by 1300 years. As far

back as recorded history goes, humans have known that certain plants and extracts have medicinal value. And at some point, says anthropologist Patrick McGovern of the University of Pennsylvania, people figured out that if you mixed some herbal medicines into an alcoholic medium, they'd be preserved longer and dissolve more fully than in water, making them more potent. Through trial and error, early physicians became fairly adept at concocting alcohol-containing cures for a range of ailments.

“Although researchers aren't sure when people first added medicinal herbs to their wine, the earliest written evidence of such wines in ancient Egypt comes from papyri dating to about 1850 B.C.E. But in 1994, German archaeologists came upon more direct evidence, analyzing a flaky yellow residue from a jar found in a tomb belonging to King Scorpion I in Abydos, Egypt, and built at about 3150 B.C.E. Working with the German group in 2001, McGovern determined that the residue had contained salt crystals left behind when tartaric acid in grapes breaks down. "That was solid confirmation that these vessels contained wine," McGovern says.



(The yellowish residue streaked across this shard of pottery contains evidence of a 5100-year-old medicinal wine)

“The tests also revealed the presence of tree resin. McGovern and colleagues used a barrage of chemical techniques to tease out other biological additives and match them to known plants. As the

researchers report online this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the tests found compounds that suggested the presence of a number of possible herbs, including savory, balm, senna, coriander, mint, sage, and thyme.



(Wine jars in King Scorpion I's tomb)

“The researchers then compared these findings with the residue from a jar dated to 500 C.E. that was discovered in a tomb in southern Egypt. That jar carried an ancient version of a wine label, identifying it as an herbal wine. Many of the compounds found in the Abydos jar were present in the known herbal wine. To McGovern, that's a good indication that the Egyptians under Scorpion I did indeed infuse their wines with medicinal herbs.”

An item noted by the CyberScribe falls under the ‘aw, shucks’ category. Someone found a puppy taken along for the ride to eternity. A brief bit on MSNBC (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30519834/>) (abbreviated) offered this discovery from the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. While mummified pets or quite a variety are already known, this one is rather sweet...and offers a ‘happy’ twist.

“A small bundle found at the feet of an ancient Egyptian mummy whose tomb was inscribed with the phrase "Hapi-Men" contained the remains of a young dog, according to University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology staff who have named the canine "Hapi-Puppy.”

“The approximately 2,300-year-old puppy, revealed during a recent CT scan, is thought to be one of the world's rarest mummified animals. Early Egyptians often preserved cats, birds and even crocodiles, but not often dogs.

“Jennifer Wegner, a senior research scientist in the museum's Egyptian section, explained to Discovery News that unlike some of the other more commonly mummified animals, the ancient Egyptians "had no dog gods, per se, although certain gods, like Anubis, could take the form of a jackal.”

““In this case, we think Hapi-Men simply wanted to be buried with his beloved pet,” she said, explaining that "Hapi-Men" translates roughly to, "The Apis bull endures," referring to the bull god Apis.

“Janet Monge, acting curator of the museum's Physical Anthropology section, was delighted when the puppy images came through.



(CT scan image shows the skull and teeth of the mummified dog scientists are referring to as "Hapi-Puppy")

““You could see its Jack Russell terrier-type legs, long head and individual toes,” she said.

“Wegner added that early Egyptians commonly depicted two general types of dogs: a greyhound-looking canine and one that looked more like a corgi. Another researcher, Samantha Cox, and other scientists plan to study Hapi-Puppy to more precisely identify it.

““The ancient Egyptians showed dogs being held on a leash, sitting under the chairs of owners, and they even sometimes listed their names, such as Brave One, Reliable, North Wind and even Useless,” said Wegner. “Obviously people enjoyed close relationships with their dogs, and Hapi-Men must have been no exception.”

“The scans showed Hapi-Men was 40-plus when he died, a relatively advanced age for his time. He was draped with numerous amulets, including a “wadjet eye” stuck in the middle of his forehead, heart-shaped objects, a scarab beetle, an Isis goddess figurine and objects in the shape of the four Sons of Horus, associated with renewal and healing.

“The cause of Hapi-Puppy's demise remains unknown, but the dog's age suggests it was killed upon his master's death.

““We see this as a senseless slaughter today, but in ancient Egypt it would've been viewed very differently,” Monge explained. “People then felt life on Earth was very short. Hapi-Men wanted to spend all of eternity with his dog.””

A sort of silly article caught the eye of the CyberScribe...entitled ‘Amid Egypt's deserts, a green lotus bud blooms’ by John Bordsen (‘Taiwan Taiwan

http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/news_content.php?id=917878&lang=eng_news). Careful reading showed that it had nothing to do with lotus (clearly a misuse of the blue water lily, an unrelated flower), but rather suggested that the Fayum branch of the Nile led to a large green area that Bordsen suggested looked like a ‘lotus flower’.

The article is really just a puff-piece for Neil Hewison, a native of Yorkshire, England, who has lived in Egypt since 1979. He is associate director of the American University in Cairo Press, which recently published a revised edition of his “The Fayum: History and Guide”.

In the interview, Hewison states:

“When you look at a map of Egypt, the Nile is like the stem of a lotus, and the Fayum looks like a lotus bud that comes out from its side. You drive about an hour in the desert southwest of Cairo to the edge of the Fayum depression. Water goes into it from a river that's off the Nile, and this creates the fertile area in what basically is the middle of the desert.”



Hewison needs to brush up on his botany, suggests the CyberScribe, for the Fayum area might indeed look like a plant growth, but it could be said to resemble a mandrake leaf...not a water lily (or 'lotus', as he called it). The CyberScribe doubts that the mapping skills of ancient Egypt were good enough for them to have realized it, but from space, the Nile river delta vaguely resembles the stalk and umbel of the papyrus plant...with a mandrake leaf projecting from the side of the stem. Enough said.

Let's finish up with a couple of Egyptian curses. One, which might or more probably will not, affect us all. The coming of Apophis...and doom!

The following, copied from a site known as the Global Egyptian Museum (<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/glossary.aspx?id=71>) states:

Apophis: The name of the sun god Re's greatest enemy, a monster in the shape of a snake. The name Apophis (Apep in Egyptian) probably means 'giant' or 'giant snake'. Like various other hostile snakes met with in the literature, the creature is the personification of everything that threatens the sun's light, for example the darkness caused by eclipses, clouds, etc. Every day Apophis tries to prevent the sun god's bark from sailing across the heavens, for example by gulping down all the water so that the bark runs aground. Using magic, the animal is forced to regurgitate the water.



Every day when he rises, the sun god has to enter into battle. Re is supported by many gods in his struggle, including Seth, who in another context is a hostile god himself. Humans can also help the sun god, for example by reciting hymns extolling the successful passage of the bark -- the magical power of the words will turn it into reality. All kinds of ways of rendering the enemy harmless are advanced, and thus effectuated, in texts and illustrations, including cutting him into pieces, impaling him on a spear, burning him, etc.

Well, folks, muses the CyberScribe, there's a new snake in town. Apophis is coming towards us even the prayers of the ancient Egyptians might not save us this time!

An article from 'Discovery'

(<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2009/04/13/asteroid-earth.html>)

states (abbreviated here):

"About 20 years from today, an asteroid about the size of a 25-story building will come closer to Earth than the networks of communications satellites orbiting the planet. NASA says there's no chance of an impact -- at least not in 2029 -- but the asteroid, named Apophis, will be back. Analysis of the asteroid's orbit show it will return to Earth seven years later. Astronomers don't yet know if Apophis' second visit will be a rendezvous or a collision, as its orbit will be bent by Earth's gravity during the 2029 flyby.



(Apophis is the dot inside the white circle)

"As things get bigger, the amount of devastation goes up dramatically," Kaiser said, but so too does the length of time between occurrences.

"As of March 31, NASA's list of so-called near-Earth objects numbers 6,191. The catalog includes 773 objects one kilometer in diameter or larger and 1,042 objects -- including Apophis -- classified as "potentially hazardous" to Earth, according to the agency's Near-Earth Object Program web site.

"During its 2029 rendezvous, Apophis will pass about 18,000 miles from Earth -- closer than the 22,300-mile-high orbits of geostationary communication satellites. The asteroid will be clearly visible in the night sky to the unaided eye -- even with city lights.

"These 300-meter objects deliver about 1,000 megatons of TNT equivalent, so while they don't kill everyone they would certainly give you a very bad day," Kaiser said. "It's been estimated that they would devastate an area equal in size to France. These things happen about every 70,000 years, so there's a 1-in-700 chance that one of these will collide in the next 100 years. "

"If one of these is out there, then Pan-STARRS 4 will detect it and figure out exactly when it is going to hit. More likely, we will do our survey and be able to give Earth a clean bill of health -- for now at least," he added."

And lastly, don't you think that after all these years, King Tut might give the poor Earl of Carnarvon a break now and then. This curse stuff must be getting a little old by now, suggests the CyberScribe.

A fun piece that recently appeared in the 'Daily Mail' (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1170775/Tut-Tut-Thats-earl-mistake.html>) shows that this doesn't seem to be the case for the present Earl of Carnarvon. Read on:

"Nearly nine decades after the sudden death of the 5th Earl of Carnarvon spawned the curse of King Tutankhamun, the legendary jinx is still playing havoc with the lives of the Earl's descendants. The latest victim is the current Earl, Geordie Herbert, occupant of the family pile, Highclere Castle in Berkshire.

“Geordie is a great-grandson of the 5th Earl who died from blood poisoning after a mosquito bite following his funding of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in 1922. Geordie, 52, was at Bonhams auction house in New Bond Street for the sale of rare letters and pictures from his forbear.

“The £2,000 estimate was well within Geordie's budget, but he and other bidders were astonished to see the price soar to £12,600 before being sold to a casually-dressed Frenchman. Afterwards, however, the purchaser said he had made a mistake. He bid by accident, thinking he had secured the previous lot, a photograph of a Constantine gate, with an estimate of £500.

“Says Eton and Oxford-educated Geordie, who is opening an exhibition next month at Highclere dedicated to Tutankhamun: “I couldn't understand what was going on. I was prepared to go as high as £4,000, but I never got the chance as it soon went past my limit. Then it turns out the chap who bid for it hadn't wanted it after all.”

“The auctioneers cannot recall such an occurrence happening before. 'It's not like James Bond. You can't make a mistake with a nod or a wink. Everyone has a paddle with a number on it,' says a Bonham's aide.

“Bonham's has agreed to place the items in next month's sale where Carnarvon will bid again.

“But Geordie is not in mortal dread of the curse, linked with the (presumed) premature deaths of people associated with the discovery of Tutankhamun: “My great-aunt was one of the first people to go inside the tomb and she lived on for a long time afterwards.””

And with that, dear readers, muses the CyberScribe...its time to close this month's 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/>.

