

CyberScribe 169 - September 2009

The CyberScribe did a little math this month and discovered that this issue marks the beginning of his fifteenth year as the writer of this column. He has no idea how many news items have been presented and discussed, but together we have covered a great deal of the Egyptology news during that time. Hopefully you have enjoyed the journey half as much as did the CyberScribe himself.

And speaking of longevity, Zahi Hawass confirmed that he is about to retire from his position as head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Rumors have been rife for years as to how long he'd remain in this very important post. He has had a much longer tenure than most who held this important position, but at last his task seems to be ending.

His times have been marked by controversy, confrontations, grandstanding and posturing...but at the same time he has made very substantial changes in Egyptology, in the monuments and museums of Egypt and in the preservation of Egypt's heritage. Zahi Hawass has been the consummate showman, drawing immense good will and news attention to Egypt.

Here is what he, himself, said about this retirement (read the entire article here, <http://tiny.cc/4Q4wq>), and understand that the quote below is just part of the interview:

“Interviewer: Dr. Hawass, is it true that you plan to retire from the SCA next year?”

“Zahi Hawass: Yes, by law I have to retire.”

“Interviewer: What are your plans after leaving office?”

“Zahi Hawass: I will continue my excavations in the Valley of the Kings, writing books, give lectures everywhere.”

This is surprising news, for the retirement of Hawass and the appointment of a successor has been a somewhat taboo subject among Egyptologists. Lots of suggestions about this replacement are tossed about but those who may well know, but such comments are always off the record. It is not wide to speculate about the fate of the “king” while he is still in a position to take offense and perhaps take revenge.

Whatever happens, Zahi Hawass will be a tough act to follow. In so many ways, we will all miss him.

The curse of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun has struck the Highclere Castle, the house of the Earls of Carnarvon! Actually, this curse is the product of generations of neglect. The grand country home that is Highclere Castle is a wonder to see and visit. The CyberScribe and his Principle Wife were there some years ago, guests of the last Earl, and as part of a conference held in the Castle. The Earl was a great host and opened his entire castle to those of us at the conference, but we only saw the public spaces.

By any standards, Highclere Castle is an amazing place. Unfortunately, upstairs, in the third floor and above, neglect of the roof, the windows and aided by the porous stone, water had been seeping in. The damage is very severe, and the present Earl must take steps, very expensive steps, if the Castle is to survive.

The article below (edited for space reasons) from 'Mail Online' (<http://tiny.cc/iYzkB>) shows the dilemma faced by the present Earl.

"It was the 5th Earl who famously went in search of Egyptian treasure, discovered the Tomb of Tutankhamun, and never made it home, dying of blood poisoning in a Cairo hotel, aged 56. The 'curse' was born, along with countless Hollywood films involving mummies, murder and archaeologists.



“Now, the 8th Earl, the great-grandson of the tomb-raider, is facing problems much closer to home - up in the roof and elsewhere. Having surveyed all the urgent maintenance problems in the great house and across the 4,000-acre estate, the present Lord Carnarvon has done his sums. He reckons it is going to take £12 million pounds (nearly US\$20 million) to put the whole lot on an even keel for future generations. And with the recession hitting his core business of corporate hospitality and weddings, the situation grows more worrying.

“In the mid-19th century, Barry remodeled what was a Georgian house into a Victorian palace for the 3rd Earl. The crowning glory was the sandstone tower, despite the prescient warnings of the land-agent who observed it was 'pregnant with the most alarming danger to your lordship's pocket'.

“A century and a half down the line, it is the pocket of today's Lord Carnarvon which must suffer the consequences. Climbing from the perfectly preserved ground-floor state rooms, up through the surprisingly homely guest bedrooms on the (second)-floor, he arrives in the dark and threadbare labyrinth of rooms on the (third)-floor.



“Here and there, chunks of plasterwork have given way, leaving gaping holes in the ceilings. Stairs lead up to the top of the tower and its stupendous views across four counties. But the gently crumbling masonry and the eroded balustrades tell their own story. This house is certainly not falling down - yet. But, if nothing is done soon, it's only a matter of time.

“My grandfather's generation went through World War II and never did the repairs which were needed back then and now there's no avoiding them,' says George Carnarvon, 52. Since inheriting the title and the estate from his father, the 7th Earl (the Queen's racing manager and confidant), who died in 2001, he has been well aware of the challenges.

“Among his first tasks was an urgent £200,000 repair job on the roof. But he knows that serious renovation by cathedral-standard stonemasons is needed. And he could not sell off the family treasures - Van Dyck and Sir Joshua Reynolds are well represented here - even if he wanted to. 'Almost all of the art here is tied up by various agreements with the

Government and the last thing the public want to see is an empty house,' he explains.



© INS News Agency Ltd
Sorry state: Windows are smashed and wood is rotting

“He hopes to get special planning permission which would allow him to build housing on 60 acres of land dotted around the estate, provided that

all the profits are put back into maintaining the castle (it's early days and many locals are up in arms at the prospect).

“The place has the feel of a lived-in museum, even though the Earl, his wife and his three children actually live in an estate cottage down the drive. They still move into the main house for big family events, filling the first-floor bedrooms where bedside copies of *Country Life* and Michael Crichton thrillers suggest fairly recent occupation.

“But it is not just the house which keeps Lord Carnarvon awake at night. The estate has many troubled outbuildings with Grade I-listed status - which means he is obliged to treat them as seriously as the main house.

“I drive out to see two properties on English Heritage's register of endangered buildings. One is London Lodge, the once-triumphal arch through which Victorian visitors would arrive. It is in a terrible state, its gates locked by rusty chains, while vandals have done their bit to the lodge windows. Elsewhere, a 15th century Hampshire barn is in dire need of an overhaul, which will cost £1 million.

“We're not at crisis point but we have to take a serious long-term view,' he says. 'The last thing I want is for my grandchildren to say, "Grandpa was useless" and sell up. It would be the ultimate put down.'

“So what does he think of the curse? 'Well, I've been into Tutankhamun's tomb and I'm still breathing,' he laughs. 'And I have a lot more to worry about than a dead Pharaoh.'”

In a very different direction, the CyberScribe was surprised by the next report. It has been ‘common knowledge’ that the Egyptians wore rather plain and drab clothing, because they wore linen...and linen is very hard to dye without modern techniques. Now it has been suggested that they had already discovered one of the great secrets of dying...the use of madder, perhaps even with a mordant, such as alum, a chemical common in ancient Egypt. New techniques have allowed researchers to examine ancient colored materials in ways never dreamed of previously.

The following article from MSNBC (edited for length) relates the new discovery and the techniques employed (<http://tiny.cc/AA7Tz>):

“Four thousand years ago Egyptians had mastered the process of making madder, a red dye, according to a researcher who uncovered the earliest

known example of the color still used today. Refining a technique that allows the study of microscopic bits of pigment, Marco Leona of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was able to analyze the color of a fragment of leather from an ancient Egyptian quiver.

“The discovery that the color was madder is the earliest evidence for the complex chemical knowledge needed to extract the dye from a plant and turn it into a pigment, Leona reports in Tuesday's edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. The find is some 700 years earlier than any previously known use of madder.

“Tracing the use of organic colorants offers a way to follow trade routes, identify relations among archaeological objects, detect forgeries and attribute works of art,” Leona wrote. Leona refined a technique called Raman spectroscopy, which relies on the scattering of light to study materials. That process is not generally suitable for studying madder or some other dyes, but Leona enhanced the result using tiny metal particles that could amplify the findings and detect even very low levels of chemicals.

“This is the first documented example of lac dye in European art before the 15th century, according to Leona.”

A rather odd announcement appeared, being picked up by a number of sites, but the best version seems to be the one in the ‘Discovery Channel’ (<http://tiny.cc/OEOGa>). Of course, since it is also part of book lease announcement, one must be cautious.

The report...the author claims to have rediscovered a vast series of caves under the Great Pyramid at Giza and under the sphinx. He claims that the caves were once known and then lost, only to be rediscovered by the intrepid explorer...who just happened to make what he himself describes as an illegal exploration inside a neglected Giza tomb. Edited for length, here is the tale:



“An enormous system of caves, chambers and tunnels lies hidden beneath the Pyramids of Giza, according to a British explorer who claims to have found the lost underworld of the pharaohs. Populated by bats and venomous spiders, the underground complex was found in the limestone bedrock beneath the pyramid field at Giza.”

(Notes the CyberScribe...ALL spiders are venomous)

“There is untouched archaeology down there, as well as a delicate ecosystem that includes colonies of bats and a species of spider which we have tentatively identified as the white widow,” British explorer Andrew Collins said. Collins, who will detail his findings in the book "Beneath the Pyramids" to be published in September, tracked down the entrance to the mysterious underworld after reading the forgotten memoirs of a 19th century diplomat and explorer.

“In his memoirs, British consul general Henry Salt recounts how he investigated an underground system of 'catacombs' at Giza in 1817 in the company of Italian explorer Giovanni Caviglia,” Collins said. The document records that the two explored the caves for a distance of

"several hundred yards," coming upon four large chambers from which stretched further cave passageways.

“With the help of British Egyptologist Nigel Skinner-Simpson, Collins reconstructed Salt's exploration on the plateau, eventually locating the entrance to the lost catacombs in an apparently unrecorded tomb west of the Great Pyramid. Indeed, the tomb featured a crack in the rock, which led into a massive natural cave.

““We explored the caves before the air became too thin to continue. They are highly dangerous, with unseen pits and hollows, colonies of bats and venomous spiders," said Collins.

““Ancient funerary texts clearly allude to the existence of a subterranean world in the vicinity of the Giza pyramids," Collins told Discovery News.”

Hmmmm, muses the CyberScribe, time will tell. Caution seems to be demanded here.

Shades of Bob Brier! Another lab is trying to replicate the process of Egyptian mummification...and as far as can be seen in the article below, they are strolling along well-explored pathways. Nothing much seems new in their report, but they have, after all, just worked on a human leg, so far. The report from “Swiss.Info’ (<http://tiny.cc/qaKo0>) has been edited for length, but read on!:

“A leading Swiss anatomy expert has managed to mummify a body part using the same salt drying process the ancient Egyptians employed.



“Frank Rühli, who has also examined the King Tutankhamun CT scans and the Ötzi iceman mummy, is looking at how human tissue reacts during mummification, in what is a unique project. Rühli's laboratory is set in the depths of Zurich University's Irchel campus. In one corner stands a wooden box, filled with salt, behind a protective screen. Just visible in the box is an outline of a shape.

The researcher has used a salt mixture based on a mid-1990s United States study, which tried to determine the "magic formula" used by ancient Egyptians to dry out bodies before burial.

(Well, asks the CyberScribe, did he just copy the work of Bob Brier?)

“It's amazing how much you actually need, so far we have used around 60 kilograms,” said Rühli, who leads the research at the university's Institute of Anatomy, as part of the Swiss Mummy Project. “In the 1990s study more than 200kg of salt was needed for the mummification process of a whole body,” Rühli said. Surprisingly, mummification has taken longer than the 70 days expected, said Rühli.

“We did some analysis a few days ago and we still see on the magnetic resonance image that there are signals for water. This means that there is still some sort of humidity in the tissue which we had expected to have decreased further.”

“Rühli said that although much is known about ancient Egyptian mummification – believed by them to be essential for passage to the afterlife – it is not fully clear how much time was invested in the salt part.

“The Zurich experiment certainly looks like a museum mummy. “If you take the salt off, from a morphological and macroscopic point of view, it has the appearance of dry tissue, looking dark greenish brownish,” Rühli said.

“Eventually Rühli would like to do a whole body mummification using the salt process, but this would be a huge logistical undertaking. He is using a leg for his present study. All body parts used are donated, said Rühli. “These kinds of body parts are donated to research during the life time of the deceased people and the whole project underwent screening and approval by the local ethics committee,” he said.

“The idea of the research, which is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, is to see how human tissue reacts under various environmental conditions, such as change of temperature and humidity.

“As for the medical doctor, his research reunites two interests. “I’m medically interested in how tissue reacts, but I’m historically interested to know how ancient cultures tried to preserve their loved ones after death,” he said.”

A most interesting paper appeared in “Heritage” (<http://tiny.cc/OtjGB>), dealing with the almost unknown topic of what happened to German Egyptology during the time Hitler ruled that nation. The paper is much too long to present here (19 pages), but the reader is strongly urged to check out the original version. Shortened for length, here are a few of the major points and observations:

“In January 1933, Adolf Hitler, head of the far-right National Socialist (Nazi) party, was sworn in as Chancellor. Over the next few years he and the Nazi party would gain control over Germany’s institutions and levers of power, allowing Hitler to govern as a de-facto tyrant. One of those institutions was the universities which, before the rise of the Nazis, had enjoyed a level of autonomy. A tradition established in the 19th century saw the state as a “benevolent patron” for academic life. With Hitler in power, that quickly changed.

“Before Hitler’s rise to power Germany was a respected centre of Egyptology. The foreign affairs ministry financed an archaeological

institute in Cairo that was used as a base to conduct scientific research. The country's scholars had made important contributions. To name a few examples, Adolf Erman helped unravel the grammar of Egyptian writing. Ludwig Borchardt uncovered the bust of Nefertiti and Heinrich Schäfer broke new ground in the understanding of Egyptian art.

"The people involved in Egyptology, during this time, reacted to Nazism and its belief in the supremacy of an "Aryan race," quite differently. There is only a small cast of characters involved. Egyptology, in Nazi Germany, was a relatively small discipline. In 1945 there were only six chairs dedicated to the subject in the Reich with further positions as junior professors or museum staff. "The people knew each other.

"In 1935, Helmut Berve, a professor of ancient history at the University of Leipzig and a dedicated Nazi, questioned Egyptology's right to exist as a discipline.

"Thomas Schneider writes, "Berve pleaded for a national history both committed to and committing German nationhood ('volksverbunden und volksverbindlich') and tied the possibility of historical understanding to race ideology."

"Walther Wolf was an Egyptologist at Leipzig who had pro-Nazi leanings. He is known for lecturing while wearing a SA uniform. The SA was a pro-Nazi organization that sprang up in the 1920's. They were the main force in Hitler's unsuccessful coup attempt in 1923.

"In 1937 Wolf authored a defense of Egyptology as a discipline "Wesen und Wert der Ägyptologie." Wolf's defense, "unveils the distinct will to align his discipline with the doctrinal requirements of the new ideology. It postulates for Ancient Egypt a predominant significance of the racial collective ("Volksgemeinschaft") which Wolf believes to have been essential for the shaping of Egyptian culture (kulturprägend) and which he said was owed to "soil and blood" (Boden und Blut)."

"Adding, "Wolf construes pharaoh as the realizer of forces lying dormant in the national collective and waiting to be set free."

"If these ideas sound familiar, they should, this leadership model for pharaoh is very similar to that which Hitler used for himself.

"As Wolf attempted to twist Ancient Egypt into something the Nazis could agree with, a prominent Egyptologist stood up against this.

Alexander Scharff held an Egyptology chair at the University of Munich. He was strongly anti-Nazi and in 1938 authored a piece that dismissed Wolf's attempt to see Egyptology through the lens of Nazism.

"George Steindorff was a prominent Egyptology Professor at Leipzig. He was also Jewish. He edited the journal *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache* and was in charge of other editorial projects. In a 1935 letter to Adolf Erman, he lamented what was happening in Germany. He wrote-

"The Nuremberg legislation has completely paralyzed us and cut our thread of life, it has annihilated our zest of life and my zest of work (...). I was always proud to be able to say "civis Germanus sum", and cannot bear it to be locked up in a ghetto. In the place where I worked honestly for more than 40 years and where I was conferred all honors, I don't want to and cannot stay any longer.

"Professor Schneider said that it appears as if the Ministry of Propaganda found it intolerable that a Jew have these editorial responsibilities and pressured Steindorff heavily to quit. There was a directive from Berlin that Steindorff could no longer be the protagonist of those publishing projects in Germany, those should go to a Nazi official. Steindorff was forced to quit the journal in 1937 and in 1939 left for the United States.

"When the Nazis took over Germany they inherited the Cairo office of the German Archaeological Institute. Professor Schneider explained to me that the SS left Egypt alone and archaeological work was done by the institute's Cairo office. The head of the institute, after the Nazis came to power, was Hermann Junker. He was an established Egyptologist. During the time of Nazi rule he conducted digs in the Cairo-Memphis area and Nubia. But, he spent the bulk of his energy excavating at the Great Pyramids at Giza.

"Professor Schneider was asked whether the Nazis got involved in his fieldwork, directing him to excavate at the Great Pyramids or telling him to look for certain artifacts. Schneider said that he has found no evidence of that kind of control. He believes that, when it came to excavations, Hitler's government let Junker pursue his own agenda.

"Hitler's own personal views on Egyptology remain something of a mystery. Professor Schneider said that more archival research needs to be done to determine this. He does appear to have had an interest in Egyptian Art. Professor Schneider sent me an intriguing photo, dating to

February 1939. It shows the opening of an Ancient Egyptian Art exhibition in Berlin. Sitting on the front row is Hitler himself.

“Schneider points out that Hitler was particularly interested in the bust of Nefertiti and vetoed its return to Cairo. Hitler was planning to build a new museum in “Germania,” (his name for what would have been the transformed city of Berlin). According to Professor Schneider’s research the bust of Nefertiti would have been close to that of Hitler himself.

“It’s difficult to gauge the full impact that the events of 1933-1945 had on German Egyptology. But certainly the impact was negative.

““This was, what I think, a decisive turning point in the international history of Egyptology,” Said Professor Schneider. “It is difficult to say how the discipline would look today without National Socialism but we can very certainly say that Germany would have a different standing today.” The German Archaeological Institute in Cairo did eventually reopen after the war and today Germany is again a centre of Egyptological research.

“Herman Kees and Walther Wolf were both removed from their positions after the war. Although in 1963 Wolf did get a professorship at the University of Münster. Kees notes were confiscated as part of de-nazification efforts, something that hindered his writing efforts.

“Years after the war Hermann Junker, while writing his memoirs, would choose to not write about the time of Nazi rule. Only saying that, “this was a dark time.””

And now for something a little lighter. All who have heard of Charles Piazzi Smyth will know him mainly as the oddball who came up with the pyramid inch and the extremely goofy ‘science’ of pyramidology’...a discipline which spawned a small group of zealots generally referred to today as ‘pyramidiots’.

There was more to him than that, and a recent short piece tried to give a little more respectability to Smyth’s reputation. The article in “Sharrow.Org” (<http://tiny.cc/MarPL>) has been somewhat shortened:

“On the western edge of our churchyard stands an unusual tombstone in the shape of a miniature pyramid, topped with a cross. It commemorates Charles Piazzi Smyth, sometimes known as the pyramid man, and his wife Jessie Piazzi Smyth who accompanied him on many of his expeditions. He

has been described as, "Brilliant and Eccentric" but this use of the word 'Eccentric' has been challenged on the basis that it detracts from his remarkable discoveries and inventions. It has been suggested that 'Innovative' would be more accurate and kinder. I am happy to include this as accuracy is essential to the integrity of a document like this.



“Charles Piazzi Smyth was born in Naples, Italy on 3rd January 1819 to Admiral and Annarella Smyth. They named their son Piazzi after his Godfather who was an Italian astronomer. Admiral Smyth was himself an amateur astronomer. So perhaps it's not surprising that Charles Piazza Smyth would eventually study astronomy.

“It was in 1845 that Charles Piazzi Smyth was appointed Astronomer Royal for Scotland, a post he held for 43 years, and also Professor of Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh. In 1856 he set out on a scientific voyage cum honeymoon. This took him to the mountain peaks of Teneriffe.

“The records of this outstanding scientist seem to be somewhat muddled by the prejudice, even bigotry, of others of his times. But there is no doubt he was a man of great achievement. It is with the Great Pyramid of Gizeh that his name will always be remembered. He was a pioneer of

indoor photography and the photographs he took inside the Great Pyramid are some of the earliest known. Amongst his various publications were, 'Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid' (1864) and 'Life and Work at the Great Pyramid' (1867). He resigned his Fellowship of the Royal Society when they refused to publish his papers on pyramid research; but there are still hundreds of entries under his name in the Royal Society's Catalogue of Scientific Papers.

(Notes the CyberScribe, they refused to publish the papers because they had been shown to be nonsense, discredited in part by Petrie, the founder of modern Egyptology)

“In 1888 he resigned his official position, retired to his residence Clova in Ripon and apparently devoted the rest of his life to cloud photography. He died on the 21st of February 1900 and was buried, with his wife, in St John's Churchyard, Sharow”

And finally, the CyberScribe can't be left out of the frenzy and mania that surrounds the death of Michael Jackson. In an article in 'The West' (<http://tiny.cc/Ay8Mt>), a minor frenzy ensued when people began to imagine a resemblance between a New Kingdom bust on display at the Field Museum in Chicago.

Notes the CyberScribe, the face is not all that unusual, but perhaps the resemblance is aided by the fact that both Jackson and the statue both had screwed up noses. Read on and make up your own minds:

“An ancient Egyptian bust on display at the Field Museum in Chicago has been the focus of interest since the star's death as visitors double-take at the eerie similarities between the 3,000-year-old statue and the singer.



“The limestone statue - which depicts an unidentified woman - went on display at the museum in 1988 and was carved during the New Kingdom Period, dating from between 1550 BC to 1050 BC. Like Jackson's surgically altered face, the carving has a distinct, upturned nose and rounded eyes.

“And like Jackson - if rumors of the singer's prosthesis are to be believed - the statue's nose has partially disintegrated.

“Museum curator Jim Phillips said staff had been "inundated" with inquiries from Jackson fans since the star's similarities to the bust were pointed out in a recent newspaper article.

““We've had people coming to the museum and asking 'Where's Michael Jackson?' So we have to tell them that he's not here, but there is a bust that looks a lot like him," Phillips told AFP.

“Phillips said while it is doubtful that Jackson's physical startling image may have been inspired by the statue - the singer was not believed to

have visited the museum - the resemblance between the two is undeniable.

"I have to admit it, there are a number of very striking similarities," Phillips said. "I don't follow all the permutations of Michael Jackson's physical appearance, but they do look a lot alike."

And the CyberScribe claims that this is enough fun and news for one month

See you next time!

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/>.

XX