

## CyberScribe 173 – January 2010

To start off, I apologize for the shortness of this month's contributions, but the CyberScribe and twenty of his Chapter friends have just returned from two weeks in Egypt. And upon arrival, we encountered an irate Newsletter Editor who demanded that we still produce a Newsletter. Short...but here are some of the new stories from Egypt.

Recently, Dr. Hawass announced the reopening and study of a tomb that had been discovered many years ago (<http://snipurl.com/u7860>). The Tomb of Sa-Iset at Dashur was discovered by Jacques de Morgan, in his excavations at Dashur in 1894-1895, just south of the 12th Dynasty cemetery of Amenemhat II. The tomb is located between the pyramid of Amenemhat II and the black pyramid of Amenemhat III. The tomb owner chose a good location, on a small mound that overlooks the whole area, including the 4th Dynasty pyramids of Snefru and the royal cemetery east of the red pyramid of Snefru.

Here, abbreviated a bit is the report. It sounds like the opening of the sarcophagus will be quite a challenge!

“The 19th century was a time of great discoveries in Egypt. However, at that time there were no standard methods of mapping and recording sites, so important things were lost. Excavators would record that they found a tomb, but not describe the exact location, so later scholars would not be able to find them easily. A good example of this is found at Dashur, the pyramid site just south of Saqqara.



The first hall, lined with mud brick, of the tomb of Sa-lset. (Photo: Jennifer Willoughby)

“The four funerary stelae represent the owner of the tomb, a man named Sa-lset. He is shown in each stela seated in front of an offering table with a list of offerings as well as his name and titles. These stelae are inscribed in bas-relief and they show some of the best 12th Dynasty inscriptions, and perhaps some of the best of the whole Middle Kingdom, because the inscriptions are beautifully done and the details of the faces and bodies of the figures are exquisite.

“Some of the titles of Sa-lset are recorded in each of the stelae. These titles include that he was the higher prince, the chief of the lector priests, a scribe of the sacred books, holder of the seals of the south, sole friend of the king, overseer of the treasury, overseer of the pyramid city, vizier, judge, and overseer of the six chapels. Some of these are very prestigious titles, showing that he was a very important man in his time.

“In 2006, the archaeological team at Dashur led by Hussein led by Hussein began to work in the area midway between the pyramids of Amenemhat II and Amenemhat III in order to rediscover this tomb. We knew of the existence of the tomb, but not its exact location or many details about it. Rediscovering the tomb of Sa-lset was an important goal, as it could reveal more information about the reign of Amenemhat II and the Middle Kingdom.



The first vaulted chamber, lined with fine limestone. At the end of the chamber, the sarcophagus lid is visible. (Photo: Jennifer Willoughby)

“The tomb was found soon after excavation work began, and it was evident that the superstructure had been destroyed. Hundreds of stone blocks were found scattered all around, and these can give us an idea about the architectural plan of the superstructure and chapel of the tomb. It was built of fine white limestone and the walls were inscribed with false doors that included lines of hieroglyphic inscriptions including the name and titles of the tomb owner. These titles matched those of Sa-Iset recorded on his funerary stelae in the Egyptian Museum. However, the inscriptions inside the tomb are incised on a much bigger scale, to match the size of the exterior of the chapel and the ten large blocks found. We also found smaller limestone blocks and pieces that came from the interior of the chapel that show the decoration. Here we found a scene of the family of Sa-Iset giving him offerings. With him are his brothers, sisters, father, mother, and grandmother and grandfather. These scenes are very interesting because they are unique to this tomb.

“The substructure of the tomb starts with a ramp that slopes down into the north-facing entrance. The western wall extended for about 10 meters and is 86.5 cm thick. It is made of five courses of mud brick laid in steps. The eastern wall of the ramp is about 11.70 meters long. The ramp slopes down until it reaches two thick walls that were constructed in order to protect the lower part of the tomb. The ramp leads into a tunnel lined with mud brick before the antechamber and burial chamber. At some point the sealed antechamber was opened, perhaps by ancient thieves or possibly during de Morgan’s excavations. The sealed chamber has a vaulted ceiling lined with large limestone blocks. This rectangular chamber is about 5.5 meters long and 2 meters wide. The floor slopes down, and we can see the remains of the mortar used between the blocks, which may indicate that the tomb was finished in a hurry.

“The first vaulted chamber leads to the burial chamber. It is a small room, about 3.4 meters by 1.75 meters, and the sarcophagus occupies the entire floor. The huge lid of the sarcophagus is made of green diorite. On the eastern side of the room are two small niches carved into the lower half of the wall. The southern niche contains a canopic box of green diorite, that is cracked and broken in places. The northern niche is empty. The vaulted ceiling of the burial chamber is lined with limestone, and the limestone walls are decorated with Pyramid Texts in vertical rows colored in green. Each row contains the name of Sa-Iset at either the beginning or the end of each spell. These Pyramid Texts are similar in style to those in the 5th Dynasty pyramid of Unas at Saqqara, which means that the artist in the 12th Dynasty who decorated Sa-Iset’s tomb was likely imitating the texts from Unas’ pyramid.





The burial chamber of Sa-Iset, showing the sarcophagus lid, Pyramid Texts, vaulted ceiling and side niches. (Photo: Jennifer Willoughby)

“It is interesting to note that both chambers with vaulted ceilings were lined with limestone, while the first chamber in mud brick did not have a vaulted ceiling. This tomb has a unique architectural style; it is the only tomb at the site of Dashur, and even in the area of Memphis, that has this plan. The use of Pyramid Texts is also very unusual. The tomb was left unfinished, perhaps because the burial was completed in a hurry. We can see that some of the red artist’s lines used to define the inscriptions still remain. Also, the lid of the sarcophagus is still very rough and was not polished. The walls of the first vaulted limestone chamber were also never finished, they are not polished or decorated, but bear the remains of tool marks.

“We are planning to continue the excavation of this tomb, and in January, we hope to open the sarcophagus. De Morgan attempted to open it, but it proved impossible, as the lid of the sarcophagus is just touching the walls. If the lid were lifted, it might scrape the walls and damage the texts. Therefore I consulted with the archaeologists at Dashur as well as Reis Talal. Reis Talal comes from a famous family that is known for being able to move any heavy object. They worked with myself and Miroslav Verner on the tomb of Iufaa at Abusir. They also worked with me to move the lid of the sarcophagus of the governor of Bahariya Oasis, and six months ago, we lifted the lid of the sarcophagus inside the subsidiary pyramid of Teti. Reis Talal presented me with his plan for lifting the lid of the sarcophagus of Sa-Iset. He will open a

shaft outside the tomb and bring in construction equipment that will hold a weight. The weight will be about 15 tons, one and a half times the weight of the sarcophagus lid, to counter-balance the lid. In this way, the lid will be lifted slowly by the weight outside the burial chamber. We will move very slowly and carefully; the process will take at least 5 days. I am really looking forward to opening the sarcophagus and revealing what is hidden inside the sarcophagus of this important man, the vizier Sa-lset.

A very different, but exciting item also came across the CyberScribe's desk. The sacred Egyptian ibis may return. The short report (in <http://snipurl.com/u788a>) tells us that:



“According to NCE, French NGO Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) under the auspices of BirdLife International is looking to reintroduce the Sacred Ibis into Egypt. France has a growing feral population of the Sacred Ibis originating from escaped captive birds. The plan is to release a number of these birds into areas of suitable habitat here. NCE is to make detailed studies of the birds' current breeding habitat in neighboring Sudan and then to propose suitable areas for release back into the wild here.

“The Sacred Ibis is a heron-like bird, 70–80 centimeters long, all white with black legs, head and neck, black tips to the primaries and a mantle of lacy

black plumes on the lower back. The bill is long and curves downward. It is widely portrayed in ancient tomb and temple friezes in portraiture and as a hieroglyph, and also in statuary. One of my favorite pieces is a wonderful, and wonderfully lifelike, statue of a Sacred Ibis in gilded wood and silver currently in the Egyptian Museum. It is part of a sarcophagus that would have contained a mummified ibis. Ancient Egyptians, in veneration of the god Thoth, mummified their ibises in industrial quantities. Catacombs at sites such as Tuna Al-Gebel near modern Minya and at the Sacred Animal Necropolis at Saqqara are piled with literally hundreds of thousands, even millions of ibis mummies and given the quantities involved, it seems likely that the species was reared in aviaries. Today similarly large quantities of ibis statuettes, ranging from the exquisite to complete tat, can be seen in Khan el-Khalili.

“The Sacred Ibis was apparently still common in Egypt in the early nineteenth century, with the population centered on Lake Manzala. However it then seems to have gone into dramatic decline. The Birds of Egypt, edited by Steve Goodman and Peter Meininger, documents an individual shot in the Delta near Tanta in 1864 and another near Damietta in 1877. The last accepted records from Egypt come from Al-Tor in South Sinai in 1886 and 1891 probably concerning stray birds from Sudan. A clutch of four eggs in the British Museum labeled Damietta and taken in 1894 are of questionable origin. And then, save for a smattering of unconfirmed and often dubious records, there is nothing. Sacred or not, the Sacred Ibis seems to have disappeared from modern Egypt. Today it is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa (I have seen flocks as far north as Khartoum in Sudan) as well as an isolated population in the marshlands of southern Iraq. The potential reintroduction of the Sacred Ibis in Egypt is an exciting prospect, though it would be a long, difficult and expensive process and it is not made clear in the NCE report whether the French birds proposed for reintroduction are of the *aethiopicus* subspecies to which all Egyptian records refer. That’s important.

“While the Sacred Ibis has disappeared, another species, the Glossy Ibis, can still be seen. It is a somewhat smaller bird at 55–65 centimeters long, sharing the long, downward-curved bill of the Sacred Ibis, but uniformly glossed dark black-brown all over. Individuals and small flocks will be passing through on their way to sub-Saharan wintering grounds through November and a few will stay here through the winter. I have seen wintering birds at the exquisitely beautiful lake in the shadow of the Dashour pyramids and at Bilbais. It is probable that the species now breeds here too.



“A third ibis, the Northern Bald Ibis or Waldrapp has gone the way of the Sacred Ibis. It was last recorded in Egypt in 1962. Sadly, the Northern Bald Ibis is now one of the world’s rarest birds. In historical times it ranged over much of southern Europe and North Africa but has been reduced to a few small colonies in Morocco and a single colony of captive-bred birds in Turkey. Very recently it has also been found in Syria. It too was depicted extensively in the ancient Egyptian tombs and temples, mainly as a hieroglyph. Given its perilously low numbers, it is unlikely to be found here again; though, as there have been recent reports of migrants in Yemen it could conceivably turn up here in winter. It resembles a large glossy ibis but the unfeathered head, legs and bill are all red.”

A detailed report in BU Today (<http://snipurl.com/u788w>) gives us an update on the boat discoveries that Kathryn Bard has been making on the Red Sea coast. The CyberScribe has reported on her work several times, but the scope of the project just keeps getting larger. Read on (abbreviated slightly):

“Five years ago, Kathryn Bard made a remarkable discovery in the Egyptian desert. While digging with an archaeological team along the Red Sea coast, she reached into the opening of a wall — and felt nothing. Further excavation revealed an ancient man-made cave containing a mud brick, a small grinding stone, shell beads, and part of a box.



“Days later, the team, led by Bard, a College of Arts & Sciences associate professor of archaeology, and Italian colleague Rodolfo Fattovich, uncovered the entrance to a second cave. Inside they found a network of larger rooms filled with dozens of nautical artifacts: limestone anchors, 80 coils of knotted rope, pottery fragments, ship timbers, and two curved cedar planks that likely are steering oars from a 70-foot-long ship. According to hieroglyphic inscriptions, the ship was dispatched to the southern Red Sea port of Punt by Queen Hatshepsut during the 15th century B.C.

““It just gave me chills to stumble across such a frozen moment in time,” Bard recalls. “The ropes were perfectly preserved. They looked as if they’d been coiled yesterday.”

“The team discovered seven caves at Wadi Gawasis containing relics dating back 4,000 years. The first pieces ever recovered from Egyptian seagoing vessels, they offer a tantalizing glimpse into an elaborate network of Red Sea trade.

“Most of the stelae are indecipherable, worn blank from centuries of wind and sand. But one was in near-perfect condition. “I found it lying facedown in the desert,” Bard says, “and it contained the complete historical text of two expeditions, one to Punt and one to Bia-Punt, as ordered by King Amenemhat III, who ruled at about 1800 B.C.”

“In addition to the stelae, the team recovered more than 40 cargo boxes, 2 bearing painted inscriptions reading “The wonders of Punt.”

““It was like a modern-day packaging label,” Bard says. “The preservation was incredible.”

“Since the initial discovery, the team has returned to Wadi Gawasis each year and uncovered more artifacts: clay sealings, boxes and bags, cooking tools, fragments of a letter written on a sheet of papyrus. “We even found a piece of pottery that describes how to prepare a meal for 100 men,” she says. “The Egyptians kept records of everything.”

“Bard will make her fifth voyage to Egypt in late December. “We think there’s another cave,” she says. “And through analysis of satellite images, we think we’ve found some sort of walled structure beneath the harbor that may be a ship slipway or a dock.””

Tired of having to stay at second rate hotels in Egypt, such as the Winter Palace at Luxor or the Old Cataract at Aswan? Well, now there is a really classy alternative...Castle Carter! Yes, the same place that Howard Carter lived in while he excavated the tomb of Tutankhamun. A tad pricy, but certainly exclusive. Read about this very unusual offer in Al-Ahram Weekly Online (<http://snipurl.com/u78ae>):



Anti-clockwise from top: the Egyptian excavation team at the Valley of the Kings; Carter's office; Hawass dining with the great grandson of Lord Carnarvon and his wife

“In association with the anniversary of the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb, the old rest house used by the famous discoverer Howard Carter has been renovated and turned into a museum. After Carter left the valley, the house, which had been built in 1910, was abandoned and neglected. Now it has been turned into a beautiful museum to celebrate Carter's work and is open to the public for the first time.

“For just three nights a year the house will be open overnight to guests. This, Hawass says, will be timed to coincide with the discovery in early November, when the house will be available for rent for \$20,000 on 4 November and \$10,000 for each of the following two days.

“Divinity and serenity flood through the house, which displays tools that Carter used alongside some of the objects he discovered in the Valley of the Kings. Here are his desk, camera, coat hanger, sofa and chimney. Black and white photographs show Carter busy at work, removing Tutankhamun's funerary collection from the tomb, and welcoming British, Egyptian and foreign dignitaries during the celebrations that marked its opening. Pieces of

English furniture illustrating a typical interior of the time are also on show. A visitors' centre attached to the house provides visitors with information about Carter.

“As part of the exhibition, a simulation presentation by Carter is also provided at the museum to tell the story of Carter and his work up until the discovery of the boy king's tomb, as well as the history of his financial sponsor Lord Carnarvon. One room of the house is set aside; it contains a desk and other items behind a glass wall. An image of Carter is projected against this wall and talks to the audience for 20 minutes.

“According to Mustafa Wazeri, director of antiquities at the Valley of the Kings, it was time to take good care of the house. "We have thousands of tourists coming every day and all their guides point to the Carter house. Many people asked us if they could take a look," he added.”

And finally, an odd little story about lead and eye paint...and of course, ancient Egyptians. Read on ( from: <http://snipurl.com/u78ct>):

“Science does not allow for magic, but it does allow for healing cosmetics. The lead-based makeup used by the Egyptians had antibacterial properties that helped prevent infections common at the time, according to a report published Friday in *Analytical Chemistry*, a semimonthly journal of the American Chemical Society.

““It was puzzling; they were able to build a strong, rich society, so they were not completely crazy,” said Christian Amatore, a chemist at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and one of the paper’s authors. “But they believed this makeup was healing — they said incantations as they mixed it, things that today we call garbage.”

“Dr. Amatore and his fellow researchers used electron microscopy and X-ray diffraction to analyze 52 samples from containers of Egyptian makeup preserved at the Louvre. They found that the makeup was primarily made by mixing four lead-based chemicals: galena, which produced dark tones and gloss, and the white materials cerussite, laurionite and phosgenite.

“Because the samples had disintegrated over the centuries, the researchers were not able to determine what percentage of the makeup was lead.

“Although many written texts, paintings and statues from the period indicate that the makeup was extensively used, Egyptians saw it as magical, not medicine, Dr. Amatore said.

“In ancient Egypt, during periods when the Nile flooded, Egyptians had infections caused by particles that entered the eye and caused diseases and inflammations. The scientists argue that the lead-based makeup acted as a toxin, killing bacteria before it spread. But while their research provides a fascinating insight into an ancient culture, the scientists say the makeup is not something that should be used today.

“Dr. Amatore said that the toxicity of lead compounds overshadowed the benefits and that there had been many documented cases of poisoning as a result of lead in paints and plumbing in the 20th century.

“Neal Langerman, a physical chemist and the president of Advanced Chemical Safety, a health safety and environmental protection consulting firm, said, “You probably won’t want to do this at home, especially if you have a small child or a dog that likes to lick you.” Nonetheless, Dr. Langerman said, it makes sense that the Egyptians were attracted to the compounds.

““Lead and arsenic, among other metals, make beautiful color pigments,” he said. “Because they make an attractive color and because you can create a powder with them, it makes sense to use it as a skin colorant.”

“The issue of lead in makeup continues to be debated in the cosmetics industry, particularly with regard to the small amounts of lead found in some lipsticks.

“While some advocacy groups and doctors argue that, over time, lipstick wearers might absorb levels of lead that could result in behavioral issues, the Food and Drug Administration has said that the trace amounts of lead in makeup are too small to cause harm.

““It’s the dose that makes the poison,” Dr. Langerman said, in paraphrasing the Renaissance physician Paracelsus. “A low dose kills the bacteria. In a high dose, you’re taking in too much.””

And that will have to be enough for this month.