

CyberScribe 177 – May 2010

Let's start this month with a very refreshing message...Egypt and a foreign museum have agreed to a very major loan...the statue of Hemiunu, architect of Khufu's pyramid. Hawass has tried for years to get it returned as Egyptian property, but as it is legally in Germany, it will have to just go to Cairo on a loan.

The interesting part is that both sides seem to trust one another to receive, care for, and then return the famous statue. The story (<http://bikyamasr.com/?p=11300>) is very favorable to the people on both sides of the exchange (abridged, below).

“Egypt's top archaeologist Zahi Hawass is feeling good today, after the German museum housing a famous seated statue of Hemiunu has agreed to lend Egypt the statue for the 2013 opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, near the pyramids. It continues Hawass' push to have all Egyptian artifacts taken from the country returned to Egypt.



“This is just a loan, but a Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) official said that they fully expect Germany to allow the statue to remain in Egypt upon the end of the agreement.

““We would not have agreed to only a loan if there were not discussions in the works that could see the statue return to its rightful home for good,” said the official, who was not authorized to speak to the media.

“The statue is one of the top pieces at the Roman and Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim and doubts over the weekend of the possible loan deal had emerged after Hawass, the outspoken and often controversial figure, had called for the statue and other ancient Egyptian pieces to be returned to Egypt permanently.

“The museum, however, did confirm they would loan the statue for the opening of the museum, but said upon the end of the deal, the statue would return to Germany.

“Hawass’ office said that there “shouldn’t be a need for an official government request. It is common sense to return what is Egyptian to Egypt.”

“Hildesheim was not even considering giving the statue back, she added. The whole museum collection was of “honest provenance.

““Every item in our collection arrived in Germany legally,” she said. If the Egyptian government were to officially question the statue’s ownership, the museum would have to reconsider the loan, the museum said in a statement. “The whole thing would have to be thought out again,” she said.”

At the end of the above story, the CyberScribe discovered a little sleeper item. It seems that the ‘Grand Egyptian Museum’ may have hit an enormous financial snag. Apparently Egypt and the Japanese have a very different view of the Japanese loan provided for museum construction (<http://bikyamasr.com/?p=11300>). The seminal paragraph states:

“Despite the loan, Egypt is struggling to complete the Grand Egyptian Museum due to a funding dispute with the Bank of Japan. According to one American archaeologist, the Egyptian government believed the “loan” given to Egypt for the construction did not need to be repaid. The Bank of Japan thought differently and has suspended the transfer of funds, which has left building on the museum dead in its tracks.”

Of course we have to have some stories about King Tut! There are two very different tales for this month. The first involves the possible state of his footwear. Every since Hawass and the boys decided that Tut had a club foot...everyone has tried to work on variations of the story. This first item suggests that he wore the equivalent of 'orthopedic' shoes...er, sandals.

Check out what they think Tut wore when out golfing...or whatever (<http://snipurl.com/w188x>) (abbreviated):

“At least three pairs of shoes found in King Tut's tomb display a horizontal strap just below the toes, as shown in this illustration.



“King Tutankhamun might have worn some sort of orthopedic shoes specially designed to cope with his club foot condition, an investigation into the pharaoh's footwear has suggested. Even though the mummy had been X-rayed several times, it was only recently, during a major genetic investigation into King Tut's family, that researchers found a series of malformations in the pharaoh's feet.

“Apart from a foot bone disorder known as Kohler disease II, King Tut might have had seriously deformed feet which left him hobbling around with the use of a cane. Indeed, the second toe in King Tut's right foot lacked the middle bone, making it shorter, while the left foot was clubbed, rotating internally at

the ankle. The foot condition might have required appropriate shoes with a tight strap in order to avoid them being dragged over the floor.

“Indeed three pairs of shoes found in King Tut's tomb have horizontal straps just below the toes. One of the pairs also features semi-circular panels at the shoe's sides.

““These features are not known in any other footwear, sandal or shoe alike,” book author Andre Veldmeijer, a Dutch archaeologist who specializes in ancient Egyptian leatherwork, footwear and cordage, told Discovery News in an exclusive interview.

“Over 80 pieces of footwear of different sizes were buried with the boy king. Some are much deteriorated, with just fragments or isolated straps remaining. Others, however, have survived in decent condition. Veldmeijer studied 81 specimens, including simple sewn sandals as well as other elaborately decorated, gold ornamented, brightly colored open shoes.

““They were very colorful, shiny shoes. Some are really unique as they combine shape, special materials and new manufacturing techniques,” Veldmeijer said. Veldmeijer believes it is unlikely that the most elaborate shoes, complete with gemstone inlays and gold sheets, ever touched the ground.

““King Tut might have been carried around wearing them. Some shoes, such as the elaborate marquetry veneer sandals, might have been carried by a servant,” Veldmeijer said.

“According to the archaeologist, the group of smallest size footwear might have fit King Tut when he was 10, the approximate age when he became king in 1333 B.C, while the largest could have been worn just before his death at age 19.

““This suggest that only the shoes he wore as a king were buried with him. Indeed, many sandals show wear, including the print of King Tut's foot on the sole,” Veldmeijer said. Two pair of open shoes were made to be extra comfortable, with the middle part of the sole stuffed to be more soft on the plantar.

“Together with a German specialist in reproduction of ancient footwear, Veldmeijer is now testing the "orthopedic" shoe hypothesis by remaking King Tut's leather open shoes.”

The second Tut story is rather humorous...and involves the mummy that Hass believes is Akhenaten. It seems that someone pocketed a toe from the royal mummy...and now after a long period has elapsed, the toe has returned (<http://snipurl.com/w18b6>). The short item tell us:

“The toe of King Akhenaton, which was stolen in 1907 during an examination of the pharaoh's bones, was returned during a signing ceremony for an agreement with Switzerland over the return of ancient artifacts, the council said.

“”The toe is now back in Egypt and will be displayed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo,' said the statement, which confirmed that it was from the skeleton of the pharaoh, which had been found in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

“The toe's movements since 1907 were not disclosed. Frank Ruehli, a scientist at the University of Zurich and a specialist in mummies, obtained it 'thanks to his personal contacts' in 'another European country,' a diplomat told AFP without elaborating.”

There have been a number of nice new finds in Egypt lately. The first of these involves an unusual tomb found in Ismailia. The story (<http://snipurl.com/w18f3>) appeared in Zahi Hawass's private blog, and states (abbreviated slightly):

“A new tomb was discovered by an SCA mission at Tell el-Maskhuta in the Ismailia governate. The tomb dates to the 19th Dynasty (1315-1201 BC), is constructed of mud brick and consists of a rectangular room with a domed ceiling made of stone, and a deep square-shaped shaft. The interior is decorated with scenes depicting the owner of the tomb, whose name was Ken-Amun.



[The newly discovered tomb, shown with the 35 Roman Period tombs nearby. (Photo: SCA)]

“Zahi Hawass reported that this is the first Ramesside tomb to be discovered in Lower Egypt. The tomb is very high quality, and is beautifully decorated and inscribed with scenes known from the Ramesside Period, added Dr. Hawass. In addition to this tomb, the excavation has found 35 tombs dated to the Roman Period.

“The excavation discovered a limestone stela inscribed with hieroglyphs containing the name of the capital of the Hyksos, Avaris (Het-Waret). The stela depicts the god Set in front of a king of Dynasty 19, whose name is not written. This stela shows the relationship between the site at Tell el-Maskhuta and the Hyksos capital Avaris, located at Tell el-Daba in Sharqiya.

“Dr. Mohamed Abdel Maqsood, the supervisor of the Department of Antiquities of Lower Egypt, said there was a large limestone sarcophagus found inside the tomb that belonged to the owner, Ken-Amun. He was the overseer of the royal records during the 19th Dynasty. The sarcophagus contained inscriptions on its inner and outer surfaces. The tomb walls were inscribed with the titles of the deceased and the name of his wife, Isis, who was a singer of the god Atum. The tomb is decorated in sunken relief with different religious and funerary scenes; the most important scenes were one from the Book of the Dead Chapter 125, as well as one of women mourning the dead. Other important scenes include a depiction of the goddess Hathor in the



shape of a cow, emerging from the Delta marshes, as well as a scene of the four sons of Horus. The scenes and titles in the tomb show that Ken-Amun was an important man, who was in charge of keeping the royal records.



[Interior decoration of the tomb, showing a scene from Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead. (Photo: SCA)]

Tell el-Maskhuta is located in the Wadi Tumilat near the eastern branch of the Nile that connects with the Suez Canal. When the Suez Canal was being constructed, many sphinx statues of Ramesses II and stelae were found. It is known that the ancient city at Tell el-Maskhuta contained a settlement in the Ramesside Period with a temple for Atum. It also contained a garrison, which stored supplies to equip the ancient Egyptian army before they went east to the border on their military campaigns.

Although we usually have news concerning the Pharaonic periods, from time to time a new story appears that deals nicely with later eras. The story which follows details the discovery of some of those most interesting later burials. In the story (<http://snipurl.com/vfian>), Greco-Roman mummies were found. Read on (abbreviated somewhat):

“A collection of 14 Graeco-Roman tombs, artifacts and a mummy dating to the third century BC have been discovered in a cemetery in the Ain El-Zawya area of Bawiti, a town in the Bahariya Oasis, Egypt. The find is early evidence of a large Graeco-Roman necropolis at the site.







“The tombs were found during excavation works ahead of the building of a local youth centre in the area, about 260 miles southwest of Cairo. Dr. Mahmoud Affifi, director of Cairo and Giza antiquities, said that the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has halted construction and has started legal procedures to bring the area under SCA control. Affifi adds that the tombs have a unique interior design consisting of a long stairway leading to a corridor which ends in a hall containing mastabas at its corners that were used in burying the dead.

“Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the SCA, said the newly discovered tombs are rock-hewn, and that early investigations have unearthed four

anthropoid masks made of plaster, a gold fragment decorated with a scene of the four sons of the god Horus, and a collection of coins, as well as clay and glass vessels.

“The excavation has also unearthed the mummy of a 97cm-tall woman, covered with colored plaster featuring her in Roman dress and wearing some of her jewelry.”

Since the Egyptians did not use money till Ptolemaic times, we seldom see or hear of coin discoveries, but just recently there was a sensational discovery. We are told (<http://snipurl.com/w1819>) (abbreviated here):

“Archaeologists unearthed 383 bronze coins dating back to King Ptolemy III who ruled Egypt in the 3rd century B.C. and was an ancestor of the famed Cleopatra, the Egyptian antiquities authority announced Thursday. The statement said one side of the coins were inscribed with hybrid Greek-Egyptian god Amun-Zeus, while the other side showed an eagle and the words Ptolemy and king in Greek.



This undated photo released by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities on Thursday, April 22, 2010, shows some of 383 recently-unearthed bronze coins, said by the Supreme Council to be inscribed with the hybrid Greek-Egyptian god Amun-Zeus on one side, with an eagle and the words Ptolemy and king in Greek on the other side, dating back to King Ptolemy III who ruled Egypt in the 3rd century B.C. Descendants of one of Alexander the Great's generals, the Ptolemaic dynasty ruled Egypt for some 300 years, fusing

Greek and ancient Egyptian cultures. ((AP Photo/Supreme Council of Antiquities)

The coins were found north of Qarun lake in Fayoum Oasis 50 miles (80 kilometers) southwest of Cairo. Other artifacts were unearthed in the area included three necklaces made of ostrich egg shell dated back to the 4th millennium B.C. and a pot of kohl eyeliner from the Ottoman Empire.”

Everyone loves the color blue...and the Egyptians were excessively fond of that lovely hue. As the CyberScribe’s readers will probably recall, Egyptian pottery was seldom decorated. Through all of Pharaonic history, painted or otherwise decorated pots and utensils are very rare...with one exception. During the end of the 18th dynasty and beyond, a lovely soft blue was used to adorn pottery. This color lends its name to a pottery style...the so-called ‘Amarna Ware’.

The story below relates the search for the elusive source of the blue that we all love on Amarna ware (<http://snipurl.com/w18nq>) (abbreviated somewhat):



Pottery decorated in a distinctive pale blue color was in vogue in New Kingdom Egypt, particularly during the reign of Amenhotep III and Ramesses II. (Colin A. Hope)

“While most Egyptian pottery was undecorated, during the New Kingdom—Egypt’s Golden Age—a variety of pottery was elegantly decorated in a distinctive pale blue. The pottery has been found at many sites in Egypt, the Middle East, and Sudan, with most of it being in Egypt. Given the restricted use of the blue paint, it probably was available only to artisans associated with major royal residences.

“To obtain an uncontaminated sample of the blue paint for chemical analysis, Dr. Jennifer Smith, at Washington University in St. Louis, Dr. Colin Hope, associate professor and director of the Center for Archaeology and Ancient History at Monash University in Australia, and Paul Kucera, a doctoral student at Monash University, belly-crawled through a long, narrow tunnel at a desert oasis. The tunnel was carved in the rock by Egyptians at the time of the pharaohs.

“Although some Egyptian sculptures were colored by adding ground copper to ground quartz, the pale blue pottery was thought to be decorated by cobalt.

““Copper-based pigments must be applied in thick layers and were added after firing, so they tended to flake off when an object was handled. Instead of copper, the colorant used on most of the blue painted pottery is cobalt, which was fired onto the pots,” said Hope in a press release. Analysis of the paint obtained from the site showed that the cobalt was accompanied by trace amounts of zinc, nickel, and manganese, a mixture of elements distinctive enough to serve as a chemical fingerprint.

“While searching for the paint, the scientists looked into the waste of eastern Sahara resting against the limestone escarpment that separates the desert from the Nile Valley in the Dakhleh Oasis, where the tunnel is situated. In the lower foothills of the escarpment at the western end of Dakhleh, four mine shafts were meticulously hand-cut into the rock. Steps carved along the shafts allowed a safe descent. The shafts provided access to horizontal galleries, some as long as 15 meters (about 49 feet), that followed horizontal veins of the mineral alum.

“A few centimeters thick, the alum veins are fibrous, pale gray to pink in color, and slightly astringent. Wondering whether the alum was the secret ingredient used to make the blue paint, Smith obtained a sample for analysis.

“Smith’s results showed that the alum did contain cobalt, although it wasn’t particularly rich in this element. The cobalt, however, was accompanied by



trace amounts of manganese, nickel, and zinc—the same mixture of elements found in the blue paint.

“Surprised by the low concentration of cobalt, Smith wondered if the ancient artisans found a way to concentrate it on site. From one sample she collected, she found that crust at the edge of a partially flooded mine shaft had a higher cobalt content than the others. Smith said that probably because the sulfate in the alum dissolves easily, the leftover cobalt content would therefore become higher.

““I look at all these different veins of sulfate, and I don’t know which are useful for which purposes without doing analyses, but they must have had ways of telling from observable properties which ones to mine. That’s impressive,” she said.”

The second ‘blue’ story is an odd one with only a tenuous connection to ancient Egypt, but it is none the less interesting. It seems that the ancient Egyptian pigment called ‘Egyptian Blue’ was discovered in the decoration of an altar piece...a millennium or more after the last time Egyptian Blue was manufactured. How did this possibly happen? The possible answer is filled with suggestions and few facts (<http://snipurl.com/w18qz>), but is well worth a look (abbreviated):

“researchers from the University of Barcelona has discovered remains of Egyptian blue in a Romanesque altarpiece in the church of Sant Pere de Terrassa (Barcelona). This blue pigment was used from the days of ancient Egypt until the end of the Roman Empire, but was not made after this time. So how could it turn up in a 12th Century church?

“Egyptian blue or Pompeian blue was a pigment frequently used by the ancient Egyptians and Romans to decorate objects and murals. Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 AD), this pigment fell out of use and was no longer made. But a team of Catalan scientists has now found it in the altarpiece of the 12th Century Romanesque church of Sant Pere de Terrassa (Barcelona).



“We carried out a systematic study of the pigments used in the altarpiece during restoration work on the church, and we could show that most of them

were fairly local and 'poor' - earth, whites from lime, blacks from smoke - and we were completely unprepared for Egyptian blue to turn up", Mario Vendrell, co-author told SINC.

"The researcher says the preliminary chemical and microscopic study made them suspect that the samples taken were of Egyptian blue. To confirm their suspicions, they analyzed them at the Daresbury SRS Laboratory in the United Kingdom, where they used X-ray diffraction techniques with synchrotron radiation.

"The results show without any doubt that the pigment is Egyptian blue", says Vendrell, who says it could not be any other kind of blue pigment used in Romanesque murals, such as azurite, lapis lazuli or aerinite, "which in any case came from far-off lands and were difficult to get hold of for a frontier economy, as the Kingdom Aragon was between the 11th and 15th Centuries".

"The geologist also says there is no evidence that people in Medieval times had knowledge of how to manufacture this pigment, which is made of copper silicate and calcium: "In fact it has never been found in any mural from the era. The most likely hypothesis is that the builders of the church happened upon a 'ball' of Egyptian blue from the Roman period and decided to use it in the paintings on the stone altarpiece", Vendrell explains.

"The set of monuments made up by the churches of Sant Pere, Sant Miquel and Santa María de Terrassa are built upon ancient Iberian and Roman settlements, and the much-prized blue pigment could have remained hidden underground for many centuries. "But only a little of it, because this substance couldn't be replaced - once the ball was all used up the blue was gone", concludes Vendrell."

And finally...to wrap this month's column up...

The CyberScribe is not well plugged into modern pop culture, and when the name Nicolas Cage popped up, the last thing that seemed likely was a connection to ancient Egypt...but...there it was.

The movie star is preparing for the future...and has caused a pyramid to be constructed for his burial place. True, its not much of a pyramid...but it is a pyramid, and it is in New Orleans. Read on (<http://snipurl.com/w18t8>):



“Blonde hero Nicolas Cage wouldn't be the Teflon movie star if he didn't have his mind on preparing for the future so it comes as no surprise that Nic was recently spotted tomb-shopping in New Orleans for his final resting place.

“Being something of a god himself, Nic decided that his tomb should be like that of the ancient gods and settled on a giant white pyramid-shaped tomb. We wouldn't have expected anything less for Nic.

“Is it any coincidence that a pyramid-symbol played an important part in Nic's National Treasure film franchise? Of course not, and we wouldn't be surprised if Nic had his body wrapped in copies of the U.S. Constitution as he was laid to rest. It just makes sense.”

A few photos of the pyramid...in progress and completed, show that it seems to be made of poured concrete...with a burial slot at the base and room for a couple of inset plaques.











All in all, it's a rather cheesy production, gloats the CyberScribe.