



The newsletter of  
The  
**Southampton  
Ancient Egypt  
Society**

Issue 3 December 2015

## **MERRY CHRISTMAS!**

### **Review of our November meeting**

On Saturday 21 November we welcomed **Dr Marsia Bealby**, alumna of the University of Birmingham who teaches on-line courses in Roman and Hellenistic History. Her talk dealt with her PhD study of Aegean-Egyptian relations c1900-1400 BC to which she applied World Systems Theory and Game Theory. She applied similar methodology to that of detectives who seek means, motive and opportunity in their search for the perpetrator of a crime.

By identifying the players in any confrontation or 'game', by comparing the success of the various strategies adopted by the players, such as trade, diplomacy or warfare, and by evaluating the outcome of the game, Marsia showed that the political and economic structure of the ancient world was not too dissimilar from that of more modern times. She used the case studies of the Minoan-style frescoes at Avaris and the Amarna letters to illustrate her theories. This novel approach was both enlightening and thought-provoking.



Bull-leaping scene from Tell el-Daba

### **Hilary reviews the Members' Evening meeting held on Friday 27 November**

**David Marriott** treated us to a survey of **Pyramidiots**, from Herodotus to more recently published authors like Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval.



David entertained us with an amusing tour of some of the more extreme if not crack-pot theories on why, how and when the pyramids were built, including Piazzi Smyth's 'pyramid inch' and some remarkable evidence supporting the identification of Khufu's pyramid as a power station. To quote the Father of Egyptology, Flinders Petrie, 'The fantastic theories...are still poured out, and the theorists still assert that the facts correspond to their requirements. It is useless to state the real truth of the matter, as it has no effect on those who are subject to this kind of hallucination.' (*Seventy Years in Archaeology*)

### **Answers to November Quiz**

- 1)** Men shaved their heads for many reasons from cleanliness to comfort but for a priest a shaven scalp was part of the purification ritual required for service in the temple.
- 2)** Marl clay produces a buff coloured pottery fabric which suited the available red and brown ochre pigments.
- 3)** The creature is a scarab or common dung beetle, symbol of rebirth and resurrection.

Ever thought of trying a MOOC – Mass Open Online Course? Here is **Susanne Cooke's** review of:

### **Superpowers of the Ancient World**

I recently completed this free 4-week on-line course run by Liverpool University. It dealt with international relations between Egypt, the city states of Syria-Palestine and the empires of Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the second millennium BC.

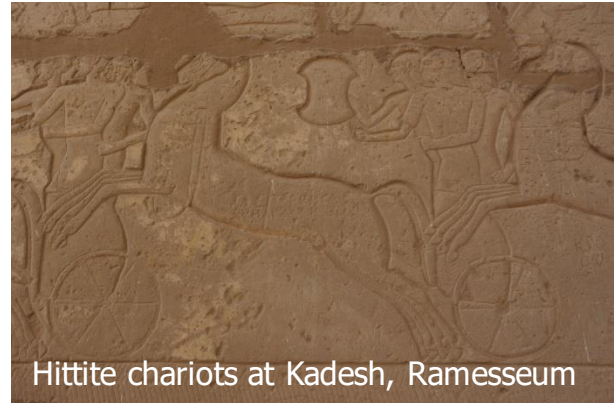
Starting with the expulsion of the Hyksos in c1500BC we studied the careers of early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty pharaohs, who prevented future incursions with military campaigns into Palestine and Syria where Egypt confronted alliances of small city states vying for territorial control. Tuthmose III's victory at the Battle of Megiddo gave Egypt access to valuable trade routes and natural resources, particularly timber, and enhanced the image of Pharaoh as a military hero.

The subsequent power vacuum created in the Levant allowed a new Empire, Mitanni, to fill a gap between the Assyrians and Babylonians in Mesopotamia, and the Hittites in Anatolia. Most of what we know about these Hurrian-speakers, possibly originating in Armenia, comes from other sources, such as the Egyptians and Hittites. Even the exact location of their capital is still not known.

Though Levantine local rulers switched their allegiance back and forth between Egypt and Mitanni, a period of peace and prosperity prevailed. The symbolic brotherhood of Great Kings is revealed by the Amarna letters detailing such things as gift exchanges and diplomatic marriages.

The expanding Hittite Empire challenged Mitanni and Egypt, picking off areas under Egyptian authority, putting loyal city-states like Kadesh under pressure. Mitanni, also under threat from the Assyrians, was reduced to a buffer zone between the great powers. After Akhenaten's death and during the uncertain period at the end of Dynasty 18, the Hittites became the dominant force in Syria-Palestine.

Ramesses II's efforts to reclaim territories from the Hittites culminated in the Battle of Kadesh, which, in spite of his near defeat, Ramesses used to promote his military hero image. Sixteen years after Kadesh a treaty of mutual cooperation was drawn up between Egypt and the Hittites, to counter the next threat, from Assyria.



Throughout the course, artefacts from Liverpool's Garstang Collection were used to stimulate discussion; a soldier's dagger, a curved *khopesh* sword, chariot fittings etc. One delightful section described the oldest written music ever found, a 3500 years old Hurrian song in which a young woman asks a goddess to forgive her sins and let her have babies. The song is poignant and amazingly Arab in melody.

The course encourages comments and discussions including historical and political comparisons with more modern times, but with hundreds of participants around the world, it can be very time consuming. There is no need to answer quizzes or take part in activities unless you want to buy a certificate of completion from the university. I found the lack of suitable reading material (other than occasional links) to be the course's main weakness. The recommended books are expensive and the main text is heavy going. Even the timeline was only available in printable format after requests but this was the first run of the course and changes will no doubt be made.

Overall the historical content was riveting and helped me to put many well-known Egyptian events into context.

## Trip to London

We are planning to take a coach party from the Society to the **British Museum exhibition 'Sunken Cities: Egypt's Lost Worlds'** which starts next year. We have chosen Saturday 22 October for our visit so put this date in your diaries. Further details will be given in the New Year.

## In the News

The *Daily Telegraph* 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015, included a short article on the CT-scan of a mummified crocodile from the British Museum. Four metres long, the creature was found to have, '20 newborn crocodile hatchlings sewn onto its back, each also carefully embalmed'. The mummy dates from the Graeco-Roman period and so may not be typical of the ancient Egyptian treatment of animal mummies.



The crocodile god Sobek from the Ptolemaic temple of Kom Ombo

## Up-coming events:

Saturday **16<sup>th</sup> January: Dr Sonia Zakrzewski** debates the role of bioarchaeology in exploring interrelationships between peoples and places and examines biological expressions of identity in terms of ethnicity and disability, representing multiple strands of identity within ancient Egypt.

## The Osiris Story

a **5-week evening class**, starting Friday 29 April 2016, 7.30-9 p.m.

This provides an introduction to the mythology surrounding one of Egypt's most popular deities. Many of the rituals associated with death and burial, as well as Egyptian concepts of the afterlife and kingship, were based on the stories surrounding the divine family of Osiris, Isis and Horus and the rivalry between the god and his brother Seth. This is an informal course with no assessment. It is intended to enhance Members' understanding of some of the ancient customs and beliefs which are regularly encountered in our lectures.



## Now it's Quiz Time

Can you name these festive Pharaohs?

A



B



C



D



Answers in the next issue of **Hotep**.

Don't forget that contributions to **Hotep** may be sent to the Secretary or handed to the editor, **Avril Poppitt**, or any member of the Committee.

