

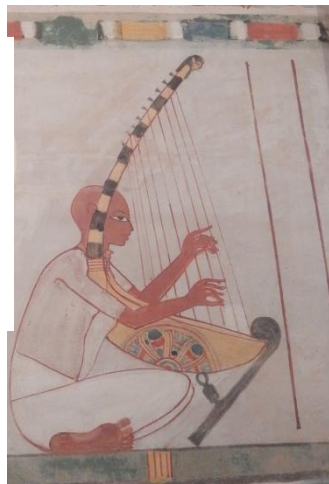
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Review of our December meeting

On Saturday 12 December we held our Christmas meeting which started with **David Goldsmith**, giving us a talk on the harp in ancient Egypt. He showed some striking images from the Old Kingdom to Late Period times to illustrate the various types of harp and the materials used in their construction. These enigmatic pictures of the instrument and the lack of any musical notation indicating the structure of Egyptian composition add a mysterious element to the study of ancient music. There was some lively discussion as to the reason why many images of harpers appear to show the musicians as being blind.



Examples of the angled and bow or arched harp, from paintings in the Bankes Collection, Kingston Lacy House, Dorset.
(photos by Hilary Wilson)



David's talk was followed by a social gathering including fun and games with an Egyptian theme. Several people entered into the festive spirit by trying out a game of **Hounds & Jackals**, a sort of cross between Ludo and Snakes & Ladders. Now you know how easy it is to play this game we hope that next Christmas you will take part in a tournament for the **SAES Hounds & Jackals trophy**. Other activities included spotting the differences between sphinxes and pinning the beard on the pharaoh...

In relation to the last, which was, of course, inspired by the disastrous and heart-stopping moment when the beard fell off Tutankhamun's golden mask as it was being moved in order to repair lighting in its display case, you will be pleased to hear the following news item:

Return of the Mummy (that is, unfortunately, the actual headline)

The restored golden mask of Tutankhamun has been put back on display in Egypt after German experts removed glue applied in a botched repair when the artefact's beard fell off. The mask was unveiled at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo after more than two months' work...In a hurried attempt to fix it, museum workers had applied too much epoxy glue, leaving a visible crust. The restoration included a 3D scan of the mask as well as warming it to allow the glue to be removed...using wooden tools.

The Daily Telegraph Friday 18 Dec. 2015.

Answers to December Quiz:

The pharaohs in their snazzy Santa hats were:

(A) Montuhotep II (B) Seti I

(C) Khafre (Chephren) (D) Tuthmose III

Keith Rider reviews an article in the October 2015 issue of **Scientific American**.

Stars of the Dead.

This article tells of the way the ancient Egyptians observed the rotation of the heavens at night, enabling them to deduce the progress of the year according to which stars rose and set throughout the night. The research was conducted by Sarah Symons and Elizabeth Tasker, who combined information from twenty-seven known star charts, mostly from the inside of the lids of coffins from the Middle Kingdom. One of the best preserved examples (below) is held in the University of Tübingen Museum.



The Egyptian year was divided into three equal length seasons, Akhet, Peret and Shemu, which related to the inundation, growing and harvesting periods respectively. Each season comprised four 30-day months and the months were divided into three 10-day periods giving 360 days in the year. In a heavenly circle there were 36 identifiable stars (or small groups of stars) that related to each 10-day period. These stars are referred to as decans since their shift in the star table represent 10 days.

The coffin lid shows part of a table with 12 rows, which when complete would consist of 36 columns reading from right to left, with four auxiliary columns on the left. The table is divided horizontally by a prayer

and vertically by the deities Nut (sky), Meskhetiu (Ursa Major), Sahu (Orion) and Sopdet (Sirius), which do not form a functional part of the table. The table is shown schematically on the next page where numbers have been used for each decan instead of their hieroglyph.

At the beginning of the year a particular decan (1) would be observed rising at sunset. Ten days later another decan (2) will rise at sunset and decan 1 will not be seen again until later in the year. The night was divided into 12 hours. The length of each hour therefore altered according to the length of the night, shorter in summer, longer in winter. Each hour started with the rising of the next decan, so the first week would display decans 1 to 12 throughout the night. Week two would display decans 2 to 13 and so on. The result is a diagonal pattern that marches up the table from bottom right to top left throughout the year.

This however does not take account of the five extra days required to increase the year from 360 to 365 days. This half week is allocated to 12 special stars that only occupy a half size sector of the sky. These stars (denoted by capital letters) are allocated a 37th column at the left of the table. There are three more columns (not shown) but these appear to be just a non-functioning list of the 36 decans. The above does not allow for the additional $\frac{1}{4}$ day that causes our leap year, so the Egyptians most probably allowed an extra day to creep in every so often.

Analysis of the existing examples of star tables shows that there are two distinct versions, similar in form but with the decans shifted by several columns. The researchers concluded that one set represented the rising and the other the setting stars. It has not been possible to identify which stars (or groups) the decans definitely represent. The axis of the Earth precesses over time and four thousand years ago would have presented a different alignment with the stars. However by using planetarium software to recreate the heavens of the past the decans of Sirius (Sopdet), the Pleiades (Khou) and Antares (Tjemes en Khentet) have been identified with reasonable certainty.



Top to bottom: Nut (sky), Meskhetiu (Ursa Major), Sahu (Orion) and Sopdet (Sirius)

What was the purpose of the star tables? As they are mostly found inside coffins it suggests that they enabled the deceased to navigate through the afterlife.

Further information about this article and Egyptian diagonal star charts may be accessed at the following websites:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/slideshow/surprising-new-finds-from-ancient-egyptian-star-charts-slide-show/>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/surprising-new-finds-from-ancient-egyptian-star-charts-slide-show1/>

<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decans>



slap 5	March - May (Harvest)												October - February (Emergence)												June - September (Inundation)																																		
	IV Shemu			III Shemu			II Shemu			I Shemu			IV Peret			III Peret			II Peret			1 Peret			IV Akhet			III Akhet			II Akhet			I Akhet																									
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B	A	36	A	34	35	A	31	32	33	29	30	31	27	28	29	24	25	26	21	22	23	18	19	20	15	16	17	10	11	12	9	10	11	6	7	8	5	6	7	4	5	6	3	4	5	2	3	4	1										
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F	E	D	C	B	A	36	A	34	35	A	31	32	33	29	30	31	27	28	29	24	25	26	21	22	23	18	19	20	15	16	17	10	11	12	9	10	11	6	7	8	5	6	7	4	5	6	3	4	5	2	3	4	1						
G	F	E	D	C	B	A	36	A	34	35	A	31	32	33	29	30	31	27	28	29	24	25	26	21	22	23	18	19	20	15	16	17	10	11	12	9	10	11	6	7	8	5	6	7	4	5	6	3	4	5	2	3	4	1					
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Dates for your Diary

Trip to London: Sat 22 October 2016

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.

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 of one of Egypt's most popular deities. Many of the rituals associated with death and burial, and 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.



Up-coming events:

Saturday 20 February: Hilary Wilson will strive to answer the question **Who was Who at the Court of Tutankhamun?** After the chaos of the Amarna Period, Tutankhamun heralded the restoration of order and stability. But who was responsible for the policies enacted in the name of the boy-king? This talk introduces the principal officials and advisers in Tutankhamun's court, examining their origins and their contributions to the success of the Egyptian state.



Now it's Quiz Time

- 1) The Egyptian New Year's Day was known as Wepet Renpet 'the Opening of the Year'. On approximately what date by our modern calendar was this celebrated?
- 2) How many years were represented by the hieroglyph of a kneeling figure with arms raised and wearing the palm-rib symbol for 'year' on his head?
- 3) What is the name of this goddess who is shown marking off the years of a king's reign on the palm-rib tally?



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

For Your Information

We are in the process of overhauling and updating our website. There may be times when the website is temporarily unavailable. We apologise for this inconvenience. However, the Secretary may still be contacted on the usual e-mail address:

info@SouthamptonAncientEgyptSociety.co.uk

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.

