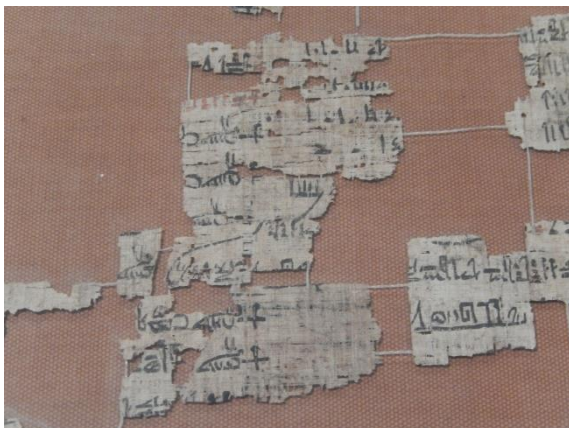


Issue 8: May 2016

the Newsletter of
The
Southampton
Ancient Egypt
Society

Review of our April meeting

On Saturday 16 April we welcomed **Professor Andrew Shortland** from Cranfield University. His talk, **'Radiocarbon and the Chronologies of Ancient Egypt'**, was split into two distinct sections. First he explained the different approaches that have been adopted in creating a chronological sequence of events for Egyptian history. He described the difficulties in interpreting fragmentary contemporary texts such as king-lists. He showed how the conventional Egyptian chronology, followed by most scholars, was established with reference to rare examples of verifiable recorded events such as solar eclipses. He gave a wonderfully clear explanation of the heliacal rising of Sirius and the 'sliding' calendar and illustrated how difficult it is to allocate precise dates to events without allowing for a few years on either side. In the second part of his talk Andrew showed how the technique of radiocarbon dating has developed and how, in conjunction with other scientific methods, it has been used to support the traditional chronology, at least for the New Kingdom onwards. He was clear that the further back in history we go the greater the leeway for error but generally the study of radioactive decay provides independent scientific verification for the chronologies derived from conventional Egyptology.

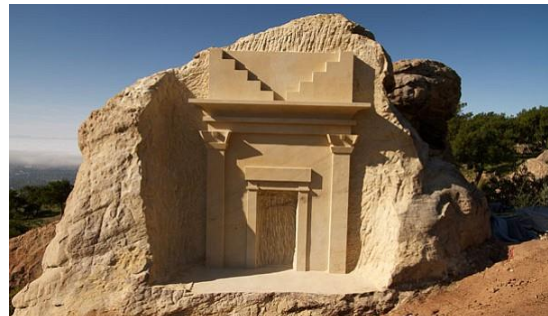


Fragment of the Turin Canon
a king-list from Dynasty 19

Recommended Viewing

Surfing the TV channels over the Bank Holiday I happened upon **Petra: Lost City of Stone**. This documentary in the NOVA series is produced in America by PBS, a Public Broadcasting Service, who describe the series thus: *'Explore the science behind the headlines in PBS' premier science series. With compelling stories and spectacular visuals, NOVA programs demystify science and technology for viewers of all ages and spotlight people involved in scientific pursuits.'*

The film is refreshingly free of the dramatic re-enactments so beloved of many directors of programmes intended for popular consumption and the CGI effects are relevant and tasteful. The methods which the Nabataeans used to provide their city with water demonstrate an impressive degree of engineering skill and technological understanding.



But from an Egyptological perspective I found the experimental archaeology most interesting. To discover how the façades of buildings like the Treasury were carved from the living rock two modern stone-masons took their tools to a sandstone knoll in southern California, (above), to demonstrate how a near-vertical cliff face could be carved from the top down without the use of elaborate scaffolding. This gave a vivid and credible explanation for how the temples and tombs of Egypt could have been decorated. The programme can be seen on YouTube or streamed through:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/building-wonders.html#petra-lost-city>

(may be subject to scheduling restrictions)

Now the answers to April's Quiz

1) The game is known as **senet**, or the game of passing

2) Akhenaten's new city was called **Akhetaten** or **'The Horizon of Aten'**

3) Meretseger means **'She who loves silence'**.

Ostrakon from
Deir el-Medina



Sakhmet gets around

Susanne Cook spotted these statues, part of the superb Hearst Castle art collection, on display at La Cuesta Encantada, the Californian hilltop retreat of the newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst.

The Hearst Mansion website describes these as being granite and dating from the 18th and



19th Dynasties but with no details of provenance. This is not surprising as many such statues of the lioness-headed goddess, standing and seated, can be seen in museums across the globe. In many cases the statues were acquired by collectors more than 100 years ago when the trade in antiquities was unregulated and purchasers asked few questions about the origins of these monumental works of art.

The goddess portrayed is Sakhmet, the wife of the creator-god Ptah, whose name means simply 'the Powerful One'. As a daughter of Ra she wears the solar disc on her head with the encircling uraeus serpent rearing above her forehead as it does on the brow-band of a royal crown. One of her titles was 'the Eye of Ra' and she was personified as the agent of vengeance, punishing backsliding humans when they stopped paying due respect to the sun-god. Kings invoked her support in battle and she is shown as a rampaging lioness trampling Egypt's enemies. One of her titles

was 'Smiter of the Nubians'. Sakhmet is often indistinguishable from Hathor, or Bastet, Tefnut or Mut, all of whom can be portrayed in leonine form. She was also thought to be the bringer of disease and plague.



3 seated Sakhmet statues, Open Air Museum, Karnak

In fact, most of the Sakhmet statues in museum collections come from the area of Luxor where hundreds of them were set up around the sacred lake of the Mut Temple and in the precincts of other Theban temples, including the huge mortuary complex of Amenhotep III. The Mut Precinct had been closed to the public for more than 40 years until, after conservation work by the Brooklyn Museum, it was reopened to tourists in 2014.

As with many things in ancient Egypt, there were two sides to Sakhmet. Apart from being a fierce, blood-thirsty avenger she was also a goddess of healing, worshipped by doctors. It is thought that the Mut temple at Karnak may have housed a medical centre where sick people could receive simple remedies dispensed by priests of Sakhmet. The establishment also probably served as a medical school where trainees practised their craft on the patients attending this 'free' clinic. Part of any cure would have



Sakhmet statue, Berlin,
with cartouche of
Amenhotep III

been the presentation of offerings to one or other of the Sakhmet statues, each with its own name or title indicating a specific aspect of the goddess.



Standing Sakhmet
statue. Paris

Obituary



Terence James William Mason
November 1938-April 2016



It is with great sadness that we report the death of Terry Mason, a founder member of the Southampton Ancient Egypt Society. I first met Terry when he joined one of my classes in what was then the Adult Continuing Education Department of the University of Southampton. In taking early retirement from his career in mechanical engineering and avionics he became an enthusiastic adult learner. He was one of the first ACE students to gain a Certificate in Humanities, picking up several of my courses including an introduction to *Egyptian Hieroglyphs* held in Chichester, *Egyptian Art* in Emsworth and *History of Maths* at New College. Terry, along with Sue and David Marriott, persevered against all the obstacles put in their way to achieve their BA degrees in Historical Studies. Having got the taste for Egyptology he went on to complete a part-time Master's degree at the University of Wales, Swansea, where his dissertation on the cataloguing of pottery excavated by Garstang but dispersed throughout various collections was praised as a useful tool for future researchers. Terry visited Egypt many times, usually as an independent traveller, and made some good friends among the locals in Luxor. He was one of the SAES party to visit Luxor in 2000, when he kept us amused with his mischievous theories about the connections between ancient and modern cultures. I particularly remember his excitement at the discovery of a Ptolemaic baked potato oven at the Edfu Temple.

Terry fell ill on one of his last trips to Egypt and his problem was later diagnosed as leukaemia which he battled bravely for several years. He last attended an SAES meeting at Wyvern by which time he was clearly very ill but had not lost his wicked sense of humour. I was very touched to discover that he had mentioned the Society in his will. Safe journey to the West, Terry. With love, Hilary.

Upcoming Events

On 18th June Kris Strutt from the University of Southampton will give his talk 'Reflections on the Nile: some results from the Theban Harbours & Waterscapes Survey'

Textual and archaeological resources show that the Nile has migrated across the floodplain over the last 4000 years, steadily changing its relationship with temple and harbour sites on both banks. Using geophysical and topographic survey methods and borehole surveys our project investigates the changing pattern of waterways and related building complexes, assessing how the landscape functioned through time.



And finally.....**Quiz time.**

1) Where is the oldest Egyptian obelisk still standing in its original location?

2) Who was the former circus strongman who acquired many of the large sculptural pieces such as this head of Amenhotep III which are now displayed in the British Museum?



3) Which Egyptian deity was recognised as the patron of embalmers?

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

