

HOTEP

Issue 14: December 2016
Season's Greetings

Review of the November Meeting

On 19 November our speaker was **Tessa Baber** who talked about her research into the **Mummy Pits of Egypt**. She showed how she has traced the existence of these enigmatic mass burials through the journals and memoirs of 19th Century travellers. They have been little studied and even less understood because they usually comprise a collection of simply prepared mummies with no burial goods to attract treasure seekers. Most of these mass burials date from the Late, Ptolemaic and Roman Periods but often occupy derelict tombs from earlier eras and Tessa has identified examples throughout Egypt. Sadly, at the time when they were found there was no interest in scientific investigation and the sites were exploited as tourist attractions and the mummies as a source of gruesome souvenirs.



When the tourist market was saturated Egyptian entrepreneurs found other uses for the bodies which were exported in quantities for the manufacture of fertiliser, pigments in oil paints and even medicines and the linen

wrappings were sold separately for paper manufacture. Altogether through these depredations we have lost much of the information which could have been gained from studying the mummy pits, so much so that we do not even understand why these mass burials occurred. Suggestions include plague pits or war graves but Tessa is working on the premise that they represent a burial custom which, in the latter part of Egyptian history, offered an affordable form of burial for the poorer classes. She hopes that future forensic study will help to confirm this theory though the resources needed to properly investigate the unfashionable mummy pits will be hard to find.



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

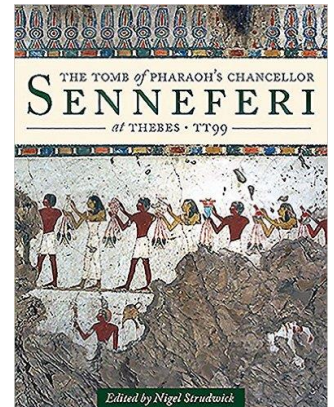
Book Review

The Tomb of the Pharaoh's Chancellor Seneferi at Thebes (TT99) Part 1: The New Kingdom edited by **Nigel Strudwick**

Published by **Oxbow Books**

ISBN: 978-1-78570-331-7

Percy Newberry made the connection between a statue of Seneferi, Chancellor in the reign of Tuthmose III, in the British Museum and the badly damaged tomb in the Upper Enclosure of Sheikh Abdel Qurna which he discovered in 1895. The first part of this new publication describes the recent history of the tomb leading up to the work by the Cambridge Theban Tombs Project. Nigel Strudwick has chosen to follow a chronological sequence of the tomb's



use starting with a review of other monuments relating to its original owner and his family. He then presents a fairly typical and detailed excavation memoir looking at the architecture of the 18th Dynasty tomb, its decorative scheme and the archaeological finds. The book is lavishly illustrated with high quality photos, both colour and black and white, and accurate line drawings of texts, wall paintings and artefacts. There is a comprehensive bibliography for cross-referencing. This book is not cheap, even with the introductory offer for SAES members, and for its weight alone it is not a book for bedtime reading but it will become an important reference source. It should be noted that this is only Part I. Strudwick promises that Part II will take the story up to the 20th Century.

Hilary Wilson

In the News

Our Secretary, **Annette Winter**, spotted this article in the on-line version of the **Egypt Independent** 13:11:2016

3,000-year-old mummy discovered in new Pharaonic tomb

'The Spanish archeological mission working on the excavation project of the "Temple of Millions of Years" of Pharaoh Thutmose III, uncovered a tomb at the external part of the southern wall to the temple, the Antiquities Ministry said Sunday in a statement.

The "mission for excavation, restoration and enhancement project" of the Temple of Millions of Years began its work in 2008 and is led by Myriam Seco Álvarez, who coordinates research in the temple. The Pharaoh Thutmose III is considered one of the most important of Ancient Egypt, a sort of "Egyptian Napoleon."

A coffin in cartonnage has been found inside the tomb for a mummy, preserved in very good condition, Mahmoud Afifi, Head of the Ancient Egyptian Sector at the ministry, said in the statement.



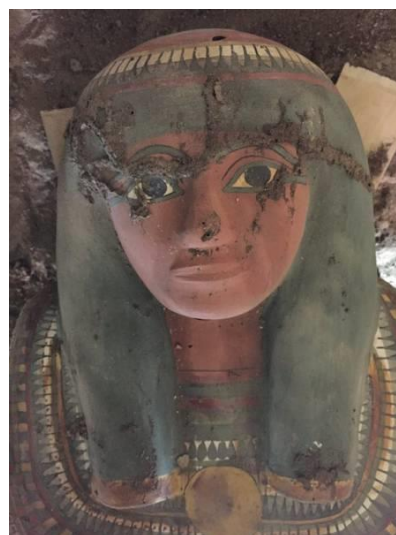
Preliminary studies of the tomb show that it dates back to the Third Intermediate Period and belonged to someone called "Amn-ner-nef," who had the title "Custodian of the Royal House," Afifi said.

He pointed out that the mission will study the tomb and its contents further as



soon as possible, in order to learn more about its owner.

The head of the mission Álvarez said that the importance of this discovery lies in the mummy found inside the coffin, as it contains many colorful trappings for a group of religious symbols in ancient Egypt. Among these symbols, a representation of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys spreading their wings, and the four sons of Horus, along with many other scenes.'



Answers to November's Quiz

1) The **el-Rassoul brothers** were behind an organised gang of tomb robbers in the early 20th Century.

2) **Howard Carter's** watercolour paintings are preserved in the **Griffith Institute** of Oxford University, at the **Ashmolean Museum**.

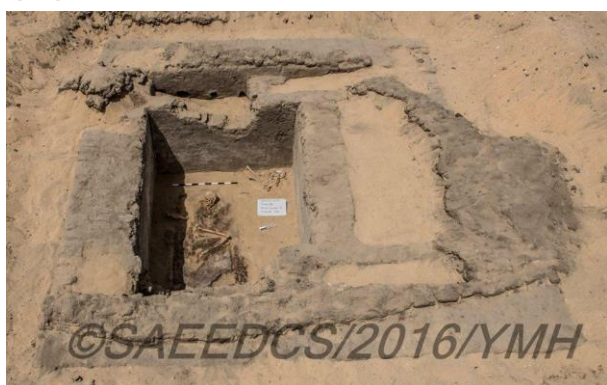
3) Howard Carter negotiated on behalf of the **Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York**, to acquire the Treasure of the Three Princesses.

More news from Egypt

The discovery of an early settlement site with several large tombs actually made the morning headlines on BBC Radio 2 on 24 November. It was heralded as a find of such significance that it would revitalise Egypt's flagging tourism industry. By the time the evening TV news had taken up the story, press enthusiasm had somewhat subsided because the images of brick-lined graves and mention of finds including 'shards of pottery and stone tools' were not as exciting as initial reports suggested.

News websites like Egypt Independent, MSN and Foxnews gave conflicting descriptions of the discovery but the most important aspect of the announcement is the emphasis placed on this being the work of Egyptian archaeologists without the support of any foreign group.

The site is at Abydos, about 400 metres from the Temple of Seti I, in an area which John Bilman mentioned in *'Hidden Abydos'*, (SAES February 2015). It is variously described as a residential area, town or city with several large mudbrick 'cemeteries' or tombs. The initial radio report claimed the site was over 5000 years old i.e. late pre-dynastic or early dynastic. MSN, however, headlined it as being over 7000 years old since Mahmoud Afify, Head of the Antiquities Sector of the Egyptian Government, who made the announcement, claimed it dated back to 5316 BCE, 'the beginning of an important dynastic period (sic)'.



Most interest has focused on the tombs which are said to be larger than some of the 1st and 2nd Dynasty royal tombs nearby. Afify speculates that they were the burial places for senior royal officials 'who were responsible for building the cemeteries of the royal families at Abydos.' If this is so they cannot be older than those same royal tombs, c. 3100BCE.

The BBC asked Professor Chris Eyre, an Egyptologist based at the University of Liverpool, for an expert opinion. He said, '...this appears to be the town, the capital at the very beginning of Egyptian history.' Amidst the confusion, Yasser Mahmoud Hussein, head of the Egyptian archaeological mission, said they had identified many mastaba-style graves within the tomb groups. Previously the earliest known mastabas were at Saqqara.

To both the ancient Egyptians and modern Egyptologists, Abydos has always been one of the most important sites but access to the area has become more difficult in recent years. To anyone interested in the earliest phase of Egyptian history the news of this discovery is fascinating but for the average tourist the images are uninspiring. There is no glint of gold, no artistic sculpture, no decorated mummies. Even if they were to be displayed in some sort of local museum – and we all know how long that could take – the finds are hardly spectacular enough to reinvigorate the tourist industry as claimed.

Next Meeting: Saturday 1 January 2017

Alan Reiblein, professional chemist and free-lance Egyptologist, who has written about the study of mineral pigments used in ancient art, will talk on **Egyptian Wall Paintings**. This promises to be a visual treat not to be missed.

...and finally, **Quiz Time**

Identify these jolly Santas.

(Hint: all have been speakers at previous monthly meetings)



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

