

INSCRIPTIONS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea

Issue 20

December 2005

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A Taste of Egypt

will now take place on
25 February 2006
 at Egypt Centre,
 12.30 to 14.30 p.m.



Mystical Mummies!

Workshops October 26th –28th 2005

During the half-term holiday 31 young Egyptologists came along to the Egypt Centre for a Mystical Mummies Experience.

The children dressed up as Ancient Egyptians and then travelled to the House of Death to take part in a ritual mummification and learn about the Weighing of the Heart and the monster who is ready to eat the heart of those who have been bad!

Next the children attended an Ancient Egyptian craft workshop and painted an amulet to help guard their body during their journey to the afterlife, painted magical spells on bandages to help protect their hearts, wrote their name in a protective cartouche and finally designed an Ancient Egyptian Death Mask, which was entered for an art competition. The children were presented with a photo-card of their group dressed as Ancient Egyptians at the end of the workshop.

by Wendy Goodridge



Some of the children enjoying the Mystical Mummies Experience

Visit us online!

Egypt Centre has just put its catalogue of objects online at www.egyptcentre.org.uk.



A Different Cruise on the Nile

Last July, our family decided to take a second Nile cruise. My sister and her husband had never been before and a few weeks before departure, we received a phone call offering a free upgrade to the SS Karim, the only working paddle steamer on this part of the river and once the property of King Fuad and King Farouk. It was the “Royal” boat.

On arrival at Luxor, we were taken beyond the many large cruise boats to a little harbour where, dwarfed by two huge cruisers, was our little boat. There were only twenty-four passengers and once everyone was settled and fed, we set off for Esna and the lock. As usual there was a queue to go through so we were told we could go ashore. My sister and I sat on the deck with lovely refreshing drinks whilst the two men disappeared towards the souk, only to reappear some twenty minutes later clutching mysterious black bags and each bedecked with a fez, only to disappear again further along the road. Never mind, I had the money and the tickets!!

Later that morning, after we had retired to our cabins, with much shouting, bumping and grinding we made our way through the lock and with a wheeze and a puff made our way to Edfu where we arrived early next morning.

We set off for the temple, so early that we got there before the man with the key. After our visit to the main temple we wandered around the site when a guide insisted on taking me

to see a carving of Isis with baby Horus, then demanded payment of one biro! I wandered off again, only to find myself confronted by the same guide some fifteen minutes later, demanding another biro as the other one did not work.

We returned to the boat for lunch, then disaster struck! Or should I say, *we* struck—another larger boat, breaking two windows. We carried on our way but were pursued by a police launch who, despite our two Kalashnikov-wielding guards, boarded us with much shouting and yelling. We were finally allowed to go on our way, but we had been damaged too, we had developed a ‘boom’ to go with our wheeze and puff.

Our arrival at Kom Ombo was at dusk. We had to tie up alongside three much larger boats and scramble up a rope ladder to their level before we could cross them to the park leading to the temple. On our return, our boat had moved to a different berth and with the path lit by torches held by our obliging crew, the majority of us returned in good time, hungry for our delicious evening meal. Some, however, only discovered that our boat had moved after they had crossed the three big cruisers to find empty space, and they believed they had been abandoned at a rapidly darkening temple dedicated to the crocodile god.

But in the end all was well and we set off for Aswan, our boat now sounding like an ancient Roman galley with a regular drumbeat: wheeze-puff-boom-boom. We all slept soundly that night to wake next morning at Aswan.

To be continued!

by Merlys Gavin

Garden Party

I have been asked to write a brief account of the garden party we held in July for you people who were unfortunate enough not to be able to attend. As you may know, the Saturday Club, held in the Egypt Centre for socially and educationally deprived children, is running short of funds. At a social occasion in the Taliesin whilst chatting over a few glasses of wine, one thing led to another and I volunteered to host a garden party, so the idea of “Berries and Bubbly” emerged.

My husband took the idea in his stride—years of practice in dealing with my ideas—and gave 110% support. At the next committee of the Friends we sorted out a division of labour with everyone swinging behind it with great enthusiasm. As the time approached, I grew very nervous; would people attend? Would the curse of the Pharaohs strike and the weather be bad?

But the gods were with us! The marquee erecting team on the Friday had great fun putting it up in the front garden. Our friends brought tables and chairs, tablecloths, cool boxes and raffle prizes. The committee did table decorations, balloons on the gate, helped with the bar, raffle and general duties.

The sun shone, people came, the atmosphere was fantastic and we raised £330. Special thanks to Su, Claire, Lydia and Hannah who picked the strawberries and made biscuits. Also to Andrew Morris of Cheers for special price Cava and free glass hire. Everyone said how much they had enjoyed it, and would we do it again next year. My reply—yes, but not in my back yard!

by Sheila Nowell





Editorial

Welcome to the twentieth issue of *Inscriptions*.

This issue sees the beginning of another successful year for Egypt Centre. In particular we have been favoured with the loan of the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus (see Page 6) and the Centre's work with children continues to expand.

The Editor and his wife thank the Committee and Friends for their generous gift at the AGM. It was much enjoyed!

We note that the Centre's fame and reputation is growing, with our forthcoming conference on **Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt** attracting national and international attention. Places are strictly limited, so if you want to come, please book soon using the form on the back page.

A big "thank you" to those who have contributed to this issue. We are looking forward to future episodes of Merlys Gavin's amusing story of her trip to Egypt. If you've got a story to tell or an opinion to voice, why not send a contribution for the next issue?

Contributions (which should be original, not copied from other published works which are subject to copyright) should be sent to the Egypt Centre, marked for the attention of Mike Mac Donagh.

We wish all our members a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. We look forward to seeing as many Friends as possible at the forthcoming lectures which promise to be most interesting.

Mike Mac Donagh

To El Khab and Back

(August 2005)

On the last three trips to Luxor I have endeavoured to get to El Khab with absolutely no joy. Imagine my delight when my taxi driver (Rafaat) said he could get me there (I've heard that from taxi drivers before!!)



Well, there was no harm in trying. I arranged for him to pick me up at my hotel at 6.30am to get the 7.00am convoy heading to Aswan. 6.30 came and went, my mood dropped, yet another failed attempt. Half an hour later Rafaat rang me to apologise, he had slept in so we arranged to go on the 11.00am convoy instead.

The convoy left 'Convoy Street' in Luxor promptly at 11.00am and raced through Luxor with horns blaring and lights flashing.

We arrived at the halfway checkpoint where the Luxor and Aswan Police divide. The checkpoint was colourful with a few small stalls and a café and rest area (not great toilets though), where I eventually submitted to buying 'another scarf' to add to my ever growing collection. The starting price was LE95, the end price LE20!

While all this haggling with the scarf seller was going on, a different type of negotiating was occurring between my taxi driver and what appeared to be the 'chief' policeman at the checkpoint. At this point all I overheard was ".....El Khab? ... La!" In other words 'NO EL KHAB'. I had been travelling for an hour and a half for nothing. At least, I thought I could go to Edfu as compensation for coming this far.

Allah must have been looking down on me. Somehow Rafaat had managed to organise my own personal policeman to ride in the taxi with us to El Khab. I was so pleased that at this point I would have bought another ten scarves!!

We continued with the convoy towards Aswan – me, Rafaat, and policeman with his faithful AK47 (machine gun) propped on the back seat of the taxi. We left the convoy after another 15 minutes and waved goodbye – I really was going to El Khab.

We arrived at the site. There was not a soul to be seen until Rafaat beeped his horn and an elderly gentleman in his galabya appeared from his sleeping blanket under a tree.

He directed me to the ticket office. This was almost like a sketch from Monty Python. I followed him to the building where he proceeded to enter. He stopped me and directed me to the front of the building. I stood there and waited until a hatch opened and that same elderly gentleman popped his head through and asked me if I wanted a ticket to the tombs. He promptly sold me the ticket, returned to his blanket and another man



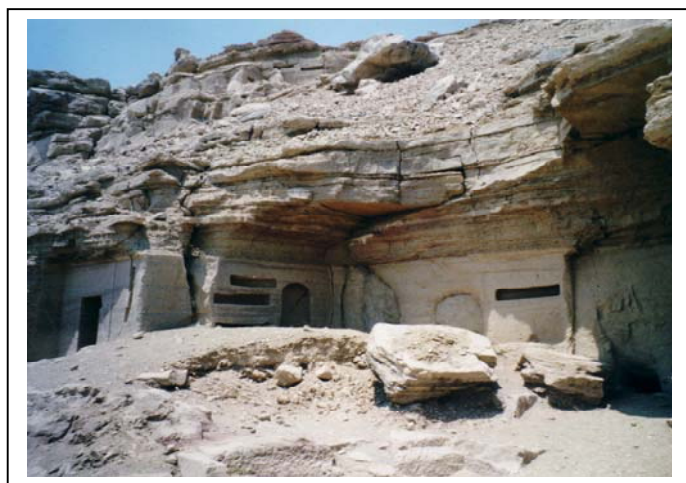


appeared with a large bunch of keys. The tombs were awaiting.

After a small climb up a newly built flight of stone steps we arrived at the small escarpment that the tombs are cut into.

Five tombs are currently accessible:

- Ahmose Pennekhbet (EK2) – an ‘Overseer of the Seal’ in Dynasty XVIII.
- Paheri (EK3) – Mayor of Nekheb, Dynasty XVIII – nice statue in rear of tomb, of Paheri sitting between his wife and mother.
- Setau (EK4) – Priest in the service of Nekhbet during the reign of Ramesses III.
- Renni (EK7) – Mayor of Nekheb during the reign of Amenhotep I.
- Ahmose son of Ibana – prominent figure during the liberation of Egypt against the Hyksos in the early 18th Dynasty. He is described as ‘Captain of Sailors’ in the biographical texts on the tomb walls.



The decoration was still in fairly good order, with some vibrant colours in places. The tombs are not dissimilar to nobles’ tombs seen at Qurna in Luxor, showing scenes of daily life, family festivals, and funeral rites. It was lovely to spend unlimited time in each tomb without the bustle of other tourists and botherings from the gaffer – the man with the keys just opened up and let me spend as much time as I wished alone in each tomb.

When I emerged from the last tomb, feeling quite satisfied with the day so far, I was told of an added bonus – I was permitted to visit the small shrine and temple further along a very rough track (about two miles) known as the Wadi Hellal road (using the word road in the very loosest terms!) We arrived at the small rock-cut temple and gave another beep of the horn. A sleepy looking gentleman in his gelabia ran from a little shack to the taxi and greeted us very warmly. We were the only tourists of the day, probably of the week!

Let me just set the scene, it was August, in the desert, 2.30 p.m. and about 48 degrees Celsius. There was not a tree, building or person in site apart from us four (me, taxi driver, guard and gatekeeper). For some reason this heightened the excitement and the experience – it was more of an adventure than any day at the Valley of the Kings could ever be.

At this site there is a small Ptolemaic rock cut sanctuary; slightly further up the hillside is a two halled temple of Nekhbet with Hathor columns. It was built by Ramesses II and restored by later Ptolemaic kings. Closer to the road is a small single roomed structure locally called el-Hammam (the bath). It is a chapel dedicated to local gods and the deified Ramesses II by his Viceroy of Nubia, Setau (not the same Setau as the tomb owner EK4).



It was time to return to the checkpoint to await the arrival of the convoy from Aswan. On leaving I thanked all with baksheesh and pens, goodbyes and greetings exchanged – woke up my guard, who was having a lovely siesta in the back of the taxi and returned to the checkpoint.

We had about an hour to wait before the convoy arrived. The checkpoint was totally different from my encounter earlier in the day – the stalls and wares had been packed away and all of the traders were sleeping in the shade of a canopy – not expecting any tourists for about an hour. Nonetheless they were exceptionally hospitable and made me some Egyptian tea and opened the heavily locked fridge so that I could get some fresh cold water and cola.

I spent a very enjoyable hour in the shade sipping beverages, chatting and watching the world go by. It gave me time to reflect on the day I had just experienced – thinking – I have been to El Khab! It still hadn’t sunk in. There was one trader there that I had a very interesting conversation with – he spoke little English, I speak very little Arabic so we got by on a very rough French translation, which was most entertaining.

At 3.40 p.m. this little oasis sprung to life. A well organised routine was unfolding before my eyes with almost military precision. By 3.50 p.m. the traders had set up their stalls, draped their wares and were ready for the next onslaught of the newly arriving, unsuspecting tourists from Aswan. It was fascinating to watch. Once the latest arrivals had been pestered into spending ridiculous amounts of money on drinks and souvenirs the convoy was ready, as was I, to continue its journey to Luxor. We arrived back at Luxor at about 6 p.m. I showered and went for a very long drift on my inflatable in the pool. What a day!

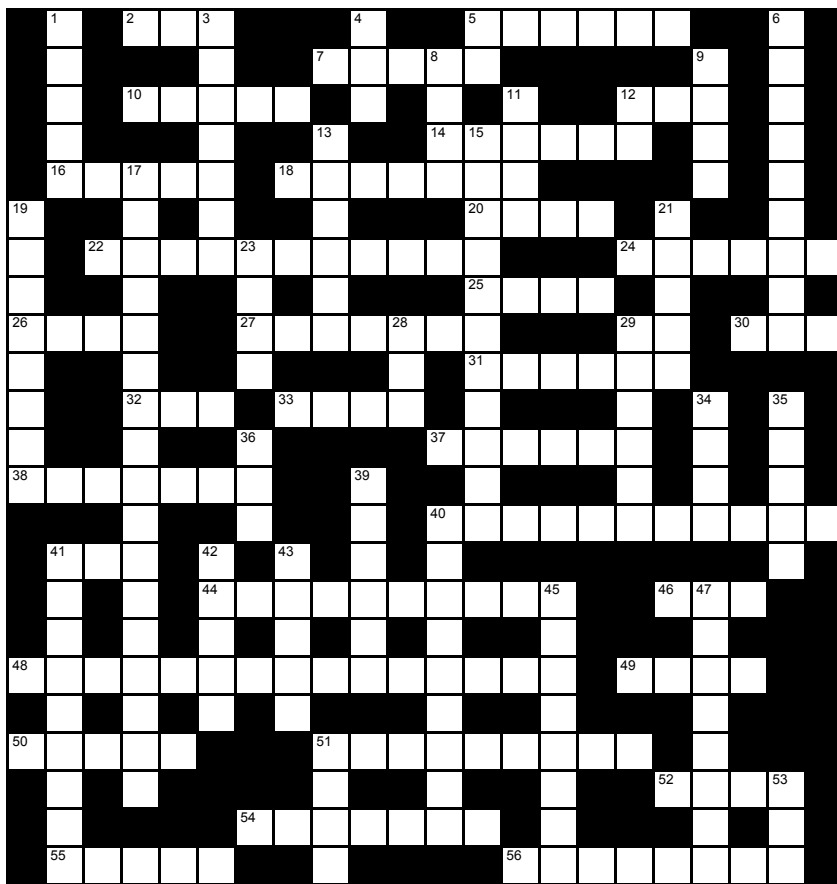
(Bibliography: www.egyptsites.co.uk Photos: author’s own.)

by Karen O’Flanagan





Jumbo Christmas Crossword



- 40 18th Dynasty pharaoh famous for his golden mask (11)
- 41 God of infinity (3)
- 44 Annual flooding of the Nile (10)
- 46 God of air and sunlight (3)
- 48 Two huge seated statues (7,2,6)
- 49 Double sphinx (4)
- 50 Falcon-headed god of war (5)
- 51 Site of Rameses II's rock-cut temples (3,6)
- 52 Creator-god of Heliopolis (4)
- 54 Needle-like stone monument (7)
- 55 Crocodile god (5)
- 56 Potsherd or flake of stone bearing an inscription (8)

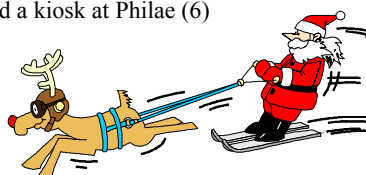
Down

- 1 An Egyptian board game (5)
- 3 Sneferu has two pyramids here (7)
- 4 Vulture-goddess (3)
- 5 Successor to Tutankhamun (2)
- 6 Principal wife of Akhenaten (9)
- 8 Goddess of justice and harmony (4)
- 9 Sister of Osiris and mother of Horus (4)
- 11 God of the inundation (4)
- 12 Personality of the deceased, often represented as a bird (2)
- 13 Funerary figurine (6)
- 15 Site of temple of Rameses III (7,4)
- 17 Ritual by which the dead were brought to life (7,2,3,5)
- 19 A people who clashed with Rameses II (8)
- 21 Modern city at the first cataract (5)
- 23 Site of a large temple of Horus (4)
- 28 God of the primeval ocean (3)
- 29 Huge temple in modern Luxor (6)
- 34 Site of the great 4th Dynasty pyramids (4)
- 35 Falcon-god who embodies kingship (5)
- 36 Sky-goddess (3)
- 39 Ruined pyramid, possibly Huni's (6)
- 40 Birth name used by several 18th Dynasty pharaohs (9)
- 41 Ancient Greek historian who wrote about Egypt (9)
- 42 A small openwork temple supported by columns (5)
- 43 Modern city opposite Valley of the Kings (5)
- 45 Egypt's enemies (4,4)
- 47 A cursive script derived from hieroglyphs (8)
- 51 The sun disk (4)
- 53 Fertility god (3)

CLUES

Across

- 2 A festival to renew the king (3)
- 5 A small charm worn in life or death (6)
- 7 Preserved body (5)
- 10 12th Dynasty fort in Nubia (5)
- 12 Dwarf god who protects the home and childbirth (3)
- 14 Name given to the period when Akhenaten ruled (6)
- 16 God of knowledge and writing (5)
- 18 New kingdom queen who helped expel the Hyksos (7)
- 20 A pair-statue (4)
- 22 Site of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple (4,2,5)
- 24 God of death and resurrection (6)
- 25 A great river that flows through Egypt (4)
- 26 First ruler of the 6th Dynasty (4)
- 27 Ceramic glazed with blue or green (7)
- 29 Life-force of the deceased (2)
- 30 Principal wife of Amenhotep III and mother of Akhenaten (3)
- 31 He has a column in London, a gate in Rome and a kiosk at Philae (6)
- 32 God of the earth (3)
- 33 Major Theban god (4)
- 37 A salt used in mummification (6)
- 38 First pharaoh of the 4th Dynasty (7)



Definitions and spellings taken from *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, by Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson.

(Solution on page 6.)

by Daphne MacDonagh





The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus

Launch of the Display

On Thursday 24th November, the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus Display was launched at the Egypt Centre by Dr Richard Parkinson of the British Museum, author of several academic and popular books on Egyptian literature, together with Britain's most decorated mathematician, the Abel Laureate, Sir Michael Atiyah, OM PPRS. The Rhind will be on display for a year. The Centre is very grateful to the British Museum for the opportunity to borrow this piece and to the academic departments of the University who have supported this loan. Sir Michael Atiyah gave a talk for students and 6th formers studying Mathematics or Engineering entitled 'An unsolved problem in elementary geometry'.

The loan of the Mathematical Papyrus (BM10058), from the British Museum, was made possible through the generous support of various Swansea University academic departments, but particularly the Department of Mathematics and School of Engineering. The loan is a British Museum Partnership Scheme. It is intended to enhance and publicize the Centre's existing innovative schools' mathematics project through the display of this artefact. A week of special half-term children's mathematics activities is also planned for the week of the 26th of May 2006.

The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus comes from an unknown site at ancient Thebes, modern Luxor. It was presumably found in the tomb of a Theban official who lived around 1530 BC. It was acquired by A. H. Rhind (hence its name) in the 1850s and was purchased in two pieces by the British Museum in 1865. Some small fragments of the papyrus are also in the Brooklyn Museum.

The Rhind Papyrus is one of the most famous of the British Museum's magnificent collection of Egyptian papyri and a unique document in the history of mathematics. This section on loan to the Egypt Centre consists of one third of the complete roll, which would have measured around 18 feet in length. It is written in hieratic, in red and black ink, and reads from right to left. It begins with a grandiose introduction: *Accurate reckoning. The entrance into the knowledge of all existing things and all obscure secrets...* There follows an arithmetical table, perhaps the most extensive and complete table we have from ancient Egypt. The piece in the Egypt Centre has instructions for doubling odd-numbered unit fractions with values of $1/3$ to $1/87$. The Greeks were using the same system 2000 years later. The Papyrus is also important as a historical document, since the scribe Ahmose noted the date when he made his copy of the text: about 1570-1530 BC, during the reign of the penultimate Hyksos king. He claims that it is copied after an original dated c.1818-1770 BC, which may or may not be true.

The other two thirds of the Rhind consist mostly of geometrical results, used in building the pyramids, based on early ideas of trigonometry and the Egyptians' primitive value for π , namely $(16/9)^2$. These two themes (similar triangles and squaring the circle) persisted into Greek geometry through Euclid's 'Elements', which is the basis of the

everyday geometry that we use in Science and Engineering. Euclidean Geometry also underlies the graphics of the high-powered virtual reality cave in the Technium Digital. It is fortuitous and entirely appropriate that the launch of the Rhind should coincide with the first public demonstration of the virtual reality Book of the Dead.

So what does the papyrus say?

The introduction reads:

Accurate reckoning. The entrance into the knowledge of all existing things and all obscure secrets. This book was copied in the year 33, in the 4th month of the inundation season, under the majesty of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ahmose, endowed with life, in likeness to writings of old made in the time of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Ne-maet-Re. It is the scribe Ahmose who copies this writing.

Translation based on Gillings (1972, 45).

Robins and Shute (1987, 11) write of this grandiose introduction 'Perhaps the high-sounding phrases merely express the pride of the copyist scribe in the methods that he knew how to handle, but may have only partially understood.'

There then follows an arithmetical table, perhaps the most extensive and complete table we have from ancient Egypt. The Rhind mathematical papyrus piece in the Egypt Centre has instructions for doubling odd-numbered unit fractions with values of $1/3$ to $1/87$.

On page 33 of their book, Shute and Robins suggest that the method for doubling fractions described may represent either: the actual method used by the scribe; or formal proofs of what he has learnt by other methods; or procedures which an apprentice had to undertake in order to better understand mathematical principles and practice.

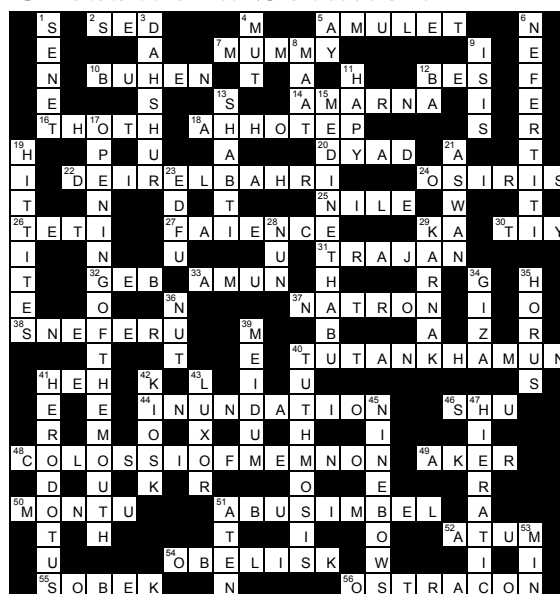
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Gillings, R.J. 1972. *Mathematics in the time of the Pharaohs*. New York: Dover Publications.

Robins, G and Shute, C. 1987. *The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus. An ancient Egyptian Text*. London: British Museum Press.

by Carolyn Graves-Brown

Crossword Solution





An intimate embrace?

Egypt Centre's exciting International Conference on Gender is reported in The Times Higher Education Supplement, 28 October 2005. The following article by **Steve Farrar**, Opinions Editor at the Times Higher Educational Supplement is reproduced by kind permission of THES.

An intimate embrace between two Ancient Egyptian men has stirred strong feeling and rigorous debate in the academy, says Steve.

Mounir Basta crawled out of the rough-hewn passageway and found himself standing in one of the innermost chambers of the tomb. The experienced Egyptologist held his kerosene lamp high and looked around him.

Mummies choked the floor. But Basta paid little attention to them. Instead, his eyes fixed on the beautiful figures carved in the walls. There in front of him were images of the two men for whom the tomb had been built more than four millennia earlier. The long-dead court functionaries stood face to face, eyes locked directly on one another. And to Basta's astonishment, they were locked together in an eternal embrace.

Basta had worked for many years in the great necropolis of Saqqara, in Memphis on the west bank of the Nile. Within its expanse are interred several pharaohs and many nobles while over everything towers the celebrated stepped pyramid of Zozer. The discovery of another tomb in 1964 was a cause for excitement. But there was not much expectation that anything inside would ultimately stir so much controversy. Yet as Basta explored the compact rock-cut complex, the more intrigued he became.

Carvings throughout the chambers appeared to tell a fairly conventional story about a couple preparing for their journey into the afterlife. But the couple, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, manicurists to the pharaoh Niuserre, were men. Again and again they were pictured in intimate embraces. Both had wives and children but they were pushed into the background, minor characters in the funereal drama. The carvings depicted something quite exceptional, the like of which Basta had never seen. But with no obvious explanation in the hieroglyphs that surrounded the images, he later wrote: "Were they two brothers? Were they the father and son? Or were they two officials in the king's palace who had enjoyed a cordial friendship?"

There is another possible explanation, one that has divided opinion and prompted

accusations of political correctness, and one that is set to be debated for the first time at a conference on sex and gender in Ancient Egypt, to be held at Swansea University's Egypt Centre in December—that Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were homosexual. Could the funeral embrace that Basta had gazed upon in awe some 40 years ago be the earliest image of a socially accepted gay couple?

Greg Reeder, a respected non-academic Egyptologist in San Francisco and contributing editor of *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt*, is the champion of this interpretation. While the idea has been around for some years, Reeder's full thesis about what the carvings depict was published only in 2000 in the journal *World Archaeology*. He concluded: "Same-sex desire must be considered as a probable explanation."

In a tour of the tomb on Reeder's website¹, the scattered clues as to Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's secret stare out from the ancient walls. Some scenes depict them separately, alongside their wives and children. But elsewhere, they walk hand in hand and embrace one another in poses that Reeder says are usually reserved for husband and wife. Their names are inscribed together as one above the entrance to the inner rooms; in the offering chamber they are shown in such a close embrace that the tips of their noses and the knots on their kilts touch; in another they are pictured at a final banquet, Niankhkhnum's wife having been deliberately erased by the tomb's craftsmen, Khnumhotep's not appearing at all.

To Reeder, the connotations are striking. The two men, who shared the title of royal manicurist, were also sharing their journey to the afterlife. They had to be a couple. Nevertheless, he stops short of explicitly stating that they had a homosexual relationship, acknowledging the limits of the evidence. "We can only say the carvings show a profound intimacy between the two men, and the people who constructed the tomb were possibly unsure how to portray this," he says.

But the suggestion has been embraced by many outside academe. The tomb itself, restored in the late 1970s and opened to the public in the 1990s, has become something of a place of pilgrimage for gay tourists. Activists use it to show the antiquity of homosexual couples. Reeder finds this understandable. "When gay

marriage is being discussed and debated, people want to look to the past and find things that would indicate that there were same-sex relationships in ancient times that the state on occasion could sanction," he says. But the academic community has proved more resistant.

The principal alternative explanation was proposed by John Baines, professor of Egyptology at Oxford University. In a seminal study in 1985, he suggested the "exaggerated affection" displayed by the two men pointed to them being twins. The tomb's craftsmen had then sought an acceptable symbolism that showed Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep as individuals as well as a single social person. But Baines, like Reeder, was careful not to interpret too much from one set of unparalleled images, noting: "Since the hand-holding and embracing scenes may be unique between men of equal station in private tombs, little can be said about their meaning beyond the fact that they express publicly the close involvement of the two men."

David O'Connor, professor of Egyptian art and archaeology at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, is due to develop Baines' concept further at the Swansea conference. "The hypothetical solution I suggest is that Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were indeed twins, but specifically 'Siamese' or conjoined twins," O'Connor says in the abstract of his paper.

"The artists involved in this tomb chapel adapted the visual language relevant to emotional and perhaps sometimes sexual intimacy in order to express an extremely rare fraternal circumstance."

Yet could such suggestions reveal something profound about the whole Egyptological community? Thomas Dowson, an independent scholar formerly at Manchester University, argues that the reluctance to conclude that the carvings could show a same-sex relationship being celebrated in ancient Egypt reveals an overwhelming bias towards heterosexual normality in academe. Why, he asks, is the same degree of proof not required of depictions of male-female couples? In the forthcoming volume *Feminist Anthropology*, Dowson notes: "Reeder and others are required to produce closely argued analyses for why a particular relationship should be seen as homosexual, whereas heterosexual identities are merely and credibly presumed."

¹ (www.egyptology.com/niankhkhnum_khnumhotep)





In the abstract to the paper Dowson will deliver at the Swansea conference, he says: "Despite recent attempts by a few more enlightened scholars in Egyptology to shake off this heteronormative tradition, problems in the way in which sex and gender in Ancient Egypt are constructed persist. One of the reasons is certainly due to the reluctance on the part of some Egyptologists to engage with recent gender theory." He notes that some opponents have felt able to dismiss Reeder's work by claiming it demonstrated "a tendency to push the ancient data in the service of contemporary sexual politics, irrespective of the evidence".

Richard Parkinson, assistant keeper in the department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan at the British Museum and another speaker at the conference, does not believe Egyptology is afflicted with homophobia. Furthermore, he feels the homosexual interpretation of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's tomb could in fact imperil queer theory in Egyptology.

"If one is trying to find queer images in the ancient past, one has to be absolutely certain. Otherwise people might conclude that one is seeing what one wants to see and that all such investigations might be slightly flawed," he says. "There is a fine line between reading against the grain in a new historicist, queer theory manner and producing a reading that's highly unlikely."

The evidence, Parkinson believes, suggests the two men were twins, the similar elements in their names and the lack of any other case adding to his conviction. Furthermore, his research into Ancient Egyptian texts has revealed that in Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's time, homosexual desire was recognised but sexual acts between men were seen as irregular and on a par with adultery.

"Both men are married and both have children so whatever the relationship is, it cannot be seen as a modern gay relationship," Parkinson says. "It is hard for the European eye to resist seeing images of men being physically intimate as homoerotic. And the two men have short hair and moustaches and have titles to do with hairdressing—there is the worry that modern stereotypes and caricatures of the homosexual are being projected back into the ancient past."

Everything is primed for a passionate debate. Of course, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep will remain silent. In fact, nothing of them survives—the tomb had been stripped bare by the graverobbers whose passageway Basta had used to get in.

by Steve Farrar

This article first appeared in The Times
Higher Education Supplement
www.thes.co.uk

The Egypt Centre & UWICAH

Presents

'Don your wig for a happy hour':
Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt
Monday 19th-Tuesday 20th December 2005

University Of Wales Swansea

Tickets available using the form below. You will need to book in advance as we cannot guarantee tickets on the door. Morning and afternoon coffee and biscuits and Welsh lunches are included in the price. Tickets are available from Carolyn Graves-Brown at The Egypt Centre, University of Wales Swansea, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP. Tel: 01792 295960 or e-mail c.a.graves-brown@swansea.ac.uk

The cost of the whole conference is £38.00, or for one day £20. There is no reduced rate. Sorry places are now taken for the conference dinner on Monday evening, but we can put you on a reserve list (£25 a head).

The UWICAH and Egypt Conference—Monday 19th-Tuesday 20th
December 2005.

Name.....

(Official Use only Ticket Number.....)

Address.....

Telephone Number.....

E-mail address.....

Please send me:

.....ticket/s for the whole conference at £38.00 each

.....conference ticket/s at £20.00 for Monday only

.....conference tickets at £20 for Tuesday only

Any special dietary requirements

.....
.....

I enclose a cheque/postal order for the amount of £.....
payable to University Of Wales Swansea

