

INSCRIPTIONS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea

Issue 3

April 2000

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The Nubies are coming!

Recently the number of young Saturday volunteers has grown from 3 to 12. To encourage and reward the children we have come up with the idea of awarding them with "Nubies"!!!

"Nubies??" I hear you ask, "what are they?" Well, you know when you go into that shop beginning with an 'M' to buy a burger, you will notice that the staff have name badges with gold stars underneath. The more experience they have the more stars they get.

As 'Nubie' (Anubis) is our mascot we thought he would look much better than gold stars. Nubies are awarded when the children have completed training in a particular area of gallery work. There are four categories, 'The House of Life', 'The House of Death', Terry's 'Hiero-gift Shop' and 'Health and Safety', plus a special 'Golden Nubie' which will only be awarded when the first four categories have been completed.

The badges will not only give the children a sense of achievement, they will also encourage a team building attitude; those who have completed the course will hopefully encourage those who have only just started or are half way through.

Saturday, March 25th, saw the first 'Nubies' awarded to volunteers at the Egypt Centre. Francesca Goodridge, Alys Maconie, Ben Mogford, Jodhi Taylor, Emile Williams, David Wisby, Hannah Harries and Charlotte Williams all passed their health and safety tests and were awarded their 'Nubies'. The photograph shows the children proudly displaying their badges and rewards.

Continued



Egypt Centre

Closed
Good Friday
&
Easter Monday

Open as usual
Easter Saturday



"Nubies" continued from Page 1

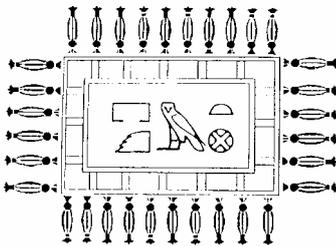
If you would like to see how well the children guide tours at the centre, they are in action from 10 until 4 o'clock every Saturday.

It has already been suggested to me by one of our 'mature' volunteers who shall remain nameless (Mair), that perhaps a similar scheme should be introduced for the 'mature' volunteers. What do you think? Perhaps 'Pyramids' instead of 'Nubies' for us 'mature' ones.

For further information contact the Volunteer Liaison Officer Stuart Williams on 295960 Tuesday to Saturday 10 until 4.

Stuart

Volunteer Liaison Officer



Hiero-Gift Shop opens its doors

The 'Hiero-Gift Shop' is the new name for the giftshop at the Egypt Centre, University of Wales Swansea. This name was the brainchild of Mrs Jayne Lloyd of Brynhyfryd. Suggestions came from as far away as the USA and the selection process was very difficult.

To commemorate the launch of the new name, the shop had its first sale, with savings of between 10% and 50% off marked prices (except books and photocopied sheets). The sale ran from Tuesday 4th April until Saturday 8th April.

The shop sells items such as scarab beetles, perfume bottles, Egyptian ornaments and jewellery, and prices start from 27p! So come and buy your unusual presents here.

For further information ring Terry Brown on 01792 295960.



Mrs Jayne Lloyd, winner of the Egypt Centre "name the shop" challenge, with Egypt Centre Retail Manager Mr Terry Brown.

PROGRAMME 2000

Wednesday April 26th

Letters to the Dead, a lecture by the distinguished Alexandra Velten MA.
7.30 p.m. room 303 North Arts Building, University of Wales Swansea.
Admission: Members - free, Non-members - 50p.
Refreshments (cakes, coffee, tea) are available for 50p

Saturday May 6th

Visit to the Ashmolean Museum Oxford.
Leaving University at 8.00 a.m., leaving Oxford at 5.30 p.m.
Members: £10, Non-members: £15.

Friday June 16th

Social event (barbecue) at Mumbles Yacht Club, £5 per head. starting at 7 p.m. If you're coming let us have your £5 by Friday June 1st and tell us if you want a vegetarian meal. For more details, contact the Museum on 01792 295960.





Call for Volunteers!

The opening of the galleries at the Egypt Centre Swansea depends entirely on how many volunteers they have on any particular day. Many of these volunteers are students at the University.

With the onset of the Easter holidays, exams, and of course the summer holidays, the number of volunteers falls drastically, so Volunteer Liaison Officer Stuart Williams is on the lookout for new recruits.

You do not have to have any previous knowledge of Museum work, or have a great interest in Egypt. You might want to help out with the school parties who visit the galleries regularly, or maybe you would just like to help out at our shop, or act as gallery assistants.



Two of our younger volunteers, Charlotte Williams (left) and Hannah Harries (right) giving a mummification demonstration to children



Howard Ingham conducting a tour on a Saturday

Whatever your involvement here we are sure you will have a thoroughly great time, so if you are interested in joining our 'Happy Band' give Stuart a ring. He would love to hear from you if you have free time on your hands from Tuesday to Saturday 10.00 until 4.00, and have an interest in meeting people of all ages.

Stuart Williams can be contacted at the Egypt Centre on 01792 295960.

A Volunteer's view

Nearly every Saturday myself, 10 or 11 other young volunteers and various older volunteers, help out at the Egypt Centre in the Taliesin. As I have said, we volunteer for this work because of our interest in the Egyptian culture and me personally because I enjoy it.

My favourite part of the job is giving tours. I have led numerous visits and have enjoyed all of them. Other tasks I perform include playing Senet against the visitors, working the till and looking after the House of Life or the House of Death.

I believe that the most interesting, exquisite and rare thing in the Egypt Centre is the Stone Axe. This flint tool could be 1.2 million years old which shows us that man was not as primitive as we expected him to be so long ago.

The other volunteers and myself would also like to thank Wendy, Hazel, Terry, Stuart and all of the other volunteers for showing us the ropes and for getting us interested in this wonderful hobby.

Ben Masford Age 14





Editorial

Welcome to the third issue of *Inscriptions* and the first issue of the new millennium. The number and variety of subject matter in the contributions has increased, as you can see from the contents of this issue. A big "Thank you" to all our contributors. You will see that, once again, we have had a busy and successful time at the Centre since the last issue of *Inscriptions* and look forward to building on that success in the future.

In particular, the interest and commitment from our young Friends who give so freely of their time is most encouraging and deserves recognition (see Stuart's article on "Nubies") – congratulations to one and all. Our programme of events seems to be well received and supported and suggestions for consideration for future events would be welcome.

As always, all suggestions and contributions for the newsletter, serious or otherwise, are most welcome. Please send them to me at the Egypt Centre, marked F.A.O. Mike Mac Donagh.

The staff of the Centre and the editor wish all our Friends a happy Easter season.

Mike Mac Donagh

Introducing

Alexandra Velten



Alexandra Velten was born and brought up in Germany. She graduated in 1999 from Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, with a Masters' Degree in English Linguistics and Egyptology. She has been living in Swansea since last September and currently works as a language teacher in the German Department at the University of Wales Swansea and as a volunteer at The Egypt Centre Swansea.

Her main research interests within Egyptology are early dynastic tombs (basically just very old piles of bricks), the history of the God's Wives of Amun (a class of priestly women with remarkable rights) and letters to the dead (how to tell your dead uncle that your dead aunt keeps annoying you). Her other interests cover a lot of bygone things as well - she claims that she knows more dead than living languages! Her interest in Egyptology actually stems from a book on Tutankhamen from the 1970s that she discovered in her parents' bookshelf even before she was able to read, which eventually led to her studies at university.

She will give a lecture on "Letters to the dead" on Wednesday 26 April, which will probably open a whole new chapter of knowledge even for people who have already heard a lot about Ancient Egypt. Letters to the dead were given to non-royal people - so there's no gold and jewellery to be found in their vicinity - but surely a treasure-trove of a different kind. These letters present a memorable insight into the minds of "normal" people and their relationship with the afterlife in Ancient Egypt.

Namedropping

by Mike Mac Donagh



Khufu (The Greek Cheops who built the Great Pyramid)



Amen-meri Ra-meses-su
Ramesses (The beloved of Amun)



Alexander





Pyramyths

We get a lot of people visiting the Egypt Centre who want to know about 'alternative Egyptology'. They are particularly interested in extra-terrestrial links with Egyptology, usually involving the pyramids. In order to explain briefly why such theories are not accepted by 'academic Egyptologists' we have produced an information sheet which is available in the Museum. It is reproduced here.

The pyramids of Egypt have attracted much speculation and there are many misconceptions about their building and function.

The pyramids are not the first stone structures made by humans.

The first pyramid was built around the time of Djoser (c.2667-2648 BC). Megalithic chambered tombs in Wales date to a thousand or so years before this.

The pyramids were not built by slaves.

Citizens were paid for the work which was largely done in periods when little work was needed on the land.

The pyramids are not associated with human sacrifice.

There is no evidence that the Egyptians ever sacrificed people. It has been said that the large numbers of partial human remains around graves in the early Dynastic period is evidence of sacrifice, but such remains could have been gathered up and buried long after death.

There is no evidence that the Egyptians colonised central America and taught Indians to build pyramids.

Maya pyramids in Central American are very much later than those in Egypt (*well over 2,000 years later - Ed.*).

The evidence that the pyramids at Giza are aligned with Orion's belt is at best shaky.

The match is not perfect. In addition it is said that shafts in the Great Pyramid were aligned on certain stars. They may have been but with 75 years difference between them! Besides which the shafts are not straight but bent.

Further Reading

There are a great number of other unusual ideas about pyramids, for example that they were built by aliens or that they keep razor blades sharp. If you are interested in reading about why so many myths have come to surround the pyramids you might like to read *The Stargate Conspiracy* by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince (1999. Little, Brown and Company). There is also a web page devoted to debunking pyramid and other pseudo-archaeological myths at

<http://www.ramtops.demon.co.uk>

For accurate information on pyramids Mark Lehner's book *The Complete Pyramids* (1998. Thames and Hudson) is a useful introduction and I.E.S. Edwards' *The Pyramids of Egypt* (1993 reprint, Penguin paperback) is good. We also sell a short introduction in the Egypt Centre called *Egyptian Pyramids and Mastaba Tombs* by Philip Watson. This is only £4.99.

Carolyn Brown

CROCODILE TEARS

By the banks of the Nile,
Sat a sly crocodile,
Hiding among the reeds.
Along came a servant,
Not very observant,
Soon all that was left were his beads.

Said the sly crocodile,
"I'll wait here a while
To see what else I can catch."
A hippo came past
Moving not very fast
But size-wise was more than his match.

Silently creeping away
Croc said, "I'll call it a day
don't want him sat on my poor head.
I've more in my tummy
than old Pharaoh's mummy
So I'm off to my riverside bed."

Merlys Gavin





Sir Henry Wellcome



Henry Wellcome in 1902 (Wellcome Institute Library, London)

Most of the objects in the Egypt Centre were part of the collection of Sir Henry Wellcome, who is virtually unknown, even though he was the most generous benefactor ever to British medical science.

He was born on August 21st 1853 in a log house in Wisconsin USA. His father Solomon was a minister and along with his father, mother Mary and his brother George, led a hard, farming and deeply religious life. The family moved to Minnesota, near Solomon's brother Jacob, a surgeon. Jacob was to have an early influence on the young Henry who became interested in medicine and pharmacy.

Henry trained as a pharmacist and became a student of William Mayo the doctor and scientist. Mayo told him a statement made by Pasteur, which he never forgot: 'Men without labs are as soldiers without arms.' He was to make research a main part of his life's work. Henry Wellcome was very ambitious and devoted himself to his work.

Silas Burroughs (1846-95) was

also an ambitious businessman and specialised in the new compressed medicine tablets. In 1880 Henry came to London to join Burroughs and set up a successful pharmaceutical firm called Burroughs, Wellcome & Co. Their list of goods was quite limited at this time and many items such as 'pine tar soap' and 'witchhazel' were not drugs.

Wellcome enjoyed entertaining and used it as a tool to promote business. He was obsessed with publicity and took great care in designing elaborate adverts. He wanted a distinctive trademark for the Burroughs Wellcome products and he invented the word 'tabloid' which was registered as a trademark in 1884. The word entered the English language and dictionary and many years later it was used to describe a type of newspaper. He did not take kindly to others firms imitating his distinctive products and took some to court for using his trademarks.

But in spite of their success, by 1882 the Wellcome-Burroughs relationship had turned sour. The bad feeling increased and they had bitter disputes. Burroughs' sudden death in 1895 made Wellcome the sole owner of the company and he was now free to establish his laboratories and place emphasis on research. Over the years many important results have come from the Wellcome laboratories.

Burroughs' death also meant Wellcome was free to collect on a grand scale. He had always been a collector, but with no particular emphasis until the early 1890s. His ambition was to collect books & artefacts relating to the history of medicine & pharmacy. He now began to form the collection that in 1913 became the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in London. His purpose was to illustrate the History of medicine. Research & study was his main aim. The museum was not for the use of

the general public, whom he referred to as 'Stragglers.'

Wellcome admired the good works of others. One such man was Dr. Barnardo. Wellcome became a close family friend and married Barnardo's beautiful young daughter called Syrie who was 26 years his junior (pictured below). They had a son called Mounteney in 1903. It was unfortunate that their marriage coincided with Wellcome's passion for collecting and travelling; his collecting became a major cause of friction between them. While on one of their long trips abroad he angrily accused Syrie of being unfaithful to him; she left him and went to New York. They never spoke to each other again.

Wellcome Institute Library



In 1912, after the break-up of his marriage, Wellcome returned to Egypt, cruised up the Nile and travelled to Jebel Moya. Finds from the site were shipped in great quantities to London for inspection and storage. His collection was out of control: it had five times more items than the Louvre and had an expenditure far higher than the British Museum. Items included paintings, weapons, sculpture and human remains. It became so vast that the bulk of it never left its packing cases.





He employed a network of agents to buy for him in many countries. While buying himself from auctions and dealers he learned a few tricks; 'I usually put on plain clothes, a top hat usually excites the dealer and the higher the hat the higher the price.' He also tried to keep his extensive buying a secret. He never allowed his name to be used in the salesroom and often used the name 'Wilton'. However, even with his elaborate precautions, the dealers found out and mixed lots containing rubbish were made up around items they knew Wellcome would want.

He was knighted in 1932 for his contribution to medical science and elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. He also received honours from other countries.

He died on July 25th 1936 and his will established the Wellcome Trust, whereby five Trustees ensured the profits of his company were to be used for medical research. This was the first time in Britain that a bequest was made whereby trading profits were dedicated to the advancement

of knowledge for the benefit of mankind.

Wellcome trustees had a formidable task deciding what to do with the vast and largely uncatalogued collection. The medical material was transferred to the Science Museum, London on an indefinite loan. There, two galleries contain a display called the Wellcome Museum of the History of Medicine. The vast quantity of non-medical material was sold, or offered to other museums or institutions on a permanent loan, or offered back to their place of origin, or given to organisations such as the British Red Cross where they could be used. Approximately 1,300 cases of material were sent to the British Museum for inspection, a policy later resented by other museums taking part. By 1983 all the collection was effectively in the care of museums all over the world.

In February 1971 an agreement was signed by University College London on behalf of the Wellcome Trustees and University College Swansea. The condition of the transfer was that the objects should

be made available to research students and that part of it, at least, should be shown to the public. The Egyptian material was put under the care of Dr Kate Bosse-Griffiths and housed in a room in the Classics department, called the Wellcome Museum. Later Kate retired and Dr David Gill took over caring for the collection as honorary curator. It was decided to provide full public access to the collection and a grant was obtained from the European Regional Development fund and from the Heritage Lottery Fund to build an extension onto the Taliesin Arts Centre in order to house the collection.

Wendy Goodridge

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Henry Wellcome The Man, His Collection and His Legacy.
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The Treasures from the Tombs of China

Those of you who missed the recent talk given by one of our committee members, Ena Neidergang, on the treasures from the tombs of China missed a real treat. Ena, who has done much work in introducing Welsh culture into China, brought a little of China's culture to us here in Swansea. The slides of the treasures were magnificent, and as Ena said, many of the pottery objects would not look out of place in our homes today. If only! What struck me, and others there, was the similarity between many of the objects and objects found in Egypt. For instance, the magnificent wooden coffin with a window inlaid into its side for the deceased to see out of, was strikingly similar to the 'wedjat' eyes painted on the sides of many Egyptian coffins, for the same reason. There were even some shabtis! Even more incredible was the mummified body of a Chinese princess, dare I say she looked as fresh as the day she died!!

Over 50 'friends' were in attendance, and the evening ended with coffee, tea and cakes including mini meringues, chocolate profiteroles, Welsh cakes and jam splits. So as you can see not only was Ena's talk one of the most successful we've had but the refreshments were of an incredibly high standard also! Thanks Ena!! And a special thanks to our catering officer Debbie!!

Stuart Williams (Chairman)





ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MEDICAL PRACTICES AND RITES

The recorded history of Egyptian medical practice spans right back to the early dynastic period, consisting of both magical rites and medicine. It was generally thought that malevolent spirits or some immoral conduct caused most illnesses and that magical spells would be the cure for these ills. However, according to a Christian writer, Alexandrinus Clemens, living in Alexandria around AD 200, the priests of early dynastic Egypt had recorded all of their human knowledge in 42 sacred books kept in the temples and carried during religious processions. Six of these books were totally devoted to medicine and dealt with the human body, diseases in general, surgical instruments, remedies, diseases of the eye and diseases of women. Unfortunately, these books, said to have been written by Athothis, second Pharaoh of the First Dynasty, have never been discovered. However, it is interesting to look at the medical papyri that have been found. The most important find was that of the Edwin Smith papyrus which was purchased from Mustafa Agha in 1862. It was translated by James Henry Breasted with the help of Dr. Arno B. Luckhardt in 1930, revealing it to be the first known Egyptian medical papyrus to follow a style of diagnosis then treatment.

During the Old Kingdom a series of ranks were in place for the people of the medical profession: Doctor was known as *sinw*. He was watched over by the Overseer of Doctors *imy-r sinw*, then there was the Chief of Doctors called *wr sinw*, then there was *smsw sinw* the eldest of Doctors followed by *shd sinw* the Inspector of Doctors.

Surgeons (any *sinw*, doctor) were known as Priests of Sekhmet, a lion-headed goddess who, it was said, took pity on human suffering. Some doctors were directly connected to the court and were assisted by nurses, masseurs and wound dressers, all worshipping Thoth the god of wisdom.

On building projects doctors were commissioned as overseers to the workmen. At the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina there was a Chief Physician and a doctor called Metu, as well as foremen, who kept records of absenteeism due to ill health and accidents. One reads: 'Fourth month of the flood, day 27, Nebnefer was ill – was stung by a scorpion' and another: 'First month of winter, day 21, Temento was

absent – had fight with his wife'. However, there were no records of absence from work due to toothache, although most Egyptians must have suffered with this because of the number of badly worn teeth that have been discovered from antiquity. One remedy for treating a tooth that has rotted away at the gums can be seen in the 'Ebers Papyrus': it consists of a mixture of cumin, frankincense and carob-pod pulp ground to a powder and applied directly to the tooth.

From the Pharaonic era, some 100 doctors are known sufficiently well to reveal an overall view of the ancient medical practice, the most famous being Imhotep. He was Vizier, Architect and Chief Physician to the Pharaoh Djoser (c. 2700 BC). Some say he was the father of medicine. During the later Greek period he was deified and identified with Asklepios, the Greek God of healing.

Hesire, a contemporary of Imhotep, was Chief of Physicians and also a dentist. Dental disease was quite common in ancient Egypt. A discovery in a Fourth Dynasty grave at Giza (c. 2613 - 2181 BC) revealed several teeth wired together, suggesting an early attempt at bridgework.

Continued ...

Riddle-Me-Ree

Who am I?

My first is in Anubis but not in Hathor
My second is in Thebes but not in Luxor
My third is in felucca but not in boat
My fourth is in crocodile but not in goat
My fifth is in Ramses but not in Isis
My sixth is in natron but not in spices
My seventh is in ibis but not in Bastet
My eighth is in Thoth but not in Set
My last is in a feather in hieroglyph script
My whole a lady most beauteous equipped

What am I?

My first is in Hathor and also in Horus
My second in Ba-bird, will he sing us a chorus?
My third in Thebes with its Ram-bordered walk
My fourth in falcon but not in hawk
My fifth in Isis and husband Osiris
My sixth in shabti and also papyrus
My last in Sobek the croc-god so sly
My whole is something that points to the sky

(Answers at the bottom of page 9)

Merlys Gavin





ANCIENT EGYPTIAN MEDICAL PRACTICES AND RITES *Continued*

When people fell ill, they would journey to the temples to seek a cure and would be required to make an offering to the gods. The offerings seem to have been means-tested, as they ranged from bread or cloth to maybe an ox or some item of jewellery. Evidence suggests that some patients underwent a form of sleep therapy through being administered opium or mandrake; the demons could then be exorcised. While the subject was in a dream-like state, other more painful treatments could be possibly administered.

Charles Freeman states that elementary surgery was used to excise tumours and that some trepanned (drilled) skulls were found which had healed over, showing that it was possible to survive intrusive surgery. The Egyptologist James Breasted has translated as many as thirteen references to *idr* as stitching, from the Smith Papyrus, which also mentions wounds being brought together with a form of 'adhesive tape' made from linen. Linen was also used for bandages, ligatures and sutures. Needles were thought to have been made of copper.

Many of the important ingredients that were used to make medicines came from outside Egypt. Even in Pre-dynastic times, trade played a very important role in the growth of Ancient Egypt. The mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*) was grown in Egypt from the New Kingdom; before this, it is thought it was imported from Palestine. Mandrake is a highly poisonous plant containing the narcotics atropine and scopolamine; when mixed with beer or wine it induces unconsciousness. The Egyptians believed that it possessed aphrodisiac properties and promoted conception. From Syria and Asia Minor came fir (*Abies cilicia*), its pungent resin being used as an antiseptic and embalming material. Oil of fir was used to clean infected wounds. Eastern Africa was the source of aloe (*Aloe vera*) used to relieve catarrh in the nose. Queen Hatshepsut's expeditions regularly brought cinnamon, frankincense and myrrh back to Egypt on their return from Punt during the New Kingdom.

Medicinal plants were introduced to Egypt during the Dynastic Period and still grow there today. Henna (*Lawsonia inermis*) is thought to have come from Persia but may have grown in Egypt from the Middle Kingdom. The Ebers Papyrus gives a prescription containing the word *hnw* to treat hair loss. The tannin from the pomegranate root was used to dislodge roundworm. Malachite or copper carbonate found in the Eastern Desert was used as eye makeup to prevent bacteria, particularly *staphylococci*. Also a black pigment was used as eye makeup and a salve known by the Egyptians as *msdmt*. This was lead sulphide or galena, which also came from the Eastern Desert.

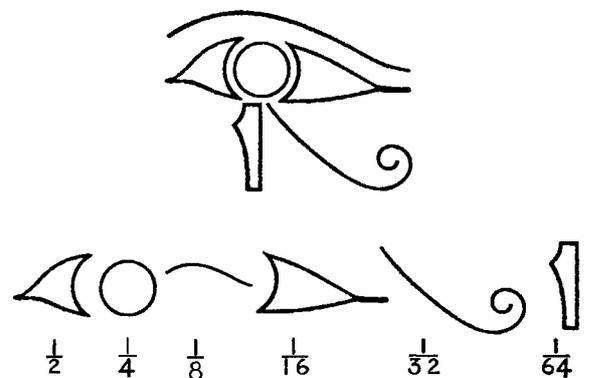
The Edwin Smith Papyrus refers to a drug called *spn*, which translates as poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), from which is produced an alkaloid used for opium and morphine production. A remedy for a crying child in the Ebers Papyrus reads: '*... spn seeds, fly dung from the wall, is made to a paste, strained and drunk for four days. The*

crying will cease instantly'. The use of animal excrement is quite common, the Kahun Papyrus (c. 2100 - 1900 BC), deals with the ailments of women and is particularly concerned with the womb and in the determination of fertility. It also gives a method of contraception as the consumption of '*excrement of crocodile mixed with sour milk*'.

The Berlin Papyrus, on the other hand, contains the earliest pregnancy test known to date. 'Barley and Emmer. The woman must moisten it with urine every day...if both grow, she will give birth. If the barley grows, it means a male child. If the emmer grows, it means a female child. If neither grows she will not give birth.' Modern experiments have shown that the urine of a woman who is not pregnant will actually prevent the growth of barley, suggesting surprising scientific support for this test.

To date, some 500 medicinal remedies list honey as the main ingredient. Honey provides resistance to bacterial growth. It contains 'Inhibine', a bacterial enzyme from bees. Bee's Wax (*propolis*) is also known to have preservative and antibiotic qualities and was often used in the embalming process. Yeast was also widely used, applied directly to boils and ulcers as well as being swallowed for stomach disorders.

In the course of discovering the exact measures of various drugs that would be beneficial rather than lethal, the doses were measured in a very interesting way. The symbol of the 'Eye of Horus' (*wdjt*) was dissected and became the hieroglyphs for fractions.



Horus was the son of Isis and Osiris, his eye being torn out by Seth, the evil brother of Osiris. It was later repaired by Ra-Atum and charged with his magical healing powers and then became a very powerful symbol of healing and protection. The really interesting part of this story is that even today the character used to denote the word 'prescription' is "R", a direct descendant from the symbol of the 'Eye of Horus'.

Terry Brown

Answers to Riddle-me-Re: 1 Nefertiti 2 Obelisk





RESERVE HEAD 4th DYNASTY (2589-2532 BC) W164

by Carolyn Brown

Although it might not look it, one of the most unusual objects in the Egypt Centre is our 'reserve head'. We have it on display in a rather unassuming position in the downstairs gallery, near the ba-birds. Only about 30 examples are known (and this includes those still in Egypt). Egyptologists argue about their purpose.

Although most reserve heads, such as this, date to the Fourth Dynasty, a few have been found dating to the 5th. All come from private mastaba tombs around Memphis (usually Giza). They are not usually found in the burial chamber itself but are walled-up in the passage or at the bottom of the tomb shaft (Vandersleyen, 1977). Reisner believed that the heads had originally been placed in the burial chamber (D'Auria et al., 1988 p 82). Some have certainly been found within the burial chamber (Smith, 1949, pp. 25-27). It is possible that those not found in the burial chamber had been thrown into the shaft by thieves.

At least some reserve heads were painted. A black painted reserve head was found in a burial chamber (Eaton-Krauss 1976 p24) and a head of Kanofer had traces of black and yellow paint (Knudsen, 1987 quoted in D'Auria et al., 1988). Red paint was also found on a male reserve head now in the Museum of Fine Art in Boston, Massachusetts (D'Auria et al., 1988 p83).

Their purpose is uncertain. It is possible that they were intended as an enduring substitute for the actual head of the deceased, or a means by which the dead could identify their own body. At this date mummification had not been fully developed and so a 'spare' head would be necessary.

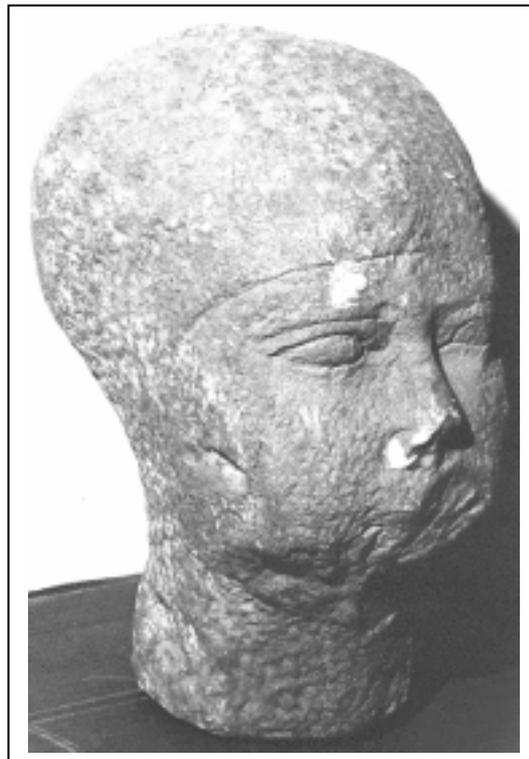
Many of the heads have damaged or unfinished ears and incisions cut into their surface around the neck and down the back of the cranium. These features have been interpreted as ritual destruction, suggesting perhaps that the heads symbolised a decapitation and a means of protecting the living from any evil intentions on the part of the dead. Alternatively, the intention may have been to protect the dead.

Interestingly, other structures associated with death and burial were often similarly dismembered, for example, the southern ships of Khufu, or the canopy found under Khafre's satellite pyramid. This canopy had probably been used for transporting a funerary statue but was then chopped up and put in a blind passage under the pyramid. In the Pyramid Texts, hieroglyphs representing human beings are decapitated.

Disassembled items, including bodies themselves, seem to be a feature of some, but not all, early burials, from Pre-dynastic times until the end of the Old Kingdom. Often skeletal and mummified remains are found dismembered, although often put back (sometimes incorrectly) in a way representing a living form. Or pieces may be entirely missing. This is perhaps somehow linked with the Osiris myth, in which the god Osiris was chopped up by his brother Seth. Maybe the practice gave rise to the Osiris myth or perhaps the myth gave rise to the practice of dismembering. Fragmentary burials are not uncommon even in the recent past and may be associated with secondary burial, the taking of parts of bodies as mementoes for the living, or with ancestor rites.

A recent hypothesis states that reserve heads were sculptor's prototypes and that moulds were taken from them, perhaps at the tomb site for workers on relief portraits or in the sculptor's workshop (Kelly 1974 p 9). This might explain the scoring around the back of the skull. The sculptor would remove the mask, once it had dried, by cutting down the skull, leaving a groove. The ears would often break off in the process. However, it is difficult to see how a mask could be removed without damage to the mask. It could be removed in two halves, in which case one would expect the groove to run from ear to ear, which it does not. Reisner believed the cranial groove to be the result of thieves looking for gold in heads they believed to be hollow (D'Auria et al., 1988, p 83).

Carolyn Brown





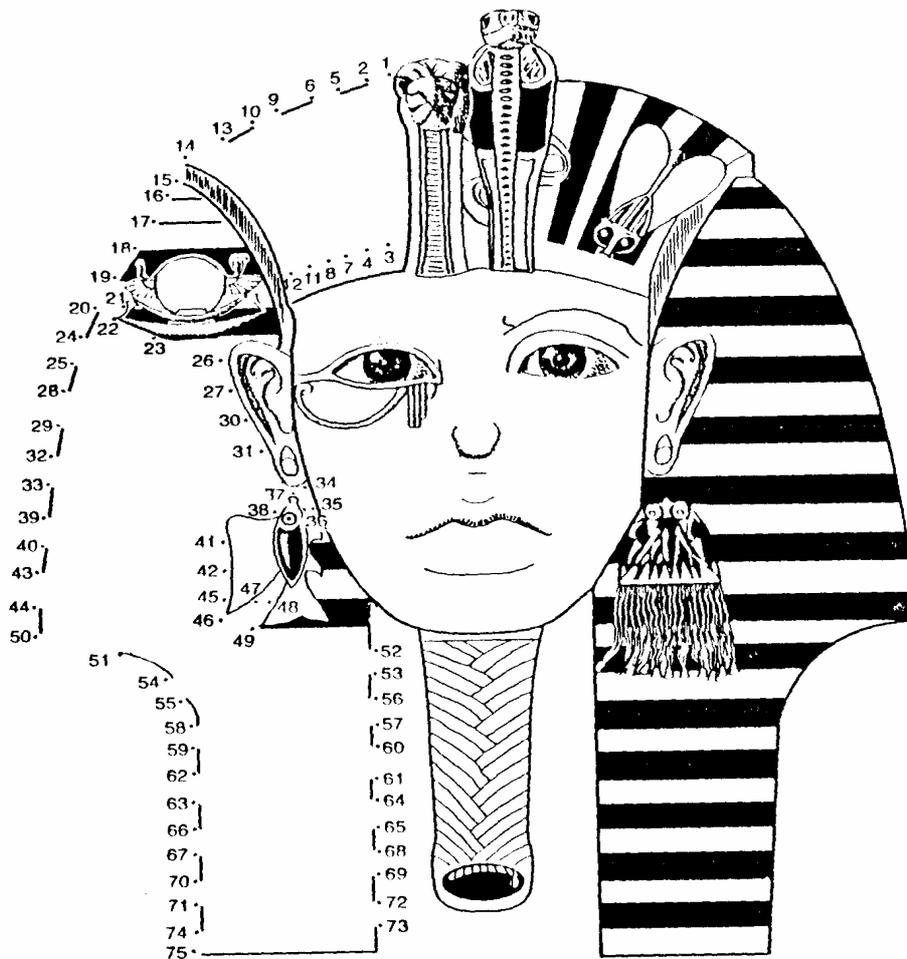
Further Reading

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Pharaoh's Mask

DOT TO DOT

Join the dots from 1 to 75 and colour the Pharaoh's Mask in black strips to match the other side.



Jackie Hanford

