

Conference Report

CRE XIV – University of Cambridge, 19th - 22nd March 2013

Emily Millward and Carl Graves

After their successful bid at the University of Birmingham in March 2012, a team of postgraduate students from the University of Cambridge organised and hosted the [fourteenth Current Research in Egyptology](#) conference from the 19th to the 22nd March 2013. Attended by delegates from all over the globe and with 59 presentations; CRE XIV continued a tradition in bringing together Egyptological students and scholars to hear about current research across all fields of Egyptology. Postgraduates and independent scholars travelled from Australia, North America, Africa and Europe to exchange ideas and network with others in their fields. The CRE XIV committee - made-up of Cambridge students Paul van Pelt, Renate Fellingner, Kelly Ann Accetta, Sarah Musselwhite, and Pedro Gonçalves - did a fantastic job of organising the event for such a large and diverse range of students and scholars; a feat affirmed by the positive comments and overall enjoyment of the delegates, including seven of us from the University of Birmingham. This brief report, compiled from our experiences of the week, hopes to provide an insight towards the breadth of topics covered by this year's CRE and to promote those interested in Egyptology to consider attending similar conferences in the future.

This year's CRE conference theme was 'Crossing Boundaries' a concept introduced from the outset during the first key note lecture given by Geologist Dr. Judith Bunbury of the University of Cambridge titled 'Team Games from Karnak to Kharga: Exploring Landscape and Climate Change in Egyptology'. Providing an overview of her current work carried out in the Kharga Oasis, Dr. Bunbury exhibited the importance of interdisciplinary fieldwork in Egyptology and the potential results and invaluable interpretations it can provide.

The traditional conference dinner took place after Prof. Geoffrey Martin's paper in Sidney Sussex College. Prof. Martin's paper outlined his work since the 1970s in the tomb of the Pharaoh Horemheb in the Valley of the Kings (KV57). His efforts to clear the rubble left by previous excavations had led to a number of significant conclusions regarding the original contents of this burial and assist in giving a clearer idea of what a typical 18th Dynasty royal burial may have contained. His encouraging words for future Egyptologists not to ignore areas of

previous excavation and what evidence might have been overlooked should be emphasised and is very pertinent in current Egyptology.

The usual AGM was held on the final day of the conference, sensibly during the day (to snare as many delegates as possible), which provided a productive environment to discuss the future of CRE. A series of guidelines for the subsequent organisers of CRE were agreed on by those in attendance, and the 2014 venue was voted on. A successful bid, by Justin Yoo, to host CREXV jointly at UCL and KCL in London means that we will all have a trip to the capital to look forward to next year.

Finally, the conference was brought to an end with a presentation by Dr. Kate Spence about her excavations at the Nubian temple town of Sesebi. Her presentation particularly focused on the questions that her team set out to answer when they first began their work. While some of these answers have proved more elusive than others it is clear that the team is providing new indications of life in New Kingdom colonial Nubia and the purposes for Egyptian occupation there.

Before we give an overview of some of the papers that particularly stood out to us, we shouldn't forget the way that CRE continues to facilitate networking and socialising amongst its delegates. While a central 'hub' for coffee and refreshments provided space for introductions and relaxing between papers, as well as registration, book sales (by Oxbow), and poster presentations, it was the evening socialising that caught our attention. Each evening naturally ended with a gathering in a local establishment; 'The Bath House' seemed to be the place of choice this year. Some late nights were in order, but the informal nature of these events allows all those there to 'let their hair down' during the evening. Mention should be made of a reception hosted by the [EES](#) on the Wednesday evening. This was held in the impressive surroundings of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Delegates were welcomed by Dr. Christopher Naunton (the Director of the EES, and academic advisor to the [Birmingham Egyptology Journal](#)) and encouraged to chat to EES representatives about their ideas for further interaction and development between Egyptologists and its related institutes. Needless to say - a few ears may have been bent that evening.

The papers given by delegates continually stressed the theme 'Crossing Boundaries', with panels arranged to discuss textual analysis, architecture, religion, trade and economy, archaeological

science, and aspects of the various chronological periods of Egyptian history. While we can only outline a few papers below, it should be stated that all of those we attended exceeded our expectations and bear witness to the efforts of current researchers to better understand ancient Egypt in new and innovative ways.

Firstly, Eman Khalifa - of Cairo/Tulane University - presented research fittingly titled 'Crossing Boundaries in Ceramic Studies: Applying Chemical Residue Analysis to Predynastic sherds from Hierakonpolis'. Beginning by explaining the process of chemical residue analysis and the types of data it can provide for Egyptologists (including details of manufacturing methods and ancient Egyptians diets) Khalifa discussed the value of combining scientific analysis and Egyptological interpretation. Her presence at the conference also emphasised the importance of CRE as an outlet for international students and scholars to share their research.

One of the more diverse papers from the conference was presented by Gemma Tully from Humboldt University Berlin. Her research, together with Monica Hanna (Freie Universität Berlin) was entitled, 'Ancient Landscape, Contemporary Narratives: Reinterpreting the Theban Necropolis in the eyes of its users'. Tully focused on explaining the layers of use of the Theban Necropolis, specifically the area around Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. Their engaging methods of research and innovative ways of peeling back the complex layers of landscape use were a breath of fresh air to those attempting similar studies. Historical and community aspects and the perceptions of archaeologists, artists and tourists were all considered to provide the audience with the overlapping ideas and misconceptions of these various groups in relation to the Theban Necropolis. This paper truly demonstrated the interdisciplinary and multi-faceted nature of Egyptology.

It was intriguing to see that many papers focusing on landscape and the changes or use of it in ancient Egypt were presented. Not only did these compliment the opening lecture given by Dr. Judith Bunbury, but they also exhibit a changing focus in Egyptology to better understand the symbiosis of the ancient Egyptians and the land around them. Two particular papers stood out in the natural sciences area, those of John Burn (Macquarie University) and Pedro Gonçalves (University of Cambridge). John Burn presented some very original ideas regarding the nature of drought in Egypt and the implications these have on the riverine environment. His conclusions turn previous assumptions 180°, and would indicate that droughts may be responsible for increasing dependence on the river and its growing marshland areas – perhaps resulting in

breakdowns of central control at the expense of developing regional administration. Pedro Gonçalves on the other hand exhibited his work on the boreholes dug around the tell site of Memphis (Mit Rahina). His current work has found that the migration of the Nile in this area was facilitated by human as well as natural actions. Further work on these boreholes may influence reconstructions of urbanism in Egypt's ancient capital and reassess the way that Egyptologists view the natural environment of the floodplain.

Micol Di Teodoro's work on the Lahun Papyri resulted in her paper, 'The Organisation of Seasonal Labour During the Egyptian Middle Kingdom', crossing boundaries in both archaeology and textual analysis. She has been able to assess which people were drafted for seasonal labour during certain months, and thereby able to make conclusions about when and where they were housed during this *corvée* labour. Further investigation of archaeological sites may provide clues towards administrative control in these state-run establishments.

Carl Walsh, of University College London, gave a paper titled 'The High Life: Courtly Lifestyles in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean'. This well-presented discussion crossed boundaries in several instances; multi-culturally by examining evidence from both Egypt and the Aegean, in analysing a variety of both archaeological and textual sources, and by applying sociological and physiological theories to a historical perspective. Walsh began by presenting the idea that 'techniques of the body' (specifically sitting) are indicators of social status and went on to highlight particular sources that demonstrate this, including decorative imagery from Amarna and from the Palace of Nestor at Pylos. In his conclusion, Walsh suggested that there was a corpus of 'shared bodily techniques' in courtly receptions but considered the influence of human agency. This instigated a lively discussion and series of questions which showed the interest of this topic amongst the delegates present.

Many of the archaeological papers presented this year stressed the growing involvement of Egyptian dig teams and the SCA in working with and alongside missions from outside of Egypt. Once again, this crossing of boundaries within the work carried out in Egypt is clearly resulting in unique relationships forming and productive work progressing within Egyptian archaeology.

CREXIV was a huge success in the views of all those who attended, and the committee and their excellent team of volunteers at Cambridge should be proud of what was achieved that week. In

the same theme of 'Crossing Boundaries', the joint bid of UCL and KCL will likely give new dynamic to CRE next year – where we hope to see everyone again!