

Conference report: Current Research in Egyptology XVI (Oxford, 15th-18th April 2015)

When the theme for 2015's Current Research in Egyptology conference was announced as 'Travel in Ancient Egypt' at last year's conference in London, my first reaction was to confront the organisers and demand why they had read my mind and stolen our proposed, but as yet unannounced, theme for the Birmingham Egyptology Symposium (which was changed swiftly). The Oxford CRE XVI committee, like the Symposium committee, saw the potential within this theme for a broad spectrum of interpretation. Some presenters chose to focus on a literal interpretation of travel (both ancient and modern journeys), such as Filip Taterka's reconsideration of Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt, Sherine El-Menshawy and Julia Hamilton's papers on graffiti, and Elettra Dal Sie's investigation into the work of early nineteenth century Italian traveller and scientist Girolamo Segato. Others considered the metaphysical (spiritual journeys), including Cheryl Hart who presented her interpretation of the 'rosette' motif in the journey of the deceased through the afterlife, in Egypt and the Mediterranean. Intellectual travel (travel and development of ideas) also featured, for instance in the paper of Manon Schutz which charted the development of Anubis' seated pose, and Edward Mushett Cole's poster on how ideas explaining the end of the Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean have travelled into Egyptological research. Still others took a philological approach (development and presentation of words, writing and literature), with Lawrence Xu explaining through narratology theory how time and chronology can be manipulated in Roman literature so as to take the reader on an emotional journey, or Ann-Katrin Gill, who reinterpreted unusual hieratic orthography in a text relating to the journey of the Osiris mummy. This list is in no way exhaustive and, indeed, most of the papers were concerned with more than one aspect of travel, so it is perhaps a disservice to the presenters of the above-mentioned presentations to categorise them as I have done. Now, however, this report will proceed by summarising the main events of the conference, including a few of the presentations which stood out in particular.

On the first day delegates were taken on tours of the Egypt galleries of the Ashmolean with curator Dr Liam McNamara, who explained the history of the museum and collection, highlighting a few of the main pieces, and of the Griffith Institute with Elizabeth Fleming and Cat Warsi, who treated us to a viewing of some archival material, including Howard Carter's notebooks and some Egyptological and tourist squeezes. Following this, the first keynote lecture, held in Merton College, was given by Professor Richard Parkinson (University of Oxford): "'Now Voyager": the poetics of place in ancient Egypt'. Prof. Parkinson chose to approach the subject from a literary perspective, discussing travellers in ancient Egyptian literature (and more modern works!), including the Shipwrecked Sailor, and how they interacted with their physical surroundings as well as the imagined. The lecture showed from the outset of the conference how the theme could be interpreted in many ways, and was therefore a particularly suitable start to the event. It should be noted here also that the extensive introductions to the keynote speakers by the conference organisers were a notable inclusion to the programme, summarising the speaker's academic career and research interests and making them feel welcome.

On the second day, Elizabeth Eltze of the University of Auckland considered the expedition of the final Kushite king Tanutamani, with particular reference to his 'Dream Stela'. She argued that his record of his incursions from south to north (with the flow of the river) was both physical and an ideological journey, each new conquest (up to the important

and sacred Memphis) symbolising the growth in his sovereignty. Although he was eventually forced to retreat south again by the Assyrians, this is not recorded on the monument, as it was not only seen to be backtracking, but also paralleled the decline in his religious and political power, demonstrating the importance of monuments as a royal narrative and propagandistic device.

Marwan Kilani, University of Oxford, also considered ideology, here in connection with the Egyptian worldview. After drawing his audience in with a famous Star Trek quote ('to boldly go...'), he proposed that the expanding Egyptian borders resulting from Thutmose III's campaigns in the Levant altered Egyptian perceptions of Byblos. In effect, he argued, what had been a distant, almost divine land at the edges of the world which provided precious materials, was now no longer distant, no longer the edge of the known world and provided materials which were less precious, being easily obtainable by Egypt because it was now Egyptian land. The borders the Egyptians had perceived between Egypt, foreign and divine lands, and the metaphysical world were altered; their outlook, at least ideologically if not practically, had changed with expansion into the furthest reaches of their perceived world in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Both Elizabeth and Marwan had shown, therefore, that physical journeys could have implications with regard to the development (the travel, if you will) of Egyptian ideology.

Professor Emeritus John Baines connected various aspects of journeying in the second keynote entitled 'Biographies: journeying through life and creating a memorial'. Through a body of evidence from the Old Kingdom until the Ptolemaic Period, Professor Baines showed how life and death could be a journey in many ways. For instance, an inscription might preserve the reasons for a journey, such as a receiving a promotion at court, but the inscription itself might have taken a journey through time, if it was a descendent setting up their ancestor's biography. Tomb decoration could show movement through images of actions and of landscapes, or in the way it is laid out in the tomb, for instance around doorways. The talk demonstrated how all the entities involved in the biography – tomb-owner, artist, pharaoh, images, writing, and so on – undertook a journey in some way, providing a parallel to the journeys of life and death.

The presentation on the third day given by Christian Langer, of the Freie Universität Berlin, introduced theories of forced migration, which have only recently come to Egyptology. In his very clear and well-structured paper, Christian set out his theoretical framework, which highlighted the difficulties of defining the term 'forced migration' itself, and laid out some of the many reasons (man-made and natural) people may be forced to move from their country, resulting in displacement, expulsion, deportation and trafficking, for instance. He was able to demonstrate, through New Kingdom evidence, that Egypt and the Near East experienced the various types of forced migration, for example the deportations of captives that followed interstate wars such as of Thutmose III at Megiddo; Sinuhe (although remaining mindful of the issues with this tale) as a refugee fleeing from political turmoil; private transactions involving slaves; and the moving of the capital from Qantir to Tanis because of the changing course of the Nile. Although this paper was just an introduction to the research, it asked thought-provoking questions as to how forced migration can affect a country, politically and culturally, even, in the case of the Libyans, leading to non-native rule.

Amara Thornton brought us to more modern times with her analysis of UK newspapers between 1883-1900, specifically those which referred to W.M.F. Petrie. Through charts and graphs documenting geographical and monthly distribution of the

relevant articles, it was made clear which cities saw the greatest exposure to Petrie's work, and Amara was also able to match the peaks in references to archaeological events, publications and exhibitions. Her research reminded me very much of that of Dr David Gange in the University of Birmingham History Department (who presented to the Birmingham Egyptology Forum on Friday 27th February), and offered much scope for further work, which she acknowledged, for instance how the peaks of references might correspond to patterns of collection of antiquities. Attendees were also treated to some amusing anecdotes, such as the Badminton Library's attempts to prove the antiquity of racquet sports by referring to Petrie's supposed discovery of the balls, and a comic periodical designating him as being 'Petriefied'.

The end of the third day of the conference saw the third and final keynote lecture, by Dr Angela McDonald of the University of Glasgow (and also co-founder of CRE). Like others, she focused on the metaphysical aspect of journeying, looking at how ideas could develop within writing, with particular reference to determinatives. For instance, she considered the ways writing could be used to enact journeys: the layout of an inscription could direct the reader around the building, or could emulate the actions of the accompanying images (the example here was Sekhemka's dog, the captions for whom are vertical or horizontal corresponding to the seated or lying position of the animal). She stressed the importance of reading the original documents, paying attention to the orthography, since the signs used may add more information imperceptible when spoken – journeys of both the written and spoken word. This paper gave us much to think about as we made our way to the conference dinner in the grand setting of Queen's College.

From the final day of the conference, a highlight was the paper of Hannah Sonbol from the Freie Universität Berlin which concentrated on the works of Arab travellers in the Dakhla and Kharga oases between the ninth and fifteenth centuries AD. Not only did she show that they often had greatly varying backgrounds (geographers, historians, judges), but that it seems some of them never went to Egypt and simply copied from previous writers, in some cases almost word for word. Although some of the better known individuals have had their work translated into English, many are only accessible through the original Arabic, so this paper was an enlightening introduction to these figures, accompanied by medieval Arabic maps of the world and of the Nile. During the following questions, the speaker mentioned the lack of Islamic archaeology in Egypt, but felt that she, as a Christian, could not be the lead for the emergence of the discipline. It was certainly an interesting thought with which to end the sessions of papers.

One element of CRE XVI which I felt was particularly effective was the poster presentations. During each break some time was scheduled for the individuals who had created a poster to speak for a few minutes on their research and answer questions. For instance, Julia Hamilton of the University of Auckland took us through the life and work, as she had discovered through archival research, of nineteenth century pioneer Sir John Logan Campbell (an important figure in New Zealand as well as one of the country's first travellers to Egypt). Having time for researchers to present their poster ensured that the posters were an especially integral part of the conference, and that delegates could appreciate them more.

The Annual General Meeting was held at the end of the conference, with Dr Chris Naunton, Director of the Egypt Exploration Society and Dr Liam McNamara, Director of the Griffith Institute, giving 15-minute talks on the activities of their respective organisations. Next came the bids for next year's hosts, with enthusiastic pitches from Luxor (via Skype;

thankfully the technology behaved), Krakow and Naples. In what was an especially close vote, Krakow was the successful bidder, and we are all looking forward to CRE XVII. This year's conference in Oxford was a great success; my only criticisms would be the balance of the projector in one of the venues, which rendered line drawings somewhat faded (such issues cannot always be predicted, of course), and the tendency of the chairpersons to start the presentations a little early during the sessions, meaning that in some cases delegates transferring from other panels missed most of the paper, even if on time. Nevertheless, the latter situation was infrequent, and the quality of the conference as a whole mitigated the slight slip-ups in scheduling. Many congratulations and thanks go to the organisers and the University of Oxford for their success at CRE XVI.

As decided at the AGM, the CRE conferences in years to come will not have a theme so as not to discourage students and researchers who feel their work is not relevant to the topic. However, the 'Travel' theme from this year is carried over to the next in one way, as CRE will leave the UK for only the second time since it began in 2000 and we will all journey to Poland in 2016!



The photograph of the delegates of CRE XVI went ahead despite the drama caused by the fire at the Randolph Hotel across the road.

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