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**Conference Report: Current Research in Egyptology XII
Durham University, Durham 23rd-26th of March 2011**

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The twelfth Current Research in Egyptology conference was held at Durham University from 23rd to 26th March 2011. Over 50 papers were presented on a very wide selection of topics.

The conference opened on the evening of the 23rd with a reception in Durham's Oriental museum. The museum is home to a collection of more than 6,500 Egyptian antiquities, formed principally from two large 19th and early 20th century collections – those of the fourth Duke of Northumberland (2,500 pieces) and Henry Wellcome (4,000 pieces). The museum also contains an extremely large (10,000 piece) collection of Chinese antiquities, as well as smaller collections from other oriental civilisations. The first lecture of the conference, a keynote address on writing Egyptian history by Toby Wilkinson, was delivered in the museum. Wilkinson emphasised the need for Egyptologists to consider the needs and understanding of the lay audience when writing. The primary focus of the lecture was to promote his recently published book, but the central idea presented is a good one if interest and participation in Egyptology is to be widened. Wilkinson's lecture was followed by a brief talk about the Egyptian collection at the Oriental museum by Rachel Grocke, the deputy curator.

The first day of lectures was the 24th, which opened with a panel on 'Museums and Sites Management' chaired by Lyn Gatland. Megan Rowland spoke first on the aims and effects of Egyptian legislation of antiquities. This was followed by an amusing talk by Pauline Norris recounting her efforts to trace the provenance of the 'Welshpool mummy.' The final paper of this panel, given by Keith R. Amery, concerned the potential for rediscovering the provenance of unprovenanced antiquities.

This was followed by a brief session on astronomy, chaired by Dr. Angus Graham. Particularly interesting in this panel was Bernadette Brady's improbably titled 'A consideration of Egyptian ascension mythology as a reflection of the mythopoeic nature of star phases and its implication for belief in the descent of divine beings.' This, it turned out, argued for a change in our understanding of Egyptian astronomy, specifically the *ihm-wsk* (imperishable stars). Traditionally, these have been thought to be the circumpolar stars, imperishable as they never set. Brady argued persuasively that they could equally well be 'curtailed passage' stars – stars that set only rarely. Also in this panel, Rita Gautschy spoke on her attempts to create a firmer chronology for the second millennium by combining Egyptian and Mesopotamian astronomical data. This panel was followed by the second keynote lecture, given by Dr. Penny Wilson, on the subject of settlement dynamics in the Nile Delta.

After lunch, the conference was split in two, with a panel on 'Art and Architecture' chaired by Dr. Penny Wilson, and one on 'Identity and Self-Presentation' chaired by Dr. Campbell Price. Nathalie Andrews' discussion on the nature of identity as seen through the Book of the Dead is particularly worth drawing attention to from the papers in this session. Through an examination of the nature of threats faced by the deceased in the Book of the Dead, Andrews was able to describe the relative importance of bodily integrity and autonomy in the Egyptian conception of identity. She concluded that of the two, autonomy was perhaps the more important to the Egyptians.

The third day of the conference opened with a short panel on 'Commerce and Economy' chaired by Dr. Kathryn Piquette. Flavie Deglin began with an analysis of the native wood resources of Egypt. Traditionally considered non-existent, Deglin demonstrated that native wood, and the production line in which it was processed was actually an important resource to the Egyptians. This was followed by Birgit Schiller's investigation into foreign merchants trading in Egypt during the Ramesside period. A likely method and route was sketched, and an analysis was made of Egyptian titles and their significance.

After a break, the conference was again split in two: 'Linguistics' chaired by Dr. Stuart Weeks, and 'Cultural Memory and Reception' chaired by Dr. Kathryn Piquette.

Among the more interesting of the papers in this session was Ljuba Merlina Bortolani's 'The snake, the lion and the scarab: Egyptian images of the primordial/creator god in a Greek magical hymn.' This argued persuasively through a line by line analysis, that the magical hymns in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM), traditionally assumed to be of Greek authorship, are in fact as influenced by Egyptian as the rest of the PGM. Also of interest in this panel was Kim Ridealgh's investigation of the role of Amun in late New Kingdom society through an analysis of the Late Ramesside letters.

The final session of the day was 'Religion and Myths' chaired by Dr. Penny Wilson. Particularly worthy of note in this session was James Taylor's 'Describing Religious Landscapes: Pilgrimage Accounts and Monastic Landscapes.' In a fluent account, Taylor applied the theory of cognitive mapping to a late fourth century AD account of an Egyptian pilgrimage to develop an understanding of the relationship between the monastic landscape and the pilgrims at this time. Also of interest in this session was Julien Cooper's analysis of the phrase *t3-ntr* (God's land). The paper concluded that the Egyptians conceived vast swathes of land to the west, approximately from the northern Levantine coast to the tip of the Sinai, in their use of this phrase. This, from Egypt, is where the sun rises, and therefore the phrase *t3-ntr* is connected with the myth of the solar cycle.

This was followed by a keynote lecture from Dr. Kathryn Piquette about an intriguing method of digitisation currently being developed by the Universities of Oxford and Southampton. Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) utilises open access software, a digital camera, two ball bearings, a flashing light and a piece of string, or, for smaller artefacts, a specially constructed light dome. By the proper application of these, a composite image is produced in which it is possible to examine an object as though holding it. It is expected, over the coming years, that this technology will be further developed so as to create a 3D image. For more information on this, see http://www.southampton.ac.uk/archaeology/acrg/acrg_research_DEDEFI.html.

The final day of the conference began with a long session on 'Funerary arts and practices' chaired by Rachel Grocke. This began with a paper from Anke Weber analysing the depiction of food in New Kingdom tombs. This sought to tackle many interesting questions, but notably it addressed the issue of whether these scenes

show sufficient details to establish firm dating criteria. This paper only detailed early results from an ongoing study, but these were promising. Other interesting papers in this panel included Emily Millward, a Birmingham student, discussing the evidence for mourning in New Kingdom Egypt, and David Ian Lightbody's analysis of the use and significance of the cartouche and shen symbols in the Old Kingdom. They are, he concluded, symbolic of the encircling nature of royal protection.

The conference then split for the final time into 'From Villages to Urban Centres' chaired by Nico Staring, and 'Ancient Medicine' chaired by Dr. Gillian Scott. Of particular interest here was Fatma Keshk's description of the development of urbanism in Egypt and Maria Correias Amador's paper on domestic architecture. In the latter, Amador described her work on uncovering the details of Egyptian mud houses, in particular through an analysis of modern Egyptian mud houses.

The final lecture was a keynote address from Dr. Karen Exell. This was an amusing autobiographical explanation of the true value of an Egyptological education, and the possibilities of life outside education. The thrust, essentially, was that it is important not to assume that education will be the only thing necessary to be successful in the outside world – other experience and skills will be invaluable. This went down very well with the largely postgraduate audience.

At the AGM which followed the Dr. Exell's lecture it was unanimously decided, given the lack of an opposing bid, that the University of Birmingham should host the next conference. The hosts, staff of the Oriental museum, organising committee and speakers are all to be thanked for an enjoyable and informative four days.

For a full programme see: <http://crexii-durham.appspot.com/programme.jsp>