

CyberScribe 178 – June 2010

Lahun is a site that gets little attention because, while important, it is not a major tourist area. Just this past weeks it came into the news with a bang with an announcement made in the 'Washington Post' newspaper (<http://snipurl.com/wuadw>) of the discovery of a major set of tombs and mummies. The mummies are spectacularly decorated and are most attractive, plus a number of other discoveries were rolled into the major article. Here (abbreviated somewhat) is what appeared:

“Archeologists have unearthed 57 ancient Egyptian tombs, most of which hold an ornately painted wooden sarcophagus with a mummy inside, Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities said Sunday. The oldest tombs date back to around 2750 B.C. during the period of Egypt's first and second dynasties, the council said in a statement. Twelve of the tombs belong the 18th dynasty which ruled Egypt during the second millennium B.C.

“Egypt's archaeology chief, Zahi Hawass, said the mummies dating to the 18th dynasty are covered in linen decorated with religious texts from the Book of the Dead and scenes featuring ancient Egyptian deities.

“Abdel Rahman El-Aydi, head of the archaeological mission that made the discovery, said some of the tombs are decorated with religious texts that ancient Egyptians believed would help the deceased to cross through the underworld.

“El-Aydi said one of the oldest tombs is almost completely intact, with all of its funerary equipment and a wooden sarcophagus containing a mummy wrapped in linen.

“In 31 tombs dating to around 2030-1840 B.C, archeologists discovered scenes of different ancient Egyptian deities, such as the falcon-headed Horus, Hathor, Khnum and Amun, decorating some of the tombs. Last year, some 53 stone tombs dating back to various ancient periods were found in the area.”

a number of colorful photos were released by the SCA to accompany this announcement:



A painted wooden sarcophagus containing a painted wooden sarcophagus with a mummy inside.



Tombs discovered in Lahun, near Fayoum, some 70 miles (100 kilometers) south of Cairo, in Egypt.



Painted wooden sarcophagus and coffin set discovered in Lahun



Tomb and contents from Lahun.



Stacked wooden sarcophagi discovered in Lahun, most containing a mummy inside, with the oldest tombs dating back to around 2750 B.C. and twelve of the tombs belonging to the 18th dynasty which ruled Egypt during the second millennium B.C.

In an article that appeared at about the same time (in Zahi Hawass's person blog site: <http://snipurl.com/wuavg>). In it we are told: "Also, at the four corners of king Senwosret II's temple, the mission has located four shafts filled with a large collection of clay vessels."

These announcements brought an angry response on the web from the Hungarian mission at Lahun, accusing the Egyptians of misrepresenting and appropriating their discoveries. As we all know, large finds in Egypt generally get announced by the SCA as if they were the work of Egyptian parties, no matter who actually made the finds. Here is what was said by the head of the Hungarian mission:

"This is just to inform you that the intact foundation deposits of the Senwosret II mortuary temple have been discovered and excavated by the Hungarian Lahun Survey Project working at the site since 2008, and not the Egyptian mission headed by El-Ayedi as the press release claims.

"The discovery made in November 2009 was first presented to the scholarly public at the conference Art and Society, held in Budapest in May. Of course, the foundation deposits included much more than "a large collection of clay vessels", and the finds have been transported to the Kom Aushim magazine

for further study and publication. Not to say, I am very much surprised at the SCA's announcement and the apparent misunderstanding of the facts.

Best wishes,
Zoltan Horvath”

Dr. Michael Baud of the Louvre Museum in Paris announced the results of his work at Abu Roash, a strange and interesting site near Saqqara, but which is very seldom ever visited by tourists. This is the site the famous so-called ‘sun temple’ of Djedefre (4th Dynasty). Baud feels that a reappraisal of the site is now in order, and his recent lecture made a number of very interesting observations (abbreviated here) (<http://snipurl.com/wub83>):

“Dr Michel Baud gave an interesting lecture last week about his excavations of a pyramid at Abu Roash. The monument was badly preserved and its stone had been quarried in Roman times, but the certain details, such as its apparent solar connections, were still discernable. Earlier, Vassil Dobrev stated that the pyramid may actually be a solar temple. However, Baud dismisses these claims.



Photo courtesy Dr. Michel Baud. This passageway descends beneath the pyramid of Djedefre. It leads to the pharaoh's funerary chamber. The pyramid was quarried in Roman times and little of it is left standing today.

“The person who succeeded (Khufu) was a man called Djedefre (also spelled Radjedef). He was Khufu’s son and, like his father, would have had access to the vast resources of the Egyptian state. His reign is estimated at 11 years and in that time we know that he built a pyramid complex at a place called Abu Roash.

“A Franco-Swiss expedition has been analyzing the remains of this pyramid and its nearby buildings. At 103 meters in length, Djedefre’s pyramid at Abu Roash was a formidable monument, but nowhere near the size of Khufu’s. It was “almost exactly the size of Menkaure’s,” said Dr. Baud, referring to the smallest of the three pyramids on the Giza plateau.



Photo courtesy Dr. Michel Baud. A shot from the descending passageway, looking up.

“Baud said, contrary to popular belief, the pyramid of Djedefre is not an unusual structure at all. “Excavation revealed that it’s a normal monument,” he said. The slope of the pyramid would have been between 50 and 52 degrees, an angle which is just about the same as the pyramid of Khufu. It also had a mortuary temple, boat pit, satellite pyramid, inner and outer

enclosure walls. It also has a descending passageway that takes people down into the funerary chamber.

“We can say that in the reign of Djedefre there are strong solar connections”. An anomaly is the presence of what seems to be dwellings for priests beside the pyramid, along with storage areas. “Usually this is something you expect in the valley temples,” said Baud. “Everything is on the plateau, it is quite strange.”

“Another misconception about this pyramid, that Baud tried to debunk, is that it was nowhere near completed when Djedefre died. “There are such huge piles of granite that it of course means that this monument was at least half finished and probably more,” said Baud.

“The team also found solid evidence that construction of the pyramid began as soon as Djedefre became pharaoh. “We also found in this descending corridor the painted mark of the first year of Djedefre,” said Baud.

“There is solid evidence that this pyramid had solar ties to it, said Baud. “We found a huge number of statue fragments all in quartzite,” he said. “We know in Egyptian beliefs this stone was associated with the sun.” Baud explained that purple is a color associated with the rising sun and there is also some yellow on the fragments.

“Baud started reconstruction work of the statue remains in the 1990’s and it is being carried on today by an Egyptologist in Belarus. There are about 1,100 fragments - “it’s a complete nightmare”, he admitted.

“This idea, that the pyramid has strong solar ties, has (caused) one Egyptologist to suggest this monument was actually a sort of sun temple. Vassil Dobrev, of the French Institute of Archaeology in Cairo. It’s “not even a pyramid,” Dobrev told the publication.

“Dr. Baud said that sun temples “are known monuments... there is nothing like it at Abu Roash.” He added that, “it’s a special funerary complex with solar connection but (to) go as far as to say it is a solar temple is something I cannot accept.”



Photo courtesy Dr. Michel Baud. This portrait is of the owner of a tomb in Djedefre's royal cemetery. The unnamed man depicted here is the "director of the personnel in Phylé."

"Baud believes that his team has identified the royal cemetery used for Djedefre's pyramid. It contains roughly 50 mastaba tombs and is located about 1.5 km east of the pyramid itself. Compared to the royal cemeteries at Giza this is a very small site. "It's nothing," Baud said when asked to compare this cemetery to Giza. "It's a little Giza - but a very, very little Giza."

"The cemetery at Abu Roash was laid out in a disorganized fashion – a throwback to the way royal cemeteries were set-up at pyramids before Khufu. This stands in contrast to Khufu's cemetery which showed "extreme order."



The Abu Roash cemetery was excavated by an assortment of archaeologists in the early 20th century. Image courtesy Dr. Michel Baud



Photo courtesy Dr. Michel Baud. Mastaba F37 also belongs to an unnamed king's son.

Because some of the most intriguing stories in Egyptian history left few clues, modern workers have had to become more and more clever and inventive. Perhaps one of the best of the recent clever attempts to unravel one of these mysteries involves a novel approach to finding where the ancient land of Punt was located. We know that there were periodic trips to

this place and that Punt was an important exporter of goods the Egyptians craved...but we don't know where it is. It involved sea trips and was a difficult place to reach.

Using a very different approach to the puzzle, recent workers used an unexpected resource...baboon hair (in "The Ancient World In London" <http://snipurl.com/wuby7>). (Here (abbreviated) is their story:

"Throughout their history the ancient Egyptians recorded making voyages to a place called the 'Land of Punt'. To the Egyptians it was a far-off source of exotic animals and valuable goods.



Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen are all possible locations of the Land of Punt.

“From there they brought back perfumes, panther skins, electrum, and, yes, live baboons to keep as pets. The voyages started as early as the Old Kingdom, ca. 4,500 years ago, and continued until just after the collapse of the New Kingdom 3,000 years ago.

“Egyptologists have long argued about the location of Punt. The presence of perfumes suggests that it was located somewhere in Arabia, such as Yemen. However the depiction of a giraffe, at a temple built by Queen Hatshepsut, tells archaeologists that Punt is likely somewhere in Africa – perhaps around Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somalia. There are even suggestions that it could be further south on the African coastline, perhaps as far as Mozambique.

“To solve the mystery of where Punt was, a team of scientists is turning to two mummified baboons in the British Museum. They date back about 3,000 years, a time when Egyptians were voyaging to Punt and acquiring the animals as pets. One was found at Thebes and the other in the Valley of the Kings.



Photo by William Warby. An Olive Baboon from Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. CC Attribution 2.0 Generic

“The team is conducting oxygen isotope tests on the preserved hairs of the baboons. Oxygen isotopes act as a 'signal' that can tell scientists where an animal is from.

““We have hair samples from the older mummified ones in the British Museum and depending on how the results look the curators are willing to give us bone samples,” said Nathaniel Dominy of University of California Santa Cruz, who is a member of the team doing the work.

“To aid in narrowing down the location of Punt the team is also performing oxygen isotope tests on samples of modern day baboons from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Uganda and Mozambique. If the oxygen isotope signatures of these baboons match their ancient counterparts the team will know where Punt was.

“He explained that the Egyptians were importing baboons from Punt to keep as exotic pets. This poses a problem since the longer an animal stays in Egypt and consumes the local diet, the more its oxygen isotope value changes.

“Hair grows fast and in a year or so “the chemical signal associated with their origin will be completely obliterated,” said Dominy. Bone is a possible fallback option because it grows slower than hair and the 'signal' stays in it longer.

“The team will be using baboons from the Petrie Museum in University College London. While this work will tell archaeologists where the Ptolemies were getting their baboons, it isn't likely to reveal the location of Punt. “The New Kingdom expeditions to Punt had largely diminished by that point,” said Dominy.”

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has recently opened a novel exhibit based on the materials found in a post-burial cache in the Valley of the Kings, where left over materials from Tutankhamun's interment were stashed. Long known, but little studied, these materials have revealed much new data. MSNBC reported (<http://snipurl.com/wuc5o>) (abbreviated here):

“King Tutankhamun's mummy was wrapped in custom-made bandages similar to modern first-aid gauzes, an exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art has revealed. Running from 4.70 meters to 39 centimeters (15.4 feet

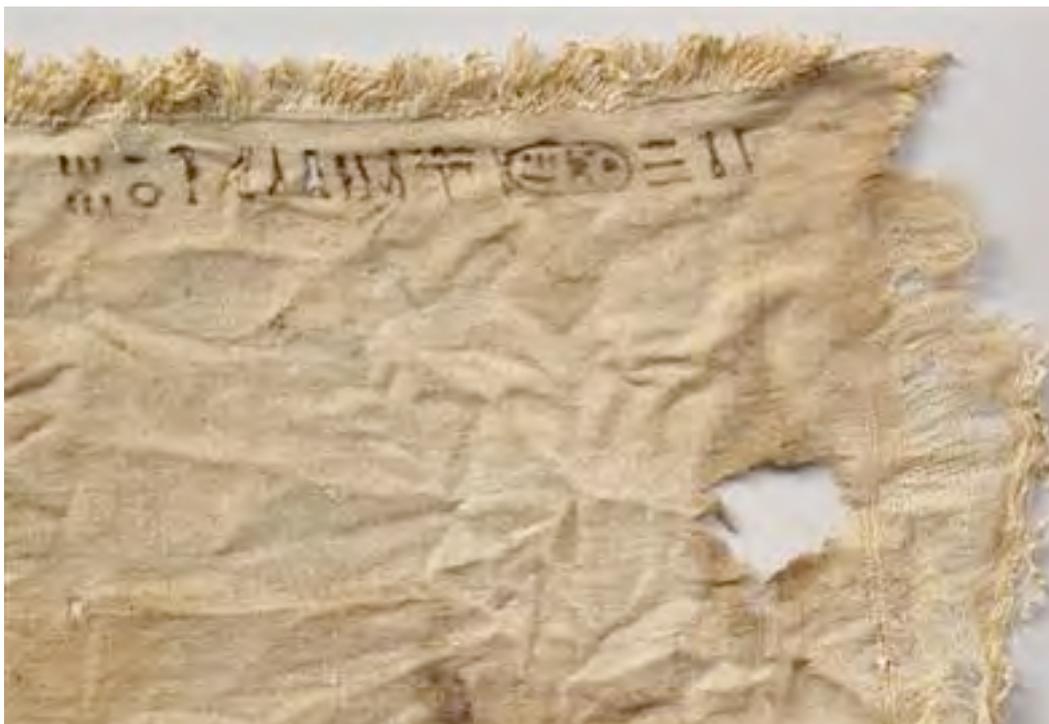
to 15.3 inches), the narrow bandages consist of 50 linen pieces especially woven for the boy king.

“For a century, the narrow linen bandages were contained in a rather overlooked cache of large ceramic jars at the museum's Department of Egyptian Art. The collection was recovered from the Valley of the Kings between 1907 and 1908, more than a decade before Howard Carter discovered King Tut's treasure-packed tomb.

““The linens on the actual mummy were so much decayed by excessive use of resins that the bandages on display at the museum are actually the best-preserved lot of Tutankhamun wrappings,” Dorothea Arnold, curator of Egyptian art at the Metropolitan museum, told Discovery News.

““When the floors was swept after wrapping the body of a king, naturally, there were quantities of pieces of linen, some of them bandages and some wider bits, gathered up,” Herbert E. Winlock (1884-1950), the Metropolitan's curator, wrote in a 1941 account.

“Bearing inscriptions with dates — the Egyptians used to write the date the linen was woven so that they knew how old it was — the sheets provided Winlock with precise evidence for dating the cache's material. One linen featured an inscription with "Year 8 of the Lord of Two Lands, Nebkheperure" (Tutankhamun's throne name). Indeed, "Year 8" was the final year of Tutankhamun's life (1341-1323 B.C.).



Leftover linens from the wrapping of King Tutankhamun's body bear an inscription including the date the linen was woven.

“But the most "curious things among the bandages" were 50 pieces of narrow linen tape with finished edges on each side.



Bandages that were custom-made for Tut's mummy bear an eerie resemblance to modern-day gauze.

“How these modern-looking gauzes were applied is still uncertain.

“"According to known later custom, they were used to fix the larger sheets around the body," Arnold said.

“Especially woven for King Tut, some of these expensive linens still evoke the presence of the embalmers, as they show fingerprints indicating that someone had wiped his hands on them.

“The large jars containing the linens were first discovered buried in a pit (subsequently called KV 54), just 110 meters (360.8 feet) away from the yet-undiscovered tomb of King Tut. The jars also held what appeared to be an unexciting array of broken pieces of pottery, animal remains, collars of dried flowers, kerchiefs and embalming material.

“"It was a perfectly undisturbed cache which Mr. Davis found ... a cache of materials which, according to Egyptian beliefs, were too impure to be buried in the tomb with the dead man, but which had to be safely put not far away from his body," Winlock wrote in his account of the material found in the pit.”

Continuing the reporting of new techniques and analysis, the next item reports the initial studies of ancient Egyptian Faience using a device called a Synchrotron. This was part of a larger study to find out how the Egyptians handled and manufactured this very desirable material.

ABC News (<http://snipurl.com/wucfu>) posted the report (abbreviated below):

“Not content with managing the household it appears women in Ancient Egypt were also keeping the budget in the black with some home-based manufacturing. That is the conclusion an Australian team has drawn by using synchrotrons to analyze the synthetic turquoise that was popular during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaten around 1300BC.

“Eccleston says Egyptian 'faience', a fine-glazed quartz ceramic of distinct turquoise color, was a common material used in items ranging from simple beads to religious artifacts. He says while it was known that larger factories were used to produce the faience, his research has shown less prestigious pieces could also have been produced in ovens in household courtyards.



“There is an increasing amount of evidence that work was done in the home to provide extra income for the household,” says Eccleston, from La Trobe University in Melbourne. “Large state industries were effectively subcontracting labor and the household would get something in return, for example more food.”

Women's work

“Eccleston says that because women did work in the home, he believes these cottage-type industries were undertaken by women, and possibly even children. Among the evidence he points to is artifacts made from faience that have been found in household courtyards. Eccleston has also shown that faience can be 'cooked' at home by demonstrating this in a replica 1300BC bread oven.

“Eccleston says faience remains "an enigmatic" material to archaeologists as little is known about how and by whom it was made and exactly what materials it was created from. Dr Peter Kappen, Eccleston has placed small faience beads in a synchrotron beam to determine the raw materials, and from where those materials were sourced. He says the synchrotron can

reveal levels of detail never before possible about the structure of raw materials used to make ancient glazes and the minerals used to color them.

“By being able to tell where these raw materials were sourced, we'll be able to answer other questions about the economy of trade in bronze and metals, how industries were set up and how materials were distributed throughout society for different purposes,” says Eccleston.

“Eccleston says they aim to replicate the creation of faience in the laboratory using a mineralized solution. He says they will then compare this with ancient faience, to see if they have found the right recipe.”

A report on work at the Brooklyn Museum related something rather unusual...the re-wrapping of a mummy (<http://snipurl.com/wuck9>). Untold numbers of mummies were stripped of their wrappings for every reason from scientific study to simple entertainment, but Brooklyn restored, redressed and re-wrapped their mummy in the original materials. Here is the report (abbreviated):



“The Mummy Chamber” at the Brooklyn Museum features the carefully restored Anonymous Man, also known as Melvin. The museum is currently displaying Melvin for the first time since he entered its collection in 1952.

“When it comes to names for Egyptian mummies, there’s no question that Anonymous Man lacks the royal heft of, say, King Tutankhamun. Even the Anonymous Man’s nickname, Melvin, isn’t quite a head turner.

“The Brooklyn Museum is currently displaying Melvin for the first time since he entered its collection in 1952. He has been cleaned up, rewrapped and is stretched out beneath his boldly painted cartonnage, or decorative covering — he looks a bit like a Byzantine Jesus graced with Groucho Marx eyebrows — as part of “The Mummy Chamber.”

“Melvin, however, almost didn’t make it to his latest star turn. After being excised from 14 layers of linen wrappings in 1956, as part of a treasure hunt for amulets and jewelry, he was almost consigned to an incinerator. But Melvin, given his nickname by the museum’s staff in the 1950s, escaped the flames in a near miss so dramatic that it inspired an hour long teleplay that was broadcast on CBS in 1958. Then he was shut in storage for decades. Only his cartonnage was deemed worthy of display and study.

“But now he has been rewrapped, head to toe, in the original linen in which he was sent to the afterlife. It was an exacting process that, with study and research, took nearly a year.

“Repairing a swatch of ancient linen, or rewrapping a mummy in new material, are both accepted restoration practices. But Melvin’s reswaddling in 1,700-year-old fabric is something new, mummy experts say. “Brooklyn is pioneering in this,” said Marie Svoboda, an associate conservator of antiquities at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. “That’s the first I’ve heard of such a rewrapping.”

““It was kind of nice, actually, putting his clothes back on — two little boat-neck tunics with cap sleeves,” Lisa Bruno, the Brooklyn’s Museum’s chief conservator, said of dressing Melvin more than 50 years after his clothes were removed and flung aside. Even his plant-fiber necklace survived in storage and was draped around his cartonnage once again.

“Putting his clothes back on was easy. Then came the linen, the traditional Egyptian mummification material since about 2400 B.C. When Ms. Bruno took on the project, she knew that she was lucky that Melvin had been entombed around A.D. 300, late in the mummification era, when Rome ruled Egypt.

““Resins were poured inside his body to preserve it, but not on top of the body with the wrapping,” she said. “In earlier eras they also went on the

linen, which became a brittle shell. If that had been done, there would be nothing left to rewrap him in.”

“Ms. Bruno compared Melvin’s coverings at the start of the project to “a giant sleeping bag with a cut up the middle.” The outer layer had been sliced and the other 13 peeled back. Once he was again snug in his traveling clothes for the afterlife, a delicate sewing job was needed. The original bindings that held the layers in place, also made of linen, were beyond repair, so the staff members distressed pieces of new cotton and used them to replace the old ones.

“Conservators and curators from other institutions have taken note of the Brooklyn Museum’s approach. “They have been shocked, and not in a bad way, that we could reuse the linens,” Ms. Bruno said.

“Melvin’s makeover is part of the effort to restore all nine of the Brooklyn Museum’s mummies. The museum had an inquiry from the Getty in 2006 about another Roman-era man in the collection, and “it got us thinking about studying our mummies in depth,” said Mr. Bleiberg, who organized “The Mummy Chamber.”

““When these mummies were altered and covered, they became artifacts,” Mr. Bleiberg said, adding that the museum would never show them uncovered. “We display the mummies, and we respect them.””

And finally, were you aware that there was a golden pyramid in Illinois? In a publication called the ‘Chicagoist’ (<http://snipurl.com/wud9o>) we learn that there is an it’s a bit of a hoot. The story is brief, but the photos are worth the time to check on this site. Read on:

“In Wadsworth, IL is a private residence, built in the shape of a pyramid, and decked out with all the trappings of an ancient Egyptian pyramid. A ‘Chicagoist’ contributor tells us, “I used to live in the northern suburbs and when driving on the tri-state, I would always see the tip of the pyramid. It looked bizarre and out of place, an instant eye magnet.”

“The six-story-tall, 17,000-square-foot Gold Pyramid House was built by Jim and Linda Onan, after reading a University of Wisconsin study that suggested pyramids generate energy. The home, which also features a three-pyramid garage, sits on a natural spring, which forms a moat around the domicile. The water from the spring was reportedly so pure that Jim Onan was permitted to bottle and sell it.

“Although the property is closed to the public now, the Onan's have, in the past, offered tours of the gold-plated home. In 1993, the Onan's offered their odd home as a means to help pay down the national deficit, telling the Chicago Tribune [via The Beachwood Reporter] in a written statement that they "'offer today, free and clear, with no tax deduction or credit, the Gold Pyramid House!... We make this offer in the hope that the federal government will use the Pyramid House as a successful fundraiser, in much the same way as the state of California uses the Hearst Castle.'"

“The Gold Pyramid House is believed to be the largest 24-carat gold plated object in North America, among those that keep track of such things.”

