

## Colloquium abstracts

# Asyut through time: conflict and culture in Middle Egypt

The Annual Egyptological Colloquium  
Thursday 20 July and Friday 21 July 2017  
BP Lecture Theatre, British Museum

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### **Asyut, rural shrines, and the rise of the Coptic Church**

Phillip Booth, University of Oxford

Starting from an unpublished text attributed to Constantine, Bishop of Asyut (c. AD 600) – the *First Encomium on Saint John of Heraclea* – this paper explores the connection between rural saints' shrines within the region of Asyut and the ascendant anti-Chalcedonian ('Coptic') episcopate founded in the late 570s, of which Constantine was a prominent member. It first of all highlights the extensive production of texts which Constantine and his episcopal colleagues within the region produced in this period, and the pressing need to edit their neglected Arabic corpora. But it also argues that these same bishops were promoting the region's rural shrines in competition with their Chalcedonian rivals, who still dominated the cities. In this, these bishops attempted to mark out the region's hinterland as a distinct sacred space, linked through the shrines of which the new bishops were the cultic impresarios.

### **In search of ancient Shashotep**

Judith Bunbury, University of Cambridge & Ilona Regulski, British Museum

The British Museum Asyut region project aims at reconstructing and preserving the deep history of the Asyut region through survey and documentation of its pharaonic and post-pharaonic heritage, including the varied responses of local communities who live atop the layers of history below. The village of Shutb, 5km south of Asyut city, offers an excellent window into the micro-history of a rural community living on an ancient site. The village perches atop the remains of ancient Shashotep – a regional centre and capital of the 11th Upper Egyptian province from c. 2000 BC onwards. The situation on the ground thus provides an ideal archaeological and

anthropological context rarely preserved in the Egyptian Nile valley: a middle-sized provincial town combined with its hinterland in a continuous historical setting accessible for research.

Our presentation will report on the first three field seasons, focusing on the documentation of Shutb's ancient heritage in relation to the surrounding landscape.

### **Objects in context: the Turin Museum excavations in Asyut (1906–1913)**

Paolo Del Vesco, Museo Egizio

Ernesto Schiaparelli and his Missione Archeologica Italiana (MAI) carried out seven fieldwork seasons in Asyut between 1906 and 1913 and brought back to Italy more than 3,000 objects, including human remains. All the artefacts are still awaiting complete assessment, study and publication. Recently conducted research on the museum archive documentation by Alice Sbriglio, in collaboration with Jochem Kahl, allows us to partially reconstruct the work done by the Italian mission and understand the original contexts of many objects. This paper aims to present an overview of the main funerary assemblages from Asyut, now in the Museo Egizio of Turin, along with the contextual data available from the archive.

### **A wood workshop at Asyut at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom: technical and stylistic study of a profuse production**

Gersande Eschenbrenner-Diemer, UCL

The necropolis of Asyut has provided one of the most abundant ranges of wooden funerary material dating from the early Middle Kingdom. The quality and distinctive features of these products support the hypothesis of a regional artistic school. Today, the Asyut finds are mainly divided across three large European Egyptological collections (British Museum, Louvre and Museo Egizio in Turin).

Together they shed new light on a major craft activity in early second millennium BC Egypt. Combining the study of manufacturing techniques, materials and stylistic features of this production, the local specificities will be examined in order to highlight its evolution, to define dating criteria, and to assess the origin of the craftsmen.

### **The 11th Upper Egyptian nome: shedding new light on a neglected neighbour of Asyut**

Ann-Cathrin Gabel, FU Berlin

The common designation of the area between the 14th and the 10th Upper Egyptian nome as 'the Asyut region' indicates the special importance of Asyut. At the same time, it suggests that other cities and settlements in the vicinity might have played a minor role in comparison. This applies to the 11th Upper Egyptian nome and its regional capital Shashotep (modern Shutb) which is situated only 5km from Asyut – a proximity that is remarkable. Known as Egypt's smallest nome, the area has consequently received little attention in Egyptology; information on its pharaonic history is still sparse since archaeological investigations have mostly been carried out in Asyut and its necropolis. However, inscriptions in the tombs of Asyut and Deir Rifeh – though badly preserved – attest to a relationship between both capitals and their strategic importance during the First Intermediate Period. Despite their scarcity, a closer look at the archaeological and textual sources thus reveals that this region in fact offers a lot of information, especially concerning our understanding of Middle Egypt's history in general but also of Asyut's history in particular. Providing a diachronic overview of the nome's development, this paper aims at reinvestigating the role of the 11th Upper Egyptian nome and its capital concerning their interaction with Asyut.

### **Rifeh: burial customs between palace and local tradition**

Wolfram Grajetzki, UCL

Rifeh is the modern name of a series of cemeteries in Middle Egypt which served the regional centre Shashotep. Flinders Petrie excavated here in 1906/07 and found burials dating from the First Intermediate Period up to the Ramesside Periods. The burials cover a wide social distribution from local governors to the local farming population. It is one of the few burial grounds in Middle Egypt with a continuous series of burials covering this time

frame and a wide social range. Rifeh is most famous for the so-called soul-houses; other important finds are less famous but demonstrate how this local centre interacted with other local centres and the royal residence. In the Middle Kingdom, coffins used at Rifeh were heavily influenced by those made at Asyut and Meir and it seems likely that they were even produced there. Other objects such as model coffins show links to royal cemeteries at Thebes and Lisht. The talk will focus on single objects and tomb groups in order to provide evidence for these connections.

### **Valorising the ordinary: documenting the vernacular heritage of Shutb village**

Kareem Ibrahim & Heba Shama, Takween Integrated Community Development Cairo

Shutb is a small village located 5km to the south of Asyut City in Upper Egypt. The history of the village as a human settlement dates back to the pharaonic era. Its unique geographic setting – located on a mound (of human occupation layers) and surrounded by agricultural fields – has contributed to preserving the village's historic landscape, traditional urban fabric and many of its vernacular buildings. Moreover, the village is privileged with a rich intangible heritage through its social and economic ties with the larger Asyut region. However, this tangible and intangible heritage is at risk of eventual loss due to urban pressures, deteriorated physical and socioeconomic conditions, and most importantly, lack of appreciation of such heritage among different stakeholders. In March 2016, Takween Integrated Community Development – an Egyptian consultancy firm – started collaborating with the British Museum's Asyut region project in an extended effort to document this valuable heritage, and to embark on a dialogue with the different stakeholders to establish a level of appreciation and understanding of the village's tangible and intangible heritage. This presentation aims at illustrating the main findings of this process, how it engages with the local residents in order for the village heritage to benefit the community, how this effort would contribute to establishing a shared long-term vision towards the protection and management of this heritage while fulfilling the village's developmental needs, and, more importantly, how this effort, its potentials and its limitations are relevant to other Egyptian villages suffering from similar conditions.

## **Asyut: capital that never was**

Jochem Kahl, FU Berlin

Located 375km south of Cairo, the city of Asyut was a gateway to important trade routes leading to the oases of Dakhla and Kharga, and on to Darfur in present-day Sudan. Asyut's very name – translated into English as 'Guardian City' – highlights its considerable strategic importance, which almost inevitably consigned it to the fate of becoming what cultural anthropologists have termed a 'wounded city'. Its geographical location in the middle of Egypt placed Asyut between rival blocs of power on several occasions in the course of history, with damage inflicted in the wake of civil wars and occupation by foreign rule – yet it would appear that the city's changing fortunes prompted its culture to thrive and flourish. Asyut's history as a major population centre and a regional capital stretches back more than 4,500 years. Indeed the ancient Egyptians held Asyut's artistic and cultural knowhow in high esteem; reusing, reconfiguring and recontextualising products of Asyuti expertise for more than 2,000 years. The quality of artwork, craftsmanship and architecture originating from pharaonic Asyut has been met with great acclaim by contemporaries and modern Egyptologists alike. Asyut's heritage of texts, images and architecture forms an integral part of ancient Egypt's cultural memory, an intellectual reservoir maintained and cultivated by Egyptian elites in order to boost their claim to power, and stabilise and convey their self-image. The texts, iconography and architectural layouts used to great effect in the nomarch tombs from the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, were passed on to later generations and emulated repeatedly all over Egypt. Unfortunately, Asyut's temples, palaces and mansions have all been buried under strata of alluvial plain and the sprawling modern city. Only written sources or clues retrieved from the pharaonic necropolis in the city's mountainous vicinity, the Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi, can shed light on the city. The Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi was not only used as a necropolis, however, but housed military facilities, monasteries, places of prayer, quarries and even a temple, over a period of 6,000 years. Since 2003, a joint German-Egyptian research project has been reinvestigating the Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi and its archaeological structures in light of their *longue durée*. The wealth of material discovered here allows us to write a specific regional history of

Asyut emphasising local patterns of thought and craftsmanship in comparison with, for example, the customs followed at the royal residence(s).

## **Asyut's First Intermediate Period pottery: new insights into ancient material**

Andrea Kilian, Mainz University

Asyut is well known for its monumental tombs of the nomarchs of the First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom. The inscriptions, especially those of Tomb I, have attracted much scholarly interest and have been extensively incorporated by Sir Alan Gardiner in his *Middle Egyptian Grammar*. Less well known is the pottery from this period which yields peculiar characteristics unique to Asyut. The main focus of this paper is the pottery retrieved from Tomb N11.1, one of the few tombs dating to the early to middle First Intermediate Period. The inventory from this tomb is markedly different from that of the late First Intermediate Period. Although 'anepigraphic', Tomb N11.1's sheer size and layout are comparable with that of other known nomarch tombs at Asyut and thus must have belonged to an individual of similar status. This offers the possibility of comparing between the inventories of a nomarch's/high status person's tomb and those of more humble interments. The latter are often roughly constructed small corridors equipped with only few burial goods. The material from Tomb N11.1 offers insight into craftsmanship, design and forms/types which will be introduced during the presentation, resulting in a brief history of evolution and meaning of this corpus.

## **Going to the dogs: canid mummies and faunal remains from the Tomb of the Dogs in Asyut**

Chiori Kitagawa, Mainz University

Since 2003, the joint German/Egyptian Asyut Project has conducted fieldwork at the Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi; the western mountain of the city. The site had diverse functions, such as necropolis for the Asyut people, quarry, destination for school excursions, dwelling place for Christian anchorites, place of worship during the Islamic Period, military base, and animal necropolis. Two animal necropoleis connected with the gods Wepwawet and/or Anubis are known. In ancient Asyut, they were the main gods of the city. Often depicted with canid imagery, they played important roles in the (local) religion. One of animal burial places, the so-called Tomb of the Dogs, dates from the 7th

century BC at the latest to the Roman Period. It was relocated during the 2008 survey and a part of the tomb was cleaned in the following years. Animal mummies and osteofaunal remains of birds, reptiles and mammals were found in and around the Tomb of the Dogs. Among mammal remains, those of canids were the most predominant (over 90%). They include species such as dog, *Canis familiaris* (and possibly African wolf, *Canis aureus lupaster*), and fox (*Vulpes* sp.). Body habitus, mortality pattern and osteopathological features of the dogs will be discussed.

### **Conflict in Middle Egypt: new insights into the early Demotic family archive from Asyut**

Jannik Korte, University of Heidelberg

As the number of Demotic textual sources from Asyut is quite low, the importance of the available material is even higher. Especially the two preserved Demotic family archives offer valuable information on private legal affairs as well as social and economic developments during the Late and the Ptolemaic Period. While the Ptolemaic archive is well known in Egyptology, mainly due to its early publication by Thompson in 1934, the Late Period archive, which holds both contracts and accounts from the 26th to 27th Dynasties, was never published in its entirety. In this paper, new insights into this interesting material will be presented. The focus will lie on the contracts, which tell us the story of a dispute between two families, resulting not only in court procedure but also in the illegal destruction of one of the texts. Discussing some of the underlying circumstances, the paper will also touch upon a few peculiarities of the texts and the papyri themselves, which shed more light on archival proceedings and scribal traditions in Late Period Middle Egypt.

### **Surroundings of 'Siut' as told by papyri**

Bahar Landsberger, University of Heidelberg

This is an attempt to reconstruct the ancient topography of Asyut by means of information from the archive of Tufhapi. The family archive of Tufhapi, today kept at the British Museum, is a collection of private legal papyri shining light on the life of Tufhapi and his family and conveying family conflict. The family lived around the 2nd century BC in and around Asyut and used Demotic as their written language. A large amount of properties are mentioned in various documents as part of a

patrimony and include the traditional attribution of adjacent neighbours. An audacious attempt can therefore be made to localise mentioned objects in order to possibly reveal new findings about the region.

### **Artists and their clients at Shashotep**

Marcel Marée, British Museum

During the late 12th Dynasty the town of Shashotep briefly flourished as never before or since. The town and its hinterland, the small 11th nome of Upper Egypt, were raised from their provincial slumber for just a few generations. The local elite of that time is unusually well documented, as Shashotep was then – and only then – a centre of prolific artistic production. Unfortunately the associated cemetery at modern Deir Rifeh has received but scant archaeological attention, and the governors' rock tombs still await adequate publication. There is, however, a sizeable group of funerary objects, many of them unprovenanced or discovered elsewhere in Egypt, that can be attributed to owners, workshops and artists that lived and worked in Shashotep. Integral study of this material yields interesting insights into local traditions, society, and craft activity.

### **The dyke of Asyut: from Mamluk to modern times**

Nicolas Michel, IFAO Cairo

The long-term history of irrigation works in Egypt has yet to be explored. Primary sources show that before the 19th century in Middle and Upper Egypt dykes, not canals, were the main component of the irrigation network. By chance, the Asyut dyke is among the best documented dykes of all Egypt, due to Mamluk chronicles and administrative documents from the Ottoman and modern period. The dyke linked the city to the desert from one side, and from the other side to the Nile and the villages upstream. Textual evidence sheds light on the maintenance and management of the dyke and on the communities involved in it. Maps from the Atlas of the *Description de l'Égypte* onwards help to understand the role this dyke played in shaping an entire sub-region, and iconographic documentation shows its importance in the visual and material landscape surrounding the city.

### **The site of Manqabad:**

#### **from Roman castrum to Christian monastery**

Rosanna Pirelli, University of Naples L'Orientale

The Italian Egyptian project at the monastery of Abba Nefer at Manqabad started in 2011. During three brief surveys between 2011 and 2013, the mission identified most of the structures already brought to light and recorded by previous investigations. In autumn 2014, a topographical survey started and numerous structures still extant on the site were investigated. The work focused on the northern sector of the site, characterised by a long row of housing units in good condition, where a large number of finds had been discovered between 2000 and 2010 by the local inspectorate. The mission analysed some of these objects in the storerooms of el-Ashmunein and Asyut (Shutb). A more detailed study of the material was undertaken in the store of el-Ashmunein, where 152 specimens were analysed, catalogued and photographed. On the basis of the results of the fieldwork, the study of the first group of artefacts and analysis of the written sources, the site will be integrated into its geographical and cultural context. Further attention will be given to the identification of the site in Roman times and the foundation date of the Christian phase, and to some cultural and liturgical links between the Monastery and other coeval monastic settlements in Middle and Lower Egypt.

#### **Asyut: a place at the heart of trade routes**

Teodozja Rzeuska, University of Warsaw

*'Its trade is considerable, for it is not only the emporium for the supply of merchandise, for Cairo and Lower Egypt, for the use of the upper country, but it carries on an extensive business with that district also, for the produce wanted in return; but its most important trade is that with the people who reside in the interior of Africa. Caravans cross the Great Oasis from Darfur, and bring much of value – ivory, ostrich feathers, furs, drugs – destined to find their way over Europe. A busier town than Siout is not upon the Nile.'*

This is how Fairholt, a 19th-century English traveller, described Asyut. Several factors led to this particular situation, the most important being the geographical location of Asyut. The town is situated exactly in the heart of Egypt, at the crossroads of important north-south and east-west routes. Such a location can be extremely beneficial

to trade in the times of peace and stability – clearly confirmed by the ceramics.

#### **Activities in the Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi during the New Kingdom**

Ursula Verhoeven, Mainz University

Rock-Tomb N13.1 of the nomarch Iti-ibi (-iqer) was built and decorated under Mentuhotep II. At the end of the Second Intermediate Period or the very beginning of the 18th Dynasty, a scribe from the oasis came to the tomb and wrote a first and very small *dipinto* (ink jotting) near the head of the tomb owner. During the early 18th Dynasty, until Amenhotep III, other visitors followed and left inscriptions, some dated. Those scribes started the practice of copying famous teachings. During the Ramesside period until Ramesses XI, more texts covered the walls. We hear about new functions of Asyutian scribes and can recognise that some had come from far away. The paper will outline a chronology of the activities in this tomb with respect to archaeological remains from the New Kingdom.

#### **The rise of Asyut as regional capital of Upper Egypt in modern times (18th and 19th centuries)**

Terence Walz, Washington DC

During much of the Ottoman period, Asyut remained a provincial backwater, a town that specialised in linen manufacture and weaving but where merchants were rare. Toward the beginning of the 18th century, caravan routes from Sudan, which debouched in Bedouin villages near Asyut, quickened as a new powerful kingdom emerged. Caravans from Darfur began arriving more regularly. The fortunes of Asyut waxed in tandem with the Sudan trade, and new numbers of Asyutis began traveling to Cairo and Sudan in search of commercial opportunity. The old capital of Upper Egypt was moved from Jirja to Asyut in 1824, thus cementing its new-found status as the chief city of Upper Egypt and the home of the governors-general. This presentation provides an overview of these developments and the rise of a new mercantile class that profited from both agricultural and commercial developments.