

Egyptological Conference in Copenhagen (ECC)
“Life and Heritage in Ancient Egypt”
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University of Copenhagen

Conference report by Marsia Bealby (University of Birmingham)

Attendees in the Egyptological Conference in Copenhagen had the opportunity to follow and discuss ongoing research in the field, attend a special tour of the Papyrus Carlsberg Collection and visit the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.¹ During the event, keynote speakers from the University of Copenhagen referred to how ancient lives are portrayed in the Papyrus Carlsberg Collection (Kim Ryholt), the difficulties of fieldwork in Egypt (Rachel Dann), antiquities trade in Egypt between 1880-1930 (Fredrik Hagen) and Egyptian pictorial representations as a means of expression of symbolic metaphors: for example, eroticism (Lise Manniche). Additionally, ongoing research was presented by research students from Copenhagen and abroad. Hereafter, I refer to some notable papers discussing textual sources, iconography and research methods.

With regards to textual material, Lawrence Xu provided a brief analysis of the manipulation of time and chronology in two Demotic stories from the Inaros corpus, with a reference to passages from the 'Contest for the Breastplate of Amun' (for example, 12.25-13.11) and 'Padikhons and Sarpot' (for example, 3.45-4.5). The speaker examined the time direction in these texts by analysing narrative technologies such as the use of rhythm and examples of 'flash-back' versus 'flash-forward'. Xu also noticed that these narrative technologies assist the reader in the comprehension of passing time. A comparison was attempted with other textual sources from Egypt and beyond (for example, Homeric texts).

Dora Olsen researched the *snb* plant and its medicinal and protective properties. The name of this plant is probably derived from hieroglyphic *snb* (= to be healthy) and the plant is often associated in the examination of the texts with the Cyperaceae family, the city of Buto and rituals of royal purification. The speaker revisited a number of textual references: for example, Papyrus Carlsberg 200 with a spell for making a knotted amulet out of the *snb* plant, and Papyrus Salt 825VII,9 which states that its roots 'are in the heart of Hermes' (Thoth). Olsen saw a possible connection of the *snb* plant with the *w3d* plant.

Amber Jacob presented her research on scribal education, in late Ptolemaic and early Roman Egypt, through the examination of the Demotic Book of Thoth. The Book of Thoth refers to the ritual of the initiation into the mysteries of the House of Life, describing the 'entrance' of an apprentice scribe to the House of Life (a highly secretive educational and professional institution). The Book of Thoth also discusses scribal education, and it provides details about the physical layout of the House of Life itself. In particular, Jacob investigated how the social, political and religious status of the scribes changed as they entered this institution.

Considering iconography, Anne Sofie Drewsen investigated why the early Egyptian king is portrayed as both a serene human and a ferocious animal in scenes of ceremonial and political content. The speaker drew examples from ceremonial palettes and mace heads such as the Narmer and Battlefield Palettes, and pointed out that the king was portrayed as an animal in an effort to legitimize himself according to royal ideology. In closing her paper, Drewsen used Freud's theory

¹ The conference was organised by Nikoline Tyler (Organiser), Rune Olsen (Organiser) and Marlene Kristensen (Founder and Organiser).

of projection in order to explain the duality of the king's representation.

Andrea Sinclair presented a paper in which she examined the pattern of the 'blue lily', in New Kingdom Egypt, as a symbol of royal power and statehood. While placing emphasis on the Amarna Period, she looked at the motif's iconography and style in space and time by presenting a number of iconographic parallels from Egypt and abroad (for example, Syria). Sinclair concluded that the pattern of the 'blue lily', and its symbolism and ideology, became synonymous with the internationalism of the Amarna Period.

Lastly, with respect to research methods, Lena Tambs discussed social connectivity in Graeco-Roman Egypt via the application of the so-called Social Network Analysis (SNA) which is relatively new to Egyptology. Using SNA, Tambs studied a series of private letters from Pathyris; thus, examining interconnectivity among individuals and networks of individuals who exchanged these letters. Specially generated digitalized graphs ('sociograms') showed the most influential individual actors ('nodes') related to these letters, their multi-directional links ('ties'), and ultimately revealed how networks of senders/receivers were connected.

Huw Twiston-Davis and Nicky Nielsen focused on the unpublished Garstang Stela E.31 from the cenotaph of Nemtyemweskheth-Amenemhatseneb at Abydos. The stela, which is now heavily damaged, had been photographed by John Garstang (the excavator) in the early 20th century. After taking digital scans of the negatives, the speakers improved the quality of Garstang's pictures with the help of a computational photographic method called Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI). As a result, a new reading of the stela was achieved and it was possible to 'rediscover' the family of Iy, a Middle Kingdom official mentioned on Garstang Stela E.31 and on other stelae unearthed at the same cenotaph.

Using palaeopathological accounts of ancient Egyptian mummified and skeletal human remains, Joanne-Marie Robinson talked about reported congenital anomalies (e.g. achondroplasia, congenital hip dislocation, and osteogenesis imperfecta). In particular, she focused on congenital conditions more commonly observed within consanguineous families, such as cleft lip and palate and cognitive disorders, and discussed evidence, if any, of these anomalies in ancient Egypt. As a case of reference, the speaker discussed a female mummy (Twenty-second to Twenty-fifth Dynasties) found at Matmar. The woman had total absence of the premaxilla, a rare condition that would have flattened her facial profile. As Robinson noted, the deceased would have experienced speech difficulties and feeding problems, and may have been prone to infection, yet she survived to reach old age in terms of ancient Egyptian life expectancy. Of course, the social impact of her altered facial appearance remains unknown but there is no evidence to suggest that she would have been excluded from society because of this condition. Robinson concluded that the custom of close-kin marriage in ancient Egypt provided a support network towards family members with increased physical and mental needs.

Thanks to the variety of the presented research papers, the Egyptological Conference in Copenhagen provided an international forum with networking opportunities for academics working in the field of Egyptology; and it is hoped that other similar conferences will be hosted at the University of Copenhagen in the future.