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An Exercise in Exorcism, Egyptian Style

Modern Medicine Expels an Ancient Demon

W. Benson Harer, Jr., M.D.

Egypt has been a continuous source of awe, wonder and adventure for travelers from the time of Herodotus to the present. My personal adventure showed me that the veneer of modern civilization has covered the ancient culture as incompletely as the sands of time have covered its monuments. This cultural observation came with a rare and dramatic glimpse into obstetrical practices in a rural village while I served as a volunteer with the University of California, Berkeley Theban Mapping Project in May 1979.

For a change of pace from my obstetrics practice in California, I joined the Berkeley expedition in the village of Kom Lollah, near Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramesses III. Shortly after my arrival, I became acquainted with Dr. Boutros Waddeih, one of three family practitioners who serve the 65,000 people in the complex of eleven villages scattered over the site of ancient Thebes on the West Bank of the Nile across from Luxor. We spent an afternoon sipping tea while comparing medical practice in our respective homelands.

Communication was no problem. I learned, to my surprise, that the medical curriculum in Egypt is conducted entirely in English with English textbooks. This legacy from the British ensures that all Egyptian physicians are fluent in English and often educated to practice medicine far beyond the limitations imposed by available facilities.

I also learned that village women customarily give birth at home, assisted by experienced, older women. Accordingly, in his four years out of medical school, Dr. Boutros had attended only three deliveries. All had been extreme emergencies in which he was a last resort. Little did we suspect that we would soon encounter his fourth.

Several nights later as I was about to fall asleep, Dr. Boutros urgently knocked on our door. "I need a consultation," he said. "I've been called to see a pregnant, 15-year old girl in a neighboring village. Her family says she has been possessed by a demon. In truth, she is convulsing with eclampsia."

As I rapidly dressed, I speculated on the prospects for this girl. Eclampsia is the severest form of toxemia of pregnancy — a dread complication in the best of circumstances. In America today, with the world's best facilities, the maternal mortality is 10% and the fetal mortality 30%. What were the odds for this child and mother in a mud-brick village in Egypt? Indeed, what were the risks for me in this strange land if the worst came to pass? I knew

about many of their superstitions — about the *Eye Shevirra*, or "Evil Eye," and their distrust of foreigners.

Nubie, a local boy who worked for the expedition, had already taught me the distinction between an *afreet*, a



With a camel for an audience, physician-archaeologist Harer sights through a theodolite.

malevolent demon, and a *djinn*, which could be helpful. I had learned it is appropriate to apologize when one spits on the ground just in case there may be an invisible genie at the spot who would take offense and wreak terrible vengeance. Perhaps there was some fearful experience waiting for me.

I was ushered onto a sheepskin-draped donkey solicitously prepared for my transportation. A slap sounded on the donkey's rump and we were off. The night was dark and my prior experience of donkey riding was limited to a

couple of short rides on desultory beasts to visit ancient monuments in the bright of day.

This donkey, however, instinctively knew it was finally returning home to food and rest after a long day's work and promptly proceeded for that goal with spirit and vigor vastly beyond my experience or expectation. Suddenly, my concerns for the girl's health were replaced with concerns for my own as I clenched the sheepskin in our headlong rush through the blackness. With a great sense of relief between man and beast, we finally arrived at the village of El Kom.

Winding through the dirt streets, we arrived at the mud-brick home of our patient, Fatimah. At the door, the scene was evocative of a Cairo bus at rush hour. The room was packed with people, talking excitedly. They knew that a pregnant woman, possessed by a demon, might not live through the night. Dr. Boutros finally persuaded them to leave, and I saw our patient lying on a bed woven of palm fronds, cradled by the bodies of five women, seated tailor fashion.

I felt my misgivings confirmed by the coldness of this group to the sudden intrusion of a white male foreigner. However, Dr. Boutros introduced me and related my qualifications. Within a few minutes, to my great relief, they radiated genuine warmth. They had accepted that it was the will of Allah that I should be provided to help. *In shaa' alaaah* – "God willing," is a phrase that neatly sums up their philosophy of life. Now, God willing, all would be well and the demon exorcised.

It was now time to assess the magnitude of the problem and the resources at hand to meet it. I knew that Dr. Boutros had his total stock of drugs, and every piece of medical equipment he owned, in a bag the size of a large camera case slung over his shoulder. I was soon impressed that, while his supplies were limited, they were well chosen.

From the family, we learned that this was Fatimah's second pregnancy. Her first had terminated one year earlier, shortly after she had turned 14 years old. The baby was prematurely born at six months, and had died shortly after birth, an event so common with the first pregnancies of the child brides of the area that it is almost taken for granted.

This time, however, Fatimah was only a month from term. Typically, she had never seen a doctor. For the preceding couple of weeks, she had not felt well and had developed puffiness of the face, hands and feet. Increasingly severe headaches were accompanied by blurred vision and abdominal pains – the classic symptoms of severe toxemia of pregnancy and the impending convulsions of eclampsia.

The village soothsayer had provided her with an amulet verse of the Koran inscribed on a scrap of paper folded in the proper fashion to provide relief for her. The family, devout Moslems, also had thoughtfully tacked a picture of the Madonna and Child to her wall. As her condition grew

worse, the superstitious fears of the demon grew. It was even hinted that an offering had been made to the ancient gods at the nearby temple of Medinet Habu. Nevertheless, the demon arrived to wrack her body with convulsions and the family had turned to Dr. Boutros as their last resort. The American obstetrician was an unexpected bonus.

Rapid examination showed Fatimah to be comatose with a blood pressure so high that fatal cerebral hemorrhage could easily occur. Fortunately, conditions were very favorable to induce labor. This was the crucial beneficial finding, because even at the most advanced medical centers of the world, the ultimate treatment of eclampsia is simply to deliver the baby by inducing labor or by cesarean section. Fatimah's condition was so critical that attempting a night transfer across the Nile to the hospital at Luxor was out of the question.

Dr. Boutros' limited pharmacopoeia contained the key items we needed. Valium was given intravenously to stop her convulsions, Darvon was given intravenously for pain relief, and Pitocin was given to induce labor. We had two half-bottles of glucose water for intravenous fluids. It was all we needed. As Dr. Boutros sorted out his equipment, he barked out a command: "*Yiglee miya!*" While surveying in the hot sun, *miya* was one of the first Arabic words I learned – water. Of course. "Boil Water!" A pain of anguish shot through me. Since childhood, I've watched movies where the doctor came to the cabin in the wilderness and sent the husband off to boil water. I've practiced obstetrics for over 20 years, delivered thousands of babies, and never had the opportunity to ask anyone to boil water. And here Dr. Boutros, coming for his fourth delivery in as many years, beat me to this classic line!

The mud-brick room was about 10 feet square. Palm fronds loosely spread over the ceiling provided broken shade during the day. On Dr. Boutros' request for light, a single naked bulb on an extension cord was dropped down through this ceiling to be our sole source of illumination. We attached our IV bottle to another frond. As the intravenous infusion induced labor, Dr. Boutros persuaded the women that it would be effective without the traditional local supplement of an onion inserted in the rectum to promote good labor.

No longer convulsing, Fatimah's body was consigned to one woman holding her head in her lap and another squatting at each hip. As labor progressed, they rotated their positions almost hourly, usually coincident with the arrival of glasses of strong syrup-sweet tea for Dr. Boutros and me. They were obviously relieved that the demon was quieted and I, too, felt at ease. Modern medicine was exorcising the ancient demon.

Two battered wooden chairs and a decrepit table were brought into the room, which had no furnishings other than the crude bed. Chickens wandered in and out. I was



Dr. Harer visits his patients not long after Fatimah safely delivered her healthy son.

startled when we were joined by a young man who, it rapidly became apparent, was mentally retarded. With gentleness and kindness, he was eased from the room. I was deeply impressed with the manner in which he was treated – a marked contrast to what I would have expected in America. They explained to me that such people are “special to Allah” and, accordingly, treated with respect and consideration.

In examining Fatimah during her labor, I learned of another prevailing custom of rural Egypt. Like all the women of the village, she had been circumcised. This procedure, which involves excision of most of the labia minora and part of the clitoris, is traditionally carried out at about age three to four months. It is done by one of the older women of the village using a razor blade or a piece of broken glass. In other villages near the Delta, this is delayed until puberty – sometimes with disastrous emotional and/or physical consequences.

I was shocked to learn of this procedure and I asked if it was simply an ancient tradition or was intended to serve some purpose. It was explained that this was an act of kindness for the girl as well as an important protection for the reputation of the family. They believed that if this were not done, the woman would have uncontrollable sexual passions that would lead her to become a prostitute, thus disgracing herself and her family. Indeed, there was ample precedent in the village of killing a girl who became pregnant out of wedlock to preserve her family’s honor.

The eight hours of Fatimah’s labor passed quickly as we stayed at her side. With Dr. Boutros translating and filling

in from his own knowledge and observations, I gained an insight into sexual customs, mores, and morals rarely afforded an outsider.

The villagers regard the splendid monuments of the pharaohs as repositories of ancient power, particularly in matters of sex and reproduction. The sacred lake at Medinet Habu remains today as a small pool of brackish water ignored by most tourists and is viewed with distaste by those who do see it. Yet it is well known in the village that a barren woman may bathe in the pool at night, drink of that potent water and not only conceive but bring forth a boy. Some hold, however, that this will not work unless she first walks three times around the

perimeter of the mortuary temple situated near the pool.

The ancient god Min was a symbol of sexual virility and power, typically portrayed on the monument walls with an erect penis, although in many cases the organ has been scraped off as if in censorship. Tourists are told this was done by puritanical Copts, the early Christians who were offended by the ancient pagan gods. This is partly true, but the villagers know better. The stone scraped from those sacred parts carries with it the power to make the weak strong, the impotent virile, the barren fertile. Villagers afflicted with such problems will not hesitate to utilize this effective remedy if they can elude the guards. It is not defacing the monument but taking its magic power. Indeed, the greatest tragedy for a woman is to be barren, but it is almost as bad to have daughters and no son.

Shortly after dawn, Fatimah’s baby was ready to deliver. Fatimah was still unconscious, but her vital signs were stable, and I felt elated that her problem was under control. The demon, however, might still claim one victim, since the baby’s fate remained in doubt. Because we were never able to hear the baby’s heartbeat with Dr. Boutros’ standard stethoscope, we prepared the family for the fact that the baby would probably be stillborn.

Dr. Boutros had soaked his obstetrical forceps in the boiling water, but they were not needed. A small episiotomy was performed with scissors (the women present would have used a fragment of broken glass) and the baby was delivered, weighing about five pounds. Its prompt gasp and cry was followed by ear-piercing shrieks of joy from the women.

“*Walad! Ilhamdu lillah!*” “It’s a boy! Praise Allah!” I experienced once more that indescribable elation that would make it difficult for me ever to give up the practice of obstetrics.

The rest, however interesting, is an aftermath. After the placenta was delivered and the episiotomy sutured, the patriarch of the family entered with a tray of glasses with hot water and buffalo milk sweetened with molasses. We drank this rather ceremoniously while Fatimah’s sister dug a hole beside the bed and buried the placenta. She added a mixture of raw sugar and spices “to assure a good pregnancy next time”. Meanwhile, the baby had been dried off and wrapped in an appalling assortment of rags (which Dr. Boutros had insisted at least be washed and clean) so that it would appear to be a worthless bundle and thus deceive the “Evil Eye.”

I felt as if I could win an election for mayor of the village as I shook hands with the members of her extended family. Most of the village people were in some manner related; here the ideal marriage is between first cousins. The sun was well above the horizon when, satisfied that our patient’s condition was stable, Dr. Boutros and I remounted the donkeys to return to Kom Lollah. Tired but exhilarated in the bright sunlight, riding a donkey seemed to come naturally.

Fatimah did not regain full consciousness for another 24 hours and was totally unaware of the drama in which she was the central figure. When I revisited her the following day, the family wished to name the baby after me. But as the name William Benson does not roll freely off the Egyptian tongue, it was decided instead that I should choose a name. With the help of Dr. Boutros, we selected “Naim” which, as I understand it, roughly corresponds to a Moslem form of paradise. We sipped tamarind tea in celebration while Fatimah nursed Naim with the family smiling happily. I shared their joy in the outcome of my one and only experience in obstetrical exorcism.

A postscript to this narrative came upon my return with the expedition a year later. As Dr. Boutros led me through the winding streets of El Kom to Fatimah’s home, I felt strangely disoriented. After an emotional reunion with Fatimah, Naim and her family, I felt certain

that I was not in the same house. When this was confirmed, they explained to me that when a woman marries she moves into her husband’s family’s house to live. However, the birth of a child is regarded as an event so threatening and likely to attract the “Evil Eye” to a household that it represents an unacceptable risk to the husband’s family. Thus the woman is returned to her own family’s home for the birth and remains there for 40 days until it is safe for her to return.

The wisdom of this custom had been confirmed by Fatimah’s experience. The story of her possession by the demon, and the American doctor who had come to save her, was becoming part of the lore of the village.

On a visit 18 months later, Dr. Harer finds Naim robust and Fatimah in good spirits.



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Hogging In Ancient Egypt

Richmond T. Prehn

This short essay does not describe how the pharaohs kept their pigs, albeit domestic pigs were commonly husbanded in ancient Egypt. Rather, it is a précis of a talk that I gave at a study group meeting of the Ancient Egypt Studies Association in Seattle concerning a problem

or welds that they became, for all practical purposes, a single rigid structure; thus, hogging could not occur. A wooden vessel, in contrast, is composed of numerous relatively small pieces of wood, often sewn together as in ancient Egypt (and, in many parts of the third world, even in modern times). The structure of a wooden ship,

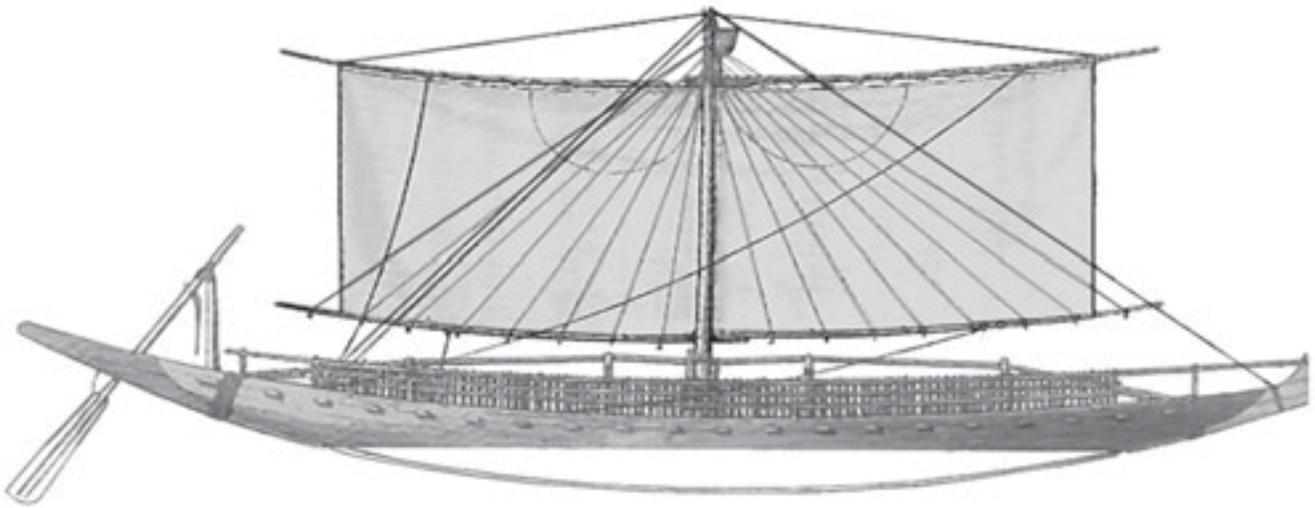


Fig. 1 (New Kingdom ship/Landstrm)

peculiar to wooden boats and, in that presentation, compared the ancient Egyptian solutions with those devised elsewhere.

Hogging is the nautical term that describes the unfortunate tendency of the ends of wooden boats and ships to sag as they age. Because the middle portion of the boat always displaces more water than the ends, and is consequently pushed up by the supporting water to a greater extent, the ends eventually droop. This is seen in an exaggerated form in boats, such as many in ancient Egypt, in which the ends rose high above the waterline and therefore completely lacked any support from the water (Fig. 1).

Hogging tends to occur even when the ends of the vessel are designed to be immersed, as the support by the water, in relation to the load that requires the support, is almost always less at the bow and stern than it is amidships. This uneven support eventuates in hogging, which was a continuing problem until the age of iron and steel. Iron ships were so securely fastened by rivets

even when fastened with wooden pegs or, in later times, with iron rivets, lacks sufficient intrinsic rigidity to prevent eventual hogging.

Most of the methods used to combat hogging can be categorized into one of three basic types: hogging trusses, plank immobilizations, and cross beams.

HOGGING TRUSSES

One commonly employed technique used in ancient Egypt to prevent hogging was the installation of a hogging

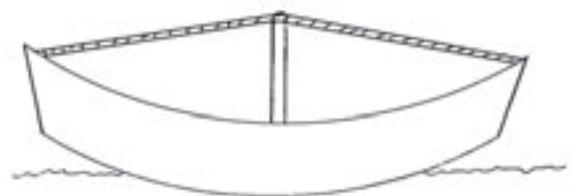


Fig. 2 (Hogging truss diagram/by author)

truss. One or more short posts were set upright amidships and a hogging cable (a stout rope) was run over the tops and secured at the ends of the boat. The cable, under tension, supported the ends of the vessel while the post or posts, under compression, pushed down amidships,

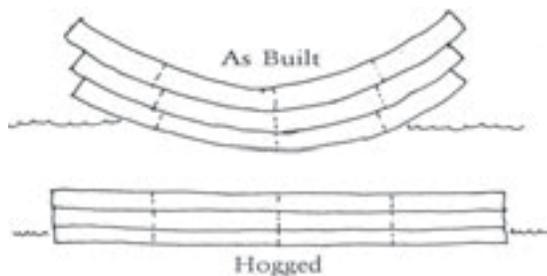


Fig. 3 (Plank slippage diagram/by author)

thus counteracting the tendency to hog (Figs. 1 and 2).

Hogging cables were installed on many ancient Egyptian craft. They tended to be used on heavy-load carriers such as Hatshepsut's granite barges or on sea-going vessels, but were often not installed on riverine and ceremonial ships such as the great ship of Khufu. Hogging trusses, though possibly an ancient Egyptian invention, are such logical devices that they were used in modified form on some more modern ships in Europe and America, especially those ships of shallow draft, until iron replaced wood in the middle of the 19th century. They were used on almost all Mississippi river boats, where the cables became iron bars, and on Long Island Sound steamers where the cable became a rigid steel girder.

The hogging truss was an overhead cable, rod or girder that was placed under tension to support the ends of some wooden ships, both ancient and more modern. By contrast, in American wooden warships, such as the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides of War of 1812 fame), the tendency to hog was counteracted by an interesting system that might be considered the exact opposite of the hogging truss. During the most recent dry-docking and refurbishing of that famous frigate it was found that her ends had drooped by about a foot and a half! The reason for this hogging was not only the ship's age, but in addition, it was found that, during an earlier restoration, a vital anti-hogging system had been, for some unknown reason, removed. This was a system of heavy curved wooden beams that had run diagonally along the inside of the planking from near to the deck, at the bow and stern respectively, down to the keel near the center of the ship. These beams had been under compression and had served as struts to support the bow and stern while pressing down on the ship's backbone or keel near its center. The marks where these beams had been could be easily seen along the inner surface of the planking. After

the ship had been slowly straightened, i.e., after the hog had been removed, new compression beams were again installed in their original positions so that future hogging of this famous old American warship should be much reduced.

PLANKING IMMOBILIZATIONS

One of the structural weaknesses that contribute to the susceptibility to hogging is the side section of wooden vessels. Side planking consists of numerous separate pieces that are held together by a variety of means. As is made clear in Fig. 3, as a ship hogs there is a tendency for the planks to slide to a slight degree along each other, a process that the figure exaggerates. If this movement could be restricted or prevented, hogging might be much reduced.

In order to prevent movement of the side planks, a variety of methods were employed at various times and in various parts of the world. In much of the ancient world including Egypt, planks were sewn together and/or were held to each other by rope ligatures. Among the methods also common to ancient Egypt and many other cultures was the use of *tenons*. Tenons are pieces of wood shaped to fit into matching holes or recesses in the edges of adjacent planks. The diagram in Fig. 4 will make their usage obvious.

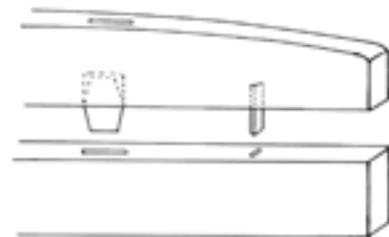


Fig. 4 (Tenon diagram/Ward)

In ancient Egyptian shipbuilding, some authorities suggest that tenons were probably used primarily to hold the side planking to the proper curve during construction rather than to immobilize the adjacent planks after the ship was complete. This may have been necessary because Egyptian ships, like other ancient vessels, were built without frames, i.e., the planks of the sides were assembled without being fastened to the ribs that in later Northern European construction were usually set up first and which, in these later craft, established the vessel's shape. The shape of ancient vessels, Egyptian and otherwise, was imparted by the shape of the planks as adjacent planks were fastened together. After the shape of an ancient Egyptian vessel had been established, curved frames or ribs were sometimes placed inside the

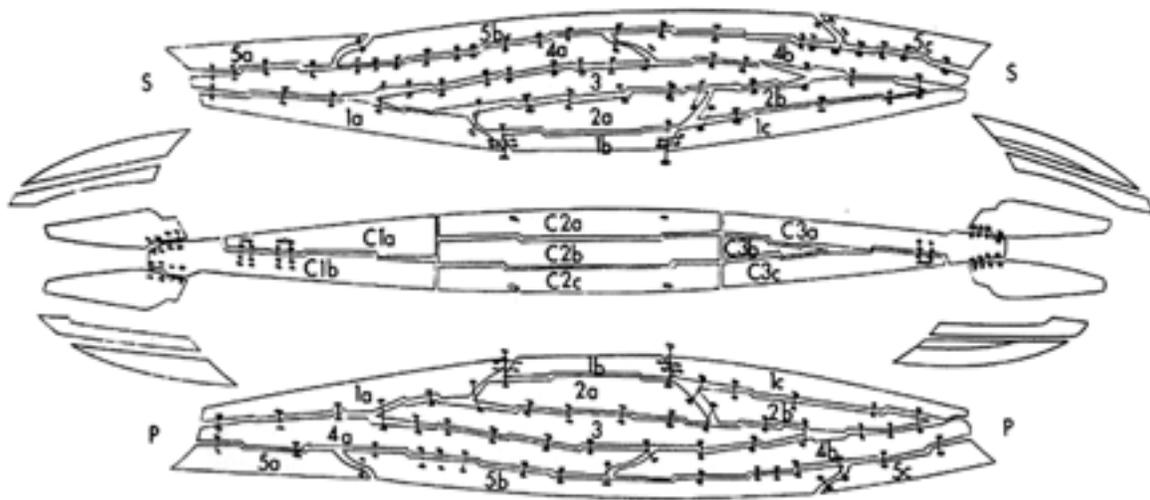


Fig. 5 (Khufu ship planking plan/Ward)

nearly completed ship and held in place by various lashings. The ribs, when used, also helped to immobilize the planking.

One method of immobilizing the side planking was sometimes used by the ancient Egyptian shipbuilders to an astounding extent and, although used in other cultures to a small degree, probably can be considered a peculiarity of ancient Egyptian shipbuilding. This was the use of joggled edges and irregular plank shapes. The shapes of the planks in the great ship of Khufu are shown in Fig. 5.

Although this wonderful vessel is constructed of beautiful long timbers, thought to be Lebanon cedar, the shapes are not entirely uniform and the joggles or hooked joints can be clearly seen. The irregular shape and particularly the joggles help to keep the planks from sliding one against another.

The irregularity of the side planks of many ancient

Egyptian ships is demonstrated in its extreme form in the reassembly of a part of the side planking of a boat from Lisht. In this case, the craft had been retired and its planks unceremoniously recycled as part of a roadbed around the early 12th Dynasty pyramid of Senusret I (c. 1950 BCE). However, the irregular shape leaves no doubt as to their original relative positions in the reassembled side of the boat (Fig. 6).

The Lisht boat is thought to be a heavy-load workboat made of tamarisk and acacia. It is my belief, although I have not as yet seen any suggestion of a similar belief by a more competent authority, that the irregularity of the planking was an intentional anti-hogging device. It is obvious that the planks in this planking jigsaw puzzle were rather securely immobilized by the interlocking of the various pieces. Imagine the craftsmanship required to fit these irregular shapes together to form watertight joints!

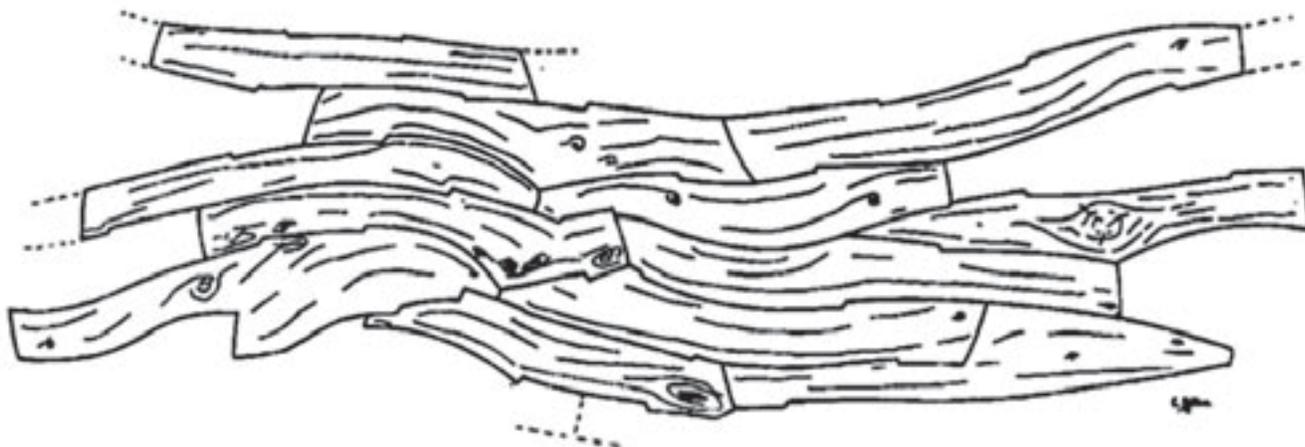


Fig. 6 (Lisht ship planking plan/Ward)

It might be suggested that the ancient Egyptians went to all this labor, not merely to prevent hogging, but because timber was exceedingly scarce and expensive. I doubt this explanation, although it may be partially correct. I think that the savings in valuable timber, by making use of naturally irregular shapes, would have been slight. Furthermore, a

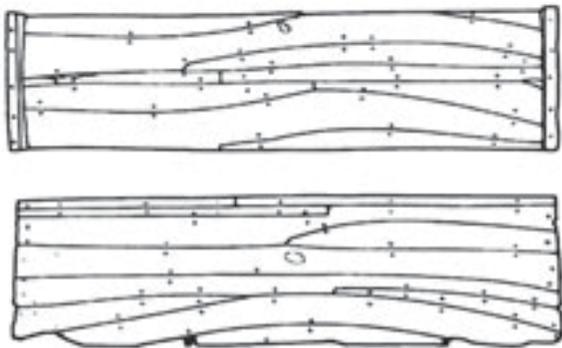


Fig. 7 (Coffin side-Old Kingdom/Ward)

variety of ship building woods were actually not as scarce in ancient Egypt as they are today. However, it needs noting that some ancient Egyptian boxes and wooden coffin sides were also built in a complex way with irregularly shaped pieces, except that, as pointed out by Ward, the smoothly curving plank edges in coffins differ significantly from the joggled edges that create an interlocking wall of planking in ancient Egyptian hulls (Ward 2000).

My own belief is that this method of construction, in coffins, must have had some unknown but profound esthetic or religious significance (did not everything else in ancient Egypt?). I originally thought that this method of constructing a coffin might have been intended to prevent the coffin from hogging, especially useful if the occupant had had a swelled head and dropsy, until I learned that these coffins had no bottoms, but were open to the ground.

CROSS BEAMS

One last method of combating hogging needs mention, but was not peculiarly Egyptian. It was common practice in ancient ships, as it is indeed in modern, to tie the sides together at the deck with heavy crossbeams. In antiquity, these often were allowed to project through the sides so that their ends are visible in profile pictures of ancient ships (Fig. 1).

A ship with flared sides would hog if the tops of the sides could move inward. In essence, the downward weight of the ends of the ship pulls on the top part of the sides and tries to straighten the curve that the sides normally make when seen from above. This straightening of the sides would tend to lengthen the ship along the deck while the

length along the bottom remained unchanged, thus allowing the ends to droop. The cross beams prevent the inward movement that would straighten the top of the sides and they are an important aid in resisting hogging.

CONCLUSIONS

I think that you, the patient reader, have now read more than you really care to concerning hogging. However, I believe that you will agree that the complexity of the side planking of the Lisht ship is absolutely astounding and worthy of much contemplation.

REFERENCES

I have not found any source that discusses hogging per se in the way that I have discussed it here, although such may exist. However, the sources from which the figures were obtained contain the basic information upon which this essay is based. These are:

Fig. 1: Landström, Björn. 1970. *Ships of the Pharaohs*. New York: Doubleday & Co.

Fig. 4: Ward, Cheryl A. 2000. *Sacred and Secular: Ancient Egyptian Ships and Boats*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum Press.

Fig. 5: Ibid.

Fig. 6: Ibid.

Fig. 7: Ibid.

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FIRST (Outermost) GREAT WOODEN SHRINE



16 ft. 8 in. X 10 ft. 9 1/4 in.
(9 ft. high)

SECOND SHRINE Between the first and second shrines is a 9-piece wooden gabled framework. It is 14 ft. 2 in. X 9 ft. 7 1/2 in. (9 ft. 1 1/2 in. high) Hung on the wooden support is a linen pall with gilded bronze marguerites sewn to its fabric.



12 ft. 3 1/2 in. X 7 ft. 8 1/2 in.
(7 ft. 4 1/2 in. high)

THIRD SHRINE



11 ft. 1 1/2 in. X 6 ft. 3 1/2 in.
(7 ft. high)

FOURTH (Innermost) SHRINE



9 ft. 6 1/2 in. X 4 ft. 10 1/4 in.
(6 ft. 2 1/2 in. high)

The four floorless shrines, rectangular in shape, are decorated with religious texts and depictions of funerary importance, including Book of the Dead instructions.

Most surfaces, both inside and out (and doors), are covered with gold paint and blue faience inlay (on plaster of Paris, called "gesso"). Some walls have beautifully designed grill-work.

The First (outermost) Shrine is constructed of 1 1/2 inch heavy cedar panels. The others are made of 2 1/2 inch oak planking. The Second Shrine is in 16 sections, the Third Shrine is in 10 sections and the Fourth Shrine is in 5 sections

THE FOUR SHRINES

Figure 3

© Doris Auger Davis '98

stood in the southwest corner. On the floor between the Great Wooden Shrine and the north wall of the chamber were 11 paddles (or steering oars) that were intended to ferry the king magically across the waters of the Underworld.

The folding doors of the Great Wooden Shrine were found to be sealed and bolted but the seal had been broken, possibly by tomb robbers. Fortunately, when the doors were opened, Carter and his workmen found that the nest of shrines had not been disturbed (Fig. 3).

On top of the second shrine was a linen pall with gold rosettes sewn onto the fabric, held by a wooden, framework support. When touched, the fabric disintegrated but the rosettes (similar to modern sequins but more elaborately designed) were preserved.

Many objects were placed in the narrow corridors on either side and between the shrines. These included numerous ceremonial maces, sticks, staves and bows, some of which were wrapped in linen. There was a series of curved batons, and gold and silver sticks with tiny statues of the youthful monarch. A "reed" was found and the hieroglyphs on it stated that "His Majesty cut it with his own hand". (Hoving 1978:269) There were more ceremonial and religious items such as scepters as well as crooked and forked sticks made of wood covered with gesso and gilt. Two ostrich-feather fans were found between the second and outermost shrines. One was made of ebony overlaid with gold and encrusted with semi-precious stones; the other was of wood inlaid with gold. The front of one had a hunting scene of the king, while on the back was a scene of the king in his chariot.

When the innermost shrine was removed, the workmen discovered a magnificent, yellow quartzite sarcophagus (Fig. 4). The mismatched lid of rose granite, painted yellow to match the body of the quartzite sarcophagus, had been cracked and mended. The corners of the sarcophagus rested on alabaster slabs. Guardian goddesses — Isis, Nephthys, Selket and Neith — were carved in raised relief on each of the four corners and their full-spread wings and outstretched arms encircled the sarcophagus in a protective embrace. Other protective symbols had been carved around the base.

At the bottom of the sarcophagus was a bed-shaped bier, with a carved lion's head and feet, supporting the coffins. The heavy wood was covered with gesso and gold gilt. It stood about 12 inches off the ground and was 7' 6" long. The center panel was designed to represent the cord-mesh of an ancient Egyptian bed. Amazingly, this intact bier had supported the three massive coffins, weighing a total of 2,500 pounds, for more than 3,200 years.

Using a system of pulleys and ropes that Carter had installed in the Burial Chamber, the two pieces of the massive sarcophagus lid were lifted and suspended precariously over the opening. Directly beneath the lid were fine linen shrouds. When these were rolled back, Carter discovered a gilded wood coffin, 7' 4" in length. On the top was a carved likeness of Tutankhamun, its eyes inlaid with obsidian. A vulture and a cobra, the symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt, protruded from the forehead. The hands were crossed over the chest — the right holding the flail and the left holding the crooked scepter, both made of gold and faience. The coffin was

YELLOW QUARTZITE SARCOPHAGUS

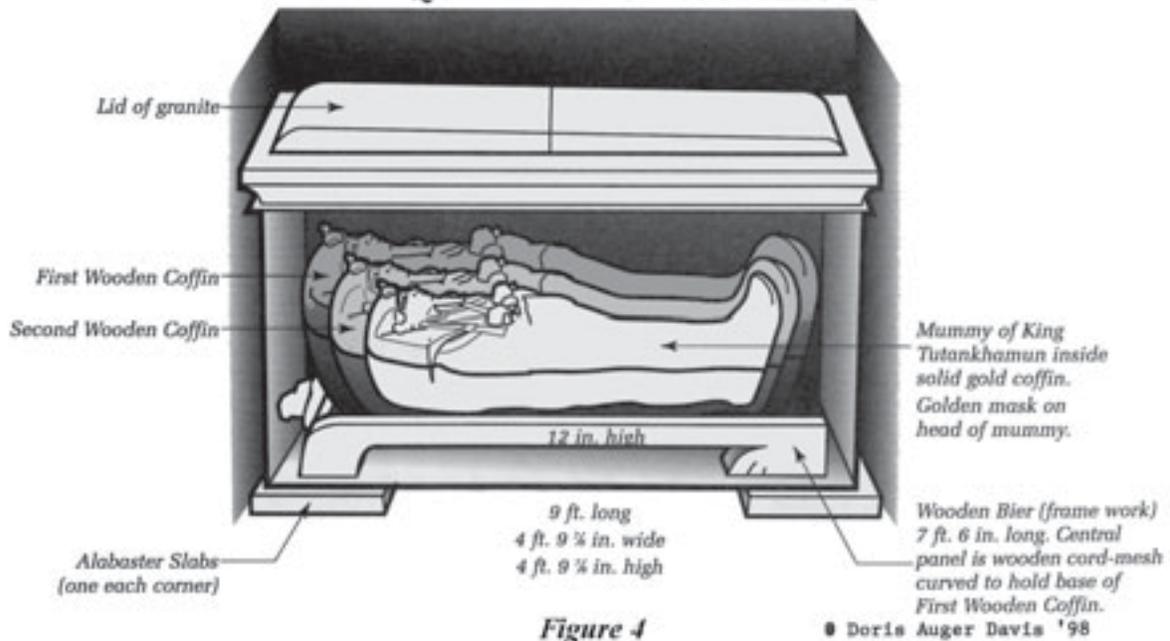


Figure 4

decorated with thin gold plates and inlaid with faience and semi-precious stones in a *rishi* or feather design.

When Carter removed the lid of the first coffin, he discovered a second coffin, even more elaborate than the first. Beneath layers of linen and garlands of flowers, it was covered with gold foil, richly inlaid with engraved glass simulating jasper, lapis lazuli and turquoise.

Carter removed the lid of the second coffin and discovered yet another. The smallest of the three, this coffin was still over six feet long (Fig. 5). On the top of the linen

shroud was a bead and floral collar surrounding the neck of the gleaming figure underneath. Unlike the two wooden, outer coffins, this one was made of solid gold – all 243 pounds of it. It was covered with reliefs portraying the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, the winged figure of Nekhbet, and the snake Buto. There were inlays of semi-precious stones and glass and faience cloisonné.

Removing the lid of the third coffin revealed the mummy of Tutankhamun. It was bound by a corselet of gold and inlaid glass and stones. And, against a background of linen,

COMPLETION OF BURIAL

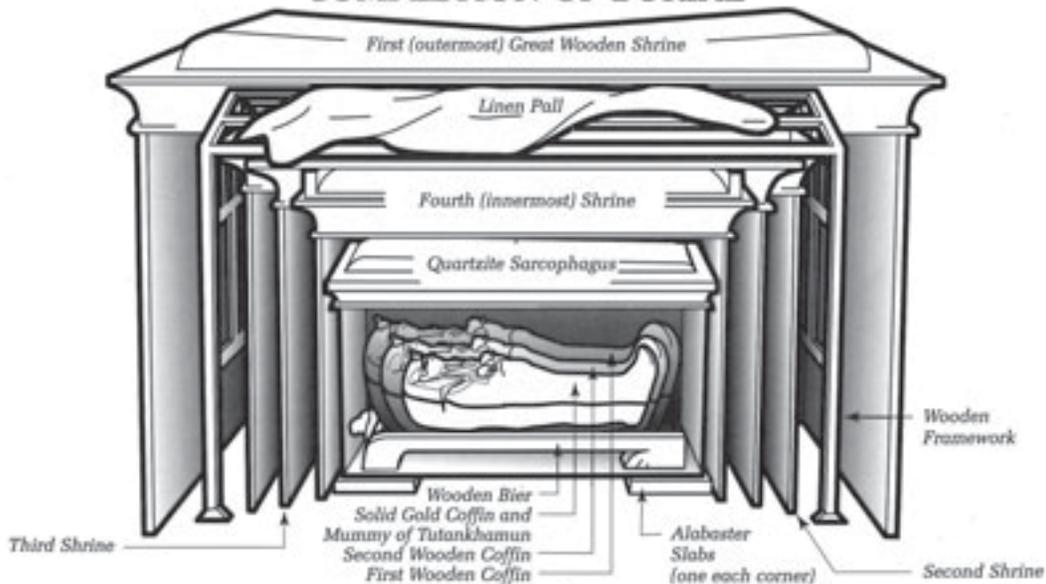


Figure 5

© Doris Auger Davis '98

was the famous, 22.6-pound, solid gold death mask of the young pharaoh. The death mask was outlined by a *nemes* headcloth, inlaid with carnelian and blue glass simulating lapis lazuli, with the reliefs of a vulture and a cobra on the front of the headdress, and a ceremonial beard, all of solid gold. The death mask has been called an unparalleled masterpiece of Egyptian metalwork. (Reeves 1990:111)

The layers of linen covering the mummy revealed a treasure of gold. In the first layer, on the left side of the body, lay a royal diadem surmounted by a sacred cobra. A gold and inlaid pectoral, meant for protection, surrounded the mummy's throat and depicted the god Horus. The second layer held a belt with a finely incised knife and scabbard made of pure gold. As Carter cut through the 13 layers of linen wrappings on the mummy, he found 143 pieces of personal jewelry, amulets, ornaments and implements. Three of the objects (a dagger blade and two amulets) were made of iron and may represent the first introduction of that metal into the ancient Egyptian civilization. (Reeves 1990:112, 177) One of the most important artifacts was a gold-and-glass hawk pectoral that would have covered the king's entire chest, inlaid with hundreds of pieces of glass and faience.

When Tutankhamun's skeletal remains were exposed, there were no decorations found except for the toes, fingers and penis, which were all encased in gold sheaths. The face of the king revealed a handsome young man with well-formed features. But most of the mummy was in terrible condition. Care had been taken in his mummification but the unguents that had been poured over the body in great quantity caused both the mummy and the mask to be stuck to the bottom of the coffin. No amount of legitimate force could move them. Carter eventually solved this problem by applying heat underneath the gold coffin, which helped to remove the mummy and mask.

Following the clearance of the tomb and the autopsies performed on the mummy, all but two of the artifacts were removed and shipped to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The two artifacts that remained in the tomb were the lidless, yellow quartzite sarcophagus and the outermost wooden coffin. Today, the remains of Tutankhamun lie within these in the Burial Chamber of his tomb.

The Burial Chamber contains the only painted walls in the hastily finished tomb. In bright colors but with poor quality, the dead king is depicted as the god Osiris, King of the Underworld and Lord of the Dead. The High Priest and Tutankhamun's successor, Ay, is shown performing the ritual of the "Opening of the Mouth" to the standing mummy so it could regain its power of speech and be able to partake of food and drink offerings. Another scene shows the king's mummy on its sledge being dragged to the tomb by courtiers and high officials – the only such processional scene found

in the Valley of the Kings. Still another wall depicts a solar barque preceded by five deities in the upper register, while below squat twelve baboon deities representing the first hour of the Amduat (or the Book of What Is in the Underworld), through which the sun and the king must travel before being reborn each dawn.

Carter's original count of the artifacts found in the tomb was about 3,000 but that figure has increased with more exact cataloging. With the possible exception of a small number of artifacts that may have been retained by Lord Carnarvon (Hoving 1978) and arguably by Howard Carter himself, the treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb are now on display on the second floor of the museum in Cairo.

Although no rolls of papyri were discovered in the tomb, many of the artifacts are inscribed with hieroglyphs that enlighten us with regard to certain aspects of the king's daily life. Based in part on previous work done by two Englishmen, Thomas Young and William Bankes, in September 1822 Jean-François Champollion announced that he had deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs. It is an interesting coincidence that Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered almost exactly 100 years after that announcement.

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House Of Scrolls

The Harem Conspiracy: The Murder of Ramesses III

by Susan Redford 2002, Northern Illinois University Press; 200 pp;
\$32 hardcover; ISBN 0-87580-29508

Reviewed by Richard Harwood

It was a balmy evening in early April 1167 B.C., and the pharaoh Ramesses III was relaxing in one of the harem rooms, his favorite retreat at the royal palace. The evening's enjoyment consisted of sipping wine and playing *senet* with lovely, young concubines, who were inmates of the royal harem. The old king was content and well satisfied with himself and sublimely unaware that he was about to meet his fate. Without hesitation the women made their long-awaited move to end the king's life and place one of their own choosing on the throne. An armed uprising within the palace ensued. Several of the guards on duty had been rendered inactive. However, the spontaneous popular revolt that had been planned did not materialize. The conspirators had badly miscalculated and were apprehended almost immediately, but the king lay dying.

In this first paragraph of her fascinating book, Susan Redford lays out the outline of what is to come, both good and not so good. To her professional credit, she does not try to be overly dramatic or build suspense. Presumably, most readers of this book will be at least vaguely familiar with what occurred that day in the harem quarters of Ramesses III's combined mortuary temple and royal palace at Medinet Habu, on the West Bank of the Nile, across from Luxor.

The book begins with a brief but excellent preface on Egypt's New Kingdom by the author's husband, Dr. Donald Redford, concentrating on the 18th and 19th Dynasties and setting the stage for the events that transpired in the early part of the 20th Dynasty. Then, using thorough research and new translations of the various papyri that cover the trials of the conspirators, Susan Redford examines the factual elements touched on in that first paragraph of the main part of the book.

Of particular interest is the author's description of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern harems. Contrary to popular belief, the harems were much more than a non-charging, private brothel for the king. In fact, the women of the royal harems often numbered in the hundreds and were housed in luxurious quarters on many of the king's estates

throughout the country. Although they were sequestered from the rest of the royal court (Redford continually refers to them as "inmates"), many of them were princesses from foreign countries, with their own servants in attendance, or from aristocratic Egyptian families. They were considered and treated as part of the king's extended family and generally were a source of great pride, increased influence and wealth for their own families.

Much of the book deals with the actual conspiracy and its abortive outcome: the planning that went into it, the purpose and intended results, the co-conspirators outside the actual harem, the trials of the conspirators and their resultant punishments. A riveting chapter examines the harsh judicial system of the ancient Egyptians and the forms of punishment and execution that evolved during the various dynasties.

Readers who have visited Medinet Habu will find Redford's description of the physical temple fascinating, including many of the architectural elements and the uses of many parts of the temple that are no longer visible. In addition, she makes many of the rituals that took place within Medinet Habu really come alive.

Despite her great research on this important moment in pharaonic Egyptian history and its aftermath, Redford's narrative is not always easy to read. Too often, Redford uses a \$10 word when a 5-cent word would work just as well or better, which causes rather jarring interruptions in the flow of the narrative. A few of her non-Egyptological words are so obscure that they are not even found in standard English dictionaries. The spelling of many common, ancient Egyptian names will be confusing to most American readers. For example, Redford's *Ese* is the goddess *Isis*; *Manthihopshaf* is *Montuherkhepshef*, a son of Ramesses IX and the eventual occupant of KV 19; and *Teya* is *Tiy/Ty/Tye*, the name of the chief queen of Amenhotep III and of a secondary queen of Ramesses III. The latter queen instigated the "harem conspiracy" to put her son, Prince Pentawere, on the throne of Egypt.

In several places throughout the book, Redford succumbs to the temptation to attribute unknowable personalities and motivations to the conspirators, and to fictionalize a number of undocumented events. For example, with reference to the book's initial paragraph quoted above, there is nothing in any existing document to indicate that the attack on Ramesses III occurred on a "balmy evening", or that he was enjoying "sipping wine and playing senet" with the ladies of the harem. On that day or night, was the king really "content and well satisfied with himself and sublimely unaware that he was about to meet his fate"? Neither the author nor anyone examining the known records would have any way of knowing.

In some cases, Redford also tries to substantiate her facts by referring, in footnotes, to sources that actually do not support her theories. For example, she cites "Reeves and Wilkinson, *Complete Valley of the Kings*, 161" as verification that KV 3 was started for the crown prince Ramesses, the future pharaoh Ramesses IV. In fact,

Reeves and Wilkinson are very careful to state that KV 3 was begun for an unknown son of Ramesses III.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Harem Conspiracy* is the best-researched, comprehensive, and most readable examination of the events surrounding the death of Ramesses III that has yet been published. The tables in both the appendices and the main text that list the names and positions, indicted crimes, judicial sentences, and the methods of execution of the conspirators are invaluable to the research of this momentous event in the history of pharaonic Egypt.

Richard S. Harwood is an Associate Director of the University of Arizona Egyptian Expedition. He is a past president of the Egyptian Study Society and a past trustee and officer of The Amarna Research Foundation, Inc. He is also the Editor of The Ostrakon.

Errata:

Egyptian words and phrases in Suzanne Onstine's article "The Musician Priestesses of Ancient Egypt", *The Ostrakon*, Summer 2002, were improperly transliterated. We apologize to the author and anyone who was confused by them. The correct versions are as follows:

Page 9, Para 7:

- ...titles found during the Old Kingdom was *hmt ntr* ("Hemet netjer"),
- ...extremely common male title *hm ntr* ("Hem netjer"), the male servant of the god
- ...and (*w^cb*) or "pure" priests.

Page 9, Para 8:

- ...the title *hm ntr n Hwt-hr* ("Hem netjer of Hathor") (Robins 1993: 142).

Page 10 Para 3:

- ...the title "Chantress" (*šm^cyt*) ("*shmayt*") became common
- ...the most common title for a woman after "lady of the house", *nbt pr* ("nebet per").

Page 11, **Singers:**

- ...temple worship was *hsyt* ("Hesyt").

Page 12, **Sistrum Players**

- ...sistrum player, *ihyt*, *shmyt*, *ssty* being the main three.

Page 12, **The Khener:**

- ...the *hnr* ("khener").
- ...One specific title, *wrt hnr* ("weret khenert") "the great one of the musical troupe"

Page 13, **References:**

- Nord, D. 1981. "The Term *hnr*: 'Harem' or 'Musical Performers'?"

Onstine, S. 2001. *The Role of the Chantress (šm^cyt) in Ancient Egypt*.

A corrected copy of the article will be placed as a PDF file under "Ostrakon Archives" on the Egyptian Study Society Web Site at <http://www.EgyptStudy.org>