

Newsletter

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

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H. P. Lovecraft and Ancient Egypt

Juan José Castillos

Winter 2018-19 #1

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H. P. Lovecraft, like many other authors of fiction, mentioned in his vast repertoire of subjects ancient and modern Egypt, dwelling on the mysteries of a land he never visited but that he exploited as a source of horror and unspeakable rites as well as a deep wisdom that if tapped could warn us of dangers lurking in its tombs, monuments and in the human remains of its former inhabitants.

The different skill of all the writers of fiction that over the years that have dealt with ancient Egypt is revealed by such perceptions and can be profitably compared to illustrate us about how much trouble they took to use the available information at the time to at least provide believable accounts of ancient people.

My fascination with H. P. Lovecraft started early in my youth, almost at the same time as that for Edgar Allan Poe.

I could perceive at the time that Lovecraft's style was verbose in excess, overloaded with adjectives, revealing a hideous racist perception of many foreigners that differed in appearance or habits from his cherished Anglo-Saxon ideal.

However, there was something in his wild



H. P. Lovecraft in 1934

imagination that made you ignore all that and which captured his readers in the contemplation of nameless horrors that originated aeons ago when extra-terrestrial visitors came to earth as gods and conquerors.

He influenced many other American writers that over the years contributed to his mythology and eventually helped make him widely known and extremely popular.

My first approach to his writings involved some of his short stories included in horror anthologies, but I became especially impressed by what I consider his masterpiece, a much longer story, 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward'.

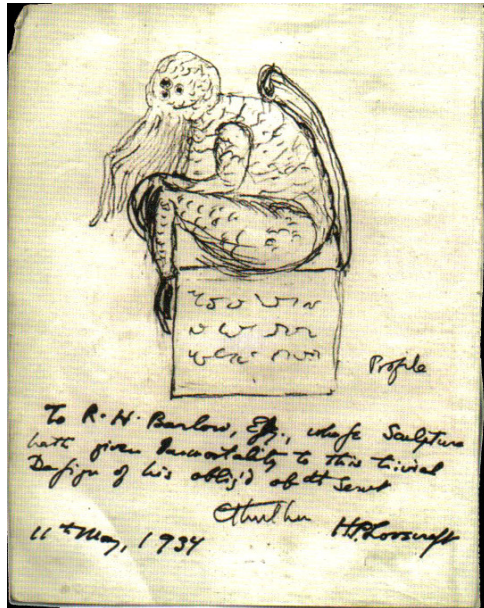
Part of my appreciation came from his hero's long walks along modern landscapes and buildings that are amply described and reveal the author's fascination with New England, its people and environment a long time ago.

The plot, that has to do with a group of evil wizards that manage to revive themselves through the centuries to continue with their dark occult investigations, is so well conceived that it is hard to put it down until reaching the likely terrible conclusion.

Ancient Egypt appears briefly mentioned in this story but only as a country providing human mummies that, after being brought to life and brutally interrogated, were expected to reveal dark secrets.

Here Lovecraft shows the superficiality of his knowledge of the ancient past since such mummies being no doubt unidentified, as are most of those found in their country, could hardly provide the wizards with any important information when being brought back to life. The fact that they were mummified shows only that they were part of the poorest sectors of the ancient population, and also that they were not likely the purveyors of any special wisdom or secrets.

In 'Imprisoned with the Pharaohs' Lovecraft, that usually mentions ancient Egypt in a cursory manner dwelling



Cthulhu sketch by Lovecraft

on its supposed secrets and horrors, had an opportunity to exhibit some deeper knowledge of that civilization but perhaps he could not be bothered.

This story was written at the request of the famous magician Houdini dealing with some experiences he claimed to have had during a visit to Egypt. He maintains to have been kidnapped by a bedouin and a tour guide, who as a prank lower him into a deep hole in the ground, which becomes later on some sort of crypt, where he dreams of ancient people coming in solemn procession in front of him.

The details for the story must have come from one of the common contemporary travel books and no effort is made to go further than attempting to link the events with his own mythology, making some of his ghastly monsters somehow present in ancient Egypt.

Both Houdini and Lovecraft shared an aversion to superstition, but were at the same time fascinated by science and extraordinary events, for which Lovecraft's vivid imagination added an original and quite sophisticated perception. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that Lovecraft, having lived a century after Edgar Allan Poe, with all the new knowledge that the science of Egyptology had brought to light, failed to try to find out and add to his stories a more elaborate and truthful version of ancient events and beliefs.

That Lovecraft was aware of his inferiority as a writer to his earlier fellow American distinguished colleague is clear from a passage in 'The Shunned House' in which he calls him 'the world's greatest master of the terrible and the bizarre'. It is interesting to notice that Lovecraft had a contempt for democracy, as did Poe, which the latter considered to be 'the rule of the mob'.

A short story bearing the title 'Nyarlathotep', a combination of a Lovecraftian word and an ancient Egyptian one, tells us about a sort of an evil Egyptian god that is the symbol of chaos, worshiped and feared by humans. If Lovecraft had looked into the ancient religion there was actually a great god bearing such a description, turned by later theology into the murderer of Osiris, the 'swarthy, slender, and sinister', as he describes him, god Seth, no need then for fabricating a new one.

'The Mountains of Madness' mentions the ancient Egyptians as having a scarabaeus as a potent national symbol resembling those of other nations, when in fact it was a sacred image of a powerful god but without having such an exalted nature.

In 'The Cats of Ulthar' the importance of cats as sacred animals in Egypt is also greatly exaggerated: 'For the cat is cryptic, and close to strange things which men cannot see. He is the soul of antique Aegyptus, and bearer of tales from forgotten cities in Meroe and Ophir. He is the kin of the jungle's lords, and heir to the secrets of hoary and sinister Africa. The Sphinx is his cousin, and he speaks her language; but he is more ancient than the Sphinx, and



Lovecraft family monument in Providence, Rhode Island

remembers that which she hath forgotten’.

But it is in ‘The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath’ that this idea of those cats as violent and nightmarish is revealed: ‘It was a stupendous sight while the torches lasted, and Carter had never before seen so many cats. Black, grey, and white; yellow, tiger, and mixed; common, Persian, and Marix; Thibetan, Angora, and Egyptian; all were there in the fury of battle, and there hovered over them some trace of that profound and inviolate sanctity which made their goddess great in the temples of Bubastis. They would leap seven strong at the throat of an almost-human or the pink tentacled snout of a toad-thing and drag it down savagely to the fungus plain, where myriads of their fellows would surge over it and into it with the frenzied claws and teeth of a divine battle-fury’.

As to ‘The Haunter Of The Dark’, Lovecraft hints there at the existence of devil worship in ancient Egypt and strange beings that cannot exist in the light of day: ‘Turning away from the windows, Blake noticed that the cobwebbed cross above the altar was not of the ordinary kind, but resembled the primordial ankh or crux ansata of shadowy Egypt ... Fr O’Malley tells of devil-worship with a box found in great Egyptian ruins - says they call up something that can’t exist in light. Flees a little light, and banished by strong light. Then has to be summoned again’.

Things get definitely fantastic in ‘The Nameless City’ where Lovecraft speaks of a civilization millions of years old and far superior to the real ones we know: ‘As I crept along the corridor toward the brighter light I saw later stages of the painted epic - the leave-taking of the race that had dwelt in the nameless city and the valley around for ten million years; the race whose souls shrank from quitting scenes their bodies had known so long where they had settled as nomads in the earth’s youth, hewing in the virgin rock those primal shrines at which they had never ceased to worship. Now that the light was better I studied the pictures more closely and, remembering that the strange reptiles must represent the unknown men, pondered upon the customs of the nameless city. Many things were peculiar and inexplicable. The civilization, which included a written alphabet, had seemingly risen to a higher order than those immeasurably later civilizations of Egypt and Chaldea, yet there were curious omissions’.

The unnecessary invention of ancient Egyptian characters capriciously named like in Verdi’s opera Aida, who talk of fictitious gods reinforces this trend to the facile

rendering of situations in ‘The Shadow Out of Time’: ‘I talked with the mind of Nug-Soth, a magician of the dark conquerors of 16,000 A.D.; with that of a Roman named Titus Sempronius Blaesus, who had been a quaestor in Sulla’s time; with that of Khephnes, an Egyptian of the 14th Dynasty, who told me the hideous secret of Nyarlathotep; with that of a priest of Atlantis’ middle kingdom’.

In spite of the lazy attitude Lovecraft displayed researching many of the topics that were behind his stories, his over-burdened and often repetitive writing style and his contemptible attitude to certain contemporary groups of people may strike the modern reader how some of his pessimistic opinions as to the results of scientific research are reflected in contemporary outlooks on the same subject.

Lovecraft wrote in ‘Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family’ some terrifying words on the subject: ‘Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it, peer daemoniacal hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species –if separate species we be- for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world’ and in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ he insists: ‘The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age’.

No less of a scientist than Stephen Hawking recently said that the current human pursuit of artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race and contemporary philosophers in the light of continuous atrocities due to human agency cannot find an optimistic perspective for the future of mankind either.

Here Lovecraft as a latter day prophet and in spite of his limitations, has found support for some of his misgivings and nightmares.

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Report on the 2018 Scholars' Colloquium and Poster Session

Friday, November 2nd and Sunday, November 4th, 2018

This year's Friday presentations were: *Hunters and Pseudo-hunters in predynastic Egypt*, by Prof. J.J. Castillos, Uruguayan Institute of Egyptology; *The Stela of Tjetji (British Museum EA 614) in Cubits* by Prof. Ronald J. Leprohon, University of Toronto; *New Light on a Double-Falcon bowl of Unas* by Dr David Ian Lightbody, *The Journal of Ancient Egyptian Architecture*; *The Question of the Concubine: Re-examining Egyptian female lexicology*, by Prof. Jennifer Hellum, University of Auckland; *A glimpse into the life of a late Middle Kingdom business man: analyzing the possessions of Ramesseum Tomb No. 5's owner* by Prof. Christina Geisen, Yale University; *Putting a Face on Death at Feg el-Gamous: identifying the mummy portraits found there by Grenfell and Hunt* by Prof. Kerry Muhlestein, Brigham Young University and Bethany Jensen, Museum of the Bible; *The Use of Pharaonic Religious Imagery in the Modern Coptic Icons of Victor Fakhoury* by Gayle Gibson, Royal Ontario Museum and Dr. Helene Moussa, Coptic Museum of Canada; *"Integrating 2-D and 3-D Models for Documenting a Third Intermediate Period Egyptian (White Type) Coffin"* by Marissa Monette (read by Mark Trumpour); *"Queen's University Egyptian Coffin Project: Identification and Characterization of a Dynasty 25 'White' Coffin Using Computed Tomographic (CT) Imaging and Instrumental Analysis"* by Victoria Kablys et al (read by Mark Trumpour); *Animal Butchering Technology in Bronze Age Egypt* by Eleuterio L Sousa and Haskel Greenfield; *The qbHw "fresh waters" and the outer limits of the cosmos in the Book of Nut* by Silvia Zago, University of Toronto; *3:55 The n-prefix in Old Egyptian: a new analysis of an old phenomenon* by Silvia Stubnova, Brown University and *Theorizing Complicit Masculinity and the Maintenance of Maat in Ancient Egypt* by Dr. Kelly-Anne Diamond, Villanova University.

The Sunday presentations were: *The King in the Catacombs: Why Does He Appear on the Walls at Kom el Shoqafa?* By Mark Trumpour; *"The Dynasties of Kush and the language of power in the Second Intermediate Period Nubia"*, by Dr. Julien Cooper, Yale University; *Nu as a dreadful instance. Remarks on the first sense of the concept of the primeval matter and on its etymology within the Pyramid and the Coffin Text* by Cloé Caron, Université du Québec à Montréal/ Université de Montpellier 3; *More Potential Examples of Amphiboly in Ancient Egyptian Texts: A Dimension of Literary Creativity* by Dr. Edmund Meltzer, Pacifica Graduate Institute; *From Egypt to Bombay to Aberdeen into a Hologram – The History and Recent Research on the Lady of the House Ta-kheru* by Dr. Christian Bayer, Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum (Hildesheim, Germany). The Scholars' Colloquium and Poster Session Committees would like to extend thanks to those who chaired these sessions, especially Peter Robinson and Prof. Leprohon, and to extend a special thanks to Prof. Leprohon for his audio-visual aid throughout the weekend.

Queens of Ancient Egypt

Our 43rd Annual Symposium

This year's Symposium examined the lives and achievements of Egyptian queens from the Third Millennium BC to the end of the First Century BC. The day began with a lecture entitled Bald Queens with Pointy Shoulders and other Egyptian Royal Women of the First Twelve Dynasties by Prof. Ann Macy Roth, New York University. The next lecture looked more closely at the funerary monuments of one of these queens: Rachel Aronin (Harvard University) spoke on Fit for a Queen: Experimental 3D Reconstruction of the Tomb of Meresankh III at Giza.

Dr. Kelly-Anne Diamond of Villanova University gave us a view from gender theory with New Kingdom Queens Performing Gender and Dr. Jacquelyn Williamson, George Mason University, gave us a précis of her doctoral dissertation with The Royal Women of Amarna and the Sunshades of Re. The afternoon session continued with Defining Ramesside Queenship by Dr. Heather Lee McCarthy, NYU Epigraphical Expedition to the Ramesses II Temple at Abydos and Heavenly Brides – Re-considering the Status of Royal Consorts and God's Wives During the First Millennium B.C. by Dr. Christian Bayer, Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum (Hildesheim, Germany)

The day finished with a look at the queens of the Ptolemies: Berenike II of Egypt: the Power of Queens and Coinage by Tara Sewell-Lasater, University of Houston and The 'Sometimes Cruel Histories of the Ptolemies' and the Legacy of Pharaonic Queenship by Dr. Lyn Green, Royal Ontario Museum/SSEA.

In Search of Ancient Egypt in Canada À la Recherche de l'Égypte Ancienne au Canada Report to the SSEA/SEEA Annual General Meeting November 2018

I am pleased to present the annual report for In Search of Ancient Egypt in Canada / À la Recherche de l'Égypte Ancienne au Canada.

Work with the Queen's University Coffin Project has continued, despite the May departure from Queen's of Amandina Anastasiades, the professor leading the project. I have continued to make informal efforts to coordinate ongoing work, encouraging and supporting students in their efforts to publish their work. You can see two posters they produced in this year's Poster Session display. My own contacts with Stanford University have continued, with a view to further clarifying the provenience of the coffins that the fragments originated from. Tangentially, the work of the Project stimulated local Stanford curator Christina Hodge to set her students to studying fragmentary material that remained at Stanford, with a small exhibition resulting.

In Montreal, M. Guillaume Sellier has published Canadian material collected in the 19th century by Dr. James Douglas and the Hon. James Ferrier as part of his academic work. We may have further collaboration in the future.

Further afield, I finally received information from Kelowna BC on a small collection that they maintain in their local museum. The contact was first made in late 2015, and only now brought a result thanks to persistence. In Toronto, Chapter president Thomas Greiner has identified a new egyptianizing funerary monument, the mausoleum of Sir Casimir Gzowski, in the St. James Cemetery.

I have had the opportunity to continue delivering introductory courses and sessions on ancient Egypt, both locally and through the Kingston Seniors' Centre. These give an opportunity to publicize the SSEA in eastern Ontario.

Overall, the Project continues to periodically receive requests for information on Egyptian material in Canada from researchers in other countries.

Respectfully Submitted by Mark Trumpour

November 2018

The Dakhleh Oasis Project 2017 – 2018 Field Season A Brief Report to the SSEA Annual Meeting, November 2, 2018

The 40th season of the Dakhleh Oasis Project was a brief study season from January to February, 2018. Because of security concerns in the Western Desert, causing the absence of permission from the military, there was no excavation work done in the field.

Dr. Colin Hope and four members from Australia were able to do a study season on pottery and artifacts stored in the dig-house. Other members present were Tony and Lesley Mills, Fred and Vereni Leemhuis and Peter Sheldrick, who made minor repairs to the house. A day trip to Qasr provided a useful opportunity to study the town and inspect the houses recently restored there by Dr. Leemhuis.

The 9th DOP conference was held at the Monash University campus at Prato, near Florence, Italy from June 10 to 13 and was dedicated to Anthony Mills. Forty-six papers were presented. At this meeting, field directorship of the project was transferred to Peter Sheldrick on an interim basis, until a younger scholar with an academic position can be found.

Further information can be gleaned from our website; <http://dakhlehoasisproject.com> which presents the project in a more defined and detailed way, but which is intended to describe us to the general public.

Respectfully submitted by
Peter Sheldrick for Tony Mills,

November 2, 2018

Chapter Reports - Winter 2018

SSEA Calgary Chapter Report, December 2018

The Calgary Chapter has two talks planned for early in the 2019, with additional lectures in the spring pending.

In January Marina Fischer, a numismatics specialist at the Nickle Galleries (<https://nickle.ucalgary.ca/>), will be speaking on aspects of coinage in Ptolemaic Egypt, whilst in February Beth Labrecque will speak on iconography of coffins of the 21st Dynasty, based on her masters research at the University of Liverpool.

The Chapter, along with an additional matching donation from a Calgary member, provided sufficient monies to fund the 2018 Larkman-Szekrenyes Memorial Travel Grant. However the Grant was not awarded this year, so the funds will be retained by SSEA National specifically for the 2019 Memorial Grant.

Submitted 2018-12-03 by Paul English, Calgary Chapter President.

Montréal Chapter Report - Fall of 2018

Yet another season has passed loaded with activities: no less than 4 public lectures, an AGM and a benefit supper, this last activity still upcoming as your favorite Montréal reporter, even though late as always, sends this report in.

The first two public lectures were held at, and in conjunction with, the Pointe-à-Callière Museum, on the occasion of the “*Journées de la Culture*”. On September 29th, our Vice-President, Prof. Jean Revez (UQAM) lectured on “*Le projet de recherche UQAM-Université de Memphis dans le temple d’Amon-Rê à Karnak*” while our President, Ms. Cloé Caron (PhD student, UQAM and U Paul-Valéry) addressed the crowd about “*L’origine du monde en Égypte ancienne d’après les textes funéraires*” on the following day.

The next two lectures were held in the premises of UQAM. On October 23rd (and not the 24th, as originally announced) Ms. Jessica Bouchard (PhD student, UQAM and U Münster) introduced us to “*Les ancêtres que l’on commémore et ceux que l’on oublie : Enquête sur quelques phénomènes mémoriels durant le règne du roi kouchite Aspelta*”. And finally, on November 20, the Chapter, in conjunction with the AEPOA, had the great privilege of receiving Professor Emeritus John Baines (Oxford). This giant of Egyptology taught us about the “*Paysages, rituels de marais et d’eau dans l’Égypte ancienne*” along with wonderful pictures of the rarely seen Egyptian Delta.

Meanwhile, the AGM was held on October 17th. No revolution shattered us this year as the executive remained identical: Cloé and Jean, already mentioned, Nicole Brisson, secretary and treasurer, Dr Brigitte Ouellet, Michel Gervais, Dr Moustafa Zayed and me as councillors. The one wonderful news, however, is our recognition by UQAM! This will allow us to have a permanent office within the University’s History department. The small room, shared with the AEPOA, will also house our small library, making it more accessible for our students and members alike. Truly an amazing development on the eve of our 20th anniversary! Stay tuned for more greatness upcoming in 2019!

Toronto Chapter Report 2017-2018

A great deal of work this year went into improving the Chapter’s online presence. Thomas Greiner and Taylor Woodcock worked at bringing the website up-to-date. The Chapter also started using Eventbrite to facilitate event registration (we also still offer traditional registration by email or in person). Eventbrite has been positively received! Emily Hotton took over our Facebook page and was excellent at posting on a regular basis! Finally, the Chapter created a monthly newsletter sent out to members using Mailchimp.

We organised a mini-symposium on the theme of trade and contact between Egypt and her eastern neighbours. We collaborated with the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies and the Canadian Institute for Mediterranean Studies. It featured Beth Ann Judas (ARCE Pennsylvania), Sarah Murray (University of Toronto), Jana Mynářová (Charles University) and Tara Prakash (Johns Hopkins University). It was a wonderful day! During the day we hosted a book sale and raised over \$300 toward the Nicholas Millet scholarship.

We were treated to an excellent programme of monthly lectures. In order from November to May, they were: Guillaume Bouchard Labonté (UQAM) on “*Dialogue or coercion: social pressure in Ancient Egypt*”

Susanne Voss (DAI Berlin/Cairo) on “*From Lepsius to WW II – The History of German Egyptology in the 19th and early 20th century*”

Carla Mesa Guzzo (UofT) on “*Maces and Daggers from the Royal Ontario Museum’s Egyptian Collection*”

Pierre Tallet (Paris-Sorbonne) on “*Khufu’s Harbour*”

Jitse Dijkstra (U Ottawa) on “*Khnum Temple Graffiti Project*”

Mary-Ann Pouls Wegner (UofT) on “*Birth and Rebirth in the Abydos Landscape*”

Sarah Symons (McMaster) on “*Shadows and Droplets: timekeeping instruments from Ancient Egypt*”

Adela Oppenheim (Met Museum) on “*Work at Dahshur*”

Toronto Chapter collaborated with Louis Cifer Brew Works to have an Ancient Egyptian Beer Event. Executive member Tish Mancini organised beer samples along with a lecture by Gayle Gibson on ancient Egyptian beer - we had over 20 persons attend this event despite the Taste on the Danforth happening the same time.

The Chapter also had our Annual New Year’s Dinner. It was again wonderfully organised by Arlette Londes. This year the event drew over 30 participants and Gayle Gibson talked about food and drink in ancient Egypt. A good time was had by all!

We were also fortunate to have a course taught by Gayle Gibson on “*The Best of Times, The Worst of Times: The First and Second Intermediate Periods*”, which drew nearly 20 students.

Toronto Chapter had a very successful 2017-2018, with an excess of revenue over expenses of \$961.00!

The Toronto Chapter executive for 2018-2019 is:

Gayle Gibson (President),
Erin Kerr (Treasurer),
Stephen Ficalora (Secretary),
Deirdre Keleher (Vice President),
Arlette Londes (Vice President),

Zoë McQuinn (Vice President) ,
Les O’Connor (Vice President),
Leslie Cowger (Member-at-large),
Letitia (Tish) Mancini (Member-at-large)
Taylor Woodcock (Member-at-large).

The opinions expressed in the Newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities. Are you a member of the SSEA? The SSEA/SÉÉA has Chapters in Calgary, Alberta, Montréal, Québec, Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia. The Chapters host lectures and events on Egyptological topics. Full Individual and Student Memberships in the Society includes a volume of the scholarly Journal of the SSEA and the SSEA Newsletter, and free or discounted admission to SSEA events. Associate Membership in the SSEA includes the Newsletter and free or discounted admission to events. Associate Membership is only open to members in provinces which have a Chapter. All categories of membership, excluding institutional members, are entitled to vote at the Annual General Meeting. To apply for membership, write to the address on the front of this Newsletter or email us at info@thessea.org. For updates, schedule changes, and further information, see the SSEA website at: www.thessea.org.