

Newsletter

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

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Meeting Metjetji (ROM 953.116.1)

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Like many of you reading this newsletter, I became enthralled with Ancient Egypt when I was a child. I fed my love and wonder with visits every Sunday afternoon to the Royal Ontario Museum. One of the first pieces that I carefully copied, when I was eleven or twelve, was a fragment of a wall relief from the Fifth Dynasty tomb of a man named Metjetji.

This rather standard piece was once on the left of a doorway where it greeted visitors to the tomb. We don't know where he was buried, though Sakkara is a safe bet. Metjetji stands facing right, with a smaller figure, naked except for a necklace, standing beside him. Over the half century since I first met Metjetji, I have learned that the jamb from the other side of the doorway is now in Berlin. Other reliefs from Metjetji's tomb are in Kansas City, New York, and Paris. There are very beautiful wooden statues of him in Brooklyn and in Kansas City. Toronto also has a charming frieze of donkeys eating barley from somewhere in the tomb. There may be more fragments in private collections.

The first things Metjetji taught me were that there were far more signs in Ancient Egyptian than in the English alphabet, and that it's quite possible for text to run from top to bottom of a line, or from right to left. I was very happy the day I finally found his name in the top row, but it was many years before I could actually read the entire piece.

You don't need to be able to read hieroglyphs, though, to tell that Metjetji was an important man. He steps forward, slender, straight and muscular, a confident man with a staff in one hand and a sceptre in the other. You might think of him as a powerful protector, or as a member of the ruling class, armed and dangerous. His large, wide-open eye misses nothing. His lips are closed. There is no anxiety in his calm face. He wears a fine wig, a necklace, bracelets, and a pleated kilt. The small person at his feet holds onto his staff, and stands in his footsteps. The naked, vulnerable body is completely surrounded by Metjetji's power and authority. The glyphs above the boy tell us this is "His son, whom he loves, Sabui-Ptah." If you look very closely, you'll see another name, Ihy, scratched under these carefully carved glyphs.

From reliefs in Paris and Kansas City, we know that Metjetji had a son named Ihy. There were also two boys with the title 'eldest son.' One was named Ptahhotep and the other Khuensobek. There was also a daughter, Iret-sobek. Sabui-Ptah is the only child shown naked, suggesting he was the youngest. As the baby of the family was he Dad's favourite? Was Ihy a middle child, who felt lost in the crowd? Did Ihy put his own name on the door jamb out of jealousy? We'll never know, but there is a hint of a story in those scratched letters, and maybe in the fact that they were allowed to stay.

Two eldest sons suggest another lost story. Was Metjetji polygamous? Or was he widowed, and had a second family? No wife is named in any of the known pieces. [They are unlikely to be twins because they are never shown together, and for other reasons I won't go into here.]

And while we're speculating, there is the question of Metjetji's name. It's a rare name, possibly unique¹. Men of his time often had a formal name, usually compounded with the name of a deity, and then a



Metjetji relief ROM 953.116.1 – left side of façade

'beautiful name' that seems to have been the name friends used. All of Metjetji's children carry the name of a god; two are named for the craftsman and creator, Ptah, one for the god of music, Ihy, and two for the ferocious crocodile, Sobek. Only Metjetji has an unusual, apparently secular name.

There may be an explanation. Metjetji's False Door, which is in New York, says he was 'honoured by (King) Wenis.' That would place his lifespan at the end of the Fifth Dynasty and the beginning of the Sixth, around 2350 bce – 2300 bce. Metjetji's main title,

proudly written in the top line of the lintel, directly above his face, says he was overseer of the kind of palace attendants called khenty-she. Khenty-she has been translated in several ways, but it clearly refers to trusted servants whose duties placed them physically close to the king. Evidence suggests that at least some of these men and woman were body guards. This is important because there was something like a harem conspiracy or palace revolt around this time, and possibly more than one.²

Could Metjetji's hypothetical theophoric name have been identical to one borne by a conspirator? Did it become an embarrassment or unwelcome reminder? Perhaps someday the



Metjetji relief ROM 953.116.1 - detail of Metjetji

remains of Metjetji's tomb will be found and we will learn a little of how he fitted in to those dangerous years.

The more I study my old friend, and the more I learn about his life and times, the more mysteries I find. Some seem insoluble, but others suggest explanations.

For example, why did Egyptians go to so much trouble and expense to not only build and equip elaborate tombs, but also to have images carved so that passers-by could see and read them? Such inscriptions are sometimes called Tomb Biographies, though they usually tell us little enough about the lives of the owners. The aim of the ROM's Metjetji relief, like that of most portraits, was to show us, what a powerful, handsome, absolutely ideal man the subject, in this case Metjetji, was. But why would Metjetji have cared what people thought about him long after he died?

The inscription suggests the answer. The top was lost when the piece was cut out of the tomb, but the line of text above his head tells us he was a royal noble, Director of the Office of Khenty-She. A few words are missing at the beginning of his address to us, which begins at the upper right corner, but we know from similar texts that the missing words tell us that Metjetji was "Beloved by his father." The remaining text says he was favoured or praised by his Mother. He goes on to inform us that he arranged his parents' burial in the royal cemetery, consecrated ground. Through his relationship with the king, he was able to have sarcophagi carved for them. He tells us that he brought offerings for them every day. He also tells us that he "never caused them to see anything bad." Does he mean he kept them from any unkindness? Or does he imply that there were no bad deeds of his own to distress them? He boasts that he never, since his birth, did anything to anger anyone. And finally, he

reminds us that he was an important man, one who assisted the king in all his works. An ideal man.

Why did Metjetji show and tell us these things? He wants something from us, even as he wanted something from the people who visited his tomb at Sakkara four thousand years ago. He wants us to leave an offering; in modern terms, we'd say he wants us to remember him, and pray for him. He'd like us to share our lunch, give him a beer and some bread, and say his name out loud. If we do that for him, his spirit will live, and he will help us in our daily lives. He assumed that we'd be more likely to help him out if we believed he was a good and powerful man, worthy of our time and attention. He is trying to show and tell us that he was a man we'd have admired, whose values were the same as ours: loyalty to king and to family, both as son and as father. And it doesn't hurt to show us that he was a nice-looking fellow, too.

If we visit with Metjetji, say his name, and, by speech alone, magically provide him with the bread and beer he needs, he will look after us. It's good to have a friend on the Other Side.



Donkeys ROM 953.116.2

Notes

¹. The great book of Egyptian names, no longer up-to-date, Ranke's 1935 *Personennamen*, offers no other holders of this name.

². The most complete treatment of these tumultuous days that I know of is Naguib Kanawati's *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace*, 2003 Routledge. Professor Kanawati translates *khenty-she* as 'guard' and discusses the history and use of the term on pages 14 and following.

Translations of Metjetji's reliefs can be found in: Christiane Ziegler, 1999, "The Tomb of Metjetji," in *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Pages 408-417. Nigel Strudwick, 2005, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*. Atlanta: Writings from the Ancient World. 222 Texts of Metjetji pages 297-299.

Annual Symposium / Symposium Annuel 2020 Tombs of the Theban Hills



We can picture ancient Egypt like no other culture. This is because of the vivid depictions of ancient life preserved in fabulously beautiful tombs. The hills of Western Thebes contain the tombs of thousands of ancient Egyptians: nobles, bureaucrats, artists and minor priests and their families. The artifacts and wall paintings found in these graves, and the remains of the people themselves, have shaped our understanding of Egyptian culture and history. 2020's SSEA Symposium will focus on the history of this vast necropolis and on recent discoveries and research. Join us for a wonderful day exploring the life and thought of our ancient friends. Due to the pandemic, this year's Symposium will be on Zoom. We hope that this will enable more SSEA members and other friends of Ancient Egypt to participate. Please join us online for this unique event.

Among our confirmed speakers are Dr. Kent Weeks, Dr. Aidan Dodson, Dr. Cedric Gobeil, Dr. Julia Budka, Dr. John Gee and Mr. Mark Trumppour.

This event takes place November 6-8th, 2020. Friday, November 6th and Sunday the 8th will consist of short academic papers and November 7th of a series of longer, invited papers by international scholars.

Joining fees for the event will be \$35 non-members, \$30 members, \$25 non-member students and \$20 student members

2020 Annual General Meeting of the SSEA/SÉÉA

Every year, on the weekend of the Annual Symposium and Scholars' Colloquium, the entire voting membership of the SSEA/SÉÉA hold their ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING in Toronto to elect the Board of Trustees which governs the Society through the parent, "national" organization ("Head Office") and pass the Society's budget and approve the financial statements.

The national organization organizes the Annual Symposium and Scholars' Colloquium and all publications, including the Journal and Newsletter and maintains the database of members. All members of any chapter of the SSEA or SÉÉA are members of the national organization and entitled to vote. If you cannot attend the Annual General Meeting of The SSEA/SÉÉA, you may also send a proxy, using the salmon-coloured form, which will be mailed to you. This year's Annual General Meeting will be held virtually on November 6th, 2020 from 5:30pm.

Schedule for the 2020 AGM weekend

Date & Topic TBA – Sally L.D. Katary Memorial Lecture

Friday, November 6th, 9am to 4:30pm – Scholars' Colloquium Day 1

Friday, November 6th, 5:30 pm onward – Annual General Meeting of the SSEA/SÉÉA

Saturday, November 7th, 9am to 5pm – 43rd Annual Symposium

Sunday, November 8th, 11am to 4pm - Poster Session and Scholars' Colloquium Day 2;

All events will be held virtually. All times are ET. The Colloquium and Symposium are now grouped together as paid events. One fee pays for the entire weekend.

A detailed schedule for the entire weekend will be available online at www.thessea.org

Symposium Annuel 2020

Nous pouvons imaginer l'Égypte ancienne comme aucune autre culture. C'est à cause des représentations vives de la vie ancienne conservées dans des tombes fabuleusement belles. Les collines de Thèbes occidentale abritent les tombes de milliers d'anciens Égyptiens: nobles, bureaucrates, artistes et petits prêtres et leurs familles. Les artefacts et les peintures murales trouvés dans ces tombes, ainsi que les restes des habitants eux-mêmes, ont façonné notre compréhension de la culture et de l'histoire égyptiennes. Le symposium SSEA 2020 se concentrera sur l'histoire de cette vaste nécropole et sur les récentes découvertes et recherches. Rejoignez-nous pour une merveilleuse journée à explorer la vie et la pensée de nos anciens amis. En raison de la pandémie, le Symposium de cette année sera sur Zoom. Nous espérons que cela permettra à davantage de membres de la SSEA et d'autres amis de l'Égypte ancienne de participer. Rejoignez-nous en ligne pour cet événement unique.

Parmi nos conférenciers confirmés figurent le Dr Kent Weeks, le Dr Aidan Dodson, le Dr Cedric Gobeil, le Dr Julia Budka, le Dr John Gee et M. Mark Trumppour.

Cet événement aura lieu du 6 au 8 novembre 2020. Les vendredi 6 et dimanche 8 novembre comprendront de courts articles universitaires et le 7 novembre une série d'articles plus longs, invités par des universitaires internationaux.

Les frais d'entrée seront de \$35 non-membres, \$30 Membres SSEA, \$25 étudiants non-membres, \$20 membres étudiants.

2020 Assemblée Générale Annuelle de la the SSEA/SÉÉA

L'assemblée générale annuelle des membres de la SSEA/SÉÉA se tient chaque année à Toronto lors de la même fin de semaine que le symposium annuel et colloque. On y élit l'ensemble des administrateurs (Trustees), lesquels gouvernent l'organisme parent, « national », de la Société ("Head Office") ; aussi, on y adopte le budget de la Société et approuve les états financiers.

L'organisme national organise le Symposium annuel de même que le Colloque, s'occupe de toutes les publications nationales, incluant le Journal et le Newsletter et maintient la liste des membres. Tous les membres de tous les chapitres de la SSEA/SÉÉA sont aussi membres de l'organisme national et ont droit de vote. Si vous ne pouvez être présent lors de l'assemblée, vous pouvez aussi voter par procuration (proxy), en retournant le formulaire couleur saumon qui vous sera envoyé.

Cette assemblée aura lieu le 6 Novembre à 17h30.

Horaire de la Fin de Semaine de l'Assemblée Générale 2020

Le Colloque et le Symposium sont maintenant les événements payant.

Vendredi 6 novembre, 9h à 16h30 – Premier jour du Colloque

Vendredi 6 novembre, débutant à 17h30 – Assemblée générale annuelle des membres de la SSEA/SÉÉA

Samedi 7 novembre, 9h à 17h – 41e Symposium annuel

Dimanche 8 novembre, 11h à 16h – Deuxième jour du Colloque et Session d’Affiches

L'horaire détaillé pour chaque jour sera disponible en ligne, sur le site de la SSEA/SÉÉA : www.thessea.org.

Montreal Chapter Report – August 2020 (the COVID Report)

The 2019 / 2020 season was our chapter's 20th, and we wanted it memorable... 2020 sure began under the best auspices! After a most successful fundraising supper on January 17th, we enjoyed, back on the 13th of February, a great lecture by Cynthia Parra, introducing the audience to the topic of her Masters thesis: "L'amulette du cœur sur corde dans les représentations de l'Égypte pharaonique: évolution et signification".

In the following month, on March 7th, our dear President, Cloé Caron, held a well-attended seminar on translation and commentaries of Pyramid Text (formulas 241 and 486, to be precise). Certainly a "formula" to be repeated in future seasons!

The next lecture was scheduled for April 1st. The lecturer, Aidan Dodson from Britain, had flown across the ocean hours earlier, the venue was full, and we finished the evening at the pub, discussing Ancient Egypt 'til the wee small hours... A most believable story, isn't it? But it's all April's fools! Aidan never took his flight, the venue and the pub were closed down. And we all were in confinement... A mysterious virus wreaked havoc, bringing our season to a sudden halt. (Geeze... any other year this would seem like an unbelievable April's fool story!). Memorable you say?

But fear not! The Chapter will be back for its 21st season! And online! Allowing you all to join us in our future activities. Looking forward to see you all, if only virtually!

Toronto Chapter Report

Fall 2020 Lectures and Updates: Online Lecture Series

After having to cancel all our spring and summer events due to COVID19, the SSEA-Toronto Chapter is happy to announce our return for the Fall 2020 Lecture Series. Like many organizations, we have had to make adjustments. The Fall 2020 Lecture Series will be entirely online through Zoom. Members will receive a link to the SSEA-Toronto Chapter's Zoom "meeting room" to be able to attend a live lecture.

We will be presenting 3 virtual events this fall, including a lecture by Dr. Dawn Power of the University of Toronto. In addition, we are proud to be pairing with the Société pour l'Étude de l'Égypte Ancienne-- Montréal to share lectures. SSEA-Toronto Chapter members will have the opportunity to attend SÉÉA- Montréal Zoom Lectures. More details on all this to follow.

Our September Lecture is Tanis: the Second-hand Capital and its Untouched Royal Tombs, given by Gayle Gibson on September 17 at 7:00PM.

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.