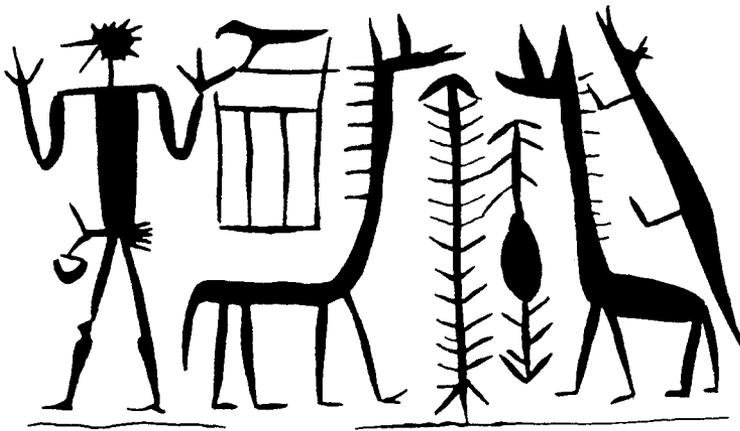




The Rundle Foundation for Egyptian Archaeology

NEWSLETTER NO. 60

April 1997



A Protodynastic cylinder-seal from Helwan
The new design for our next coffee-mug!
(Actual height of representation ca. 3 cm.)

This unusual representation is carved on a tiny cylinder-seal, made of steatite, which was found at the cemetery at Helwan/Ezbet el-Walda, located about 25 km. south of Cairo.

The site of Helwan consists of several thousand graves, which cover a time span from late Predynastic to Early Old Kingdom Periods; most of these graves, however, can be dated to the Early Dynastic Period.

Helwan has been excavated in the 1940's and 50's by Zaki Saad, who published a number of preliminary reports and a small monograph on selected graves and objects, the majority of the graves, though, remained unpublished. The size of the site, the richness of some of these tombs and

the quality of many of the objects, that have been published so far suggest that the site of Helwan provides a great potential to achieve very detailed information about a community in the vicinity of Egypt's capital Memphis.

Some of the objects from Helwan, as our cylinder-seal, are currently on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Dr Christiana Köhler had the kind permission by the Director of the Museum, Dr Mohammed Saleh, to study and record them in January 1997.

Cylinder-seals were meant to be impressed in, or rather rolled over, a surface such as wax or clay, in order to have control over access to a commodity or a room. Vessels, boxes and doors would be closed with a string and the knot would be covered with a lump of clay which could then be sealed. By doing so, the owner of the commodity - i.e. the owner of the seal - could ensure that no unauthorized person could have access to it without breaking the seal.

Therefore, seals were the proof of ownership and authority and were an essential part of private and state administration throughout Pharaonic history. There are a number of different types of seals, e.g. stamp-seals and scarabs in later periods, many of which carry the names of kings and their officials, who represented an administrative unit such as a granary or a treasury. The cylindrical type of seal is the earliest to be found in Egypt and is probably derived from Mesopotamian forerunners of the Fourth Millennium B.C. It could be worn like an amulet, attached to a string around the neck of its owner, exactly the way as we find it in the hieroglyphic sign (S 19 in Gardiner's sign-list), which could be part of administrative titles.

Our cylinder-seal is probably one of the earliest examples found in Egypt, the reading is therefore very difficult and requires considerable research, however, some preliminary remarks can be made at this early point of investigation.

The representation, drawn after impression in soft plasticine, is dominated by a male figure on the left side with raised arms, the head turned to the left. He possibly wears a penis-sheath, which is quite a common attire during the predynastic period. Next to his left hand is a rectangular structure with one internal horizontal line and two vertical lines. From contemporaneous and later parallels we know that this structure represents a building, namely the façade of the royal palace. The same parallels tell us that this palace-façade is usually topped by a hawk, which we can actually see in the little figure on top of the rectangle, and that it can contain the name of a king, thus representing the so-called Horus-name of a king. To the right, next to this sign, we can see a number of animals, namely two

giraffes in an heraldic position and possibly a crocodile behind the neck of the right-hand giraffe. In between the giraffes are two vertical signs that are very difficult to identify: The one to the right with the oval centre-piece could perhaps be compared with the symbol for the god Min, although it is usually depicted horizontally; the other sign might be a plant.

Whereas the animals pose some problems of interpretation, the male figure and the palace-façade can be understood more easily. Though the palace-façade is not inscribed with a name, the close relationship to the figure suggests that it identifies the person as being either a representative of the royal palace, i.e. the king, or the king himself. We can assume that the owner of this seal played some role within the administrative system, he might have been an official in charge of an administrative unit, who was directly and personally responsible to the king, otherwise, he would not have had the seal buried with him after his death and the end of his office.

Judging from the date of the parallel evidence and from the style of representation, the seal can be dated to the protodynastic period, a formative phase just before Dynasty 1, when the socio-political complexity was still in process of being defined. From this early period, we only have very little information about the governmental hierarchy and administration of Egypt. The cylinder-seal from Helwan therefore provides rare and invaluable evidence.

The study of objects from Helwan at the Cairo Museum represents the beginning of research on the site of Helwan. It is planned to re-excavate and map the cemetery, to record and study all objects for a more comprehensive analysis and publication.

COURSES FOR FIRST SEMESTER

EGYPTIAN MUMMIFICATION & BURIAL CUSTOMS: Mr Paul Bentley will hold a one-day Seminar on SATURDAY 3 May, from 10 am to 5 pm. Cost: \$50.

THE LAND OF THE PHARAOHS: An outline of Egyptian History: Ms Rodna Siebels will conduct an 8-weeks course each WEDNESDAY, commencing 14 May, from 7-9 pm. Cost: \$70 (members \$65).

CONFERENCE - DIGGERS ON THE NILE

The Australian Centre for Egyptology will hold a Conference on SATURDAY 19 July, from 10 am to 5 pm, in X5B Theatre 1. The Australian Egyptologists will discuss their excavations in the important sites

of Helwan (Early Dynastic); Abu Sir (Old Kingdom); the Teti Cemetery at Saqqara (Old and New Kingdoms) and Thebes (New Kingdom).
 COST: \$35 (Students and Pensioners \$25).

ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR BRISBANE

The following activities are being planned:

1. A Public Conference on Egyptian Archaeology from 12 noon to 5 pm on SATURDAY, 26 July. Illustrated lectures will be given by all Egyptologists of the Australian Centre for Egyptology from Sydney, describing the results of their recent work in various sites in Egypt.
2. *An Introduction to Egyptian Hieroglyphs* Course will be given by Professor Naguib Kanawati during the week from MONDAY 21 to FRIDAY 25 July. Time to be advised.
3. *Reading Hieroglyphs*. This course will be held from MONDAY 21 to FRIDAY 25 July, and is designed for people who completed the Introductory Course in 1996. Selected texts will be read in class with linguistic and historical commentary. Times to be advised.

PROFESSOR KANAWATI'S VISIT TO ADELAIDE

On April 11, Professor Kanawati will visit Adelaide to give two lectures on the current excavations at Saqqara. He will outline the main finds and results of these excavations.

PLANNED PUBLICATIONS FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 1997

A.C.E. Reports:

The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara Vol. 2 - *Smaller Burials*, Report No. 8

The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara Vol. 3 - *The Tomb of Ankhmahor*, Report 8

A.C.E. Studies:

Studies in Ancient Egyptian Medical Terminology, J. Walker. Study No. 4

The Amarna Age: Evidence from West Asia, F. Giles. Study No. 5

The cost of A.C.E. Reports and Studies is \$40 (members \$35), plus postage (\$5 within Australia and \$9 outside Australia) per volume.

ALL ENQUIRIES: MISS JOAN BECK - (02) 9850 8848