

*The Director's Editio -**Thank you Mr Obama for returning its Letters of Nobility to "history" ...and therefore to the task of "historian"*

Mr Barack Obama's election constitutes a major event, not only for the US but also for the world. Expectations from all parts are considerable. The new president of the United States is conscious of this, as well as of his responsibilities to succeed for fear that disappointment would be proportional to the enthusiasm which millions are presently expressing. May we thus wish him to succeed and to make, within the time frame of his mandate, both the US and this world a better place.

Historians, and scholars in all fields alike, are on the other hand busy with the intemporal, our task being to establish the truth, or at least attempt to near it, in our respective fields of specialisations. This is why tribunals – such as in the recent Paris/Louvre Sekhmet statue affair - sometimes request our assistance as they expect this truth, bound to independence of mind and disinterest. Precisely why science and politics, the latter which deals with the temporal and the more often *negotiated* interests, should as best as possible be dissociated.

Among these scholars, we Egyptologists are usually busier with the politics of the pharaohs than that of any living politician, and often, not to say very often, we are cut off from present "realities" - as is too keenly reproached by non academics - to investigate the past actions of these antic civilisations with which we are concerned.

In some cases however, history catches us back; or it may be that in turn we wish to catch it as we understand that time has come to emerge from the past, and witness the present, in view of the obvious importance of a forthcoming event. This is why, for my part, I managed on January 20th to find myself in front of CNN to watch – live - Elected President Obama take his oath as well as express his inaugural address*.

If an Egyptologist seldom appears in places which are not of his initial concern, perhaps like the great Swiss Egyptologist Edouard Naville who at one time in his life left Egyptology for the *Société des Nations*, rarer are the

times when he chooses to express himself publicly about matters which are not directly his speciality. Such is our reserve and the decision whether to insert or not this Editio has been a matter of deep reflection.

However the speech of Mr Obama contains something for which any historian worldwide and hence many Egyptologists will be grateful. It is not - as many lauded - the wish to put Science – with a big S - back to its rightful place. A wish which will rightly satisfy any American scientists and their fellow citizens who understand that science has not only a lot to do with the future of any nation, but also of mankind; yet still a wish *to be* accomplished, and *not yet so*.

That to which I am referring is already historic – hence *de facto* expressed public statement that: "*To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history*".

For any politician *to decide* on which side of history one should stand, requires for a start *to know* the flow of history - as established by historians (we know that Mr Obama is a great reader of historical texts, if not for a start by his regular reference to Lincoln). Every historian being indeed a source, and the union of their knowledge making this river of history to which Mr Obama refers, and the shores of which are often difficult to distinguish - even for the most learned.

Historical knowledge painstakingly assembled over centuries, down to the most minute and seemingly trivial detail - and as I speak, and since several decades, the true name of a single tree is the subject of a continuous debate between Egyptologists, to better understand the pharaohs' foreign trade policies.

Acquisition of a flow of knowledge to which tens of thousands of scholars have decided not only to devote their life, but very often much sacrifice in the usual same



Mr B. H. Obama, President of the United States during his inaugural address on January 20th, 2009. (Photo A. Wong, Getty Images).

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*The full text of Mr Obama's Inaugural Address may be found in several places including on the website of the *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html>) where it can be read or equally seen and heard.

silent dedication and conviction to which Mr Obama also referred when he said: *“some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labour - who have carried us up the long rugged path towards prosperity and freedom”*.

This “history” to which Mr Obama refers is not US history alone; but the history of mankind in its totality. His global vision and philosophy does not restrict itself to the present and the past; but to general human history – that is to the “histories” of many nations - unified in an analysed and thereafter comprehensible flow.

It is indeed to philosophers to observe the course of history, and the “use” which one may make of it. This is why all leading statesmen have been philosophers in their own way - what we popularly call *great minds* - as they referred to past actions, and interpreted them so as to project their future actions. In fact most leading politicians know that *history-philosophy-politics* form a chain and it is to any of them to remember it; or in forgetfulness brake it - with the known inevitable and resulting tragedies, such as war.

Hence the merit of Mr Obama's reference to history does not lie in the fact that history is useful; many of us are fully aware of this. His merit is to have reminded millions of listeners that history *is so important*, that **a politic for national or world governance shall rely on the global observation of its course**: *“Know that you are on the wrong side of history”*. By extension, this irrevocably implies that the work of historians is of such extreme importance that the future of the world shall no less rely upon their work.

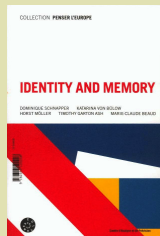
Considering that some still question the value of history, and even some disciplines of the Humanities – a number by ignorance, others willingly so as to down cut state funding for other more “practical” – i.e. immediately cash raising - hard sciences or, within the frame of new philosophies (see right) meant to forget “history” to preserve peace in the future, such statement could not be left unnoticed. It may be said that should the debate of the purpose of the study of the past be raised again, perhaps by some student(s), one could reply: *“For a start, listen to the inaugural address of President Barack Obama, as his vision for domestic or foreign political action - that for which millions have elected him - relies greatly on the global view of the history of mankind”; something which incidentally also includes Kenyan, Egyptian or other “histories”*.

For another feat of Mr Obama is not only to show that the heritage of Africa can join other heritages, to change the world. Something which as an early student of African archaeology at University College London I find particularly pleasing considering the disdain shown for years by many for the “primitive” cultures of Africa; but also unequivocally establish that any of us - from the farthest corner of our planet may as from now on become president of the Unites States, or of another nation, provided that for a start some qualities (wisdom foremost), hard work and will are at hand.

So, yes, for all of this and here in particular for publicly returning its *“Letters of nobility”* to history, and hence to the task of historian, thank you very much, Mr Obama!

C. T. de V.

A new philosophy for the partial oblivion of... history



The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently sponsored and very widely diffused a new book entitled *Identité et Mémoire/Identity and memory** (2007). A double cover bilingual French-English publication which aims to be accessible to a wider than usual audience and incorporates five key texts by French, German, and English leading scholars, including Dominique Schnapper (EHESS - Paris), as well as from the popular writer Katarina von Bülow, of the known German family of the same name. The book contains very important reflections on history and its use, or non use, much summarized in Schnapper's words when she says: *“Modern democracies have a problematic relationship with time...They are societies of the present. Democracy is the system of immediate demands, of the desire for equality and universal well being hic et nunc, here and now...This involves a large amount of forgetting - to relive the past and reinterpret it in relation to the present in order to go on living...The past is not to be negated or blotted out. Answering for and transcending the past is the key to being present in the present and to envisaging the future (p. 5)...How do we go about accepting Europe's past and establishing a common memory in order to build Europe's future together? (p. 7)”*.

The building of Europe through a common historical heritage is, as will have been understood, at the centre of the book's debate. K. von Bülow's personal experience during the Second World War and later life in the US and France has been called and integrated in the book, if not because born a German she finally decided to bring down frontiers and never see such horrific war again by taking the French nationality. This is all too well, but her autobiographic chapter - which expresses on a personal tone the general new philosophy of the book, ends on this marking sentence *“Memories, even sad ones, are beautiful, but they should be made into books, not nations (p. 31)”*.

What is the use of a book - starting by the one in question - if it not to be used to build our knowledge and hence our future. What is the use of keeping “memories” in them, that is to say “historical knowledge”, if they are not to be used to precisely... build the future. Nothing more than blowing in the wind. Certainly the idea of creating an Europe based on universal values is extremely valuable - undoubtedly the positive side of the book - but attempting to do so by deleting (and who will decide?) any or the relevant parts of history, so as to eliminate political and territorial claims, is indeed very dangerous. As forgetfulness of what happened leads precisely to the same things to happen again; and in this respect there is much for a start from the referred World War II which we certainly should not forget. **C. T. de V.**

*Schnapper, D. Bülow, K. (von); Möller, H., Garton Ash, T. Beaud, M-C. *Identité et mémoire/Identity and Memory*. Collection Penser l'Europe. Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Cultures Frances, Paris; 2007

The Times Higher Education recent article on the instrumentalisation of ...history

Precisely what the authors of the above book do not wish to see happened. The political instrumentalisation of archaeology and history, for among other things political/territorial claims, is the subject of an article entitled *The past is a disputed country* published a few days ago (January, 9) in the *Higher Education* supplement of *The Times* (London) and which may be read online*, as already spotted by Egyptology News. [*http://egyptology.blogspot.com/2009/01/past-is-disputed-country.html](http://egyptology.blogspot.com/2009/01/past-is-disputed-country.html) [*http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=404892](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=404892)

British Museum's major discovery of degraded oil in ancient Egyptian pigments

The importance of the recent British Museum article entitled *Writing that cannot be erased: investigations of a box of pigmented inlays from the tomb chapel of an Old Kingdom noble** has not, despite its misleading title, escaped our attention (it was only a question for us to get to its reading stage). Misleading because for a start it seems to us that the inscription "He is one who fashions his representations in writing that cannot be erased" found in Nefermaat's tomb (Fourth Dynasty, circa 2600 B.C.) refers rather to the carved technique employed for the reliefs, then the indeed innovative and possibly unique paste-inlay technique used to fill them with colours (colours which BM staff have analysed using various techniques). With the result that the article could have been entitled something like *Rare malachite based pigment found from Old Kingdom tomb* since as the authors rightly pointed out finds of such pigments from ancient Egypt are extremely rare, if not unknown. However it could have more importantly equally been called *Analysis of Old Kingdom Colours Suggest the Use of Oil based Pigment(s) in Ancient Egypt* - if not to propose a more sensational title. The authors of the research, Janet Ambers, Rebecca Stacey and John H. Taylor have nevertheless fully understood the implications for the history of ancient Egyptian art of the discovery of "oil paints" at such an early date, as betrayed by their statement: "The presence of such a medium is potentially extremely significant, as the use of oil binders in dynastic Egyptian painting is virtually unknown. The use of an oil binder is unprecedented for such ancient material and may demonstrate a previously unsuspected technology". The words *potentially extremely significant* no doubt competing for the prizes of "Understatement" or "Euphemism of the Year" where the history of ancient Egyptian art is concerned. Yet the extreme prudence of the authors is comprehensible in view of the implication of such advance, that is to say should the fatty acids and the polymerized lipids identified be definitely attached to linseed oil, as suggested in the article. In this respect great prudence is equally needed as, as rightly stated, ancient Egyptians may have indeed used other drying oils such as safflower or poppy oils. If not rarer substance such as *Moringa* oil, although in this latter respect the undersigned does not know whether it could work as pigment binder or base. A forthcoming much waited for article is announced, and while waiting for its publishing, may we extend to our colleagues our sincere congratulations for what is a truly remarkable and, yes, a *potentially extremely significant* discovery. **C. T de V.**

*Ambers, J. Stacey, R. and Taylor, J. H. *Writing that cannot be erased: investigations of a box of pigmented inlays from the tomb chapel of an Old Kingdom noble. The British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* (2007). Available online at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/TRB2007_Ambers.pdf.

PS - Note that you have the right of answer to this notice or any other article found in the present newsletter.

Set of pigments just discovered in KV63 (Valley of the Kings, Tomb 63) !

As we write these lines Dr. Otto Schaden and his team (Memphis University, USA) are continuing their much followed excavation of New Kingdom KV63 tomb. Much followed not only in view of their exciting finds, notably a set of sealed jars found with various sarcophagi, but also in view of their much appreciated decision to put photos of their discoveries *as* they study the tomb's content on the web. Decision allowing thousands to follow progresses. This is why, thanks to the direct authorisation of Dr. Schaden as well as - despite their very busy occupation - thanks to the very kind diligence of team member Mrs. Roxanne Wilson, we are pleased to show our readers photographs (right & below) of one of the two sealed plates containing pigments which they have just discovered! Once opened the plates revealed a black and a brown pigment; the black one most probably some crushed wood charcoal as the planned analyses will probably reveal. These two photographs, with others of the January/February finds or other remarkable finds - such as wonderful flower wreaths -, may be seen on the excavation's website at: <http://www.kv-63.com/photos2009.html>



Black pigment, probably crushed wood charcoal, just found in KV63. Left, plates sealed as found, right opened (All rights reserved, Dr. O. Schaden, February 2009)

Similar ochre use in Armenian Erebuni (scientific correspondence)

[Received: January 20th, 2009]

"I've just received the 9th issue of AEC Newsletter and was amazed by the scientific coincidence I've discovered there! I want to share it with you. Perhaps it will be interesting for you to know that I have done a similar experiment you have described in the Newsletter with yellow ochre last October.

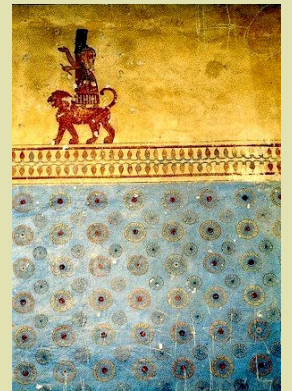
Here is the short story: as you may remember, I work on the research project concerning the Urartian bone remains and animal representations. One of the main sites I work on is Erebuni citadel situated on the Arin-berd hill with its adjacent territories. The excavations on the Northern slope of Arin-berd in 2003-2007, directed by Prof. Felix Ter-Martirosyan, revealed different Achaemenian and Urartian layers.

In the second Urartian layer a deposit of bone remains was found in the environment very much reminding a workshop. The remarkable fact is that these bone fragments were coloured

and the natural texture of the bone had been changed. Next to the bone remains, pieces of yellow ochre, dark blue crystalline paint and white chalk were found. As known, these materials were used for colouring Erebuni citadel's walls and drawing frescos. For confirming the use of bones in the painting activities and finding the function that bones played in this, I've done an experiment, the description of which and results I've presented in the IX ASWA (Archaeozoology of South-Western Asia and Adjacent areas) conference in Al-Ain, UAE, November 16th (the Proceedings of the Conference are forthcoming)". Now, why should the bones were used in the paint making processes? All is about the collagen of bone. When the bone (= collagen) is boiled in the water, the three tropocollagen strands separate into globular, random coils, which hydrolyzing partially and producing gelatine. It serves as a good solvent and, once it has been dried, it is a perfect fixer and preservative. From the other side, as you

know, ochre is a natural pigment, the colouring agent of which is the iron III oxide – Fe_2O_3 . The yellow ochre is the iron III oxide hydrate: $Fe_2O_3 \cdot H_2O$. It is partially soluble in the water, but well soluble in gelatine. Thus, we have a good combination of a solvent/fixer/ preservative, which is the gelatine and the solute – painting pigment. Eventually, this combination produces a qualitative paint for the frescos. I don't know whether Egyptians used animal bones for the paint making processes, or it was Urartians' (or others) innovation, but the sametechnique was used by Romans much later times. **Lilit Mirzoyan***

(*Doctorant, Institute d'histoire et archéologie de l'Orient ancien, Université de Strasbourg (France)).



Yellow ochre tinted bones found in Erebuni (Photos L. Mirzoyan)

The use of glue in ancient Egypt (scientific correspondence)

[Received January 23, 2009] "After your last newsletter (No. 9) where you also speak about fish or rabbit glue, I have spent a lot of time trying to find something about the kinds of glue Egyptians used during the XXI dynasty or, at least, during the 3rd intermediate period. I haven't been able to find any single identified sample where rabbit glue or fish glue or casein glue has been specifically identified also if the presence of "animal glue" has been often reported. Representation of adhesives application from ancient Egypt are quite rare. The first one comes from the tomb of Rekhmira at Thebes (TT100, XVIII dynasty). The second one is reported in Bogue [2008], *The Chemistry and Technology of Gelatine and Glue*. "Among the stone carvings of the ancient city of Thebes, of the period of Thothmes III ... is one representing the gluing of a thin piece of a rare wood of red colour to a yellow plank of sycamore." Paul I. Smith, *Glue and gelatine* (1929), and Lucas [1962, *Ancient Egyptian Materials & Industries*] have reported about the recovery of a glue specimen in a rock chamber over the mortuary temple of Queen Hat-shep-sut at Deir el Bahari. Also in this case no news about the real nature of the glue. Among the many kinds of glue available, I have thought to consider the ones with the best properties: rabbit skin glue and isinglass. They both could have been available to Egyptian craftsmen. About the first one, I have only verified if rabbit was a common animal in Egypt and I have found that there is a rabbit breed reported as "native" (Gabali rabbit - Mahmoud, 1938). Isinglass, anyway, is more interesting. It is very pure fish gelatin from the swim bladders of a limited number of fish, chiefly the sturgeon, practically colorless, and it is the only kind of fish glue comparable to rabbit glue. At least, a sturgeon specie is still present in Egypt (*Acipenser sturio*) and, anyway, a less pure isinglass can be obtained from bladders of other fishes. Fish is a quite common animal in Egyptian religion: oxyrinchus, tilapia, pagro ... There is also a representation of Anubis "preparing a huge fish for embalming" (Tombs of Khonsu and Khabekhnet, Cemetery of Deir el-Medina). It seems that the oxyrinchus was the fish "that swallowed the penis of Osiris"... The tilapia fish escorted the solar barque of Ra in the underworld and in the Book of the Dead, the deceased was assured that while in the god's barque he would have seen the tilapia fish, considered a re-birth symbol. Is it possible that the use of fish glue (particularly isinglass) was something symbolic or concerning a particular religious aspect? It is a simple, non evidence-based theory but, in painting, isinglass is used as a binder too and if a plasticizer is necessary; Russian conservation practice is to add dark wild-flower honey to the glue solution, usually in a proportion equal to the weight of the dry glue..." **Antonella Pasquale** (Architect Specialised in the restoration of monuments, Scuola di Specializzazione in beni architettonici e del paesaggio, Dipartimento di Scienze per l'Architettura, Università di Genova (Italia)) [Mrs Pasquale is also a team member of our *Sarcophagus Project*. We thank her for this interesting letter. Should a reader know better please contact us at Egyptology@ysu.am. Follow-ups to her letter can be published, if requested. C. T. de V.]

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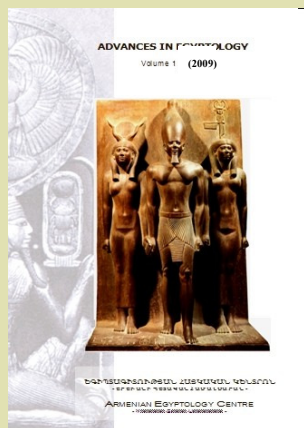
Appointment: Ms Ingeborg Waanders of Holland is appointed *Senior Research Associate* with our centre in view of her more than invaluable services and good assistance to our research made over the last year. Our sincere congratulations and gratitude go to her.

First issue of *JAEL*, a new Egyptology peer-reviewed bulletin is now online!



The first issue of the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* or *JAEL*, with Prof. Richard Wilkinson of the University of Arizona as general editor, is now available at: <http://www.uair.arizona.edu/holdings/journal/issue?r=uadc://azu.egypt/Volume1/Number1/>. The journal is a wholly online scholarly publication integrating Egyptian archaeology with Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and African studies—providing a new venue for this growing field of interdisciplinary and inter-area research. The article *Can Scarabs Argue for the Origin of the Hyksos?* by D. Ben-Tor will be of interest to Armenian readers as it provides an up to date account concerning the Hyksos and in particular their increasingly more precise Palestinian place of origin.

Advances in Egyptology No. 1 (2009) - CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS!



Advances in Egyptology (*AinE*) is the new bulletin of Egyptology of Yerevan State University's Armenian Egyptology Centre, under the general editorship of its director.

AinE accepts articles which clearly contribute to the advance of Egyptological knowledge and make a step forward into the unknown.

Please send contributions to egyptology@ysu.am or by post at the above address before **May 1, 2009**.

Acknowledgments and please become a supporter of our centre!

Our thanks again to *Egyptology News* (<http://egyptology.blogspot.com/2009/01/armenian-egyptology-centre-newsletter.html>) and to you Ms. Byrnes for again diffusing the last issue No. 9 of our newsletter. No less to the *Association of Andalusian Egyptology* (www.egyptomania.com/asade/aec_newsletter_09.pdf or type simply "AEC Newsletter" in Google) for equally diffusing - and again of their accord - the same issue. The AEC Newsletter, it will be reminded, is a free non funded information newsletter about our centre's activities and subjects related to its Egyptological activities or Egyptology in general - now read by a very wide audience indeed! Taking every month a considerable amount of our energy, it is very satisfying for our staff to see it so willingly diffused by third parties. **Should you wish to make a donation to support it or one of our projects, or place an advertisement for example for a new book or for your company or project, please mail Egyptology@ysu.am to thereafter SWIFT/IBAN transfer the sum donated to the university account via our correspondent bank:**

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Black and white photographs may be inserted at will; color photographs or plates are also accepted in reasonable numbers if justified.

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