

Gemma Tully: *Fieldwork in Egypt (Winter 2022)* Report for Friends of the Petrie Museum

Gemma Tully, Co-ordinator of the UCL Petrie Museum's 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project, describes some of the principal activities and outcomes of the fieldwork undertaken at Amarna at the end of 2022 by herself and Anna Garnett. The report illustrates the impact of the funding received from the Friends of the Petrie Museum. It also looks forward to the next phase of activity.

Aims

Anna Garnett and I travelled to Egypt in early November. Our aims were to work with local communities at Amarna as part of the 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project and to develop links between the Petrie Museum—its team and its collection—and Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities colleagues at museums and sites in Cairo and Middle Egypt.

Activities in Cairo

Our first five days were spent in Cairo. We visited the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) and met colleagues Sayed Fadl (Curator, NMEC), Mohamed Mokhtar (Curator, NMEC) and Azza Abd el-Maqoud (Public Programmes, NMEC) who gave us a guided tour of the new displays, including the newly-developed Royal Mummies gallery, and also provided privileged behind-the-scenes access.



Gemma Tully with Sayed Fadl (Curator, NMEC) as he explains the ideas behind NMEC's new displays

We also visited colleagues at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, and the Children's Museum of the Egyptian Museum with Shreen Amin (Curator, Children's Museum). In both museums, we met several other curators and public programmes staff, and had the chance to share ideas and discuss new developments in their work as well as the 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project. We took the opportunity to present museum colleagues with copies of *Amarna - Life Under the Sun* and *Conversation Pieces from UCL Collections*, together with Arabic booklets from the Petrie Museum's Tutankhamun temporary display.

During our time in Cairo, we also presented an evening lecture on updates from the Petrie Museum, and the 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project. The hour-long public event was held at the British Council and in collaboration with the Egypt Exploration Society. Thirty people came to the lecture, the majority being Egyptian museum staff and university students in Egyptology and Tourism Studies. At the end of the lecture, we had a short handling session with the new 3D-replicas produced as part of the 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project, which were *en route* to their permanent new home at the Amarna Visitors Centre where they will be used in learning sessions with visiting schools and community groups. ➡

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Shreen Amin (Curator, Children’s Museum) explains some of the recent innovations in the Egyptian Museum



*Professor
Ayman Wahby
Taher talks to
his students
from Mansoura
University
about the 3D
printed replicas
following our
talk at the
British Council*

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Work at Amarna

On November 14th we travelled to Amarna. Anna Garnett took annual leave to work on the ceramic finds from the Amarna North Cliffs Cemetery excavations, whilst also working with me to deliver the first activities and meetings relating to the ‘Tutankhamun the Boy’ project. This included meeting Hamada Kellawy (Chief Inspector, Mallawi) and Fathy Awad (Director of Southern Minya Antiquities, Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA)) to discuss plans for the forthcoming Friends of the Petrie Museum funded ‘Skills Exchange’ week at UCL.

We also toured the current displays in the Amarna Visitor Centre and contributed ideas to discussions about new interpretation plans. We delivered an introductory lecture on the Petrie Museum collection and the Tutankhamun project for local MoTA inspectors and the Amarna Visitor Centre staff. This lecture was followed by interviews with the Visitor Centre team and MoTA Inspectors to determine who will attend the 2023 ‘Skills Exchange’ in London. In addition, we visited Mallawi Museum to see the new displays and meet the team.

We also presented a ‘behind the scenes’ Zoom talk from the Amarna dig house for a Cambridgeshire primary school class, introducing them to the ‘Tutankhamun the Boy’ project and to excavation life. We even had the unexpected pleasure of seeing Lucia Gahlin at the dig house as she was visiting Amarna on one of the tours she leads to Egypt for specialist archaeology travel companies.

Anna Garnett travelled back to Cairo at the end of November where she had the chance to meet with Nagwa Bakr (Community Archaeologist and NMEC staff member) to discuss the ‘Tutankhamun the Boy’ project and Egyptian community work undertaken at the Petrie Museum more generally.

Co-creating Child-led Content

I spent two more weeks at Amarna holding workshops and lectures at the Visitor Centre, which aimed to co-create new, child-led content about Amarna—past and present—focused on the themes of the ‘Tutankhamun the Boy’ project. Run in partnership with colleagues from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the international Amarna Project team, the workshops explored Tutankhamun’s childhood and wider childhood in ancient Amarna with over 80 local children and their families. The workshops centred on local children’s ideas, interests and awareness of the topics, the archaeological methods used to interpret them and their relevance to life in the area today. The range of techniques used to enhance children’s learning included short talks, role play, question and answer sessions, together with hands-



Gemma Tully, Lucia Gahlin and Anna Garnett (left to right) at the Amarna dig house – image courtesy of Anna Garnett.

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on activities which mirrored those carried out with Year 3 children from the project's UK partner school, George Mitchell Primary, Leyton.

One highly successful element of the sessions involved a child being dressed as a young Tutankhamun before he became King, and another as a child from a more 'everyday' background from Amarna. After providing some information to set the scene, children then asked Tutankhamun and the non-elite child questions about their daily lives. These questions will be used to guide the second phase of the Tutankhamun temporary display at the Petrie Museum, and to further develop the learning collection at the Amarna Visitor Centre.



Children practise archaeological methods for excavating skeletons – © Amarna Project

Workshop on Excavating Pit Graves

During a workshop with the local excavators and their children, the workmen demonstrated the methods they use to excavate pit graves in the non-elite cemeteries. This was done using two large sandpits, a replica skeleton and associated burial goods including printed 3D replicas of amulets, ceramic fragments, plant remains, and basketry. After the workmen explained and demonstrated excavation techniques, the children took over, carefully exposing and then lifting the disarticulated skeleton and the artefacts, which were spread across the two sandpits. The Amarna Project's bioarchaeologist, Prof. Gretchen R. Dabbs from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, then explained how to reassemble the skeleton and what we can learn about individuals, their lives and wider society from human remains.

Dr Anna Stevens, who co-directs the Amarna Project, worked with the children to categorise and label the associated artefacts and to help them think about the sorts of clues objects can provide about people, status, daily life, beliefs and community. Other activities involved reinforcing what had been learnt during the excavation activity by cutting out and reassembling paper skeletons and designing personal amulets from colourful modelling clay.



Children show the outcome of the 'build a skeleton' activity – © Amarna Project.

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The children's ideas and feedback from the sessions will shape the next phase of temporary displays and 3D printed handling collections linked to Tutankhamun and childhood in ancient Egypt at the Petrie Museum and Amarna Visitor Centre.

Q&A session about the different experiences of daily life in ancient Amarna for children from rich and poor backgrounds – © Amarna Project



In addition to the child-centred elements of the workshops, community engagement also involved visiting a local primary school to hear children's questions about archaeological methods, the archaeological site and where their interests lie in terms of future activities and resources. I also delivered a second Zoom lecture on life on an excavation for the Year 3 classes from George Mitchell Primary school.

'Tutankhamun the Boy': Next Phase

Every aspect of the season's engagement initiatives will feed into the Petrie Museum's 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project and further develop relationships locally with staff at the Amarna Visitor Centre and with colleagues from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

The fieldwork has given the Petrie Museum a much more visible presence in Middle Egypt, which will continue to be mutually beneficial during the period of the project and beyond. The work also will contribute to the longer-term goals of the local MoTA and international Amarna Project teams in terms of enhancing site access, preservation, understanding and learning resources for local children and family audiences at the Amarna Visitor Centre. These outcomes will also link to the development of associated initiatives and materials in other museums and online and will contribute to wider discussions of best practice in community archaeology and co-production both within and beyond Egyptology.

Gallery 

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Gallery

Here are a few more of the many photographs taken in the course of our work in Egypt.



Hamada Kellawy leads a tour of the Amarna Visitor Centre – image courtesy of Anna Garnett



Local children being introduced to the project at the Visitor Centre – © Amarna Project

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The local excavators and their children at the end of a workshop session at the Amarna Visitor Centre – © Amarna Project.



Artefact discussion session in the Amarna dig house using the Petrie Museum's 3D printed replicas made for the 'Tutankhamun the Boy' project – Courtesy of the Petrie Museum, UCL