

J. Wilfrid Jackson in Egypt

J. Wilfrid Jackson (1880-1978) had a distinguished multi-disciplinary career as a conchologist, osteologist, archaeologist and geologist. He first became involved in Egyptology when he joined the staff of Manchester Museum in 1907 and he assisted in cataloguing the Egyptian collections during 1907-1908. On 6th May 1908 he assisted Margaret Murray in the famous mummy unrolling at Manchester Museum before an audience of about 400 people.



Figure 1 Mummy unrolling at Manchester Museum in May 1908. Left to right: Robert Standen (Jackson's father-in-law); Margaret Hart-Davis; Margaret Murray; JWJ.

It was not until much later, however, that Jackson actually visited Egypt. The story begins on 27th April 1931 when Oliver Humphrys Myers from the Egypt Exploration Society (Armant Expedition), on recommendation from Sir Arthur Keith, wrote to JWJ about recruiting an "advanced student" to work for 3 months as an osteologist in camp that winter season. After a very short period of deliberation, Jackson replied, hinting that he might be able to come himself, providing that he could secure "£100 at least for fares and to see something of the country", together with leave of absence from the Museum.

However, it seems that Dr Robert Mond (President of the EES and sponsor of the expedition) was unable to provide Jackson with financial support and the next 4 or 5 months were a frantic scramble to come up with funding. After several unsuccessful approaches to charitable bodies, and at the eleventh hour, Myers managed to get Henry Wellcome to rescue the situation. On 27th October, a letter and cheque for £100 arrived from The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, the quid pro quo being that at least some of the bones come back to their institute. Leave of absence was secured and Lady Mary Boyd Dawkins (wife of Sir William Boyd Dawkins, JWJ's early mentor at Manchester Museum) contributed a further £20.

On the 6th November, JWJ booked his berth on S.S. Eumaeus sailing on the 21st November from Birkenhead to Port Said - costing £20. Eumaeus was a cargo vessel with limited passenger accommodation. Jackson recorded that there were "38 Whites" on board (of which 8 were passengers) and "38 Chinese (including a Chinese deportee)". The 8 passengers included a doctor, a professor of Mathematics and a rubber planter travelling to Penang.

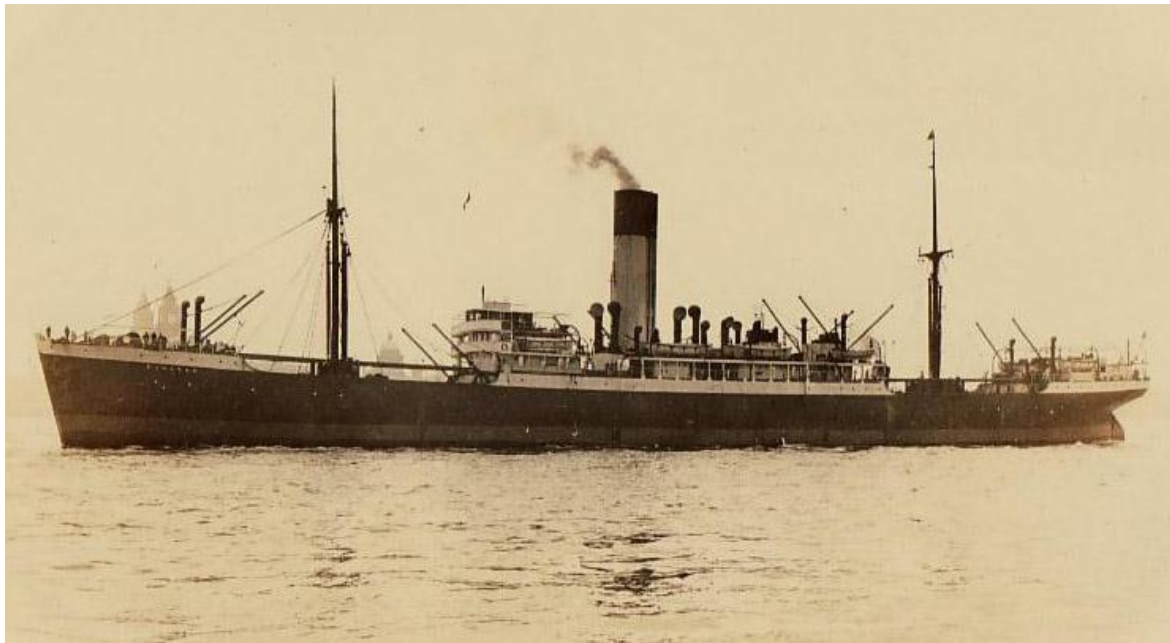


Figure 2 S.S.Eumaeus was a steam turbine ship, built by Caledon, in Dundee, in 1921. During WW2 it was on loan to the Navy when torpedoed and shelled by Italian submarine Comandante Cappellini and sank 118 miles W of Cape Sierra Leone on 14 January 1941. There are conflicting reports on the number of casualties though records of Lloyds list 23 British fallen and 63 survivors. At the time, Eumaeus was a troop transport ship, directed to Egypt.

Jackson was an inveterate record keeper and his archive material at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery includes two weekly on-board-ship bar accounts (for alcoholic drinks and tobacco) of 12/9d and 16/10d, together with a menu card for 29th November 1931 with signatures of the passengers and senior members of crew.

Jackson arrived at Port Said, Egypt on 1st December and transferred immediately to Cairo where he saw the sights until the 9th when he met Myers and travelled to the 'campsite' at Bucheum House where he stayed and worked until 13th February. Jackson, an accomplished photographer, took several pictures of Bucheum House, including the view of the dining room shown in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3 – JWJ's photograph of the Bucheum House dining room.

The following is an account of Jackson's time in Egypt, in his own words (edited from the script of a lecture delivered at Manchester Museum on 28th April 1932):

"Leaving Liverpool in November 1931 I spent ten days at sea in a Blue Funnel Line cargo boat and joined up with the rest of the party early in December after a few days in Cairo where I had the opportunity of inspecting the remarkable collection of Tutankhamen relics in the famous Egyptian Museum of Antiquities. The Pyramids were also visited. I spent nearly three months in the desert camp of the Expedition at Bucheum House, near Armant, Upper Egypt, some 460 miles south of Cairo. While there I examined many animal and human remains, identified shells found in burials, and classified the materials of beads, dishes, and carved stones.

The expedition was financed through the generosity of Dr Robert Mond, the President of the [Egypt Exploration] Society, and was under the capable direction of Mr O.H. Myers. In addition to the director and myself, there were four other members, viz. Messrs H.W. Fairman, T.J.C. Baly, W.B.K. Shaw, and R.N. Lester. All were skilled in some particular branch of work.



Figure 4 – Jackson in his desert gear.

In addition to the examination of a fairly large cemetery of predynastic date, the work included the excavation of a number of protodynastic tombs and the investigation of a cemetery of the early XIIth dynasty.

During visits to Luxor for letters, stores, etc., the opportunity was taken of visiting many of the famous temples and tombs. Luxor and Karnak Temples were carefully studied and photographed and expeditions were made to the great Theban Temples and to the tombs of the Queens, the Nobles and the Kings, including that of Tutankhamen. On one occasion we had the interesting experience of seeing the last of the relics of this famous Pharaoh (1354-1345 B.C.) being conveyed on the shoulders of many bearers down the valley to the river for transport to Cairo. A photograph of this interesting procession was obtained. Some of the treasures we ascertained were four golden funerary shrines which stood over the nested coffins and the camp-bed with bronze hinges which the young king took with him on hunting expeditions. These are now on exhibition in the Museum at Cairo along with earlier relics.

Our longest trip from camp was to visit the remarkably perfect Temple of Hather at Dendera (1st Century B.C.). This was accomplished by bumping along the 40 miles of desert edge by car and returning in the same manner – an experience well worth the discomforts."

On the 13th February 1932, Jackson took the overnight train from Luxor to Cairo (165 piastres), with dinner (37 piastres) where he stayed for a week before transferring to Port Said and then embarking for the return trip on the 22nd February. On this leg he sailed on the S.S. Mongolia, a P. & O. mail and passenger vessel.



Figure 5. S.S. Mongolia.

On Jackson's return, he wrote up his report on the animal remains from the Baqaria and Bucheum, and this was sent to Myers on 4th July 1933, and incorporated into *'The Bucheum, I'* by Sir R. Mond & O.H. Myers, Egypt Exploration Society (1934) as the *'Report on the Remains of Sacred Cattle from the Baqaria and Bucheum, Armant, Upper Egypt'* - Chapter XVII, pp137-142 and Plate XCVII (III). Three years later the *'Cemeteries of Armant I'* by Sir R. Mond & O.H. Myers, Egypt Exploration Society (1937) incorporated Jackson's *'Report on the Human Remains'* & *'Report on the Animal Remains'* as Chapters IX & XV, pp144-157 & 254-258.

In 1936 Jackson tried to arrange another visit to Egypt. Myers suggested that Mond would pay £80 for travel, but it fell through. There was some reluctance by the Museum Committee to grant leave of absence and his wife was poorly. He asked Myers whether January 1937 would be any good, perhaps anticipating improvement in his wife's condition, but nothing came of it. Jackson kept in touch with Myers, noting in a letter in July 1938 that he had "heard from Colin Baly" who was sending me some "(shells and bones) from Beersheba for report." A month later he also received, from Myers, a consignment of bones from Gilf el Kebir (Libya). Some of this material was referred to Dorothea Bate at the British Museum, but the War interfered with Jackson's access to the material and it was not until 1946 that he sent his report, and that of Bate, to Myers. At the same time he also sent his *'Report on remains from Ox-burials at Armant'*, *'Report on remains from Ox-burials at Kom-el-Abd'*, and *'Report on Pan Graves material'*. Regrettably, none of this work seems to have been published (although manuscripts are held in the JWW archive at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery). Alice Williams (in an Egypt Exploration Society newsletter), makes mention of the unpublished Armant studies:

"Correspondence shows that Myers, recognising the importance of their findings, strived for many years to get the *'Cemeteries of Armant II'* published. He accumulated increasing amounts of material for the volume, including draft chapters, specialist scientific reports, context registers, plans, maps, photographs and illustrations - testimony to his academic rigour and eye for detail."

Myers clearly valued JWW as a colleague and there was one further approach (14th August 1948) regarding a return to Egypt, proposing either:

- "A) to go for two (or) three years and do the job right through [or]
- B) to go out each winter for [10] seasons digs of say 5 months."

In view of the difficulty in funding earlier work, this seems like a wildly over-optimistic proposal, and by now JWJ was 68 years old (three years retired) with a very poorly wife. He replied that:

“present circumstances would prevent me from going out to Egypt, worse luck. I would not like to be away from my wife so long as if anything happened I would never forgive myself.”

His wife died in 1952, and by then any further opportunity was gone. Jackson, a prolific lecturer throughout his working career and for many years in retirement, continued lecturing on ‘Famous Egyptian Tombs and Temples’ and ‘Recent Excavations in Egypt’, although as the years passed he dropped the ‘Recent’!

As Alice Williams noted about Oliver Myers:

“It is a great shame that Myers’ achievements at Armant were never fully acknowledged, but through the material in the Lucy Gura Archive we can reconstruct the work, thereby preserving the memory of this talented archaeologist.”

A similar sentiment can be applied to J. Wilfrid Jackson in his role as osteologist and whose long interest in Egypt is preserved in the archives of Buxton Museum and Art Gallery.