A team of archaeologists from the Freie Universität, Berlin (Joanne Rowland, G. J. Tassie and Sebastian Falk) undertook an examination of the material from Hermann Junker’s expedition to Merimde Beni Salama (West Delta, Egypt) held in the Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm from the 27th October until 7th November 2014. This examination was undertaken as part of ‘The movement of peoples and the transition to a food producing economy in the western Nile Delta (with focus on Merimde Beni Salama): (re)evaluating the data within its wider socio-economic, geographic, environmental and modern research contexts’. This project is part of Research Group A-2 ‘The Political Ecology of non-Sedentary Communities’ of Excellence Cluster 264 TOPOI, Group A-2-4 project ‘The Neolithic of the Nile Delta’ (https://www.topoi.org/project/a-2-4/) directed by Joanne Rowland.

Merimde Beni Salama is one of only two Neolithic sites so far discovered within the Nile Delta (the other being Sais), and has a long history of research. This large Neolithic site was found in the 1927-1928 season by Hermann Junker as part of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna’s West Delta Survey. Prof. Junker and his team continued to investigate the site until 1939. The next major work was directed by Josef Eiwanger from 1977 to 1982 on behalf of the German Archaeological Institute. This project produced scholarly articles and three, soon to be four monographs. The material excavated by this later expedition stayed in Egypt and some of the ‘star’ finds are on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. However, the material excavated by Junker was divided between various institutions, including those that sponsored his expedition. This partition of the finds was one of the means by which many missions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century funded their expeditions, and was allowable at the time under the contemporary Egyptian law. The chief Inspector of antiquities would examine the finds at the end of the season or campaign and select which pieces were to stay in Egypt (to be displayed in the Cairo Museum) and which could leave the country. Although about 600 objects from Junker’s work remain in Egypt (some on display), the vast majority are scattered throughout Europe and the USA. Although annual preliminary reports were published, due to the loss of much of the paper archive in WWII no final monograph was ever published of this project.

The Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm houses the largest collection of objects from Junker’s investigations of Merimde Beni Salama, however, the objects seen within the excellent new exhibition at the Museum itself, are only the tip of the iceberg. The vast majority of the artefacts are located in a state-of-the-

Beyond the Showcases of the Medelhavsmuseet

Report from a research visit to the Medelhavsmuseet by researchers from Freie Universität, 2014
The art storage magazine located a short way outside Stockholm. To study this collection of over 6,000 objects in full would take several years. Therefore, prior to visiting Stockholm the team made use of the website of the Medelhavsmuseet, where the majority of objects are recorded in superb detail. The objects selected for study mainly consisted of a representative sample of ceramics and lithics, although bone and other artefacts were also examined. Priority was given to objects that had not been recorded before, or rare or unusual objects of particular interest. Another of the criteria was the provenance of the artefact, usually only those with the details of the grid-square in which they were found along with the depth they were found at were analysed. The group also undertook research into the animal and plant remains held in the collection.

The objects were recorded in various media: photographic and diagrammatic (drawing) combined with entering specific data on size, surface treatment, fabric/material, use wear and, mode of manufacture into a database. The facilities in the magazine made this job much easier and more efficient. However, these are only the initial steps of the project, and further scientific analyses, such as radiocarbon dating, stable isotope analysis, residue analysis, and laser scanning are hoped to be performed on certain objects in the near future.

As has been found at other of the museums visited, as well as during our new field project at the site itself, not all the artefacts from Merimde Beni Salama held in the Medelhavsmuseet are of Neolithic date. A few Palaeolithic tools were also identified, which correlates with Junker and Menghin's accounts (as well as the later work of Schmidt), for they state in their report that they found Palaeolithic tools when the team undertook a survey of the area around the Neolithic site.

As well as undertaking research into the archives of the various museums in Europe, such as the UCL Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, the Instituts für Ur- und Frühgeschichte Universität Wien Museum of the Vienna Archaeological Institute, Museum of the Institute for Egyptology, Heidelberg, and the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin, the team hopes to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Fine Art, Boston in the USA and the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Cairo. The team headed by Joanne Rowland have also initiated new research at and in the environs around Merimde Beni Salama (http://imbaba.tumblr.com/). The work undertaken by the previous missions was in an area of the site that is now under cultivation, and so prevents further intrusive investigation...although it is already clear that there is much work to keep the team busy in the region for years to come! The inaccessibility of the areas of the former work, however, makes the museum collections all the more valuable. This current project illustrates the importance of using museum collections as part of ongoing archaeological research; some of these collections are even centuries old, but they play a vital role in helping current research projects to understand sites under current investigation. As many sites in Egypt are threatened with land reclamation, urban sprawl and looting, these two forms of complementary research will probably become more and more common in our understanding of Egypt's long history.

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