



Petrie at Hawara: Pioneering Debatable Standards?

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ABSTRACT

Flinders Petrie's first two seasons in Hawara, between 1888 and 1889, and their subsequent exhibitions in London, were arguably pivotal for the career of the British archaeologist. They also provide a wealth of documentation in his own hand to better *understand* the man. But to better *critique* him, this paper aims to reassess Petrie's mindset, field work, and results in Hawara, first by the standards he began to craft for himself in the field, before briefly taking a modern perspective to complete the critical picture.

To evaluate Petrie's work by his own ambition, what could be more appropriate than to take him at his word? In the seminal *Methods & Aims in Archaeology* of 1904, he would neatly set out his vision and the practicalities for the discipline. This assessment proffers to proceed along the original processual chapters of the book to examine how Petrie's practices in Hawara in 1888–1889 already pioneer the theory he would consolidate 15 years later, while incorporating the latest research views. The main sources for this review are, by order of relevance, threefold: first, his original handwritten documentation from two so-called 'Journals' collected from letters, eight excavation 'Notebooks' and three 'Day Diaries'; second, his publications for both seasons; and third, his autobiographical pieces.

It appears that the 'Father of Egyptian Archaeology' did not entirely live up to his nascent ambition, leaving a contentious legacy to this day. The urge of the 'salvage man', trapped in contradictions, produced good results for the time but may also have led him astray in terms of aims and methods.

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THE KILLING OF THE FATHER

June 18, 1888, Petrie's first exhibition of his finds from Hawara opened at the Egyptian Hall in London (Figure 1). The exploration of a pyramid, the identification of Herodotus' 'Labyrinth' or some gilded mummies drew the public's attention, but the sensation would be the unexpected 'Fayum Portraits', whose perceived European classicism appealed most to the Victorian mind. It would prove to be a great success, arguably pivotal, for the career of the British archaeologist,¹ firstly on his own and privately financed after having fallen out with the Egypt Exploration Fund.²

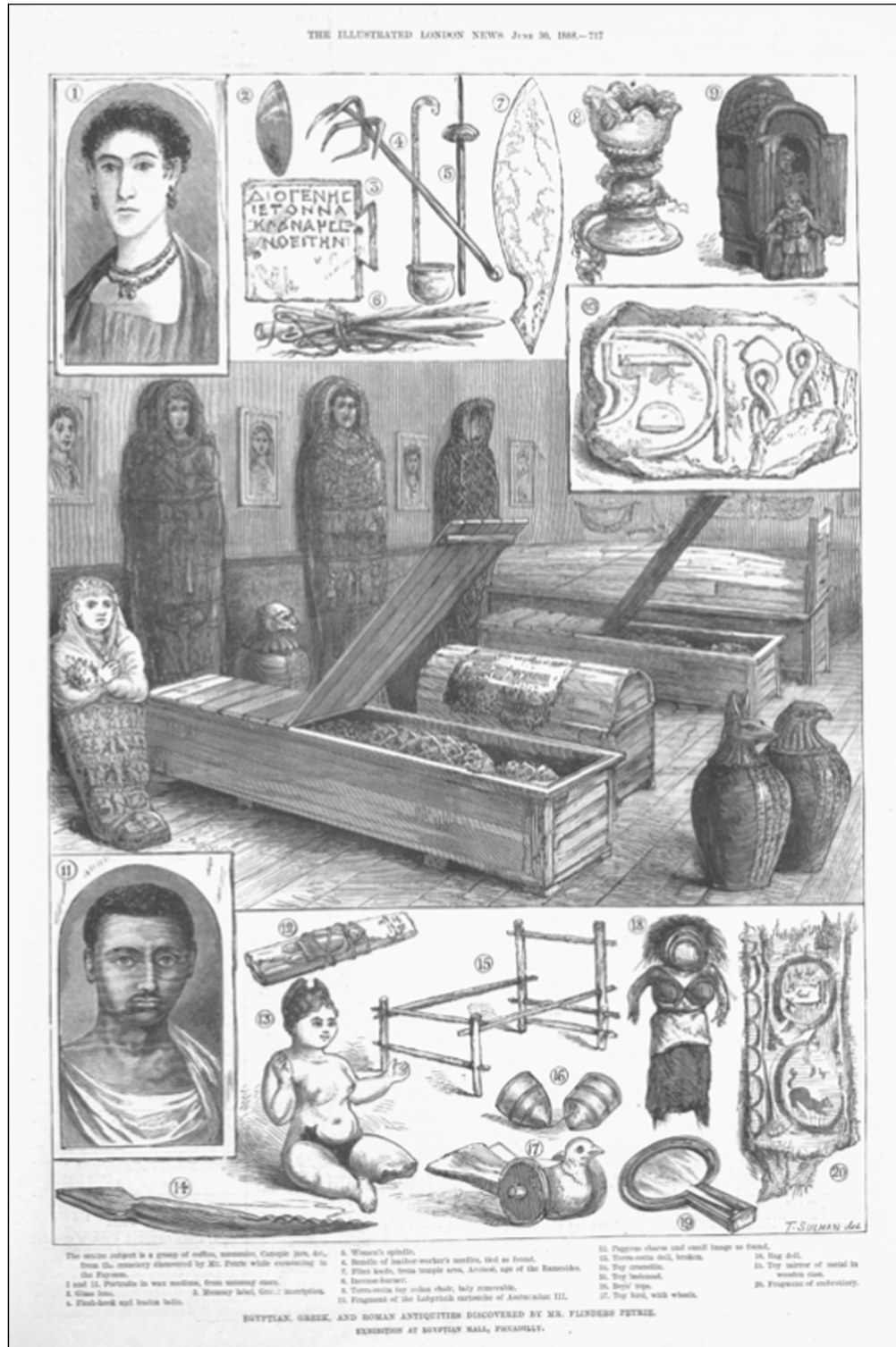


Figure 1 *The Illustrated London News* report on Petrie's first Hawara exhibition³ (public domain).

1 Thornton, A., "Tis the Season: Annual Exhibitions in Archaeology", in *Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: Characters and Collections*, ed. Stevenson, A. (London: UCL Press, 2015), 84.

2 Petrie was displeased with the management of the EEF, notably complaining over contrary instructions, governance, administrative inefficiency, and publication tactics; he resigned from the Fund in October 1887, preferring to give no reasons (Drower, M.S., *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 99–104).

3 Sulman, T. "Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Antiquities Discovered by Mr. Flinders Petrie: Exhibition at Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly", *The Illustrated London News*, June 30, 1888, 717.

Petrie would become the first British professor of Egyptology in 1892⁴ and to this day is often regarded as the ‘Father of Egyptian Archaeology’. However, how exactly did he make these remarkable discoveries in the Fayum? What were his aims, his methods?

Critically assessing Petrie’s work has been a rather recent development in Egyptology. For a century, he had been unanimously celebrated for the ‘ground-breaking developments’⁵ he brought to the nascent archaeological discipline. As this paper will show, since the major but blatantly benevolent biography by Drower, a closer examination of his work has been conducted by Roberts, Quirke, Stevenson, and Price, all dissecting Petrie’s technical and collecting practices, and some light has finally been shed on his darker side, notably by Sheppard and Challis, both analysing his deeper motivations and ambiguous relations with the emerging eugenic movement.⁶

Petrie’s two significant excavation seasons in Hawara (January to April 1888 and November 1888 to April 1889) provide a wealth of documentation in his own hand to better *understand* the man. But to also better *critique* him, this paper aims to reassess, along with original evidence and scholars’ analyses, Petrie’s mindset, field work, and results in Hawara, first by the standards he began to craft for himself, before briefly taking a modern perspective to complete the critical picture.

FROM PETRIE’S WORDS TO A MODERN PERSPECTIVE

To evaluate Petrie’s work by his own ambition, what could be more appropriate than to take him at his word? In the seminal *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*⁷ of 1904, he would neatly set out his vision and the practicalities for the discipline. This assessment proffers to proceed along the original processual chapters of the book to examine how Petrie’s practices in Hawara in 1888–1889 pioneer the theory he would consolidate 15 years later (see Table 1). Sections 1 and 2 will serve to examine Petrie’s aims given the excavator’s circumstances and the site’s historical background, while Sections 3 through 10 will scrutinise his methods from field work to publication, before Sections 11 and 12 dissect the analysis and interpretation of his discoveries.

The main sources for this review (aggregated in Table 1) are, by order of relevance, threefold: first, his original hand-written documentation from two so-called ‘Journals’ collected from letters, eight excavation ‘Notebooks’ and three ‘Day Diaries’; second, his publications for both seasons; and third, his autobiographical pieces.⁸ Additionally, the latest research views will be incorporated in the assessment.

Finally, it is only after having assessed Petrie’s work with a critical stance but from his own perspective that modern approaches will be called upon to briefly evaluate the evidence in the light of the current archaeological process, interdisciplinary techniques, and technological developments (see Table 2).

4 ‘Edwards Professor of Egyptian Archaeology and Philology’ at UCL, Drower, M.S., “Petrie, Sir William Matthew Flinders”, in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Bard, K.A (London – New York: Routledge, 1999), 615.

5 Ramsey, J.D., “Petrie and the Intriguing Idiosyncrasies of Racism”, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 14, no. 2 (2004): 15.

6 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*. Roberts, P.C., “If the Face Fits... A Comparison of Mummies and their Accompanying Portraits Using Computerised Axial Tomography”, in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. Bierbrier, M.L. (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 121–126; “An Archaeological Context for British Discoveries of Mummy Portraits in the Fayum”, in *Living Images: Egyptian Funerary Portraits in the Petrie Museum*, ed. Picton, J., Quirke, S. and Roberts, P.C. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 13–72. Quirke, S., “The Hawara Mummy Portraits and the Periodisation of Burial Customs” in *Living Images: Egyptian Funerary Portraits in the Petrie Museum*, ed. Picton, J., Quirke, S. and Roberts, P.C. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007a), 73–82; *Hidden Hands: Egyptian workforces in Petrie excavation archives 1880–1924* (London: Duckworth, 2010). Stevenson, A., “Artefacts of excavation: The British collection and distribution of Egyptian finds to museums, 1880–1915”, *Journal of the History of Collections* 26, no. 1 (2014), 89–102; Stevenson, A., *Scattered Finds* (London: UCL Press, 2019). Price, C. *Golden Mummies of Egypt: Interpreting Identities from the Graeco-Roman Period* (Manchester: Manchester Museum – Nomad Exhibitions, 2020). Sheppard, K.L., “Flinders Petrie and Eugenics in UCL”, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 20, no. 1 (2010): 16–29. Challis, D., *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

7 Petrie, W.M.F., *Methods & Aims in Archaeology* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1904).

8 Petrie, W.M.F., “Petrie Journal 1887 to 1888 (Medinet el-Faiyum and Hawara)”, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://archive.griffith.ox.ac.uk/index.php/petrie-1-7>; Petrie, W.M.F., “Petrie Journal 1888 to 1889 (Hawara, Gurob and Kahun)”, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://archive.griffith.ox.ac.uk/index.php/petrie-1-8>. Petrie, W.M.F., “Notebooks from Hawara” [Notebooks], Petrie Museum Archives, Vol. 35, 36, 38, 38b, 39a, 39b, 39c, 39d – Files PMA/WFP1/99/1/35 to /39c-e, accessed January 12, 2022. Petrie, W.M.F., “Day Diaries” [Diaries], Petrie Museum Archives, Vol. 1887–1888, 1888–1889, 1889–1890 – Files PMA/WFP1/115/9/1_7 to _9, accessed January 12, 2022. Petrie, W.M.F., *Hawara, Biahmu, and Arsinoe* (London: Field & Tuer, 1889); *Kahun, Gurob, and Hawara* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co, 1890). Petrie, W.M.F., *Ten Year’s Digging in Egypt* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1893); *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1932).

PETRIE'S WORK BY HIS NASCENT STANDARDS

Table 1 systematically gathers the most remarkable instances of Petrie's work during his first two seasons in Hawara along the lines of *Methods & Aims*. That evidence will now be discussed critically with latest research views, section by section, but generally without again quoting the original words or facts referenced in the table.

Table 1 The Hawara Evidence.

PETRIE'S WORK BY HIS OWN STANDARDS	
PETRIE'S PERSPECTIVE	THE HAWARA EVIDENCE
METHODS & AIMS SECTIONS	EXCLUSIVELY FROM PETRIE'S DOCUMENTATION
1. 'The Excavator' Personal background, motivations and skills	Funding only from Haworth and Kennard (1889: 3; 1932: 84) 'Control' visits from Kennard (J1: 29; DD: Jan 27) and many others stakeholders (DD).
2. 'Discrimination' Discernment and site identification	Fayum allotted by Grébaut, to work for the museum (J1: 11) Pyramid and 'labyrinth' primary aims, but shift to Roman tombs (J1: 29–30) Evaluating and choosing spots in the first days (1889: 3)
3. 'The Labourers' Selection criteria and management	53 staff (DD: Jan 23), drilled in 3 weeks (1932: 88) 22 staff in second season (J2: 13) Workmen from a distance and locals (1889: 3) Dismissal for laziness (J1: 20) Control over workmen (J1: 47) Payroll lists (NB 38, 39a, 39b), groceries and furnitures (NB 39a, 39c) Payment anecdotes (J1: 61; 1890: 10–11; 1932: 89) Extortion case by reis (J2: 69–70; 1932: 104) – never a reis again Health issues (J1: 85–87; 105–106) Reward system (1932: 97–98, 101) Constant commute between different sites (J1; J2; 1890)
4. 'Arrangement of Work' Excavation organisation and method	Buying from locals (J1: 19, various NB) Camp on spot, village too far – better and more secure to manage workmen (J1: 28; 1889: 3; 1893: 81) Camp sketch (NB 39a: 35) Many references to classical authors (J1: 26) Trench cutting (J2: 34, 39) Tunnel to the middle of the pyramid (J1: 42; 1893: 85; 1932: 91) Fending off potential thieves (J2: 48) Break in the roof to the pyramid chambers (J2: 50) Hands-on, personal intervention (J2: 47, 51; 1890: 10) Abandonment of sites when they 'produce little' (J2: 62), losing interest rapidly (J2: 133) Health issues (J1: 85–87; 105–106) Difficult weather conditions (J1: 89–90) Stone sarcophagus quite damaged by forceful opening (J2: 98–99; 1890: 10), progress and damages in Petrie's absence (J2: 110, 114)
5. 'Recording In the Field' Content and quality criteria	All NB Portraits numbered with letter codes (J1: 23) Physiognomic descriptions (J1: 34, 56, 58, 63–64), deduction on racial origins Detailed sketches (J1: 43, 83; NB37: 4–45, 38–39; NB 38: 28–43; NB 39a: 10–11; NB 39b: 24, 28–31; NB 39d: 71), a few from in situ finds. Mummies described as 'lumped together' (J1: 59) Mummy cases simply brought without findspot recording (J1: 81)
6. 'Copying' Techniques and requirements	Copying himself a sarcophagus (J1: 39; 1893: 96), waxed tablets (J1: 60) Plates in publications (1889; 1890; 1911)
7. 'Photographing' Technology and settings	Only a dozen published portraits (1889; 1890), photographed back in Cairo (J2: 16). Few in Griffith Institute and Petrie Museum archives Later addition of photographs (1911; 1913) No in situ finds
8. 'Preservation of Objects' Material techniques	Poor regard for lower quality finds (J1: 33), discarding mummies and keeping skulls 'for comparison' (J1: 53), resulting in headless mummies (J1: 73) Interest in keeping skulls associated with portraits (J1: 34) – Skullery (J1: 41) Damages by workmen (J1: 37–38) Conservation on site, sometimes in own tent (J1: 36, 54) or at locals' (J1: 45) Preservation work, experiments of new wax techniques (J1: 37–38, 48), with failures (J1: 60; 1893: 96, 100) Preservation effort (J1: 59) Mummies 'cut open' (1889: 9; 1890:10)
9. 'Packing' Preparation and containers	Box-making and packing (1932: 94) Portraits packed separately from mummies (J1: 40) Shipment by rail (1893: 96)

(Contd.)

PETRIE'S WORK BY HIS OWN STANDARDS	
PETRIE'S PERSPECTIVE	THE HAWARA EVIDENCE
METHODS & AIMS SECTIONS	EXCLUSIVELY FROM PETRIE'S DOCUMENTATION
10. 'Publication' Content, arrangement and process	Publication in the following year (1889; 1890) First Hawara season in ca 50 pp. and 23 pl., arranged in labyrinth, cemetery, decoration and burial of mummies, inscriptions, papyri, pictures, botany—with 4 specialists (1889) Second Hawara season in ca 25 pp. and 9 pl., arranged in abstract, pyramid, tombs, botany, with 1 specialist (1890)
11. 'Systematic Archaeology' Corpus, sequence and conservation	Dating and sequencing (J1: 31–37, 76–80) Horuta ushabti classification (NB 39d: 43–44; 1890: 19) Gilded masks as predecessors of portraits (J1: 42), considered inferior (J1: 74) Greek/Roman work considered as inferior to Egyptian (J1: 74–75) Painted jewellery corpus (1889: pl.XI) Mummy decoration sequencing (1889: pl.IX) Pottery sequencing (1889: pl.XIV–XVI; 1890: pl.XII–XIII) Scarab corpus (1890: pl.X) Plans (1889: pl.XXV; 1890: pl.II–IV,VI–VII) Critic of museum conservation (1889:4; 1932: 90,94), disaster with boxes in Cairo (J1: 119)
12. 'Archaeological Evidence' Evidence value and interpretation	Rarity and money value of the portraits (J1: 30) Absence of grave goods as indication of reburials (J1: 39,70) Speculation on use of portraits during life time (J1: 74, 83; 1932: 88) Later burials with clothes and possessions (1893: 101) Survey of the 'labyrinth' (1889: Ch.I) Cemetery finds from D12, 20, 26, 30, Ptolemaic, Roman (1889: Ch.II) Decoration and burial of mummies, with sequences (1889: Ch.III) Greek papyri (1889: Ch.V) Pictures (Smith in 1889: Ch.VI) Botany (Newberry in 1889: Ch.VII) Pyramid survey (1890: Ch.I) Further tombs and finds (1890: Ch.II) Further botany (Newberry in 1890: Ch.VII) Names for identification (1893: 90)
Petrie, <i>Methods & Aims</i> Content synthesis by the author	Aggregated from Petrie's 'Journals' 1887–1888 (J1), 1888–1889 (J2); 'Notebooks' 1887–1889a (NB) and 'Day Diaries' 1887–1889b (DD); Petrie 1889; 1890; 1893; 1911; 1913; 1932. Ordered chronologically by first occurrence

1. 'THE EXCAVATOR'

When he arrived at Hawara in January 1888, William Matthew Flinders Petrie was 34 years old and already an experienced, hands-on excavator.⁹

Born in Charlton, Kent, in 1853, home-schooled, he exhibited 'unusual scientific ability' from an early age and was introduced to archaeology by his father, a civil engineer, before he sailed to Egypt for the first time in late 1879 to survey the pyramids.¹⁰ Petrie's later diagnosis was definite: 'A year's work in Egypt made me feel it was like a house on fire, so rapid was the destruction going on'—he had found his purpose: 'My duty was that of a salvage man, to get all I could'.¹¹ His work attracted the attention of Amelia Edwards, a successful writer who had just founded the Egypt Exploration Fund (EEF), for which Petrie would work in the Delta for a few years, arguably already setting new standards.¹² He would resign in 1886 after having accused EEF's committee of poor management, notably 'of wasting funds on poorly produced publications'¹³ and find himself without institutional support. But, gracefully, Edwards, who still wanted him back in the EEF, found him a private sponsor in 1887—Jesse Haworth, a cotton magnate from Manchester primarily interested in linen textiles and biblical archaeology—before Petrie met a second financial backer in London—the collector Martyn Kennard, both influencing Petrie's 'collecting' approach in the field.¹⁴ Petrie insisted on paying his own expenses, and the three

⁹ Quirke, "The Hawara Mummy Portraits", 74.

¹⁰ Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 34.

¹¹ Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 20.

¹² Drower, M.S., "Petrie, Sir William Matthew Flinders", in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Bard, K.A. (London – New York: Routledge, 1999), 615.

¹³ Naunton, Ch., *Egyptologists' Notebooks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), 182.

¹⁴ See Forrest, H., *Manufacturers, Mummies and Manchester: Two hundred years of interest in and study of Egyptology in the Greater Manchester area*, BAR British Series 532 (Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2011). Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 127–129. Stevenson, *Scattered Finds*, 11.

men agreed to 'equally divide all [finds] that came to England', boosting Petrie's motivation: 'Thus it was my interest to find as much as I could'.¹⁵

Interestingly, what Petrie did not mention (and Drower characteristically omits) was his long-standing relationship with Francis Galton, pioneer of the eugenics movement and sponsor of any skull photographs Petrie would need.¹⁶ Incidentally, it was also only after a conference presentation and an exhibition of casts of racial types in the autumn of 1887¹⁷ that Petrie, his own boss but attached to new financial strings (which would materialise in field visits from and letters to many stakeholders (Figure 2), left for Egypt, without a dig site defined for the season.¹⁸

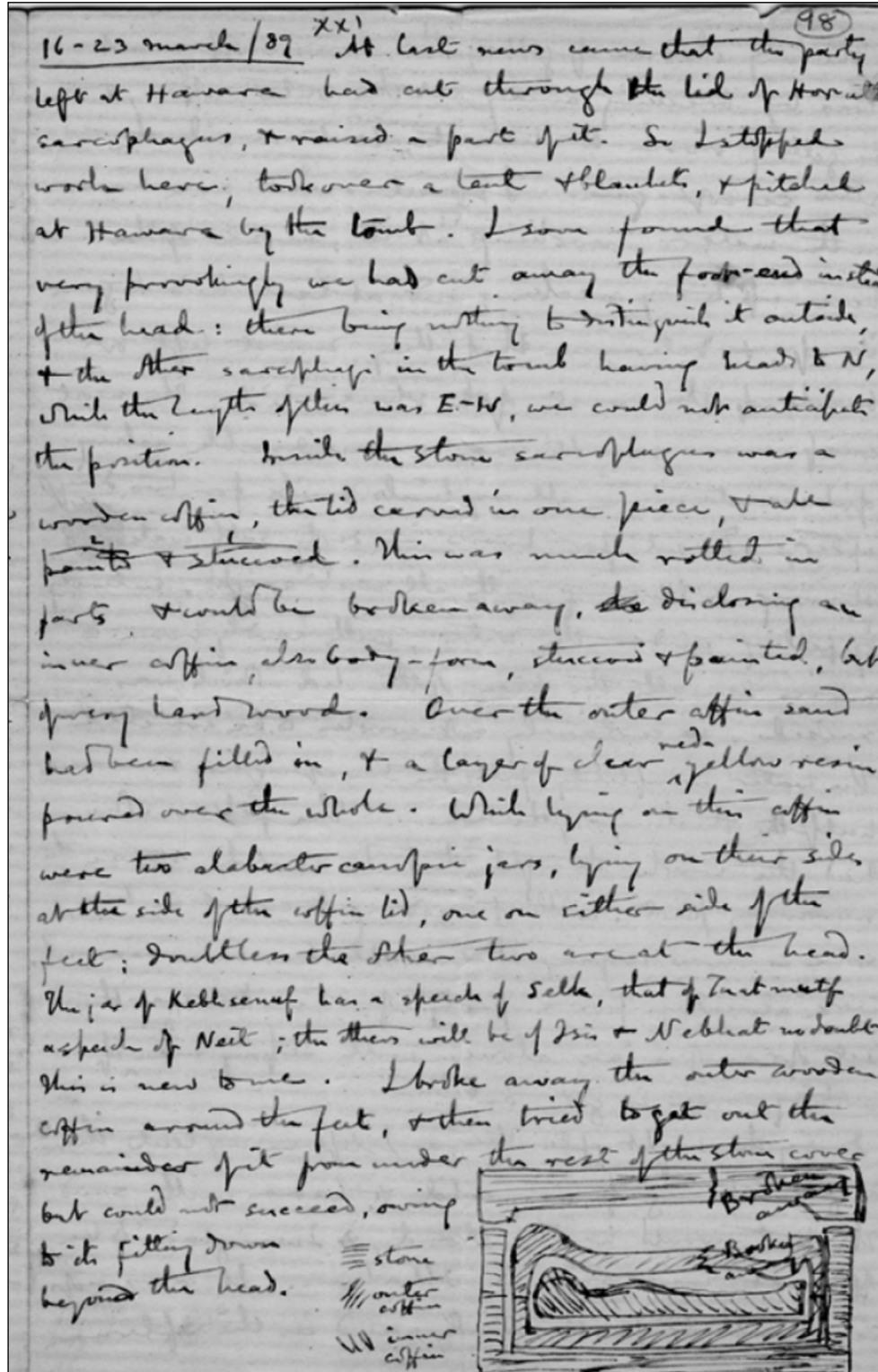


Figure 2 A 'Journal' page, in fact a letter to Petrie's stakeholders¹⁹ (courtesy of the Petrie Museum, UCL).

15 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 85.

16 Sheppard, "Flinders Petrie", 18. Schutz, M., "Der Vater der ägyptischen Archäologie: Das abenteuerliche Leben des William Matthew Flinders Petrie", *Antike Welt* no. 4 (2016): 63.

17 Challis, *The Archaeology of Race*, 110.

18 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 128.

19 Petrie, "Petrie Journal 1888 to 1889", 98.

2. 'DISCRIMINATION'

Hawara was not Petrie's first choice. He had previously expressed preferences for Meydum, Abydos, Ahnas el Medineh, and Dashur, but Eugène Grébaut, the French director of the Department of Antiquities, thought the Fayum (Figure 3), untouched for a quarter of a century, needed urgent protection.²⁰

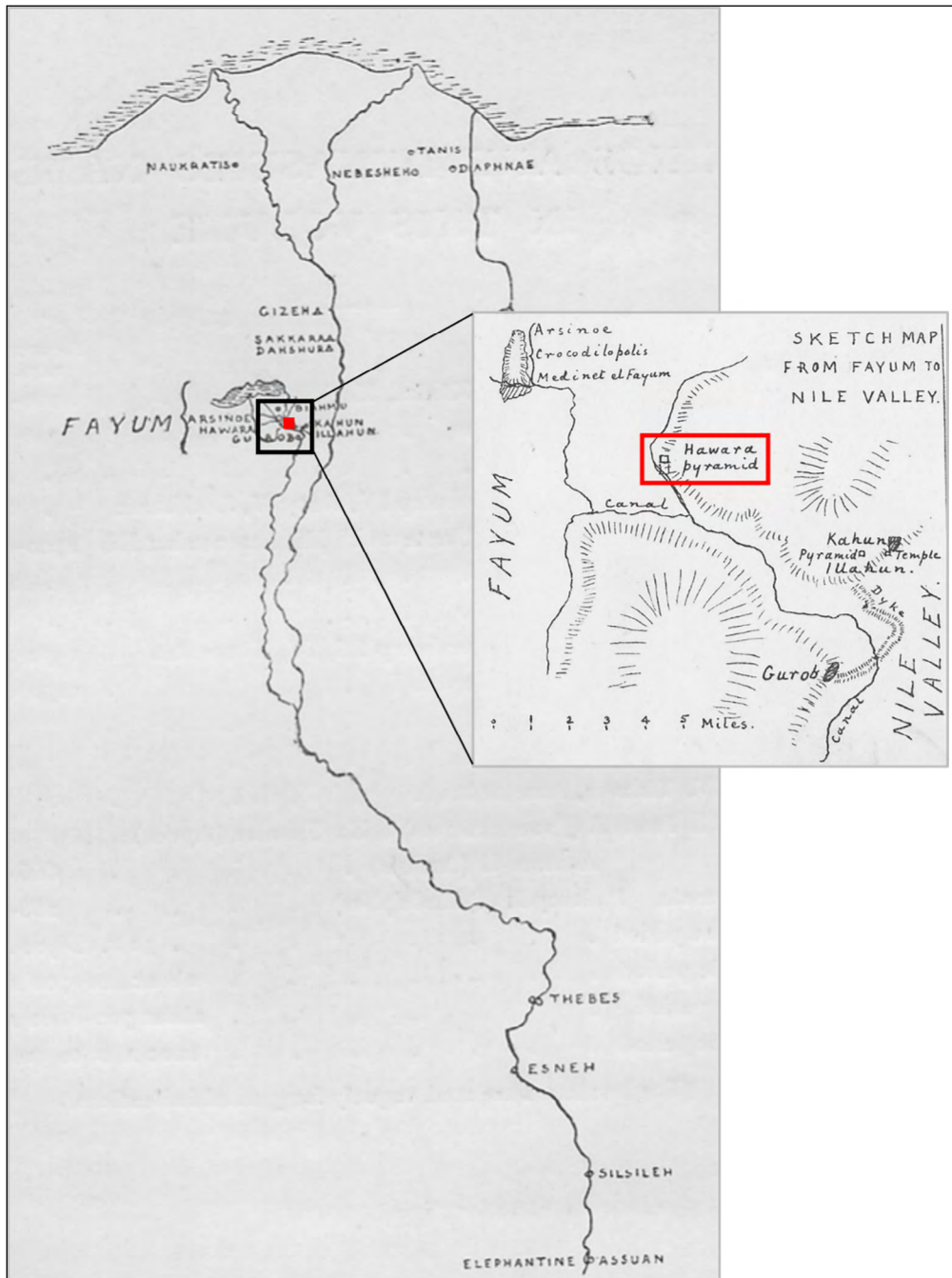


Figure 3 The Fayum sites²¹
(public domain).

After short stays in Medinet el Fayum and Biahmu, Petrie recognised Hawara's relevance to his pursuit of a periodisation of Egyptian burial customs.²² Ten kilometres southeast of Medinet el-Fayum, at the entrance of the Fayum, Hawara was indeed a promising, multi-layered site, with its distinctive feature a crumbling but apparently inviolate pyramid—also suspected to

²⁰ Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 128. Petrie, *Hawara*, 1.

²¹ Petrie, *Ten Year's*, 10; Petrie, *Kahun*, pl. IV.

²² Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 87. Quirke, "The Hawara Mummy Portraits".

encompass Herodotus' 'Labyrinth'.²³ According to the Greek historian, the building complex would count more than 3,000 rooms and 'even surpasses the pyramids' (Herodotus II: 148).²⁴ Petrie would soon discover not only that the pyramid was built in the Middle Kingdom for Amenemhat III and the correctly identified 'Labyrinth' was its temple complex, but also that the site's cemeteries stretched from Dynasty 12 to the Roman Period and held in store for him possibly his most iconic finds.

Indeed, if Petrie quickly walked the site and defined its excavation strategy in just a few days, aiming initially for the attractive pyramid and the labyrinth, his approach would shift with the first discovery of a 'portrait-mummy'.²⁵

3. 'THE LABOURERS'

In the first season, Petrie attacked the pyramid 'with as many men as possible', 53 to be exact, drilled in three weeks. Recruiting both local and distant workmen, personally supervising and training them was of utmost importance for Petrie,²⁶ who could be, in a condescending and colonial fashion,²⁷ controlling, harsh on laziness and misconduct, but also caring, on health issues for instance. In fact, the documentation shows that Petrie, commuting between sites and further interests, was not as present as he professed and the basic remuneration and additional reward system he designed to prevent the theft and resale of antiquities (Figure 4) might also have created false incentives. In Petrie's absence, labourers, who were paid for their finds, could have dug them out or bought them cheaply elsewhere and possibly even forged pieces to get their reward—when Petrie himself did not buy from locals and dealers.²⁸

4. 'ARRANGEMENT OF WORK'

Efficiency and a focus on a return drove Petrie's excavation approach. The excavation progress can be retraced in four, overlapping phases (see Figure 5).

As initially decided, the work 1) started in the first season at the pyramid, but despite a bold approach ('It seemed the most practicable course to tunnel to the middle'),³¹ it proved more laborious than hoped and the burial chamber with its secrets would only be cracked a year later.³² Meanwhile, 2) the somewhat disappointing 'labyrinth' in the south was rapidly surveyed³³ until 3) a first portrait find refocused the effort on the northern cemetery. Indeed, Petrie immediately saw the economic value of its discovery: 'If we can get one or two a week we shall be well repaid'.³⁴ Moreover, he saw the value those depictions could have for eugenic interpretations, immediately writing a letter to Galton.³⁵ The second season, under increased commute pressure due to dealers operating in the Fayum,³⁶ saw the pyramid painstakingly but

23 Petrie, *Ten Year's*, 91.

24 Cited in Hölzl, Ch., "Hawara", in *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Bard, K.A. (London – New York: Routledge, 1999), 365.

25 Thompson, J., *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology – 2: The Golden Age: 1881–1914*. (The American University in Cairo Press, 2020), 30; Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 22. Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 88.

26 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 430.

27 Scham, S.A., "Ancient Egypt and the Archaeology of the Disenfranchised", in *Views of Ancient Egypt since Napoleon Bonaparte: Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations*, ed. Jeffreys, D. (London: UCL Press, 2003), 173.

28 Quirke, *Hidden Hands*, 131.

29 Petrie, "Notebooks", 39b, 74.

30 Petrie, *Hawara*, pl. XXV.

31 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 91.

32 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 141.

33 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 133.

34 Petrie, "Petrie Journal", 30.

35 Challis, *The Archaeology of Race*, 110.

36 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 96; Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 144.

11.11.21.7	4.30	2 1/2	20, 40	54 3/4
6.5.6.7	25	5 2		
3.4.8.5.3	62 3/4			
5.10.7.7.2	34.2			
2.2.2.3	35			
16.4.5	31			
5.2.11	35 1/2	18 3/4		
2.5.2	42 1/2	6 1/4		
2.2.6	72			
3.4.8.5	72 1/4			
2.2.6	38 1/2			
26.12.7.7.9.8.2	72			
12.11.10.10.10	53 1/2	13 3/4		
8.7.10.3.6.4	38			
16.18.8.11.7	61			
3.8.7.6.9.6	40 1/2	8 1/4		
9.7.9.9.6.2	43			
8.5.4.12.8.3	42			
4.1.3.4.3.2.5.9.8.2.3.4.4.3	158			
8.7.13.8.12	45			

Figure 4 A payroll list²⁹
 (courtesy of the Petrie
 Museum, UCL).

finally explored, the northern cemetery exhausted, allowing ultimately 4) the excavation of the north-eastern 'crocodile tombs'.³⁷

Even if Petrie would use stratigraphy only decades later and cut brutal trenches during his excavation in Hawara, scholars argue that his 'techniques of excavation were vastly superior to those employed by most of his contemporaries'.³⁸ While he often left his men unsupervised,

³⁷ Petrie, *Kahun*, 17.

³⁸ Shaw, I., and Nicholson, P., "Petrie, William Matthew Flinders", in *British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Shaw, I., and Nicholson, P. (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 222.

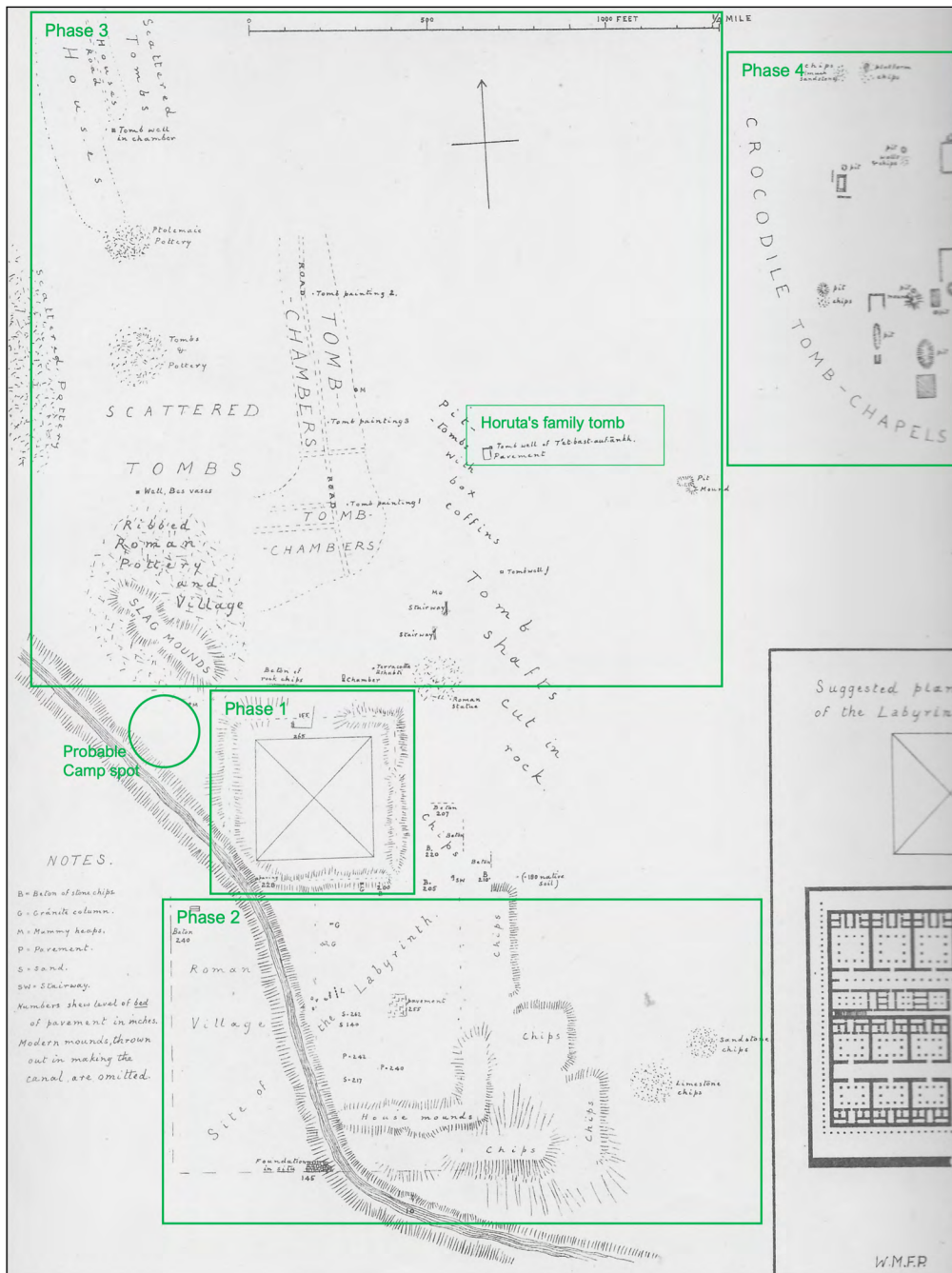


Figure 5 The Hawara site³⁰ (public domain) and excavation phases by starting point (by the author).

he dived into the fieldwork on important occasions, or when he thought that ‘far more skill and care than a native workman would use’ was needed³⁹—acting like ‘a proto-Indiana Jones’ as Price puts it.⁴⁰ At the same time, his notes prove abundantly that it was, as Stevenson describes, an ‘imperative to provide for collections that was in his mind’s eye [...], not the archaeological landscape that might be revealed’.⁴¹

5. ‘RECORDING IN THE FIELD’

A wealth of notes and relatively detailed sketches (Figure 6) make it, uniquely for the time, possible to reconstruct an archaeological framework for Petrie’s finds, but not without challenges in his record-keeping due to the absence of defined context or relative positioning in terms of find spot.⁴² His discoveries were generally numbered with letter codes, but could be inconsistent, were irregularly dated, and he was ‘only rarely, if ever, present at the time

³⁹ Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 85.

⁴⁰ Price, *Golden Mummies*, 59.

⁴¹ Stevenson, *Scattered Finds*, 32; Stevenson, “Artefacts of excavation”, 96.

⁴² Roberts, “An Archaeological Context”, 24.

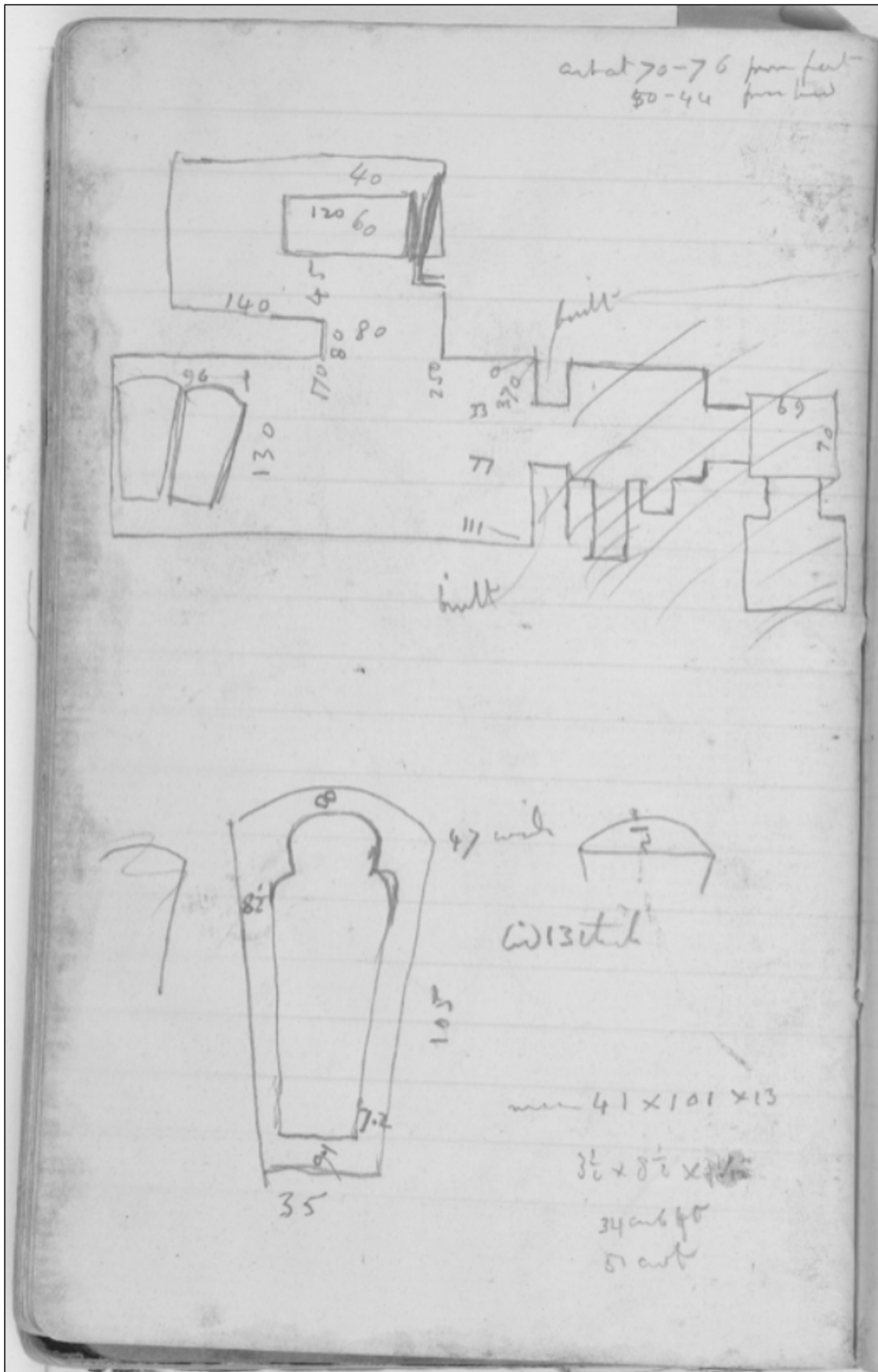


Figure 6 Plan of Horuta's family tomb⁴⁶ (courtesy of the Petrie Museum, UCL).

of discovery', relying solely on oral indication from the men excavating and bringing the artefacts to his tent.⁴³ Subsequently, original findspot, context or positioning were seldom recorded.⁴⁴ What often transpires from his notes are quick conclusions and, for the portraits, an 'ethnographic identification [...] bound up with physiognomic assumptions [...] [which] would have ramifications long beyond the nineteenth century'.⁴⁵

43 Quirke, "The Hawara Mummy Portraits", 77.

44 Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 24.

45 Challis, *The Archaeology of Race*, 110.

46 Petrie, "Notebooks", 39d:71.

6. 'COPYING'

There is little original evidence of epigraphic fieldwork in Hawara, and each time there is, it is Petrie sitting to copy important discoveries, like the sarcophagus in Horuta's family tomb (Figure 7).⁴⁷ It can only be supposed that the published plates were first drawn in the field, but not how or by whom.

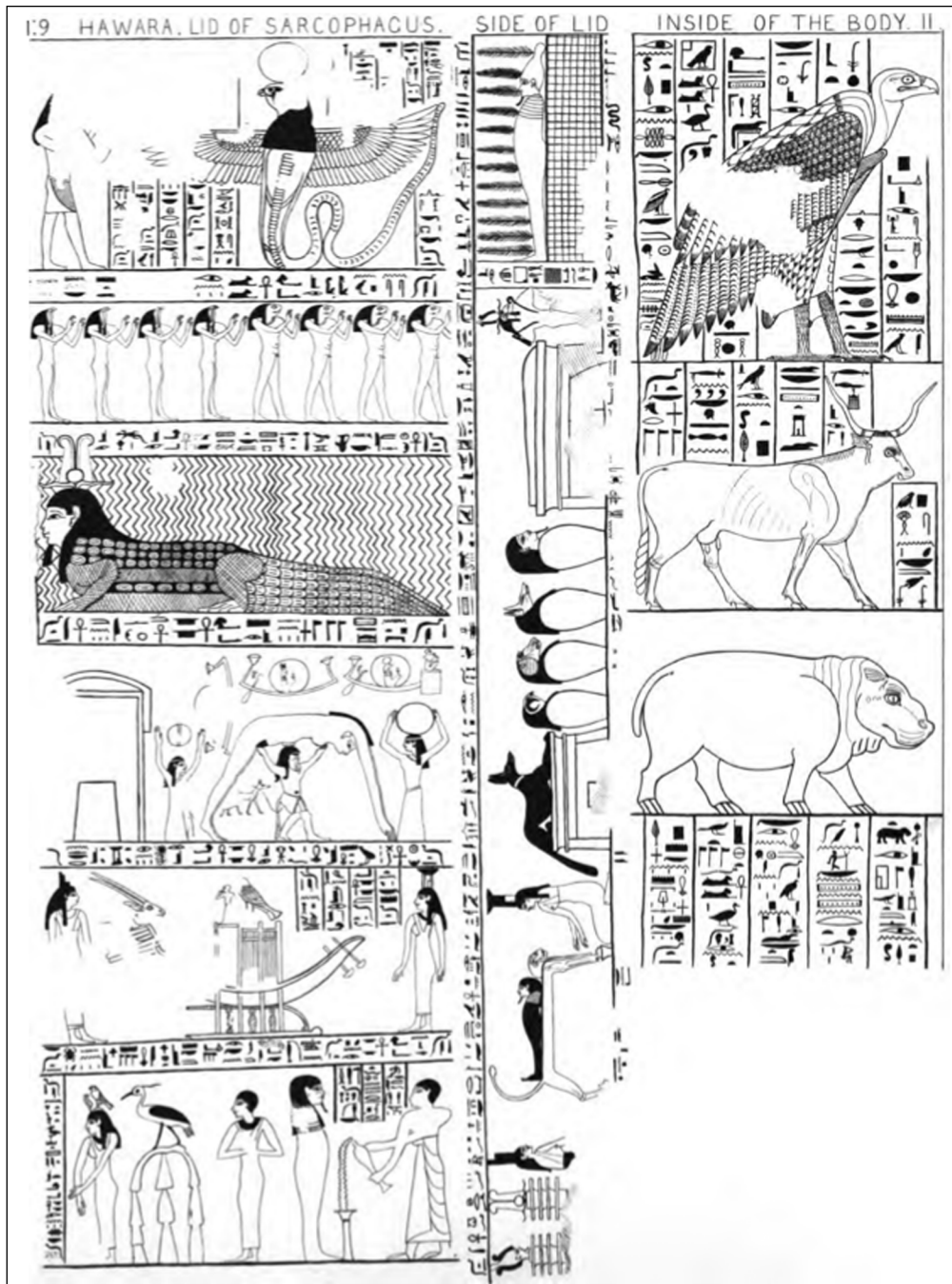


Figure 7 A copy from a sarcophagus lid, first recorded by Petrie himself in the field⁴⁸ (public domain).

7. 'PHOTOGRAPHING'

Similarly, there are few photographs in the Griffith Institute and Petrie Museum archives from Hawara's first two seasons, and none show discoveries *in situ*. Admittedly, photographs may have been technically difficult to take on site at that time, though a dozen portraits would get a special shooting in Cairo and be published rapidly.⁴⁹ Only Petrie's third season in Hawara, two decades later, would provide more field and portrait photographic documentation.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ For consistency with original quotations, Petrie's orthography of Egyptian names will be used—here Horuta for 1r-wDA.

⁴⁸ Petrie, *Hawara*, pl. II.

⁴⁹ Petrie, *Hawara*; *Kahun*.

⁵⁰ Petrie, W.M.F., *Roman portraits and Memphis (IV)* (London: School of Archaeology in Egypt, Bernard Quaritch, 1911); *The Hawara portfolio: paintings of the Roman age* (London: School of Archaeology in Egypt, Bernard Quaritch, 1913).

8. 'PRESERVATION OF OBJECTS'

Petrie had a poor regard for the finds he deemed of lower quality. Mummies were regularly 'cut open' for amulets⁵¹ and discarded—generally headless, because skulls were of particular interest for Petrie and his eugenics-fixated colleagues: complete mummies or sectioned heads lucky enough to have a portrait for physical comparison (an endeavour which would never lead to conclusive results)⁵² were kept together, the important ones 'put under [Petrie's] bed'⁵³ or in special store,⁵⁴ while orphan heads were aligned in a dedicated 'skullery'. Other artefacts found with the portrait-mummies are seldomly mentioned and complete preserved assemblages are the exception.⁵⁵ Further finds were regularly brought to nearby houses for storage.

In contrast, valuable pieces, generally portraits, were eligible for preservation by Petrie experimenting—not always successfully—with various techniques, well attested to in the documentation.

9. 'PACKING'

Likewise, Petrie, not all too confident in the prudence of local transporters as well as in museum staff at destination, organised custom-made boxes and packed his important finds carefully, even if he had to separate portraits from their mummies for security and for train shipment to Cairo.⁵⁶

10. 'PUBLICATION'

Quite characteristically, Petrie put his 'Publication' chapter before further analytical guidance in his *Methods & Aims*,⁵⁷ as part of the process and final product of the fieldwork. Believing more in rapid dissemination than academic analysis but also economically pressured to satisfy subscribers, he had the urge and discipline to publish rapidly, generally the year following the field season, which he did for Hawara.⁵⁸ After a short chronological abstract, he would go through the main discoveries, with occasional involvement of further specialists, and present comprehensive, packed plates. He has been accused of heavily condensing his published results⁵⁹ but, while it may also be true for his Hawara volumes, he did not yet respect his later rule of thumb of 'twice as many plates as there are pages'⁶⁰—quite the reverse in fact. While both publications already fulfil his later edition requirements in terms of format and quality, the content may have suffered from the speedy process. Academic language and discipline are limited: references and datings are not necessarily consistent, especially with field notes, and texts and illustrations do not always cover one another, as Drower notes for many of his publications.⁶¹

Interesting add-ons to his 'publication' process were his systematic exhibition and press relations efforts. As Thornton notes, both Hawara seasons would immediately be followed by a one-month display in London's Picadilly Egyptian Hall⁶² along with organised media coverage,⁶³ underlining Petrie's recognition 'of the value of marketing for archaeology',⁶⁴ notably in raising funds.⁶⁵

51 Petrie, *Hawara*, 9; 1890:10

52 Filer, J.M., "'One of our mummies is missing': evaluating Petrie's records from Hawara", in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. Bierbrier, M.L. (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 16–25.

53 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 87.

54 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 134.

55 Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 32.

56 Petrie, *Ten Year's*, 96.

57 Petrie, *Methods & Aims*.

58 Petrie, *Hawara; Kahun*.

59 Shaw and Nicholson, "Petrie", 222.

60 Petrie, *Methods & Aims*, 116.

61 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 432.

62 'chosen no doubt for its theatricality', notes Price, *Golden Mummies*, 194.

63 Thornton, A., *Archaeologists in Print: Publishing for the People* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 80.

64 Thornton, *Archaeologists in Print*, 75.

65 Price, *Golden Mummies*, 67.

11. 'SYSTEMATIC ARCHAEOLOGY'

Petrie was obsessed by the systematic analysis and arrangement of his discoveries. His exemplary constitution of corpora organised in chronological sequences, neatly shown in Hawara's unpublished (Figure 8) and published (Figure 9) documentation became iconic but may also have led to overzealousness. Roberts points out that in his 'need to forge links' Petrie may occasionally have manipulated the facts and led later scholars to erroneous conclusions, citing assumptions and omissions in Hawara's family groupings.⁶⁶ Furthermore, as remarks Stevenson, the unique object was awarded higher importance at the cost of the find site itself, moving the 'wondrous curiosity' to become 'merely one nod in the wider taxonomic schemes that pervaded intellectual thought and practice in the late Victorian era'.⁶⁷

Horuta ushabtis			
	204	195	
Short broad faces fair	9	12	13
" " " poor	6	8	14
Small head poor detail	11	26	37
" " clumsy	—	7	7
" " thin bod	5	20	25
Side top head detailed	32	17	49
Flat faces brown specks	2	9	11
Good proportions ^{split} to	4	13	17
Better straight lips ^{liney} to	8	10	18
Fine curved lips	19	10	29
Red fruit	—	8	8
Flat faces but fair	37	11	48
Square face narrow face	11	18	29
Poor small	21	21	42
Better similar, strong to	28	27	35
Rough	5	—	5
Large undetailed	15	—	15
	<u>202</u>	<u>197</u>	419 399

Figure 8 Attempt to organise Horuta's ushabtis into 17 categories⁶⁸ (courtesy of the Petrie Museum, UCL).

66 Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 41-44; "If the Face Fits", 21-22.

67 Stevenson, "Artefacts of excavation", 97.

68 Petrie, "Notebooks", 39d, 43

69 Petrie, *Hawara*, pl. IX.

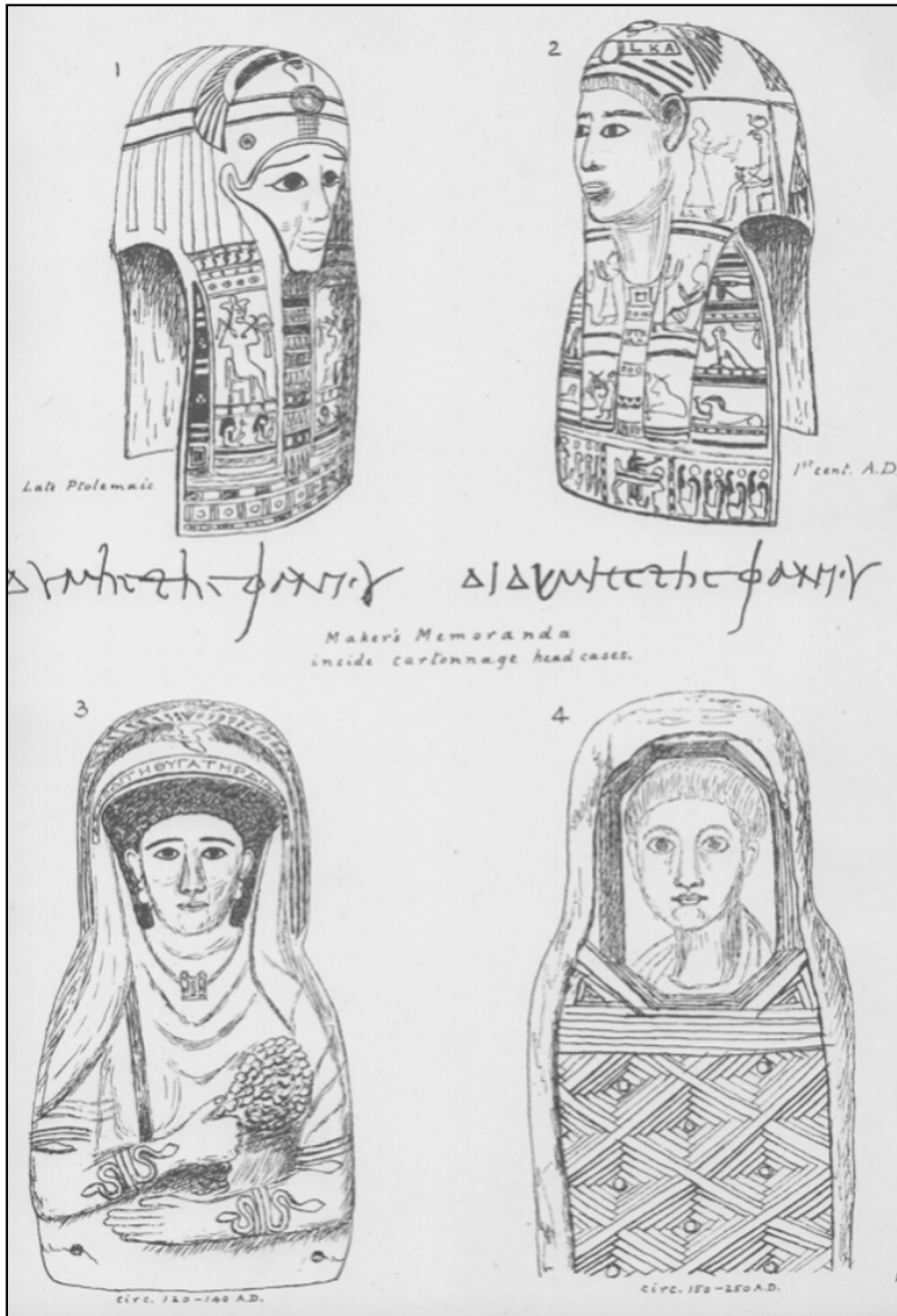


Figure 9 Mummy decoration sequence dating⁶⁹ (public domain).

12. 'ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE'

While Hawara's evidence value is diminished for modern scholars by the lack of context record, Petrie's finds of 1888–1889 count among the most spectacular in his career.⁷⁰ As intended, he successfully surveyed and properly attributed the pyramid, as well as cleared and definitively identified the 'labyrinth'. Although, as Petrie admitted himself, 'perhaps the greatest success at Hawara was in the direction least expected',⁷¹ with the astonishing portraits, but also the gilded mummies (whilst abhorred by Petrie) and the intact family tomb of Horuta. Along the way, he cleared tombs from Dynasties 12, 20, 26, and 30 on top of the Ptolemaic and Roman burials (condescendingly disregarded by a Petrie 'establishing a system of values that has endured in Egyptological thinking'),⁷² collected Greek papyri—a copy of the *Iliad* among them—as well

⁷⁰ Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 33–35. Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 430.

⁷¹ Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 97.

⁷² Price, *Golden Mummies*, 63.

as botanical remains. For roughly ten months on site, often part-time, the discoveries were impressive. The conclusions Petrie drew from them, less so: flawed with prejudice (against the gilded masks, for instance), physiognomic assumptions (creating entire life stories), and pure speculation (portrait-mummies displayed for years in Roman houses), they certainly fall short of the ‘legal proof’ standards he would demand later.⁷³

PETRIE’S WORK BY MODERN STANDARDS

Nevertheless, Petrie’s pioneer work in Hawara, not yet up to the standards he would formulate in 1904, might not be shamed by a modern review following three perspectives (see Table 2, columns from left to right).

Table 2 Petrie’s work by modern standards.

PETRIE’S WORK BY MODERN STANDARDS			
PETRIE’S PERSPECTIVE	A MODERN PERSPECTIVE		
METHODS & AIMS SECTIONS	ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROCESS	INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH	TECHNOLOGY IMPACT
1. ‘The Excavator’			
2. ‘Discrimination’	hypothesis creation survey and site location prospection		high
3. The Labourers’	management excavation data collection and recording		medium
4. ‘Arrangement of Work’		archaeological biological inorganic	medium
5. ‘Recording in the Field’			high
6. ‘Copying’			high
7. ‘Photographing’			high
8. ‘Preservation of Objects’	laboratory and conservation		low
9. ‘Packing’			0
10. ‘Publication’	publication		low
11. ‘Systematic Archaeology’	typology spatial analysis	chronometric biomedical	high
12. ‘Archaeological Evidence’	chronological, social, cultural, environmental interpretation	bio molecular degradational environmental statistical and computational	
	After Djindjian (1991), Renfrew and Bahn (2020), Archaeological Institute of America (no date)	After Brothwell and Pollard (eds) (2001)	Author’s assessment

Firstly, his archaeological process was sound and on a structural level fairly close to the present-day approach. His site ‘discrimination’ was essentially intuitive but relied on personal experience and (debatable) contemporary objectives. While people management has generally left colonial attitudes behind and excavation techniques have evolved significantly, his approach was at least well-organised and he trained generations of archaeologists. Intellectual rigour and scientific knowledge have certainly brought field recording and conservation much further, and nowadays, slower, comprehensive publications make for the thorough analysis and holistic interpretation of results Petrie missed.

Secondly, various scientific disciplines enrich today’s evidence-collecting methods and analyses. ‘Archaeology has become an interdisciplinary science’, insists Gamble,⁷⁴ but, given

⁷³ Roberts, “An Archaeological Context”, 42. Challis, D., “What’s in a Face? Mummy Portrait Panels and Identity in Museum Display”, in *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. Carruthers, W. (New York – London: Routledge, 2015), 230; Price, *Golden Mummies*, 187–188. Edwards would go even further, see Price, *Golden Mummies*, 192. Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 88. Petrie, *Methods & Aims*, 140.

⁷⁴ Gamble, C., *Archaeology: The Basics* (London – New York: Routledge, 2015), 10.

the state of science at the end of the 19th century, Petrie did a fair job from an archaeological, botanical, material, as well as from chronometric and statistical perspectives, especially with his ‘Sequence Dating’⁷⁵ and, decades after Hawara, stratigraphy. Biosciences, environmental and computational methods were out of his reach and his point of view was limited by his time. Gamble’s four characteristics of modern archaeology—‘multiscalar’, ‘mutualistic’, ‘globally focused’, ‘reflexive’⁷⁶—would have meant little in the Victorian era and are equally irrelevant for this assessment.

Thirdly, technology has evidently become a game-changer, variously impacting the stages of the archaeological process. Yet Petrie’s Hawara record shows adaptability and a taste for experimentation, for instance with conservation work or the addition of botanical analyses. Drower speculates about how Petrie would have embraced new technologies: ‘Had they been available, there is no doubt that Petrie would have welcomed and made full use of them’.⁷⁷

THE URGE OF THE ‘SALVAGE MAN’

Petrie would conclude his *Methods & Aims* with chapters on ‘Ethics of Archaeology’ and ‘The Fascination of History’, stating rights and responsibilities for the future of the discipline but also, quite uncharacteristically, declaring his ‘love of life,—of preservation, of continuity of life’.⁷⁸ In Hawara, he experimented with—and sometimes set—new standards, some good, but also bad ones, drifting astray in many respects.

Considering his discoveries, Petrie’s passion and concern for the remains of ancient Egypt are palpable, while definitely colonial. The urge of the ‘salvage man’⁷⁹ produced, for the time, in the absence of further knowledge and technologies, ‘extraordinary results’,⁸⁰ arguably pioneering archaeology as a craft in Shanks and McGuire’s sense.⁸¹ No other Egyptologist or archaeologist would ever publish as much—probably for the best.⁸²

Regarding his aims and methods, the same urge may have led the man astray. Petrie’s fieldwork and publications lack discipline and do not fulfil his professed responsibilities to produce work ‘which shall be incapable of being altogether superseded’.⁸³ The documentation ‘is sometimes incomplete or contradictory, and can be knowingly or unknowingly misinterpreted’.⁸⁴ Moreover, contradictions transpire from a man who would later deplore an archaeology ‘still attracted by pretty things, rather than by real knowledge’⁸⁵ but declared ‘the fine art of collecting’ his very first speciality.⁸⁶ As Stevenson underlines, ‘for Petrie, [...] the telos of fieldwork was the displayed collection, whether on the printed page of an excavation memoir, or in a museum cabinet back in England’.⁸⁷ Yet, in Hawara, it was not only the portrait’s monetary and collecting value that visibly drove him: his belief in a ‘social evolutionary framework’⁸⁸ and a ‘racial hierarchy’⁸⁹ may also have ‘influenced many of his revolutionary interpretive techniques’, suggests Ramsey, who points to a man who ‘frequently complemented his artifactual analyses with considerations of

75 Bard, K.A., *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 15.

76 Gamble, *Archaeology*, 10–11.

77 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 435.

78 Petrie, *Methods & Aims*, 192.

79 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 20.

80 Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 435.

81 Shanks, M. and McGuire, R.H., “The Craft of Archaeology”, *American Antiquity* 61, no 1 (1996).

82 Uphill, E.P., “A Bibliography of Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942)”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32, no. 4 (1972), 356.

83 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 112.

84 Roberts, “An Archaeological Context”, 24.

85 Petrie, *Methods & Aims*, vii.

86 Petrie, *Seventy Years*, 113.

87 Stevenson, *Scattered Finds*, 33.

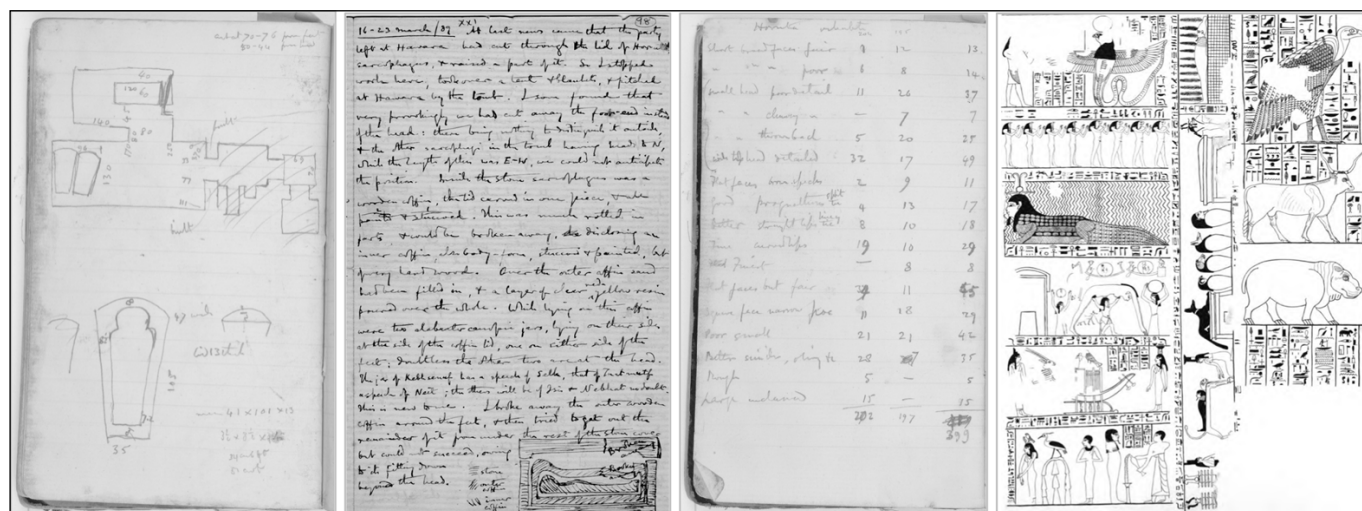
88 Sheppard, *Flinders Petrie*, 18.

89 Challis, D., “Skull Triangles: Flinders Petrie, Race Theory and Biometrics”, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 26, no. 1 art. 5 (2016), 1.

ethnic physiognomies'.⁹⁰ Petrie systematically provided human data⁹¹ and 'len[t] the authority of historical evidence to the eugenics movement'.⁹²

Nevertheless, Egyptology might be indebted to him, and Hawara's original documentation shows how valuable his efforts were and remain. The archives continue to offer opportunities for further research, providing much more information than the publications and allowing us to reconstruct archaeological frameworks and recontextualise artefacts, as the Horuta examples have shown along the paper (Figure 10).⁹³ Furthermore, *Methods & Aims's* standards, emerging in Petrie's pioneer work in Hawara, could be more thoroughly applied to Petrie's later excavations, to check if the man followed his own advice.

Figure 10 The archaeological processing of Horuta's family tomb and artefacts (from left to right: field sketch, journal report, typological analysis and epigraphy/publication).⁹⁴



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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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⁹⁰ Ramsey, J.D., "Petrie and the Intriguing Idiosyncrasies of Racism", *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology* 14, no 2 (2004), 15.

⁹¹ Sheppard, *Flinders Petrie*, 18.

⁹² Challis, *The Archaeology of Race*, 231.

⁹³ Quirke, *Hidden Hands*, ix. Roberts, "An Archaeological Context", 20.

⁹⁴ Fig. 6, 2, 4, 7 brought together.

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