

Yale Egyptology Lecture Series

“King Nehesy in Avaris and the Looting of the Memphitic Necropolis during the 14th Dynasty”

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2PM ET (online zoom lecture)

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With the blessing of the pharaohs, a formidable Asiatic community settled already from the late 12th Dynasty onwards in the Egyptian harbor town at Tell el-Dab‘a and was able to keep to some extent their Middle Bronze cultural heritage. They seem to have served the crown in different capacities in organizing sea-bound expeditions and trade with the Levant besides participating most likely in the mining expeditions to the Sinai. A special role may have played an ephemeral dignitary with the title of a “Ruler of Retjenu” with the residence in Tell el-Dab‘a.

During the decline of the 13th Dynasty in the late 18th century BCE a local dynasty of Western Asiatic origin established itself in the Eastern Delta and it is not unlikely that they originated from the “Rulers of Retjenu” with very close ties to Byblos. The impact of this dynasty and its people can be felt by the introduction of Canaanite religion, the construction of monumental Near Eastern temples and a sumptuous palace. Besides trade with the Levant the economic background of this kingdom, which must have extended until the Memphite realm, was the looting of the Memphite elite cemeteries. Typical objects from there not only appear in tombs of that period in Tell el-Dab‘a but also as prestige items in the royal tombs of Byblos and may have been traded from Byblos to other courts in the Levant. These resources seem to have declined soon afterwards as the imports from the Levant decreased considerably during the second part of this dynasty. Soon afterwards, another dynasty, the Hyksos, established themselves in Avaris c. at 1640 BCE. The change of power may not have taken place peacefully as the pre-Hyksos palace at Avaris shows signs of a heavy conflagration.

(The research for this lecture is based on the excavations of the speaker at Tell el-Dab‘a 1966-2009 and 2011 for the Austrian Archaeological Institute and the University of Vienna. It is now part of the ERC Advanced Grant “The Hyksos Enigma”).