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Working with capart: Quftis and local workmen during the Elkab excavation seasons, 1937-1946

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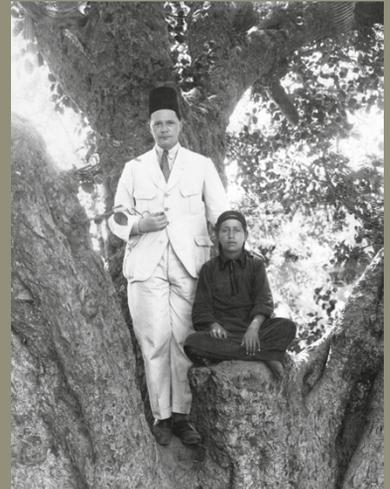
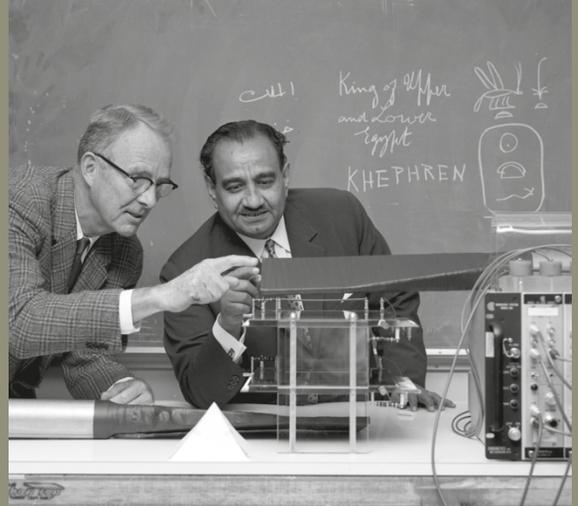
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Addressing Diversity

Inclusive Histories of Egyptology



Edited by Hana Navratilova,
Thomas L. Gertzen, Marleen De Meyer,
Aidan Dodson and Andrew Bednarski

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Thomas L. Gertzen,
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Hans Neumann

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Münster
2023

Cover illustrations: *top left*: Hildegard von Deines in 1959 (cf. contribution Dils, Fig. 7; Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-67639-0002 / Christa Hochneder); *top right*: Ahmed Fakhry (right) and Luis Walter Alvarez (left) (cf. contribution Tolba, Fig. 2; Photo: Marilee B. Bailey © The Regents of the University of California, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory); *bottom left*: The team of Quftis employed by Jean Capart during the third Elkab campaign (cf. contribution De Meyer et al., Fig. 3; © RMAH Inv. EGI.12234, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945–1946); *bottom right*: Ludwig Keimer and an unknown person in a sycamore tree in Old Cairo, 1929 (cf. contribution Lehnert, Fig. 1; © DAIK. DAIK-KEI-094-001-046).

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Investigatio Orientis 9

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Jaromir Malek

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The volume is dedicated to the memory of Jaromir Malek (1943–2023).

Among his many achievements, Jaromir trailblazed an extensive use of Egyptological archives to explain the intricate histories of our discipline.

He never avoided complexity, and both supported and challenged his colleagues in equal measure to make us do our best.

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Working with Capart

Quftis and Local Workmen during the Elkab Excavation Seasons, 1937–1946*

Marleen De Meyer, Wouter Claes, Noha Mostafa Mahran,
Athena Van der Perre and Aude Gräzer Ohara

Ever since the publication of Stephen Quirke's ground-breaking *Hidden Hands*,¹ now just over a decade ago, interest in, and studies about, the agency of Egyptian workmen in archaeological excavations have been steadily on the rise – and rightfully so. The picture shifts from the corvee labour employed under Auguste Mariette in the mid-19th century, through the introduction of the Qufti workforce under Flinders Petrie at the end of the 19th century, and the broad dissemination of the Quftis at many excavations throughout Egypt in the 20th century, up to the present day.² Several studies link historical workforces with modern day practitioners of the same craft,³ while others focus on the labour force at excavations today.⁴ This same emerging focus on workforces is noticeable as well in the broader range of Near Eastern archaeology, not just that of Egypt.⁵

The legacy of these thousands of skilled excavators who over decades have unearthed much of Egypt's archaeological heritage is largely only to be found embedded in the documentation compiled by foreign expedition directors. One

* This research was undertaken within the framework of the SURA Project and funded by the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (Belspo) as part of the BRAIN-be 2.0 research programme (project B2/191/P2/SURA; www.sura-project.be); see Van der Perre et al. 2021; Gräzer Ohara et al. 2023. We thank Wendy Doyon for help with the Arabic documents and for her critical review of the paper and its findings. We also thank her and Peter Der Manuelian for stimulating discussions on the topic of archaeological labour in Egypt.

¹ Quirke 2010.

² Particularly prominent in this regard is the work of Wendy Doyon (Doyon 2015; Doyon 2018; Doyon 2021; Doyon 2023; Doyon forthcoming). For workers on German-led excavations, see Georg 2018; Georg 2019; Georg 2021; for French-led excavations, see Relats-Montserrat 2023.

³ Rowland 2014; Jeffreys 2014; Bareš 2023.

⁴ For instance Beck 2016. An exhibition about the Egyptian workmen was organised at Misr Public Library in Luxor by Wesam Mohamed from 21–27 January 2021, entitled 'El Reis'.

⁵ See for instance recently Mickel 2019, Mickel 2021 and Cline 2022. The Badè Museum of Biblical Archaeology organised an online exhibition in 2021 entitled 'Unsilencing the Archives: The Laborers of the Tell en-Nasbeh Excavations (1926–1935)': <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/dc601d4d131145f88f828196860b8a44> (accessed 16 November 2022).

exception to this, however, is the collection of 73 Arabic expedition diaries written by Quftis of the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition, under the direction of George A. Reisner. Between 1914 and 1942, the Qufti foremen documented the day to day work on site in their native language, and these documents now form the object of a new multidisciplinary research project.⁶

So far, it is mainly the workforces of large archaeological expeditions that have been studied, such as those working on British, French, German, and American excavations. A country that practiced archaeology in Egypt at a more modest scale during the first half of the 20th century was Belgium. With hardly any fieldwork before the start of the Elkab excavations in 1937,⁷ Belgian archaeology in Egypt had a late start. However, the documentation of the first three Elkab seasons between 1937–1946 that is preserved at the Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH) in Brussels is quite extensive, and allows us to dig deeper into the organisation of the workforce. Not only are notebooks preserved that keep track of workers' wages and expedition expenses, but also correspondence with the *reis* (lit. *ra'is*, *rāyīs*; Eng. foreman), and a large collection of photographs.

1937–1946: Three seasons at Elkab

The first Elkab campaign took place during February–March 1937, led by Jean Capart⁸ and a small team of collaborators (Fig. 1). During that first season of fieldwork, the Belgian team concentrated its efforts on the temples of Nekhbet and Thoth within the great enclosure wall. One year later, during January–March 1938, fieldwork continued in the same area, but was expanded beyond the temple-proper. The onset of the Second World War compromised plans for a third campaign in 1939, which could eventually only take place after the war, during November 1945–February 1946. This third campaign was Capart's final one, owing to his death on 16 June 1947 at the age of 70.

After the 1946 campaign, Capart published a popularising book containing memories, anecdotes and impressions of his three field seasons, entitled '*El Kab: Fouilles en Égypte, impressions et souvenirs*'.⁹ Capart was a true storyteller, who related many of his observations and experiences concerning working in the field, and his book offers the kind of personal reflections that are often lacking in official field reports. Most of his stories are about the Egyptians he collaborated with.

⁶ Manuelian 2022a–b.

⁷ For an overview of the brief Belgian excavation seasons at Heliopolis (1907), Sheikh Fadl (1923–1924), and Tell Hiw (1927), see Bruffaerts 2012. For an overview of the Belgian excavations at Elkab between 1937 and 2007, see Limme 2008.

⁸ See the recent biography on Capart: Bruffaerts 2022.

⁹ Capart 1946. All quotes from this publication are translations by the authors from the French.



Fig. 1: Group photo of the Elkab team taken inside the Somers Clarke house on 21 February 1937, the day that Capart celebrated his 60th birthday. The Quftis and *Reis* Chared stand in the back, while the Belgian team members are seated in the front. From left to right: Jean Stiénon, Marcelle Werbrouck, Éléonore Bille-de Mot, Jean Capart, Violette Verhoogen, and Arpag Mekhitarian (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11296, photograph by Éléonore Bille-de Mot, 21 February 1937).¹⁰

	1937	1938	1945–46
Jean Capart (director)			
Marcelle Werbrouck			
Arpag Mekhitarian			
Jean Stiénon			
Marcelle Baud			
Éléonore Bille-de Mot			
Violette Verhoogen			
Adhémar Massart			
Jozef Janssen			

Table 1: Overview of European participants in the three Elkab campaigns between 1937–1946.

¹⁰ The exploits of Capart and his team were featured heavily in the Belgian press at the time, and the Quftis were frequently mentioned as well. This photograph was printed in an article in *Le Soir*, 30 March 1937.

The Elkab campaigns were led by fairly small teams, with Capart himself and his assistant Marcelle Werbrouck¹¹ as the only constant elements through the three excavation seasons (Table 1). The architect Jean Stiénon was present during the first two campaigns and was responsible for producing maps of the site, and of the temples of Thoth and Nekhbet, where work had been concentrated during these seasons.

The team set up camp in the Somers Clarke house¹² overlooking the Nile, just a short distance to the south of Elkab, which remains today the (now itself historic) excavation house of the Belgian mission of the RMAH. Somers Clarke had a personal servant named Daoud, who built a house close to that of Clarke himself.¹³ After the death of Somers Clarke, Daoud went back to his native Nubia, and Daoud's house was taken over by the old Sheikh Ibrahim, mayor of the village of al-Nasrab,¹⁴ which was located next to the Somers Clarke house. While al-Nasrab was the nearest small village, the nearest town where there was also a train station was al-Mahamid.

The Elkab workmen: Quftis and local crew

Capart had not done any serious archaeological work before 1937, and he needed a team of workmen when he started at Elkab. As head *reis*, he chose Chared (Shārid) Muhammad Mansur, who had experience at other sites and who was apparently recommended to him by (un-named) Americans (Fig. 2). For the organisation of work on site, Capart – who was already 60 years old when he undertook his first campaign at Elkab in 1937 – relied heavily on *Reis* Chared and his experience.

We have a very experienced *reis* who supervised various excavations, among others at Giza and Medinet Habu. During the war, he entered the service of the British army in the Suez region where he intelligently directed several squads of workers. He seems to have returned to us very happy to be back in Elkab and it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that he is almost as interested as we are in the archaeological problems that arise every day.¹⁵

¹¹ For Marcelle Werbrouck, see Bruffaerts 2018.

¹² Somers Clarke came to Elkab for the first time in 1892 with J.J. Tylor. He built the house in 1906 and used it intermittently until he died there in 1926. Capart 1946: 23–30 (Chapter 2, with various images) offers a description of the Somers Clarke house and its surroundings. An in-depth study of the house is found in Warner 2012.

¹³ For a photograph of Daoud's house, see Capart 1946: 25. This house still exists today, although with modifications.

¹⁴ Capart 1946: 26 shows a photograph of the small village of al-Nasrab.

¹⁵ Capart 1946: 61.

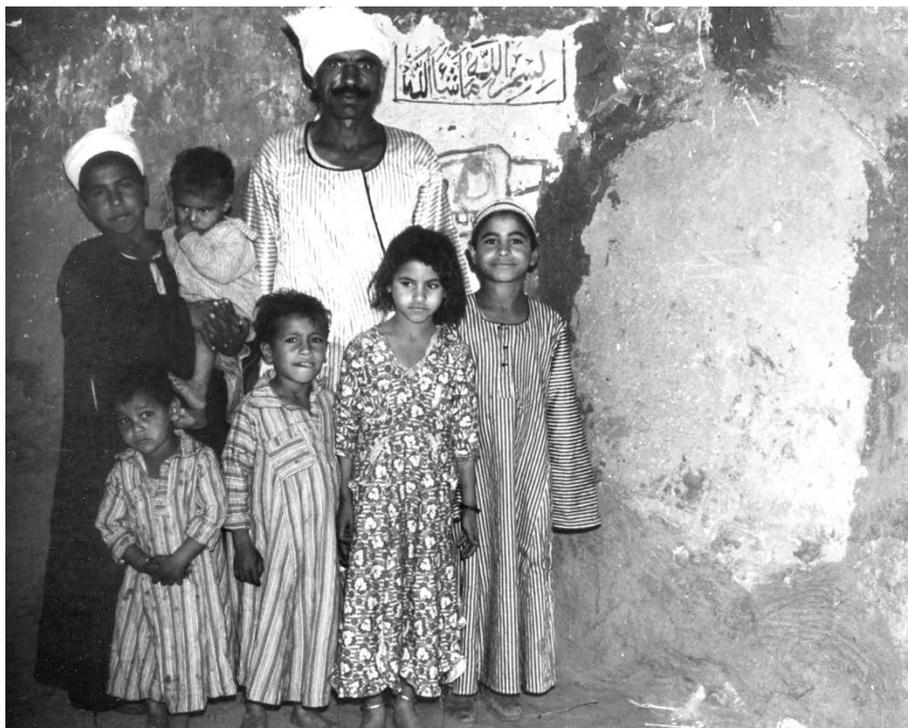


Fig. 2: *Reis* Chared Muhammad Mansur with six of his children
(© Archives of the RMAH, photograph by Arpag Mekhitarian, 1950).

Reis Chared put together a team of workers composed on the one hand of skilled and experienced workmen from Quft/al-Qal'a (Fig. 3), and of local un-specialised laborers on the other:

Reis Chared recruited about twenty men in the Coptos region who constitute the solid core of the team. They are truly specialists and one has to see them in action in the field to understand the finesse of their perception. These people are called Qufti because they were first recruited from the region of Quft (Coptos) over half a century ago. It was Flinders Petrie,¹⁶ the great excavator of Egypt, who taught these men principles and method; now a real tradition has been established.¹⁷

¹⁶ Capart knew Petrie well personally, and his organisation of the workforce was explained in his 'Methods and Aims in Archaeology' (Petrie 1904).

¹⁷ Capart 1946: 61.



Fig. 3: The team of Quftis employed by Capart during the third Elkab campaign, with *Reis* Chared Muhammad Mansur in the center wearing a white *galabiya*.

Three of his sons – Anwar, Sayf, and Kamal – are seated in front
(© RMAH Inv. EGI.12234, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945–1946).

In the archives of the RMAH is preserved a notebook of the 1945–46 season, in which *Reis* Chared kept track of wages and other mission expenses. This notebook is entirely in Arabic, and was in fact a repurposed school notebook of his son, Kamal Chared,¹⁸ who was in 4th grade of the school at al-Qal‘a, as the cover clearly states (Fig. 4). A list of 21 Quftis is recorded (Table 2), along with 57 local workmen from the villages of al-Mahamid, Hilal, and al-Nasrab (Table 3) (Fig. 5).

¹⁸ A photograph of Kamal Chared, along with *Reis* Chared’s two other sons Anwar and Sayf, was published in Capart 1946: 123.

Fares Muhammad	Al-Dasuqi Ahmed Mansur
Hussein 'Ali	'Ali Dardir
Mahrus Muhammad Hussein	'Atta al-Sawy
Bishar Ahmed Abu Kharas	Yusuf 'Urabi
Hilal Ahmed	Muhammad Abu Zeid
Muhammad Haraji	Suliman Badawi
Muhammad Mahmud Metwalli	Ramadan Fares
'Attiya Hamed	Muhammad Ahmed al-Shawry
Mahmud al-Dayri	Mahmud Muhammad
'Abdallah Muhammad Shahat	Gad al-Tayeh
Isma'il Mahmud	

Table 2: 'Kashf bi'umal Quft' (List of workers from Quft),
1945–1946 (notebook of *Reis* Chared p. 1; see Fig. 5a).

al-Mahamid	Hilal	al-Nasrab
'Abd al-'Al Ahmed Ramadan	Masry 'Attitu	Fadl Hassan
Hamed Ramadan	Ahmed 'Attitu	Hufni 'Amr
Zeidan Sayyid	'Abd al-Nasim Ahmed	Hamdan 'Abdallah
'Abd al-Hamid Ramadan	Muhammad Hassan Taha	'Attitu Hassan
Amin Ramadan	Khaled Ahmed	Gad al-Duwy
Muhammad Galal	Ahmed 'Attallah	Gami'a Ahmed
Ali 'Amr Ahmed	Hassanein 'Ali	Shakir Hassanein
Yusuf 'Abd al-Dayyim	Wahbi Fargallah	Hassan 'Abdallah
Badawi Sa'id	'Abd al-Rady Mahmud	Sa'ad Musa
Ahmed Musa Ahmed	Hassan Ahmed Muzari'a	Ahmed al-Duwy Hassan
Hassan Saleh	Muhammad Mahmud Midani	Muhammad Mahmud 'Abd al-Dayyim
Muhammad 'Eisa	'Ali Hassan	
Abu al-Hassan Mustafa	Maghrabi Jabril	
Badawi Ahmed Taha	Fu'ad 'Eizza	
Ahmed al-Duwy	Nabrawy Muhammad	
Sayyid 'Umar	'Ali Salim	
Al-Sayeh Hassan	Hassan Ahmed al-Banna	
Mahmud Taha Ibrahim	'Abd al-Rady Hamed	
Rashidi 'Amr	Muhammad Ahmed 'Attallah	
Dahi 'Amr	Muhammad 'Abd al-Meguid	
Yusuf Sayyid	Mamluk Bakr	
Ahmed Hamed Isma'il		
Isma'il Taha		

al-Mahamid	Hilal	al-Nasrab
Sayyid Isma'il		
Mustafa Muhammad Ibrahim		
25	21	11

Table 3: 'Kashf 'umal al-Mahamid wa Hilal wa al-Nasrab min 9/9/1945 ila 2/7/1946' (List of workers from al-Mahamid, Hilal, and al-Nasrab from 9/9/1945 to 2/7/1946) (notebook of *Reis* Chared p. 2; see Fig. 5b).

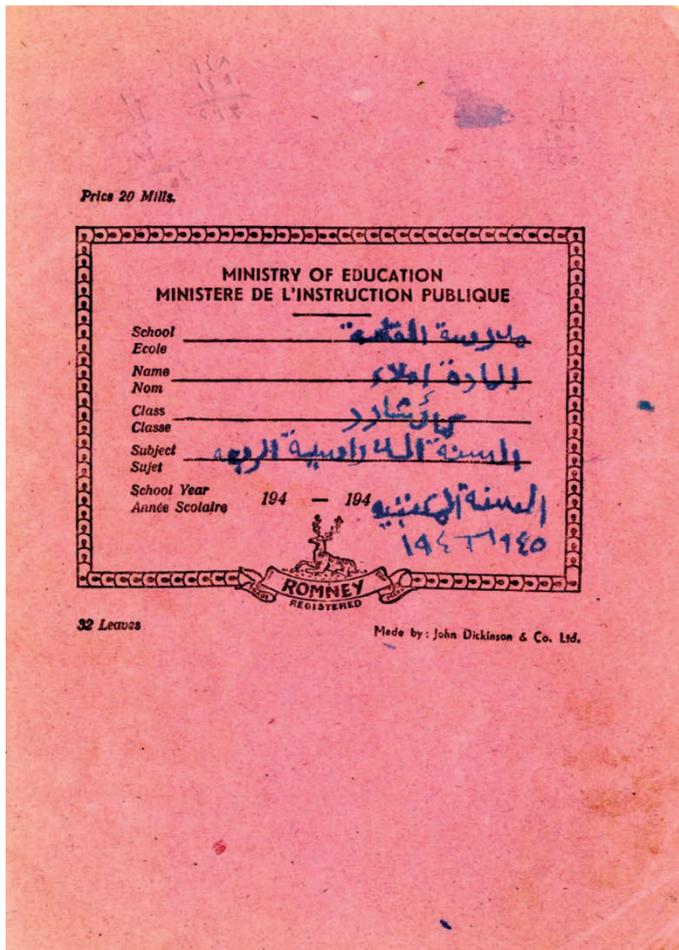


Fig. 4: Notebook of *Reis* Chared 1945–1946, Elkab & al-Kula (© Archives of the RMAH). Arabic text on the cover: School: School of al-Qal'a / Name: Subject of dictation / Class: Kamal Chared / Subject: 4th grade / School year: 1945–1946.

كف عمال قفط	النسراب	هلال	كف عمال المهدي وهلال والنسراب
خاريس محمد	مفضل خان	مصطفى عطفوا	الهميد
سعيد علي	عصني عمر	احمد عطفوا	عبدالعالي احمد رمضان
محمود سعيد	حزونا عبدالم	عبدالمعطي احمد	حامد رمضان
ستار احمد ابو زيد	عاطف احمد	محمد صهيب	زهران سيد
هلال احمد	جواد الطوي	خالد احمد	عبدالمعطي رمضان
محمد شادي	عابغ احمد	احمد عطفوا	امير رمضان
محمد محمود رسول	شكر عصفه	حسنه علي	محمد جلال
عاطف احمد	حسه عبدالم	وهبي فرحان	علي عمر احمد
محمود الواسي	سعد موسى	عبدالواحد محمود	يوسف عبدالواحد
عبدالم محمد سنان	احمد الطوي حسه	حسه احمد مزراغ	بروي سعيد
اسماعيل محمود	محمد محمود عبدالمعطي	محمد محمود صديق	احمد موكا احمد
الرسولي احمد منصور	١١	علي خان	حسه صالح
علي دريس		مفتي جبريل	محمد عيسى
عاطف احمد		نوا دمنة	ابو الحسه عطفوا
يوسف عزابي		نبراوي محمد	بروي احمد طه
محمد ابو زيد		محمدي سالم	احمد الطوي
سيمان برون		حسه احمد الشنا	سيد ماز
روضان فارس		عبدالواحد حاهد	الساح حسه
محمد احمد الشاوي		محمد احمد عطفوا	محمود طه ابراهيم
محمد محمد		محمد عبدالمعطي	رشدي عمر
جواد التايه		سكندر بلبر	صالح عمر
		١٢	يوسف سيد
			احمد موكا شابل
			اسماعيل طه
			سيد اسحاق
			عطفوا محمد مراهيم

Fig. 5a-b: Notebook of Reis Chared 1945-1946. Left: List of 21 Quftis; Right: List of workmen from al-Mahamid, Hilal and al-Nasrab (© Archives of the RMAH).



Fig. 6: The workmen inside the enclosure wall of Elkab at the end of the 1937 season (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11411, photograph by Jean Stiénon, 1937).

The team of Quftis consisted of men who had worked with the Belgian expedition before 1945–46, together with new recruits.¹⁹ About the local workmen Capart writes: ‘Our porters are recruited, young and old, from the local population; they belong to neighbouring villages; they are sometimes members of the same family, form groups and clans; they are recommended by the village authorities’.²⁰ The differences in wages between the different classes of workmen are clear (Table 4). The highest pay grade is 21 piasters (pt) per day, received by four of the Quftis; the lowest pay grade for the Quftis is 14 pt/day, which only one of them receives. For the local workmen, pay starts at 10 pt/day, which is given to 30 men; the lowest pay grade is 7 pt/day, given to only three workmen. The Quftis thus made on average double of what the local workmen made.

Some of the Qufti workmen had developed a specialised skill, such as Abu Shusha, who had become an expert at identifying and exposing mud bricks.

Our men put their pickaxes into the rubble and move quickly: it’s only sand. Suddenly, their movement slows down and they warn the *reis* that they have discovered bricks (*tub*). Indeed, under the influence of the sun, the surface of the uncovered bricks will soon become clear. When enough of the surface has been cleared to recognise the general direction of the wall, the ‘specialist’ will clean part of it. We had, in 1937 and 1938, an old man, Abu Shusha, who swept the wall with such care that he brought out the joints, making it possible to determine the dimensions of the bricks and thus their date.²¹

¹⁹ ‘Several of these men have only known us for a few weeks; others have already worked with us in previous seasons’ (Capart 1946: 129).

²⁰ Capart 1946: 63.

²¹ Capart 1946: 62, with a photo of Abu Shusha.

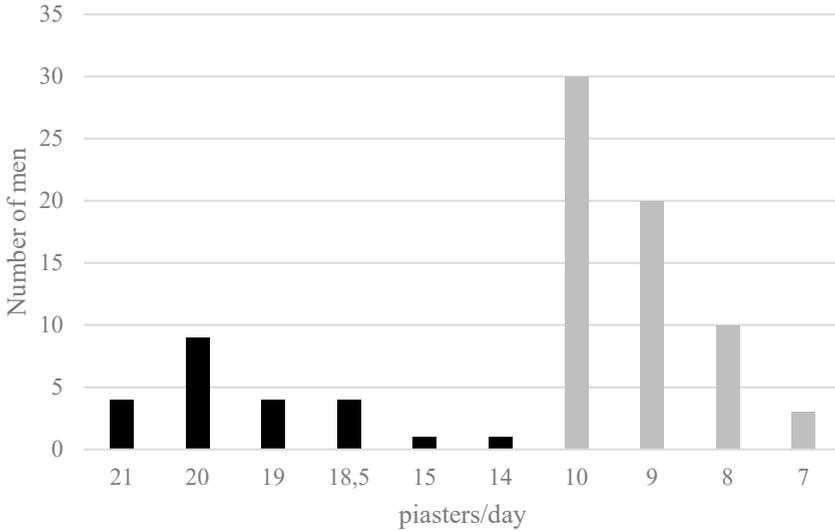


Table 4: Wages of Quftis (in black, 8/11–23/12/1945) and local workmen (in grey, 1–15/12/1945) during the 1945–46 Elkab season, in piasters per day (notebook of *Reis Chared*).²²

The spirits of the workers were kept up by a singer (Fig. 7b), about whom Capart writes:

One of our Quftis is the musician of the group and sometimes he accompanies his singing with the beat of the tambourine. The singer is as indispensable in a well-organised work site as he is among the crew of a ship. [...] The singer naturally has a varied repertoire, but in order to be appreciated, he must be a brilliant improviser. We arrive at the site and the song rises; it greets the *mudir* and assures that I will soon raise the wages; then it is the *wakil*'s turn (my lieutenant Mekhitarian), about whom it is declared that at the next fortnight's pay he will give more than at the previous one. Of course, no one takes this seriously, but it spreads a good mood and the work gets done.²³

²² The numbers of workmen in the payment tables do not correspond exactly to the numbers of workmen listed initially in the notebook, so it seems more workmen were hired during the course of the excavation season.

²³ Capart 1946: 66.



Fig. 7a–b: Workmen at work. Left: At the northwestern corner of the temple of Thoth at Elkab (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11428, photograph by Jean Capart, 1937). Right: The Qufti singer animating the men at work (© RMAH Inv. EGI.12183, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945–1946).

In between the various excavation seasons, *Reis* Chared corresponded by mail with the Belgian team when they were back in Belgium. The topics discussed were both personal as well as ‘business’: the purchase of a rifle for Chared, the guarding of the excavation house, and of course issues of salary. This correspondence was handled by Arpag Mekhitarian,²⁴ who was of Armenian descent, but had been born in Tanta in Egypt in 1911. At age 14 his family immigrated to Belgium, but by then he already spoke and wrote Arabic fluently. He became one of Capart’s closest collaborators at the Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth (FÉRE)²⁵ in Brussels, and Capart considered him like a son. The convenience of having a close collaborator in the Belgian team who had mastered Arabic also shines through when Capart writes:

Late in the evening, the *wékil* [Capart’s designation for Mekhitarian, MDM] does the Arabic mail, because the official documents must be in this language. It is necessary to correspond with the Antiquities Service, for supplies with the suppliers of Edfu, Luxor, Tahta (for butter), Cairo (for the pharmacy); with the station master or the director of the post office of al-Mahamid.²⁶

Capart always refers to the workmen as ‘nos gens’ (‘our people’) or ‘nos hommes’ (‘our men’), and his relations with them seem to have been very cordial. At his 60th birthday, on 21 February 1937, the workmen organised a big *fantasia* (entertainment), which Capart describes in detail.²⁷ The men received a day off with pay and had arranged for two Coptic belly-dancers to come and entertain the team. The men asked Capart for two bottles of wine in order to encourage the dancers to perform better. Apart from the belly-dancers, there were also horsemen and stick dancing. The Quftis attended the party along with the local workmen. A photo taken that same day shows Capart surrounded by the team of Quftis, all dressed in their finest *galabiyas* (Fig. 1). Capart muses about the life and working methods of the workmen as follows:

Really, one might think for a moment that these working methods are more of a game than a chore. Egyptians are, by nature, content and jovial; our workers are not like the proletarians crushed by industrialism. They are emerging this year from a long period of misery and epidemic. The wages

²⁴ On Mekhitarian, see Bingen et al. 2005. During the Second World War, Mekhitarian, as an Egyptian citizen, was ordered to leave Belgium, and he watched over the excavation house and equipment of the Belgian mission at Elkab during those years (Capart 1946: 14; Bingen et al. 2005: 4–5).

²⁵ For the FÉRE, see De Meyer et al. forthcoming.

²⁶ Capart 1946: 114.

²⁷ Capart 1946: 139–145 (Chapter 16, with photos).

we bring them will give them a little well-being during the few weeks of our stay.²⁸

The epidemic of which Capart speaks here was typhus, which wreaked havoc among the Egyptian population during the Second World War.²⁹ Reis Chared acted as spokesman for his team in the matter of vaccination against typhus: ‘In the first days of November, Chared had already told the *wékil* of the desire of his Quftis to be vaccinated against typhus with the American vaccine he had heard about’.³⁰ The workmen received their vaccinations at a hospital close to Elkab, but since typhus was transmitted by lice, other measures were taken too:

Work is suspended and our men take turns to have their heads completely shaved by barbers. The government bears the cost of the syringes, which is quite high. Our workers are very happy to learn that they receive, in their skin, a very expensive medicine for which they don’t have to pay anything. Think about it: the vaccine represents, for each one, the salary of almost one or more than a week’s work. The doctor and his secretary, escorted by the *wékil*, then entered Somers Clarke House to vaccinate our servants and the family of Sheikh Ibrahim. We very politely declined the invitation to submit ourselves to the needle which had already passed through more than a hundred skins in succession without any disinfection.³¹

Ghafirs of the Service des Antiquités

Besides the Quftis and local workmen, various other Egyptians worked on site during the Elkab excavations. There were the guards or *ghafirs* of the *Service des Antiquités*, one of whom (Mahmud) was already at the site when Capart visited Elkab in 1930 with Belgian Queen Élisabeth. Mahmud remembered that visit well when Capart started work in 1937.³² Capart devotes an entire chapter³³ to the *ghafirs*, about whom he writes:

There are two *ghafirs* in Elkab: an old one, Mahmud, and a young one, Musa. They both report to the chief *ghafir* of Edfu who comes once a month to see, I think, that his subordinates are still alive. The chief *ghafir* reports to the inspector of the Antiquities Service for the *Moudirieh* of Asswan, who is under the orders of the Inspector General of Upper Egypt, who resides in Luxor and has jurisdiction over the region from Nag Hamadi to

²⁸ Capart 1946: 67.

²⁹ Described in Capart 1946: 134–137.

³⁰ Capart 1946: 134.

³¹ Capart 1946: 136–137.

³² Capart 1946: 14.

³³ Capart 1946: 76–84 (Chapter 9).

the southern border of Nubia.³⁴

Musa, the young man, a fairly strong fellow, is less interesting than his old colleague, called Mahmud Ahmed Aly, known as *Mouzareh* (farmer). This one is a real character, in the fullest sense of the word. From his shrivelled face, one estimates him to be fairly old, although he has remained alert. Mahmud does not want anyone to know his age, because he is afraid that his superiors might think of retiring him. Already a long time ago he claimed to be fifty-five to fifty-seven years old, and in this area, where civil status is hardly in order, it is difficult to contradict him. We call him Mahmud, but throughout the region he is known as Abu ‘Abbas, the father of ‘Abbas. This is quite a story, and a most fantastic one.³⁵



Fig. 8: The two *ghafirs*, Musa and Mahmud (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11972, photograph by Jean Capart, 1937).

³⁴ Capart 1946: 76.

³⁵ Capart 1946: 78. The story of *ghafir* Mahmud is recounted on p. 78–84, with an addition about his three dogs on p. 101–102. Mahmud’s son ‘Abbas died young and became venerated as a Sheikh (see Capart 1946: 85–91 (Chapter 10).

The two *ghafirs* and their families lived in mud brick houses to the west of the temples of Elkab, the core of which had been built by Somers Clarke before building his own large house.³⁶ The descendants of *ghafir* Mahmud/Abu ‘Abbas would work with the Belgian mission for generations to come. He had several children, among whom were Nabawiya and Muhammad, who were photographed by Éléonore Bille-de Mot in 1937 (Fig. 9a). Wouter Claes photographed the same Muhammad in 2012 (Fig. 9b), an old man then, who passed away in 2015, thereby ending the last direct link to the Capart-led missions. However, his son, also named Muhammad (Fig. 10a) worked with the Belgian mission as well, and two of his grandsons, Muhammad and Mahmud (Fig. 10b–c), still do so today, making it the fourth generation of the same family to work with the Belgians.



Fig. 9a–b: Left: Nabawiya and Muhammad, children of *ghafir* Mahmud, Elkab 1937 (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11207, photograph by Éléonore Bille-de Mot); Right: Muhammad, son of *ghafir* Mahmud, Elkab, 12 March 2012 (© RMAH, Belgian archaeological Mission to Elkab).

³⁶ Capart 1946: 32, with a photo on p. 34.



Fig. 10a–c: Left: Muhammad, son of Muhammad, Elkab, 9 November 2016; Middle and right: Two grandsons of Muhammad, named Muhammad (middle) and Mahmud (right), who still work with the Belgian mission, Elkab, 27 April 2022 (© RMAH, Belgian archaeological Mission to Elkab).

House staff

Life at the Somers Clarke house was run by an accomplished Egyptian house staff.³⁷ The head *sufragi* (house servant) was named ‘Abd al-Baghi / ‘Abdu and he came from Luxor, recommended by French colleagues. He served at table, made the beds, and cleaned the house.³⁸ He was assisted by Soliman, a cousin of *Reis* Chared, while Chared’s wife³⁹ supplied the team with freshly baked bread every day. Two of Sheikh Ibrahim’s children were employed as well: Ahmed served as boatman and Badry as boatman, guardian and messenger. The brother of the *ghafir* Mahmud worked as a carpenter and did repairs in and around the house.⁴⁰ The family relations that existed between the various staff in the house and on site did not go unnoticed by Capart, who remarks that ‘nepotism is practised very strongly here and, from the excavation site to the house, from the *ghafirs* to the farm of Ibrahim, a network has been woven around us, like a spider’s web around flies. We feel that it would be dangerous to try and break a link in the web’.⁴¹

³⁷ Capart 1946: 113–121 (Chapter 13).

³⁸ Capart 1946: 118.

³⁹ Capart 1946: 116–117. While Capart refers to Chared’s wife several times throughout the book, he never records her name. This is also the case for other women he speaks about, such as the two wives of *ghafir* Mahmud (p. 78–84). In fact, the only Egyptian woman he calls by her name is Nabawiya, the daughter of *ghafir* Mahmud (p. 80–84) (Fig. 9a).

⁴⁰ Capart 1946: 117.

⁴¹ Capart 1946: 118.



Fig. 11: The two men depicted here in front of the Somers Clarke house were members of the house staff: on the right the *sufragi* ‘Abd al-Baghi, also named ‘Abdu, and on the left Badry, son of Sheikh Ibrahim, who worked as a boatman, guardian and messenger (© RMAH Inv. EGI.12164, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945).

The cook was named ‘Abbas, and came from Karnak, recommended by French colleague Alexandre Varille.⁴² He was illiterate, but had devised his own ingenious system to keep track of the kitchen accounts, which Capart elaborately describes:

Our good man showed us that, though he had not been to school, he was doing as well as anyone else, thanks to a pictographic method, the mother of writing. On a sheet of paper, he drew small images as best he could: a bird’s outline for chickens, an oval for eggs, an herbaceous bulb for onions, a large rectangle for the butter, a very small one for the salt and dots for the flour. Milk was admirably represented by the silhouette of a jar with a handle. The units of each species were noted by lines and the half-measures by

⁴² Capart 1946: 123.

an o, which in Arabic numeration means 5 and characterises the coins of half a piaster (five milim).⁴³

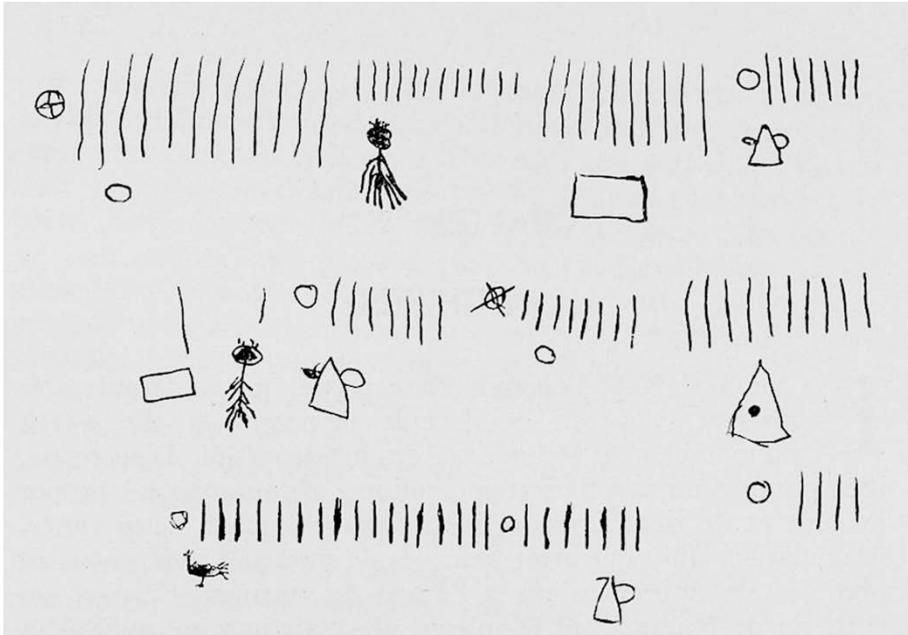


Fig. 12: The pictographic system devised by the cook 'Abbas to keep track of the kitchen accounts (after Capart 1946: 121).

Conclusion

Making use of his connections with other international teams, Capart built his team for the archaeological work on site, as well as for the work in the dig house at Elkab. The administrative documents of *Reis* Chared preserved at the RMAH offer tangible evidence reflecting the workers' organisation. The many stories Capart recorded about life during the excavation seasons allow us to go beyond just names and numbers, and they betray a fondness for the Egyptians and the country in which he worked. He described this sentiment himself as such:

There is a real team spirit among all of us. We feel attached to the same work; our workers only imperfectly understand what the significance of the work may be, but they share in the joy of our findings, for which they are the indispensable agents. I could not help making this remark in my mind: What would be the attitude, in similar circumstances, of our workers in Belgium?⁴⁴

⁴³ Capart 1946: 121.

⁴⁴ Capart 1946: 129.

While this article only offers a glimpse into one workforce during three excavation seasons in the period immediately preceding and following the Second World War, these observations may eventually be integrated into a wider social network analysis in both space and time of a community of Egyptians that was so central to the formative years of Egyptian archaeology. The stories presented here are an illuminating, if modest, contribution to our knowledge of the social and cultural dimensions of working in the field. And in at least one case, four generations of the same family have worked with the Belgian mission of the RMAH, which has a long-running concession at Elkab from 1937 until today. Chared also worked with the Belgian mission until long after Capart's death, as the *reis* of the latter's successors Pierre Gilbert and Herman De Meulenaere. He passed away on 18 June 1970 and is buried in Quft, which was communicated to the Belgian team by his son Anwar in a letter.

With the emergent focus on diversity in the history of Egyptology that is well represented by this volume, we now have the historical understanding and theoretical framework to interrogate, rather than take for granted, what the attitudes and experiences of Egyptians working in the field were and are. This kind of 'reading back' on the archive is made possible by the stories documented in reports and notebooks like those presented here.

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- Fig. 4: Groupe d'ouvriers originaires de Karnak en train de fouiller en sous-cœuvre la plateforme de fondation du Nouvel Empire (© Archives Ifao – pv_2004_10903).
- Fig. 5: 'Ali Isma'il nettoyant les blocs de la porte de Tibère (© KU Leuven).

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- Fig. 1: Group photo of the Elkab team taken inside the Somers Clarke house on 21 February 1937. (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11296, photograph by Éléonore Bille-de Mot, 21 February 1937).
- Fig. 2: *Reis* Chared Muhammad Mansur with six of his children (© Archives of the RMAH, photograph by Arpag Mekhitarian, 1950).
- Fig. 3: The team of Quftis employed by Capart during the third Elkab campaign (© RMAH Inv. EGI.12234, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945–1946).
- Fig. 4: Notebook of *Reis* Chared 1945–1946, Elkab & al-Kula (© Archives of the RMAH).
- Fig. 5a–b: Notebook of *Reis* Chared 1945–1946. (© Archives of the RMAH).
- Fig. 6: The workmen inside the enclosure wall of Elkab at the end of the 1937 season. (© RMAH Inv. EGI.11411, photograph by Jean Stiénon, 1937).
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- Fig. 10a–c: Left: Muhammad, son of Muhammad, Elkab, 9 November 2016; Middle and right: Two grandsons of Muhammad, named Muhammad (middle) and Mahmud (right), 27 April 2022 (© RMAH, Belgian archaeological Mission to Elkab).
- Fig. 11: Members of the house staff: on the right the sufragi 'Abd al-Baghi, also named 'Abdu, and on the left Badry, son of Sheikh Ibrahim, who worked as a boatman, guardian and messenger (© RMAH Inv. EGI.12164, photograph by Jean Capart, 1945).

- Fig. 12: The pictographic system devised by the cook ‘Abbas to keep track of the kitchen accounts (after Capart 1946: 121).

Rosalind Janssen

- Fig. 1: Galton’s map of Egypt, with his highlighting of Abydos as ‘where Flinders Petrie is’ (c. 1900), paper and purple ink (Reproduced by permission of UCL Library, Special Collections; Galton Papers, GALTON/1/4/12/1).
- Fig. 2: (left) Francis Galton in later life as sketched by his great-niece Eva Biggs (right); (both undated), charcoal sketch; black and white photograph (Reproduced by permission of UCL Library, Special Collections).
- Fig. 3: The final page of Galton’s letter to his sisters Emma Galton and Elizabeth Wheler (14 January 1900), paper, ink, crayon and pencil (Reproduced by permission of UCL Library, Special Collections; Galton Papers, GALTON/1/4/12/1).
- Fig. 4: Charles S. Myers (left) and Anthony Wilkin (right) (El-Amrah, January 1901), black and white photograph (Reproduced by permission of the Egypt Exploration Society; AB.NEG.02.07).
- Fig. 5: (above) Henry Wallis, *Flinders Petrie Admiring a Find, the Ramesseum, Western Thebes*, 1895; (below) Petrie and his *fellahin* workmen in the Early Dynastic Tomb of Pharaoh Khasekhemwy (Umm el-Qa’ab, Abydos, 1901), framed watercolour; black and white photograph (Above reproduced by permission of UCL Art Collection; 2674. Below reproduced by permission of the Egypt Exploration Society; AB-RT.NEG.II.256).
- Fig. 6: Members of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits, standing are Alfred Cort Haddon (first row, left); Anthony Wilkin (first row, right); W.H.R. Rivers (second row, left); Charles S. Myers (third row, centre) (Murray Island, 1898), black and white photograph (Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology; N.22900.ACH2).
- Fig. 7: Holmgren’s Wools in original lidded cardboard box with instructions (early Twentieth Century), wool and cardboard, 15.0 × 10.5 × 5.9 cm. (Reproduced by permission of the Cyril Kett Optometry Museum, Melbourne; cat. no. 1934)
- Fig. 8: W.H.R. Rivers and a Murray Islander with a colour wheel (1898), black and white photograph (Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology; N.23036.ACH2).