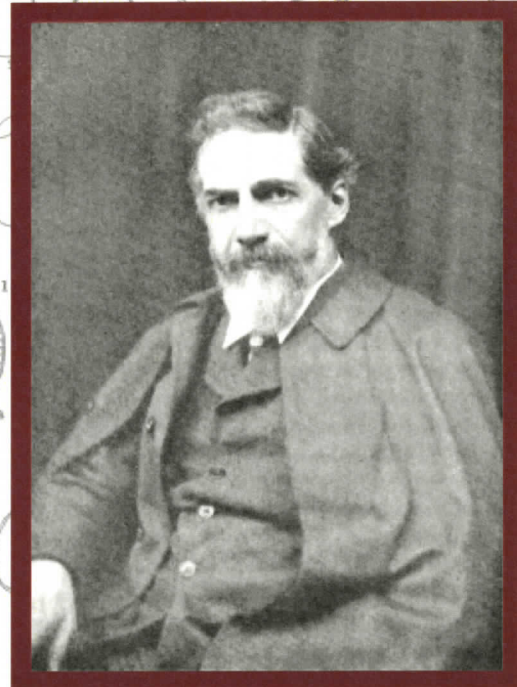
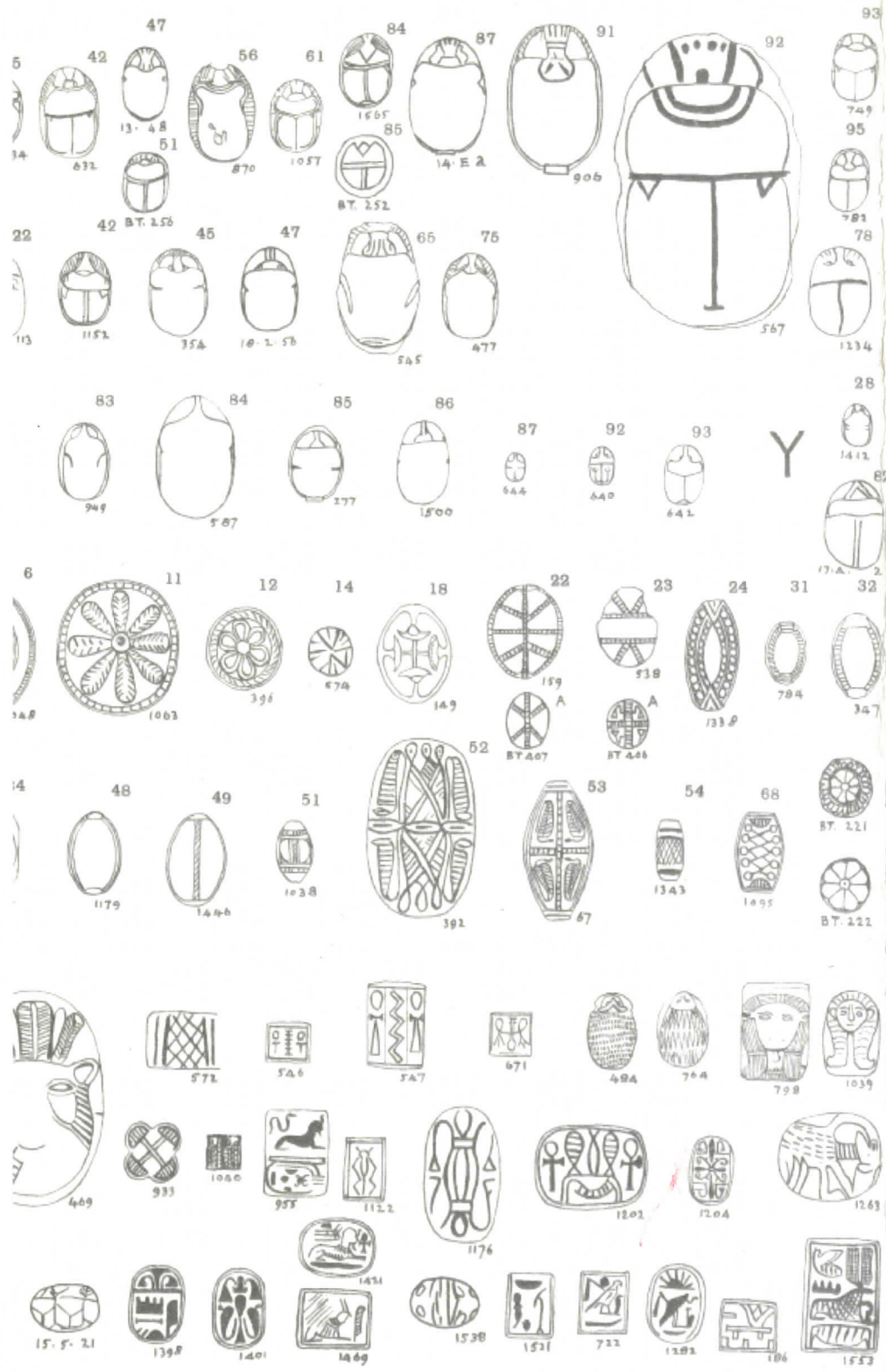


SIR WILLIAM MATTHEW FLINDERS PETRIE
(1853-1942)
The Father of Egyptian Archaeology





Petrie Examines an Egyptian-style Pot from Palestine, 1930.
Petrie Museum, London.

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Elaine Altman Evans

A trip to Atlanta. Co-Sponsored by

The Frank H. McClung Museum of
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November 5, 2005

To See

Excavating Egypt

***Great Discoveries from the Petrie Museum of Egyptian
Archaeology
University College London***

An Exhibition

Organized by the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Archaeology

At

Emory University in Atlanta Georgia

Frank H. McClung Museum Occasional Paper Number 17.

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Egyptologists Make Important Discoveries

Significant inroads were being made by a few pioneer excavators from various countries in the very early Nineteenth Century. Their work stimulated interest in excavating and influenced later archaeologists such as Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie.

Just eleven miles southwest of Cairo is the famous site of Gizeh, one of the oldest in the world. The attractions there were well preserved so it was natural it would be a place early explorers and excavators focused their attention, paving the way for succeeding Egyptologists. The Italian excavator Giovanni Battista Caviglia (1770-1845) brought information about the interior of the Great Pyramid to light, completely excavated the Great Sphinx and uncovered steps up to that monument. The Italian explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823) opened the Second, Khafre's Pyramid. The British army officer and excavator Colonel Howard Vyse (1784-1853), assisted by a British civil engineer John S. Perring (1813-1869), published an important three volume account of his pyramid operations, which included a survey by Perring. Karl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884), the German Egyptologist and one of Egyptology's most renowned scholars, excavated, made plans of chapels and almost a hundred tombs, and mapped the whole Gizeh necropolis.

Early on, scholars copied the reliefs and inscriptions found in the Gizeh mastaba tombs. Among them was the French decipherer of hieroglyphs Jean Francoise Champollion (1790-1832), the Italian Egyptologist Ippolito Rosellini (1800-1843), British Egyptologist John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875), British traveler and collector Robert Hay (1799-1863), British Egyptologist James Burton (1788-1862), French archaeologist Lestor L'Hote (1804-1842) and the French Egyptologists and linguists Emmanuel (1811-1872), and Jacques de Rouge (1842-1928). These trail blazers also worked at and studied sites other than Gizeh,

providing abundant material towards the strengthening of Egyptian scholarship.

By the mid-nineteenth century the most outstanding Egyptologist in Egypt was Auguste Mariette. (1821-1881). Mariette's archaeological excavations were astonishing in number as were his unpublished writings and notes housed at the Louvre Museum and Griffith Institute, Oxford, England. Although his excavation techniques were criticized by later archaeologists, Flinders Petrie, too, complained about the condition of his predynastic site "after it had been ransacked by Mariette," Nonetheless Mariette's work can be judged superior to others of his time and the many honors he received well deserved.

There were many others that followed, who made important advances and distinguished themselves in the field. But the one who stands tall is William Matthew Flinders Petrie. He has been singled out for his genius and his many accomplishments. Not only did Petrie greatly improve archaeological methods, but he was the first to emphasize the significance of the small objects he uncovered that were so much a part of the daily life of the ancient Egyptians. Petrie also established his system of sequence dating, whereby pottery could now be placed in a chronological context.

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William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853-1942)

Called the "Father of Egyptian Archaeology," Flinders Petrie is undoubtedly the world's best known and most prolific excavator, who uncovered more objects and excavated more sites than any other archaeologist. When he was thirteen, books about the Great Pyramid by the English astronomer Charles Piazzi Smyth (1819-1900) captivated him, inciting his interest in Egypt. In 1877, at age of twenty-four, he published his first book about weights and measures entitled *Inductive Metrology*. Although he lacked a formal education, he nevertheless trained himself with intensity and had a disregard for the archaeological methods and

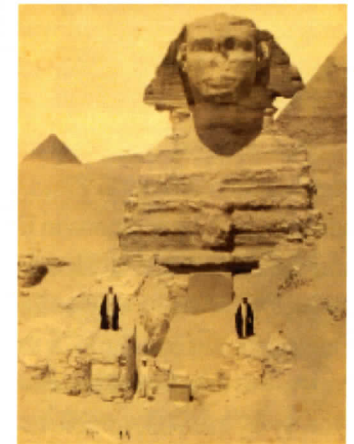


Hilda Petrie Lends a Hand, 1887-1898. Petrie Museum(?), London.

theories of others, deciding about procedures himself. In 1896 he married an Egyptologist, Hilda Umlin, his true, devoted helpmate. He dedicated his book *Seventy Years in Archaeology* "To My Wife on whose toil most of my work has depended."

Petrie was born in Charlton, England to a civil engineer and surveyor and the daughter of an explorer of Australia. As a youth he was a coin collector which may have anticipated his future career. In his teens he worked with his father, also a surveyor, and together they surveyed Stonehenge, an experience that shaped his interest in weights and measures. At the tender age of twenty-two Petrie began to survey and draw

plans of numerous archaeological sites in southern England, building a basis for new methods that were to become legendary and in 1880 Petrie went to Egypt for the first time to inspect and survey the Gizeh pyramids. Through his energy and enthusiasm a loan exhibition of ancient Egyptian art was held at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London in 1894.



The Sphinx, circa 1880, by G. Lekekian, & Co. McClung Museum, Knoxville.

It is important to note that Petrie set standards and was soon clear about what made good archaeology, ideas often ignored by other practicing archaeologists of his time. Petrie felt archaeologists should have an education, which combined the scholar and engineer along with a strong historical background. It was also crucial to draw accurately, have knowledge of the written language of the culture at hand and that of the modern spoken language as



Detail of a Watercolor of Excavations of a Tomb by Petrie. Petrie Museum, London.

well. Another important principle in his methodology was having the powers of observing the smallest detail along with an exceptional ability for visual memory. Petrie was able to have a fixed image of everything about the excavation site in the mind at all times, day after day. Also everything at the excavation had to be studied. Essential was a good working and sympathetic relationship with your workmen, listening to their concerns, but maintaining discipline.

Primary to his principles about archaeology was conservation. To leave a monument uncovered, or unprotected, to be destroyed by weather, or robbers, was unforgivable and a crime. In addition, not only was a written record of a site essential, but even more so was the documentation in print of the discoveries. Therefore, prompt publication was the golden rule, even if the written record might prove imperfect due to a haste to publish.

Petrie had strong ties with Amelia Blandford Edwards, who founded the Egypt Exploration Fund, in London, which sponsored numerous archaeological excavations in Egypt and funded his publications. Each season the subsidized work effected positive results for him in Egypt. By 1900, Petrie and a few colleagues were in charge of the explorations. One important operation of the EEF was the distribution of antiquities and papyrus to museums and universities, including those in the United States. However, in 1905, unable to accept the EEF Committee's intrigues and resistance to his terms regarding his work, Petrie left the EEF and established the British School of Archaeology in Egypt at the University College in London. There he worked hard to widen interest in the study of Egypt. These organizations had supported Petrie's excavations, where he scientifically directed and compiled information in order to provide documented objects and provenance for his discoveries.

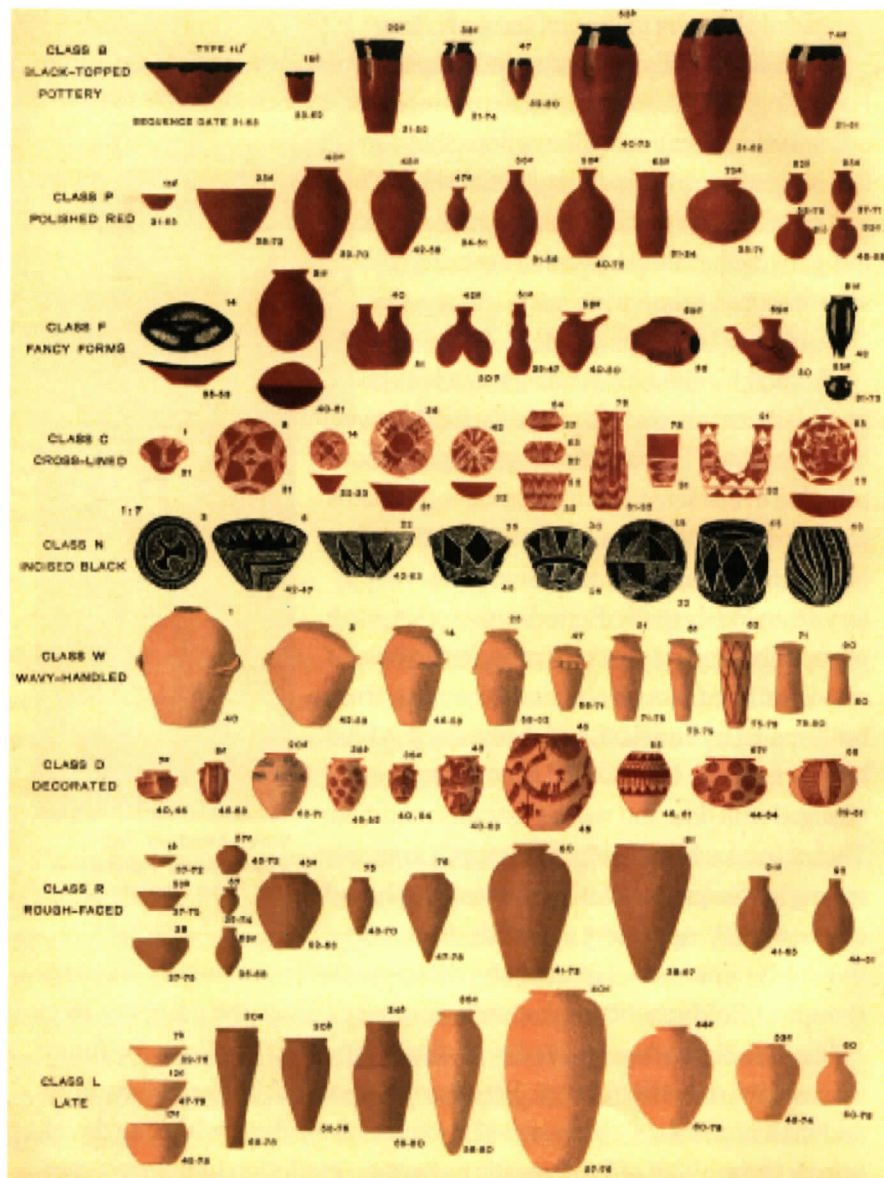
In his lifetime Petrie made more important discoveries than any other Egyptologist. He introduced new and improved archaeological field methods and classifications, innovations that contributed to his renown. He had invented sequence dating, established relationships between Egyptian and Greek pottery, and emphasized the importance of examining everything, even the smallest and of seemingly little significance.

Among his numerous talents was his ability as a mathematician, an aptitude which proved indispensable. Perhaps his most important contribution in this sense was his numbering systems for Sequence Dating, a method of relative dating. Petrie compared successive groups of pottery from Predynastic Period cemeteries, each group showing a stylistic change. In the case of wavy-handled jars he observed changes, from bulbous to cylindrical and from deep edged ledges to none. He showed how a single style changed with time and was stylistically modified. These changes he called "degradation." In simple terms, his Sequence Dating system was based on his classifying pottery according to consecutive body changes. He made typological studies of pottery forms in groups of Predynastic tombs, with the phases given the numbers 30 to 100. The first phase started with the number 30 to allow for future discoveries of earlier graves. By drawing a parallel between the graves and their contents, Petrie was led to connections from which he developed a chronology of Predynastic pottery, an evolution of pottery types.

Petrie was known for marking every pot or sherd, where it was found, and recording what other beads, or man-made objects, were in the same locale. These methods allowed him to create a more accurate dating system than previously established. The technology, the materials,



Wavy-handled Jar, Predynastic Period. McClung Museum, Knoxville



Common Types of Predynastic Pottery Classified by Petrie.

and methods of manufacture of the ancient Egyptians fascinated him. Again, Petrie was far ahead of his time, when, for example, he collected and studied stone implements and discarded stone cores and those sections showing drills marks of metal saws so he could learn and document methods of stone-working.

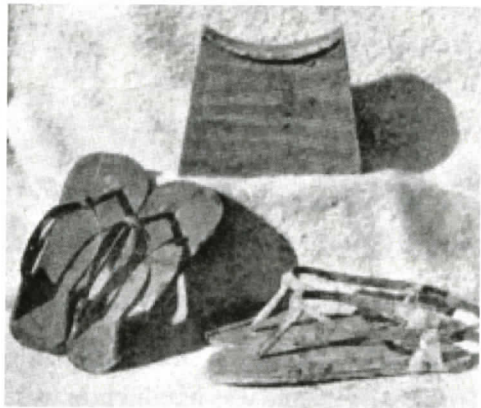
The number of sites Petrie excavated from 1884 to the 1930s in Upper and Lower Egypt, Palestine and Israel was staggering. One of his many great contributions was the discovery at Naqada in Upper Egypt of early Dynastic and Predynastic sites, thereby bringing to light for the first time important data about the very first cultural remains in Egypt. Another was at Hawara the site of the pyramid of Amenemhat III of the Middle Kingdom, perhaps one of the most challenging because of the water seepage. In the cemetery, Petrie explored and cleared a Late Dynastic Period tomb, where he again slithered about in deep water and mud. There he found, among other important objects, numerous amulets and hundreds of very finely executed *shawabty* figurines. When he first visited the site of Tell el Amarna, the city of the New Kingdom Pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti, he was overwhelmed by its size. Nevertheless, he divided the area and within a season uncovered countless extraordinary objects, including beautifully painted wall and pavement fragments. He found the sarcophagus of Sesostri II of the Middle Kingdom in his pyramid at Lahun and a nearby hidden treasure of the fabulous gold jewellery and toilet accessories of his daughter Princess Sit-Hathor-Yunet. The list goes on.



Shawabty of Hor-wedja from Hawara, Dynasty XXVI. McClung Museum, Knoxville.

Petrie held the first chair in Egyptology at University College, London, created the journal *Ancient Egypt* and was its editor for twenty years and received numerous honorary degrees. In 1923 he was knighted. The publications of his books, articles and reviews number some one thousand!

The results of Petrie's work as an Egyptologist/Archaeologist brought untold riches and dimensions to the world's understanding of ancient Egyptian life. The "Father of Egyptian Archaeology," also called "Father of Pots," by his Egyptian excavation labor force, worked in Egypt for more than half a century, introducing pioneering archaeological field methods. His extraordinary discoveries tell the story to the smallest detail how people lived beginning in the earliest dynasties of Egypt. Petrie's legacy is reflected in his publications, the objects he uncovered, his excavation notes and personal journals, which document and illustrate his outstanding contributions to the early days of Egyptology in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century. Sir Flinders Petrie was a giant of his time and remains so to this day.



Headrest and Sandals, Dynasty V, from Deshasheh. British Museum(?), London.

Suggested Reading:

- Warren R. Dawson and Eric P. Uphill, *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, 1972.
 ———and M. L. Bierbrier, 3rd revised edition, 1995.
 Margaret S. Drower, 2nd edition, *Flinders Petrie. A Life in Archaeology*, 1995.
 ———, *Letters from the Desert, the Correspondence of Flinders & Hilda Petrie*, 2003.
 William Flinders Petrie, *Diospolis Parva. The Cemeteries of Abadiyeh and Hu.* Egypt Exploration Fund, 1901.
 ———, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, 1931.
 John David Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology 1549-1906*, 1971.

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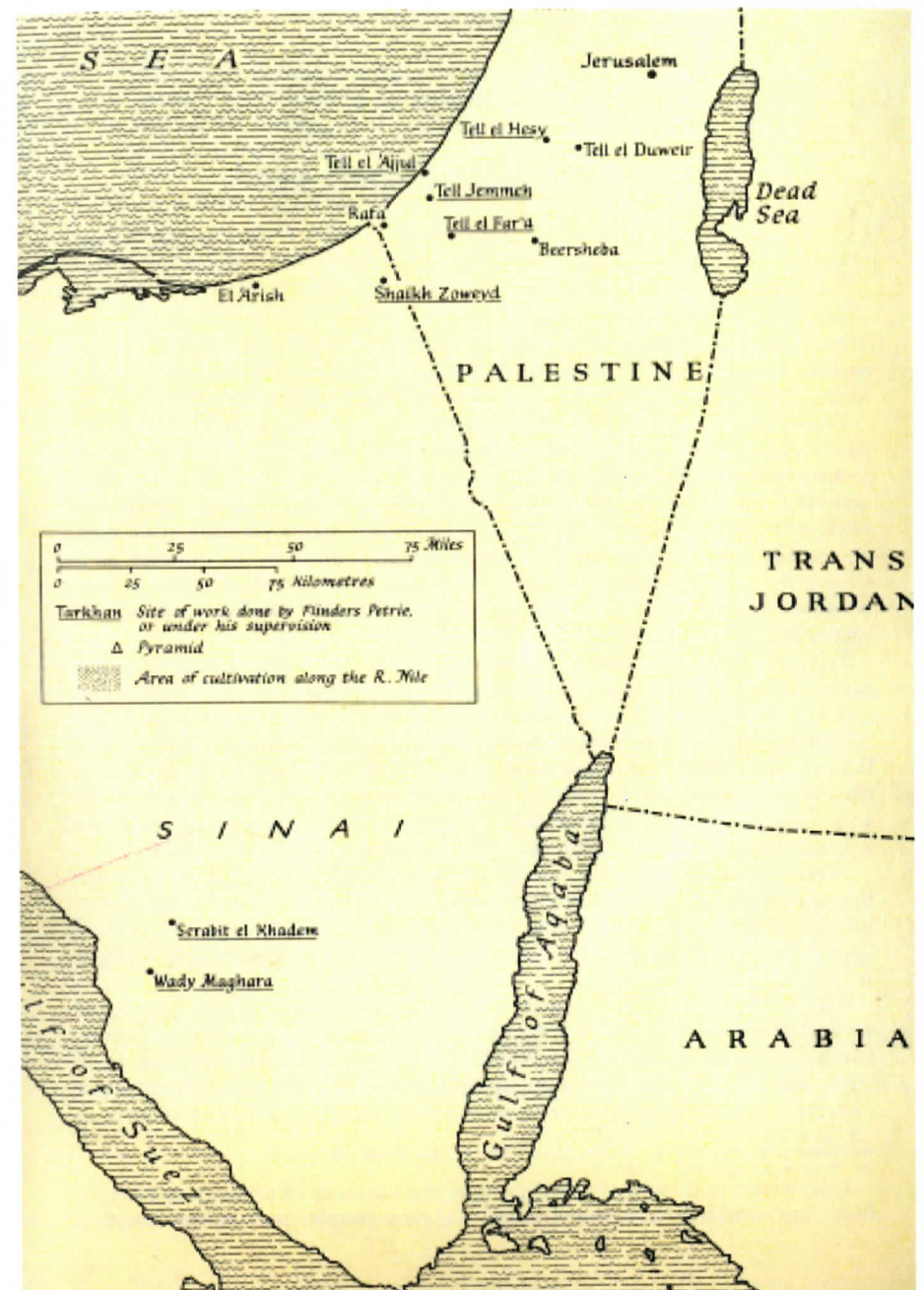
Cover:

- Flinders Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*. London, 1931.
 ———, *Buttons and Design Scarabs*. British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1925, PL. XXX.

Inside:

- Frontispiece: Flinders Petrie: Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, no. 110.
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 Page 10: Common Types: W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Diospolis Parva*.
 Page 11: Shawabty: McClung Museum, Knoxville
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 Page 14-15: Map: Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, Appendix B.

Some of Flinder Petrie's Excavation Sites*



* Adapted from Margaret S. Drower, *Flinders Petrie. A Life in Archaeology*, 1995.