

THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM NEWSLETTER



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A Word from the Director

2008 is over, and as always it has been full of events, developments and new projects. One of the most notable projects in 2008 is the Egyptian-Italian training project aimed at training young Egyptian conservators and curators in museological practices and conservation techniques. This Egyptian-Italian project has put on an exhibition in room 45 with large displays detailing the progress and techniques in conservation of Egyptian antiquities that the participants were trained in. More exhibitions were held in the famous Temporary Exhibition room, R44, which as always hosted several successful exhibitions. The first was "Discovering Ancient Egypt", celebrating 50 years of Egyptian– Czech collaboration in Egyptian Archaeology. This was followed by the "Victor Loret in Egypt" exhibition which showcased documents belonging to the archaeologist Victor Loret and 20 key objects discovered by Loret. Finally, the current exhibition is about the History of the Egyptian Museum, and is featured on page 2 of this issue. More developments are taking place in the Museum, and on the west and east sides major works are being carried out, and will be featured in detail in a coming issue of the Newsletter. Work is also being carried out to conserve the Museum's registers, which are a vital record of the Museum's history.

We wish everyone a peaceful and successful new year.

*Dr Wafaa el-Saddik
General Director*

Profile of the Issue

Respected and admired by many, Sabah Abdel Razek has been a curator at the Egyptian Museum since 1995. Ms Sabah has a B.A. in History from Cairo University and obtained a diploma in Egyptian Archaeology from Cairo University in 1987.

Ms. Sabah is involved with many projects around the museum, and is most active with the frequent temporary exhibitions. She has been supervising and coordinating the basement renovation project since 2004.



Her day is mostly spent between the basement project, of which she is the Head Curator, and the well-known curator's hall, Room 39, where she works on inventorying and writing and coordinating the labels.

Photo: Ms. Sabah during a committee to register new acquisitions, accompanied by curators Khalifa Mohamed (right) and Walaa Mostafa (seated).



Exhibitions



After the successful collaboration on the Victor Loret exhibition between the Egyptian Museum and the Università degli Studi of Milan, Dr. Wafaa el-Saddik invited Dr. Patrizia Piacentini to collaborate on another exhibit, this time on the History of the Egyptian Museum. The exhibition contains some rarely seen architectural plans of the Museum made by architect



Marcel Dourgnon, and photographs of the Museum being constructed, as well as archival images of the ground breaking ceremony, many of which have been seen only once before, during the Museum's centennial celebrations in 2002. Photographs of the older Museums are also shown, including the Boulaq Museum.

Right: Dr Piacentini, Mr Mohamed Abdul Fattah (Head of the Museums Sector), Dr Wafaa, and curator Asmaa Hassan at the opening.
Left: Photographic plate of Queen Ahhotep's tomb goods as displayed in the Boulaq Museum, (In A. Mariette, Album du Musee de Boulaq, Cairo 1871. From the Università degli Studi Egyptological Library and Archives)

On the occasion of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008), the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo organized a conference with the support of the European Delegation to Egypt, the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Cairo and the SCA. The opening reception was held at the Egyptian Museum, and was additionally, an opportunity to exhibit the conference's posters under the title "Ancient Egypt in the Mediterranean." A purpose-built tent was erected in the Museum garden and contained sixteen posters representing participants from seven countries: Egypt, USA, UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, and Australia. The posters focused on contacts between ancient Egypt and Mediterranean countries, as well as the foreign groups living in Egypt. The posters were displayed until December 26th.



Photo left: r-l: Director of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute Dr Kim Duistermaat, Dr Zahi Hawass, the ambassador of the Netherlands H.E. Susan Blankhart, and Signor Nicola Bellomo, counselor of the European Commission's Delegation to Egypt
Right: Exhibition panels. Photography by Stefan Geens



Italian President Mr. Giorgio Napolitano visited Cairo to celebrate the official opening of the Egyptian-Italian laboratory at the Egyptian Museum. The celebration was also a chance to sign a memorandum of understanding, which aims to consolidate the cultural, scientific, and archaeological collaboration between Egypt and Italy. The signing



included a second memorandum of student exchange between Italian and Egyptian universities. This occasion saw the inauguration of a poster exhibition in Room 45 displaying the steps in conservation and restoration that have been taking during the training and cooperation between the Egyptians and Italians.

One of the objects that was studied and worked on is the stela of Akhenaton and his family. The darker background colour in the photograph was originally thought to be surface weather, but UV testing that took place as part of the project show that it is a type of surface preparation for the stela and is original. Further tests performed on the entire surface and pigments showed how different colours have faded.

Egyptian Museum Sections

MUSEUM
ACTIVITIES

This issue's featured section is Section One. Headed by Mrs Hala Hassan, Section One houses most of the masterpieces of the Cairo Museum. Not chronologically organised like other sections, this part of the Museum houses entire object collections including the funerary furniture of Queen Hetepheres displayed in R37, the Tutankhamun Collection, the Museum's jewellery collection and the Tanis silver, as well as the collections of King Sheshonq and Psusennes. The two mummy rooms are also included.



As in all sections, the duties of the curators include organising committees to provide scholars with access to objects and cataloguing the collections. However, Section One staff have been diligently preparing labels to be placed in the vitrines. Additionally, since 2006 a regular committee assembles in this section in order to inventory and photograph all objects. As many of the items are made of gold, this team includes a "weighing committee" because gold items are measured to keep track of their weights. This committee includes Mrs Hala, curator Mr Mokhtar Abdoh Abdel Razek, and a number of officials from the SCA and the Museums Sector, and is chaired by Dr Abdou Ramadan. The sector also includes members of government departments that specialise in weighing and pricing gold.

Photos: Standing l-r: Section Head Mrs Hala Hassan, Section Curator Mr Mokhtar Abdoh Abdel Razek, Mr. Mohamed Sakr, Mr. Ismaiel Badr from the Ministry of Finance, Seated: Dr. Ramadan Abdoh Head of the Department of Archaeology at Minya University, Dr. Galal Abu Bakr Professor at Minya University, Mr. Mohamed el-Souefy.

Papyrus Restoration Laboratory

Section Six has previously been featured in the Newsletter and once again we approach it, but this time to talk about the Papyrus Laboratory that falls under this section. In 2003 Section Five head, Mr Sayed Hassan, obtained approval from Dr Zahi Hawass to establish a laboratory for papyrus restoration within the Museum, and another one at the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.

The International Papyrus Institute, under the chairmanship of Dr Corrado Basile and Dr Anna Di Natale, began its activities in papyrus restoration in 1998 at the Egyptian Museum, the Greco-Roman Museum, and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Museum in conjunction with a group of SCA Egyptian conservators. The Egyptian Museum's Papyrus Laboratory opened in 2005, after being fully equipped and prepared. It now provides a safe environment for the restoration of delicate papyri, and also provides a training area for conservators.

As mentioned in an earlier issue, the Egyptian Museum houses a large collection of papyri, some on display and others in storage; most of them are stored between sheets of glass. There are many factors that affect the state of preservation, the most harmful of which are humidity, heat and pollution; for all of which Cairo is renowned. The ideal relative humidity for papyri is 45%, almost half the level of an average summer day. As for the temperature, 16–18°C is ideal. Papyri are very sensitive to changes in heat and humidity. Further threats are insects and fungal infections, which feed on the papyrus; these appear as holes on the surface and may cause complete deterioration.

Many of the papyri in the Museum were restored early in the last century, and most of them have been mounted on highly acidic paper backing, which has caused the disintegration of many papyri. Drs Di Natale and Basile have been working with a team of conservators from the Museum to sterilise the papyri, remove the acidic supports, stabilize them, and remount them on acid-free paper. Sterilisation takes place over 20 days during which the papyri are stored in an oxygen-free environment to kill any living organisms. The acidity is then measured and neutralised, and manual cleaning is used at all stages to ensure a thorough conservation process.



(1) Funerary Papyrus of Amun-Hat-Pa-Mesha, provenance unknown (2) Dr Basile carefully separating the old paper backing from the ancient papyrus. All the spots on the backing are infections caused by the acidity of the supporting paper, or insects and micro-organisms feeding on the glue holding the papyrus and support together. (3) Dr Basile manually cleaning stains caused by moisture, from the papyrus. (4) Drs Di Natale and Basile placing the papyrus between foam-like sheets topped by glass.

Dr Anna Di Natale is Director of the Papyrus Museum in Italy.

Dr Corrado Basile is Vice President of the International Papyrus Institute.

News Column

From November 18, 2008 to March 15, 2009, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is hosting "Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C." This exhibition includes a collection of antiquities from royal palaces, temples, and tombs (and apparently a shipwreck as well). The Egyptian Museum is contributing four objects. The Metropolitan Museum has also offered four internships for two curators and two conservators from the Egyptian Museum to train in various museological practices and the latest conservation processes. *For more information, see: http://www.metmuseum.org/Special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId={F3EC2A76-071C-45DE-9713-B4EA77EBA531}*

2008 witnessed a large-scale training project carried out in a collaboration between the Instituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro and the SCA/Board of the Egyptian Museum. This project provided training to curators, conservators, and employees in the Egyptian Museum, the Coptic Museum, the Museum of Islamic Art, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation, and the Textile Museum in museology, conservation, restoration, and library sciences. The project was funded by the Italian Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For twelve months, about 120 participants were instructed by almost 100 specialists.

Every year, blind and visually impaired school students participate in the Egyptian Museum School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which lasts from October through to January, and then from February through to March. At the end of every year the students put on a performance. Last year they re-enacted the Tale of the Golden Serpent from the literary tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor. Next March they will perform a play entitled "Truth and Falsehood" inspired by the conflict between Osiris and Seth.

The Egyptian Museum School for Adults provides members of the community with an opportunity to learn more about ancient Egypt at the hands of the most prominent professors of Egyptian Universities. The School also contains a section for children. Coordinators of the children's school visit orphanages, schools, and children with disabilities to tell them about ancient Egypt and facilitate a visit to the Museum. Both schools are coordinated and run by the Zamalek office of the SCA.

Transporting Senusert III

Egyptian Museum workmen are amongst the most skilled in Egypt at moving large, heavy objects. Last September, five of the workmen from the Museum were assigned to collect a life-size black granite statue of Senusert III from



Beni Suef (approximately 120km south of Cairo), and deliver it to its new home in the Suez Archaeological Museum. They left Cairo at 10 am, and arrived in Suez at midnight. Aside from the expected delays, an overturned car on the highway further delayed them for several hours. During this time they were observing the Ramadan fast, seated in the back of the truck with the king.

After arriving in Suez, they unpacked the statue, which they had wrapped in an Egyptian flag, and unloaded it safely in the storeroom where it will wait for a base to be made for display. They then had a quick bite and a cup of tea before climbing back onto the truck and returning to Cairo. A fast and efficient day's work!



The workmen are Sayed Atta, Abdel Rahman Ibrahim, Ramadan El Sayed, Ramadan Hamed, Mohamed Ghazal, and the driver is Eed Abd Raboh.

The Suez Archaeological Museum is due to be inaugurated soon... Insha-Allah.

Entrance Fees:

Foreign Adults: 60 LE
Foreign Students (with valid ISIC ID): 30 LE
Egyptian and Arab Adults: 4.00 LE
Egyptian and Arab Students: 1.00 LE

Mummy Room:

Foreign Adults: 100 LE
Foreign Students (with valid ISIC ID): 60 LE
Egyptian and Arab Adults: 10 LE
Egyptian and Arab Students: 5 LE

All information in the Newsletter is correct at the time of issuing.



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www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg is not valid.
A new website is under construction.

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