

## Aesthetics & Science: The new permanent Egyptian galleries in the Leiden National Museum of Antiquities

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On 18 November 2016 the National Museum of Antiquities (or in Dutch *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* (RMO)) opened its new Egyptian galleries. An urgent asbestos restoration had offered the opportunity to renew the exhibitions thoroughly, as had been planned for a long time. In the previous display the Egyptian material had been presented in chronological order in a highly educative fashion. Visitors began their tour in the Egyptian Stone Age, passed through the Early Dynastic period, followed by the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, into the Greco-Roman Period, ending with the Copts. The aim of the exhibition was to present the history of Egyptian culture at full length. In the new display Egyptian history is told explicitly through the lens of the Leiden collection. Clear choices were made in terms of objects and storyline in order to stress strong aspects of the Leiden collection. After a general introduction about Egyptian history and culture, four thematic rooms focus on Egyptian religion, afterlife, sculpture, and Egypt's interaction with other cultures. This article discusses the ideas behind this conceptual change and its consequences for the presentation of the material.

### Art and Authenticity

An important factor among others is the number of museum visitors.<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, the more visitors, the more money museums can get to spend on new projects. Exciting new exhibitions can thus move the museum into an upwards spiral of positive media attention and growing numbers of visitors. Besides entertainment, research and education, however, museums conserve and protect (national) heritage.<sup>2</sup> Therefore museum access needs to be regulated, to protect both visitors and the museum collection, but also, for example, to control the climate in a museum building. In August 2017 the struggle between accessibility and control reached a new climax when the director of the Italian Uffizi promised to take measures against tourists who just spend about two seconds in front of masterpieces like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* to take a photo of

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<sup>1</sup> E.g.: [reference](#), accessed on 9 August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> [Reference](#), accessed on 9 August 2017.

themselves.<sup>3</sup> What is interesting from an anthropological point of view is the increasing interest of the broader public not only in more or less ancient art, but also in seeing the original and providing evidence for their own presence in the realm of the original by means of a selfie. Pix or it didn't happen.<sup>4</sup> The RMO does not have an object that attracts the crowds as such. Nevertheless the episode is illustrative for the importance the public attaches to authenticity and to the original. Iconic pieces of art are widely available online, printed on merchandise articles, and on posters, postcards, prints or books, and yet modern visitors usually aim for the experience of the original.<sup>5</sup> How different were things in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when numerous gypsum casts of artefacts were produced by the museums and exchanged. This practice enabled curators and researchers to study the objects, but also to present visitors an as complete as possible impression of the ancient cultures in every museum.<sup>6</sup> In the new Leiden display all replicas, casts, and reconstructions had to disappear into storage in order to make room for the original artefacts. Travel is relatively cheap and easy today, so it seems less interesting for the public to see replicas of artefacts now in Paris, London, or Berlin. More importantly, however, a rising interest in the formation of National Heritage allows museums to highlight their own histories against hiding lacunae in the collection by means of replicas. In Leiden, four thematic galleries emphasise strong aspects of the collection such as the sculpture from Saqqara and Abydos, but also Egyptian coffins and mummies (see below). The new showcases in the Egyptian department of the RMO are no longer crowded, but leave room for each individual object to unfold its aesthetics. A consequence of removing the casts in Leiden was a relatively poor choice of objects from the Amarna period that remained. We are therefore especially pleased and grateful for a loan granted by the Egyptian Museum and the Papyrus Collection Berlin (fig. 1). The queen's head from the Amarna period presumably represents the famous Queen Nefertiti, wife of King Amenhotep IV, perhaps better known as Akhenaton.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. [reference](#).

<sup>4</sup> See also Cynara Geissler, "Pix or it didn't happen: Social networking, digital memory, and the future of biography", in: V. Chan et al., ed., *The MPub Reader New Perspectives on Technology and Publishing* (Vancouver: CCSP Press 2010), 135-141.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g., D. Sassoon, "'Mona Lisa': The Best-Known Girl in the Whole Wide World", *Workshop Journal* 51 (Spring, 2001): 1-18.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Jana Helmbold-Doyé, "Von Lepsius besorgt' – geschätzt und verdammt. Gipsabgüsse in der Sammlung des Ägyptischen Museums Berlin", in: Martin Fitzenreiter, ed., *Authentizität Artefakt und Versprechen in der Archäologie*, IBAES 15 (2014), [online](#).



Figure 1: Head of Nefertiti (?) Sandstone, Amarna, 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (ca. 1340 BCE), loan from the Egyptian Museum and the Papyrus Collection Berlin (inv. no. ÄMP 21222), as it is currently displayed in the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* (RMO) in Leiden

Amarna is located about 300 km south of the modern city of Cairo in the desert and was the capital of Egypt under king Akhenaten. The Amarna art is characterised by a distinctive style that is unique in the history of ancient Egypt. Before 1983 excavated finds were shared between the Egyptian government and the respective archaeologists, and hence the Berlin Egyptian Museum obtained its world-famous Amarna collection through the initiative of the German architectural historian Ludwig Borchardt and the willingness of the German Oriental Society to support this endeavour.<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps regrettable that – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the Dutch were less adventurous than some of their colleagues. The letters of Jan Herman Insinger, a Dutch art dealer and collector who lived in Luxor show how he tried to motivate his museum colleagues in Leiden to start their own excavation campaign in Egypt. In one letter, for example, Insinger stresses the possibilities for scientific exploration,<sup>8</sup> the implication of course also being that the museum could – by means of find sharing – expand its collection. Jan Herman Insinger was an important person for the Leiden collection also in terms of acquisitions. In almost 40 years of living in Egypt he used his contacts

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. Friederike Seyfried, “Erforschungs- und Grabungsgeschichte von Tell el-Amarna bis 1914”, in Friederike Seyfried, ed., *Im Licht von Amarna: 100 Jahre Fund der Nofretete. Für das Ägyptische Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2012), 43-49.

<sup>8</sup> Maarten Raven, “The most prominent Dutchman in Egypt: Jan Herman Insinger and the Egyptian collection in Leiden”, Appendix II, letter no. 54, To Holwerda – RMO Archives 17.2.1/6: ontvangen brieven 1906-1923, He-Jy. Leiden (Sidestone) forthcoming. I would like to thank my colleague Maarten Raven for his kind readiness to share the yet unpublished manuscript with me.

with the Egyptian Archeology Service to buy many important pieces for the museum. His best-known acquisition is perhaps the Papyrus Insinger, a famous Demotic wisdom text named after him.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Insinger transferred numerous other objects to the museum, such as an interesting collection of Coptic manuscripts,<sup>10</sup> many ostraca<sup>11</sup> but also, for example, a mummy<sup>12</sup> and a mummy box.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Formation of the Collection: Spending Spree**

This episode shows once again that the history of a museum is always the history of its acquisition. Every artefact has a long history which tells us not only about Egyptian culture but also about our own history.<sup>14</sup> The first Leiden excavations took place in Abu Roash, a village west of Cairo. Here, Leiden's curator Adolf Klaasens found 380 tombs from the time of the earliest Egyptian kings. In Abu Roash, the common inhabitants of Memphis were buried. Their grave gifts were vessels made of different materials: ceramics, stone or alabaster, but also flint, stone or copper tools, shale pallets, cosmetics and pearls. Egypt has donated most of these finds (almost 1200 articles) to the RMO. The material became an important part of the Egyptian collection and in the new permanent display forms the starting point into a chronologically organised gallery on the Egyptian afterlife (fig. 2).

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<sup>9</sup> Leiden inv. no. F 95/5.1, cf. e.g. P.A.A. Boeser, *Transkription und Übersetzung des Papyrus Insinger*, OMRO 3, Leiden 1922.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Willem Pleyte and Pieter A. A. Boeser, *Manuscripts Coptes du Musée d'Antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide* (Leiden: Brill, 1897).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g. M. A. A. Nūr al-Dīn, *The Demotic Ostraca in the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> Leiden inv. no. AES 14-b, cf. M.J. Raven and W.K. Taconis, *Egyptian mummies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), cat. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Leiden inv. no. AES 15-b, cf. Raven and Taconis, *Egyptian mummies*, cat. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for example, Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 7 ff. on the sculpture gallery in the British Museum through the lens of colonial history.



Figure 2: The new Abu Roash display, various stones, ca. 3200-3000 BCE ©RMO

So how did the RMO acquire its collection in the early years after its foundation in 1818, if not by means of excavations and find sharing? The ancient world was *en vogue* at the beginning of the 19th century and so was Egypt. In order to distinguish themselves as a nation with cultural-political aspirations, the future museum became a prestige object for the Netherlands, which had just become a kingdom.<sup>15</sup> King Willem I. let the funds flow, so that the museum could buy large collections from the art trade. The most important acquisitions are the art collections of Lescluze (1926), Cimba (1927) and d’Anastasi (1928), examples of which are now being displayed in a section showing the formation of the Egyptian collection in Leiden to visitors (see also below “transcending hyper reality”). Together these collections make up almost 4500 objects, which is about a fifth of the Leiden Egyptian collection (about 25,000 objects). Many objects from these three purchases came from Saqqara, the royal and elite cemetery of the city of Memphis, which was ‘rediscovered’ by art traders in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the d’Anastasi collection, for example, the famous statues of Maya and Merit came to Leiden (fig. 3), but also parts of the gold of honour of general Djehuty (fig. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g. Lara Weiss, “The History of the Egyptian Collection in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden”, in: P. Giovetti and D. Picchi, ed., *Egitto. Le collezioni di Leiden e di Bologna / Displaying Ancient Egypt. The collections of Leiden and Bologna* (Milano: Skirà, 2015), 22-7.



Figure 3: Maya and Merit, limestone, Saqqara, c. 1319-1307 BCE,  
Leiden inv. no. AST 3 ©Mike Bink



Figure 4: Gold of honour of the general Djehuty, Saqqara (?), gold,  
c. 1490-1436 BCE ©Mike Bink

These and other statues, stelae and monuments from Saqqara (but also from Abydos) are now displayed in a sculpture gallery, inviting the visitor to dwell and marvel the beauty of the Leiden collection, and understand its history in Egypt and beyond.

### **Mummy ethics**

One of the massive crowd pullers are the Egyptian mummies.<sup>16</sup> For the new permanent display of the Leiden collection, ethical aspects have been reconsidered and a new mummy display has been built. A large showcase displaying the stylistic development of Egyptian coffins (fig. 5) is the heart of the new gallery on the Egyptian afterlife. On its back side human and animal mummification techniques and their religious significance are being explained (fig. 6). What is important is the manner in which the mummies are now displayed separated from objects, in a shrine-like construction out of direct sight, and relatively close the rear wall of the room. These measures shall encourage the visitors to a respectful rapprochement with the human remains.



Figure 5: The new coffin display ©Rob Overmeer

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<sup>16</sup> See also Alice Stevenson, “Egyptian Archaeology and the Museum”, in Oxford Handbooks Online, Oxford, Feb 2015, 5 and 7 with [references](#), accessed on 14 August 2017), 8.



Figure 6: The new mummy display ©Mike Bink

What did not return into permanent display is a Roman child mummy endearingly known as ‘the mummy boy’ (in Dutch: “het mummiejongetje”). Already about a year before the big opening of the new Egyptian galleries, this decision was hotly debated in various newspaper articles.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately for the museum, the news of the future return of the Roman child mummy into storage was framed by some critics as excessive political correctness. The *Rijksmuseum* which houses, for example, Rembrandt’s famous *Night Watch* had just removed terms like “neger”, “eskimo” and “hottentot” from its text boards, and some writers envisaged the Netherlands disappearing under a “suffocating blanket of political correctness”.<sup>18</sup> However important, dealing with racism and the colonial past is a completely different discussion than the ethical considerations the RMO made for the new mummy display, which were motivated by the question of how to deal with the display of human remains in the exhibition. The child mummy dates from the Graeco-Roman period, presumably between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE.<sup>19</sup> During that time, Egypt was occupied by Greeks and later Romans and we see an interesting mix of cultures. Like our famous *Sensaos* (fig.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. e.g. [reference](#) or [reference](#) or [reference](#), accessed on 15 August 2017.

<sup>18</sup> [Reference](#) accessed on 15 August 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Maarten J. Raven and Wybren K. Taconis, *Egyptian Mummies, Radiological Atlas of the Collections in the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden* (Leiden: Brepols, 2005), 184-186, Leiden inv. AMM 27c, cat. 27.



9), the child mummy was buried in Egyptian style, but the mummy was already unwrapped when it arrived in 1828 as part of the d'Anastasi collection (we see yet again how important that purchase was for the formation of the Leiden collection). Therefore, the original style of the wrappings is unknown, and whether the mummy was, for example, decorated with a Fayoum portrait. In absence of any archaeological context, no information about the individual's name, family relations or origin remain obscure. From the mummy, it is clear that the child was a toddler when he died for unknown reasons (1-3 years old). The extraordinary state of preservation due to the high quality of mummification suggests that his family was wealthy. For example, even his eyelashes are still intact. The sight of the little naked child who died more than 2000 years ago was affecting our visitors. A columnist wrote that at one glance you grasp the timelessness and that the museum should not be allowed to take away this experience. Indeed visitors are usually not afraid and the display of mummies is a long-term practice that remained relatively unaffected by the discussions on the display of human remains in Ethnological Museums until fairly recently.<sup>20</sup> When the discussion reached Egyptology and Egyptian museums, some museums decided to cover their mummies (Manchester),<sup>21</sup> or removed them from display entirely (Munich), whereas others still display mummies and even mummy parts (Brussels). The respective decisions depend on different interpretations of the ICOM Ethical Code.<sup>22</sup> The Egyptian Museum in Munich, for example, refrained from the display of mummies in order to fully respect the ancient Egyptians' attitude to the deceased and their strict taboos concerning the dead body.<sup>23</sup> The RMO has opted for a broader interpretation of the ICOM Code of Ethics. The knowledge of ancient Egypt is largely based on objects that come from tombs. Luxury items from the daily life of ancient Egyptians are rare and often poorly

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<sup>20</sup> Compare, for example, the case of the so-called "Hottentot Venus", Saartjie Baartman, a South African girl was brought to Europe in 1810 and exhibited there. After her death in 1815 she was analysed and partially conserved. Only after many discussions and after many debates, could she be retrieved from distant descendants from South Africa in Paris. On Egyptian Mummies e.g. Jasmine Day, "Thinking makes it so': Reflections on the ethics of displaying Egyptian mummies", *Papers on anthropology* 23, 1 (2014): 29-44.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. [reference](#).

<sup>22</sup> [ICOM, Code of Ethics](#), 2.5, cf.: "Collections of human remains and material of sacred significance should be acquired only if they can be housed securely and cared for respectfully. This must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from which the objects originated, where these are known."

<sup>23</sup> I would like to thank Sylvia Schoske for her kind feedback and open discussion during our visit in spring 2016.

preserved, because they often stayed in the same places and the old towns have long since expired. The temples and graves were built for eternity and - besides the climate conditions in the desert - that is the reason that objects from digging have often been well preserved. This applies not only to objects but also to mummies intended to endure for eternity. As a National Museum, openness to the collections is as important as fulfilling an educational mission. Mummies are the hallmark of ancient Egyptian culture for many people and tell fascinating stories about that culture, the afterlife, and the ideas of the ancient Egyptians about what happened after death. The RMO explicitly aims at telling this story, told not by displaying a naked child mummy. All mummies on display in Leiden are wrapped, no uncovered mummy parts are shown.

### **New Insights into Old Mummies**

Inspired by the display of the Gebelein man in the British Museum,<sup>24</sup> and by using the same software (*Inside Explorer* by *Interspectral, Sweden*) a tool was created to enable visitors to digitally unwrap two Leiden mummies. New insights were not expected, as the whole Leiden mummy collection had already been studied in detail in the 1990s by Maarten Raven and radiologist Wybren Taconis.<sup>25</sup> However, technology advances quickly and the higher resolution of the scans, the 3D digitisation, and interactive visualisation made many new details visible, thereby making the mummies more accessible to both researchers and the general public.<sup>26</sup> The big surprise was, however, the adult crocodile (length 314 cm).<sup>27</sup> A scan in 1996 had already shown that instead of one 'giant' crocodile, the mummy is actually made up of two adolescent crocodiles lying on their backs. The foremost crocodile is missing his rear legs and tail, the rear one is complete. The corpus of the large mummy was shaped around them by a bundle of vegetable stalks visible through holes in the back and tail and at least one wooden stick protruding at the caudal end. This whole assemblage was bound together with numerous concentric windings of palm rope and then wrapped in linen. Two bulbous eyes had been modelled as protrusions on the head to enhance the impression of one large crocodile. The evidence that 47 baby crocodiles were wrapped in separate bags into the exterior layers of this assemblage between the vegetable stalks is new (figs. 7 and 8).

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<sup>24</sup> [Reference](#) and [reference](#), accessed on 11 October 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Raven and Taconis, *Egyptian Mummies*.

<sup>26</sup> With special thanks to Thomas Rydell and Kristofer Jansson, [Interspectral](#).

<sup>27</sup> Leiden inv. no. AMM 16a, cf. Raven and Taconis, *Egyptian Mummies*, 300-301, cat. 113.



Figures 7 and 8: Scans of the Leiden crocodile mummy ©Interspectral

The artist and traveller Willem de Famars Testas saw bundles of baby crocodiles attached to adult crocodile mummies in the catacombs of el-Sheqilqil (near el-Ma'abdah in Middle Egypt) in 1860.<sup>28</sup> Such a mummy, but from Kom Ombo, is now in the British Museum.<sup>29</sup> In the Cairo Museum there is one baby crocodile

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<sup>28</sup> W. de Famars Testas (M. J. Raven, ed.), *Reisschetsen uit Egypte 1858-1860* (The Hague, Maarssen, 1988), 167-168. I would like to thank my colleague Maarten Raven for his helpful comments and for providing the reference.

<sup>29</sup> British Museum inv. no. EA38562 described as “A large mummified crocodile with over 20 mummified infant crocodiles mounted on reeds adhering to its back; whole coated with a black resin. Traces of linen wrappings remain on the bodies.”, cf. [reference](#), accessed on 15 August 2017.



among the most important motives of Egyptian religion. Perhaps the Leiden ‘giant’ crocodile was purposefully made of two younger ones and the babies to combine three generations in one cosmic circle of rejuvenation. Or some priests wanted to sell a large expensive votive mummy and just took whatever crocodile parts they could lay their hands on. Lacking the find context of this mummy (that came to Leiden again as part of the d’Anastasi collection in 1828), it is not even certain whether the crocodile was a votive mummy or not.

### **Transcending Hyper Reality**

Beside stressing the strong aspects of the Leiden collection, the Egyptian collection is now hopefully better embedded in its broader frame of history, both Egyptian and beyond. Pyramids, statues and mummies may still be main attractions of Egyptian history,<sup>42</sup> but there is so much more than that. For example, the mix of styles in the Graeco-Roman period as seen on the cloth of Sensaos (Fig. 9) is particularly interesting.



Figure 9: Mummy shroud of Sensaos, linen, Thebes, 109 AD, Leiden inv. no. AMM 8-d  
©RMO

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<sup>42</sup> See also Stevenson, “Egyptian Archaeology and the Museum”, 8.

Tied with crossbands over her mummy, Sensaos' shroud provided an idealized image of the deceased.<sup>43</sup> The jackals at her feet bear the key of the underworld, something untypical for Egypt showing Graeco-Roman influence. In the new display, the Graeco-Roman Period is explicitly presented as part of Ancient Egypt in every thematic gallery, not only as far as mortuary culture is concerned, but also for example, by integrating the later history of Abydos in the sculpture gallery and focussing on interesting aspects of the Egyptian collection such as the Leiden share of the archive of Ptolemy, the son of Glaucias from the Serapeum in Saqqara (fig. 10).<sup>44</sup> In this temple the god Serapis was worshipped and like any Egyptian temple it served also as an economic centre. Ptolemy was a kind of secular priest in the temple in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, who also did some of the administrative work. His archive paints a vivid picture of life in the Serapeum, and also includes interesting texts such as the 'Dream of Nectanebo'.<sup>45</sup> Other aspects displayed here are the merging Egyptian and Greek scholarship with new devices for measuring and weighing, and manuals such as the pharmaceutical manual written by the Greek physician Dioscorides (ca. 50 CE) including an alchemical treatise on making gold.<sup>46</sup> Not only the Graeco-Roman, but also the Byzantine period has gained more prominence in the new permanent exhibition in several showcases on, for example, the Coptic monastic tradition, but also 'Daily life in Late Antiquity' and in a large new cupboard with textiles in drawers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Raven and Taconis, *Egyptian Mummies*, cat. 26, 179-183.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. e.g. F. A. J. Hoogendijk, "Ptolemaios: een Griek die leeft en droomt in een Egyptische tempel", in: Pieter W. Pestman, ed., *Familiearchieven uit het land van Pharao* (Zutphen: Terra Zutphen, 1988), 47-69.

<sup>45</sup> Leiden inv. no. AMS 67, cf. e.g. Ulrich Wilcken, *Urkunden der Ptolemäerzeit I* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 1922, no. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Leiden inv. no. AMS 66, cf. e.g., Marcellin Berthelot, *Introduction à l'étude de la chimie des Anciens et du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Steinheil, 1889), 28-50.

<sup>47</sup> Compare Philomeen P. M. van't Hooft et al., ed., *Pharaonic and Early Medieval Egyptian Textiles Collections of the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden, C.N.M.A.L.* vol. 8 (Leiden: RMO, 1994).



Figure 10: View into the new 'Inspirations' gallery of the RMO ©Mike Bink

### A Temple for the Netherlands

Another aspect newly exhibited are some finds from the museum's excavations in Nubia. In the 1960s, the Aswan High Dam was being built in Egypt, which regulates the flooding of the Nile and provides Egypt with hydroelectric energy. Since its large reservoir, Lake Nasser, threatened to flood various Nubian archaeological sites, rescue excavations were organized with help from UNESCO and many monuments were able to be saved. The Dutch first saved a Nubian village dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, which consisted of thirty houses made of sun-dried mud-bricks.<sup>48</sup> Some 1,200 objects were excavated here, mostly colourfully painted pottery, but also smaller everyday objects and amulets providing a nice impression of daily life in the village. Shokan was excavated between 1962 and 1964. Afterwards the Dutch mission moved north and excavated the church of Abdallah Nirqi (also in 1964).<sup>49</sup> Today the well-preserved wall paintings are on display in the Nubia Museum (in Aswan) and the Coptic Museum (in Cairo), but the other finds came to Leiden. The church was used from the 8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century CE. As gratitude to this major contribution to the UNESCO rescue campaign, the Egyptian government presented the temple of Taffeh to the Netherlands as a gift, which still features prominently in the then

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<sup>48</sup> Maarten J. Raven, *Hakken in het Zand, 50 jaar opgraven in Egypte door het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* (Leiden: RMO, 2007), 24-35.

<sup>49</sup> Hans D. Schneider, *Abdallah Nirqi: Description and Chronology of the Central Church with a Special Reference to the Objects and Pottery* (Recklinghausen, 1970).

newly-built entrance hall of the museum free for everybody to admire.<sup>50</sup> In 2018 the museum celebrates its 200-year anniversary which will be celebrated with three jubilee exhibitions. Since the museum wants to create more unity between the entrance hall and the temple it has been fitted with dynamic LED (atmospheric) lighting that can be adapted to the various functions of the room at any time: a weekday museum by day, a concert in the evening, or a debate. The acoustics and the sound system were also adjusted. Light projections on the temple created by “Mr.Beam Projection Art” show the 200-year-old museum history and the history and origin of the temple, which has kindly been funded by the “BankGiro Lotterij” (fig. 11).<sup>51</sup> A story and accompanying music reinforce this projection. This 'new coat' gives the impressive entrance hall and the temple the allure they deserve and adds extra cachet to the bicentenary of our National Museum of Antiquities.



Figure: 11. A 200-year anniversary lightshow on the Taffeh temple in the Leiden museum entrance hall by “Mr. Beam Projection Art”, kindly sponsored by the “BankGiro Lotterij”, photo: Hielco Kuipers

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<sup>50</sup> Hans D. Schneider, *Taffeh: Rond de wederopbouw van een Nubische tempel* (The Hague 1979). The Roman temple dates from the reign of Augustus and was probably dedicated to the goddess Isis.

<sup>51</sup> See [reference](#), accessed on 6 March 2018.



### **Egypt from European Perspective**

The new display of the Egyptian collection in Leiden thus aims to show that Egyptian Antiquity is not a closed book, but a culture that continuously reveals new facts through modern research, and that it was also dynamic in the past. An important aim of the new concept is therefore to show that history is a dynamic process and that culture continually adapts to changing contexts. The new gallery 'Inspirations' shows the mutual influence between Egypt and other cultures such as Nubia and Greece but also modern Europe, guiding the visitor back into the present time. Already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, the first European 'tourists' visited Egypt. One of the first Dutch travellers was the merchant David le Leu de Wilhem. In the years 1620 and 1621, he donated a mummy and other objects to Leiden University, to be displayed in its anatomical theatre. Today the RMO possesses not only one of the largest mummy collections in the world, but also the oldest studied mummy in the Netherlands is part of the Leiden collection. This mummy was dissected on 21 August 1771 in the house of Count Charles John Bentinck van Nijenhuis.<sup>52</sup> Although this dissection was partly meant as intellectual amusement for distinguished company after lunch, the procedure was taken so seriously that a report was made. From this document it appears that the company found only a black resinous lump in the mummy wrappings. This was examined by a befriended pharmacist and was a chunk of bitumen, myrrh and resin, not a fragment of an animal or human mummy. The accompanying 'mummy box' was composed with fragments of an Osiris statue and a canopic chest. The whole ensemble was thus probably rather the creation of an enterprising antique dealer in the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE than an Ancient Egyptian mummy.

### **The Quest for Maya**

It is well-established that the origin of Egyptology as a scholarly field of study lies in Napoleon's campaign to Egypt (1798-1801). Along with his army, Napoleon brought scholars and artists to study the country, who published a series of volumes on their findings, the *Description de l'Égypte*. In 1824, Champollion published his decipherment of the hieroglyphs. Other campaigns followed: Champollion and his student Rosellini organized a French-Tuscan scholarly expedition to Egypt in 1828-1829. Later a Prussian expedition led by Carl Richard Lepsius was organized in 1842-1845. The reports of these expeditions

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<sup>52</sup> For this and the following see e.g. Maarten Raven, *Mummies onder het mes* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1994), 31f.

are still important sources for today's scholars, as some of the monuments depicted in them are now damaged or have been lost completely. In the new display, a few examples from each campaign illustrates the beginnings of Egyptology to visitors. How important this old documentation remains for modern scholars emerged in the 1970s when the museum (at that time still in cooperation with the Egypt Exploration Society in London) endeavored to find the tomb of Maya and Merit. Their statues (Fig. 3) are unique because of their size and particularly fine execution and belong to the absolute masterpieces of the Egyptian collection of the RMO. When Maya and Merit arrived in Leiden as part of the d'Anastasi Collection in 1828, the original context, i.e., the exact position of their tombs and indeed of their statues therein, was no longer known. The problem of lost context of course applies to most objects acquired from the art trade, and it is one of the most important aims today to try to reconstruct this disrupted past.<sup>53</sup> It is therefore extraordinary that the RMO did succeed in rediscovering the tomb of Maya and Merit and restoring its lost find context about 150 years after Maya and Merit had arrived in Leiden.<sup>54</sup> Over the course of about 40 years, the RMO not only revealed the tomb of Maya and Merit, but also that of general Horemheb (fig. 12), and other tombs.<sup>55</sup> This retrospective restoration of context is unique. And indeed, excavations in Saqqara continue now under the supervision of myself and Christian Greco from the Museo Egizio in Turin and Paolo Del Vesco as his deputy, whereby we hope to be able to add new stories to the exhibition that will allow us to better understand our collection, as well as the necropolis Saqqara. A great candidate for the discovery of a new tomb would, of course, be the Overseer of the royal apartments of the harem at Memphis, Mr. Hormin,<sup>56</sup> whose statue also came to Leiden with the d'Anastasi collection (Fig. 13). Another nice candidate would be

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<sup>53</sup> Stevenson, "Egyptian Archaeology and the Museum", 5 and 7.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Maarten J. Raven, *The Tomb of Maya and Meryt, II: Objects and Skeletal Remains* (Leiden/London, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. e.g. Maarten J. Raven, "Eenheid in verscheidenheid: Veertig jaar opgraven in het Nieuwerijks grafveld van Saqqara", in: Olaf Ernst Kaper and Jan Gerrit Dercksen, ed., *"Waar de geschiedenis begon." Nederlandse onderzoekers in de ban van spijkerschrift, hiërogliefen en aardewerk. Uitgave naar aanleiding van het 75-jarig bestaan van het Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1939-2014* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2014), 325-338.

<sup>56</sup> Leiden inv. no. AST 5, cf. C. Leemans, *Lettre à M. François Salvolini Sur Les Monuments Égyptiens Portant des Légendes Royales dans les Musées d'Antiquités de Leide*, Leiden 1838, 94 and pl. xvii, n. 168 and see recently N. Staring, *SAK* 45 (2016), 355, n. 69.

Mr. Paatenemheb,<sup>57</sup> whose chapel was also acquired with the d'Anastasi collection and who is most famous for the scene of the blind harp player (Fig. 14). Yet Hormin's tomb surely is more likely to be found soon as the location of his tomb is also indicated on Lepsius' map now exhibited in the 'inspiration gallery'.



Figure 12: Reliefs of Horemheb, Saqqara, limestone, c. 1324-1320 BCE, Leiden inv. no. F 1914/4.1, H.III.OOOO, H.III.PPPP, H.III.QQQQ-a and -b, H.III.SSSS-a, -b, and -c  
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<sup>57</sup> Leiden inv. no. AMT 1, cf. e.g. Hans D. Schneider and Maarten J. Raven, *De Egyptische Oudheid* (The Hague 1983), no. 83. The chapel is still unpublished, but its decoration will be studied as part of the sub-project on Transmission by Huw Twiston Davies within the NWO project "The Walking Dead at Saqqara. The Making of a Cultural Geography", cf. [reference](#), accessed on 6 March 2018.



Figure 13: Naophorus statue of Hormin, Saqqara, limestone, c. 1290-1250 BCE, Leiden inv. no. AST 5 ©RMO



Figure 14: Detail of the chapel of Paatenemheb, Saqqara, limestone ca. 1319-1307 BCE, Leiden inv. no. AMT 1 ©RMO

### **The Nachleben of the River Nile**

Finally, I would like to return to the introductory gallery of the exhibition. It is perhaps well-known that the Abbot Shenute from the Coptic (Christian) White Monastery of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE took aggressive action against “pagan” practices, thereby proving that in fact ancient Egyptian beliefs continued to exist. The National Museum of Antiquities does not collect post-Byzantine objects from Egypt, and so the happier we are that a loan from the University Library of Leiden University allows us to issue at least an outlook into later periods. The introduction of the exhibition into Egyptian culture and history ends with an Arabic text from the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE, which will soon be published by Petra Sijpesteijn.<sup>58</sup> The papyrus is not particularly beautiful or well-preserved, but the story written on it is very intriguing: In Islamic Egypt, a delegation of the Copts comes to the Arab governor announcing that a virgin must be sacrificed to the Nile to ensure the flood. The governor refuses and the Copts warn that he will feel the consequences. The governor keeps track of it. He says “these are barbaric, pre-Islamic practices” (while of course, in reality, neither Copts nor ancient Egyptians offered virgins to the Nile). The refusal of the governor recorded on the papyrus of the University Library Leiden has terrible consequences: when the flood season begins, no water comes, resulting in famines and the departure of people from the country. The governor then writes to the caliph in Medina to explain what has happened and asks him for advice. The caliph confirms that the governor has acted correctly and suggests that he (the caliph) will write a letter to the Nile. The letter is sent and the governor throws it into the water. The letter states: “From the caliph of the Nile of Egypt. If you let your waters rise from yourself, you can do whatever you wish, but if it is God who raises the waters, let the waters rise now.” The next day the water rises to the ideal 13 fingers! The writing of letters to the Nile is not an ancient Egyptian practice, but the story recalls that the Nile was considered to be God who brought fertility over Egypt with the annual floods, and it is interesting to see that this idea was still vivid in the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE.

### **Aesthetics & Science**

To conclude, not only the story line, but also the underlying concept of the new permanent Egyptian exhibition in Leiden has changed completely. Instead of one

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<sup>58</sup> I am very grateful for Petra Sijpesteijns’ kind readiness to cooperate with us for this part of the new exhibition and to provide a preliminary translation.

grand tour, it can now be experienced also in separate chapters. The five rooms provide an independently coherent story and maintain an internal chronological order. Thereby the new exhibition in Leiden presents Egyptian culture with updated Egyptological insights and presents the civilisation by focussing on both aesthetics and science. For the upcoming decade until the next renovation, visitors shall hopefully dwell and marvel at the beauty of objects, but also discover their historical context, and be inspired by some fresh thoughts.