

# 'EGITTO. SPLENDORE MILLENARIO'

Egyptian Treasures from the  
Rijksmuseum van Ouheden,

**LEIDEN**

on view at the  
Museo Civico  
Archeologico,

**BOLOGNA**

by Lucy Gordan-Rastelli

Photos courtesy  
the Exhibition & Author

In the spring 2002 issue of *Kmt* (13:1) — a year after its collection of some 24,000 ancient Egyptian artifacts had reopened (following a five-year closure for renovation) — Aidan Dodson and Dyan Hilton co-authored “The New Egyptian Display at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, The Netherlands”. In the winter 2007-08 issue of the *Journal* (18:4) there was my report on “The Egyptian Collection of Bologna, Italy.”

In 2011 Leiden’s Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, the National Archaeological Museum of The Netherlands — which houses one of the world’s ten most important Egyptian collections — and Bologna’s Museo Civico Archeologico (with some 5,000 artifacts) — Italy’s most important Egyptian collection after Turin (with 32,000 artifacts) and Florence (14,000 artifacts) — signed a five-year agreement with the aim to share research and cultural activities; to organize workshops, conferences and exhibitions; and to make reciprocal long

*Detail of the limestone life-size pair-statue of Tutankhamen’s treasurer, Maya, & his wife, Meryt, centerpiece of the exhibition of treasures from the Rijksmuseum van Ouheden, Leiden, on view in a special exhibition at the Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna.*

or short-term loans. The two museums can be regarded as twin-institutions for what concerns their traditions, international prestige and archeological heritage, their main link being especially their Egyptian collections. Their principal *trait d'union* is that the stars of both Egyptian collections originated from the same area of the Sakkara necropolis. Both collections started at the end of the 1500s/beginning of the 1600s and developed similarly, reaching their apex during the first half of Nineteenth Century, when Leiden purchased the first of the three collections assembled by Giovanni Anastasi (1780-1860), and that of Pelagio Palagi (1775-1860) became the core of the Bologna collection. After that the two institutions went their separate ways. Leiden has always excavated in Egypt and, until recently, divided their finds; neither Bologna's museum or university has ever conducted Egyptian excavations, so the collection there hasn't increased much in size. Over the years Bologna has received a few donations, while Leiden continues to make purchases, the last being a year ago.

To celebrate this intense and fruitful collaboration, Leiden's Egyptian

*Ceramic vessel dated to Naqada IID (3450-3325 BC), decorated with stylized ostriches. It is 15 cm h.*



collection, again closed for renovation until October 15, 2016, has loaned over 500 artifacts to the temporary exhibition "Egypt. Millennia of Splendour" at Bo-

logna's Archaeology Museum until July 17, 2016. Some of these artifacts — spanning the entire chronological frame of ancient Egypt, from the Predynastic to the Roman periods — are being lent for the very first time. The exhibition — which is displayed in chronological order with thematic nuclei every so often (for examples, that of "Osiris" runs from the Middle Kingdom to the Late Period and the "Army" runs from the First Intermediate Period to the New Kingdom) — pivots around artifacts of the Eighteenth Dynasty from the necropolis at Sakkara, the source of the stars of both collections.

*"The reason that this exhibition is in Bologna and not in Turin or Florence," Daniela Picchi, curator of Bologna's Egyptian collection and also of "Egypt. The Millennia of Splendour," told me on December 21st, during a private tour, "is that Leiden's and Bologna's collections compliment and complete one another. Leiden's Museum still excavates in the necropolis of Sakkara, where many of our artifacts here in Bologna originated. We both hope that their excavations will uncover other tombs from which we and they already have artifacts."*

As the first wall panel tells us, *"Due to the importance of Italy in the history of collecting Egyptian antiquities and in order to foster a cultural network that*

*Here & opposite bottom, An assortment of Late Period polychrome-wood coffins & assorted funerary objects displayed with the Leiden loans to the Bologna Museo Civico Archeologico.*





*Several additional Predynastic ceramic vessels from the Leiden collection, displayed in Bologna. Author's photo*

*“The uniqueness of ‘Egypt. Millennia of Splendour’ is twofold,” Picchi told me. “One is the large number of artifacts from Sakkara dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539-1292 BC) reunited for the first time since leaving Egypt displayed in exhibition’s fifth of seven sections, ‘The Saqqara Necropolis of the New Kingdom’; and two, the reunification of the reliefs of Horemheb, now divided between Leiden, Florence and Bologna. A visitor’s once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, this is the first occasion they have been reunited since the first discovery of Horemheb’s tomb by robbers some 200 years ago.” Horemheb was the commander of the Egyptian army during the reign of Tutankhamen, then rose to become the final sovereign of the Eighteenth Dynasty, reigning from 1319 to 1292 BC. “It should be noted,” relates the pre-exhibition press release, “that, when the Egypt Exploration Society of London and the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden began excavation work southeast of the Djoser pyramid in 1975, the goal was to find the Tomb of Maya and Meryt. It was therefore a great surprise when they instead rediscovered the long-lost*

*involves the main Egyptological collections in Italy, with which the Museo Civico Archeologico of Bologna has signed special agreements, the materials from*

*Leiden and Bologna have been integrated with some objects loaned by the Museo Egizio of Torino and the Museo Egizio di Firenze.”*





*Calcite offering-table of Defdji, dating to the 5th-6th dynasties; part of Leiden's Anastasi collection.*

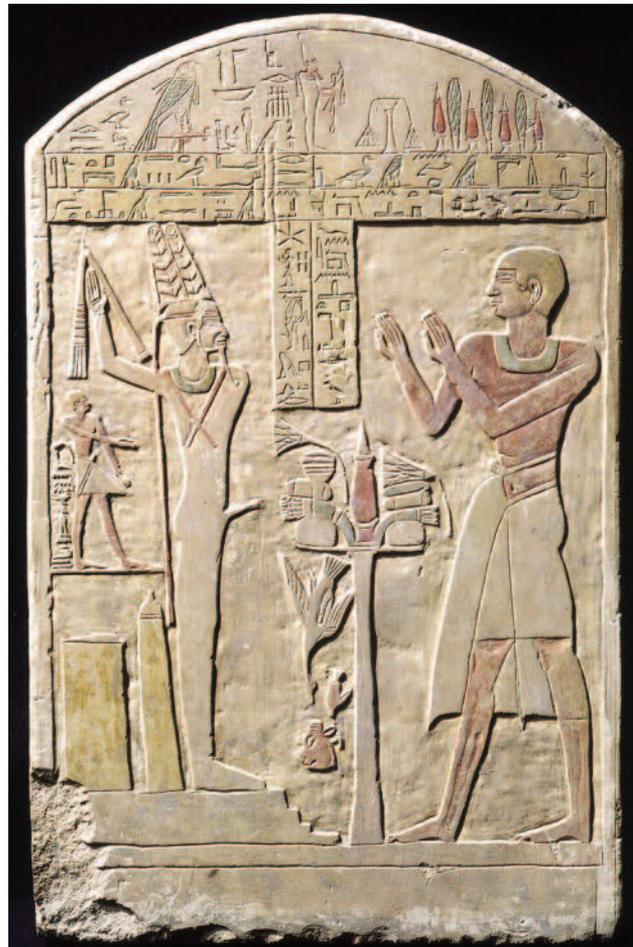
lost Tomb of Horemheb.... His tomb, which has a temple structure, is characterized by a pylon entrance, three courts and three cult-chapels facing onto the innermost court, which has a peristyle structure. This court is where most of the reliefs preserved in Leiden and Bologna were found, narrating Horemheb's most important military feats against the populations bordering Egypt: the Asians, Libyans and Nubians." Also on display immediately after the statue of Maya and Meryt seated together and before the reliefs of Horemheb and also from his tomb at Sakkara is a limestone statue of him seated together possibly with his wife, Mutnodjmet, also on loan from Leiden.

Speaking of Maya and Meryt, beside the reliefs of Horemheb, other stars of the exhibition are their limestone statues, one of each separately and one of them seated together on display in Bologna in Section 5, featuring the Sakkara necropolis of the New Kingdom. Maya was superintendent of the royal treasury under Tutankhamen; and his wife, Meryt, was a

chantress of the god Amen. "These statues reached the Netherlands in January 1829," Picchi told me. "Part of the Anastasi collection, this is the first time they've left Leiden. It wasn't until 1986, that an Anglo-Dutch team identified the couple's tomb to the southwest of Djoser's step pyramid at Sakkara."

Other treasures from that site, on display in Section 4, "From the Middle to the New Kingdom-Territorial Control at Home and Abroad," includes magnificent jewelry, some pieces from Florence, but most from Leiden, being part of the Anastasi collection, discovered at Sakkara in the Tomb of General Djehuty, who led the Egyptian troops to victory in the Near East for the great conqueror Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC). His titles include King's Scribe, Overseer of the Troops (general) and Overseer of the Northern Foreign Countries in contemporary Egyptian records.

Concerning Djehuty's tomb Wikipedia tells us: "In the winter of 1824, the diplomat Bernardino Drovetti found his completely undisturbed tomb at Sakkara. In these early days, Egyptian archaeol-



*Pigmented limestone stela of Aku, 64 cm. h., depicting him adoring the god Min, an offering table between them; it dates to the 11th-12th dynasties & is in the Museo Civico Archeologico's collection.*



*Display at the Museo Civico Archeologico of Early Dynastic sculptures & hard-stone bowls.*

*Author's photo*

ogy was in its infancy and only a few notes of the excavations were ever made. Today, there are only brief descriptions of the discovery preserved in archaeological records. The objects were sold to different museum collections all around the world and, in most cases, can only be ascribed with certainty to Djehuty's tomb when they bear his name." Of particular beauty and displayed here, all from Leiden, are several gold bracelets, a heart-shaped scarab set in gold on a gold chain and a pectoral element or belt part. As the pre-exhibition press release tells us: "Representing a blue lotus [water lily] flower, a symbol of re-

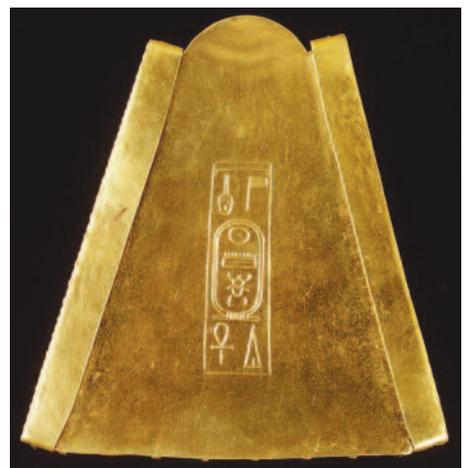
birth and regeneration, it must have served as the central element of an elaborate pectoral. The king's name engraved on the back suggests that the piece was given personally by Thutmose III."

On display in Section 6, "New Kingdom-Prosperity after the Conquest," are many items of daily life dating from the Eighteenth-Twentieth dynasties, from furniture, headrests, table games, writing materials, musical instruments, baskets and sandals. In addition to more beautiful jewelry, the most special item is the wood-and-ivory handle of a mirror (1292 BC) in the shape of a young woman holding a little bird, which came to Bologna with the Palagi collection. These items attest to the widespread prosperity and refined

lifestyle enjoyed by royalty and the elite in Egypt as a result of the expansionist policies of the New Kingdom pharaohs.

Still other stars date from several periods of Egyptian history. The earliest on display in Section 1 — "The Predynastic and Archaic Periods: At the Origins of History" — is a vase, the press release tells us, "from the Naqada IID period (named for a site in Upper Egypt and datable between 3375 and 3325 BC) decorated with ostriches, hills and water motifs. The scene depicted on this vase takes us back to an Egypt characterized by a flourishing landscape later altered over time by climate changes. Ostriches, here painted red, along with elephants, crocodiles, rhinoceros and other wild animals were common in the Nile region at the time."

The wall panel "At the Origins of History" explains that prior to Petrie's fieldwork artifacts from the Predynastic



*Both sides of an inlaid-gold pectoral element in the form of a stylized water lily, bearing the cartouche of Thutmose III; 8.6 cm. h., it was found in the Tomb of Djehuty at Sakkara & is from Leiden's Anastasi collection.*

and Early Dynastic periods (c. 3750-2707 BC) were not commonly collected. “The only objects that were considered worthy of attention,” explains the panel, “were almost exclusively eye-catching artifacts that could easily be found in funerary and temple contexts dating to the Old Kingdom (c. 2707-2639 BC) onwards.”

The Bologna collection did not fill in this lack; the Leiden collection did, however, through purchases in 1901 from Jan Herman Insinger (1854-1918) — a Dutchman who lived in Egypt for forty years — and later in 1936-1938 from the well-known German Egyptologist Friedrich Wilhelm Von Bissing (1873-1956). “It was thus enriched,” continues the panel, “with terracotta figures, greywacke cosmetic palettes, amulets, flint knives, copper alloy objects, as well as terracotta and stone vessels of various shapes, objects that continue to be integrated thanks to new purchases.”

As part of the five-year agreement between the Leiden and Bologna collections, the Dutch museum has lent long-term to Bologna thirty-five Predynastic and First Dynasty artifacts, which would otherwise have remained in storage during Leiden’s renovations. The loan has been extended until 2020. A number of these artifacts on display now originated at Abu Rawash. The wall panel — “Abu Rawash: A necropolis to be rediscovered” — relates: “Between 1957 and 1959 Adolf Klassens launched the first archeological campaign of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden of Leiden in Egypt, during which he identified several necropoleis — about 400. The majority of the burials... date between the Late Predynastic (Naqada IIIB, c. 3300-3707 BC) and the Early Dynastic Periods (Naqada III C-D or the 1st and 2nd Dynasties, c. 3085-2707 BC). ... At the end of the fieldwork seasons, the Dutch museum received 1,200 finds as a gift from Egypt.”

Defdji’s offering table is another star on loan from Leiden and displayed in Section 2: “The Old Kingdom — a Political/Religious Model Destined for Success and its Weaknesses.” Leiden’s Museo Civico has a particularly rich collection of funerary artifacts including this calcite offering table (end of Fifth-Sixth Dynasty, 2347-2216 BC) in Anastasi’s collection. “Offerings to the deceased,” the press release tell us, “were a fundamental part of

*the funerary ritual, ensuring life after death. The uniqueness of this table, which belong to Defdji, a high government official, lies in its circular shape, which was unusual, as well as the repetition of the concept of the offering as indicated by the inscription, the sculpted receptacles and, most importantly, the central depiction corresponding to the hieroglyph hotep (offering), or a table upon which one places a loaf of bread.”*

Another outstanding object from the Anastasi collection, also in Section 2, is the grey-granite statue of a scribe dating to the second half of the Fifth Dynasty (2504-2347 BC).

Still another star, the limestone stela of Aku, dating to the Twelfth-Thirteenth Dynasty (1776-1648 BC) and showing traces of paint, is on display in Section 3, “The Middle Kingdom — The God Osiris and a New Perspective on Life in the Afterworld.” Again, the press release recounts that “The end of the Old Kingdom and the period of political breakdown that followed it led to major changes in Egyptian society, within which the individual had greater responsibility for his own destiny, including in the Afterworld. Any Egyptian with the means to build a tomb complete with a sufficient funerary assemblage could now aspire to eternal



life. The god Osiris, lord of the After-world, became Egypt's most popular divinity. Many stelae now in Leiden and Bologna came from his temple at Abydos, one of Egypt's most important cult centers."

Although Leiden has a splendid collection of stelae, many of which are on display in Bologna, Aku's came to Bologna in Palagi's collection. Aku was a *major domo* of the Divine Offering. He dedicated the stela to Min-Hor-nekht, the

*The Museo Civico Archeologico exhibition of Leiden masterpieces includes several Old Kingdom stelae & figurative sculptures, as seen here. Author's photos*



form of the ithyphallic god Min worshipped in the city of Abydos. "Aku's prayer to the god," says the press release, "describes an otherworldly existence in a tripartite world: the sky, where the deceased were transfigured into stars; the earth, where the tomb was the fundamental point of passage from life to death; and the beyond, where Osiris granted the deceased eternal life."

*"In the last and seventh section,*

*'Egypt in the First Millennium,' Picchi told me, "we've displayed numerous votive animal mummies (cats, falcons, ibis, fish, snakes and crocodiles) and several of Leiden's spectacular coffins, many of which belonged to priests and came from important temple areas." Here the star is the newly restored (in Leiden) coffin of Peftjauneith (Twenty-sixth Dynasty, 664-525 BC), which again the press release tells us, "represents the likeness of the*

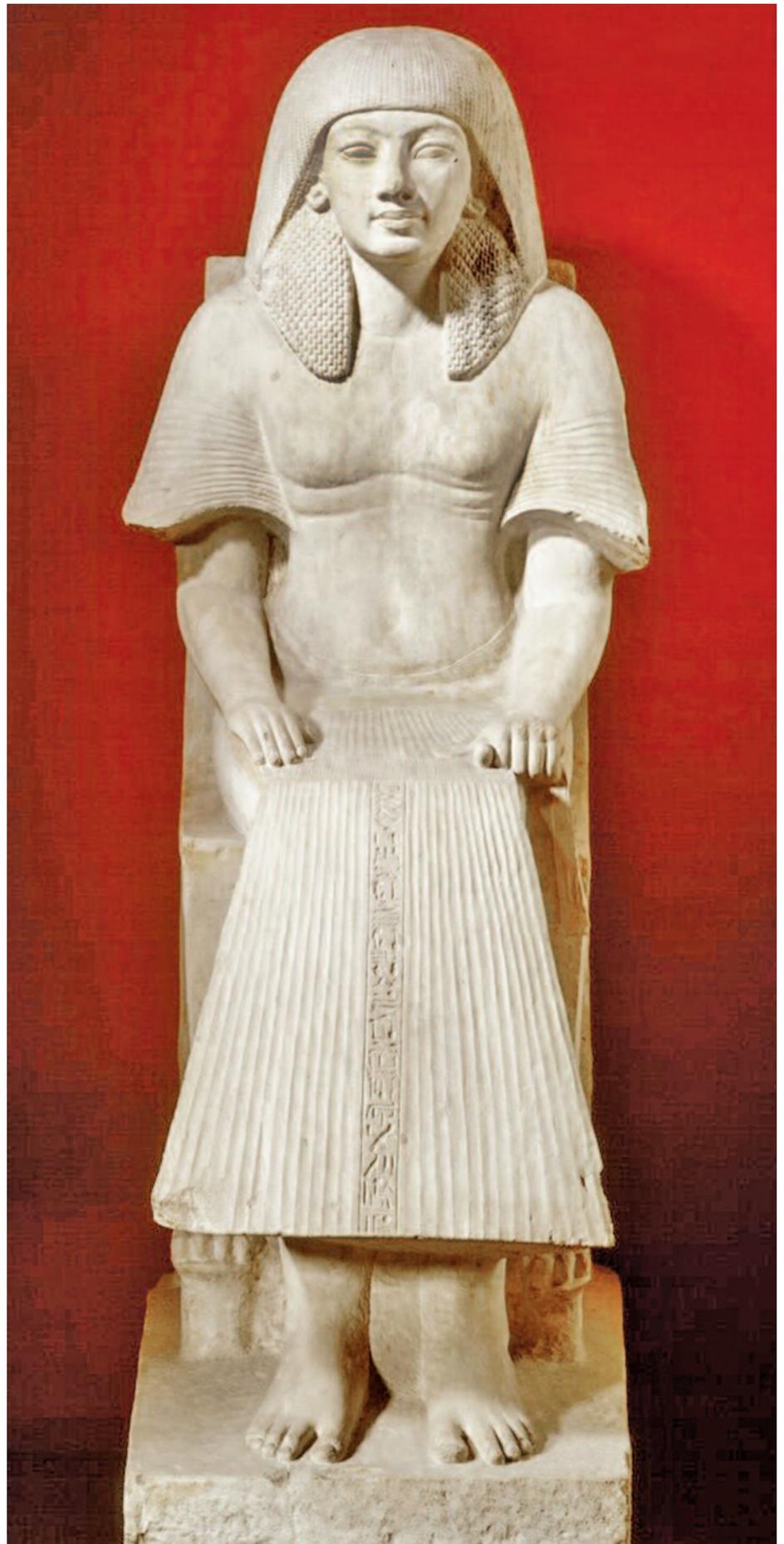


god Osiris, wrapped in a linen shroud, and with a green face evoking the concept of rebirth. The refined decoration of this coffin confirms the high rank of its owner (the superintendent of the possessions of a temple in Lower Egypt) in the temple sphere. Of particular note is the interior scene of the sky goddess Nut swallowing the sun every evening (to the west) to then give birth to it in the morning (to the east).”

“The aim of ‘Egypt. Millennia of Splendour’,” Picchi told me, “is not to provide our visitors with all the answers, but to tantalize and stimulate them to find out more and form their own opinions. We definitely need to modify the traditional chronology of ancient Egypt cemented in the late Nineteenth Century. For example, Nineteenth Century Egyptologists insisted upon dating the Third Dynasty to the Old Kingdom, whereas we grouped it with the First and Second Dynasty and not



Opposite, The magnificent late-18th Dynasty limestone seated statue of Singer of Amen Meryt, wife of Maya, royal treasurerer under Tutankhamen & Horemheb (his companion statue is at right). Both life-size sculptures & a pair-statue of the couple (above, Author's photo) were found in their tomb at Sakkara in the early 19th Century & arrived in Holland as part of the Anastasi collection in 1828.





Top, Detail of a limestone sunk-relief of General Horemheb receiving Gold of Honor collars, from his private tomb at Sakkara (Author's photo). Above, Leiden's large 18th Dynasty limestone mummiform statue of Tjei. Right, Limestone sunk-relief from the 18th Dynasty private Tomb of Horemheb at Sakkara (reign of Tutankhamen), depicting Egyptian soldiers with Nubian prisoners; in the collection of the Museo Civico Archeologico.





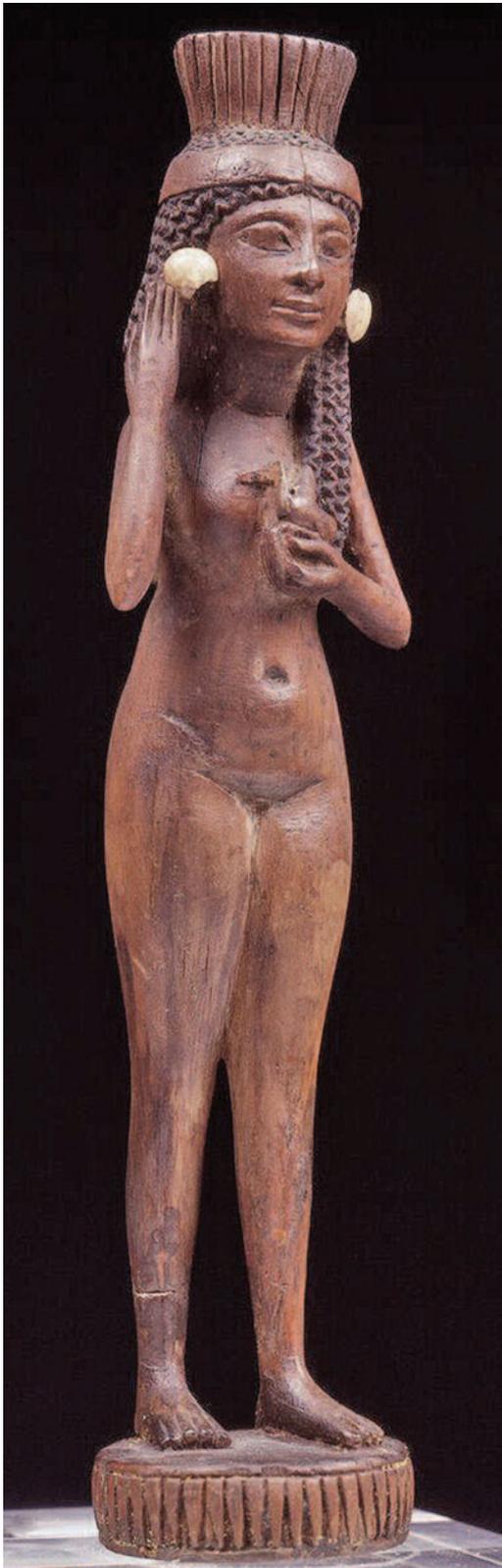
the Fourth and Fifth. We need to reconsider this Nineteenth Century rigidity.

“We also have to recognize the various territories and ethnicities of ancient Egypt,” continued Picchi, “and not just Upper and Lower Egypt. For example, the First Millennium BC of ancient Egypt is generally looked upon as a period of decadence. Instead it is simply the evolution of a civilization with a very long life, which is living in a context evermore Mediterranean, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. We have to stop making judg-

ments about history and just read history. This is our intent, our aim for ‘Egypt. The Millennia of Splendour’. For example the Old Kingdom should be studied together with the First Intermediate Period; the Third Dynasty dialogues with the Second and should be separated from the Old Kingdom; the Intermediate Periods are united in the theme of the army, thus from the First Intermediate Period to the Second Intermediate Period/New Kingdom, if we follow a less common reading of ancient Egyptian history, we should pay

more attention to the foreign populations which had always lived in Egypt and influenced its culture, although there is very little official documentation concerning them. Another conconsideration, which Stephen Quirke, writes about in the exhibition catalogue, is ‘Did every ancient Egyptian really want to be Osiris?’ Possibly yes, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, but earlier, if at all, just at court, among high officials and priests involved in mummification. Again, in short, our aim is to stimulate new opinions and dis-

*Opposite, Another limestone pigmented sunk relief from Horemheb's Sakkara tomb, depicting Asiatic prisoners; from the Leiden collection. Below, 18th Dynasty wood-&-ivory mirror handle (14.5 cm. h.) of a nude young woman, in the Museo Civico Archeologico's collection. Right, the Museum's display of New Kingdom domestic objects. Author's photo*



*cussion. Let's not forget that within one year, Leiden's very important collection will be displayed twice, since October 2015 here in Bologna and then in October 2016 in its new home in Leiden, so visitors to both will be able to formulate two different interpretations of the collection."*

Although its Egyptian collection will still be closed, Leiden's museum will house the temporary exhibition "Egypt, Land of Immortality" from April 15 to September 4. The more than 150 artifacts to be displayed will include magnificent sculptures, bronze figures of the gods, mummy cases and mummies. All are from Leiden's own collection and illustrate how the ancient Egyptians prepared for eternal life in the next world. Some have never been displayed publicly before, while others have been on a five-year world tour to destinations in Canada, Japan, Scotland and Spain.

When the collection reopens, on view for the first time will be several artifacts purchased by the Museum in 2014 and 2015. They include two pharaoh figurines (Price: 150,000 €), one of which is the oldest figurine in the world depicting an Egyptian ruler. It is the seated figure of King Nynetjer, one of the earliest rulers of ancient Egypt (c. 2785-2742 BC). The other is a funerary figurine of King Taharka (690-664 BC), one of the "black pharaohs" from Nubia. Although Leiden's is one of the world's top ten Egyptian collections, it owns only a few sculptures of pharaohs.

The other 2014 purchase was a small relief-fragment from the Tell el-Dab'a area (Nile Delta) showing the god Khnum. "Around the Fourth Century BC," the Museum's website ([www.rmo.nl](http://www.rmo.nl)) tells us, "this piece of granite was part of a small chapel inside a temple. ... Khnum was



*The 26th Dynasty gessoed-&-painted wooden coffin of Pefstjauneith, from the Leiden Anastasi collection. 240 cm. l., it is seen here in three views: Left, The lid, with the deceased in the guise of a green-faced Osiris; Middle, Backside of the basin; & Right, The interior of the basin, with a frontal-facing figure of the sky-goddess Nut.*

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*worshipped as the god of creation. The relief shows him about to start work on his creation, a rare choice of subject. It is exceptional, in any case, for a relief of Khnum to be on display in a museum. An image of this kind is generally an integral part of the wall of an Egyptian temple."*



The Museum's most recent purchase dates to September 2015 and is a set of objects from the former collection of H.C. Jelgersma (1897-1982), a psychiatrist and amateur Egyptologist. The most striking object is a small red-quartzite figurine from the reign of Amenhotep III. It



has the characteristic facial features of this pharaoh, "... but the wig with vertical stripes," the website tells us, "suggests that this is not the head of the pharaoh himself, but of a god with his features. Amenhotep ordered the making of hundreds of god figurines like this one for



temples all over the country."

"Egypt. Millennia of Splendour" is accompanied by an attractive catalogue published by Skira, Milan, costing 70 €. An English edition will be available in the late spring, also for 70 €, from Chiara Signoroni at <csignoroni@skira.net>.

**About the Author** Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is the European correspondent for the Journal and is based in Rome. She has contributed numerous articles on the Egyptian collections of Continental museums.