



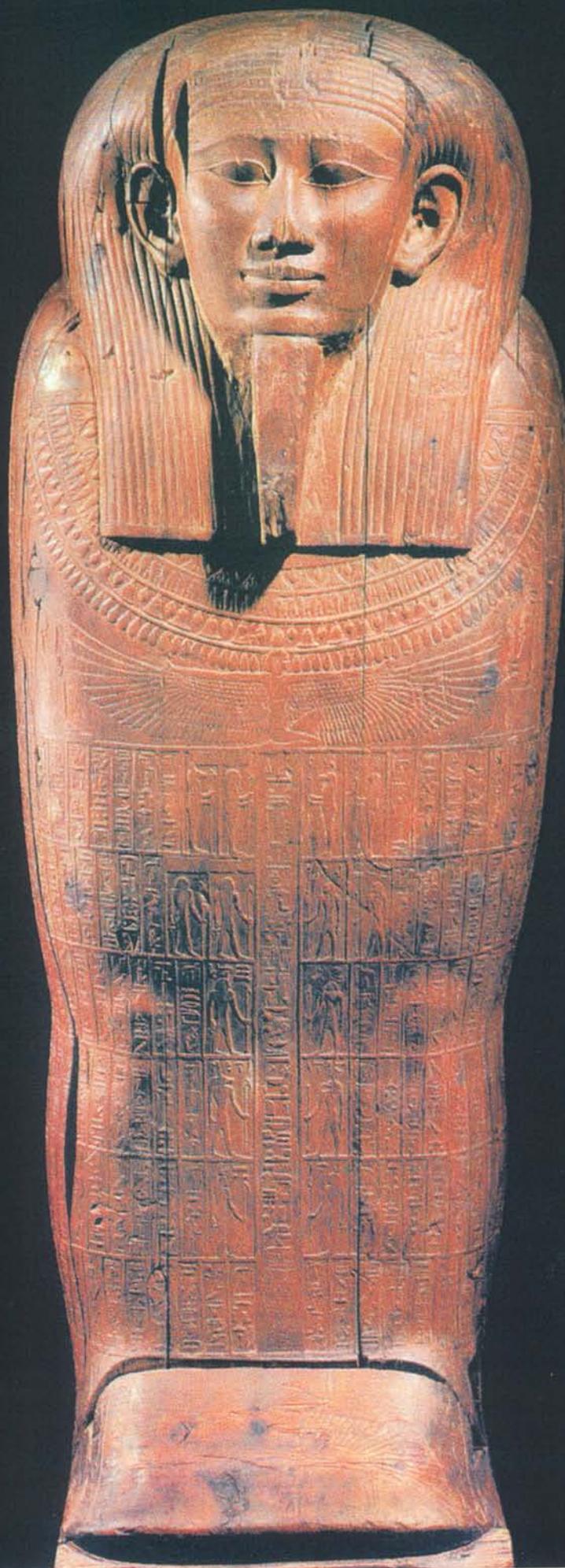
# ANCIENT EGYPT IN 'LITTLE PARIS'

*Leipzig University's Antiquities Collection*

by **Lucy Gordan-Rastelli**

In Goethe's "Faust" a character named Frosch appropriately calls Leipzig "a little Paris." For several centuries until World War II, this city was one of Europe's richest and most artistic centers, and home to many of the great names of German culture, especially of music, literature and science: Bach, Goethe, Leibniz, Mendelssohn, Nietzsche, Schiller, Schumann and Wagner all lived there for a time.

The cultural appeal of Leipzig began with the arrival there of itinerant typographers. The city's first book was printed in 1481; and



*Left, The 27th Dynasty anthropomorphic cedar-wood coffin of Hedebbastetiru, of unknown provenance, but purchased in Trieste for the Leipzig Egyptian collection. Below, Detail of the exquisitely carved raised-relief funerary texts on the lid of the coffin.*



by 1530 about 1,300 titles — ordered by the church or university — had been printed there, including liturgical items, theological, philosophical, legal and mathematical works, as well as first editions of ancient classics, works on the Reformation and the world's first textbook, printed in 1507.

The university at Leipzig dates back to 1409, but was officially founded in 1543; it has always attracted scholars in various fields from all over Europe. Through the centuries these scholars acquired prestigious teaching tools, displayed today in the several university-owned museums of: Musical Instruments; Egyptian Artifacts; Greek and Roman Art; the Geological and Paleontological Collection; Collection of Medical History; Collection of Mineralogy and

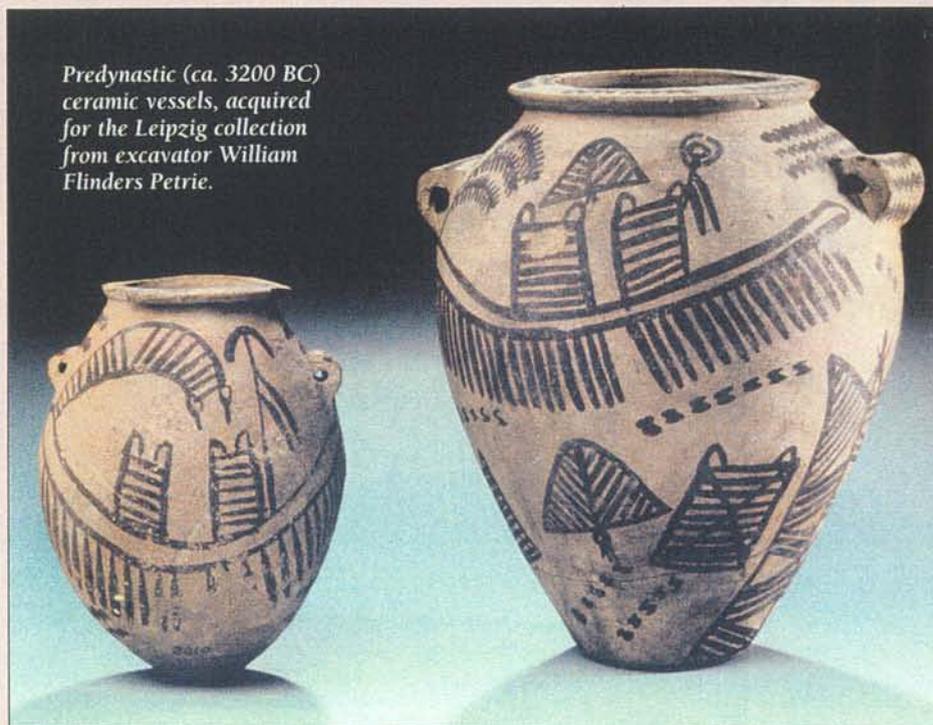


General view of the Leipzig Egyptian Collection display galleries, with the coffin of Herischehotep in the foreground & that of Hedebba-setiru seen in the background.

Petrography; and the Botanical Gardens.

The University's Egyptian Museum is one of the most important medium-sized collections of ancient Egyptian art and artifacts in Europe. It is also one of the oldest of its kind at a German university and contains over 6,000 (though before the end of World War II 9,000) ancient objects: sculptures, reliefs, small artifacts, coffins, sarcophagi and other items pertaining to the cult of the dead, as well as articles for everyday use. Other German universities with Egyptian collections are at Heidelberg, Tübingen and Würzburg, all teaching museums like the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (see "Ancient Egypt in Philadelphia," *Kmt*, fall 2004).

The Museum's foundation stone was laid in 1843, when Gustav Seyffarth (1798-1855) — who was a theologian, a professor of Egyptology at the University of Leipzig and first curator of the Museum — purchased for the sum of 298 *taler* at Trieste the anthropoid wooden coffin of an otherwise-unknown Hedebba-setiru. This



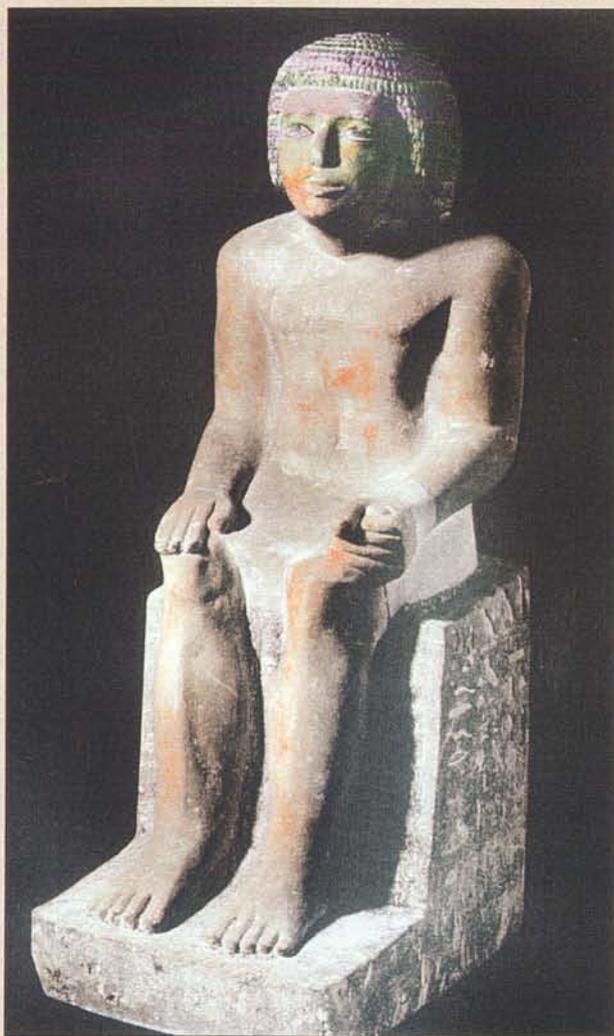
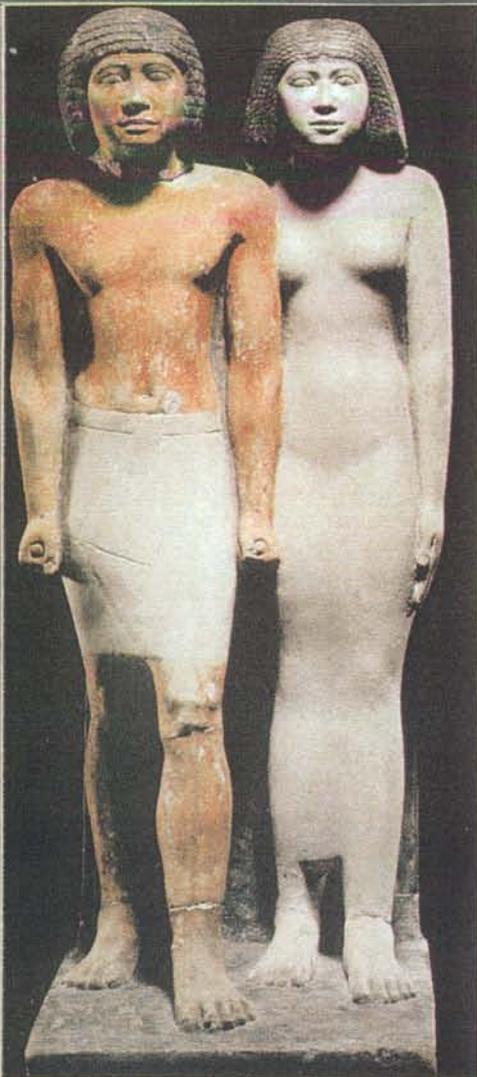
Predynastic (ca. 3200 BC) ceramic vessels, acquired for the Leipzig collection from excavator William Flinders Petrie.

had been on its way to the *kunstkammer*, or curiosities collection, of a German nobleman, who died while it was in transit, and whose family no longer wanted it.

In 1874 the collection became known for study purposes as an

*Ägyptologischer Apparat*. Although it was not yet a museum, the general public could visit the Egyptian collection on weekends.

Egyptology quickly became popular in Leipzig thanks to Georg Ebers (1837-1898) a professor of the

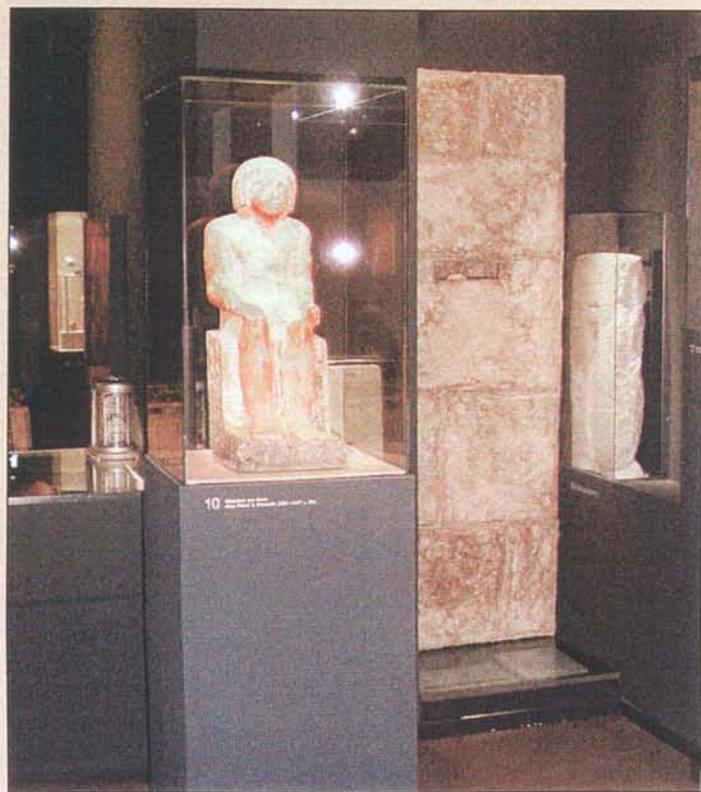


discipline and also the well-known writer of historical novels, almost all of which were set in ancient Egypt, and many translated into English including: *An Egyptian Princess* (1864), *Serapis* (1885), *The Bride of the Nile* (1887) and *Cleopatra* (1894). Ebers was also the author of many scholarly works and, most importantly, he discovered an Egyptian medical papyrus (dating to ca. 1550 BC) at Luxor in the winter of 1873-1874, which he named for himself. Due to ill health, Ebers retired from teaching in 1889.

In the years between 1893 and 1934, Leipzig University's Egyptian collection saw considerable growth — well beyond the size required for teaching purposes — and this was mainly due to the finds from excavations undertaken in Egypt by the University: at Giza from 1903 to 1911; at Abusir in 1910; at

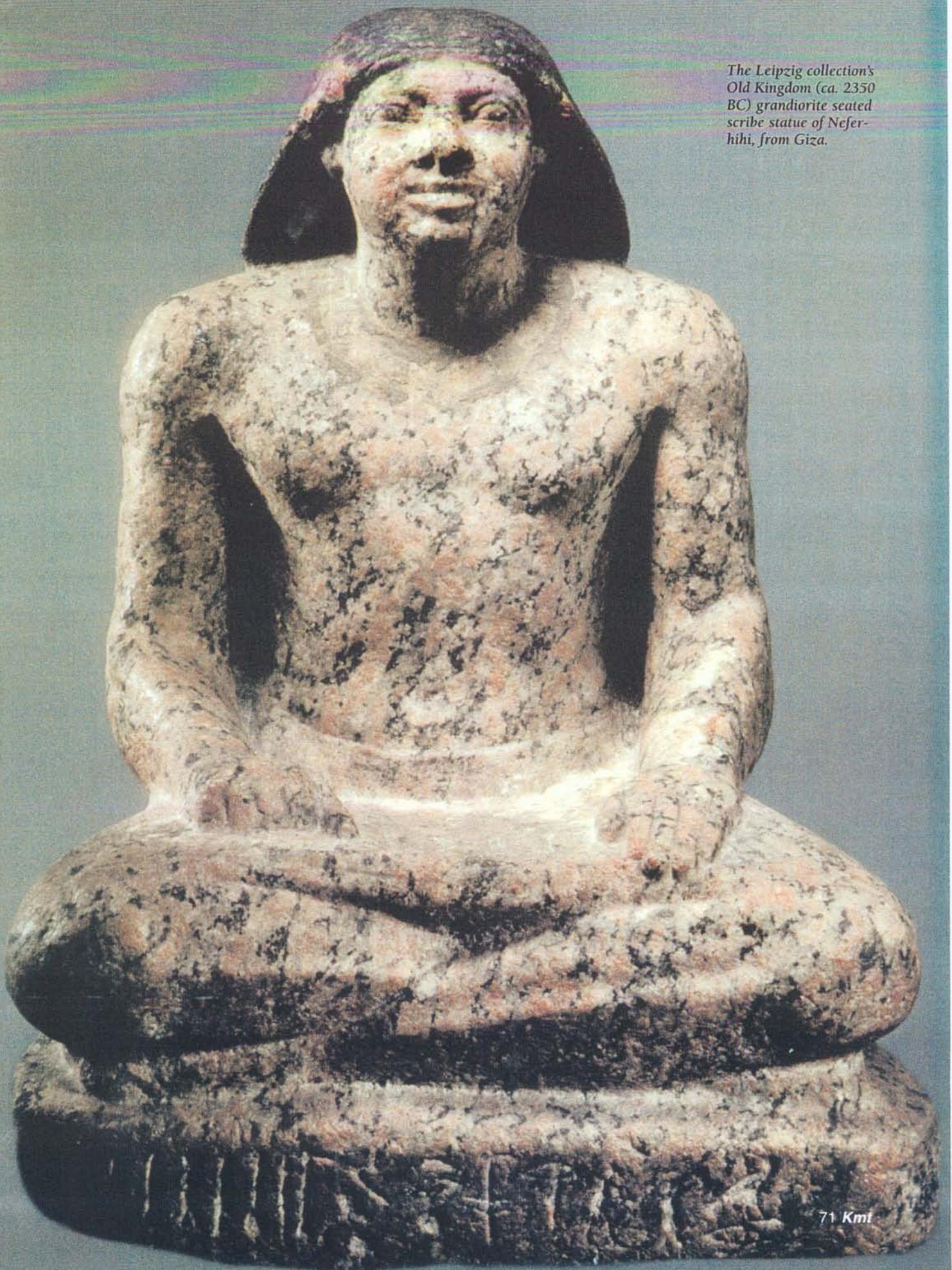
Aniba in 1912 and 1914. After World War I, not much excavation was undertaken by the University, except in Nubia in 1930-1931, by Ebers's successor as professor of Egyptology, Georg Steindorff (1861-1951). Steindorff's tenure was the apex of Egyptology in Leipzig; being Jewish, he migrated to the United States in 1938. Just a few acquisitions have been added to the Leipzig Egyptian collection since the 1930s. Part of the collection was destroyed by World War II bombing raids, but most of it had been evacuated to safety. Following the war, what had survived was taken to the U.S.S.R. in 1958; this was eventually returned, however; and, in May of 1976, the collection opened as a museum.

Although today still officially part of the University of Leipzig, the collection, directed by H.W. Fischer-Elfert and curated by Friederike Seyfried, both professors at the Uni-

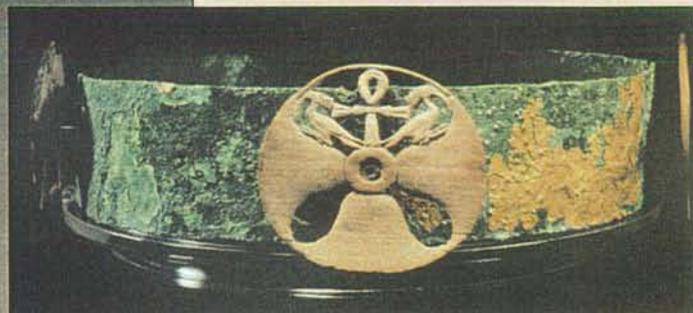


*Clockwise from above left: 5th Dynasty standing painted-limestone pair-statue of Iahb & Chuaut, found in front of the false door of the Mastaba of Itju in the Western Cemetery at Giza; 5th Dynasty painted-limestone seated figure of Memi, also from Giza's Western Cemetery, Mastaba D208; view of the Leipzig Old Kingdom installation, with the statue of Memi in the foreground.*

The Leipzig collection's  
Old Kingdom (ca. 2350  
BC) grandiorite seated  
scribe statue of Nefer-  
hihi, from Giza.

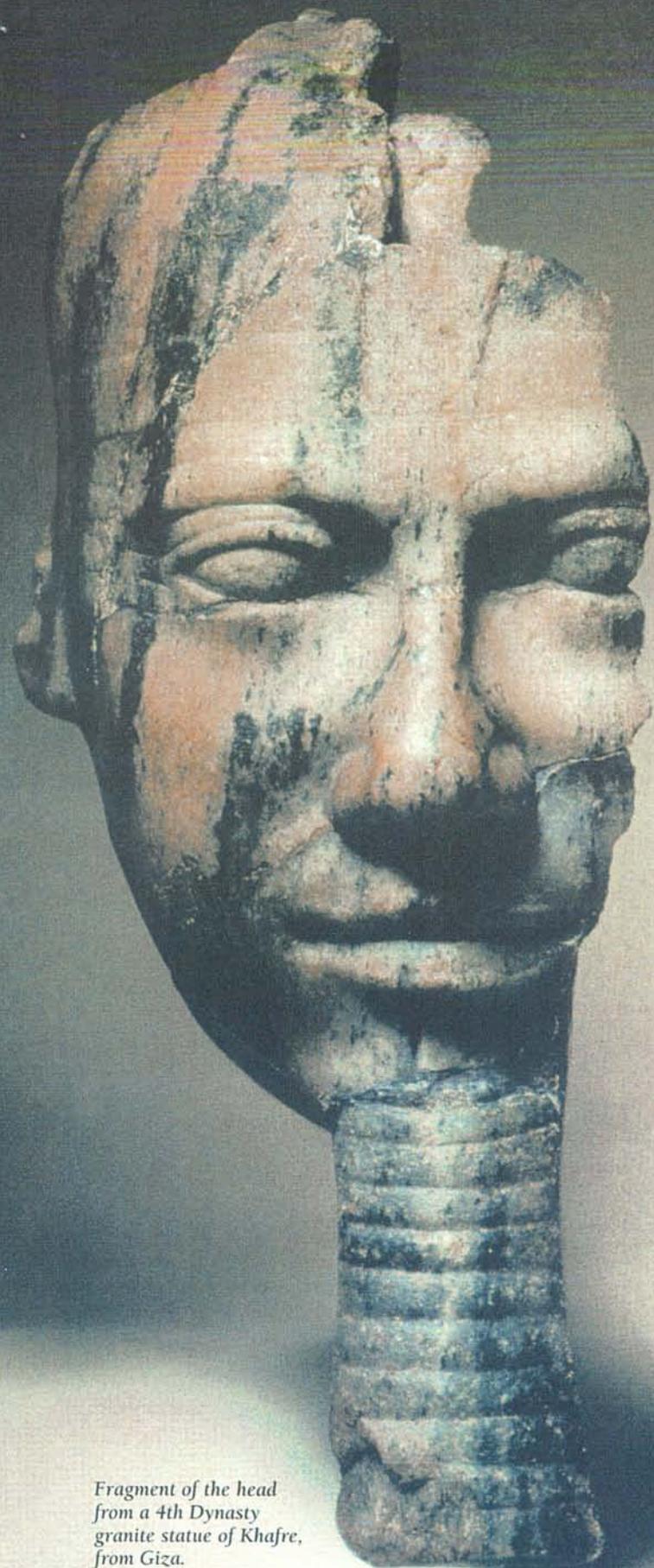


5th Dynasty copper diadem with gold leaf & wooden bosses, found in the excavation of Mastaba D208 at Giza.



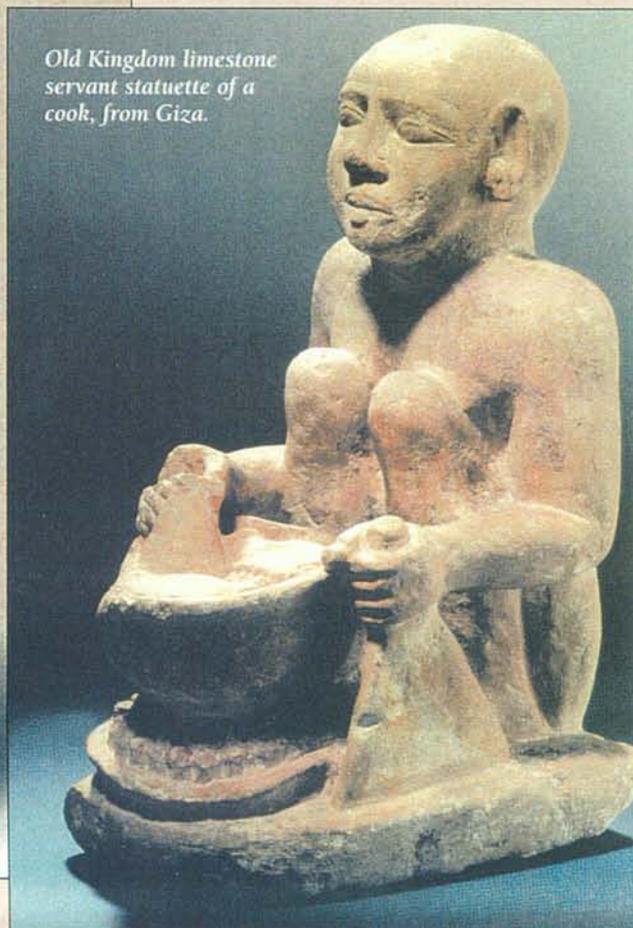
versity, is temporarily housed at Burgstrasse 21, D-04109 Leipzig. Its hours are Tuesday-Saturday, 1-5 PM and Sunday 10 AM-1 PM; it is closed on Monday. The entrance fee is 2 Euros.

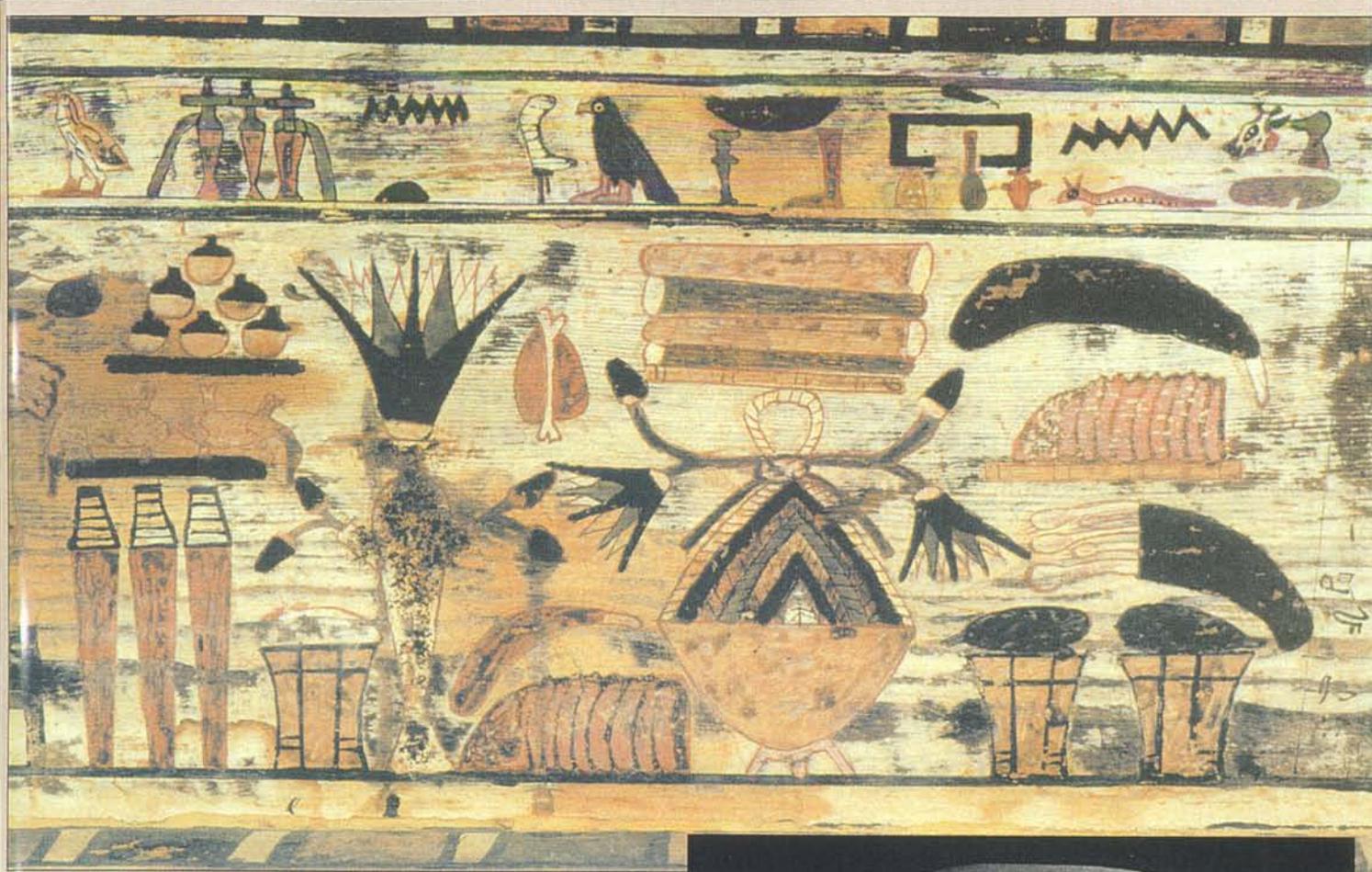
In September 2004, during a press trip to several German cities sponsored by the German National Tourist Organization, I spent a day in Leipzig. Dr. Seyfried — who teaches Egyptian art, history and archaeology — was busy giving an exam; so her associate, Dr. Frank Steinmann — who teaches Egyptian



Fragment of the head from a 4th Dynasty granite statue of Khafre, from Giza.

Old Kingdom limestone servant statuette of a cook, from Giza.





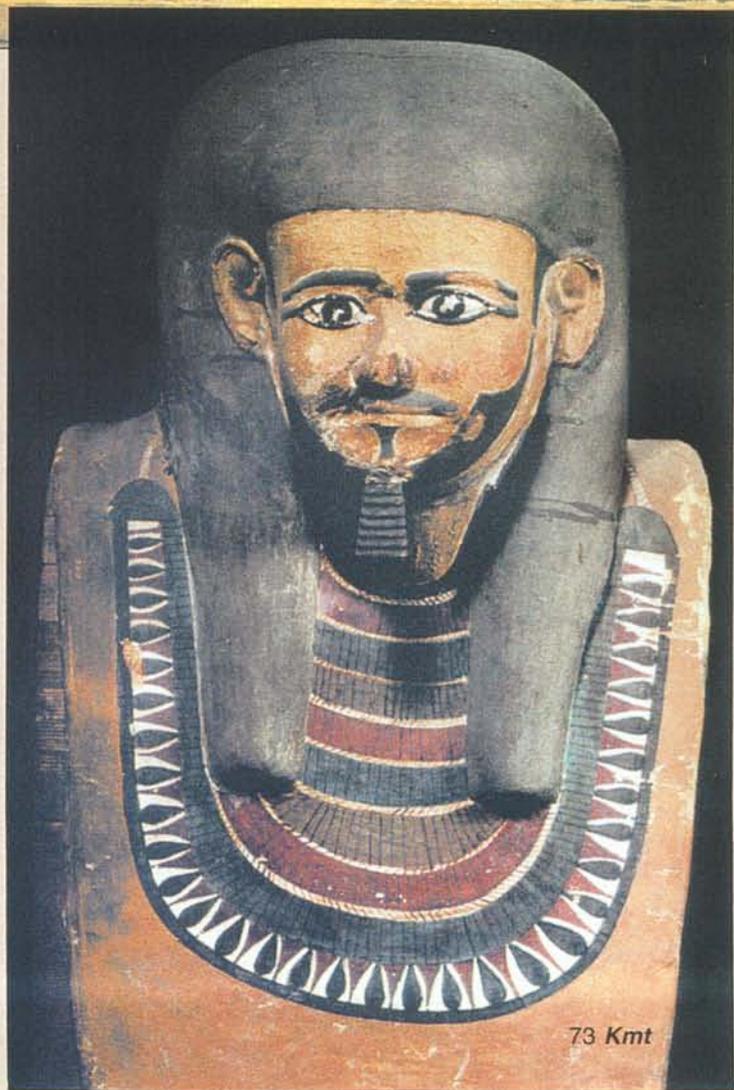
history and Coptic, and excavates at Tuna el Gebel — graciously hosted my tour of the collection.

“We have about 1,000, mostly German, visitors a month. The Museum’s ‘temporary’ new home, here since February 2003,” said Steinmann, “although small — because we can display only 300 objects at one time — is a great improvement over our facilities in Schillerstrasse 6, where we were before. There we had a bigger exhibition space, but here we have state-of-the-art display cases, lighting, modern facilities for our office and restoration equipment, and modern storage space. We hope to have a bigger exhibition space again somewhere else in Leipzig, but where and when we do not know.

“Our *pièce de resistance* is over there,” Steinmann continued, pointing to the back wall. “Hedebastetiru’s wonderfully carved coffin, made of cedar wood and dating from the Late Period, from around 500 BC, is covered with a delicate relief of carved figures and magical inscriptions; we now know these are prayers

*Above, Detail of the painted food offerings in the interior of the 1st Intermediate Period wooden coffin of Herischeshotep, found in his tomb at Abusir:*

*Right, Painted cartonnage funerary mask of the same Herischeshotep.*



Limestone block statue of an official named Ruju, found in Tomb S66 by Steindorff during his 1912 excavations at Aniba in Nubia. It dates to the New Kingdom, time of Hatshepsut. It was accompanied by a seated limestone figure of Ruju.



Right, Open-work silver stands & bowl, found in Tomb S91 during Steindorff's Nubian excavations at Aniba; dated to the time of Thutmose IV/Amehotep III.

Below, Three ushabtis of different periods, made of wood (l.), faience (c.) & steatite, all found during the excavations at Aniba.



ique piece — there is nothing like it anywhere else in the world — to study its hieroglyphs, which are normally not carved, only painted. He disagreed with Champollion's deciphering. He had his own complicated systems and interpretations, which then turned out to be wrong. We do not know the coffin's place of origin before it arrived in Trieste."

In the one long, narrow exhibition room, approximately 300 artifacts of the Leipzig Egyptian collection are displayed in thirty-six cases in chronological order and are divided into four sections: Pre- and Early Dynastic; Old Kingdom; Middle Kingdom; and Late Period, Graeco-Roman and Coptic. They cover approximately 3,000 years of Egyptian history.

Other highlights besides Hedebastetiru's coffin include:

(1) Predynastic pottery from

Nagada, which the eccentric British archaeologist William Flinders Petrie either sold to or exchanged with Steindorff, a friend of his;

(2) Several 5,000-year-old stone vessels of Early Dynastic date, made of calcite, limestone and other hard stones, excavated by Steindorff at Abusir;

(3) Three *ka*-statues dating from the Old Kingdom, excavated by Steindorff at Giza;

(4) A Fifth Dynasty copper-diaDEM with gold leaf, found by Steindorff in a noble's tomb at Giza;

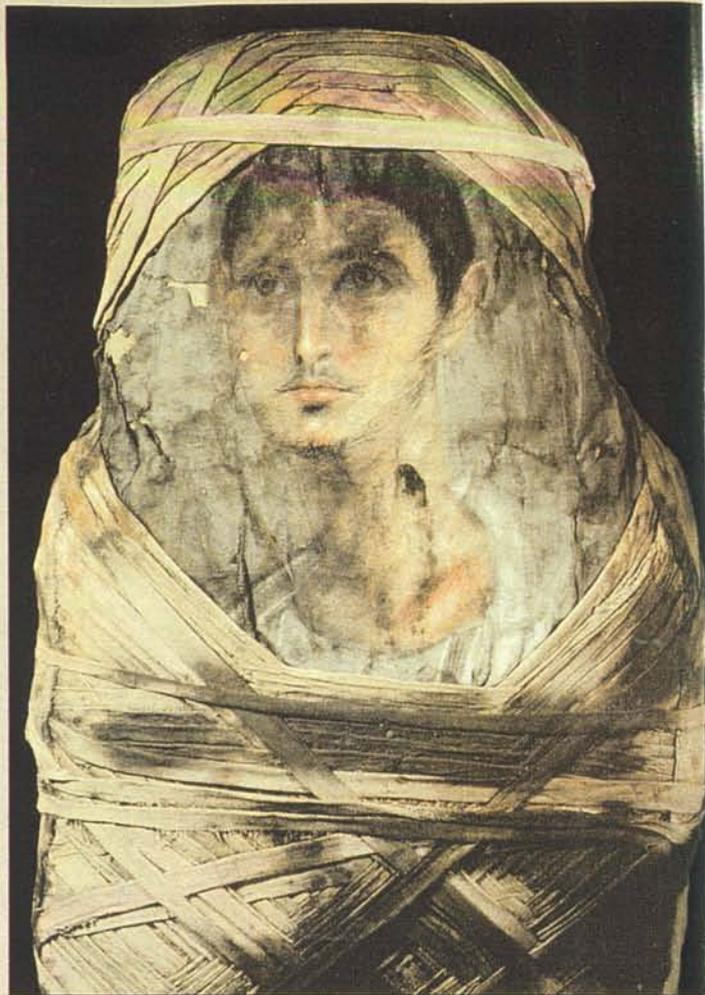
(5) Also from Giza and dating to the Fifth Dynasty, the funerary equipment of the scribe Neferihi, including a seated scribal statue of him, his writing tools, walking-stick handle, jewelry and pottery;

(6) The complete contents of the First Intermediate Period tomb of a priest, Herishefhotep, excavated at Abusir, including the inner coffin painted with depictions of tools and food offerings, plus a pair of sandals, a headrest, sticks and bows, a model boat and model kitchen, and a mum-

for a good life in the Afterlife.

"A closer look indicates that the carving is partially unfinished, so an experienced viewer can get an impression of Egyptian woodworking methods. All of the carvings were left unpainted.

"Seyffarth bought this un-



Above, Humorous late New Kingdom ostracon of unknown provenance. Left, Pigmented fragmentary sandstone talatat from Karnak with depiction of Nefertiti. Right, Roman mummy from Hawara, with tempera-on-linen portrait of a young man.

my mask, but no mummy;

(7) The almost-complete contents (again, no mummy) of a New Kingdom Nubian official from Aniba, from Steindorff's excavations there in 1912; and

(8) The *ushabti* of Ipj, the right hand of which holds a small bird with a human head, the so-called *ba*-bird.

**A**lthough in the Leipzig University Library, rather than part of the University's Egyptian collection, one cannot talk about ancient Egypt in Leipzig without describing the special find of Georg Ebers. The *Ebers Papyrus* is the most important ancient Egyptian medical document, and one of the two oldest such preserved documents in the world.

In actual fact Ebers did not "find" the papyrus; rather he purchased it from Edwin Smith, already the owner of the *Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus*, which he had acquired from a certain Mustafa Agha in 1862. An *Kmt* 76

American residing in Egypt, Smith had a shady reputation and was variously described as an adventurer, usurer, antiquities dealer and forger. It seems that Smith also purchased the *Ebers Papyrus* in 1862, but probably not from Agha, as it was said to have been found between the legs of a mummy — possibly a doctor — in the Asasif necropolis on the west bank at Luxor. The papyrus remained in Smith's possession until at least 1869, when it appeared in the catalogue of another dealer as "a large medical papyrus in the possession of Edwin Smith, an American farmer of Luxor."

Measuring about twenty meters in length and thirty centimeters in height, written in hieratic script and divided now into 108 pages, it contains some 880 medical recipes for a wide range of afflictions, from how to cure crocodile bites, arthritis and toenail pain, to how to rid one's house of such pests as flies, rats and scorpions. The papyrus also contains

chapters on intestinal diseases and parasites, eye and skin problems, contraception, pregnancy diagnosis and other gynecological matters, dentistry, and the surgical treatments for abscesses, tumors and burns, plus how to set bone fractures. It also includes an accurate description of the heart and circulatory system, as well as one of clinical depression, although it in no way antedates W. Harvey's discovery of 1628.

In 1875 Ebers published a superb facsimile edition of the papyrus, with an introduction and an Egyptian-Latin vocabulary. The first complete translation in German appeared in 1890, and one in English in 1930. In 1987 Dr. Paul Ghalioungui, head of the medical department at Ain Shams University in Egypt completed a new English translation, which was not published until 2004.

*About the Author:* Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is an American free-lance writer living in Rome, who has contributed several articles to the Journal on European Egyptian collections and exhibitions.