

LESS KNOWN EGYPTIAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS HELD IN SMALL MUSEUMS IN PIEDMONT (NORTH ITALY)

R. Boano¹, G. Mangiapane², E. Fulcheri³, E. Fiore Marochetti⁴

¹ Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology, University of Turin (Italy)
Via Accademia Albertina 13, 10123 Torino, Italy.
rosa.boano@unito.it

² Department of Philosophy and Educational Science, University of Turin (Italy)
Via Michelangelo 32, 10126 Torino, Italy

³ Dept. of Surgical and Diagnostic Sciences (DISC) Division of Anatomic Pathology
Viale Benedetto XV, 16132 Genova, Italy

⁴ Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Torino
Piazza S. Giovanni 2, 10122 Torino, Italy

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Abstract. The contribution aims to give voice to the lesser known Egyptian anthropological collections held in small museums of Anthropology, Archeology and Natural Sciences in Piedmont. In this region of the north Italy besides the Egyptian Museum of Turin, that holds one of the largest, most important and best known Egyptian collection in the world, several other local museums hold large or small biological samples from

Egypt. We discuss about their amount and comparing them. Differences and similarities among the collections are described in order to create the condition for a better understanding of the history of these collections. In particular, an update on the Egyptian Collection at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University of Turin (MAET) and future directions of the Museum will be provided.

Keywords. Anthropological collection. Egypt. Mummies. Museums.

I. HIDDEN EGYPT IN PIEMONTE

In the second half of the 19th century, Piemonte was invaded by a passion for ancient Egypt and the collecting of antiquity is its most elitist expression. In this period, numerous collections are formed, mostly by patrons and intellectuals who love art and history and belonged to the rich bourgeoisie or local nobility (Boano and Rabino Massa, 2012). In most cases, these are private collections purchased on the antiques market to enrich existing antiquities or naturalistic collections. Below and in [Table I](#) is the list of the museums that house the minor Egyptian collections in Piemonte.

The «Carlo Alberto» Real College Collection is located in the «*San Francesco dei Padri Minori*» convent in Moncalieri (Turin), founded in the 1838; from 1849 it housed several naturalistic and antiquity collections, among which several Egyptians archaeological items and two Egyptian mummified heads are present. Some Egyptian objects and the two heads were donated in the 1876 by Enrico Chicco, former student at the school and then Vice-Consul at Cairo (Grilletto, 2012; Grilletto, 2009; Grilletto, Leospo, 1993).

The Civic Museum in Susa (Turin) is located in a small town near Turin, housed 68 Egyptian items, including parts of human mummies (two heads, one hand and three feet) and two animal mummies donated in 1884 by Pietro Terziano who most likely bought them in Luxor during a business trip (Fiore Marochetti, 2012).

The Civic Archaeological Museum in Asti housed two Egyptian mummies and several objects donated by the Count Leonetto Ottolenghi (1846-1904), patron and benefactor of Asti. The Egyptian items were most likely purchased on the antiques market and donated to the Museum at the moment of its foundation in the 1903 (Malgora, 2012; Marchegiani, 2012).

The «Federico Eusebio» Civic Archaeological and Natural Sciences Museum in Alba (a small town near Cuneo), stored a part of an Egyptian mummy (two legs and feet) belonged to the Boateri-Sotteri private collection, put together in the first half of the 19th century (Fulcheri and Albanese, 2012).

The Civic Archaeological, History and Art Museum in Bra (a small town near Cuneo), stored a partially preserved Egyptian mummy of a child (two legs and feet). No further information is known about the provenance and acquisition (Cravero, 2012; Curto, 1965).

The Egyptian section of the «Territorio Biellese» Museum in Biella (Ernesto Schiaparelli's hometown) is located in the cloister of *San Sebastiano*; it presents

Table I. Mummified human remains housed in the minor Egyptian collections in Piedmont.

Museum	City	Topic	Mummified human remains
Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia	Torino	Anthropology Ethnography	31 body 80 heads 2 hands 2 feet
Museo Civico di Susa	Susa (Torino)	Different items	2 heads 1 hand 3 feet
Museo Civico Archeologico di Asti	Asti	Archaeology	2 complete
Museo Civico di Archeologia e Scienze Naturali «F. Eusebio» di Alba	Alba (Cuneo)	Archaeology and Natural Sciences	2 legs with feet
Museo Civico di Archeologia, Storia, Arte	Bra (Cuneo)	Archaeology History Art	2 legs with feet
Museo del Territorio Biellese	Biella	Archaeology History Art	1 complete
Museo Camillo Leone	Vercelli	Archaeology	4 hands
Museo Scienze Naturali «P. Calderini»	Varallo Sesia (Vercelli)	Natural Sciences Archaeology Anthropology	2 heads hands and feet

several objects most likely purchased on the antiques market during and the 19th and 20th centuries by Corradino Sella (1860-1933), Italian politician, Mayor of Biella at the end of the 19th century, collector of antiquities and good friend of Ernesto

Schiaparelli, the director of the Egyptian Museum in Turin. Sella donated the collection to the city of Biella in the 1908. In the 1951, the Museum asks for 32 objects in temporary storage to the «*Soprintendenza alle Antichità - Egitto di Torino*», including a complete mummy, to enrich the section in order to honor the memory of Ernesto Schiaparelli (Deodato, 2012; Fiore Marochetti et al., 2012; Fiore Marochetti, 2016).

The «Camillo Leone» Museum in Vercelli houses about 200 Egyptians archaeological items including four human mummified hands and four crocodile cub, most likely purchased on the antiques market and donated by Camillo Leone (1830-1907), notary and collector of antiquities (Bertoni, 2012).

The «Pietro Calderini» Natural Science Museum in Varallo Sesia (Novara), founded by Pietro Calderini (1824-1906), host about 65 archaeological items and several parts of mummies (about 10 items) donated to the Museum by friends and colleagues of the founder (Coloberti, 2012).

2. FOCUS ON THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Unlike the previous cases listed, the Egyptian human remains of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography were collected specifically for research reasons. The «G. Marro» Egyptian Collection constitutes the original nucleus of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography at University of Turin, founded in the 1926 by Giovanni Marro (1875-1952), medical doctor, physician and anthropologist, director of the Anthropological Institute of the University of Turin at the beginning of the 20th Century.

This Collection was assembled from excavation campaigns during the Italian Archeological Mission (M.A.I.) in Egypt directed by the Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli (1856-1928), from 1903 to 1920, and then by Giulio Farina (1889-1947) up to 1935. At that time, the M.A.I. was one of the archaeological mission that first combined archaeological and anthropological research. The excavations yielded not only statues and vases, sarcophagi and stelae, but also hundreds of skeletons and same mummies. The anthropological and ethnographical specimens currently housed at the MAET originates mainly from the Pre-dynastic and Dynastic necropolis (III-XI dynasty) of Gebelein and Dynastic necropolis of Assuan and Asyut, which cover a time range from 3500 to 1800 B.C. Some finds are related to Tolemaic period. The anthropological remains consist of over 550 complete skeletons and 650 isolated skulls, 80 heads of mummies, 33 complete or virtually complete Pre-dynastic

and Dynastic mummies and several hands and feet. The biological Collection includes also different materials that are a part of funerary equipment such as baskets, wooden headrests, linen cloths, pottery: (more than 50 items) of various shapes and sizes and funeral vases (Rabino Massa and Boano, 2003; Boano et al., 2012).

The paleobiological studies of this collection are numerous: they span from paleodemography, paleonutrition, paleopathology to paleogenetics, biochemistry and molecular biology. To date, these studies have resulted in the publication of about 200 scientific papers (Rabino Massa, 2004).

Our challenge for the future of the mummies collection of the MAET is put human remains back into the history and tell new stories and biographies.

The research will explore the funeral rituals as a symbol of cultural identity: in particular, the study will be developed by considering the end of pre-dynastic and the beginning of dynastic period, when fundamental political and cultural transitions occurred.

A bio-archaeological research will be conducted in order to create a “body of knowledge” regarding the constituent materials, the diagenetic and/or tanatological transformations and on the anthropogenic processes of mummification of the human body (including the use of resins, waxes, oils, essences). It will allow comparing notions of anatomy, pharmacopoeia and cosmetics with the funeral ritual and its transformations in the period considered in order to document the presence of embalming treatments in the transition period considered.

The heterogeneity of the materials, i.e. mummified, embalmed or skeletal bodies, preserved with parts of their funerary equipment (consisting of baskets, wooden headrests, linen sheets, pottery and painted clay), leads to a broad transversal investigations, which include aspects of Anthropology, Bioarcheology, Archeometry, Egyptology, History, Archaeology, Museology; experts from these different disciplines will be involved. New trans-disciplinary and attractive storytelling based on human remains exhibition will be the goal to be achieved.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Piedmont is a region with many small museums that preserve traces of an ancient passion for Egypt. These museums, scattered throughout the territory, are an invaluable source of information on the history and local personalities who have contributed to spreading the knowledge of ancient Egypt in Piedmont. The motivations that promoted the birth of these collections have become an integral part

of their biography, exactly as well as the knowledge of the constituent materials to the funerary objects and their use in ancient times. Therefore, these museums have a central role in safeguarding and protecting these information as well as the vestiges of the past population and communicating these knowledge in order to enhance the interest in scientific disciplines, human sciences and local history among the young people.

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