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Managing Early Museum Collections of Ancient Egyptian Materials

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**Managing Early Museum Collections of Ancient
Egyptian Materials**

by

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Museum Professions

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My internship experience at the Brooklyn Museum opened my eyes to the many roles of museum professionals and the numerous challenges that are presented to them day after day. The significance of my time spent there cannot be measured and has prepared me for my future endeavors. This MA thesis was inspired by the work and research that was conducted within that institution.

I would first like to thank Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Ph.D., who guided me through my first experience in writing a thesis paper with kindness and support. Without her advisement this paper would have made little sense to anyone but myself.

I am also grateful to the efforts of Alex Pezzati, Senior Archivist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Thank you for somehow knowing where everything is and always finding exactly what I was looking for. You made this process so much easier than I could have ever expected.

My deepest thanks are offered to Kathy Zurek-Doule, Curatorial Assistant at the Brooklyn Museum and my internship supervisor. Without her suggestions and endless patience this paper would never have been written. I will always be thankful for the opportunities you have created for me and for answering all my countless questions. You are what every museum professional should aspire to.

This paper epitomizes my experiences over the last two years at Seton Hall University. It encompasses the frustrations I have felt at times as well as my belief in the amazing potential museums have in today's society. I hope this will serve as a reference to the possibilities that all museums should strive for in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Some of the oldest and largest American museums developed out of an interest in different cultures. They laid the basis of scholarly anthropological and archaeological research in the country.¹ At the turn of the nineteenth century, museums such as the Field Museum in Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia presented different cultures through the judicious presentation of objects.² Initially, museums focused on the acquisition of objects produced by “civilized” cultures. Ancient Egypt in particular became central to the acquisition policies of anthropological/archaeological as well as art museums. The Napoleonic Campaign in Egypt from 1798-1801 had inspired an interest in ancient Egypt throughout Europe. It not only led to an Egyptian revival in architecture and design but also to archaeological research. This interest persisted throughout the nineteenth century and eventually spread to the United States.³ By the 1880s a number of American museums, eager to acquire Egyptian objects, began to sponsor archaeological excavations of Egyptian settlements throughout the Nile River Valley, thus igniting an archaeological frenzy that would persist well into the twentieth century. Over the next few decades museums were amassing Egyptian collections from various periods of the country’s history that sometimes comprised thousands of objects. The University of Pennsylvania Museum, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, the Brooklyn Museum, the

¹ Conn, Steven. *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926*. The University of Chicago Press, 1998. pg. 77.

² A large portion of the Field Museum’s anthropological collection was directly acquired from the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893, which was held in Chicago and established the creation of a museum.

³ Curl, James S. *Egyptomania, The Egyptian Revival: a Recurring Theme in the History of Taste*. Manchester University Press, 1994. pgs. 118, 207.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, were the premier American institutions that had the means and financial backing to establish themselves as Egyptological centers. Though some of these museums were established later than others, they were all involved in the archaeological excavation and acquisition of Egyptian artifacts by the early twentieth century. These museums can be still be identified today by the large Egyptian collections they house in their institutions.

The late nineteenth century was also the time when modern archaeology as we know it today was first practiced. However, even as there was significant improvement in the excavation, collection, and study of objects, most archaeological projects remained lacking by today's standards.⁴ Any present-day excavation requires a number of conditions before an archaeologist can even consider uncovering objects. These include background research of the culture in question as well as research of the physical site, mapmaking, land surveys, soil and sediment research, and geomorphology.⁵ With few exceptions, most archaeologists a hundred years ago did not subscribe to such a meticulous methodology. It can be argued that the main drive of an excavation was to uncover as many objects as possible in a given season.⁶ But what became of these objects when they were excavated? Their fate can be linked to who was in control of a specific excavation. While some excavations were sponsored by a single museum, which claimed nearly all the objects that were uncovered, other digs were sponsored by multiple parties, which usually led to a dispersal of objects among a number of museums and institutions.

⁴ Sullivan, P. & Childs, S. *Curating Archaeological Collections: From the Field to the Repository*. AltaMira Press, 2003. pg. 6.

⁵ Stewart, Michael. *Archaeology: Basic Field Methods*. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2002.

⁶ Due to the oppressive summer weather in Egypt, typical archaeological seasons run from late December until March in that region.

Many modern-day museums that house significant Egyptian collections have conducted in-depth research on these artifacts that help us better understand this ancient culture. A number of these research projects are published in collections catalogs, exhibition catalogs, or on the museums' websites and can be easily accessed by the public. Such research is best accomplished when excavations were properly carried out and documented and when the collections were well managed over the years by a diligent museum staff. Unfortunately, such ideal conditions are not always present in museums. Some collections suffer from a longstanding neglect that often has its roots in improper excavation methods and incomplete documentation of the objects found. The museums that received such collections were hampered from the start in their efforts to inventory and research them. This led to their neglect, which further aggravated the problematic nature of these collections.

This thesis will analyze two collections in two museums, the Abydos collection in the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Henri de Morgan collection in the Brooklyn Museum, which will serve as case studies of, respectively, a well-cared for collection and one that was neglected over the years. A comparison of these two collections will demonstrate the benefits that a properly cared for collection can offer. This thesis will also show what strategies remain for museum professionals who must work with a neglected collection.

A comparison of the two Egyptian collections in The Brooklyn Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum will also demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of the complete transferral of all objects from a specific excavation to one museum. From an archaeological standpoint it is easy to imagine that there is great

potential for research in having a complete collection of objects from a single site housed in one institution. But having complete ownership of, and control over, the archaeological finds of a single site can also be viewed as hoarding and monopolizing an aspect of world heritage. By contrast, the dispersal of objects after an excavation not only eases the responsibilities of a museum, but also distributes a part of world heritage across museums and in so doing offers its educational benefits to people in different countries. If done responsibly, so that the dispersal is clearly documented, the research potential of the collection needs not be seriously diminished.

CHAPTER 1

Uncovering the Mistakes: The Problems of a Neglected Collection

Many historians and archaeologists consider Henri Charles-Marie Ferdinand Dieudonné de Morgan (b. 1854 – d. 1909) as one of the pioneers of modern archaeology in Egypt. Along with the discoveries of Sir William Flinders Petrie and his own brother Jacques Jean-Marie de Morgan, Henri's excavations have contributed much to the understanding of Predynastic and Archaic Egypt.

Henri was trained by Jacques, who encouraged his brother's archaeological ambitions by taking him along as his assistant on a number of his own excavations throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.⁷ Having worked in the Nile Valley with Jacques in 1896 and 1897, Henri wished to continue researching Egyptian prehistory. In the winter of 1906-1907, the Brooklyn Museum received a concession to excavate an approximately fifty-five kilometer stretch of the Nile River which ran from Esna in the north and as far south as Edfu. Before the expedition to Upper Egypt began, Henri de Morgan had reached an agreement with the Brooklyn Museum to direct the excavations that were to be conducted under this concession. Unlike the longstanding relationship that W.F. Petrie had with the University of Pennsylvania Museum, as discussed in Chapter Two, Henri de Morgan's relationship with the Brooklyn Museum was comparatively brief. Yet the nature of his work and discoveries proved to be significant for both Morgan and the Brooklyn Museum.

⁷ Needler, Winifred. *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in The Brooklyn Museum*. The Brooklyn Museum, 1984.

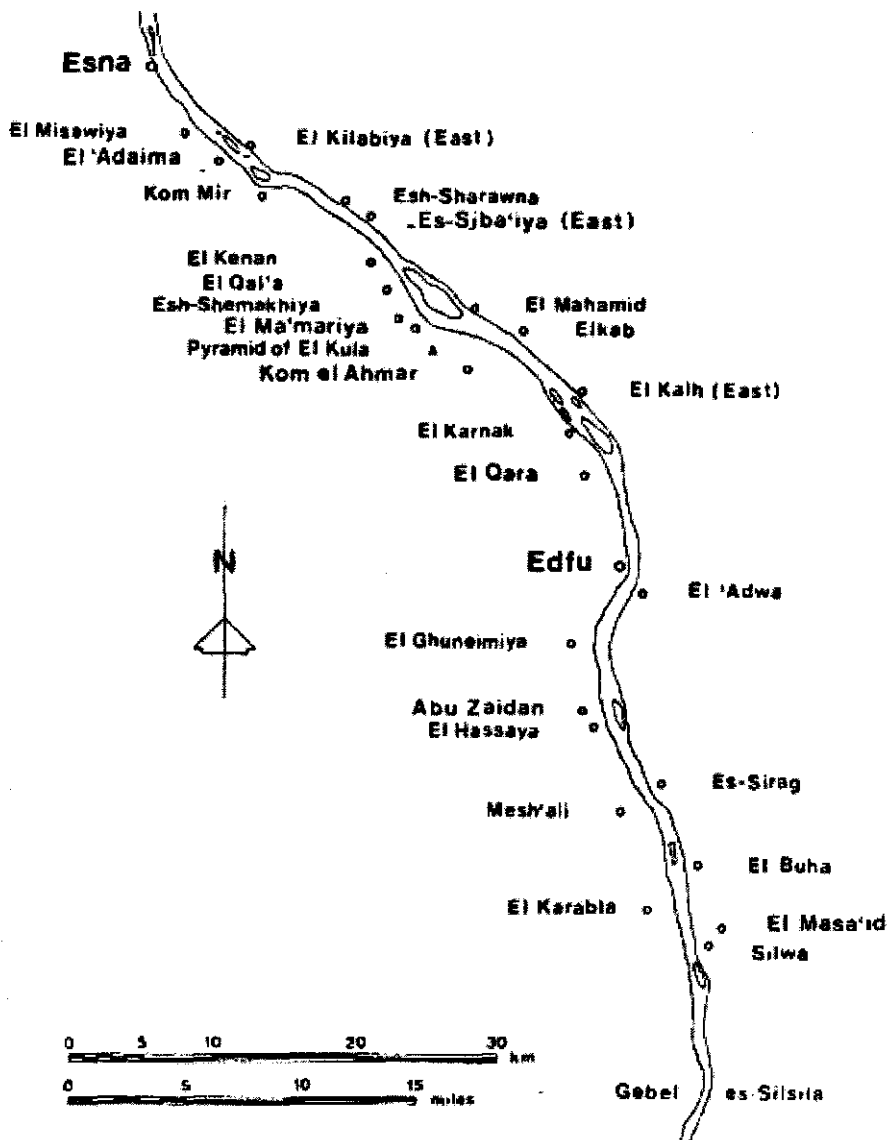


Figure 1.1
Map of Brooklyn Museum's Concession, Nile River Valley

In all, Morgan led two expeditions for the Brooklyn Museum during the winters of 1906-07 and 1907-08. He had planned to excavate for a third season but unexpectedly passed away from a cerebral hemorrhage in November 1909. His discoveries during the two seasons were “chiefly of prehistoric material and represent one of the earliest excavations of prehistoric sites ever made in Egypt.”⁸ Morgan’s first season in Upper

⁸ Federn, Walter. *Report to the Director and the Trustees of the Brooklyn Museum*. September 27, 1945. Brooklyn Museum Archives.

Egypt included excavations in and around Abu Zaidan, El 'Adaima, El Qara, and El Ma'mariya (Figure 1.1). The objects that were uncovered were shipped to the Brooklyn Museum after the season concluded. Unfortunately, documentation for this collection (aside from the current accession and object cards) either no longer exists or cannot be located by the Brooklyn Museum, making research of the objects an incredibly difficult task. The lack of records has a serious impact on the usefulness of this collection for museum professionals and academics, as will be discussed below.

Henri de Morgan's second season lasted from December 1907 through February 1908 and focused on the sites of the previous season, as well as others, such as Kom el Ahmar and El Masa'id. He even ventured further south to Gebel Es-Silsile (Figure 1.1).⁹ By the end of the expedition seven sites had been explored, with an eye of finding burials as well as the settlements themselves. Morgan once again made numerous discoveries, some more impressive than others, and also purchased a number of objects from locals on behalf of the Brooklyn Museum.¹⁰ Upon conclusion of the season all objects were shipped to the Brooklyn Museum (with the exception of a number of duplicate stone and pottery fragments which were given to the Musée des Antiquités Nationales in St. Germain-en-Laye, France). This dramatically increased the size of the Brooklyn Museum's Egyptian Collection, which began collecting objects in 1902. The museum was now in possession of a Predynastic Egyptian collection that included, but was not limited to, pottery, spearheads and arrowheads, mace heads, knives, and animal mummies.

⁹ Needler. Pg. 49.

¹⁰ Federn, Walter. *Report to the Director and the Trustees of the Brooklyn Museum*. September 27, 1945. Brooklyn Museum Archives.

The Inadequate Standards of the Brooklyn Museum

The unexpected death of Morgan at the end of 1909 prevented him from adequately publishing his findings and results. This has had a disastrous impact on the handling of the 1909 collection and its documentation for the past one hundred years. Though Morgan was one of the first to practice modern, scientific archaeology, by today's standards he lacked precise and structured methods in his excavations. He dug at multiple sites in a short period of time, purchased objects with uncertain provenance, and improperly recorded a number of objects. Though this was common practice in the early days of modern archaeology, Henri's inadequate methods must nevertheless be considered to gain a full understanding of the problems that beset the Morgan collection at the Brooklyn Museum. According to Winifred Needler, an expert on the collection, these problems are especially acute when it comes to the objects found in the settlements:

Because it ignored stratification, exact location, osteological and botanical evidence and traces of dwellings, Henri de Morgan's excavation of settlements at El 'Adaima, Kom el Ahmar and El Qara seems today to have been conducted even less adequately than that of his cemeteries.¹¹

Without proper documentation for the De Morgan collection, it is easy to see how the Brooklyn Museum could have let objects and paperwork fall through the cracks, especially at a time when registration and object provenance were not considered as vital as it is in today's institutions. The Brooklyn Museum was fortunate enough to have Henri's general report on his second season's findings, which is published in Winifred Needler's *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in the Brooklyn Museum*, as well as a "descriptive list" from the 1909 season that was written in Henri de Morgan's own

¹¹ Needler. Pg. 69

hand.¹² This list includes brief object descriptions, occasional references to other archaeologists' findings such as Petrie and James Quibell, rudimentary illustrations of some of the objects, and a basic numbering system that marks the objects from 1-854. The objects were also organized by material and type of object. The list below gives a breakdown of how the collection was organized by Morgan.

Original Object Designation for 1909 Collection: Henri de Morgan¹³			
Stone Vases	1-100	Black Top Red Pottery	540-574
Stone Implements	101-114	Polished Red Pottery	575-598
Stone Cylinders	115-117	Wavy-Handled Vases	599-618
Flint Implements	118-156	Large Clay Vessels	619-633
Palettes & Fetiches	157-196	Clay Plates, Dishes	634-643
Stone Maces	197-207	Pottery Urns	644-647
Spear & Arrowheads	208-290	Pottery Strainers	648-657
Sundry Small Stone Pieces	291-327	Painted Vases	658-724
Bronze & Copper Implements	328-342	Storage Pots	725-800
Painted Pottery Vases	400-439	Historic Period Pieces	801-814
White Painted Pottery	440-479	Jewelry & etc.	815-854
Pottery Bowls, Dishes	480-539		

This list also includes a significant number of objects that were purchased by Morgan through local connections, but that were mostly of unknown provenance. Henri would write in his notes that a purchased object was “believed to be from Abou Zedan” or some other site. Most of these objects have little scholarly value since their provenance can never be established with certainty. Uninterested in the scientific and ethical circumstances under which De Morgan had obtained them, the Brooklyn Museum thus purchased a number of objects that could at best provide a problematic understanding of Predynastic Egypt.

¹² This list was hand-typed by the Registrar's Office in 1974. The descriptions were based on Henri de Morgan's original words, not from a reexamination of the objects.

¹³ Gathered from Henri de Morgan's original field notes, Brooklyn Museum. There is a number vacancy from 343 – 399. It is unclear why Morgan left these numbers undesignated.

The objects sent by Morgan to the Brooklyn Museum arrived in three different shipments; the first two were received on April 15 and July 8, 1908¹⁴ while the last arrived on July 30, 1909. The museum's method of numbering objects at that time was to provide a specific number or code for each donor or contributor to the Museum's collection. Henri de Morgan's 1909 collection was assigned the number 11186, making the first object accessioned in the 1909 Henri de Morgan collection 11186.1. Unfortunately, no documentation exists to tell us why the collection was given that specific number. Although the objects came in different shipments, the numbering correlated to Morgan's original field numbers for the objects. The objects were not measured again or given more thorough descriptions upon their arrival to the Museum. The primary goal of the Brooklyn Museum, apparently, was to amass as large an Egyptian collection as possible in the shortest possible time, putting aside considerations of the usefulness of these objects for research or teaching.

The Brooklyn Museum should not, however, be singled out for its cavalier attitude towards archaeological collections. It was common practice for early American anthropological and archaeological museums to "hoard" Egyptian objects, even if they were incapable of properly caring for them once they entered their institutions. Though in principle, an anthropological or archaeological collection is more valuable as it is more complete, the example of the De Morgan collection in the Brooklyn Museum demonstrates that the acquisition of so many objects all at once, especially if they are not well documented to begin with will almost certainly lead to poor care and handling of the objects, which will severely diminish their scientific value.

¹⁴ This year is typed in the Registrar's copy of the "Descriptive List." Needler writes that the objects arrived in 1909. While it is possible that shipments could have arrived in April 1908, these dates remain in question.

For the next few decades, the Morgan collection remained in the Brooklyn Museum, without being properly researched or catalogued. There is reference to the 1909 collection being placed on display soon after its arrival, along with the 1907 objects,¹⁵ but all records of the exhibit, including object labels, were lost or destroyed.¹⁶ In 1912, Professor W.H. Goodyear, who was curator of the Department of Fine Arts, published a rather generalized article on Henri de Morgan's findings.¹⁷ While he placed emphasis on the importance of Morgan's discoveries for an understanding of Predynastic Egypt, neither he, nor anyone else in the museum, made an effort to create a catalogue for the objects to help ensure that the collection remained whole for future study or examination.

At some point before 1958 the objects were renumbered in light of a revised accessioning procedure. In the new numbering system, the first number signified the year in which an object was accessioned and a second number showed in what order it came into the department. Not only did these numbers fail to match the museum's previous accession numbers or Morgan's original numbering, they were also particular to a specific department and not the whole museum. This means that while the Egyptian department could have an object numbered 09.82 (the 82nd object accessioned in 1909) the Decorative Arts department could have another object with that same number. Current records also show that 238 objects from the 1909 collection no longer have this revised accession number as an alternate while the remaining objects' accession files still preserve them. It may be that this number was simply dropped out since it was no longer

¹⁵ Brooklyn Museum 1909 Annual Report. Brooklyn Museum Archives.

¹⁶ While there is no documentation that details an exhibit that displayed the entire Morgan collection, a significant number of objects from the 1907 and 1909 acquisitions have been continuously exhibited in the Museum's permanent Egyptian collection.

¹⁷ Brooklyn Museum Quarterly, Volume I. Brooklyn Museum Library, ARL Reading Room.

in use, but without any records from that time it is improbable to know for sure. It is easy to see the confusion that this new numbering system could have created as unrelated objects within the museum could have had identical numbers, possibly contributing to the improper care of a number of objects. As discussed below, this system would eventually be replaced.

Research Provides Answers

The available documentation does not again mention Morgan's 1909 collection until May 1944. The Brooklyn's Board of Trustees approved to have the collection finally researched by an external consultant, Dr. Walter Federn, thirty-five years after the objects were purchased.¹⁸ It is uncertain why the museum hired Federn to research the Morgan collection, but it can be assumed, given the amount of time it took Federn to complete this task, that no one on the museum's staff had the time to undertake this project. By September 27, 1945, Dr. Federn had completed his research of the collection and submitted his condition report to the Trustees. During the nearly two-year project, he was able to uncover a number of problems with the collection.¹⁹ Foremost among them was that a significant number of objects were lost, discarded or given away as duplicates.²⁰ However, it was uncertain which specific objects were no longer in the museum's possession. Other issues that arose were, according to Federn, that "for nearly 150 pieces...no individual records existed, except for the number written in ink on the

¹⁸ May 2, 1944 Memorandum, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

¹⁹ The May 2, 1944 memo states that Dr. Federn had begun researching the collection over a year earlier, in December 1943.

²⁰ According to Federn's report, 96 pieces were given to St. Gregory's College in Shawnee, Oklahoma, approximately 90 pieces are at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Oriental Museum in San Jose, California, and "a few" are at the Queens Children's Museum.

piece itself, often hard to discern, and the initials of the site it came from.”²¹ Federn also makes mention of a previous attempt to catalogue the collection that was “incomplete,” “full of inaccuracies,” and “unreliable.” This failed attempt had attributed objects to the Morgan collection that were never a part of it. Federn removed these objects, identifying their original source, except in two cases. Lastly, Henri de Morgan’s original measurements were highly inaccurate as were the dates for many of his objects. Dr. Federn had every object that could be attributed to the 1909 excavations measured again (in centimeters, as opposed to Morgan’s inches) and properly dated the objects to their appropriate periods.

The efforts of Walter Federn probably saved the collection from further neglect and mishandling. His cataloguing allowed the Brooklyn Museum to designate new accession numbers to the collection. The Museum, by then, had adopted the tripartite numbering system (year accessioned/lot/object within lot) and in 1958 the Registrar’s Office assigned the Henri de Morgan 1909 collection with the accession number 09.889.²² Unlike the previous accession numbers, these numbers parallel the two previous numbering systems (Morgan’s excavation numbers and the museum’s original accession numbers). Thus, the 350th object in Morgan’s list had been assigned 09.889.350 (as of now the objects are numbered from 09.889.1 – 09.889.855).

The final twist in the fate of the 1909 collection occurred in December 1959. Soon after the cataloguing project had been completed, the Brooklyn Museum sold a number of objects through their Museum Gallery Shop. It was then a common practice for the Museum to sell deaccessioned objects to the public and even the Museum’s

²¹ Federn, Walter. *Report to the Director and the Trustees of the Brooklyn Museum*. September 27, 1945. Brooklyn Museum Archives.

²² The 1907 collection was assigned the accession number 07.447, presumably around the same time.

Trustees.²³ The Egyptian department's current accession and object cards establish that at least fifteen objects from the Morgan collection were sold in December 1959. Though it is known which objects were sold, there is no trace of who bought the objects or where they went. As of today, one hundred years after the purchase of the collection, a minimum of thirty-four objects²⁴ are no longer part of the collection. This number does not include the sixty-four accession numbers that are either vacant or were never included in the original report. There are also a number of objects in the Museum's storage that cannot be attributed to any specific collection or object. While a few of these objects have been linked to the 1909 collection over the past few years, it is likely that there are still a number of these undesignated objects that may belong to this collection as well.

The poor care of this collection creates a difficult obstacle not only for the current museum professionals at the Brooklyn Museum, who must make sense of the collection's checkered past while maintaining their other responsibilities, but also for those individuals who utilize this collection as a research tool. Though it is likely that most of the objects that were lost were simple, unspectacular pieces of pottery, something of integral importance is lost when a collection is not kept whole. All pieces, no matter their level of quality or magnificence, help us piece together the past of the cultures we are trying to understand. Gaps in a collection will ultimately lead to gaps in one's research. It is only reasonable then to ask if a collection like the Morgan collection in the Brooklyn Museum has the capacity to provide meaningful research to those interested in the subject. That question was answered in the 1980s by the research of Winidfred Needler.

²³ Carey, Ted. *Bringing Museum Ethics into Focus*. ARTnews, April, 1978. Reprinted in *Law, Ethics, and the Visual Arts*, by Merryman, Elsen, Urice. Kluwer Law International BV, 2007.

²⁴ These thirty-four objects have some sort of mention or proof that they are no longer in the Brooklyn Museum.

Winifred Needler: *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in the Brooklyn Museum*

The most significant research conducted on the objects excavated by Henri de Morgan was done in 1984 by Winifred Needler. The focus of Needler's research was the relatively unknown periods of Predynastic and Archaic Egypt. The Brooklyn Museum's Egyptian collection, particularly Henri de Morgan's finds, made up the basis of her studies. It should first be noted that Needler's research and publication of her work would not have been possible without Walter Federn's contributions in the 1940's. She references him not only in the secondary title of her publication²⁵ but multiple times throughout her study. At the time of Needler's publication in 1984 nearly forty years had passed since Federn completed his own work, and while naturally more information was discovered and understood during that time Needler admits that Federn's cataloguing "seldom required revision."²⁶ This only provides further proof to the importance of Walter Federn's work as a foundation for later research.

Needler was very well aware of the difficulties that presented themselves in working with this collection:

After ancient and modern plundering, after the due removal of certain "unique" objects to Cairo and of some archaeological material to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and after mishaps in transit and various transfers and disposals since reaching Brooklyn, the finds from the Morgan excavations that have survived down to the present in The Brooklyn Museum represent only a small incalculable percentage of the funerary deposits. The omission from the present publication of common objects identified simply as Morgan material, without clearly indicated site provenance, reduces this percentage still further.²⁷

²⁵ "With a reexamination of Henri de Morgan's excavations based on the material in The Brooklyn Museum initially studied by *Walter Federn* and a special zoological contribution on the ivory-handled knife from Abu Zaidan by *C.S. Churcher*."

²⁶ Needler, pg. 68.

²⁷ Needler, pg. 68.

Added to the shortcomings listed by Needler is the fact that very little written information remains from the 1906-1907 excavations. While Henri de Morgan did visit the museum in order to work with Professor Goodyear, it is assumed that the meetings mainly took the form of informal verbal presentations and notations. Needler does use a large number of 1907 objects in her study but, lacking any documentation for these objects, relies solely on the physical aspects of the artifacts. Even so, Needler still uses approximately the same number of objects from the 1907 excavation in her study of the various settlements and periods as she did for the 1909 collection.

This means that, even with the mishandling of the objects from the 1906-07 excavations and the lack of supporting documentation, they still serve a valuable purpose. Ironically, the outmoded archaeological methods of Morgan (and others in years past) hold a blessing in disguise. As stated above, Morgan directed the excavation of seven different settlements in a matter of three months – a statistic that is unfathomable in modern archaeology. Yet, this dispersal of sites created a unique distribution of objects that were examples of various Naqada settlements and periods.²⁸ Specifically, Needler discusses how the objects uncovered by Morgan defend the proposition that the primary region of the Naqada culture reached further south than previously thought - to the region of Hierakonpolis - proving that this settlement achieved significant development during Naqada I. Morgan's discoveries also provide examples and clues as to how people in Predynastic and Archaic Egypt functioned and lived on a daily basis during a time where relatively little was known. Furthermore, the objects uncovered in the multiple burial

²⁸ Naqada refers to the Egyptian Predynastic culture; Naqada I (about 4400-3600 BCE), Naqada II (about 3600-3200 BCE), and Naqada III (about 3200-3000 BCE). This chronology was first introduced by Werner Kaiser in 1957.

sites helped create a common association of burial rites and materials throughout the Nile region.

It is apparent that this collection, as incomplete as it may be due to inadequate archaeological methods and improper museum care, still plays a vital part in furthering our understanding of Egyptian culture. Needler's thirteen-year long research into the Brooklyn Museum's Predynastic and Archaic objects proves that, despite their incomplete archaeological context and excavation information, these artifacts still allow scholars to gain meaningful information and insights into a culture that existed over three thousand years ago.

CHAPTER 2

Maintaining Diligence: The University of Pennsylvania Museum and Excavations at Abydos

Of the many American institutions devoted to Egyptological study, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (referred to in this chapter as the UPenn Museum) was one of the first.²⁹ The earliest and most significant figure to represent the UPenn Museum in Egypt was Sara Yorke Stevenson (figure 2.1), who became curator of the Egyptian and Mediterranean Section in 1890. Her tireless work and actions helped shape the Museum as a primary venue of Egyptian artifacts. Though not a practicing archaeologist, Stevenson was passionate about the study of Egyptian culture and promoted the Museum's focus on Egypt as early as 1898, when she visited the country. Stevenson met and spoke with Egyptian officials in order to establish a relationship between her institution and the

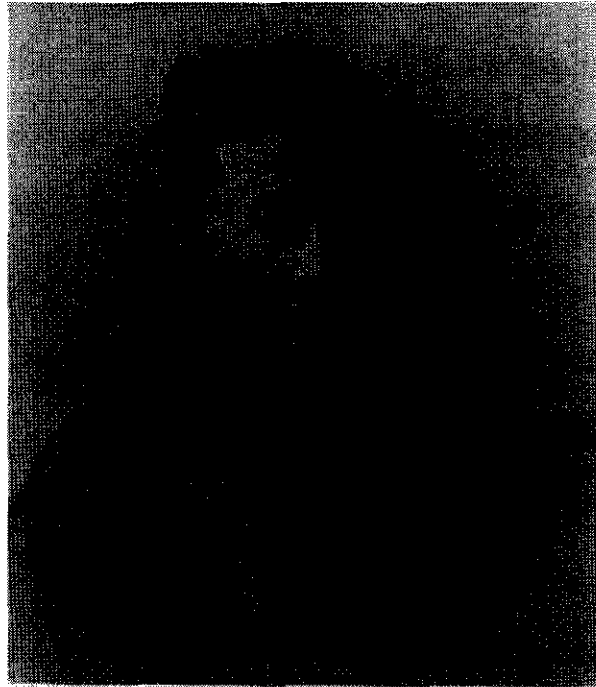


Figure 2.1
Sara Yorke Stevenson

²⁹ The UPenn Museum was founded in 1887 and was originally called the Free Museum of Science and Art.

Egyptian government, as well as gain permission to commission an archaeologist who would be hired to excavate for the UPenn Museum.³⁰ The funding for such a commission was granted by the American Exploration Fund, an organization consisting of wealthy men and women whose main purpose was to provide funding that would allow the UPenn Museum to establish its own excavations in Egypt.³¹

This ultimate goal was never accomplished despite Stevenson's persuasive and impassioned attempts to convince the proper individuals. Neither Stevenson nor the American Exploration Fund could find a sufficiently capable and devoted archaeologist to lead the excavations for the UPenn Museum.³² Fortunately, Stevenson had a positive relationship with the Egypt Exploration Fund (E.E.F.)³³, the British-created organization which oversaw all archaeological work conducted by England. One of the archaeologists who was working on behalf of the E.E.F., among a notable list of colleagues, was William Flinders Petrie.

Sir W.F. Petrie (figure 2.2) was what many consider the polar opposite of Henri de Morgan in terms of archaeological method, and this is perhaps why he is considered the

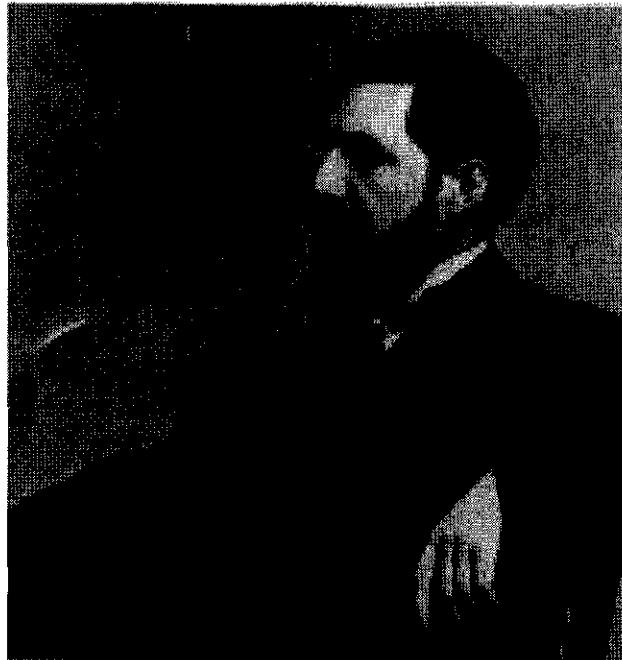


Figure 2.2
William Flinders Petrie

³⁰ Egypt was governed by a British consul-general at the time, making any archaeological affairs a British matter.

³¹ Stevenson was also a member of this organization.

³² *Expedition Magazine*. University of Pennsylvania. Winter, 1979. pg. 15.

³³ The E.E.F. is now known as the Egypt Exploration Society.

father of modern archaeology. Petrie (b. 1853 – d. 1942) came from a family of surveyors and was taught by his father how to accurately survey geographic areas.³⁴ This training proved valuable in his archaeological career, as it taught him to take a systematic and meticulous approach to excavating. Unlike the destructive shoveling techniques that were used by earlier archaeologists, Petrie sought the slow removal of earth in order to refrain from destroying any potentially valuable information and to find the objects as they originally were laid out.³⁵ For Petrie, the layout of a settlement or a cemetery was just as important as the objects that were discovered. The detailed sketches that can be found in a number of his journals and logs attest to his careful and deliberate method. . Because of his novel scientific approach to archaeology Petrie had the opportunity to excavate a number of locations, including Stonehenge, Giza, Tanis, Fayum, and sites in Palestine. Max Müller, himself an archaeologist, highlighted Petrie’s devotion to archaeology, which was known and respected by many, writing that “even the Egyptians speak of his [Petrie’s] frugality and his ability to endure the roughest life with wonder and awe.”³⁶ Living up to his role as the father of modern archaeology Petrie trained a number of successful archaeologists such as James Quibell and Howard Carter.

Petrie’s Excavations in Abydos

By 1900 the UPenn Museum had already acquired a number of objects through the E.E.F. that were excavated by Petrie from various sites. It was at this time that Petrie began his excavations in Abydos, a settlement located six miles west of the Nile River that was the major center for the cult of Osiris, god of the dead (Figure 2.3). Though the

³⁴ Petrie’s grandfather, Captain Matthew Flinders, was surveyor of the Australian coastline.

³⁵ Petrie, W.F. *Seventy Years of Archaeology*. Greenwood Press, 1969 (reprint).

³⁶ Letter from Max Müller to Sara Yorke Stevenson. March 21, 1901. UPenn Museum Archives.

From the very beginning the objects discovered by Petrie were separated by the E.E.F., instantly making it an incomplete collection. As discussed in Chapter One, though valuable information can still be extracted from the individual objects, there is still that “bigger picture” which is lost when the objects excavated from a single cemetery or settlement do not remain together.

Another unfortunate consequence of having a secondary stake in the excavations at Abydos is that the UPenn Museum was unable to obtain Petrie’s field notes after each season, though they do have limited copies of his notoriously indecipherable handwritten notes from Abydos and other sites throughout Egypt. As a result the curators of the UPenn Museum were unable to pair the objects with Petrie’s original descriptions or notes, making the process of cataloguing the large entry of objects into the Museum extremely difficult. Despite these troubling circumstances, the scholarly results of the excavations at Abydos far surpassed those of the excavations of Henri de Morgan and this was due at once to Petrie and the E.E.F. and to the curators of the UPenn Museum.

Benefiting From Cooperation and Diligence

The success of the Abydos excavations began with W.F. Petrie. Though he worked at a faster pace than he intended due to agricultural development and the threat of looting, Petrie’s meticulous excavation procedure was admirable. Although all his field notes became property of the E.E.F. the UPenn Museum does have an electronic copy of Petrie’s field notebook from the 1900 season at Abydos. Though it is difficult to read because of his terrible handwriting, it is a testimony to Petrie’s attention to detail in the

sections that can actually be deciphered.³⁹ Admittedly, these notes do little to help the Museum in cataloguing the collection, but it must be remembered that these notes were not created as a museum reference, but rather as a journal for the archaeologist's use. What can be seen is a number of sketches that depict various bowls and vases along with their measurements, the location of objects within a burial site, temple rooms with the objects in situ, and actual geographic layouts of entire cemeteries.⁴⁰

Along with the journal notes are 1,005 tomb cards that were filled out by Petrie and give us an idea of the type of archaeologist that he was. These cards of which the UPenn Museum owns scanned copies, depict what objects each tomb contained (pottery, stone, metal, amulets, beads, etc.), as well as information that explained whether the remains were disturbed, what direction the head and face pointed to, type of clothing, the sex of the remains, chamber type and chamber measurements. Some cards also include illustrations of the burials. It should be noted that not all the sections were filled out on every card and there is no year marked on the cards, but the importance of these materials cannot be ignored. This contextual information is something museums and researchers rarely get the opportunity to study, particularly with objects that were excavated over a century ago. Petrie's detailed documentation of his excavations created an organizational standard that allowed the E.E.F. to divide the objects he had excavated in groups which were sent to a number of museums throughout the world. For such a division to be successfully accomplished, the kind of careful documentation that was part of Petrie's method was a sine-qua-non.

³⁹ A number of the pages show various calculations that possibly can be attributed to payment for workers rather than any surveying analysis. Nevertheless, these pages show Petrie's thoroughness as director of excavations.

⁴⁰ Petrie, W.F. *Field Notebooks: Abydos 1st Year*. UPenn Museum Archives (electronic file).

Acknowledgment must also be given to the E.E.F., which commissioned Petrie to excavate a single site for four seasons. Compared to Henri de Morgan's excavations in multiple locations, each for just a single season, Petrie's focus on only Abydos for four years seems like a significant improvement that ensures a detailed and comprehensive analysis of a site. The presence of a single scholar working at one site for a number of seasons suggests that as early as the beginning of the twentieth century there was a realization of the importance of meticulous and exhaustive archaeological research for a complete understanding of a specific location and the lifestyles of its people.

The positive relationship between Stevenson and Petrie must also be stressed. Their frequent correspondence and mutual respect allowed each person to express any concerns that may have arisen over the years. Stevenson often requested specific objects that were not in the Museum's collection and would help to fill any gaps that existed. This relationship kept the UPenn Museum in good standing with the E.E.F. and allowed an on-going connection between the two for a number of years, allowing the acquisition of many objects throughout Egypt and from various periods in history.

Thinking Ahead: The Successes of the University of Pennsylvania Museum

While the excavation at Abydos, at the turn of the twentieth century, was a great accomplishment in terms of modern archaeology, the most impressive aspect of the history of the Abydos collection is the care that was given to the objects by the staff of the UPenn Museum. With the arrival of the very first object from Abydos, records were maintained that tracked their presence within the Museum. The original Museum accession ledgers that documented the acquisition of every Egyptian object still exist and

remain accessible as a source of reference. For each object that arrived in the museum, specific information was entered into the ledgers, which were organized chronologically, by the date an object was excavated. While not much information was provided due to the large quantity of objects that were entering the UPenn Museum, the type of information that could be recorded in the ledgers were: current number assigned by the museum, the original number assigned by Petrie at Abydos, the name of object and material, tomb of..., locality, date, measurements, remarks, when collected, received, and donor. Locating all the objects from Abydos that were accessioned by the Museum during the four seasons that Petrie excavated there, the ledgers show that 1,240 objects were accessioned just from that one site.⁴¹ The list below shows the original numbers that were assigned to the objects based on the order they were accessioned.

Accession Numbers of Objects Excavated from Abydos (1900-1904)⁴²			
1436-2177	2775	3014-3026	3493-3494
2475-2489	2820-2975	3029-3033	3496-3497
2491-2508	2984	3035-3070	3501
2540-2760	3010-3012	3472-3491	3503-3506

These numbers became the objects' permanent accession numbers and remained so over the years. In the 1930s the UPenn Museum undertook a recataloguing of the objects within their possession. Because of the large amount of objects that the Museum acquired in the first few decades of its existence, a number of objects had remained uncatalogued. The recataloguing of all the objects housed within the Museum was coupled with the creation of a new numbering system for newly acquired objects. Any new objects from the time of this undertaking would be given a tripartite number that was

⁴¹ Pennsylvania University Museum Egyptian Section "E S" Register, Vol. I. UPenn Museum Archives.

⁴² Only six of these objects have been deaccessioned over the years. This is documented in the accession ledgers, giving the year the object was deaccessioned and where the object was sent.

formatted in the year/lot/object within lot style that was utilized by the Brooklyn Museum in the 1950's.⁴³ But instead of giving a new number to the older objects, the UPenn Museum opted to keep the old numbers that were originally assigned to them. The only addition was a prefix that marked the department to which the object belonged. Objects within the Egyptian department that were accessioned before the 1930s were designated with an "E" before their numbers. Thus, the first object that was excavated by Petrie from Abydos and accessioned by the UPenn Museum now has the number E1436. The fact that these objects have held the same number for over a hundred years is incredibly beneficial in tracing their history or location within the Museum and contrasts sharply with the practice of the Brooklyn Museum, which has assigned multiple numbers to each of its Henri de Morgan objects, leading to much confusion.

The UPenn Museum's impressive recordkeeping during its earliest days offers a great advantage for the study of its objects. In regards to Petrie's excavations in Abydos, the Museum did not initially have access to the archaeologist's full notes of his four seasons. Yet any information that came into their possession was properly recorded and preserved. It was mentioned earlier that the Egyptian Exploration Fund sent a number of objects to various locations throughout the world. This is only known because the UPenn Museum made note of every location that received objects from the Fund and in which year. A researcher interested in the other artifacts found during Petrie's excavations has as the very least a distribution list that allows inquiries to be made to other institutions. The more information that is provided, the more useful information a scholar is able to uncover to help him understand not just the individual objects in the collection, but the entire culture or settlement it represents.

⁴³ See Chapter I.

This also brings us back to the question whether it is preferable to own a complete collection which provides great opportunities for archaeological study but runs the risk of neglect and improper care, or to own a portion of a collection and be able to maintain these objects at a higher standard. Arguments can be made on both sides of the question but the two case studies here discussed seem to suggest that the second option is the best.

Diligence Paid Off: *Abydos in Egypt and the University Museum 1898 – 1969*

The UPenn Museum's ability to successfully maintain the objects as well as the vast amount of documentation that relates to them has allowed the staff certain opportunities that would otherwise not be available, the primary of which is the ability to thoroughly disseminate knowledge of this collection to the public, which is arguably a museum's main mission. Interest in Abydos was not confined to the years during which Petrie was directing excavations. The Museum in fact continued to acquire objects from Abydos for a number of years, eventually teaming up with Yale University to create the *Abydos: The University Museum – Yale University Expedition*. The excavations took place during the winter seasons of 1968-1969 and resumed again in 1977. The on-going scholarly interest that the UPenn Museum has shown for Abydos is rare among museums. While it has been commonplace over the last few decades for institutions to take part in excavations at specific sites, how many can claim to have done so for over a century?

UPenn Museum's continued involvement with Abydos along with its careful preservation of early documentation pertaining to excavations there allowed the Egyptian Department to conceptualize an exhibit that highlighted the significance of Abydos in ancient Egypt as well as the Museum's participation in uncovering its past. The exhibit,

titled *Abydos in Egypt and the University Museum 1898 – 1969*, was open to the public from February 13th through March 26th 1970.⁴⁴ When looking through the paperwork pertaining to this exhibit one cannot help but be impressed by the thoroughness with which the Museum’s curators were able to research the history of Abydos and the UPenn Museum’s own relationship to the site.

The overarching themes in this exhibit were first, to show “the significance of Abydos to the ancient Egyptians; specifically its links with the god Osiris and his myths, with the royal funerary cult, and with the funerary beliefs and customs of Egyptians,” and secondly to emphasize “the discovery of this significance by modern scholarship and excavation, with P-Y Expedition being treated as the latest phase of this process.”⁴⁵ In line with these themes, the exhibit began with introductory material that offered a brief summary of the site’s significance as well as the history of excavations there. The exhibit continued by educating the visitor on the actual discovery of Abydos, which included classical references to the site, early excavations that were more of a destructive nature, and the influence of Petrie’s work there, which marked the beginning of scientific excavation at Abydos. The progression of the exhibition was chronological, beginning with Abydos in the First Dynasty, moving on to the myth of Osiris and Abydos as his cult center, the settlement’s development throughout the Middle Kingdom, XVIII Dynasty, XIX Dynasty, Post-XIX Dynasty, and ending with the Christian influence at Abydos.

The goal of *Abydos in Egypt and the Pennsylvania Museum*, as the previous director of the UPenn Museum Dr. Froelich Rainey stated, went beyond the display of ancient Egyptian objects:

⁴⁴ *Abydos in Egypt and the University Museum*. Press Release, February 1, 1970. UPenn Museum Archives.

⁴⁵ Abydos Exhibition Outline. 1970. UPenn Museum Archives.

The material displayed in this exhibition is extraordinarily rich in historical and, in some cases, aesthetic, interest. Using it, we are attempting to present to the public a coherent account of the chief developments in the history of a major Egyptian site, as well as to document our own recent activity there.⁴⁶

The objects displayed in this exhibit consisted of recently excavated pieces found in Abydos by the P-Y Expedition as well as objects that were already in the Museum's collection for a number of years. Making the connections between these objects could not have been possible without the decades-long effort of the museum's curators to keep a complete record of documents and correspondence relating to Abydos. Without this documentation, it would have been a challenge to fully understand Petrie's significance at the site while connecting his own work to more contemporary finds.

Recalling the Brooklyn Museum's situation in terms of the Henri de Morgan collection, it is apparent there are certain limitations to the use of these objects. The objects themselves still offer significant opportunities for research, but imagine the potential that is lost because of the setbacks that have occurred over the years. How can the Brooklyn Museum create an exhibit that uses objects from Henri de Morgan's excavations to educate the general public? The simple answer is that they cannot, at least not in the meticulous way that the UPenn Museum organized its Abydos exhibition.⁴⁷ Nearly from the start the UPenn Museum believed in a scholarly approach to the acquisition of objects, particularly from Egypt. While they too found themselves taking in more objects than they were prepared to care for, figures such as Sara Yorke

⁴⁶ *Abydos in Egypt and the University Museum*. Press Release, February 1, 1970. pg. 4-5. UPenn Museum Archives.

⁴⁷ Chapter Three outlines how the Henri de Morgan collection can still be exhibited, as long as a different approach is taken in doing so.

Stevenson helped position the UPenn Museum as an institution that did not just see itself as a repository of objects, but a center for academic advancement and research.

CHAPTER 3

Current and Future Museum Professionals: What Can Be Done?

For the most part the care of Egyptian collections in America is taken very seriously, particularly with the growing scrutiny of institutions possessing other cultures' tangible histories. Yet we must be aware that exceptions exist. Little is known about them because museums generally do not want to make the disorganization and neglect of previous years become public knowledge. While it may seem that a museum has thoroughly maintained its collections throughout the years, we cannot be completely certain that this is true.

In chapters 1 and 2, I have presented two case studies that epitomize differing modes of excavation, acquisition, and collections management. While there are other museums that have partnered in Egyptian excavations and possess equally old or even slightly older collections, the Brooklyn Museum and the UPenn Museum are good comparative case studies because of their similarities. Both were acquiring objects from the same region of Egypt during approximately the same time period, and it can be argued that the Egyptian collection of each museum is at the heart of its institution. But the Brooklyn Museum and the UPenn Museum represent contrasting cases in the history of museum management. The lessons that can be learned from their past actions can help museum professionals today understand the importance of preserving objects as well as the documentation that supplements them. The benefits that are reaped when a museum has diligently documented and preserved a collection have been detailed in the previous chapters. It has also been highlighted that, no matter how disorganized archaeological collections may be, the objects that were collected decades ago remain useful as research

and educational tools though objects that are better documented prove to have greater benefits for a museum. The responsibility of maintaining these collections and maximizing their potential now lies with current and future museum professionals.

Advantages of Diligent Practices: UPenn Museum

The UPenn Museum serves as an example of a management system in which explicit responsibilities are assigned to departments within a museum. The UPenn's registrarial department houses all documentation or accession records for objects that were acquired after 1981. All acquisitions and accession documentation that was created by the curatorial departments prior to 1981 can be located in the Museum's archives. In researching Petrie's excavations at Abydos all information that was needed was found within that one department instead of being dispersed throughout the institution. Such a precise division of the records creates an impressive level of efficiency that is not only helpful to the Museum staff but to academic researchers and the public in general, producing collections that are easily accessible to those who offer interest. It took only a few visits to the UPenn archives to locate all the necessary documentation required for my research. Furthermore, the UPenn's archivist knew precisely what information was available in the archives and where other documentation would have been located. The responsibility of knowing the location of the UPenn Museum's documentation was given to one individual, along with his assistants, and it is his primary task to keep the process of locating this information as efficient as possible.

This commitment to organization also gives the UPenn Museum the reputation as a highly organized institution that sees the care of these objects, which are held in public

trust, as one of its highest priorities. The positive perception that this creates can bring in more potential donors, public and private funding, higher membership and ensure that the museum remains accredited with the American Association of Museums; factors that support the notion of a museum acting as a permanent establishment and a responsible public institution.

Dealing with Years of Neglect: The Brooklyn Museum

The Brooklyn Museum finds itself in quite a different situation. The origins of the problems of its Egyptian collection can be traced, in large part, to the amount of objects the museum accepted at once. Focused on amassing as impressive a collection as possible, the Brooklyn Museum took on more objects than they could care for. These problems could have been alleviated if the museum had partnered with other museums and dispersed the findings in Egypt among multiple institutions, allowing more in-depth research into Predynastic Egyptian history.

Unfortunately the past cannot be changed, but the present can. In researching the objects of the De Morgan collection today, the biggest problem is that there are no established communication channels among departments that allow the staff easy access to what little documentation of the collection that exists. The registrar and museum archive have little to no information on the collection while the Egyptian curatorial department has the original documentation filed away in various cabinets. The time it takes to locate desired documentation is time taken away from other important tasks that need to be completed. More importantly, the lack of efficient access to the

documentation of the collection can have an impact on the public's perception of the institution and the quality of care of the objects that are entrusted to it.

What the Brooklyn Museum, and others that are in the same situation, must aim to accomplish is the establishment of a system of cooperation/communication between departments, specifically registrarial, curatorial, and archival, exemplified by the UPenn Museum, which can ensure the best possible organization in the future and allow the opportunity to find uses for collections with minimal documentation. This can be a complicated, but immeasurably beneficial process for museums that wish to maintain the highest standards of museum practices.

Best Practices for Museums with Problematic Organizational Standards

In recent years the AAM has established a Code of Ethics as well as Standards and Practices that serve as guidelines for American museums in their everyday operations. In regards to museum collections the American Association of Museum's (AAM) Code of Ethics for Museums states that "stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal." It further details that objects "are accounted for and documented."⁴⁸ Keeping these standards in mind the options museums have in handling incomplete collections may seem limited, but they do exist. It would be best to begin with what museum professionals should not do in considering the future of such objects.

⁴⁸ *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2000), American Associations of Museums.
www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm

At first thought, the most obvious decision for a museum to make would be to deaccession these objects. Though there are a number of methods of deaccessioning, the majority of them are not viable when considering Egyptian collections. Even if the decision to deaccession these objects “conform to [the museum’s] mission and public trust responsibilities,” and “is solely for the advancement of the museum’s mission,”⁴⁹ there are certain ethical issues that must be considered. The sale of these objects cannot be justified because the objects would be scattered around the world, which would completely dissolve the collection and diminish their scholarly and cultural value. This decision is the more indefensible as these objects belong to another culture’s heritage, for which an American museum has taken responsibility. Even if there are no legal issues in terms of the illicit acquisition of objects, a museum, which operates in the public trust, should not have the ability to sell off cultural objects, particularly of another culture. In the case of the Brooklyn Museum, a number of the objects Henri de Morgan acquired were obtained not by excavation but through purchase, thus making their provenance unknown. The sale of objects that have questionable origins promotes the trading of unprovenanced material and thereby negates the ethical standards a museum should aspire to.

Some may consider the repatriation of objects a suitable form of deaccessioning, but this should also be questioned carefully. It is unreasonable to assume that the Egyptian government, with the countless amount of objects already in the country’s possession, can properly care for hundreds more objects given the limited resources they have. Nor would it be suitable for a museum to send back objects when there is missing or incomplete documentation. This would only transfer a problem to another institution.

⁴⁹ *Code of Ethics for Museums*. AAM.

The fact remains that, although current museum professionals may not have been responsible for their institutions' decision to acquire large amounts of objects years ago nor for improperly caring for them, they are nevertheless representatives of these museums and must accept the responsibility of managing both new and old issues that can affect a museum and its public.

What, if any, feasible and ethical options remain for museum professionals when considering the future of incompletely documented Egyptian (or any other) collections? It is well known that among the greatest obstacles museums have to face are a lack of time, money, resources, and space. Most museums face these problems at all times and can find it a struggle as non-profit entities to just stay afloat. With this in mind, it may be that the realistic response to such a question is, there are no options. While this may be a disheartening thought, let us assume that such factors are of no concern to museums and consider some solutions that can be accomplished at some point in the future.

Before any options can be considered museum practices must be analyzed and reevaluated. The first step that must be addressed is the promotion of interdepartmental communication within an institution. No matter how complete the documentation of a collection may be, it is ineffectual if it is scattered across departments and no one knows which departments possess what documentation. While the importance of maintaining a complete archaeological record along with inventory documentation has already been discussed, there also needs to be clearly defined responsibilities in terms of who is responsible for actually storing this information. Museum staff can be so focused on their specific responsibilities that the registrarial, archival, and curatorial departments are left wondering where specific information within the museum is located. Marie Malaro

argues that, if good records are to be kept, the entire museum must cooperate as one and establish internal policies, as well as redefine traditional roles.⁵⁰ From a registrarial standpoint, registrars need to broaden their responsibilities and make sure that they maintain and care for past documentation, while the rest of the museum staff needs to adapt their roles in order to “accommodate registrarial responsibilities.”⁵¹ Good communication among departments allows anyone in the museum to locate all existing documentation that pertains to a specific collection. This gives the registration department, as well as all other departments, the means to locate all the objects that still remain within the museum and, in some cases as well, to determine where the objects that are no longer in the museum’s possession are located.

After good communication between departments is established, the next step for a museum should be to recatalogue the collection in question, giving the museum an updated master list of objects that has precise measurements, condition reports, provenance, and descriptions. This list will serve as a means to tie together all the scattered documentation that has accumulated over the years. While it is important to have the updated information computerized as soon as possible in order to allow the easiest access for museum staff, a hard-copy of all documentation should also be given to every department that has a stake in the collection. A specific staff member needs to be made responsible for maintaining all documentation. But it does no harm to create multiple copies of the master list and all documentation as well. If the past can teach museum professionals anything, it is that there is no such thing as too many copies. The overarching goal for a museum is to make sure that a collection never again becomes

⁵⁰ Malaro, Marie. *Museum Governance*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994. pg. 132.

⁵¹ Malaro, pg. 132.

neglected in the future. Furthermore, documentation is “the primary means by which a museum exerts intellectual and physical control over its collections.”⁵² In order for a museum to find a logical solution for a specific collection it is necessary to take the steps required in establishing as complete a catalogue as possible.

The best way to accomplish these goals is for a museum to establish a concrete collection management policy and to adhere to its guidelines. Since every museum is unique in its governance and departmental structure a standard collections management policy does not suffice. Every policy must be unique to that institution in order to create a system of guidelines that function properly. While the creation of such policies is now common practice in museums, it appears that the main cause of problems that occur in the collections management of museums is the lack of, or incomplete, implementation of the policies. Once a collection management policy is completed, specific responsibilities for its execution must be assigned to appropriate departments and employees. There should be no question as to who is responsible for care of a collection, the preservation of records and data, inventories of collections, and the accessioning of new objects.⁵³ By producing a level of accountability within a museum the chances of mistakes created by oversights is diminished and the protection of not just archaeological collections, but all the objects that are cared for by an institution is ensured.

Considering the limited resources museums have at their disposal, it may be a practical decision to acquire the help of interns and volunteers when considering the reorganization of collections that have been disregarded over time. Students who are

⁵² Simmons, John E. *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*. American Association of Museums, 2006. pg. 91.

⁵³ Malero, pg 45. An additional benefit that maintaining a collection management policy, Malero argues, is its use as an “effective security device” (pg. 409). These standards allow a museum staff to discover missing objects, including those that have been stolen.

pursuing a Masters degree in Museum Studies/Professions are often required to conduct an internship. Individual museums that take on these students benefit because most interns already have previous knowledge of museum functions and need relatively little training to perform the tasks at hand. The museum world generally benefits because these interns are the future professionals who will eventually work in museums and may confront similar collections issues in the course of their careers. Finally, the interns benefit because in just a few months time they can learn much from first-hand experience of these difficult situations.

My own internship experience at the Brooklyn Museum was helpful because it allowed me to discover the collections management problems of the Henri de Morgan Collection. I was set to work on a task that was necessary but could not be completed by the Museum's employees because of the overwhelming workload that they deal with everyday. I found that diligent research, which can take many hours, can give a museum the opportunity to address the issue of a neglected collection if they chose to do so. To reiterate, however, the work done by an intern is meant to establish an overall understanding of the condition of a particular collection. This is useless unless a museum establishes specific responsibilities and sincerely subscribes to its collections management policy. Only when all available documentation has been gathered, interdepartmental communication becomes commonplace, and museum responsibilities are followed can meaningful discussions take place between museum staff as to what the most beneficial plan of action is for their institution.

Making Use of Neglected Collections

A self-imposed incentive museums could consider to address the lack of undocumented collections would be to organize a temporary exhibit that highlights them. This can be beneficial for two reasons. The first reason is that an exhibit creates the need for a museum to research the collection as thoroughly as possible in order to present the material to the public in the best possible way. Secondly, it creates a use for the objects by putting them on display and makes them available for public viewing instead of letting them continually sit in storage. One of the biggest concerns regarding a number of these collections is that no one is really aware that they exist. Their obscure past and the owner-museums' embarrassment about their improper care keeps the potential of such collections hidden away from the public. Placing a collection in the public eye not only promotes the value of the objects for future study and research, but, if properly explained, may give the museum a reputation for transparency that will garner respect from its visitors and the museum community. The AAM's *Standards Regarding Archaeological Material and Ancient Art* maintains that "in order to advance research, public trust, and accountability museums should make available the known ownership history of archaeological material and ancient art in their collections."⁵⁴ While it may be impossible to solve the problem of missing documentation in a specific collection, there is still use for such a collection.

⁵⁴ *Standards Regarding Archaeological Material and Ancient Art* (Approved July, 2008), American Association of Museums. www.aaam-us.org/aboutmuseums/standards/stbp.cfm

The UPenn's exhibition on Abydos that was described above was successful because it was able to link Petrie's archaeological finds from 1900-1904 with later discoveries that the Museum acquired from that same location. This was possible



Figure 3.1
Exhibition of Egyptian Collection (Main Gallery), Brooklyn Museum, June 1933

because of the thorough maintenance of objects and the documentation that accompanied them over the decades. Without this information it would be nearly impossible to have achieved an exhibit like *Abydos in Egypt and the University Museum 1898 – 1969*. An exhibition that highlights a collection with inadequate documentation must take a different approach. It should nevertheless be a priority for a museum to create a certain level of accessibility, which according to AAM standards is a responsibility that all museums should accept.



Figure 3.2
Exhibition of Egyptian Collection (Secondary Gallery), Brooklyn Museum, June 1933

By putting a neglected collection like the Henri de Morgan collection on exhibit, and by explaining in a direct and honest way the problems that their neglect have caused, a museum can demonstrate that their operations over the last few decades have not only changed, but improved. The museum can explain that raised ethical standards as well as a shift of focus toward public outreach will ensure that unfortunate practices of the past will not reoccur. This is what the focus of such an exhibit should be. It should tell a story of the evolution of museum practices while simultaneously bringing a neglected collection into the public eye.

The distinction between past to present could also be emphasized in other aspects of the exhibition, more specifically in terms of the transformation of displaying objects over the years. As Figure 3.1 illustrates, the Brooklyn Museum presented a more

anthropological presentation of its Egyptian artifacts in 1933, placing emphasis on the sociological/cultural significance of these objects.⁵⁵ They also displayed objects from the Henri de Morgan collection in a surprisingly contextual approach, grouping objects to illustrate the connection between a sarcophagus and the funerary objects that were found with it (figure 3.2).

The images of these galleries remind us of how the exhibiting of objects has changed over the last century. Would a contemporary curator display objects in a contextual or anthropological manner, as seen in 1933 at the Brooklyn Museum, or form a thematic link between the objects where they could be presented in a way that would explain the developments of Predynastic Egyptian culture over time? What kind of information was presented on object labels and wall text? An exhibition that focuses on past and present could provide answers to these questions. Once again, this may not directly answer the concerns of having incomplete documentation, but it serves a valuable role in researching the collection with the documentation that is still available to the museum staff. It also provides an institution with the opportunity to become transparent to its public and display the high level of ethical professionalism that has developed in American museums.

⁵⁵ The Brooklyn Museum was originally founded as The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, taking an interest in anthropological artifacts as well as works of art. The Museum eventually became the Brooklyn Museum of Art and accordingly adjusted its mission statement to adhere to this. A vital concern that arises is a significant number of the objects excavated by Morgan, as well as the majority of Egyptian artifacts, were anthropological discoveries and these objects may no longer fit into the Museum's mission of what it aims to collect and preserve. Keeping this dilemma in mind, I still argue that the most suitable decision is to keep the objects within the institution and ensure that no further accidents caused by human error will occur.

CONCLUSION

Museums have greatly changed in the course of the past century, becoming more responsible institutions that place the greatest emphasis on the preservation of collections and their responsible and ethical management. Creating and maintaining an accurate and complete system of documentation from the moment an object or a lot of objects enter a museum is today an important part of collections management. The guidelines laid out by the AAM help museums understand how to accomplish this goal. But in older museums, particularly those whose origins go back to the nineteenth century, professionals may be faced with challenges that are the result of past inadequacies and substandard management. Though the actions of past professionals may still be seen as an embarrassment for the museum today, they should not become an excuse for the continued neglect of the mismanaged objects or collections. Instead, problems should be faced head-on and museums should be transparent about their existence.

While the problems of the past are sometimes impossible to solve, especially if documentation has either been lost or never existed in the first place, what museum professionals must keep in mind is their responsibility for the collections they care for and must preserve for the future. If time and effort can be set aside to understand past shortcomings, most if not all collections can be managed in such a way that they offer potential research opportunities for scholars who may not know they even exist.

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FIGURES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Figure 1.1 – Courtesy of Winifred Needler, *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in The Brooklyn Museum*.

Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 – Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania. *Expedition Magazine*, Volume 21, Number 2 (Winter, 1979).

Figures 3.1, 3.2 – Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum's Egyptian, Classical, and Middle Eastern Art Curatorial Department.