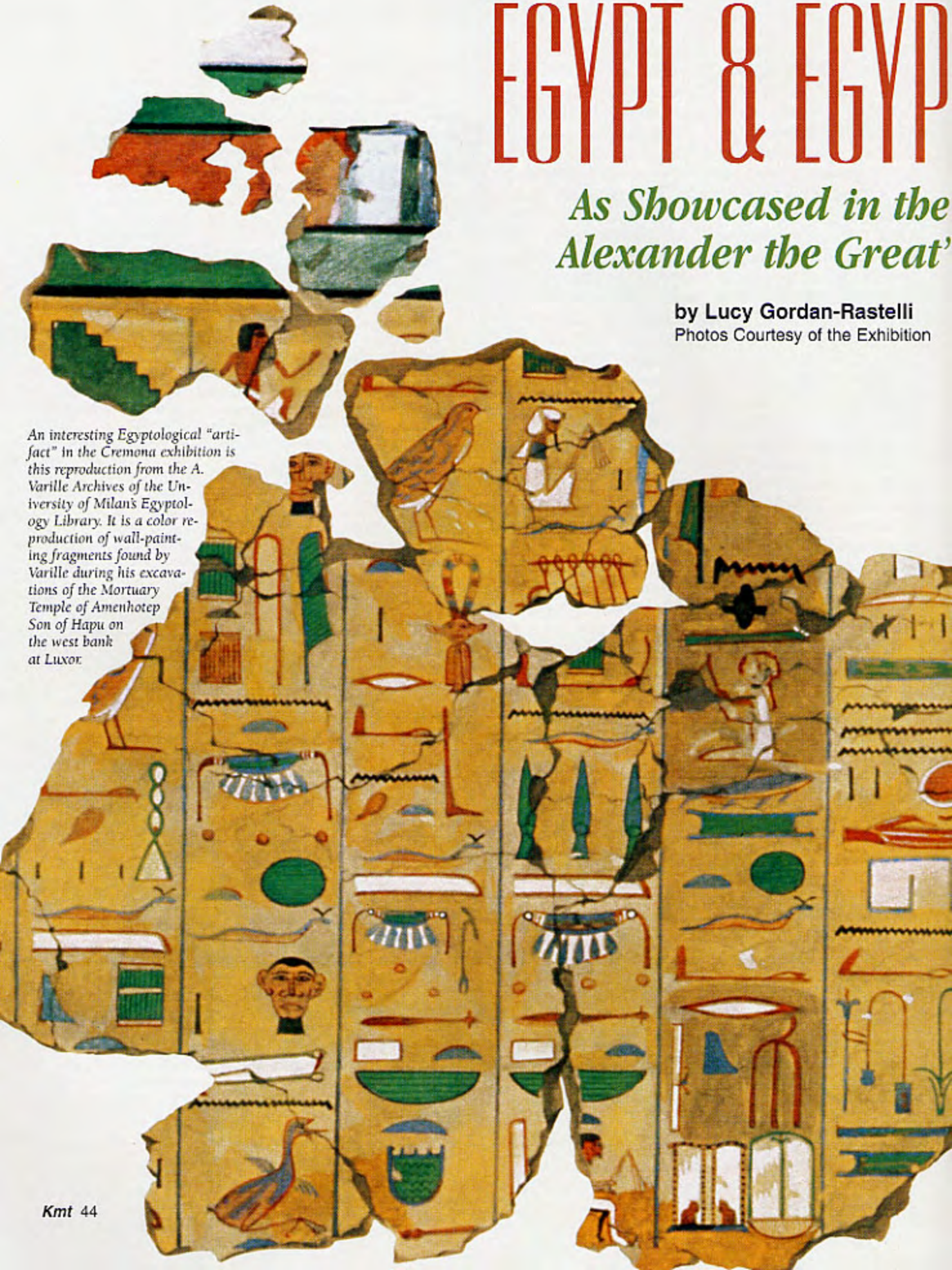
EGYPT & EGYP

As Showcased in the Alexander the Great'

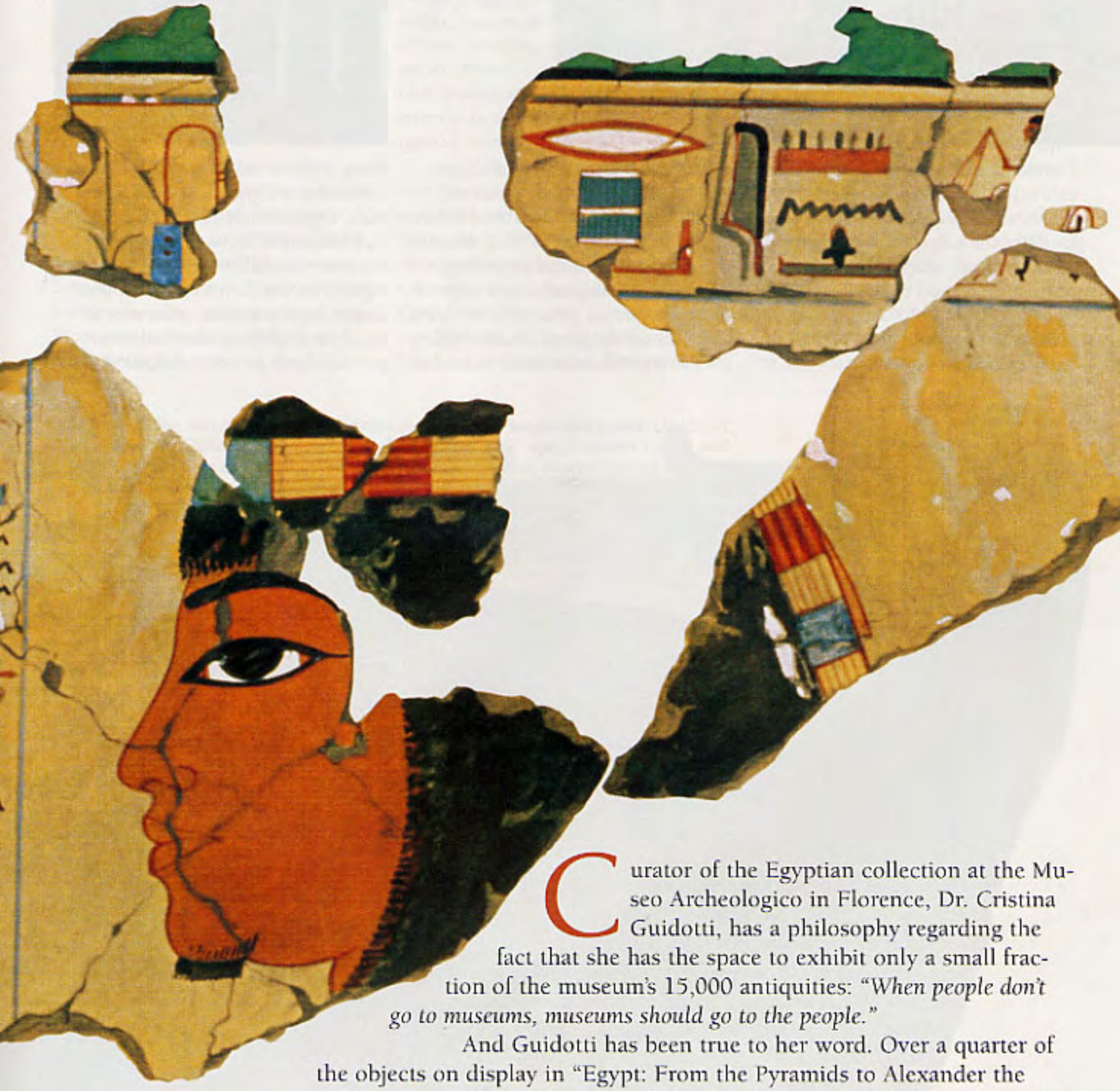
by Lucy Gordan-Rastelli
Photos Courtesy of the Exhibition



An interesting Egyptological "artifact" in the Cremona exhibition is this reproduction from the A. Varille Archives of the University of Milan's Egyptology Library. It is a color reproduction of wall-painting fragments found by Varille during his excavations of the Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep Son of Hapu on the west bank at Luxor.

TOLOGY IN CREMONA, ITALY

Exhibition 'Egypt: From the Pyramids to



Curator of the Egyptian collection at the Museo Archeologico in Florence, Dr. Cristina Guidotti, has a philosophy regarding the fact that she has the space to exhibit only a small fraction of the museum's 15,000 antiquities: *"When people don't go to museums, museums should go to the people."*

And Guidotti has been true to her word. Over a quarter of the objects on display in "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great" in Cremona, Italy — until March 28, 2005 — are on loan from the

The two venues of the "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great," in Cremona, Italy: the City Museum Ala Ponzone (l.) & the Palazzo Stanga (r.).

Florentine institution. This splendid exhibition of over 150 artifacts, atmospherically placed in cases made to look like the polychrome columns of ancient Egypt's temples, is similar, but not identical, to an exhibition held from December 5, 2002 to May 18, 2003 at the Fondazione Biblioteca in Via Senato in Milan. The goals in Cremona go far beyond just the temporary display of artworks, many of which have not been exhibited before.

Massimilliana Pozzi, the exhibition's co-curator, and Egyptologist for the Archaeological Cooperative of Milan, said at the press preview: *"First and foremost my fellow-curator, Professor Patrizia Piacentini, and I wanted to bring to public attention the over ninety collections of Egyptian art we have in Italy. Unfortunately, except for the Egyptian Museum in Turin, they virtually are not known to Italians, much less to foreigners. All but Turin's are collections within larger museums, often more famous for artifacts of other historical periods. Some are not even catalogued."*

The 22nd Dynasty polychrome coffin of Amen wab-priest & granary scribe Ankhekhonsu, on loan to the Cremona "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great" exhibition from the City Archaeology Museum in Bergamo, Italy. One of the reasons it was selected by the exhibition curators was that it was seriously in need of conservation, which would be done in preparing it for its current display.

Secondly, Pozzi and Piacentini want to correct the common misconception that, in spite of its 3,000 years of history, Egyptian civilization remained static and unchanged in our collective imagination. Rather, within this very long timespan there were many political and social changes, which brought about an enormous cultural evolution. The two curators hope to illustrate this evolution by the chronological order of the exhibition's displays, which actually start with several Predynastic artifacts.

Thirdly, ancient Egypt has fascinated Italians since the 1700s, more than a century before the foundation of the modern Italian state; and the curators want the public to know that there are Egyptian collections throughout the country, and to learn how these various collections were formed. In this regard *Kmt* readers are luckier than the Italian public at large. From articles by this writer, they already know the stories of the Turin (15:1) and Florence (15:2) collections. And before that, Kenneth D. Ostrand recounted (14:3) how the Naples Egyptian collection had been formed by uniting the collections Cardinal Stefano Borgia (of the powerful Farnese family) and of Venetian fortune hunter Giuseppe Picchianti. "*Except for Picchianti's collection and some Coptic pieces bought by Borgia,*" said Pizzo, "*many of the objects in Naples, unlike those in Turin and Florence, had all been brought from Egypt to Italy in ancient Roman times. Still today the collection continues to grow with objects recently excavated in Campania, but originally from Egypt.*"

The Egyptian collections in northern Italy are found in: the private museum Ludovico Pogliaghi, in Santa Maria del Sacro Monte (Varese); the City Museum Ala Ponzone, in Cremona; the archaeology museum P. Giovio, in Como; the City Archaeology Museum, in Bergamo; the City Museum of Roman Art, Brescia; the City Archaeological and Numismatic Collections, in Milan; the City Museums, in Pavia and Lodi; and the Palazzo Te, in Mantua. Several other collections are in private hands.

Twelve items in the Cremona exhibition are on loan from private collectors. Besides the many pieces from Florence, the other two museums with the most objects on loan are those in Naples and Mantua.

An essential criterion for Pozzi's and Piacentini's choice of some of the exhibition's artifacts was their precarious condition — that unless restored immediately, they risked being lost through deterioration and decay. Case in point is the exhibit's star piece: the polychrome coffin of Ankhekhonsu, a *wab* priest of Amen and scribe of the granary for divine offerings at the Temple of Amen. The coffin's exterior is completely covered with funerary scenes and texts, with Ankhekhonsu's wife, Henutnofret —

On loan to the "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great" exhibition from the National Archaeology Museum in Florence is this small quartzite Old Kingdom (5th Dynasty) statue head of a male, with especially well-carved features and wig detail.

"lady of the house" and a temple singer — also being mentioned. The scenes and texts decorating the coffin's interior, however, are illegible, due to the fact that the balsams used in the mummification have melted.

Almost certainly of Twenty-second Dynasty date (900-800 BC), the Ankhekhonsu coffin reached Bergamo in 1885, a gift of the Italian consul in Alexandria, Giovanni Venanzi. Bergamo's Public Library conserves Venanzi's letter about the donation, in which he says that he consulted Ernesto Schiaparelli about the coffin's authenticity before purchasing it in Luxor. Besides the coffin, Venzani's gift included the coffin board and the mummy itself — the latter in very poor condition as the result of the plundering of ancient tomb robbers.

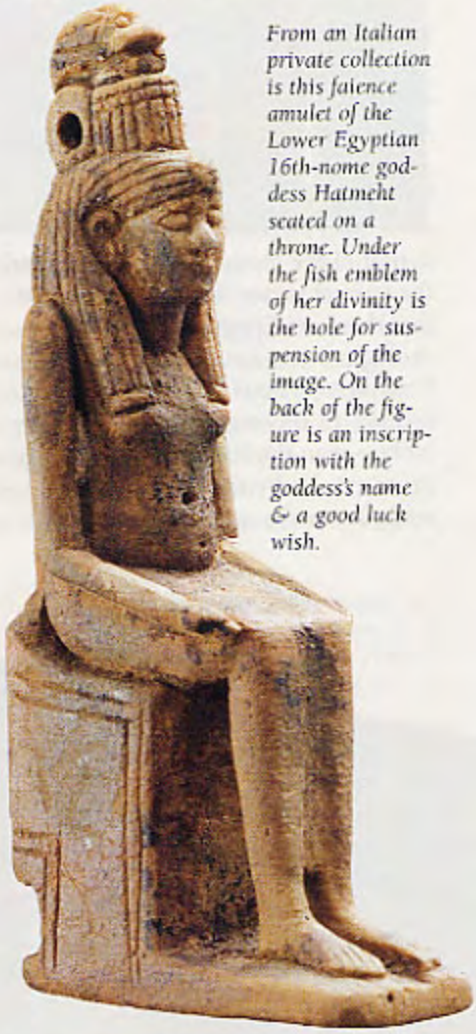
Other objects especially restored for the Cremona exhibition were all of the mummies and a relief fragment from the Temple of Derr.

With artifacts from almost every period of ancient Egyptian history, other highlights of "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great" include:

A Predynastic fish-shaped makeup palette, which shows no traces of having been used; and a black-rimmed red terracotta vase of the type common in Naqada I and Naqada II times, demonstrating how technically advanced Egypt already was.

Detail of a fragmentary clay model of a basket for an offering-bearer statuette of Middle Kingdom date, also lent to the exhibition by the Museo Archeologica, Florence.

Remarkable for its Old Kingdom date is a small quartzite head of a young man from the Fifth Dynasty, with beautifully sculpted features and hair. Looking like Twentieth-Century design is a bronze ewer — whose spout could also be used as a handle — and a bronze basin, both made from sheet metal, since neither show any signs of hammering. From this same age of the pyramids is one of the 36,000 turquoise faience tiles which covered the walls of the underground rooms of King Djoser's Third Dynasty Step Pyramid at Sakkara. Pozzi remarked at the exhibition's press preview that *"The ancient Egyptians believed faience tiles brought good luck."*



From an Italian private collection is this faience amulet of the Lower Egyptian 16th-nome goddess Hatmeht seated on a throne. Under the fish emblem of her divinity is the hole for suspension of the image. On the back of the figure is an inscription with the goddess's name & a good luck wish.

Of New Kingdom date, this wooden statue of the god Anubis in his jackal form is of uncertain provenance, but very likely originated in a Theban tomb. The missing collar may have been gilded, accounting for its absence. On loan to Cremona from the Egyptian collection of the Palazzo Te in Mantua.

Nineteenth Century and every museum Egyptian collection has several examples.

The New Kingdom's Amarna period is represented at Cermona by a polychrome wooden *ushabti* from a private Italian collection. Although its provenance is not known, it is dated to the reign of Akhenaten based on the figure's facial features and exagerated hips.

Also of New Kingdom date are objects from a foundation deposit of Queen-King Hatshepsut (1473-1458 BC). These tiny objects made of calcite, bronze, wood and vegetable fiber are models of items used in daily life and of building tools: unguent vases, axes, hoes, sleeping mats and levers for lifting blocks of stone. Each of the objects has Hatshepsut's name in a cartouche and the inscription, *"A good god, blessed with eternal life.*

A major New Kingdom piece in the exhibition is the limestone funerary stela of Pasanesut and his wife, Tamehit, dating to the Nineteenth Dynasty Ramesside period. The deceased couple are depicted in three vignettes in two registers. In the uppermost they present offerings to the seated god Osiris, who is attended by godessess Isis and Nephthys. In the lower register, they are seen on the left seated at an offering table before which a priest makes a libation offering. On the right, they kneel together, Pasanesut presenting a tray of offerings to a cow-headed Hathor emerging from a tree, with a *ba*-bird present. The stela is on loan from the National Archaeology Museum in Naples.

An important Late Period (Twenty-sixth Dynasty) object on view in the Cremona exhibition is a limestone canopic jar, also borrowed from the Naples National Archaeology Mu-

A wooden funerary model in the exhibition — of a woman probably making beer — dates to the First Intermediate Period (2145-2020 BC), a time of social upheaval and famine due to infrequent inundations of the Nile, with corresponding decline of central government and with art reverting to provencial rather than royal-court styles. And the serious expression and deep wrinkles on a small sandstone head of a pharaoh wearing a *nemes*, and dating to the Twelfth Dynasty, reflect a new, more-human, less-divine concept of Pharaoh.

Most of the several scarabs on display in the Cremona exhibition date to the Second Intermediate Period, a time of foreign domination of Egypt, when the Hyksos (*hekau khasut*, "princes of foreign countries") held sway in most of Lower Egypt.

Dating to the subsequent New Kingdom are the exhibition's several *ushabti*, one of which still has its own coffin. These little "he who responds" funerary statuettes are made of stone, wood and faience; and because of their small size (and their frequent availability, having been manufactured in great numbers), plus their connection with magic, *ushabtis* were very popular collector's items in the

Polychrome wooden ushabti *of unknown provenance, but thought on stylistic grounds to be datable to the Amarna period. Lent to the exhibition by an Italian private collector.*

Ramesside limestone funerary stela of Pasanesut & his wife, on loan to the Cremona exhibition from the National Archaeology Museum, Naples.

seum. Its lid is the baboon head of Son of Horus Hapi, who protected the mummified lungs of the deceased. On the front of the vessel are five engraved vertical columns of text (once painted black) which recite the protective formula of Hapi and identify the owner as Paeftjau(em)auyaset, son of the *"governor of the temples, Her-(em)akhbit and lady of the house Tainiti."* Although this canopic jar is limestone, peculiarly it has been covered with a thin layer of clay to make it look like terracotta.

Other Late Period (664-332 BC) objects in the Cremona exhibition are numerous amulets, bronze votives of cats and cat mummies. Two of the

26th Dyn. limestone canopic vessel with Hapi-baboon lid. Inscription on the body reveals the owner was Paeftjau(em)auyaset. Loaned by the National Archaeology Museum, Naples.

bronzes are particularly noteworthy. One cat statuette dates to the Twenty-fifth or Twenty-sixth Dynasty and is exceptional in its accurate antatomical rendering. It once had gilding and is missing its glass-inlay eyes and an earring (which was probably of gold). A necklace of five strands with a flower motif is engraved around the neck. It is from the collection of Mantua's Palazzo Te.

The second bronze cat-votive is reproduced on the cover of the exhibition's catalogue and is on loan from the National Archaeology Museum in Naples. The carving of the face is detailed and the hole in one ear attests to the figure once having been

been adorned with an earring. The popularity of the cult of the cat-goddess Bastet began to grow in the Twenty-second Dynasty and increased throughout the Late Period, giving rise to the extensive production of these small statuettes, which were either presented as *ex-voto* offerings by devotees or else kept in private home chapels.

In addition to mummified cats, the Cremona exhibition includes mummies of a snake, falcon and crocodile. All are of Late Period date.

"*The fourth aim of 'Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great' is didactic,*" said Pozzi, "*to make ancient Egypt seem less remote. So what could be a better way than to display the books of the great Egyptologists along with the artifacts?*" All the books are on loan from the Library of Egyptology at the University of Milan. Since 1999 the University has purchased the libraries of two of Europe's greatest Egyptologists: Elmar Edel and Alexandre Varille. Edel was professor of Egyptology at the University of Bonn from 1955 and was distinguished for his philological studies. His library contained over 9,000 volumes and 6,000 extracts. Varille's library was smaller, a mere 400 volumes; but is particularly important because it includes the library of Victor Loret, Varille's mentor.

The oldest volume on display is Michele Mercati's *De gli Obelischi di Roma* (Domenico Basa, 1589). Others especially worth noting are: Frederik Ludwig Norden's *Drawings of some ruins and colossal statues in Thebes in Egypt* (London, 1741); James Bruce of Kinkard's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, & 1773* (Edinburgh, 1805); Jean-François Champollion's *Grammaire égyptienne, ou principes généraux d'écriture sacrée égyptienne* (Paris, 1836-1841); and *Medum* and *Lahun II* by Sir William Flinders Petrie.

A great coup for the Cremona exhibition is the display of the late-19th Century copy made for Britain's Egypt Exploration Society of the wall painting from Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis, the most significant cultural testimony of the Naqada II period. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo preserves only a few fragments of the original. The desert has long since covered over the site of the tomb, discovered in 1899, leaving no trace of its whereabouts today. Without this reproduction by Tomb 100's excavator, F.W. Green, there would be no complete record of the painting's hunting and war scenes, including a Predynastic king intent on executing three prisoners with a mace.

Painting by F.W. Green for the Egypt Exploration Society, reproducing the wall decoration he discovered in Naqada II Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis in 1899. The tomb is lost today & only fragments of the scenes are preserved in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

Another interesting Egyptological "artifact" in the Cremona exhibition — on loan from a private collector — is a little volume by the Countess Justine Winne De Rosenberg, dedicated to Padua's Altichiero family and published in 1787. In it are the countess's drawings of an ancient Egyptian statue in the garden of Villa Melzi in the town of Bellagio on Lake Como, made shortly after the artifact's arrival from Egypt.

The hieroglyphic inscriptions on the statue are no longer visible today, but from the drawings by the countess it is possible to identify the subject as Parahotep, vizier under Rameses II, who was involved in the construction of Piramesse, that king's new Delta capital; and that Parahotep had dedicated the statue to his predecessor of the same name.

There are two venues in Cremona for "Egypt: From the Pyramids to Alexander the Great": most of the artifacts from Lombardy are in the temporary exhibition rooms of the City Museum Ala Ponzone, housed in Renaissance Palazzo Affaitati, at Via Ugolani Dati 4; the remaining objects can be seen in the magnificently frescoed rooms of nearby Renaissance Palazzo Stanga, at Via Palestro 36. Hours are: Tuesday-Saturday, 9 a.m. -6 p.m.; Sunday and holidays, 10 a.m. -7 p.m.; closed Monday. The catalogue (in Italian only) is 10 euros. There is an entrance fee of 6 euros. Online reservations can be made at www.charta.it; more information is available at www.cremonamostre.it Δ

About the Author Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is an American free-lance writer resident in Rome, who has contributed previous articles to the Journal on Italy's Egyptian collections in Turin and Florence.