




*Inset, The Antikenmuseum in Basel, Switzerland. General view of the Museum's Egyptian Hall.*



A photograph of a museum gallery. In the center, a tall glass display case sits on a black pedestal, containing a dark statue. To the left, a black pedestal holds a large, light-colored stone block. Further left, another pedestal holds a smaller, arched stone object. To the right of the central case, a black pedestal holds a bronze head of a sphinx. Further right, another pedestal holds a bronze torso. The walls are light-colored, and the floor is dark. Track lighting is visible on the ceiling.

# EGYPT ON THE UPPER RHINE

## in Basel, Switzerland

by Lucy Gordan-Rastelli

Photos courtesy of the Museum

**L**ocated in northwest Switzerland on the River Rhine where the Swiss, French and German borders meet, Basel — with a population of less than 200,000 people — is the third largest city in Switzerland, after Zurich and Geneva, and the nation's only cargo port. Thanks first to its Mittlere Bridge, built in 1225-26 and for centuries the only way across the Rhine south of Cologne, and then to the Roman Church council held there from 1431-1449, Basel has been a commercial and cultural center for several hundred years. Its university, the first in Switzerland, was endowed in 1459 by Sienese-humanist Pope Pius II, who reigned from 1458-1464 and is the

29 *Kmt*



only pope ever to have written his autobiography. There such notable scholars as the Dutch humanist, priest and theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) — known as “*the crowning glory of the Christian humanists*” — and the Swiss Renaissance physician, botanist, alchemist and general occultist Paracelsus (1493-1541) taught. During this same time-period, apprentices of Gutenberg introduced the new craft of printing to the city. The Schwabe publishing house was founded in Basel in 1488 by the German typographer Johannes Petri (1441-1511) and is the oldest publishing house in the world still in continuous business.

Today the city is also home to over three-dozen museums, which together with the city’s trade fairs account for Basel’s well over 1,000,000 visitors annually. Their contents cover a diverse spectrum of subjects: the largest collection of teddy bears in Europe; the history of pharmacy, complete with ancient Egyptian amulets, alchemistic laboratories and obsolete medicines; Judaism in Switzerland; caricatures and cartoons; a hands-on paper mill dating from the Church council and still in use, where visitors can learn the trades of paper manufacture and typography; the Basel Cathedral Treasury; musical instruments; a zoo (Switzerland’s first [1874]), world-famous for its breeding of endangered species;

one of the oldest botanical gardens in the world; natural history; and architecture, to name just a few.

This high density of museums compared to other cities of similar size is the result of closely interwoven private and public collecting and promotion of the arts and culture going back to the Sixteenth Century. For example, the Kunstmuseum Basel — then called Amerbaschsches Kabinett — was opened to the public in 1661 and is the world’s oldest public art-collection in continuous existence. Since the late 1980s various private collections have been made accessible to the public in new purpose-built structures, like the Beyeler Foundation, designed by Renzo Piano from Genoa; Italian-Swiss Mario Botta’s Tinguely Museum; and Californian Frank Gehry’s Vitra Design Museum.

**D**irectly across the main downtown street, St. Alban-Graben, from the Kunstmuseum Basel, and housed in several “protected” small landmark Nineteenth Century houses, is the Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig (<<http://www.antikenmuseumbasel.ch>> <[www.antikenmuseumbasel.ch](http://www.antikenmuseumbasel.ch)> Phone +41 (0)61 201 12 12. Hours Tuesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.). Founded in 1961 and opened in 1967 — thanks (Continues p. 34)







*Above, 5th Dynasty tomb relief with a desert hunting scene, BSAe 1092.*



*Background, Another general view of the Egyptian gallery of Basel's Antikenmuseum.*






*Predynastic ceramic vessel in the form of a hippopotamus, Nagada I/II, 3500 BC, LgAe BDE 1.*







*The Museum's recreation of a Nagada-era burial , with objects typically interred with the naturally dessicated deceased, including a slate palette, ivory bracelet & ceramic vessels.*

33 Kmt



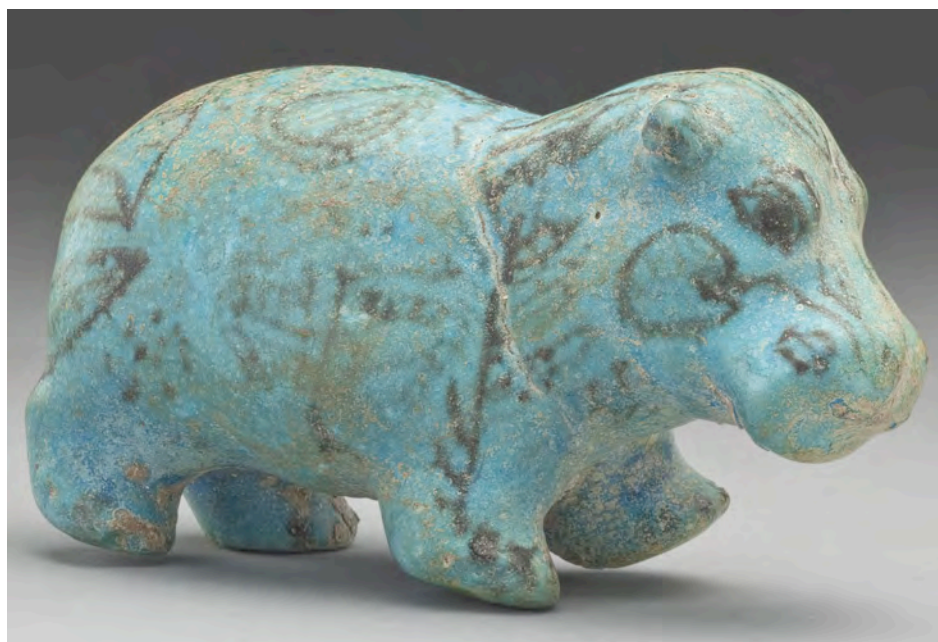
from p. 31 — to the support of many local scholars, businessmen and collectors — and then enlarged in 1981, because of the generosity of German chocolate magnate and voracious art collector Peter Ludwig<sup>1</sup> and his wife Irene. It is the only Swiss museum devoted exclusively to the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean region, with artifacts from the Fourth Millennium BC to the Seventh Century AD, most dating from 1000 BC to 300 AD.

In the summer of 2001, this Basel Museum of Ancient Art — until then devoted to the art of ancient Greece and Rome — opened a department of ancient Egyptian art. This new wing, built below ground under the Museum's courtyard — thanks to the personal interest of Marcel Ospel, then the Chairman and CEO of UBS, and a generous donation of around 5,000,000 Swiss francs in 1999 by his bank — gives *“an exhausting insight into the private and public collections of ancient Egyptian art in Switzerland,”* Dr. André Wiese, Basel-born curator of the Museum's Egyptian collection since 1997, told me during my recent visit to Basel's Antikenmuseum, made possible by Swiss Tourism in Italy and Basel Tourism. *“There are older public Swiss Egyptian collections, dating back to the Nineteenth Century, at Musée d'Art et Histoire*



Basalt head of King Montuhotep II, 11th Dynasty (ca. 2000 BC), BSAe III 8397.

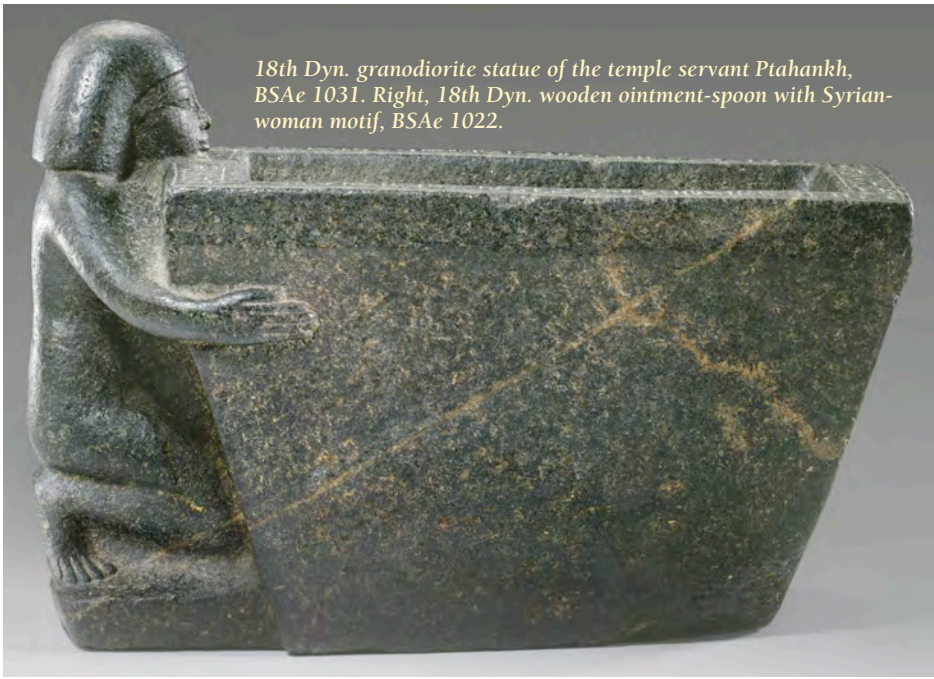
Below, Blue faience hippopotamus with a butterfly on its back. Middle Kingdom, ca. 1800 BC, LgAe BBL 6.



Kmt 34

in Geneva and at the Musée d'Ethnographie in Neuchâtel,” continued Wiese, “but ours is the first in German-speaking Switzerland. Inspiration for this collection began in 1997, with an exhibition I organized as a consultant, called *‘Egypt: Moments of Eternity. Unknown Treasures in Swiss Private Collections.’* Its 80,000 visitors convinced our director, Professor Peter Blome, to create a permanent Egyptian collection here. The next year I compiled a preliminary first catalogue called *Ägyptische Kunst im Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. Neue Leihgaben, Schenkungen und Erwerbungen* (Egyptian Art in the Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. New Loans, Donations and Acquisitions), which was updated and expanded when the collection opened three years later, but only published in German.”





18th Dyn. granodiorite statue of the temple servant Ptahankh, BSAe 1031. Right, 18th Dyn. wooden ointment-spoon with Syrian-woman motif, BSAe 1022.



Right & detail above, Painted-ceramic vessel with bull-calves-in-marsh motif, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, BSAe 1119.



"Today here at the Museum," Wiese said, "which is an art, not an archaeology, museum, and should best be called "The Museum of Art of the Ancient Mediterranean World," we have 3,741 ancient Egyptian artifacts. About sixty percent — or 2,224 objects — are our own property. The remaining forty percent are on long-term loan; but all of





18th Dyn. ivory hand-clappers with heads of Hathor, BSAe 990 a, b.



Fragmentary limestone head of Nefertiti, on long-term loan to the Basel Antikmuseum from the collection of Sonja & Hans Humbel, LgAe HHS 1.

Kmt 36

them have been here since my first exhibition in 1997: 1,051 make up the Deposit of the 'Foundation of a Swiss Oriental Museum'; another sixty-four items come from other public collections in Switzerland; still another sixteen masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture dating to the Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Late Dynastic Period — some of them of large size — come from the storage of the British Museum<sup>2</sup>; and 386 items, or twenty-five percent of the forty percent on loan, are from private persons. I requested many of these long-term loans to fill in chronological holes in our permanent collection."

**T**he some 800 objects on display — which cover all periods of ancient Egyptian art, from Predynastic to Coptic — are shown in chronological order (with an explanation for each in German) and then by theme within each historic period. Some of the artifacts were originally loans, which were then later donated. Others were acquired, at the suggestion of Wiese, from persons who had originally lent or donated artifacts. The collection's most-recent acquisitions — made possible in 2010 by private donations — were a bronze *khepesh* sword with dagger, a bronze incense burner, a terracotta statue of the God Bes, and a small bronze furniture mounting of the god Hapi.

**A**ccording to Wiese, the highlights of the collection listed here in chronological order are:

Nine hundred scarabs, seals and amulets from the Friedrich von Bissing collection, ranging in date from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic era<sup>3</sup>;

**Predynastic:** a terracotta hippopotamus-vessel, on long-term loan from the famous Elsa Bloch-Diener collection in Bern; a little toad made of limestone with fossil corals; a slate palette in the shape of a ram, from the collection of Sheikh Saud al Thani in Qatar and London; and a large Thinite vine-jar made of calcite, from the former Rudolf Schmidt collection;

**Old Kingdom:** a limestone relief showing a desert-hunting scene; a





small bust of King Menkhare, the son of Khafre and builder of the smallest pyramid at Giza; a rare life-size granite head of an official, early Fifth Dynasty; and a limestone false door from Sakkara;

**Middle Kingdom:** a basalt head of Montuhotep II; a faience hippopotamus decorated with butterflies; a magical rod made of hippopotamus ivory; an intact female cartonnage mask, on long-term loan from the Sonja and Hans Hummel collection in Zürich;

**New Kingdom:** ivory clappers depicting the face of Hathor and a granodiorite statue of the official Ptahankh from Memphis, both dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty; golden falcon heads from a necklace; a limestone fragment of the head Nefertiti on long-term loan from the Sonja and Hans Hummel Collection; a vase with polychrome painted bulls dating to the reign of Amenhotep III; the recently-purchased *khepesh* sword dating to the Nineteenth dynasty; and a ushabti box from Deir el Medina, on long-term loan from the Hummel collection;

**Third Intermediate Period:** the



*Above, l & r, Two-sided 19th Dyn. limestone stela decorated on the front by the treasurer Seti and on the reverse by the military administrator Minmose, BSAe 1080. Left, Faience statuette of deified Rameses II as Horus, BSAe 1096.*

painted-cartonnage coffin from Akh-mim of the priestess Tahai;

**Late Dynastic Period:** a cube-stature of the priest Pefjtjauemauiaset from Sais, on long-term loan from the Hummel collection;

**Ptolemaic Period:** a large bronze statue of a lion-headed goddess; a very rare, recently purchased bronze incense burner in the form of an arm with a hand, which once belonged to a former director of the Louvre; and a papyrus of the *Book of the Dead* of the Priest Nes-min.<sup>4</sup>

*"Our strength is that we have on display artifacts from all periods of ancient Egypt, as well as all types of objects, like sculpture, stela, wall paintings, shabtis, bronzes, toiletries and weapons, etc., etc. Most special are our objects concerning magic and daily life, for*





Above left, Polychrome wooden stela dating to the Third Intermediate Period, BSAe 1138. Above right, Painted-cartonnage coffin from Akhmim of the Lady Tahai, also of Third Intermediate Period date, BSAe III 129.

example cosmetic utensils from the New Kingdom, not to mention an impressive complete Roman mummy<sup>5</sup> and several beautifully painted coffins. The weaknesses of our collection,” continued Dr. Wiese, “are three: (1) that our beautiful catalogue is in German only; (2) that some of our artifacts are still loans; and (3) that, since most of our artifacts were

**Kmt 38**

bought by collectors during the Nineteenth and early-Twentieth centuries, we do not know their provenance, although I have traced about twelve artifacts to sales made by the British archaeologist Petrie to collectors who then later sold, donated or lent them long-term to us; and so we know where Petrie excavated them. Besides Petrie, other identifiable artifacts

come from the excavations carried out by Edouard Naville,<sup>6</sup> Gustave Jéquier<sup>7</sup> and Cecil Firth, plus others.”

**S**witzerland was never a colonial power, so, unlike France and England,<sup>8</sup> none of its Egyptian artifacts were carried off as war booty. Most are small sculptures or artifacts of





Black-granite cube statue of the priest Pestjauemauiaset, dating to the 30th Dyn. (340 BC), LgAe HHS 5.



the Afterlife. The collections in Geneva and Neuchâtel owe their existence to the French-speaking pioneers of Swiss Egyptology: Edouard Naville (1844-1926) and Gustave Jéquier (1868-1946); but the majority of private Swiss collections can be traced to the large number of Swiss expatriates who lived in Alexandria or Cairo during the Nineteenth and first half of the Twentieth centuries and brought their small treasures home, when they or their descendants were expelled from Egypt by Gamal Nasser.

One such collector was Achille Groppi, the son of Giacomo Groppi, a pastry maker from a humble Ticino (Italian Switzerland) background, who had immigrated to Egypt in 1884 at age twenty-one. Achille was the subject of Wiese's most-recent temporary exhibition in 2008: "Delicacies from Cairo. The Egyptian Collection of the Confectioner and Coffee House Owner Achille Groppi (1890-1949)." Groppi's ancient

Egyptian artifacts, which he collected from the 1920s until his death, are mostly small objects, in particular mosaic glass beads from the Ptolemaic era. His mosaic-bead collection was not only the largest and most significant, but the first of its kind. Besides beads, Groppi also collected amulets, scarabs, and small stone, bronze, faience statues.

In 1949 Groppi died childless of a heart attack and bequeathed his collection to his sister, Georgette Bianchi-Groppi, who divided it later among her three sons in Switzerland. Unfortunately, the family sold significant parts of it at an auction in London at Christie's in 1993. No one knew it was the Groppi collection because it was listed under a pseudonym, the "Per Neb Collection"; thus much of the unique glass went to museums and private collections worldwide, including the Miho Museum in Japan and the collections of Bolivian-born Geneva resident George

Ortiz and of the already-mentioned Sheikh Saud al Thani of Qatar, the Emir's cousin and former Minister of Culture.

"It wasn't hard to organize the Groppi exhibition here," Wiese explained, "because all three families of Groppi's descendants, now named Bianchi, still own much of their uncle's collection. They live in Lugano and were very happy to lend us the some 160 artifacts on public display for the very first time ever. We had 30,000 visitors and the catalogue sold out immediately. I have only my personal copy."

Wiese tries to organize one major temporary exhibition every second year, all so far with audio guides in German, French and English. Before the Groppi exhibition, Basel's Antikenmuseum had hosted two other major exhibitions of ancient Egyptian art. In 2004 it was the first venue of "Tutankhamen. The Gold-

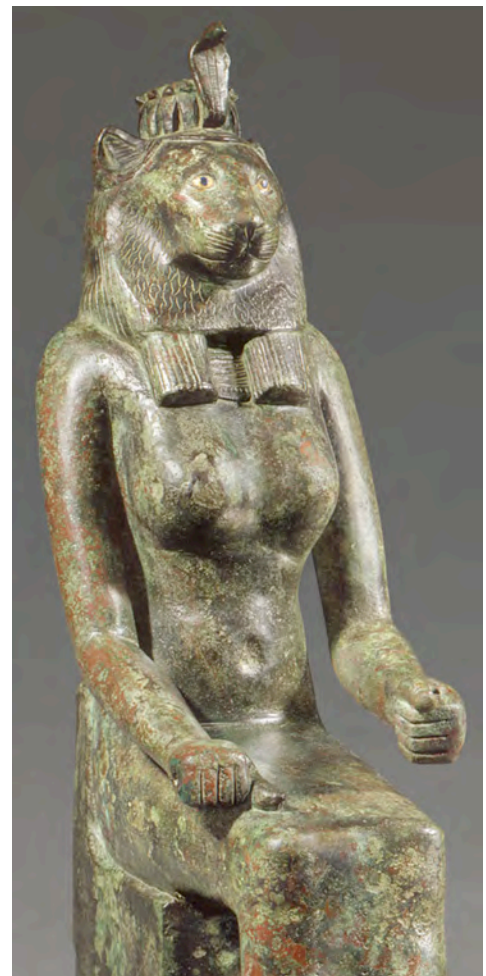


Kmt 40



Counterclockwise from left, Late Period basalt baboon statuette with inlaid-glass eyes, BSAe 1103; Faience Hathor sistrum dating to the 26th Dyn., BSAe 1125/26; Ptolemaic (3rd Cent. BC) gold bracelet with two Bes heads, LgAe SSOM 3; Detail of large bronze statuette of a lion-headed goddess, also of Ptolemaic date, BSAe 994.

Opposite, inset & detail, Intact Roman-period male mummy, with painted portrait-panel, from Antinoopolis, dating to the 2nd Cent. AD, BSAe 1030.







41 Kmt



en Beyond. Tomb Treasures from the Valley of the Kings,” which counted over 650,000 visitors in four months; and in 2006 it hosted “In Pharaoh’s Tomb: The Hidden Hours of the Sun,” which attracted 35,000 visitors. For this exhibition Thutmose III’s burial chamber was reconstructed by Factum-Arte — a company, based in Madrid and directed by Adam Lowe — which produces digital reconstructions in two or three dimensions for artists, museums and special projects. The artifacts displayed in this exhibition came from the Antikenmuseum’s own collection and on loan from the August Kestner Museum in Hanover, Germany, and concerned the *Amduat* and the rituals surrounding burial, mummification and rebirth. Included were coffins from the Third Intermediate Period, stelae, bronzes of gods of the Afterlife, as well as a *Book of the Dead* and royal funerary texts from the New Kingdom.

This year, 2011, from March 25-July 31, will be the turn of “Egypt, Orient and Swiss Modern Art. The Collection of Rudolf Schmidt (1900-1970).” “Dr. Rudolf Schmidt from Solothurn, the most beautiful Baroque city in Switzerland about twenty miles north of Bern, was another world-famous collector,” Dr. Wiese told me. “Like Ludwig, his extensive art collection, now dispersed, included works from ancient collections, as well as landmark paintings of Swiss modern art. On the fortieth anniversary of his death, the Antikenmuseum will host for the first time a wide-ranging selection of Schmidt’s collection: stone vessels from ancient Egypt, now property of his two nephews; seals from the ancient Near East, now in Fribourg’s Biebel und Orientmuseum; ancient bronze figurines from Luristan (Iran), now in the Rietberg Museum in Zürich; ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, now in a private collection; and modern works by Ferdinand Hodler, Giovanni Giacometti, and Cuno Amiet, all divided between his two nephews.”

#### Notes

1. Born in Koblenz on July 9, 1925, Peter Ludwig was an artistic maverick, whose tastes included Picasso, Russian avant-garde painters and Pop Art, in particular, as well as South American gold trinkets and Med-

ieval German manuscripts. The only foreigner on the Board of Trustees of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and an important influence on cultural policy worldwide, his artistic tastes were highly eclectic. For example, he opened the Ludwig-Institut für Kunst in the German Democratic Republic in 1984; but he also collected the work of Hitler’s favorite sculptor, Arno Breker. Ludwig donated modern works of art to over thirty museums and founded several others, specializing in modern art: in Aachen (where he died of a ruptured colon on July 22, 1997), Cologne, Vienna and Budapest. He also donated his collection of 200 ancient Greek artifacts to Basel’s Antikenmuseum, but he certainly expected that his foundation’s generous endowments be matched by public investments in the arts.

2. “The most-impressive artifacts on loan from the British Museum,” said Wiese, “are eye-catchers, objects found nowhere else in Switzerland.” Examples: part of a granite monumental head of Amenhotep III, a granodiorite statue of lion-headed Sekhmet, seated on a throne (Eighteenth Dynasty) and a granodiorite statue of a vizier also Eighteenth Dynasty), excavated by Édouard Naville at Tell Basta in the Delta, between 1887 and 1889, in cooperation with the Egypt Exploration Fund. “The loans from the British Museum are on a three-year renewable contract,” Wiese explained. “They’ve been here for nine years already and we’ve just renewed the contract for another three.”

3. A Prussian aristocrat, Von Bissing was a professor of Egyptology at the University of Munich. He was perhaps most noted for his work at Abu Ghurab at the turn of the Twentieth Century, where he excavated the sun temple of King Niuserre. He later became an early Nazi sympathizer, because of his friendship with Rudolf Hess, but was soon expelled from the party.

4. Like his father and many paternal ancestors, Nesmin was a priest of the gods Min and Khonsu. He pursued his duties in Middle Egypt at Akhmim. His coffin and his mummy are the cornerstone of the collection at the Rhode Island School of Design’s Museum of Art in Providence, Rhode Island.

5. Basel’s Egyptian collection has five human mummies: three females and two males. One of the latter dates from the Third Intermediate Period; the other is the complete mummy (with shroud) from Roman times. One female mummy is Predynastic; the second, still wrapped in her cartonnage, dates to the Third Intermediate Period; the third female is a child of the Roman era. The col-

lection counts around fifty or sixty animal mummies.

6. Édouard Naville was born in Geneva in 1844 and died there in 1926. He first ventured to Egypt in 1865, and published the myths of Horus from the temple at Edfu in 1870. In 1882 he began to work with the Egypt Exploration Fund in the Nile Delta. However, by far the most important of his archaeological achievements was his work at the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahari, during the seasons 1893-1896. His most-important publication is the edition of the *Book of the Dead* in German, which remains a standard reference even today.

7. Gustave Jéquier was born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, in 1868, and died in the same city in 1946. He studied in Paris and Berlin and began his career under the guidance of Egyptologists Gaston Maspero and Jacques de Morgan. Jéquier specialized in the Predynastic Period and excavated sites at Sak-kara, where he cleared the pyramids of Pepi II, Aba and two kings of the Middle Kingdom, plus the so-called Mastaba Faraoun of Shepsekaf. He also worked at Dashur, Lisht and Mazghuna, as well as explored pyramids of the Old and Middle kingdoms. His work on the *Pyramid Texts* was significant to the understanding of these.

8. The first European in modern times to visit the ancient city of Petra in Jordan and to arrive at the great Egyptian temple at Abu Simbel, was not an archaeologist. He was Swiss traveler and Orientalist Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who learned Arabic fluently and later converted to Islam, took the name Sheikh Ibrahim Ibn Abdallah and wore Arab dress. Born at Lausanne into a family from Basel on November 24, 1784, he died of dysentery in Cairo on October 15, 1817. Accredited as the discoverer of Petra in 1812 and Abu Simbel in 1813, he bequeathed his collection of 800 volumes of oriental manuscripts to the library of Cambridge University. Three books about his travels in Nubia (1819), in Syria and the Holy Land (1822), and in Arabia (1829), as well as his *Arabic Proverbs, or the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1830), and *Notes on the Bedouins Wahabys* (1831) were all published posthumously. Katharine Sim published *Desert Traveller: The Life of Jean Louis Burckhardt* in 1969 (paperback edition, 2001). In 2012, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Burckhardt’s discovery of Petra, Basel’s Antikenmuseum will put together an exhibition. It will include loans from the National Museum in Amman and from Petra and include a section on Burckhardt’s life.

**About the Author** Lucy Gordan-Rastelli is a Rome-based free-lance journalist & *Kmt*’s



European correspondent.