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## Archduke Maximilian's Dream Comes True—If Only Partially

The late Hapsburg ruler's restored Egyptian collection showcased at Miramare Castle



*Italian Hours*

Lucy Gordan



Miramare Castle. Photo: S.Cofolli. Courtesy of the Castello di Miramare

The Castle of Miramare and its magnificent park, perched on a rocky promontory overlooking the Adriatic just outside Trieste, the only seaport of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, have long been a popular tourist venue. Now even more so, because until November 1, its stables are hosting the exhibition, “A Sphinx Attracts Him: Maximilian of Hapsburg and the Egyptian Collections Between Trieste and Vienna.”

Here’s why: in 1857, to distance the ambitious Archduke Maximilian (1832–67) from Vienna, his less intelligent older brother, the Emperor Franz Joseph (1830–1916), appointed him Rear Admiral and Commander of the small Imperial Navy and Viceroy of Lombardy-Venetia. That same year, the Archduke married Princess Charlotte of Belgium and commissioned the construction of Miramare, which took so many years to build that, although the couple moved there in 1860, he didn’t see it finished. Its park was to include a museum building for Maximilian’s collection of ancient Egyptian memorabilia from most periods of its history.

Like many 19th-century royals, Maximilian was an avid Egyptophile and bought his first artifacts around 1850 from Anton von Laurin, the former Austrian consul in Alexandria. Following a naval inspection in Egypt in 1855, his already keen interest was further sparked when the viceroy, Sa’id Pasha, is said to have given him the entire contents of the Royal Archives. The collection continued to expand thanks to Maximilian’s diplomatic missions and deliberate purchases, with the Viennese Egyptologist Simon Leo Reinisch busily compiling its scientific catalog. Architectural plans for the museum were drawn but put on hold when, in 1864, Maximilian, having been dismissed by the Emperor as Viceroy—thereby leaving him without a royal title—agreed to become the Emperor of Mexico, naively believing the Mexican people had voted for him to end their brutal civil war.



*Green-schist sphinx head of the pharaoh Senwosret III, the exhibition's logo.  
Courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna*

In spite of the distance, Maximilian’s enthusiasm for ancient Egypt didn’t diminish. He sent Reinisch to Egypt, where between 1865–66 he purchased some 1,200 artifacts (including several fakes) and sent them to Mexico, as Maximilian planned to allocate them in Mexico City’s Museo Nacional to establish a major cultural institution in his new empire. The ship carrying the crates arrived in Veracruz, but after Maximilian’s execution by anti-royalist Republicans in 1867, it returned to Trieste without unloading its cargo.

Thus, from 1868 onwards, Miramare became part of the network of Austrian imperial residences, administered directly from Vienna. Until the first complete catalog of Maximilian’s many collections was compiled, their contents were all displayed together in a pavilion in Miramare’s park; but in 1878, Vienna commissioned a separate inventory of the Egyptian section, which since 1891 has been housed in Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum. That is

everything but the pink-grey-black granite sphinx at the head of the jetty of Miramare’s small harbor. Too heavy to transport, she dates to the Ptolemaic period (2nd century BC) and probably arrived in 1860 at Miramare, where she will remain alone again after November 1.



Manet's painting "The Execution of Emperor Maximilian" in Mannheim, Germany's Kunsthalle. Wikipedia.

Now finally, after 143 years, Maximilian's dream has come true, if only partially and for a short time. On display, along with Miramare's museum's architectural plans, are just over 100 of the some 2,000 ancient Egyptian artifacts the Archduke had collected himself before his Mexican demise: funeral statuettes or ushabti, protective amulets, scarabs, jewelry, fragments of coffins, canopic vases, statues of gods, engraved stelae, and ritual objects. In addition to the nearly 60 Viennese loans are some 40 artifacts, including the mummy of a cat, from Trieste's Civic Museum of Antiquity J.J. Winckelmann.

The two stars of the exhibition, as well as of the Kunsthistorisches Museum's vast Egyptian collection, are a 12th Dynasty (1991-1802 BC) green-schist head of a sphinx of the pharaoh Senwosret III—the exhibition's logo—and a life-size, corpulent black-granite statue of the official Sobekemsaf (c. 1700 BC), rare because only pharaohs were entitled to life-size or larger-than-life statues. Other highlights are a very well-preserved Middle Kingdom blue-faience hippopotamus, very much like "William," the Met's mascot; as well as a small cuboid crouching figure—called a "block statue" by Egyptologists—of the priest Ankh-takelot and an alabaster canopic jar with a falcon-headed lid, both especially dear to Maximilian, who kept them in Miramare's library of 7,000 volumes.

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*Italian Hours*

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