

Offerings to the Discerning Eye
An Egyptological Medley in Honor of Jack A. Josephson

Culture and History of the Ancient Near East

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VOLUME 38

Offerings to the Discerning Eye

An Egyptological Medley in Honor of Jack A. Josephson

Edited by

Sue H. D'Auria



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2010

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Offerings to the discerning eye : an Egyptological medley in honor of Jack A. Josephson / edited by Sue H. D'Auria.

p. cm. — (Culture and history of the ancient Near East, ISSN 1566-2055 ; v. 38)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-17874-8 (hard cover : alk. paper)

1. Egypt—Antiquities. 2. Historic sites—Egypt. 3. Excavations (Archaeology—Egypt. 4. Egyptology. 5. Egypt—Civilization—To 332 B.C. 6. Josephson, Jack A. I. D'Auria, Sue. II. Title. III. Series.

DT60.O58 2009

932—dc22

2009022055

ISSN: 1566-2055

ISBN: 978 90 04 17874 8

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Magda Saleh	Preface	vii
Magda Saleh	Jack A. Josephson: A Biographical Narrative	ix
Diane Bergman	Bibliography of Jack A. Josephson	xv
List of Abbreviations		xvii
List of Illustrations		xxi
Matthew Douglas Adams and David O'Connor	The Shunet el-Zebib at Abydos: Architectural Conservation at One of Egypt's Oldest Preserved Royal Monuments	1
Dieter Arnold	Earthquakes in Egypt in the Pharaonic Period: The Evidence at Dahshur in the Late Middle Kingdom	9
Dorothea Arnold	Foreign and Female	17
Kathryn A. Bard and Rodolfo Fattovich	Recent Excavations at the Ancient Harbor of <i>Saww</i> (Mersa/Wadi Gawasis) on the Red Sea	33
Edward Bleiberg	Reused or Restored? The Wooden <i>Shabti</i> of Amenemhat in the Brooklyn Museum	39
Andrey Bolshakov	Persians and Egyptians: Cooperation in Vandalism?	45
Bob Brier	The Great Pyramid: The Internal Ramp Theory	55
Betsy M. Bryan	Amenhotep III's Legacy in the Temple of Mut	63
Günter Dreyer	Eine Statue des Königs Dewen aus Abydos?	73
Mamdouh Eldamaty	Die leeren Kartuschen von Akhenaten	79
Richard Fazzini	Aspects of the Mut Temple's Contra-Temple at South Karnak, Part II	83
Erica Feucht	A God's Head in Heidelberg	103
Rita E. Freed	Reconstructing a Statue from a Head	109
G.A. Gaballa	The Stela of Djehutynfer, Called Seshu	115
Ogden Goelet, Jr.	Observations on Copying and the Hieroglyphic Tradition in the Production of the <i>Book of the Dead</i>	121
Tom Hardwick	A Group of Art Works in the Amarna Style	133
W. Benson Harer, Jr.	Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Ancient Egypt	153
Melinda Hartwig	The Tomb of a <i>ḥ3ty-ꜥ</i> , Theban Tomb 116	159
Zahi Hawass	A Head of Rameses II from Tell Basta	169
Salima Ikram	A Pasha's Pleasures: R.G. Gayer-Anderson and his Pharaonic Collection in Cairo	177
Sameh Iskander	Merenptah's Confrontations in the Western Desert and the Delta	187
T.G.H. James	A Contemplation of the Late Period	195

Peter Jánosi	“He is the son of a woman of Ta-Sety . . .”—The Offering Table of the King’s Mother Nefret (MMA 22.1.21)	201
Nozomu Kawai	Theban Tomb 46 and Its Owner, Ramose	209
Peter Lacovara	A Unique Sphinx of Amenhotep II	217
Sarwat Okasha	Rameses Recrowned: The International Campaign to Preserve the Monuments of Nubia, 1959-68	223
Paul F. O’Rourke	Some Thoughts on τὸ ὕδωρ of Thales and τὸ ἄπειρον of Anaximander	245
William H. Peck	Mapping the Temple of the Goddess Mut, Karnak: A Basis for Further Exploration	253
Elena Pischikova	The Dog of Karakhamun	263
Donald B. Redford	The Second Pylon of the Temple of Ba-neb-djed at Mendes	271
Gerry D. Scott, III	Four Late Period Sculptures in the San Antonio Museum of Art	277
Hourig Sourouzian	News from Kom el-Hettan in the Season of Spring 2007	285
Rainer Stadelmann	The Prince Kawab, Oldest Son of Khufu	295
Paul Edmund Stanwick	New Perspectives on the Brooklyn Black Head	301
Emily Teeter	A “Realistic” Head in the Oriental Institute Museum (OIM 13952)	313
Nancy Thomas	Transformation of a Royal Head: Notes on a Portrait of Nectanebo I	317
Jacobus van Dijk	A Cat, a Nurse, and a Standard-Bearer: Notes on Three Late Eighteenth Dynasty Statues	321
Kent R. Weeks	The Theban Mapping Project’s Online Image Database of the Valley of the Kings	333
Christiane Ziegler	The Tomb of Iahmes, Son of Psamtikseneb, at Saqqara	339
Alain Zivie	The “Saga” of ‘Aper-El’s Funerary Treasure	349
Index		357
Dynasties		362
Theban Tombs		362
Egyptian Words and Phrases		362

PREFACE

With sincere pleasure, this volume is dedicated to Jack A. Josephson by his friends and colleagues in token of their esteem and affection, on the occasion of his approaching 80th birthday on January 31, 2010. May he, as the ancient Egyptians wished, live 110 years in robust health, joyfully pursuing his passion for Egypt and its great civilization as energetically and purposefully as he does today.

Jack is a singular scholar in a rarified field. A latecomer to Egyptology, he has molded himself into a writer and researcher in the tradition of the “gentleman scholar.” In the process, he has attained specialized expertise in three-dimensional sculpture and achieved broad recognition as an authority in Egyptian art history. Museums and collectors seek his advice on matters of authenticity and identification, and young scholars look to him for guidance. Over the years, Jack’s lucid investigative analyses have probed and redefined the limits of inquiry, expanded research parameters, and broadened perspectives. His scholarship helps validate the discipline, emphasizing its undeniable contributions in an intra-disciplinary framework and highlighting its promise of further potential.

In clear, concise language and a crisp, unadorned style, his output displays the rigorous application of conventional methodological tools and techniques, informed by an increasingly original, innovative approach, instilling new vitality into a field too often dismissed or ignored. At their most complex, his writings and lectures weave cultural and political history into fascinating vignettes and narratives reflected in the formulaic art of the Egyptian civilization. Art-historical interpretation thus applied can reveal tantalizing insights—clues offering a figurative reading between the lines—which might elude the philologist solely focused on often propagandizing, and often misleading, hieroglyphic texts. To cite one example, Jack’s comparative study of two contrasting statues of the 26th Dynasty vizier Mentuemhat posits an elaborate power struggle pitting

the ambitious Theban against the wily Psamtik I—a protracted long-distance intrigue culminating in a stalemate, but foiling the southerner’s apparent aspirations to royal status.

Innumerable extant sculptures—deprived of archaeological context, intact but shorn of inscription, archaizing, usurped, re-carved, or broken and battered fragments, the detritus of time—can, under the practiced scrutiny of the art historian, still have a name to regain, a period, a reign, a workshop, or even a master sculptor to be assigned to, and still provide answers to queries and elucidate historical conundrums. Yet others, embellished in modern times, or altogether fake, can be exposed under the stylistic assessment of a keen and knowledgeable eye.

In one such instance, a collaborative research effort by Jack and Rita Freed concluded that the stunning Middle Kingdom sphinx head of a queen, a masterpiece of the Brooklyn Museum collection, while indeed ancient, had undergone substantial repair and re-working in eighteenth-century Italy. The inquiry setting the investigation in motion was an initial observation, made during an earlier joint endeavor on the identification of another MK sphinx queen’s head now at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (the Centennial Queen). The Brooklyn Queen, viewed in the context of the known corpus of MK female sphinx heads, appeared anomalous. With the two scholars pursuing all leads, from scouring every available source reference to seeking out comparable sculptures in Roman museums, the resulting article is a classic example of art-historical analysis in application at its best.

Intensely examining an enigmatic image may give Jack the eerie sensation of communing with the artifact, of seeking to inhabit the world of its maker. In reality, he is mustering an array of the invaluable personal resources of connoisseurship—a discerning eye; an innate aesthetic sensibility; insight and intuition; strong visual recall and mental acuity bolstered by avid reading; constant interaction with fellow scholars; and the continu-

ous scrutiny of countless images. The course of art-historical analysis is painstakingly methodical and protracted. Sometimes, in an exciting procedural reversal, the trigger is an exhilarating “Eureka!” In one startling occurrence, the mass of information stored in a supple mind fused in instant revelation. Examining a photograph of the Cairo Museum statue of King Snefru set bells ringing and led to the identification of a rare surviving head of a statue of the first ruler of the Fourth Dynasty, once namelessly assigned to the Fifth. Intuitive recognition, honed by eye and memory, had still to be substantiated by strict science—but it was a moment to be savored.

As a critical area of study, Egyptian art history is currently imperiled, to the serious detriment of the field of Egyptology. To Jack’s dismay, the subject has all but disappeared from the curricula of the few institutions both in the United States and Europe offering graduate degrees in the field. Deploring this untoward attrition, Jack is a determined proponent of its reinstatement as an essential component in the formation of new cadres. He voices unbounded reverence for the giants of Egyptian art history, among them his mentor Bernard V. Bothmer (a.k.a. BVB), and his personal ideal, William Stevenson Smith, for their inestimable contributions to the discipline.

Profound thanks are due to many participants who have in various ways made this *Festschrift* possible. Foremost among these are Jack’s friends and colleagues, the authors who have, despite the heavy demands of their notoriously overburdened schedules, so generously joined together to offer Jack an exceptional gift. I note with satisfaction that the articles included here reflect a diversity of topics and themes of particular interest and importance to the writers, and I am infinitely

touched by their gracious response. I am truly grateful to my two fellow coordinators of this project, our peerless editor Sue D’Auria, who has undertaken this lengthy, arduous task—a labor of love—with infinite patience, unfailing good humor, and a scrupulous efficiency; and Rita Freed, Jack’s good friend and frequent collaborator, who found time despite her weighty duties as John F. Cogan, Jr. and Mary L. Cornille Chair, Art of the Ancient World at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, to function as logistics manager, wise advisor, and ever-optimistic encourager—and to contribute an article! The team at our publisher Brill, including Publishing Manager Michiel Klein Swormink, Production Editor Michael Mozina, and Acquisitions Editor Jennifer Pavelko, whose dedicated professionalism has made all our dealings a pleasure, has produced a quality publication of which we are all justly proud. My friends Mary McKercher and Malcolm McCormick have provided heartily appreciated assistance and support. Mikhail Ghali kindly supplied e-mail linkage services from Cairo. Amal Safwat el Alfy, Director of the Supreme Council of Antiquities Press, and Janice Kamrin, Director of the Egyptian Museum Database and Registrar Training Projects at the American Research Center in Egypt obligingly forwarded urgently needed archival photographs. Ben Harer proposed an inspired amendment to the working title, and Ogden Goelet contributed the perfectly apt cover illustration. In the interests of discretion, local e-maildrop was orchestrated by Helen Atlas and Michaela Gold. Without all these, and many other aiders, abettors, and well-wishers, this volume would not have seen the light of day. Thank you, one and all. Shukran!

To JJ, with love and admiration,

Magda Saleh

THE “SAGA” OF ‘APER-EL’S FUNERARY TREASURE

Alain Zivie

CNRS (Paris) and Mission Archéologique Française du Bubasteion (Saqqara)

“Beautiful objects,” *les beaux objets*, of the remote past, from ancient Egypt or from anywhere else in the world, are a blessing. Don’t they bring beauty and harmony to the heart, as well as puzzling questions and stimulating interrogations to the intelligence? But sometimes, when an unusual or even outstanding archaeological ensemble (homogeneous funerary material for example) is discovered, “beautiful objects” can generate problems: they begin living their own life, being separated from this knowledge that gives them their genuine significance and to which they give a big part of its real value. It is a pity, because then beauty separated from meaning is no more just a blessing, but can become almost a curse.

Yet beauty and knowledge must and can live in perfect harmony, as is illustrated by such an incredible number of ancient Egyptian artifacts kept and beautifully presented in museums and collections in Egypt and all over the world. Jack Josephson would certainly agree with that idea. So I thought, as I wrote this short tribute to a great friend (even if his interest goes first to the periods posterior to the New Kingdom, the period that is the focus of this paper). Jack’s humanity, generosity, science, and sense of beauty are indeed a blessing for Egyptology, as well as for Egyptologists; from America, from Egypt, and from everywhere, including France! With him I associate of course our dear Magda, his wife.

The tomb of ‘Aper-El at Saqqara (tomb Bubasteion I.1, figs. 1-2) was discovered in 1976, and then excavated, preserved, and studied

since 1980 by this writer, with his team of the MAFB (Mission Archéologique Française du Bubasteion).¹ During all these years, there were several highlights. Amongst them we can particularly mention the discovery, in November 1987, of the burial chamber of the tomb, still containing the mummies (now rather skeletons) and a large portion of a unique funerary treasure. These human remains and objects belonged to the Vizier, Divine Father, the Child of the Palace (*kap*), and several other things, ‘Aper-El, certainly an Egyptian transcription of ‘Abed-El or ‘Abdiel/‘Abdouel, a name meaning “Servant of the god El,” variant ‘Aperia (for ‘Abdi?)²; to his wife, the lady Tauret or Uriai; and to their son, the Generalissimo, Chief of the Chariotry, and Overseer of Recruits, Huy (for Amenhotep).³

The excavation of the tomb was a long and difficult task. With the MAFB we had to face many problems and challenges. We have even been almost obliged to quit because of the apparently hopeless situation that we met, and because of the really dangerous aspects of the excavation. I shall simply recall here some facts. The tomb Bub. I. 1 of ‘Aper-El is located under the rest-house of the Antiquities Service (now SCA) built on the top of the escarpment in the forties of the last century. Because of the presence of this modern building erected just over it and other very close tombs, ‘Aper-El’s sepulture suffered terribly from the water and sewage falling down from the rest-house. So, for several years, working in this tomb and trying to rescue it, in this rather strange con-

¹ To be completely accurate, the MAFB was created in 1986, and during the first years the work entered the frame of the Mission Archéologique Française de Saqqara (MAFS). For the detailed history of the work at and about ‘Aper-El’s tomb until 1989 (before the discovery of the hidden part of the chapel), see A. Zivie, *Découverte à Saqqarah. Le vizir oublié* (Paris, 1990), abbreviated below as *Découverte*, which has unhappily never been translated into English (but has been translated into Arabic with a foreword by Dr. Zahi Hawass, under the title *Kachef fi Saqqara. Maqbara ‘Abria* (Cairo, 1995). Many facts and data, updated or new, can be found in the recently published *The Lost Tombs of Saqqara* (Toulouse,

2007), by the writer, with photographs by P. Chapuis, translated into English by D. Lorton.

² See A. Zivie, “Le nom du vizir ‘Aper-El,” in *Études Égyptologiques et Bibliques à la mémoire du Père B. Couroyer*, Cahiers de la Revue biblique 36 (Paris, 1997), 115-123, where the editor did not correct some misprints of his own (cf. the review by C. Cannuyer in *CdE* 74, (1999), 45-46.

³ Certainly the elder son of the vizier, whose parents and parents-in-law remain unknown for the time being. Two other sons are mentioned in the chapel, the steward Seny and the priest Hatiai, and the family could have also included one or several daughters.

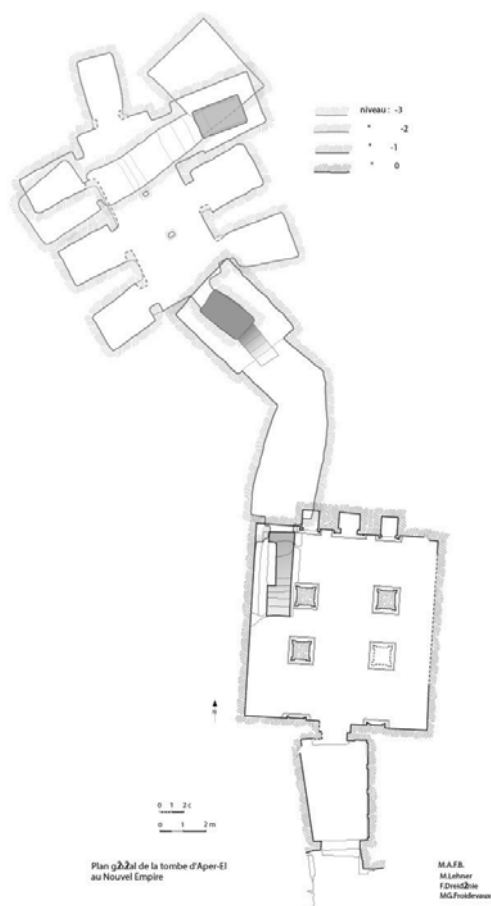


Fig. 1. Plan of the tomb (Bubasteion I.1) of 'Aper-El, by Marie-Geneviève Froidevaux (CNRS, MAFB). © Hypogées.

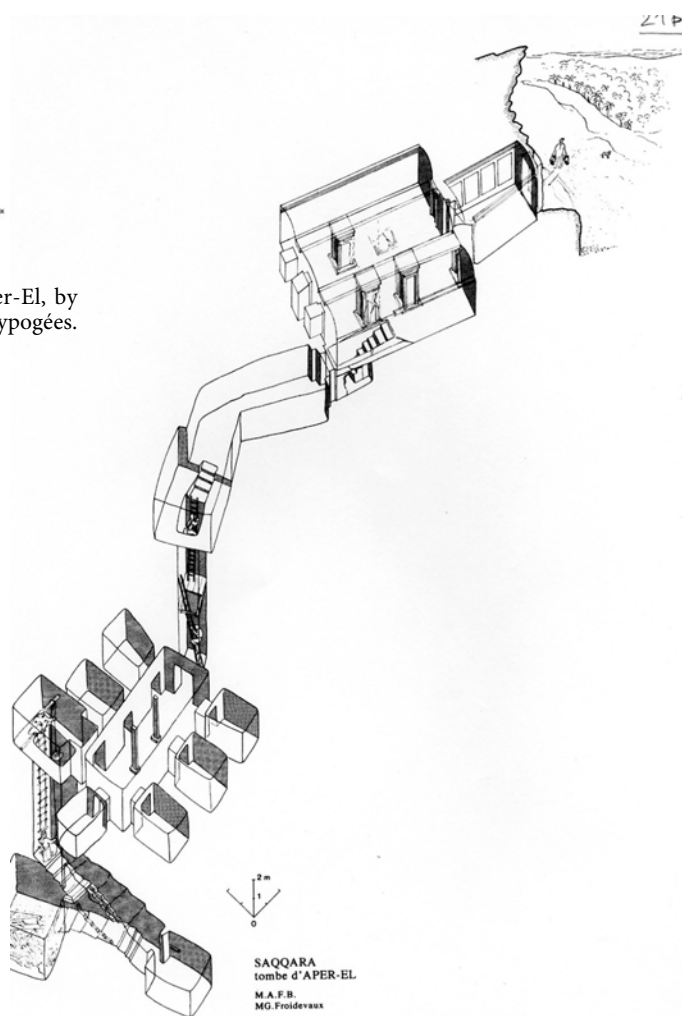


Fig. 2. Perspective showing the four levels of the tomb (Bubasteion I.1) of 'Aper-El. Axonometric drawing by Marie-Geneviève Froidevaux (CNRS, MAFB). © Hypogées.

text, was a permanent challenge for the team, with the strong support of the SCA (then Egyptian Antiquities Organization) Inspectors of the site, a challenge never definitely won.

As a matter of fact, excavating the Bubasteion, beginning with 'Aper-El's tomb, has been a real rescue operation. A few decades later, the marl clay of the *gebel* would have eventually completely collapsed and the tomb would have been lost forever.⁴ A striking illustration of the risks the tomb faced, and of our rescue role, occurred in 1989. The burial chamber of the tomb had been discovered in 1987, and its excavation began in 1988. Only half of the material, more or less, had been excavated and removed from the tomb at the end of this season. But when we came back as quickly as possible for the next campaign in 1989 (in summer, not the best season for exhausting work more than 20 m down the *gebel*), we had the surprise of discovering a kind of local "Niagara Falls" in the burial chamber. Masses of water were rushing down along the eastern side of the room. But the remaining unexcavated material was in the western side; so we arrived just in time, even if this strong hygrometric increase of the atmosphere was not very good for material (especially wood) already much decayed...⁵

Even if we felt the discreet jubilation of having been right to be obstinate, our feelings at the discovery of the burial chamber in 1987 were not exactly triumphal. No temptation to say "wonderful things" like our admired colleague Howard Carter when we caught the first glimpse into the room! Everything indeed seemed in such a bad condition. We saw at first a heap of shapeless wooden fragments, except for a coffin lid with its original shape and its mask, and some vessels. It took time before we realized that at our modest scale, we too met a unique funerary treasure, even if it had been plundered in antiquity. As a matter of fact, such a set of funerary material of the New Kingdom had never been found in a regular and

scientific excavation before this discovery (and after). This tomb and its material indeed shed new light on the period of the kings Amenhotep III and Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten). Moreover, the quality of many objects is noteworthy and is comparable to some artifacts discovered in the Theban tomb (KV 46) of Yuya and Tuya one century ago.⁶

It took two or three seasons at least (i.e., two or three years) before we could succeed, with the conservators of the mission,⁷ in giving meaning to many fragments of wood and to restore some wooden objects, and, at first, the coffins of the three owners of the tomb. Altogether there were nine coffins, three for each one, as we understood, and the lids of some of these coffins were not completely lost. Some were real masterpieces. But such a huge amount of work was waiting for us in the storerooms of the mission. And yet it took time before the discovery was acknowledged at its real value, due to several reasons, or so-called reasons. For example: the apparently bad condition of the discovered material (which needed several seasons of work and restoration to interpret all its significance). Or the "strange" context of the site, with the presence of the Antiquities rest-house and the Late and Graeco-Roman Bubasteion, with its catacombs of mummified cats. Or also the fact that Saqqara, in spite of all the discoveries and studies at this time, was known at first as an Old Kingdom cemetery. Moreover, it was difficult to admit that this tomb and its material, which were supposedly shedding some light on the Amarna Period (and which really do), did not seem so much "Amarnian" at first glance. Lastly, there is the puzzling identity of 'Aper-El: instead of considering that a vizier and a father of the god (*inter alia*) unknown before, for a period we are supposed to know so well, brings important new data, many limit themselves to saying that this man was just a "foreigner," which is certainly not true, or not so simple.⁸

⁴ And alas, not only this tomb: in the early eighties of the last century, we saw the progressive destruction of the tomb Bub. I.6, belonging to the chancellor Nehesy, certainly the man of the famous Punt expedition under the reign of Hatshepsut: see A. Zivie, "Un chancelier nommé Nehesy," in *Mélanges Adolphe Gutbub* (Montpellier, 1984), 245-252.

⁵ *Découverte à Saqqarah*, p. 125ff.

⁶ About the funerary material (treasure) discovered in the tomb, see A. Zivie, "Recherches et découvertes récentes dans la tombe d'Aperia à Saqqarah," in *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (Paris, April-June

1989), 490-505; Zivie, "Le trésor funéraire du vizir 'Aper-El," in *BSFE* 116 (1989), 31-44; Zivie, "The 'Treasury' of 'Aper-El," *EA* 1 (1991), 26-28.

⁷ Mrs. Valérie Lacoudre and Mr. Jean-Baptiste Latour, later joined by Mrs. Aleth Lorne.

⁸ A "foreign" name is not enough to make a foreigner... On this question, see Zivie, "Le nom du vizir 'Aper-El," and Zivie, "Le vizir 'Aper-El au Musée," in *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World: Studies for the Centennial of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo 2* (Cairo, 2002), 1261-1274.

Immediately after they were discovered, the objects and all the fragments were deposited in the two adjacent storerooms built at the site, close to the Inspectorate. In one of these storerooms, we even built a laboratory well fitted for conservation, restoration, photography of the coffins at the same scale, etc. The material was studied and when possible restored before being published on an ongoing basis. Of course, a large percentage of this material, particularly the wooden coffins and the elements of furniture, was in very bad condition. The conservators of the mission succeeded in reconstituting objects from small and shapeless fragments and preserving them. But some other objects were, on the contrary, in very good condition, after having received adequate treatment.

Then, after the discovery of the burial chamber itself, came the time of new surprises and discoveries: in the storerooms, indeed, but even in the tomb itself. The work realized on the objects, even on some material apparently devoid of meaning that was found in the burial chamber, gave us the opportunity to discover objects whose presence, at first, we were unaware of.⁹ It was a kind of resurrection or rebirth. But at the same time, a big surprise was waiting for us in the tomb itself. After a few seasons of work, we had the feeling that there was nothing more to be recovered from the tomb, particularly at its upper level, where the larger part of the chapel was missing, certainly destroyed or collapsed. But, preparing the final plans, we needed more information, and we tried to remove some later blocking or masonry that we could see in some places, as well as in other spots in the cliff. Carefully removing the blocking, we discovered that a large portion of the chapel was still preserved, and well preserved, with its paintings, inscriptions and decoration.¹⁰ This *coup de théâtre* and its consequences brought us an unexpected amount of scientific, but also conservation and site-management, work, always during too-short seasons.

But then came also the time of dispersion, which is sad, and can even be negative in the

case of an important archaeological discovery that brought to light rich material, in quantity and quality.¹¹ This is, nevertheless, what began to happen to the funerary treasure of 'Aper-El and his family. As is usual in such cases, two elements played their part: gold and beauty. Gold, because there are legal regulations about the antiquities, the legitimacy of which we perfectly understand, due to the always-crucial problem of security: gold objects and elements must be transferred to, and kept in, the Egyptian Museum, without exception. Beauty, because the archaeological and historical importance of the whole discovered in the tomb, and particularly of some its elements, goes often with an evident beauty. As a matter of fact, many of the objects are real "pieces de musée," as we say in French, and so some of them became, but sometimes following strange and sinuous ways, as we shall see.

For many years now, the gold objects, even the fragmentary ones, found in the funerary chamber of the vizier and his family have been transferred to the Cairo Museum (Egyptian Museum), and specifically to the jewelry room on the second floor. The pieces from tomb Bubasteion I.1 are kept in a case along the western (left) wall of the room, near the northwest corner.¹² This move has been realized in three phases, between September 1990 and November 1992, according to the progress of the work of conservation done in the mission's lab on the site. These ornaments and elements of jewels, in gold, faience, glass, or gilded wood, were found during the excavation in the rock tomb of 'Aper-El, mainly in the burial chamber, but also at upper levels, except for a much later statuette of Osiris.¹³

The exhibits include earrings, rings used as seals (they belonged to Tauret), fragments of a collar or a pectoral with inlays, and beads or pieces of collar(s) of different types, in the shape of the *nefer* sign, or little palmettes. Two kinds of gold ribbons (fragmentary), which were found around the humeri of the vizier, are also particularly noticeable. One of the coffins contained

⁹ About this phase of the work and some examples, see Zivie, *Lost Tombs of Saqqara*, 44-45; Zivie, "Aper-El, Taouret et Houy: la fouille et l'enquête continuent," *BSFE* 126 (1993), 5-16; V. Looten-Lacoudre, "Fouille et restauration de bijoux nouvellement découverts dans le matériel de la chambre funéraire d'Aper-El," *BSFE* 126 (1993), 17-23.

¹⁰ See Zivie, *Lost Tombs of Saqqara*, 46-51.

¹¹ About the beginning of this dispersion, see Zivie, in *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World*, 1261-1274.

¹² At first, these objects were exhibited in their own case with some pictures of the discovery and the work. But some time later, the room in the Cairo Museum was completely transformed and refurbished, and the presentation of 'Aper-El's objects received some modifications.

¹³ This piece (JE 98629) was discovered outside, in front of the cliff, and must be from the Late Period.

some gold circular bands, as well as a well-preserved diadem, certainly belonging to the equipment of the mummy. These objects have been registered in the Journal d'entrée (JE), on three occasions, after preservation and presentation work done by the conservators of the Museum: A. September 8, 1990: 14 entries (JE 98587-98600); B. December 4, 1990: 8 entries (JE 98602-98609); C. November 26, 1992: 14 entries (JE 98616-98629). Altogether 36 items.

Almost at the same time as gold objects came the time of "beautiful objects," at first for a superb temporary exhibit organized by the SCA in Cairo. So, in the month of July 2002, six pieces from the tomb of 'Aper-El were removed from the MAFB storerooms, having the honor of participating in the exhibit "The Hidden Treasures of the Cairo Museum," opening in December 2002 in the Egyptian Museum, for its centenary.¹⁴ The five objects that were exhibited with "Hidden Treasures" later returned to Saqqara and are now prominently displayed in the Imhotep Museum. But almost at the same time as the Cairo exhibition, other objects from the funerary treasure of 'Aper-El experienced a different fate. Because of their often-exceptional character, and more generally, because of their beauty, a certain number were chosen to be put on display in one of Egypt's new museums. Such is the case with the canopic jars of Tauret, 'Aper-El's wife, and some stone vessels that were also discovered in the vault. Thirteen objects have been removed from the storerooms on November 11, 2002, indeed, to be transported to the museum of the Great Library of Alexandria, where they have been on display for some years.

Of the thirteen objects moved to Alexandria, only ten were discovered in the tomb of 'Aper-El: four canopic jars with their lids, belonging to the lady Tauret, and two alabaster vessels. The three other numbers have nothing to do with this tomb, but are a series of Late or Graeco-Roman Period

amulets found in 1998 in the tomb of the lady Maïa (Bub. I.20).

However, Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the SCA, who has always been aware of the problems generated by the dispersion of such an ensemble, decided that all of the objects that had been transported formerly to Alexandria had to be brought back to Saqqara. Therefore, eventually Tauret's canopic jars and vessels (and also the late amulets) came back to the Memphite necropolis after their long sojourn on the Mediterranean coast: the transfer and return trip occurred on May 11, 2007, with the efficient and kind help of the curators of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina Antiquities Museum and of the Director and Inspectors of Saqqara.

Happily, the recent opening of the beautiful Imhotep Museum in Saqqara is changing a lot of things in this respect. Now "beautiful objects," and not only those, can be exhibited on the site in outstanding conditions, even if temporary exhibits can be organized here and there in the future. 'Aper-El's funerary treasure now has its own case in this museum (northwest room, right-hand case). Some twenty objects are now exhibited (fig. 3), being amongst the most beautiful ones discovered in the tomb, we must confess, and including the five objects that had been exhibited in the Cairo Museum ("Hidden Treasures") in 2002.¹⁵ Amongst them figure some elements connected to the mummy of 'Aper-El (amulets, pectoral, etc.), and also two objects that became emblematic of the tomb: an ivory unguent palette in the shape of a *Tilapia nilotica*,¹⁶ and the head of a young woman in stuccoed and painted wood, which must have been the support of a wig.¹⁷ We can also quote two outstanding glass inlays representing the goddess Nut; they are parts of the lids of the inner coffins of the lady Tauret and the generalissimo Huy.¹⁸ Lastly, how not to mention here two cubit rods, one in schist, anepigraphic,

¹⁴ The numbers of these pieces in the SCA (former EAO) register of the MAFB at Saqqara are n° 28, 107, 130, 225, 172, and 220 A-B (these last two numbers are different pieces of one piece, a pectoral in schist), and 286 (a stela eventually not exhibited). In this list, the first five objects were superbly exhibited in a showcase, the last one is not. See also Z. Hawass in *Hidden Treasures*.

¹⁵ Amongst the exhibited objects, there are also two elements of a wooden harp, discovered in an upper level of the tomb Bub. I.1, in a different context, and therefore certainly not belonging to this ensemble.

¹⁶ Discovered in the "eastern tombs" communicating with 'Aper-El's and without doubt coming from his material, because a sherd from a wine jar and inscribed with the name

of the general Huy, which was discovered close to this palette à fard, perfectly fits the jar itself, found in the burial chamber. For this *tilapia*, which seemingly received the number JE 99124 after its passage in Cairo, see A. Zivie, "Tombes rupestres de la falaise du Bubasteion à Saqqarah—II^{ème} et III^{ème} campagnes (1982-1983)," *ASAE* 70 (1985); and *Découverte à Saqqarah*, 65.

¹⁷ This wooden head has been published by A. Zivie, "Portrait de femme. Une tête en bois stuqué récemment découverte à Saqqarah," *RdE* 39 (1988), 179-195. See also Zivie, *Découverte à Saqqarah*, 83-86.

¹⁸ For these inlays, see Zivie, *Découverte à Saqqarah*, 109ff., and *The Lost Tombs*, 38-39.



Fig. 3. General view of the case devoted to 'Aper-El's treasure in the Imhotep Museum, Saqqara. Picture A. Zivie © Hypogées.

and the other in wood, with the names and titles of 'Aper-El?¹⁹

With the exhibition of beautiful, and even outstanding, pieces in the Imhotep Museum at Saqqara, and the return to the SCA storerooms at Saqqara of the objects once sent to Alexandria, the situation of this unusual ensemble seems, and is, better. But dispersion is still operating. Certain objects from the funerary treasure of 'Aper-El could perhaps enter the new museums in the Cairo region: the Museum of Egyptian Civilization, which is now under construction in Fustat,²⁰ and the Grand Museum of Egypt, north of the pyramids, a grandiose edifice that is planned for the coming years.

The last, and perhaps the most important, event in the endless saga of 'Aper-El's tomb treasure happened at the end of the year 2007 with the moving of the MAFB storerooms to the new storerooms of the SCA. Due to new site-management policies of the SCA, indeed, all the storerooms constructed on the plateau of Saqqara have to be

emptied and dismantled. Naturally, the rich material gathered by the mission over the years is no exception to this rule. The mission, therefore, had to leave its former storerooms on the plateau in December 2007, and to move, rather quickly, all of their contents (including many more objects than 'Aper-El's) into the new storeroom n° 2 of the SCA, north of the storeroom n° 1 and the Imhotep Museum at the limit of the valley. This move, realized in good conditions due to the help of the authorities of Saqqara and the conservators of the mission (Mr. Fabrizio Finotelli and particularly Ms. Vanessa De Castro Dutra), is not without consequences, at least for a while, for two reasons. First, the mission had two storerooms (one being a real lab) of altogether 200 m² on the plateau and has now only one of 50 m² in its new premises. Second, the transportation of the remains of the nine coffins that were originally in the tomb has been a challenging operation for such fragile material. Moreover, this particular material still has to find its definitive location, which will allow

¹⁹ After having been exhibited in the Cairo Museum, they received the ref. JE 99121 (schist cubit), and JE 99120 (wooden cubit). About this last object particularly, see Zivie, in *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World*.

²⁰ I understand that a certain number of objects removed

for some years from the storerooms of the mission, including "beautiful objects" from 'Aper-El's tomb, are already in the Civilization Museum, but still in boxes.

us to continue the difficult work of presentation, which these sadly damaged but exceptional coffins still deserve in the future, in spite of all the important conservation work already realized.

²¹ I want to thank here Dr. Zahi Hawass, who strongly supports the necessity of keeping together the *membradis-jecta* of ‘Aper-El. In this quest, I have also received the help of the Director of Saqqara, Mr. Osama El-Shimy, the Chief Inspectors, and the Inspectors, as well as the officials in charge of the Imhotep Museum and the new SCA storerooms. I also

But at the same time, the finder of this precious treasure rescued from destruction and oblivion would like to hope that he will not have to set off, again and again, on the trail of these traveling “beautiful” objects!²¹

take this opportunity to say how much the work on ‘Aper-El’s material owes to Marie-Geneviève Froidevaux, whose drawings will be so precious for the forthcoming complete publication of the tomb and its material, once the last phase of work in the new storeroom is finished.