

FINAL REPORT

Archaeological Institute of America

Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Scholarship

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## The Internship

### The Turin Museology Program

The Turin Museology Program is a collaborative field school between the Institute for Field Research (IFR), the University of California – Los Angeles, the University of British Columbia, and the Museo Egizio. Since 2016, the field school has educated students on not only Ancient Egyptian history but the ins and outs of the field of museums and museology.

### Why I Picked This Program

Working in museums and cultural heritage has always been my career goal. Before being admitted to Brown University, I worked at art museums, National Parks, libraries, and archives. I knew this was the path I wanted to take in furthering my education. That being said, my undergraduate foundation is in Early American Colonial History and the colonization of Namibia. I studied these two (if you will) categories by studying material culture in textiles and colonial paper printing. With the resources at Brown, I can develop a more concrete, academically based understanding of the Ancient Mediterranean, namely Egypt and Greece.

These two schools of study give me a “switch-hitter” approach to job hunting. I can comfortably and competently work in any museum regardless of if their collections are American History or the Ancient World. This substantially broadens the list of potential employers, not just nationally but on a global scale. Of course, I cannot deny that I love Ancient History, and I did not have the resources to study it at my undergraduate alma mater.

The field school fell in line with my two-prong approach; it would not only satisfy my criteria for working with museums, but it would provide a solid start in learning Ancient

Egyptian History. It would also focus on techniques I wanted to explore deeper, such as Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), photogrammetry, and digital exhibits. This is a perfect segue into the big assignment for the field school: the Final Project.

## **Final Project**

### **Inspiration**

As part of our field school, we were required to create a digital exhibit. We were given a lot of free reign in determining what our exhibit would look like and what it would be about. This left many of us a bit lost in deciding what to do because there was just so much in the museum!

Before I explain my inspiration, I would ask the reader a question. Answer truthfully – do you not try to find animals in exhibits? Be it modern art, Renaissance, or what have you, I always try to find cats or dogs in the museum. Lucky for us, each day, we would gather in the permanent exhibit of the Tomb of Iti and Neferu. The door to our classroom was in a narrow corridor just beside it. The exhibit is comprised mainly of the wall paintings in their tomb.

Every early morning while I waited for my classmates, I would look at the exhibit. Very quickly, I noticed the number of dogs depicted. I also noticed that they appeared to be the same dogs, not just a random representation of “here is a generic dog.” I became more curious about these dogs, especially after looking at the funerary stela.



Figure 1 - Funerary stela showing Iti, Neferu, and two dogs receiving offerings. Limestone, First Intermediate Period (2118-1980 BC) Gebelein, Tomb of Iti and Neferu, Schiaparelli excavations (1911) S.13114.

Iti and Neferu had their dogs in their funerary stela. It felt very significant to me, so I decided to give an “exhibit within an exhibit” by using the Tomb of Iti and Neferu to talk about Ancient Egyptian dogs. I learned so much about pets and the long legacy of dogs within Ancient Egyptian culture. By now, I think I know more about Ancient Egyptian corgis than what most people would think is necessary.

You can view my final project here: <https://itineferudogs.wordpress.com/>

### Bibliography

This is just a tiny sampling of critical readings for my exhibit that I found particularly fascinating. A more extensive and more detailed bibliography is available on the digital exhibit itself here: <https://itineferudogs.wordpress.com/bibliography/>

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Figure 2 - Short legged terrier type dogs. (left) from the tomb of Tehuihetep, 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; (right) from the tomb of Mereruka, 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Scanned from Chapter 3 in "Dogs of Ancient Egypt" by Douglas J. Brewer; rendered for transparency by a friend and fellow academic, Park Parison.

## Dramatic Shifts

### My Thesis Changed!

At the time of my application to the Elizabeth Bartman Museum Internship Scholarship, I identified my thesis as an investigation of the broad curation and collection management of Ancient Egyptian collections by examining two art museums and two anthropological museums. One of each would be American, and another European to serve as counterparts. My four museums are the MFA Boston, Penn Museum, Museo Egizio, and the Neues Museum. My thought process in determining this method was that Ancient Egyptian collections are often depicted in both types of museums. Just as any scientist tries to collect a diverse sample, I did not want to narrow my focus to museums in the United States.

I could not have anticipated that my time at the Museo Egizio would radically alter the direction of my thesis and my career in general. I am also an archaeologist – I went into the field with the firm conviction that I did not want to deal with human remains. I wanted to study craft and trade, so I did not need to invest in bioarchaeology. I learned about NAGPRA law and repatriation in my undergraduate degree and have carried it with me. I strongly believe in repatriation and advocate for it.

The Museo Egizio's ethos and culture in how it cares for the human remains in its collections was surprising, mostly because I had assumptions from my time in Berlin. The Neues displays approximately four remains that I could find, three of which are Roman-era child mummies in a display case that appears to be curated around gold objects. There was much filigree on the mummies. When I was in the Neues, it was startling to come up upon the three child mummies suddenly. The museum's atmosphere was tense and weird; the covid precautions had dozens of guards forcefully directing people along the exhibits. It was a bit disorienting and



distracting, so I am unsure that I would have noticed any warning that human remains were in the exhibit. When I looked around further, there was no such warning at all. The fourth, I did not see myself, but a member in my Public Humanities cohort texted a photo that was possibly a predynastic pit mummy in an open display from what I could determine in the image.

With this unintentional bias in mind, I thought the displays would be similar. Possibly more theatrical and played up for the “creepiness” of the remains. I was blown away that it was not at all alike. Firstly, the Museo Egizio does have a warning label and indicates it at the start of the exhibit entrance. Shown on the left, it is much larger in scale than the photo depicts. It



Figure 3 - Sign alerting to the red triangle symbol as having human remains.

explains to the patron to look for the red triangle mark that indicates a display contains human remains.

I would not have known there was a body in several displays without the marker saying so. The Museo utilizes the sort of “open storage” display method by keeping many of the mummies within their respective coffins. We do not always see the mummy, thus focusing attention on the coffin itself rather than their human remains. Director Christian Greco and curator

Paolo Del Vesco explained that they do not want to display the remains of a person unless it makes sense within the exhibit. For example, the Tomb of Kha and Merit has their mummies, but they are in their coffins. The exhibit’s point was to display their tomb goods and how unique and extensive it was. The exhibit also ties into the story of Schiaparelli discovering the tomb and to Deir el-Medina and the workers. Therefore, it would not make any curative sense to display their remains except in the name of theatrics, which they did not want.

Their main exhibit of human remains was probably my most pivotal moment. It isn't easy to describe the room, but I will try my best. There is a large wall discussing the ethics of showing human remains, and the Museo Egizio surveyed social media asking if human remains (mummies) should be displayed. There is an entrance and a path that loops around the exhibit and then exits the other side. The exhibit room itself is dark, especially when the lights go out. Oh yes, the lights go out! The mummies are in a storage unit in the center, with only some displayed on the shelves. A series of screens narrates the daily life span of Ancient Egyptians through the lens of the ages of the mummies. One must be very patient with this exhibit because of the frequent lights off and lights on. You do not always have the right or access to the remains, which is curatively demonstrated here. It also reduces the stress on the human remains by being under display lights. WARNING: contains human remains: Here is a video showing the [lights on](#) and [lights off](#) effect. As you can see, it is a slow process.

From the day we were guided through it by Paolo Del Vesco, I visited this exhibit several times daily. I do not know what drew me there, but I would stand at each section and carefully observe. It was also a reprieve from the museum's crowded, often noisy, and sensory overload. The very nature of the room makes people quieter. People either walk through very carefully like they are going through a shrine, or silently stand and wait to read all the text and video on the screen. It took approximately 45 minutes to watch and look at all the life stages, and human remains.

As someone who was formerly an EMT, I spent the better part of my life making sure bodies did not die and had witnessed death. When I earned my bachelor's degree, I did not want to see more of it and instead wanted to bring these people back home to where they belonged. Then I learned that Egyptian academics and government have only asked for royal mummies,

such as Rameses I, to be repatriated. According to a letter from Salima Ikram and Zahi Hawass to the Penn Museum, they opposed Penn's decision not to display human remains.

I asked myself, then, how does one take care of these remains? Of my field school cohort, I was one of the few that could stomach seeing or being around human remains. Human remains are a "difficult" part of collections, one that I know archivists, curators, and collections managers may not feel comfortable with. But I am comfortable and can do that with sensitivity and understanding of the human part in the word human remains.

Thus, my journey begins with narrowing my initial thesis topic to the care and curation of human remains in Ancient Egyptian collections. I am throwing myself entirely into bioarchaeology and osteology. It also led me to my idea for one of the displays at the Museo Egizio.

### Re-Imagining the Predynastic Man Display

One of the displays I also spent much time with was the Predynastic Man. After finishing the brief exhibit about the museum's history, you start the exhibits chronologically. The Predynastic Man is the first thing you see when you enter, which is why the sign marker giving the warning label exists.



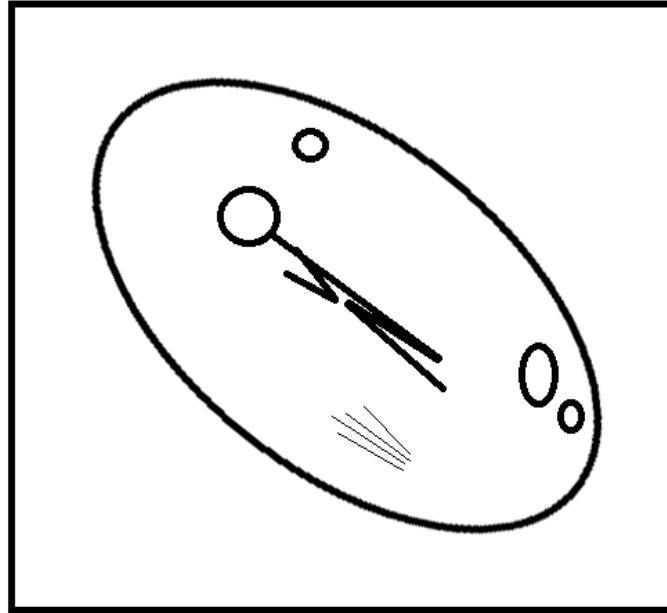
*Figure 4 - Side view of the display case. Museo Egizio, Predynastic Man.*

The display is set up like a pit grave with a long sign off to the side that explains it. The sign label talks about predynastic pit burials and the acquisition of the mummy by Ernesto Schiaparelli, the father of Museo Egizio. It hints at how the mummy market that existed during Schiaparelli's time was unethical and particularly unreliable in the authentication. That section reads:

The burial assemblage on display here does not come from an archaeological excavation. It was purchased in Egypt by Ernesto Schiaparelli at the beginning of the twentieth century. It consists of the body of an adult man, about forty years of age, and grave-goods including arrows, baskets contain textile fragments, and a pair of sandals. Recent scientific testing of the body and the textiles in the baskets suggest that they may indeed belong to the same burial. (A Predynastic Burial; sign in Museo Egizio)

It admits that it cannot verify with certainty that the goods shown in the display are from this man's burial. Dr. Hans Bernard, the leader of the Turin Museology program, pointed out that

the sandals were Roman. Obviously, Romans did not exist in the predynastic era of Ancient Egypt.



*Figure 5 - Rough sketch of the top-down view.*

This is where I imagine an artist intervention of sorts. I want to visually depict the sense of displacement and uncertainty, as I think it is essential to address the fact that this man was taken from his grave and mixed in with the “bulk sale” of items. My idea for the display is to 3D print some generic grave goods like the ones in the display (sans Roman sandals) in a greyscale material. The choice of greyscale is to demonstrate a void. While some may envision a void as black, I did not want to associate death and this burial with something dark or spooky. A grey feels more neutral and ties in with the rest of the grey designs but still stands in stark contrast to the sandy color within the pit-grave motif.



*Figure 6 - My favorite grey, surprising no one, is this one from the camera color balance card.*

I would also add interpretive labels to the corners of the glass on top of the display: one Italian, one English, and one Arabic as part of the Museo's tri-lingual initiative. I am still unsure what should be said, but I want a more realistic depiction of early 20th-century academics partaking in these roadside market purchases of human remains and other goods. This causes considerable issues in museums for provenance and authentication, which can get the patron to think critically about what that means within museums and the history of archaeology.

I passively mentioned this idea to the Museo, but I am collecting this idea into what I call [a visual essay](#). Perhaps – with a bit of courage - I will formally offer this idea and can collaborate with the Museo Egizio on this vision to make it a reality.