

“CONSERVATORS & ARCHAEOLOGISTS” BRINGS TOGETHER TWO RELATED DISCIPLINES

by Sven Kielau

Minia, December 2021: “My lovely students,” this is how Prof. Dr. Hussein Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, professor for restoration and conservation at the University of Minia in central Egypt, addresses his students at the end of the DAAD Winter School “Conservators & Archaeologists: Understanding, Preserving and Communicating Material Culture 2021.” He and Prof. Dr. Regine Schulz, scientific director of the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim (RPM) and professor at the Institute for Egyptology and Coptic Studies at the Ludwig Maximilians University Munich (LMU), are in charge of the project. In their final speeches for the 2021 project year at the University of Minia, both emphasized that the participating students of conservation, restoration and archaeology, will be responsible for preserving Egypt’s world heritage and imparting knowledge about it.

Since 2006 there has been close cooperation in the field of conservation and restoration between the RPM, the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Hildesheim /Holzminden/Göttingen (HAWK) and the University of Minia. The late Prof. Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow (HAWK) played a key role in regular exchange projects that took place from 2012 and were financed by the Volkswagen Foundation. The exchange ended with the death of Nicole Riedl-Siedow in 2017. However, the close contacts between Minia and Hildesheim re-

mained – both cities have been cooperating since 1979. It is thanks in particular to Regine Schulz and her friendship with Hussein M. A. Ibrahim that the desire for further collaborations remained.

The exchange has been taking place again since 2021, now financed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and expanded by the participation of archaeologists. The funding for 2021 was almost €40,000, for 2022 almost €90,000 was approved.

During this time of the pandemic, there are always two sides to planning events and projects, the plan and reality. The plan was to hold a two-week summer school in Hildesheim in 2021 and a one-week winter school in Minia later in the year. In the autumn of the pandemic year 2021, the participating institutions RPM, HAWK and University of Minia were able to hold the belated summer school in Hildesheim with the presence of all those involved – a success in view of the gloomy forecasts at the beginning of 2021! In addition to Prof. Dr. Hussein M. A. Ibrahim and the archaeologist Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Massoud I. A., 13 students of conservation /restoration and archaeology from Minia were also able to travel to Hildesheim. In addition, Prof. Dr. Julia Schultz from the HAWK, teacher for the conservation / restoration of furniture, wooden objects and material combinations, was persuaded to take part,

Fig. 1 Prof. Hussein M. A. Ibrahim (third from left), Prof. Mahmoud Massoud (second from left), the conservator Miss Reem Maher Abd el-Wahab Mohamed (fourth from left) and Egyptian as well as German students looking at ancient objects from the Pelizaeus Museum (and two modern objects imitating ancient Egyptian statue heads).



Fig. 2 Organizers and participants "Conservators & Archaeologists 2021" in Hildesheim, November 2021.
1st row (from left): Margot Rathenow, Mahmoud Massoud, Regine Schulz, Hussein Ibrahim, Marc Hudy, Ludolf Pelizaes. The 2021 coordinators were Helmut Brandl (2nd row, right) and Sven Kielau (3rd row, 2nd from right).

as well as the Egyptologist Dr. Helmut Brandl and the author, who is a classical archaeologist. This was preceded by multiple rescheduling and the boundless cooperation and support of the German Embassy in Cairo to issue the necessary visas. Some Egyptian participants had already been vaccinated with the Astra Zeneca vaccine, others with a Chinese vaccine that is not recognized in the EU. Luckily, Johnson & Johnson has since become available in Egypt, so that those

who took part received their vaccinations with it. When these requirements were also met, the flight tickets could be booked.

On most of the ten project days, the participants met in the beautiful Schaffhausen-Saal of the RPM. The restoration team at the RPM had put a lot of effort into ensuring that ancient original objects could be used, including stone sculptures and wooden statuettes from the Pharaonic eras and mummy portraits painted on wood from the Roman period. On the first day, the participating students were divided into four nationally and professionally mixed teams. "Team Ibis", for example, consisted of the Egyptian students of conservation/restoration Reem Maher Ab-del-wahab (University of Minia), Mazen Khaled Garmal (Minia) and Kassadra Wirth (HAWK), and the archaeology students Amania Talaat Ahmed (Minia) and Carina Rosenlehner (University of Göttingen).

The working groups consisted of thirteen conservation/restoration students (nine from Minia, four from the HAWK), seven archaeology students (four from Minia, three from Göttingen), as well as two restorers from Minia who work there for the Ministry of Antiquity and Tourism in Cairo. The task of the teams was to work on selected RPM objects in terms of conservation, restoration and archaeology. This included, for example, detailed material investigations, damage mapping,

archaeological descriptions and interpretations. The participating teachers not only held lessons, but also supported the teams in working independently on the objects and gave keynote speeches on specific topics such as “restoration and conservation of metal objects” or “packaging antique objects for international lending.”

For some of the Egyptian students, participating in the autumn school was their first trip abroad. For the students, it was also an absolute specialty to be able to work with antique originals, because in Egypt this is usually reserved for trained scientists. Communication in English was not always easy – for co-director Hussein M. A. Ibrahim in particular, this meant the additional task of translating into Arabic, which he mastered with great calm and patience. The exchange was an incentive for many young students to improve their English.

For the German students, physical participation in the summer school meant a break from the remote online studies. At the same time, together with the experienced students from Minia, they proved to be important “engines” in their teams, who were able to pull the less experienced participants along.

Excursions were also undertaken during the autumn school. We took the train to Berlin to visit one of the most famous archaeological objects in the world. When, after an expert tour of the Neues Museum by Dr. Helmut Brandl and the director of the Egyptian provincial museums, Dr. Ahmed Hemida, the students finally saw the bust of Nefertiti, and time stood still a bit. Some of the participants from Minia could hardly tear themselves away from the contemplation of the world-famous bust. The importance of Nefertiti is explained by the site of Tell el-Amarna in the Governorate of Minia. Nefertiti is also included in the coat of arms of the University of Minia.

There are a number of people to thank for the successful implementation of the autumn school, which ended with the official award of a certificate – there are too many to name them all. Special thanks go to our grande dame of the Hildesheim-Minia town cooperation, Margot Rathenow, who supports us organizationally and financially with the town cooperation twinning steering group of the city of Hildesheim (at this point we wish Margot a speedy recovery!). The collaboration with colleagues from the Landesmuseum Hannover, the Lower Saxony State Office for the Preservation of Monuments, seminars by the restorer Jens Klocke on the subject of “Dealing with ancient mummies” and the conser-

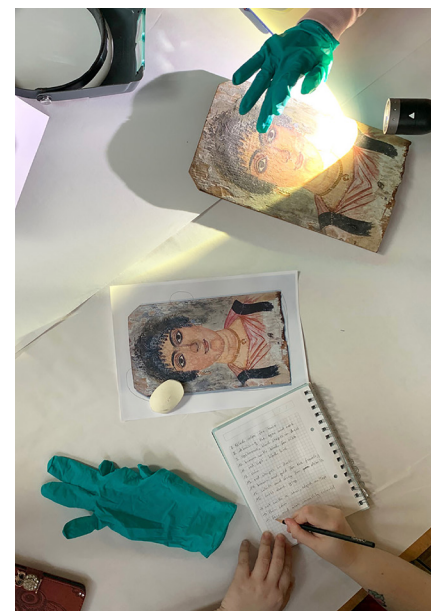


Fig. 3 Students examining a mummy portrait (2nd century CE) from the RPM collection.



Fig. 4 Winter School participants visiting Hermopolis Magna, behind the architrave of a 3rd century BCE sanctuary. The blocks bear a Greek inscription that reveals details of the yet unexplored complex.

vator Antje Zygalski on the wooden sarcophagus of Penju from the RPM collection, enriched this program to include other valuable specialist units. When the autumn school ended, everyone involved was confident that they would be able to travel to Minia for a week in December for the concluding week-long winter school at the Archaeological Museum of Mallawi (Minia Governorate).

In the course of November 2021, however, the pandemic increased again, and teachers and students at the HAWK were not allowed to travel abroad. So it was decided that only the author and the co-director Prof. Dr. Regine Schulz, after weighing the health risk for themselves, would travel. Dr. Helmut Brandl prepared video lectures that were used by the Egyptian students and the German students who were not traveling with them, to deepen their knowledge of certain ob-

jects. Instead, the six German students received a small DAAD grant to continue working on the catalogue entries for the objects at home – online meetings with the German lecturers took place for support.

In Minia and Mallawi, the participants, from the 11th-19th, December 2021, examined selected objects in the permanent exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Mallawi. Damage mapping was carried out over four days, objects were measured and photographed. There were exercises in dealing with archaeological specialist literature and in writing catalogue texts. An archaeological excursion day was held for the students to Tell el-Amarna and the site of the ancient city of Hermopolis Magna. All activities were supported in many ways, notably by the director of the museum in Mallawi, Jehan Naseem and her team, as well as by the archaeological inspectors of the sites visited: Fathy Awad, Hesham Abdel Kader and Sayed Abdelmalik.

In 2022, the “Conservators & Archaeologists” project will again be funded by the DAAD, now in the renowned “Higher Education Dialogue with the Muslim World” program. The project was expanded for this. Not only the RPM, the HAWK and the University of Minia are involved, but also the LMU Munich (represented by Prof. Dr. Regine Schulz), the Technical University of Braunschweig

with the Institute for Building History (Prof. Dr. Ulrike Fauerbach) and the Foundation Euro-Mediterranean Space of Knowledge and the Université de Picardie Jules Vernes in Amiens (represented by the historian Prof. Dr. Ludolf Pelizaeus). In 2021, the vacant professorship of the late Nicole Riedl-Siedow for stone objects and architectural surfaces was filled. We are very pleased that Prof. Dr. Barbara Beckett is on board as a partner and co-director.

With the increased funding, a 17-day summer school in Hildesheim and a 24-day winter school in Minia are planned for 2022.

The summer school will be similar to last year’s, with the winter school or Field School taking place primarily at the ancient site of Hermopolis Magna. Superficially visible antiquities there, including the remains of a Greek-style Ptolemaic sanctuary from the 3rd century BCE and the Amarna period relief blocks scattered throughout the field (approx. 1,300 BCE) are to be processed under the same aspects as the museum objects in 2021, including the first publication in a project catalogue. The topic of the DAAD program „Higher Education Dialogue with the Muslim World” is taken into account by Prof. Dr. Pelizaeus, who initiated an embedded workshop on the subject of “Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean”, in which the students are actively involved. The

summer school will also focus on objects that have to do with cultural transformation processes and cultural diversity.

In addition to objects in the RPM collection, gravestones from one of Hildesheim's Jewish cemeteries are being studied. The site of Hermopolis Magna, which will play a central role in the Autumn School, bears witness to a wide variety of cultural influences due to its thousands of years of settlement and offers many points of contact. Last but not least, the project is also about bringing the other cultures closer to the students. In 2021, we attended an outstanding baroque concert in the Imperial Palace of Goslar at the invitation of the Theater für Niedersachsen (TfN).

During the winter school, we took the Egyptian participants on an evening excursion to the village of Nazletedid near Minia, which is predominantly inhabited by Christian-Orthodox (Coptic) Egyptians, and where our student Aml Wageeh lives. Attending a service, meeting a priest and visiting a community center with delicious hospitality made this a special evening for all.

It is very fortunate for everyone involved that there are programs that bring students, young scientists and teachers together and create and strengthen professional and personal bonds.

Our thanks also go to the President of the University of Minia, Prof. Dr. Mostafa Abdel Nabi, the President of the HAWK, Dr. Marc Hudy and the management of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, for their willingness to support this project.

The author is a classical archaeologist and has been a Research Fellow at the RPM since 2019. In 2020, he suggested expanding the project to an interdisciplinary level and applying for funding from the DAAD. In 2021, the project was included in the DAAD funding line "Egyptian-German Progress Partnership / Short Measures," and in 2022 in the DAAD program "University Dialogue with the Islamic World." A continuation of the project is also planned for 2023 and beyond.

The page www.facebook.com/minia.hildesheim updates regularly on the exchange.



Fig. 5 Meeting the President of the University of Minia, Prof. Dr. Mostafa Abdel Nabi (second from left) during the Winter School. About 60,000 young people study at the Central Egyptian University.