

The antiquities path: from the Sale Room of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, through dealers, to private and public collections. A work in progress

Patrizia Piacentini

(PLATES XII–XXI)

Notes, letters and photographs related to Egyptian antiquities that found their way into public or private collections, or whose location is unknown at present, are housed in the Loret, Quibell, Varille and Bothmer archives preserved in the Università degli Studi di Milano. A research project on these objects, now scattered around the world, started with the examination of the copy of some pages of the register of the Cairo Museum Sale Room. Most likely opened at the end of 1892 (even if official sales of objects took place since around 1883), it was active until 1979. This register provides the photographs, a short description, and the names of the buyers of items that were judged saleable, as “duplicates” of objects already present in the Collection. Combining information from archives and museums it is now possible to follow the path of numerous objects: of some of them, we can identify the owner(s), and eventually find out where they are kept at present; of others, sold to public museums, it is possible to establish the original provenance and trace their way from the ancient sites to the Cairo Museum Sale Room, and then to antiquities dealers, auctions, different owners, up to their final location.

1. *Starting points and objectives*

In the Loret, Quibell, Varille and Bothmer archives preserved at the Università degli Studi di Milano, we found many notes, letters, and photographs related to Egyptian antiquities that found their way into public or private collections, or whose location is unknown at present.¹ A research project on these items now scattered around the world has been initiated by the Chair of Egyptology of the Università degli Studi di Milano, with multiple objectives:

- to better understand what kind of objects were chosen by the Egyptian Antiquities Service to be donated, sold, or included in the “partage” over more than one century (mid 19th–mid 20th centuries). On the other side, to better understand what kind of items/monuments were directly

1. On the Egyptological archives of the University of Milan, cf. P. PIACENTINI (ed.), *Egypt and the Pharaohs: From the Sand to the Library. Pharaonic Egypt in the Archives and Libraries of the Università degli Studi di Milano*, « Le vetrine del sapere » 9, Milano 2010, in particular the chapter *The Egyptological Archives of the Università degli Studi di Milano*, pp. 61–114.