Croato-Aegyptica Electronica. Database of the Egyptian antiquities in Croatian museum and private collections

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ISSN 1567-214X

Abstract

In Croatia are more than 4.030 Egyptian artefacts in 20 museums and an unknown number in private collections. The basic aim of the project 'Croato-Aegyptica Electronica' (CAE) is to select relevant material presenting the Egyptian cultural heritage in Croatia both in institutions and private collections.

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1. Introduction

In Croatia there are more than 4.030 artefacts in 20 museums and an unknown number in private collections (I presume around 1000). The basic aim of the project 'Croato-Aegyptica Electronica' (CAE) is to select relevant material presenting the Egyptian cultural heritage in Croatia both in institutions and private collections. It will include all Egyptian museums and private collections in Croatia from Predynastic periods until the Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th century AD.

2. The Egyptian collections in Croatia

Most of our artefacts came to museums in the second part of 19th century from various private collections. There are more than 3.140 artefacts pertaining to the Egyptian civilization kept in the Archaeological Museum of Zagreb, the most important cultural and museum institution of the city of Zagreb and Croatia. The nucleus of the collection dates from the donation in 1862 of the well-known 'Zagreb mummy' of Nesi-Hensu with its linen Etruscan wrappings (*Liber linteus Zagrabiensis*). The bulk of the collection consists of the Egyptian collection collected by the Austrian under Marshall Franz Koller that was bought for the National Museum in Zagreb in 1868. It comprises about 2300 artefacts. Next to the Egyptian collection as a main part of the Egyptological inventory of the Archaeological Museum of Zagreb, there are many other artefacts related to the history of Egypt kept in the museum. There are about 500 pieces of Ptolemaic coinage, and the coins from the Roman era minted in Alexandria kept in the Numismatic collection. The Antique collection comprises the statues, statuettes and epigraphic monuments related to the Egyptian cults of Greco-Roman era, originating from the Mediterranean or from the Croatian historical area. During the last 150 years, the collections have been supplemented by a variety of smaller or larger purchases and donations by private individuals, so the number of artefacts increases constantly.

There are also smaller or larger collections of Egyptian origin in other museums in Croatia. The most important collections according to the number of artefacts are to be found in the Mimara Museum in Zagreb (503), the Archaeological Museum of Dubrovnik: the Dubrovnik museums (197), the Archaeological Museum of Split (84), the Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula (38), the Collection of the St. Euphemia monastery in Kampor on the island of Rab (14), the Archaeological collection of The Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb (11), the Archaeological Museum of Zadar (13), The Museum of Slavonia in Osijek (10), Museum of the City of Varaždin (6), the Franciscan monastery in Sinj (6), and in about a dozen more town and regional museums with only one or two artefacts. According to our knowledge, there are 4030 artefacts in museum institutions and almost 1000 artefacts in private collections in Croatia. The data on each collection are published in the book 'Egypt in Croatia' (Tomorad, 2003).

3. Croato-Aegyptica Electronica (CAE). General information

The main goal of the CAE project is to build an aimed and selected database of relevant monuments pertaining to cultural influences of Egyptian civilization in the Croatian historical area based on the institutional and private collections in Croatia.

In the initial phase of project development, the plan is to process the Egyptological artefacts kept in the Egyptian, Ancient and Numismatic collections of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (AMZ). Simultaneously with processing the monuments from the AMZ, we plan to process all the artefacts kept in other museum collections in Croatia and to include the results into the database. After processing the collections of museum institutions in Zagreb (Mimara Museum in Zagreb, The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Benko Horvat Collection, Museum of the city of Zagreb), we plan to process scientifically the artefacts kept in museums outside of Zagreb (The Dubrovnik museums: Archaeological Museum of Dubrovnik, Archaeological Museum of Split, Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula, Archaeological Museum of Zadar, The Museum of Slavonia in Osijek, The City Museum of Varaždin, and variety of town and regional museums with minor collections) that have not yet been interpreted and processed, and to include the results into the database as well.

Several similar projects are currently in progress in the world, such as the 'Egyptologica. Museum Collection Project' (main researcher: Gerhard H. de Knegt), 'Totenbuch project' (main researcher: Dr. Irmtraut Munro, Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Bonn), 'Petrie Museum Project', and a few projects under the aegis of the 'CCER' (Centre for Computer-aided Egyptological Research, Utrecht University directed by Prof. Dr. Dirk Van Der Plas). These link the Croatian project directly to the contemporary activities in Egyptology. At the beginning of last year, the virtual 'The Global Egyptian Museum' with about 6.600 artefacts started working under the aegis of the Centre for Computer-aided Egyptological Research CCER. It is believed that 'The Global Egyptian Museum' would include about 17.500 artefacts by the end of the year 2004. Currently, the most

important museum collections in the world are involved in this project. By connecting to this project, Croatia could show the great cultural value of artefacts kept in national museum institutions.

The particular value of the 'Croato-Aegyptica electronica' projects is also the fact that it is a pioneer effort aiming to revise and correct the available data published in the catalog and museological works by authors such as Šime Ljubič (Ljubić, 1889) and Janine Monnet Saleh (Monnet Saleh, 1970) which are considered relevant even today.

The database as a finalized product, available through different media, will guarantee the comprehensive insight into the rich Croatian Egyptological material for national and foreign researchers and cultural institutions, offering a practical and quick search through the whole inventory and a data display suitable for the general public.

4. The project's scientific research part

Interpretation of the material according to the standards for the processing of the museological materials valid in the Republic of Croatia, in cooperation with the experts from the Chair for Museology at the Department for Information Sciences, Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy, and from the Museum Documentation Centre in Zagreb.

The scientific processing of the artefacts would be carried out by Croatian experts from the fields of archaeology, Egyptology, history, art history, classical philology and museology with the help and cooperation by the part of numerous foreign Egyptologists. The main researchers for the field of Egyptology are Petar Selem (Department of History, Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy), Igor Uranić (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb), and Mladen Tomorad (Department of History, Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy, head of the Computer Laboratory, and the project's main researcher), for the field of numismatics: Ivan Mirnik and Zdenka Dukat (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb), and for the ancient history: the art historians and archaeologist employed as curators in various museum institutions under direction by Ante Rendić-Miočevićem (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb) and Hrvoje Gračanin (Department of History, Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy).

5. Short description of the project's computer-aided research part

Building a special database based on the M++ application developed by Goran Zlodi, M.Ph. The unique database will be adapted for input and storage of data from the databases of museum information systems (these will be located on the computer servers within the same institutions), and for the purpose of presenting the monumental heritage of the Egyptian civilization from the Pharaonic and Greco-Roman eras kept in the Croatian institutional and private collections. Such a database would enable manifold reuse of digital content. The adopted forms of presentation, created by automatised generating of interactive multimedia contents from the data stored in the database, would involve a possible distribution through different media: web-pages, printed catalogues, cd-roms, info-kiosks located in the museums, etc.

As the majority of Egyptological collections are unprocessed within the museum information systems for the time being, the project collaborators would help the curators to process and organise the database input. The adopted project's approach is based on the international experiences in the computerisation of museum inventories by recognising the difference between the data for description of a museum artefact with a purpose to manage the museum collections, and the data serving for presentation and communication of the museum inventory to the variety of users. As one cannot foresee how the particular institutions would use different applications to manage the museum collections, it is necessary to implement such an approach to distributed databases. The link between the categories in respective museum systems and database developed within the project will be established via generic data model (the 'Dublin Core' as a widely accepted standard that enables description and access to heterogeneous material in digital form will be used for its definition).

The digital photographing of all the artefacts and input of the photographs into the database that is enabled by the M++ applications together with the creation of the project's website which is the responsibility of the webmaster Matija Gračanin (monitor.hr).

6. Current phase of the CAE project

I started the initiative for the CAE project in spring 2002 but work on the CAE project actually began in November 2003, after we finally got financial support by the Ministry of Sciences and Technology.

Since November 2003 we managed to re-analyse almost 750 artefacts in the CAE database from various museums in Croatia (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula, Archaeological Museum in Zadar, Archaeological Museum in Split, Museum of the City of Varaždin, Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Museum Mimara in Zagreb and many small regional collections). The CAE

database offers various kinds of information on the artefacts (origin, date, material, techniques, description, inventory number, collection, inscriptions with transliteration and translation, various image, etc.).

In May 2004 the Croatian version of the 'Croato-Aegyptica Electronica' website was launched at http://infoz.ffzg.hr/cae. The English version was launched at the end of June 2004. It is slightly different from the Croatian version. In the future it will include: basic information about the CAE project, historical details of every museum collection in Croatia, historical interactive maps of Egypt from Prehistoric periods until the end of Byzantine rule in Egypt, information about new Egyptological conferences in the world, news about new exhibitions, new books about Ancient Egypt in Croatia, links and information about new discoveries in Egypt and the most important CAE database.

In the middle of September we will move our website to the new domain www.croato-aegyptica.hr. In the meantime we are still working on on-line access of the CAE database. Right now only artefacts from Archaeological Museum in Zagreb can be accessed through our web portal but we hope that at the end of this year all the collections will be accessible on-line.

The next stage of the project is the English version of the CAE database, which will be finished in spring 2005. Next year we also plan the publish the first volume of the 'Croato-Aegyptica Electronica' catalogue with 300-350 most interesting Egyptian objects that can be seen in various Croatian museums. Until then we hope that our effort will be recognised among Egyptologists.

7. Cited literature

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Submitted: 3 September 2004.
Published: 1 October 2004.

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