

Cooperation and Exchange

Heike Pfund, 10.11.2018

Introduction

The artistic and cultural heritage of Egypt and Germany can only be preserved in a sustainable way if it is maintained, conserved and restored up to the highest technical standards. This can be achieved only if young professionals in both countries are responsibly and consistently trained to be fit for this task.

The “German-Egyptian Field and Summer School Programme for Restoration and Conservation of Wall Paintings” was designed by Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow, University of Applied Sciences in Hildesheim (HAWK) in cooperation with Prof.Dr. Katja Lembke, State Museum of Lower-Saxony Hanover, and Prof.Dr. Hussein Mohammed Ali, Minia University, Minia. The programme began in 2012 and ended in 2018. It served to train scientific conservator-restorers in both countries. Funding came from two German institutions, to which we are deeply grateful. The German Academic Exchange Service DAAD financed the first three years of cooperation in the frame of their special programme „Societies in Transformation“. The three subsequent years were funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, the largest private research funder in Germany¹.

Summer and Field School Programme

1

In 2012 the already existing city partnership between Minia and Hildesheim was reasserted by reviving a university cooperation established in 2008.

The University of Minia with its Faculty of Fine Arts and the University of Applied Sciences HAWK in Hildesheim with its Faculty of Architecture, Engineering and Conservation, became partners in a summer and field school programme for conservation and restoration of wall paintings. The aim to train conservators-restorers came naturally, as close bonds in the fields of archaeology and museology were already existing.

Field schools with a focus on hands-on training were performed in Egypt, summer schools with a mix of theoretical and practical sessions were held in Germany.

In 2016 the president of Minia University, Prof.Dr. Gamal al-Bint, paid a visit to Hildesheim, and in 2018 he visited the field school in Tuna el-Gebel, demonstrating his interest and support of this marvellous programme.

¹ <https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en/foundation>, accessed November 3, 2018



Fig. 1: Participants of Summer School 2016.

First row: Prof.Dr. Hussein Mohammed Ali, Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow, Prof.Dr. Gamal al-Bint and the Mayor of Hildesheim, Ekkehard Palandt, in the Hildesheim Town Hall

Prof.Dr. Katja Lembke and Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow had raised funds for the programme and were directing it together. Prof.Dr. Katja Lembke is leading an archaeological research project in Tuna el-Gebel since 2004. As an archaeologist she was convinced that, besides excavation and research, the conservation of the site is a must. As director of the State Museum of Lower Saxony she strongly supported both, field schools and summer schools.

2

Field Schools

Field Schools in Egypt were exclusively performed in the necropolis of Tuna el-Gebel, always strongly supported by the Ministry of Antiquities and its local and regional experts and staff.

Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow, acting professor for wall painting conservation and restoration at the HAWK, and Prof.Dr. Hussein Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, acting professor in the same field at the University of Minia, became the most important players in a profound training programme. Aiming for high-quality training in conservation and restoration, the programme was also expected to arouse interest in the realities of everyday life, raise awareness for own historic identities and enhance networking between Egyptian and German participants. Equally important was the practical contribution to the conservation of endangered wall paintings in Tuna el-Gebel, enabling Egyptian students to work on originals, usually not allowed.

Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow said: »In this project two good intentions are intertwined: the preservation of a unique heritage and the enhanced qualification of future Egyptian restorer-conservators.²«

Between 2012 and 2018 four field schools and four summer schools could be held. Each year one group of Egyptian and German students partnered up and met for a three-week practical field school. Starting point was a visit to Minia University, where the group was welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts and the President of Minia University. University workshops for different arts and crafts were presented and younger students, who just started their academic career with the aim to become conservator-restorers, could be met.



Fig. 2: Field School 2016- Celebrating successful years of cooperation: the President of Minia University hands presents to the directors and the coordinator of the programme

² »In diesem Projekt werden zwei gute Zwecke miteinander verbunden: die Erhaltung von einmaligen Kulturgütern und die verbesserte Ausbildung angehender ägyptischer Restauratoren.«
<https://www.archaeologie-online.de/nachrichten/niedersaechsische-aufbauhilfe-fuer-mittelaegypten-2100/>,
accessed 19.10.2018

Once the practical work in Tuna el-Gebel started, the strategy for conservation was explained.

An emergency conservation concept for wall paintings in the necropolis had been developed between 2009 and 2011. Prof.Dr. Nicole Riedl-Siedow and the conservator-restorer Dipl.-Rest. Alexandra Winkels had worked on this concept since 2010. Careful evaluation of preserved areas throughout years showed good results justifying methods performed. Recipes and methods were adopted and implemented during field school work. Students were invited to ask and discuss the approach leading to interesting discourses especially about conservation materials faintly known in Egypt.

Conservation measures were practised first on test walls at a building with younger plaster, before laying hands on Roman plaster.



Fig. 3: Field School 2012- conservator Alexandra Winkels explains how to handle the conservation materials



Fig. 4: Field School 2012- stabilizing loose plaster in tomb house GB27

Only Master students were accepted in this programme. Work groups on site were small and well-mixed, keeping a balance of Germans and Egyptians, men and women, Muslims and Christians. Project language was English – still, there could be times of confusion, when Prof.Dr. Hussein graciously explained to his students in Arabic language.

Students learned to implement the pre-set concept to conserve the specific wall paintings and plaster of Tuna el-Gebel. Mentored and supervised by experienced senior conservators and an Egyptologist, the students worked hands-on in the necropolis and contributed to the safeguard of these most endangered wall paintings.



Figs. 5+6: Field school 2012- Plaster conservation at GB 13 (left) and GB 21



Fig. 7: Field School 2018- consolidation of mud plaster at GB 24



Fig. 8: Field School 2018- Filling cracks at GB 13

One very important objective was the thorough documentation of the objects, their condition, and all measures carried out. “Mapping” became the magic word, and all students were requested to document their work graphically.

Why is this so important? In combination with photos and a written text only the graphic can give exact information on locating areas and beyond (compare chapter “documentation”). Later, hand-mapping done on site was digitalized with the latest computer software. This state-of-the-art method had been used consistently.



Fig. 9: Field School 2015- Explaining the first step, mapping by hand on site

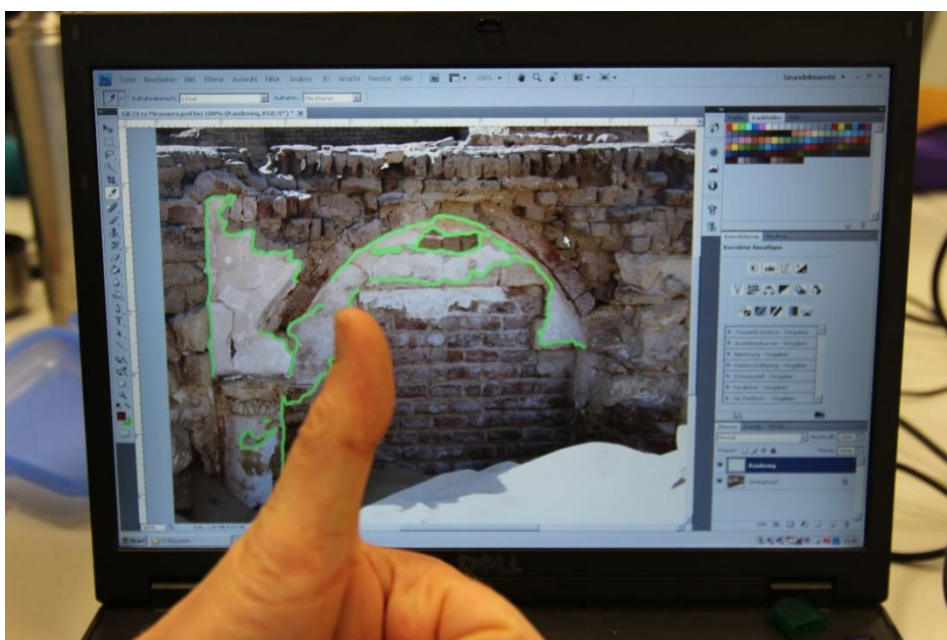


Fig. 10: Field School 2012- Digital mapping



Fig. 11: Field School 2015- document the condition in GB 13 by mapping

Sometimes fragments of paintings fallen off the walls had to be retrieved, before conservation work on walls and plaster could begin. Fragments were carefully examined, documented and stored in boxes.

8



Fig. 12: Field School 2014- investigating fragments before packing and storing



Fig. 13: Field School 2018- Plaster consolidation in GB 24



Fig. 14: Field School 2018- Plaster consolidation in GB 24

Always aiming for best practice, the exchange of knowledge and experience among participants had been enriching for everyone. Intercultural encounters lead to a better understanding of each other and also triggered joy and laughter. Besides learning about conservation recipes, food recipes were also high on demand and home-made Egyptian specialities much savoured.

Fridays were off, and the German students were taken to archaeological sites in the vicinity. Amazing rock-cut tombs, cut into the cliffs at the eastern bank of the river Nile, were visited at two sites. In Beni Hasan, huge stone chambers have interiors highly decorated with painted relief carvings. At Tel el-Amarna another set of decorated rock-cut tombs could be visited, and the excavation site of the palace of Akhenaton.

In Cairo great museums opened their conservation workshops to the students, and Egyptian conservators gracefully dedicated their time to present their projects, always open to professional discourse. Interesting insights were given to the Egyptian Museum and its conservation workshops and the workshops of the not yet opened Grand Egyptian Museum, providing precious information and cherished moments.



Fig. 15: Field School 2016- Meeting Egyptian colleagues at the conservation workshops of the Grand Egyptian Museum



Fig. 16: Field School 2016- experts explains conservation issues

Of course we should not forget the pyramids! Every German student visited this amazing World Heritage Site, taking home unforgettable impressions. A walk through the old city of Cairo and visits of ancient mosques gave insights to the challenges of managing this vibrating and mesmerising World Heritage City.



Fig.17: Field School 2016- talking about the history of the ancient Ibn al-Toulun mosque



Fig. 18: Field School 2016- Bye-bye Egypt!

[Summer Schools in Germany](#)

12

The second part of the programme took place in Germany, where a three-week summer school rich in content was performed. Although the focus of the programme was training in conservation and restoration, one important objective was to show the Egyptian participants a lively democracy, and introduce some German history to them. Historic city walks, visits to the Hildesheim Municipal Museum and excursions to other German towns were part of the programme.³

Starting point was an intercultural seminar, where Germans and Egyptians could ponder their perception of one and another.

Together with the third partner in this programme, the State Museum of Lower Saxony in Hanover, a comprehensive scheme had been developed including other partner institutions like the State Authority for Monument Preservation of Lower Saxony, the Roemer Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim and the Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig.

Much appreciated was, that the programme contained several practical parts. Lectures at HAWK about various topics ranging from “Volatile conservation materials” to “Conservation of detached Roman Wall paintings” to “Translocation of the monumental statue of Ramses II in Cairo” were complemented by practical conservation work in the wall painting

³ Quoting Nicole Riedl-Siedow, in: Abenteuer auf fremdem Kontinent, Hildeheimer Allgemeine Zeitung, 10.04.2013

workshop at HAWK in Hildesheim. Detached Roman wall paintings from Trier were conserved, practising exemplary measures. In small mixed groups students could lay hands on the objects and experience specific methods and materials. Other topics like desalination of walls or working with volatile conservation materials were discussed and materials could be tested on dummies.



13

Fig. 19: Summer School 2014- consolidating the backside of painted Roman plaster



Fig. 20: Summer School 2017- stabilization the edges of Roman plaster and cleaning paintings

Visits to other conservation workshops at the HAWK were enlightening. Presented by the respective professors, the students gained insights in the conservation of wooden objects and easel paintings. Another highlight was the demonstration of a laser cleaning technique, allowing each participant to try out the machine.



Fig. 21: Summer School 2016- the Egyptian group with the president of Minia University visiting the workshop for conservation and restoration of wooden objects and easel paintings

The State Museum in Hanover offered a workshop on museum management including climate issues, pest control, storing artwork and presenting objects in an exhibition. Practical workshops were included and well received. Participants learned how to make a stand for a small fossil and how to wrap and pack small museum objects with appropriate materials. How to decorate a small wooden box with leaf gold in a historic technique and restoring historic picture frames were other practical sequences, where everybody was vividly engaged.



Fig. 22: Summer School 2017, State Museum of Lower-Saxony, Hanover: Systematic cleaning tests

The Roemer-Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim offered workshops as well as insights in its exhibition and into conservation workshops. Besides practical issues in conservation work, ethical issues were also lively discussed, regarding possibilities of completion and presentation of a human statue from Egypt. What norms do we have and how can they be applied? Here it was enlightening to learn the views of our Egyptian participants.



Fig. 23: Summer School 2016, Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum- discussions in front of a statue from Middle-Egypt

Art handling including shipment of objects was another interesting topic introduced. A very special topic was “inclusion”. How can a museum reach people with disabilities? The “Museum of Senses” at Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum evoked vivid interest and the experience of walking with closed eyes with a blind person’s cane will certainly be a strong memory.

How international networks and exchange play an important role in heritage preservation was a significant topic too, encouraging students to join organisations like ICOM, the International council of Museums, in their home countries.

How chinaware could be handled and conserved was shown exemplary in the conservation workshop at Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig. The museum’s beautiful permanent exhibition opened to the students and was greatly enjoyed.

Summer schools contained a trip to another German city with Roman history. One year Cologne had been the destination, another year it was Trier, the city in Germany with most remains from Roman times. Visits of museums, excavations and exhibitions there, as well as meetings with conservators on scaffoldings were items on the programme being instructive and inspiring.



Fig. 24: Summer school 2014 in Trier, students meeting German colleagues on site at the Konstantin Basilika

Two Egyptian groups completed their summer school in Berlin, being warmly welcomed at the Egyptian Museum on the Museum Island. Sightseeing in the capital was rounding out the summer school experience, including shopping for presents for family and friends at home!



Fig. 25: Summer School 2017 – in February! Visiting Berlin, posing in front of the “Reichstag”

On weekends, picnics and outings for the Egyptian group were organized. German students accompanied the group and could give them some understanding of Germany and the Germans. In return, they learned from a visit to a Coptic monastery close to Hildesheim. Intercultural encounters of various kinds happened - one group could even experience a carnival procession and was fascinated!

Summer schools would not have been possible without the engagement of so many dedicated people who cannot be named here, mainly staff at all involved institutions, who worked extra-hours to make the workshops happen. Summer schools were finally crowned and closed by a festive dinner on invitation by the Echnaton e.V. and the RPM. All participants received certificates on this occasion, and, of course, delicious food was savoured.

What has been so special in this programme? Egyptian students were allowed to lay hands on original objects and do true conservation work, what is usually impossible in Egypt. Germans and Egyptians gained insights, not purely in technical fields, but had a taste of life and customs in the partner country. Exchange and cooperation had happened in various ways and certainly made a lasting impression on everybody. A sense of togetherness had been developed in the groups, benefitting not only work, but also the attitude towards another, and perhaps towards the foreign culture. The very personal atmosphere of this programme showed again: it is not cultures that meet, it is always people.