

The Egyptian Section of the Civic Museum of Crema (Italy) and its latest additions

Christian Orsenigo

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the Egyptian Section of the Museum of Crema (Italy). The first core of the collection comes from that of the late Carla Maria Burri (1935–2009), who worked in Egypt between the 1960s and 2000s. Moreover, the donation to the Museum of Crema of another private collection has been formalized at the beginning of 2020. The highlights from both collections are here discussed and presented together with the latest additions to the Egyptian Section, consisting of some antiquities from the collection of the late Professor Giampiero Guerreschi.

KEYWORDS

Ancient Egypt – museum collections – Egyptian collections – Egyptian antiquities – Italy

القسم المصري بمتحف كريما المدني (إيطاليا) وأحدث إضافاته
كريستيان أورسينيغو

الملخص

إن الهدف من هذه الورقة هو إعطاء لمحة عامة عن القسم المصري الموجود بمتحف كريما (إيطاليا). حيث تكون جوهر تلك المجموعة عن طريق الراحلة كارلا ماريابوري (1935–2009)، التي عملت في مصر بين ستينيات وأواخر القرن العشرين. علاوة على ذلك، تم إضفاء الطابع الرسمي على التبرع بمجموعة مقتنيات خاصة أخرى بمتحف كريما في بداية عام 2020. تتناول تلك الورقة أهم القطع الأثرية من كلتا المجموعتين، حيث يتم تقديمهما جنباً إلى جنب مع أحدث إضافات القسم المصري للمتحف، والتي تتكون من بعض الآثار من مجموعة البروفيسور الراحل جيامبييرو جويرتشي.

الكلمات الدالة:

مصر القديمة – مقتنيات المتحف – المقتنيات المصرية – الآثار المصرية – إيطاليا

This paper aims to give an overview of the antiquities from the Egyptian Section of the Museum of Crema (Italy), and to present some of the latest additions to the Section. The Museum was opened in the 1960s in what had been a Fifteenth Century monastery. Among the founders was Carla Maria Burri, who, upon her death in 2009, bequeathed her personal collection of antiquities to the city. The Burri Collection represents the core of the Egyptian Section of the Museum. The collection was formed over many years, and reflects not only Burri's taste for beauty, but also for "curious" objects. Carla Burri was a regular visitor to auction houses and to dealers authorized by the Egyptian Government in the antiquities trade, and she could often be found at the Sale Room of the Cairo Egyptian Museum, making purchases (Orsenigo 2019).

Carla Burri was born in 1935, and in the 1960s left Italy for Egypt and worked there intermittently until the 2000s, first as Cultural attaché of the Italian Embassy, then as Director of the Italian Cultural Institute of Cairo, while at the end of her career she was appointed Italian General-commissioner for Italy-Egypt initiatives. Carla Burri was well known for her skills in the Egyptological milieu of the second half of the Twentieth Century, as were the greatest scholars of the period. Between 1964 and 1981, as attaché of the Italian Cultural Institute of Cairo, Carla Burri played an active role in helping the Italian archaeological missions working in Egypt, particularly those involved in the rescue of Nubian sites and monuments affected by the Aswan High Dam Project. And it is thanks to her intercession, and to the work of the late Professor Silvio Curto, that, in 1966, the Egyptian Government made the decision to donate, as token of its gratitude to Italy, the rock-temple of Ellesya, which today is one of the highlights of the Museo Egizio of Turin (Gallo Carrabba 2012).

Some years ago, under the aegis of the Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Lombardy, we were asked to undertake a research study on the Burri's antiquities and to put together an Egyptian section dedicated to the late Carla Burri at the Museum of Crema, which opened in April 2019. A few months after the opening of the new Section, another patron, Ms. Carla Campari, expressed the desire to donate her own collection of antiquities to Crema, following the example of her college roommate and long-time friend, Carla Burri. The Museum accepted the bequest, which was also named in memory of Camillo Lucchi, the donor's late husband. The collection, which is complementary to the Burri one, consists of round 100 artefacts. Between 1966 and 1972, all the objects were acquired legally during the journeys of the Lucchi family to Egypt, while additional few objects were gifts, they received before 1977 (Orsenigo 2020a; Orsenigo 2022a).

We will now proceed with a general overview of the main materials included in both Collections – Burri and Campari-Lucchi – exhibited in the showcases of the Museum (not those in the storerooms), grouping them by typology following, whenever possible, a chronological timeline. The most ancient artefacts are several flint-stone implements, probably of Fayum provenance, which cover a vast chronological span extending from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Neolithic (inv. 1259a-n)¹ and – continuing the chronological timeline – we can mention the presence of the oldest Pharaonic piece of the Collection, namely a faience tile, which very likely was part of the wall decoration of the galleries underneath Djoser's Step Pyramid (inv. 2160) (Ziegler *et al* 1999: 148–150; Davidovits – Davidovits 2017; Friedmann 1998: cat. 17–20). Two wooden statuettes are also to be mentioned, which relate to the First Intermediate Period or to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. The body of the first one, a woman leaning forward, suggests that the figurine originally belonged to a model of daily life that saw her engaged in activities such as baking, brewing, or weaving (inv. 2154) (Tooley 1995; Winlock 1955: pl. 22–23 and 26–27; Loffet 2007: cat. 165; D'Amicone – Pozzi Battaglia 2009: 208; Freed *et al.* 2009: 172, fig. 132). Conversely, the seated pose of the other statuette, which depicts a man, could suggest that he originally belonged to a model-boat: in this case it would represent an oarsman (inv. 2153). It is conceivable, however, that it may be a man intent on some activity that required

1 Currently under study by Giulio Lucarini, Institute of Heritage Science, National Research Council of Italy (ISPC CNR) / Dept. of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies, University of Naples L'Orientale.



Fig. 1 Seated man from a model of daily life
(© Museum of Crema, photo by A. Boni)



Fig. 2 Terracotta offering tray (© Museum of Crema, photo by A. Boni)

him to be seated (Tooley 1995; Winlock 1955: pl. 35, 37, 41, 43, 46 and 48; Glanville 1972: pl. 4, fig. 11, pl. 7, fig. 19 and pl. 9, fig. 23; D'Amicone – Pozzi Battaglia 2009: 266; Giovetti – Picchi 2015: cat. III.21) (fig. 1).

Approximately belonging to the same period, is a hand-built oval-shaped terracotta offering tray with raised exterior walls. Numerous reproductions of food offerings are applied in relief. In addition to the food, objects of more difficult interpretation are applied to the bottom of the tray. These are most likely to be architectural elements such as column bases and seats. Due to its oval shape, it is conceivable for the object to have a Theban, or at any rate, an Upper Egypt provenance (inv. 2161) (Müller – Forstner-Müller 2015; Kilian 2012: esp. 108; Mi 2020) (fig. 2).

The Crema Collection also includes several objects more properly belonging to the funerary equipment of a wide chronological spectrum, up to the Ptolemaic and Roman Era. Among them some shabtis, a dozen wooden faces from anthropomorphic coffins, and two fragments from cartonnage mummy-cases. On closer examination of the shabtis belonging to the Burri Collection, two are carved in wood and three are modelled in terracotta. The first wooden shabti presents a particularly schematic rendering of the arms and could belong to a typology common to the first half of the New Kingdom or being a mediocre realization of the Ramesside period (inv. 2165) (*cf. e.g.* Janes 2002: cat. 28; Aubert – Aubert 2005: cat. 15, 17; Christie's 6/7/1994: lot 71; Christie's 25/10/2007: lot 179; Bergé 29/05/2013: lot 29; Bergé 30/5/2015: lot 25), whereas the other one presents some similar features to wooden specimens of finer workmanship dating back to the New Kingdom, in particular to the Nineteenth Dynasty (inv. 2166) (*cf. e.g.* Janes 2002, cat. 24; Bergé 30/11/2012, lot 293; Eisenberger – Price 2014: lot 180).

Unlike the wooden ones, the three terracotta shabtis, are inscribed (inv. 2162–2164). The workmanship of the specimens, groups them with other similar shabtis of a “provincial style” dating back to the second half of the New Kingdom (inv. 21162: *cf. e.g.* Janes 2002: cat. 24; Bergé 30/11/2012: lot 293; Eisenberger – Price 2014: lot 180; inv. 2163; Aubert – Aubert 1974: 126–129; van Haarlem 1990: fasc. II, 19; Droste zu Hulshoff *et al.* 1991: cat. 9; Chappaz 1984: cat. 21; Bresciani – Betrò 2004: 292, n. 8; Aubert – Aubert 2005: cat. 25; inv. 2164; Bergé 1/12/2007: lot 413).

The Lucchi-Campari collection includes two shabtis as well. The first is modelled in limestone and is reduced to only the central fragment. The modelling and the choice of material suggests a date-back to the New Kingdom (inv. 2413) (Orsenigo 2022a: 144–145). The second shabti of the collection is made of terracotta using a one-piece mould (inv. 2414). The back of the shabti shows no traces of processing, while an excess of clay material, not removed after baking, is evident on the sides. We favour a dating at the beginning of the Ramesside period. This is supported by funerary statuettes almost identical to the one in question coming from documented archaeological contexts. We are referring, for example, to some mummiform shabtis unearthed in Qantir by the mission of the Hildeshiem Pelizaeus-Museum (Moje 2016: 206, cat. 01/B and 207, fig. 2; *cf. also* Reiser-Haslauer 1990: 101).

As previously mentioned, there is a large group of anthropomorphic coffin face-pieces dating back mainly to the Third Intermediate and Late periods. Although most of the specimens in the collection are rather crudely carved in wood (*cf. e.g.* Edgar 1905; Schmidt 1919; D'Auria – Lacovara – Roehrig 1988; Ikram – Dodson 1998; Lacovara – Teasley Trope 2001; Jørgensen 2009; Dawson – Strudwick 2016), two stand out because of their lively polychromy (inv. 2172 and inv. 2428). The style adopted in the handcrafting of these wooden faces, as well as their

proportions, allow a comparison with other similar items, attributable to inner coffins from the Theban area, dating back to the XXIIth Dynasty (for inv. 2172, Orsenigo 2020b: 69–71; for inv. 2428, Orsenigo 2022a: 149) (fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Anthropomorphic coffin face-piece (© Museum of Crema, photo by A. Boni)



Fig. 4 Cartonnage coming from the back terminal of a mask (© Museum of Crema, photo by A. Boni)

Equally pertinent to this group of objects, are a fragment of a foot covering from a mummy (inv. 2430) and a nice polychrome cartonnage coming from the back terminal of a mask, depicting a human-headed *ba*-bird (inv. 2173) (Orsenigo 2022b). Unfortunately, nothing is known about the provenance of this latter object, as is the case for a very similar fragment kept at the Petrie Museum, that is a particularly good comparandum (Petrie Museum database online: UCL 45892). The material is linen covered with plaster and then painted. Cartonnages such as this, as it is known, can be dated from Ptolemaic to Roman Periods (fig. 4).

The last two items presented, as well as other polychrome artefacts from the Burri Collection, have been subjected to non-invasive analyses carried out by a team of the Physics Department of the Politecnico di Milano. The group, called ArtisLab, is specialized in the development of photonics-based devices for the non-invasive application on cultural heritage materials. The analysis carried out in Crema was aimed at investigating optical properties of pigments, and, in particular, at identifying the presence of “Egyptian blue” traces (Comelli *et al.* 2016).

The Burri collection also comprises a great number of amulets. Among those are some specimens in the form of the *wadjet*-eye (inv. 2174-2175-2155), as well as a pottery mould for production of the same type of amulet (inv. 2176), other than a refined faience scarab pierced

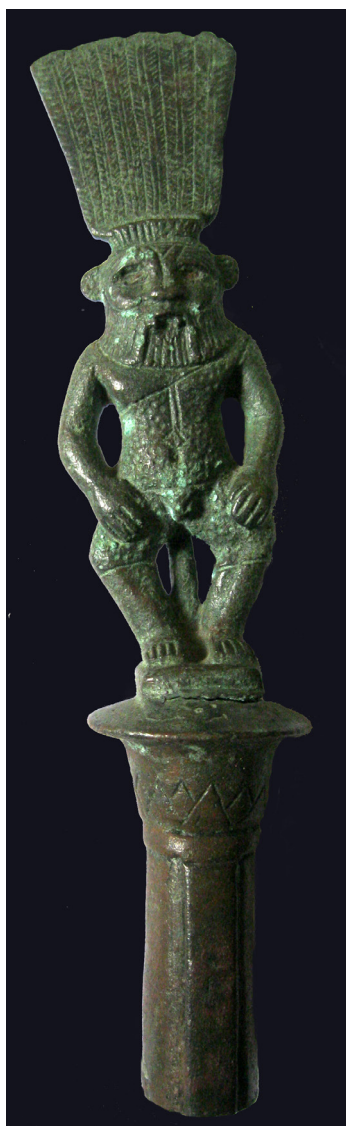


Fig. 5 Statuette of Bes on a lotus column (© Museum of Crema, photo by A. Boni)

with holes (inv. 2178). Two other amulets portray Bes (inv. 2180–2181); another one depicts him larger in scale, carved in wood, and this item is probably to be interpreted as a furniture inlay with an apotropaic purpose (inv. 2182). In addition, there is a so-called “*talisman d’hereuse maternité*” (unfortunately fragmentary), as well as a small bifrontal mask of the goddess Hathor, perhaps originally inserted as an amulet in the handle of a sistrum (inv. 2183 a–b and 2186). Isis (inv. 2415), Thot in form of an ibis (inv. 2416), and a jackal-headed deity inserted as pendant in a necklace (inv. 2431), are instead from the Lucchi-Campari Collection.

The Burri collection, as well the Lucchi-Campari, include several votive bronzes, most dating back to the Late Period. Those from the Burri Collection include one Osiris depicted in his usual pose (inv. 2191), one Osiris-Canopus (inv. 2191), the god Nefertem (inv. 2193), a male human head (perhaps Imhotep) (inv. 2157), a cat head (inv. 2195), a small papyriform situla (inv. 2196.), and a refined statuette of Bes on a lotus column. The composition as a whole denotes a certain technical skill and mastery of the material used for its realization (inv. 2194) (fig. 5).

On the other hand, the Lucchi-Campari Collection includes a figure of Osiris, a pantheistic deity, an uraeus, one figure of Eros, two representations of Harpocrate and one rooster (inv. 2418–2424). A New Kingdom mirror, recently restored, is also worth mentioning, even if it is not a “votive” bronze (inv. 2308) (Orsenigo 2023).

A substantial number of artefacts from the Burri and Lucchi-Campari collections refer to the Egyptian choroplastic production of the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine period. Even if some of them are unfortunately fragmentary, this does not prevent in most cases their identification. In particular, the main deities worshipped during the long period following the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, are well represented. Among them: Isis, in the form of Isis-Lactans, Isis-Thermouthis, or Isis-Aphrodite, Serapis, Hapocrates, represented in the typical gesture of an index finger placed on sealed lips, whereas a few other items show him with a hand resting on a pot (“L’Harpocrate au-pot”), but also lesser common deities such as Bes-Silenus (inv. 2406) (Orsenigo 2021) and Hermanubis. There are also many zoomorphic figurines, which, as it is well known, were particularly wide-spread in the Hellenist-Roman choroplastic (Orsenigo 2024).

Both the collections house several oil lamps mostly in a perfect state of preservation, dating back to the Roman and Byzantine eras. Several among the oldest pieces belong to the “frog” type, some of them, particularly nice and detailed (*cf. e.g.* Młynarczyk 1997: 100–104; Michelucci 1975: 197, 199, 201, 203, 205 and 207; Pernigotti 1994: cat. VIII.12–13; Grenier *et al.* 1997: cat. 259–261; Bagh 2011: cat. AEIN 1197; Lintz – Coudert 2013: cat. 350–351). Two other items from the early Byzantine time are ampullae with representations of Saint Mena (inv. 2231–2232) (Bresciani 2010: 9, note 9; Gilli 2002a; Gilli 2002b).

In addition, it is worth mentioning nineteen glass containers. With the exception of one specimen, all of these are containers intended for the trade and storage of ointments, as well as cosmetics or medicinal powders. These cover a wide timespan, ranging from the Roman imperial era to the first Islamic period (inv. 2211–2229) (Romagnolo 2016).

The Islamic Period, particularly the Early Islamic Period, is represented by some fragmentary clay strainers, a large textile-fragment dating back to the Mamluk period but also the only inscribed papyrus from the collection.²

The Egyptian Section of the Museum of Crema also includes some stone artefacts, four of which deserve special mention. The first item is the lower fragment of a small calcite vessel (inv. 2412). An inscription engraved in hieroglyphs, perhaps originally painted, preserves portion of a text, where we can read “[...] loved by Min of Coptos”. The item, for material, typology and content of the inscription, is comparable with a series of vessel-models from foundation deposits unearthed by Flinders Petrie in Coptos in the area of the Temple of Min, dating back to the period in which Thutmose III rebuilt a part of the main temple (Porter – Moss 1962: 125; Petrie 1896: 13–14, pls. 1, 14–16; Weinstein 1973: 178–180, 40A; and esp. Adams 1975).³

The second stone object of the Collection that we would like to mention is a small leonine protome, carved in limestone with a refined workmanship (inv. 2426). The ignorance of the context of provenance makes the interpretation of the item difficult. It could be an *ex-voto*,

2 Currently under study by Arianna D’Ottone Rambach (La Sapienza Università di Roma).

3 Compare also: Petrie Museum, UC 15904–15906; Manchester Museum, 3591; Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrus-Sammlung, 12504; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, E.4293 (photograph in Gabolde – Galliano 2000: 68); Philadelphia, Penn Museum, E.955A–B.

an architectural element, or a sculptor's model. A dating to the end of the Ptolemaic period for the Crema lion could perhaps be hypothesized based on a comparison of its facial features with those of the sphinxes of the dromos of the Temple of Medinet Madi, but a generic dating to the Ptolemaic period would perhaps seem more prudent (*cf. e.g.* Bianchi 1981; Tomoum 2005: cat. 120–123, pl. 64, figs. a–d and pl. 65, fig. a. 148; Affholder-Gérard – Cornic 1994: cat. 24; Arslan 1997: cat. II.56–II.58).

The other object is a limestone sculpture which reproduces the head of a King (inv. 2197). The back of the piece is rough and shows no signs of workmanship. Many examples are known that have the same characteristics, other than being unfinished as well. This type of depiction does not find univocal interpretation by scholars. As it is well known, according to some, they were sculptor's models, but for others are to be interpreted as votive objects deposited in temples. Based on parallels, we would suggest assigning this head to the reign of Ptolemy II (Ashton 2005; Tomoum 2005; Stanwick 2002; Ashton 2001: cat. 3–6; Jørgensen 2009: cat. 146.3; Eisenberger 1960: lot 2; Bergé 26/11/2013: lot 133).

The limestone portrait is exhibited in the same showcase with a small clay modelled sphinx with a human head. A group of similar figurines was unearthed by Flinders Petrie in Memphis. The proximity of the site to the Giza plateau, has led to the hypothesis that these figurines were bought by pilgrims who went in large numbers in the Graeco-Roman period to visit the area and its monuments.

The last stone object we would like to mention is a polychrome limestone funerary stela, dating back to the 4th–5th centuries, carved in high relief with the figure of a boy seated within a niche and holding a bunch of grapes in his left hand and a dove in his right hand (inv. 2230) (Donadoni 2000; *cf. e.g.* Grenier *et al.* 1997: cat. 165; Wiese – Winterhalter – Brodbeck 2001: cat. 152; Russmann 2009: 58–59; Schneider – Raven 1981: cat. 251; Giovetti – Picchi 2015: cat. VII.85; Christie's 6/7/1994: lot 123; Christie's 13/05/2003: lot 322). We cannot fail to mention that among the antiquities from the Lucchi-Campari Collection, is a polychrome limestone head that reproduces a young man with a shaved head which was more probably originally part of the same typology of funerary stelae (inv. 2427).

Among the latest additions to the Egyptian Section, obtained through two new donations, there are two items from the Collection of the late Professor Giampiero Guerreschi. The first one is a Late Period (more probably XXVIth dynasty) faience shabti, which was purchased by Guerreschi in 1957 (inv. 2510). The figure, of slender proportions with dark green glaze, is in excellent condition apart from a superficial crack affecting its lower portion. It represents the owner in the usual mummiform shape, with a rectangular base and back pillar not separated from the tripartite wig. This falls on the chest in two bands and leave the ears completely uncovered. The features of the face, provided with a long false beard, are treated with particular finesse. The hands that emerge from the wrapping of the bandages at chest height, the left being over the right, hold the pick on the right shoulder and the hoe represented in light relief, as well as the cord to a small seed bag, on the left, characterized by a tightly woven texture. On the front of the figure runs a vertical hieroglyphic inscription, enclosed between two engraved lines. The text, crudely inscribed, contains the owner's name and the patronymic: Psamtekdinet, son of Hormes. We have identified only one other shabti bearing the same name and patronymic as the one in question. This is an item kept at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (inv. 72.475), identical in size, shape and content of the inscription to

that of the Guerreschi Collection, so much so that we can assert that they were made starting from the same mould.

The second item is a large fragment of cartonnage which was purchased by Guerreschi in 1959 (inv. 2511). The scene on the cartonnage shows a representation of Osiris seated on a throne. The god's flesh, face and hands, are painted green, while light red is the colour of the shroud that wraps around his body. On his head the god wears the white crown with an uraeus painted with ocher. The hands, which emerge at the level of the chest, hold the flabellum-*nekhekh* and the scepter-*heqa*. In front of the god are the nebris/*imy-wt* and a lotus flower surmounted by two tall feathers. The representation is captioned by four columns of text in hieroglyphs, clearly readable. The inscription contains the usual formula *dj nswt htp* and mentions, as one would expect, the god Osiris. The item corresponds, without any doubt, as mentioned above, to a fragment from the upper part of an inner coffin that can be dated to the Third Intermediate Period (Orsenigo 2022b).

To conclude, we would like to mention that recently the Crema Museum succeeded in acquiring a second lot of antiquities originally from the Burri Collection. They have already been inventoried but are still under study. They are mostly clay artefacts among which an impressive quantity of oil lamps mostly in a good state of preservation, dating back to the Roman and Byzantine eras and several among the oldest pieces which belong to the "frog" type and a great number of Early Islamic Period fragmentary clay strainers.

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Christian Orsenigo

Museo Civico di Crema e del Cremasco; christian.orsenigo@hotmail.com