

Dickey Internship Report

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At Dartmouth I am studying Ancient Cultures and Civilizations, a special major in the humanities focusing on understanding the emergence of the earliest human cultures and civilizations. My focus, however, is on ancient Egypt and, in particular, on the ancient Egyptian religion. But as Dartmouth does not yet have a resident Egyptologist, my studies have largely been independent. What the Dickey Center for International Understanding provided me this past spring was an incredible experience—I was able to intern at the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Germany. In Berlin, I work alongside Egyptologists, philologists, papyrologists, archaeologists, museologists, and a variety of restorers and conservators, gaining invaluable exposure to the field.

The Egyptian Museum Berlin (*Ägyptisches Museum Berlin*) is housed in a building called the New Museum (*Neues Museum*), which was the original site of the Egyptian museum but the building had been closed since 1939 due to the war and only just reopened in 2009. The New Museum is part of a larger complex called Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*), a UNESCO world heritage site, at the center of Berlin comprised of five different museums. Museum Island is currently undergoing constant reconstructions in an effort to connect four of the museums on this island (the New Museum included), as part of the cultural master plan for the heart of Berlin. The Egyptian Museum Berlin is directed by an overseeing organization called the Berlin State Museums (*Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*), which is in turn under another larger organization called the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (*Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz*). The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which is comparable to the Smithsonian Institution in the United States, also manages other cultural sites throughout Germany, including many palaces and libraries.

The Egyptian Museum is really the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, because it contains one of the best papyrus collections in the world. Although I reported directly to the deputy director of the museum, I had the opportunity to work with almost every single sub-department of the museum, including the Papyrus Collection. Generally, I did a lot of research, translations and editing, but the most rewarding moments were when I was able to work directly with the objects.

I really cannot adequately share the excitement of my first day at work, of being paraded around the office and being introduced to all of the scholars and staff working at the Egyptian Museum, many of whom I have read about during the course of my studies. Nor could I express my astonishment when I stumbled upon the incredibly rich collection in the museum library, which houses a sizable number of books relating to Egyptology and papyrology. My main task for the spring was to write two information sheets that explained two different rooms in the museum: the predynastic period room and the tomb architecture room (which contains three offering chambers from ancient Egyptian tombs). Initially, I only had a bare-bones knowledge of both of

these subjects, but through the abundance of material from the museum library, including the original notebooks and publications from the nineteenth century expeditions that brought the offering chambers to Berlin, I quickly caught up. Although the language barrier at first seemed intimidating, the Dartmouth LSA and FSP programs prepared me well, and all of my colleagues at the museum were helpful and friendly. It was definitely a luxury to be able to consult with Egyptologists and learn about which sources are the encyclopedic references and which are less reliable.

As part of my internship I also proofread the English versions of several museum publications, including forthcoming ones, and corrected the labels throughout the museum. The director allowed me to sit in on many of their curatorial meetings to observe how they plan for upcoming exhibitions. The process is much more complicated than I had previously realized—the sheer number of components, of things that could go wrong, is daunting. Although my time in Berlin was short, and as such, I was only exposed to the early stages of exhibition planning, it was enlightening to comprehend how much work happens behind each exhibition. Furthermore, it was a good exercise in thinking about problem solving and a wonderful chance to really engage with Germans in their workplace.

Being at the Egyptian Museum gave me the chance to attend several lectures organized by the Humboldt University and a few organized by the Society for the Promotion of the Egyptian Museum Berlin. I also was able to attend a papyrological colloquium held at the museum. The topics ranged widely from the development of Theban graves to the sun temples during the Old Kingdom, but it was stimulating to hear about the latest research in the field of Egyptology. But as I previously mentioned, the most enriching moments were when I actually worked with real objects. Once a week, I worked with a conservator and we would dust statues and reliefs. Although the work seemed at first tedious, there was a sense of intimacy, of really connecting with the objects. In fact, as the term progressed, I found the task becoming increasingly poetic, as I grew more attached to every statue that I clean, and this attachment reminds me of the ancient Egyptian reverence for their cult statues. I also was fortunate enough to spend some time in the storage depots, browsing through the treasures of the museum that are not on display in the museum (because of a lack of space). I assisted the registrar with selecting objects for the upcoming exhibitions and finding objects that were going on loan to various museums around the world.

During my internship, I lived in a WG (*Wohngemeinschaft*), which is roughly a flat share, but culturally different because they are really community living structures in Germany. There were three of us, and we cooked a lot of meals together, we travelled together, and we went jogging together. We had a lot of relationship drama in my WG, which I was not a part of, but as a result, we grew a lot closer as a family. I learned a lot about cultural differences, and because one of my flat mates did not speak English, I was constantly exposed to German and my language skills dramatically improved as a result.

In Berlin, I also pursued my interest in theatre. I volunteered for the English Theatre Berlin and joined a play reading group. The days in Berlin were long but fulfilling, and I learned something different from each different circle of friends. Around my work colleagues we talked a lot about American television—for some reason, the papyrologists were all extremely well-informed about *House* and *The West Wing*. The colleagues who have spent some time in the United States all speak highly of the educational opportunities in the United States, and I am incredibly thankful that Dartmouth has programs that encourage students to pursue their interests, even obscure ones like Egyptology. At the English Theatre, I met a lot of aspiring German actors, most of whom had been English literature majors. They were eager to practice their English, and I was eager to learn about their experiences. The play reading group is an interesting story. I was originally introduced to the group through a Dartmouth alumnus who was working in the city at the start of my internship, and although he moved shortly afterwards, I kept going to the weekly meetings because the evenings were enjoyable both in terms of food and conversation. We talked a lot about German politics and the German university system, but because we met in various people's houses each week, the focus of each conversation was different.

I met a lot of people: students, strangers, tourists, colleagues. There were a lot of exciting moments, but there were also some lonely ones. I did a few independent trips to see a bit more of Germany, and every time I was glad to come home to Berlin. For me, Berlin will always be home.

My internship was a practical learning experience and it greatly complemented what I could not do at Dartmouth. I learned a lot academically, and I felt more independent and more confident at the end of the term than I had ever felt before. I am grateful for the wonderful opportunities that Dartmouth has presented me, and I realized that I have learned so much more than Egyptology. One of the greatest challenges that I faced was time management, because there were simply so many things to do in the city—the city was so alive—and I had so little time. I did not solve this problem, but I learned to plan better and really forced myself to try new things, to talk to people, and to think about my experiences. The best advice that Dickey gave me at the onset of my internship is to blog, and now, as I look back on the spring of 2010, I will always have a record of some of my most treasured memories.

Captions:

Depot: Looking through the storage depots to find a relief that a museum wants to borrow. (I am not sure if this picture can be published)

Assyrian Reliefs: I am dusting an Assyrian relief from the palace of the King Ashurnasirpal II in the Neues Museum

BeerDrinker: This is picture of me and Frank Marohn with the famous Beer Drinker (Syrian drinking beer through a straw), hidden away in the storage depots.

Chertihotep: I am dusting Chertihotep, one of my favorite pieces from Berlin's collection.