

SPECIAL EXHIBITS

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The past year saw two major exhibits here in the Marshall and Doris Holleb Family Special Exhibits Gallery: *In Remembrance of Me: Feasting with the Dead in the Ancient Middle East* (April 8, 2014–January 4, 2015) and *A Cosmopolitan City: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo* (opened February 17 and on view through September 13, 2015). For details of the first show, see the *2013–2014 Annual Report*, pp. 222–24.

The *Cosmopolitan City* show (figs. 7–8) focuses on medieval Cairo, also known as Fustat, from the seventh to twelfth century AD. This is a time span for which the Oriental Institute is not exactly known, but the show was the result of a survey of our Islamic-period collections by Research Associate Tasha Vorderstrasse, who identified an amazing number of important and relevant objects, some of which were previously known and published years ago, and others which were unidentified. Among the most surprising things that Tasha was able to identify were Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts that can be traced to the Genizah of Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. Among other materials were the finds from the George Scanlon excavations at Fustat in the 1960s that came to the Oriental Institute in 1983 via a circuitous route that included Princeton and the Akron Art Museum.

After discussions with Associate Professor of Islamic Archaeology Donald Whitcomb, the idea arose of doing an exhibit on Fustat. Tanya Treptow, who has a PhD in Islamic archaeology, joined Tasha as co-curator of the exhibit. Almost all of the material from the collection of the Oriental Institute has never before been on display. So the exhibit fulfills the desired goals of our special exhibits program: to reflect new scholarship, and to exhibit objects from the reserve collection in order to have them photographed, researched, and published. In addition to the seventy-one objects from our collection, three important items were borrowed from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. Of greatest impact for the exhibit is a door from the ark of the Ben Ezra Synagogue, co-owned by the Yeshiva University Museum, dating to about 1000 AD. This piece was installed at the entrance to the exhibit. In addition, we borrowed a beautiful lusterware bowl and a fragment of a vessel painted with a scene of the deposition of Christ. We are very grateful to our lenders for their generous help with our exhibit.

The exhibit focuses on community and life in Fustat. It is divided into topics of the different religious communities, the administration of Fustat, trade and industry, dress, the home, leisure, dining and ceramics. Text panels also discuss the development of Fustat and the excavations at the site. As usual, the text on the wall panels was translated into Spanish and Mandarin thanks to Mónica Vélez and Yin Can, respectively.

A special feature of the exhibit is an audio component, “Voices from Old Cairo.” Tasha selected a series of text passages ranging from a poem of Moses ben Abraham Dari (12th century), music composed by Obadiah the Proselyte (performed on a vintage harp by Tasha), translations of several of the manuscripts on view, an account of a day in the life of the physician Moses Maimonides, and descriptions (both good and bad) of Fustat. We thank Jack Green, Wahied Helmy, Tasha, Josh Tulisiak and Emily for recording the segments at UChicago Creative (Eric Fey, engineer). Brenda López designed a very handsome interface for the nine segments that were presented on three iPads, grouped under the topics Leisure, The City, and Administration.



Figure 7. View of the Cosmopolitan City exhibit, looking toward to entrance. The door from the ark of the Ben Ezra synagogue is in the center, the pavilion with documents of the three religious communities of Fustat to the left (photo: K. Bryce Lowry)



Figure 8. View of the Cosmopolitan City exhibit. Left to right: cases on dining, daily life, dress, and adornment (photo: K. Bryce Lowry)

Tasha and Emily curated a mini-exhibit for the Oriental Institute lobby on “A Street in Cairo,” one of the most popular attractions on the Midway of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, making the connection that another “Cairo” was just a couple blocks away. The case contains ephemera, including an original guide to the attraction, a stereoscope card of the “temple” (graciously loaned by Richard Fazzini and Mary McKercher), admission tickets, a cut-glass souvenir teacup, and a copy of the 1893 book *The Dream City: A Portfolio of Photographic Views of the World’s Columbian Exposition* opened to a double spread featuring on one side, a western buckaroo, and on the other, “Joseph” on his donkey “Boom-De-Ay,” “the two offering infinite amusement from morning to night by a display of their comic antics.”

Our head of preparation and exhibit design, Erik Lindahl, did an outstanding job of making an atmospheric gallery space for the Cosmopolitan City exhibit (figs. 7–8). Working from photos of Cairo architecture, he designed a pavilion and created walls of striped tan and maroon, so characteristic of medieval Cairo architecture. Our graphic designer, Josh Tulisiak, used motifs from the Ben Ezra ark door to decorate the very handsome text panels.

We thank Laura Krenz and Judy Brinkmann for the use of their photographs in the gallery space.

We continue to experiment with the format and timing of the members’ opening for the exhibit. Because of the winter season, we scheduled it for Sunday afternoon, February 15. One hundred thirty-nine people attended (fig. 9). We were honored to have both the Consul General of Egypt, Mr. Maged Refaat (fig. 10), and the Deputy Consul, Mrs. Heba Zaki, attend the opening. Consul Rifaat gave very touching remarks about Egyptian-American relations and his appreciation of the work of the Oriental Institute in Egypt.

In addition to the program for the Holleb Gallery, we mounted an abbreviated version of the Our Work: Modern Jobs — Ancient Origins photos by Jason Reblando on the lower level of the Institute (September 2, 2014–ongoing).



Figure 9. Guests at the member’s preview of Cosmopolitan City exhibit admire ceramics. (photo: David Turner Photography)



Figure 10. Consul General of Egypt Maged Refaat with exhibit co-curators Tanya Treptow and Tasha Vorderstrasse at the members’ reception (photo: David Turner Photography)

The Museum also produced several smaller shows, including a panel series called A Threatened Heritage that were put on display throughout the galleries in May, and Doing Business in the Ancient World, presented at the Booth School of Business. For further details of these projects, please see the *Museum* report (above).

Plans are progressing for the new special exhibit, entitled Persepolis: Images of an Empire, curated by Kiersten Neumann, which will open to the public on October 13, 2015. This will be a smaller show, comprised mainly of photographs and a video component produced by our CAMEL lab. The show is deliberately scaled back as the Museum staff heads into a major project to refresh all the galleries (see *Museum* report). However, we plan to continue to do smaller-scale shows as opportunity arises, and we are working with our Public Education and Outreach Department on their ideas for exhibits for the lower level. One, coordinated by Moriah Grooms-Garcia and entitled Dream Rocket, is an art project created by Chicago-area school children that will be presented on the lower level next year.

As usual, we thank the members of our museum advisory group for their comments about the In Remembrance of Me and Cosmopolitan City exhibits. Co-curator Tanya Treptow has special experience with focus groups, and she structured our June 24, 2014, meeting in such a way to get the impressions and expectations of the group to content and titles. Members of the group who participated are Beverly Serrell, Diane Hanau-Strain, Patty McNamara, Molly Woulfe, Nathan Mason, Matt Matcuk, and Charles Bethea, as well as Oriental Institute staff members Catherine Kenyon, Moriah Grooms-Garcia, Carol Ng-He, and Erik Lindahl.
