

Turin Egyptian Museum gets overhaul of pharaonic proportions

March 31 2015, by Colleen Barry



The inner coffin of Kha is seen at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the-art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

For the earliest Egyptologists, a trip to the Egyptian Museum in Turin

was considered indispensable. The museum's new director is seeking to return the almost 200-year-old museum to its one-time prominence, boosted by an overhaul of the collection and exhibit space of near-pharaonic proportions.

Museum director Christian Greco, who arrived in Turin 10 months ago and is well into an ambitious five-year reinstallation of the [museum's](#) considerable treasures, aims to make the Egyptian Museum the second-most important in the world, after Cairo.

"Our museum needs to be back on the international scene," Greco said in an interview in front of the ancient Temple of Ellesjia on Tuesday, as the museum showed off its five-year, 50-million-euro (\$53.6-million) reinstallation. "For too many years we have been absent. For too many years, the focus has been on building and renovating the museum."

The museum, founded in 1824, is filled with treasures found in digs commissioned by Savoy kings. The vast holdings include a captivating statue of Ramses II, one of the world's most important papyrus collections and nearly the entire contents of an architect's tomb dating back well over 3,000 years.

The large-scale renovations nearly doubled the space, allowing many artifacts to be taken out of storage and a more complete and modern exposition of those already on display. The museum remained open during the years of work, rotating closures of wings.



The coffin of Tabakenkhonsu is displayed at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

"It is a very important improvement from an archaeological and Egyptological point of view," said Guillemette Andreu, former director of Egyptology at the Louvre in Paris and member of the Turin Egyptian Museum board who toured the museum on Tuesday. She praised the chronological organization of the reinstallation from the 4th century B.C. to the Coptic period, new lighting and modern showcases.

Andreu said the Turin collection is unique because alongside masterpieces, it includes many objects that describe daily lives, funerary

customs, religion as well as architecture and philosophy.

"Even if you are not a scholar of Egypt, you can see how great this civilization was," she said.

The revamp puts the 6,500 objects on display in their archaeological context, transforming it from what Greco called "an encyclopedia of Egyptology from A to Z," and includes 3-D films using historical photos that depict the moment of discovery.



A visitor walks at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

The museum already belongs on the European itinerary of any Egyptologist, amateur or otherwise, along with the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris and the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin. But Greco's ambition is to make it a more integral part of the scientific community, restoring its standing to the one it enjoyed when one of Egyptology's founding figures, Jean-Francois Champollion, famously declared: "The road to Memphis and Thebes passes through Turin."

Greco, a 39-year-old Italian who arrived from the Antiquities Museum of Leiden, in the Netherlands, announced on Tuesday that the Turin museum in May will join an ongoing, 40-year-old dig in Saqqara, Egypt, that was founded by his former employer and the University of Leiden. Greco is also working on a coffin project with the Vatican and trying to organize a joint exposition of artifacts from the craftsmen's village of Medina with the Louvre.



Christian Greco, director of the Egyptian Museum, attends a press conference in Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

"I suspect Greco has a lot of irons in the fire that are going to be very exciting that will be of real benefit to Egyptology and to world culture," said Kara Cooney at the University of California, Los Angeles, who will be traveling to Turin in June to look at the museum's coffins.

The museum is among the top 10 visited in Italy, with a record 567,000 visitors last year. Greco could like to increase that to more than 700,000. The opening of the expanded museum a month before the Expo 2015

world's fair in Milan, just a 40-minute train ride away, is expected to bring a boon in visitors, along with the rare exposition of the shroud of Turin from April 19-June 24.



A cameraman shoots an ancient Egyptian statue at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)



The coffin of Merit, architect Kha's wife, is seen at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)



Ancient Egyptian statues are displayed at the Egyptian Museum of Turin, Italy, Tuesday, March 31, 2015. The museum, containing the world's second-largest collection of Egyptian artifacts after Cairo, is unveiling its new digs, including state-of-the art displays and an exhibit space double the original, allowing ancient artifacts to come out of storage and be seen by the public for the first time. (AP Photo/Antonio Calanni)

More information: EGYPTIAN MUSEUM: Turin, Italy. Tuesday-Sunday, 8:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.; Sundays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Full admission, 13 euros.

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