CONSERVATION INTERN

The Kelsey Museum is pleased to welcome Brittany Dolph, who is undertaking a nine-month graduate internship with the conservation lab. Brittany currently a third-year graduate student at the University of California Los Angeles/Getty Master’s Program in Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is from the State University of New York at Buffalo, where she majored in archaeology and psychology. Brittany brings diverse conservation experience to the Kelsey. At the National Museum of American History, she helped to prepare the Star Spangled Banner for exhibition. At the National Gallery of Art she assisted with conservation treatments in the museum’s sculpture garden. In Greece, at the Theater of Doriatic, she worked on preservation of sandstone amphitheater seats, as well as on objects at the Athens National Archaeological Museum in Volos. At the Methone Archaelogical Project, also in Greece, she conserved metals, particularly stone. Her thesis research at UCLA/Getty has focused on weathered volcanic stone. While at the site concerns wood artifacts. In most archaeological contexts wood does not survive, but Egypt is different; dry desert conditions often lead to excellent preservation of organic materials like wood. The Abydos Middle Cemetery is a fascinating place to work, and artifacts excavated there present unique conservation challenges. In fact, if there were a reality show titled “Conservation Nightmares,” we’d put money on Abydos to win. Our most difficult preservation challenge at the site concerns wood artifacts. In most archaeological contexts wood does not survive, but Egypt is different; dry desert conditions often lead to excellent preservation of organic materials like wood. The Abydos wood, unfortunately, has not been so lucky. At Abydos, wood artifacts like coffins and figurines have suffered from attack by termites and fungi, and the remaining “wood” has the structural coherence of a very dry, very crumbly brownie. In other words, the artifacts fall apart once they’re touched. They cannot even be lifted out of the ground without extra support. However, the surfaces of these artifacts are often well-preserved, resulting in a beautifully painted, eggshell thin layer of paint and wood in the shape of the original artifact. And often these artifacts have unexpected and important stories to tell.

Because there are currently no guidelines for conservation of wood that is so severely degraded, we assembled a small think-tank of conservators and scientists, each of whom brought specialized expertise to the project. This group included: Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Azeem, a mycologist from Suez Canal University; Dr. Robert Blanchette, a plant pathologist and mycologist from the University of Minnesota; Harriet “Rae” Brashears, an expert in the excavation of fragile organic material from the Smithsonian’s Museum Conservation Institute; Pamela Hatchfield, a conservator with extensive experience in conservation of Egyptian painted wood artifacts; and Dr. Gregory Smith, the senior conservation research scientist at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Our research was funded by a grant from the American Research Center in Egypt and the United States Agency for International Development. The team visited Abydos for a week, conducting scientific analyses and testing excavation and conservation techniques on site. We also traveled to other sites and conserva- tion labs in Egypt where conservation of archaeological wood is being conducted. After several months to read, think, write, and come up with new ideas, we met again in Ann Arbor to discuss our findings and recommendations. As part of this meeting, the group gave a public lightning-round-style presentation about the project. You can learn more about our work by visiting the Discovery! Excavating the Ancient World exhibition, where several panels explore this research and its contributions to understanding ancient Abydos.

Suzanne Davis and Claudia Chemello

SYMPOSIUM ON ABYDOS CONSERVATION

In September the Kelsey Museum hosted the special symposium “Discovery! Conservation and Science in Action at Abydos, Egypt.” The meeting brought together a group of scientists and conservators who have recently been working to develop better preservation protocols for severely degraded wood. The Abydos Middle Cemetery is a fascinating place to work, and artifacts excavated there present unique conservation challenges. In fact, if there were a reality show titled “Conservation Nightmares,” we’d put money on Abydos to win. Our most difficult preservation challenge at the site concerns wood artifacts. In most archaeological contexts wood does not survive, but Egypt is different; dry desert conditions often lead to excellent preservation of organic materials like wood. The Abydos wood, unfortunately, has not been so lucky. At Abydos, wood artifacts like coffins and figurines have suffered from attack by termites and fungi, and the remaining “wood” has the structural coherence of a very dry, very crumbly brownie. In other words, the artifacts fall apart once they’re touched. They cannot even be lifted out of the ground without extra support. However, the surfaces of these artifacts are often well-preserved, resulting in a beautifully painted, eggshell thin layer of paint and wood in the shape of the original artifact. And often these artifacts have unexpected and important stories to tell.

Because there are currently no guidelines for conservation of wood that is so severely degraded, we assembled a small think-tank of conservators and scientists, each of whom brought specialized expertise to the project. This group included: Dr. Ahmed Abdel-Azeem, a mycologist from Suez Canal University; Dr. Robert Blanchette, a plant pathologist and mycologist from the University of Minnesota; Harriet “Rae” Brashears, an expert in the excavation of fragile organic material from the Smithsonian’s Museum Conservation Institute; Pamela Hatchfield, a conservator with extensive experience in conservation of Egyptian painted wood artifacts; and Dr. Gregory Smith, the senior conservation research scientist at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Our research was funded by a grant from the American Research Center in Egypt and the United States Agency for International Development. The team visited Abydos for a week, conducting scientific analyses and testing excavation and conservation techniques on site. We also traveled to other sites and conservation labs in Egypt where conservation of archaeological wood is being conducted. After several months to read, think, write, and come up with new ideas, we met again in Ann Arbor to discuss our findings and recommendations. As part of this meeting, the group gave a public lightning-round-style presentation about the project. You can learn more about our work by visiting the Discovery! Excavating the Ancient World exhibition, where several panels explore this research and its contributions to understanding ancient Abydos.

Suzanne Davis and Claudia Chemello

KELSEY ASSOCIATES BOARD CONTINUES TO DEVELOP NEW MEMBER BENEFITS

Over the past year the Kelsey Board of Associates worked diligently to revise the organization’s by-laws. The new by-laws were approved by the Associates at their May meeting and are available on the Kelsey website. In addition, new procedures were implemented for Board recruitment, orientation, and governance. The Board also welcomed three new board members: Mary Heumann, Bill Kryska, and Emma Sachs. Their profiles are included in the new section on the Kelsey website for Associates. Visitors to the site can also learn about recent Associate and Board projects, upcoming events, and educational offerings exclusively for members.

Kelsey Associates are essential for supporting the Behind-the-Scenes programs, the Kelsey is also offering exhibition preview views for members and will be introducing more opportunities for international travel with Kelsey faculty and research affiliates. We will also continue to offer regional trips to cultural institutions, enhanced by unique experiences with their faculty and curatorial staff. A number of Associates enjoyed recent trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Eli and Edythe Broad Museum at Michigan State University. Upcoming travel is being coordinated for museums in Chicago and in the spring for museums in London, Paris, and Berlin. As we acknowledge the significant relationship that members have with an institution, the Kelsey wants to learn more about what programs would interest Associates. This summer the Membership Committee of the Board of Associates worked on developing a member survey, and in the coming months we will be soliciting your ideas and suggestions. We very much look forward to meeting the Museum this year and appreciate your participation and ongoing support. For information on becoming an Associate of the Kelsey Museum or increasing your involvement by joining the Board of Associates, please contact Dawn Johnson at 313.744.9195 or djohnson2@umich.edu or visit the Associates page of our website.

UPCOMING ASSOCIATE EVENTS

Upcoming Associate Events’ Behind-the-Scenes Tour Curator: Terry Willings
“From Dybtomuse to Jackal Gods” Thursday, November 7, 2013 6:00 pm, reception to follow

Kelsey Associates’ Holiday Party Friday, December 13, 2013 6:00 pm, reception to follow