

ANCIENT EGYPT: DIALOGUE BETWEEN COLLECTIONS

Fifty years separates the births of Amélia Machado Cavalcanti de Albuquerque (1853–1946), Viscountess of Cavalcanti, and Eva Klabin Rapaport (1903–1991), two women whose trajectories converge around collecting. Both women formed notable collections that allow us to contemplate different time periods and sources, from the remotest periods of humanity. Among them are artifacts from Ancient Egypt, which are brought together here for the first time.

The dialogue between the two collections encompasses both the singularity of the artifacts and the trajectories of the collectors, from the similarities between their tastes to affinities in their collecting habits, despite having lived in such different times. Both purchased items on their travels or when they were living abroad, which allowed them to expand their social circles, including visits to artists' studios, renowned antique dealers, and auction houses.

Bringing these two collections of Egyptian artifacts together provides an opportunity to reflect on collecting, from the motivations and intentions behind it to the practices involved, ranging from the collecting of items per se to the classifications used. Above all, it sheds light on the role of women in Brazilian collecting, not least their enterprising and systematic approach to the activity, as epitomized by both collectors here, in contrast to the male tradition. This opens up the prospect of expanding studies addressing a hitherto little-explored topic and its interfaces with questions of memory and time.

Eternal Egypt: Immortality in the Viscountess de Cavalcanti and Eva Klabin Collections is also an opportunity to observe and compare artifacts—how they offset and complement each other. In the viscountess's collection, the highlights include a polychrome stela belonging to Per-a-Iset depicting him making an offering to the god Ra-Osiris, a fragment of a face from a man's coffin, shabti figurines (funerary servants), and a sizeable set of funerary amulets in excellent condition.

The highlight from the Eva Klabin collection is the head of a pharaoh wearing a nemes head-dress. Notable among the funerary objects are part of the lid of a coffin from the Eighteenth Dynasty showing a face with inlaid eyes and votive objects that demonstrate the importance of animals in Ancient Egyptian religion, such as the coffin for a cat mummy.

It is curious that the artifacts in both collections are for the most part linked to belief in the after-life, which was common in Ancient Egypt but contrasts markedly with Western culture and its efforts to hide death. According to Antônio Brancaglione, "death was not an enemy or an obstacle, but a gateway to another existence. The Egyptians did not share our foolish aim not to die, but had the more poignant desire not to repeat death, to find beyond death a life they could enjoy completely on the other side." The collections also contain artifacts that are offerings and which call for protection from the gods.

Fascination for Ancient Egypt is not restricted to the past. Indeed, this interest and its influence are present and active in the most diverse sectors of society. And in art, it is materialized in contemporary Brazilian art, which offers a different but important dialogue in this exhibition in the form of 25 works by ten artists.

These collections bequeathed to the public, and in particular these artifacts of Egyptian art brought together here, representing the assurance of the permanence of a name and continuation of life after death, were how the Viscountess of Cavalcanti and Eva Klabin Rapaport achieved their own perpetuity. In other words, one of the forms of immortality so desired by the Ancient Egyptians.

We might therefore say that these two women's fascination for Egypt merits borrowing the words that appear on the tombstone of the Egyptologist Howard Carter, discoverer of Tutankhamun's tomb, which were themselves taken from the Alabaster Chalice, found in the tomb of that young and emblematic pharaoh: "May your ka [vital energy] live, may you spend millions of years, oh, you who love Thebes, sitting with your face to the north wind, your eyes beholding happiness."



HELENA SEVERO AND DOUGLAS FASOLATO