

THE BAY VIEW COLLECTION

Collected in the 1880s–1890s for the Bay View Association

Acquired by the Kelsey Museum: 1971

In 1971, the Bay View collection of slightly more than 300 Egyptian antiquities came to the Kelsey Museum from the Bay View Association, located in Bay View, Michigan, on the picturesque Little Traverse Bay of Lake Michigan. Founded in 1875, the Association initially consisted of a group of Michigan Methodists who established a camp meeting—a type of American organization familiar at the time, dedicated to promoting intellectual and scientific discourse in a cultural environment informed by religion and morality.⁸⁷ Like the Chautauqua Assembly (now called the Chautauqua Institution), which convened for the first time in 1874 on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in New York state, the Bay View Association grew quickly, spawning ancillary reading circles across the United States that embraced some 25,000 members between 1893 and 1921. And like Chautauqua, Bay View thrives to this day, continuing to foster literary, scientific, and religious programs as well as dramatic and musical performances in the summer. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both communities attracted famed speakers, the most sought-after being the charismatic politician William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925). The larger-than-life presence of men like Bryan within both Bay View and Chautauqua reflects the social movements of the day; the grand oratory of their advocates, who crisscrossed America on the lecture circuit, formed a backdrop against which we must appreciate the church members and missionaries who then traveled and collected antiquities.

John M. Hall, director of the Bay View Association in the late 1800s, was committed to creating a museum for the community that would encompass specimens of natural history and Michigan history, and would also include a major collection of artifacts from Egypt and the Holy Land. A Flint, Michigan, real estate magnate married to a wealthy heiress, Hall probably underwrote a generous portion of the enterprise, augmenting the more modest contributions of others who answered his call. In March 1889, the *Bay View Association Herald* announced:

In a few years we will have at Bay View rich treasures of literature, science and curios of great interest which will beckon hundreds of students to that favored spot. . . . Then these collections we are now making will have grown to superb proportions. In time they will be enriched by rare curios and objects to illustrate other civilizations, Bible narrative and the triumphs of genius. Casts of classic art, and of discoveries throwing light on Biblical history, libraries which few private fortunes can afford, reading rooms, and gifted instructors to discourse upon the treasures of such an institution, will incite a thirst for learning and create enthusiasm among students.⁸⁸

As John Hall endeavored to fulfill his dream, he fortuitously encountered the Reverend Camden McCormack Cobern (1855–1920). Cobern had earned his BA degree

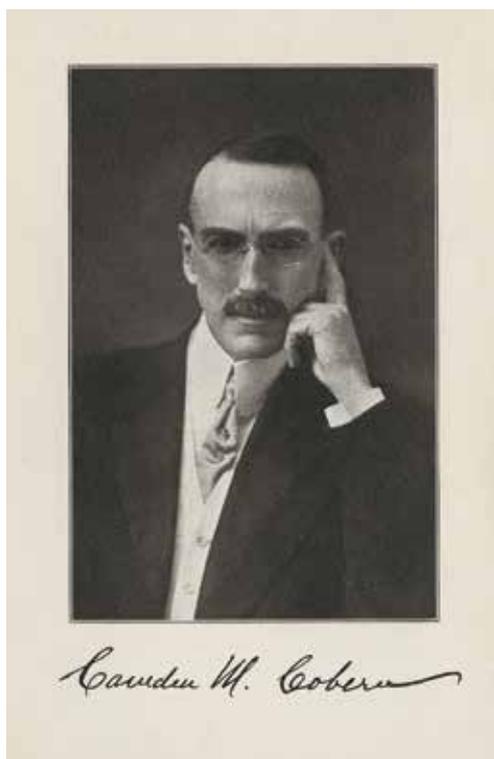


Fig. 6.11. Photograph of the Reverend Camden McCormack Cobern (Cobern 1914, frontispiece).

from Allegheny College in 1876 and was ordained as a Methodist minister shortly thereafter, receiving his PhD from Boston College in 1885 (fig. 6.11). He served as pastor of the Cass Avenue Methodist Church in Detroit for several years, and in 1893 as pastor of the Ann Arbor First Methodist Episcopal Church at 13 North State Street (where records show that he officiated at a local wedding attended by Francis W. Kelsey). An active member of the Methodist lecture circuit in the United States, he is listed as a speaker on “Ethics and Politics” at Bay View in the summer of 1888.⁸⁹

Because Cobern’s travels and circle of acquaintances provide an unusual window onto early collecting in Egypt, it is worth dwelling at some length on his history. During the 1880s Cobern had become affiliated with the Egyptian Exploration Fund and the Palestine Exploration Fund, both British scientific organizations devoted to antiquarian and archaeological pursuits. Like many clergymen of the 19th century, he developed a keen interest in the archaeology of the Near East as a way of recovering an historical affirmation of the Bible. He authored several books, including *Ancient Egypt in Light of Modern Discovery* (1892) and *New Archaeological Discoveries and Their Bearing upon the Life and Times of the Primitive Church* (1917). Cobern befriended Sir Flinders Petrie (chapter five), visiting the great archaeologist on an Egyptian excavation in late 1889 and again on a dig in Palestine at Tell el-Hesi in the spring of 1890. At the latter site (which was then identified with the ancient city of Lachish sacked by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BCE), Cobern wrote rapturously of the simple life in the field that Petrie practiced: “We were nomads, and had the pleasure of a perpetual picnic. Tinned meats, and the preserves for which we longed as boys, were luxuries which we enjoyed at every meal—and to eat out of the can saved washing a dish.”⁹⁰ His report for the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* of 1890 includes descriptions of the local people that accord with the tenor of most Western observations of the day:

There are few such happy-go-lucky sorts of people to be found in England or America as are these Arabs. They have nothing, and they need nothing, and they want nothing. To have a turban and a shirt, and to be able to lie down during the greater part of the day in the shade of a rock in a weary land, is the summum bonum . . . while they seem to think that Allah will take care of them without work, they seem to think that it would be tempting providence not to steal.

Cobern concluded this passage with warm praise of Petrie: “May he stick his spade deep into Philistia and bring up great spoil!”⁹¹

The Reverend Cobern acquired not only Egyptian antiquities but Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman material as well. In addition to the Egyptian objects he presented to the Bay View Association in the 1890s, he also gave a substantial collection of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman artifacts to Allegheny College. Of the many artifacts representing his own purchases in Egypt that Cobern presented to the Bay View Association (and now in the possession of the Kelsey), two are of special significance in the history of Egyptology: a pair of inscribed faience shabtis, figurines that acted in burial contexts as



Fig. 6.12. Two shabtis of Pinudjem II, High Priest of Amun (ca. 969 BCE); donated by the Reverend Camden McCormack Cobern to the Bay View Association; Bay View collection (photo, R. Stegmeyer; KM 1971.2.169 and 1971.2.170).

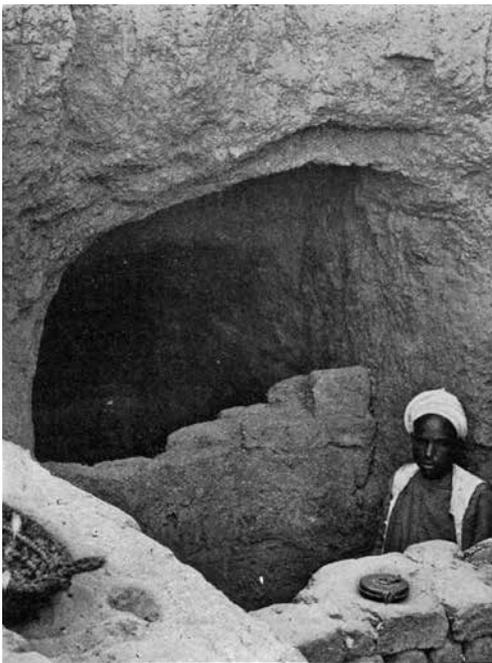


Fig. 6.13. Entrance to Jackal Catacombs of Abydos, Egypt (Cobern 1913, p. 1051).

surrogate laborers and facilitators for the deceased in the afterlife (fig. 6.12). These had come from the tomb of Pinudjem II at Deir el-Bahri, just above the grand funerary monument of the New Kingdom queen Hatsheput. Pinudjem II was the High Priest of Amun at Thebes from 990 to 969 BCE. Somewhat later, his family tomb became the repository for a large cache of robbed royal burials in the Valley of the Kings. The discovery of the tomb of Pinudjem in 1881, along with its surprising contents, caused an international sensation, even inspiring the now iconic Egyptian film *al-Mumiya* or *The Night of Counting the Years* (1969) by Shadi Abd al-Salam.⁹² We do not know the particulars of how these two shabtis entered the art market—or from whom Cobern purchased them less than a decade after the remarkable discovery. The provenances of some other Bay View artifacts have links to Petrie projects through Cobern, including shabtis “said to be from the Pyramid of Illahun,” where Petrie worked in February or March of 1890.⁹³

Cobern had a compelling writing style, evidenced by his later contributions to *National Geographic*. An article published in 1913 described the conditions in the “Catacomb of Jackals” at Abydos and his own exploration of it:

Although deep underground, the stench was so great when it was first reopened that it was disagreeable at a hundred yards distant. The first man who attempted to enter the cave with me was almost asphyxiated, but we crawled out without harm. To the writer, three days later, was assigned the odoriferous duty of finding among these tons of decayed or half mummified bodies a number of specimens fit for scientific examination. . . . Crawling on hands and knees for four hours over these piles of bodies, one sees many a ghastly sight—thousands of skulls or half-mummified heads; bodies broken and mashed; bones that crumble at a touch; eyes staring wild or hollow sockets filled with black paste; mouths closed just as they had been reverently arranged by the priestly undertaker 2000 years ago, or sprung wide open as if the creature had sent out a terrible wail in the last moment of its life. The sight of white, sharp teeth glinting everywhere in the light of the candle was indeed weird and gruesome. That four hours’ experience can never be forgotten: shoulders bents, back cramps, down almost with face and nose touching these grinning skulls, feet, hands, and knees crunching into a mass of putrifying bones which often fall to a powder as you touch them or cause a cloud of mummy dust to envelop you. . . . Let us be careful, too. If this mummification was with bitumen, it only needs a careless movement of the candle, and in a moment your body and those of the sacred beasts will be offered to the gods in a hecatomb of flame (fig. 6.13).⁹⁴

Most of the pieces in the Bay View collection are of high quality even if they do not rise to the level of historical interest of Pinudjem’s shabtis. One fine example, now on display, is a funerary stela of the Middle Kingdom depicting a man called Shemsu, who is shown performing an offering ritual to nurture the *ka* (soul) of his deceased sister (fig. 6.14).⁹⁵ Incorporated into the imagery is a distinctive lidded libation vessel for

Fig. 6.14 (near right). Limestone stela of Shemsu (seated), performing an offering ritual for his sister (1991–1783 BCE); Bay View collection (KM 1971.2.190).

Fig. 6.15 (center right). Burnished clay libation vessel with lid (2040–1650 BCE); acquired in the Egyptian Fayum, 1930s; gift of Enoch Peterson (photo, R. Stegmeyer; KM 91162).

Fig. 6.16 (far right). Detail of wrapped cat mummy (1st century CE); Bay View collection (photo, R. Stegmeyer; KM 1971.2.183).



Fig. 6.17. Photograph of the Reverend Chauncey Murch, a missionary, collector, and purveyor of antiquities who was stationed in Luxor, Egypt, in the 1880s (Hartshorn, Merrill, and Lawrence 1905, p. 359).

offerings—a type for which the Museum has an actual Middle Kingdom example (fig. 6.15), a gift from Professor Peterson, who must have acquired it while serving in Egypt as director of the Karanis excavations. Overall, the Bay View objects are impressively varied. A favorite among Museum visitors is an entire cat mummy in its decorated linen wrapping, one of numerous attestations of the feline cults in ancient Egypt (fig. 6.16).⁹⁶

Although the core of the Bay View collection revolves around his own acquisitions, Cobern coordinated the donations of additional Egyptian artifacts purchased by several Methodist missionaries who worked in Egypt. Among them was the Reverend Chauncey Murch, nicknamed “the fat reverend” (fig. 6.17). Stationed in Luxor, he was ideally situated to become closely associated with the renowned Egyptologists of the day—in particular, the British Egyptologist E. A. Wallis Budge (keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum from 1894 to 1924 and author of seminal books such as *The Mummy* and *The Book of the Dead*). Indeed, Murch became a key player in many important acquisitions for the British Museum. As Egyptologist T. G. H. James (a successor to Budge at the British Museum) has described the arrangement,

In Egypt it was usually necessary to clinch a deal speedily; the native owner could rarely wait for the outcome of protracted negotiations in London, which might include delays in making the necessary funds available. Murch, however, could buy quite informally, to be reimbursed in due course by the Trustees.⁹⁷

The Reverend Murch intersected not only with the great Budge but also with the colorful American journalist and amateur Egyptologist Charles E. Wilbour, whose legacy includes patronage of the Department of Egyptian Art at the Brooklyn Museum and an endowed professorial chair in Egyptology at Brown University. Wilbour’s letters



Fig. 6.18. Wrapped mummy of child (1st century CE); acquired in the Egyptian Fayum in the 1880s by Harriet (“Hattie”) Conner; donated to the Bay View Association; Bay View collection (KM 1971.2.179).

to family frequently mention the Reverend Murch and the collections he was amassing at his house. On January 23, 1890, Wilbour wrote,

I took Mr. Brunner to Mr. Murch’s where I recognized two of the cartouches cut out of the grand inscription at Beni Hassan, and a tablet with the cartouches of Pepi, which I judge comes from a tomb at Bersheh. These he [Murch] bought from Sidrach at Ekhmeem, who had five or six Beni Hassan cartouches and about ten others.⁹⁸

The spoliation of tombs at Beni Hassan was a controversial topic of the day in Egypt, raising some awareness of and perhaps a sense of complicity in the deprecation of ancient monuments to create saleable fragments that served the growing appetites of Westerners. Scholars, missionaries, and tourists alike eagerly bought up everything on offer, and we know that Murch, a permanent expatriate in Upper Egypt, certainly participated in such practices. While many of the dealings at the time would be considered unethical today, they did bring Coptic material into the hands of scholars, thus revolutionizing the study of early Christianity at the time.⁹⁹ In 1910, Murch sold about 3,370 of his artifacts to the British Museum, and later a small number of additional pieces to the Art Institute of Chicago. He was far less generous in his gifting than in his sales—donating only a handful of the most modest artifacts to the Bay View Association.

A different sort of missionary donor to the Bay View Association, also associated with Reverend Cobern, was Harriet (“Hattie”) Conner (1858–ca. 1898), who purchased and then gave to Bay View the wrapped mummy of a child (fig. 6.18) that today attracts schoolchildren to its specially designed area in the Museum’s Egyptian gallery. The



Fig. 6.19. Group photograph of Egyptian girls at the Cairo Mission School in Hattie Conner’s era (Elder 1958, p. 49; Visual Resources Collection, University of Michigan, with permission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America).

Fig. 6.20. Group photograph of some missionary evacuees from Egypt, taken in Southampton, England, 1882 (Elder 1958, between pp. 192 and 193; Visual Resources Collection, University of Michigan, with permission of the United Presbyterian Church of North America). Harriet Conner is in this group photograph, but she cannot be identified more precisely.



mummy is of Roman date and probably comes from the Fayum region (the locale of the Michigan excavations at Karanis), where we can trace Conner's presence. She was one of many unsung female Protestant missionaries serving in Egypt, teaching the Bible, imparting practical skills to local girls, and doing charitable works during the closing decades of the 19th century. The daughter of a Presbyterian pastor in Pennsylvania, she first sailed for Cairo in 1880, where she helped run a mission school for girls in Cairo's Faggala district and ministered to poor families (fig. 6.19). In advance of the British invasion of 1882, anti-colonial tensions ran high among Muslim and Coptic populations alike; Conner and other missionaries received threats on the streets. Ultimately violence escalated, and on June 15 the members of the American Mission took refuge on the American frigate *Galena*, anchored at Alexandria.¹⁰⁰ Soon they were divided up and shipped either to England, Italy, or America, with Conner sent to England. A photograph of the evacuees who reached Southampton includes Hattie Conner, but we do not know which figure she is (fig. 6.20).¹⁰¹

Conner returned to her work in Egypt and remained there until 1892, when she went home on furlough, attending Chautauqua that summer. Although booked to sail again to Egypt in November, she resigned her ministry on September 14 under circumstances that still elude us. She served thereafter at the Syrian mission in the former Basin Alley neighborhood of Pittsburgh. In 1895 she pleaded for better assistance for treating typhoid fever, which was raging at the time in this underserved community where folk medicine often collided with more modern treatments. She drops off the record soon thereafter. She may herself have died of the disease.

Fig. 6.21. Charles E. Wilbour and other Egyptologists in the Temple of Luxor, late 1800s; *left to right*: the Marquis de Rochemonteix, Albert Jean Gayet, Charles E. Wilbour, Jan Herman Insinger, and Gaston Camille Maspero, member of the Collège de France and Director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service (courtesy of Brooklyn Museum Archives, Wilbour Archival Collection, Visual materials [9.4.024], n.d.).



Elusive as she remains today, Conner received notice from some remarkable men of her day. On February 23, 1887, for example, she appears in the journal entry of Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), the charismatic former slave who became a scholar, politician, and powerful figure in the abolitionist movement. She had accompanied him and his second wife, the Caucasian Helen Douglass (née Pitts), on home visits in her Cairo neighborhood so that they could observe local conditions.¹⁰²

Her notice in powerful Egyptological circles was more pronounced, even if the company was not so exalted. In three letters, Charles E. Wilbour (fig. 6.21), who dealt with the most distinguished Egyptologists of the day, mentions “little Miss Connor [*sic*].” Intriguingly for us at the Kelsey, two occasions when Hattie Conner crossed paths with Wilbour involve sites that later became the focus of Michigan archaeology. On January 10, 1891, Wilbour writes:

I went by rail to Wasta and thence to Medeenet el Fayoom. Dr. Watson and little Miss Connor [*sic*] of the American Mission were on the train. She is enthusiastic about antiquities. They were going to Senoras to a station and she would come to Medeenet soon. To my disgust, Grébaut had cleared out the principal anteekeh shop, paying seventy pounds therefor. There was a big mortar in granite we might have pounded our coffee in with a fine inscription about it and a long piece of carved wood of Roman time. We should have bought them last spring.¹⁰³

Fig. 6.22. Plupy, one of the Egyptian “dig dogs,” posing at Michigan excavations at Soknopaiou Nesos in an ancient stone mill similar to those Miss Conner noticed coming out of nearby Karanis (Kelsey Museum neg. no. 327).



The Kelsey holds an enormous stone mortar, or milling vessel, from the Michigan excavations at Soknopaiou Nesos near Karanis (fig. 6.22). Although without an inscription visible today, it closely resembles the one Wilbour reports seeing in this Fayum shop and regrets not having purchased. It may well have come from Soknopaiou Nesos or Karanis. Karanis was subject to ongoing looting decades before Michigan began systematic work, with its treasure traveling significant distances to market. Wilbour’s letter of January 25, 1891, is vivid testimony to the sale of items illicitly harvested there: “I got a note from little Miss Connor [*sic*] who tells me that D. P. Giovanni has at Senouris in the Fayoom, two or three hundred [British] pounds worth of fine antiquities mostly from Kom Isheem [Karanis], three and a half hours ride away.”¹⁰⁴

Although a wonderful collection of Egyptian antiquities was thus gathered for the Bay View Association, plans to build a museum on the Bay View grounds never materialized. In order to safeguard the objects for posterity, the Association sold the lot to the University of Michigan in 1971. For almost a decade prior to this, the artifacts had already been held in the Kelsey on loan under the stewardship of then curator Louise Shier (d. 1990), who had family ties to the Bay View Association and was instrumental in securing the purchase.

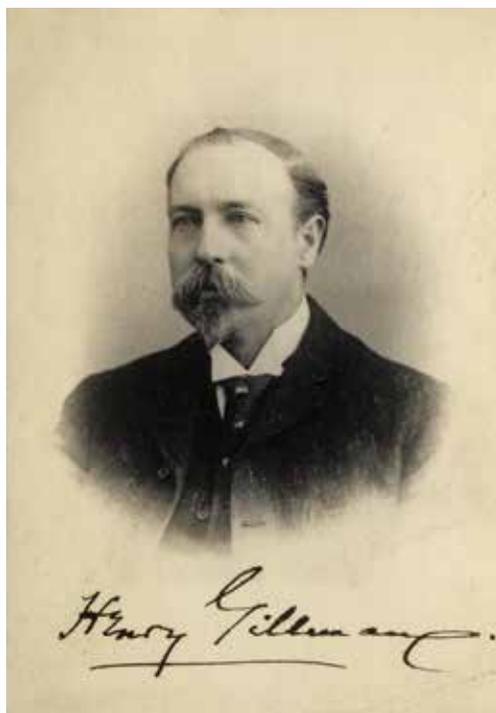


Fig. 6.23. Photograph of Henry Gillman (courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library).

THE GILLMAN COLLECTION
Acquired by the University of Michigan: 1952

Henry Gillman (1833–1915), born in Kinsdale, Ireland, led a varied life as a scientist, public servant, writer, and diplomat (fig. 6.23). While still in his late teens he moved with his family to Detroit, where he began working for the Geodetic Survey of the Great Lakes under the Engineer Corps of the US Army, becoming a rising star in the community

Passionate Curiosities

Tales of Collectors & Collections from the Kelsey Museum

Lauren E. Talalay & Margaret Cool Root



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To our husbands and partners in the passionate curiosities of life

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