

Borchardt's Photo Archive: a preliminary report

Tarek El Awady

(PLATES XXIV–XXVII)

Lo SCA possiede oltre 100.000 fotografie antiche che per decine d'anni sono state immagazzinate in archivi inadatti, senza alcuna inventariazione o documentazione specifica, soffrendo inoltre di condizioni climatiche instabili soprattutto nella stagione calda. Attualmente, lo SCA sta lanciando un progetto volto a riunire tutti gli archivi in un unico luogo ben equipaggiato con i moderni strumenti per il lavoro di catalogazione e documentazione, dotato anche di un laboratorio specifico per questi importanti documenti.

Over almost 150 years, since the establishment of the Antiquities Service in 1858 — now the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) — an enormous number of documentation works have been accumulated and is still in the possession of the SCA. Among the works of documentation, photo archives represent invaluable material and an important resource of information not only to Egyptologists but also to other scholars in different fields. Unfortunately, the SCA photo archives have never been in one place. They are stored at several locations, which are not adequately equipped or prepared to hold photo archives.¹ Nevertheless, these archives have continually suffered from being transferred from one hand to another hand, treated as government custody, instead of valuable documentation material, which needs to be properly registered, imputed into a central database and preserved. Only, a few years ago, the SCA, under the leadership of Zahi Hawass, the Secretary General of the SCA, established an ambitious plan to save the photo archives and make them available to scholars.² The SCA photo archives are mostly

1. Perhaps, the largest collection of photo archives in the possession of the SCA is the so-called German Archive in the documentation centre of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. As the name of the archive refers, it originally belonged to the German Institute of Egyptology in Cairo. The second largest photo archive, which belongs to the SCA, is located in Saqqara and has been kept for many generations in the hands of El Taib family. It is, in fact, one of the best documented archives — the photographs still have their inventory numbers and the register books still exist. Most of the photographs are related to the Saqqara region, documenting past and present excavation and other activities in the necropolis. Another important archive exists in the administration wing of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. This archive is well documented and preserved. The register books of the archive still exists, giving description and number of each glass negative photo and paper photo. A large part of the Egyptian Museum archive is, in fact, relating to the collections of the Egyptian Museum including both, the artifacts on display and those stored in the museum basement. The photo archive in the Salah El Din Citadel in Cairo contains a large number of photographs saved on glass negatives. These are mostly photographs that depict Islamic sites and monuments. Only 2,200 photographs are depicting Pharaonic sites. These are the photographs that were already moved to the documentation centre in Zamalek and joined the German Archive. Other, relatively, small photo archives are in the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, and in the prince Mohamed Ali's palace in Cairo. Other photo archives are kept in small departments of the SCA like the photo geometric department.
2. This plan includes the classification and the registration of the archives, also digitizing all the photo archives in order to establish a database for the archives, which will be accessible to the scholars.