

# THE ORIENT EXPRESS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Oriental Museum

No: 50

September 2022

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## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

*Sue Childs*

Welcome to my second Oriental Express Notes. Thanks to your support the Friends of the Oriental Museum continues strongly. I hope you will enjoy our 2022 to 2023 programme of lectures and events, hopefully back to our normal pattern of meeting in person.

The Chinese 'curse' *May you live in changing times* has certainly been true of the last few years. But we also have the 'blessing' of being associated with the Oriental Museum and its marvellous collections and hard-working staff.

Warm wishes *Sue*

### ***Last Season's Lectures***

Once again we had a mix of in-person and Zoom lectures. Zoom will continue to remain a possibility for lectures if circumstances require this, though we are aiming to return to our normal in-person lectures for 2022 to 2023. We started the 2021 to 2022 season with our usual joint session with NEAESOC (North East Ancient Egypt Society). On Zoom on 9th October 2021 Gianluca Miniaci, Associate Professor, Department of Civilization and

Forms of Knowledge, University of Pisa, spoke on 'The Middle Kingdom World in Miniature'. The subject was faience figurines. On 10th November we held our first in-person lecture since the Covid pandemic started. David Rosier talked about 'The Origins and Evolution of Chinese Imperial Silk - Heaven's Embroidered Cloth'. The lecture traced the origins and myths, that surround Imperial Chinese silk. The AGM was also successfully held in person on 5th December. The meeting was followed by refreshments and the opportunity to socialise. We moved back to a Zoom lecture in January because of concerns over Covid infections and the weather. On 26th January 2022 Dr Penny Wilson, Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, gave a lecture on 'Egyptian Hieroglyphs: Symbols, Writing and Cryptography'. Having this lecture on Zoom was of benefit as we could see the hieroglyphic characters up close on our screens. On 23rd February we moved back to an in-person lecture when Charlotte Spink, Learning Assistant, Durham University Museums, talked about 'Community Engagement: Moving Towards Accessible, Inclusive and Collaborative Ways of Working at the Oriental Museum'. After

describing the range of community activities held at the Museum, she focussed on the Street Museum project, creating a street-trail of 3D printed versions of Oriental Museum objects in Blackhall. The lectures were followed by two events restricted to Friends. On 30th March 'Origins of Coinage in South Asia' was a coin-handling session conducted by Dr Craig Barclay, Head of Museums, Galleries and Exhibitions at Durham University. It is wonderful to have the opportunity to see objects up close and to study them. On 25th April Rachel Barclay, the Oriental Museum Curator, gave Friends a private tour of the exhibition 'Monogatari: the Art of Storytelling in Japanese Woodblock Prints'. The opportunity for an in-depth explanation of the prints on display enhanced the exhibition. We are continuing with Friends-only events in the 2022 to 2023 programme. We had planned an 'Oriental' themed guided walking tour of the University's Botanic Gardens with Mike Hughes the Garden Manager at a time when the cherry trees would be in blossom. The unexpected death of Mr Hughes, an inspiring gardener who enthusiastically shared his expertise and love of the Botanic Gardens with community groups, meant this tour was not possible. We finished the season with a lunch at Ramside Hall Hotel on 14th May. A number of Friends had expressed concerns about driving at night so we moved our annual meal from an evening to a lunch occasion. This was so well-received that we have arranged a lunch event again in 2023.

## **ORIENTAL MUSEUM OPENING HOURS AND BOOKING INFORMATION**

*As at September 2022*

Oriental Museum is currently open on:

- Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday between 10am-5pm
- Thursday between 10am to 7pm
- Saturday and Sunday between 12noon-5pm

Currently, entry is free. There is a booking system but you can also just turn up on spec to see if there is a slot available.

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/oriental.museum/visit/>

## **NOTICES**

### ***Subscriptions***

Subscriptions are due by 1st October 2022.

- Family – £25
- Individual – £15
- Concession (individual) – £10

Subscription requests will be conducted via email and online documents, and via the post for people without an email address. Membership cards will be sent out in the post.

### ***Notice of the Annual General Meeting***

The AGM will be held on Sunday 27th November 2022, 3pm, in the Museum. It will be followed by refreshments and a tour of favourite Museum objects introduced by Council members.

Matters for discussion should be submitted to the Chair on [fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk](mailto:fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk), or by post (to the address at the top of this newsletter), to be received 14 days before the meeting.

**Agenda** will comprise:

- Minutes of the previous meeting, and matters arising
- Chair's Report
- Treasurer's Report, independently examined accounts, and appointment of independent examiner

- Secretary's Report
- Museum Curator's report
- Election of Officers and Members of the Council
- Submitted discussion topic(s)
- Any other business

### ***Current Members of the Council***

Chair – Sue Childs

Vice Chair – Anne Bothwell

Hon. Treasurer – Brian Straughan

Hon. Secretary – Jane Manley

Members – Lyn Gatland, Keith Pratt, Charlotte Spink, Ian Stewart, Malcolm Walker, Penny Wilson

### ***Annual Lunch***

Saturday 6th May 2023, 12noon for 12.30pm, Ramside Hall Hotel

### ***Mahjong Group***

The Mahjong Group meets in the Museum (the Education Room) on the second Sunday of the month 2.00pm to approx. 4.00pm. New members are welcome. Mahjong sets are available and training will be provided. The group is informal and welcoming.

On 12th May 2022 the Oriental Museum held its first Games evening. Members of the Mahjong Group offered demonstrations at this event. And when we can, we will continue to support these Games evenings: an engaging way to try out new games in the wonderful setting of the Museum.

### **FRIENDS LECTURE PROGRAMME 2022 to 2023**

Normally lectures are held in Room 009, Elvet Hill House (next door to the Oriental Museum) on Wednesday evenings at 7.30pm, unless otherwise stated.

If you have any queries please contact Sue Childs at:

[fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk](mailto:fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk)

Wednesday 12th October 2022, 7.30pm  
Lecture Room 009, Elvet Hill House  
Tanju Sen, Wellbeing and Student Experience Office, Durham University  
*The cultural and some of the socio-religious aspects of the festival of Diwali*  
**Note:** Diwali dates in 2022 are 23rd-27th October

Saturday 19th November 2022, 9.30am to 5.00pm  
Joint North East Ancient Egypt Society (NEAESOC) and Friends of the Oriental Museum event  
Hybrid: Newcastle in-person venue (Literary and Philosophical Society, Westgate Road) plus Zoom  
**STUDY DAY and NEAESOC AGM:**  
*Tutankhamun: His Life and Legacy for Egyptology*

Wednesday 14th December 2022, 7.30pm  
Lecture Room 009, Elvet Hill House  
Ross Wilkinson, Learning and Engagement Manager, Durham University  
*The educational team and the work they do*

Wednesday 18th January 2023, 6.00pm  
Oriental Museum  
Gillian Ramsay, Project Curator, Oriental Museum  
*Tour of the Central Asian photography exhibition on display followed by a handling session with the new Uzbek ceramics acquired with the support of the Friends.*  
**Note:** Attendance restricted to Friends of the Oriental Museum

Wednesday 22nd February 2023, 7.30pm  
Lecture Room 009, Elvet Hill House  
Dr Qian Gao, Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeology, Durham University  
*International cultural heritage issues related to museums, with reference to China*

Wednesday 15th March 2023, 7.00pm  
Oriental Museum  
Rachel Barclay, Curator, Oriental Museum  
*Tour of the Museum's stores*  
**Note:** Attendance restricted to Friends of the Oriental Museum

Tuesday April 4th 2023, 7.30pm  
Lecture Room 009, Elvet Hill House  
Prof Kathryn Stevens, Fellow, Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford  
*The Greeks in Asia*

**ORIENTAL MUSEUM CURATOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021 to 2022**  
*Rachel Barclay, Senior Curator*

If I had to sum up 2021/22 at the Oriental Museum, I'd describe it as a long, steady road out of Covid restrictions. The Museum reopened to the public in May 2021 under tight limitations. Over the last 12 months we have been able to slowly peel these away revealing more and more of the museum we all know and love.

We started the year with all visitors being asked to book in advance online to reserve a two-hour slot so that we could ensure we kept within the very limited number of visitors we were permitted to have in the Museum at the same time. We were also closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. This allowed us to use the galleries both to continue our live-streaming into schools and to host university teaching sessions that we could not have run in our smaller classrooms owing to strict room occupancy limits. During this period, the Museum closed at 4pm each day.

By the end of summer 2021 we were welcoming visitors who had not pre-booked. From December 2021 we introduced late night opening on Thursday until 7pm. From February half term 2022 we returned to a 5pm closing time and started to open again on a Tuesday.

Towards the end of March 2022, we welcomed back our first school groups. We have limited schools to just two days a week and only one class at a time, but I can't tell how much joy it brought every single member of staff to hear that first class learning about ancient Egypt in the gallery.

A key priority upon reopening was to restart groups such as our Creative Age art group and the Little Dragons Under 5s club. Initially numbers had to be very limited, with only five families permitted in each Little Dragons session, later moving to eight families. Even running two back-to-back sessions each Wednesday morning, slots would be booked up within minutes of becoming available each week. Saturday afternoon and weekday craft activities for families started again during the Easter school holidays and we have slowly been able to reintroduce interactives and activities in the permanent galleries.

Our events programme has followed a similar path. Diwali celebrations in November 2021 and Lunar New Year Lantern Festival in February 2022 were both limited to only 40 attendees. By March we were able to welcome 448 people to our outdoor Holi Festival, our first large scale festival since the pandemic started and a joyous and colourful way to welcome people back. In May 113 people were able to attend the Buddha's birthday event in the galleries. None of these events would have been possible without the support of our student volunteers and the members of our local faith communities who give so much of their time to support us.

Despite all of the limits and restrictions, we have welcomed 14,251 visitors to the Museum during 2021/22. Time and again visitors have told us how happy they are to be back. Staff feel the same way. The

Museum is at its most magical when it is humming with the conversation and laughter of visitors. We hope that many more will join us in the coming year. With the cost of living crisis hanging over everyone, we are also committed to continuing free entry for everyone, as we have since reopening.

This year's exhibition programme has been varied and exciting. In September 2021 we opened *Taxila in Focus: 100 years since Marshall*. The ancient cities and monuments of the Taxila Valley in Pakistan form a UNESCO World Heritage Site. They were the focus of excavations undertaken by the British archaeologist Sir John Marshall and Indian colleagues in the early 20th century. These investigations were recorded in a detailed photographic archive which is now part of the Oriental Museum collections.

Created in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Pakistan and the UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage, the exhibition compared this historic imagery with contemporary photographs to document the site's development since Marshall, as well as new discoveries. It also highlighted how Marshall's archive can contribute to the management and protection of these important historic sites in the present and the future. Alongside the physical exhibition, a bi-lingual online exhibition, in English and Urdu, has allowed this important research to be shared with a much wider audience in South Asia and around the world.

*Monogatari: the art of storytelling in Japanese woodblock prints* had been planned as the summer exhibition for 2020. This collaboration with the National Museum of Japanese History (NMJH) drew on the JP Scott Collection of Japanese art donated to the Museum in

2019. It explored how images of famous tales of samurai, travellers and heroes produced during the 18th and 19th centuries in Japan inspired art reflecting the real life conflicts of the Sino- and Russo-Japanese wars.

Covid restrictions meant that it was still not possible to hold a private view in January when the exhibition finally opened. Instead, a closing event in May 2022 marked the launch of a book to accompany the exhibition and allowed us to welcome back many Friends we had not seen for too long. Like the exhibition itself, this catalogue and accompanying essays were created by the team at the Oriental Museum working with NMJH colleagues via email and Zoom. We are very grateful to the Friends of the Oriental Museum for their support for this publication, which will be a valuable resource for researchers into the future.

Continuing Covid restrictions in Japan meant that none of our Japanese colleagues were able to visit the exhibition in person. However, at an online event the Japanese curators were able to see parts of the exhibition as our new Vice-Chancellor, Prof Karen O'Brien, and representatives of the Japanese Embassy in London joined us to renew our Memorandum of Understanding between Durham and the NMJH. Since then, we have begun work on a new collaboration focused on the collections of the Squire family who lived in Japan in the early 1900s and then returned to settle in the North-East of England.

The final major exhibition of the year focused on another recent gift, the Indian miniatures generously donated by Dr Simon Fleming. *Tradition and transformation: contemporary Indian miniature painting from Rajasthan* opened at the end of May 2022. This exhibition highlights the work of a group of

contemporary miniature painters working in Udaipur.

The cataloguing of this collection and the creation of the exhibition was led by Grace Ranford. Grace undertook the initial work on the paintings for her Durham University 'Work of Art' placement module during 2020/21, completing the second half of her placement from her bedroom when lockdown restrictions prevented her from coming onsite. After graduating Grace joined the Museum team as a graduate intern, continuing work on the cataloguing of the Marshall Collection. This also enabled her to continue working on this exhibition. Grace's contract came to an end in July 2022 but, inspired by her time with us, she is now setting off to travel in South Asia and will visit the artists involved in this exhibition on behalf of the Oriental Museum so that we can continue our relationship with them.

Alongside Grace, the Museum has benefited from the hard work of another graduate intern this year, Hannah Tidyman. Hannah was involved in the installation of *Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust*, two artworks by contemporary artist Alan O'Cain which also opened in May 2022. Located in the Thacker Gallery of Ancient Egypt, this installation uses artefacts from our collections as part of two startling visual explorations of historic and modern responses to death and the symbolic and emotional power of exhibited objects.

Away from the galleries, the main focus of Hannah's placement has been an audit of all of the museum's stored collections. The project to modernise our storage and research spaces during 2020/21 involved moving more than 35,000 objects in only three months. This year, Hannah has led the work to update all of the locations for these objects on our database. She and Grace have also worked together to

improve the packing of many objects, replacing old packing with modern acid-free materials to ensure the long-term preservation of the collections. This work will continue into 2022/23.

In the permanent galleries, the focus has been on the completion of the *Silk Roads* gallery. Changes were made to the labelling style for the gallery based on feedback from the faith communities who had worked with us. The gallery was then trialled for a range of uses and further changes made to the furniture and layout of the cases over the course of the year. The final stage of the gallery development is now under way. An in-depth guide for visitors wanting more detailed information is now almost complete and we have been able to purchase a touch screen which we hope to install in September 2022 to share the digital content created for us by community members.

Durham University committed to moving as much teaching as possible back to face to face for this academic year. Early in the year this meant running sessions in the museum galleries with students spaced two metres apart or teaching in classrooms with all of the windows open in the middle of winter. Imagine the students and staff sitting in coats and keeping an eye on the dreaded CO<sub>2</sub> monitor in the hope it did not turn red, cutting short the class! Despite these restrictions, staff across the museums team have worked with more than 1000 students using over 1200 objects across 49 different undergraduate and postgraduate modules. The Oriental Museum continues to be the most heavily used of the University's collections for teaching with staff supporting and delivering teaching for a range of courses in Archaeology, Modern Languages & Cultures, History, School of Education and Foundation Studies.

Strict Covid limits on room occupation made it impossible to return to our usual volunteering programme for much of the year. We prioritised students who needed to undertake placements or internships as part of their formal learning programmes. As a result, 60 of the 62 people who volunteered their time this year were Durham University students. Together they contributed 2944 hours of their time to the Museum, making use of the new research facilities created during 2020/21. We hope to welcome back more of our community volunteers during 2022/23 to join the students.

Curators supported the research of 82 academics, students, museum professionals and private individuals over the year. As well as Durham University and UK-based researchers these included scholars based in Australia, Egypt, France, Japan, Italy, PR of China, Poland, Russia, USA, Spain and Switzerland. Twenty-five of these researchers visited the museum in person, making use of our new research facilities and working with almost 550 objects.

I joined the staff of the Oriental Museum back in 2008 and for many years was the only permanent member of curatorial staff. However, as we enter 2022/23, I am very happy to be able to report that our hard work and contribution to the University has been recognised in creation of additional permanent posts.

After a very competitive selection process, in March 2021 we were able to appoint Gillian Ramsay as a permanent Assistant Curator. Gill will be known to many of the Friends as she has worked at the Museum for a number of years on short term contracts. Knowing that she will be with us permanently has allowed me to pass on some key long-term projects to Gill over the last year. In particular, Gill is now taking the lead on further developing our

research collaboration with the University of Malaya and National University of Singapore focused on the Malcolm MacDonald collection of Chinese ceramics. We were able to obtain grant funding this year to create new digital resources focused on this collection. In October 2022, Gill will travel to Malaysia and Singapore to discuss next steps.

This March we interviewed for an additional curator to focus on our Chinese collections. Next month we will be joined by Dr Qin Cao, formerly a Senior Curator at the National Museum of Scotland. Qin will bring a huge amount of expertise to the team. We look forward to welcoming her.

Having Gill and Qin as part of the team will allow me to focus more on strategic, long term aims for the development of the museum. From July this year I moved into a Senior Curator role. While my main focus will continue to be on the Oriental Museum, this reflects my increasing workload on cross-departmental projects such as the ongoing development of a new set of websites for all of our venues.

Finally, I want to mention two key new acquisitions during 2021/22: a collection of central Asian ceramics and a significant collection of Vietnamese contemporary art. The Vietnamese collection includes around 150 works, often purchased directly from the artists. It focuses on pieces produced by up-and-coming young artists over the past 20 years. This exciting collection has no parallels in any other UK museum. During 2022/23 we will start to research and catalogue the collection with the aim of producing an exhibition and publication.

The Friends of the Oriental Museum provided the funds to purchase the central Asian ceramics. These works had come to the UK as part of the International

Ceramics Festival at Aberystwyth University in 2021. While the Oriental Museum is famous for the strength of its ceramic collections, up to this point we had nothing in the collections from Uzbekistan and so we have purchased 10 pieces by contemporary Uzbek ceramists. This purchase significantly enhances our collections from central Asia. Work is underway to catalogue this collection at the time of writing so that we can share them with you.

We are very grateful to the Friends for the financial support you provide for purchases like this and for publications like the *Monogatari* catalogue. In addition to this vital financial support, all of the staff at the Museum appreciate the many other ways in which you support us, from the Mahjong club supporting our first games night to all of the hard work committee members put into creating and running the diverse series of lectures each year.

My thanks to you all. I look forward to seeing you over the coming year.

## **ORIENTAL MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS 2022 to 2023**

*Rachel Barclay, Curator*

### **‘There was light’: King Amunhotep III and his Dazzling Age**

***Private view Friday 30th September 2022,  
6-8pm***

***Open 1st October 2022 to 21st May 2023***

The ancient Egyptian king Amunhotep III was the grandfather of the famous boy king Tutankhamun.

Tutankhamun ruled Egypt for only nine years and died at the age of 18. He was largely forgotten by history until the discovery of his relatively undisturbed tomb by the British archaeologist Howard Carter in 1922. In the hundred years since

this discovery Tutankhamun has become a household name the world over.

Using the collections of the Oriental Museum, this exhibition focuses on Tutankhamun’s family, particularly his father and grandfather, together with the courtiers who surrounded them, exploring the dazzling age of the boy king.

These kings ruled at a time when Egyptian power extended over lands from Syria to Nubia. They possessed enormous wealth, including luxuries from across the known world. *There was Light* showcases a selection of treasures from this golden age, ranging from royal sculpture to the intimate personal objects once owned by the men and women who lived and died along the banks of the Nile over three thousand years ago.

### **Guardians of the Silk Road’s Heritage: Women of the Mountains of Central Asia**

***Private view Friday 30th September 2022,  
6-8pm***

***Open 1st October 2022 to 21st May 2023***

A landscape of open plains and the highest mountains on earth, cut with deep valleys whose rivers feed most of Asia. For thousands of years this landscape witnessed processions of caravans carrying cargoes of spices and silks, along with ideas and innovations, heading along the ancient silk routes joining east and west. Cities grew up and grew rich from the trade, forts were built to defend and control it, and shrines served the spiritual needs of those undertaking the long, arduous journey.

With the rise of sea trade in the age of sail and then steam the importance of these land routes shrank. But now there is talk of the ‘New Silk Roads’ sparked by China’s vast ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. It aims to create transit corridors across what they call the ‘Eurasian land bridge’ connecting

China to Europe. The mountains of Central Asia will once again become a world of trade and transport.

People living along these routes fear that their way of life may be destroyed while others see opportunities to bring local arts and crafts to new audiences. It is set against this backdrop of uncertainty that the GCRF Resilient Silk Route Heritage Network aimed to foster ways for local communities to develop their cultural heritage, commercially and creatively. To make cultures move once more across the mountains, to learn from each other and work together.

This photographic exhibition showcases the work of the professional artists and craftswomen who do so much to preserve and transfer traditional knowledge and skills, adapting them for new audiences and popularising Central Asian folk art.

**Contemporary wood-carved netsuke**  
*Private view Thursday 19th January 2023, 6-8pm*  
*Open 20th January to 14th May 2023*  
Netsuke are Japanese miniature sculptures with origins in the 17th century.

As kimono culture flourished in Edo Period Japan (1603-1868 CE), netsuke were created as toggles to hold pouches and cases containing tobacco and medicine in place on the obi sash worn with the kimono. What began as functional pieces to prevent those little suspended containers from falling to the ground, evolved into small but highly creative carvings. Small but intricately designed objects, today netsuke are widely appreciated by both craftsmen and enthusiastic collectors worldwide.

This exhibition, organised by the Japan Foundation, showcases 65 of the finest contemporary netsuke carved from wood by living netsuke craftsmen in Japan, as

well as by contemporary artists such as Izumi Kato. Through this exhibition, visitors will appreciate the sophisticated skills and playful minds behind modern-day netsuke, while also perceiving its formal beauty and contemporaneity.

**Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb exhibition**

*Private view Thursday 1st June 2023*  
*Open 2nd June to 10th September 2023*

An exhibition created by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum together with partners in Nagasaki and at the National Museum of Japanese History to pass on the realities of the atomic bombings to as many people as possible and to raise awareness for peace on behalf the people of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**MA Museum and Artefact Studies Exhibition**

*Private view Wednesday 14th June 2023, 6-8pm*  
*Open from 15th June 2023*

This year our Masters students will be creating a trail and tour around the galleries of the Museum on the theme of 'reduce, reuse and recycle'.

Cultures worldwide and throughout history have understood the value of these ideas and the Oriental Museum displays are full of examples. The students will be highlighting objects already on display as well as adding new objects from our stored collections which can inspire us all to make the most of our planet's natural resources.

*To check the start and end date of exhibitions before you visit* consult the Museum's website

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/oriental.museum/whatson/>

or ring the Museum on 0191 334 5691