

The Pharaohs Invade Venice



FROM MUSEUM
GALLERIES TO
THE PALAZZO
GRASSI —
VIA THE
GRAND CANAL

BY LYNN GRANT

Early in 2002, the Palazzo Grassi, an exhibit venue in Venice, Italy, began arranging a major exhibit of Egyptian artifacts titled *I Faraoni* (The Pharaohs), borrowing more than 300 objects from 32 institutions worldwide. The Museum loaned several works to the exhibit, and their transport to that venue became an epic journey.

We had arranged for the artifacts to fly to Italy on a combination passenger/cargo jet so that I, as the courier, could travel with them. Unfortunately, one of the four containers of crates

could not be loaded onto the jet, despite massive efforts that delayed the flight (and everyone on it) for two hours. The other three pallets and I arrived in Milan, only to discover that our customs papers were now void and had to be completely redone, which meant we were trapped in customs for eight hours. The fourth pallet did not arrive for another 36 hours, necessitating an all-night truck ride to Maghera, the port for Venice.



LEFT: Several of the artifacts requested were so heavy that we required the services of riggers, specialists in moving heavy objects. One object, a fragment of the monumental gateway to the Palace of Merenptah, which usually resides in our Lower Egyptian gallery, weighed 6,800 pounds, straining our freight elevator to its limit. Although getting the objects out of the building was an effort, the adventure was just beginning.

ABOVE: In the morning, the crates were lifted with a crane and loaded onto a small boat for transport to the Palazzo Grassi.



BOTTOM LEFT: JUANA DAHLAN; ALL OTHER PHOTOS: LYNN GRANT

conservation notes



TOP LEFT: The boat took us up the Grand Canal to the loading stage for the Palazzo. CENTER LEFT: A crane on the boat lifted the crates off onto a specially laid walkway because the Venetian pavements could not support their weight without damage. BOTTOM LEFT: Because the 18th-century Palazzo has no freight elevators, a complicated system of scaffolding and pulleys was used to transfer the objects to the exhibit spaces. TOP RIGHT: The complexity of the arrangements meant that every stage of the installation process required much discussion — often in three languages simultaneously. CENTER RIGHT: After five intense days, all the objects were safely transferred to the Palazzo Grassi, and there was a little time to enjoy the grandeur of Venice.

Lynn Grant has a degree in archaeological conservation from the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London. She joined UPM's Conservation Laboratory in 1988, as conservator for loans and traveling exhibits. Before that, she worked as a conservator in Canada, England, and Hong Kong, and conducted on-site field conservation in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Jordan, and Honduras.