

OPEN LETTER
From the Egyptian scholars and civil society
on the issue of Shepen-Isis' Human remains

**To the Aabbey Library in at. Gallen,
To the Catholic Denomination in St. Gallen,
To the City Council in St. Gallen
To whom it may concern,**

We – Egyptian scholars, Egyptologists, scientists, artists, students, and members of the civil society – demand the restitution of the human remains of Shepen-Isis in possession of the Abbey Library in St. Gallen back to Egypt. We are overly concerned about the display of Shepen-Isis in the Abbey Library of St. Gallen, both from an ethical and a legal perspective, we hereby emphasize our request for repatriation. There is no better time than the present moment, to correct the mistakes of the past and take agency of our future, collectively as Egyptians.

We strongly believe in cultural continuity; therefore Shepen-Isis is our ancestor. Displaying our ancestor in a glass vitrine naked down to the chest, not only violates the beliefs of ancient Egyptians, but also disrespects their wish for eternal life. As the indigenous community of Egypt, we were also not involved in any way in this decision. We refuse the objectification of our ancestors, their bodies are not an object of art.

August 1820 the two Sarcophagi with Shepen-Isis' body arrived in Switzerland. Eight weeks after her arrival Shepen-Isis was unwrapped in a ceremony led by Professor Peter Scheitlin. All guests were allowed to take a piece of the Shepen-Isis' linen wrap as a souvenir. Human remains are not an attraction! We consider the actions of the past offensive, as well as the current way of display as a clear imposition.

After reading the wonderfully detailed book "Schepenesese – die ägyptische Mumie der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen" written by Peter Müller and Renate Siegmann and published by Cornel Dora, we learn the following facts:

On January 30, 1820, Karl Müller-Friedberg, founder, and leading politician of St. Gallen, receives a letter from Egypt, informing him about the acquisition of one of "the most beautiful" mummies of ancient Egypt and its shipment to St. Gallen. (p.11) Heinrich Menu von Minutoli (1772 – 1846) had acquired it (before January 1820) with other antiquities in Egypt and sold it to the Prussian state (p.55). We would like to note here that Minutoli was a general Lieutenant of the Prussian state – not an archeologist or an Egyptologist – which clearly indicates his non-academic or educational intentions.

Furthermore, going back to the documents of the "Egyptian National Library and Archives" "Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiya", von Minutoli was granted only two permissions by Mehmet Ali to investigate archaeological sites in Siwa and Girga, which date back to November 1820.

As indicated, the mummy of Shepen-Isis was found and dug out of her grave clearly before November 1820, which inculcates an illegal action. If the mummy was not excavated with a legal permission from Egypt, which was the de facto process, then this leaves only one possibility: grave robbery and looting. The robbery is also stated in Cornel Dora's book explicitly ("The coffins of the Shepen-Isis originate from a robbery excavation" / "Die Särge der Shepen-Isis dürften aus einer Raubgrabung stammen", Schepenesese, p.59). Since the mummy was taken out of her grave before Auguste Mariette, the French Egyptologist, officially excavates the graves in the Hatshepsut temple in 1858. (p.59)

Let's fight for justice together, against looting and robberies. Here we have a chance to correct the mistakes of the past.

THEREFORE:

- **We urge the Abbey Library to cooperate with an Egyptian task force, consisting of Egyptologist, scientists, and cultural activists on bringing Shepen-Isis back home and to give her the peace and respect she had wished to receive.**
- **We suggest opening the archive of the Abbey Library to disclose all binding legal contracts from 1820 to prove the acquisition of Shepen-Isis, as well as all letters and documents that could help in tracing back her exact provenance.**
- **We are in a process of preparing the necessary documentation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Egypt to submit the official request.**

We would also like to draw your attention to the various historical libraries in Egypt. For example, the library of St. Catherine in South of Sinai, which entails 3,300 Christian manuscripts and the Codex Sinaiticus, the oldest handwritten copy of the New Testament dating back to the 4th century. The library also has a museum and an ancient basilica. There are approx. Twenty million Christians living in Egypt. Egypt's history merges Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, who resided side by side, which can still be seen in the architecture of old Cairo. There is a wide interest in religious cultural artefacts to be displayed in Egypt. Hosting an exhibition in Egypt with artefacts from the Abbey Library would be a precedent to the entire world, an example of honest cultural exchange and a promising possibility to build bridges between our cultures.

Every single mummy and each single object of the ancient Egyptian culture plays a significant role in reconstructing our history.

Every story counts!

A mummy is not an object of the past, Shepen-Isis is a subject related to us. Hence by gaining knowledge about our ancestors and about our past, we help shape the livelihoods and identities of the present generation and so pave the way for a free and just future.

Sincerely,

Monica Hanna, Prof. for Egyptology, member of the "St. Gallen Declaration for Shepenense"
and

Bassem Ibrahim Ibrahim, General Director of General Department of Services of Touristic, Archaeological Sites and Museums – Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Dr. Daniele Salvoldi**, Part-Time Lecturer of History of Architecture and Egyptologist, the American University in Cairo; **Dr. Mohamed Abdelmaqsoud**, Previous Director of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt; **Dr. Mohamed Gamal Rashed**, Professor of Museum Studies – Head of Museum Management Department, Faculty of Archaeology, Damietta University; **Dr. Omniya Abdelbar**, Head of Development, Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation/ Researcher V&A; **Galal Abada**, Professor of Architecture, Ain Shams University, Cairo; **Haifaa Khalaf Allah**, Professor for Islamic and Middle East History Georgetown University, Washington DC director Centre for Islamic Mediterranean Studies (SCIMS); **Hoda El-Sadda**, Chair Co-Director of the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW) in the UK – Co-Founder Women and Memory Forum; **Ibrahim Saweros**, Phd., Associate Professor of Coptology, Sohag University; **Mahmoud Abd El Hafez Mohamed Adam**, Associate Professor of Conservation Science. Department of Conservation, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University; **May Al-Ibrashy**, Architect, Co-Founder of Megawra Built Environment Collective (BEC) -Recipient Prince Claus Award; **Prof. Dr. Ahmed Mahmoud Eissa**, Professor of Egyptology – Ex Chairman of the Egyptology Department – Cairo University; **Prof Ibrahim Mohammed Mohammed Badr**, Professor of Conservation and Restoration Archaeological Materials; **Prof Khaled Gharib Shaheen**, Head of the Greco-Roman Archaeology Department – Cairo University; **Wessam Samir**, Head of Broadcasting and Media Production AASTMT;

and

Abdullah Hassan, Heritage Specialist and a Visual Artist; **Abdulnaby Helmy**, Founder & CEO , Daily Sun Travel – Ex. Head of Tour Guide Syndicate of Red Sea; **Ahmed Elanssari**, Prof. of Egyptology, Sohag University; **Alex Meszmer**, Artist-Directors of Transitory Museum at Pfyn; **Ali Ahmed Abou**

Hemed, Politician – El Adl Party; **Ali Mahfouz**, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Ali Zoughba**, Archaeologist at the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Alia Mortada**, Architect – Founder of Buro Doqqi; **Alya A. Monsef Reshwan**, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Asaad A. Zaki**, Associate Professor – University of Sadat City – Visiting Scholar at City University of New York; **Dalila Elkerdany**, Professor of Architecture and Urban Design – Cairo University; **Dina Hafez**, Policy Officer, Embassy of the Netherlands; **Dr. Vivianne Saleh-Hanna**, Professor, Crime and Justice. Studies and Black Studies, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth; **El-Sayed Mahfouz**, Professor of Archaeology – University of Kuwait; **Emad Mekhail Gerges**, Director of Irrigation Authority; **Esraa Sleem**, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Essam Atteya**, Journalist “News of Today”; **Faiza Haika**, Professor Emeritus of Egyptology, the American University in Cairo; **Ghada Waheed**, Financial Sector Specialist- the World Bank; **Hagar Saad Eldien Mostafa**, Coptologist; **Hamada Zidan**, Author and Director of Megraya Institute for Education; **Hanan Ezzat**, Conférencière, École D’Architecture, Porte La Villette; **Haytham Nawar**, Professor of Art and Design – American University In Cairo; **Heba Alders**, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities-Egypt; **Howard Middleton Jones**, Archaeologist and Director of the U.K. Coptic Research Centre; **Inês Torres**, Postdoctoral Research Fellow – Centre for the Humanities, Nova University; **Kandeel Mohamed**, Journalist; **Mahmoud Nada**, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Mai El Sheikh**, Cultural Center of Gamal Abdel Nasser; **Mamdouh Ouda**, Director of the Crisis Management Unit – Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Manar Abd El Raouf**, Professor of Polymer Science at the Egyptian Petroleum Research Institute; **Marc Wassim Lotfalla**, Professional Photographer; **Mennat Allah Fayed**, Film Director; **Mohamed Abd Elrady Ahmed**, Inspector of Antiquities, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Mohamed Ragab Sayed**, Assistant Professor Minia University; **Monica Samir Kamal Kamel Hanna**, Associate Professor and Acting Dean, College of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage; **Mostafa Ezz Elarab**, Archaeology Researcher; **Nadine Emile**, Opera Singer and Radio Presenter; **Natalia Klimczak**, Historian and Journalist; **Rana Ehab**, Heritage Researcher; **Rasha Sabri**, AUC Press and Bookstores; **Reto Müller**, Artist / Director of Transitory Museum at Pfyn; **Shenouda Rizkalla**, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; **Shrouk Muhammad Elswify**, Museum Studies and Archaeological Sites Management Researcher; **Tarrel Al Atar**, Lawyer; **Valentina Porcheddu**, Archaeologist and Journalist; **Vivian Tadros**, Property and Material, Embassy of Canada; **Wagih Gamal**, African Tourism Council NPC; **Yara Mekawei**, Sound Artist;

and

Abd El Rahman Ahmed; **Abdallah Mohamed Zahran**, Dentist; **Abdulla Hessiun**; **Abdulrahman Mangoud**; **Adel Boulos**, Electronic Engineer; **Adeline Jérôme**, Student In Egyptology, University of Manchester; **Ahmed Abdeen**; **Ahmed Elbassuony**; **Ahmed Esmat**; **Ahmed Mehrez**, Banker; **Ahmed Noor**, Student at the I.I.Ns, Department of Chinese; **Ahmed Osama Ebeid**, Archaeologist; **Akram Maged**, Student; **Al-Hassan Abu El-Nasr Mansour**, Egyptian Archaeology Student In Archaeology and Cultural Heritage College & Junior Researcher – AASTMT; **Alberto Di Gennaro**, Author and Publisher; **Amany Ramadan**, Architect; **Amira Gamal**, Civil Engineer; **Amr Elhakim**; **Ana Mesquita**, Former Egyptology Student at Nova University; **Ana West**, Early Childhood Educator – Winnanggay Preschool Berkeley, NSW; **Ashraf Mohamed Sabry Obaya**, Audit Accounts; **Ashraf Naassar**; **Asmaa Hussein**; **Asmaa Omar Yusuf**, Computer Science Student – AASTMT; **Aya Diab**; **Ayman Taher**; **Bahgat Naguib Fanous**, Graphic Designer; **Basma Enany**, Economist; **Beshoy Mark El-Mallah**, Computer Science Student – AASTMT; **Christine Adel**, Mother; **Christine Samir Fanous**; **Claire Eskander**; **Dina Amin**; **Ehab El Raheb**; **Eiman Said**, Librarian; **Eman Allam**; **Eman El Ayadi**, Mother; **Eman Elmeaddawy**; **Eman Hassan Seliem**; **Esraa Ahmed**, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – Teacher Assistant and Researcher AASTMT; **Eyad Khaled**, Student at the Faculty of Commerce English Sector; **Fadi Credi**, Engineer; **Fady Atef**, Teacher Assistant – Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – AASTMT; **Fady Samir Mina**; **Farida Waheed**; **Fatima Osman**, Plant Pathologist – UC Davis; **Fatma Omar Yousef**, Computer Science Student – AASTMT; **Fawzya Fouad Naeem**, Master Student; **Gergis Nady Shaker**, Cardiologist; **Ghada Ashour**, Scientific Researcher, Pre-Master of Environmental Science Student, PSAS; **Habiba Abdelnabi Abdelshakor**, Egyptology Student In Archaeology and Cultural Heritage College & Junior Researcher. AASTMT; **Hady Shenouda**; **Haissam Daher**; **Hala Omran**; **Hanaa Halim Wissa**, Mother; **Hanan Khashaba**; **Hany George Ramzy**; **Hasnaa Mohareb**; **Hassan Altakroni**; **Hassan Farah**, Student at the Faculty of Commerce English Sector; **Haya Kamal**; **Haytham Darwesh**; **Hoda Fawzi**, Architect; **Hosam Fahmy**; **Ihab Waheed**; **Iman El Essawy**; **Inas Ramzy**, Education Consultant; **Irene Nashed**; **Islam Emad**; **Kamal Abdelaziz Mohamed**; **Kerylos E Aziz Boules**, Tour Guide; **Khaled Zeidan**, Student; **Lubna Muharram**, Engineer; **Magdy Rashad**, Engineer; **Maggie Hakeem**; **Maher Ebead**; **Maher Malak**; **Manar Mazhar Ashour Hassan**; **Marcus Zacharia**, Community Health

Worker; **Mareez Issac; Mariam Hanna; Marian Farag Adly; Marina Fouad; Marina Sherif Farouk,** Student; **May Mahmoud Elhalawany,** English Teacher; **Meddhat Ghabrial,** Professor of Engineering; **Melania Samir Beshara,** Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Student – AASTMT; **Meriam Edwar; Michael Hanna; Mirette Atnas, Ob Gyn; Moataz Mohamed; Mohamed Ahmed Eladawy; Mohamed Khedr; Mohamed Youssef; Mohamed Zaki,** Civil Engineer; **Mohammed Elfatih,** Researcher, Hydro Plants Generation Co. Aswan; **Mona Taher,** Marketing Director; **Monica Nader Mikhaeil,** LPC, NCC – Mental Health Psychotherapist; **Monica Youssif Soliman; Morgan Moroney,** PhD Egyptology, Johns Hopkins University; **Mostafa Fathy; Mustafa Waheed Ismail; Nabil Fouad,** Director of the Jerome Gases; **Nadia Magdy; Nashwa Mahmoud Mohamed,** Archaeological and Culture Heritage, Major Conservation of Material Culture, Junior Research Teacher Assistant; **Neama Nabil,** Teacher; **Nermeen Dowaik; Noha Hisham Othman,** Luxor University; **Nour Zakaria Eltarzy,** Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, Egyptology Specialization. – Junior Researcher. – AASTMT; **Omaima Magdy; Omar Bhaa Eldin,** Petroleum Engineer; **Omneya Elsergany,** Banker; **Omnia Mahmoud Salem; Osama Amer; Peter Nagy,** Networks Engineer; **Philopater Magdy,** Student at the Faculty of Arts, Department of Greek, Latin and Classical Studies – Sohag University; **Philopos Essam Fakhry Daoud,** Egyptology Student – University of Pisa; **Rafik Abdel Malek; Rafik Isaac; Reem Abdulkader; Reem Mehanna; Robert Younan; Sahar Elkhoully,** Associate Professor of Logistics – AASTMT; **Salah Hanna,** Electronic Engineer; **Salma Bahey; Samaher El-Sayed Mahran,** Archaeology and Culture Heritage – Junior Researcher – AASTMT; **Samia Fathy,** Doctor; **Samira Abdel Meguid,** Head of the Library Services – AASTMT; **Sandra Samir,** Architect; **Sara Giannotti; Sara Samuel,** Electrical Engineer; **Sara Wael; Seif Eldin Mohsen; Shaimaa Matar,** Archaeologist; **Shrouq Zain; Susana Bailarim,** Teaching Assistant at College of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage, AASTM; **Tarek Abdelkawi; Tarik Kilani,** Deputy Supply Chain – Lecico Egypt S A E. Alex; **Toka Hassan Ali,** Architech and TA at Cairo University; **Waelgamal Abdel Hamed; Yahia Alaa Yahia,** Procurement Manager – Ansaldo Energia; **Youssef Goubran,** Management and Consultation; **Youssef Hossam Shahin,** Political Science Graduate – Junior Researcher – AASTMT; **Youssef Iskander,** Sound Engineer; **Youstina Elia,** Archaeology and Cultural Heritage – Teacher Assistant – AASTMT; **Ziena Aly Eldieb,** Mother;