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978-1-107-63525-8 - The Preservation of Antiquities: A Handbook for Curators

Dr Friedrich Rathgen

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THE PRESERVATION
OF ANTIQUITIES

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Time, which antiquates antiquities, and hath an art
to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these minor
monuments.

(SIR THOMAS BROWNE, *Hydriotaphia*, cap. v.)

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THE PRESERVATION OF ANTIQUITIES

A HANDBOOK FOR CURATORS

TRANSLATED, BY PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORITIES OF THE ROYAL
MUSEUMS, FROM THE GERMAN OF

DR FRIEDRICH RATHGEN

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE increasing recognition of the importance of the preservation of antiquities justifies the publication of a handbook dealing with this subject. As far as I can ascertain, with the exception of a short article¹ for which I am myself responsible, only one work has appeared which covers the whole field—the “Merkbuch”² prepared by Dr Voss at the request of the Government. But as this book only gives a selection of the known methods of preservation, the need of a more comprehensive publication will scarcely be denied.

In spite of my ten years' experience in the special Laboratory of the Royal Museums and the frequent opportunities of learning the methods in use elsewhere, which the journeys and correspondence arising out of my duties have given me during this period, I do not feel competent to produce a review of these various methods

¹ “Lexikon d. gesamten Technik,” Vol. I. p. 257. O. Lueger.

² “Merkbuch.” The excavation and preservation of Antiquities, 2nd edition, Berlin, 1894.

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which will be at once exhaustive and sufficiently critical. There are several reasons for this. In the first place the individual methods have been but rarely published, and even then through the most varied literary media; often they are only casually mentioned in articles dealing with anthropological or historical subjects. On the other hand, the value of an object to be dealt with may prohibit an attempt at treatment, the success of which is not assured. My own experience has been gained by trials with objects chiefly from the Egyptian section, but also to some extent from the Antiquarian and Numismatic departments of the Royal Museums.

This deficiency can only be remedied by a work such as that now offered to the public, and it is to be hoped that this handbook will stimulate the Curators of State, Municipal and Societies' Collections, as well as private collectors and others interested in the subject, to make public their further experiences in this field of archaeology. I take this opportunity, therefore, of expressing the hope that I may receive other communications bearing upon the subject and may thus perhaps at some future date be able to produce a more complete work.

In using the book it will be noticed that for the proper understanding of the first portion, which deals with the causes of destruction, a certain amount of chemical knowledge is assumed. In the second portion,

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however, the methods of preservation are treated from a more elementary standpoint, and the simple apparatus and manipulations required are so described that the treatment may be readily carried out by those who are unfamiliar with chemical methods.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to all those who have given their help, and especially to Dr Otto Olshausen for his continued interest in the work of the Museum Laboratory and in the production of this handbook. Especially am I indebted to his extensive knowledge of anthropological literature for many references which would otherwise have escaped my notice.

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TRANSLATORS' PREFACE.

DR RATHGEN has, in his preface, stated the aim of this handbook, and it is with a desire to further this aim that we have prepared an English translation.

Claiming but limited experience in this field of research we have only added such explanatory notes as seem in some way to bear upon the subject or likely to be useful in a handbook of this kind (viz. the method of taking squeezes, Appendix A, and a few footnotes which are signed and enclosed in square brackets). We take this opportunity of thanking Dr Rathgen for his interest in our undertaking, for his kindness in supplying much additional matter which did not appear in the German edition, and also for the loan of the blocks for Figs. 22 and 23. Figs. 7, 9—12, 30—33, and 37, are from photographs of objects treated by ourselves.

Our thanks are especially due to Dr W. A. Caspari, of the National Physical Laboratory, for his invaluable help in the revision of the translation, and for his advice and suggestions in reference to the more technical aspect of the work.

YORK,
December 1904.

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