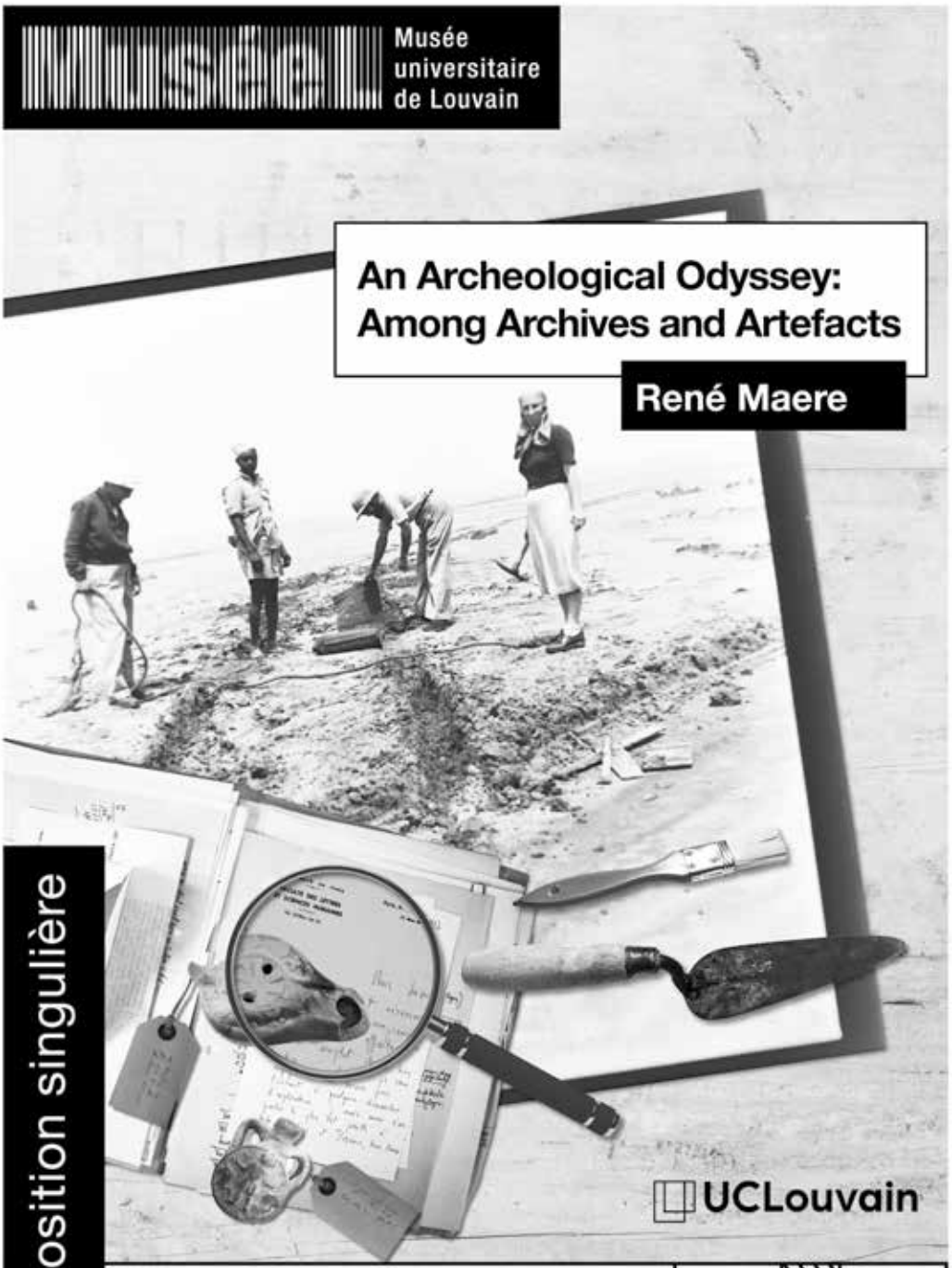
Musée universitaire de Louvain

An Archeological Odyssey: Among Archives and Artefacts

René Maere



Exposition singulière

UCLouvain

Visitors' guide

19 February 2020

17 May 2020

This exhibition is part of Dr Annelies Van de Ven's postdoctoral project. Her research focuses on the relationships between objects and texts in archaeological collections.

The displays are intended to highlight the behind-the-scenes aspects of archaeology, its historiography as a discipline and its methodology. We show the rigour of archaeological work beyond the context of excavation, as a field that takes advantage of elements from various disciplines (philology, history of religions, sociology, etc.) to create a new way of interpreting the past.

The two collections on display use both artefacts and archives to recreate the archaeological research environment from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, a period in which the discipline changed considerably, becoming more scientific and developing strong specialisations.

Exhibition Design and Production

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This exhibition has two entrances that correspond to the two archaeologists whose collections and archives are featured. **René Maere**'s career is explored on these pages. For **Jean Doresse**'s work, flip the book over and start on the other side.

René Maere *(1869-1950)*

G. B. de Rossi (1877)
Il Museo epigrafico cristiano Pio-Lateranense: Memoria, Roma, pl. 14.
Musei Vaticani

The Archaeologist Priest

Today the word archaeology conjures up images of outdoorsy types dressed in khaki and caked in dirt, but this was not always the case. When archaeology first emerged as a field of study, it was an exclusive leisurely pursuit directed mostly by wealthy businessmen, diplomats and clergymen.

Antoine Jorissen
Médaille commémorative de René Maere, Louvain, 1947
Bronze | Musée L | Archives

René Maere was an ordained priest in Rome before he turned his life to archaeology. In 1896 he went to study History and Ethics at the Catholic University of Louvain, under the tutelage of ecclesiastical history professor Alfred Cauchie and Leuven's first-ever chair of Christian Archaeology, Edmond Reusens. After a few years working as a bibliographical assistant to Cauchie in Rome for the Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, he was called back to Belgium in July of 1900 to take over Reusens' post as professor of Christian Archaeology. However, he would continue to travel to Rome regularly throughout his career.
Though Maere travelled a great deal as part of his research, he never put trowel to soil. His research focused on elaborating the histories of previously-excavated sites, monuments and artefacts. He had a particular knack for researching inscriptions. Thanks to his training he had the ability to study inscriptions as both archaeological materials and as historical texts.

Squeezes

As part of his study of early Christian inscriptions, René Maere made paper copies in the form of squeezes. These 3D impressions were made by repetitively hammering thick dampened paper against an inscription using a stiff brush.
Though now largely replaced by photography, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries squeezes were the preferred means for documenting inscriptions.
The squeezes in this exhibition were produced by Maere during his various forays to Rome at the turn of the 20th century. During this time he studied inscriptions in Roman catacombs, churches and museums under the supervision of Orazio Marucchi, curator and member of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology.

R. Maere au Museo Lateranense
Estampage du* loculus *de Severa (détail), 1898-1901
Papier | Musée L | Fonds Maere
D'après un original en marbre, Catacombe de Priscilla, 3e s. apr. J.-C., conservé aux Musei Vaticani

The squeeze above was made during one of Maere's visits to the Museo Lateranense in Rome. The *loculus* slab was taken from the catacomb of Priscilla in the mid-19th century. The relief attests to the faith of a woman named Severa (represented in a bust), with an inscription reading *Severa in Deo vivas* (Severa may you live in God) and the adoration of the magi depicted on the right of the squeeze. The *loculus*' relief, breaks and edges were not only copied but also coloured in for easy reading, highlighting the squeeze's use in ongoing teaching and research.

Travelling through the Catacombs

The catacombs of Rome are a series of underground cemeteries located outside the ancient city walls. They are made up of multi-level galleries and *cubicula* (tomb chambers) with several *loculi* and *arcosolia* (rectangular and arched burial niches) carved into the walls. The stone slabs closing the *loculi* often bore reliefs and inscriptions attesting to the faith of those buried inside.

We know of over 60 Christian catacombs in Rome as well as 6 Jewish catacombs. They were used for burials between the 2nd and 5th centuries CE. After this time they slowly fell into disuse, many becoming completely inaccessible. It was only in the 15th century that interest in the catacombs was revitalized. However, systematic archaeological excavations would not begin until the latter half of the 19th century.

Lampe avec un chrisme, fabrication carthaginoise (?), 5e-6e s. apr. J.-C.
Terre cuite | Musée L | Legs Chabot

Early Christian burials were simple in comparison to those of other Roman belief systems, with little to no grave goods in the *loculi* themselves. However, objects have been found around the burials, many bearing Christian symbols such as crosses, fish and anchors. One of the most common artefacts found in the catacombs were clay oil lamps placed in niches along the walls. Thought this particular lamp likely originated in Carthage, its date matches the heyday of the catacombs and its iconography would have been common around the tombs.

Martyr Cults

From the 5th century onwards the catacombs were rarely used for burials, and tomb chambers were transformed into underground chapels for groups of pilgrims to worship at the graves of nearby martyrs. During the turbulent period of the 7th and 8th centuries, Popes began transferring important remains into large urban churches, making the catacombs less attractive for worshippers. Most catacombs were abandoned and fell from the public eye.

A series of rediscoveries in the 15th century led to a renewed interest in the catacombs as well as an avid removal of relics by visitors. In the centuries that followed, a papal decree would lead to the shambolic excavation of the remaining martyrs. The situation would completely change once again in 1851 when the newly formed Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology helped to promote Christian Archaeology as a discipline in its own right.

Reliquaire de saint Sébastien (détail), Europe, 18e-19e s.
Os, bois, verre et papier | Musée L | Donation Boyadjian

The new catacomb discoveries of the 15th to 19th centuries fed public interest in martyrology. Bones were collected from various catacombs and distributed as the remains of saints and martyrs. This reliquary decorated with paper filigree features the image of St Sebastian as well as a bone fragment attributed to him. The catacombs of St Sebastian on the Appian Way just outside Rome remained accessible throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, making them an easy target for collecting saintly souvenirs.

Studying the Archives

Alongside the squeezes, Musée L also has Maere's notes in its collection. In these pages, he documents each of the inscriptions that he copied according to their location on the walls of the Museo Lateranense. Rather than giving a detailed analysis of each inscription, he focuses on particular questions, most prominently date and iconography. He analyses the inscribed texts and reliefs linking them to historical figures as well as known Christian symbols and formulas. These notes give us insight into his interest in these inscriptions, as he attempts to create a representative typology of christian archaeology through his small collection.

Carnet de notes de René Maere, Rome et Belgique, 1902
Papier | Musée L | Fonds Maere

Besides being noteworthy for their textual contents, these archives are also materially interesting objects. They were found stored in the cover of an old magazine from 1902 about the new developments in electrical lighting. Maere often reuses paper for his study. A good example of this is the two pages of his notes that were written on the back of wedding announcements regarding the son of one of Maere's colleagues at the University. It makes you wonder whether he even took the time to read Prof. Dumont's invitation before using it as scrap paper...

A Collection's Legacy

Along with his contemporaries, René Maere contributed to the development of archaeology at the Catholic University of Louvain. He represented the Belgian academies within a wider network of international scholars, contributing to numerous publications and committees. In addition to this, he and his colleagues were responsible for building the archaeological collections at several Belgian institutions. They returned from research abroad with various artefacts, squeezes and casts, creating a way for students in Belgium to study the materials of foreign sites first-hand.
Though it was not yet the scientific discipline that we know today, the groundwork was set for a century of intense archaeological work. Maere was able to experience a great deal of these changes himself, as he continued to teach and research until his retirement at the age of 78.

Lettre d'Alfonso Bartoli à René Maere, Rome, 21 mai 1901
Papier | Musée L | Fonds Maere

Though much has changed since Maere's time, some things are strikingly familiar. This letter, found among René Maere's notes, describes a recognisable situation: two scholars planning a meeting to pass on books. Their complaints about weekend work, tedious book reviews and grey weather would be just as fitting in a modern e-mail among academic colleagues.

An Archaeological Odyssey…

Archaeology involves researching the past through the scientific investigation of physical remains. Though there are of course trends over time, as excavation and recording strategies become more meticulous and technological developments allow new insights, it is this direct access to physical remains that defines the discipline and makes it so captivating.

Our understandings of the past come from the interpretation of these remains by archaeologists, who weave together the evidence into a single narrative. The methods and theories that archaeologists use give the narrative scope, while their experiences and identities colour its contents.

This is what makes archaeology so dynamic, but also what makes it so complex. Our analyses of excavated sites, artefacts and collections don't just have to account for the physical remains themselves, but also the lives of those who interpreted them, archaeologists like René Maere and Jean Doresse.

Image tirée du livre de Guiseppe Marchi sur l'architecture des premières catacombes chrétiennes, Italie, 1844
Papier | Musée L | Fonds Maere

… Among Archives and Objects

A hallmark of archaeology is its reliance on physical remains. However, archaeological research is also intrinsically connected to text. Besides the books and records that archaeologists use to identify and study sites, the discipline also generates an immense amount of written material. From administrative documents securing grants, to site records, to drafts for research publications, archaeologists are constantly producing texts, each with its own form, function and history.

Fragments de poterie décorée de Deir el Gizaz, 1947-1948
Négatif | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Fragment de col d'amphore au décor animalier peint, Deir el Gizaz, 6e-7e s. apr. J.-C.
Terre cuite | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

If deemed significant enough, these texts are collected into archives and preserved. These archives allow us to reconstruct the context in which archaeology was carried out, and find out more about the individuals involved. The staff at Musée L looks after several archives that relate to archaeological activities, including those of René Maere and Jean Doresse. By examining these archives and artefacts alongside one another, we can put our collections in relation to those who collected them, building a better understanding of their connected histories.

Archaeology as Process

Doresse's archives help us to contextualise the artefacts that he excavated and collected by providing maps, sketches and notes about his fieldwork. They also give a unique insight into two often unseen parts of an archaeologist's work: text-based research and the process of writing up results. Doresse's files are filled with reference cards from years of library research, administrative documents pertaining to his academic status, lists of figures for articles and various drafts of his publications.

Lettre de Paul Lemerle à Jean Doresse concernant la publication de sa thèse, 26 janvier 1967

Papier | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Among these documents are the letters from the late 1960s between Jean Doresse and senior academic Paul Lemerle. Doresse is regarded by many today as a founding father of Coptic archaeology, an experienced field researcher with an extraordinary knowledge of hagiography (histories of the saints). His letters complement this image by showing another side of Doresse's character, his uncertainty and frustrations as well as the intense effort he put in to complete his research. It also focuses our attention on the collaborative nature of archaeology, from field teams to editorial boards. No researcher is an island, not even those as accomplished as Doresse.

Unnamed but not Forgotten

In his archive bequeathed to the Centre for Oriental Studies (CIOL) at UCLouvain, Egyptologist Jean Doresse had brought together just under 2000 photos, many of them focusing on the landscapes, architecture, artefacts, icons and manuscripts that he encountered during his visits to Egypt between 1947 and 1952.
However, Doresse also had a keen interest in the people living and working in and around his sites of study. This emerges in his photographic collection, which includes shots of his expedition companions, the archaeological team at his site of Deir el Gizaz, Coptic monks and local people living their day-to-day lives.

Jean Doresse

Travailleurs anonymes à Deir el Gizaz, 1947-1948

Négatif | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, Dépôt Musée L

One thing that is unfortunately not preserved in his archives is the names of all the people that he photographed. In the case of his colleagues and significant clergy members, a bit of background research can reveal their names. However, the names of monks, workers and local inhabitants prove more difficult to uncover, and, as is the case in many collections, most remain unidentified.

Mapping the Monasteries

In 1947, Jean and Marianne Doresse travelled to Cairo on a mission from the French Institute of Archaeology to uncover ancient texts. In addition to this, they were given another important task, recording the remains of Coptic monasteries in Egypt. This involved a survey of known monasteries, but also a search for unexcavated ones. It was during this period that Doresse identified the ancient Theban Monastery of Apa Samuel at Deir el Gizaz. His excavations at this site confirmed Doresse's place as a key figure in the history of Coptic archaeology.
His work on Middle Egyptian monasteries became the subject of his doctorate, defended in 1970. The thesis combined textual research with cross-site studies and excavations to better understand the development of the Coptic faith in Egypt.

Croquis des églises de Saint-Antoine et des Apôtres au monastère de Saint-Antoine, 1951
Papier | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Many of the photos and sketches included in Doresse's collection at Musée L pertain to the Monasteries of Saints Anthony and Paul located in the Eastern Desert. These are two of the oldest monasteries in the world, with communities surviving to the present day, preserving Coptic architecture, artefacts, manuscripts and traditions. No wonder Doresse was so interested in them!

Research and Politics

As much as we try, it is impossible to disconnect our scientific endeavours from social and political realities. This is something that Jean and Marianne Doresse discovered first-hand… Only a decade after the Second World War had derailed their work, the couple was once again redirected by conflict, this time the Egyptian revolution (1952-1953) and Suez Crisis (1956).
Barred from Egypt, Jean Doresse went to Ethiopia to establish a national archaeological service there, developing structures for research and laws for the protection of heritage. His skills caught the eye of the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, and he was commissioned to teach history and archaeology in Addis Ababa. Jean and Marianne travelled frequently between Ethiopia and France and saw Ethiopia as their second home.

Jean Doresse (1972)
La vie quotidienne des Éthiopiens chrétiens aux XVII[e] et XVIII[e] siècles,
Hachette (détail de la couverture)
UCLouvain, Service central des bibliothèques

Jean Doresse was interested in all aspects of Ethiopian culture, but most of all he was keen to learn about its religion. He recognised many of the traditions in Ethiopian Christianity from his research in Egypt and wrote extensively about Coptic influences in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Church was after all part of the Coptic Orthodox Church until 1959. He wrote numerous books and articles about his research, many of which still form the basis of studies on Ethiopian history today.

The Scientist and the Scholar

In the storerooms of Musée L, nine boxes contain the artefacts and archives bequeathed by Egyptologist Jean Doresse to the Centre for Oriental Studies (CIOL) at UCLouvain in 1999.

Jean Doresse avec l'Abbé du monastère Saint-Antoine, 1947-1952
Marianne Doresse dans le désert du sud de Louxor, 1947-1952
Négatifs | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Jean Doresse was an erudite scholar who spent his life researching Egypt and Ethiopia. By the end of his life, he was fluent in 13 languages and had had a long and distinguished career in both academia and diplomacy.
He studied Egyptology at the École des Hautes Études in Paris. When the Second World War waylaid his ambition to travel to Egypt, he began working at the Louvre, cataloguing Coptic collections. He worked alongside other Parisian museums, including the Musée Guimet where his wife worked. Marianne Doresse, née Guentch-Ogloueff, was a formidable Egyptologist in her own right. Though her archives are dispersed across various institutions, she is present in various parts of Jean Doresse's archive.

Egyptology beyond the Pharaohs

When we talk about the field of Egyptology, we often think about the time of the pharaohs. A world of multiple gods bearing animal features and hieroglyphic inscriptions cut into hard stone. Some may think of the Graeco-Roman period, where Egypt became the grain basket for a Mediterranean-wide empire. Few would look first to the history of the Christian Copts despite their central role throughout later antiquity. Jean Doresse recognised the significance of the Copts and their relationships to the traditions of both East and West. He studied their texts, but also their material culture through his work in museums and in the field as an archaeologist.

Orbiculus *(médaillon) d'un textile copte* (détail), 3e-4e s. apr. J.-C.
Laine | Musée L

Exhibitions of Coptic materials almost always include textiles. These items bear the influence of the classical world, providing a material record of East meeting West in the melting pot of ancient Egypt. Coptic textiles are well known, as they provide a unique insight into clothing in the ancient world. The impeccable preservation of these materials was made possible by Egypt's arid desert climate and the evolution of their burial practices. Many of these textiles found in museums, including the one depicted here, can only be identified by their design. Their acquisition as part of unrecorded excavations outside the purview of archaeology means that their original context is impossible to fully reconstruct.

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Jean Doresse *(1917 - 2007)*

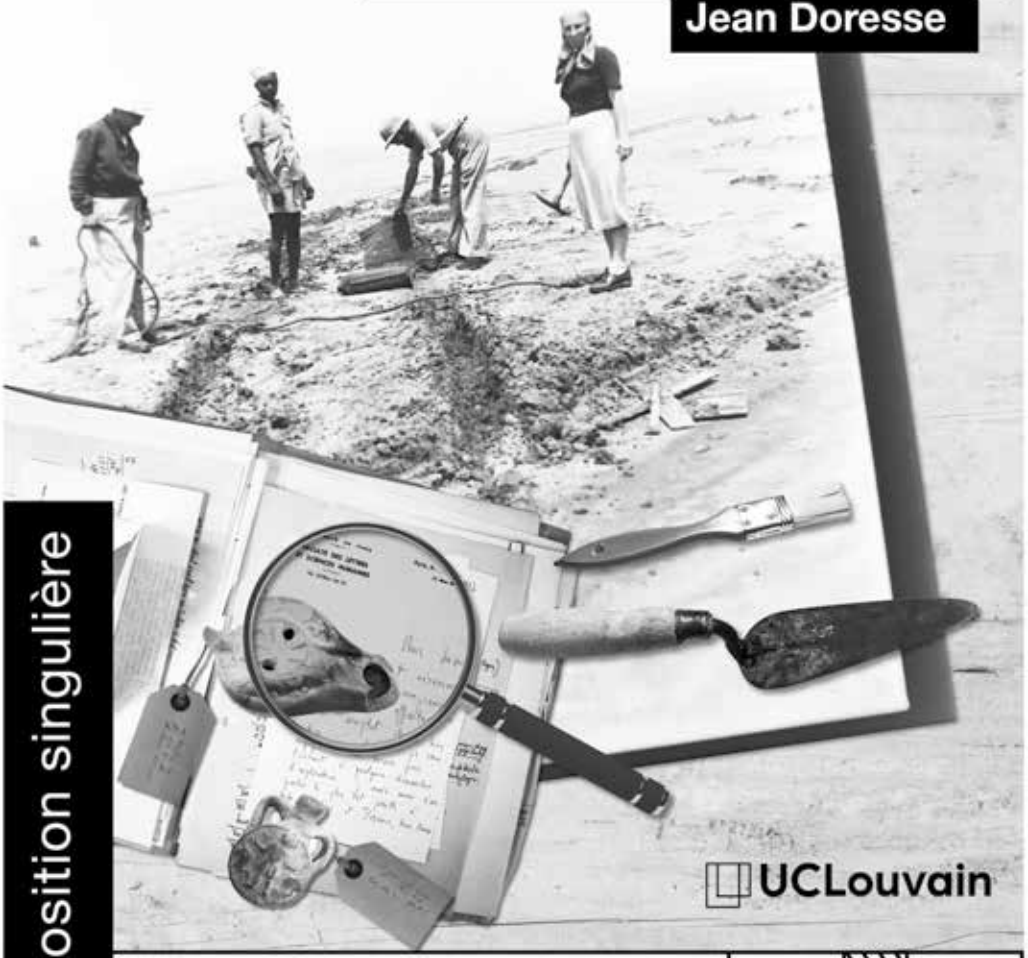
Deux moines à l'extérieur du monastère Saint-Antoine, 1947 - 1952
Plaque de verre | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Vue du monastère Sainte-Catherine du Sinaï, 1947 - 1952
Plaque de verre | Fonds Doresse, CIOL, dépôt Musée L

Musée universitaire de Louvain

An Archeological Odyssey: Among Archives and Artefacts

Jean Doresse



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