

Inspiring the Next Generation – An Archaeology Adventure on Berlin Museum Island

On **21 July 2026**, the **Rathgen Forschungslabor (Rathgen Research Laboratory, RFL)**, with the National Museums Berlin, welcomed **80 pupils from Rhön-Gymnasium (Bad Neustadt a. d. Saale, Bavaria)** to **Museum Island, Berlin**, for an inspiring day of archaeology, conservation, and ancient Egyptian culture (Figure 1). Organized within the framework of the **STECCI Horizon Europe Project**, the educational program offered students a unique opportunity to experience the work of archaeologists and conservators through hands-on activities, scientific demonstrations, and direct engagement with one of the world's most exciting museum collections.



Figure 1: Introducing students to heritage science. © Abdelrhman Fahmy.

The day began at **Haus Bastian**, where the pupils received a warm welcome from **Monika Demler** (Haus Bastian), RFL Scientists **Bill Landsberger** and **Abdelrhman Fahmy**, and **Frank and Julia Stürmer** (Rhön-Gymnasium). During the opening session, the students were introduced to the objectives of the **STECCI Horizon Europe Project**, learning how researchers and conservators, from across Europe collaborate to document, monitor, and protect the UNESCO World Heritage of Steccis in the Balkan region, threatened by accelerating climate change.

The pupils became archaeologists for a day during an interactive excavation and conservation workshop. Working in small groups, they carefully searched through trays of sand to uncover hidden pottery fragments, simulating a real archaeological excavation. As the sherds emerged from the sand (Figure 2), the students gently lifted them, observed their condition, and discussed their possible origin and function.



Figure 2: Simulating an archaeological excavation. © Abdelrhman Fahmy.

The workshop continued with the archaeological documentation process. Guided by the RFL team, the pupils learned how archaeologists classify ceramic fragments according to their fabric, shape, color and decoration. Each fragment was assigned an inventory number, highlighting the importance of systematic archaeological recording before the start of any conservation work.

The challenge became even more exciting as the students attempted to reconstruct the broken vessels. Solving a three-dimensional puzzle, they carefully examined fracture edges, identified matching fragments, and temporarily assembled the ceramics (Figure 3). Their teamwork, concentration, and problem-solving skills were evident throughout the activity as they discussed different reconstruction possibilities and celebrated each successful match (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Reconstructing the ceramic vessels. © Abdelrhman Fahmy.



Figure 4: Presenting successful matches. © Abdelrhman Fahmy.

To conclude the conservation workshop, the pupils were introduced to the principles of ceramic conservation and restoration. They observed how archaeological ceramics are permanently reassembled using specialized conservation-grade adhesives developed for fragile heritage materials. Through this practical experience, the students gained a deeper appreciation for the precision, patience, and scientific knowledge required to preserve cultural artefacts for future generations.

The workshops were conducted and supervised by RFL scientists **Abdelrhman Fahmy**, **Bill Landsberger**, and **Betül Sezgin**, who guided the pupils through each stage of the archaeological and conservation process while encouraging curiosity, observation, and collaborative learning.

In the afternoon, the program continued with a guided visit to the **Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection** at the **Neues Museum** (Figure 5). Accompanied by expert guides, the pupils explored one of the world's most significant collections of ancient Egyptian artefacts. They were fully engaged throughout the tour, asking thoughtful questions and showing genuine curiosity about the objects on display. From monumental statues and beautifully decorated coffins to papyri, sculptures, and everyday artefacts, the collection offered remarkable insights into the beliefs, achievements, and daily lives of ancient Egyptians. The visit also demonstrated how museums preserve and interpret cultural heritage, reinforcing many of the conservation principles introduced during the morning workshops.



Figure 5: Guided visit to the Neues Museum. © Abdelrhman Fahmy.

The final activity of the day transported the pupils into the fascinating world of ancient Egyptian writing. During an interactive hieroglyphics workshop, they learned about the origins of the ancient Egyptian language and its different writing systems, discovering how hieroglyphs were used to record history, religious beliefs, and royal achievements. A highlight of the session was the story of the Rosetta Stone, whose trilingual inscription enabled scholars to decipher hieroglyphic writing and opened the door to understanding ancient Egyptian civilization (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Pupils participating in the interactive hieroglyphics workshop and learning about the Rosetta Stone. © Betül Sezgin.

Inspired by this remarkable discovery, each student created their own name in hieroglyphic script. After learning the phonetic values and symbolism of the hieroglyphs, the pupils carefully arranged the signs inside a traditional Egyptian cartouche, taking home a personal souvenir inspired by one of humanity's oldest writing systems.

Whether uncovering pottery fragments from the sand, documenting their finds, reconstructing ancient ceramics, exploring the treasures of the Egyptian Museum, or writing their names in hieroglyphs, the students embraced every challenge with excitement and interest. The program encouraged them to think and work like archaeologists and heritage scientists, collaboratively, and appreciate the challenge of preserving our shared cultural heritage.

The Adventure on Museum Island showed how research, practice, and museum education can come together to inspire the next generation (Figure 7) of cultural heritage professionals. The event managed to transform history into a living experience and highlight the essential role of heritage science in protecting the past for future generations (**Error! Reference source not found.**).



Figure 7: Group photograph of the participants from James Simon Gallery. © Rhön-Gymnasium.