Barque funéraire
Abû Rawwâsh - 1ère dynastie
### Système de translittération des mots arabes

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**voyelles**

- longues : َ, ُ, ِ, ِ
- brèves : َ, ِ, ِ
- diphtongues : ُ reaffirmé

**autres conventions**

- ta’ marbūta = a, at (état construit)
- article: al- et l- (même devant les “solaires”)

Les articles ou extraits d’articles publiés dans le *BIA* et les idées qui peuvent s’y exprimer n’engagent que la responsabilité de leurs auteurs et ne représentent pas une position officielle de la Rédaction.
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A unique ancient Egyptian green faience amulet was discovered by a curator at Swansea University’s Egypt Centre in Wales on Tuesday. Carolyn Graves-Brown stumbled upon the amulet when examining a collection of 50 objects loaned to the centre by Woking College in England. The amulet depicts the face of the ancient Egyptian dwarf god Bes, the protector of households. It has bulging eyes, a long tongue sticking out of its face and a crown of feathers. The amulet has a hole at its top so it can be suspended on a necklace or a pin. In addition to the amulet, the collection includes a Sokar hawk, a large number of 3000-year-old ushabti figurines, two glass bottles from the reign of Cleopatra and two amulets.

Graves-Brown told Live Science that she did not recognise the importance of the amulet until she learned of similar objects at the British Museum. She was then able to determine that it was a faience god Bes bell amulet once used to protect mothers and children from evil spirits. “It is one of a very few known to exist,” she said. The amulet is well preserved but fragile and could be easily broken, said Graves-Brown. “Faience was very often used for objects that had a magical or religious significance in ancient Egypt,” she told Live Science.

Few existing Bes bell amulets have been found in their original context, which is why there are several theories about their purpose, she added. They may have been worn by pregnant mothers or children, or perhaps placed beside the child while they slept as magical protection against evil. However, there could be another explanation, she said. (Nevine El-Aref, “Rare ancient Egyptian amulet found in UK”, Ahram Online, July 1, 2012).

Eight years after giving the go-ahead for the National Project to Document Egypt’s Heritage, Bani Hasan necropolis in the Upper Egyptian town of Minyâ has become the first site on the list to be documented. The Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) is responsible for archaeologically documenting Egypt’s cultural and historical heritage, in an attempt to protect and preserve it, as well as providing comprehensive and detailed studies of every site and monument in Egypt for researchers and students in the field. Muhammad Ibrahim, antiquity’s minister, told Ahram Online that Egyptologists used state-of-the-art equipment and modern technology to document the necropolis and published the findings in a booklet of 337 pages, including 268 photos and 62 drawings and charts.

Director of the ministry’s registration department, Magdi al-Ghandour, described the documentation effort as one of Egypt’s major projects to preserve its heritage. He added that the project aims to establish a scientific database for every monument in Egypt, to help the work of researchers. “It is the second documentation project to be established in
Egypt. The first was carried out in 1985 during the Nubian temples salvage operation, documenting the Nubian temples whether rescued or inundated in Lake Nâsir.” Ahmad Sa’d, professor of ancient Egyptian civilisation at Cairo University, stated that the Banî Hasan necropolis is the first archaeological site to be documented, and many are still on the list. He said that Egyptologists had focused their documentation work on the 12 out of 39 tombs within the necropolis, which are complete and have distinguished wall paintings and architecture. (Nevine El-Aref, “Major project to document all Egypt’s sites starts with Banî Hasan tombs”, Ahram Online, July 2, 2012).

Mercredi 4 juillet 2012

The historic mosque was built by Prince Inâl al-Yûsufî in 1392. It represents one of the earliest examples of the attenuated Cairene mosque and madrasa (school), with its distinctive qibla (praying niche) and opposing iwân (arcade). The mosque’s façade boasts a sabîl-kuttâb (water fountain/Quranic school) decorated with fine wooden decorations. Much of the mosque’s interior ornamentation has since disappeared, but its beautiful stained glass windows continue to impress visitors. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt’s antiquities ministry honours man who foiled mosque theft”, Ahram Online, July 4, 2012. Voir également Amîna ’Urâbî, « Le CSA honore un jeune homme qui a affronté 4 pilleurs tentant de voler la mosquée Inâl al-Yûsufî », al-Badîl du 4 juillet; Dînâ ‘Abd al-’Alîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie honore un jeune homme qui a déjoué une tentative de vol de la mosquée Inâl al-Yûsufî », al-Badîl du 4 juillet ; ’Alâ’ al-Dîn Zâhir « Le ministère de l’Archéologie attribue 2 000 L.E. à un jeune homme qui a sauvé la mosquée Inâl al-Yûsufî du vol », Ruz al-Yûsuf, 24 septembre).

Sa’d say he noticed the thieves while drinking tea on his balcony, located in front of the mosque. At around midnight, he recounts, a car pulled up outside the mosque and four people got out. “While watching, I realised they were trying to remove the mosque’s ancient doorknocker,” he said. “I went to investigate, and when I asked them why they were there and what they were doing, they ran away.” Sa’d immediately called the police after finding several tools — including a hammer, axe and saw — that the men had left behind. Sa’d later described the men, who remain at large, to police.
all monuments throughout the country. According to Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm, the project will utilise the latest recording and documenting technologies. The 377-page book includes 268 high-resolution photos of the tombs, along with 62 diagrams.

Magdî al-Ghandûr, head of the Egyptian Centre for Recording Monuments, says the project’s next step is to publish the scientific studies and make them available to future scholars. al-Ghandûr went on to explain that the first comprehensive effort to record the nation’s monuments was implemented in 1958, during attempts to save the temples of Nubia after the construction of Egypt’s High Dam. This required that all inscriptions and scenes be recorded with the utmost accuracy to aid in the reconstruction of dismantled temples in new locations.

Ahmad Sa’îd, professor of ancient Egyptian civilisation at Cairo University, currently heads up the project. He began the initiative by documenting 12 graves from newest to oldest, with a focus on their architectural features. The findings are then all recorded in a single database. (Nevine El-Aref, “Minyâ’ s Banî Hasan tombs: Picture and significance”, Ahram Online, July 4, 2012).

**Jeudi 5 juillet 2012**

Within the framework of the Ministry of State for Antiquities’s programme to preserve its ancient Egyptian monuments, Giza Plateau inspectorate has begun operating a state-of-the-art pumping system to reduce the high rate of subterranean water that has accumulated beneath the Sphinx and the underlying bedrock. ‘Alî al-Asfar, director of the Giza Plateau archaeological site, says that under the new system 18 water pump machines distributed over the plateau are pumping out 26,000 cubic metres of water daily at a rate of 1,100 cubic metres of water an hour, based on studies previously carried out by reputed Egyptian-American experts in subterranean water and ground mechanic and equilibrium factors.

The LE22-million project was initiated to reduce the high level of subterranean water under the Sphinx, which had increased because of the new drainage system installed in the neighbouring village of Nazlat al-Simmân and the irrigation technique used to cultivate public gardens and green areas in the neighbouring residential area of Hadâ’iq al-Ahrâm and the golf course at the Mena House Hotel. “All these have led to the leakage of water into the plateau, affecting especially the Valley Temple and the Sphinx which are located on a lower level,” al-Asfar said.

Despite all the efforts taken to preserve the plateau and the Sphinx, some ecologists and hydrologists have raised doubts about the project, suggesting that it could further damage the Sphinx and lead to its collapse. Kamâl ‘Ûda, professor of hydrology at the Suez Canal University, said that under the latest project 9.6 million cubic metres would be pumped out the plateau every year at a depth of 100 metres beneath the Sphinx, which in its turn would definitely decrease the original level of subterranean water in the plateau and thus cause a drop in the ground level and of course increase the risk of decay and collapse of both the Sphinx and the Pyramids themselves.

“*This absolutely is not the case,*” al-Asfar said. He explained that the pumping machines started operating when the subterranean water level exceeded 15.5 metres above sea level and stopped automatically when this level was reached. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Sphinx, the Pyramids and the Valley temples on the plateau were completely safe because the water level beneath them was determined and reached 4.6 metres below ground level, which was the same as the water level present in ancient Egyptian times. “*Such a level is a natural phenomenon,*” the Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm said.
He pointed out that the River Nile had once reached the plateau, and at the time a harbour was dug to shelter the boats transporting the pyramid blocks from the quarries in Aswân and Tura.

Muhammad al-Byall, head of the ancient Egyptian Antiquities section at the ministry, told the *Weekly* that there were three reasons for the rise of the water table: the increase in the cultivated area around the Giza Plateau; the lack of proper drainage in the shanty housing area near it; and the heightened level of the Nile in July and August. “We have noticed that the water table has risen since the High Dam was built,” he said, adding that the most serious damage occurred during the Nile’s former flood season, since the river continued to adhere to its natural cycle despite being regulated by the dam.

Most experts agree that even if the dam is the reason for the higher water level, it was necessary for Egypt. While antiquities are important, they say, we would have had the worst famines Egypt had ever witnessed had we not built the High Dam. (Nevine El-Aref, “Rising water: a necessary evil?”, *Ahram Weekly*, July 5, 2012. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt’s Sphinx, Pyramids threatened by groundwater, hydrologists warn”, *Ahram Online*, July 5 ; Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : le Sphinx en sécurité après l’achèvement de la baisse des eaux souterraines », *al-Yawm al-Sâbî* du 5 juillet ; MENA, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : le Sphinx est totalement en sécurité après la baisse du niveau des eaux souterraines dans la zone archéologique », *al-Misriyyûn* du 5 juillet ; Muna Yâsîn, « Le Sphinx sauvé des eaux souterraines grâce aux efforts du CSA et à l’argent de l’USAID », *al-Masrî al-Yawm* du 6 juillet).

After 14 years of hard work, Bernard O’KANE, professor of Islamic art and architecture at the American University in Cairo (AUC), has managed to compile a detailed report of Islamic inscriptions in the historic zone of Cairo as part of the project to preserve and document inscriptions and epigraphs on Islamic monuments in the city up until the 1800s. According to a press release distributed by the AUC press office, what drove O’KANE to undertake the project was that many of the Islamic monuments in Cairo were deteriorating and in danger of disappearing; there was no documentation of the inscriptions. “I felt I needed to do something to help with the preservation of information,” he said.

The project has collected data and photographs from 1997 to 2004, after which a report was submitted to ARCE. Since then, O’KANE, in conjunction with the National Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT), has been working on transferring the data into software that will generate a fully compatible and searchable database in both the original Arabic epigraphy and English translations. The release says the database, which includes 3,250 inscriptions and 11,000 photographs, will be available in DVD format and, ultimately, online. “The main aim is to make access to the thousands of photographs and information on the database easier,” said O’KANE, who also took part in the photography. “This is a tool that can be used in many ways by scholars, historians, art historians and linguists to study the inscriptions and language used on Islamic monuments in Cairo.”


A number of archaeologists have launched a project to develop archaeology in Egypt to be carried out by the new government, according to MENA. The project, which was launched under the title, 'Egyptian Antiquities' Renaissance Project includes a plan to develop archaeology to occupy a prestigious position as one of the state’s main economic sources, said Muhammad ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, deputy chairman of the Egyptian antiquities sector. The project aims at changing the technique of work in this field that should be controlled by a specialised state security body to protect Egypt’s monuments and archaeological heritage.

‘Abd al-Maqṣūd noted that the antiquities sector is facing financial problems due to the reduced number of tourists visiting Egypt during the last couple of years. The archaeologists have called for cultural tourism to be mainly based mainly on visiting monumental sites throughout Egypt. It is known the antiquities sector is self-financing, says ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd, adding that the annual revenues of the monuments normally reaches to LE1.2 billion nearly ($200 million) annually. The project includes establishing a complementary industrial zone to manufacture high-quality replicas of world-famous Egyptian antiquities. This would be creating up to 15,000 job opportunities indifferent specialisations ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd stressed. (Amina Abdul Salam, “New antiquities project”, The Egyptian Gazette, July 5, 2012).

When Hasan Fu’ād Pasha al-Manistarî, who served as interior minister during the reign of Khedive ‘Abbâs Hilmi II, decided to build a grand residential house, he chose a superb location on Rhuda Island which was then a very elegant and quiet suburb of Cairo overlooking the River Nile. The plot of land allocated for the exquisite, Rococo style residence was at the southwestern corner of the island. Next to the palace he built a mosque and the mausoleum where he was eventually buried. al-Manistarî’s name derived from the name of the place where he had originated, the city of Munastir in Macedonia, not far from the Bulgarian border. He progressed in the governmental echelon during the reign of ‘Abbâs Hilmi II, being appointed governor of Cairo in 1854 and later minister of interior.

He built his elegant house in 1851. It consists of a series of grand rooms and two large terraces connected to one another. The floors are laid with marble, except for two rooms northwest front of the palace that are paved with very exquisite parquet in the French style. The ceilings are in various wooden architecture designs including level, domed and semi-domed, all of then plastered and embellished with coloured foliage ornamentation. Sculpted plaster has been used to produce greenery shapes, and the surfaces of the terraces are decorated in the same way. All the ceilings and walls are decorated with foliage and figures of birds, similar to those found in contemporary buildings in Europe. The influence of the Ottoman rococo is even obtrusive.

Muhsin Sayyid, head of the Islamic and Coptic antiquities section at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), said that several meetings were held at the palace during the reign of King Fârûq. Among the most significant was the meeting of King Fârûq with Arabs
leaders and rulers in 1947 after World War II, held in order to discuss the establishment of the Arab League. The palace, he continued, was also a permanent premise for the Arab League. After the July Revolution in 1952, the palace was seized by the government and became public property in 1954. The property was indeed theoretically sequestered, but it remained as a residence for members of the family until the old grandmother’s death in the early 1980s.

In 1989 the palace was put on Egypt’s antiquities list and in the early 2000s it was opened as the International Musical Centre for the performance of concerts and lectures. In 2002 a museum dedicated to the famous Egyptian singer Kawkab al-Sharq (The Star of the East) Umm Kulthûm opened inside the palace, making it an added attraction. The museum is located in a building in the open courtyard in the palace, which was originally a museum of precious stones owned by the Ministry of Irrigation and Public Work. The building was entirely refurbished and redesigned for the purpose by a cutting-edge interior decorator from Italy, Maurizio Di PAOLO, who incorporated the latest lighting, display and air-conditioning technologies into the framework of his plans, thus giving the venue a zippy, post-modern feel.

The museum put on show of Umm Kulthûm’s personal belongings such as some of her iconic galabeya-style dresses, scarves, spectacles and sunglasses. Several photo-collages look by turns like a family album and stills from a biographical documentary. Objects on display range from Umm Kulthûm’s diplomatic passport to the 1934 contract she signed with the Egyptian Radio Corporation and transcriptions of her song lyrics in the handwriting of Ahmad Shawqî and Bayram al-Tunsi. There are framed photographs that were once hung on the walls of her villa, recording the equipment she owned, medals and trophies she earned and letters she received from heads of state and other significant figures. Such trophies as the Nile Medal, presented to her by King Fârûq in 1946, and the Order of Merit given by president Gamâl ‘Abd al-Nâsir in 1960 are also on show.

On the left side of the palace stands the Nilometer, a small gem built by Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861 AD to measure the height of the annual flood. The system used in this Nilometer was devised by Abû al-‘Abbâs Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Kathîr al-Farghâni, a native of Farghana, West Turkestan, who was known in the West as the astronomer Alfraganus. His chief work, in which the system appeared, was translated into Latin and first printed at Ferrara in 1493. This is the oldest Islamic structure in Egypt whose original form is preserved, and takes the form of an octagonal column within a stone-lined pit. The pit is connected to the Nile by three tunnels and accessed by a staircase on the interior walls. The arches within the pit are the first occurrence of the “tiers-point” arch, used here three centuries before its appearance in Gothic architecture, and with the novel use of zigzag framing carved on its stone voussoirs. It retains its original Kufic inscriptions, both Quranic and secular, commemorating al-Mutawakkil’s work, though it was tampered with by Ibn Tûlûn, possibly to conceal the caliph’s name. The inscriptions were executed in white marble on a blue background to produce a striking contrast.

Several renovation projects have been carried out on the palace, but in 2010 the Supreme Council of Antiquities, now the MSA, closed it for complete restoration and the music centre was transferred to the Gold Hall at the Manyal Palace. Muhammad al-Shaykha, head of the projects section at the MSA, said
the restoration was carried out over four phases. Cracks were filled, walls consolidated and the ceilings were injected with insolation material to prevent rainwater leakage and humidity damage in the future. Tiles in the garden walk have been restored, with damaged tiles being replaced with reproduction copies. (Nevine El-Aref, “Days of marble and roccoco”, Al-Ahram Weekly, July 5, 2012. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, “The Mânistarlî Palace regains its youth and welcomes visitors”, Ahram Online, June 18; Nasma Rêda, « Le faste retrouvé », Al-Ahram Hebdo du 11 juillet).

**Samedi 7 juillet 2012**

Le ministère de l’Archéologie organise demain, dimanche 8 juillet, un stage pratique intitulé : l’importance de l’enregistrement et de la documentation des pièces archéologiques dans les sites historiques et les musées. Ce stage se déroulera durant une semaine dans le musée archéologique de Suez. Il est organisé à l’intention des archéologues et des spécialistes des musées dans les villes de Suez et au Nord-Sinai. Dans un communiqué de presse, le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, explique que le stage se focalise sur les bases et les différentes méthodes de documentation et leur importance dans la préservation du patrimoine. Le stage traitera également des règles et des normes internationales appliquées en matière de traitement des pièces antiques, ainsi que les défis qui concernent leur préservation. Ce stage s’inscrit dans le cadre d’une série de formations pratiques destinées à rehausser les connaissances et à améliorer les capacités du personnel archéologique. (Dînâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « Le CSA organise dans le musée de Suez un stage sur la documentation archéologique », al-Yawn al-Sâbî’ du 7 juillet 2012).

**Dimanche 8 juillet 2012**


**Lundi 9 juillet 2012**

Electric cars will replace gas-run cars at the Salâh al-Dîn Citadel archaeological site in an attempt to reduce the rate of pollution from the excess number of cars that circulate in the area. Cars will no longer be allowed to enter the site and around the different monuments in the area. Salâh al-Dîn stands as one of the world’s greatest medieval ruins and houses a number of mosques and several museums, including the Muhammad ‘Alî Mosque; the Carriage Museum and the National Military and Police Museums. The citadel was built on a spur of the Muqattam Hills. It was once Cairo’s seat of power for succeeding caliphs, sultans, ministers and pashas until the time of Muhammad ‘Alî in the 19th century. The citadel stopped being the seat of government when one of Egypt’s rulers, Khedive Ismâ‘îl, moved to his newly-built ‘Abîdîn Palace in the 1860s.

The citadel is mainly divided into three sections: the main fortress and eastern walls, which were built by Salâh al-Dîn al-Ayyûbî in 1176; the southern enclosure, which has 19th century walls; and the lower enclosure extending down the western face of the hill, with its main gate opposite the Sultan Hasan Mosque. Muhsin Sayyid Secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) said that a visitor’s path would laid out in order to facilitate tours. (Nevine El-Aref, “Cars to be banned from Cairo Citadel zone”, Ahram Online, July 9, 2012. Voir également MENA, « Mise en service des voitures électriques dans la zone archéologique de la citadelle afin de préserver l’environnement », al-Misriyyûn du 9
The street contains. A map is drawn on every panel with background information available on every monument. Muhsin Sayyid 'Ali, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities at the Ministry of State for Antiquities, said the panels are the first phase of a project to improve access to the area’s historical sites and restoration works underway.

al-Mu’izz Street runs through the heart of Fatimid Cairo, gloried in its splendid Islamic architecture. But it became badly run down in time. It has taken almost 20 years of restoration work for the street to regain much of the splendour it saw in the days of the Fatimids, Ayoubids, Mamluks and Ottomans.


Samedi 14 juillet 2012


Mardi 17 juillet 2012

Sarcophagus of a mummified rat.

On Tuesday, the Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square will host a very rare Ptolemaic sarcophagus of a rat after 15 years of being on display at the Egyptian Museum in Leipzig, Germany. The sarcophagus is wooden and as small as its host: a mummified rat. Rats symbolised the god Horus in ancient times and a subservient nation during the decline of the civilisation. Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm reveals that the recovery of such a very distinguished and rare object began a year ago when some of the curators at the Egyptian Museum in Lisberg, Germany questioned the origins of the sarcophagus before it came into the possession of the museum. They surmised it was probably smuggled illegally out of Egypt. Those curators, continued Ibrâhîm, reported their doubts to the concerned Egyptian authorities and called the Egyptian Cultural Bureau in Germany. The cultural bureau, in turn, trailed the documents and confirmed that it, indeed, belonged to Egypt.

The sarcophagus was among the artefacts discovered by a Cairo University excavation mission led by Egyptian Egyptologists Sâmî Gabra in 1804 at the Tûna al-Gabal archaeological site in the governorate of al-Minŷā. In November 1964, Ibrâhîm continued, a German antiquities collector called

Dans le check point d’al-Matmar, les forces de sécurité d’Asyût ont arrêté six personnes en possession d’une statuette de 20 cm et de près de 2 Kg représentant Amonhotep. Les six suspects mis en examen sont : Hânî Z., âgé de 27 ans et résidant dans la Nouvelle Vallée ; Yusrî H., étudiant de 22 ans habitant à al-Khârja ; Muhammad T., 43 ans habitant à Suhâg ; Islâm K., étudiant de 17 ans originaire des oasis ; ‘Abb al-Rahmî A., 52 ans habitant à Suhâg ; ainsi que Ayman A., étudiant âgé de 15 ans. (Muhammad Rabî’, « Arrestation à Asyût de 6 personnes en possession d’une statuette antique », al-Badîl du 17 juillet 2012).

Egyptian archaeologists have sent a petition to President Muhammad Mursî and Prime Minister Hishâm Qandîl asking them to not to merge the antiquities ministry with the culture ministry, and to maintain its cabinet status. According to a press release, which the Ahram Online has a copy of it, the archaeologists’ syndicate said:

“For 30 years we lived under a corrupt system that was hostile to our cultural heritage... It kept it under the control of outsiders who sold it cheaply. The former regime always stood against our independence and even hindered the establishment of an archaeologists’ syndicate. We must keep the ministry independent in order to prevent its resources being consumed by other ministries, which they will spend on everything except preserving and protecting Egypt’s heritage, which has been suffering from neglect for decades. The revolution took place and a new separate and independent antiquities ministry was created in the cabinet. This decision was welcomed by all archaeologists, curators and restorers who work in the field. It does not make sense to retreat to a status that we were forced into by the old regime.

On Tuesday, al-Ahram’s Arabic-language news website and Ahram Online received a video from a source who requested anonymity showing artefacts which, the source alleged, had been stolen from the Egyptian Museum at the height of last year’s Tahrîr Square uprising and subsequently smuggled to the Upper Egyptian governorate of Qinâ for sale to the highest bidder. Museum officials, however, say the artefacts shown in the video were never part of the museum’s collection.

“The objects shown in the video are fake and have nothing to do with the Egyptian museum,” Yasmîn al-Shâzlî, head of the museum’s documentation department, told Ahram Online.

According to the video posted on the websites and an accompanying article, the pilfered objects included a stone head of King Tuthmosis IV, a royal papyrus fragment featuring the pharaoh’s cartouche, four statues of a scorpion goddess, and a painted statue of King Seti I, founder of Egypt’s 19th Dynasty. Upon obtaining the video, Ahram Online’s reporter in Qinâ showed it to an Egyptologist who confirmed its authenticity. Ahmad Sâlih, antiquities director in the southern city of Abû Simbil, told Ahram Online that some of the pieces shown in the video had in fact been displayed in Egypt’s national museum.

Nevertheless, the museum’s al-Shâzlî expressed anger over the allegations, which she — along with other museum officials — says are fabricated. “I was really disappointed when I read the article entitled ‘Egyptian Museum artefacts stolen during Jan Uprising for sale in Qinâ’,” al-Shâzlî said. She told Ahram Online that the reporter should have confirmed the information with museum officials instead of “relying on an anonymous source.”

Ilhâm Salâh, supervisor at the museum’s Central Administration for Scientific Affairs, supported al-Shâzlî’s assertions, saying the objects shown in the video were “totally fake” and that no papyri had been stolen from the museum. She went on to say that the descriptions of the objects in the video were inaccurate; suggesting that whoever was responsible for it was “not an Egyptologist.” The “papyrus” shown in the video, she said, was not a papyrus, but a parchment skin; while the object described as a “sarcophagus” was in fact a painted ancient Egyptian naos. Other objects depicted in the video, she said, were also fakes. “Some ninety per cent of the objects reported missing from the museum [after the uprising] were later recovered,” she asserted. “And no sarcophagi, papyri or naos were among the objects stolen.”

Nûr al-Dîn Raslân, an Egyptologist at the museum, pointed out that a number of videos had appeared online since last year’s uprising claiming to show antiquities stolen from Egyptian archaeological sites and offering them for sale. Among the best known of these sites, Raslân said, were ‘Treasures and Burials’ (Kunûz wa dafâ‘în) and ‘Archaeologists Forums’ (Muntadayât ‘ulamâ’ al-athâr). Raslân went on to point out that one such site even featured a photo of King Tutankhamun’s famous gold chair — one of the most celebrated pieces in the Egyptian Museum’s collection — claiming it too had been recently stolen and offering it for sale.

‘Âdil ‘Abd al-Sattâr, head of Egypt’s Museums Sector, told Ahram Online that, according to the International Museums Committee, it was illegal to purchase any artefact that had been reported missing from the Egyptian Museum or any Egyptian archaeological site. Even in the event that a collector or museum bought such an artefact, he said, they would be legally bound to return
it to the Egyptian authorities. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egyptologists refute video claims about artefacts looted from Egypt Museum”, Ahram Online, July 18, 2012).

**Jeudi 19 juillet 2012**

This week Egypt succeeded in recovering two ancient Egyptian artefacts, the first a rectangular limestone relief from the reign of the 19th Dynasty Pharaoh Ramses II found in a house in the Hisn al-’Arab district in the Matariyya area of Cairo and the second a rare Ptolemaic sarcophagus of a mouse, formerly on display at a museum in Lisberg in Germany. The relief was uncovered when a house owner in Hisn al-’Arab complained to the Matariyya governmental office that his house was falling down and needed renovation. The authorities then embarked on an inspection of the house, discovering that the owner of the neighbouring house was carrying out illicit excavations.

On inspecting the neighbour’s house, the police discovered an engraved limestone relief broken into two pieces, the hieroglyphic text on which included one of the names of Ramses II as “king of Upper and Lower Egypt, the master of both lands, Ramses II.” Tools and measuring equipment were also found, and these were confiscated by the police, together with the relief in question. According to Yûsuf Khalîfa, head of the Confiscated Antiquities Section at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), an expert committee has now verified the authenticity of the relief, early studies showing it to be part of a lintel of an entrance gate or a false door of a tomb. The relief has now been sent to the Egyptian Museum for restoration, after which it will be put on public display. (Amîna ‘Urâbî, « CSA : le relief de Ramsès II saisi à Matariyya est authentique », al-Badîl du 14 juillet 2012. Voir également Dînâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « Saisie à Matariyya d’une pièce datant du règne de Ramsès II », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 14 juillet).

**Samedi 21 juillet 2012**


**Dimanche 22 juillet 2012**

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the death of Thor HEYERDAHL, the legendary
explorer famous for showing the Pharaohs were possibly capable of crossing the Atlantic to establish contact with Western Hemisphere’s cultures “Civilization grew in the beginning from the minute that we had communication, particularly communication by sea that enabled people to get inspiration and ideas from each other and to exchange basic raw materials” – Thor HEYERDAHL. Was it a coincidence that both the Pharaohs and the Aztecs built pyramids? Or that the Incas, just like the Pharaohs, practiced mumification? Or that both Ancient Egyptians and Native Americans built reed boats? One man, a Norwegian ethnologist and explorer, thought it was not at all a coincidence.

Between what he thought and what he proved, an epic voyage would immortalise his name and practically demonstrate a fact that shocked everyone: contact could have been established between Ancient Egyptian seafarers and Native American cultures millennia before the Vikings and Columbus. What did it take to prove this theory? It took an extraordinary man called Thor HEYERDAHL and a weird-looking boat called Ra II.

To understand the relationship between the Pharaohs and Pre-Colombian civilizations, one has to start in Oslo, and to be more accurate, at the Kon-Tiki Museum. The Museum is named after the Inca-style balsa raft that carried HEYERDAHL on one of his most famous journeys, in which he sailed across the Pacific for 101 days from Peru to Polynesia (1947). The raft is on display at the Museum, and so is ‘Ra II’, the ship that carried him and his crew on an expedition that further immortalised his name and cemented his legacy. “Sailing a ship of papyrus reeds, held together only with rope, we crossed the Atlantic from Africa to the West Indies. We make the 57-day trip in this incredible craft to learn if such a boat — a copy of those used thousands of years ago — could have crossed the ocean and carried elements of ancient culture of the Mediterranean to the Western Hemisphere” – Thor HEYERDAHL, The Voyage of Ra II (National Geographic, January 1971, Volume 139, Number 1).

Passion and belief can work miracles, especially for an explorer. That was exactly the case for HEYERDAHL, who defied all the long-standing theories, which held that it was impossible for Ancient Egyptian and Mediterranean vessels to cross the Atlantic. Following a failed attempt with a papyrus boat (called Ra, after the Egyptian God), he set sail again from Safi (a Phoenician port in Morocco) with the same crew in a new boat, Ra II. On board, eight men from eight nations formed a multicultural crew working in harmony under the sun disc that adorned the sail (one of the crew members, Georges SOURIAL, was Egyptian).

Day after day, the crew faced the bad temper of the Atlantic, unaware they were making history. The whole world held its breath as the 12-metre reed boat floated like a cork on the surface of a ruthless ocean, finally reaching Barbados after an epic journey of 6100 km over 57 days. The expedition’s success quickly made headlines all over the world, and proved that prehistoric journeys of the sort were possible. No one believed a reed boat could survive more than two weeks on the high seas, let alone cross the Atlantic. HEYERDAHL put an end to the controversy: cross-oceanic contact is much older than we thought, and so is cross-cultural exchange.

Later, HEYERDAHL would embark on other expeditions, most notably on the Tigris, in which he set his boat on fire as a political statement against the war. He received countless honours and published many books, two of which remain to be among the best travel literature of all time: The Kon-Tiki Expedition and The Ra Expedition.

The Ra II Expedition eventually inspired generations of explorers, adventurers and scientists. Dominique GÖRLITZ was one such figure. Building on the –disputed- discovery of traces of tobacco and coca (native to the Americas) in some ancient Egyptian mummies, he decided to set sail in 2007 in a reed boat (Abora III) from the US to Spain (and then North Africa). The point was to prove that sailing the Atlantic against the current was possible, and that tobacco could have reached Egypt through Western seafarers.

The legacy of HEYERDAHL is not limited to his scientific work. His humanistic values remain to inspire everyone that reads about his life and work: value like peace, condemning violence, respect for cultural diversity, and above all, the power of the dream. Throughout a long career marked by bitter failures and
spectacular successes, he never gave up on dreaming and working hard on pursuing his dreams. Last year, HEYERDAHL'S Archives were inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. Photos, films, documents and diaries, the Archives are of great historical and cultural value, but the true value lies in his humanism, something that can be appreciated when we contemplate what he said reflecting on his personal experience: “Borders, I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people.” (Mohammed Elrazzaz, “Ra II Voyage: How Ancient Egypt inspired Pre-Colombian civilizations”, Ahram Online, July 22, 2012).

Lundi 23 juillet 2012


Mardi 24 juillet 2012


Mercredi 25 juillet 2012

En association avec le Centro Italo-Egiziano per il Restauro e l’Archeologia, la maison al-Sinnârî organise une conférence intitulée Réaffectation des monuments islamiques le mardi 31 juillet à 21 heures. Cette conférence sera assurée par Dr Husâm Ismâtîl, professeur d’archéologie islamique à la faculté de Lettres de ‘Ayn Shams, et ‘Alî Taha,
When Arab conqueror 'Amr Ibn al-'Āas entered Egypt in 641 AD he built the first Islamic capital of Egypt called al-Fustât, a name which means a large tent or pavilion. According to tradition, the location of al-Fustât was chosen by a dove which laid its egg in Ibn al-'Āas tent, located to the north of the Roman fortress of Babylon. Ibn al-'Āas saw that this is a sign from God and left the tent untouched at its location until he returned victorious from Alexandria. He ordered his soldier to pitch their tents around his and established al-Fustât Misr (The Pavilion of Egypt), the first Islamic Egyptian capital.

al-Fustât remained Egypt’s capital until 750 AD when the Abbasid revolted against the Umayyads and gained power. They moved Egypt’s capital to al-'Askar located to the north of al-Fustât. In 868 when the Tulunid took power, the capital moved to a nearby area called al-Qatâyî’. In 905 the al-Qatâyî’ was destroyed and the capital returned to al-Fustât where it remained Egypt’s capital until 1168 when its own vizier Shawar ordered it burnt to keep its wealth out of the hands of the Crusaders. The remains of the city were absorbed by nearby Cairo, which was built by the Fatimids to the north of al-Fustât. The whole area consisting of al-Fustât, al-'Askar and al-Qatâyî’ remained in disrepair for 1,000 years and was used as a garbage dump. Only a few buildings are still visible as well as remains of some others. Time took its toll on the al-Fustât city until Khedive Muhammad 'Ali built al-Bârûd Khâna, a storehouse for gunpowder in 1820.

Modern al-Fustât includes the three main old capitals of Egypt: al-Fustât, al-'Askar and al-Qatâyî’ which they called ‘Izbat Khayrallah in Old Cairo. The area is very rich in its archaeological remains as it relates the history of Egypt since the beginning of the Islamic era right through the modern time of Khedive Muhammad ‘Ali. The area includes Istabl ‘Antar which was visited by a French archaeological mission from the IFAO; Khadra al-Sharifa mosque and mausoleum; and the seven domes which is the burial place of seven members of the family of the Fatimid ruler al-Hâkim Bi-Amr Allah. According to myth, said Ibrâhîm 'Abd al-Rahmân, head of the al-Fustât inspectorate, those members were killed according to a decree issued by al-Hâkim Bi-Amr Allah because they did not obey his rules. But a few years later he pardoned them and built on their burial site seven domes. These domes, explains 'Abd al-Rahmân, is a very important archaeological monument since it is the first example that shows the development of Islamic architecture from the square to dome structure.

The area continued to be an empty virgin until the early 1980s when armed gangs stole some of the 800 feddans of ‘Izbat Khayrallah. They divided the land into small portions and distributed them among the people who in turn built mud brick houses and converted the land into a slum area. 'Abd al-Rahmân pointed out that only yesterday the government removed all encroachments on archaeology in the area. The decision comes too late — residents have ruined these sites by building on top of them. In 1985 the Supreme Council of Antiquities, now the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), succeeded in preserving four feddans to the north of Cairo at Istabl ‘Antar area where a French archaeological mission is digging there.

According to the IFAO web site, the chronology of the site starts with the foundation of the city of al-Fustât in 642. It is on this site that levels of habitat at the time of the conquest were revealed for the first time. They discovered remains of a habitat built by a Yemeni tribe of Mā’dhīfīr on the heights overlooking the Birkat al-Habash at the time of the founding of the city. Roland-Pierre Cayraud, responsible for the site, wrote that the levels of habitat could be divided into two distinct phases: the first, between 642 and 690, is that of the Arab and Muslim city, the second, between 690 and 750, is that of the city melee. In 750 a fire, started by the last
Umayyad caliph, on the run, ravaged the whole of this southern quarter of al-Fustât.

Immediately after this event, a very small residential area was rebuilt. It includes a few houses on the sidelines but it is mainly a necropolis, which then took the place of the Umayyad habitat. This funerary complex was built between 750 and c.765, date of construction of an aqueduct that served the buildings. It is likely that these large tombs belonged to notable families Maṭbfrīk®. These are, wrote Gayraud, actually the oldest Muslim mausoleums now known in Egypt and probably throughout the Islamic world. "The contribution of the search is thus significant in this regard, especially as some architectural and decorative aspects are able to change our approach to the history of Islamic architecture," noted Gayraud.

Studies on the mausoleums revealed that they were taken up, restored and enlarged in 973, with the arrival of the Fatimid family who gave a second burial to the deceased brought back from Africa. Until the late 11th century, the cemetery developed into a small town with organised cobbled streets and adorned mausoleums attributed to patrician houses of theépoque: gardens, ponds and even baths. But regrettably, in around 1070, all was destroyed and looted. The chronology of the five aqueducts discovered during the excavations revealed the exact date of the gradual drying of Birkat al-Habash and also allowed for the study of the topographic evolution of the city of al-Fustât for these periods.

In the report Gayraud sees that the material collected during the excavation of Istabl Antar is an exceptional documentary contribution. Ceramics and glasses found were allowed to establish new chronologies and typologies, which were found in Polish-led excavations at Kum al-Dikka. As for organic materials such as textiles, papyrus, paper, leather, wood and bone, two levels of scavengers (ninth and early 12th century) provided an exceptional documentation.

But early this month, the site was invaded by an armed gang that covered the excavation area with sand and began to bulldoze it. The area is now rubble-filled with few remnants of its monuments and historical buildings. The intruders began to divide the land and distribute it among each other into parcels of approximately 800 square metres each. Every man surrounded his part with blocks of stones in order to separate it from the others. ‘All Mu’nis, an inhabitant who gave this reporter a fake name for fear of being caught by the gang, said the armed assailants consisted of several wealthy local residents, and some 15 armed men stood by to guard the operation.

Until now, said Mu’nis, it is unclear what exactly they will build on the land, but based on similar incidents in the neighbouring area it could be another bunch of residential houses. "I want to make sure that the names [of those responsible] are mentioned, because given Egypt’s ongoing security vacuum, only the media can shed light on the situation," said Mu’nis. He claimed that approximately 56 people were involved in the armed invasion, the best known of whom were Ahmad Mitwalli, Shihâb Barûma, Ahmad Sa’d, Muhammad Kahâna, Husayn Rashwân, Husnî Sa’d and Ibrâhîm Sa’d — all of them relatively wealthy entrepreneurs from the neighbourhood. Sa’d and Barûma, said Mu’nis, joined the scheme on the same day that results of Egypt’s first post-Mubârak presidential poll were announced, on 24 June.

The al-Fustât inspectorate called the police to stop the invasion. The prosecutor-general ordered the removal of all blocks and to return the land to the MSA but until now nothing has happened and the armed gang still has the upper hand. "They are erasing Egypt’s early Islamic history," Abd al-Rahmân told Al-Ahram Weekly. "We are in a theatre of chaos". He said that despite several complaints nothing had been done. “It’s out of our hands; we’re not an executive body." Abd al-Rahmân stated that since the 1980s, such incidents had become increasingly common after the increase of urban encroachment on the site of ‘Izbat Khayrallah. Only six months ago, he said, a section of the historic Ibn Tûlûn aqueduct, located in Old Cairo’s Basâtîn area, was brought down to open the road to pedestrian traffic. 'Abd al-Rahmân attributed this largely to a lack of understanding on the part of the general public about the importance of preserving historical monuments.

"The government must get rid of these
slum areas in order to preserve its history. A country without history is nothing,” said ‘Abd al-Rahmân. Those residents in slums, he added, could be transported to other areas where a suitable standard of living is found. “We have to have good urban planning in order to avoid such incidents,” ‘Abd al-Rahmân said. (Nevine El-Aref, “Endangered past”, Al-Ahram Weekly, July 26, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « Le directeur de la zone archéologique de Fustât : les empiètements se déroulent avec la bénéédiction du gouvernorat et du ministère de l’Intérieur », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 11 juillet ; Hasan Ahmad, « Les résidants de ’Izbat Khayrallah dévoilent les détails sur les voyous qui ont fait main basse sur les terrains archéologiques », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 29 juillet).

Vendredi 27 juillet 2012


En février 2012, la police, avec l’aide des citoyens du quartier, a arrêté le vol de pièces archéologiques de la mosquée al-Rifāʿi qui comprend les tombes de certains dirigeants de l’Égypte, de la famille de Muhammad ‘Ali, comme le roi Fu’âd Ier et son fils le roi Fārūq, en plus de celle du shah d’Iran, Mohamad Reda Pahlawi. récemment, la disparition de deux accessoires en cuivre rattachés à la porte de la mosquée al-Yûsufi et celle de Qagmasse al-Ishâqî dans le quartier d’al-Darb-al-Ahmâr est venue encore une fois tirer la sonnette d’alarme.

Pour mettre un terme à cette série de vols, le ministère d’État aux Antiquités et le ministère des Waqfs ont pris la décision d’accorder à une société privée la mission d’assurer la sécurité de ces mosquées. En outre, ils ont effectué un inventaire des mosquées archéologiques qui sont sous la supervision du ministère des Waqfs. Elles sont au nombre de 128. 77 d’entre elles ont été choisies pour faire partie de la première phase de ce projet. D’ici le lancement de l’adjudication, le ministère d’État aux Antiquités donnera des cours de formation au personnel de la société choisie, pour lui faire connaître l’importance et la valeur des objets contenus dans ces mosquées.

En fait, depuis longtemps, le ministère d’État aux Antiquités et le ministère des Waqfs se lancent la balle quant à la responsabilité de ces mosquées. « La protection des mosquées archéologiques est du ressort du ministère des Waqfs, car elles sont sous sa supervision selon la loi. La responsabilité du ministère d’État aux Antiquités se limite à la supervision technique. Toutefois, les grandes mosquées archéologiques comme celles d’Ibn Tûlûn, sultan Hasan et Muhammad ‘Alli sont gardées par le ministère d’État aux Antiquités, car elles sont sur des sites archéologiques, mais les clés de ces mosquées et leurs contenus archéologiques sont sous la supervision des Waqfs », a ajouté Sayyid. Le ministère des Waqfs a refusé d’admettre sa responsabilité quant à ces vols. Il a insisté sur le fait que la protection des pièces archéologiques à l’intérieur des mosquées dépend du ministère d’État aux Antiquités, alors que sa responsabilité concerne l’affectation d’imâms et d’ouvriers pour la propreté des lieux. À quand durera cette accusation réciproque ? (Iman Fathallah, « Halte au pillage », Al-Ahram Hebdo du 1er août 2012).

Une commission archéologique présidée par Dr Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rahîm, président du secteur des antiquités islamiques et coptes, s’est rendu aujourd’hui à la mosquée sultan Hasan, afin d’élucider le vol de quatre éléments en cuivre qui ornaient un porte Coran historique. Le ministère d’État aux affaires archéologiques a traduit tout le personnel de cette mosquée devant un conseil disciplinaire.

Jeudi 2 août 2012

Situated eight kilometres northwest of the Gîza plateau, Abû Rawwâsh contains vestiges of archaeological remains that date back to various historical periods ranging from the prehistoric to the Coptic eras. Abû Rawwâsh displays exclusive funerary structures relating not only to the different ancient Egyptian periods but also their places of worship until quite late in time. There at the prehistoric necropolis dating from the archaic period and located at the northern area of Mastaba number six, Egyptologists from the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo (IFAO) have uncovered 11 wooden panels of a funerary boat used by ancient Egyptians to transport the soul of their departed king to the afterlife right through eternity. It is the earliest such boat ever found.

"The boat is in a very well-preserved condition and is almost intact, thanks to the preservation power of the dry desert environment," Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm said. He added that each panel was six metres tall and 1.50 metres in width. Ibrâhîm continued that early studies of the panels revealed that the boat belonged to King Den of the First Dynasty, who was not buried in Abû Rawwâsh but whose tomb was found at the royal necropolis of the Early Dynastic kings in the Upper Egyptian town of Abydos. Because of his young age, King Den shared the throne with his mother, Meritneith. It was said that Den was the best archaeologically attested ruler of his period. He brought prosperity to the land, and many innovations were attributed to his reign. He was the first to use granite in construction and decoration, and the floor to his tomb is made of red and black granite. During his reign Den established many of the patterns of court ritual and royalty used by his successor kings.

The newly-discovered panels of the boat have been transported to the planned National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation (NMEC) for restoration and reconstruction in the museum’s laboratories. Once the museum is opened next year, the funerary boat will be exhibited in the Nile Hall. King Den’s boat is far from the first funerary boat to be discovered. In 1954 historian and archaeologist Kamâl al-Malâkh discovered the two solar boats of the Fourth-Dynasty king Khufu intact inside two pits beside the pyramid. One of these boats was
restored and reconstructed by the renowned restorer Ahmad Yusuf and was put on display in a special exhibition hall near the Great Pyramid, while the second one remained in the pit until 1992 when a Japanese archaeological team carried out research on the boat inside the pit. In 2011, the Japanese-Egyptian mission began the first stage of a three-phase project to lift the cedar panels, reconstruct the boat and place it on display at the side of its twin in the planned Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) overlooking Giza plateau, which is planned to be open in 2015.

The Abû Rawwâsh site was described in the early 19th century by European travellers including Howard Vyse and John Shae Perring. Four decades after Karl Lepsius published the results of his research on the pyramid complex of King Djedefre, son of the Great Pyramid builder King Khufu, in 1842, Flinders Petrie — renowned as the father of Egyptology — conducted a survey on the funerary complex between 1880 and 1882.

In 1901 and 1902, the IFAO was the first mission to begin in-depth archaeological excavations at the eastern façade of the pyramid at Abû Rawwâsh. The dig was led by the IFAO Director Émile Chassinat, who discovered several archaeological complexes including the remains of a funerary settlement, an empty boat pit and numerous statuary fragments that bore the name of King Djedefre, which allowed for the identification of the tomb owner. Under the direction of Pierre Lacau, the IFAO continued the excavation work and found new structures to the east of the pyramid of Djedefre. However, an earlier presence was indicated at Abû Rawwâsh as was evidenced by objects bearing the names of the First-Dynasty kings Aha and Den that were found near the pyramid. (Nevine El-Aref, “Sails set for eternity”, Al-Ahram Weekly, August 2, 2012. Voir également Dinà Abîl ‘Alîm, « Découverte à Abû Rawwâsh de la plus ancienne barque pharaonique datant de la Iʳᵉ dynastie », al-Yawm al-Sâbi‘ du 25 juillet ; MENA, « Découverte à Abû Rawwâsh de la plus ancienne barque pharaonique datant de la Iʳᵉ dynastie », al-Shuruq du 25 juillet ; « Découverte à Abû Rawwâsh de la plus vieille barque pharaonique », al-Dustûr du 25 juillet ; “Update: Oldest Pharaonic boat discovered”, Egypt Independent, July 25 ; MENA, « Découverte à Abû Rawwâsh de la plus ancienne barque pharaonique », al-Misriyyûn du 25 juillet ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « Découverte de la plus ancienne barque pharaonique à Abû Rawwâsh », al-Ahrâm du 26 juillet ; Doaa Elhami, « La plus ancienne barque au monde », Al-Ahrâm Hebdo du 15 août).

The Ibn Tulûn Mosque stands as splendid as it was when it was first constructed — at a cost of 120,000 gold dinars — on the top of a hill known as Gabal Yashkur in the city of al-Qatâ‘î. This city was founded in 868 after the Abbasids gained control over the Islamic Empire by the Abbasid governor Ahmad Ibn Tulûn to replace Egypt’s earlier capital of al-Fustât. The historian al-Maqrîzî noted that construction started on the mosque in 876, while the mosque’s original inscription slab identifies the date of completion as 265 AH, or 879 AD.

The high and solid bedrock on which it was built has protected the structure from natural catastrophes such as floods, earthquakes and the more insidious threat of rising groundwater, as well as from encroachment inflicted by human activity. The bricks that make up its walls are fire-resistant, and the mortar that gives them coherence has proved flexible enough to absorb the shocks dealt by earthquakes and military bombardments, and even the tremors caused by heavy vehicles passing through neighbouring streets. The largest mosque ever to be built in Egypt, the Ibn Tulûn Mosque, was the focal point of al-Qatâ‘î, which was also the capital of the Tulunids. The mosque originally backed on to Ibn Tulûn’s palace, and a door adjacent to the minbar (pulpit) allowed him direct entry.

(...) This week and for the first time
since its restoration in 2004, the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) opened the Ibn Tûlûn mosque at night for worshippers to say their tarâwîh prayers in Ramadan. Muhsin Sayyid 'Alî, general-secretary of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), told Al-Ahram Weekly that the mosque was opened this Ramadan because of frequent demands by the residents of Sayyida Zaynab to open it at night for prayers. Opponents of the opening cited the spacious area of the mosque, as well as the technical problems of lighting such a vast area. Following several attempts, 'Alî said, an appropriate solution was reached and the mosque courtyard and prayer hall were lit to allow worshipers to perform the tarâwîh prayers. (Nevine El-Aref, "Ibn Tûlûn Mosque opens for night prayer", Al-Ahram Weekly, August 2, 2012).

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After taking the oath of office in front of President Muhammad Mursî, Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm, who is retaining his seat from former prime minister al-Ganzûrî's cabinet, told Ahmed Online that he will continue his efforts to preserve Egypt’s archaeological heritage, as well as opening up more sites to increase tourism. "A new strategy will be drawn up, to find other monetary resources besides the usual ones, in order to increase the ministry’s income, which are currently dependent on tourism levels," Ibrâhîm said. The strategy will aim to increase the ministry’s resources, so that it will be on target to complete ongoing construction and restoration works at the scheduled time. These projects include the construction of the Grand Egyptian Museum overlooking Giza Plateau, which is due to be completed in 2015, and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Fustât in Old Cairo, due for completion in 2013.

Ibrâhîm also promised to cooperate with all the concerned ministries such as the ministries of tourism, foreign affairs, international cooperation, religious endowments and culture in an attempt to support tourism and promote Egypt’s cultural and archaeological heritage around the world. The minister told Ahmed Online that he also plans to promote the establishment of archaeological exhibitions abroad, to generate more money for the ministry.

Ibrâhîm asserted that he will continue to work on returning Egypt’s stolen and illegally smuggled antiquities, as well as to tighten security at all archaeological sites, monuments and museums. He will also continue the process of adjusting the status of the ministry’s temporary contract staff to give them permanent positions, according to the schedule previously created. New channels are to be opened to cooperate more with foreign archaeological institutes and centres, in order to provide scholarships to curators, archaeologists and restorers. (Nevine El-Aref, "Revised strategy to preserve Egypt's heritage: Returning minister", Ahmed Online, August 3, 2012. Voir également Dinâ 'Abd al-'Alîm, « Ibrâhîm élabore une feuille de route pour le travail archéologique au cours de la prochaine période », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 2 août ; Dinâ 'Abd al-'Alîm, « Le ministre de l'Archéologie se réunit avec les présidents des départements afin d'examiner la poursuite des projets archéologiques », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 5 août).
archaeological excavations revealed very little of what went on at the Dahshûr site during the construction of the Bent and Red pyramids.

The Bent Pyramid was Senefru’s failed attempt, and is unique in shape. It represents a transitional period when the architectural style of a tomb changed from a flat mastaba to a step pyramid and finally a complete pyramid. The Red Pyramid is a true smooth-sided pyramid. To know human practices at the Senefru pyramid area, a team of earth scientists from Germany examined fractals (natural or artificial created geometric patterns that form designs) at the area around the Dahshûr pyramids. According to the scientific journal *Quaternary International*, Ame RAMISCH of the Freie Universität Berlin and colleagues from the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo created a digital model of the topography around Dahshûr and investigated the area using fractal pattern recognition analysis.

Investigations revealed that the area is filled with natural and man-made fractal areas as well as a huge non-fractal footprint around the pyramids. Research identified that an area almost six kilometres long was modified during the Old Kingdom and no evidence of natural fractals, which suggests that the site was once a wide promenade. “The modification is hard to spot, especially if your eyes are untrained,” says RAMISCH. “Even with trained eyes, it is difficult to believe the gigantic footprint the Egyptians have left.” RAMISCH told *New Scientist* magazine. The disturbance to natural fractals can give a sense of what occupied the site. In this case, RAMISCH continued, it was probably broad terraces several kilometres long, which would have “increased the sense of monumentality of the pyramids.”

Keith CHALLIS of the University of Birmingham commented on the discovery in the *New Scientist*, describing it as “a new approach.” There is a well-established link between human activity and landscape modification, he pointed out. “This provides an interesting new way of identifying such modification.” (Nevine El-Aref, “Ancient activity identified by new mapping method at Senefru pyramids in Egypt’s Dahshûr”, *Ahram Online*, August 4, 2012).

**Mardi 7 août 2012**

7 individus ont tabassé à mort un ancien gardien de la paix dans le quartier de Matariyya. La victime, Mustafa A — qui avait été renvoyé de son poste — a fait croire à ses assassins en sa capacité à localiser et à exhumer des trésors archéologiques. En échange, il leur a extorqué la somme de 20 000 L.E. Une fois le pot aux roses découvert, les dupes l’ont entraîné pour se venger en le l’éliminant. 3 accusés furent arrêtés par la police. Les 4 autres complices restent en cavale. (Ibrâhîm Mustafa, « Meurtre d’un ancien gardien de la paix à cause de fouilles clandestines », *al-Masrî al-Yawm* du 7 août 2012).

**Mercredi 8 août 2012**

Le musée archéologique de la Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), en association
Tension and conflict have always been the essential features that defined the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and Egyptian intelligentsia. In the past decades, when the MB was only a political movement, it assassinated several intellectuals and authors who opposed their radical ideas. Now as the MB has become one of the largest and most influential movements in Egypt especially after winning the majority of parliament seats and after one of its most prominent members Muhammad Mursî has become the first elected president of Egypt, the rise of the Islamists has concerned many who are fearful of their gaining influence in art and culture. What increased such apprehension has been the position taken by members of parliament and lawyers affiliated to the MB including calling for the confiscation of the legendary book One Thousand and One Nights as well as new books such as Al-Sakkar (The Falconer) written by Samîr Gharib.

Along with the even more ultra-conservative Salafis the Brotherhood have asked for sculptures in squares and streets to be covered. In Alexandria, for example they have covered the Statue of Liberation, at al-Sisilâ Square overlooking the Corniche, with a black sheet because it features a semi-naked woman symbolising the mermaid trying to free herself. They also called for the destruction of the Pyramids of Gîza and the Sphinx. The MB’s top leader Muhammad Badî’ in al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ newspaper described soap operas shown on TV in Ramadan as a deliberate plan to waste people’s time and deprive the nation of achieving piety.

In the current cabinet reshuffle carried out by Prime Minister Hishâm Qandîl, Minister of Culture Sâbir ‘Arab and Minister of Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm stayed on but they did not do much in the cultural and archaeological fields in the previous government. Is this perhaps one way of saying the MB is to give less attention to culture and heritage in Egypt, which were not mentioned at all in Mursî’s renaissance project? Or is this like what intellectual and poet Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî Higâzî said in the early 20th century, when Ataturk cancelled the Turkish Islamic Caliphate, and intellectuals turned Egypt from the old radical regime of the Mamluks and Ottomans to the enlightenment era led by Rifâ’a al-Tahtâwî, ‘Alî Mubârak, Ahmad Lutfî al-Sayyid and Taha Husayn?

“Arts and culture are regrettably the last priorities in the programmes of all political forces, whether liberal or Islamic,” poet ‘Abd al-Rahmân Yûsuf told Al-Ahram Weekly. But Yûsuf said he wished success to both ministers of culture and antiquities though he added that at the end “they will not be able to do much to the cultural and antiquities scene for several reasons. Both ministers belong to the same old administrative way of thinking. They will be operating both ministries in the same way as their processors.” Second, budgets allocated for both ministries should be increased 10 fold and more for antiquities “in order to achieve something efficient and concrete especially in the archaeological realm, as Egypt was a country to illegally export its heritage.”

“Egypt’s top governmental officials were top antiquities dealers and those who were arrested are only the lads of those top statesmen,” Yûsuf pointed out adding that even though he did not have a concrete vision of how to deal with such an issue he suggested that developing strong legislation and getting rid of top official in question could save Egypt’s heritage from any further theft and
As for culture Yûsuf sees that a strong statesman fully aware of the importance and value of culture has to take it upon his shoulders the responsibility of creating a good cultural system and to put culture atop all priorities. He also has to let people feel the importance of culture in their life through providing decent theatre, art and good quality of books with appropriate prices and so on. “Culture is not more important than bread and food but food cannot build or create a rational person,” said Yûsuf who explains that a human being is a combination of body, spirit and mind, which needs to be nourished with food, religion and thoughts. “Without nourishing people’s minds through good thoughts and culture a man could be transformed into a monster and this is what happened during the era of the toppled president Mubârak.”

“We should not succumb to the status quo,” asserted Yûsuf pointing out that the decline of cultural, intellectual and aesthetic levels in Egypt in the previous decades “led to several problems we are facing now such as the inappropriate practice of political rights and the exploitation of religion to achieve gains.”

Intellect and writer Yûsuf al-Qu‘id sees that President Mursî is less interested in culture. He told the Weekly that since he became Egypt’s president Mursî did not mention the words culture, thought or art in any of his speeches. He did not quote a verse of any poem of Ahmad Shawqî or Hâfiz Ibrâhîm or a novel or a titbit of wisdom found in Egypt’s folk heritage. In his speeches Mursî did not highlight Egypt’s culture and role in building civilisation and did not talk about the freedom of creativity and thoughts. Badi‘, al-Qu‘id continued, in al-Yawm al-Sâbî’ described those who worked in Ramadan soaps as “free devils”. “Mursî’s position towards archaeology is unclear but he has an adverse position towards art, culture and creativity,” said al-Qu‘id. (Nevine El-Aref, “Bearded art”, Al-Ahram Weekly, August 9, 2012).

Thanks to Google Earth imagery, Egypt has rediscovered “lost pyramids” in the country. Satellite archaeology researcher Angela Micol of Maiden reported that the potential pyramid complexes were located some 90 miles from each other and contained an unusual grouping of mounds with intriguing features and orientations, leading experts to believe they are pyramids. One site located in Upper Egypt, just 12 miles from the city of Abû Sidhum along the Nile, features four mounds each with a larger, triangular-shaped plateau. The two larger mounds at this site are approximately 250 feet in width, with two smaller mounds about 100 feet in width.

The site complex is arranged in a very clear formation with the large mound extending a width of approximately 620 feet, or almost three times the size of the Great Pyramid in Gîza. “Upon closer examination of the formation, this mound appears to have a very flat top and a curiously symmetrical triangular shape that has been heavily eroded with time,” Discovery News quoted Micol wrote in her
A website Google Earth Anomalies.

Some 90 miles north near the Fayyûm oasis, the second possible pyramid complex contains a four-sided, truncated mound, which is approximately 150 feet wide. “It has a distinct square center which is very unusual for a mound of this size and it almost seems pyramidal when seen from above,” Micol wrote. Located just 1.5 miles south east of the ancient town of Dimai, the site also has three smaller mounds in a very clear formation, “similar to the diagonal alignment of the Giza Plateau pyramids,” Micol said. “The colour of the mounds is dark and similar to the material composition of Dimai’s walls which are made of mud brick and stone,” the researcher wrote. According to Micol, both sites have been verified as undiscovered by Egyptologist and pyramid expert Nabîl Silîm. (“Egypt finds “lost pyramids” via Google Earth”, Bikya Masr, August 11, 2012. Voir également Sayyid Hâfiz, « Une archéologue américaine découvre de nouvelles pyramides en Égypte ! », al-Shababî du 15 août ; ‘Alâ’ al-Dîn Zâhir « Le ministère de l’Archéologie met en doute la découverte de nouvelles pyramides par Google Earth », Ruz al-Yûsuf, 16 août ; « Découverte d’une pyramide égyptienne plus grande que celle de Chéops », al-Dustûr du 20 août).

**Mardi 14 août 2012**


**Mercredi 15 août 2012**

Une fois de plus, la question des eaux souterraines sur le plateau des pyramides de Giza revient comme un leitmotiv. Cette affaire dure depuis plus de 15 ans. Elle surgit de temps à autre, mais le problème est toujours là. Cette fois-ci, les choses sont plus graves puisque le niveau de l’eau s’est élevé de façon visible et effrayante. En fait, une intervention rapide est indispensable, afin de sauver le site d’une vraie catastrophe. Bien que le danger soit visible pour beaucoup de spécialistes, le ministre d’État pour les Affaires des antiquités, Muhammad Ibrâhîm, nie carrément l’existence du problème, voire il a déclaré que le Sphinx est à l’abri des risques de l’élévation du niveau de la nappe phréatique.

En fait, des études et des recherches archéologiques ont été faites dernièrement par des spécialistes de la faculté d’ingénierie en collaboration avec le ministère des Antiquités ainsi que le gouvernorat de Giza, afin de pouvoir calculer le taux des eaux souterraines et leur accumulation. De même, des études sur le sol et sur le corps du Sphinx ont été effectuées. « Des compagnies spécialisées ont peaufiné un projet complet à long terme afin de pouvoir résoudre ce problème sans aucun danger », explique Muhammad al-Shaykha, directeur des projets au CSA.

Ce projet a commencé il y a un an et demi, par la distribution de plus de 18 pompes,
afin d’aspirer l’eau supplémentaire. ‘Alî al-Asfar, directeur du site, a souligné que les pompes extraient 26 000 m³ d’eau par jour, environ 1 100 m³ par heure. Ainsi, le niveau de l’eau sous le Sphinx est en sécurité, soit à 15 m au-dessus du niveau de la mer. Le projet mis en œuvre a coûté 24 millions de L.E. (3 millions d’euros) accordées par l’USAID. al-Asfar a annoncé que ce financement vise en premier lieu la réduction du niveau de la nappe phréatique, notamment en dessous du temple de la vallée de la pyramide de Chéphren.

En fait, le Sphinx et le temple de la Vallée, situés à un niveau inférieur de celui du plateau de Gîza, avaient été les plus affectés par l’eau. Les nouveaux réseaux de drainage du quartier voisin Nazlat al-Simmân, de Hadâ’iq al-Ahrâm et l’irrigation des jardins publics des zones résidentielles alentour sont les causes premières de cette montée des eaux souterraines selon le directeur du site. « Le plus important est que l’eau infiltrée n’était pas polluée. C’est de l’eau potable utilisée par les habitants du site », explique al-Asfar.

Par contre, des spécialistes en hydrogéologie ont exprimé leur inquiétude quant à une forte baisse du niveau de l’eau souterraine qui pourrait déséquilibrer le sol, entraînant ainsi un grand risque pour les monuments et, à long terme, un possible effondrement du Sphinx et des trois pyramides. al-Asfar a démenti cela en expliquant que les pompes sont automatisées, le système s’arrêtant lorsque l’eau retombe à 15,5 m au-dessus du niveau de la mer. Le niveau de l’eau a été fixé à 4,6 m en dessous du sol, autrement dit le même que pendant l’Égypte ancienne. « Ce n’est pas tout, plus de 30 autres puits d’inspection ont été creusés pour surveiller de près le niveau d’eau et pouvoir intervenir rapidement, afin de régler définitivement ce problème », commente Dr al-Shaykha.

also on display. Letters written by Pope Shinûda commemorating the death of the late Grand Imam of al-Azhar Muhammad Sayyid Tantâwî are also on show, as well as another one written by Field Marshal Tantâwî to Shinûda greeting him at a Christian festival. In a corner of the exhibition is a replica of the pope’s cell with his original bed, lamp, chair and desk.

The exhibition will eventually be transferred to Saint Bishoy monastery in Wâdî al-Natrûn on the north coast, where Pope Shinûda is buried. “It is really a great exhibition relating the life of a prominent clergyman who spent his life calling for mercy and tolerance,” Lu’ayy Mahmûd Sa’îd, head of the Coptic Studies Programme at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, told Ahram Online. He described it as an opportunity for Christians to renew their acquaintance with his religious philosophy and for Muslims to learn something about his life. Sa’îd went on saying that the exhibition was meant to be at the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, but due to security reasons the exhibition was transferred to the Coptic Cultural Centre at ‘Abbâsiyya Cathedral. The Coptic Museum’s security chief said he would not be able to secure the items because of the predicted influx of visitors, said Sa’îd. He also mentioned the chaos that had happened at the Saint Bishoy monastery during the ceremony held there 40 days after the pope’s death, which led to the death and injury of several people.

“I am very happy to see such an exhibition. It is a dream come true,” said Hâla Mitrî, who was admiring one of the pope’s crosses. She told Ahram Online that such an exhibition will reminds us of a pope that we loved, and it will keep us spiritually in connection with him after his death. “He will always be in our hearts and souls.” Peter Mo’anes says the exhibition should be bigger and in a museum of its own along with other objects from previous popes, like the one at Saint Catherine Monastery in South Sinai. (Nevine El-Aref, “Pope Shinûda exhibition opens in Cairo”, Ahram Online, August 15, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Tentative déjouée d’exportation illicite d’antiquités égyptiennes à travers l’aéroport international du Caire », al-Yâm al-Sâbî’ du 16 août).
Dimanche 19 août 2012


Samedi 25 août 2012


Dans un communiqué de presse, Ibrâhîm a précisé que ce nouveau musée situé directement sur le port de Port-Saïd s’étendrait sur une superficie de 8 000 m² : 3 600 m² pour les bâtiments et le reste sera dédié à l’exposition des grandes pièces antiques. Le sous-sol du musée hébergera un laboratoire de restauration, des bureaux administratifs et des réserves. Le rez-de-chaussée et le premier étage seront consacrés à l’exposition des pièces archéologiques qui retracent l’histoire et le folklore de la ville à travers les différentes époques. Lors de sa visite d’inspection, le ministre a demandé l’ajout d’une passerelle reliant le musée au port, afin de faciliter l’accès direct des touristes, ainsi qu’un escalator pour les handicapés.

Le ministre a également inspecté le vieux phare qui sera restauré et réhabilité pour la visite touristique. Rappelant que ce phare de 56 m de haut a été érigé en 1869 lors de l’inauguration du canal de Suez. Dans son sous-sol se trouve une grande salle qui pourrait être réaffectée pour les célébrations culturelles. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-’Alîm, « 101 millions L.E. pour la construction du musée archéologique de Port-Saïd », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’ du 25 août 2012).

Mercredi 22 août 2012

Police at Cairo Airport prevented a large copper decoration from the Muhammad ’Alî era being smuggled out of the country on Wednesday. The piece was hidden inside a box on a flight to Bursa in Turkey via Dubai. Police arrested the box’s Turkish owner. Archaeologists at the Antiquities Unit at Cairo Airport authenticated the object and suggested it was taken from a larger Islamic monument owned by Muhammad ’Alî’s family.

Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm said the artefact was a very distinguished piece of decoration with foliage and geometric patterns. It is engraved with a Quranic verse written in Kufi script saying “There is only one God and Muhammad is his Messenger.” The piece is now at the Islamic Museum for restoration and to determine its original location. (Nevine El-Aref, “Muhammad ’Alî-era artefact seized at Cairo Airport”, Ahram Online, August 22, 2012. Voir également MENA, « Tentative déjouée d’exportation illicite d’antiquités vers la Turquie », al-Misriyyûn du 23 août).
Dimanche 26 août 2012

Serenity has returned to the rich Islamic site of Istabl’ Antar in al-Fustât area in Old Cairo after almost a month of uproar and turmoil. Early this month an armed gang led by wealthy residents of the area invaded the four feddans wide archaeological site, covered the excavation area with sand and began to bulldoze it. The gang divided the land and distributed it among its members in parcels of approximately 800 square metres each. Every member surrounded his part with blocks of stones in order to separate it from the others and started to build mud brick houses.

Ibrâhîm ’Abd al-Rahmân, head of al-Fustât inspectorate, called the Tourism and Antiquities Police to stop the invasion while the prosecutor-general ordered the removal of all blocks and to return the land to the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA). But only few days ago did the government remove all encroachments on the archaeological site. “The removal comes too late as residents have ruined the remains of a very distinguished site that relates to the history of the early Islamic era, since ’Amr Ibn al-‘Âs right through Muhammad ‘Ali’s reign,” ’Abd al-Rahmân pointed out. He added that since the 1980s, such incidents had become increasingly common after the increase of urban encroachment on the site of ’Izbat Khayrallah where Istabl’ Antar is located. ’Izbat Khayrallah includes three of Egypt’s early Islamic capitals: al-Fustât, al-’Askâr and al-Qâtâ’î.

In 1985 a French archaeological mission led by Roland-Pierre Gayraud started excavation at Istabl’ Antar area where they discovered remains of a habitat built by a Yemeni tribe on the heights overlooking Birkat al-Habash at the time of the founding of the city. A funerary complex houses tombs of notable families of the Yemeni tribe, built between 750 and c.765, was also uncovered. Gayraud said that studies on the funerary complex revealed that until the late 11th century, the cemetery developed into a small town with organised cobbled streets and adorned mausoleums attributed to patrician houses of the era, with gardens, ponds and even baths. Regrettably, in around 1070, all was destroyed and looted.

Ceramics and glass artefacts were also found during excavations, establishing new chronologies and typologies, as well as other materials such as textiles, papyrus, paper, leather, wood and bone. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt’s Istabl’ Antar rescued”, Ahram Online, August 26, 2012).

Mercredi 29 août 2012

C’est non loin de la ville d’al-Simbillâwin dans le gouvernorat de Mansûrâ (Delta), que se trouve l’antique ville de Thmus qui comprend le site archéologique de Tell Timaï. Cette région bénéficie d’une longue histoire qui remonte à l’époque pharaonique. Situé entre les deux anciennes branches du Nil, Tanis et Mendes, Tell Timaï est à environ 500 m au sud de la ville antique de Mendes, capitale de la province à l’époque antique et connue actuellement sous le nom de Tell al-Rubaa. Toutes les deux sont considérées comme étant les plus grandes villes antiques encore existantes dans le Delta du Nil. Là, opère une mission archéologique américaine, dirigée par le professeur Robert Littman de l’Université de Hawaï, en coopération avec le Conseil Suprême des Antiquités.

Il s’agit d’un site qui s’étale sur 7 Km, couvrant plus de 200 ha. Son plus haut point se situe à 18,5 m au-dessus du niveau de la mer. À ce jour, rien n’indique que Tell Timaï s’étendait au nord pour joindre Tell al-Rubaa. Les sites sont situés sur deux collines séparées par des centaines de mètres. La première, au sud, est dans le moins bon état, et couvre la ville de Thmus qui a remplacé Mendes à l’époque gréco-romaine. Tell Timaï a été fondé au IVe siècle av. J.-C. et a survécu jusqu’au IXe
siècle de notre ère. Malgré tout, ce site a été sélectionné en 2007 par les autorités pour l'installation d'un stade sportif. « Une décision qui menace tout le site de disparition complète avec la perte d'un trésor archéologique inédit qui pourrait éclairer une phase sombre de l'histoire égyptienne », explique Muhammad Qinâwî, expert en archéologie et codirecteur du chef de la mission. Les membres de la mission — de 14 différentes nationalités — s’activent, depuis 2009, pour mener les dernières fouilles.

Pour ce faire, les membres de la mission sont équipés d’instruments les plus sophistiqués à l’instar du radar magnétique qui enregistre et indique les emplacements d’objets antiques et de fondations en sous-sol avant de commencer les fouilles, sans oublier le GPS. Selon Qinâwî, ces instruments facilitent la tâche de la mission dont le travail est réparti en principe sur deux phases. La première est de traiter le terrain sur lequel sera fondé le stade sportif ; la seconde s’oriente plutôt vers le centre du site qui comprenait le centre de la ville antique de Thmuis.


Dans la seconde région, celle du centre-ville, la mission a partiellement identifié le secteur industriel. Il s’agit d’un quartier d’entrepôts qui comprenait les débris de parfum révélant la présence de cette industrie à Tell Timai. Selon les archéologues, le parfum de Tell Timai avait une très bonne réputation à l’époque. Cette production était exportée aux autres cités méditerranéennes, soit directement grâce au port local situé sur la branche fluviale mendesienne, ou bien à travers les ports alexandrins auxquels étaient transférés ces produits. En effet, la localisation de Tell Timai sur cette branche fluviale, dont les traces sont identifiées par les archéologues, lui avait donné une importance majeure. Tell Timai est alors devenu un centre commercial puisqu’il se situait sur la voie commerciale maritime qui reliait la Grande Syrie et les pays africains. Ce site jouissait d’une prospérité économique florissante.

« Au cours de nos fouilles, nous avons dégagé des villas qui reflétaient la richesse et la vie aisée que menaient les habitants de ce quartier », reprend Qinâwî. Par conséquent, Tell Timai a accueilli au fil des ans une autonomie remplaçant de fait la capitale Mendes. « La branche fluviale mendesienne s’orientait vers Tell Timai attirant en fait la population vers la ville naissante au profit de Mendes », commente LITTMAN. Cette autonomie administrative et la prospérité économique avaient incité les autorités romaines à décréter trois catégories d’impôts ponctionnés, surtout sur les paysans. Le papyrus Thmouïs I, daté de l’an 170/171, relevé sur le site et traduit par l’archéologue Sophie KAMBITSIS, indique les procédures administratives utilisées dans la perception des impôts, les dates, les fonctionnaires en charge ainsi que la géographie du nom mendesien. Ce sont des taxes versées sur la terre, des impôts sur les esclaves... Quant à la troisième catégorie, elle est concernée par les villages ayant subi un dépeuplement. Cette dernière se réfère à un grave problème de l’époque : le dépeuplement avait atteint plus de 90 % au cours de la moitié du IIe siècle, en raison d’une épidémie de peste dans la ville. Sans oublier les attaques de brigands et les assassinats perpétrés par les troupes romaines.

Outre la prospérité économique, la localisation stratégique de Tell Timai double l’importance et la valeur de la ville antique. À l’est du Delta égyptien, elle faisait partie d’une série de points de protection de l’Empire romain contre les mouvements rebelles et des attaques des juifs vivant en Palestine, qui se révoltaient contre la domination romaine. Selon les documents, Thmuis était le point de départ d’une grande armée dirigée par Titus, le futur...


Les autorités archéologiques égyptiennes sont censées travailler sur certains des sites du Delta, afin d’y promouvoir le tourisme. Pour le moment, l’équipe archéologique a établi un plan pour conserver et préserver 80 % de la ville Thmuis, dont les travaux de fouilles prendront une dizaine d’années, afin que les futures générations puissent en profiter. La mission forme aussi de jeunes archéologues égyptiens afin d’améliorer leur niveau. Les résultats sont éloquents, puisqu’ils deviennent des codirecteurs des missions archéologiques en quelques années. (Doaa Elhami, « Un trésor va disparaître », Al-Ahram Hebdo du 29 août 2012).

Jeudi 30 août 2012

The painted lid of an anthropoid coffin belonging to an as yet unidentified nobleman will be flown home within the next two weeks. Their homecoming follows almost a year of negotiations between Egypt and Israel. The anthropoid lid, which is broken into two pieces, was seized by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) in the showroom of a shop in the Old City of Jerusalem. Usâma al-Nahhâs, director-general of the Repatriation of Antiquities Department at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), told Al-Ahram Weekly that the lid was stolen and illegally smuggled out of the country after being cut into two pieces, probably to facilitate fitting it into a regular suitcase, and modified to appear as fake replicas. It was first taken to Dubai, from where another flight took it to Israel. It subsequently turned up in a shop in the Old City of Jerusalem, and last September MSA officials
asked for its return.

Muhammad Ibrâhîm, the minister of state for antiquities, told the Weekly that the ministry had sent an official letter to the Egyptian Embassy in Tel Aviv requesting it to take all the necessary legal and diplomatic steps to restitute both artefacts. After several meetings and negotiations with its Israeli counterparts, the IAA bought the lid from the shop owner and offered it to Egypt. Ibrâhîm said that within the next two weeks the lid would be brought to Cairo, where it would be taken to the Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square for restoration before being placed on special display in the museum’s foyer.

Ibrâhîm confirmed that the lid was now being stored in a climate controlled room at the IAA, where archaeologists who have examined it say it dates back to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century BC and are in a well-preserved condition. Each part of the lid is of carved wood, painted on plaster and decorated with colourful religious scenes. (Nevine El-Aref, “Homecoming of a nobleman”, Al-Ahram Weekly, August 30, 2012. Voir également “Egypt recovers two artifacts from Israel”, Egypt Independent, August 29).

History curricula are designed to chronologically cover all periods of Egyptian history from pharaonic to contemporary times with further details added depending on students’ age group. So, it seemed only intuitive to add a chapter about the 25 January revolution to the curricula of sixth graders and middle schoolers last year. Previous lessons about the role of the National Democratic Party in political life and its many “achievements” were removed along with photographs of former President Husnî Mubârak. Historical narratives offered in schools are generally fragmented and highly selective, and change based on political developments. Most lessons covering the pharaonic, Islamic or modern periods stress taking pride in monuments, with rare mentions of economic or social developments. And when periods of colonization are examined, invaders from the Hyksos to Mongols are presented as pure evil, without going deeper into the context. In high school history curricula, students learn about Egypt from Islamic times until the present. Yet the 500 years between the Crusades and Napoleon BONAPARTE’s expedition to Egypt are completely missing, which makes us wonder how such decisions are made.

Instilling a sense of pride of the country’s past in the young is a priority for history educators in Egypt. “History is an endless source of morals,” says Inâs al-Qâdî, a social studies consultant at the Education Ministry. “Hence, we stress values of affiliation and identity in the introduction of every lesson.” But most students seem apathetic toward the subject, and parents and teachers continue to complain about the quality of history education in schools across the country. History professors all over the country contribute to developing the curricula. The Education Ministry announces to publishing houses that it will be printing a new history book and provides an outline of the content, according to its Document of Standards for History Programs. “Each publishing house is then free to select the book’s authors and make submissions,” says al-Qâdî. A social studies consultant, such as al-Qâdî, and a committee from the ministry’s Center for Developing Curricula and Educational Materials then review submissions and approve selected curricula. Occasionally, institutions other than the Education Ministry are called in to review submissions as well. Su’âd Migâhid, professor of Greek and Roman History at ‘Ayn Shams’s Faculty of Education, says the Coptic Orthodox Church had to officially approve lessons she put together on the Greco-Roman period that include information about the arrival of Christianity to Egypt.

Despite the apparent efficiency of the process, both parents and professors at the Faculty of Education, which graduates most history teachers, agree that students are not
receiving a properly insightful and engaging history education. “The study of consecutive historical events can by all means be a tool to train young students on critical analysis and thinking,” says Gihân Rushdî, ancient Egyptian history lecturer at ‘Ayn Shams’s Faculty of Education. “It is not just about memorizing by heart historical names, dates and events.” But school curricula are developed with an eye on the quantity of information presented rather than its quality, says Rushdî. “Young students, for instance, are obliged to memorize names of 18th dynasty pharaohs without knowing the clear definition of a dynasty and how the chronology works.” This has driven many students to dislike studying history altogether.

In an attempt to engage students with the subject, exercises and activities have been introduced into the curricula over the past few years. Still, Rushdî believes most lessons and activities are based on a one-way flow of information from the teacher and textbook to students. Some parents are concerned about the very accuracy of the information in textbooks. King Ahmose, for instance, is mentioned in the chapter on the Middle Kingdom in the fourth grade history book, while in fact he reigned some 200 years later. “Sometimes, I have to accept teaching my daughter the wrong information although I know the correct information,” says Amîra Sâdiq, Egyptologist and mother of a fourth grader. “In the final exam, she will be asked to cite the information as it is in the ministry’s book.” Another error is the publishing of photos of monuments from the New Kingdom period next to a lesson about the Old Kingdom.

The Education Ministry has been working hard since 2008 on developing the content and design of history schoolbooks, al-Qâdî says. But the plans came to a halt when the revolution began. Instead of adding a chapter about the revolution, educators need to revolutionize the approach beyond updating or adding exercises and activities. A new vision that is neither monolithic nor simplistically centered around the achievements of pharaohs, kings, presidents and leaders should be considered. Hopefully then students would not be quizzed on the achievements of King Zoser without learning about the architects and workmen involved in building the Saqqâra ziggurat. And they would also get a more complex understanding of contemporary history and events that is based on discussion and critical thinking. (Fatma Keshk, “Despite rich past, history fails to interest Egyptian students”, Egypt Independent, August 30, 2012).
As Germany celebrates the centennial of the discovery of Queen Nefertiti bust on 6 December — the day when it was discovered a hundred years ago — can Egypt wrench back such a unique bust? A century later and the dispute over its ownership have stepped from one level to another with no concrete solution in sight. Although Egypt provided all the documents supporting its ownership and that its German discoverer, Ludwig Borchardt, took it by fraud, Germany refuses all restitution requests proposed.

The story of the iconic bust began in 1912 at the archaeological dig of what was the workshop of king Akhenaton’s court sculptor, Thuthmosis, in the capital city of Amarna when German Egyptologist Borchardt and his team stumbled upon a magnificent painted stucco and limestone bust. Fond of its beauty, skilful carving and historical importance, Borchardt exerted all efforts to secure the bust for the German share. According to the antiquities law and regulation at that time all repeated and common spoils of any new discovery would be split between the Egyptian antiquities authority and the foreign mission concerned, while unique and distinguished artefacts must be placed in the Egyptian share.

The head of the International Union for the Preservation of heritage and former director of the Egyptian Museum, Wafâ’ al-Siddiq, told Ahram Online that according to documentation and, importantly, Borchardt’s own diary, he knew the importance of the artefact on the first day of the discovery: the Egyptologist clearly identified the bust as Nefertiti. Borchardt, however, described the bust in the division protocol as a gypsum (not limestone) statue of an unnamed princess of the royal family, although, again, he knew the real identity of the bust. With this nebulous description, the striking bust of the renowned beautiful Queen Nefertiti, wife of the monotheistic king Akhenaton, went to the German share. Furthermore, the bust remained undercover in Germany until 1924 when it first shown at the Egyptian Museum in Berlin.

Egypt began to demand the restitution of the bust and in 1925. Egypt threatened to ban German excavations in the country unless the Nefertiti bust was returned. In 1929 Egypt offered to exchange other artefacts for the Nefertiti bust, but Germany declined. The Egyptian government later made an attempt to have the bust returned, but Hitler, who had fallen in love with it, refused to return it. After World War II Egypt made a formal request to the Allied Control Council, who at that time was responsible for art objects in Germany. The Allied Control said they had not the authority to make this decision and recommended that Egypt petition for the bust again after a competent German government had been re-established. Egypt again tried to initiate negotiations in the 1950s, but there was no response from Germany.

In 2005 the dispute rose again to the surface when Zahi Hawwás, former minister of state for antiquities, asked for the bust’s return while speaking at a meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its countries of Origin. He also asked for the return of four other ancient Egyptian objects in addition to Nefertiti’s bust: the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum in London; the statue of the Great Pyramid architect Hemiunu in the Roemer-Pelizaeus Museum in Hileshenim; the Dendara Temple Zodiac in the Louvre in Paris and the
The bust of the Khafre Pyramid-builder Ankhaf in the Museum of Fine Art in Boston. Hawwâs renewed his request in 2006 but that time he asked for a three-month loan so it can be exhibited in the foyer of the planned Aten Museum in al-Minyâ where Akhenaton built his capital and monotheistic civilisation. The German government refused, saying that restorers had reservations about the viability of transporting the bust such a distance.

Appeal court judge and former legal consultant of the ministry of state for antiquities, Ashraf al-'Ashmâwî, who has followed the dispute since 2007, sees that such a request had "weakened" Egypt’s argument for recovering the bust because it implied Germany owned the bust. The Germans, he continued, did use that argument against Egypt. al-'Ashmâwî asserts, however, that Nefertiti's bust could still return to its homeland. Firstly, he says, the bust was smuggled illegally out of the country. Reports and documents found at the Swiss and German archaeological institutes in Cairo when the bust was discovered show that Forchert kept it in a box in his own residential tent at Amarna until January 1913 when the division process was carried out on site. This was in violation of antiquities Law No. 14 of the year 1912, which stipulated that the division must be held at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo — not on site.

The second violation, the attorney went on, took place during the division process in the presence of Gustave Lefebvre, the French expert of ancient language and papyri studies who was a representative of the Egyptian antiquities service at the time. al-'Ashmâwî claims the technical report attached reveals that the division process was marred by fraud on the part of the German mission before Lefebvre arrived, who was only briefed on the photograph of Nefertiti's bust and did not examine the object itself. The division protocol was entered as such after Forchert wrote, incorrectly, that the head was made of gypsum. The third violation, al-'Ashmâwî continued, was that Forchert did not publish the bust scientifically within the five-year grace period approved by law.

In 2009 the director of Berlin's Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection presented the Egyptians with a protocol signed by Forchert and the Egyptian antiquities service listing the artefact as a painted plaster bust of a princess. Again, however, Forchert clearly referred to the bust as the head of Nefertiti in his diary. "This document confirms Egypt’s contention that Forchert acted unethically with intent to deceive," al-'Ashmâwî concluded.

Ergy renewed its request for the return of the bust, using all the legal documents provided in 2009 and 2011, but the German side rejected Egypt’s repeated requests, insisting that Egypt had no grounds to demand its return and that even if Forchert had plotted to keep the bust, it would be the fault of the Egyptian officials for not being diligent enough to inspect the new discoveries. "But we still have the right to ask for it," al-'Ashmâwî asserts, adding: "We have all the legal tools that could make us win this battle. There is no provision in the UNESCO Convention 1970 or in Egyptian law that prevents the request for restitution of the Nefertiti bust."

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrahîm said that up until now the ministry had no plans to renew the restitution request. All the paperwork and documents relating to the case are under study and they are waiting for results. "If there is any solution to the conflict it will be offered," Ibrahîm said. "Egypt and Germany have a long friendship and strong political and industrial ties, as well as archaeological cooperation," Ibrahîm pointed out. (Nevine El-Aref, "100-year battle for the iconic Egyptian bust of Nefertiti", Ahram Online, September 1, 2012. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, "Germany to celebrate centennial of Nefertiti bust discovery", Ahram Online, August 27).

The Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) filed a complaint Saturday with the Prosecutor General implicating officials of the Cairo governorate in the encroachments on two
of Egypt’s archaeological and monumental landmarks. Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Muhsin Sayyid claims that the Cairo governorate is building wooden and metal kiosks for peddlers in the archaeological zone of the Museum of Royal Carriages in Bûlâq and Cairo’s Northern Islamic Wall in the Gamâliyya area. Speaking to Ahram Online in a telephone interview, Sayyid, described such construction work as a “disaster,” and asserted that “It is a great violence against two of Egypt’s magnificent monuments and a real threat to our heritage.”

Sayyid explains that although antiquities inspectors at both sites filed reports at the Bûlâq and Gamâliyya Police Stations two days ago against the Cairo Governor’s Deputy and head of both Middle and South Cairo districts, construction is quickly going ahead. He went on to complain about the aesthetics and lack of safety: the construction not only disfigures the panoramic view of both monuments but if a fire breaks out at these kiosks the whole museum and wall would become ashes.

The kiosks are ruins the panoramic view of both the Royal Carriage Museum (now undergoing restoration) and the Cairo Northern Wall, which is part of al-Mu’izz Street, an open-air museum of Islamic heritage. Both site’s buffer zones are being built upon, although they are protected by antiquities law no 117 for 1982 stipulating that every monument and archaeological site would be surrounded by an appropriate buffer zone. The MSA Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm formed an archaeological legal committee to take all legal procedures to stop any such constructions and to follow up on similar cases. (Nevine El-Aref, “Antiquities ministry fights peddler’s takeover of Egyptian archaeological sites”, Ahram Online, September 1, 2012. Voir également Amîna ’Urâbî, « Le CSA dépose des plaintes auprès du Procureur général contre le gouvernorat du Caire... », al-Badîl du 31 août ; Dinâ ’Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le Parquet enquête sur les empiètements commis contre le musée des carrosses royaux », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’ du 4 septembre).

Mardi 4 septembre 2012

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a annoncé que la Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) avait accepté de contribuer au financement du nouveau musée archéologique d’Hurghada. Cette déclaration survient au lendemain de la rencontre du ministre avec le directeur général de la JICA, ainsi que le directeur de son bureau au Caire. La délégation japonaise a examiné la maquette préliminaire du musée et a pris connaissance de l’importance de ce projet et de ses retombées à la fois culturelles et économiques. Par ailleurs, les deux côtés égyptiens et japonais ont passé en revue l’avancement des travaux du Grand Musée Égyptien dont l’inauguration est prévue en 2015. (Muhammad ’Abd al-Mu’tî, « La JICA participe au financement du musée d’Hurghada », al-Ahrâm du 4 septembre 2012).

Mercredi 5 septembre 2012

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a annoncé l’organisation de stages pratiques à l’attention des jeunes archéologues récemment embauchés dans les domaines des fouilles, de l’enregistrement et de la rédaction des rapports scientifiques nécessaires pour la documentation archéologique. Ces stages de formation, qui auront lieu à partir du 15 septembre à Qantara au siège du Centre scientifique pour les antiquités du Sinai, seront supervisés par le département des antiquités égyptiennes du CSA et financés par le projet de fouilles au Sinai. Rappelant que le ministère de l’Archéologie a embauché plus de 10 000 jeunes archéologues cette année en tant qu’inspecteurs et restaurateurs dans les différentes zones archéologiques à travers le pays.

Dans un communiqué de presse, Ibrâhîm a affirmé l’importance de ces programmes d’entraînement qui viennent enrichir les connaissances théoriques des diplomés par un savoir-faire pratique indispensable dans ce domaine. Chaque stage accueille 25 jeunes archéologues durant trois semaines à l’issue desquelles le stagiaire
obtient une attestation lui permettant de participer aux projets de fouilles et d’accompagner les missions archéologiques.

De son côté, Dr Muhammad ‘Abd al-Maqsûd précise que le CSA assumera tous les frais de ce programme : entraînement, séjour, indemnités de déplacement, etc. En outre, le stage comprend une série de conférences sur l’histoire des fouilles entreprises par le CSA sur plusieurs sites archéologiques. Trois sites à al-Qantara ont été sélectionnés pour servir de terrain pratique aux stages. Il s’agit d’Abû Sayfî, Tell Hibwa et Tell al-Farmâ. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le CSA lance son premier programme d’entraînement à l’attention des nouveaux archéologues », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 5 septembre 2012).

Jeudi 6 septembre 2012

In the area of the Sûq al-Khamîs (Thursday Market) in the district of Matariyya, an area that was once the capital city of Upper Egypt and remained a major religious centre throughout the history of ancient Egypt, a large bulldozer is ploughing up the surface and throwing aside some archaeological elements that have lain for thousands of years in the sand. The bulldozer, as Mahmûd ‘Affî, head of the Central Administration for Cairo and Gîza Antiquities, told Al-Ahram Weekly, was preparing the ground in compliance with an order from the Ministry of Endowments (ME) for the foundations of a large wall to surround the Sûq al-Khamîs, despite the fact that such disturbance of the ground is in total opposition to the antiquities law. ‘Affî went on to explain that although the area is on property owned by the ME, it falls under the supervision of the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) since it borders the neighbouring Matariyya archaeological site where the granite obelisk of the Middle Kingdom King Senusert I is situated, along with a number of ancient Egyptian tombs and statues.

When the ‘Ayn Shams inspectorate learnt about the incident, ‘Affî said, it made a complaint to the area police station to halt the destruction that was being perpetrated. At that point all work stopped, but unfortunately the bulldozer damaged a large number of artefacts, among which was part of a New Kingdom stela showing a list of offerings offered by the ancient Egyptians in their religious rituals.

MSA Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm described the newly discovered stela as extremely important since it could reveal more of the secrets of this mysterious site, which was used over a long time of the ancient Egyptian and Coptic eras. He said that the part of the stele that had been rescued was the right side, and depicting a complete illustrated list of many of the offerings presented to the deities, namely geese, vegetables, fruit, bread and cattle. Lotus flowers are also depicted, as well as a hieorglyphic text with a poem of worship for the deities. An immediate rescue operation was launched to save the objects in the pit that had been dug and transfer them to the storage facility for restoration and research.

‘Affî insisted that the ME has broken the law because it should not have attempted
any construction work on the property without the approval of the MSA and under its supervision. Second, he continued, any digging to lay foundations had to be carried out manually and not with a bulldozer. All work has now stopped until an investigation is completed. “What happened is really a great loss of Egypt’s ancient heritage.”

Târiq Tawfîq, a lecturer at the Faculty of Archaeology at Cairo University, told the Ahram Weekly. He said the Matariyya site contained under the sand many secrets from the Middle Kingdom, a very important era of ancient Egyptian history about which we know relatively little. “I am really disappointed because the area is a bit neglected and it deserves more care,” Tawfîq said. He pointed out that Matariyya was the site of ancient Heliopolis, which was the capital city of the 13th Nome of Upper Egypt and one of the main religious centres for the worship of the sun god Re throughout the span of the ancient Egyptian civilisation. The ancient city expanded over a vast area that included the whole of modern Matariyya; Athar al-Nabî, south of Old Cairo; and Gabal al-Ahmar, a quarry for dark red quartzite, a type of stone associated with the sun god. “The exact boundaries of the city in the various historical periods are not yet clear and still require a lot of excavation,” Tawfîq said.

The importance of the city as a religious centre starts as early as the Old Kingdom, and remains have been discovered of a shrine dating from the reign of Third-Dynasty King Djoser as well as a part of an obelisk from the time of King Teti of the Fifth Dynasty. During the Middle Kingdom the sun temples of the city saw much building activity and were embellished with huge granite statues, some of which have appeared in recent excavations at the area of the Sûq al-Khamîls. One of the landmarks of Matariyya is the obelisk of the Twelfth-Dynasty king Senusert I, which means that the area could still provide valuable information about the Middle Kingdom, a rich era of ancient Egyptian history, which still needs much research. So far, comparatively few monuments from this period have been excavated. (Nevine El-Aref, “Digging up the past”, Ahram Weekly, September 6, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Découverte fortuite d’une stèle datant du Nouvel Empire dans le quartier de Matariyya », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 4 septembre ; Reuters, « Découverte d’une stèle pharaonique à Matariyya », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 4 septembre ; MENA, « Le hasard conduit à la découverte d’une stèle antique dans le quartier de Matariyya », al-Misriyyûn du 4 septembre ; Reuters, « Le hasard mène à la découverte d’une stèle pharaonique dans un quartier populaire du Caire », al-Shurûq du 4 septembre ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu‘tî, « Une stèle archéologique exhumée à Matariyya », al-Ahrâm du 5 septembre ; Nevine El-Aref, "Building blunder prompts discovery of pharaonic stele in Cairo", Ahram Online, September 11 ; Amîna ‘Urâbî, « Le CSA découvre une stèle du Nouvel Empire dans le quartier de Matariyya », al-Bâdîl du 11 septembre ; ‘Alâ’ al-Dîn Zâhir « Mise au jour d’une stèle antique à Matariyya », Ruz al-Yûsuf, 12 septembre).


Last Wednesday, al-Azhar Street was as crowded as usual, and as it always will be. Vehicles of various sizes were pushing their way along the street; peddlars were calling out their wares and pedestrians wove in and out of traffic as they crossed the road. I gazed up at the awe-inspiring Mamluk dome of al-Chûrî, and set off on my exploration to find Benjamin’s tomb. My guide was tour agent hâb Mâlik, who found out about the tomb by chance. The
noise in al-Azhar Street followed us as we walked into the alleyway beside the al-Ghûrî dome. After almost 20 minutes of stepping out of one alley into another, a modest, honey striped building with three long mashrabiyya (woodwork) windows appeared. On top of one of the windows was a wooden plaque engraved with Kufic characters spelling out that this was the mausoleum of Muhammad Sudon al-Qasrâwî. On a second window was another plaque labelling it as the mausoleum of Muhammad Shihâb al-Dîn, while the third window, painted green, bore a plaque with these words: “The mausoleum of Benjamin, brother of the Prophet Joseph.”

I went around the building and stared through the windows, trying to catch a glimpse of what lay inside. Would I see Benjamin’s tomb or sarcophagus? Through the holes of the broken mashrabiyya I realised that the building was in a very dishevelled state. Heaps of rubble and sand were piled on the floor, and the walls and decorated wooden bars engraved with Islamic texts were scattered all over the place. According to Mâlik, Benjamin’s tomb is typically an ancient Egyptian tomb with a treasured collection of pharaonic objects and gold coins depicting Joseph’s name and facial features, and these would help Egyptologists uncover the mystery of an era referred to in the Torah, the Bible and the Quran but never, ever mentioned in ancient Egyptian history.

Now I know that the first coins were not minted until about the seventh century BC, and that the ancient Egyptians did not use them in their financial transactions and instead exchanged goods, but Mâlik’s enthusiasm and his belief in his story led me for a moment to doubt my own wisdom. I asked lawyer and local resident Muhammad Diyâb what he thought about the tomb. “What a great loss!” he said. “I feel sorry that only mosque is being neglected like this when it actually houses Benjamin’s tomb.”

Diyâb said that nothing had happened there in five years. The mosque was closed to worshippers and was in a very bad condition. “I have made several complaints to both the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) and the Ministry of Endowments and asked them to rescue and restore the mosque and mausoleums, but nothing has happened.” Both ministries, he continued, were fighting each other to decide who would fund the restoration work, and the victim was the building.

“I locked the mosque and kept the key with me so as to prevent a robbery,” I was told by Husayn Diyâb, who owns a barber’s adjacent to the mosque. He says that three years ago a contractor, ’Âdîl ’Urâbî, came on site and claimed that he had been assigned by the Ministry of Endowments to restore the mosque and mausoleums. “’Urâbî came several times to inspect the site and started removing the ground floor of the mosque and some parts of the ceiling and columns,” Diyâb, the barber, told me. “One day, while I was admiring the restoration that had been carried out, I realised that the minbar [pulpit] was missing. When I asked ’Urâbî where it was, he said he had taken it along with other parts of the mosque because it was scrap and all the pieces would be replaced with new ones.” The pulpit was previously used in the Husayn Mosque on al-Azhar Street, and was renovated eight years ago with a budget of LE36,000 financed by wealthy local residents. It was a decorated wooden pulpit inlaid with ivory.

Diyâb agreed to open the mosque to show me the extent of the damage. The interior of the mosque is totally ruined. Most of the columns are inclined or broken; the ceiling almost does not exist; while the floor is covered with rubble and sand which make it hard to tread on and walk through the rooms. The mosque consists of an open colonnaded court surrounded by four side rooms, three of which are empty while the fourth houses the mausoleum of Muhammad Ibn Sudon al-Qasrâwî, a top government official during the reigns of the Mamluk sultans Inâl and Qâytbây.

The mausoleum, or the dome as the MSA calls it, was built in 1468 AD to be the burial place for al-Qasrâwî. It consists of a tiny lobby leading to a small square room with a vaulted ceiling and a dome. The dome’s 16 windows are decorated with foliage decoration. Inside the room is a marble sarcophagus with two tombstones inscribed with Kufic calligraphy. The texts consist of Quranic verses, the name of the deceased, his various titles and the date of his birth and death. The room is a real mess; full of dust, broken windows and book shelves as well as engraved wooden plates that have fallen off the walls.
The secretary-general of the MSA, Muhsin Sayyid, told Al-Ahram Weekly that the mosque and mausoleum had been restored twice; the first time during the reign of Khedive ‘Abbâs Hilîmî II and the second in the 1970s by the Arab Antiquities Committee. Three years ago, Sayyid said, the MSA “consolidated the mausoleum and dome” as they were an Islamic monument registered on Egypt’s Islamic heritage list, but not the mosque, which came under the umbrella of the Ministry of Endowments because it was not a monument. According to official regulations, Sayyid explained, the endowments provided the budget and assigned the restoration contractor, while the MSA supervised the work, especially the restoration carried out at the mausoleum and dome of al-Qasrâwî.

But where was Benjamin’s tomb? I searched all over the building and found nothing except the coffin of al-Qasrâwî, damaged walls and floors and empty rooms. I was disappointed. Then Diyâb pointed to a very small, empty room and said, "Here it is." I went inside and saw nothing. Diyâb laughed and told me that the room was known as the clergymen’s room, and the tomb was under the floor. He went on to say that every sheikh during the last century had spent a night in the room had reported hearing voices speaking to him at night and had noticed a very pleasant aroma of incense, which supported the idea that the tomb of Benjamin lay beneath them. Diyâb had told me that residents of the area said that all the treasures in Benjamin’s funerary collection had been stolen except for the body and the sarcophagus, because some people wanted to hide important historical evidence that could, he said, change the record of ancient Egyptian history.

"This is totally untrue," Sayyid said. He insisted that there was nothing under the mosque apart from the foundations — and the stories concerning Benjamin’s tomb were mere “imagination and fairy tales”. So why this “legend” is so popular and well known, and why do people in the neighbourhood believe the story? By searching on the Internet and asking Egyptologists, I found a study published in 2007 by professor of gynaeology Sa’îd Thâbit, head of the Antiquities Lovers Association at Cairo University. This research seemed to be the source of the stories of Benjamin’s tomb.

Thâbit’s study claimed that the tomb of Benjamin, the youngest brother of Joseph, had been located underneath the foundations of an Islamic mosque called al-Du’a at al-Batniyya behind al-Azhar Mosque. He explained that he had reached this conclusion through an ancient Egyptian papyrus named “Land of Peace”, which pinpointed the area where the Jews lived after they arrived in Egypt, at about the time of Joseph and Moses. He claimed that the area mentioned in the papyrus was in al-Batniyya behind al-Azhar Mosque, and ran towards the Rum and Jews’ alleyways.

Thâbit claimed that Joseph’s palace once stood in al-Hidan al-Musell Street in al-Batniyya, where the Tudors Monastery, the Church of the Virgin the Rescuer (al-‘Adhrâ al-Mughîtha), al-Du’a Mosque and al-Qasrâwî Mausoleum stand now. He said that the imam of the mosque told him that the tombs of both Benjamin and Joseph were inside the mosque, but that Joseph’s tomb did not contain a body. Benjamin’s tomb, he said, was similar to those of ancient Egyptians and contained funerary objects such as amulets, scarabs and “gold coins”. This piece of information, the imam claimed, was written in hieroglyphic text on a wooden plaque in the mosque, but for unknown reasons it had vanished after excavation work was carried out in 1994. In the study, Thâbit wrote that the coins found within the tomb of Benjamin were amulet shaped and depicted the face of Joseph — whose ancient Egyptian name was Zafini — on one side and his cartouche on the other.

“All this is nonsense and has no historical or archaeological basis,” Ahmad Sa’îd, professor of ancient Egyptian civilisation in the Faculty of Archaeology at Cairo University told the Weekly. He went on to say that, moreover, “we don’t have, from near or far,” any document, papyrus or even a tomb scene that mentions the name of Joseph or Moses or any prophet of the Torah, Bible or Quran. The individuals who wrote down ancient Egyptian history were from the royal palace, and they were too loyal to their pharaohs. “They would never, ever dare to write what contradict their kings’ will or religious concept,” Sa’îd said. “What supports my point of view is that the monotheistic pharaoh Akhenaten was removed from the kings’ list engraved on a wall at Pharaoh Seti I’s temple in Abydos because he called for the worship of one god, Aten,” he.
(... He insisted that no such coin had ever been found bearing the name of Zafini or Joseph, as it was claimed. The ancient Egyptians never used coins in their transactions, they only bartered goods for goods. "They didn’t know about coins until the 29th Dynasty of the Late Period when they had extensive trade with Cyprus." These coins, Sa’îd explained, were very simple and plain. The name of the king was on one side, and his likeness on the obverse. "According to the Bible and the Quran, the 29th Dynasty was presumably a very distant period from that of Joseph and Moses," he said. Sa’îd said people should not believe any studies or research on such an issue unless there was archaeological and scientific evidence. (Nevine El-Aref, “The youngest son”, Al-Ahram Weekly, September 6, 2012).

Today, the Antiquities Unite at Burg al-‘Arab airport in Alexandria succeeded to abort two smuggling attempts of a large collection of authentic coins. The authentic coins were packed in two parcels mixed with a collection of commemorative coins within the luggage of two Egyptians who are travelling to Gheda and Dammam in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad ‘Alî eras. They are now at the ministry restoration labs for restoration and then put on display at the Islamic museum. (Nevine El-Aref, “MSA aborted two foiled smuggling attempts of authentic coins”, Ahram Online, September 6, 2012. Voir également Muna Yâsîn, « Le CSA déjoue une tentative d’exportation illicite de 1 080 pièces de monnaies vers l’Arabie Saoudite », al-Masri al-Yawm du 6 septembre ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Échec d’une tentative d’exporter 1 080 pièces antiques vers l’Arabie Saoudite », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 6 septembre).

The State Council Administrative Court on Saturday ordered the government to take the necessary procedures to recover 179 artefacts that belonged to Queen Cleopatra from the United States. The artefacts had been sent to be displayed at a number of private exhibitions between 1 April 2010 and 3 July 2013. Former Prime Minister Ahmad Nazîf had issued a decree to display the artefacts in the United States, based on an individual agreement signed by Zâhî Hawwâs, the former head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities; the National Geographic Society, owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch; and two other American associations. The court ruled that the agreement is a violation of Article 10 of the Antiquities Protection Act, which prohibits contracts with private foreign societies to display antiquities outside Egypt.

The case documents show that the Supreme Council of Antiquities signed a contract with the Ohio International Arts and Exhibitions Foundation, the National Geographic Society in Washington and the Exhibition foundation in Los Angeles to display a number of Egyptian artefacts in five US cities in return for an amount of US$ 1.250 million. The documents, the court says, do not show the approval of the president for the agreement. In addition, the bodies that had been contracted are private institutions and are not considered museums or scientific institutes as defined by the Antiquities Protection Act.

The court noted, therefore, that the
conditions for the display of Egyptian antiquities abroad have not been met, and thus sending the antiquities abroad was illegal. The court described the incident as a serious matter calling for immediate remedy, because the damage or loss of such artefacts would be irreparable. ("Administrative court orders recovery of 179 artefacts from US", Egypt Independent, September 8, 2012. Voir également Âmir Khamîs, « Le tribunal administratif oblige le ministre de l’Archéologie et le gouvernement de récupérer 179 pièces antiques exposées à l’étranger », al-Misriyyûn du 8 septembre ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Nûr ‘Abd al-Sâbi’ et du temple de la déesse Bastet. Dr ‘Abd al-Halîm a annoncé l’achèvement des deux premières phases de titularisation des 16 165 CDD au sein de son ministère. 9 065 CDD ont d’ores et déjà étaient titularisés dans différents postes. Le reste le sera au cours de la IIIe phase programmée dans les prochains mois. Le ministre a précisé que 3 000 jeunes diplômés viennent d’être embauchés, les primes des employés ont été augmentées de 420 %, malgré la lourde charge financière que représentent ces embauches et les

Mardi 11 septembre 2012


Jeudi 13 septembre 2012

In an attempt to push forward Egypt’s tourism industry, Prime Minister Hishâm Qandîl has formed a new ministerial committee comprised of the tourism, endowments and antiquities ministries. The committee will draw up a comprehensive strategy to promote Egypt as a distinguished tourist destination. Muhammad Ibrâhîm, minister of state for antiquities, said that responsibility for raising the tourism industry should not be thrown only on the shoulders of the Ministry of Tourism but should also be borne by all who work in the tourism field and associated industries. “Reinvigorating Egypt’s tourism industry is a national priority that requires coordinated efforts,” Ibrâhîm said. Members of the new committee will meet every month to discuss developments in the industry and to find ways to resolve any problems that surface. (Nevine El-Aref, “Committee to promote tourism established”, Ahram Online, September 13, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « Coopération entre les ministères de
**Vendredi 14 septembre 2012**


Le président de la République, Dr Muhammad Mursî, a émis un décret présidentiel obligant le ministère de l’Archéologie à verser 20 % de ses revenus annuels à l’État. Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, relève que son ministère fonctionne sur l’auto-financement, ne perçoit aucun soutien financier de l’État, assume tout seul les frais d’embauche des jeunes diplômés, la titularisation des employés, le versement de leurs salaires, en plus du versement de 10 % de ses propres revenus au ministère de la Culture.


Dimanche 16 septembre 2012

Final restoration work is now in full swing at Egypt’s famous Saqqâra Necropolis, home of King Djoser’s iconic Step Pyramid and a collection of Old Kingdom mastabas and tombs. Soon, tombs of Sixth Dynasty Chief of Justice Mereruka and Fifth Dynasty Vizier Ptahhotep, along with the Apis tombs of the Serapeum, will be open to the public. After more than six years of restoration, during which underground water was pumped out of the three tombs, cracked walls and ceilings have been repaired. Wall paintings and engravings have also been cleaned and restored. A visitors’ centre that relates the history of the Saqqâra Necropolis and the monuments it houses through documentaries and photos is now in the final stages of construction. A new road has also been prepared to facilitate tourists visiting the necropolis’ precincts. “Opening these tombs at the Saqqâra Necropolis represents a great success, as it will attract more tourists to one of Egypt’s most important ancient sites,” Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm told Ahram online.

(...) On the northern side of Teti I’s Pyramid stands the mastaba tomb of Mereruka, king Teti’s vizier and chief justice minister. His tomb represents Saqqâra’s largest nobleman’s tomb, illustrating his exalted position during the reign of Sixth Dynasty King Teti. This tomb was discovered in 1892 by French Egyptologist Jaques DE MORGAN. It bears excellent ancient Egyptian reliefs showing different aspects of Old Kingdom life and customs. The tomb held the remains of Mereruka, his wife Seshsheshet and their son Meriteti. Ibrâhîm said that the tomb’s walls were intricately decorated with scenes depicting Mereruka in different poses with deities and family members, and during his
frequent hunting and fishing trips. Among the most striking reliefs is one portraying a hippopotamus hunt and fowling expeditions in the marshlands. Old Kingdom crafts and industry are also depicted, including scenes showing carpenters, sculptors, vase-makers, metalworkers and jewellers at work.

The tomb of Ptahhotep, city administrator and vizier of Fifth Dynasty King Dkedkare Isesi, is the third tomb to be opened in the Saqqâra Necropolis since it was discovered in 1850 by MARIETTE. This tomb was documented by Norman de Garis DAVIDES at the beginning of the last century. The tomb also houses the burial chambers of Petahotep and his father Akhethotep. It bears outstanding reliefs depicting both viziers in different positions with attendant family members and deities. Rich with original scenes, the tomb combines the precision of attentive observation with that of remarkable craftsmanship. It consists of an entrance with a two-pillar portico, which leads to a corridor decorated with paintings depicting agricultural activities presided over by Akhethotep and his son Petahotep. (Nevine El-Aref, “Three monuments set to re-open in Egypt’s Saqqâra Necropolis”, Ahram Online, September 16, 2012. Voir également MENA, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie inaugure des sites archéologiques à Saqqâra », al-Misriyyûn du 18 septembre).

Sayyid Hasan considers the Egyptian Museum to have many roles. First and foremost to inform people about ancient Egyptian history. During a visit to the museum people can learn what the ancients knew about the body and how they used surgery. They can find information about how important statues were to the ancients, how these sculptures were made, the use and forms of their coffins, and how much and in which form the ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. Besides the educational aspect of the museum, Hasan also stressed that people come to have a nice time and that providing this to visitors is an integral part of the job of the people that work in there.

When asked about the relationship of the visitors to the museum, Hasan said that it means different things to different people. Some visitors come to see ancient art while others interested in science come to see the mummies. The museum is home to a wealth of artifacts and offers something for everyone, regardless of their specific interest; the 5,000 pieces of pure gold found in Tutankhamun’s tomb are one of the highlights of a visit for example, as is the large collection of items that shows how ordinary people lived.

Curating such a diverse collection is a challenge and Hasan explains that how you present a museum dictates what kind of visitors you will receive. It is important to show
the purpose of the museum, and that behind all pieces there is history, science, art and religion. The museum was built to house three or four curators, with five or six security guards and 8,000 pieces. Currently the museum hosts 70 Egyptologists, a laboratory that can hold 40 restorers, and over 120,000 artifacts. One of the difficulties the current location is that there is no space for lectures, as it was not built with that purpose in mind.

The museum is a place that displays how the ancients lived through different ages. The pyramids at Giza relate to 200 years of history, while the temples and tombs in Luxor and Aswān show different period of time, and the pyramids of Saqqāra yet another. In the museum all of these eras are brought together and generate a unique timeline of history.

To create a modern environment that offers space for the complete collection, plans were made 15 years ago to move the museum to a new location near the pyramids at Giza. At the new location two new museums are planned, the Grand Museum and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. The latter will cover all four periods of Egyptian history: Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Coptic, and Islamic. However the plans for are taking a long time to eventuate; opening dates have been mentioned as far back as 2000 and the current expected date of delivery is 2015.

The current Egyptian Museum is unique as it was the first building to be built specifically as a museum in 1902. It was the first museum to have a collection of Egyptian artifacts and it has the largest collection of these in the world. Hasan discussed other, modern museums around the world and highlighted their merits. At the Louvre the glass pyramid and the way they sell tickets is very innovative, yet he felt the museum itself is laid out in a classical way. He mentioned how the Metropolitan has good ways of exhibiting pieces that are not complete, by showing how the piece as a whole might look, and how museums in Germany use CAT scanning to imagine how someone might have looked. Hasan feels that the new museums will be able to make their mark. He intends that the collection will show that although there are the differences in life between then and now, the people here are still Egyptian and still the same kind of people in the way they have been created.

The restoration laboratories in the new museums are already finished and the museum will exhibit pieces without restoration if they can. If, for example, a statue is missing a limb but can still stand up the museum will exhibit the piece as it is. On the other hand, if it is an ugly piece that is still important historically, the museum will choose to make certain compromises. Hasan feels that the designs of the new museums will ensure they will be comparable to other world-class museums.

The revolution has had a significant effect on the amount of visitors of the museum. Before the revolution 10,000 visitors entered the large building daily, while now only 2,500 people purchase a daily ticket. The museum is open from nine am to seven pm, with each visit lasting on average one and a half hours. There is ample space to roam around and visit the exhibitions you are interested in. The percentage of Egyptian visitors has increased from 20 to nearly 40 percent since the revolution, but this is most likely because of the decline of foreign tourism in the last period of time. The museum is funded by the Ministry of Antiquities and some additional projects are run by archaeology institutes of countries such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in conjunction with the Ministry of Antiquities. (Rachel Adams, "The Egyptian Museum: a timeline of history", Daily News Egypt, September 16, 2012).

The Matariyya archaeological site at Cairo University on Tuesday has been cleared of rubble and construction materials by the Tourism and Antiquities Police. A mud brick
Wall, the foundations of houses, and materials used in the construction of new properties was removed from the area around King Merneptah’s pillar. The site was once a major religious centre in ancient Egypt. “This is the first step in a long series of attempts to end all encroachment on archaeological sites and monuments throughout the country,” Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm said. Security would also be improved, he added. Over the last year a lack of security measures at archaeological sites in Matariyya, Bûlāq and Ḥurrî among others have led to encroachment. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt police move to protect Merneptah’s pillar in Matariyya”, Ahram Online, September 18, 2012. Voir également Dinâ Abd al-Allîm, « Retrait des empiètements sur le site de Matariyya avec la collaboration du ministère de l’Intérieur », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 18 septembre).

Mercredi 19 septembre 2012


Selon le professeur, les souffrances des monuments islamiques ont commencé il y a 60 ans avec la Révolution de 1952. À cette époque, les édifices islamiques n’avaient aucune valeur pour les autorités égyptiennes. « Les plus belles wakâlas comme celle d’al-Ghûrî ont été dissimulées avec des planches de bois », raconte l’expert avec amertume. Et lorsqu’il a été décidé de les réutiliser, toujours pendant l’époque nassérienne, le ministre de la Culture, Tharwat ‘Ukâsha, a transformé certains édifices en centres d’art. « Au sein des édifices religieux étaient célébrés des festivals qui comprenaient des programmes de danse. Ce genre artistique, respecté certes, ne pouvait être tenu dans un dôme par exemple », reprend le professeur. Ces activités ne convenaient pas à la fonction originelle de ces constructions islamiques.


Même la réhabilitation de la rue al-Mu’izz est malmenée : elle a été envahie par des véhicules et des marchands ambulants depuis la révolution. Pire encore, « Le Caire islamique n’est pas sur la carte touristique. Le visiteur n’y voit que la mosquée Muhammad ‘Alî à la Citadelle, Khân al-Khalîlî, les pyramides et s’il a du temps il visite Saqqâra. Où est Le Caire fatimide dans cette tournée ? », se demande le professeur avec ironie. Et d’ajouter : « Les habitants de ces sites historiques ne s’y intéressent pas, car ils ignorent la valeur des édifices qui les entourent et aussi parce qu’ils n’en profitent pas ». 

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Face à cet état déplorable des sites islamiques et dans le but de les préserver, le CIERA, en coopération avec le CSA, a organisé le séminaire en question. Selon le professeur, les monuments islamiques doivent être réutilisés d’une manière adéquate. Par exemple, la fontaine du sultan Mustafa, qui se dresse majestueusement en face de la mosquée Sayyida Zaynab, a été restaurée par l’architecte polonaise Dobrowolska et financée par l’ambassade hollandaise. Elle pourrait reprendre sa fonction en l’enrichissant de réfrigérateurs现代. De même, les wakâlas et les rubû’ pourraient être transformés en points de repos touristiques avec service de sandwiches et de boissons chaudes ou froides. « Grâce à leur ancienneté et leur localisation, les prix des billets de ces lieux doivent être plus élevés que les hôtels modernes », reprend le professeur. Les bimâristâns ou les hôtels, répandus à l’époque islamique, comme celui de Barqûq et qui se dressent toujours dans Le Caire fatimide, pourraient retrouver leur splendeur en les enrichissant de statues représentatives pour incarner les activités qui les animaient à leur époque. Le touriste visitera alors non seulement un monument, mais il verra aussi la splendeur de la civilisation islamique incarnée.

"Port Said has a remarkable cultural and architectural heritage that no one cares about," says Walîd Muntasir, the general coordinator of the campaign. "Every building has a unique style; the history goes back to Greek or the Italian architects who lived in the city in the 19th century.” Muntasir explains that the importance of this building comes from its unique wooden architecture, with wooden arcades and façades that are more than four stories high, the likes of which cannot be found in any other country in the world. This building also features a bust of the initial owner of the house, as well as busts of his wife and children, carved on each of the arches. "Destroying such buildings will open the door for other contractors and investors who want to replace these historical buildings with others to make money," Muntasir says.

Several groups have been joining forces to protect the city’s heritage. At the protest on Thursday, members of Tawâsul, an association for protecting Port Said’s artistic and cultural heritage, convened alongside members of the Port Said Writers and Artists Association, the Alliance Française, the Port Said Businesswomen Association and the Islamic Arts and Archaeology Association. The controversy started a year ago, when a group of investors bought the building from its original owner, Gerges Abdel Rabbo. The investors began offering compensation to the building’s residents to get them to leave, says Maryam Ismâ’il Abû al-‘Aynayn, the owner of a furniture gallery in the building. "When I refused to leave..."
my shop, they brought a restoration permit, claiming that they will repair the building from the inside. However, when they entered, they started destroying the building by breaking the stairs and removing the windows. I called the police immediately and they came and saw the deliberate sabotage and documented it in a police report,” Abû al-’Aynayn told Egypt Independent.

Abû al-’Aynayn has also sent complaints to the governor of Port Said, the minister of culture and the National Organization for Urban Harmony to take action, but to no avail. She explains that the head of Eastern Port Said district sent a committee to examine the building, but the committee reported that no damage was done to the building. Three months later, the investors succeeded to obtain a demolition permit. “We have all the documents and police reports that guarantee our rights, but no one listens to us,” she says. “It’s a big mafia, and we accuse the authorities, especially those people of the Eastern Port Said district, of corruption and taking bribes to help investors take down the building.”

Pierre ALFARROBA, the director of Alliance Française de Port Said — an organization that has been strongly involved in the campaign — links the ongoing problems also to a decades-old rent control policy. “[This] is the main thing that will doom the heritage of Port Said,” ALFARROBA says, adding that “if you have the most beautiful place in the world and you get LE40 every month out of it, I can’t blame you for thinking of demolishing it as [owners] don’t even have the money for required maintenance and repairs of these old buildings.” “The government must find a solution that can benefit the owners of those buildings and the tenants who can’t pay thousands of pounds for an apartment,” he adds.

According to ALFARROBA, everything in Port Said, including culture, has turned into a business. The old theatres have been converted into shops, and most of the historical places that used to serve the community — such as the Greek and Italian schools — have been abandoned, although they enjoy prime locations at the heart of the city. People “don’t have enough awareness about the rich cultural history of the city and the authorities do not accept any assistance we offer,” he concludes. (Rana Khaled, “NGOs and activists protest to save the architecture of Port Said”, Egypt Independent, September 21, 2012).
A security guard has been detained over the theft of a star-shaped bronze decoration bearing the name of Sultan Barqûq that was stolen from the entrance gate of the Sultan Farag Ibn Barqûq funerary complex in al-Mu‘izz Street. The guard has been charged with dereliction of duty. The theft highlights the lack of security at historical and archaeological sites, especially those from the Islamic period. This is the first theft to occur at the Sultan Ibn Barqûq funerary complex, which is considered one of the most distinguished of all the Islamic monuments in Cairo, but it is the eighth in a line of recent thefts from Islamic monuments. The Rifâ‘î Mosque, Qubbat Afandînâ and Inâl al-Yûsufi have all been victims, to mention only a few.

Police say the guard of the Ibn Barqûq funerary complex left his position at prayer time last Friday to go to the mosque. On his return he was astonished to see that the decorative copper centrepiece had been removed from the entrance gate. He called the Tourism and Antiquities Police who came immediately to inspect the theft, but they were unable to ascertain who had taken the object. The guard was taken into custody for investigation and was subsequently accused of negligence in deserting his post.

In response to the incident, archaeologist Imân ‘Abd al-Fattâh, currently on leave from the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), told Al-Ahram Weekly: “Sadly, the recent theft at the Complex of Sultan Barqûq is not garnering the outrage and press that it deserves. While such incidents of theft predate the revolution, they have become all too frequent since.” She said that if Barqûq was not an ancient monument, it was still an archaeological site that had been irreversibly violated. If sites are not looted, they are enveloped in a veil of ugliness. “I feel particularly sad because I spent five years of my life working with these treasures, and a year on these very doors,” ‘Abd al-Fattâh said.

The chairman of NADIM Industries, Adham Nadîm, who with his father was responsible for the restoration of the Bayt al-Suhaymî in the Darb al-Asfar district off al-Mu‘izz Street, posted on his Facebook wall that he, “Can’t sleep after hearing such news”. He said it was “unjustifiable, unacceptable for this to go on”. Nadîm continued: “This is no coincidence, nor is this an isolated event. This is part of a daily-organised crime campaign against our cultural heritage covering all periods of our history. One might have expected mass outrage and heavy media coverage. I would have liked to see an official statement by the minister, if not the PM.” Nadîm says there should be an official international ban on selling stolen artefacts, as well as on exhibiting them in any exhibition or museum in the future. “The world must know that we are taking notice,” he says.

He described the mosque and madrasa (religious school) of Sultan Barqûq, built in 1386, as a monument that had defied the passage of time for six and a quarter centuries. “Barqûq used what were then state-of-the-art doors for his monument”, Nadîm said. “No effort was spared; no material or technique was not stretched to its limits to create a time capsule as a testament to those glorious times.” He added that the Egyptian people had lived with the pieces that had gone missing for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. “It is terrible that we have to see live through this tragic time of not being able to hold on to our past. This is typical of a nation suffering from Alzheimer’s.”

Nadîm wonders how this situation was reached, and how to get out of it. “How did we arrive at the collective who cares about our
“heritage?” he says. Nadîm says that the state is setting a bad example when it wipes off the graffiti documenting the events of the past 17 months from downtown Cairo in an attempt to erase history. “It is this same spirit that justifies the illegal trade of the soul of a nation,” he claims. “Obviously there is a market and price for what we were and what we culturally created. I feel that the Egyptian soul has lost a part.” He hopes the people who steal the country’s heritage know what they have and take good care of it until, someday, it comes back. “I wish I was in a position to make a call for action,” Nadîm lamented.

In a telephone interview the secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), Muhsin Sayyid ‘Alî, told the Weekly that the guard was still in custody for negligence and an investigation was taking place. To put an end to the problem of constant thefts and the charges of lack of responsibility flung to and fro between the Ministry of State for Antiquities and the Ministry of Endowments, ‘Alî announced that a private security agency would be appointed to safeguard the historic mosques all over Egypt. As a first step, ‘Alî said, 76 of the 128 historic mosques in Cairo would be safeguarded. He said that a bid had been tendered to select the most suitable security agency to take on the job. The guards’ salaries would be shared equally between the MSA and the Ministry of Endowments.

The Ibn Barqûq complex was built in 1384 by the first “tower” or Burgi Mamluk sultan, who ruled from 1382 to 1399. At that time the northern cemetery was nothing but a desert, and Farag Ibn Barqûq took the decision to develop it to meet a wish of his father. This complex includes a sabîl-kuttâb (water fountain and Quran school) and a mausoleum where Barqûq’s son ‘Abd al-‘Azîz and one of his daughters are buried. Farag Ibn Barqûq himself was not buried there, as he was killed in Syria at an early age and was buried there. The complex also houses a khanqa, or living quarters for Sufi mystics, the façade has a distinctive stone entrance of black and white marble, a plain cupola, narrow recessed panels that frame the windows and an octagonal minaret with three balconies. The offset entrance has bronze-plated doors inlaid with polygonal silver designs, and Barqûq’s name appears on a central star. (Nevine El-Aref, “Stealing from a historic mosque”, Al-Ahram Weekly, September 27, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ‘Alîm, « Vol du complexe archéologique de Barqûq », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’ du 16 septembre).

The long gallery of the Apis bull tombs lined with niches of sarcophagi

The centre of activity at the Saqqâra necropolis last Thursday was the area on the north-western side of Djoser’s Step Pyramid. A huge, white air-conditioned tent was erected in the parched desert to welcome dozens of foreign and Egyptian journalists, photographers and TV presenters together with governmental officials, archaeologists and restorers as they witnessed the official inauguration of the gallery of Apis tombs known as the Serapeum.

The Serapeum, for long one of the main tourist attractions at Saqqâra, has been closed to the public since 1986. No tourists have been allowed to wander awestruck through the splendid rock-hewn tomb chambers, each with a huge sarcophagus that once held the remains of a sacred Apis bull. One began to wonder when, if ever, the Serapeum, would reopen and it would again be possible to meander along the 200-metre corridors flanked by 64 vaulted burial chambers with granite, limestone and sandstone sarcophagi.

The Serapeum tombs were excavated between 1851 and 1854 by French archaeologist Auguste MARIETTE. He discovered the two parts of the Serapeum: the Simple Vaults that contained the tombs of the Apis bulls from the period of the Eighteenth to the Twenty-sixth Dynasties (these were later buried in sand and remained covered for more than 100 years, and are currently still under restoration); and the Great Vaults, which were open to the public until 1986 and have now been restored. The Great Vaults consist of a long corridor lined with 24 vaulted Apis bull tombs still with granite sarcophagi and date from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty to the Graeco-
Roman Period.

A vaulted tomb consolidated with iron shields

(...) “Throughout different eras the fragile nature of the rock in which the Serapeum was carved has suffered various stages of deterioration,” says Husayn Fahmi, a former professor of engineering at Ayn Shams University who drew up the restoration plan at the Serapeum. He explained that in the 1980s, when steps were taken to develop the Saqqara Plateau with paths and a rest house with all necessary facilities, the quantity of water used for these operations seeped into the bedrock and caused wide cracks. The rock split in the areas where the ancient Egyptians had dug tombs, and one of the most seriously affected areas happened to be the Serapeum and the great galleries where for generations the sacred Apis bulls were buried.

Archaeologists erected wooden scaffolding to maintain the roof of the Serapeum, which was partially fractured. However, Fahmi said, it was regrettable that military training exercises and explosions carried out in the Dahshur quarries a few kilometres away from Saqqara had led to the instability of the rock, which moved from its original location.

Despite several meetings between archaeologists, restorers of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and engineering and technical experts, the restoration techniques being used gave rise to controversy. Two divergent views were presented on the restoration so far carried out. One faction suggested erecting iron shields at the 24 galleries, which were the most seriously undermined and leaving them in place even after the completion of restoration. The other opinion was to remove and replace them with steel frames, which were as strong as iron, but less intrusive.

Fahmi, who supported the iron shields, considers it the appropriate method to save the Serapeum from collapse. “I refute the suggestion that the rock itself should be consolidated, because it has already absorbed water which is, moreover, spread throughout the galleries,” Fahmi said, adding that in the early 1950s the then Egyptian Antiquities Organisation carried out major restoration work on the latter plan — the consolidation of the walls with steel frames — but that it was a failure. Fahmi added that according to the international criteria of UNESCO, ICOM and ICOMOS, such shields had been deemed satisfactory in other areas where urgent action was needed because of deterioration. SCA archaeologists supported the iron shields, pointing out that earlier restoration in the 1950s had actually increased the fissures on the walls, and that the iron shields were appropriate to save further deterioration.

The German Egyptologist Rainer Stadelmann voiced another opinion. He said that he was shocked when he saw the vaulted iron shields installed in the Apis tombs. “They can only be regarded as a temporary solution,” he says. “That is to say, they should not be considered part of the overall restoration plan but merely an instant necessity to stabilise the rock, which could then be treated before being removed.”

In view of such contrary opinions at that time, Zahi Hawass, the former Minister of State for Antiquities (MSA), called on UNESCO to send a team of experts to evaluate the work
already carried out and help draw up an overall plan of action for the progressive restoration of the tombs. After three UNESCO’s visits and inspection tours, the committee approved the Iron shields and actual restoration work began in 2001.

Muhammad al-Shaykha, head of the Projects Section at the MSA, said that the restoration was carried out in the Great Vault gallery of the Serapeum while the Simple Vault gallery was still under restoration. The work was done in three phases with a budget of LE12.500 million. The first phase was an archaeological and geophysical documentation of the galleries, tombs and sarcophagi; the second included the technical and engineering studies as well as the required analysis of the bedrock. The third and final phase, al-Shaykha said, included the consolidation of the tombs walls using iron shields, and of its ceilings with injections. New ventilation, security and lighting systems have been installed.

“The official opening of the Serapeum is a starting point for a series of forthcoming inaugurations of several monuments and archaeological sites in Egypt, such as a group of noblemen’s tombs on the Giza plateau and the Hibis Temple in the New Valley,” MSA Minister of State Muhammad Ibrâhîm told reporters at the press conference held at the Serapeum. He went on to say that the MSA was very keen to inaugurate the site, as well as two other noblemen’s tombs on the Saqqâra necropolis, before the start of the Egyptian tourism season in order not only to open up new tourist attractions but to “send the message that Egypt is safe and exerts all efforts to preserve its archaeological heritage.” He also called on people everywhere to come to Egypt and visit its unique archaeological sites.

In his speech, Ibrâhîm expressed his gratitude to those who had worked for several years to restore the Serapeum and make this dream come true. “I am not the one who masterminded the job, but I was one of those who witnessed its initial restoration work in 1986 as an archaeologist working in the Projects Section,” Ibrâhîm said. He continued that in 1986 the working team consolidated the Serapeum’s walls with wooden scaffolding, cleaned all the void spaces and rediscovered the Simple Vaults discovered in 1853 by Auguste Mariette.

(...) The Old Kingdom mastaba tombs of Mereruka and Ptahhotep, two of Egypt’s most powerful officials at the time when the influence of local state noblemen was increasing in wealth and power, have also been inaugurated after restoration. (Nevine El-Aref, “Sacred bulls for the tourists”, Al-Ahram Weekly, September 27, 2012. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, “The Apis tombs at Saqqâra Necropolis back on Egypt’s tourist map”, Ahram Online, September 20 ; MENA, « L’inauguration du Sérapeum suscite un intérêt international », al-Shurûq du 25 septembre).

Inaugurated amid much fanfare last week by the President of France François Hollande in the company of major donor Prince al-Walîd bin Talâl of the al-Walîd Foundation, the new Islamic art department of the Louvre museum in Paris opened to the public on Saturday as members of the international press vied with each other to find a story relating to tensions over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad published in a French magazine or images of the prophet himself allegedly on display in the Louvre. However, while such stories may have made good copy, they could not displace the story that the Louvre itself wanted to convey regarding the opening of its newest department and architecturally one of its most spectacular. While the Louvre has long had a world-class collection of Islamic art, defined as the arts and crafts of the Islamic world from Morocco in the west to Central Asia in the east over a period of more than 1,000 years, this has not been on anything other than intermittent display.

A decision was taken in 2002 to create a new department of the museum to present the collection to the public and architects Rudy
RICCIOTTI and Mario BELLINI contracted to design a space for it in the Visconti courtyard in the Denon wing of the Louvre. It is this space that has now been opened to the public and this collection, made up of the collection of Islamic art owned by the Louvre itself and by its sister institution the Museum of Decorative Arts, that has been placed on display in an exhibition design by Renaud PIERARD working with the architects and the curatorial team of the Louvre.

The Louvre’s collection of Islamic art, ultimately the property of the French state, contains many well-known pieces that visitors may have seen in different contexts before. They include the Saint Louis Baptistere, a Mamluke brass basin inlaid with silver and gold and signed by Muhammad ibn al-Zayn that was produced during the reign of the Mamluke sultan al-Nâsir ibn Qalâwwûn (reigned 1309-41) and that seems to have been brought to France shortly afterwards, and an ewer made of a single piece of carved rock crystal produced in Egypt around the year 1000. Such pieces have a fascinating provenance, going back something like a millennium. The baptistere, until January 1793 housed in the Saint-Chapelle at the Chateau de Vincennes, was confiscated at the height of the French Revolution and assigned to the public collections that ultimately made up the Louvre. The rock-crystal ewer, one of only seven such pieces known and probably made for the court of the Fatimid caliphs in Cairo, was given by Thibaud le Grand, comte de Blois-Champagne, to the Abbey of St Denis before 1152 where it apparently stayed for the next 650 years until it was confiscated during the destruction of the Abbey during the French Revolution and reassigned to the Louvre.

These landmark pieces, together with many hundreds of others, are now on display in the new presentation of the Louvre’s collection of Islamic art that opened at the weekend. They have been inserted into a chronological and thematic display of Islamic art that covers two floors of the new galleries and some 3,000 square metres. This is a permanent exhibition of the Louvre’s collection, though it represents only a proportion of the over 18,000 pieces the collection contains. The design is sober with few of the technological accessories still largely banned from the conservative gallery spaces of the Louvre.

There are a few video screens at the edges of the visitor circuit and some gesturing towards aural context, with voices to be heard reading classical Arabic and Persian poetry in a few delimited spaces. All the technology used gives the impression of being reassuringly expensive. The new galleries of Islamic art took 10 years to build at a cost of some 100 million euros. Their story, and the effect they produce on visitors, is very much part of the story of the new Islamic art department at the Louvre. The Denon wing of the Louvre, the one neighbouring the Seine, consists of an ensemble of buildings built around internal courtyards that function among other things as light wells open to the sky. Some of these courtyards, such as the Cour Marly, Cour Puget and Cour Khorsabad in the Richelieu wing of the Louvre, have been glassed over to create additional exhibition spaces. The courtyards in the Denon wing have not been so used, and in their design for the Islamic art department in the 19th-century Visconti courtyard architects RICCIOTTI and BELLINI decided to build downwards by excavating a basement level below the courtyard while at the same time building new exhibition space within the courtyard beneath a new glass roof at first-floor level.

This new roof, undulating in design and covered on both the exterior and interior sides by a golden metal mesh, has been described as a “dragonfly’s wing”, a “veil”, or a “flying carpet” in publicity material put out to accompany the opening of the new department. The challenge for the architects of the new roof structure and for the engineers that built it was how to give the new structure a suitably weightless and evanescent character, more like a dragonfly’s wing than a mass of steel and glass, and how to achieve the desired quality of the natural light in the exhibition spaces.
beneath it, creating different effects of light and shadow as the day wears on and as one season gives way to the next.

The new exhibition space is the most ambitious that has been built at the Louvre since I.M. Pei’s famous entrance pyramid and the reorganisation of the public circulation system that took place at the museum in the 1980s. Visiting the Islamic art department’s new first-floor space, easily accessible from the museum’s main entrance through the Denon wing, early in the morning and again late in the afternoon on an overcast but intermittently sunny September day, it was possible to gain a sense of how the natural light falling through the translucent roof structure could work with the museum’s discreet system of artificial lighting to create changing light effects over the course of the day.

The first-floor structure, tent-like in some respects perhaps in a reference to Bedouin or desert tents, is placed above a much-larger basement level that feels like a kind of Aladdin’s cave. This uses entirely artificial light and has black-painted walls. Visitors descend down into it from the natural light above via a set of stairs placed in a corner of the gallery. While the exhibition design across the two levels is the same — square or rectangular glass exhibition cases of the same height arranged asymmetrically on the first-floor and on a grid-like pattern in the basement below — the atmosphere changes as the visitor makes the dramatic transition from light to darkness and from a tent-like structure beneath a dragonfly’s wing to a dark, double-volume space in which the objects on display gleam like jewels beneath the artificial light.

Unlike the presentation of Islamic art at the Islamic Museum in Cairo, which is arranged geographically by region or Islamic dynasty, the Louvre presentation is roughly chronological, with Islamic art up until the year 1000 being presented on the first-floor level beneath the dragonfly’s wing roof and everything else, from 1000 to around 1800, consigned to the basement level below.

Within this broad chronological structure, items are arranged by theme, there being one theme per case and a set of sometimes very disparate objects chosen to illustrate it. The theme of calligraphy, for example, could entail objects of very different date — in the case of the lower gallery from 1000 to 1800 CE — geographical and cultural origin — from the Arab Maghreb to Moghul India or Safavid Iran — and material or function — household ceramics, architectural elements, or metalwork — being placed together in one case. While this arrangement has the virtue of underlining some of the major features of Islamic art, for example the tendency of decorative features to migrate across materials and to remain remarkably constant across the Islamic world, it can also strip objects of their context and the circumstances of their manufacture and function.

Such observations are as old as Islamic art museums themselves, which started to be built in Europe at the end of the 19th century. Soon all the major European capitals either had galleries dedicated to the arts and crafts of the Islamic world, at the time largely under European colonial control, or at least had departments displaying such materials in larger “universal” or “encyclopedic” museums such as the British Museum or the Louvre whose ambition was to build up collections that represented the world’s major cultures.

The Louvre’s original presentation of Islamic art dates from 1893, when an “arts musulmans” section was created in the museum. The contents of this were later divided among the department of objets d’art,
the department of Asian arts and the department of oriental antiquities. It was only a decade or so ago that it was decided to build a separate department of Islamic art at the Louvre.

This history signals some of the uncertainty about the identity of Islamic art, since not all Islamic art is Asian (some of it comes from Africa or Muslim Spain), not all of it can reasonably be contained within a department of oriental antiquities, and not all of it is what in Europe would traditionally have been considered art. Aside from the issues of geographical scope, covering objects made in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, as well as in India and Southeast Asia, and temporality — did Islamic art develop over the 1,000 years of its existence, or did it remain essentially the same — much of what counts for museum purposes as Islamic art is actually functional in character and is closer to craftwork or the decorative arts than it is to the traditional fine arts.

As a result, Islamic art tends to be a rather mixed bag, perhaps a convenient curatorial label rather than a genuine category, made up of the traditional metalwork, woodwork, textiles, architectural decoration, weaponry, ceramics, bookbinding and illustration, scientific instruments, glassware, carpets and so on of the Islamic world. It tends to be presented thematically, as it is in the new department of Islamic art at the Louvre, because this enables connections to be drawn between materials that are otherwise rather disparate in character, allowing the arts and crafts of the Islamic world to be drawn together as the expression of a single civilisation.

One can respect this intention while still wondering about the juxtaposition of materials that it sometimes entails. In the presentation in the Louvre, for example, 18th-century weaponry from Moghul India, 17th-century ceramics from Safavid Iran and 13th-century metalwork from Mameluke Egypt are pressed together a few feet from each other in a single gallery space. Some of the themes are almost comically recondite, one case learnedly illustrating “the development of historiated decoration” with objects made in 13th-century Egypt, for example, while being pressed up against another on “the development of sculpture in the round” (small three-dimensional sculpture) that is entirely unrelated to it.

However, this procedure makes for wonderful browsing, and watching visitor behaviour in the newly opened galleries at the weekend served as a reminder, if one were necessary, that a strong narrative or chronological line is not necessarily a condition of enjoyment. People seemed to be quite happy to browse among the display cabinets in the new department without apparently being too concerned to make connections between them, like honeybees moving between flowers in an abundantly planted bed.

A visit to the Louvre is always an occasion, and even if one gets there before the museum opens there is a line of people waiting to be admitted. Since many, if not most, of the objects in the Louvre are already masterpieces, works that express to the full the potential of the materials from which they are made, it is possible to come across pieces hidden at the ends of corridors that in any other museum would be exhibited to draw visitors to them or at least made the focus of the rooms in which they are located.

Perhaps an expression of house style, this is emphatically not the case at the Louvre, and in the new department of Islamic art few concessions have been made to crowd-pleasing. Buying a ticket for the new department last weekend, the person in the line in front asked the sales clerk, “which way to the ‘Mona Lisa?’” Nobody wants to miss the masterpieces or landmark works on what may be a rare visit to the Louvre, but unlike for the “Mona Lisa”, the object of a special display in the department of Italian painting, the curators of the department of Islamic art seem to have gone out of their way to hide the department’s masterpieces in what may be an unnecessarily academic display.

The uniformity of the display cases means that there are few obvious focal points to orient the visitor, and the fragmented thematic display means that there is no obvious visitor circuit. The first-floor space can be entered from four directions, with what seems to be the main entrance marked by a panel on “imagery and its miniaturisation in the Islamic world.” This is an interesting subject, but it seems a strange way to begin an
exhibition, especially if one had been expecting a landmark work that would make some kind of major statement about the nature of the collection to follow.

Landmark pieces are sometimes almost hidden from view, and there is little indication from the exhibition itself, which avoids notions of qualitative hierarchy, of which pieces should be taken as masterpieces and which should be taken as merely illustrative of a particular theme. The Saint Louis Baptisterie, for example, one of the masterpieces of the collection, is hidden away in a corner of the basement level in a section entitled "precious vessels of emirs and sultans". It took quite some time to find the piece used for the publicity for the exhibition, the so-called "Monzon Lion", an engraved bronze fountain spout in the shape of a lion made in 13th-century Spain. (It is also in the basement gallery).

Such things wouldn't matter much, except that the careful placement of landmark works creates focal points for visitors to an exhibition and helps create memorable ensembles. There are large-scale works that create focal points for the gallery displays, with the mosaics from the Great Mosque in Damascus on the upper level and the displays of Ottoman tiles on the lower level drawing the eye towards them. However, these works are not used to create thematic units, and neighbouring display cases explore other themes.

Small glitches might include the Louvre’s audioguide system, which seems to use an adaption of a Nintendo games console. The technology used is out of date, and the console is fantastically fiddly and only intermittently functioning — a pity, since the quality of the commentary seems to be high. The catalogue of the exhibition, resplendently produced by the Louvre, is another puzzle related to the role that they could play in broadening the knowledge of European and international audiences of the history of Islamic art, and the prestige of the Louvre, one of the world’s most important museums, has attracted a long list of donors.

Following last week’s triumphant opening of the Louvre’s new department of Islamic art, it is to be hoped that the museum will now initiate an ambitious series of temporary exhibitions building on the promise represented by its magnificent new galleries and possibly drawing on the many thousands of items in its collection of Islamic art for which room could not be found in the permanent display. (David Tresilian, "Islamic art at the Louvre", Al-Ahram Weekly, September 27, 2012. Voir également AP, « Le Louvre inaugure une aile consacrée à l’art islamique », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 20 septembre ; AP, "Amid cultural clash, Louvre honors Islamic art", Ahram Online, September 22).

Vendredi 28 septembre 2012

At the Egyptian Museum on Friday, Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm honoured 50 pioneer members of the Friends of the Egyptian Museum Organisation (FEMO) for their work in assisting tourists at the museum. Ibrâhîm presented each member with an honorary certificate recognising distinguished work. The FEMO is a local organisation established in 1990 by museum staff and students of archaeology, tourism and art history who work as volunteers giving tours to visitors inside the museum.

Sayyid Hasan, director of the Egyptian Museum and head of the FEMO said that, “Every summer, about one hundred Egyptian students come to volunteer at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo for such a project. A curator is assigned to them, and they help the museum in every way they possibly can. Mainly, their job is to help tourists with any problems they may have, such as helping them find their way, or accompanying them as guides. After completing their volunteering there is a graduation event.” He pointed out that since it was founded 12 years ago, the organisation has helped in raising cultural and archaeological awareness among Egyptians, as well as highlighting the importance of Egypt’s ancient history. (Nevine El-Aref, “Antiquities minister honours Egyptian Museum volunteers”, Ahram Online, September 28, 2012. Voir également « Le ministère de l’Archéologie honore des citoyens qui ont rendu des pièces antiques volées du Musée Égyptien durant la révolution », at-Dustûr du 15 août ; Dînâʿ Abd al-ʿAlîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie récompense des pièces antiques volées du Musée Égyptien lors de la révolution », al-Yawn al-Sâbiʿi du 15 août).

Under the auspices of Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) bureau in Egypt and Egypt’s Ministry of State for Antiquities, the Faculty of Archaeology at Cairo University is hosting an emergency meeting to discuss all possible measures to protect Syrian archaeological heritage presently subject to destruction amid the ongoing civil war in the country. According to Muhammad Ibrâhîm, minister of state for antiquities, the meeting will discuss all possible efforts that could be exerted to stand against the destruction of Syria’s archaeological sites that date back more than 6000 years.

Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology Muhammad Hamza pointed out that archaeologists and Arab ambassadors who will attended the meeting will issue a statement condemning the destruction of Syrian archaeological sites, putting all the responsibility on the shoulders of the Syrian state for failing to protect such sites across Syria. The statement will also seek to mobilise international and Arab public opinion to take a quick action to stop all destruction of Syria’s cultural and urban heritage. “Syrian cultural heritage is in great danger and could vanish,” said Hamza. The meeting will be held in the presence Arab League Secretary General Nabîl al-ʿArabî, Minister of Education Mustafa Musʿad, Cairo University President Husâm Kâmil, the head of the World Organisation for African and Asian Writers, and the ambassadors of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar.

Many of Syria’s historic treasures have fallen victim to the 18-month-long conflict that has reduced parts of some cities to ruins. The
latest site destroyed on Friday was 700 to 1000 shops of the Old Souk (market) in Aleppo, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. UNESCO believes that five of Syria’s six World Heritage Sites, which include the ancient desert city of Palmyra, the Crac des Chevaliers crusader fortress and parts of old Damascus, have been affected by the ongoing armed conflict. The meeting Monday will be held at Cairo University’s Conference Centre. (Nevine El-Aref, “Emergency meeting on saving Syria’s heritage to be held Monday at Cairo University”, Ahram Online, September 30, 2012. Voir également Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « L’ISESCO convoque une réunion urgente au Caire afin de protéger le patrimoine syrien », al-Ahrâm du 27 septembre ; « Réunion urgente à l’université du Caire sous l’égide de l’ISESCO pour examiner les moyens de protéger le patrimoine syrien », Akhbâr al-Adab du 28 septembre ; Amîna ‘Urâbî, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie en appelle à une intervention en Syrie, afin de sauver le patrimoine archéologique », al-Badî du 1er octobre ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie appelle à une intervention internationale pour stopper la destruction du patrimoine syrien », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 1er octobre ; ‘Isâm ‘Atîyya, « Réunion urgente à l’université du Caire pour examiner les moyens de protéger le patrimoine syrien », Âkhir Sâ’a du 2 octobre).
Renovations at Egypt’s oldest pyramid in Saqqâra have halted because the Antiquities Ministry has not paid the company implementing the restoration. Experts have warned that parts of the ancient structure could collapse. The Revolutionary Youth Union has also threatened to file a complaint against the antiquities minister and to submit a memo to UNESCO asking for its intervention.

Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm, speaking to al-Masrî al-Yawm, denied the pyramid was in any danger, and added that renovations are continuing. He said the ministry failed to pay the company restoring the pyramid for its work due to heavy debts. Ibrâhîm said UNESCO had months ago sent an expert to follow up on the restorations. al-Masrî al-Yawm said the minister intends to hold a press conference to address more details about the renovation project. Sabrî Farag, the ministry’s chief inspector in Saqqâra, said financial constraints were behind renovation delays. He said the director of the renovation company was behind what he characterized as “rumours” alleging that the pyramid is facing collapse.

But ‘Umar al-Hadařî, head of the Revolution Youth Union’s tourism committee, accused the minister of circumventing the problem by insisting that the pyramid remains safe. “If the minister is so confident of his claim, he should give technical reports as evidence,” he told al-Masrî al-Yawm. “We will soon respond to the minister’s allegation, especially since some parts of the pyramid are indeed facing collapse.” (“Saqqâra pyramid in danger as restorations halt over financial woes”, Egypt Independent, October 1, 2012. Voir également Dînâ ’Abd al-Allîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : La pyramide de Djoser est en sécurité et sa restauration est régie par les critères internationaux », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 27 septembre ; « L’Union des jeunes révolutionnaires menace de recourir à l’Unesco et au Procureur général pour stopper l’effondrement de la pyramide de Djoser », al-Dustûr du 26 septembre ; MENA, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : La pyramide de Saqqâra est en sécurité », al-Shurûq du 27 septembre ; Muna Yâsîn, « La crise financière gêne la restauration de la pyramide de Djoser », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 3 octobre).

Les policiers du commissariat d’al-‘Attârîn, en coopération avec la police du tourisme et des antiquités d’Alexandrie, ont arrêté Muhammad Ibrâhîm, chômeur de 33 ans, pour avoir entrepris des fouilles illégitimes sous sa maison située à proximité de la mosquée Sîdî Mihrîz dans la zone de Kom al-Dikka. La perquisition de son domicile a révélé l’existence dans une des chambres du rez-de-chaussée d’une fosse de 1 m² sur une profondeur de 6 m. Les policiers ont également saisi quelques pots en terre cuite. Le prévenu a tout avoué. (Nisma ‘Alî, « Saisie de pièces archéologiques sous une maison en Alexandrie », al-Dustûr du 1er octobre 2012).

« Nombreux sont mes soucis. Hélas, la solution n’est pas entre mes mains ! », tel est l’aveu du ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm. Le premier de ces tracas
est évidemment l’endettement chronique, qui atteint 862 millions de L.E. Endettement contracté auprès des entreprises de BTP et du ministère des Finances, qui exige le remboursement de la dette majorée des intérêts accumulés depuis 2005. Vient ensuite les 20 % des revenus du ministère de l’Archéologie versés depuis le mois dernier à l’État. Le budget de l’Archéologie ne suffit plus à payer les salaires des employés ni à poursuivre les projets de restauration.


Jeudi 4 octobre 2012

Early this week the Shûra Council asked the government to issue new regulations to protect more Egypt’s archaeological heritage from illicit theft, smuggling and encroachment. The request came during a periodical meeting between the council and the Committee of Culture, Tourism and Media (CCTM). Subhî ‘Atiyya, dean of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels at Mansûra University, told the members of the CCTM that former presidents used Egypt’s archaeological heritage for political purposes, and that Gamîl ‘Abd al-Nâsir, Anwar al-Sâdât and Husnî Mubârak offered various ancient artefacts from the Egyptian Museum to their counterparts abroad. The recipients included former French president Valéry GISCARD D’ESTAING and United States president Richard NIXON.

‘Atiyya also noted that Mubârak followed in the steps of his ancestors by offering authentic pieces to foreign presidents. “If they admired any artefact on display in the Egyptian Museum, it disappeared from its showcase,” he said. He referred to what is perhaps the most notorious case of such gifts, which was the disappearance of a collection of 48 artefacts from the museum. Despite a media gala, an investigation was closed without it emerging where, when and how it disappeared. ‘Atiyya told the Middle East News Agency (MENA) that the case had 100 question marks. He also mentioned the artefacts that were
stolen from the museum on 28 January 2011, when the museum was broken into by thugs and vandals during last year’s revolution. The university dean suggested that guides from the Tourism and Hotel Faculty be assigned to the Egyptian Museum and archaeological sites. They would be given a six-month training course at the Police Academy.

How true are 'Atiya’s claims? “Regrettably, part of his statement is true,” Judge Ashraf al-'Ashmawi told Al-Ahram Weekly. al-'Ashmawi, formerly a legal consultant at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), went on to say that all laws and regulations made in Egypt concerning the country’s archaeological heritage and antiquities passed before Law 117/1982, and its modification by the new antiquities Law 3/2010, encouraged antiquities trafficking, offering and sharing. The Ottoman viceroy Muhammad 'Ali, he said, encouraged the offering of Egypt’s antiquities, while the division law issued during the reign of Khedive Tawfiq, as illicit excavations and antiquities trafficking reached their zenith, stipulated that all repeated and common spoils of any new discovery would be split between the Egyptian antiquities authority and the foreign mission concerned. Unique and distinguished artefacts must however be placed in the Egyptian share.

This law, al-'Ashmawi said, gave foreigners whether scientific institutions, universities, or even individuals official licence to dig up Egypt searching for treasured ancient Egyptian, Islamic or Coptic objects. “The division law, in fact, opened a large new gate to official antiquities trading, which in its turn helped extend most of the antiquities museums abroad such as those in New York, Barcelona, Paris and London,” al-'Ashmawi claimed. Before the law was passed, he said, these museums exhibited very few Egyptian antiquities that had been offered to them by the Egyptian government or officially exchanged for other items.

In his book Sariqat mashrū’a (Legal Robberies), al-'Ashmawi noted that antiquities trading flourished between 1912 and 1951 under Law 14/1912, which approved the division law and legalised antiquities trading. As a result there were several licensed auction halls and antiquities galleries all over the country buying and selling artefacts. In mid-20th century, the Egyptian government took its share in the antiquities trading business, al-'Ashmawi wrote. Room 56 on the second floor of the Egyptian Museum was an official auction hall.

The situation continued, al-'Ashmawi said, until Law 117/1983 was issued. This prohibited antiquities trading and approved the division of only 10 per cent of a newly-discovered collection rather than all of it. It also gave the Egypt Antiquities Authority the right to make the first selection from any discoveries. In 1988, he continued, former minister of culture Fâruq Husnî issued a ministerial decree that prohibited any division. The modified new antiquities Law 3/2010, which al-'Ashmawi masterminded along with Husnî and former MSA minister Zâhi Hawwâs, prohibited the division and the tracking and imposed stiffer penalties. “Although Egypt’s archaeological heritage is the public possession of all Egyptians and not a private one for its rulers, the country’s various rulers from 1800 to 1980 abused it and offered some of it to foreign countries for their own fame or political purposes,” al-'Ashmawi told the Weekly. “Egyptian rulers have neglected and overburdened the country’s heritage by offering it up, while those who took it have protected it and saved these items for their population by displaying it in museums.”

In his Legal Robberies, al-'Ashmawi noted that Muhammad 'Ali offered a large number of Egypt’s archaeological heritage pieces to foreign rulers. In 1829 he gave the Ramses II obelisk, which stood at the entrance to his temple in Luxor. This obelisk is now on display in the Place de la Concorde in Paris. The zodiac that once decorated the ceiling of the Hathor chapel in Dandara temple is now exhibited at the Louvre in Paris. Khedive 'Abbâs I offered Archduke Maximilian Joseph of Austria the furniture of a hall in a Mamluk palace, which was meant to be the location of the first antiquities museum in Egypt. As for Khedive Ismâ'îl, he offered 400 artefacts to kings, dukes and chancellors in France, Germany and Austria. King Fu'âd I gave Italy the funerary contents of a New Kingdom tomb on the Dayr al-Madîna necropolis on Luxor’s west bank. This collection belonged to an artisan named Kha, who helped build the temples, chapels and tombs of New Kingdom kings and queens as well as their tombs located in the Valley of Kings and Queens. It is now on display at the Egyptian museum in Turin.
After the 1952 Revolution Gamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir followed in the Muhammad ‘Alî family’s footsteps by offering Egyptian antiquities, but on a smaller scale. Nāsir gave some temples and artefacts to countries that helped in the salvage operation of the Nubia temples in the 1960s within the construction work of the High Dam. He also gave a dozen of authentic items to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The renowned journalist Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, who was formerly editor-in-chief of al-Ahrām newspaper and a confidant of Nāsir, asserted in his book Kharīf al-Ghadab (Fall of Anger) that Nāsir had repeatedly offered genuine objects to countries and institutes, and not individuals. He gave an ancient Egyptian alabaster vase from a Saqqāra storehouse to the Central Committee of the Soviet Union and two similar ones to the National Museum of Tokyo and the Vatican.

According to official documents in the Egyptian Museum, gifts of antiquities to other countries flourished during the presidency of Sādāt, al-Ashmāwī claimed in his book. In the 1970s, more than 100 small ancient Egyptian objects were taken from the Egyptian Museum and given to president GISCARD D’ESTAING, president NIXON, emperor Reza PAHLAVI of Iran and US foreign affairs minister Henry KISSINGER. Two bronze ibis statuettes were given to both Yugoslavia’s President TITO as a present for his 80th birthday in 1972, and Sweden’s King for his 90th birthday. During his first visit to Egypt in 1974, Sādāt gave NIXON a bronze Osiris statuette. In 1975, during his visit to the US, Sādāt offered the UN headquarters in New York a bronze statuette of Ibis. He gave another one to president NIXON.

Sādāt’s wife Gīhān al-Sādāt also had her share of giving away Egypt’s antiquities. In 1976 she gave Imelda MARCOS, wife of the Philippine president, a bronze ibis statuette. She gave the wife of the Mexican emperor an agate stone necklace with an Osiris-shaped pendant during the celebrations of 2,500 years since the establishment of Mexico.

al-Ashmāwī says Mubārak did not give away any part of Egypt’s heritage to any foreign country during his 30 years in power. According to Egyptian Museum documents from May 1980 to February 2011, al-Ashmāwī said, no gifts had been registered in the documents, nor had any objects been removed from the museum or any archaeological sites to be given to any kings, queens or presidents abroad.

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrāhīm supports al-Ashmāwī’s view, and confirmed that there was no evidence to support the removal or departure of any object exhibited at the Egyptian Museum as a presidential present during Mubārak’s tenure. Ibrāhīm suggested that if anyone had any evidence of such an offer, he or she should present it to the prosecutor-general or investigation authorities. “Egypt’s heritage is owned by all Egyptians,” he said.

Fifty-four objects were stolen from the museum during the January Revolution, of which 25 were recovered and 29 are still missing. Ibrāhīm said the Tourism and Antiquities Police were exerting every effort to recover the items through security campaigns in various locations in Egypt. They are also collaborating with Interpol in case any of these items were smuggled abroad. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egyptians bearing gifts”, Al-Ahrām Weekly, October 4, 2012. Voir également « Le Sénat réclame de nouvelles lois pour la protection des Antiquités », al-Misriyyūn du 27 septembre ; Dinā ’Abb al-’Alîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie innocente le régime déchu d’avoir offert des pièces archéologiques à ses hôtes de marque », al-Yawm al-Sābi’ du 28 septembre ; « Le ministre de l’Archéologie: Il n’existe aucune preuve sur la sortie de pièces archéologiques en tant que cadeaux présidentiels sous le régime de Mubārak », al-Dustūr du 28 septembre).

Pharaoh’s Island lies 250 metres off the Sinai coast not far from the tip of the Gulf of ’Aqaba. The fortress, built by Salâh al-Dîn in 1171 AD, played out an important chapter in the history of the Crusades, staving off an invasion of Egypt as well as controlling the route between the three banks of the Gulf of ’Aqaba: Palestine (and Syria) on the north; the Arabian peninsula the east; from Sinai and Egypt on the west. The importance of Pharaoh’s Island emerged as early as the Byzantine period, and the remains of a Byzantine church dating from the reign of Justinian VI have been found there. The island grew more and more prominent during the Muslim era because of its position on the pilgrimage route to Mecca, and it was also a major strategic outpost when the Christian Kingdoms were set up in Palestine and Syria in 1099 AD.

During the 12th century, the Crusaders built a fortress there that they called Ayla, a reference to a town on another island on the opposite shore of the Gulf. The Crusaders were then in control of the pilgrimage route, and levied a charge on passing pilgrims until Salâh al-Dîn seized the island and ’Aqaba in 1171. Salâh al-Dîn redeveloped the existing fortress and left his own impressive castle as a permanent reminder of his strength. For its strategic location on the route serving pilgrims, trade and military purposes and linking the gulfs of Suez and ’Aqaba, the fortress continued to prosper throughout the span of Islamic history.

Archaeologist ʿAbd al-Rahîm Rayhân told Al-Ahram Weekly that the fortress was built on a steep, 285-metre-high escarpment that was difficult to climb. This is the peak of Pharaoh’s Island, and is 650 metres above sea level. The fortress was built of limestone cut from a nearby hill on the mainland and mortar found near the run-off rain water. Rayhân explained that a ditch six metres deep separated it from the ravine whose shape it took, that of an irregular rectangle extending from north-east to south-west over a length of between 100 and 150 metres, with a maximum width of 120 metres. The whole building is surrounded by a wall two metres thick and reinforced at regular intervals with square and round towers.

The fortress has a square entrance gate crowned with a limestone arch stone, of which the bedrock bears an inscription in the name of Allah. The name of the founder was also inscribed in Nashki (cursive Arabic) script saying “Salâh al-Dîn Abû al-Muzzafar Yusuf Ibn Ayûb Ibn Khailîl, emir of the believers” (Saladin); the name of the builder: Ibrâhîm Ibn Abî Bahr and his son; and the date of building: Jamâd II 538/1187 Hijra. The door opens onto a wide courtyard lined with several rooms to accommodate the military guard. On the western side is a meeting room with a vaulted ceiling borne by pointed arches. There are two prayer rooms, but one is in ruins while the other is very well preserved with a beautiful mihrâb (Pulpit) niche enhanced with epigraphy.

There are three very well preserved underground cisterns, of which one dates to the Salâh al-Dîn era. These were used to supply the fortress with drinking water from the ʿAyn Sudr source located five kilometres away. The citadel had 22 military towers and a pigeon tower with pigeon nests and seed silos. It also had a furnace for producing weapons and soldiers’ barracks, a bakery, mill and bath house. Regrettably, time took its toll on the great citadel and it was subjected to negligence and erosion. Restoration work carried out in 1986 was merely cosmetic and did not do justice to such a distinguished garrison. Three years ago the fortress was again restored with a budget of LE20 million.

Muhammad al-Shaykha, head of the projects section at the Antiquities Ministry told the Weekly that in order to decrease the amount of sea water flooding the citadel, particularly in winter, a number of cement wave breakers had been erected in the sea around the citadel. Dilapidated structures were restored and external walls were strengthened. Signboards with full historical details were also erected to facilitate visits, as were wooden sun shades, and a new lighting system was installed.
to make the citadel accessible at night.

On Saturday, the prime minister along with Minister of Tourism Hishâm Za‘zû’ and Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm officially inaugurated the site in order not only to draw more tourists to Tâbâ but also to promote Egyptian tourism in general. According to a press release from the Antiquities Ministry, Ibrâhîm said that during the inauguration ceremony Qandîl said that the cabinet was continuing to support the Ministry of State for Antiquities to continue its duties to preserve and protect Egypt’s heritage. He himself was happy to see such a great monument back on the tourist map.

Ibrâhîm said that a small, temporary marina has been established at the foot of the escarpment leading to the fortress in order to facilitate the transportation of tourists to and from the island. He continued that so as to increase the attractions available to visitors it was planned to put on cultural activities and dancing performances on the island with the citadel as the backdrop. (Nevine El-Aref, “Our own island fortress”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 4, 2012. Voir également Amîna ‘Urâbî, « Hishâm Qandîl inaugure samedi prochain le monument back on the tourist map », Ahram Online, September 28 ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Inauguration de la citadelle de Salâh al-Dîn al-‘Ayyûbî à Tâbâ après sa restauration », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 29 septembre).

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a rencontré aujourd’hui l’ambassadeur de Singapour au Caire, afin d’examiner de nouveaux horizons pour la coopération archéologique entre les deux pays. Dr Ibrâhîm a déclaré que « l’entretien s’inscrit dans le cadre du renforcement des activités archéologiques et scientifiques, du transfert du savoir-faire égyptien en matière de muséologie et de préservation du patrimoine, d’organisation de stages de formation et de la coopération dans le domaine des fouilles sous-marines et de la documentation archéologique ». Cet entretien a également porté sur l’organisation d’une exposition archéologique égyptienne de différentes époques à Singapour. Cette exposition vise à augmenter le tourisme en provenance de Singapour et des pays voisins, notamment l’Indonésie et la Malaisie. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Renforcement de la coopération archéologique entre l’Égypte et Singapour », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 4 octobre 2012).

** Vendredi 5 octobre 2012 **

Minister of Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm threatened on Friday to terminate the contract of the company conducting reconstruction work on the Saqqâra Pyramid. Ibrâhîm said he would take strict action against the company, and that might include terminating the contract. The conflict began when the Shurbâgî Company tasked with the reconstruction work suspended operations due to the ministry’s failure to pay the agreed upon fees. On Thursday Shurbâgî Company sent a letter to the Ministry of Antiquities saying it would halt work on the pyramid in mid-October if the ministry did not agree to new terms of payment. Ibrâhîm said in a statement Friday that the letter sent by the company was a “clear and explicit threat.”

Al-Masrî al-Yawm reported that the UNESCO had asked the Ministry of Antiquities to look into the structural and conservation problems afflicting the Saqqâra Pyramid, prompting ibrahim to form a committee of professors from Cairo University’s Faculty of Engineering to examine the pyramid and send a report to the UNESCO. (“Ministry threatens to end contract with company rehabbing pyramid”, Egypt Independent, October 5, 2012. Voir également Muna Yâsîn, « Les pierres de Djoser perturbent la sérénité du ministère de l’Archéologie », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 26 août ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie nie la chute de pierres de Djoser », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 26 septembre).

Ridâ M, agriculteur âgé de 37 ans, et Husayn M., ouvrier de 34 ans, ont été mis en examen pour trafic archéologique. La perquisition de leurs domiciles situés dans le gouvernorat de Minyâ a conduit à la découverte d’une barque en bois, d’un ouchebi

**Dimanche 7 octobre 2012**

The old plan of the Hurghada National Museum

Construction of the Hurghada National Museum is set to begin after a four-year hiatus despite opposition from employees at the local library, which will be demolished to make way for the project. Antiquities Minister Muḥammad Ibrâhîm made the announcement during a tour of archaeological sites in the area. According to a plan drawn up in 2009, the museum was to be built on a 22500 sq metres site overlooking the Hurghada National Library and shaped like a shell with two sections: one devoted to the museum, restoration labs and storage sections, while the second was to be a visitors’ centre displaying photos and documentary films on Hurghada’s archaeological sites and its history since prehistoric times. An area of 350 sq metres was allocated to become a parking plot.

However, due to budget problems Ibrâhîm and Red Sea Governor Muḥammad Kâmil announced the decision to transform the Hurghada National Library into an archaeological museum in an attempt to promote tourism. Ādîl ‘Abd al-Sattâr, head of museums at the antiquities ministry, told Ahram Online that the museum would display around 5000 artefacts from local archaeological sites, including the Marsa Gawâsîs area which was the harbour used by ancient Egyptians when travelling to Puntland in modern day Somalia.

However, library employees have rejected the authorities’ decision. A library employee, who refused to give his real name, said the decision was wrong because LE3 million had been spent building the library just a few years ago. “How can we encourage people to read if they demolish the library?” he said. “It will shut the doors of the only library in Hurghada.” Employees protested in front of the library building on Sunday. (Nevine El-Aref, “Long-awaited Hurghada Museum gets green light”, Ahram Online, October 7, 2012. Voir également Ahmad ‘Awad, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie étudie la création d’un musée international à Hurghada », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 3 octobre ; Mushîra al-Tâhir, « Les jeunes de la mer Rouge refusent la décision du ministre », al-Cumhûriyya du 5 octobre ; Biâl Ramadân, « Protestations contre la transformation de la bibliothèque Misr à Hurghada en un musée archéologique », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 5 octobre ; ‘Alî al-Tayrî, « Le musée archéologique d’Hurghada : rien que des barbelés depuis 3 ans », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 21 octobre).

**Lundi 8 octobre 2012**

Suez is a marginalised city, even by Egyptian standards. While it is no secret that most of the nation’s funds go to our major two cities, Cairo and Alexandria, any resident of Suez will tell you that the city was, more than any other, neglected by Muḥârak. In fact, it is widely known that Suez was the only city never visited by Muḥârak during his 30 years of presidency. Perhaps the opening of the city’s newest museum might put it on the national cultural map.

The Suez national museum was recently visited by the governor of Suez, Samîr Aglan, where he inspected the showrooms and made sure everything was ready for its opening, scheduled for 24 October. The museum is located on the banks of the Suez Canal and consists of the main building, a garden and a parking lot to accommodate
visitors. The main building will include a hall for VIP guests, a lecture hall, cafeteria, library and storage facilities for antiquities. The garden is approximately 6000 square metres and has rare plants including papyrus and lotus as well as a cafeteria which overlooks a pool containing a boat of Pharaonic design and is surrounded by statues from the Greco-Roman period. The garden will be illuminated by light, adding a new landmark to Suez.

"The museum is not only specific to Suez, except when it comes to showcasing the history of the Suez Canal from the ancient times to this day, as well as certain key periods in our history. The other showrooms portray Islamic, Pharaonic, and Greco-Roman histories among others and the museum is meant to attract all sorts of audiences, not just those with an interest in Suez," a museum spokesperson said. "The museum was officially opened last January by the Minister of Antiquities but this is the first time that the museum will actually be open to the public. We hope no more delays will hinder its public opening," he added.

The museum has an agreement with the governorate education directorate to conduct workshops for children and host lectures targeted specifically towards students. The museum’s library will include books that focus on the fields of history and antiquities, and will be open to the public. The halls of the museum showcasing the Suez Canal will include the Sesostris hall, the navigation and trade hall, which exhibits different boats and ships throughout the eras which have had an impact on the canal, the mining hall, the Qulzum hall and Mahmal hall, which focuses on Suez’s important role in transporting the Kaaba cover from Cairo to Mecca. The museum will bring more attention to Suez’s importance in Egyptian history and will hopefully become a major landmark. The museum may just see the negligence this ‘city of martyrs’ has suffered from for a long time finally end. (Omar El Adl, “Suez national museum open to public on 24 October”, Daily News Egypt, October 8, 2012).

Egyptian authorities have thwarted two recent attempts to smuggle precious 19th century artifacts out of the country. The country’s Tourism and Antiquities Police (TAP) says it has arrested two Egyptians at Cairo Airport since Sunday, concealing a combined total of six items dating from the reign of Muhammad ‘Ali in their luggage.

The first passenger was apprehended on Sunday after trying to board a flight to the United Arab Emirates with a bronze chandelier, a gold-plated desk clock decorated with angels, and a set of three porcelain reliefs in a brown wooden frame. Each relief was embellished with blue geometrical designs and Kuffic script. The other case this week involved an Egyptian attempting to travel to Kuwait with three Islamic manuscripts dating from the era of Muhammad ‘Ali, who ruled Egypt in the early 19th century.

Egypt’s antiquities minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm speculated that the scripts were being taken to the oil-rich Emirate as the first step towards smuggling them to London for auction at Bonhams. Hasan Rasmî, head of the Archaeological Units — a Ministry of State of Antiquities initiative that places experts at every Egyptian airport and harbour in order to thwart smuggling — said that investigations are underway to discover from where the scripts came. All seem to date from the time of Muhammad ‘Ali, Rasmî added, describing one three-page manuscript on which poems, advice and dietary tips were written in black ink. The second 24-page manuscript has a hardback cover decorated with foliage and geometrical designs and contains religious writings and prayers. The final one is 11 pages long and bears Quranic verses written in both Arabic and Persian.
The two Egyptians were arrested on charges of attempting to smuggle parts of Egypt's archaeological heritage. The antiquities were confiscated by police and will be transferred to Egypt's Islamic Art Museum once investigations are complete, Ibrâhîm said. The Archaeological Units initiative began five years ago in a bid to put the brakes on burgeoning illicit trade in Egyptian artifacts. (Nevine El-Aref, "Egypt authorities thwart attempts to smuggle 19th century rarities", Ahram Online, October 9, 2012.


Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm has said that the Egyptian Museum is safe and sound, and has not been affected by clashes that took place between Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Mursî protesters in Tahrîr Square. He pointed out the the smoke seen near the Egyptian museum was from the burning of two cars at ‘Abd al-Mun’îm Riyâd Square, which set off the security sensors of the museum and the alarm bells rang automatically. In a telephone call, Ibrâhîm told Ahram Online that the Egyptian Museum was secure both inside and out. Archaeologists and top antiquities officials are now inside the museum to monitor the situation. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egyptian Museum untouched by Tahrîr clashes, says minister”, Ahram Online, October 12, 2012. Voir également Muna Yâsîn, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : Le Musée Égyptien est sain et sauf », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 13 octobre).

La rue al-Mahatta al-Qadîma dans le quartier d’Abû Qîr en Alexandrie a été le théâtre d’un glissement de terrain, qui a englouti une voiture. Cet incident est dû aux fouilles illicites qu’entrepreneu
foyer, assistée par ses deux fils et son frère. Ils ont creusé une fosse de 6 m de profondeur sous leur maison à la recherche d’un trésor archéologique. (Muhammad ‘Abd al-Ghanî, « Clissement de terrain à Abû Qîr dû aux opérations de fouilles archéologiques clandestines sous une maison », al-Badîl du 14 octobre 2012).

Lundi 15 octobre 2012

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, s’est entretenu aujourd’hui dans la zone archéologique de la citadelle avec l’ambassadeur de Turquie au Caire. Ils ont examiné les moyens de renforcer la coopération archéologique et touristique entre les deux pays. La discussion a porté sur les termes du protocole qui sera bientôt signé par l’Égypte et la Turquie et qui concerne la restauration de quelques monuments qui datent de l’époque ottomane : la mosquée de l’imâm al-Shâfi’î située dans le quartier al-Khalîfa, la tikîyya du sultan Mahmûd située rue Port Saïd dans le quartier de Sayyida Zaynab, en plus des mosquées Tirbâna et al-Sharbâshî situées dans le quartier al-Manshiyya en Alexandrie.


Mardi 16 octobre 2012

The Ministry of Antiquities urged the British government to halt bids on Pharonic artefacts that were put on display at a London auction hall, calling on it to investigate how the items left Egypt. Intisâr Gharîb, coordinator for “Antiquities Revolutionaries,” a group of ministry workers, told al-Masrî al-Yawm that the pieces were put up for sale at Sotheby’s and Christie’s, noting that other items had already been sold on 25 April. Egypt has been struggling to retrieve antiquities stolen during the security void that followed the 25 January revolution and the fall of President Husnî Mubârak. (“Ministry calls to halt UK auction of Egyptian antiquities”, Egypt Independent, October 16, 2012. Voir également Muna Yâsîn, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie demande l’annulation d’une vente aux enchères d’antiquités pharaoniques à Londres », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 16 octobre).

Jeudi 18 octobre 2012

In the al-Marg area of Cairo once stood the two-storey palace of Zaynab al-Wakîl, wife of the 1920s Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahhâs Pasha. If stones could talk, the former building would be able to tell the story of a very important saga in modern Egypt’s political history. In addition to being the residence of al-Nahhâs Pasha and his family, the palace was the setting for some of the meetings of the Wafd Party as well as being the first premises of the fledgling Arab League, which al-Nahhâs
Pasha helped found in 1944.

In 1954 the palace became the place where Egypt’s first post-1952 Revolution president Muhammad Nagib was permanently confined after his fall from grace. Shortly after the revolution and Nagib’s appointment, Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir accused him of supporting the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood group and of harbouring dictatorial ambitions. A struggle for power broke out between the two leaders, which Nasir won, forcing Nagib to resign in November 1954. President Nasir then isolated Nagib in the suburban Zaynab al-Wakil Palace. President Anwar al-Sadat released him from his isolation in 1972, but Nagib decided to spend the rest of his life there until he died in 1984.

Nagib’s memoirs were published after his death under the title I was a President of Egypt. The book was reprinted several times and was also translated into English with the title The Fate of Egypt. According to Nagib’s biographer Rifat Yunan, the ex-president viewed living in the house as a “descent into hell”. It was surrounded by 20 guard posts, and the garden was stripped of trees for security reasons. All the furniture and other antiques in the palace were removed; even the refrigerators were taken away, as well as kitchen utensils, pots and pans. Nagib’s own medals, shields and military diplomas were confiscated.

The residential part of al-Wakil consists of two floors: a basement, which Nagib transformed into a large library housing hundreds of books, the only entertainment for Nagib and his connection to the outside world; and a first floor with a large reception area of living room and dining room, both modestly furnished. A vestibule led to Nagib’s bedroom and a balcony, which he transformed into a chicken coop decorated with a bronze statue of Wafd Party leader Saad Zaghlul Pasha. In his memoirs Nagib revealed his skill at breading animals.

The house has a large, neglected garden with a wrought-iron gate. After Nagib’s death, al-Wakil’s heirs filed several law suits against the government asking for the appropriation of the house to be lifted and for possession to be returned to the heirs. After several court cases they won and succeeded in regaining possession of the palace. They promptly sold the house to an investor, who recently began to demolish it. This action has created a furor and led to conflict between the new owner of the house on the one side and the National Organisation for Urban Harmony (NOUH) and the governorates of both Cairo and Qalyubia on the other. Cairo Governor Usama Kamal had asked Qalyubia Governor ‘Adil Zayyid to call a halt to the demolition and force a moratorium on all work.

The house was near Muasat al-zakat Street in al-Marg, which technically comes under the jurisdiction of Qalyubia governorate. Zayyid, however, insists the house falls within the Cairo governorate zone. Still, no approval has been reported to have been issued by the Qalyubia governorate for the demolition of al-Wakil. Kamal says he will take necessary legal procedures against whoever issued a demolition permit. Samir Gharib, head of NOUH, says the house was registered as a distinguished historical building according to Law 144/2006, which would prohibit its demolition. (Nevine El-Aref, “Palace turned prison turns to rubble”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 18, 2012. Voir également Hazim al-Mallah, « Le NOUH dénonce les travaux de démolition du palais Zaynab al-Wakil », al-Badil du 10 octobre ; ‘Abdallah Mahmud, « Le NOUH exige l’arrêt des travaux de démolition du palais

Six tombs in the vicinity of King Khufu’s Great Pyramid, as well as the second pyramid, that of Khufu’s son Khafrê, have been reopened as part of the government’s strategy to encourage tourists to come to Egypt in the wake of plummeting tourist numbers following the revolution in January last year. Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm officially inaugurated the six royal and noblemen’s tombs at a gala ceremony last Thursday morning at the foot of the Khafrê Pyramid. The tombs, which all date from the Old Kingdom, are located at the eastern and western cemeteries on the Gîza plateau and have undergone extensive restoration.

Work on the second pyramid, which has been going on since 2009, was deemed necessary because the humidity rate inside soared to 80 per cent and salt encrustation was seen to be causing rapid deterioration. ‘Âlî al-Asfar, director-general of the Gîza Plateau, explained that each visitor to the pyramid exhaled about 20 grammes of water vapour. The salt this contained accumulated and caused cracks in the pyramid’s inner walls. After three years of restoration, the cracks have now been repaired and the walls of the Grand Gallery cleaned of the salt residue and graffiti left by visitors. The dilapidated stairway leading from the main doorway to the king’s burial chamber has been replaced, and the inner chambers have been also restored. The vents previously installed in the king’s chamber beside the original air shafts have been cleaned, as have the lamps in the king’s burial chamber and the corridors and passages leading to it. The new lamps do not emit heat.

“A rotation system was introduced in 1998, under which one of the three pyramids will be closed for restoration every year while the other two will remain open,” al-Asfar said. Under this scheme it is now the turn of Khufu’s Great Pyramid, where the humidity has affected the walls of the Grand Gallery, which are coated in up to 2cm of salt. The Permanent Committee for Ancient Egyptian Monuments is studying the decision to close the Great Pyramid.

The six tombs inaugurated on Thursday consist of the tomb of King Khufu’s granddaughter Mersankh III, which is located in the eastern cemetery, and five noblemen’s tombs in the western cemetery. These tombs were discovered in 1927 by American Egyptologist George EISNER and are rich in architectural features and inner decorations. Some have impressive façades that are more like temples than tombs, and contain large chambers with rock-hewn pillars. However, Ibrâhîm said, owing to deterioration the tombs were closed 10 years ago for restoration according to a site management plan drawn up for the Gîza Plateau to accommodate both the importance of tourism as a source of national income and preserving the monuments. This plan requires that a number of tombs on the plateau will be closed every now and then for restoration and maintenance, while other tombs will open and close to the public on a rotating basis.

“I am very happy today to reopen these monuments; and it is a message to the whole world that Egypt is safe and welcomes visitors by opening more sites to them,” Ibrâhîm said at a press conference held on site. He announced that the opening was the second in a month after the inauguration of the Serapeum in Saqqâra, and was one of a series of openings within the coming period. The Temple of Hibis in al-Wâdî al-Gadîd will be opened soon, as will the Jewellery Museum in Alexandria.
Waad Ibrāhīm, head of the engineering department at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), told Al-Ahram Weekly that the restoration work aimed at returning these tombs to the way they appeared on the day they were discovered. He explained that salts were removed from the tomb walls, the wall paintings were cleaned and reinforced, graffiti left by visitors removed and inscriptions and paintings conserved. The ground floors are now protected by wood to preserve the original rock of the tombs as well as facilitate the visiting tour inside. New lighting and ventilation systems were also installed. A path linking the tombs to the rest of the plateau has been built in order to facilitate visits.

At the entrance gate of the tomb of Princess Mersankh III, granddaughter of Khufu, dozens of assembled journalists, photographers and TV cameramen waited for their turn to pan their cameras round the sections of this distinguished royal tomb, which has a wall decorated with 12 limestone statues of a woman. al-Asfar explained that the tomb was originally built for her mother, Queen Hetepheres II, but on Mersankh’s sudden death the tomb was given to her. Inscriptions on the tomb provide both the time of Mersankh's death and the date of her funeral, which followed some 272 days after her death. "She apparently died during the first regnal year of an unnamed king, possibly King Menkawre," al-Asfar said, adding that this inscription recorded that the death of Mersankh III was sudden and unexpected. On the day of its discovery, he continued, the tomb had a black granite sarcophagus decorated with palace façades of Mersankh III's burial, a set of Canopic jars, and a limestone statue depicting Queen Hetepheres II embracing her daughter. The sarcophagus is now on display at the Egyptian Museum while the statue is exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The second tomb, which is located in the western cemetery to the south of the Great Pyramid, belonged to Seshem-Nefer, the overseer of the two seats of the House of Life and keeper of the king’s secrets during the Sixth Dynasty. "This is one of the largest tombs on the Giza Plateau," al-Asfar said. The tomb is decorated with very fine decorations and paintings depicting funerary, hunting and offering scenes, as well as a depiction of Seshem-Nefer’s daily life with his family and before the deities. Some of the most beautiful scenes are of offering bearers, the deceased and his wife hunting in a marsh and a harvest scene composed of three wall segments. The bottom register shows large sacks of barley being transported to the threshing floor, while to their right two labourers are piling up the goods; the central segment has scenes of flax and barley being harvested with sickles, with an overseer inspecting their progress; the top register continued the agricultural theme, but it has now disappeared. The entrance to the tomb is flanked by two statues of the deceased.

The third tomb belonged to Senefru-Kha-Ef, the king's treasurer and priest of the god Apis. It dates from the end of the Fourth Dynasty and the beginning of the Fifth. Inside the tomb was a beautiful limestone sarcophagus that has since been removed and placed in the Egyptian Museum. al-Asfar said that the tomb’s inner walls revealed typical scenes of the dead official and his children.

The fourth tomb was constructed for Nefer-Maat, the overseer of the soul priests. Its walls are decorated with scenes showing the daily life of Nefer-Maat with his family and his pet dog. Its walls are decorated with scenes of the deceased and his wife in front of scribes and offering bearers. Another unique scene shows the deceased seated in front of an offering table, with his favourite dog under his chair.

The fifth tomb belonged to Yassen, the overseer of the king’s farms, and the sixth was built for Ka-Em-Ankh, overseer of the royal treasury. These tombs have very distinguished false doors showing the various titles of the deceased and their portraits.

"These new tourist attractions have now been opened and added to the Giza Plateau with the idea of attracting more visitors," al-Asfar said. He continued that the MSA was still searching for more solutions to the financial problems that the Giza Plateau Developing Project is currently facing. Ever since last year’s January Revolution, the project has been on hold as it waits for improvements in the security and financial situations. The Giza Plateau Development Project was launched almost six years ago with the aim of developing the plateau so as to improve
standards and update the site to be more tourist friendly and put a stop to encroachment by horse and camel owners, who disfigure the plateau’s panoramic view.

The project aims at opening a new entrance gate to the plateau on the Fayyûm desert road, where tataf (electric wagons) transfer visitors to and from the plateau. Meanwhile, an empty area nearby would be dedicated to horses and camel riders. A visitor centre would be provided that would show the plateau’s history through documentary videos and photographs. al-Asfar said the first phase of the project was the only part to have been completed. Opened three years ago, it involved the construction of an external wall around the plateau, electronic gates and the installation of security cameras.

The Gîza Plateau inspectorate has begun operating a state-of-the-art pumping system to reduce the high rate of subterranean water that has accumulated under the Sphinx and the underlying bedrock. Waad says that under the new system 18 water pump machines distributed across the plateau are pumping out 26,000 cubic metres of water daily at a rate of 1,100 cubic metres of water an hour, based on studies previously carried out by Egyptian-American water specialists. He explained that the pumping machines began operating when the subterranean water level exceeded 15.5 metres above sea level and stopped automatically when this level was reached.

The LE24-million project was initiated to reduce the high level of subterranean water under the Sphinx, which had increased because of the new drainage system installed in the neighbouring village of Nazlat al-Sammān and the irrigation technique used to cultivate public gardens and green areas in the neighbouring residential area of Haqā’iq al-Ahrām and the golf course at the Mena House Hotel. "All these have led to the leakage of water into the plateau, affecting especially the Valley Temple and the Sphinx which are located on a lower level," Waad says. He told the Weekly that the Sphinx, the Pyramids and the Valley Temple on the plateau were completely safe because the water level beneath them was determined at a depth of 4.6 metres below ground level, which was similar to the water level present in ancient Egyptian times.

"Such a level is a natural phenomenon," Ibrāhîm said. He pointed out that the River Nile had once reached the plateau, and at the time a harbour was dug to shelter the boats transporting the pyramid blocks from the quarries in Aswān and Tura. (Nevine El-Aref, “New tourist magnets”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 18, 2012. Voir également MENA, « Inauguration après demain de la pyramide de Chéphren et de 6 tombes antiques sur le plateau de Gîza », al-Misrijyyûn du 9 octobre ; Nevine El-Aref, “After a 10-year-break, Khafre’s pyramid and 6 royal tombs open on Gîza plateau”, Ahram Online, October 11 ; MENA, “Khafre Pyramid opens for first time in three years”, Egypt Independent, October 11 ; Joseph Mayton and Manar Ammar, “Tourism boost as Egypt opens Khafre Pyramid to visitors after renovation”, Bikyamasr, 12 October ; « Inauguration de la pyramide de Chéphren après l’achèvement de ses opérations de restauration », al-Bashâyyir du 13 octobre ; Omar El Adl, “Egypt’s second landmark pyramid reopens”, Daily News Egypt, October 14 ; Steven Viney, “A tour in the bulls’ tombs”, Egypt Independent, October 17).

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After almost six decades of restoration, the 27th Dynasty Hibis Temple at Khârga Oasis regains its original allure and will open its doors to visitors Sunday. The inauguration is due to be attended by Prime Minister Hishâm Qandîl and Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm, as well as top governmental officials and archaeologists.

Hibis Temple was closed for restoration in the late 1980s and declared off limits to visitors. Ibrâhîm said the deterioration of the temple started as early as 1958 when the level of ground water in Khârga Oasis rose, endangering the temple. Efforts were then made to control the subterranean water that had
risen because of irrigation projects in the surrounding area. A drainage channel was excavated to direct the excess water. The former sacred lake of the temple was re-dug to contain the water. But, Ibrâhîm said, these solutions were only temporary as the temple continued to weaken under water leakages. Cracks spread all over the temple's walls, columns tilted and reliefs were damaged.

In 1980s, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (now the Ministry of State for Antiquities) suggested physically removing the temple and rebuilding it on higher dry ground to stop any further damage. The suggestion was ultimately rejected. A committee of archaeologists, engineers and restorers rejected the relocation plan fearing the collapse of the temple during the dismantling and reconstruction process. The committee pointed out that half of the blocks and columns of the temple were in a critical condition. The committee suggested restoring the temple in situ. Restoration work began in early 2000s. Columns and walls were consolidated, cracks repaired and reliefs restored. To protect the temple from drainage and underground water, insulation materials were used as a protective layer between the ground and the foundation of the temple. New lighting systems were installed to allow access to the temple at night.


The Pyramids of Giza invariably hog the limelight of ancient Egypt, topping all other Pharaonic monuments and sites. Since time immemorial, tourists have travelled to Egypt to view these miraculous relics of history with their own eyes. Sadly for Egypt, however, tourist numbers have been on a bumpy decline ever since the terrorist attack of 1997 in Luxor, and because of the modern notion of Islamophobia following 9/11 they never regained momentum. Moreover, with the Egyptian revolution and the lack of security and instability in which it left the country, the number of tourists is lower even than at previous bad times, which leaves the pedlars by the Pyramids in worse shape than ever. “Something needs to be done as soon as possible about tourism, otherwise we will not have any food to put on the table,” says Sâlim Muhammad, a vendor on the site. “This is not a life. Egypt should be the leading country in tourism.”

Visitors to the Sphinx and Pyramids frequently complain about being irritated by the incessant cries of, “Come here sir, very good price!” The interruptions mean they cannot breathe in the beauty of the Pyramids in peace. The touts and pedlars are desperate to make money from the tourists through the exotic services and goods they offer, from camel and horse rides to cheap souvenirs, or even having their pictures taken. Although the offers are occasionally interesting, most of the tourists are annoyed by the way the touts push themselves into their groups. “They don’t leave you alone once you set foot in about a 100m radius of the Pyramids,” British tourist Maria HARTMAN said. “They approach you very closely and don’t understand the concept of privacy as is in the West.” From the vendors’ point of view, however, this kind of encounter is perceived to be friendly and inviting rather than an ambush.
The Giza Plateau was an empty space on the day of my visit, but the road leading up to it was already buzzing with the hum of hassling. No less than seven men came running to my car from all directions, trying to force me to park in a certain area, and of course hoping to get lucky and be the recipient of the small tip I would probably hand over. Then they could become even more friendly and get their hands on me for the whole visit, metaphorically speaking.

The plateau was becoming crowded; there were at least four tours of different nationalities with their tour guides. I saw that the touts were waiting to pounce on the tour guides. They were like competitors in a race waiting for the sound of the gunshot. When I asked vendor Muhammad Husayn why they were in such a great rush, he said, “If I am not the first to approach them then I might not have a chance for the whole day. You see, these few tours can be the only ones all morning. Since the revolution it has been bad.”

One problem the vendors create for themselves is the amount of money they demand compared with the value of the items. Prompted by that same desperation, more often than not, they ask for much higher prices than they should. If the tourists are aware of this mechanism, they are left feeling even more annoyed. “The value of the Egyptian pound is probably less than any Western currency, and so most of us will not mind being robbed of a certain amount, but the amounts they ask us for are extreme,” said Christopher HANES, who was walking around the plateau with his family. HANES said it was his third visit to Egypt, and he found it easier to buy nothing rather than stand there for 15 minutes trying to strike a bargain.

I find this point interesting. I had always wondered about it, and so I asked one of the vendors straight out why they asked for so much money. “I think this is normal. I hear that in other places the natives are not treated like the tourists, and here in Egypt too. Like the museum or the Cairo Tower, they view it as a problem because it is not legalised on paper right here,” vendor Minâ Bûlus replied. “It would be a lot smarter, though, for them to have a united quota of how much money to ask for each activity, and this way it would seem professional and civilised rather than a big chaos.”

Worst of all is when a vendor tries physically to touch a tourist, which happens constantly. This grabbing a shoulder and pulling a person towards a certain stand is viewed completely differently through the eyes of each of the parties involved. On the one hand the vendor is trying out of desperation to persuade the tourist to buy his products rather than the other man’s, but he does not understand that this gesture is not considered acceptable in other cultures. On the contrary, the tourist sees that touch as a form of physical aggression. “What really got on my nerves was when one of the men tried to pull me to see something. I couldn’t control myself any more and screamed my guts out,” tourist Victoria ENGE told me as she boarded the bus back to her hotel.

When I tried talking to the vendors, all they wanted to discuss was how little they were making in a week, and how most of them were looking to put bread on the table. They also faced the problem of being constantly chased by the police for their licences and registrations, which most of them do not have because they cannot afford to be registered because they would have to pay taxes. “See, to get rid of us they say that we should stay away now with our horses and camels, because of a new development project, but after the revolution no one says anything. The policemen themselves sometimes don’t find anything to do for days, and they just sit there too,” another vendor, Mansûr ‘Arabî, said. When I asked about the way they approached people, they claimed that otherwise the tour guides said how much of a rip-off they were, and said they would not get any money out of them.

Tourists love coming here, but they surely do not understand why the vendors enter their peaceful space and ruin their enjoyment. It would be best for both to find a middle ground. Whereas the tourist might tolerate relatively bearable interruptions, the touts need to be more discrete by listening to what the tourist wants. It does not have to be a battle. (Areeje Hindi, “Battle of the Pyramids”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 18, 2012).

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**Dimanche 21 octobre 2012**

La décision du ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad İbrâhîm, de rehausser de 25 % les billets d’entrée des sites touristiques à partir de janvier 2013 a soulevé une vague de protestation dans les milieux touristiques. Le président de la Chambre du tourisme de Louqsor, Tharwat ’Agamî, s’insurge contre cette décision, notamment que la majorité des agences de voyage ont déjà signé des contrats pour les cinq prochains mois. Il est impossible de revenir maintenant sur leurs tarifs d’engagement.

Le secrétaire général du Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, Dr Muhsin Sayyid, affirme que cette augmentation a été décidée il y a deux années, mais remise à 2013. La baisse du flux touristique et la diminution des revenus archéologiques rendent nécessaire à présent l’application d’une telle majoration. Celle-ci étant destinée à couvrir les frais de restaurations gelées et d’inaugurations ajournées. D’autant plus que cette augmentation ne représenterait pas une grosse charge pour les touristes étrangers, comparée aux tarifs pratiqués dans la plupart des pays. (Muhammad ’Abd al-Mu’tî, « Collère dans les milieux touristiques après la hausse de 25 % des tarifs d’entrée des sites », al-Ahrâm du 21 octobre 2012).

**Mercredi 24 octobre 2012**

La Police du tourisme et des antiquités à Suhâg a arrêté un ouvrier du village al-Akhdar en possession de 4 stèles antiques ornées de motifs hiéroglyphiques. (« Saisie de 4 stèles archéologiques », Ruz al-Yûsuf, 21 octobre 2012)

**Lundi 22 octobre 2012**


Intellectuals and writers have lashed out at Islamic preacher Yusuf al-Badri’s call to destroy statues because he considers them idols. The private Sada al-Balad news website had quoted Badri, a member of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, which is associated
with the Endowments Ministry, as saying on Sunday that destroying the statues in Egypt is a religious duty to prevent sedition and the return to idol worship. Badrî also noted that Prophet Muhammad destroyed the idols that were around the Kaaba in Mecca for that purpose.

Intellectuals called Badrî “ignorant” and Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm said he only recognizes fatwas issued by al-Azhar. Writer Gamâl al-Ghîtânî called Badrî’s statements terrifying, saying, “It is expected, for the Muslim Brotherhood is now ruling.” He added that Egypt has 60 percent of the world’s antiquities and that calls like this would destroy tourism. “UNESCO should pressure the Brotherhood government not to allow such things.”

Such please kill man’s appreciation of art, writer Mahfûz ‘Abd al-Rahmân said. “We will become cows if we lose that appreciation.” “The early Muslims did not do that,” said writer Yûsuf al-Qa‘îld, contending that Badrî was close to ousted President Husnî Mubârak and is now seeking some high post with the government by issuing such fatwas. He added that the whole world stood against Afghanistan when the Taliban destroyed Buddhist statues. “It made them think of rebuilding them,” he said.

One of the foremost defenders of Egypt’s built heritage is Muhammad al-Dusuqqi, who teaches in the Arab Academy of Science and Technology in Alexandria, sits on the Heritage Committee of the Alexandria governorate, and runs a blog called “Save Alex”. “There have been persistent attempts to erase and deface the legacy of Alexandria, and not just the buildings. Entire neighbourhoods have lost their character, including the Latin Quarter (al-Hayy al-Latîhî), Sporting, and Simûha, all of which are areas that used to be very exclusive. Once the city’s population grew from half a million to six million people, a lot of buildings were knocked down and residential towers were built in their place, totally changing the character of the place,” al-Dusuqqi said.

Part of the problem is that the original plans of the city did not allow for smooth expansion to accommodate the future growth of the city. But the indifference of local developers to the city’s legacy is making things worse. In 1987, the late dramatist Usâma Anwar ‘Ukâsha wrote a television series called “The White Flag” on this theme. al-Dusuqqi is fond of this series, which warned that unless action was taken developers would end up demolishing most of the city’s historic buildings. “‘Ukâsha wrote this series 25 years ago and yet nothing has changed,” al-Dusuqqi said. In the series, there is a building called the Villa Mufîd Abû al-Ghîr, which a businesswoman called Mi’allima Fadda al-Ma‘adâwî wishes to demolish. In the fiction, the building is saved by the intervention of conservationists. However, in fact, the villa — which belonged to former prime minister Kamâl al-Ganzûrî — was pulled down two years ago.

In 1999, Muhammad ‘Awad, one of Alexandria’s top heritage experts and director of the Research Centre of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, made a survey of all the historical buildings in the city. An updated version of this survey was produced in 2006 by the Heritage Committee of Alexandria. This should have slowed down the process of demolition, but since last year’s revolution the opposite has happened. In the absence of law and order that has marked the past 20 months, the city has lost dozens of historical buildings, including superb examples of period architecture and rare examples of the villas and apartment buildings built 100 or so years ago.

The developers, who usually start working at night to avoid a public outcry, use legal loopholes to justify their actions. Sometimes they even hire criminals to take the blame for the destruction of the listed buildings. Meanwhile, conservation activists are up in arms and have staged several vigils to protect major buildings from the pickaxes of the developers. One such vigil was held on 11 June to defend the Villa Aghion in the district of Wâbûr al-Mayya. The developers had sent a crew to pull down the villa at 4am. When ‘Awad was told about it, he woke up the governor and the demolition was stopped, though only after the building had lost its irreplaceable period façade. The Villa Aghion was built in 1922 by the French architect Auguste Perret (1874-1954), one of the pioneers of the use of reinforced concrete.

Alexandria activists also held a vigil to defend the city’s Villa Cicurel against demolition after former prime minister Kamâl al-Ganzûrî inexplicably ordered its removal from the heritage list. The art deco Cicurel building was built in the 1920s and was designed by French architects Leon Azema, Jacques Hardy and Max Edrei.

Another architectural activist is Shaymâ’ ʿÂshûr, who lectures at the Arab Academy for Science and Technology. She runs the blogspot “keep hunting photos” which focuses on building styles in Egypt over the past two centuries. The blogspot later developed into an electronic newspaper called The Io Weekly, which is updated every Tuesday, runs articles, photos, and videos about Egypt’s architectural heritage, monitors current violations against listed buildings and alerts the architectural community to lectures and various events. ʿÂshûr’s 2005 MA dissertation on “Pioneer Egyptian Architects in the Liberal Period Between the 1919 and 1952 Revolutions” has been published in Arabic by Madbûlî, and it contains a wealth of information about the major Egyptian architects who were active in the country’s building boom at the turn of the
20th century.

According to 'Ashûr, modern Egyptian architects cut their teeth working with European colleagues in the Cairo districts of Heliopolis and Maʿādî. One early prominent architect was Mahmûd Husayn Pasha Fahmî, who was followed by Mustafa Pasha Fahmî, formerly king Fârûq's architect, who used many Islamic motifs in his work. In his wake came 'All Gabr, who favoured European styles and designed the villas of the celebrities of the time, including 'Abd al-Rahmân Hamâmûd, Umm Kultûm, al-Badrâwî and Sâfinâz Zul-Fiqqûr. There was also a cohort of architects of Syrian origin that worked in Egypt 100 years ago or so, and this included Charles Ayrût, a Syrian who was influenced by the Dutch school in using yellow and red facing bricks. There was also Antoine Nahhâs, another Syrian, who worked mainly in French styles and left his mark on dozens of downtown Cairo buildings.

Shaymâ' divides Egyptian architects into three groups: those influenced by British styles, those influenced by the French, and those inspired by the traditions of Germany, Switzerland and the US. Those who favoured British styles were architects who received their training in Liverpool and London, where they were influenced by the architectural fashions of the 1920s and 1930s, including modern trends. Members of this group included 'All Gabr, Muhammad Ra'fat, Sharîf Nu'mân, Muhammad al-Tawîl, Mahmûd Riyâd, Mahmûd Hâkim, Mustafa Rushdî, 'Umar Ghabbûr, 'Alî Farîd, and Tawfîq Abd al-Gawwâd.

Those influence by French styles, and who largely received their training in Paris, included Mustafa Fahmî, Hasan Fathî, Ahmad Sharmî, Ahmad Shâkir, Abû Bakr Khayrat and Ahmad Sidqî. This group of architects had a tendency to fuse Islamic motifs with European styles. The third group, mostly educated in Germany, Switzerland and the US, included Sayyid Kurayyîm (who studied in Zurich), Shaftiq al-Sadr, Yusuf Shaftiq, Mustafa Shawqî and Salâh Zaytûn (who studied in Illinois). Another architectural activist is Muhammad al-Shahîd, who is currently finishing his PhD at New York University in the US. al-Shahîd created the electronic magazine Cairoobserver, which appears in the form of an online newspaper, although one of its issues has appeared in hard copy format thanks to a grant from the British Cultural Centre.

Cairoobserver covers everything related to modern and contemporary Egyptian architecture, with a special focus on conservation and city-planning issues. al-Shahîd, who has spent most of his life abroad, especially in the US, has more recently been spending his time in Egypt in relation to research on the Egyptian architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries. He rails against those who believe in a dichotomy of European and Egyptian architecture. “Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that some designs were influenced by European styles, these later became totally assimilated and integrated into the Egyptian environment. Some say that Cairo, from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, was a ‘copy’ of Paris. But what such people don’t seem to notice is that the bulk of historic Cairo has remained unchanged since the beginning of the city-planning efforts under Muhammad ‘Ali,” al-Shahîd said.

Although Paris was largely demolished and rebuilt in the nineteenth century, with the exception of rare architectural landmarks, Cairo has stood the test of time. Some thoroughfares were superimposed onto the old city, but this happened in a “surgical manner” and over several decades, perhaps 40 years or so, according to al-Shahîd. The creation of these thoroughfares, such as the Muhammad ‘Ali and Clot Bey streets, did not change the city’s character, but allowed it to evolve, he adds. In Paris, on the other hand Baron HAUSMANN’S designs completely remade the city in the 1860s. He imposed strict regulations for building styles and stated the dimensions and heights of various buildings, down to the sizes of their windows. In Cairo, the rules set out by ‘Ali Pasha Fahmî, the city’s chief planner under the khedives Ismâ‘îl and Tawfîq, were more relaxed. Fahmî imposed building specifications, but he had nothing to say about the style of the buildings. This is why Cairo retained its own independent ways. “Cairo was never Paris. It was always itself,” al-Shahîd concluded. (Osama Kamal, “In defence of old buildings”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 25, 2012).

In the early hours of the morning three weeks ago, the façade of the Athena Hotel in Port Said came tumbling down. The hotel, one
of 500 listed buildings in Port Said, has been one of the landmarks of the city’s al-Nahda Street since it was built in the early 20th century. The authorities wanted to pull it down a few years ago, but its heritage status protected it from the demolisher’s wrecking ball. Now a piece of history has disappeared. The hotel, a two-storey building, was used to lodge British troops during their invasion of the city in 1956. Because the building collapsed in the early hours of the morning, questions immediately arose. Many buildings seem to be coming down during the night these days, and they tend to be period villas, coveted by developers interested in putting high-rises up in their place. As a result, local conservationists were up in arms.

As soon as he heard of the collapse of the Athena Hotel’s façade, Ahmad Sidqi, director of the Urban Monitor Project at the Heritage Programme, another heritage group, immediately rushed to the city. Sidqi, a well-known conservationist, is especially interested in between-the-wars buildings, which he sees as symbolic of the country’s liberal past. “Many people of different nationalities came to Egypt between the two world wars and they interacted with Egyptian society economically, culturally and socially. As a result of this interaction, cosmopolitan cities emerged and Port Said is one of these. Its architectural legacy is varied and unmatched,” Sidqi said. Sidqi would like to see the city refurbished through a concerted architectural revival project, perhaps along the lines of Beirut’s Solidere Project. Other conservationists also dream of a revival plan, but one along the lines of those implemented in Tunisia and Syria, where interventions have been more beneficial to the local community.

Port Said does not lack a vocal retinue of conservationists. One group that has been active in defending the city’s architectural legacy is the city’s Alliance Française, which has already issued a book about the city’s heritage. Other groups include the Writers and Artists Association and the Coalition of Port Said Intellectuals. Activists defending the city’s architecture include Pierre Alfarobba, 34, director of the Alliance Française. Alfarobba, who came to Port Said three years ago, fell in love with the city at first sight. “Before 2003, we had no documented research about the architectural heritage of Port Said, but then the Alliance Française commissioned French, Greek and Egyptian writers to write about the special architectural styles of the cities on the Suez Canal. As a result, three books were produced, one on Port Said (2006), another on Isma’iliyya (2009) and a third on Suez (2011),” Alfarobba said. The books, selling at about LE200 ($65) a piece, are too expensive for many people to buy, but at least it is a start.

The Alliance Française is an Egyptian-registered organisation affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs. It was formed in 1989 and is one of 1,000 local societies operating in 130 countries around the world. For the past three years, it has been celebrating the heritage of Port Said in a festival called “Heritage Days”. This year’s event, held from 24 September to 17 October, featured lectures, film screenings, roundtable discussions and a photographic exhibition in which 30 local photographers contributed works about the city.

One of Port Said’s most outspoken conservationists is Walid Muntasir, a photographer who lives opposite the Arsenal Building, not far from the old Suez Canal Company Building and the well-preserved examples of the Company’s staff housing. “Port Said was not a city; it was a melting pot,” Muntasir said. He speaks fondly of the city’s
architectural attractions, citing their dates of construction from memory: the Suez Canal Building (1869), the Old Lighthouse (1870), the Greek Church (1864), the Tawfiq Mosque (1882), the Eugenie Church (1890), the Bazaar Market (1891), the Cinema Eldorado (1896), the Abbâs Mosque (1904), the Italian Cathedral (1934), the Italian School (1910), the Lycée Français (1910), the Italian Cultural Centre (1937), the Police Station (1932) and the Simon Arzt Store (1932).

Khâlid ‘Abd al-Rahmân, who lives in al-Talâtînî Street in the Arab Quarter, has been collecting old Port Said photographs. "Old Port Said is not just about buildings. It is a source of inspiration that one can feel deep inside despite the surrounding ugliness," he said. Poet Ahmad Shalabî, active in the conservationist movement, is also fascinated by the city’s cosmopolitan past. "Port Said is not just a city — it is a state of mind," Shalabî said. "The stories older people tell of the city paint a portrait of a magical city, one that evokes the mood in port cities in France, Italy, Greece or Spain. Port Said was a city of the Orient, but it had a European soul. This is clear in its architectural heritage which mirrors many religions — Islamic, Christian and Jewish — and different cultures." "Port Said will never die, because it lives through its old buildings," Shalabî said.

The Villa Aghion, built in 1926 in Wâbûr al-Mayya, an elite Alexandrian district, is situated on the corner of a street where hundreds of residents have been passing by on a daily basis for decades. What they may not know, however, is that the villa they have been walking past is one of a few buildings built by the French architect Auguste PERRET in Egypt. PERRET was resident in Alexandria in the early 20th century, and he was commissioned by a Jewish family to build the villa. The building, constructed during the modernist period, is an example of the architect’s use of steel construction techniques in domestic buildings. The French architect gave free rein to the design and construction, producing lotus-inspired ironwork for its balconies and using space to create symmetry and character.

Tragically, on 28 August, 2009, the villa was attacked by bulldozers in the middle of the night, breaking its entrance pillars. The security forces intervened and stopped the demolition, and those working on it were arrested on the orders of general ‘Âdil Labîb, the former governor of Alexandria. Since last year’s revolution, there have been fears that the villa might be under threat once more. According to Law 144/2006, designed to halt the demolition of heritage buildings, the villa is still listed and cannot be demolished.

Meanwhile, the protesters are hoping to restore the building to its former glory since the damage can be repaired. According to a letter sent by the Engineers Syndicate on 9 June 2012 to the Alexandria governor, "we want to direct your attention to the importance
of this heritage building, which was designed and constructed by the famous French architect Auguste Perret, a pioneer in steel construction. The architectural, historical and artistic value of the Villa Aghion could never be compensated for if it was lost, since it forms a link in the chain of modern international architectural history and not only in Egypt. No textbook on modern architecture would be complete without mentioning it.” The letter went on to point out that “UNESCO has listed Perret’s architectural designs on its heritage lists due to their artistic and architectural value, thereby making them part of the heritage of all mankind and not just of a particular country. Thousands of tourists visit these sites every year, at a time when this building is facing demolition in the city of Alexandria.”

“All Barakat, head of the Engineers Syndicate, said that it “would be impossible that we should have, in Alexandria, one of the few buildings in Egypt that are mentioned in architectural textbooks as representing the modern style, and decide to tear it down.” He is one of the campaigners who attended the June campaign calling on the government to take measures to protect the villa. However, the issue raises questions about how the owners of the villa can be appropriately compensated for maintaining the property intact. Accordingly, among the banners raised was one that suggested creating a fund to raise funds for the owners. Since the revolution landlords have tried to have buildings delisted in efforts that have unfortunately in some cases been successful.

Listing a building can reduce its value. However, due to the current lack of development sites, real-estate developers are still interested in old buildings situated in prime locations. Due to low rents and rising prices, landlords are often keen to sell their property regardless of its historical value. The case of the Villa Aghion has foregrounded the problems facing Egypt’s architectural legacy, especially since some historic buildings have been torn down since the revolution in Heliopolis in Cairo, in Port Said and of course in Alexandria. In the latter city, buildings have been suddenly torn down, or have been built on overnight without the issuing of building permits.

Such developments took place particularly during the administration of former prime minister Kamal al-Ganzuri, and Khalid Mitwalli, head of the eastern zone of Alexandria, said that “we have raised the issue with the government and sent a letter requesting funding to compensate owners so that they will not sell their property, attempt to demolish it, or build new buildings on it. However, these are trying times, and we have to have patience.” Since then, the former governor of Alexandria, Usama al-Fuli tried to arrange the sale of the Villa Aghion to an embassy, such that the owner could be paid a suitable price for his property. Such a deal would have the additional benefit of guaranteeing the building’s maintenance. However, al-Fuli has recently resigned, and since then news of the deal has sunk from sight.

"Part of the problem is that many people today lack awareness of the value of heritage buildings and believe that this value is limited to very ornate or ancient buildings. They often do not take into consideration the historical or cultural value of a given building. Most importantly, they sometimes fail to realise that the country’s built heritage is not just the ornate symbol of the past, but is an active reality that constitutes Egypt’s visual memory. Many people are unaware of this, and they complain of the lack of ornamentation of modern architecture. One passing Alexandrian asked what all the fuss was about. After he had listened to the explanation, he said, “but there’s nothing special about the villa.”

According to architect Muhammad al-Disqqi, "the building’s restoration would require highly skilled labour. It could not be done as some people seem to think. It would be necessary to find the original plans and carefully plan its restoration.” The June protests attempted to call attention to the
aggressive demolition of Alexandria’s heritage that has been taking place. Experts have concentrated on raising public awareness and calling for government action, while citizens have filed complaints with the local government in an attempt to prevent further demolitions.

However, sadly not all such calls have been successful, and often the governmental response has been slow, or non-existent, on an issue that has been raised in more than one city. In addition to Alexandria, Heliopolis in Cairo and Port Said face similar problems. The real threat now is that the country’s historic cityscapes may be transformed before the government takes appropriate action to prevent it. (Osama Kamal, “A city that will never die”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 25, 2012. Voir également Hishâm al-Hatîmî, « Effondrement de l’hôtel Athéna, le plus célèbre et le plus ancien de Port Said », al-Misriyyûn du 4 octobre).

Irregularities in the restoration of Alexandria’s cityscapes have been reported. Experts have attributed the damage to poor restoration techniques, and have called for government action to prevent further damage. (Osama Kamal, “A city that will never die”, Al-Ahram Weekly, October 25, 2012. Voir également Hishâm al-Hatîmî, « Effondrement de l’hôtel Athéna, le plus célèbre et le plus ancien de Port Said », al-Misriyyûn du 4 octobre).

Sayyid a explained that the Parquet général was seized of the case of the restoration of the Institut d’Égypte. In case of a verdict obliging the army to restore the building to the Ministry of Archaeology, it would be carefully examined by the CSA, in order to determine if it was possible to restore it according to the law on the protection of antiquities, or if the building had definitively lost its historical character. In such a case, it would be removed from the list of patrimony. (Dînâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « À la suite d’une mauvaise restauration, le ministère de l’Archéologie menace de rayer l’Institut d’Égypte de la liste du patrimoine », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 28 octobre 2012. Voir également Muhammad ’Abd al-Mu’tî, « Le bâtiment de l’Institut d’Égypte n’est plus historique à cause de sa restauration d’une manière erronée », al-Ahrâm du 30 octobre).

Dimanche 28 octobre 2012

Le secrétaire général du Conseil Suprême des Antiquités (CSA), Muhsin Sayyid, a déclaré que le bâtiment de l’Institut d’Égypte ne peut plus être considéré comme un bâtiment historique après sa restauration d’une façon erronée par les Forces armées égyptiennes. En effet, celles-ci ont rasé le bâtiment historique et édifié à sa place un autre bâtiment tout neuf. Ainsi, l’Institut d’Égypte a perdu tout caractère historique. Si rien n’est fait, le CSA serait amené à le rayer de la liste du patrimoine.

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Le département de recherches de la Bibliotheca Alexandrina, avec la collaboration de la zone archéologique d’Alexandrie, organise aujourd’hui un atelier sur les fouilles archéologiques. Cet atelier, qui s’achèvera le 29 novembre, vise à rehausser la conscience archéologique du grand public et à expliquer l’importance des fouilles et des missions archéologiques dans la préservation du patrimoine. (Muhammad Raslân, « Atelier sur les fouilles archéologiques organisé à la BA », al-Ahrâm, 4 novembre 2012).


Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad İbrâhîm, s’est entretenu aujourd’hui avec l’ambassade du Royaume-Uni au Caire, S.E. James WATT. L’entretien vise à dégager de nouveaux horizons devant la coopération archéologique commune. Dr İbrâhîm a examiné le renforcement de la coopération avec le gouvernement anglais et l’Union européenne en matière de formation et d’entraînement des archéologues égyptiens, de préservation et de restauration des antiquités égyptiennes. De son côté, WATT a affirmé le désir de son pays de renforcer les relations avec l’Égypte dans le domaine archéologique. (Dînâ ’Abd al-‘Alîm, « İbrâhîm rencontre l’ambassadeur anglais pour renforcer la coopération archéologique », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 4 novembre 2012).

The Kumi Dome in the al-Darb al-Ahmar area in Old Cairo is one of Cairo’s archaeological treasures. Built in the 10th century in the Circassian Mamlik era, the dome is listed on the official map of the Ministry of Antiquities as antiquity number 256. For a long time a protective fence ensured that the monument could be admired by anyone passing by yet would be protected from harm. Recently the fence came down and instead of preserving the past, the area around the dome has turned into a place where garbage is dumped and unwanted possessions are discarded. ("Archaeological treasure under threat", Daily News Egypt, November 5, 2012).

Lors d’une perquisition au domicile d’un trafiquant d’antiquités à Gîza, la police a saisi 285 pièces archéologiques. Il s’agit de 133
ouchebtis en faïence bleue, 40 autres ouchebtis de plus grande taille, 80 pièces de monnaie d'époques grecque et romaine, 8 cartonnages de momie en bois peint, 3 bracelets métalliques, 2 bagues décorées d'époque pharaonique, 2 petits pots en faïence, 2 terracotta représentant une tête féminine et un personnage les bras levés, une quantité de perles de colliers de différentes tailles et couleurs, 2 amulettes en forme de pilier Djed et en forme d'Horus. (Muhammad Shûmân, « Saisie de 285 pièces archéologiques dans la maison d'un trafiquant d'antiquités », al-Âhrâm, 5 novembre 2012. Voir également Ashraf Ghayth, « Saisie de 287 pièces antiques à Gîza », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 5 novembre 2012).


Un incendie gigantesque s’est déclaré dans une boulangerie située dans la rue al-Mu’izz l-Dîn Allah al-Fâtimî. Il a failli ravager les monuments situés à proximité : mosquées al-Sultân Barqûq et Qalâwwûn, sabîl Khisrî Pacha ainsi que le dôme de Nagm al-Dîn Ayyûb. L'incendie a duré entre 12h30 et 14h. En l'absence de pompiers, les habitants eux-mêmes ont combattu les flammes avec des moyens dérisoires. À présent, les habitants lancent un S.O.S. au Premier ministre, Hishâm Qandîl et

Jeudi 8 novembre 2012

Security services seized on Thursday stolen artefacts in Cairo, Gîza and Sharqiyya. Four people are suspected of attempting to sell artefacts stolen from the Egyptian Museum out of an apartment in Ma‘âdî. Two suspects were arrested for possessing a stone bust and 28 golden pieces, which are not believed to be authentic artefacts. One of them reportedly admitted to planning to sell the objects. A third suspect was also arrested for possession of stolen artefacts, which he said he had acquired from a fourth person, who allegedly stole them from the museum.


Mardi 13 novembre 2012


Dimanche 11 novembre 2012

Before the Conrad Hotel overlooking the Nile Corniche, where an exact replica tomb of the ancient Egyptian mysterious king Tutankhamun is located, thousand of journalists, TV cameras and photographers gathered to witness on Tuesday the unveiling of the tomb by European Commission Vice President Catherine Ashton and the Minister of Tourism Hishâm Za’zû’. The tomb was immediately opened to public after its official inauguration within the framework of the two-day-long EU Task Force Conference on Tourism and Flexible Investments.
The replica tomb is a gift to Egypt from the Factum Foundation, Madrid, the Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt, Zurich and the University of Basel, to promote the EU Task Force Conference taking place in Egypt as well as to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the discovery of the first signs that led British archaeologist Howard Carter to a full discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb at the Valley of the Kings on Luxor’s west bank on 22 November 1922.

James MacMillan-Scott, president of the factum foundation said that the work undertaken in the tomb of Tutankhamun is an initiative instigated in 1988 by the Society of Friends of the Royal Tombs of Egypt with the full support of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), who have long supported the idea of building replicas of the royal tombs at Theban Necropolis that are either closed or need to be closed for their preservation. The first phase included the three tombs that are in danger due to the high rates of visitors; Tutankhamun, Nefertari and Set I.

Concrete production and facsimile of Tutankhamun’s replica tomb started in 2009 and was completed in October 2012. The Madrid-based Factum Arte used high-tech 3D scanners to facsimile the real tomb. MacMillan-Scott explained that these replica tombs would provide another opportunity for visitors to admire the ancient Egyptian royal tombs and learn the history since its discovery. Importantly, it also encourages conservation of the originals and promotes Egypt as a world leader in applying technology and manual skills. Furthermore it promotes an awareness of tourism as a positive force in the conservation of Egypt’s cultural heritage.

Director and Chief Engineer of Factum Arte Michael Ward said that the facsimile of the Tutankhamun’s replica tomb took three years to complete and work involved the creation of a new technology to record every inch in the tomb and perfectly replicate it. In 2010 the SCA said they had selected the Carter’s Rest House at the entrance of the Valley of the Kings for the permanent installation of the three replica tombs, however, the current Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm clarifies that, actually, the Permanent Committee of Ancient Egyptian Monuments will select a location and that he doesn’t foresee it will be at the Valley of the Kings entrance. (Nevine El-Aref, "Tutankhamun’s replica tomb unveiled", Ahram Online, November 13, 2012. Voir également Muhammad al-Rammâh, « L’Union européenne offre à l’Égypte une réplique de la tombe de Toutankhamon », al-Dustûr, 7 novembre ; Dinâ ‘Abd al-'Alîm, « Ibrâhîm : Je préfère installer la réplique de la tombe de Toutankhamon loin de Louqsor », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 7 novembre ; Muna Yâsîn, « Hawwâs : la réplique de la tombe de Toutankhamon ne peut pas être installée à Sharm al-Shaykh », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 10 novembre ; Nevine El-Aref, “Tut brings EU, Egypt closer”, Al-Ahram Weekly, November 14 ; Muhammad ’Abd al-Mu’tî, « Guerre de déclarations autour de la réplique de la tombe de Toutankhamon », al-Ahrâm du 14 novembre).


La Police du tourisme et des antiquités du Fayûm a arrêté deux chauffeurs en possession de 136 pièces antiques. Le premier, Ayman E., transportait dans sa voiture 2 momies et 14 pots en terre cuite de différentes formes et tailles. Le second chauffeur, al-Sayyid A., transportait 120 pièces archéologiques remontant aux époques pharaonique et romaine. (Yusrî al-Badrî, « Arrestation au Fayûm de 2 chauffeurs en possession de 136 pièces antiques », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 17...
Mardi 20 novembre 2012


Mercredi 21 novembre 2012

An archaeological mission from the Czech Institute of Egyptology at the Charles University in Prague, who is carrying out routine excavations on the north side of the Abû Sîr necropolis, 30km south of the Gîza Plateau, has been taken by surprise with the discovery of an important rock-hewn tomb. The tomb belonged to a Fifth-Dynasty princess named Sheretnebty, and alongside it were four tombs belonging to high-ranking officials. An era enclosed within a courtyard. The tombs had been robbed in antiquity and no mummies were found inside them.

According to the Czech mission’s archaeological report, a copy of which has been given to Al-Ahram Weekly, traces of the courtyard were first detected in 2010 while archaeologists were investigating a neighbouring mastaba. However, active exploration of the royal tomb was not undertaken until this year, when it was discovered that the ancient Egyptian builders used a natural depression in the bedrock to dig a four-metre-deep tomb almost hidden amidst the mastaba tombs constructed around it on higher ground. Four rock-hewn tombs were also unearthed within the courtyard surrounding the royal tomb.

The north and west walls of the princess’s tomb were cased with limestone blocks, while its south wall was cut in the bedrock. The east wall was also carved in limestone, along with the staircase and slabs descending from north to south. The courtyard of the tomb has four limestone pillars, which originally supported architraves and roofing blocks. On the tomb’s south side are four pillars engraved with hieroglyphic inscriptions stating: “The king’s daughter of his body, his beloved, revered in front of the great god, Sheretnebty.”

Miroslav BARTA, head of the Czech mission, says early investigations have revealed that the owner of the tomb was previously unknown, but that it most probably belonged to the family of a Fifth-Dynasty king. The preliminary date of the structure, based on the stratigraphy of the site and analysis of the name, BARTA says, falls in the second half of
the Fifth Dynasty. It is surprising that the tomb should not be located in Abû Sîr south, among the tombs of non-royal officials, considering that most members of the Fifth-Dynasty royal family are buried 2km north of Abû Sîr pyramid.

While digging inside Sheretnebty's tomb, the Czech archaeologists found a corridor that contains the entrances to four rock-hewn tombs of top officials of the Fifth Dynasty. BARTA says two tombs have been completely explored so far. The first belonged to the chief of justice of the great house, Shepespuptah, and the second to Duaptah, the inspector of the palace attendants. Both tombs probably date from the reign of King Djedkare Isesi. The remaining two are still under excavation, but early investigation reveals that one belonged to the overseer of the scribes of the crews, Nefer, whose false door is still in situ. This tomb has a hidden tunnel in which excavators have unearthed three statues of the owner, one showing the deceased as a scribe.

Muhammad al-Biyali, head of the ancient Egyptian and Graeco-Roman antiquities section, said that between the entrances to the four tombs the mission unearthed three naoi with engaged limestone statues bearing small traces of the original polychromy. The statues, which show excellent quality craftsmanship, depict the features of an unknown man alone, with his son and with his wife and son. Several fragments of a false door engraved with the various titles and names of princess Sheretnebty were also uncovered.

More statues have been found inside the fourth tomb, which had a hidden tunnel that was blocked with limestone fragments and brown sand. BARTA says that although tomb raiders entered the tunnel in antiquity, they did not appreciate the beauty of the statues and left them buried inside. Regrettably, however, while they were carrying out their activities in the tomb they broke some of the statues into two pieces. Luckily, some were found intact. These statues were carved in wood and limestone, and some were found standing in their original position while others rested on the floor. One of the statues was inscribed with the name of the tomb's owner who is named as Iti, the inspector of crews. Excavations show that at least nine statues were placed in the tunnel, two carved in wood and the other seven in limestone. Only three statues were in a very good state of preservation.

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm described the discovery as a new chapter in the history of the Abû Sîr necropolis and Saqqâra, since the tomb was discovered in an area midway between Abû Sîr and Saqqâra necropolis. "The exploration of the tombs is not yet complete, but it has already provided us with a lot of information," BARTA says. He adds that both the architecture of the tombs and the remains of their original equipment provide indications about the beliefs, traditions and burial practices of the tombs’ owners, and about ancient Egyptian society, the environment, history and art in the Fifth Dynasty. The discovery of the statues in the corridor next to the princess’s courtyard, in addition to Nefer's decorated false-door and four statues in his serdab, are unique finds in Abû Sîr south.

"We are very fortunate to have this new window through which we can go back in time and follow and document the step-by-step life and death of several historically important individuals of the great pyramid-age era," BARTA says. The Czech mission will continue its
exploration and documentation work to reveal more about the new collection. The mission from the Charles University in Prague has been working at Abû Sîr since the 1960s, and over the ensuing decades they have explored monuments in the royal necropolis including the pyramid complex of the Fifth-Dynasty King Raneferef, where they discovered an enormous number of objects. South of the pyramids are the tombs of officials, among which they found the courtyard of Sheretneby.

In the western part of Abû Sîr the mission found shaft tombs dating from the Late Period, including the intact tomb of a priest, Iufaa, which contained a huge sarcophagus containing the mummy and walls covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions recording ancient Egyptian religious beliefs. (Nevine El-Aref, “Princess tomb”, Al-Ahram Weekly, November 21, 2012. Voir également « Une mission tchêque découvre la tombe d’une princesse pharaonique », al-Dustûr, 2 novembre ; Dinâ ’Abd al-’Alîm, « Mise au jour d’une tombe d’une princesse pharaonique au Sud d’Abû Sîr », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 2 novembre ; Muna Yâsîn, « Découverte de la tombe d’une princesse pharaonique », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 3 novembre ; Nevine El-Aref, “Statues of 5th dynasty top officials discovered in Abû Sîr”, Ahram Online, November 18).

Monthu Temple is dedicated to the worship of the falcon-headed god of war Monthu. The temple is located five kilometres northeast of Karnak in an area called Armant on Luxor’s east bank. Armant was excavated by French archaeologist Fernand Disson from 1925 to the post-war period, when he revealed many buildings, including Monthu Temple. The temple replaced an older sanctuary from the Old Kingdom and consists of an open forum with a tower and enclosing two mounds that housed the chapels of worship.

The ruins of the last structure date to the reign of Ptolemy VIII, although decorations and additions continued to be added centuries later by the Romans. Along the span of time, Monthu Temple was a major centre of worshipping Apis bulls, that is why it contains many statues and reliefs of bulls. Most of these statues are now on display in various museums around the world. (Nevine El-Aref, “Monthu Temple reveals new pharaonic secrets”, Ahram Online, November 21, 2012. Voir également « Découverte d’une statue en granit noir dans le temple d’Armant », al-Dustûr du 21 novembre ; « Découverte d’une statue royale
On Thursday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handed over two Old Kingdom sandstone engravings to the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), which were for decades in the possession of a New Zealand photographer. The blocks depict two scenes; one shows the lioness goddess of war Sekhmet wearing the Cobra crown, while the second is a hieroglyphic text uncovering a title of an Old Kingdom king saying: "King of Upper and Lower Egypt and the core of the two lands, Horus."

Usâma al-Nahhâs, director of the retrieved antiquities section, relates that the story of these two blocks which were in the possession of a photographer from New Zealand who lived in Egypt during the 1940s and 1950s and died this year. Before his death, al-Nahhâs said, the photographer told his best friend Bruce Hall to hand over the two blocks to Egypt.

Antiquities minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm told Ahram Online that the two blocks are now at the Egyptian Museum for restoration, and will be put on show in a special exhibition along with other artefacts that were retrieved last year. He added that the blocks would be studied to determine their original position and location. (Nevine El-Aref, “Two Old Kingdom engraved blocks return home”, Ahram Online, November 22, 2012. Voir également “Egypt recovers two pharaonic palettes from New Zealand”, Egypt Independent, November 21; Muna Yâsîn, « Le testament d’un photographe néo-zélandais restitue 2 pièces archéologiques à l’Égypte », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 22 novembre; Dînâ ‘Abd al-’Alîm, « La Nouvelle-Zélande restitue à l’Égypte 2 pièces archéologiques de l’Ancien Empire », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 22 novembre).

Samedi 24 novembre 2012


Le directeur général de la zone archéologique d’Alexandrie, Dr Muhammad Mustafa ‘Abd al-Magîd, a révélé que « la réunion tenue récemment pour résoudre ce différend n’a eu aucun succès. Surtout que la municipalité ne nous a pas autorisé à effectuer des sondages sur ce site et s’est mis à couler les fondations du nouveau siège. Le CSA compte prendre plusieurs mesures en vue de suspendre la construction de ce siège dans cet emplacement contigu au Musée gréco-romain ». ‘Abd al-Magîd a en outre accusé le gouverneur d’Alexandrie, Muhammad ‘Atâ ‘Abbâs, de ne pas respecter le code de construction qui stipule l’obtention d’une autorisation du CSA avant toute nouvelle construction. (Ragab Ramadân, « Le siège de la municipalité attise la crise entre le gouvernorat d’Alexandrie et le CSA », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 24 novembre 2012).


Quant à la seconde pièce de monnaie, elle pèse 4,27 gr, 1,9 cm de diamètre et 1mm d’épaisseur. Sur une face, on voit l’empereur byzantin HÉRACLUS (610-640), avec à sa droite son fils CONSTANT III et à sa gauche son fils HÉRACLUS II. Sur l’autre face de cette monnaie, on voit une croix et des échelles. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Découverte à al-Buhayra de 2 pièces de monnaie byzantine », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’ du 26 novembre 2012. Voir également « Mise au jour à al-Buhayra de 2 pièces de monnaie d’époque byzantine », al-Dustûr du 26 novembre).

(…) Muhammad Ibrâhîm, Minister of State of Antiquities, said the very important discovery gives Egyptologists a full and complete vision of the shapes, sizes and looks of coins during such an era. It also shows the high skills of craftsmen of the Byzantine period, he added. Mustafa Rushdi, Director of al-Buhayra Antiquities, told Ahram online that the area of Kom al-Ghuraf is a very important archaeological site located between Damanhûr and Rosetta. It was previously a part of the seven Nomes of Lower Egypt, the district still little explored. In the Late Period this area was dominated by the city of Metelis, not yet identified. The vast site was destroyed intensively since the late nineteenth century, as seen from topographical maps of different periods that record the progressive dismantling.

Rushdi said the area is full of impressive structure ruins of mud brick,
residential houses with a large amount of domestic ceramics, mostly of the Roman and Byzantine periods. Some modest depositions and 11 structures from the Roman period, built in adobe, are located in various areas of Kom al-Ghuraf, except one of them is completely submerged in mud. Studies carried out along previous excavations of the site reveal that the site was used until the early 7th century AD, at the time of the Arab invasion of Egypt. A collection of architectural fragments, including a large stone gargoyle in limestone and a lion’s head have also been found. Rushdi pointed out that the size and architectural decoration of the building suggests it is a construction of a public nature that dates back to the Roman times. A late Roman settlement, consisting of buildings constructed in mud brick with a curtain in terracotta, was found above these structures. (Nevine El-Aref, "Two Byzantine coins found in al-Buhayra", Ahram Online, November 26, 2012).

En 2012, le travail archéologique a essuyé une grande défaite en Égypte. Les manifestations réclamant des emplois ont eu pour conséquence l'embauche de près de 7 000 archéologues diplômés surnuméraires. Cette politique d'embauches injustifiées vise à arrêter les manifestations et à calmer l'ire des protestataires. Ceux-ci ont été distribués sur les différentes zones archéologiques et les musées. Leurs salaires sont puisés dans les ressources financières consacrées aux travaux de fouille et de restauration. Autrement dit, les projets de fouille et de restauration des tombes, des temples et des sites archéologiques sont sacrifiés pour payer ces salaires et apaiser la gronde.

(...) J’aurais aimé que les efforts de Mme ASHTON soient orientés vers une campagne en faveur de la préservation de la Vallée des Rois, l’organisation d’une rencontre internationale à Louqsor pour inciter au retour du tourisme, ou le démarrage des projets archéologiques importants suspendus. (...) L'intrusion de la politique dans le champ archéologique ne sert pas nos intérêts. La préservation de notre patrimoine nécessite plutôt de fournir un travail sérieux et systématique, de s'occuper de l’archéologue et du restaurateur égyptiens et de rehausser leurs niveaux à travers l’entraînement et la confrontation avec de nouvelles expériences. (Zâhî Hawwâs, « Message à ASHTON », al-Sharq al-Awsat du 29 novembre 2012).
Vendredi 30 novembre 2012

**VI – DÉCEMBRE 2012**

**Lundi 3 décembre 2012**


Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, s’est entretenu hier avec l’ambassadeur de la République d’Azerbaïdjan au Caire, Chahine Abdel Layef. L’entretien a porté sur la mise en place d’un projet de réaménagement de l’enceinte Nord du Caire. Avec la contribution de l’Azerbaïdjan, il est prévu de créer deux musées de la calligraphie arabe et du tapis dans le cadre de la réaffectation de cette enceinte dont le coût s’élève à 28 millions de livres égyptiennes.


**Mardi 4 décembre 2012**


**Mercredi 5 décembre 2012**

(...) Although Luxor’s Governor ‘Izzat Sa’d announced two weeks ago that tourists were flowing back to Luxor and that the town was slowly returning to normal, with hotel booking rates indicating that the catastrophic downturn in the Egyptian tourism industry was nearing an end, the town is quieter than usual. The airport is empty except for a very few
passengers that can be counted on two hands. Luxor residents work in or depend directly or indirectly on the tourist industry, which has been in the doldrums since the 2011 revolution owing to the uncertainty and the lack of security that accompanied the revolution, and they are suffering financially. A stroll along the Corniche and through the bazaars reveals how desperate felucca (boat) owners, hantour (carriage) drivers and shopkeepers have become as they solicit passers-by to buy from them or take a carriage ride. What happened? Why is Luxor empty apart from its residents and the revolutionaries camped in the Midân Abû al-Haggâg Mosque in the core of the city?

I headed for the tomb of Merenptah, beloved son of Pharaoh Ramses II, which recently opened to the public after four years of restoration. The official opening was carried out by Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm, Minister of Tourism Hishâm Za‘zû’ and Governor Sa’d as part of the attempt to provide more tourist attractions as a step to encourage Egypt’s tourism industry. The opening coincided with the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun by British Egyptologist Howard CARTER, who also discovered the tomb of Merenptah in 1903.

Merenptah was the 13th son of Ramses II by his second wife, Isis-Nofret. His elder brothers were dead and he was already 60 years old when he came to the throne on his father’s death. Although his reign lasted only a decade, he succeeded in maintaining the peace that his father had pledged with his neighbours. During the 10th year of his rule, Merenptah was forced to carry out several military campaigns including battles with the invading Libyans and an uprising in Nubia.

Merenptah’s tomb (KV 8) lies not far from his father’s (KV 7) in a small lateral valley on the northeast flank of the Valley of the Kings. To reach the tomb’s corridors and Pharaoh Merenptah’s burial chamber, I had to make my way down a very steep wooden ramp, newly installed to facilitate the visitor’s path. The walls lining the ramp are painted with scenes showing the king in different positions before several deities. The tomb is quite straightforward, lined with eight chambers, a colonnaded hall and the burial chamber. There are also three initial corridors, the first leading to the rituals shaft, while the second has a stairway. The decorations in the first corridor show the king in the presence of the god Re-Hurakhty and the Litanies of Re. The second and third corridors have religious texts and scenes from the Imydiwat book.

The rituals shaft is a colonnaded hall with a double pillar annex decorated with scenes from the Book of the Gates. A vestibule decorated with scenes of the Book of the Dead leads to the king’s burial chamber, where the anthropoid alabaster lid of the king’s sarcophagus lies under a vaulted astronomical ceiling.

A top official at Luxor governorate who required anonymity told Al-Ahram Weekly: “It’s bad luck.” He said that just as international tourists had started to return to Luxor — peaking at almost 90 per cent of pre-revolutionary numbers on 22 November — the call to destroy the Sphinx and Pyramids made by Murgân al-Guharî, an Islamist leader who served two jail sentences under former president Husnî Mubârak for inciting violence, as well as the constitutional declaration by President Muhammad Mursî, had dampened every effort to clean up Egypt’s tarnished safety image and had led to the cancellation of all current bookings. Tourism in Luxor is now at zero, and Luxor’s high tourist season is almost over. “Political decisions are taken haphazardly without studying their advantages or disadvantages on other industries in the country,” the source said.

The same scene is mirrored on Luxor’s west bank. The Valley of the Kings, which is usually buzzing with visitors to its snaking valleys and royal tombs, is completely empty. The sound of silence is overwhelming. I hear only the sound of my own footsteps; I am the only visitor to the ancestors.
Muhammad Beabesh, chief archaeological inspector for Luxor’s west bank, told the *Weekly* that Merenptah’s tomb was the second largest in the Valley of the Kings, second only to the tomb of Seti I. It is almost 165 metres in length, and it was well known up to Graeco-Roman times. Graffiti in Greek and Latin left by Greek and Roman travellers on the tomb’s entrance indicate that the tomb was visited, at least as far as the first pillared hall, until the Roman period. However, floods that hit the area have accumulated sand and debris in a large part of the tomb and have totally blocked the burial chamber and some of the halls so that they were no longer accessible.

Beabesh said that the tomb once had four sarcophagi, three carved in granite and the fourth in alabaster. During excavation work carried out by CARTER and American archaeologist Edwin Brock, as well as the archaeological mission from the Louvre and the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), a number of fragments of the four sarcophagi had been found. In collaboration with a mission from the Royal Ontario Museum, he continued, Brock succeeded in studying and replicating the box of the first sarcophagus in red brick, and in painting it in a similar colour to the original and placing on it the authentic fragment of the sarcophagus. In order to give visitors a complete view of the details of the sarcophagus, Brock continued the scenes by drawing them on the brick box.

"Merenptah is the only king whose name was associated with Israel," said Mansûr Burayk, supervisor of Luxor antiquities. In the Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square there is a famous stela, the Stelae of Victory, bearing the text: "Israel has been destroyed and their women no longer conceive." "This is the only ancient Egyptian artefact that mentions the word Israel," Burayk said. He explained that the restoration work aimed at counteracting the deterioration of the architectural features and decorations of the tomb resulting from natural causes and misuse by past visitors. The walls were reinforced, cracks removed, reliefs and colours consolidated. New wooden stairways, flooring, lighting and special ventilation systems have been installed. Glass barriers that cover the tomb reliefs have been cleaned or replaced by new good ones.

Burayk said that the mummy of Merenptah was removed by priests from the tomb during the 20th Dynasty and was taken to the tomb of Pharaoh Amenhotep II along with dozens of other royal mummies in order to preserve and protect them from tomb robbers. These royal mummies were recovered in 1898 and were taken to Cairo to be studied and then placed on display in the mausoleum of mummies on the second floor of the Egyptian Museum.

I also paid a visit to the small, newly-restored Ptolemaic temple-chapel of Qasr al-‘Agûz, which is located about 200 metres to the southwest of Madînat Hâbû temple on the west bank. The Ministry of State for Antiquities has completed a restoration project so that it can reopen in mid-December. Burayk said the paintings and decoration of the temple had suffered deterioration, with a great many cracks appearing all over the walls. Restoration work was carried out by Marc Bloch University of Strasbourg, France, in collaboration with the French Archaeological Institute (IFAO).

Now, he continued, all the cracks had been mended, the walls consolidated, paintings cleaned and the floor restored. In spite of being architecturally almost intact and thus being of great interest, the temple is not well known to visitors. Dedicated to the Ibis-headed god Thoth, it dates back to the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes and consists of three oblong halls two of which are decorated with religious paintings. (Nevine El-Aref, "Tomb opens doors to tourism", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, December 5, 2012. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, "Qasr al-‘Agûz temple in Luxor to open next week", *Ahram Online*, December 6).

La faculté d’Archéologie de l’université du Caire organise le 15 décembre prochain un


**Dimanche 9 décembre 2012**


**Mardi 11 décembre 2012**

Les responsables de la zone archéologique de Bûlâq Abû al-Ilâh ont été surpris à l’aube de ce lundi par un bulldozer qui démolit la minoterie archéologique de Mirzâ. Celle-ci fait partie d’un complexe archéologique regroupant une mosquée et un hammâm. Le coupable prétend être le propriétaire de cette minoterie qu’il compte raser pour y construire à sa place une tour d’habitations. Il est actuellement interrogé par les policiers.

**Vendredi 7 décembre 2012**

En coopération avec le département de l’entraînement et du développement humain du Caire historique, la maison al-Sinnârî organise un stage de formation intitulé : Bases et principes de la restauration archéologique, le lundi 10 décembre prochain. Ce stage se focalise sur les débuts de l’art de la restauration et son développement pour devenir une science, un exposé des conventions internationales et des lois qui régissent ce domaine. Seront également abordés les bases et les principes appliqués lors des différentes phases de restauration. Ce stage s’adresse aux spécialistes dans le domaine de la restauration et dans le champ archéologique. Un groupe d’experts, de restaurateurs, d’archéologues, d’architectes et d’enseignants universitaires prendront en main les stagiaires dont le nombre est fixé à 50 participants. (Bilâl

Mercredi 12 décembre 2012

Archaeologists made other discoveries in Fayûm and al-Buhayra. The Italian archaeological mission from Salento-Litchi University unearthed a pair of limestone statues depicting seated lions, which once flanked the main entrance gate of the Graeco-Roman temple of Soknopaios at Dima al-Sibâ’ in Fayûm. Dima al-Sibâ’, eight kilometres from Lake Qârûn, is the site of the small Graeco-Roman town of Soknopaios Nesos, centre of the ancient Egyptian crocodile god Sobek. It was founded in the Ptolemaic era on an earlier Neolithic settlement, but in the Greek period it was the “island of the crocodile god” while in the Roman period it was a garrison for soldiers.

This week Italian and French archaeological missions in Luxor, Fayûm and al-Buhayra announced a number of new discoveries that reveal more details of ancient Egypt’s history. During their recent archaeological season, French excavators at Monthu Temple, located northeast of the Karnak Temple complex in Luxor, unearthed a statue of an unidentified New Kingdom Pharaoh. The statue was headless but was otherwise very well preserved. Carved in black granite, it was a standing statue of an athletic Pharaoh 1.25 metres tall and wearing the short royal kilt. Although the head is missing, the statue’s artistic features show that it belonged to a ruler in the New Kingdom. Excavations in the area are continuing in a search for the rest of the statue so it can be identified.

The temple is dedicated to the worship of Monthu, the falcon-headed god of war, who was the patron god of Thebes. It was discovered in 1925 by French archaeologist Fernand Bisson de la Roque, along with a collection of other ancient buildings. The Monthu Temple dates from the reign of Ptolemy VIII and was built to replace an Old Kingdom sanctuary. The temple was once a major centre for the worship of the Apis bulls, and its halls were decorated with a large number of bull statues and reliefs. These are now on display in several museums around the world.

From right: unidentified royal statue; the lion statues stored for restoration; lion statues in situ
mission from Michigan University excavated the town and unearthed the ruins of residential houses, two mud-brick temples and the external enclosure wall of the town. A section of this wall almost 10 metres high is still strewn with debris and potsherds. The lion statues were found hidden in the sand. They were unearthed by the Italian mission during routine excavation and cleaning of the temple and are in a very good state of preservation. They have been transferred to the town storehouse for restoration and cleaning.

Mario Capasso, head of the mission, describes the discovery as important as it is the first time a decorative statue has been found in a small Graeco-Roman temple. It also reveals that the temple was built according to the architectural plan used in the construction of the main temples in the capital city. (Nevine El-Aref, "Regal discoveries cast new light", Al-Ahram Weekly, December 12, 2012. Voir également "Découverte de 2 statuettes ptolémaïques dans le Fayyûm", al-Dustûr du 3 décembre).

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The damaged toe of King Amenhotep II has been repaired, a curator at the Egyptian Museum has said. On Tuesday, curators discovered the big toe on King Amenhotep II’s right foot had fallen off, four months after maintenance had been carried out on the mummy. Amenhotep II has been on display in the mausoleum of mummies since 1994 alongside 52 other royal mummies from the 17th to the 21st dynasty. Scientific examinations showed there was a bright material on the rear of the mummy’s toe, which could have caused the damage. Anthropologists reattached the toe and repaired some other damage to the mummy caused by it being removed from its humidity-controlled showcase. Each mummy is stored inside a showcase supplied with a small electronic device to observe and control the humidity level.

Antiquities Minister Muhammad İbrâhîm told Ahram Online that early investigations suggest a leakage of nitrogen from Amenhotep II’s showcase was the main reason for the damage. Silica, which is used to seal the showcase, had not been applied properly, causing nitrogen to leak and disturb the regulated environment inside the case, he added. Silica has been reapplied on the showcase and it has been refilled with nitrogen. A comprehensive maintenance check of all the equipment at the mausoleum of mummies is now under way to prevent damage to other exhibits. (Nevine El-Aref, "King Amenhotep II’s damaged toe has been repaired", Ahram Online, December 13, 2012. Voir également Muna Yâsîn, « Détachement de l’orteil du pied droit d’Amenhotep II », al-Masrî al-Yawm du 12 décembre ; Muhammad 'Abd al-Mu’tî, « Détachement de l’orteil du pied d’Amenhotep II », al-Ahrâm du 12 décembre ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : L’orteil du pied d’Amenhotep II a été recollé », al-Ahrâm du 13 décembre).

Le National Organisation for Urban Harmony (NOUH), présidé par Samîr Gharîb, organise un séminaire scientifique intitulé : Les antiquités et le patrimoine architectural égyptiens entre les risques et les solutions. Ce séminaire se tiendra le 17 décembre avec la coopération de l’Union générale des archéologues arabes, du Dr Muhammad al-Khalâwî et du Dr Salâh Zakî, professeur à la faculté de Polytechniques de l’université al-Azhar. Les études présentées visent à déterminer les risques et les conséquences néfastes qui menacent le patrimoine égyptien. Seront également examinées les menaces islamistes qui ciblent les antiquités, la protection des zones archéologiques contre les dégradations, la négligence, l’insécurité et les empiètements urbains. Le séminaire examinera également la problématique posée par les travaux de restauration, le rôle qui doit être joué par la société civile et l’État pour rehausser la conscience archéologique des
Mardi 18 décembre 2012

Un banal accident de la circulation sur l’autoroute Suhâg - Asyût a permis aux policiers de faire une saisie archéologique intéressante. Dans le coffre de l’une des deux voitures accidentées, conduite par Ayman Fath Allah, âgé de 43 ans, se trouvaient : une tête humaine en granit rouge (50 cm), une tête de chien en granit rouge (45 cm), une statuette en marbre blanc représentant un singe assis devant un oiseau (30 cm), deux statuettes d’Horus (20 et 25 cm), une statuette de taureau (20 cm), une statuette d’une femme couchée sur un scarabée (15 cm), etc. (Târiq ‘Abd al-Galîl, « La police d’Asyût saisit 50 pièces antiques lors d’un accident sur l’autoroute désertique », al-Dustûr du 18 décembre 2012. Voir également Muhammad Munîr, « Un accident de la route permet de saisir 50 pièces archéologiques », al-Ahrâm du 19 décembre).

Dimanche 23 décembre 2012

Forensic technology has recently been playing a major role in Egyptology. After centuries of ambiguity and mystery surrounding several chapters of ancient Egyptian history, modern science has finally cleared up many of the enigmas and provided a better understanding of some important episodes in this great civilisation. Modern methods have recently succeeded in identifying several royal mummies, detailing their lineages and recognising the diseases from which they suffered in life as well as solving the paradoxes behind some mysterious deaths.

Among these achievements has been solving the enigma of the early death of the boy king Tutankhamun, including the symptoms that led to his demise in early manhood as well as the identity of the mummies of his two unborn children. It also identified the mummy of the monotheistic Pharaoh Akhenaten, and proved that he was Tutankhamun’s father by a secondary wife. The mummies of Queen Hatshepsut and Pharaoh Amenhotep II, the grandfather of Tutankhamun, have also been identified.

This week scientific researches, archaeological reviews, DNA analyses, CT images and forensic, anthropological and genetic studies have put an end to the long-debated mystery over the death of Pharaoh Ramses III, a conundrum that has perplexed Egyptologists ever since the discovery of the king’s mummy in the Dayr al-Bahari cachet in Luxor in 1886. The events recorded on the harem conspiracy papyrus now exhibited at the Turin Museum further deepened the mystery.

Ramses III, the second Pharaoh of the 20th Dynasty, is considered the last New Kingdom ruler to hold substantial authority over Egypt. His 31-year reign saw several invasions from the Sea Peoples and Libyan tribes that weakened the country’s economy, and which in turn contributed to the decline of the Egyptian empire in Asia. Internal conflicts and strikes eventually led to the collapse of the 20th Dynasty.

The Pharaoh’s death was overshadowed by a plot called the Harem Conspiracy, as described in the Judicial Papyrus of Turin. Despite the information in the papyrus it could not be determined whether Ramses III escaped or was killed during the plot. According to the Judicial Papyrus, also known as the Trial Transcripts Papyrus, a plot to kill Ramses III was woven in 1155 BC by top officials of the palace and army standard bearers, as well as his secondary wife Tiya and her son Prince Pentawere. The plan was to end the life of the king and place his son Pentawere on the throne in his stead.

The papyrus asserted that the coup failed and the defendants were rounded up and sent for trial, but it was unclear whether the assassination was successful. It goes on to recount four separate trials and lists the punishments meted out to the criminals. Some were sentenced to death while others were sentenced to commit suicide. Among the latter was Pentawere. The papyrus also relates that the court received direct instructions from the Pharaoh, but this fact does not in itself pinpoint the exact time of the king’s death and whether it took place during the court trials or later. Previous Egyptological studies on the papyrus have shown that a sentence about “overturning of the royal bark” suggests a possible metaphor for an assassination.

Because of the lack of a concrete cause of death found in previous forensic studies on the king’s mummy, Egyptologists have surmised that the Pharaoh was injured in the plot and then succumbed his wounds, or that the coup was foiled, or that it was a complete success. What has made the interpretations more difficult is that the mummy of Prince Pentawere had not yet been identified to help settle the Egyptologists’ argument. It has been now determined, however, that the unidentified mummy E, known as the
“screaming mummy” and also found in the royal cachet at Dayr al-Bahari in Luxor, is a possible candidate for Pentawere. The mummification process for this corpse was unusual in that it was found wrapped in impure goatskin, which according to ancient Egyptian rituals is evidence of a punishment. Studies carried out on the mummy suggest that the deceased might have been poisoned or buried alive because its contorted facial features reflect pain and discomfort, while the mouth is wide open — hence the nickname “screaming mummy”.

Two years ago, following the success forensic technology had gained in similar cases (as in determining the cause of Tutankhamun’s early death), an international scientific and archaeological team led by renowned archaeologist and former minister of state for antiquities Zâhî Hawwâs and radiologist Ashraf Sîlim carried out a large scale study analyses on Ramses III’s mummy and the “screaming mummy” using CT scans, X-ray images, and anthropological, radiological, forensic and genetic methods. The results of the studies were published last week in the British Medical Journal (BMJ).

Sîlim told Al-Ahram Weekly that CT scans on Ramses III’s mummy had revealed a deep, serious wound almost 70mm wide in the throat of Ramses III’s mummy, directly under the larynx and extended to the spine. The trachea was clearly cut and its proximal and distal ends were retracted and separated by about 30mm. The trachea, oesophagus and large blood vessels were detached. “The extent and depth of the wound indicated that it could have caused the immediate death of Ramses III,” Sîlim says. He adds that studies on the unknown mummy suggest that he died between the age of 18 and 20, and that the body underwent a mummification procedure unusual for the 20th Dynasty. The skin had a reddish colour and the body was wrapped in a goatskin. Remains of the brain and inner organs were still inside the body, while there was no trace of embalming materials inside the body cavities. Unusual compressed skin folds and wrinkles were visible directly under the right mandible and on the right and left neck regions.

According to the report published in the BMJ, scientists suggested that the red colour could have been caused by a mixture of natron, crushed resin and lime, which had been detected under a layer of bandages during the unwrapping in 1886. “The scans also revealed taphonomical changes in the mummy, as shown by gas formation in the abdominal cavity, bladder, hip and lower neck. The thorax also seemed to be strongly inflated with air, together with widened intercostal spaces and a lateral shifting of the scapulae,” the BMJ report said.

Paleoanthropologist Albert Zink from the EURAC Institute for Mummies and the Iceman in Italy, one of the team members, says this effect could be due to post-mortem processes of degradation in the mummy, but that other reasons for the thorax widening should also be considered. In modern cases, diseases such as emphysema or death by suffocation can lead to over inflation of the lungs. The report said that genetic kinship analyses revealed identical haplotypes in both mummies. The Y chromosomal haplogroup E1b1a was determined. The testing of polymorphic autosomal micro satellite loci provided similar results in at least one allele of each marker.

“This study provided the clues to solve a long debated issue among Egyptologists,” Hawwâs said. He noted that it had been a great success and proved to be another facet of science that served archaeology. “We are changing a very important saga of ancient Egyptian history,” he said, adding that these recent results contradicted what was written in the trial papyrus, which suggested that Ramses III was not killed during the plot and continued to give directions during the trials.

Hawwâs said it was now obvious that Ramses III was killed during the coup by a sharp knife or blade that cut his neck from the
Damage to the throat after death appears to be unlikely because the collar around the mummy’s neck was intact and undamaged at the unwrapping in 1886. “The presence of an udjat eye of Horus inside the soft tissue of the wound, together with homogenous materials and other amulets featuring the four sons of Horus is further evidence of the assassination, according to Hawwâs. Embalmers inserted such an amulet in the mummy in order to heal the king’s wounds in the afterlife. In ancient Egyptian belief, the eye of Horus was a magical amulet that served as a metaphor of royal power, protection and good health.

Hawwâs said the studies also revealed that the screaming mummy was indeed that of Ramses III’s son, Prince Pentawere. Genetic analyses showed parental lineage on both mummies for a father and son, while the unusual mumification process of the shown by the use of the impure goat skin to cover the body and the presence of the internal organs was evidence of punishment in the form of a non-royal burial procedure.

The findings are backed up by historical evidence. It is known that Pentawere was the only one of Ramses’s sons to revolt against his father and to have been part of the Harem Conspiracy. His inflated thorax and the skin folds found around his neck point to violent actions that led to death, such as strangulation. (Nevine El-Aref, “Death of a pharaoh”, Al-Ahram Weekly, December 26, 2012. Voir également « Une découverte archéologique prouve que Ramsès III a été assassiné », al-Dustûr du 17 décembre ; Muhammad ’Abd al-Mu’tî, « Ramsès III est mort poignardé », al-Ahrâm du 18 décembre ; Nevine El-Aref, ”Mystery of Ramses III’s death unravelled”, Ahram Online, December 18 ; ’Alâ’ ’Abd al-Hâdî, « Ramsès III a été vicime d’un complot oudi par sa femme et son fils », al-Akhbâr du 18 décembre ; « Selon BMJ : Un complot féminin se cache derrière le meurtre de Ramsès III », al-Sharq al-Awsat du 18 décembre ; AFP, “Scientists solve 3,000-year-old pharaonic whodunit”, Egypt Independent, December 18).

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, ISESCO, is to add the Red Monastery in Suhâg to its World Heritage List for the Islamic World. The move comes in recognition of Egypt’s ancient civilisation and the country’s many outstanding monuments. The decision was taken during ISESCO’s General Conference held last month in Tunisia. Usâma al-Nahhâs, director-general of the Antiquities Repatriation Section at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), told Al-Ahram Weekly that this was the first time any Egyptian monument had been approved and placed on the ISESCO list, where it will stand alongside the city of Jerusalem.

The monastery is located in the region that in ancient times was called Adriba, today al-Gabal al-Gharbî or the Western Mountain. It lies in Suhâg governorate about four kilometres north of the Monastery of St Shenouda the Archimandrite, also known as the White Monastery, and about 11km west of the town of Suhâg. The monastery is overseen by Bishop Yoanas, the Coptic bishop of public and social services.

The Red Monastery was at the heart of a large monastic community in an area known as an important centre of ascetic life in the fifth century. It is an astonishingly rare example of the artistic intensity of late antiquities monuments in Egypt. It was so-called because of the red granite taken from nearby Pharaonic temples and used in its construction. Considered one of the most important monuments of the Coptic period, it was built in the fourth century and modelled on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. According to the late Pope Shenouda III, “anyone who has not visited Jerusalem must visit the Red Monastery in Suhâg, since going there is like going to Jerusalem.”
The Red Monastery also borrows from ancient Egyptian architecture, with the outside of the building resembling a Pharaonic temple in its rectangular form. The outer walls slant upwards, and the carvings on the outer gates are also inspired by those on ancient Egyptian temples. The grandeur of Coptic art is showcased in the ancient icons kept at the Red Monastery, such as the icon of the Holy Eucharist, the icon of the Cross, and the icon of the Net in the Sea showing a spiral net with circles representing fish and a dove representing the Holy Spirit. The monastery also possesses an icon of the Last Supper dating from the 18th century and other ancient icons.

Extensive restoration work is underway at the Red Monastery, including the construction of a surrounding wall around it covering a large area. The monastery now has a four-storey lodge for visitors, as well as a farm, meeting hall, tile workshop, pharmacy and library. A church in the monastery grounds is named after St Karas the Anchorite, while another church on the monastery farm is named after saints Bishay and Bigol.

UNESCO has earmarked LE30 million to renovate the monastery in cooperation with South Valley University and make it into an important tourist destination. The American Research Centre in Egypt has administered a major conservation campaign, art historical study and publication on the Red Monastery church sanctuary. The wall painting conservation carried out by Luigi De CESARIS and Alberto SUCATO has continued to reveal new and unexpected surprises. The tri-conch basilica includes four phases of late antiquities painting, and at least one from the mediaeval period.

In the spring of 2010, conservators under the direction of Elizabeth BOLMAN of Temple University began preliminary work on the eastern semi-dome of the sanctuary. The heads of two angels belonging to separate phases of work in the church were selected for test cleaning. (Michael Adel, “Red Monastery goes on World Heritage list”, Al-Ahram Weekly, December 26, 2012).

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