Système de translittération des mots arabes

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longues : ﻃ th, ﺢ h, ﺗ t, ﺪ d, ﻤ m
brèves : a, i, u
diphongues : aw, ay

autres conventions

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

Remarques ou suggestions
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During routine excavations at the dog catacomb in Saqqara necropolis, an excavation team led by Salima KRAM, professor of Egyptology at The American University in Cairo (AUC), and an international team of researchers led by Paul NICHOLSON of Cardiff University have uncovered almost 8 million animal mummies at the burial site. Studies on their bones revealed that those dogs are from different breeds but not accurately identified yet. “We are recording the animal bones and the mummification techniques used to prepare the animals,” KRAM said.

Studies on the mummies, KRAM explains, revealed that some of them were old while the majority were buried hours after their birth. She said that the mummified animals were not limited to canines but there are cat and mongoose remains in the deposit. “We are trying to understand how this fits religiously with the cult of Anubis, to whom the catacomb is dedicated,” she added. KRAM also told National Geographic, which is financing the project, that “in some churches people light a candle, and their prayer is taken directly up to God in that smoke. In the same way, a mummified dog’s spirit would carry a person’s prayer to the afterlife”.

Saqqara dog catacomb was first discovered in 1897 when well-known French Egyptologist Jacques DE MORGAN published his Carte of Memphite necropolis, with his map showing that there are two dog catacombs in the area. However, mystery has overshadowed such mapping as it was not clear who was the first to discover the catacombs nor who carried out the mapping, and whether they were really for dogs. “The proximity of the catacombs to the nearby temple of Anubis, the so called jackal or dog-headed deity associated with cemeteries and embalming makes it likely that these catacombs are indeed for canines and their presence at Saqqara is to be explained by the concentration of other animal cuts at the site,” NICHOLSON wrote on his website. “These other cults include the burials of, and temples for, bulls, cows, baboons, ibises, hawks and cats all of which were thought to act as intermediaries between humans and their gods.”

Despite the great quantity of animals buried in these catacombs and the immense size of the underground burial places, Egyptologists have focused on the temples and on inscriptional evidence rather than on the animals themselves and their places of burial. The mysteries behind DE MORGAN’s mapping were unsolved until 2009 when this team started concrete excavations at the cemetery in an attempt to learn more about the archaeological and history of the site. “Results at the first season showed that DE MORGAN map has substantial inaccuracies and a new survey is under way,” NICHOLSON said. “The animal bones themselves have been sampled and preliminary results suggest that as well as actual dogs there may be other canids present. Furthermore the age profile of the animals is being examined so that patterns of mortality can be ascertained.” (Nevine El-Aref, “Eight million dog mummies found in Saqqara”, Ahram Online, January 2, 2013).

Le ministère de l’Archéologie a inauguré une nouvelle cellule à l’aéroport d’Assiut, afin de déjouer toute tentative d’exportation illicite de pièces antiques. À présent, le nombre de postes archéologiques implantés dans les différents ports et aéroports égyptiens atteint 38 unités. Cette nouvelle inauguration s’inscrit dans le cadre des efforts déployés par le ministère de l’Archéologie afin
Jeudi 3 janvier 2013


Dimanche 6 janvier 2013

Le personnel du ministère de l’Archéologie a décidé d’organiser un sit-in devant le Musée Égyptien à Tahrîr, afin de protester contre les politiques adoptées par leur ministre, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm. Les archéologues ont demandé au Premier ministre, Dr Hishâm Qandîl, le limogeage du Dr Ibrâhîm accusé, selon eux, d’échec dans la protection du patrimoine égyptien, de couvrir la corruption au sein du ministère et d’être en deçà de leurs attentes et de leurs ambitions. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Sit-in des archéologues devant le Musée Égyptien pour exiger le départ du ministre de l’Archéologie », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 6 janvier 2013).

Mardi 8 janvier 2013

At Simon Bolivar Square in Cairo’s Garden City stands the Villa Qâzdûghlî with its distinguished architecture and European-style paintings. The villa is in need of restoration because some of its external features and internal wooden ornaments have deteriorated due to exposure and other factors. The villa was built in late 19th century by the Austrian architect Edward Matasek for the British-Levantine businessman Emanual Qâzdûghlî. In 1943, the villa became the US embassy until the end of World War II and after the 1952 revolution it was converted into a girls’ school named after the Sudanese revolutionary ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Latîf.

In 2006, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), now the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), placed the villa on Egypt’s heritage list as an Islamic monument. In 2008, the SCA, in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the American Research Centre in Cairo (ARCE), developed a comprehensive restoration project for the building. The project was funded by the US Department of State’s Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation.

The restoration project will be carried out in two phases over 12 months. The first six months will consist of conservation studies looking into the best ways to restore the villa’s distinguished architectural features after an environmental assessment, stone and brick investigations, and laboratory tests on frescoes and glass. Phase two is the restoration work, which will attempt to return the villa to its original appearance and turn it into a Museology Institute with a public library.

In late 2010, the school was relocated and the restoration project was due to begin.
However, the project was halted due to the January 2011 revolution. There were media reports that the villa was subjected to several robberies during and after the revolution and that several of its architectural and ornamental wooden features were reported missing. Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm told Ahram Online that the villa was never officially handed over to the MSA due to the revolution. The villa is currently in the possession of the Ministry of Education, which has to release it to the MSA.

He asserted that the villa had deteriorated because during the last Muhammad Mahmûd Street clashes in November 2012 thugs and vandals damaged some sections of the building's glass and stole iron gates ornamented with foliage elements, and some marble steps. "In general the villa is safe and sound except for what I have told you and the MSA is waiting to start the previously planned restoration project to begin," Ibrâhîm added. (Nevine El-Aref, "Cairo’s Villa Qâzdûghlî needs rescuing", Ahram Online, January 8, 2013).

Le palais Qâzdûghlî a été incendié avant-hier pour la deuxième fois. Les flammes ont ravagé les décorations qui restaient. Le président du département architectural du ministère de l’Archéologie, Muhammad Shîha, déplore le ravage de ce joyau situé place Simon Bolivar. Le directeur du Centre du patrimoine, Dr Sâlih Lamî, a révélé que le CSA avait chargé son Centre d’élaborer une étude visant à restaurer le palais le plus rapidement possible. Lamî a précisé que le montant des travaux de restauration dépasserait 50 millions de livres égyptiennes. (Riyâd Tawfîq, « Le palais Qâzdûghlî touché par un incendie », al-Ahrâm, 4 février. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, "Cairo landmark Villa Qâzdûghlî to be restored to former glory", Ahram Online, March 19 ; Dalia Farouq, « Oublié, Qâzdûghlî va retrouver ses lustres », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 28 mars).

Mercredi 9 janvier 2013

Le ministre d'État pour les Antiquités, Muhammad Ibrâhîm, évoque les problèmes auxquels ce secteur est confronté et les efforts déployés pour relancer le tourisme en Égypte :

— Al-Ahram Hebdo : Comment évaluez-vous les travaux effectués durant l’année 2012 ?

— Muhammad Ibrâhîm : Il n’est pas possible de séparer 2012 de l’année qui l’a précédée. Le ministère va mal. Examinons les chiffres pour mieux comprendre. Le revenu des musées par exemple, qui est l’une des ressources du ministère, atteignait, en novembre 2010, près de 13,5 millions de L.E., tandis qu’en novembre dernier, ce revenu n’était plus que de 3,8 millions de L.E. Le revenu du Musée national d’Alexandrie par exemple a gravement chuté, au point de faire moins de 300 L.E. par jour, ce qui ne couvre pas la moitié de la facture d’électricité du musée. Le Musée du Caire s’est retrouvé début décembre dernier avec parfois 550 visiteurs par jour. C’est du jamais vu pour un musée qui accueillait jusqu’à 6 000 visiteurs par jour. Dans ces conditions, il est simple de comprendre que la crise financière du ministère s’aggrave de jour en jour. L’insécurité, les manifestations et les grèves continuels entraînent évidemment la chute du nombre de touristes. Plusieurs centaines de groupes viennent, par exemple en novembre, d’annuler leur voyage. Le tourist vient en Égypte pour contempler des monuments uniques au monde, mais bien évidemment pas à n’importe quelle condition : il choisit une autre destination en période
d’insécurité.

— Le gouvernement donne-t-il des subventions au ministère des Antiquités ?

— Le ministère des Antiquités est un ministère autonome qui, au contraire, paye à l'État 20 % de son revenu annuel.

— Que proposez-vous pour sortir de cette crise financière ?


— Ne serait-il pas plus utile de restaurer les sites et musées déjà existants et de les moderniser afin de pouvoir attirer un plus grand nombre de visiteurs ?


— Le ministère va-t-il parvenir à couvrir ses dépenses malgré la crise économique ?

— Non. Le ministère a un grave problème budgétaire. Seuls les travaux les plus simples, comme la peinture ou le nettoyage, peuvent être accomplis. Mais le plus important reste de préparer les restaurations et les inaugurations. Par exemple, l’ambassadeur d’Azerbaïdjan s’est engagé à financer la construction de deux musées, consacrés respectivement aux calligraphies égyptienne et arabe et aux tapis, dans le cadre de la restauration globale du mur nord du Caire historique, à al-Gamâliyya. Une somme de 4 millions de dollars devrait être versée. Actuellement, nous comptons sur le financement étranger pour mener à bien nos projets. C’est le seul moyen de sortir de cette impasse financière.

— Qu’en est-il des travaux accomplis par les missions étrangères ?

— Plus de 150 missions étrangères travaillent sur les différents sites archéologiques en Égypte. Leurs découvertes seront au fur et à mesure intégrées aux différents musées correspondants.

— N’y a-t-il pas de nouvelle réglementation prévue pour ces missions ?

— Non, ces missions étrangères poursuivent leurs travaux de fouilles. Le travail des missions égyptiennes a, en revanche, considérablement baissé à cause du manque de financement. Mais nos archéologues qui accompagnent les missions étrangères profitent énormément. L’exposition de Toutankhamon qui se tient au Japon jusqu’à la fin du mois a bénéficié d’un réel afflux de touristes japonais.

— Où en est actuellement le grand projet du Caire historique ?

— Le Caire historique est un projet international depuis l’inscription de cette région sur la liste du Patrimoine mondial de l’humanité en 1979. Quelques nouveaux bâtiments mettent à mal son aspect historique. Le ministère des Antiquités, la police et le gouvernorat ont fondé un comité qui étudie la situation pour mettre fin si possible à ces violations. La célèbre rue al-Mu’izz, qui était, avant la révolution du 25 janvier 2011, un exemple grandiose du projet de conservation du Caire historique, a subi les mêmes ravages et le même chaos que le reste du pays. Les voitures y pénètrent, les lanternes ont presque toutes été cassées, les portes électroniques qui barraient l’entrée de la zone aux véhicules ont été neutralisées. Le contrôle de l’entrée des véhicules a aujourd’hui repris, et pour assurer la sécurité des touristes dans la zone, des comités auxquels participent les habitants ont été formés. Ces comités se chargent aussi du
— Quel intérêt trouvent les sponsors à participer à de tels projets de réparation ?

— Nous faisons appel à des professionnels de la levée de fonds. Leur rémunération se fait en intérêts (comme dans le cas d’un crédit).

— La montée des islamistes est-elle la cause de la baisse du nombre des touristes ?

— Je ne crois pas. Si le touriste sent que la stabilité revient en Égypte, il viendra. Les islamistes ne peuvent rien faire : le peuple égyptien a protégé ses monuments pendant la révolution, c’est un peuple qui défendra son histoire. Même s’il est vrai que des extrémistes de tous bords peuvent, à n’importe quel moment et à n’importe quel endroit, détruire des trésors archéologiques.

— Où en sont les travaux entamés par le ministère pour le Grand Musée Égyptien (GEM) et celui de la Civilisation ?

— Le travail continue normalement pour le GEM. Concernant le musée de la Civilisation, il ne possède pas ses propres laboratoires de restauration, les travaux, comme ceux ayant trait au bateau pharaonique récemment découvert à Abû Rawwâsh, ont donc été transférés aux laboratoires du GEM à Gîza. Ce musée souffre aussi de problèmes administratifs, sa réalisation ayant été menée de façon chaotique et faisant intervenir un trop grand nombre d’acteurs. Mais les choses avancent et l’Unesco nous aide à former les 5 000 archéologues qui travailleront sur le site.

— L’augmentation de 25 % du prix des billets qui a été annoncée deux fois va-t-elle prendre effet en juillet 2013 ?

— Si la situation politique se stabilise et que le tourisme reprend. Les intérêts du ministère des Antiquités et de celui du Tourisme sont indissociables. Et, malgré les campagnes sur le thème Découvrez votre pays, il est difficile de dépendre sur un revenu du tourisme intérieur puisque le prix du billet pour les Égyptiens est de 1 LE.

— Quels projets sont actuellement en danger ?

— Le Musée des bijoux d’Alexandrie, à cause de sérieux problèmes techniques, ainsi que le Musée sous-marin d’Alexandrie, dont la visite serait, aujourd’hui, un luxe.

— Étes-vous pour les expositions de nos collections et pièces à l’étranger ?

— Elles sont nos ambassadeurs à l’étranger. L’exposition de Toutankhamon qui se tient au Japon jusqu’à la fin du mois a bénéficié d’un réel afflux de touristes japonais même en cette période difficile. Je pense cependant que les pièces uniques ne devraient pas voyager. Il n’y a malheureusement pas de nouveau contrat d’exposition mondiale en vue actuellement.

— Quel est votre bilan de la situation actuelle ?


Vendredi 11 janvier 2013


Dimanche 13 janvier 2013

Un chauffeur âgé de 32 ans et ses deux frères ont été mis en examen pour fouilles illicites sous leur maison située à al-Diyâbât dans la région d’Akhmîm. Les policiers de Suhâg y ont découvert un cratère de 2 m de diamètre et de 6 m de profondeur, ainsi que des outils de fosse. (Âyât Yâsîn, « Arrestation de 3 frères pour fouilles clandestines sous leur maison à Suhâg », al-Badîl, 13 janvier 2013).

Mercredi 16 janvier 2013

If you want to sleep on King Tutankhamun’s bed, rest on his painted royal chair, drink your morning coffee from his gold cup and wear his bracelets encrusted with semi-precious stones, or if you want to decorate your house with painted ceramic Mamluk and Ottoman vases, then all these dreams can come true. The Replica Production Unit (RPU) opened recently at Salâh al-Dîn Citadel in the two-storey-building of the Military School known as the Red Palace. It will provide you with all the objects you need to enter the mysterious world of the ancient Egyptians. You will even be able to experience the personal life of the Pharaohs and live among their protective deities.

The Red Palace was constructed in 1815 by Khedive Muhammad ‘Alî Pasha following the massacre of the remaining Mamluks. The aim was to establish Egypt’s first military academy. Although the building is only partially restored — all work having stopped because of the budget shortage in the aftermath of the January 2011 Revolution — the palace on my visit was a hive of activity with workmen, artisans and archaeologists in every one of the small workshops, all occupied in carving, drawing, painting, modelling and decorating replicas of Egypt’s ancient, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic artefacts, or else hammering pieces of bronze in an attempt to transform them into necklaces, earrings or bracelets embellished with semi-precious stones.

Along the corridors and in some of the galleries are exhibited some objects from Tutankhamun’s funerary collection. Here is his
gold bed with its lioness-headed legs, and the
 closet and head rest; the Pharaoh’s military
 chariot and his throne decorated with painted
 scenes depicting him with his wife; and his
 funerary regalia including Canopic jars and
 boats for the celestial afterlife. A number of
 colourful Islamic clay vessels in various shapes
 and sizes are also on display, as well as
 jewellery and the beautifully-painted head of
 Queen Nefertiti. Each artisan, painter and
 workman stands face to face with an
 illustration of an object in hand and studying
 its features and size so as to produce an
 exact replica.

 "We must respect the nuances of each
 object," Archaeologist Wâ’il Muhammad explains.
 To do this, turquoise and lapis lazuli are
 embedded in copper plate to recreate a
 Pharaonic motif. According to RPU Executive
 Director 'Amr al-Tîbî, all the stones used are
 the same semi-precious varieties used by the
 ancient Egyptians, which explains why these
 replicas are more expensive than those sold in
 the Khân al-Khilîfî and Kirdâsā bazaars. A
 similar scenario is enacted in the drawing and
 painting department. Men and women hold
 small busts carefully in their hands. All the
 busts represent Nefertiti, and the artists are
 patiently colouring her blue crown.

 "We try to reproduce the same level of
 blue," says Rîm Mukhtâr, one of the young
 painters. Indeed, the RPU’s Technical Director
 Usâma al-Ghirbâwî told Al-Ahram Weekly, recent
 productions must meet the proportions of the
 artefact, as well as the different degrees of
 colour, any cracks that have appeared on the
 ancient objects, and the methods and
 techniques used in the fabrication of the
 original piece. To do this, al-Ghirbâwî said, the
 reproductions must be based on two essential
 poles: the personnel and materials. With this in
 view, 50 people were selected for the range of
 workshops and ateliers, not to mention painters
 and sculptors from the Faculty of Fine Arts.
 "The average length of experience of most of
 the staff recruited was more than 20 years,
 and there were also new graduates," al-
 Ghirbâwî said. "These artisans are very clever,
 and they want to improve their careers and
 their incomes." That is why, he said, they kept
 so strictly to the illustrations and colours in the
 archaeology books.

 The RPU was created a year ago as
 an implementation of the new antiquities Law
 117/1983 and its 2010 amendments. Article 36
 of the law establishes the intellectual property
 rights and trademark of the Ministry of State
 for Antiquities (MSA) in the production of
 replicas. According to the law, the MSA is the
 only foundation with permission to produce
 exact replicas on a 1:1 scale. Small sizes of
 every piece are also fabricated in order to
 meet all tastes of clients, who will obtain
 official MSA certification of its production.
 According to the law, the RPU was intended to
 create a photo bank that would then sell the
 rights to images. Professional photography
 inside museums and archaeological sites is now
 completely prohibited. Use of photographs for
 educational purposes will be free of charge,
 although the intellectual property will remain
 with the authority. The RPU also plans to
 pursue intellectual property rights on its own
 logos and trademarks. Every museum will be
 provided with an outlet where the company’s
 products will be made available to the public,
 including replicas, t-shirts, tea sets and plates.

 Owing to the revolution, however, all
 the activities of the RPU have been put on
 hold except the reproduction of replicas.
 Despite its brief age, since its inception the
 RPU has fabricated a batch of 130 replica
 statues worth LE2.3 million from the unique
 collection of King Tutankhamun for tourists
 and hotels in Sharm al-Shaykh. It has also sold
 replicas through gift shops in museums and
 archaeological sites to a value of LE256,754,
 as well as taking part in a replica exhibition in
 Berlin. "We are providing efficient services to
 complete restoration and development work,"
 al-Tîbî told the Weekly. Reproducing good
 quality replicas and sharing in internal and
 external exhibitions, as well as filling the
 Egyptian market, was a very important step to
 reviving Egypt’s ancient art and history and
 protecting them from the inferior Chinese
 products that have recently flooded the market
 worldwide.

 In Khân al-Khilîfî for example, al-Tîbî
 says, replicas of authentic ancient Egyptian
 pieces are on sale with shapes that are alien
to this great civilisation. Regrettably, although
 the goods are of poor quality they are on sale
 around the world, giving a bad impression of
 Egypt’s great monuments and artefacts. This
 view is shared by artist Ahmad Sa’îd, head of
 the RPU’s pottery section. He says it is
common to find on the US market the face of a dog wearing a nemes, a Pharaoh's headdress, as if it were Tutankhamun. "These copies distort Egyptian history," Sa'il adds furiously. al-Tibi pointed out that the RPU also aimed to increase the public awareness of Egyptian culture and heritage establishing exhibition of replicas in schools and universities for better assimilation of Egyptian history. The RPU is also a good means of developing the MSA budget by sending touring replica exhibitions around the world, as well as temporary displays in hotels and resorts in Egypt — especially in popular tourist destinations such as Luxor, Aswān, Hurghada and Sharm al-Shaykh.

Unfortunately the MSA is trying to deal with a low budget resulting from the withdrawal of tourism, caused by the breakdown in security following the turmoil of the last two years. The MSA budget is dependent on the revenue it receives from ticket sales to archaeological sites and fees for the professional services provided. al-Tibi suggests that a touring exhibition to include items that are prohibited from leaving the country, such as the gold throne and mask of Tutankhamun and the funerary collection of King Khufu's mother, Queen Hetepheres, would be a good way to earn more money and to promote Egypt as a safe tourist destination.

"These ideas could easily come true, but my hands are tied with all bureaucratic governmental regulations," al-Tibi says. "If I had a free hand I would have purchased special equipment to spruce up and develop the mechanism of replica production in order to provide more goods in shorter time." Then, he says, the RPU would strike a deal with the Khān al-Khalīlī merchants to provide them with replicas to replace "those ugly, dull Chinese ones" as well as rent booths in museums abroad. Developing existing outlets and gift shops in museums as well as developing the administrative skills of its managers and staff are another way of increasing the MSA budget. al-Tibi says the current gift shops are not up to standard, and this explains why they provide the ministry with such a low income.

Spreading the RPU means of communication is another goal, al-Tibi says. A well-organised website to acquaint people with the aim and activities of the RPU and to sell the products online should be available. al-Tibi has not left children out of his overall plan. On the contrary, he suggests marketing wooden and textile bags in the shape of Tutankhamun's toy, Dama. Each bag would contain organic ancient Egyptian colours; papyri; paintbrushes decorated with pictures of ancient Egyptian deities and a puzzle featuring a scene shown on a temple or a tomb. The Red Palace is now the permanent home of the RPU, and there are hopes of a larger, well-equipped building in Fustāṭ within the visiting path of the National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation overlooking the 'Ayn al-Sīra Lake. However, the lack of budget first needs to be overcome. (Nevine El-Aref, "Living like an ancient Egyptian", Al-Ahram Weekly, January 16, 2013).
(...) Until recently Dahshûr managed to retain an atmosphere of quiet, even regal tranquillity. Now, however, more than 4,500 years after the first pyramid was built there, the serenity of the necropolis has been shattered. Until 1996, when it was proclaimed one of Egypt’s major tourist destinations, the archaeological site was part of a military zone. While the area is not as commercially developed as the Gîza Plateau, it is most noteworthy for being a site that best demonstrates the transition from the Step Pyramid at Saqqâra to the true pyramid.

Regrettably, however, the lack of security on archaeological sites during and after the January 2011 Revolution has had a bad affect on Dahshûr. The spiritual and archaeological environment has been desecrated, with plundering and destruction by vandals, thieves and neighbouring residents. Early this week, Dahshûr archaeological site guards woke up to the roar of bulldozers and shotgun blasts that wrecked the age-long serenity. An armed gang accompanied by residents of 'Izbat Dahshûr was ravaging the area in front of King Amenemhat III’s Black Pyramid and digging in the sand in order to install a modern private cemetery.

Yet this area was a necropolis for ancient Egyptian nobles and officials, and a German archaeological mission is currently excavating there and learning more about Dahshûr’s history. Over the last 10 years the mission has unearthed a number of funerary objects that can be dated back to the Old and Middle Kingdoms. Guards and antiquities inspectors on the scene confronted the invaders, but their attempts to repel them failed because they lacked sufficient arms and force. One of the inspectors had a leg broken during the confrontation and he is now in hospital awaiting surgery.

Nâsir Ramadân, director general of the Dahshûr archaeological site, told Al-Ahram Weekly that the invasion was immediately reported to the Police Station on site but they failed to intervene, and even the military detachment stationed less than a kilometre from the site did not respond to a request to come to the site and clear it of invaders. "The invaders dug more than 30 new tombs on the site with ugly white cement blocks," Ramadân said. "Not only do they distort the scene and the panorama view of the site, but they are destroying the ancient artefacts buried in the sand underneath. Our hands are tied and our heritage is in danger, and nobody is rescuing it.” Ramadân said that all the authorities concerned should move to save and protect Egypt’s priceless monuments.

Archaeologists and others concerned about the issue have launched several campaigns on Facebook and archaeological websites to rescue and protect Dahshûr from encroachment. Others have called on UNESCO to intervene to stop the intrusion and help save one of its world heritage sites. All attempts to solve the problem in an amicable manner have so far failed, and Dahshûr residents on the site have refused to move to another plot away from the archaeological area where they could easily build a modern cemetery. Instead, they insist on staying where they are.

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm told the Weekly that the ministry had taken legal steps, but that since the people still refused to move the ministry was now collaborating with the Tourism and Antiquities Police to remove the intruders by force. They had been allocated a new plot for their cemetery, he said. Ibrâhîm explained that the lack of security in the aftermath of the revolution was the main reason for the residents’ decision to encroach on the archaeological land, and that the budget shortage the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) was feeling because of the withdrawal of tourism to Egypt presented an obstacle to providing private security at every archaeological sites to prevent further encroachment.

"We have to depend on the Ministry of Interior and the Tourism and Antiquities Police as usual,” Ibrâhîm said. He added that the
situation could be solved by applying a new mechanism to prohibit citizens from encroaching on any archaeological site in Egypt. So where is the new antiquities law and its amendment? Why is it not being implemented? Among the law’s articles is one that prohibits any encroachment on archaeological sites and a prison term for offenders.

Up to the time the Weekly went to print, this question had not been answered by any official apart from one who required anonymity. He said that the current government did not care about Egypt’s history and its culture. He added that a couple of months ago a contractor damaged the Ottoman house of Madash Mirzâ in Bûlâq, and that when he was caught red-handed he was set at large with a fine of only LE500. This contractor, the official said, returned to the house and resumed the demolition, and nobody moved on to save this great Ottoman house, not even the MSA. (Nevine El-Aref, “No longer a sacred site”, Al-Ahram Weekly, January 16, 2013. Voir également « L’inspecteur en chef de Dahshûr : Nous avons informé le ministre des empiètements, mais il n’a pas bougé », al-Dustûr, 13 janvier ; « Des Égyptiens menacent de détruire la pyramide de Snêfrou et les monuments de Dahshûr », al-Bashâyyîr, 13 janvier ; « Le ministre de l’Archéologie transmet au Parquet le dossier des empiètements sur le site de Dahshûr », al-Dustûr, 14 janvier ; MENA, « Le Comité permanent examine urgemment la levée des empiètements commis sur le site de Dahshûr », al-Tahrîr, 14 janvier ; « Les habitants de Dahshûr ont payé des pots-de vin pour construire des tombes dans la zone archéologique », al-Bashâyyîr, 14 janvier ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « Ibrâhîm : les problèmes de Dahshûr en passe d’être résolus », al-Ahrâm, 15 janvier ; « Le pillage de la zone archéologique de Dahshûr s’est déroulé au vu et au su du gouvernement », al-Dustûr, 16 janvier ; Dalia Hamam, « Une catastrophe archéologique à Dahshûr », Le Progrès Égyptien, 16 janvier ; Dalia Hamam, « Une catastrophe archéologique à Dahshûr », Le Progrès Égyptien, 16 janvier ; Steven Viney, “Dahshûr antiquities site threatened as residents, authorities fight to settle scores”, Egypt Independent, January 17 ; Nasma Réda, « Dahshûr : conflit au pied des pyramides », Al-Ahram Hebdo du 31 janvier).

En collaboration avec la République d’Azerbaïdjan, le ministère égyptien de l’Archéologie annonce la création du premier musée consacré aux tapis. Ce musée dont le coût s’élève à 40 millions de dollars sera implanté dans Le Caire historique, entre Bâb al-Nasr et Bâb al-Fûtûh. Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, précise que ce musée reflètera l’évolution de l’industrie des tapis depuis les époques anciennes jusqu’à l’époque arabe. Il contribuera à attirer plus de touristes dans cette région qui bénéficie actuellement de travaux de restauration globale.


During excavation and cleaning works in the Mut Temple at Karnak, a mission from the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE) stumbled on a very well preserved statue of the goddess Sekhmet. The statue is 180 cm tall and depicts Sekhmet as a lioness wearing the cobra and the Aten sun disk on her head and holding the ankh sign in her right hand and the lotus flower in her left. "This is the first time a standing statue of the goddess Sekhmet in her original lioness form was found..."
in the Mut Temple,” Mansûr Burayk, the supervisor of Luxor antiquities, told Ahram Online. He added that previously discovered statues there depict Sekhmet seated with the facial features of the goddess Mut, the consort of the god Amun Re, not her original lioness figure.

The ARCE mission uncovered this statue within the sands of the Mut Temple’s second hall, within the framework of comprehensive restoration work carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA). The project, which began in May 2012, aims at restoring the temple and its surroundings so that it can reopen to the public, as it has been closed since 1976. The original plan includes the establishment of a visitor centre where a documentary about the goddess Mut and her role in ancient Egypt would be screened alongside photos of the temple before and after restoration.

The Mut Temple is one among several located at Karnak. For many years it stood in ruins beyond the south gate, some 200 meters south of Karnak’s 10th pylon. For some time now it has been undergoing restoration. The Napoleonic Expedition recorded one of the earliest plans of the Mut Temple as well as explorers and historians of the 19th century such as Nestor L’HÔTE, whose drawings, made in 1839, recorded details of such temple. The Royal Prussian Expedition in 1842, led by Karl LEPSIUS and the first directors of the Department of Antiquities of Egypt, August MARETTE and Gaston MASPERO, had their own record of the monument. However, the first excavation and restoration work started in 1895 by two English women, Margaret BENSON and Janet GOURILLY. (Nevine El-Aref, “The lioness for real”, Ahram Online, January 16, 2013. Voir également Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Mise au jour d’une statue de Sekhmet à Karnak », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 15 janvier ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « Découverte fortuite de la déesse Sekhmet à Karnak », al-Ahrâm, 16 janvier ; Ashraf Ikrâm, « Découverte d’une statue de Sekhmet dans le temple de Mout à Karnak », al-Akhbâr, 16 janvier).
Le musée renfermera des objets allant des périodes prédynastiques jusqu’à nos jours, en passant par les époques pharaonique, gréco-romaine, copte et islamique. Le nombre de pièces avoisinera les 300 pièces. Des objets représentatifs de la civilisation de Deir Tassa (4200 av. J.-C.), tels que les haches et les coupes en forme de fleurs ainsi que les accessoires fabriqués de coquilles et les récipients en argile noire, représenteront l’époque prédynastique. Aussi la civilisation d’Al-Badari qui remonte à l’an 5000 av. J.-C. y sera présente grâce aux statues d’ivoire et au mobilier funéraire. Le musée comprendra aussi les pièces les plus connues appartenant à Asyût, mais qui ont été transférées dans d’autres gouvernorats, à l’instar de l’autel de l’église de Bâwît exposé actuellement au Musée copte au Caire, ainsi que des pièces de monnaie dorées qui représentent la même époque. D’ailleurs, plusieurs récipients en argile décorés et conservés dans les dépôts verront enfin le jour grâce à ce musée, sans oublier les morceaux de tissus en lin sortis des dépôts archéologiques d’al-Ashmûnayn à d’al-Minyâ. De même, certains objets personnels de la famille Abiscaroun, propriétaire du palais, occuperont des places distinguées au sein du musée, car ils témoigneront d’une époque perdue de l’histoire égyptienne.


En parallèle à cette restauration, « un comité spécial d’archéologues va collecter quelques pièces antiques rares accumulées aux entrepôts du Musée du Caire et dans d’autres musées égyptiens, les examiner et les restaurer si besoin est », explique le secrétaire général. Il est à noter que le musée racontera l’histoire
de la médecine depuis les époques pharaoniques jusqu'à nos jours. On trouvera parmi les pièces exposées la statue d'Amenhotep, des papyrus expliquant les phases de la momification, des outils chirurgicaux, etc.

Muhammad Ibrâhîm, ministre des Antiquités, apprécie l'idée d'utiliser les palais historiques comme musées : « Cette affaire a un double intérêt. Le premier est de trouver un endroit convenable pour exposer les pièces et le deuxième est de faire connaître aux visiteurs l'historique d'un palais qu'ils n'ont jamais vu ». Mais le ministre avance tout de même des conditions : « L'endroit doit être adéquat aux pièces exposées. Il faut ajuster l'humidité et être certain de la stabilité du sol en plus d'assurer la sécurité du palais de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur ». Fondé en 1897 par des architectes italiens, le palais Sakâkînî est le témoin typique du style rococo. Situé au centre du quartier aujourd'hui populaire de Sakâkînî (Est du Caire), il a été construit par un fameux homme d'affaires d'origine syrienne nommé Habîb pacha al-Sakâkînî. Issu d'une famille d'armuriers, al-Sakâkînî vient s'établir en Égypte au XIXe siècle. Fortuné et influent, l'homme réussit bientôt à autoriser la construction d'un palais sur des zones marécageuses à l'Est du Caire, où se succèdent étangs et lacs. L'unique signe d'urbanisation se trouvait alors dans la mosquée al-Dâhir, al-Zâhir Baybars. Le bâtiment vu de l'extérieur présente un mélange de styles différents d'influences turques et arabes. Le palais se trouve au centre d'une place ronde vers lesquelles convergent 8 rues, en forme d'étoile à l'instar de la place de l'Arc de Triomphe à Paris. Composé de 5 étages et d'un rez-de-chaussée, le palais s'étend sur une superficie de 2 698 m². Il possède 50 chambres et 400 fenêtres. Le palais aborde de grands miroirs, des fresques et des parquets en bois.

Lors de l'actuelle restauration, le jardin extérieur du palais sera entouré de plantes médicinales répandues en Égypte. À l'intérieur d'une grille de fer forgé, des massifs de fleurs, des palmiers, des orangers séparent le palais de bâtiments modernes. Il abrite plus de 300 statues et de fontaines de style italien. Toutes ces richesses ont été laissées à l'abandon pendant de longues décennies. À l'intérieur les fissures au mur reflètent son état sinistre. « Au cours de la restauration, on va injecter les murs lézardés avec des matières quasiment identiques à la matière originale », indiquent les ingénieurs. La restauration du palais ne s'arrêtera pas aux murs et aux portes, mais tous les ornement, les détails architecturaux minutieux subiront une opération de restauration délicate. Selon les responsables du chantier, tout sera mis en oeuvre pour lui redonner sa grandeur d'antan avant l'ouverture du musée. (Nasma Réda, « Le palais Sakâkînî entame sa mue », Al-Ahram Hebdo du 17 janvier 2013).

Le ministère de l'Archéologie a approuvé l'organisation de deux expositions archéologiques au Bahreïn et aux Émirats au cours de l'année 2013. Le ministre de l'Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a annoncé que des préparatifs étaient en cours pour la tenue d'une exposition de bijoux à Manama, dans le cadre des festivités marquant l'élection de cette ville comme capitale de la culture arabe cette année. D'une durée de trois mois, cette exposition regroupera 136 pièces antiques dont 68 pièces d'époque islamique, ainsi que des joyaux conservés dans les coffres de la Banque centrale. Toutefois, seront écartées toutes les pièces rares ou fragiles pour être expédiées à l'étranger. Des négociations sont en cours avec les Émirats pour la tenue d'une autre exposition égyptienne couvrant les différentes époques pharaonique, grecque, romaine et islamique. (Muhammad 'Abd al-Mu'tî, « Organisation de 2 expositions islamiques Bahreïn et aux Émirats », Al-Ahrâm, 17 janvier 2013. Voir également Dînâ 'Abd al-'Alîm, « L'Égypte approuve l'organisation de deux expositions archéologiques au Bahreïn et aux Émirats », al-Yawm al-Sâbi', 16 janvier).

Samedi 19 janvier 2013

L'Union des Archéologues arabes, en coopération avec le département d'architecture de la faculté de Polytechnique d'al-Azhar, organise mardi prochain un séminaire intitulé : Inventaire des dangers qui menacent la sécurité des antiquités et du patrimoine urbain égyptien.

Lundi 21 janvier 2013

Depuis 2005, une mission archéologique composée de 12 archéologues mexicains est engagée dans la restauration de la tombe thébaine TT 39. Il s’agit de la sépulture de Pui-Em-Re, second prophète d’Amon sous le règne d’Hatshepsout, érigée au pied de la montagne al-Khukha dans la nécropole thébaine.

Gabriela ARRACHE, chef de cette mission et présidente de la Société mexicaine d’égyptologie, a annoncé vendredi dernier au cours d’une conférence de presse que 60 % des travaux de restauration sont achevés, au terme de 7 phases de recherche et de travail acharné. C’est la seule équipe mexicaine travaillant actuellement en Égypte sur un tel projet. ARRACHE a ajouté : « Nous sommes convaincus que le Mexique apportera sa contribution à l’histoire de l’Égypte pharaonique ». La mission a accompli des progrès dans la restauration de l’entrée et des peintures murales qui composent le monument. (Fâtima Shawqî, « Des archéologues mexicains restaurent une tombe thébaine », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 21 janvier 2013).

Mardi 22 janvier 2013

La commission archéologique chargée par le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, d’examiner les 863 pièces saisies dans
un véhicule sur l’autoroute Le Caire/Suez, a conclu que ces pièces étaient archéologiques et qu’elles datent de différentes époques. Le président de l’administration centrale des saisies archéologiques, Dr Yûsuf Khalîfa, a précisé que ces pièces sont probablement le fruit de fouilles illicites entreprises dans différentes zones archéologiques. Parmi les plus importantes pièces saisies figure un bassin rectangulaire en calcaire (38,5 x 24 x 11 cm). Sur le bord de ce bassin qui date de l’Ancien Empire se trouve une dédicace en hiéroglyphes mentionnant le nom du prêtre purificateur du roi Snéfrou.

Les policiers ont également saisi une stèle en calcaire de l’Ancien Empire décorée du dieu Ptah portant un sceptre et surmonté d’hiéroglyphes ; une statue d’Hathor (45 cm) en granit noir du Nouvel Empire ; 10 scarabées ; 180 talismans de petite taille, 120 pièces de monnaie d’époque ptolémaïque ; 407 monnaie en bronze d’époque romaine, 3 statues osiriennes en bois d’époque tardive ; une statue en calcaire (24 cm) de la PPI ; une autre statue en grès (22 cm) également de la PPI ; une fausse porte en calcaire datant de l’Ancien Empire surmontée d’une corniche avec au centre l’image d’un défunt assis au milieu des offrandes. (Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Saisie de 863 pièces antiques en possession d’un chauffeur sur l’autoroute Le Caire/Suez », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 22 janvier 2013. Voir également Ashraf Ikrâm, « Dr Ibrâhîm : Les saisies de l’autoroute de Suez sont antiques », al-Akhbâr, 23 janvier).

J A N V I E R  2 0 1 3

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Egyptian police have confiscated a hoard of 863 artefacts from a man travelling on the Cairo-Suez highway on Wednesday. The man was trying to escape from a police ambush after police stopped his vehicle for inspection. He was later arrested and has been detained pending further investigations. The collection includes objects from ancient, Graeco-Roman, and Islamic periods of Egyptian history. Yûsuf Khalîfa, head of the Confiscated Antiquities Section at the antiquities ministry, told Ahram Online that all the objects were genuine except for a dozen very accurate replicas.

The collection includes 180 small amulets, 10 scarabs, 120 Ptolemaic coins, 407 bronze Roman coins and three Osirian wooden statues from the late period. There was also a very well preserved limestone basin from the Old Kingdom outlined with hieroglyphic text and the name of King Senefru’s purification priest. A limestone stele depicting a bust of the god Ptah and a black granite statue of the goddess Hathor were also among the collection.

Antiquities Minister Muhammad Ibrâhîm said early investigations prove the objects were stolen from illicit excavations at various archaeological sites and a team from the ministry would study every object to discover its original location. (Nevine El-Aref, “Stolen Egyptian artefacts seized on Cairo-Suez highway”, Ahram Online, January 24, 2013).

« Mursî, tes mains sont tachées du sang du martyr Jika, tu dois en payer le prix », « À bas, à bas le régime du guide de la confrérie ! », « Gloire à Gaza... ». Ce ne
sont ni des cris de colère lancés par des protestataires, ni des slogans appelant à la chute du régime, mais des graffitis qui couvrent les murs du Musée du Caire situé place Tahrîr. Pour atteindre ce musée, il faut passer par cette place emblématique, haut lieu de la révolution du 25 janvier. Quelques bus et minibus font la queue devant l’entrée principale du musée pour se rapprocher le plus du portail. En fait, une seule porte est ouverte au public. « Je dois faire descendre les touristes juste devant la porte et surtout pas plus loin », dit l’un des chauffeurs de bus, précisant que lui et ses collègues sont toujours sur leurs gardes et ont reçu des consignes de quitter rapidement les lieux en cas de manifestations ou d’émeutes. Et d’ajouter : « Une fois les touristes en sécurité, je cherche un parking ».

Si le jardin du musée est ouvert au public à 8h, les portes du musée ne s’ouvrent, elles, qu’à 9h. Une longue queue qui va de la grille principale du jardin jusqu’à la porte du musée se forme tous les matins devant le bâtiment. Elle disparaît en quelques minutes une fois la porte ouverte. Mais cette queue ne se répète plus aux autres moments de la journée. Car les visiteurs ne sont pas nombreux. « Autrefois, on voyait ces queues tout au long de la journée, surtout pendant les mois de décembre et de janvier, considérés comme la haute saison pour le tourisme en Égypte. Mais malheureusement, on assiste ces deux dernières années à une chute vertigineuse du nombre de touristes », se lamente l’un des guides à la recherche d’un client.

Si les touristes prennent des photos et contemplont les quelques statues éparpillées dans les quatre coins du jardin, les guides égyptiens, eux, ont beaucoup de problèmes. Il est facile pour un visiteur de repérer ces guides. Ils portent leur carte d’identité sur la poitrine. Devenus presque « chômeurs », ils attendent impatiemment les touristes venus seuls afin de leur proposer leurs services moyennant quelques sous. « Bien que je sois trilingue, je ne travaille plus depuis le déclenchement de la révolution », raconte Muhammad Sâmi, guide touristique. « Nous prenons place tous les jours à côté de la porte du musée et nous attendons », expliquent ses collègues qui se trouvent dans la même situation.

Les officiers stationnés devant le musée ont l’air tendus, aucun sourire d’accueil, aucune information ne peut être prise à la porte. La présence d’une dizaine de soldats 24h sur 24 pour la protection des touristes exacerbe ce sentiment d’insécurité. « Étant donné que nous sommes chargés de la protection des lieux, nous n’avons pas le temps de nous reposer. Nos yeux sont tout le temps irrités à cause des bombes lacrymogènes et des incendies. On vit des jours difficiles. Que Dieu nous protège ! », raconte un des gardiens. Une fois dans le jardin du musée, les touristes jouissent de la chaleur du soleil en ce mois de janvier attendant l’ouverture des portes. Des touristes, de toutes nationalités, se baladent dans le jardin. Ils prennent des photos en attendant l’ouverture, afin de pénétrer dans ce magnifique édifice datant de 1900. « Les Japonais et les Chinois forment la majeure partie des touristes qui visitent le musée actuellement », dit Nîvin Hârûn, guide, qui ajoute que l’ambiance au musée ne ressemble en rien à celle d’avant le 25 janvier 2011.

Une fois la porte du musée franchie, chaque petit groupe se disperse dans un coin de la grande salle. Chacun s’emploie à découvrir les mystères de cette grande civilisation qu’est l’Égypte ancienne. L’intérieur du palais est presque désert. Si dans le jardin on entend des bruits, à l’intérieur c’est le grand silence brisé par quelques écoliers. « Ces élèves font l’école buissonnière et viennent ennuyer les passionnés de notre histoire », raconte Sâmi, qui travaille au musée. Il précise que la direction essaye de limiter ce phénomène, mais en vain. Le visiteur qui se balade dans les différentes galeries du musée est choqué de voir quelques vitrines brisées. Celles-ci sont dues au vol pendant la révolution. 54 pièces avaient été alors dérobées au musée. Même les vitraux du dôme, par lesquels les cambrioleurs avaient pénétré, sont toujours cassés. C’est lamentable pour l’un des plus grands musées du monde abritant la plus

**WANTED!**


**Dimanche 27 janvier 2013**


**Lundi 28 janvier 2013**

After almost four decades in the possession of a Brazilian citizen, a limestone Roman head of an as yet unidentified nobleman is on its way back to its Egyptian homeland. The head is very well preserved, and depicts the facial features of a Roman nobleman with short wavy hair. Usâma al-Nahhâs, director general of the Department of Repatriation of Antiquities at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) told Ahram Online that the story started late last year when a young Brazilian lady, who requested anonymity, called the Egyptian embassy in Brazil. She told them that she wanted to hand over a Roman sculpture that she had inherited from her father. In 1976, her father had bought the head from an Egyptian man who claimed he was the curator of one of Egypt’s museums.

al-Nahhâs said that the head continued to be in the possession of the Brazilian man until last year, when he decided to hand it back to Egypt. The man passed away before he was able to return the artefact, but his daughter decided to fulfil his wishes and contacted the embassy. The Roman head is to
return home within two weeks, where it will be examined for possible restoration and to find out more details about its original location.

**Mercredi 30 janvier 2013**

On the second anniversary of Egypt’s January Revolution, the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) officially asked the government to return the land on which the building that housed the National Democratic Party (NDP) headquarters and other governmental offices stood, to the ministry. The building itself was burnt down in the early days of the 2011 uprising. According to documents held at the Egyptian Registry and the Egyptian Survey Authority, the land was part of the antiquities zone when the building was constructed in 1901. It was originally used as a dock for cargo vessels transporting antiquities down the river from Luxor, Aswān and the rest of Upper Egypt to the Egyptian Museum for restoration or display.

In 1887 a ceremony was held at the dock to welcome the royal mummies recovered by the then antiquities director, Gaston MASPERO, from the secret cache in Luxor where they were hidden by priests during the New Kingdom. Maps drawn up in 1911 and 1926 show the presence of a bookshop and cafeteria, while on the west of the site stood the museum workshops and storehouses.

After the 1952 Revolution the land was sequestrated by the government from the Egyptian Antiquities Authority, now the MSA, and was used by various ruling parties of the regime. The last incumbent was the NDP, which shared the large Nile-side premises with the National Council for Women, specialised national agencies and the Arab Bank. On the evening of 28 January 2011, the building was gutted by fire in the midst of fierce attacks by thugs and vandals during demonstrations in Tahrīr Square.

"In this condition the building is a time bomb close to the museum,” Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrāhīm told Al-Ahram Weekly, adding that the building posed a real threat to the museum and its priceless collection. The former NDP headquarters is considered unsafe and could collapse at any time. All official documents approved that the area was MSA property and should be returned, Ibrāhīm said. The minister suggests that once it has the land the whole area could be used as an open air museum showcasing some of the museum’s collection, which is now overstuffed in its internal display. It could also have a permanent hall for temporary exhibitions to attract more tourists to the museum.

He pointed out that not all of the burnt building would be demolished, but a small section could be conserved and kept in situ as part of the story of the 2011 revolution, serving a similar purpose to the Berlin Wall. Ibrāhīm has sent a memo to Prime Minister Hishām Qandīl asking for a speedy handover of the land but so far he has not received a reply. (Nevine El-Aref, "Territorial trouble", Al-Ahram Weekly, January 30, 2013. Voir également « Le ministre de l’Archéologie demande officiellement à Qandīl la remise du terrain du PND », al-Dustūr, 14 janvier ; Dinā 'Abd al-'Alīm, « Une note officielle adressée à Qandīl pour la remise du terrain du PND », al-Yawn al-Sābī', 14 janvier ; MENA, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie demande officiellement à Qandīl la remise du terrain du PND », al-Tahrīr,
14 janvier).

Jeudi 31 janvier 2013

Des membres de la mission espagnole à côté du sarcophage découvert

**Lundi 4 février 2013**

La mission archéologique de la faculté de Lettres de Damanhûr, présidée par Dr Samâh al-Sâwî, a mis au jour une fabrique de vin d'époque gréco-romaine sur le site de Kom al-Farah dans la ville d'Abû al-Matâmîr. Le gouverneur d'al-Buhayra, ingénieur Muhammad Mukhtâr al-Hamlâwî, a confirmé l'importance de cette découverte et la nécessité d'assurer le soutien moral et financier aux projets de création de musées archéologiques et touristiques dans cette région. (Tâmir 'Abd al-Ra'ûf, « Les fouilles de la faculté de Lettres de Damanhûr mettent au jour une fabrique antique de vin », al-Ahrâm, 4 février 2013).

**Mercredi 6 février 2013**

At the Giza Plateau end of the Pyramids Road, near the Mena House Oberoi Hotel, the neo-Islamic villa of Kevork Ispenian stands wretchedly, its Mamluk and Ottoman features revealing the extent of the damage to this beautiful, historic house. The destruction is over; the house stands in ruins. The garden, once laid out with an immaculate lawn and decorated with rare species of plants and trees and graced by a ceramic mosaic fountain, is now embellished with lumps of limestone and fallen bricks; cluttered with Mamluk mashrabiyya (wooden lattice work) that formerly covered the windows and balustrades. Rubble and rubbish are scattered over the ground among the dead trees and palm trunks.

The house itself is in no better condition; on the contrary it is in a terrible state. Heaps of rubble and sand are piled on the floors, making it hard to tread on and walk through the rooms. Parts of the walls and decorated marble rails and slabs were scattered all around, while wooden doors engraved with foliage and geometrical decorations and beautiful mosaics that once decorated the arcades are broken and missing.

"What a loss!" Ahmad al-Bindârî, a researcher and photographer at the Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT), told Al-Ahram Weekly sadly. He went on to say that the villa, constructed and designed by architect Charles AZNAVOUR in 1935 as a rest house or weekend retreat for the Armenian father and son team of Kevork and Paul Ispenian, both collectors, was a great piece of heritage and its loss was tragic. As befitted the house of collectors, several Mamluk and Ottoman artefacts, including those belonging to French architect Ambroise BAUDRY, were woven within its interiors. BAUDRY moved in 1871 to Egypt where he spent 15 years, during which he received many commissions, both private and royal. He constructed the Matatia edifices at ‘Ataba in Downtown Cairo, which was demolished during the 1990s. In 1873 BAUDRY was given responsibility for the decoration of the interior of the salamlik (men’s quarters), the façade and the marble staircase of Khedive Ismâ’îl’s palace in Giza.

BAUDRY built a very distinguished residential villa for himself in ‘Abd al-Khâliq Tharwat Street in Downtown Cairo, which he decorated with authentic Mamluk and Ottoman artefacts. By the turn of the 20th century, Ispenian had bought BAUDRY’s genuine collection along with others when all the villas in ‘Abd al-Khâliq Tharwat Street were demolished and replaced with huge apartment buildings as part
of a plan to convert the area into a commercial and residential zone.

According to al-Bindârî, the ispêniâna Villa stayed in the possession of the Armenian family until the 1960s when it was then sold to the 'Abd al-Nûr family, who in their turn sold it to the Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA), now the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA). Meanwhile, the house contents were put on Egypt’s Islamic and Coptic Heritage List after that the house was abandoned. The doors were sealed in red wax, meaning that it was forbidden to enter and whoever stepped inside and removed the wax would be subjected to the law.

"I used to visit the house every now and then, but I have only seen it from the outside," al-Bindârî told Al-Ahram Weekly. He added that during his tour of office he had grown fond of the house and its distinguished architectural elements, and had even invited his friends to come so he could show them its wonderful design. "But sometimes the wind doesn’t blow the way we want," he said. Last spring, when al-Bindârî went for his usual visit, he found the Ispenian Villa was not the one he used to admire. The iron gate lay on the floor, broken in two pieces. The structure was partially demolished, and the house and garden were a total mess and in the worst possible condition.

al-Bindârî was told that the house, like many other monuments and archaeological sites in Egypt, had been looted during the January 2011 Revolution when security in the country was almost non-existent. However, he told the Weekly that there was no way of knowing for certain what had happened or how the destruction had come about. "Whoever stole the contents knew what he was doing," al-Bindârî insisted. "It was systematic. Everything from the ornamented roof, the ornamental screens, the marble floors and even a historic column supporting the balcony have been stolen. They took their time and took everything apart," al-Bindârî pointed out that the condition of the villa was not unusual by any standards. "These things happen all the time because of negligence," he said.

So what did happen to the villa? Why was it possible for it to be subjected to so much looting and destruction? Is it the property of the antiquities department or not? If so, where are the new antiquities law and its amendment? Why is it not being implemented? One of the law’s articles is one that prohibits any encroachment and destruction of archaeological sites and a prison term for offenders.

Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahîm, head of the Islamic and Coptic monuments section, told the Weekly in a telephone interview that the building was not on the Egyptian antiquities list and that the villa was still owned by 'Abd al-Nûr family. It was not a historic house, which must come under the jurisdiction of the Historic Buildings law affiliated to the Gîza governorate, nor did it come under the antiquities law or the MSA. He insisted that the building was not a listed monument.

Meanwhile, archaeologist Ahmad Taha, an inspector at the Gîza section of the MSA, laid all the blame for neglecting the building on the Tourist and Antiquities Police (TAP), who failed to protect the house even though there is TAP station not 10 metres from the Ispenian Villa. He also said that during the tenure of former MSA minister Zāhî Hawwâs there was a project to convert the historic villa into a museum for Islamic art, but no steps were taken to implement the plan. Taha’s statements are verified by an MSA official, who required anonymity. The official said that the collection of the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Bâb al-
Khalq was stored in the Ispenian Villa while the museum was under lengthy restoration. Some objects from this collection are now on display in the MIA while others were transported to MSA storage rooms in the Salâh al-Dîn Citadel.

Mukhtâr al-Kasabânî, professor of Islamic monuments in the archaeology department at Cairo University, who was the MSA consultant for Islamic monuments during the Hawwâs tenure, also supports Taha’s statements. He says the house is an MSA property and should come under the new antiquities law and its amendments. The empty 30 feddan plot neighbouring the Ispenian Villa is owned by former minister of tourism Munîr Fakhrî ‘Abd al-Nûr, who was willing to sell it to the MSA for a mega development project.

As a member of the committee who was in charge of the project, al-Kasabânî said that the whole site in this prime area overlooking the Gîza Plateau was earmarked to be transformed into a resort for tourists. It would include a small museum of Islamic art, a motel, bazaars selling replicas and souvenirs, a cafeteria and a bookstore for archaeology and art books. A parking area and a cinema would be also built as part of the complex. However, al-Kasabânî said that regrettably the revolution had put the plan into jeopardy and it had been abandoned. The villa, he went on, was looted during the revolution and some of the mashrabiyya and the mosaic fountain that once decorated the garden were missing.

“The current government and the MSA don’t care enough about Egypt’s history and its culture,” al-Kasabânî told the Weekly. He added that a few months ago a contractor damaged the Ottoman warehouse and grist-mill of Madash Mirzâ in Bûlâq Abû al-‘Ilâ, and that even though he was caught red-handed he was set at large with a fine of only LE500. This contractor, he said, returned to Madash Mirzâ and resumed the demolition, and nobody moved a finger to save this great Ottoman monument, not even the MSA. Now he had built the first floor of his new building. What made things worse, al-Kasabânî pointed out, was that all antiquities crimes were no longer prosecuted under the new antiquities law and its amendments which had priority on the court roll. Instead, they came under the usual criminal law, according to which a case can take years to be solved. al-Kasabânî suggests that to protect and rescue Egypt’s cultural and antiquities heritage, the MSA might be converted into an Independent Egyptian Authority affiliated directly to the president’s office rather than a ministry within the government echelon. (Nevine El-Aref, “Safe as houses? Not under the MSA”, Al-Ahram Weekly, February 7, 2013).

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L’Institut d’Égypte a été de nouveau attaqué lors des commémorations de la révolution le 25 janvier dernier. L’Institut a été cible par quelques « manifestants » qui ont essayé d’y mettre le feu avec des cocktails Molotov. La police a cependant réussi à défendre le bâtiment. Muhammad al-Sharnûbî, secrétaire général de l’Institut, a affirmé que ces tentatives se poursuivraient tant que les émeutes et les manifestations continuaient place Tahrîr. Il a envoyé des messages à la police et à l’armée, afin de mieux sécuriser le bâtiment.

Il y a presque un mois, l’Institut avait été attaqué pour la troisième fois. al-Sharnûbî avait tiré la sonnette d’alarme après la destruction de plusieurs fenêtres et des débuts d’incendies. Il a également fait état de la destruction de plusieurs caméras de contrôle et de dégâts sur plusieurs autres dans des tentatives de les voler. « C’est le même scénario que lors du grand incendie qui a eu lieu en novembre 2011 et qui a ravagé tout l’Institut », a regretté al-Sharnûbî, qui a dénoncé l’absence de sécurité autour du bâtiment. Pour certaines organisations et certains ministères publics, la police a mis en place des murs en béton de tous les côtés pour couper les accès. Des mesures insuffisantes selon le secrétaire général, car
L'institut donne sur la rue. Il avait fallu plus de dix mois pour restaurer l'institut, afin de nettoyer les dégâts.


« Je n'ai pas aperçu d'architecture exceptionnelle à l'intérieur de cet édifice avant l'incendie », souligne Philippe CHEVRANT, responsable de la bibliothèque de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO). Pour lui, l'incendie qui a ravagé un grand nombre de livres était une catastrophe pour le patrimoine savant hérité. L'institut renfermait des ouvrages uniques, comme la Description de l'Égypte, et des cartes remontant à l'époque de l'Expédition de BONAPARTE.

« Un certain nombre de jeunes ont déployé des efforts pour sauver le plus grand nombre possible de livres, dont quelques-uns ont été trouvés sur les trottoirs ou entre les mains d'adolescents », se souvient le secrétaire général de l'institut. Les efforts pour reconstruire cet institut ne se sont pas limités à la restauration des livres. Plusieurs pays, institutions, organisations et même individus de par le monde ont collaboré pour reconstruire l'institut. Don de livres, assistance au catalogage, accueil de stagiaires ou autres formes de soutien ont été fournis à l'institut. L'IFAO, la Bibliothèque d'Alexandrie, Dâr al-Kutub et des institutions internationales, comme l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé, y ont contribué. « Quelques grands écrivains nous ont offert leurs bibliothèques, comme Dr Wisâm Farag, ex-doyen de l'Université de Mansûra, ainsi que le syrien Haytham al-Khayyât », affirme al-Sharnûbî.


Lundi 11 février 2013

Le président du département des antiquités égyptiennes, Muhammad al-Biyâlî, a demandé au ministre de l'Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrasîm, la fermeture du Musée Égyptien, afin d’éviter tout danger lié aux affrontements politiques qui se déroulent place Tahrîr. Jusqu’au retour du calme, il est préférable de fermer le musée plutôt que de mettre en péril ses collections ou ses visiteurs.

**Mercredi 13 février 2013**

The world’s greatest open-air museum, the town of Luxor, is in the limelight this week. Archaeological work has been in full swing, and attempts are being made to conserve and preserve treasures from an important period in Egypt’s ancient history. At the Karnak Temple complex on the east bank of the Nile, French archaeologists and restorers from the Centre Franco-Égyptien d’Études des Temples de Karnak (CFEETK) have managed to reconstruct a unique limestone chapel built for Queen Hatshepsut and known as Netery Menu (The Divine Monument).

Limestone blocks from the chapel were first found at the beginning of the 20th century by French archaeologist George LÉGRAIN. They were among the gigantic statues of New Kingdom Pharaohs, queens, nobles and officials found in a cachette in a courtyard at Karnak, where they were stored in antiquity when they were no longer wanted. Another batch of blocks was uncovered in the mid-1950s during excavations carried out by Farîd al-Shâbûrî in the cachette. All the blocks were studied, restored and published by archaeologist Luc GABOLDE in 2005.

According to the CFEETK reports, studies have revealed that numerous blocks of the chapel are still missing as they were cut into smaller fragments so they could be reused in the construction of other ancient structures in and outside Karnak. Other blocks were cracked or broken. “It was therefore necessary to gather all the fragmented blocks for assembly and raise the great monument,” the report said. Consolidation and reconstruction began in 2009 and are now complete. The work included drilling, resin injections, the installation of dowels and the restitution of some laying faces. More than 30 blocks have been cleaned, while the missing ones have been replaced by new plain blocks composed of red bricks and lime mortar to present a complete vision of the chapel.

Mansûr Burayk, supervisor of Luxor Antiquities, calls this a very important building for Karnak and for ancient Egyptian history, as it is one of the few monuments still surviving that attest explicitly to Hatshepsut’s power as a ruler before she came to the throne as Pharaoh. The chapel was constructed in limestone for the worship of the chief Theban deity, Amun-Re. It contains an open court and two inner halls embellished with blocks engraved with beautiful religious scenes depicting Hatshepsut before Amun-Re and with her husband Pharaoh Tuthmosis II, her daughter Neferur and cartouches of their names. Some blocks bear the name of Hatshepsut’s son, Tuthmosis III. The chapel now stands in the Karnak open air museum alongside Hatshepsut’s red chapel, Senwosert I’s white chapel and Amenhotep I’s marble chapel as it waits for its official inauguration at the end of February.

At the footsteps of Pharaoh Amenhotep III’s mortuary temple on Luxor’s west bank there is a different scene. Workmen on the site
supervised by foreign and Egyptian archaeologists are lifting up a pair of colossal statues of the Pharaohs in readiness to transport them almost 60km away to a more convenient place for restoration. Both colossi were found in 2010 during routine excavation work carried out at the temple by the Colossi of Memnon and Amenhotep III Temple Conservation Project (CMATCP). They were lying in the passageway leading to the third pylon.

The head of CMATCP, Hourig Souriouzian, said the colossi once stood at the northern gate of the temple, 200 metres behind the only visible remnants of the temple before restoration, the colossi of Memnon, but collapsed and broke into several pieces during an earthquake in 27 BC. They were buried until 1933 when they were first uncovered, but remained in situ, covered with earth, until 2010 when the mission came across them. Souriouzian says the two colossi are the only ones of that size that have Pharaoh Amenhotep III seated on his throne, sporting the royal beard and wearing the nemes head dress and a pleated shendjyt kilt.

Muhammad 'Abd al-Maqṣūd, deputy head of ancient Egyptian antiquities section at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), says both statues, which are carved in sand stone, have been moved to a dry area 60 metres away from the mortuary temple so they can be restored and conserved. The conservation project is aimed at returning both statues to their original aspect and condition by reassembling and consolidating all the fragments. The scenes and hieroglyphic texts engraved on the statue bases will be also cleaned and restored.

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm described the statues as one of the most beautifully carved images of Pharaoh Amenhotep III known, and called it "a masterpiece of a royal portrait". It shows the facial features of Pharaoh Amenhotep III with his almond eyes elongated with cosmetic bands, a small nose and a large mouth with wide lips outlined with a sharp ridge. (Nevine El-Aref, "New glories of the New Kingdom", Al-Ahram Weekly, February 14, 2013. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, "Hatchepsut’s limestone chapel at Karnak to open soon for public", Ahram Online, February 10 ; Dînâ 'Abd al-'Allîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie : Achèvement de la restauration de la chapelle d’Hatchepsout », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 10 février ; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, « Festivités à Louqṣor pour le transfert des colosses d’Amenhotep III », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 18 février ; Doaa Elhami, « Les colosses d’Amenhotep reprennent vie », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 21 février ; Nasma Réda, « Le Netjery-Menou enfin reconstitué », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 21 février).
Celle-ci met aussi en garde contre les destructions subies par le patrimoine culturel islamique juste après le Printemps arabe et l’arrivée au pouvoir des islamistes. Pour légitimer leurs propos, les participants ont cité les conflits en Syrie, au Mali, ainsi que les troubles qui se sont déroulés au cours des dernières décennies en Irak, en Bosnie-Herzégovine, au Kosovo, en Afghanistan, etc. Muhammad Ibrahim, ministre des Antiquités, à l’initiative du séminaire, a insisté sur l’importance de telles réunions, en particulier en ce moment où « le nombre de pillages d’antiquités et d’attaques contre les sites historiques a bondi ».

Même discours du côté de Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, secrétaire général de l’OIC, qui a insisté sur « l’importance d’édicter des lois prélevant l’intégrité du patrimoine culturel et permettant de faire face à ceux qui tentent de le détruire ». İhsanoğlu faisait directement référence aux nombreux appels à « nettoyer » l’Égypte d’icônes qui seraient incompatibles avec l’islam. Il ajoute : « Ces déclarations relèvent de l’exagération. Elles reflètent des tendances extrémistes et rigides qui trahissent une ignorance de la sublime religion islamique ».

‘Ali Gum’a, grand mufti d’Égypte, qui a récité quelques versets du Coran encourageant à étudier les arts et les sciences de nos ancêtres, a écarté la question en déclarant : « Beaucoup de questions nous arrivent à Dâr al-İfâta”, concernant les monuments. Nous sommes en train de regrouper toutes les fatwas documentées dont les propos protègent le patrimoine historique, dans un livre à paraître prochainement. Nous espérons que cela pourra contribuer à mettre fin à ces actes irresponsables qui nuisent à nos trésors historiques ». Par ailleurs, Halit Erên, directeur de l’IRCICA, a affirmé l’importance de former d’excellents archéologues arabo-musulmans capables de défendre le patrimoine avant de le préserver non seulement par les technologies de restauration, mais aussi par des pensées religieuses appropriées. Les cheikhs des mosquées sont directement visés par ce document.

Pour Tal’at ‘Affî, ministre des Waqfs, il faut insister sur « l’importance qu’ils doivent accorder aux mœurs » lors de leurs prêches. Cependant, il n’indique pas clairement les mesures que le ministère devrait prendre envers n’importe quel discours à la mosquée qui ne respecte pas les préceptes de l’islam et qui encourage ces actes barbares. Le secrétaire général de l’OIC a rappelé les conséquences catastrophiques de tels appels à la destruction, soulignant que ces idées sont susceptibles de donner des musulmans une image d’ignorance et d’intolérance.

« De telles idées nous sont étrangères », a assuré Siîm al-Âwwa, conseiller du président égyptien et penseur islamique, mentionnant la destruction à La Mecque de la maison de Khadiga, épouse du Prophète. Il a affirmé que « la nation arabe est unie et ne doit pas être divisée ». İhsanoğlu a, lui, rappelé la destruction des mausolées des imams ‘Alî al-Hâdî et Hasan al-’Askarî en Irak, qui a eu de graves conséquences sur l’unité nationale entre sunnites et chiites. Et le secrétaire général de l’OIC a mis en garde contre la poursuite des actes de judaïsation des villes et des quartiers palestiniens, en particulier dans la ville sainte d’al-Quds al-Sharif, menés pour détruire son caractère arabo-musulman.

Loin de donner des solutions concrètes aux abus contre le patrimoine islamique, la Déclaration du Caire éclaire le fait que le patrimoine est le produit de la civilisation à une époque donnée. Elle affirme que les lieux de culte, les sites et les monuments sont une ligne rouge infranchissable en vertu des principes islamiques. En ce sens, elle exige d’insérer la préservation du patrimoine culturel dans le cadre des politiques de développement durable, éducatives et médiatiques. Enfin, cette déclaration lance aussi un appel à l’OIC et l’IRCICA pour publier une charte fondée sur les principes islamiques, y inclus une vision claire de la maintenance des monuments. (Nasma Réda, « Déclaration du Caire : Conserver le patrimoine, un devoir islamique », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 14 février 2013).

Samedi 16 février 2013

Pour la troisième fois, la mosquée Qâytbây située à al-Darrâsa fait l’objet d’un vol. Des pilleurs ont arraché les incrustations précieuses en ivoire du minbar qui date de


A group of Belgian archaeologists uncovered the remains of a mud-brick pyramid-shaped tomb cover in Luxor belonging to Ramses II’s vizier Khay. The Belgian archaeological mission from the Free University of Brussels and Liege University uncovered the 15 metre-tall structure during their routine excavation work at Shaykh ‘Abd al-Gurna...
Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrahim, effectue demain une visite de trois jours en Allemagne. Au cours de cette visite, il examinera avec les responsables du Musée de Berlin et de la Fondation du patrimoine culturel prussien les moyens de coopération dans les domaines de la restauration, l’entraînement et l’échange des expertises. En tête des négociations bilatérales figure le soutien allemand de la dernière phase du Musée atonien, en cours de construction dans le gouvernorat de Minya. Ce musée devrait ouvrir ses portes d’ici deux années. La dernière phase de ce projet concerne l’élaboration du scénario muséologique et la constitution d’une base de données des collections. Les responsables allemands s’étaient déjà engagés à organiser une collecte de fonds destinée à financer cette dernière phase du musée, qui s’élève à 60 millions de livres égyptiennes. L’achèvement de ce musée aura des retombées positives sur l’emploi des jeunes, le flux touristique et l’augmentation des revenus nationaux.


Muhammad E., chauffeur âgé de 37 ans, a été mis en examen pour trafic archéologique. Les policiers ont saisi dans sa voiture 199 pièces antiques de différentes...
The Egyptian antiquities ministry has rejected a proposal by the finance ministry to rent out the country’s major archaeological sites to international tourism companies in an attempt to reduce the government’s budget deficit. Some archaeologists have called the proposal ‘insulting’ and ‘humiliating.’ “How can we rent out our heritage?” Ahmad Sa’îd, professor of Egyptology at Cairo University, wrote on his Facebook page, alongside a cartoon of the Sphinx crying, “Cry dear Sphinx, people want to rent you out and maybe later cut you into pieces and sell you! Shame on those who want to rent you. You are the symbol of dignity, power and Egypt’s ancient civilization,” he added. Hâtim Suwaylim, professor of archaeology at Cairo University, said the proposal was a “rumour created by the media.”


L’allée des sphinx est éclairée pour la première fois. Après plus de trois ans de travaux effectués par le ministère pour les Antiquités en coopération avec la compagnie du Son et Lumièr, le gouvernorat de Louqsor et le ministère du Tourisme, le gouverneur de Louqsor, ‘Izzat Sa’d, a inauguré le 19 février le projet d’éclairage de cette allée historique. « Ce projet facilitera la visite des temples aux touristes pendant la nuit. Le ministère du
Tourisme a financé la phase finale du projet à hauteur de deux millions de L.E. », explique Muhammad Ibrâhîm, le ministre d'État pour les Antiquités. Et d’ajouter que l’allée des sphinx sera inaugurée officiellement le mois prochain, lors d’une cérémonie mondiale. Des tests expérimentaux sur le projet d’éclairage ont lieu cette semaine. Cette allée est également connue sous le nom d’allée ou route des béliers. « Je suis contre cette dernière appellation. Je me pose la question : où sont les béliers ? Ce sont des statues qui ont la tête et le corps du sphinx, alors c’est une allée des sphinx », indique Ibrâhîm.


Le Grand Musée Égyptien (GEM) se prépare à recevoir d’ici quelques jours cinq nouvelles pièces du trésor du roi Toutankhamon, jeune pharaon de la XVIIIe dynastie. Le ministère d’État pour les Antiquités a donné son feu vert pour transférer ces pièces du Musée du Caire vers le GEM situé à Giza. Ces pièces étaient arrivées en janvier dernier d’une exposition itinérante aux États-Unis et au Japon. Selon le ministre d’État pour les Antiquités, Muhammad Ibrâhîm, les pièces « sortiront des entrepôts du Musée du Caire place Tahrîr sous sécurité renforcée ».


When Minyâ’s archaeological inspectorate learned of the activity, it sent a report to both local police and the antiquities ministry. The ministry ordered a halt to the encroachment and stepped up security in the area, while tourism and antiquities police were deployed nearby. Speaking to Ahram Online, al-Biyall pointed out that the al-Hagg Qandîl site had represented an important part of the capital during Akhenaton’s reign. The site includes a collection of noblemen’s tombs, including that of lay, one of Akhenaton’s high priests, lay was also the godfather of the boy king Tutankhamen, after whose untimely death lay seized the throne. According to al-Biyall, the area also contains the tomb of Mahou, Akhenaton’s chief of police, along with remains of the Aten temple and the celebrated ‘borders relief,’ which depicts ancient Egypt’s geographical borders with neighbouring empires. Police and the antiquities ministry appear to have succeeded in stopping the agricultural encroachment on Tell al-Amarna at an early stage.

In Dahshûr, meanwhile, in the urban Giza governorate, new concrete buildings still stand in front of the pyramid of Amenhotep II. Dahshûr residents’ halted construction of the structures after the antiquities ministry offered to provide them with land far from the archaeological site on which to build a cemetery. Given the current lack of financial resources, however, the removal of such buildings remains difficult. (Nevine El-Aref, “Authorities foil encroachment on Egypt’s Tell al-Amarna archaeological site”, Ahram Online, March 5, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Des citoyens empiètent sur le site de Tell al-Amarna et y plantent des palmiers », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 3 mars).
Egyptian and European excavators unearthed a collection of black granite statues depicting the ancient Egyptian lioness Goddess Sekhmet during their routine excavation at King Amenhotep III funerary temple in the Kom al-Hittân area on the west bank of Luxor. The statues depict the goddess Sekhmet in her usual form, sitting on the throne with a human body and lioness’s head.

"This is not the first time statues of the lioness goddess have been unearthed at Kom al-Hittân," said Muhammad Ibrâhîm, minister of state for antiquities adding that the Egyptian-European mission led by German Egyptologist Hourig SOUROUZIAN has previously unearthed 64 statues of Sekhmet of different shapes and sizes. Ibrâhîm explained that such a large number highlights the important role of the goddess during the reign of the 18th dynasty king Amenhotep III, father of the monotheistic king Akhnaten and grandfather of the golden king Tutankhamun. Sekhmet was believed to be a protective goddess as she was also the goddess of war and destruction. "Some Egyptologists," pointed out Ibrâhîm, "believe that king Amenhotep constructed a large number of goddess Sekhmet's in an attempt to cure him of a specific disease that he suffered during his reign.” Sekhmet was well known of her supposed ability to cure critical diseases.

Mansûr Burayk, supervisor of Luxor antiquities, told Ahram online that the statues are very well preserved and each one is two metres tall. He continued saying that the newly discovered statues prove Amenhotep III’s funerary temple was once filled with Sekhmet statues of different sizes and shapes, similar to his temple on the east bank of Luxor, known as goddess Mut temple. This temple acted as a symbol of stability and prosperity during Amenhotep III’s reign.

10 years ago, the archaeologists unearthed a large number of statues of Amenhotep III and his wife Queen Tiye; they also unearthed some parts of the temple’s walls. “The work we are doing here is not only about advancing historical knowledge, but also about saving the last remnants of a temple that was once very prestigious; it is unfortunate that it been badly damaged,” SOUROUZIAN said. The teams aim to produce a virtual reconstruction of the temple using the latest computer programmes, she added, saying that this reconstruction would show the original position of every surviving piece within the original temple. (Nevine El-Aref, "More Sekhmet statues unearthed at Amenhotep III’s temple in Luxor", Ahram Online, March 11, 2013. Voir également Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Découverte de 14 statues dans le temple d’Amenhotep III à Louqsor », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’, 11 mars ; Nasma Réda, « Louqsor : Des dizaines de statues de Sekhmet mises au jour », al-Ahram Hebdo du 28 mars).
drawing up action plans concerning the construction of the National Museum for Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) in the Fustât area in Old Cairo and the Historic Cairo Rehabilitation Project (HCRP).

Ibrâhîm told Ahram Online that they discussed the possibility of establishing a regional centre for World Heritage in Cairo. This centre, he explained, would help African countries protect their archaeological sites listed on the World Heritage List as well as provide training for African archaeologists and curators on the latest technology used in discovering, studying and restoring monuments and artefacts. According to Ibrâhîm, BOKOVA also promised to review essential data required to launch an international campaign to help complete delayed work on the NMEC project. International cooperation will be required for the centre to open on time, he added. She also discussed Egypt’s proposed amendments to the Intellectual Property Rights agreement signed in 1970. The amendments would introduce the monitoring of international auctions, prohibiting them from trading in illegally smuggled antiquities.

Ibrâhîm said that UNESCO did not threaten to remove Egypt’s archaeological sites from the World Heritage List, but it has a number of concerns about the archaeological area in Dahshûr. The minister pointed out that the problem has now been solved after the ministry issued 54 urgent declarations. The ministry has stopped construction work occurring in Dahshûr and assigned an inspection committee to start excavation at a neighbouring area of the Dahshûr archaeological site where it is hoped people may construct their cemeteries without affecting the archaeological sites.

At the end of the meeting Ibrâhîm guided BOKOVA on a tour around the Carriage and Military Museums on Saladin’s Citadel to see the recent restoration and renovation of both museums before their official opening at the end of March. (Nevine El-Aref, “UNESCO visits Cairo to discuss threats to archaeological sites”, Ahram Online, March 12, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie reçoit BOKOVA au cours de sa visite en Égypte », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 10 mars ; Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « BOKOVA examine avec Ibrâhîm la création au Caire d’un centre régional pour le patrimoine », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 12 mars).

Samedi 16 mars 2013

A team of Egyptian archaeologists digging at Tell Habwa, near the town of Qantara East and three kilometres east of the Suez Canal, have made a major discovery. The find comes as part of the search for more of the ancient forts that played a major role in protecting ancient Egypt’s eastern gateway from foreign invasion. During excavation works, archaeologists chanced upon the remains of administrative buildings dating back to the Hyksos and the New Kingdom periods in the second millennium BC, as well as a great many grain silos. Each administrative edifice is a two-storey structure with a number of mud brick rooms and courtyards. Inside these halls a collection of coffins, skulls and skeletons of human beings and animals were found buried in sand.

Early studies of the skeletons reveal that they bear deep scars and wounds as the result of being stabbed with arrows or spears. “This indicates that the battles between the Hyksos and the military troops led by the ancient Egyptian king Ahmose I (c.1550–1525 BC) were violent and aggressive,” said Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm. Ibrâhîm said that a large number of grain silos and army storage galleries from the reign of kings Tuthmos III and Ramses II were also discovered. These silos can store more than 280 tonnes of grain, which indicates the great number of the Egyptian army forces, which were at Tell Habwa at that time.

Muhammad ‘Abd al-Maqsûd, leader of excavation work and deputy of the Ancient
Egyptian antiquities department at the antiquities ministry, told Ahram Online that the remains of burned buildings were also found, confirming written accounts on papyrus that describe a great conflagration during Ahmose I’s battle against the Hyksos. "This is a very important discovery which provides us with a better understanding of the Rind papyrus — now on display in the British Museum — and the military strategy used by the Pharaoh Ahmose I to liberate Egypt from the Hyksos,” said 'Abd al-Maqṣūd. He pointed out that the Rind papyrus mentions that Ahmose attacked Tharo and imposed his authority on the town in order to lay siege to the Hyksos in their capital Avaris — near the Delta town of Sharqiyya — and block any contact with their allies in the east.

Until 2003, when the fortified city of Tharo was found, 'Abd al-Maqṣūd said, nothing was known about this military town. At that time several objects were found testifying that Tharo dated from the New Kingdom, so Egyptologists believed that it was built by Ahmose I’s successors in an attempt to protect Egypt’s eastern gate from any further invaders. This latest discovery, however, proves that Tharo was built long before that, since the Hyksos took over it as a military base on Egypt’s eastern border. The town expanded after the war of liberation, and forts were built throughout the period of the New Kingdom. (Nevine El-Aref, "Hyksos buildings are the latest ancient discovery in Tell Habwa", Ahram Online, March 16, 2013. Voir également Muhammad 'Agam, « Mise au jour dans le Sinai des vestiges de la bataille de libération égyptienne contre les Hyksôs », al-Sharq al-Awsat, 17 mars ; Dalia Hamam, « Découverte des bâtiments militaires des Hyksôs », Le Progrès Égyptien, 20 mars ; Nasma Réda, « Tell Habwa dévoile ses secrets », al-Ahram Hebdo, 28 mars ; Dinâ 'Abd al-'Alîm, « 'Abd al-Maqṣūd confirme la découverte d’une zone archéologique à al-Qantara Sharq », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 28 avril).

**Dimanche 17 mars 2013**


**Mardi 19 mars 2013**

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a examiné ce matin avec l’ambassadrice de la République dominicaine au Caire, Maria PONTE, les termes d’un protocole de coopération entre les deux pays dans le domaine archéologique, la lutte contre le trafic illégal du patrimoine culturel et la sauvegarde des droits de propriété intellectuelle. Il s’agit de la seconde rencontre entre le ministre et l’ambassadrice dominicaine, en présence du directeur général des organisations internationales, Dr Usâma al-Nahhâs.

Dr Ibrâhîm a précisé que cette

Jeudi 21 mars 2013

Après plus de 15 ans d’arrêt des travaux, la malédiction qui entourait la construction du Musée atonien de Minyâ pourrait prendre fin. Mustapha ‘Îsa, gouverneur de Minyâ, ainsi que le ministre d’État pour les Antiquités, Muhammad Ibrâhîm, ont réussi à convaincre des donateurs allemands de les aider à poursuivre la construction du musée.

Ayant la forme d’une pyramide sur une superficie de 12 hectares sur la rive est du Nil, ce musée se compose de 5 étages qui devraient renfermer plus de 14 salles d’exposition, un centre de restauration et une salle de conférence avec une capacité de 800 personnes. À l’extérieur seront construits des bâtiments administratifs, une foire aux livres et aux souvenirs, ainsi qu’un musée ouvert qui racontera l’histoire d’Amenhotep IV. Un jardin autour du musée comportera des répliques des célèbres pièces pharaoniques de l’époque, ainsi que des lacs artificiels et un quai pour les croisières puisque cet édifice donnera sur le Nil. Un centre éducatif sur le culte d’Akhenaton devrait comporter un système de documentation informatique. Ce musée spécialisé ne renfermera que des statues, des stèles et tous les monuments liés à Akhenaton et à sa femme Néfertiti. Ces pièces seront récupérées des quatre coins de l’Égypte.

Selon Muhammad Ibrâhîm, qui a négocié avec le responsable de l’Organisation allemande de la culture et du patrimoine durant sa visite de 3 jours en Allemagne au début de ce mois, on devrait accélérer la mise en œuvre de la dernière phase, afin d’inscrire ce site sur la carte touristique égyptienne le plus rapidement possible. « L’inauguration de ce musée est prévue au maximum dans 2 ans », a-t-il annoncé. D’après lui, cette étape, qui arrive dans un contexte de crise touristique, peut être une opportunité pour attirer chercheurs et grand public autour de ce culte.

Selon le gouverneur de Minyâ, « les citoyens de Minyâ attendent ce projet depuis des années car celui-ci va placer le gouvernorat sur la carte touristique et sera une opportunité d’emplois pour les jeunes ». La reprise des croisières devrait aussi drainer plus de touristes. Le protocole égypto-allemand va également permettre de moderniser les alentours du musée pour en faire une zone attractive pour les touristes. Des bazars et des kiosques seront construits sur la corniche de Minyâ.

Du côté allemand, Cornelia PIEPER, ministre des Affaires étrangères, salue cette démarche de coopération égypto-allemande. La ministre allemande a félicité l’ambassade égyptienne en Allemagne pour les procédures juridiques qu’elle a mises en place afin de contrer le marché de contrebande des antiquités. Un accord a également été trouvé et l’Allemagne s’est engagée à rendre les statues et les stèles appartenant à l’Égypte. Si le côté financier est presque résolu, il reste encore à régler le problème des violations et des pillages des sites archéologiques. L’empêtement sur les territoires archéologiques, surtout ceux de la cité de Tell al-Amarna construite par Amenhotep IV, pose problème. Le ministre d’État pour les Antiquités a publié le 4 mars dernier la résolution n° 1 600 pour lutter contre ces violations sur les sites archéologiques. Le ministre a souligné qu’il
revient à la police de mettre en œuvre immédiatement cette décision et de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour lutter contre les pilleurs.


Al-Hamam Antiquities Inspectorate has succeeded to remove encroachment on al-Burdân archaeological site, located on Alexandria-Marsa Matrûh highway, in collaboration with Egypt’s tourism and antiquities police. The site includes remains of Graeco-Roman fortresses, roads, temples and cemeteries. The encroachment on the al-Burdân archaeological site, located on kilometre 67 on Alexandria-Marsa Matrûh highway, started Friday when a large truck invaded the site with a construction bulldozer, which on its turn damaged a cluster of authentic structures that date back to the Graeco-Roman era, according to director of Mârînâ al-'Alamayn Antiquities Khâlid Abû al-Magd.

Abû al-Magd accused Yâsir Khalîl, owner of a contractor company, and truck driver Muhammad ‘Abd al-Sattâr of violating and damaging the archaeological site. The tourism and antiquities police arrested both accused, but they denied all charges. Both are in custody until the completion of investigations. On Saturday, all encroachment has been removed, but the site is almost completely damaged.

Egypt has reportedly suffered from illegal urban and agricultural encroachment on archaeological sites. Earlier in March, residents of neighbouring al-Hagg Qandîl village began cultivating the area around a collection of 18th-dynasty noblemen’s tombs at the ancient site of Tell al-Amarna in the Upper Egyptian city of Minyâ, which was Egypt’s capital during the reign of monotheistic pharaoh Akhenaton. Minyâ’s archaeological inspectorate sent a report to both local police and the antiquities ministry. The ministry ordered a halt to the encroachment and stepped up security in the area, while tourism and antiquities police were deployed nearby.

Dahshûr, 30 km north of Gîza plateau, was subjected to violation in January 2013. Residents of the neighbouring Dahshûr village proceeded to construct a collection of modern cemeteries before the Black Pyramid of King Amenhotep II. However, Dahshûr residents halted construction of the structures after the antiquities ministry offered to provide them with land far from the archaeological site on which to build a cemetery. (Nevine El-Aref, “Encroachment continues on Egypt’s archaeological sites, al-Burdân”, Ahram Online, March 23, 2013. Voir également « Échec d’une
tentative d’empiètement sur une zone archéologique à al’-Alamayn », al-Ahrām, 24 mars).

Mercredi 27 mars 2013

The pathway between the opulence mosques of Sultan Hasan and Rifā’ī

Ambling around the monumental Islamic compound of the awe-inspiring Sultan Hasan complex and the Rifā’ī Mosque in al-Qa’a Square in mediaeval Cairo is an unforgettable experience, a chance not only to explore two of the largest and most extravagant mosques in the Islamic world but to delve into the dramatic life of their owners. If the pomp of ancient Egypt is symbolised by its Gîza Pyramids and Sphinx, the pride of Islamic Egypt has to be these two unique mosques. Both share the similar Mamluk opulent architectural style and engineering challenges, even though they were built in two different eras. The Sultan Hasan Mosque was built in 1360, while the Rifā’ī Mosque was built in 1912.

Sultan Hasan was the son of the great Mamluk Sultan al-Nâsir Muhammad Ibn Qalâwüwûn, whose own gigantic complex is in Bayn al-Qasrayn Street in historic Cairo and includes a mosque, a mausoleum, a madrasa (Quran school) and a bîmâristân (hospital). Hasan inherited the sultanate in 1347 at the age of 13, but three years later he assumed authority and arrested Emir Manjaq who had controlled the state’s affairs. Sultan Hasan appointed people he favoured to positions of power, which upset the dignitaries, generals and emirs who had been holding the reins. In 1351 they rebelled and deposed him, imprisoning him for three years.

Hasan spent the time in his cell studying. In 1356 he regained his throne and in an attempt to solidify his power he reshuffled most of the ruling establishment, but in 1361, before he could consolidate his position, he was assassinated. The man behind the assassination was the chief military commander Yalbugha al-Umari, who rebelled against Hasan along with other emirs, officials and generals because of his extravagance in spending the sultanate’s fortune on his favourite projects. Some documents say that Hasan first escaped from the Citadel to Cairo, where he was found and imprisoned before being put to death, leaving 10 sons and six daughters. His body was hidden and never found. The Syrian historian Ibn Kathîr (1301-1373) recorded the sultan’s extravagant use of public funds, and nowhere is this more evident than in his gigantic and lavishly decorated mosque and madrasa.

Sultan Hasan assigned Prince Muhammad Ibn Baylik al-Muhsâni to supervise the construction of his mosque in 1357. The sultan’s murder meant it was not finished. Gamâl Mustafa, director-general of the Sultan Hasan and Rifâ’ī site, says that if the work on the mosques had been fully completed then the wooden plaques on the façade would have been engraved with decorative items similar to those found within the walls of the mosque.

The mosque itself is a massive, religious Mamluk complex and includes a mosque, a madrasa, a bîmâristân and a bath. It was built close to the Salâh al-Dîn Citadel, the seat of the Sultanate at the time, in order to please the sultan when he looked down from his palace across the open space connecting the mosque to the Citadel.

It is a remarkable complex for its unusual grandeur and innovative architectural style and decoration, which led the mediaeval historian al-Maqrîzî to say that although it was commissioned by a low-profile sultan, the Sultan Hasan Mosque complex housed several wonders of construction. It was built according to the cruciform style featuring an open courtyard surrounded by four iwâns (vaulted halls with arcades) representing the four schools of Sunni Imams: al-Hanaâfi, al-Shâfi’î, al-Hanbalî and al-Mâlikî. The qibla iwân, the largest of the four iwâns, is decorated with two windows in recesses and an oculus above the
marble mihrāb covered with coloured marble panels decorated with floral motifs.

The dikkat al-muballigh (the bench of the repeater) situated at the front of the qibla iwân is made of marble and is raised on eight pillars and three piers. Two doors opening in the qibla wall lead to a mausoleum dome behind the mihrab. The dome measures 21 square metres, and its decoration is similar to that of the qibla iwân.

The open court of Sultan Hasan Mosque

The mosque complex is 7,906 square metres wide with four façades, an open courtyard, iwâns, a minbar (pulpit) and a mihrâb (niche). The cost of its construction was 30,000 dirhams per-day, making it the most expensive mosque in mediaeval Cairo. This cost was met by seizing the assets of victims of the plague who had died without heirs. In his account of the events, al-Maqrîzî noted that a eunuch was said to have heard the sultan say: “If it were not that the sultan of Egypt would be called incapable of finishing a building that he had started, then I would stop building this mosque on account of the great amount of what has been spent on it.”

The northeast façade is the most impressive. Its sheer wall has four vertical sets of windows, while at the top of the wall is a massive cornice with five layers of stone stalactites. The open court is almost square and is decorated with a large ablution fountain at its centre. This is covered with s wooden dome supported on eight marble columns the capitals of which are decorated with verses from the Quran.

The fountain has been restored. Mustafa told Al-Ahram Weekly that the marble lintels of the fountain were rehabilitated while damaged and missing ones were replaced with similar lintels. Engravings and decorated items on the fountain were also cleaned. After being restored the fountain was taken out of service. “It is not used any longer for ablutions,” Mustafa said, adding that the investigation carried out during the restoration of the fountain had not been able to determine the source of the water in and out of the fountain. It was established, however, that the fountain was not connected to the street drainage system. In order to prevent any unexpected leakage of water in the future, Mustafa told the Weekly, the water to and from the fountain was cut off and modern basins were installed outside the mosque for ablutions.

The original baths of the mosque were also restored and placed on service for worshippers and visitors. The original bath of the mosque is situated outside the mosque next to the bîmâristân and includes a large, square marble bathing basin at its centre with a large number of outlying basins. Mustafa said that the bath had its own water system, which channelled fresh, clean water from the water wheel within the complex and dumped the dirty water into a cesspit buried in the sand. The same system was used to bring clean water to each of the basins. The water runs over a marble watercourse. “This is the first time we have found a complete bath like this in an Islamic monument,” Mustafa said, adding that while other mosques had basins or baths, even those did not have a supply of running clean water and had water tanks instead.

Mustafa told the Weekly that the water wheel was now under restoration in order for it to regain its original features and stand as a model to show the plumbing system used in the Mamluk era. The area in front of the water wheel has been cleaned of rubble and sand, while the wheel itself has been cleaned and missing parts replaced. Mustafa said that over the span of time the area had been sadly neglected and was used as a garbage dump by people from the neighbouring residential area of Sûq al-Silâh (the weapons market).

The building housing the water wheel has also been cleaned and restored and will be converted into a library for Islamic arts and history. The library, Mustafa said, would not only be for the use of students and researchers but also for visitors and anyone else interested in learning more about Islamic monuments. It will include books on history and
the arts, and copies of rare Islamic documents. A cafeteria will also be established there.

Near the water wheel zone is the bîmâristân and a number of small, vaulted rooms once used to lay out the dead, according to Sunni religious rites, before funeral prayers in the mosque. Mustafa pointed out that time had taken its toll on these open-air rooms, with cracks spreading across the walls and parts of the tiled flooring damaged or missing. With restoration, however, the rooms have regained their allure. He suggested that within the development process this area would be converted into a Mamluk market displaying products used at that time. Retail spaces would be allowed to antiques and souvenir bazaar owners as well as copper and silversmiths to increase the complex’s revenue, which in turn would be used in maintenance or to restore the neighbouring Rifâ‘î Mosque. “It will also give visitors a complete view of how the Mamluk market looked in its heyday,” Mustafa said.

As for the bîmâristân, Mustafa suggested that it would be converted into meeting rooms for scholars, cultural seminars or events. He said that in order to give visitors a view of how a bîmâristân looked in the Mamluk era, one room would be furnished with furniture and equipment used in Mamluk hospitals.

To improve the landscape of the area outside the mosque, some of the original date palms were transferred to other monumental sites so as to create a dramatic view of the mosque and the landscape. All excavation in the area within the mosque zone will also be on the visitors’ path after the completion of work and restoration. Curator Hadir ‘Alî told the Weekly that until now only a part of the excavation had been completed, but the lack of funds had intervened. She went on to say that the remains of a 19th-century wakâla (business complex) had been discovered along with a number of decorated marble columns.

Unfortunately there will be a stop to functions at the site. “To protect the Sultan Hasan Mosque from further damage, wedding parties will no longer be held there,” Mustafa said. He explained that guests had damaged several parts of the decoration in the mosque. The dikkat al-muballigh and the Quran lectern had also been damaged and some wooden parts broken off.

Opposite the Sultan Hasan mosque is the spectacular Rifâ‘î Mosque, with its overwhelming structure and stunning decorative items. When one looks at both mosques from a distance, one might feel that they are one mosque split in two. The Rifâ‘î Mosque has a similar grandeur to the Sultan Hasan Mosque, so that neither is dwarfed by the other.

The Rifâ‘î Mosque was constructed in several phases between 1869 and 1912, when it was officially completed. It was built on the orders of Khushyar Hânîm, the mother of Khedive Ismâ‘îl, to be a burial place for her family and herself. She assigned engineer Husayn Pasha Fahmî to design it in harmony with the Sultan Hasan Mosque.

The Rifâ‘î Mosque was built over the mausoleum and zâwiya (chapel) of Sheikh ‘Alî al- Rifâ‘î, the grandson of the Sufi Rifâ‘îyya tarîqa (sect) leader Sheikh Ahmed al- Rifâ‘î. ‘Alî al- Rifâ‘î was considered a saint during his lifetime, and people still visit his mausoleum seeking his blessed intercession in their lives. Some people still come to this mausoleum to read a verse from the Quran for the sheikh and to offer him flowers. Bunches of flowers and roses can sometimes be seen on top of and all around his tomb.

The Rifâ‘î Mosque is rectangular in shape, measuring 6,500 square metres in size. Some 1,767 square metres of this area are reserved for prayer, while the rest is the mausoleum of the Muhammad ‘Alî royal family. It was constructed in the Bahri Mamluk style popular in the 19th and 20th centuries. This style was similar to the European style of buildings at the time, and most of the materials used in the construction and decoration of the mosque were imported from Europe.

The construction was moving ahead at a good pace until 1885 when Fahmî died, followed soon afterwards by Khushyar Hânîm. She was granted her wish of being entombed there, and then in 1894, when her son Khedive Ismâ‘îl also died, he was entombed next to her.

These events placed the construction of the mosque on hold for almost 20 years,
but when Khedive Husayn Hilmî II came to the
throne he assigned the Austrian architect Max
Pasha Hertz, who at the time was head of the
Committee for the Conservation of Arab
Monuments in Cairo, to complete the
construction. It was finished in 1912.

The mausoleum contains not only
Khushyar Hânîm and her son Ismâîl Pasha but
also his wife and two daughters. Other
members of Egypt’s royal family buried there
are Sultan Husayn Kâmil and his wife, as well
as the last crowned king of Egypt, Fârûq,
whose body was returned to Cairo after his
death in Rome in 1965. Fârûq’s daughter Firyâl
was buried there in 2009. The mosque also
served briefly as the resting place for the shah
of Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who died in exile in
South Africa in 1944. His body was taken to
Iran after World War II, but part of the burial
chamber is currently occupied by Reza Shah’s
son Mohamed Reza Pahlavi who died in exile in
Cairo in 1980.

The mausoleum is small but houses
wonderful decorations. Its walls are covered
with colourful marble designs and golden
verses from the Quran. The floor and Pahlavi
tombstone are of bright green marble. The
tomb itself is merely a small step rising from
the floor with the name of the shah and dates
of his birth and death.

The prayer hall is another
distinguishing part of the mosque. The ceiling is
beautifully decorated as it is stepped in a way
that is similar to the ceilings in other historical
Islamic buildings. The curator, Nisrîn Nabîl, told
the Weekly that the gold embellishing the
ceiling was imported from Turkey at a cost of
LE25,000, which was a very large sum of
money at the time. The walls of the mosque
are covered with colourful marble in the
various styles of the Mamluk ornamentation.
“There are 19 different types of marble from
different countries,” Nabîl said. The prayer hall has 44 grand columns in all, as
well as 18 intricately worked window grills.

“Up to now the mosque has not been
restored,” Mustafa said. He added, however,
that restoration would start early in 2014 when
work at the Sultan Hasan Mosque would be
finished. However, a tapestry given to the
mosque by the Pahlavis would be restored in
the near future.

The Rifâ’î Mosque is in an excellent
state of preservation and it requires minimal
restoration. However, Mustafa is hoping that
when an appropriate budget is available he will
be able to assign a team of surveyors to
inspect the monument’s roof, which has been
affected by rainwater. He said that previous
inspections had yielded very positive reports
that confirmed it was still in good condition.
(Nevine El-Aref, “Standing proud”, Al-Ahram
Weekly, March 27, 2013).

Jeudi 28 mars 2013

Après l’incendie et le pillage du palais
Qâzdûghlî, rue Simon Bolivar, c’est l’épée de
cuirve de la statue du Libertador d’Amérique
latine qui a disparu. Cette statue se situe sur
la place qui porte son nom, à proximité de la
place Tahrîr. La statue du leader vénézuélien
s’est retrouvée au coeur de la révolution et a
fait l’objet de plusieurs dégradations pendant
les affrontements post-révolution. Désormais,
c’est son épée qui a été volée.

Les habitants du quartier racontent que
des gamins ont mis le feu à la statue en
pleine nuit, il y a quelques jours. « Personne
n’a pu les arrêter. Mais le lendemain on s’est
rendu compte de la disparition de l’épée »,
témoigne un habitant du quartier. Si la rue qui
mène à la place Simon Bolivar est désormais
coupée, cela n’a pas empêché la guérilla, entre
jets de pierres, de cocktails Molotov et gaz
lacrymogènes de se poursuivre dans la rue
attenanisé. (Dalia Farouq, « Simon Bolivar s’est
fait voler son épée », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 27
mars 2013).

Jeudi 4 avril 2013


D’après le rapport de fouilles de 2011 du site Avaris (Tell al-Dab’a), la mission autrichienne, conduite par Manfred Bietak, qui y opère depuis des années, a découvert 16 paumes de mains droites coupées, déposées dans 4 puits différents. Avaris était l’ancienne capitale des Hyksôs, qui dirigeaient l’Égypte pendant la XVe dynastie. Les fouilles de cette cité, située dans le Delta oriental, ont révélé des inhumations caractéristiques de la période des Hyksôs.

Entre 2010 et 2012, les archéologues Irene Forstner-Müller et Pamela Rose, qui opèrent sur le site, ont lutté contre la destruction des vestiges archéologiques dus aux activités agricoles et à l’augmentation de la population. Les résultats des relevés géophysiques à Tell al-Dab’a ont révélé des vestiges de temples et de tombes réutilisés à des époques postérieures pour la construction d’autres monuments. Des méthodes sophistiquées ont été utilisées par la mission, afin de construire une image en 3D de la vieille ville d’Avaris, avec ses zones administratives, et pour identifier d’anciens lits de rivière et de leurs ports.

En 2012, l’équipe du Musée d’archéologie britannique a entrepris une courte saison de fouilles sur le site Naucratis, actuelle Kom Gayf dans le gouvernorat d’al-Buhayra qui est une ville du Delta sur la branche cantique du Nil, à 72 Km au sud-est d’Alexandrie. Les archéologues britanniques se sont basés sur des relevés magnétiques et sur des images Google Earth. Le but de cette enquête était de produire un plan précis du site.

Le Musée britannique a commencé en 2008 à travailler sur ce chantier en lançant un projet visant à étudier les contacts égypto-grecs à travers des milliers d’objets trouvés à l’Est et à l’Ouest de Naucratis, maintenant dispersés dans les musées du monde. Naucratis était le lieu de commerce grec le plus important en Égypte avec des importations en provenance de tout le monde méditerranéen. La ville grecque a été submergée par les eaux pendant 100 ans, mais l’eau a été drainée et le site est désormais accessible aux chercheurs. (« Delta du Nil : Trésors d’un passé glorieux », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 4 avril 2013).

Aidan Dodson, président de l’Egypt Exploration Society (EES), insiste sur l’urgence à mener davantage de fouilles
archéologiques dans le Delta. L’urbanisation ou les eaux de drainage font, en effet, régulièrement disparaître d’anciens vestiges. Entretien.

Al-Ahram Hebdo : Après deux jours de discussions et de présentation des recherches des missions archéologiques, quelles sont les recommandations annoncées ?

Aidan Dodson : Ce ne sont pas des recommandations exigeantes, on ne va pas changer le monde ! Mais, je crois qu’il est utile de nous rencontrer régulièrement pour être au courant du travail des autres. De cette manière, les recherches avancent. Pendant ces deux jours, nous avons eu une large palette de locuteurs d’Égypte et de nombreux autres pays qui ont parlé de leurs dernières recherches et de leurs travaux effectués sur le terrain dans le Delta du Nil. Le plus intéressant est que les archéologues parlent différemment du Delta. Après de longues années de recherches, ils tirent la sonnette d’alarme, avertissant les responsables des vrais dangers en Basse-Égypte, surtout dans le Delta du Nil.

— Et quels sont ces dangers ?

— En tête des problèmes, il y a l’expansion démographique, la présence des champs, les méthodes de drainage, et du côté maritime, l’érosion des plages. Tous ces facteurs peuvent détruire en quelques années un important et un essentiel aspect de l’histoire d’Égypte. Cela nécessite l’accélération de nos recherches pour avertir la communauté internationale de ce danger.

— Soutenez-vous donc la décision égyptienne prise en 2002, et réactualisée l’année dernière, de ne plus accepter de nouvelles missions de fouilles en Haute-Égypte pendant 10 ans ?

— Cette décision a sûrement encouragé beaucoup d’archéologues à fouiller dans le Delta, qui a encore besoin d’être exploré. Chaque année qui s’écoule sans qu’un site soit fouillé est un risque. Une superficie peut disparaître du jour au lendemain et l’Égypte risque de perdre une partie de son histoire.

— Comment cela ?

— Avec la construction d’un bâtiment ou plus simplement un coup de pelle sur un terrain qui n’a jamais été fouillé ou exploré... Cela peut effacer une partie de l’histoire du pays.

— Quels sont les projets de la EES ?

— La EES met l’accent sur l’importance de telles discussions et celles-ci seront à l’avenir encore plus encouragées. Toutes les discussions et les recherches seront au fur et à mesure publiées en ligne. Cela permettra également de corriger les erreurs ou les données. Enfin la EES essayera de fixer des rencontres régulières entre les spécialistes pour discuter de leur travail et identifier leurs préoccupations.

— Pensez-vous faire bientôt de nouvelles découvertes ?


Inscrit depuis 2010 comme bâtiment à valeur historique dans le gouvernorat d’al-Sharqiyya, le palais du roi Fârûq dans la ville de Bilbays s’est effondré en grande partie la semaine dernière. Ce palais, construit en 1920 sous le roi Fu’âd, avant-dernier roi d’Égypte, s’étend sur une superficie de 33 feddans. Il s’agit de l’un des plus beaux palais-relais du roi Fârûq en Égypte qui a donné son nom au village bien connu à l’époque d’al-Fârûqiyya, devenu après la Révolution de 1952 al-

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Manshiyya al-Gadida.

Fârûq Muhammad, un vieillard habitant le village, se souvient de son père qui travaillait au palais. Toutes les terres agricoles du village appartenaient au palais, avec la mosquée construite par le roi et une grande écurie qui était caractéristique d'al-Fârûqiyya et réputée alors pour ses chevaux pur-sang arabes. « J'ai entendu mon père raconter que le roi venait très souvent à ce palais, surtout lorsqu'il venait à Sharqiyya pour chasser les canards ou monter à cheval », raconte Fârûq. Selon lui, tous les villageois, qui un jour rêvaient d’entrer dans les jardins de ce palais somptueux, demandaient depuis quelque temps sa démolition, car il était délabré et risquait de s’effondrer et de mettre en danger la vie des enfants de l’école primaire du village qui se trouve juste à côté. « Il y a quelque temps, une partie du palais s’était effondrée et la panique s’est emparée des élèves qui se sont précipités vers la sortie pour quitter l’école après le fracas horrible de l’effondrement et la poussière qui a couvert le ciel. On aurait cru à un tremblement de terre », explique Muhammad Anwar, père de deux élèves dans cette école. Il ajoute que le palais souffrait de négligence depuis des années. Il n’a jamais été restauré.

La dégradation de ce palais a commencé avec la Révolution de 1952, lorsqu’il a été utilisé comme dépôt d’armes à l’époque nassérienne. Par la suite, il a été utilisé comme école primaire sous le président Anwar al-Sâdât. Le tremblement de terre de 1992 a causé d’autres dégâts obligeant les autorités à évacuer le palais. « Plusieurs vols y ont été commis et rien n’a été épargné : les meubles, les ornements, les portes et les fenêtres. Même les dalles et les marches de l’escalier, qui étaient importées d’Italie, ont été arrachées et volées », se lamente Anwar. Et d’ajouter que personne ne sait qui est responsable de l’entretien de ces palais : est-ce le ministère des Antiquités, celui de l’Éducation puisqu’il abritait une école, ou le gouvernorat ?

Pour sa part, le gouverneur d’al-Sharqiyya, Sa’îd al-Naggâr, a formé une commission d’enquête pour déterminer les raisons de l’effondrement du palais, et pour décider s’il doit être restauré ou entièrement démolli, car une partie du palais est restée intacte. « Ce palais figure sur la liste des monuments historiques à valeur architecturale dans le gouvernorat d’al-Sharqiyya. Sa démolition nécessite une décision du Premier ministre », assure le gouverneur.


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**Lundi 8 avril 2013**


**Mardi 9 avril 2013**

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad Ibrâhîm, a reçu ce matin l’ambassadeur tchèque au Caire, Miloslav STASEK, et le vice-ministre tchèque des Affaires étrangères, Tomas DUŠ. Au cours de cet entretien, Ibrâhîm s’est félicité des relations privilégiées unissant ces deux pays dans le domaine archéologique, notamment en matière de fouilles et de réaménagement des sites historiques. Cette coopération a porté de nombreux fruits : réaménagement de la zone archéologique d’Abû Sîr, éclairage des tombes, aménagement d’une route de 2,5 Km reliant Saqqâra à Abû Sîr, etc. Les deux partis ont examiné les moyens de renforcer la coopération commune dans le domaine des fouilles, de la restauration, de l’entraînement et de la documentation archéologiques. (*Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Muhammad Ibrâhîm examine avec l’ambassadeur tchèque les relations archéologiques », *al-Yawm al-Sâbi’,* 9 avril 2013).

**Jeudi 11 avril 2013**

Overlooking the Red Sea coast where Sirâbît al-Khâdim area is located in South Sinai stands a rosy concrete cylindrical building displaying Sinai’s varied heritage. Named “Hathor House,” the Documentation Centre for Sinai Heritage (DCSH) has finally seen the light of day after four years of construction work carried out by the Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT) under the supervision of the Regional Development Programme for South Sinai (RDPSS) and financed by the European Union (EU).

CULTNAT aims at documenting the various aspects of Egypt’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as its natural heritage. This involves the implementation of the national plan of action, making use of the most up-to-date information technology in collaboration with national and international specialised organizations. The centre is affiliated with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and supported by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Yâsir al-Shâyyib, director of CULTNAT, said that the construction of Hathor House aims at maintaining and developing the local community through activities consistent with their needs; to protect and preserve the cultural and natural resources of South Sinai as well as promoting local participation in project activities and to support entrepreneurial initiatives in the community.

The project, he went on, developed a model for cultural resource management (CRM) of the cultural heritage of South Sinai through the survey, documentation, preservation and management of archaeological sites, with and for the local community of Bedouins. “This has helped us create a sort of model for cultural resource management in this region and thus further apply it to more sites,” Yâsir asserted. The outcome of these activities is to be a locally managed node serving as a small museum to house the artefacts found from nearby excavations and serve as a tourist information centre relating the history of South Sinai through documentaries, drawings, maps and photos. The centre also houses a small exhibition of South Sinai folkloric heritage. A 3D replica of Hathor Temple is also on display at the entrance of the DCSH in order to provide visitors with a glimpse of the most important archaeological sites in the area.

Sirâbît al-Khâdim was the mine of turquoise in antiquity and the house of the ancient Egyptian goddess of turquoise, Hathor, who was also the protector goddess in desert regions. In addition to turquoise mines, Sirâbît al-Khâdim was home to a large temple dedicated to Hathor where almost 30 incidences of incised graffiti in proto-Sinaic script were found. The script has graphic similarities to Egyptian hieratic script. (Nevine

L’incendie au Cuming Museum à Londres a détruit près d’une centaine de pièces d’antiquités égyptiennes. Trois momies de la VIe dynastie, 51 pièces de monnaie grecques datant du règne de la reine Cléopâtre VII (51 à 30 av. J.-C.), 5 précieux papyrus, dix pièces en or, plus de 40 statuettes, des fragments de tombes de la capitale égyptienne impériale de Thèbes et des pierres avec des inscriptions en hiéroglyphes ont disparu dans l’incendie qui a fait rage pendant près de cinq heures.


Une promenade en calèche sur les corniches de Louqsor ou d’Aswân ? Un incontournable à toute visite dans ces deux villes. Mais, malgré le charme d’une telle activité, les propriétaires de calèches souffrent du manque de touristes. « Par jour, à peine deux ou trois calèches sont occupées par les touristes sur la corniche presque vide, une scène devenue ordinaire depuis la révolution », se lamente Ramadân Mahmûd, propriétaire d’une calèche à Louqsor.

Le ministère du Tourisme essaye de soutenir les propriétaires en nourrissant leurs chevaux, car ils n’ont plus assez d’argent pour le faire. Concernant les taxes que certains ne peuvent plus payer, le ministère souhaite...

On Sunday, officials at Cairo Airport confiscated a large collection of artefacts which originally belonged to the family of nineteenth century ruler of Egypt Muhammad 'Ali, that were being imported illegally to be sold in Egypt on the black market. The objects were hidden inside two large wooden boxes that were being transported unaccompanied, and were spotted by staff who were using scanners to look inside cargo. An archaeological committee including airport antiquity officials, curators from the Museum of Islamic Arts, the Police Museum and the Manyal Palace Museum inspected the collection and approved its authenticity. The artefacts were confiscated by the Tourism and Antiquities Police until the completion of investigations.

Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm told Ahram Online that this collection was shipped from London to a Cairo citizen, who has subsequently been arrested. Hasan Rasmî head of the central administration of the Archaeological Unit for Confiscated Antiquities (AUCA) explained that the confiscated collection would be put on show in one of Egypt’s museums, most probably the Museum of Islamic Arts.

The collection includes crystal chandeliers, porcelain plates decorated with golden frames and foliage drawings, and two blue French 'Sèvres' vases with flower decorations. It also includes eight rounded porcelain plates with golden frames decorated with Latin letters and Egypt’s royal crown. According to the experts, the most distinguished object is a dark red porcelain plate, which is decorated with the image of French king Louis XIV and a group of European ladies. (Nevine El-Aref, "Cairo airport customs confiscate large collection of historical artefacts", Ahram Online, April 14, 2013).


Le chef du département des projets et des services de la Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Dr Khâlid ‘Azab, annonce que le programme des études coptes organise pour la première fois en Égypte un stage pratique sur la restauration des icônes. Ce stage organisé en collaboration avec le département de projets du ministère de l’Archéologie aura lieu du 14 au 25 avril à l’église Mârmînâ Fum al-Khalîg, à proximité du métro Sayyida Zaynab. Ce stage concernera la fabrication des icônes et les principaux facteurs de détérioration qui les affectent comme l’humidité et les incendies. Les participants recevront une formation sur les différentes méthodes de préservation et de restauration des icônes. Les conférences et l’entraînement seront assurés par de grands spécialistes des icônes coptes. (Zîzî Shûsha, « Stage sur la restauration des icônes coptes dans l’église...

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**Lundi 15 avril 2013**


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**Mercredi 17 avril 2013**

The long-held supposition that the ancient Egyptians avoided travelling by sea and had poor naval technology can be laid to rest. Early this week archaeologists discovered a port dating from the reign of the Fourth Dynasty king Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid and owner of the Solar Boats at Gîza, in the Wâdî al-Garf area south of Za’farânâ on the Red Sea.

Little was known about the Pharaohs’ seafaring ways until 2001, when a joint Italian-American archaeological mission from the universities of Naples and Boston unearthed timbers, rigging and cedar planks in the ancient Red Sea harbour of Marsa Gawâṣîs, 23 kilometres south of Port Safâga. The harbour was used during the 12th Dynasty to mount naval expeditions to the land of Punt (now in southern Sudan or the Eritrean region of Ethiopia) to obtain gold, ebony, ivory, leopard skins and the frankincense necessary for religious rituals.

The hides of giraffe, leopard and cheetah, which were worn by temple priests, were imported along with live exotic animals — either for the priests’ own menageries or as religious sacrifices — including the sacred cynocephalus or dog-faced baboon. Little wonder that Punt became known as the “Land of the Gods” and the personal pleasure garden of the great god Amun. Trade between Egypt and Punt appears to have been suspended after the 12th Dynasty and not resumed until early in the 18th, when the most famous expedition to Punt, that of Queen Hatshepsut,
came about as an outcome of a consultation with the oracle of the god Amun in which she was instructed to send a fleet of ships there. The expedition is featured in relief in Hatshepsut’s mortuary temple at Dayr al-Baharî.

In 2001, another joint French mission from the Sorbonne and the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology (IFAO) explored another port in the town of ‘Ayn Sukhna on the opposite shore of the Red Sea in Sinai, 60 kilometres south of Suez. There storage galleries used during the late Fourth Dynasty and the Middle Kingdom were uncovered. From this port vessels sailed to the copper and turquoise mines in South Sinai. Inscriptions left by Pharaonic expeditions revealed that the ‘Ayn Sukhna port reached its peak during the Fifth and 12th dynasties.

Gregory MAROUARD of the Oriental Institute of Chicago, the senior archaeologist at Wâdî al-Garf, wrote that the point of departure from the Egyptian coast was certainly linked to the small fortress at Tell Râs Burdân on the west coast of Sinai, south of Abû Zunayma. Mainly occupied during the Old Kingdom and on a smaller scale during the Middle Kingdom, this latter site was used as a landing point in Sinai. “It may also have had a strategic function in view of its defensive architecture,” says MAROUARD.

Egyptologist Pierre TALLET, head of the archaeological mission from the Université Paris-Sorbonne, told Al-Ahram Weekly that the boats were dismantled and stored in the galleries between every expedition. “The site seems to have been used under conditions similar to those during the Middle Kingdom as two complete crafts from this period, which were burnt in ancient times, were also found inside two of the galleries,” TALLET said. “The sites of Marsa Gawâsîs and ‘Ayn Sukhna demonstrate very well, each in its own manner, the importance of the Red Sea coast throughout ancient Egyptian history,” TALLET went on to say that the discovery of a new site at Wâdî al-Garf brought further information to the general picture and scheme of this ancient occupation of the Red Sea coasts.

The port site is located at the mouth of the Wâdî ‘Arâba, a pedestrian pathway connecting the Nile Valley to the Red Sea through which expeditions travelled with the copper and turquoise needed to produce jewellery and funerary ornaments. Wâdî al-Garf was first described by British explorer Sir John GARDNER WILKINSON in 1832. WILKINSON said the site included a number of galleries, which he believed to be catacombs built into the rocky hillock a few kilometres from the coast. A century later, in 1954, Wâdî al-Garf site was mentioned in the field notes of two French amateur archaeologists, François BISSEY and René CHABOT MORISSEAU. These notes were published in Mémoire de Suez, written by Ginette LACAZE and Luc CAMINO and published by Société d’Égyptologie de Pau in 2008. They sketched out a provisional plan of the site, galleries complex along with a number of photographs, and also gave illustrations of ceramics attributed to the Old Kingdom, probably the Sixth Dynasty.

In the Bulletin de la Société d’Études Historiques et Géographiques de l’Isthme de Suez, BISSEY provided additional information and a brief description of a port structure on the coast. However, because of the political situation at the time and after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956, BISSEY’s studies stopped until June 2011 when the joint French mission took over.

“All these documents have helped the French archaeological mission to uncover and locate Wâdî al-Garf port,” maritime archaeologist Muhammad M. ‘Abd al-Magîd told the Weekly, adding that remote sensing conducted on the Za’farâna area with Google Earth satellite imaging had also helped identify the site’s location, specially the long, L-shaped dock starting at the shore and extending under water more than 160 metres in an easterly direction. It runs on a more irregular path towards the southeast for another 120 metres. There the mission uncovered ceramic fragments showing that all installations dated to the reign of King Khufu, and a complex of 30 rock-hewn storage galleries containing fragments of ropes, textiles, pieces of wooden boxes and hundreds of worked wood fragments including the end of an oar. There were also several fragments of Lebanese cedar beams and a 2.7 metres-wide piece of boat timber.

The galleries were used to store dismantled boats between the expeditions, which were held regularly. Three of the galleries house fragments of large globular storage jars...
used as water and food containers for boats. The surfaces of these jars are marked with large-scale hieroglyphic inscriptions in red ink indicating their destination and names of crews or docked boats. Tallet said the jars were locally produced, and the mission had discovered two potters’ kilns.

A number of Fourth-Dynasty stone anchors were also found submerged in seawater. The anchors are in triangular, rectangular and cylindrical shapes but all have rounded tops with a simple hole in the upper part and no vertical groove. "It is possible that these anchors were placed permanently in the water for mooring boats in transit," Tallet said. Almost 200 metres from the shore the mission uncovered the remains of an Old Kingdom structure where 99 stone anchors were stored. Some were inscribed with hieroglyphic texts bearing the names of boats.

Tallet told the Weekly that among the most important artefacts found were 40 papyrus fragments from the reign of Khufu detailing daily life for the crews in Wâdî al-Garf and the food sent by the central administration to the officials and workmen involved in the expeditions departing from the port. These are the most ancient written papyri found so far in Egypt. Tallet said one of the papyri was the diary of Merrer, an Old Kingdom official involved in the building of the Great Pyramid. "Merrer mainly reported about his many trips to the Turah limestone quarry to fetch blocks for the construction of the pyramid," Tallet told Discovery News. "Although we will not learn anything new about the construction of Khufu’s monument, this diary provides for the first time an insight on this matter."

The discovery at Wâdî al-Garf is important because it not only shows the oldest port in history, but also proves that the ancient Egyptians were good sailors. "It also reveals economic conditions in Egypt during the early Old Kingdom and the state-of-the-art maritime techniques they used," 'Abd al-Magîd said.

Tallet says the use of the site was probably limited to the early Fourth Dynasty, and more specifically the reign of King Khufu. This was, he says, the first Red Sea coastal structure, providing a function later taken over by the site at 'Ayn Sukhna, which was closer to the administrative capital of Memphis. The question remains as to the essential purpose of a complex as vast as the one at Wâdî al-Garf. "Expeditions could clearly be sent to Sinai from this location, as attested by the discovery of abundant ceramic material produced at Wâdî al-Garf on the southwest coast of Sinai, at al-Markhâ," Tallet said. "But the massive production of these water containers may also have been intended for the equipment of long-haul boats, and we think it possible, despite the absence of formal proof so far, that the site may have also served as a stopover point on the journey to Punt during an extremely ancient period of Egyptian history." (Nevine El-Aref, "The real boats of King Khufu", Al-Ahram Weekly, April 17, 2013. Voir également Dînâ 'Abd al-'Allîm, « Découverte du plus ancien port maritime et de 40 papyrus datant du règne de Chéops », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 11 avril ; « Découverte du plus ancien port sur la mer Rouge », Le Progrès Égyptien, 17 avril)
se rendent en Égypte n'hésiteront pas à soutenir la construction d'un tel musée», assure Nura 'Ubayd, responsable de la campagne de donation du GEM. Selon elle, l’Égypte reçoit en moyenne 11,5 millions de touristes par an, comme c’était le cas en 2012, passant plus de 100 millions de nuitées, ce qui devrait permettre de rassembler théoriquement plus de 100 millions de dollars par an. Le ministre du Tourisme, Hishâm Za'zû', assure qu’une campagne de promotion sera lancée auprès des acteurs du tourisme pour convaincre les touristes, avant qu’ils ne viennent en Égypte, de l’importance de ce projet. « Ce musée sera sans doute une quatrième pyramide en Égypte et comprendra des joyaux qui appartiennent non seulement au patrimoine égyptien mais également au patrimoine mondial », a indiqué le ministre lors d’une conférence de presse. Il a ajouté qu’il s’attendait à une forte participation volontaire de la part des touristes. Il compare ce projet au grand projet de sauvetage du patrimoine de la Nubie dans les années 1960, pour lequel l’Unesco avait lancé une campagne internationale de donation.

Muhammad Ibrâhîm, ministre d’État pour les Affaires des antiquités, assure que ce n’est pas la première fois que des antiquités égyptiennes sont restaurées par les contributions du secteur du tourisme. Le ministère du Tourisme avait fait don de 10 millions de L.E. au secteur des antiquités pour achever la restauration du dromos à Louqsor. De même, il y a deux ans, le ministère a contribué à l’aménagement du plateau de la Nubie dans les années 1960, pour lequel l’Unesco avait lancé une campagne internationale de donation.

Le GEM devrait s’étendre sur plus de 47 ha à 3 Km des pyramides de Gîza. Afin de respecter l’harmonie du plateau, le musée sera construit cinquante mètres en contrebas. Il aura la forme d’une flèche de 500 mètres de long avec la pointe orientée vers les pyramides. Les parois seront en albâtre avec des motifs triangulaires évoquant les pyramides. Une animation lumineuse permettra de réaliser un jeu de couleurs, de jour comme de nuit. L’édifice disposera d’un auditorium de 1 000 places, d’un cinéma équipé en IMAX 3D, d’une médiathèque-bibliothèque, d’un centre de recherche et d’un institut scientifique. Les chercheurs disposent d’ores et déjà d’un centre de conservation ultramoderne, équipé de cinq laboratoires.

Les bâtiments de conservation, d’une superficie de 22 000 m², sont à présent terminés et seront reliés au musée par une galerie à 30 mètres sous terre, avec une capacité de stockage de 100 000 objets. Pour résoudre le problème des antiquités entassées dans divers dépôts, le musée devrait renfermer près de 130 000 pièces en provenance notamment du Musée Égyptien, de son dépôt et des dépôts des différents sites archéologiques. Ces objets seront présentés selon cinq thèmes : Terre d’Égypte, Parenté et monarchie, L’homme, la société et le travail, Religion et culture, Scribe et savoir. Il est prévu d’y transférer la totalité du tombeau de Toutankhamon. (Dalia Farouq, « Campagne de financement : Un dollar par nuit pour finir le Grand Musée Égyptien », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 18 avril 2013. Voir également Mansûr Kâmil, « Versez un dollar par nuitée pour le musée », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 4 avril).

Le département des musées du Conseil Suprême des Antiquités (CSA) gère 50 musées implantés sur tout le territoire. Sur ce chiffre, seulement 24 musées sont actuellement ouverts au public, 19 musées sont fermés et 7 musées en cours de construction.

Sur les 19 musées fermés, 11 le sont sans raisons particulières :

1) Musée maritime (Alexandrie) : il renferme les pièces archéologiques repêchées sous les eaux de la Méditerranée.
2) Musée de la mosaïque (Alexandrie) : il regroupe des mosaïques exceptionnelles, des statues et des stèles.

3) Musée Muhammad 'Allî (Shubrâ al-Khayma) : ancienne résidence de Muhammad 'Allî Pacha destinée à accueillir les hôtes étrangers.

4) Musée de la police (citadelle de Saladin au Caire) : il renferme de nombreuses acquisitions relatives aux forces de sécurité à travers les âges.

5) Musée des saisies archéologiques (citadelle de Saladin au Caire) : il renferme des pièces antiques saisies par la police ou restituées de l’étranger.

6) Musée de Tâbâ (Sud Sinaï) : il renferme des pièces archéologiques de différentes époques du Sinaï.

7) Musée Kom Úshîm (Fayûm) : il renferme des collections ayant appartenu à ce souverain.

8) Musée Hâriyya Razna (Sharqiyya) : il renferme des pièces pharaoniques ainsi que des affaires personnelles du leader politique Ahmad 'Urâbî.

9) Musée Sân al-Hâgar (Sharqiyya) : il renferme une collection de statues, de stèles archéologiques et de sarcophages.

10) Musée de Tantâ : il renferme des pièces d’art et d’architecture datant des époques pharaonique, grecque, romaine, copte et islamique.

11) Musée de Port-Saïd : il offre un aperçu de l’histoire de cette ville depuis sa création à l’époque pharaonique jusqu’à la révolution de 1952.

Par ailleurs, on dénombre 8 autres musées actuellement fermés pour réaménagement :

1) Musée des carrosses royaux (citadelle de Saladin au Caire) : il renferme 8 carrosses de l’époque de Muhammad ’Allî.

2) Musée Qâs al-Gawhara (citadelle de Saladin au Caire) : il renferme des meubles et des cadeaux offerts à Muhammad ’Allî par des souverains européens.

3) Musée de la famille Muhammad ’Allî (citadelle de Saladin au Caire) : il renferme des collections ayant appartenu à ce souverain.

4) Musée Manyal (Le Caire) : il renferme des collections rares de manuscrits, de Corans, de tapis et de tableaux.

5) Musée des carrosses royaux (Bûlâq) : il renferme quelques carrosses et des uniformes d'apparat datant de l’époque de Muhammad ’Allî.

6) Musée gréco-romain (Alexandrie) : il renferme des pièces d’époques ptolémaïque et romaine depuis la création de la ville d’Alexandrie au IIIe siècle av. J.-C. jusqu’au IIIe siècle ap. J.-C.

7) Musée de Mansûra : il renferme des pièces exhumées dans le gouvernorat d’al-Daqahlîyya.

8) Musée ROMMEL (Marsa Matrûh) : il renferme des documents, des archives et des plans militaires ayant appartenu au général allemand de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, Erwin ROMMEL.

Le vice-président du département des musées, Ahmad Sharaf, explique que ces onze musées sont fermés par manque de financements. Quant aux musées en cours de restauration et de réaménagement, leur inauguration reste hypothétique pour les mêmes raisons. Le CSA fonctionne par autofinancement. Les revenus drainés par les musées ouverts au public servent à financer les projets et honorer les salaires des fonctionnaires. Le gouvernement soutient le CSA à hauteur de 0,5 milliard de livres égyptiennes par an, en attendant qu’il retrouve son autonomie à nouveau. Enfin, Sharaf n’est pas préoccupé par le pillage des musées fermés. Il affirme que ces musées sont soumis à « des mesures renforcées de sécurité et sont régulièrement inventoriés ». (Islâm ‘Abd al-Wahâb, « Musées archéologiques : 24 ouverts, 19 fermés et 7 en construction », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 18 avril 2013).
In Cairo’s al-Sayyida Zaynab district, the Mosque of Ibn Tulun stands as imposing as when it was first constructed in 876 on top of a hill known as Gabal Yashkur. Recently, however, the mosque lost some of its splendour as garbage and swaps of drainage water amassed along its external wall. The mosque is not the only monument to suffer neglect. Several Islamic, Coptic and ancient Egyptian monuments share the same fate. Among them are Dahshûr area, where the first ever complete pyramid of King Senefru is located, al-Mu’izz Street in Old Cairo which is lined with distinguished Mameluk and Ottoman monuments, the religious compound in Old Cairo where the Amr Ibn al-‘Âs Mosque stands, and the Hanging Church and Ben Ezra Synagogue, to name but a few.

"The mosque is in a real mess," Muhammad Hasan, a resident of al-Sayyida Zaynab who lived in the buildings beside the mosque told Ahram Online. He said that for long time now the lighting system of the mosque has not been working, which left the mosque in darkness, prohibiting maghrib and al-’isha prayers. Those responsible at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), Hasan said, say that despite restoration carried out in 2005, the lighting system installed is not up to standard. On personal funds, said ‘Alî Qutb, a workshop owner at the area, all the area’s inhabitants pitched in to light the mosque, buying and installing new lamps. It proved a failure, however, as the low quality of the mosque’s electricity network exploded the lamps plunging the compound into darkness again. "Several times we asked those responsible in the MSA and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, but they did nothing. They said the problem is vast and there is no budget available to repair the electricity network," said Qutb. Last Ramadan, says Muntasir ‘Abd al-‘Azîm, another resident, the MSA found a solution to light the mosque for Tarâwîh prayer, but darkness prevailed again after Ramadan.

Recently, he went on, drainage water leaked onto the external wall of al-Imâra House located behind the main Qibla of the mosque. al-Imâra House is a very important archaeological site as it is the only one remaining out of four that once surrounded the mosque. This house has wooden halls with ceilings decorated with geometrical ivory decoration. "Water is now spread along the mosque’s external wall and the swamp gets bigger and bigger," said plumber Sayyid ‘Abd al-Mit’âl, adding that he knows the source of the problem and he is willing to repair it but his hands are tied until he gains the permission of the government or district office to do so. People who are not aware of the importance and historical value of the mosque throw their garbage at the foot of mosque’s wall, beside the water swamp. The area is now a source of disease.

Muhammad ’Abd al-Rahîm, head of the Islamic and Coptic section at the MSA, told Ahram Online that the MSA is doing everything it can to protect the mosque from negligence and encroachment. Whenever leaking water or garbage accumulates, the MSA contact the Tourism and Antiquities Police, as well as the district office, to pump the water out. But days later, the water leaks again and inhabitants start throwing their garbage there. "The lack of security and budget is behind the mess," said ‘Abd al-Rahîm, adding that to repair the source of the leak and the mosque’s electricity network needs money not available due to the retreat of tourism.

Also, the lack of security and the absence of police in the area end with inhabitants throwing their garbage at the mosque’s wall. "The MSA will continue its role to protect the mosque as well as Egypt’s heritage, but the MSA alone cannot do the whole work: it needs the help of inhabitants themselves, the Ministry of Endowments and the Tourism and Antiquities Police," (Nevine El-Aref, "Egypt’s Ibn Tulun Mosque in need of rescue", Ahram Online, April 21, 2013).
During routine archaeological research as part of the Ancient Egypt Leatherwork Project (AELP) carried out by Salima IKRAM, Professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and Andre VELDMEIJER, head of the Egyptology section at the Netherlands Flemish Institute in Cairo, a collection of 300 leather fragments of an Old Kingdom chariot were uncovered at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. IKRAM describes the discovery as very important and the collection as "extremely rare." Only a handful of complete chariots are known from ancient Egypt, and of these, only one heavily restored in Florence and one in the Egyptian Museum have any significant amount of leather.

"Even then, they are largely unembellished and not as well-preserved as the fragments we found," asserted IKRAM. Although horse-drawn chariots are often illustrated in ancient Egyptian artwork, she said, archaeological evidence that goes beyond wooden frames is rare due to their organic nature, as leather fragments seldom survive. "The fragments are in a much better shape than we originally anticipated, and we were able to achieve a sense of how the leather unfolds," IKRAM pointed out, adding that the fine condition that the leather was in suggests that it may have been preserved in a tomb.

The archaeological team is now studying the technology and resources used to make the leather chariots in order to reconstruct a complete exact replica of an ancient Egyptian royal leather chariot in 2014. "The team is also going to test hypotheses about the uses of the different pieces of leather, which may prove to be a challenging endeavour," said IKRAM. She explains that studies on the newly discovered leather fragments reveal that some pieces are folded over in a crumpled state, and the reconstruction of certain portions while trying to maintain accuracy in reproducing the technologies used might be more difficult than anticipated.

The AELP started in 2008 working on all leather artefacts on display at the Egyptian Museum. During the work, IKRAM and VELDMEIJER came across a 1950s publication by Robert Jacobus FORBES titled *Studies in Ancient Technology* with a black and white photograph of ancient reigns and horse harnesses, evidently intact and said to exist at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Thrilled by FORBES's findings, both Egyptologists sought the help of museum curators to locate a cache of leather items related to an ancient chariot, including parts of the bow-case.

IKRAM and VELDMEIJER documented, examined and conducted analytical studies of the technology and resources utilised. They categorised the leather into two main groups based on colour and sturdiness. The leather fragments have been numbered and described, and include nave hoops, neck straps, gauntlets and parts of the bow-case. The remnants evidently comprised all parts of the chariot. "Everything we saw about the chariot leather was new," affirmed IKRAM, adding that it provided a revelation on how the chariot was put together in terms of the technologies and materials used. "Our examinations also disclosed how drawstrings served as the means of securing leather components over the skeleton of the chariot."

According to a press release sent from the AUC press, the findings fit in with a larger multidisciplinary and holistic research venture on leatherwork in ancient Egypt, which also includes the study of other fragmentary chariot pieces, such as those originating from the tombs of Thutmose IV (CARTER and NEWBERRY, 1904), Amenhotep II (DARESSY, 1902) and Amenhotep III (LITTAUER and CROUWEL, 1985, 1968 and 1987), as well as the leather finds from the Amarna period (VELDMEIJER, 2010). This larger project is directed by VELDMEIJER and IKRAM. "Chariots introduced the notion of roadways for faster wheel conveyance, revolutionising the way Egyptians moved through the landscape and pioneering means..."


Egypt’s Archaeological Unit for Confiscated Antiquities (AUCA), in collaboration with the tourism and antiquities police, aborted an attempt at Cairo International Airport on Wednesday to smuggle a collection of Graeco-Roman and Ottoman-era coins out of Egypt. The smuggler, an Egyptian citizen, hid the coins within his luggage in an attempt to smuggle them first to Dubai and then on to Europe, where they might be sold to collectors.

Hasan Rasmî, head of the AUCA’s central administration, told Ahram Online that the coins were in "very good condition." The collection includes 30 coins from the Graeco-Roman period (with some dating from the reign of Alexander the Great); 30 from the Ottoman period; 54 from the reign of Egypt’s King Fârûq; 11 from the reign of Sultan Hasan; and 20 from the reign of King Fu’âd I, according to Rasmî. The coins will remain in the possession of the authorities until investigations are completed and the perpetrator convicted. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egyptian police foil coin-smuggling bid at Cairo airport”, Ahram Online,
Dimanche 28 avril 2013

A private company is now cleaning Giza Plateau, the world famous archaeological site, removing garbage accumulated in the area and attempting to recapture its serenity. Visitors to the plateau, where the three pyramids of ancient Egyptian kings Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure are located, along with the Sphinx, will be pleasantly surprised with the change. Due to a lack of security and the absence of police on the plateau, the site, like other archaeological sites, was subject to encroachment. Horse and camel owners violated the law and entered the archaeological safe zone in an attempt to find clients. After the revolution, the number of tourists to Egypt has decreased, leading to greater competition in the Egyptian tourism trade. Animal dung also became a problem and is being cleared from the site.

‘Ali al-Asfar, director general of Upper Egypt monuments, told Ahram Online that the private company won a bid launched by the tourism ministry to help in preserving the plateau from urban encroachment. The company is using state-of-the-art machines to collect the dung and is recycling other garbage. A collection of garbage baskets made of stone, similar to the plateau’s bedrock, was installed in different locations on the site. “Finally, the plateau has regained some of its respect, and I hope that this company will continue its success in keeping the plateau hygienic,” said al-Asfar. (Nevine El-Aref, “Giza Plateau cleaned of garbage and dung”, Ahram Online, April 28, 2013).

Lundi 29 avril 2013


Mardi 30 avril 2013

Illegal construction of a new cemetery has been going on for months in part of a 4,500-year-old pharaonic necropolis. The expansion has encroached on the largely unexplored complex of Dahshûr, where Pharaoh Sneferu experimented with the first smooth-sided pyramids that his son Khufu, also known as Cheops, employed at the more famous Giza Plateau nearby, when he built the Great Pyramid. Authorities issued an order in January to remove the construction equipment, instructing the Interior Ministry’s police to implement it, but no action has been taken. Also, a security vacuum that followed Egypt’s 2011 popular uprising has encouraged looters.
to step up their illegal digs, clashing with guards at the site.

On Monday, dozens of young protesters at the site about 40 kilometres south of Cairo held up a sign that read: “God does not bless a nation that gives up its heritage.” Ramadân Muhammad, a 20-year old student from the nearby village of Manshiyyat Dahshûr, said he witnessed looting himself. He said he wanted to show that Dahshûr residents were not responsible and should not to be blamed. “I’m here to see the government’s response,” Muhammad said, with the shadow of Pharaoh Senefru’s Bent Pyramid looming in the background. “The military was in control of the country all this past period, they should have protected the site and caught the looters. Instead, they stood there doing nothing,” he complained.

Antiquities experts warn that construction of the new cemetery also endangers the ancient complex. Villagers say their cemeteries are full, but authorities do not give permits or land for new ones, so they grabbed what they insist is empty desert land to erect family tombs. The area, designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage site, also includes the adjacent Valley Temple and the 3,800-year-old Black Pyramid of Amenemhat III. Nearby is Senefru’s Bent Pyramid, some 700 years older, with its distinctive bent sides believed to have been caused when the builders had to correct the angle halfway through construction. Farther away is the Red Pyramid, where Senefru’s builders got the angles right, producing the first smooth-sided pyramid, evolving from the stepped structures built by earlier dynasties.

Antiquity restoration specialist Marwa al-Zaynî, who was at the protest, blamed authorities for failing to stop the cemetery construction. Muhammad Yûsuf, head of antiquities for Dahshûr, dismissed the protest as a media stunt. Monica Hanna, an independent archaeologist who has worked at Dahshûr, praised the local initiative. “It’s the first time the local community is taking a step forward, rather than the academics,” Hanna said. “Previously, it would always appear that the academics were against the residents.” (AP, “Residents protest looting, construction at ancient necropolis”, Ahram Online, April 30, 2013).
Egypt celebrates Easter this week amid an ongoing political and economic impasse and against a backdrop of attempts by some radical Islamists to sow discord between Christians and Muslims. In Old Cairo, a treasure trove of religious monuments, a mediaeval Christian icon has recently come to light. This freestanding vaulted canopy is part of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint George when studying the churches of Cairo, it is as well to remember that they are not imposing buildings: the Coptic Orthodox Church did not enjoy the patronage of a court to help fund them. Moreover they have suffered over the millennia, sometimes from pillage, at other times from destruction, even total demolition. However they were always restored, reconstructed and rebuilt.

One of these old churches is the Coptic Orthodox Church of Saint George, known as Mârî Girgis, which lies within the old Roman Fortress of Babylon, the area known today as Old Cairo. The church at one time belonged to the Greek Orthodox community, but along with its “wedding hall”, Qâ’at al-‘Iršân, it was destroyed by a devastating fire. Only a silver Gospel Casket (today one of the treasures of the Coptic Museum) was thought to have survived. The church was rebuilt in the 18th century, recently restored, and now a magnificent freestanding vaulted canopy supported by four columns has come to light. Photos of the canopy, photographed by Sherif Sonbol, are published in The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque (AUC Press, 2013).

It is not unusual in Egypt for the guardians of ancient churches to conceal treasured places mainly in order to prevent their church being earmarked by the antiquities authorities as a heritage site and turned into a tourist destination. In this case, the persistence of Sonbol has brought to light one of the most beautiful mediaeval Christian monuments in Cairo.

“I have always been curious about this church,” Sonbol says. “This was because it was a Greek Church situated in the heart of a predominantly Coptic area, which I was photographing, and also because the guards, during the several months I was in the area, were so insistent that there was nothing to see inside the church. Their very insistence piqued my curiosity.”

Time and again Sonbol made a point of going past the church and appealing for entrance; he was always refused, despite his presenting the necessary clearance papers for the task in hand. “I kept on questioning the guard and I attempted to get in touch with the priest of the church directly, all in vain. But eventually my perseverance and doggedness paid off,” he says. “The priest was there. I asked if there were any icons in the church and he instructed the guard to open a door, then he pulled back the curtains, and there before me was surely one of the most impressive ancient survivals within the newer structure.”

Sonbol describes the freestanding, vaulted canopy, its decorative elements painted in colours that retain their vibrancy. They depict Christ celebrating the Holy Liturgy at the centre of a mosaic of the 24 elders of the Apocalypse. The dome of the vault shows
Christ again, this time surrounded by angels, seraphim and cherubim. Sonbol’s delight at witnessing and photographing what few had seen before knew no bounds. “I feel that it’s my own personal discovery,” he says. When I asked about his technique and whether he used a flash to take the images, he hastens to say, “No flash, that’s forbidden because it damages works of art.” How then did you take these perfect images on pages 128 and 129 of the book, I ask him. “I know how to handle the situation.” (Jill Kamil, “The beauty of a hidden treasure”, Al-Ahram Weekly, May 1, 2013).

Wooden Jar

Egypt notified the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) on Wednesday that a collection of more than 200 allegedly “stolen” Egyptian antiquities are on auction at London’s privately-owned Bonhams. It appears the Interpol is in contact with relevant authorities in the United Kingdom (UK). The Repatriation of Antiquities Department (RAD) at Egypt’s Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) is also following the issue with the Interpol officials. On the other hand, Bonhams strongly believes the objects on auction have not been stolen from Egypt. “We are satisfied with the provenance of the Egyptian art on sale,” Julian ROUP, Bonhams’ director of press and marketing, told Ahram Online.

However, the Egyptian Ambassador to London Ashraf al-Khûlî complained to the company, asking it to put on hold the Egyptian artefacts auction. “I explained to them that Egypt has reservations on the sale of some of the Egyptian items,” al-Khûlî told Ahram Online. al-Khûlî added that he is still waiting for the RAD of the MSA to send him the documents, which claim the items on sale were stolen.

The objects include an Egyptian polychrome painted wood sarcophagus fragment (664-30 B.C); a limestone fragmentary royal stèle for King Merenptah (19th Dynasty, 1212-1201 B.C.); a bronze cat (600 B.C) and a bronze seated figure of Neith (Late Period, 664-332 B.C). "We always take enormous care to ascertain the provenance of all the items we sell," ROUP said. “Bonhams works closely with all the relevant authorities, including the Egyptian Embassy in London with whom we have a very good relationship. Any auctioneer in the UK is committed to contact the British Police’s Art and Antiques Unit, the Arts registry, and Interpol to check the provenance of its exhibits,” he explained.
An Egyptian polychrome painted wood sarcophagus fragment
Late Period, circa 664-30 B.C.

"If Interpol believes there is cause for concern about the Egyptian objects, then they will no doubt approach the relevant authorities in the UK with whom we work closely. We have heard nothing from the authorities," ROP said. ("Egypt challenges a UK auctioneer over 200 'stolen' antiquities", Ahram Online, May 1, 2013).

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**Jeudi 2 mai 2013**

Chaque année en hiver, l'allée de la citadelle Qâytbây, bâtie vers la fin de l'époque mamelouke en 882 de l'hégire (1477 J.-C.), est envahie par les eaux de la Méditerranée. Toute la corniche de Gumruk, quartier où est située la citadelle, est noyée par la montée des vagues due à la nawwa (tempêtes et pluies hivernales). Résultat : les édifices situés sur cette corniche sont bouffés par l'érosion. « C'est ainsi que la citadelle Qâytbây est chaque année endommagée. Certaines fondations de la citadelle sont totalement abîmées », explique Wahîd Ibrâhîm, directeur général des Antiquités coptes et islamiques d'Alexandrie. Un projet visant à restaurer la citadelle avait déjà été lancé, il y a quelques années, par le Conseil Suprême des Antiquités et l’Organisme de la protection des côtes. Mais ce projet fut arrêté faute de financement.

Vers la fin des années 1990, le département des Antiquités submergées d'Alexandrie et l’Organisme de la protection des côtes ont découvert que le flanc de la citadelle, exposé aux violentes vagues, a été abîmé. Des études préliminaires avaient été alors effectuées pour mesurer la force des courants maritimes, ainsi que la vitesse des vagues et leur influence sur les fondations de la citadelle. « Des blocs de béton ont alors été installés sur le flanc sud pour contenir les vagues. Il s'agit de 7 blocs de 4 mètres de largeur et plus de 5 mètres de hauteur », se souvient Ibrâhîm. Ces blocs de béton couvrent aussi le côté Est de la citadelle, inspecté une seule fois, en 2006. Depuis, aucune inspection n'a été faite. Aujourd'hui, le flanc Ouest est sous protection. Mais le côté Nord et celui sud-est sont confrontés à l’érosion.

D’après le directeur du département des projets, Sharif Héféna, il est nécessaire d’entourer la citadelle de blocs de béton qui serviraient de barrières contre les vagues. « Mais pour exécuter ce projet, nous avons besoin de 200 millions de L.E. Difficile d’obtenir cette somme », explique Héféna. Le littoral de la Méditerranée a été transformé ces dernières années, avec l'installation des blocs de béton à certains endroits. « Les changements climatiques ont changé la nature de la côte de la Méditerranée. Les vagues sont plus rapides, plus hautes et plus fortes qu’auparavant », renchérit Héféna. La protection de la citadelle et de ses fondations exige une coopération entre les ministères des Affaires des Antiquités, de l’Environnement, l’Organisme de la protection des côtes et d’autres instances.

Wahîd Ibrâhîm explique que des antiquités se trouvent sous l’eau, sur le côté sud-est de la citadelle, qui est considéré comme étant le plus endommagé de la citadelle. « Il est impossible de poser des blocs de béton sur ce côté, car cela risque d’endommager ces antiquités. Ces blocs pourraient entraîner des éventuelles opérations de repêchage », dit-il. Une solution provisoire pour les archéologues pourrait consister à restaurer et fortifier les fondations de ce côté, afin de consolider la citadelle. Préserver la citadelle des courants maritimes et des vagues sans abîmer les monuments submergés est

La Police du Tourisme et des Antiquités a réussi à démanteler un des gangs les plus redoutables à Gîza. Il est composé de Ridâ S., âgé de 35 ans ; Mus’ad S., 32 ans ; Ramadân S., 39 ans ; Farahât B., 35 ans et Magdî A., 38 ans. Ils ont entrepris des fouilles illicites dans le périmètre de la pyramide d’Aménemhat III. Ils ont creusé un puits de 2m x 2m, d’une profondeur de 6m. Ce puits conduit à une chambre funéraire de 3m x 7m, d’une hauteur de 2m. À l’intérieur de cette chambre tapissée de briques crues, les policiers ont saisi un sarcophage en calcaire (3m x 2m), ainsi que deux pots cassés et d’autres récipients de petite taille. Une commission regroupant des inspecteurs de la zone archéologique de Dahshûr a été formée. Elle a affirmé dans son rapport d’expertise que cette tombe date du Moyen Empire. (ONA, « Arrestation à Dahshûr du plus grand gang de trafic archéologique », al-Dustûr, 2 mai 2013. Voir également Muhammad Shumân, « Saisie d’un sarcophage antique dans une tombe inconnue à Dahshûr », al-Ahrâm, 11 mai ; Nâgî al-Girgâwî, « Des fouilles illicites conduisent à la découverte d’un puits et d’un sarcophage antique à Gîza », al-Ahrâm, 3 juin).


### Vendredi 3 mai 2013


### Dimanche 5 mai 2013

The Scotland Yard’s Art & Antiquities Squad (AAS) made the arrest on Friday, 3 May when international arts auction house, Christie’s, reported that it had identified some antiquities, which are almost certainly stolen from Egypt recently. This is one of the biggest operations of its kind since the Egyptian revolution exploded in 2011, well-informed sources confirm to Ahram Online. Christie’s experts, the British museum’s Egyptology department, the Egyptian embassy in London and the Art Loss Register worked closely for weeks to identify six stolen objects. The AAS is now trying to determine how these objects left Egypt, how the seller came to possess them and who his accomplices are.

Ahram Online understands that the seller (now in custody) claims he had inherited the Egyptian objects from his uncle. He told the international auctioneer that his uncle served in Egypt during WWII and stayed on for a few years before returning to the UK in the ’50s. These objects were due to be sold at a Christie’s auction on 2 May in London. “Christie’s works closely with international authorities and organisations towards our shared objective of preventing the illicit trade in improperly exported or stolen works of art,” Christie’s Director of Communications Matthew PATON tells Ahram Online. PATON pledged extra
vigilance considering Egyptian antiquities authorities’ concerns after the 2011 revolution and also to do their utmost to get these objects back to Egypt. He also emphasised that Christie's believes in strict internal policies to thoroughly research the provenance of any item consigned for sale.

The Egyptian Embassy in London confirmed to Ahram Online it is in constant contact with the Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities in order to file the proper documents to repatriate the stolen antiquities. One of the stolen objects is a recent find from Amenhotep III in Western Thebes. Made of Egyptian red granite, the relief fragment depicts a Nubian prisoner, facing right, with short hair and wearing heavy hooped earrings and a collar necklace (1550 - 1069 BC). Another is an Egyptian painted limestone relief fragment depicting a male figure with his head facing left. Experts say it is very likely to have originated from a recently rediscovered and excavated tomb, again in Thebes.

Egyptian Ambassador to the UK Ashraf al-Khûlî praised Christie’s vigilance and willingness to investigate the provenance of the Egyptian objects. "Without their support and cooperation, we would not have been able to spot and get these invaluable antiquities back," he told Ahram Online. ("Exclusive: Britain’s largest seize of stolen artefacts since Egypt’s revolution", Al-Ahram Online, May 5, 2013. Voir également « Suspension de la vente de 6 pièces archéologiques égyptiennes à Londres », al-Dûstûr, 1er mai ; Nasma Réda, « Christie’s suspend une vente aux enchères après que 6 pièces se sont avérées volée », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 16 mai).

**Mercredi 8 mai 2013**

More than two years after the January 2011 Revolution, urban and agricultural encroachment continues to threaten Egypt’s archaeological sites. The lack of security that overwhelmed the country during and after the revolution has certainly taken its toll. The sanctity of spiritual and archaeological environments has been desecrated, with plundering and destruction by vandals, thieves and neighbouring residents being carried out virtually unchecked. Well-organised and well-armed gangs of thieves are reportedly plundering archaeological sites, while illegal construction encroaches on and sometimes even covers them.

The rich Islamic site of Istabl 'Antar in Egypt’s first Islamic capital has been isolated, as have al-Mu’izz Street in historic Cairo; the ancient Egyptian necropolis of Dahshûr; the Gîza Plateau; the New Kingdom site of Matariyya; the area of al-Burdân on the Alexandria-Marsa Matrûh highway and the Hagg Qandîl site at Amarna in al-Minyâ in Upper Egypt, to mention just a few. Some building encroachments were removed safely and without damage, but for others help came too late and some areas of historical importance, where genuine objects and important remains are still hidden in the sand, were ruined or looted.

**CAPITAL OF THE FIRST MONOTHEISTIC RELIGION:** The most recent encroachment was at Amarna, where residents of the neighbouring village of the Hagg Qandîl began cultivating the area adjacent to an 18th-Dynasty noblemen’s cemetery. Minyâ’s archaeological inspectorate sent a report to both the local police and the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA), which ordered a halt to the encroachment and stepped up security in the area, while tourism and antiquities police were deployed nearby.

The former chairman of the MSA’s ancient Egyptian antiquities sector, Muhammad al-Biyall, points out that the Hagg Qandîl site was an important part of the capital during the reign of Akhenaten. It contains the tomb of the nobleman lay, one of Akhenaten’s high priests, who was also the godfather of the Boy King Tutankhamun and who seized the throne after Tutankhamun’s death. Also at the Hagg Qandîl is the tomb of Mahou, Akhenaten’s chief of police, along with remains of the Aten Temple and the celebrated “borders relief” which depicts ancient Egypt’s geographical borders with neighbouring empires. Fortunately police have succeeded in stopping the agricultural encroachment at Tell al-Amarna at an early stage without any loss to antiquity.

**THE GRAECO-ROMAN SITE ON THE NORTHERN COAST:** Events took a contrary course at al-Burdân, where encroachment has
destroyed a cluster of authentic structures dating from the Graeco-Roman era. Residents of the neighbouring town of al-Hamman invaded the site in a large truck guarded by an armed gang of two-dozen vandals and began to bulldoze the land in order to construct a number of summerhouses for themselves. The archaeological site includes the remains of Graeco-Roman fortresses, roads, temples and cemeteries.

The director of Mârînâ al-‘Alamayn Antiquities, Khâlid Abû al-Magd, accused the owner of a contractor company, Yâsir Khalîl, and truck driver Muhammad ‘Abd al-Sattâr of violating and damaging the archaeological site. Tourism and Antiquities Police arrested the accused, but they denied all the charges. Both are in custody until the completion of investigations.

DAHSHÛR NECROPOLIS: A similar event occurred at the ancient Egyptian necropolis of Dahshûr, where an armed gang accompanied by residents of ‘Izbat Dahshûr have been ravaging the area in front of King Amenemhat III’s Black Pyramid and digging in the sand in order to install a modern private cemetery. This area was a necropolis for ancient Egyptian nobles and officials, and a German archaeological mission currently excavating there is discovering more to add to Dahshûr’s history.

The invaders dug more than 30 new tombs on the site, building an ugly construction using white cement blocks. “Not only do they distort the scenery and the panoramic view of the site, but they are destroying the ancient artefacts buried in the sand underneath,” says Nâsir Ramadân, director-general of the Dahshûr archaeological site. “Our hands are tied and our heritage is in danger, and nobody is coming to the rescue.”

Although all campaigns launched by archaeologists and the authorities concerned to rescue Dahshûr from encroachment, and UNESCO visited to inspect the current situation to intervene to stop the intrusion and help save one of its world heritage sites, all attempts to solve the problem in an amicable manner have so far failed. The ‘Izbat Dahshûr residents on the site have refused to move to another plot away from the archaeological area where they could easily build a modern cemetery.

The MSA has taken legal steps, but since the intruders still refuse to move the ministry is now collaborating with the Tourism and Antiquities Police to expel them by force. They have been allocated a new plot for their cemetery, and now the ministry is carrying out an archaeological inspection of the new site before handing it over to the intruders so they can commence building. In the meantime, the intruders, in total disregard of the legal processes, are insisting on staying where they are and continuing construction. They have now raised the building to the second floor.

Meanwhile, a photograph taken early this week shows King Senefru’s Bent Pyramid at Dahshûr with a part of its soft casing and some of its blocks missing. The photograph, posted on author Yûsuf Zaydân’s Facebook wall, has triggered much anger among Egyptians, who see that their ancient heritage is under a real threat that could lead to its disappearance. Rumours abound, and while some people are commenting about the illegal construction in Dahshûr, others are demanding that the authorities give an immediate explanation of the photograph.

Hanân ‘Izzat, a housewife from Cairo, described the situation as a “futility.” “We are surrounded by people who don’t care about our heritage because they see the monuments as a sort of polytheism which must be demolished,” she told Al-Ahram Weekly. (...) On Monday, dozens of Egyptian youths and Manshiyyat Dahshûr residents protested at the footstep of the Senefru Bent Pyramid demanding that the authorities put an end to the looting and construction that threaten one of the nation’s oldest pyramids and burial grounds. They held up signs that read: “God does not bless a nation that ruins its heritage,” and: “Heritage is our past, present and future. Let’s protect it with love and respect.” Ramadân Muhammad, a 20-year-old student and a resident of Manshiyyat Dahshûr, said he came to protest against the government’s slackness in protecting Egypt’s heritage. He also wanted to show that the Dahshûr residents were not responsible for the encroachment and should not be blamed.

Antiquities experts warn that the construction of the new cemetery endangers
the ancient complex. Villagers say their cemeteries are full, but that the authorities did not give permits or land for new ones, so they grabbed what they insisted was empty desert to erect family tombs.

IBN TÜLÜN MOSQUE: Cairo’s historic Mosque of Ibn Tûlûn has lost much of its elegance recently, with wastewater and garbage lining its walls. Although the building stands much as it was when first constructed in 876 on top of the hill of Gabal Yashkur, its appearance has much faded. "The mosque is in a real mess," Muhammad Hasan, a resident of al-Sayyida Zaynab who lives in the buildings beside the mosque, told the Weekly. He said that for long time now the mosque’s lighting system had not been working, leaving the mosque in darkness and prohibiting the Maghrib and al-'isha prayers. He went on to say that when extensive restoration was carried out in 2004, the lighting system installed was not up to standard.

"The mosque is in a real mess," Muhammad Hasan, a resident of al-Sayyida Zaynab who lives in the buildings beside the mosque, told the Weekly. He said that for long time now the mosque’s lighting system had not been working, leaving the mosque in darkness and prohibiting the Maghrib and al-'isha prayers. He went on to say that when extensive restoration was carried out in 2004, the lighting system installed was not up to standard.

'Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahîm, head of the Islamic and Coptic section at the MSA, told the Weekly that the MSA was doing everything it could to protect the mosque from negligence and encroachment. Whenever leaking water or garbage accumulates, the MSA contacts the Tourism and Antiquities Police, as well as the district office, and the water is pumped out. Days later, however, the water leaks again and the residents start throwing their garbage there. "The lack of security and budget is behind the mess," said 'Abd al-Rahîm, adding that to repair the source of the leak and the mosque’s electrical system needed money not available due to the collapse of tourism.

The lack of security and absence of police presence in the area led to residents throwing their garbage against the mosque wall. "The MSA will continue its role to protect the mosque as well as Egypt’s heritage, but the MSA alone cannot do the whole work: it needs the help of the residents themselves, the Ministry of Endowments and the Tourism and Antiquities Police."

THE SPHINX AND THE AIR-CONDITIONING OF KHUFU’S SOLAR BOAT: On the Gîza Plateau the situation is somewhat different. A tiny, twisted channel of water appeared on the sandy area in front of the Sphinx, and visitors to the area concluded that the newly operated, state-of-the-art pumping system to reduce the high rate of subterranean water that has accumulated beneath the Sphinx and the underlying bedrock had been damaged.

"This absolutely is not the case," said 'Ali al-Asfar, head of Upper Egypt monuments and the Gîza Plateau. He told the Weekly that the pumping machines were safe and sound and automatically starts operating when the subterranean water level exceeds 5.2 metres above sea level and stop when this level is reached. "Such a level is a natural phenomenon," al-Asfar said, adding 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.
The water leaking in front of the Sphinx, he said, was caused by the incompetent drainage in the air conditioning system of King Khufu’s Solar Boat Museum on the plateau. The tunnels connecting the air conditioning system to the drains in neighbouring Nazlat al-Sammân were blocked and needed to be cleaned and repaired. “The quantity of water that is leaking is nothing,” al-Asfar said, adding that the MSA would replace these weak tunnels to prevent water leakage in the future. He told the Weekly that efforts were now being made to preserve the site and return it to its former serene state. To his end a private company is now cleaning the plateau, removing accumulated garbage and sprucing up its image.

The lack of security and the absence of police on the plateau, as with other archaeological sites, mean it has been subjected to encroachment. Horse and camel owners have violated the antiquities law by entering the archaeological safe zone in an attempt to find clients. The number of tourists to Egypt decreased after the revolution, leading to greater competition in the Egyptian tourism trade. Animal dung has become a serious problem and is being cleared from the site. The private company is using avant-garde machines to collect the dung and is recycling other garbage. Garbage bins made of stone similar to the plateau’s bedrock have been installed in various locations on the site.

THE ANCIENT CITY OF IWN (OUN): In the district of Matariyya in eastern Cairo, once the capital of part of ancient Egypt and a major religious centre throughout its history, the situation is much worse. Thugs and vandals have invaded the empty archaeological area known as “The land of the Lawyers Syndicate” at ’Arab al-Hasn. They broke through the archaeological wall, built small huts and converted the whole plot into a parking and car wash area. Anyone who tries to approach in order to remove severe encroachment, or even photograph what is going on, can expect to be frozen to the spot by the threat of machine guns.

A large bulldozer ploughed up the surface of Sûq al-Khamîs, throwing aside some archaeological elements that had lain for thousands of years in the sand. The bulldozer, as Mahmûd ’Affî, head of the Central Administration for Cairo and Gîza Antiquities, told the Weekly, was preparing the ground in compliance with an order from the Ministry of Endowments for the foundations of a large wall to surround the Sûq al-Khamîs, despite the fact that such disturbance of the ground was in flagrant defiance of the antiquities law. He went on to explain that although the area was on property owned by the Ministry of Endowments, it still fell under the supervision of the MSA since it bordered the neighbouring Matarîyya archaeological site, where the granite obelisk of the Middle Kingdom King Senusert I stands along with a number of ancient Egyptian tombs and statues.

‘Âdîl Husayn, head of the Ancient Egyptian Antiquities sector at the MSA, said that residents of Matarîyya had abused the situation and built a number of residential houses in Sûq al-Khamîs and on ancient Egyptian noblemen’s tombs at Fayqa land at ’Arab al-Hasn area in Matarîyya. Despite all the complaints reported to the area police station and demands for a halt to the destruction, no action has been taken and the encroachment extended. At that point all construction work stopped, Husayn said, but unfortunately the bulldozer had damaged a large number of artefacts, among them part of a New Kingdom stela showing a list of offerings extended by the ancient Egyptians in their religious rituals.

‘Affî insisted that the Ministry of Endowments had 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. In addition, he continued, any digging to lay foundations had to be carried out manually and not with a bulldozer.

To make matters worse, the area behind the obelisk of the 12th-Dynasty king Senusert I turned into a garbage dump picked over by sheep and goats. A nearby spot where remains of a Middle Dynasty temple have been uncovered now appears to be used as a swimming pool for dogs. Subterranean water has leaked into the archaeological pit where the remains lie, filling it with water, and dogs are taking a plunge to escape the summer heat.

Târiq Tawfîq, a lecturer in the archaeology department at Cairo University,
says the Matariyya site retains under the sand many secrets from the Middle Kingdom, a very important time in ancient Egyptian history about which we know relatively little. “I am really disappointed because the area is a bit neglected and deserves more care,” Tawfîq says. Matariyya was the site of ancient Heliopolis, 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.

AKHMÎM: The area where a huge limestone head of Pharaoh Ramses II was uncovered six years ago in the Upper Egyptian town of Akhmîm, near Suhâg, is now a garbage dump. According to studies, this area may house a huge temple of Ramses II, and more life-size statues of the pharaoh could be unearthed. However, because the head was uncovered within a modern cemetery of the town, the residents were ordered to put their work on hold for a few months until the cemetery could be relocated. The area was then proclaimed as an archaeological site under the jurisdiction of Egypt’s antiquities law. Some of the modern tombs were relocated to another remote area as a first phase, and as the relocation of the cemetery continues alongside the archaeological excavation more items belonging to the temple are being uncovered.

Since the revolution, however, all work there has stopped and the area has been neglected. The residents of Akhmîm did not respect the serenity and divinity of the site and the importance of the monuments discovered there, and they transformed the area into a garbage dump. It is also frequented by drug addicts. Scraps of paper fly over the beautiful face of Ramses II, and children play football over the remains of the temple. “This situation is no longer the case,” Husayn says. He says the head of Ramses II and all the objects found there have now been moved to the storage facility at the Suhâg inspectorate so as to protect them. MSA guards are also stationed on the site to protect it from further illegal excavation or other actions.

(...) “The lack of security in the aftermath of the revolution was the main reason for the residents’ decision to encroach on the archaeological land, and the MSA’s budget was feeling the pinch because of the withdrawal of tourism to Egypt,” says Minister of State for Antiquities Muhammad Ibrâhîm. “This presents an obstacle to providing private security at every archaeological site to prevent further encroachment.” Ibrâhîm says the ministry has to depend on the Ministry of Interior and the Tourism and Antiquities Police. “The situation could be solved by applying a new mechanism to prohibit residents from encroaching on any archaeological site in Egypt,” Ibrâhîm adds.

So what of the new antiquities law and its amendment? Why is it not being implemented? Among the articles in the new law is one that prohibits any encroachment on archaeological sites and a prison term for offenders. Up to the time the Weekly went to print, this question had not been answered by any officials apart from Mukhtâr al-Kasabânî, the former MSA consultant for the Islamic period, who said that the current government did not care enough about Egypt’s history and its culture. He added that a couple of months ago a contractor damaged the Ottoman house of madash Mirzâ in Bûlâq, and that when he was caught red-handed he was set at large with a fine of only LE500. This contractor, the official said, returned to the house and resumed the demolition, and nobody moved on to save this great Ottoman house, not even the MSA. (Nevine El-Aref, “From rumour to bulldozer”, Al-Ahram Weekly, May 8, 2013. Voir également Radwa al-Shâzlî, « L’arbre de la Vierge à Matariyya victime de la négligence du ministère de l’Archéologie », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 3 juin).
opérant à Tell Abû Sayfî au nord de la péninsule du Sinaï et dirigée par Muhammad Abû al-Maqṣûd, a annoncé la semaine dernière la découverte d’une zone industrielle de l’époque gréco-romaine. Outre cette découverte, la mission a désensablé un grand nombre d’ateliers de poterie et de bronze datant de la même époque. « La mission a réussi également à repérer un certain nombre de bâtiments administratifs, d’entrepôts et de maisons d’ouvriers en plus d’une série d’amphores importée de l’île de Rhodes », précise ‘Abd al-Maqṣûd.

Muhammad Ibrâhîm, ministre d’État pour les Affaires des antiquités, souligne que l’importance de cette découverte vient du fait qu’elle met en valeur les relations économiques et commerciales de l’Égypte avec les pays voisins de la Méditerranée. En effet, la région de Tell Abû Sayfî est située sur la route militaire d’al-Qantara Sharq, au Nord-Sinaï, qui était l’une des grandes routes du commerce romain. « La découverte d’un quartier résidentiel, d’ustensiles de cuisine, de pots, de bâtiments surtout administratifs et de magasins nous donne une idée complète de la vie quotidienne des employés égyptiens à l’époque », se réjouit le ministre. La mission a également découvert une collection de monnaies en bronze. Celle-ci est accompagnée d’une statue en argile du dieu de la guerre, Bès.

Des blocs en calcaire ont été aussi trouvés sur le chantier. Suite aux études accomplies et avec le déchiffrement des inscriptions, la mission a réussi à découvrir des détails sur l’histoire militaire romaine dans la région, comme la disposition de l’armée romaine à l’intérieur de la forteresse. Ainsi, Tell Abû Sayfî donne une idée détaillée de l’importance militaire de la région, les archéologues ont notamment trouvé des éléments qui dévoilent les divisions de l’armée. Un chantier riche en découvertes !


British police have released a man who was arrested on 3 May on suspicion of looting Egyptian antiquities on bail. The man is due to return to the police station in North-east London in early August for further questioning, the police said. The man was arrested last Friday by the Police’s Art and Antiques Unit officers “on suspicion of handling stolen goods, tax and fraud offences”, a police spokeswoman told Ahram Online. The spokeswoman, however, declined to confirm the suspect’s nationality, only revealing he is a UK-based man in his early sixties.

The arrest was made after the international arts auction house, Christie’s, reported that it had identified some antiquities, which were almost certainly stolen from Egypt recently. A well-informed source told Ahram Online that the AAU investigators “are trying to identify how the stolen antiquities left Egypt and how the seller managed to possess them.” Meanwhile, Christie’s expects this case will show that there should not be tolerance with this kind of illegitimate trade.

“We hope that this case — and the consequences — will send a strong message to those engaged in the illicit trade,” Christie’s
Director of Communications Matthew PATON told Ahram Online. PATON also praised the British Museum for “its crucial role in identifying the stolen antiquities.” He added his company would hold the stolen antiquities till it returns it back to its owner [Egypt] after the legal settlement of the case.

The British discovery of stolen Egyptian artefacts is the biggest operation of its kind since the start of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. One of the stolen objects is a recent find from Amenhotep III in Western Thebes. Made of Egyptian red granite, the relief fragment depicts a Nubian prisoner, facing right, with short hair and wearing heavy hooped earrings and a collar necklace (1550 - 1069 BC). Another is an Egyptian painted limestone relief fragment depicting a male figure with his head facing left. Experts say it is very likely to have originated from a recently rediscovered and excavated tomb, again in Thebes. (“Britain’s Egyptian antiquities investigation: Main suspect bailed”, Al-Ahram Online, May 10, 2013).

Since the January 2011 revolution, all work was put on hold and the area neglected. Akhmîm residents did not respect the serenity and historical value of the site and its monuments, and transformed the area into a garbage dump. It was frequented by drug addicts, neighbours said. Rubbish was strewn everywhere, and children played football over the remains of the temple.

“This situation is not anymore the case,” ‘Âdil Husayn, head of the Ancient Egyptian Antiquities section, told Ahram Online. The head of Ramses II and all objects found there have now been moved to storage in the Suhâg inspectorate, so as to protect them. The ministry’s guards are also onsite, to protect it from illegal excavations or other negative encroachment. (Nevine El-Aref, “Head of Ramses II in Akhmîm removed and stored”, Al-Ahram Online, May 12, 2013).

Dimanche 12 mai 2013

A lack of security across Egypt’s archaeological sites has taken a toll in the town of Akhmîm, near Suhâg governorate. The area where a huge limestone head of Pharaoh King Ramses II was discovered six years ago was rendered a garbage dump. According to prior surveys, the area may house a vast temple to Ramses II, and more larger than life statues of the pharaoh could be unearthed. Because the head of the pharaoh king was uncovered within a modern cemetery in the town, residents were ordered not to bury their dead there for a few months until the cemetery could be relocated. The area was then proclaimed an archaeological site under the jurisdiction of Egypt’s antiquities law. The government, as well as the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) at the time (now the Ministry of State of Antiquities), provided the required funds to relocate a group of modern tombs to another area. As the relocation of the cemetery continued, archaeological excavation discovered more items belonging to the temple beneath.

The lack of security in Egypt since the 2011 revolution exposed most of the country’s archaeological and historical sites to encroachment, particularly, monuments in mediaeval and historic Cairo as both are located in densely populated areas. Several distinguished Ottoman and Mameluk edifices were subjected to encroachment. The most recent is Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qâytbây’s water basin for animals in the northern cemetery. Peddlers, plants and seeds vendors have invaded the front façade of the water basin and put their goods on its external walls to sell it. Some others have even transferred the hall used in antiquity for animals rest and sleep into storage space for their goods.

Jeudi 16 mai 2013

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This basin is a part of a larger complex of Sultan al-Ashraf Abu al-Nasr Qâytbây, the last great sultan of the Mameluk dynasty. The repoussé work that forms the lobed petal-like decoration is typical of the late Mameluk period. The complex consists of a mosque, sabîl-kuttâb (water fountain-quranic school) and a mausoleum. Researcher Khâlid 'Azab said that water basins for animals were widespread in Egypt in the Fatimid, Mameluk and Ottoman eras. It was held alone or attached to larger commercial or religious structures on the main roads of the cities, bustling markets, pilgrim routes and caravan routes to Syria and Morocco to serve animals during their trip. Qâytbây’s monument remains a fine example of architecture during a period when decorative arts had reached their zenith. (Nevine El-Aref, “A call to rescue the water basin of Sultan Qâytbây”, Al-Ahram Online, May 16, 2013).

At Bâb al-Hisn area in south Aswân, which was in antiquity the border between Egypt and Old Nubba, an Austrian archaeological mission has unearthed a well-preserved skeleton of a young Roman warrior. The mission also uncovered a residential house along with a coin from the reign of Emperor Heracles (741-610 AD).

Erin Forestner MOLAR, head of the mission, explains that early studies carried out on the skeleton’s bones revealed that it is well preserved and belongs to a young warrior who spent his life in the Roman army. “He probably died at a young age, between 25 and 35 years old, during a war from a stab from a sharp sword,” MOLAR said, adding that until now the...
mission failed to identify the soldier but that further studies could establish his identity.

"It is a very important discovery," Minister of State of Antiquities Ahmad ‘Īsā told Ahram Online, adding that it reveals a very important moment in Egypt's history. It shows that in antiquity there was conflict from time to time in the area, and likely war. ‘Ādil Husayn, head of Ancient Egyptian Antiquities at the Ministry of State of Antiquities (MSA) pointed out that studies also tell that the stab hit the left thigh and left a very deep wound. It is likely the soldier bled to death. Husayn continued that the area of Bāb al-Hisn was destroyed in several wars, which makes it difficult for researchers to determine an exact day of the war when the warrior was killed, but that early studies indicate that the war likely occurred shortly after the Arabs invaded Egypt. Inside the residential house the mission found a fully-equipped kitchen with a large oven and a number of clay pots and pans, as well as the remains of flora inside. (Nevine El-Aref, "Skeleton of a Roman warrior unearthed in south Egypt", Al-Ahram Online, May 16, 2013.

According to the regulations, explained Gharib, any renovation to the mosque should be done in collaboration with the NOUH because the mosque is on Egypt’s historical buildings list. The mosque should have been painted in light beige to suit all Islamic historical buildings of its era and to be in harmony with historic Cairo.

Major General Khâlid ‘Abd al-Razzâq, head of Sayyida Zaynab district where the mosque is located, said that he did not know who had painted the dome and minaret of the mosque, and that those who had done so had not had permission from any relevant authority such as the governorate or the antiquities ministry. He ordered a halt to all works there and said he would carry out investigations to find out who was responsible. (Nevine El-Aref, "Unauthorised renovations at Sayyida Zaynab Mosque halted", Al-Ahram Online, May 20, 2013).
The sites under threat, according to Aswát Masríyya, include the Great Pyramids of Gîza, the Karnak Temple in Luxor, the temples of Abû Simbil, Saint Catherine’s Monastery, Saint Mina’s Monastery and Islamic Cairo.

'Abd al-Rahmân al-Âydî, the chairman of the Central Administration for Egyptian Antiquities at the ministry, was quoted saying the threat to Egypt’s heritage sites is “a stain on the conscience of the government” because it shows the government’s lack of interest in the sites. al-Âydî also said the Karnak Temple and Saint Mina’s Monastery were only recently added due to the risk posed by high levels of groundwater. He continued by saying the sites need restoration and maintenance, which Egypt currently is not able to do.

“The inclusion of Egyptian sites on the World Heritage List means Egypt can benefit from UNESCO’s expertise and financing of projects,” Aswát Masríyya cited al-Âydî. “Therefore removing these sites from the list means Egypt will be deprived of these benefits.”

The UNESCO threat is said to be based on the lack of commitment by the state to the 1972 World Heritage Convention, signed and ratified by 178 countries including Egypt. As part of the agreement, states that have ratified the convention must exert all efforts to preserve their heritage sites.

Egypt’s heritage sites have been plagued by looters and encroachment from local communities. Last month, a protest was held in Dahshûr by archaeologists and concerned locals against the encroachment of the community cemetery on the pyramids in the area. The local cemetery in Dahshûr has seen rapid expansion in growth, and has reached the causeway of the Black Pyramid. Archaeologists say the rapid expansion is often used by locals as an excuse to dig for buried artefacts to sell on the black market. UNESCO is dedicated to preserving such monuments remain Egyptian property under Egyptian sovereignty. (Luiz Sánchez, “Antiquities minister: UNESCO threatens to declassify heritage sites”, Daily News Egypt, May 20, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Âlm, « Îsâ : L’Unesco ne déclassera pas les sites égyptiens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 21 mai ; Dalia Hamam, « L’Unesco ne déclassera pas les sites archéologiques égyptiens », Le Progrès Égyptien, 22 mai).

Facing anger from Egyptologists, a surprised Minister of State for Antiquities Ahmad ‘Isâ clarifies to Ahram Online that UNESCO is not actually threatening to remove six Egyptian archaeological sites from the World Heritage List (WHL). On Monday night, hours after a meeting at the Culture and Antiquities Committee (CAC) at parliament headquarters, newspapers and websites published their usual summary of the goings-on. They reported that the newly-appointed minister, ‘Isâ, told CAC members that because of a scarcity of experts in managing Egyptian sites, the United Nations Economic Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) threatened to declassify the Gîza Plateau, Karnak Temples in Luxor, Saint Catherine and Saint Mina Monasteries, Historic Cairo and Abû Simbil Temples from the WHL. Egyptologists scowled that this reveals the “flawed integrity of the government, which lacks the attention and awareness of Egypt’s archaeological sites.”

However, when Ahram Online asked Minister ‘Isâ directly on the causes behind the UNESCO threat and what could be done to spruce up and maintain these archaeological sites to keep them on the list, he replied, astonished: “What was published in media is not accurate.” The media misinterpreted his statement to mean quite the opposite and he reiterates the statement he made at the meeting to Ahram Online:

“We have six archaeological sites on UNESCO’s WHL and UNESCO asked the Ministry of State of Antiquities (MSA) to deal properly with these sites so as to not come under threat of removal from the WHL.”

The Antiquities Affairs ministry office Director General Muhammad Hamâda confirms to Ahram Online that Minister ‘Isâ revealed to all CAC members that the MSA is about to execute a plan to develop the professional skills and integrity of its curators, inspectors, archaeologists and restorers in accordance with
all UNESCO regulations and so as to comply with all signed agreements. Hamâda also claims the MSA will ask UNESCO to add more Egyptian sites to the WHL.

During the CAC meeting_DS urged members to allocate a larger budget to the MSA in order to restore the decaying royal and noble mummies, to protect Egypt’s heritage and monuments and to develop the Egyptian museum in Tahrîr Square. Specifically, poor outdoor lighting systems and lamps make the security control cameras ineffectual, making the treasures of the Egyptian museum vulnerable to looters. In fact, the wall surrounding the property should be added onto because thieves have tried to scale the wall into the museum, which were, thankfully, caught by police. (Nevine El-Aref, “Is UNESCO threatening to pull Egypt sites from world heritage list?”, Al-Ahram Online, May 21, 2013).

Mercredi 22 mai 2013

The Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square is home to a large number of ancient Egyptian artefacts found in excavations at archaeological sites all over the country through its 111-year history. Sadly, many of these objects have languished for decades in storerooms or crammed into overstuffed display cases. This state of affairs has meant that Egyptologists have been unable to get their hands on many artefacts over the years, delaying technical and historical studies and concealing information that could provide a better understanding of the enigmas of the civilisation of the ancient Egyptians.

Among these objects was a very distinguished collection of more than 300 leather fragments of an ancient Egyptian chariot. The collection had been secreted in the depths of the museum, packed inside a dozen wooden drawers, since 1932, when a well-known Greek family offered them to the museum. The family, the Tanos, lived in Egypt for several years, dealing in the antiquities trade. This was during a time when such dealing was legal, and the Tanos had a very good reputation. In 1956, like other foreign families in Egypt, they left the country, making for Cyprus.

The collection remained in the boxes for eight decades until 2008, when the head of the Egyptology section at the Netherlands Flemish Institute in Cairo, André VELDMEIJER, and American University professor of Egyptology Salima IKRAM accidentally came across a 1950s publication by Robert Jacobus FORBES titled Studies in Ancient Technology. The study showed a black and white photograph of ancient trappings and horse harnesses, evidently intact and said to be at the Egyptian Museum.

Intrigued by FORBES’s findings, the two Egyptologists sought the help of museum curator Ibrâhîm Abd al-Gawwâd in locating a cache of trays of leather parts pertaining to an Egyptian chariot, including parts of the bow case. After searching through the various items of leatherwork stored in the museum, they finally found the chariot fragments. “It is an amazing and astonishing find,” VELDMEIJER told Al-Ahram Weekly, adding that the fragments found in the museum were many more than those shown in Forbes’s photograph. “I am not often speechless, but I was when I came face to face with the fragments and realised that I was in front of the first-ever find of the almost complete leatherwork of an ancient Egyptian chariot,” VELDMEIJER said. He said the fragments included several red, green and beige leather pieces of various sizes and shapes, some of which were 60-80cm long, and numerous small fragments measuring 20-25cm. Others were very tiny, some only a couple of centimetres long.

Investigation of the pieces revealed that most of the fragments were intact, while others had detached after being folded so they could fit into the drawers in which they were stored for 80 years. All the fragments came from a single chariot, including the leather
casing that once covered its wooden frame, the nave hoops, horse neck straps, harnesses, gauntlets and portions of the bow-case and quiver that were attached to either side. These last two objects are elaborately decorated in green and red leather.

VELDMEIJER said the fragments could be grouped into three sets of leather: bright green, red and beige. Green and red was a very common combination in ancient Egyptian leatherwork, and appeared in the large leather tent of Isemkheb of the 21st Dynasty exhibited in the Egyptian Museum. All items associated with the horses are in beige leather decorated with green. According to VELDMEIJER, preliminary studies showed that the beige leather was stronger and thicker than the green and red pieces because it was used as reins for pulling and holding the horses.

Iconography studies on these straps asserted that this chariot was in use in antiquity, as parts of its surface are dirty and have been rubbed off by the hands of the charioteers. Other parts were also cut and reinforced with attachments. The chariot’s elaborate decorations show that while it was not itself a royal one, it might have been a “mass production” chariot similar to those made for pharaohs Amenhotep II, Amenhotep III and Tuthmosis IV, as well as those in the Amarna style.

Based on the decorations of the leather and a preliminary comparison of the technology used to achieve these effects, such as examples from the tomb of Tuthmosis IV and Amenhotep III, VELDMEIJER said it seemed to date from some time between the late 18th Dynasty and the end of the 19th Dynasty, although this needed to be further investigated. However, iconographic studies conducted thus far indeed suggest that such a date is possible. Studies will also identify the type of skin the ancient Egyptians used in the production of the chariot, but preliminary investigations reveal that the reins, straps and indeed all the leatherwork related to horses were made of cow hide, while goat skin was used for the other leather combinations.

So far the mission has not been able to identify the original location of the fragments, but their good quality and well-preserved condition suggest that the chariot might have come from Upper Egypt. “The hot and dry weather of Upper Egypt has definitely preserved the fragments,” VELDMEIJER said, adding that leather could not have been preserved for so long in the wet and humid weather of Lower Egypt. “This brings us to a place like Luxor, but we are not yet certain,” he said.

He went on to say that the environment inside Tutankhamun’s tomb was too humid to allow the leather parts of the king’s chariots to survive, although the ancient Egyptians had protected them with a layer of oil. The humidity was so strong that it washed out the oil, and thus the leatherwork decayed. “Rendered leather pieces were found among several objects of Tutankhamun’s tomb collection, and all the leatherwork had vanished,” VELDMEIJER says. Tutankhamun’s chariots had a gold box casing decorated with gold pieces and gemstones and a leather floor.

“The second example of chariot we have is the one belonging to Yuya and Tuya, Tutankhamun’s great grandparents,” he says. This is a simple chariot without any cover or decoration. It has some leather parts, but in a very bad state. “In fact, the ‘Tano’ chariot is very unique as it is the only chariot with almost complete leather work,” VELDMEIJER says. He points to the very well-preserved condition of the fragments and says this has raised doubts on its authenticity. "Is it impossible to
live through these thousands of years and be in such a great conservation condition?” he wonders.

However, conservator Lucy Skinner has confirmed that the fragments are genuine. Iconographic studies to the layers of the fragments have uncovered the deterioration of the inner structure, confirming its great age. Veldmeijer says, however, that the poor condition of the inner fragment structure means it cannot be used in the reconstruction of the chariot, and so the mission has decided to fabricate similar leather fragments with new leather in order to reconstruct it and make the first ever leather chariot.

The archaeological team is now studying the technology and resources used to fabricate leather chariots in order to reconstruct a complete and exact replica of an ancient Egyptian leather chariot in 2014. “The team is also to test hypotheses about the uses of the different pieces of leather, which may prove to be a challenging endeavour,” Kram says. She explains that studies on the newly discovered leather fragments reveal that some pieces are folded over in a crumpled state. “Reconstructing certain portions while trying to maintain accuracy in reproducing the technologies used might be more difficult than we anticipate,” she says.

“Everything we saw about the chariot leather was new,” she adds. This presents a revelation on how the chariot was put together, and the technologies and materials used. “Our examinations also disclosed how drawstrings served as the means of securing the leather components over the skeleton of the chariot.”

The Egyptian Museum Chariot Project findings fit in with a larger multidisciplinary and holistic research venture on leatherwork in ancient Egypt, which also includes the study of other fragmentary chariot pieces such as those originating from the tombs of Tuthmosis IV (Carter and Newberry, 1904), Amenhotep II (Dareisy, 1902) and Amenhotep III (Littauer and Crouwel, 1985, 1968 and 1987), as well as the leather finds from the Amarna period (Veldmeijer, 2010). This larger project is directed by Veldmeijer and Kram.

“Chariots introduced the notion of roadways for faster wheel conveyance, revolutionising the way Egyptians moved through the landscape and pioneering means of transportation and warfare,” Kram says. “Studies on the fragments will not only help us to understand more about the chariot construction and its use in warfare and daily life, but about the craft itself as well,” Veldmeijer told the Weekly. He explains that nothing is known about the craft of chariots and the involvement of wood and leather used. It will answer many questions to which there are as yet no decisive answers. Did the ancient Egyptians have a large workshop for chariots where the wooden and leather parts were fabricated, or were there smaller, separate workshops?

What was the technology used in chariot fabrication? Was it the same as was used by the Hyksos, who introduced the chariot to Egypt, or did the ancient Egyptians take the idea and invent their own chariot design that suited their desires and purposes? “I believe that the ancient Egyptians created their own special chariots, since they had a better technology and better skills,” Veldmeijer suggests.

Studies are now in full swing in order to reach a concrete scientific conclusion. Skinner is working together with the conservator department in the Egyptian Museum to investigate the correct procedures and methods of consolidating the fragments. The fragments have now been moved in new, wide trays so that they can be unfolded and spread out until the studies have been completed and the reconstruction starts. (Nevine El-Aref, “Chariots of desire”, Al-Ahram Weekly, May 22, 2013).

Two attempts to smuggle historic coins were foiled at Cairo Airport on Wednesday. The Antiquities Unit Bureau and the Antiquities and
Tourism Police stopped a passenger carrying a Graeco-Roman gilded coin. Police said the passenger was travelling to an Arab country but refused to specify which one. Ahmad al-Râwî, head of the central administration of antiquities unit, said the coin is a unique Graeco-Roman artefact. It has a bearded royal face on one side and a picture of two birds standing on an olive branch on the other. The coin also bears Greek and Ptolemaic writing.

The antiquities unit also confiscated three Ottoman coins from a passenger entering the country from United States who was allegedly planning to sell them. Both passengers are in custody as investigations continue and the coins have been handed over to the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA). (Nevine El-Aref, “Coin smugglers foiled at Cairo Airport”, Ahram Online, May 22, 2013).

The Egyptian Museum, located in Cairo’s Tahrîr Square, displays the world’s largest collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities. Despite its vast wealth, worsening conditions at the museum are having a detrimental impact on the ancient artefacts it seeks to protect. “Look at the Fayûm portraits, and the mummies exhibited, they are falling apart before our own eyes. They need restoration, but regrettably we don’t have enough money to do anything,” said Wafâ’ Habîb, director of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the museum.

Although the museum galleries are high-ceilinged and spacious, the interior decoration and standards of hygiene are poor. The diffused glass panels on the ceiling and the first floor windows are covered in dirt, and the lighting is dim. Visitor signs are printed on A4 paper and carelessly taped to the tatty, half-painted walls. Despite the presence of cleaning staff, staircases and display cabinets are covered with dust. Labels and information signs are insignificant and often blank. “The exhibition of King Tutankhamun has travelled around the world, yet the museum provides no information, there must be some factual information somewhere,” said a museum curator, who preferred to remain anonymous due to fears of any political repercussions.

Consequently, visitors must hire a guide to learn anything about the exhibits. Most reviews on websites, such as TripAdvisor, highlight this requirement. Notably, the museum does not have a website, which would be a useful information resource. Hence, visitors are unable to attain vital information on the exhibits prior to visiting. Museum employees said although an Egyptian company offered to create a new website for free, its inability to connect with officials in the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) has stalled the process. The lack of an IT expert at the museum is another prohibiting factor.

Other issues raised by museum staff concerns museum bureaucracy and poor management. Since the revolution, the museum’s director, according to staff, has changed four times and is usually in office for about four to six months. At the moment there are three directors. “We are not happy about the continuous change of management. Although there are now three directors, progress is minimal,” explained Habîb. The current directors are Sa’îd ‘Âmir, head director, Lotfî ‘Abd al-Hamîd, an antiquities expert, and Muhammad ’Alî, head of general management and security.

Yasmin al-Shâzlî, head of Registration Collection Management and Documentation (RCMD) department, also drew attention to the managerial instability and frequent ministerial name changes from the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) to Ministry of State for Antiquities. al-Shâzlî pointed out that fear and paranoia of possible legal repercussions prevent signing requests, stifling any developments. Another key concern following the revolution is poor funding and corruption, which according to most employees has worsened. “The manner in which the artefacts are currently displayed is damaging them. We don’t have money for the
essential repair and conservation work,” said Habîb, elaborating that necessary repairs need to be made; the mummies must be delicately removed from the showcases and repaired by the conservation department.

According to Habîb, specific temperatures, special light and ultra violet glass is necessary to conserve the artefacts as sunlight is also damaging. The fragmenting of famous portraits from Shaykh ʿAbâda area in al-Minyâ further demonstrates the deprivation, as does Habîb’s mere request for a sum of LE4,000 ($573) to make urgent wood repairs. The portrait dates to the Roman Period and it was excavated by M. GÂYET in 1899. The material is encaustic on wood. Museum staff also stressed that the lack of resource is as rudimentary as basic office supplies, such as paper, ink and printing equipment.

“The main problem remains — corruption — as we do not receive allocated funds from donors, such as United Nation for Education Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) and Japan’s International Cooperation Agency (JICA),” suggested Amîra ʿIzzat from the restoration conservation department, highlighting her and fellow colleagues’ aspiration to establish an NGO to improve conditions.

In this regard, a “Friends” group is said to be underway, according to al-Shâzlî. This organisation is an NGO under the umbrella of Nahdat al-Mahrûsa and will handle a variety of issues ranging from funding, sponsorship, hiring experts and staff empowerment. “The current lack of governmental resources after the revolution, reinforces the necessity to establish ‘friends’ groups, following in the footsteps of all museums around the world,” affirmed al-Shâzlî. The group also aims to develop educational spheres in the museum that target tourists as well as Egyptians, who are too often sidelined. Discrimination towards Egyptians is another obstacle that requires attention, suggested the RCMD head. However, she concurrently admitted that prejudice has improved since the revolution, prior to when men wearing galabiyyas ‘cotton dress’ were not allowed.

In addition to the poor museum environment, the work conditions are not conducive to productivity. Most of the museum employees do not have uniforms (except the cleaning staff who have one change of clothes) and complain of being over worked and underpaid. “I am not happy with my job, I work six days a week and I am paid LE700 ($100) per month and only have one change of uniform,” stated one of the female cleaners. To safeguard her position, the cleaner asked to remain anonymous due to the museum security’s questioning reaction to her discussion with Ahram Online.

Furthermore, lack of motivation and purpose was a common complaint expressed by most employees. The museum guards in charge of protecting the artefacts often juggle two jobs because of low government wages, thus often appearing lethargic and unmotivated. Muhammad ʿAtâ, a young civilian dressed security guard stressed that although internal conditions have deteriorated, the security remains strong. However, the disappearance of museum objects since the revolution is another worrying phenomenon. “Some bronze statues were returned just a month ago,” explained Ahmad Malawânî, a 28-year-old police officer of the Tourism and Antiquities Police. Despite such mishaps, which most employees deny is a regular occurrence, the museum security system is applauded for successfully safeguarding the museum’s priceless antiquities.

Another major point of concern relates to the longstanding closure of the museum shop, which has not been in operation for the past two and a half years. Museum staff said this is a huge loss of revenue since at least approximately 90,000 tourists and locals frequent the museum each month. Its closure has also caused many people to lose their jobs since some of the museum products were locally produced.

Home to the world’s leading collection of ancient Egyptian artefacts, one of Cairo’s principal tourist attractions, the Egyptian museum’s decrepit conditions fail to reflect the magnitude of its contents. With the new museum, located in Gîza plateau, speculated to be completed within 3 years, experts anxiously contemplate the longstanding impact of the current inferior environment on the artefacts. The suppressed silence and fear of museum workers, often displayed by their unwillingness to publically voice concerns, is additionally worrisome. In view of the current state of affairs within the museum, experts advise
Egyptians to protect their heritage before the damage is irreparable or transferred into foreign hands as has occurred in the past. "Civil society's role cannot be underestimated," stressed al-Shâzlî. (Sarah El-Rashidi, “Egypt’s ancient artefacts crumble”, Al-Ahram Online, May 23, 2013).

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**Dimanche 26 mai 2013**

The Police and Royal Automobile Museums in Cairo’s Salâh al-Dîn Citadel were re-opened yesterday within Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) framework to restore and open new archaeological sites and museums to encourage tourism. The head of the museum department, Ahmad Sharaf said that both museums were closed for almost a year for restoration. Walls were consolidated; cracks that once spread all over its walls were filled and restored. Floors and tiles were cleaned and deteriorated ones were removed and replaced with new ones of similar materials. New ventilation and lighting system were installed and a new security system was connected to monitoring cameras and TV circuits. New guiding plates were also installed outside on the road leading to the museum as well as the visitors’ path inside. During the opening MSA Minister Ahmad ‘Îsâ told reporters that a rehabilitation project for some of the closed archaeological Citadel buildings is now being studied. This project aims to restore all these buildings and reopen them to the public.

The Police National Museum is located northwest of the Gran Muhammad ‘All Mosque. It was first open to visitors in 1986 and displayed a large collection of artefacts and objects related to the history of the Egyptian police to contemporary times. The museum’s six halls houses different collections of police weapons from the ancient Egyptian period to present, extending to Egypt’s Islamic era. Well-known crimes are also highlighted, such as the infamous Alexandrian sisters Rayya and Sakîna, who would lure women into their apartment to rob, kill and bury them in the basement of their home.

One hall is devoted to the police and Ismâ’îliyya citizens’ different struggles against the British colonisation. Another hall displays different police logos and costumes from the monarchy until the 1952 Revolution. A collection of counterfeiting devices is also on display at the museum, along with the oldest extinguisher cars used by Egyptians in the 18th and 19th century.

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**Lundi 27 mai 2013**

Graffiti on a temple wall in Luxor reads ‘Ding Jinhao was here’

A 15-year-old Chinese tourist has caused an international outcry after a picture of his graffiti on a wall of the ancient Luxor
Temple was shared on Chinese social networks. The message ‘Ding Jinhao was here’ scrawled over a carved scene on the temple wall depicting Alexander the Great was photographed by a group of Chinese tourists, who according to Chinese blogs failed in attempts to remove the marks. According to AFP, Jinhao was subsequently targeted by Chinese hackers, and his parents issued an apology to Egyptians and to the Chinese, saying that their son had “cried all night.”

The Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities told Ahram Online that it had assigned an archaeological committee to investigate the incident and examined the damages caused. The committee has reported that the marks made by Jinhao are superficial and can be easily removed. Minister Ahmad Ïsâ told Ahram Online that the section of the temple wall can easily be restored to its original appearance.

archaeological programmes and work towards reactivating projects on hold and to upgrade the skills of archaeologists and curators,” ʻĪsā told reporters. “Preserving Egypt’s priceless heritage is no easy task. My job is to embody a new vision and carry out an action plan to properly direct, develop, guard, protect and preserve them for future generations.”

To ensure that the action plan he has drawn up is executed consistently, ʻĪsā has embarked on inspection tours of sites and museums across the country, from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square to Alexandria, Luxor and Aswān. During his visits he meets with employees and listens to their problems. These tours, says ʻĪsā, have a spin-off benefit, demonstrating that Egypt and its archaeological sites are safe destinations for tourists.

Plugging security gaps at archaeological sites and removing all encroachments made during the last two years are high on his list of things to do, ʻĪsā added. “We could work towards this end in collaboration with the Tourism and Antiquities Police by providing better trained and armed security guards at all archaeological sites and museums and introducing the ministry’s guards to state-of-the-art security equipment. Archaeological inspectors should also be allowed to carry firearms in order to deter any attempted attacks on archaeological sites,” said ʻĪsā. Until 1986, he pointed out, inspectors routinely received firearms training. ʻĪsā also raised the possibility of calling on the Armed Forces to protect archaeological sites in instances where “the police fail to protect Egypt’s monuments”.

Key to the battle to end further encroachments, he argued, is to initiate a programme designed to raise cultural and archaeological awareness. This could be achieved by adding an archaeology course to the standard school curriculum. An additional benefit of such a move would be the job opportunities provided within the education sector for graduate archaeologists. The MSA is financed by income accrued from the sale of tickets to museums and archaeological sites. As tourism declined in the aftermath of Egypt’s revolution so did the ministry’s available funding.

ʻĪsā promised to review the MSA’s finances and speed up construction, development and restoration work put on hold in the last two years. Stalled projects include construction work on the Grand Egyptian Museum overlooking the Gîza Plateau, the National Museum for Egyptian Civilisation at Fustât and the decades-long restoration of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.

Over the coming couple of months ʻĪsā expects to be busy inaugurating archaeological sites and museums, including the newly restored National Police Museum and the Royal Automobile Museum at the Citadel and the first section of the Avenue of Sphinxes in Luxor. “We plan to begin removing encroachments on sites within weeks,” said ʻĪsā, beginning with Dahshûr. The police and army are now protecting Dahshûr around the clock, he said, and plans have already been drawn up to offer Dahshûr village residents an alternative site for their modern cemeteries.

Similarly, “chaos created on the Gîza Plateau by horse stable attendants will end within the month.” The MSA is seeking to regulate the presence of souvenir hawkers at archaeological sites by allocating kiosks to them within designated areas. “Vendors who violate MSA regulations or seek to work away from the allotted booths will have their licences withdrawn and be prevented from entering the archaeological area again,” said ʻĪsā. New regulations to safeguard tourists at archaeological sites from any harassment are also being drawn up in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism.

On the bureaucratic front, ʻĪsā is keen to inject new blood into the MSA Administrative Council, replenishing and adding to existing areas of expertise. “We are seeking to furnish the council with the means to furnish new and innovative ideas and to provide an institutional system that allows for independent archaeological work not personally linked to the minister to be pursued,” ʻĪsā told Al-Ahram Weekly. Other reforms include dividing the MSA into four main sections: Ancient Egyptian and Graeco-Roman and Islamic and Coptic archaeology and the Museums and Heritage sections.

On recent rumours that Fatimid mosques would be handed to Shia groups for restoration ʻĪsā pointed out that while they
were perfectly free to contribute to the costs of any restoration the donations would be purely altruistic. It was not a question of buying influence. In response to claims that the MSA is allowing the Bahara group to hold religious ceremonies in some mosques 'Isâ stressed that his ministry was mandated to protect architecturally significant mosques. The forms of ceremony they hosted were a matter for the Ministry of Religious Endowments. (Nevine El-Aref, “New minister, new plans”, Al-Ahram Weekly, May 29, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Les cadres de l’archéologie accueillent favorablement leur nouveau ministre », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’, 7 mai ; MENA, « ‘Isâ : Éradiquer la corruption fait partie de mes priorités », al-Yawm al-Sâbî’, 7 mai ; Mona Yâsîn, « ‘Isâ, le ministre de l’Archéologie, est un Frère Musulman déguisé », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 8 mai ; Nevine El-Aref, "New antiquities minister aims to ‘preserve, protect’ Egypt heritage", Al-Ahram Online, May 9 ; Nasma Réda, « Ahmad ‘Isâ, le nouvel homme fort des antiquités », Al-Ahram Hebdo, 16 mai).

The celebration included an exhibition of different Arabic manuscripts and navigation tools, with a focus on the forgotten manuscripts of Upper Egypt. The day also provided workshops for all ages, including a how-to session on the astrolabe, a sophisticated inclinometer that was used by navigators and astronomers in the past. Although invented during the time of Ancient Greece, the tool was further developed during the Islamic medieval period.

The opening witnessed speeches by Dr Khâlid ‘Azab, head of the manuscript section at Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and Dr ‘Abdallah Hamad Muharib, head of Arab League Education, Culture and Science Organisation. "If not for manuscripts and writing, our heritage would have been oral, which is impermanent and usually wastes away," said ‘Azab. During both their speeches, they called the manuscript a "creature", characterising it as a living thing that evolves the more it is analysed.

Some of the first Arabic manuscripts have survived for as long as 15 centuries, with all their contents intact for future generations. “Heritage has to be at the heart of culture,” Muharib said, underlining the importance of modern analysis of manuscripts. He blamed Arab universities for not focusing on manuscripts in their curriculums, and not pushing scholars to further analyse them; usually, he says, they just copy the contents of the manuscripts for preservation, and leave it at that. He added that this is an act of ignorance given how “manuscripts connected modern societies with earlier ones”.

Muharib added that modern culture should not be resisted, but rather incorporated into analysis of ancient manuscripts in order to put things in context. “Heritage refuses isolation,” he said. To bridge the gap, he also pressed for the inclusion of the public in the process — one of the main reasons, he said, for the founding of Arabic Manuscript Day. “Heritage should be the concern of all, not just the cultural elite,” he explained. (Thoraia Abou Bakr, “Bayt al-Sinnâr celebrates Arabic manuscripts”, Daily News Egypt, May 29, 2013).
Jeudi 30 mai 2013

Une nouvelle vallée des baleines en Égypte ? La récente découverte d'un nouveau site à Wâdî al-Hîtân, renfermant des fossiles de baleines, soulève l'intérêt des paléontologues. Le site en question est situé près de l'ancienne vallée des baleines au Fayûm. Le ministère des Antiquités entend soumettre une demande à l'Unesco, afin d'intégrer le nouveau site à la liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco.

Le ministère des Antiquités vient de soumettre une demande dans ce sens à l'agence onusienne. « Cette découverte est la plus importante dans le monde arabe et africain durant les deux dernières années. Nous avons demandé que cette région soit incluse dans la liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco en tant que prolongement de Wâdî al-Hîtân », explique Khâlid Sa’d, archéologue au ministère des Antiquités. Dans son numéro spécial de février 2013, le magazine National Geographic parle de la découverte de la nouvelle vallée des baleines au Fayûm.

L'histoire de cette découverte remonte à 2010 lorsque des hommes d'affaires ont demandé l'autorisation de bâtir un complexe hôtelier dans la zone située à 85 km de Wâdî al-Hîtân, seule réserve naturelle égyptienne inscrite sur la liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco en 2005. « Pour obtenir l'autorisation de construire, il faut l'accord du ministère des Antiquités. Celui-ci a envoyé une mission archéologique afin de s'assurer que la vallée est dépourvue de toutes sortes d'antiquités. La grande surprise a été de constater que cette région est riche en squelettes de vertébrés », déclare Sa’d, directeur de la mission égyptienne opérant sur site. Durant la période qui a suivi la révolution, les fouilles ont été interrompues sur le site. Et la découverte n'a été rendue publique qu'en décembre dernier.

Le site s'étend sur une superficie de 10 km². Jusqu'à présent, les archéologues ont sorti des sables 18 squelettes de baleines, de crocodiles, de tortues et certaines espèces de gazelles. Outre ces fossiles, des centaines de pièces de monnaie de différents siècles ont également été retrouvées sur le site. « Ces squelettes et fossiles de baleines du genre Basilosaurus et Dorudon datent de 42 millions d'années. Ils font entre 6 et 18 m de long. En plus, on a trouvé une baleine complète d'un genre unique ». Ces découvertes peuvent aider à mieux comprendre l'évolution géologique et climatique de la Terre. Car il y a des millions d'années, cette région était couverte par les eaux de la mer de Thetys avant que la Méditerranée et le Nil ne se forment.


pour éclairer et sécuriser les temples de Louqsor », al-Watan, 30 mai).
al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayyib called on Egypt’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several leaders of international organisations to stop the auction of a 19th century Quran manuscript at Paris Fontainebleau Osenat House, scheduled for sale on June 9. al-Tayyib asked Egypt’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Muhammad Kâmil ‘Alî ‘Amr, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) chairman Irina BOKOVA and Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) director general Abdel Aziz Altawaijri to take action against the sale of the rare manuscript that dates back to the Ottoman era.

According to the auction house catalogue, the manuscript shows the first three pages of the Quran connected to a brown leather notebook with a smooth spine and gilded decoration. The front consists of a net covering with ornaments to spandrels and a central mandorla decorated with interlacing handwritten European digits. The manuscript has a used binder with split back, old restorations, and detached guards, renewed in the early 19th century. The manuscript shows the two first surah of the Quran: al-Fâtiha (the opening) and Souret al-Baqara. The calligraphy is written in brown ink with some signs and hyphenation written in red ink. The manuscript presents three illuminated pages, which the general title and incipit of the two surahs are in blue, red, green and golden ink.

The catalogue mentioned that the provenance of such a manuscript is from Cairo’s al-Azhar Mosque and mentioned that Jean Joseph Marcel, an owner of a library handwrote “This script was part of the books of the mosque at al-Azhar Kaire. It was saved from pillage and fire the days when this mosque was taken by the French on the revolts of the city who had their general neighbourhood…” al-Azhar Mosque, cultural centre of the Arab world, and a symbol of the revolt against BONAPARTE in Cairo. The tax measures, safety and hygiene taken by the French soon made the Muslim population feel belittled and aroused fitna (rebellion) on 21 October 1798.

No action was taken to stop the sale as the French auction house refused to not sell the manuscript since it was taken out of Egypt before 1970. According to a UNESCO convention on the protection of cultural property, no objects of cultural heritage could be excavated or exported from a source nation without elaborate permissions from the national government after 1970. It also prohibited and prevented the illicit Import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property in combat and conflict. Accordingly, the manuscript was out of Egypt legally.

Usâma al-Nahhâs, reporter at the ISESCO and director of the department of the repatriation of antiquities, called for the immediate return of such rare manuscript because it was taken from Egypt during the French expedition, which is against the UNESCO convention that stipulates the prevention and prohibition of illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property in a combat, conflict and colonised country. “The French expedition led by Napoleon BONAPARTE was a colonisation,” said al-Nahhâs. He also asks UNESCO and ISESCO to issue an amendment of their 1970 convention in order to implement such regulation to antiquities, prohibiting the legal and illegal trading of items before 1970.
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Until now, no concrete action has been taken, yet Egypt continues to take all steps to stop such auction and restitute the manuscript. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt requests French auction house stop sale of Quran manuscript”, Ahram Online, June 2, 2013. Voir également MENA, « L’ambassade d’Égypte en France tente de stopper la vente d’un exemplaire exceptionnel du Coran », al-Shuruq, 3 juin ; « Des contacts visant à arrêter la vente d’un manuscrit exceptionnel du Coran », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 4 juin).

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Ahmad ‘Îsâ, et l’ambassadeur de l’Union Européenne (UE) au Caire, James MORAN, ont examiné hier les mesures à adopter pour concrétiser la proposition européenne de jumelage avec l’Égypte en matière de lutte contre le trafic d’antiquités et de restitution des pièces archéologiques pillées. Ceci à travers la création, au Caire et dans les pays de l’UE, d’une administration spécialisée dans la lutte contre le trafic archéologique. Selon le ministre, ce jumelage vise à transmettre à l’Égypte l’expertise européenne en matière de lutte contre le trafic d’antiquités.


Mardi 4 juin 2013

Hundred of Egypt’s ministry of antiquities employees closed the doors of the Egyptian Museum in downtown Cairo’s Tahrîr Square, barring tourists from entering as they voice demands for better benefits. Archaeologists, managers and security guards on strike demand permanent contracts for 4065 employees, better wages in all ministry sectors and to purge the ministry of corruption. The Tourism Police unsuccessfully attempted to convince the protesters to end their strike and head to the ministry headquarter in Zamalek to set their demands directly with the minister. The antiquities minister points out that his approval of permanent contracts is dependent on the approval of the finance ministry.

The issues of permanent contracts and wages are not new, however. In February 2012, for example, employees protested for the same demands in front of the antiquities ministry headquarters. Around 275,000 employees have

Mardi 3 juin 2013

An embassy message earlier this week urged Americans to “elevate their situational awareness” when visiting the pyramids because of a “lack of visible security or police” presence there. It noted incidents of “angry groups of individuals surrounding and pounding” on cars with visitors, sometimes trying to open car doors.
been granted permanent contracts since the 2011 uprisings out of an estimated 500,000 government employees on temporary contracts, according to data from the Central Agency for Organisation and Administration.

Around 5.8 million people work for the public administration; a figure that will likely climb to 6.3 million if temporary workers are finally granted tenure. Accordingly, the wages and benefits of public-sector workers are expected to grow by 21 percent in the 2013/14 budget to LE172 billion, accounting for 25 percent of total expenditures – up from 24 percent in the current fiscal year budget. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt’s archaeology museum closed by labour protest”, Ahram Online, June 4, 2013. Voir également Yâsmîn al-Giyûshî, « Le personnel du ministère de l’Archéologie manifeste devant le Musée Égyptien », al-Dustûr, 4 juin ; Muna Yâsîn, « Le personnel du ministère de l’Archéologie ferme le Musée Égyptien », al-Masrî al-Yawm, 5 juin).

Mercredi 5 juin 2013

The director-general of the Repatriation of Antiquities Department (RAD) at the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) has resigned. Usâma al-Nahhâs said he made the decision because a lack of cooperation by other departments at the MSA left him unable to carry out his duties. al-Nahhâs submitted his resignation to Antiquities Minister Ahmad ‘Îsâ on Wednesday. al-Nahhâs told Ahram Online that since he had joined the department in December 2012 his work had been stifled by the failure of other MSA departments to cooperate with him.

Most MSA departments failed to provide RAD with detailed information to help us establish an accurate database of lost artifacts, al-Nahhâs said. The other departments also failed to help RAD produce a list of sales at foreign auction halls. MSA departments also failed to provide documents concerning police reports on thefts, the identity of missing objects or details on MSA ownership. These documents, al-Nahhâs said, are of great importance for preventing auction sales and retrieving lost artifacts. But, he went on to say, RAD created and executed its own new working technique in order to recover illegally smuggled antiquities.

In the first year, al-Nahhâs said, RAD recovered 71 objects. “Although such work was praised by the foreign ministry and international authorities, no concrete collaboration was shown by other departments at the MSA,” al-Nahhâs said. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt’s Repatriation of Antiquities head resigns”, Ahram Online, June 5, 2013).


On Wednesday, Mustafa Amin, secretary general of the Supreme Council of
Antiquities (SCA), inaugurated the Abbey Church of the Apostles in Atfîh town in Gîza governorate after the completion of its restoration with a budget that reached LE6 million. The opening came within the framework of a drive by the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) to save the Coptic shrine and to open more sites to tourists, in order to encourage the tourism industry.

The church, like other Coptic and Islamic monuments located in rural areas, had suffered serious damage, including from high sub-soil water levels, high levels of humidity, and an outdated and decayed sewerage system installed 100 years ago. This in addition to the adverse effects of the earthquake in 1992, which increased the number of cracks in the church structure.

Muhammad al-Shaykha, head of the Projects Sector at the MSA, told Ahram Online that the restoration work was carried out according to the latest scientific methods. The restoration project was conducted in two phases, the first starting more than 10 years ago and aimed to decrease sub-soil water levels and to prevent water leakage in the future. The second phase, al-Shaykha said, started six years ago. It aimed at strengthening the church's foundations and protecting them from future damage. This was achieved using the “micro-pile system” which, he explained, entailed the installation of sharp pointed columns beneath the church's archaeological complex to reinforce its foundations. The walls were reinforced, missing and decayed stones were replaced, and masonry cleaned and desalinated.

Amîn pointed out that the church has a very distinguished basilica architectural style built on 400 square metres. It is known as the Domes Church as its ceilings are decorated with 12 domes representing the 12 disciples of Jesus. It also has three altars — the father of the Apostles, Saint Anthony and the Virgin Mary. At the church’s eastern wall an ancient Egyptian inscribed stelae from the reign of New Kingdom King Ramses was discovered. It depicts Ramses II giving offerings before the goddess Hathor and has hieroglyphic text showing the king’s different titles and names.


The looting of antiquities sites, both urban and rural, is continuing throughout Egypt, contributing to the dramatic loss of the country’s heritage. Unfortunately, with police and military presence at archaeological and urban sites still insufficient, there is no one to stop the looting. The increase in looting is allied to the worsening economic situation in Egypt, coupled with the lack of security. People still think that Pharaonic sites are filled with gold and treasures, just waiting to be dug up, so now, with no one to stop them, more people are looking for the nearest place where they can go dig for gold, then other artefacts that they can sell for immediate revenue. This idea that gold is readily available is an old and mistaken one; few Pharaonic era tombs had a lot of gold, and most of those had been robbed at least 200 years ago, if not longer.

Recently, sites in Banî Swayf in particular have suffered acutely from looters; in fact, if one asks to rent a car to go to Banî
Swayf, the drivers casually ask, "Oh, you are going to buy antiquities. I know someone who can help you," as we know from personal experience. Abû Sîr al-Maleq is now considered the best place to buy "coloured sarcophagi". In most of the public cafés in the city centre, and particularly in al-Wasta, antiquities dealing is a common daily practice. All one has to do is to sit in a café, look like a stranger and wait to be approached by someone who has artefacts for sale. Much of this material is probably coming from two important sites in the area, namely al-Hîba and Abû Sîr al-Maleq.

2000 year-old human remains are scattered across the site after the looters contaminated the site and ruined it. (Photo by Monica Hanna)

The police has reported several cases of illicit digging at both sites. The modern village of Abû Sîr al-Maleq is of approximately 20,000 inhabitants, according to the 2006 national consensus, and lies about 10 km from Maydûm. The archaeological site lies right behind the village’s church and is composed of 500 acres of land that was inhabited from at least 3250 BCE until about 700 CE, containing the entire history of Egypt until just after the Arab Conquest.

The identity of the people carrying out the looting is not certain, but they seem to be from every walk of life. In addition to local looters, organised gangs from other places in the Nile Valley are also digging at the site. Once gently undulating sand, the site is now a pockmarked lunar landscape with dense scatters of mummy wrappings pulled off bodies, and huge piles of bones. Wrapped limbs and heads of people who were buried here more than 2000 years ago now lie dismembered and scattered about the site. Obviously, several artefacts have been recovered from here; the pillagers hide their loot on-site in convenient tombs and covered by desiccated reeds and maize stalks.

In addition to coloured sarcophagi and coffins that are offered for sale in the area, shabtis, amulets, glazed ceramics, pots, bead necklaces, bead bracelets, and chunks of inscription, hacked out of the limestone walls, are on offer. Dealers of various levels are clearly coming to buy objects here, and then taking them to their stores or distribution points in both rural and urban locations. The smaller objects are of higher prices because they can be smuggled easier outside of Egypt while a complete sarcophagus with its mummy might be of a lower price due to the difficulty in its transportation.

All of the sites that are being looted are suffering, as objects are being ripped undocumented from their contexts, without which the knowledge that they can impart is greatly diminished. The case of Abû Sîr al-Maleq is particularly tragic, as it has never been fully excavated. The site has connections to Osiris, god of the dead, and was of great religious significance.

One of the most ancient sections, containing the graves of the Nagada II (3250-3050 BCE) era, was excavated by Otto RUBENSOHN in 1902-04. He also found 18th Dynasty burials as well as priestly graves of the Late Period (712-332 BCE). A black sarcophagus belonging to Pakhus, currently in the Maydûm storage house, has been found in the area. In 1905-06 Georg MÖLLER also found burials of the Second Intermediate/Hyksos period (1640-1532 BCE). The archaeology of the Hyksos period is limited, with the majority of evidence coming from the Delta. Thus, any site with evidence of the history of that era, particularly one from this part of Egypt, is a treasure.

In addition to these tombs, a temple of
the 30th Dynasty was also found near the village mosque. Caliph Marwân al-Ja‘di (744-751) of the Umayyad Dynasty is also said to have died very close to the monastery of Abû Sîr al-Maleq; a vase belonging to him said to have been found in the area is currently on display in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. Although some archaeological work has been carried out at Abû Sîr al-Maleq, enormous parts of it have never been scientifically investigated and it was a site filled with potential to better understand the history of Egypt, particularly in its very early and late phases.

Egyptian state bodies, civil society organisations and citizens all need to act immediately and work together for the protection of the country’s archaeological heritage. The different stakeholders of Egyptian heritage need to get actively involved in the study, protection and preservation of this heritage. Egypt’s future lies in its past, and with its loss, lies a dim future with lesser opportunities for the coming generations.

The potential Egypt has through its palimpsest of culture is enormous; its unique assets should provide economic and nationalistic values for its citizens. Each object that goes on the antiquities market loses its context and so loses its own history and that of the period it represents. It is like losing different pieces of a massive jigsaw. It is a tragedy that we will not know more about those who lived and died here, in Abû Sîr al-Maleq; their beliefs and their lives. Only salvage archaeology can help at this point, and should be encouraged, or we will lose all evidence of Egypt’s rich past in this area. (Monica Hanna and Salima Ikram, “Looting Egypt: Abû Sîr al-Maleq”, Daily News Egypt, June 5, 2013).

In addition, Isâ continued, the MSA is planning special campaigns to raise cultural awareness of the value of Egypt’s antiquities — this part of an effort to revive the country’s vital tourism industry. It is hoped that the plan will put an end to chaos at the Gîza Plateau, in Dahshûr, in Historic Cairo and Matarîyya, as well as all archaeological sites that have been looted or encroached upon in the last two years. (Nevine El-Aref, “Antiquities ministry tightens security at archaeological sites and museums”, Ahram Online, June 8, 2013).

Samedi 8 juin 2013

Thirty days into holding Egypt’s antiquities portfolio, Ahmad Isâ has lodged a comprehensive plan with the interior ministry for securing museums and archaeological sites across the country. Isâ told Ahram Online that the plan aims not only to tighten security, but also to remove all negative encroachments on Egypt’s museums and archaeological sites due of a lack of security nationwide since the January 2011 revolution. In collaboration with the interior ministry, Isâ explains, a comprehensive training programme for guards and security personnel of the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) is to be organised soon. “We are working in collaboration with the tourism and antiquities police to provide better trained and armed security guards at all archaeological sites and museums, as well as introducing state-of-the-art security equipment,” said Isâ.

In addition, Isâ continued, the MSA is planning special campaigns to raise cultural awareness of the value of Egypt’s antiquities — this part of an effort to revive the country’s vital tourism industry. It is hoped that the plan will put an end to chaos at the Gîza Plateau, in Dahshûr, in Historic Cairo and Matarîyya, as well as all archaeological sites that have been looted or encroached upon in the last two years. (Nevine El-Aref, “Antiquities ministry tightens security at archaeological sites and museums”, Ahram Online, June 8, 2013).

Dimanche 9 juin 2013

L’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (Ifao) organise le mois prochain une conférence sous le thème de “Le IVe millénaire : deux traditions culturelles et un processus d’acculturation”. Le IVe millénaire dans la vallée du Nil est une période d’accélération culturelle qui va mener, au tout début du IIIe millénaire, à l’émergence de l’État. Deux ensembles culturels, distincts essentiellement par leurs traditions funéraires, se font face : la culture dite de Basse-Égypte, au nord, et la culture de Naqada, au sud, issues l’une et l’autre de la mise en place d’un Néolithique tardif dans cette région du nord-est africain. Au milieu du IVe millénaire, les traits dominants de l’ensemble de Basse-Égypte s’effacent, remplacés par ceux issus de la culture naqadienne. Ce processus d’acculturation aboutira à une unification culturelle, prélude d’une unification politique.

Ces problématiques rejoignent celles de trois programmes scientifiques de l’Ifao : Cultures matérielles de la fin du Néolithique à

**Mardi 11 juin 2013**

The last few weeks have seen the release of several reports citing the lack of security of monuments and archaeological sites throughout the country. In May, UNESCO threatened to declassify several Egyptian heritage sites, while the US Embassy issued a warning regarding the safety within the parameters of the Pyramids of Giza last week.

On 8 June 2013, the Ministry of Antiquities issued a statement addressing the security situation, in which Minister of Antiquities Dr Ahmad ‘İsâ confirmed coordination between his ministry and that of the interior, specifically the tourism police and monuments security. The statement also explained that a plan with the police and the ministry of interior is currently underway to establish a number of contingencies, and allow for changes in the future if need be. It also reported that a programme is being planned for a re-evaluation of the monuments’ security personnel, who will also be given seminars on the value of the monuments to stress the job’s importance. The ministry spokesman confirmed that the “sites that are open to visitors are being secured by the police”. However, he explained that archaeological sites are “protected by the ministry of antiquities security personnel”. He also denied that the Armed Forces have been given the task of securing any monuments or archaeological sites.

One particular archaeological site in Dahshûr has suffered greatly from illegal encroachments and construction, prompting archaeologists and locals to demonstrate, demanding an increase in security personnel. About three days after the protest, the army was deployed to protect the site. On Saturday, archaeologist Monica Hanna gave an update of the situation on her Facebook page: “The army is still in position; the site has been secure for the past 3 weeks. The modern cemetery will start to be evacuated in 10 days by the army. Looting has almost stopped.”

Khâlid Fathî, one of the founders of an organisation to protect Egyptian heritage called the Leadership and Heritage Society, and an eyewitness to the situation in Dahshûr, confirmed that the army was still on the scene. When asked about the tourist police, he explained “They were here before the army was deployed, but they were not doing their jobs properly; that is why there were illegal encroachments. They think their only task is to protect the tourists that visit the monuments.” He added that no one has been able to trespass on the site since the deployment of the army. However, he fears their presence may be short-lived. “We were told that the army is leaving soon, but we don’t know exactly when that will happen,” Fathî said. (Thoraia Abou Bakr, “Ministry of Antiquities issues a statement regarding monuments’ security”, Daily News Egypt, June 11, 2013. Voir également « Renforcement de la sécurité à Gîza pour rassurer les touristes », al-Bashâyyir, 3 juin ; Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie forme une commission pour résoudre les problèmes de la zone archéologique des pyramides », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 13 juin).

**Mercredi 12 juin 2013**

Le temple de Karnak a témoigné l’inauguration du projet de restauration de la chapelle rouge de la reine Hatchepsout à Louxor. Cette chapelle édifiée à base de calcaire, et d’une hauteur de presque 5 mètres, a été dédiée à Amon, Dieu de Thèbes. Elle se caractérise par ses beaux motifs ainsi que par des paysages reflétant l’art à l’époque de la XIXe dynastie. Les motifs comprennent des scènes de la reine Hatchepsout et son époux le pharaon Thoutmosis II. Selon les égyptologues, la chapelle occupe une grande importance car elle représente la puissance d’Hatchepsout avant son règne sur l’Égypte.

Cette inauguration a eu lieu dans le cadre du début de la réunion annuelle du Centre Franco-Égyptien d’Études des Temples
de Karnak en présence du secrétaire général du Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, M. Mustafa Amin, du directeur de l’Institut Français d’Égypte Dr Jean-Luc Lavaud, du président du secteur des antiquités égyptiennes, M. Abdil Husayn ainsi que de nombre de professeurs français d’antiquités. À l’issue de cette réunion, le portail en ligne des temples de Karnak a été lancé, créé par le centre, visant à rendre accessible la documentation textuelle issue des temples de Karnak. Ce travail est fondé sur un dépouillement exhaustif des documents et inscriptions de Karnak.


On Wednesday, the newly-established National Committee of Egyptian Archaeological Sites (NCEAS), held its first meeting at the Ministry of State for Antiquities. Members discussed several issues concerning the protection of Egyptian archaeological sites registered on the World Heritage List, run by UNESCO. Several archaeological sites, including some not on the World Heritage List, have suffered from negligence and the lack of security since the 2011 revolution, particularly those sites that come under the supervision of more than one ministry. These include a number of Fatimid, Mameluk and Ottoman-era mosques in Historic Cairo, which are affiliated with the ministry of religious endowments but under the supervision of the antiquities ministry.

The committee, headed by antiquities minister Ahmad Isâ, consists of representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs, international cooperation, religious endowments, environment, irrigation as well as representatives from the governor’s offices of Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Aswan and South Sinai. The committee aims to provide experts in different fields in order to properly and efficiently manage the Egyptian sites registered on the World Heritage List, as well as developing more sites so they might be included on the list. It will also draw up plans to better protect these sites and make them more tourist-friendly.

Usâma al-Nahhâs, chairman of the committee, told Ahram Online that they had asked UNESCO to provide training programmes for antiquities ministry curators and archaeologists on the procedures necessary to include sites on the list. He explained that a special unit would be established to provide all the required information on the sites that were subjected to encroachment, and to respond to any ongoing issues. Al-Nahhâs said that this unit would also raise archaeological and cultural awareness among the general population and make them aware of the value and importance of monuments and heritage.

Egypt has seven sites on the World Heritage List — Abû Minâ Monastery in Alexandria, Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis in Luxor, Historic Cairo, Nubian monuments from Abû Simbil to Philae, Memphis and its necropolis (the pyramid fields from Giza to Dahshûr), and the Saint Catherine monastery in Sinai. The only natural site on the list is Wâdî al-Hitân in Fayûm. There are 32 sites on the ‘tentative’ list, including Siwa archaeological area, the temple of Sirâbût al-Khâdim, the North Sinai archaeological sites zone, the Temple of Hathor, Kom Ûshîm in Fayûm, Wâdî Fayrân, and Pharaoh Island. (Nevine El-Aref, “New committee will oversee Egyptian sites on World Heritage List”, Ahram Online, June 12, 2013. Voir également Luiz Sanchez, “Antiquities ministry forms National Committee on heritage sites”, Daily News Egypt, June 13).
Al-Mawrid al-Thaqâfi, a non-profit organisation that supports culture in the Arab world, has expressed its dismay at a decision by Egypt’s antiquities ministry to prevent the organisation’s usage of a historical site in ‘Antar Stable, an under-privileged area in Cairo, for a culture event. The culture ministry, according to the organisation, requested a fee of LE22,000 for the one-night event. According to Al-Mawrid al-Thaqâfi, the deserted site is currently being used as a rubbish dump and is home to stray dogs.

The organisation wanted to use the space to host the closing event of a series of workshops under the project ‘Hope for Work’ in ‘Antar Stable and another underprivileged area, Khairallah Farm. This particular site was chosen for its location between both areas, to allow the residents and children of the neighbourhood to showcase their artwork after working with the project, and to raise awareness of the value of arts and culture and their rights to access culture. “Those responsible for this at the antiquities ministry should be prosecuted for the poor state this heritage site is in,” Basma al-Husayni, general manager of Al-Mawrid al-Thaqâfi said in a press release. “I am not surprised at the situation with the ministry, as this is completely natural in light of the state seeing itself as an enemy of the people.”

According to Egyptian law, the Ministry of State for Antiquities has the right to rent out heritage sites for events in return for a fee. In the past, the ministry would sometimes give the sites to projects for free, or become an official partner, instead of asking for payment. The event was eventually hosted on Tuesday 11 June at a nearby youth centre. The event included exhibitions of the works produced during the workshops in the neighbourhood, as well as circus and percussion performances by al-Darb al-Ahmâr School and a concert by Muhammad Muhsin. The event also featured a market for local handicrafts. The ‘Work for Hope’ project was launched by Al-Mawrid al-Thaqâfi to offer cultural assistance to communities suffering in Egypt and Syria, by providing these communities with tools of expression, learning, creativity, forgiveness and communication. (Nevine El-Aref, “Cultural non-profit complains of lack of access to Egyptian heritage site thanks to high fee”, Ahram Online, June 12, 2013. Voir également Ibrahim Mûsa, « Le ministère de l'Archéologie exige 22 000 L.E. pour autoriser la tenue d'une célébration gratuite pour les habitants d'Istabl 'Antar », al-Dustûr, 11 juin ; Sâra 'Abd al-Muhsin, « Al-Mawrid al-Thaqâfi dénonce l'attitude du ministère de l'Archéologie », al-Yawm al-Sâbi', 11 juin).

The Ministry of State for Antiquities stated that they are awaiting the green light from the Cairo Governorate in order to begin reviewing and renovating the city’s antiquities, which are replete with relics and ruins from the Middle East’s various religious groups. The move comes as part of an effort to jump-start the tourism sector. Muhammad 'Abd al-'Azîz, director of the Old Cairo Development Project, and director of the Office for the Ministry of State for Antiquities, said that monuments up for renovation and review are primarily those located in Islamic and Coptic Cairo. He added that attempts to renovate and repair Cairo’s antiquities and the districts they are located in would help increase tourism rates, particularly in the Old Cairo district, which includes the ‘Amr ibn al-‘Âas Mosque, in addition to a number of old Coptic churches and Jewish synagogues.

He stated that the Ministry was simply awaiting approval from Cairo Governor Usâma Kamâl in order to begin renovations. Kamâl first introduced the idea to renovate Egypt’s antiquities during a festival, which took place in the al-Fustât market. The renovation process will take place in cooperation with the Arab Association for Science, Culture and Development, the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Authority. (Basma Ragab, “Antiquities Ministry awaiting green light to renovate Cairo antiquities”, Daily News Egypt, June 12, 2013).

**Lundi 17 juin 2013**

Currently, the world of archaeology looks to Egypt as experts seek ways to save ancient Antinopolis. Hurriyet photo

According to The Art Newspaper, leading archaeologists have denounced the poor state of conservation of the Roman remains at Antinopolis in Egypt, the city built by Emperor Hadrian, who ruled Rome from 117 A.D. to 138 A.D. The revolution that swept through the country in 2011 and the subsequent exit of its president, Husnî Mubârak, who is currently in jail facing corruption charges, have affected the security and conservation of many historical sites in the country, especially those that are far from major city centers. Antinopolis, located near the Nile over 30 kilometer south of the nearest large town, Minyâ, is a perfect target.

Until recently, the Roman hippodrome there was still intact, although it has now been swallowed by the ever-expanding cemetery for the neighbouring small town called Shaykh ‘Ibâda. Out of the four hippodromes built by the Romans in Egypt, this was the only one that survived. Large areas are being prepared for redevelopment and parts of the ancient necropolis on the north of the site have already been converted into farmland, reported The Art Newspaper.

According to The Art Newspaper, Rosario PINTAUDI, an Italian archaeologist from the Vitelli Papyrological Institute, Florence, has raised the alarm and involved other leading archaeologists, such as Jay HEIDEL, from Chicago University’s Oriental Institute, to bring the issue to the attention of the Egyptian authorities. PINTAUDI claims that, thanks to American involvement, he obtained a meeting with Muhammad Ibrâhîm, the minister of antiquities, who only promised to address the matter when he realized that a nearby temple, built by Rameses II, is also under threat. “It’s a battle,” said PINTAUDI, “groups of children pass by us, grinning, armed with spades with which they dig out artefacts and sell them. People don’t like our presence here.”

Raymond JOHNSON, the director of the archaeological mission from the University of Chicago in Luxor, said: “This is a disgrace, it’s a real tragedy. After the meeting with the minister they increased the number of guards, but many of them are from the same families as those that pillage the site.” (“Battle for Egypt’s ancient Roman site: Antinopolis”, Daily News Egypt, June 17, 2013).

**Mardi 18 juin 2013**

At the Hyksos fort at Tell al-Yahûdiyya area in al-Qalyûbiyya governorate in northern Egypt, an Egyptian excavation mission by the Ministry of State for Antiquities has stumbled upon an ancient Egyptian town from the Middle Kingdom, which dates from approximately 2000 BC to 1700 BC. The town includes a residential area with a collection of houses and royal palaces, as well as a four metre-tall mud brick fortress and a necropolis with a large number of rock-hewn tombs. A collection of lamps, amulets, clay pots, scarabs and faience floor
tiles that were once used to decorate the palace of the New Kingdom kings Merenptah and Ramses II were also unearthed. A collection of mud brick tombs from the Hyksos era was also found, as were remains of a temple dedicated to the god Sotekh who was worshipped during the Hyksos era was also unearthed.

‘Âdil Husayn, head of the ancient Egyptian department at the antiquities ministry, said that excavation mission in Tell al-Yahûdiyya area was resumed after having been stopped after the January 2011 revolution. He pointed out that such a site is very important as it reveals the daily life of ancient Egyptians from the New Kingdom until the Graeco-Roman era. The town was also important from a military point of view, Husayn said, saying that excavations had shown that the town was surrounded by a wall to protect it. (Nevin El-Aref, “Excavation uncovers ancient Egyptian town in northern Egypt”, Ahram Online, June 18, 2013. Voir également Reuters, « Découvertes de vestiges d’une ville pharaonique au Nord du Caire », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 18 juin ; Nasma Réda, « Les Hyksôs livrent leurs secrets », Al-Ahrâm Hebdo, 27 juin).

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Ahmad ‘Îsâ, a décidé la création d’un service chargé de la coordination entre l’Égypte et l’Afrique dans le domaine archéologique. Ce nouveau service sera chargé de renforcer le rôle joué par l’Égypte dans le continent noir, notamment avec les pays riverains du Nil. Ce service mettra en place de nombreux protocoles de coopération, de mémorandums et d’accords bilatéraux entre l’Égypte et les pays africains dans le domaine archéologique.


Mercredi 19 juin 2013

When Egypt’s new antiquities law was approved by parliament in February 2010, it was described as an important step forward in the protection of Egypt’s heritage since it would provide better protection than the previous Law 117/1983, which imposed too lenient penalties for trafficking. The new law prohibited all antiquities trading and cancelled the 10 per cent of unexcavated objects previously granted to the foreign excavation missions that had discovered them.

However, now that the Shura Council has taken over legislative powers in Egypt, Fathî Shihâb, head of the council’s culture, tourism and media committee, has announced that the committee will call for modifications to the antiquities law as it had several “deficiencies” that needed to be addressed. Shihâb told Sabâh al-Khayr magazine that the law was unconstitutional because it prevented individuals from disposing of their property freely.

The deficiencies of the pre-2010 law had been due to the fact that it had been drafted a century ago and its makers had not been archaeologists. Shihâb said that the new law’s drafters had also treated Khufu’s Pyramid like a 100-year-old palace, for example. The new law also “does not well understand the nature of Egypt’s historical eras and the value of monuments or artefacts,” Shihâb said, adding that a proposed amendment to the law would be to redefine the term “antiquity” and classify antiquities into three eras and not just one. The idea of monumental churches and mosques being used for worship was not clearly enunciated in the law, he said, which did not clearly identify the different ways of using a monument. This, Shihâb claimed, allowed antiquities inspectors to “bully” the owners of archaeological sites.

For monuments and artefacts dating to the 19th century and more recently, the amended law would allow individuals to own these and would give greater incentives for their maintenance. These monuments or
artefacts, Shihâb explained, should be classified into three levels according to terms of ownership, nature and usage.

However, a former legal consultant to the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) who had the lion’s share in drafting the articles of the antiquities law in 2010 described the reasons given to amend the law as “illogical”. According to Ashraf al-‘Ashmâwî, amending the new antiquities law for the given reasons simply showed that the whoever suggested them was “unfamiliar with the current antiquities law or any other previous laws concerning antiquities”. al-‘Ashmâwî said that those who had drafted the law had been archaeologists and that this had been standard practice for a century. According to reports and documents from previous committees, three-quarters of those drafting the antiquities law had been archaeologists.

The committee that had drafted the 2010 antiquities law, al-‘Ashmâwî pointed out, had included dozens of archaeologists, among them ‘Alî Radwân, former dean of the Faculty of Archaeology at Cairo University, Zâhî Hawwâs, a former minister of antiquities, the heads of the five MSA antiquities sections and a dozen Supreme Council of Antiquities inspectors, as well as a financial expert, a representative of the Ministry of Tourism and a legal consultant. “Where did Shihâb get the idea that most of the people who had worked on the law were lawyers and not archaeologists?” al-‘Ashmâwî asked.

He also described Shihâb’s statement about the private ownership of antiquities as being obsolete, adding that stories of antiquities inspectors “bullying” such people were “unfounded”. Shihâb “has not read the first article of the recent law,” he said. This article not only deals with properties that are more than 100 years old, as Shihâb had said, but it also defined an “antiquity” as a building or object that was a product of Egyptian civilisation or any other civilisation. It could be a product of art, science or religion found on Egyptian soil from the pre-historic era up to 100 years before the present, al-‘Ashmâwî said. According to the new law, the idea of an antiquity covered any item of historical, archaeological or artistic value that had contributed to Egyptian civilisation or that had been created in Egypt by any other civilisation. It also covered anything produced in Egypt or bearing any relation to Egypt’s history. All human remains could be considered to be potential antiquities, he said.

al-‘Ashmâwî said that the law correctly identified antiquities as objects that were not like those described by Shihâb. Not anything that was 100 years old could necessarily be thought of as an antiquity, he said, though this was a standard period in international antiquities laws. “No one said that the Khufu Pyramid had the same value as any other monument or historic palace,” al-‘Ashmâwî said, suggesting that “such a statement does not have a concrete meaning, but is instead designed for media consumption.”

The value of a monument or an antiquity, he added, was a function of its importance to the civilisation that produced it, its impact, and its historical importance. “What Shihâb’s statement says is like saying that an airplane is faster than a car,” al-‘Ashmâwî said. In his view, the 2010 law was not unconstitutional and in fact protected private ownership. It was normal to tighten up the law when seeking to protect the country’s antiquities. “Both the new and the old constitutions allow expropriation of heritage property for public benefit,” al-‘Ashmâwî added, explaining that the 2010 antiquities law does not necessarily expropriate antiquities, but instead asks their owners to protect them. It would be wrong to allow such owners to do what they like with such pieces on the grounds of personal freedom. “This would be absurd,” he said.

Moreover, the 2010 law was endorsed by parliament three years before the drafting of the post-revolutionary constitution, and in al-‘Ashmâwî’s view it did not contradict the provisions of the later document. “Having a privately owned artefact does not mean trading in it,” al-‘Ashmâwî pointed out, adding that trade in antiquities and cultural properties was prohibited by law in France, Greece, Italy and throughout Latin America. “Regrettfully, these countries allow trading in our antiquities, however,” he added.

Article 8 of the law forbids trade in antiquities but allows their possession by private individuals on condition that they do
not use them for their own personal benefit and do not damage or neglect them. An owner of an antiquity can bequeath it to his descendants, but he cannot sell it. The law also prohibits the sale or rental of monuments, archaeological sites or museums to any person, institution or other country because they are state-owned properties. "We prohibit trading in antiquities because a decent country does not sell its heritage, history and civilisation," al-'Ashmâwî concluded.

"I am not against the modification of the antiquities law — on the contrary it could be changed — but before that the Shura Council should give better reasons for its modification," he said, fearing that this could be another attempt like the one made in 2010 by Ahmad 'Izz, former chairman of the planning and budget committee of the People’s Assembly and a member of the former ruling National Democratic Party, who had suggested that antiquities trafficking should be permitted in Egypt. "Is history repeating itself?" al-'Ashmâwî asked.

For his part, Ahmad ʿĪsâ, the minister of state for antiquities, said that no one from the culture, tourism and media committee of the Shura Council or the council itself had asked for, or sent a request for, the modification of the antiquities law. "If such a statement was made, it could be just in the opinion of the person making it," he said. ʿĪsâ added that an amendment to the law could not be done haphazardly, but would have to come about as a result of discussion among archaeologists, legal experts and civil society.

"Why ask for the amendment of the law now?" ʿĪsâ asked, adding that "now is not a good time for such a suggestion." Tightening security at archaeological sites and museums was at the top of his list of priorities, he said, in order to protect the country’s heritage from looting and encroachment, as well as to encourage tourists to come to Egypt, which in turn would restore Egypt’s tourism industry.

"The law is sufficient as it stands. If there are good suggestions for its modification, these would be welcome, but they are not necessary now," ʿĪsâ said. He said that Egypt would never rent out its heritage or institutions or allow them to be controlled by people other than Egyptians. "What has been reported about renting out monuments to Qatar or any other foreign country is untrue," ʿĪsâ said, adding that "Qatar has become a kind of phobia for Egyptians." (Nevine El-Aref, "Reform on the way?", Al-Ahram Weekly, June 19, 2013).

Heritage activists in Cairo and Alexandria are planning protests on Wednesday at 5pm to demand that government officials take steps to prevent local historical landmarks from being demolished. In Alexandria, the ‘Save Alex’ group will organise a rally outside the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. In the capital, meanwhile, the ‘Save Cairo’ group will organise a similar protest outside the Cairo governor’s office in ʿAbîdin Square.

In Egypt’s post-revolution security vacuum, the practice of illegal construction has soared, taking a particularly heavy toll on both cities’ heritage sites. Protesters will demand a six-month freeze on all demolition orders and building permits in Alexandria, and twelve-month freezes in Cairo; a halt to water and electricity services to illegally-built structures; the removal of extra illegally-built floors on buildings; the creation of a committee to study the issue and compile reports; and the setting of long-term plans to improve urban living conditions in general. (Nevine El-Aref, “Protests planned to save Cairo, Alex historical sites from demolition”, Ahram Online, June 19, 2013).

A recent statement by the Minister of State for Antiquities Ahmad ʿĪsâ during a community dialogue forum with residents from the village of Nazlat al-Sammân near the Gîza Plateau has created brouhaha in the media, writes Nevine El-Aref. ʿĪsâ announced that if the
allegedly aggressive behaviour of some of the vendors and parking attendants at the Giza Plateau continued, sometimes harassing tourists by demanding large sums of money for souvenirs and rides or to park their cars, there was a danger that the area as a whole could be placed off limits.

The lack of security that overwhelmed the country during and after the 25 January Revolution has certainly taken its toll, and it is widely felt that the sanctity of the spiritual and archaeological environment of the Giza Plateau has effectively been desecrated by vendors, peddlers, and horse and camel owners who have violated the law and entered the archaeological protected zone in attempts to find clients. Aggressive parking attendants, who some people believe are thugs and not attendants at all, have stopped vehicles at the entrance of the plateau asking them for money to park cars and frightening tourists and even some Egyptians. Similar things have happened on the plateau itself, where visitors have been asked for money in exchange for a ride on a horse or a camel or even to buy souvenirs.

Such incidents have caused the US embassy in Cairo to issue a warning to US citizens to stop visiting the Giza Plateau, as tourists are harassed by vendors and horse-owners. The warning led 'Isā to call for a community dialogue forum with Nazlat al-Sammān residents, many of whom are believed to work in the tourist industry, and the Giza governorate to discuss ways of stopping encroachments onto the plateau and tighter security measures.

'Isā said the US embassy's warning was "baseless" as any complaints had been reported to the ministries of tourism or antiquities and the tourism and antiquities police. He called on all concerned, as well as the Nazlat al-Sammān residents, to work in order to address the problem with transparency and honesty. 'Isā also created a new committee to follow up problems on the plateau and in neighbouring areas, this producing a monthly report on the problems and solutions to help solve them.

The committee consists of representatives from the Ministry of State for Antiquities, the ministries of tourism and the interior, representatives from the Giza governorate, and civil society and Nazlat al-Sammān residents. The move was described by some as a positive step to build bridges with villagers from Nazlat al-Sammān.

'Isā warned vendors that the site could even be closed if they continued to harass visitors. The statement created brouhaha, with many wondering how the minister could even think of closing such an important archaeological site during a period when Egypt was suffering from a decline in its tourism industry and the negative impacts of this on the country's income. 'Isā told Al-Ahram Weekly that he would never close the archaeological site, but that he wanted to make it clear to vendors that their behaviour was threatening to drive away visitors.

If the present situation continued, he said, there was a danger that the Giza Plateau would suffer from a lack of security and no one would visit the site. "This would mean that the site would be deserted and closed to all intents and purposes even if it was still officially open to the public," 'Isā said. 'Isā called on tourists and tour-guides to approach security personnel in the area if they faced any form of harassment.

On the other hand, the community nearby blamed the Giza governor for the lack of cleaning of the plateau, which now suffers from unsightly animal dung and garbage. 'Isā said that a private company had won the bid launched by the Tourism Ministry to help preserve the plateau from encroachment. The company was using state-of-the-art machines to collect the dung and was recycling the garbage, he said. Stone rubbish bins similar in material to the plateau rock had been installed at different locations on the site, he added.

Giza Governor 'Alī 'Abd al-Rahmān said that the governorate would be issuing licences
to some vendors at the site to sell their goods, but only if they respected law and order and did not harass visitors. If a report was made against any vendor, ‘Abd al-Rahmân said, his licence could be subject to cancellation. (Nevine El-Aref, “Threats to the Gîza Plateau”, Al-Ahram Weekly, June 19, 2013. Voir également Hend Kortam, “Committee on condition of pyramids announced”, Daily News Egypt, June 14; Nevine El-Aref, “New committee aims to solve harassment at Egypt pyramids”, Ahram Online, June 17).

On the west bank of the Nile at Aswân where the Qubbat al-Hawâ (Dome of the Winds) ancient Egyptian necropolis is located, three dozen members of an armed gang attacked five of the tombs and robbed their contents recently, also illegally excavating the site as several holes were found nearby. The Qubbat al-Hawâ necropolis is named after the domed tomb of a Muslim Sufi saint located on the crest of the hill. The area consists of a large collection of rock-hewn tombs of ancient Egyptian nobles from the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms who ruled Aswân during different ancient Egyptian dynasties. The tombs’ walls are decorated with vivid paintings depicting scenes of their owners’ daily lives, as well as their different titles and biographies. They also feature hieroglyphic texts showing the noblemen’s journeys to Africa.

“This is not the first time we have seen such things happening,” an archaeologist in Aswân who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Al-Ahram Weekly. Since March, the necropolis had been subjected to looting, he said, and archaeologists at the site had inspected this during routine tours around the necropolis. Permanent security guards from the tourism and antiquities police have not been in place since the 25 January Revolution, and the guards are not well-armed to resist armed gangs. “We are asking the police to guard the necropolis permanently in order to protect a very distinguished archaeological site,” the archaeologist said.

In a telephone interview, Muhammad Hamâda, consultant at the Ministry of State for Antiquities, told the Weekly that the Aswân inspectorate had reported the case to the police, but regretfully the criminals had escaped. The ministry had sent a committee to inspect the tombs in order to report any losses, he added. Investigations are now taking place, said Hamâda, and more measures would be taken to protect such distinguished ancient Egyptian sites.

Muhammad al-Biyâlî, former head of the ancient Egyptian sector at the ministry, said that the Qubbat al-Hawâ necropolis was a virgin site that had not been totally excavated and that it’s looting was a great loss to humanity. The walls of the tombs bore scenes relating to the development of the lives of the nobles in ancient Egyptian history and their relations with Africa. The necropolis was usually fairly inaccessible, but it showed fine examples of hieroglyphic texts detailing the careers of their owners as well as scenes of daily life in the earlier periods, he said.

Many of the tombs are linked together as family members added their own chambers. The tombs are mostly quite deep in the hillside and therefore are very dark. They are arrayed on two levels, the lower one for the tombs of the Old Kingdom nobles and the higher ones for those from the Middle and New Kingdoms. The tombs that are open to the public include the tombs of father and son Mekhu and Sabni, who were both governors during the long reign of the Sixth Dynasty Pharaoh Pepi II.

They also include the tomb of Sarenput, a local governor and overseer of the priesthood of Satet and Khnum under the 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Amenemhat II. This is one of the most beautiful and best-preserved tombs, and its walls still bear the remains of vivid colours. The tomb of Harkhuf, governor of the south during the reign of Pharaoh Pepi II, is little decorated, except for remarkable hieroglyphic texts, while the tomb of Hekaib, also known as Pepinakht, overseer of foreign
soldiers during the reign of Pharaoh Pepi II, has fine reliefs showing fighting bulls and hunting scenes. The same is true of the tomb of Sarenput I, grandfather of Sarenput II and governor during the 12th Dynasty reign of Pharaoh Sesostris I. (Nevine El-Aref, “Aswân tombs attacked”, Al-Ahram Weekly, June 19, 2013. Voir également Nevine El-Aref, "Ancient Egyptian noble tombs of 'virgin site' looted”, Ahram Online, June 15).

On Wednesday, the Ministry of State for Antiquities received five Ecuadorian and Peruvian artefacts confiscated from Cairo International Airport. The artefacts include three Ecuadorian heads carved in black wood that date back to 800BC, and two Peruvian statues that date to 250BC. Official Ahmad al-Râwî told Ahram Online that the statues were confiscated in March when the police at the airport caught an Egyptian citizen trying to illegally smuggle the objects to Alexandria. The objects had been transported to Egypt from the United States in a wooden box. The objects are now at the Egyptian museum in central Cairo, and will be handed over to the Ecuadorian and Peruvian embassies this week. Nevine El-Aref, “Egyptian customs seize smuggled artefacts from Peru, Ecuador”, Ahram Online, June 19, 2013. Voir également Dinâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie réceptionne 5 pièces archéologiques de l’Équateur et du Pérou », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 19 juin).

Old Cairo is a vivid example of continuous urban habitation. It gained its heritage status not only because of its large number of monuments, but in retaining its own spirit, craft, streets and customs that historians narrated centuries ago. That is why, HAMPIKIAN pointed out, UNESCO listed Old Cairo on the World Heritage List (WHL) as a city in 1979. Regrettably, the urban structure of the city is now under threat by profiteers who tear down smaller old buildings that are not on Egypt’s heritage list and construct in their place huge cement-based residential buildings, towering over the district’s authentic buildings. “This action is threatening the city with being removed from of the WHL as it loses its distinguished architectural character and urban structure,” asserted HAMPIKIAN.

Some, she went on, are demolishing historic buildings and monument edifices. “These buildings are a time bomb for monuments and the area’s residents,” asserted HAMPIKIAN, adding that construction regulations are not properly applied. The new buildings, she said, could collapse at any time, threatening neighbouring monuments and residents alike. “Ugliness is spreading all over Cairo, the city of the 1000 minarets,” said HAMPIKIAN. In addition, several monuments were subject to looting and petty destruction in the
past two years, amid the breakdown in security.

The protestors are asking the Egyptian government to freeze any construction licenses in Old Cairo for a year, removing illegal buildings and extra floors and refusing to provide such buildings with drainage systems and electricity. They asked the government to work in collaboration with the civic community and local councils and all concerned authorities in order to rescue and protect Old Cairo. Providing long term plans to spruce up and develop the living standards of Old Cairo residents is a must.

After an hour of the protest, the Cairo governor met the protestors and told them that in collaboration with the Rotary Club, a plan was drawn up to raise cultural and historical awareness of Old Cairo residents through weekly lectures on the importance of the area and its civilization. He also said that LE100,000 has been allocated to clean the area and install environment-friendly garbage bins. (Nevine El-Aref, “Saving Cairo: Engineers, archaeologists protest ‘ugly’ Old Cairo buildings”, Ahram Online, June 20, 2013).

Antiquities minister Ahmad ʿIsā told Ahram Online that the restoration work took five years with a budget of LE27 million, as the mosque was in a very bad condition due to subterranean water damage. The mosque is now open to worshippers and tourists. (Nevine El-Aref, “Gurgî mosque inaugurated in Cairo’s Bûlāq”, Ahram Online, June 23, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-ʿAlîm, « Le ministre de l’Archéologie inaugure la mosquée Mustafa Gurgî à Bûlāq », al-Yawm al-Ṣâbī’, 23 juin ; Dalia Hamam, « Inauguration de la mosquée Mîrzâ à Bûlāq », Le Progrès Égyptien, 26 juin).

Le ministre de l’Archéologie, Dr Muhammad ʿIrâhîm, a décidé la nomination du Dr ʿIrâhîm ʿAbd al-Rahmân au poste de président du département des antiquités islamiques, en remplacement de Samârât ʿHâfîz. (Sâra ʿAbd al-Muhsîn, « Muhammad ʿIrâhîm nommé président du département des antiquités islamiques », al-Yawm al-Ṣâbî’, 20 juin 2013).

Dimanche 23 juin 2013

The ministry of state for antiquities, in cooperation with the ministry of culture, has reopened the 17th century Emir Mustafa Gurgî Mosque in Cairo’s Bûlāq Abû al-Ilâ. The mosque is also known by Mirzâ mosque because an area called Hush Mizrâ is located at its eastern side where bathrooms are found to serve worshipers. The mosque includes of a wide court covered with four riwâq (corridors) with painted wooden ceilings.

The mosque was out of service for four years for restoration. Its foundation was consolidated as well as its walls and concrete pillars, which were painted. Broken and damaged tiles were restored while missing ones were replaced. Mashrabiyya (carved woodwork) widows were restored as well as wooden doors and the minbar (pulpit).

A joint Japanese and Egyptian team began on Tuesday the work of removing a 4,500 year old Pharaonic boat from the pit on the Gîza pyramid plateau where it is buried. Restorers removed a wooden beam, part of a boat built for King Khufu which was buried in approximately 2,500 BC. The boat was discovered in 1954 along with another identical boat in a separate pit; the latter was removed and restored, and is now on display in a purpose-built museum on the site. The beam is the first of several which will be removed for restoration.
Since 2009, the boat’s wooden beams inside the pit have been subjected to laboratory analysis to determine the types of fungi, insects and viruses that are affecting the boat, as well as the amount of deterioration that has taken place, so that an appropriate method can be selected to restore it and place it on display beside the other boat, known as the Khufu ship.

"The lifting of the beams is the third phase of a long restoration project carried out by an Egyptian and Japanese scientific and archaeological team from Waseda University, in collaboration with the Japanese government," said Ahmad ‘Īsā, minister of state for antiquities. He explained that the cedar beams of the boat will be removed and restored in a special laboratory constructed at the site, and when all the beams are restored, Khufu’s second solar boat is to be reconstructed and put beside its twin at the entrance to the Grand Egyptian Museum, which is being built overlooking the Gîza plateau. ‘Īsā said that over the last five years the team had cleaned the pit of insects, but found that water had leaked from the nearby museum which housed the first boat. This had affected a small section of the wood, hence the necessity to finish the studies quickly and restore the wood.

The Japanese team inserted a camera through a hole in the chamber’s limestone ceiling to transmit video images of the boat onto a small television monitor on the site. Images screened showed layers of wooden beams and timbers of cedar and acacia, as well as ropes, mats and the remains of limestone blocks and small pieces of white plaster. The camera allowed an assessment of the boat’s condition and the possibility of restoration. A large hangar has been constructed over the area surrounding the second boat pit, with a smaller hangar inside to cover the top of the boat itself. The structures were put in place to protect the wooden remains during analysis and treatment. A laser scanning survey also analysed the area and the wall between the Great Pyramid and the boat pit.

The second was discovered along with the first one in 1954 in a different pit, when Egyptian architect and archaeologist Kamâl al-Mallâkh along with Zakî Nûr was carrying out routine cleaning on the south side of the Great Pyramid. The first boat was removed piece by piece under the supervision of master restorer Ahmad Yûsuf, who spent more than 20 years restoring and reassembling the boat.

The second boat remained sealed in its pit up until 1987, when it was examined by the American National Geographic Society in association with the Egyptian office for historical monuments. The excavators bored a hole into the limestone beams that covered it and inserted a micro camera and measuring equipment. The void space over the boat was photographed and air measurements taken, after which the pit was resealed. (Nevine El-Aref, "Excavation of 4,500-year-old boat at Gîza pyramids begins", Ahram Online, June 25, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-‘Alîm, « Sortie pour restauration de la première planche en bois de la IIe barque de Chéops », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 25 juin ; Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mu’tî, « Chéops prend la mer de nouveau », al-Ahrâm, 26 juin ; « Début de restauration de la barque de Chéops », Le Progrès Égyptien, 26 juin).
smoke from the fire blackened some parts of the gate and a section of the mud brick wall that once enclosed the temple.

Al-Shîmî assured out that the impact of fire was minimal but that an archaeological committee had been assigned to inspect the affected parts of the gate and suggest the most efficient method of restoring it to its original state. Khâlid Abû al-'Ilâ, head of the Matariyya archaeological site, said that when fire broke out on the grass surrounding the temple archaeologists called the fire service to extinguish it.

The 'Arab al-Hisn archaeological site in Matariyya is located northwest of the obelisk of Senusert I. Kings Ramses III, IV and IX all had a share in the extension of a temple that exists on the site. The site comprises pillars, gates and mud brick walls, but the most distinguished part is the gate of the temple of high priest Neb-Maat-Re who was also the son of King Ramses IX. Damage to the site again highlights the lack of security and oversight that hit the country after the 2011 revolution, along with the decline of the tourism industry that decreased the budget of the MSA and its ability to restore and secure archaeological sites. (Nevine El-Aref, "Ramses IX gate mildly damaged by fire", Ahram Online, June 26, 2013. Voir également Sâra 'Abd al-Muhsin, « 'Abd al-Maqṣūd : l’accident du temple ramesside est prémédité », al-Yawn al-Sâbi', 26 juin ; Reuters, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie : Le temple de ‘Arab al-Hisn n’a pas été affecté par l’incendie d’hier », al-Shurûq, 26 juin).
barbed wired has been installed. The museum’s surveillance cameras have also been inspected. Director General of the Giza Plateau Muhammad Shîha also detailed security measures being undertaken at the plateau and at Khufu’s solar boat museum, including surveillance camera tests. Similar security measures were also enacted in Luxor and Aswân in order to safeguard its archaeological sites and monuments.

Major General 'Abd al-Rahîm Hasan, director of the TAP’s general administration, asserted that the TAP has drawn up a plan to protect monuments, archaeological sites and museums all over the country in collaboration with central security and MSA guards. According to Hasan, these plans were designed to accommodate rumours that the well-organised antiquities ‘Mafia’ will take advantage of 30 June protests. Hasan asserted that tight security measures were being undertaken in all zones of interest, including security checkpoints equipped with armed forces, ambulances and fire brigades “The Ministry of Interior is capable of safeguarding Egypt’s heritage, history and future from any risk,” confirmed Hasan.

The Tour Guides Syndicate has called on tour guides to protect Egypt’s sites, especially the Egyptian Museum in Tahrîr Square, according to syndicate head Mu’taz al-Sayyid. The Revolution Youth Union (RYU) has asked protesters and the military to protect the country’s archaeological sites and museums ahead of anticipated protests. The union’s media spokesman ‘Umar al-Hadarî stated in a press conference that archaeological sites are no less important than banks and governmental institutions, which the police and army have planned to secure during 30 June demonstrations. “Archaeological sites can be looted, as was the case in the January 2011 revolution. The purpose of securing these areas is to preserve Egypt’s distinguished heritage,” al-Hadarî stated.

In a related move, the Independent Union of Archaeological Workers announced the formation of committees to protect museums and other historical sites, asking individuals to volunteer through Facebook. Intellectuals participating in the culture ministry sit-in have called on the army to protect monuments. They have also formed a committee in collaboration with junior archaeologists, curators and concerned citizens to hold tours around Egypt’s archaeological sites in order to raise awareness and to urge the public to play a role in securing the nation’s heritage. (Nevine El-Aref, “Egypt prepares to safeguard heritage before 30 June”, Ahram Online, June 28, 2013. Voir également Dînâ ‘Abd al-’Alîm, « Le ministère de l’Archéologie forme un QG pour suivre la sécurisation des sites et des musées durant les manifestations du 30 juin », al-Yawm al-Sâbi’, 24 juin).

Dimanche 30 juin 2013

Egypt is known worldwide for its rich ancient heritage, but during the past year the lack of security has threatened the survival of many sites and led to extensive looting and destruction. In this article we review some of the monuments and archaeological sites that were affected by the worsening circumstances of security and neglect in Egypt.

In July 2012, the theft of 54 artefacts from the Egyptian Museum was reported along with the destruction of other sites such as the Fustât area, prompting the EU and UNESCO to start an initiative to safeguard the “intangible” culture of the Mediterranean.

In September 2012, tour guides organised a protest to demand the return of security. In addition, an in-focus article on the Egyptian Museum showed that it was suffering from decreased foreign tourism due to the country’s unrest, but a slight increase in Egyptian visitors. Despite problems with security, the Khafre pyramid was reopened for visitors in October 2012 after the renovation of walkways leading to the tombs, the ventilation and electricity systems; in the hopes of boosting declining tourism numbers.

In November 2012, the Kumi Dome in Darb al-Ahmar suffered from neglect when the fence surrounding it came down and people started to dump garbage around it.

In December 2012, a renovation project concerning Djoser’s Pyramid came under scrutiny for the use of the improper materials
and a lack of supervision from the Ministry of Antiquities.

In January 2013, the house of Ispenian in Haram was extensively looted and the structure itself suffered some destruction.

In February 2013, in Luxor, statues of Amenhotep III underwent restoration.

In March 2013, bazaar owners in Luxor staged a protest after being threatened with dismissal if they were unable to pay rent. The protest completely closed off Luxor’s road leading to the West Bank, blocking access to Hatshepsut Temple, the Valley of the Kings among other sites. In Cairo, the Ministry of Antiquities launched a project to renovate al-Mu’izz Street, after it suffered several lootings.

In April 2013, the Dahshūr area witnessed illegal construction on ancient burial sites, prompting locals and archaeologists to protest the lack of security.

In May 2013, UNESCO threatened to declassify several heritage sites due to the lack of security and mismanagement of the sites.

In early June 2013, the American Embassy in Cairo issued a warning regarding the pyramids area in Cairo, warning US citizens from visiting the monuments due to the lack of security and “criminal conduct”. This prompted the Ministry of Antiquities to issue a statement regarding security of the monuments and later form a special committee to address the issue.

Archaeologists have reported the dire situation of many sites including Abū Sīr al-Malq, and Ancient Heliopolis which suffered lootings and destruction of the sites, culminating in a fire at the Temple of Ra in Ancient Heliopolis, which was reportedly ignited by “thugs”. The tourism sector suffered a major blow when a member of al-Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya ‘Ādil al-Khayyât was appointed governor of Luxor, prompting tourism workers to organize a sit-in. al-Khayyât later resigned. (Thoraia Abou Bakr, “The state of Egyptian archaeological sites and monuments under Mursī’s rule”, Daily News Egypt, June 30, 2013).
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