

# **The status of Egyptian antiquities today, 3 March, 2011**

When the revolution began on January 25, 2011, and through its first week, there were only a few reports of looting: at Qantara East in the Sinai, and at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. However, since Mubarak's resignation, looting has increased all over the country, and our antiquities are in grave danger from criminals trying to take advantage of the current situation.

## **The Egyptian Museum, Cairo**

On Saturday, 29 January, I entered the museum the morning after the break-in and I could see through the museum's monitor, objects were broken and thrown all over the galleries. However, all of the masterpieces seemed to be present. At first glance, it did not seem that objects were missing and I announced that the museum was safe.

After our preliminary inventory, we discovered that eighteen items were missing. Thankfully four of these items have already been recovered. The Heart Scarab of Yuya and the body of the goddess from the statue of Menkaret carrying Tutankhamun were both found on the west side of the museum near the new gift shop, and one of the missing shabtis of Yuya was discovered under a showcase inside of the museum. The statue of Akhenaten as an offering bearer was discovered by a young protester near the southern wall of the museum in Tahrir Square. His family immediately contacted the Ministry of State for Antiquities to arrange the statue's return to the museum. I am now waiting for the Registration, Collections Management and Documentation Department to complete its final report on what else, if anything, is missing from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. The General Director of the museum has told me that this report will be completed by Sunday.

## **Storage magazines in Egypt**

Many storage magazines have suffered break-ins; sites from all over Egypt have suffered at the hands of criminals.

- At Qantara East, in the Sinai, looters broke into the magazine and stole several boxes of objects. Fortunately, to date 292 items have been returned.
- Criminals attacked Saqqara several times about ten days ago. The padlocks of many tombs were opened.
- The magazine of Metropolitan Museum of Art's expedition in Dahshur, known as De Morgan, was attacked twice; looters were able to overpower and tie up the guards.

- In Abusir, looters broke into the magazine of a Czech expedition.
- In Giza, on March 1, 2011, criminals broke into the Selim Hassan magazine. These looters were carrying guns and the unarmed site guards quickly surrendered for fear of their lives.
- Magazines in Tell el-Basta and Wadi el-Feiran, near Sharm el-Sheikh, were also subject to breaking and entering.

Site inspectors at each of these locations are still carefully checking the magazine inventories against their databases to assess the full extent of the damage. I am waiting for the inspectors to finish their work and file their final reports with me.

### **Pharaonic sites**

Several pharaonic sites have been subjected to vandalism and looting.



Statue of Ramesses II in Aswan.

- The tomb of Ken-Amun in Tell el-Maskhuta, near Ismailia, was completely destroyed. It is the only known 19th Dynasty tomb in Lower Egypt.
- At Giza, near the Great Sphinx, the looters broke into the tomb of Impy. Vandals also attempted to destroy other buildings and tombs in Giza, but they were unsuccessful.
- In Saqqara, inscribed blocks and parts of the false door were stolen from the tomb of Hetepka.
- Inscribed blocks were also taken from the tomb of Ptahshepses in Abusir.

- The guards of sites in Nekhen, north of Edfu, caught several thieves.
- In Aswan, looters attempted to steal a statue of Ramesses II, but archaeologists and guards at the site apprehended them.
- A site in Northern Sinai was destroyed when looters arrived with a loader.
- Looters have attacked Abydos nearly every night; illegal excavations and trenches, some as deep as five meters, have damaged the site.
- Reports of illegal construction have been reported near the pyramid of Merenre and the Mastaba Fara'un, near Saqqara.

Many sites, including Alexandria, Ismailia, Saqqara, Behaira, Sharqia, Abusir and Dahshur, have reported illegal excavations, some of which have taken place at night.

### **Islamic Monuments**

Islamic monuments have also suffered during this crisis.

- The police station of el-Gamalia was set on fire; this station ensured that no cars drove on al-Muizz Street. This street was recently restored at a cost of one billion Egyptian pounds. Without the police presence, cars have already returned to al-Muizz Street.
- In Tanta, the Sabeel of Ali Bey Al-Kabir, was broken into and three windows of *Msavat* metal framework, furniture and the modern iron gate were stolen. Some pieces of the window were found in the possession of street merchants.
- Near Alexandria, Kom el Nadoura suffered some damage to its doors and furniture.
- At Wekhalit el Jeddawi, in Esna, the local people broke in, changed the locks and are protesting in front of the *wekhalit*.
- Khan el-Zeraksha, a recently restored group of villas, was broken into by about 50 armed thugs, who forced the security team to leave. The criminals are still occupying the site.
- On Monday, February 14, a group broke the door to Wekhalit el Haramin, at Hussein, which falls under the Egyptian Awqaf Authority. The Egyptian army and the Awqaf Authority worked together and had the thugs out by Tuesday, however.

Despite all of the damage and looting that has occurred, I am happy to report that all of the Jewish synagogues and all of the Christian churches and monasteries have remained safe and undamaged.

The antiquities guards and security forces at sites are unarmed and this makes them easy targets for armed looters. The guards and security forces are therefore forced to comply with the criminals' demands. In addition, the Egyptian police force does not have the capacity to protect every single site, monument and museum in Egypt. The situation looks very difficult today and we are trying our best to ensure the police and army restore full protection to the cultural heritage of the country.

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