

# The status of Egyptian antiquities today, 6 March 2011

On Friday night, a group of 35 criminals attacked the storage magazines at Tell el-Fara'in (Buto) an ancient and important former capital of Lower Egypt, the Delta. Here the remains of the ancient city walls, a temple of Ramesses II, many great statues of that king and others of gods, such as Sekhmet and Horus, have been found. Both foreign (notably, German and British teams) and Egyptian missions have worked there, excavating the stores and settlement of a New Kingdom town as well as discovering Predynastic remains, making it one of the most important archaeological sites in the Delta. The magazines that were looted contained all of the artifacts of that area, such as finds from el-Monufia, el-Gharbia, Kafr el-Sheikh and El-Beheira.

As they do almost every night at many sites across the country, the looters arrived carrying automatic weapons, overpowered the guards and broke in. I have built 40 storage magazines all over Egypt, that are well guarded with computerized systems, and which are equipped with photographic departments and conservation rooms as well. Unfortunately, however, these thieves got in, opened five boxes of objects, throwing some of them to the ground and breaking three of the doors inside the store. They took the smaller handguns of the guards, but thankfully neighboring people came to get them and successfully captured four, who are now being detained. Today I have asked for a team from the Ministry of Antiquities to inspect the site and report back to me on what has been taken.

Almost every day at the moment, there are attacks on archaeological heritage sites all over Egypt. Some of these areas have not been excavated yet, but all of them contain the remains of our ancient culture and heritage. Anyone who farms, builds or digs on these pieces of land is destroying our history. The el-Zoulien archaeological site, near San el-Hagar (Tanis), in the Sharkia Governorate, has been damaged. Villagers there have farmed the land and built houses on top of it. At Abu el-Hummus and Borg el-Arab walls and buildings have also been built. Many sites in Upper Egypt have been affected as well and my daily report states that a group attacked the Kléber Tower in Gamalia last night, which is next to the eastern wall of Cairo, a place known for smoking drugs, and that they are still inside it.

I have asked for the objects in storage in Qantara East, in the Sinai, to be moved. On January 29 we know that these things were stolen, but 292 of them have since been returned. This magazine is out in the desert and vulnerable to attack again, so Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud will move things from it to the basement stores under the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. These objects are important because they are intended to be used in the scenario for the new museum at Taba, the Port Said Museum that is being developed and for Sharm

el-Sheikh Museum. Sharm el-Sheikh Museum is incredible and when it is completely finished, it could be one of the largest in Egypt after the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza. It even has a conference room big enough to hold 3000 people and the objects that were repatriated to the country by Israel after the peace treaty. I believe that the transfer of these artifacts is the best thing we can do to protect them and I have asked the military to guard their transfer to Cairo.

I would like to tell people that I am still in my office and will be until the government has announced my successor. I have not been as happy as I have been for the last two days for a very long time. Of course, I am very, very sad to be losing my love, my work in archaeology, but this website will still be my voice against those who threaten the preservation of Egyptian antiquities. This site will stay open and be updated daily.

Those followers of Seth in the Ministry of Antiquities who have tried to spread rumors against me, are corrupt. One copied the dissertation of a fellow scholar and caused a mummy from an excavation to be stolen, and the file of another shows they were corrupt, fired many times from office and also stole things. Sadly, during the revolution, many people have found the opportunity to spread rumors for their own benefit, even against me. People are horribly abusing the hard work of the youths who fought for democracy to attack me! One of these people is even a university professor who worked in my position for nearly six years before me, but achieved nothing during his tenure and is now causing problems.

However, these are really minor things in my life and if you are an influential person, then lots of people will attack you. If I had spent my career worrying about criticism all of my life, I would never have achieved what I am proud to say that I have achieved. I try to make informed decisions and resolve my problems, and this is the first time ever that I have not been able to do anything about something I feel strongly about. I have not been able to do enough in recent days about the robbery of our heritage and this is why I have decided to resign as the Minister of State for Antiquities.

<http://www.drhawass.com/blog/status-egyptian-antiquities-today-6-march-2011>