

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

### Lack of Security Continues to Threaten Egyptian Cultural Heritage

The optimism of the Egyptian Revolution has been replaced by a host of sobering realities in Egypt. One of these is the continued lack of security throughout the country. Nowhere is this more true than for the increasingly neglected, unguarded, and looted cultural heritage sites. While ARCE continues its very important and successful training and conservation work in the Luxor area, many other sites are left unguarded, encroached upon, and often brutally pillaged. ARCE Director Gerry Scott and others have been in contact with the Ministry of State for Antiquities, but without adequate funding and in the current security vacuum, the Ministry has been unable to effectively respond.

As during the beginning days of the Egyptian Revolution, social media remains an important venue to which many have turned for reporting on the ongoing threats to Egypt's heritage. Numerous Twitter users and Facebook pages now regularly report on the damage and missing artifacts (see Facebook pages "Save El-Hibeh" and "Stop the Heritage Drain"). Former ARCE Board of Governors President, Carol Redmount and Egyptian archaeologist Monica Hana have been working especially hard to bring the losses to light through posts and speaking with various media outlets.

### Collectors: Their Contribution to Looting

*Salima Ikram*

Although the focus of our worries is on looting, one of the prime catalysts for it is often ignored: collectors. Looting often occurs in order to feed the vast and seemingly insatiable hunger for Egyptian antiquities amongst collectors. Markets for Egyptian objects have long existed in Europe and the Americas; subsequently Japan joined in the collecting mania. Now, spurred on by the construction of new museums (Louvre Abu Dhabi, Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi) and an increased focus on the sale of art (contemporary and otherwise), there is a boom in collecting Egyptian artefacts in many Gulf countries that extends to private individuals.

Most museums abide by various UNESCO conventions that forbid the purchase of items of uncertain provenance. In the case of the inadvertent purchase of 'hot' merchandise, objects may be returned discreetly to their true and legal owners. These international agreements do not, however, apply to collectors. Once an object enters a private collection, it disappears from public view until (if) the collector decides to sell it when the artefact resurfaces on the international art market. Thus, not only is the provenance and true history of the piece lost, but also the object itself disappears without a trace.

Additionally, collectors can single out specific objects or types of objects, as was demonstrated when the National Museum of Iraq (Baghdad) was looted in April 2003. At that time, according to the late Donny George Youkhanna (Director

of the Museum, 2003–2005), not only did collectors target individual pieces, but they also encouraged the destruction of particular genres of objects in order to increase the value of surviving examples of those genres. This focused and ordered acquisition of antiquities unfortunately seems now to be happening in Egypt. The looting of Amarna period objects from the Egyptian Museum in 2011 and the removal of very specific rock inscriptions from the Wadi Hammamat in 2012 are two examples of this trend. Both the pieces from the Egyptian Museum and the rock inscriptions remain unrecovered to this day.

It is now time to turn the spotlight on collectors and to lobby for more stringent controls within the international art market. The common travesty of faking provenances should be checked. This must be accompanied by more aggressive action on the part of the border police, customs and excise officials, Interpol, and international art theft squads. The launch of the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) Red List for Egypt in February 2012 represents the beginning of this process ([http://icom.museum/uploads/tx\\_hpoindexbdd/120521\\_ERLE\\_EN-Pages.pdf](http://icom.museum/uploads/tx_hpoindexbdd/120521_ERLE_EN-Pages.pdf)). Failing the introduction of even tougher legislation, public pressure must be brought to bear on private collectors and the dealers who serve them. For unless there is control on demand, what hope remains for the safeguarding of Egypt's—or anyone else's—heritage?

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

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### Looting and Land Grabbing: the Current Situation in Egypt

*Salima Ikram and Monica Hanna*



Fig. 1: Land grabbing at Al-Matariya, ancient Iwnw (Heliopolis), with large apartment buildings and shopping malls encroaching upon the archaeological site. Photo courtesy M. Hanna.

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

After the events of January 25, 2011 the police and security forces abandoned their posts, leaving the country open to lawlessness and disorder. Among the casualties of police absence was Egypt's heritage. There are many different types of heritage loss. The most obvious is land appropriation when groups of people take over antiquities' land for building or agriculture. The interested parties in these endeavours include contractors who pirate large tracts of land, divide it up, and then re-sell it for multiple purposes. (Fig. 1) This sort of activity is also engaged in on a smaller scale by villagers and townspeople. The land is used for building houses, cemeteries, and agriculture, and has long historic antecedents where the living struggle with the dead for limited space.

The whole land grabbing system is also tied, to some extent, with the looting as the contractors thoroughly investigate a site for valuables before selling the land. The looting operates on a variety of scales. The professional mafias are of two types, one violent, and one less so. The former is a new phenomenon that is directly related to the recent traffic in arms in Egypt. These weapons make these people relatively invincible before the Ministry of Antiquities' ghafirs (site guards) who are equipped with sticks and staves, small revolvers, ancient rifles, and little or no ammunition—often they have to purchase their own ammunition. As a result of this influx of arms, groups of gunmen roam archaeological sites, accessing difficult to reach places by bulldozers that are then used to rip apart the ground, revealing the antiquities within. There are increasing reports of these groups using geo-sonar machines, and in fact, being trained in their use; no doubt, they also obtain access to archaeological reports that help them pinpoint possible sites. The objects found are then taken, en masse, to a safe place. In some instances, dealers come to view the material, choose what they want, and then another group arranges for their removal and shipment abroad. In other cases, the material is taken abroad directly; it all depends on the size of the objects in question.



Ain Sukhna is a popular port for shipping larger pieces as it did not have a checkpoint until November 2012.

Fig. 2: Attempts at theft of a relief on a gateway in al-Matariya. Photo courtesy M. Hanna.

The latter mafia is less violent. Generally, a single person controls groups of villagers, particularly young boys, in a Fagan-like manner, urging them to go out and dig holes and rewarding them financially for objects that are brought in, particularly statuary, relief, and jewelery. These are then sold on by the person in charge. On a smaller scale, local people will go out and dig all over sites. Sometimes they have contacts with low-level dealers, but more often they do not. These individuals are looking for the fabled gold of the pharaohs, the mythical Red Mercury that confers dominion over one's enemies and eternal life, as well as the antiquities themselves. The looting not only deprives the world of its heritage, but also ravages sites, making them difficult to decode and losing valuable information about our communal past (Fig. 2).

Additionally, storage areas (magazines) are compromised. Objects are stolen, or, it is



## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



rumored, that in some cases, the actual object is removed and a replica put in its place, although this has not been incontrovertibly confirmed. However, if objects from magazines should appear on the international art market, they have a better chance of being recognized if their excavator spots them, or if they have been published. This increase in looting of all types is changing—perhaps for the better—the way archaeologists work. More and more, each season is regarded as the final one, and everything is recorded in detail, as there is no guarantee that the objects will be available for study the following season. Backlog is being processed, and people are pushing for increased security for their sites and their artefacts.

Urban sites, such as those in Islamic and Coptic Cairo are not immune from this threat. Pieces of minbars (pulpits), inlays from mihrabs (prayer niches), lanterns, lamps, censers, woodwork from ceilings, metal door fixtures, and other decorated pieces of buildings are disappearing. In some cases, entire buildings or oratories are dismantled

and sold or destroyed. The land that they occupied is illegally seized and speedily built on, in concrete and steel, scarring and compromising the historic urban landscape. This destruction of old buildings that are officially protected under the 100-year rule or are on the registry of protected monuments is rife throughout Egypt, contributing to the massive loss even of its 18th, 19th, and early 20th century heritage.

Artefacts and portions of buildings are being purchased by people from all over the world; the most recent and largest markets are the Gulf countries. Sadly, the advent of new museums in these countries has created an insatiable appetite for antiquities. Interestingly, in some cases, looters are actually salting sites and selling fakes that are being purchased and distributed worldwide. In many instances these are of superb quality—but others are patently false, and a few are made in China!

Sites all over Egypt are compromised. In Tanis the southern unexcavated areas are being looted by people who come from other provinces—

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



Fig. 3: The site of Dahshur is being attacked from all sides by land grabbers. Although some graves in the cemetery are doubtless used, others probably serve as covers for looting and also help to establish the parameters of the cemetery and keep the land for the villagers. Photo courtesy M. Hanna.

the villagers, on the other hand, have tried to stop this, but as there is no security back up for the villagers; they have had to give up. At Tell el-Basta, the wall enclosing and setting off the antiquities' area has been breached, and an informal road goes through the site. Some small scale looting has also taken place here. At Sa el Hagar (Sais) respectable people turn to looting as it pays so much better than legal jobs, and there is also the romantic lure of treasure. In the Memphite area the villagers are digging up the partially unexcavated necropolis at Abu Rawash. In Giza, some of the magazines have been compromised, but the wall surrounding the site has indeed contributed to its protection from land appropriation. Abusir has been systematically and continuously attacked by mafia groups as well as local looters. New tombs have come to light, but sadly, archaeologists are unable to document them in any detail as the robbers have destroyed the archaeology. Still, some fresh information has been salvaged from the looters' holes. Shabtis, amulets wrenched from mummies, statuettes of the Old Kingdom

and the Late Period are all being removed from the site. Large parts of Dahshur have been appropriated for cemeteries—with only one or two bodies within—and looters arrive fast on the heels of the archaeologists who are powerless to defend themselves or the sites in the face of superior weaponry. (Figs. 3-5)

The vicissitudes of Tell el-Hibeh have been outlined and publicized by Carol Redmount (see her report in this publication) and many sites in the Fayum are being gobbled up by land grabbers, as well as being attacked by looters. The Italian Mission to Antinopolis has reported that large parts of the site, one of the few remaining Roman cities in Upper Egypt, are being devoured by modern cemeteries, urban expansion, and agriculture (see report following). Indeed, the whole region is suffering. Close to Deir Abu Hinnis in Middle Egypt a Belgian team discovered a year 16 inscription of Akhenaton, which also mentions Nefertiti, one of the thousands of Amarna period graffiti. These are in danger of being quarried away or

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



Fig. 4: Looters' holes visible in the shadow of the Black Pyramid at Dahshur. Photo courtesy M. Hanna.

destroyed. The nearby foothills hosted a vast Dynasty III necropolis that yielded intact burials containing coffins, pottery, stone vessels, shell and faience beads; this has now been bulldozed as more space for pilgrims who visit the nearby church, located within the Amarna period quarry, is needed. Additional areas of the necropolis are being appropriated by farmers. Even at Amarna, which has an almost year-round archaeological presence, the agricultural land is fast expanding. This is also the case at Abydos, which has the added problem of thieves. In fact, recently the Abydos NYU-IFA team worked on examining the many looted areas and recording the archaeology from these as an exercise in rescue archaeology. Indeed,

many excavators are trying to make the best of the situation and are turning the looting to archaeological advantage, insofar as possible, by investigating the looters' trenches.

No part of Egypt is immune from these attacks. The areas in the Eastern desert and along the Red Sea coast have also seen some activity, and the oases of Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra, and Baharia are also scenes of looting, land appropriation, and the salting of sites.

Looting and land appropriation is not a new phenomenon; it has gone on for centuries, but the magnitude of the current destruction is terrifying. However, on some level one cannot entirely condemn the perpetrators. The rapidly



## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



increasing population means that places to live and work and grow food are at a premium. In many areas, unlike Luxor, the antiquities and tourism does not directly impact the people living around them, and thus there is little or no economic reason to protect the sites. Also, there is no real connection between heritage and the present due to the educational system that presents Egyptian history in a very fragmentary manner and gives it little value. Unemployment, both before and after the Revolution, is very high, and therefore any means by which to generate income to feed one's family are considered valid. Antiquities personnel are barely armed, and very poorly paid, so the incentive to protect the sites is minimized. Additionally, some religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, condone the acquisition and destruction of archaeological

sites, thus providing a moral justification for these activities. Still, these acts are contributing to the destruction of Egypt and the world's heritage. There appears to be no way to stop this without full governmental support, complete with well-armed personnel. Individual excavators are doing their best to increase site guards, but the problem is a national one. The international community can help best by putting strong sanctions on dealing in antiquities.

The loss of Egyptian heritage effects the whole world, but it effects the Egyptians the most. By sacrificing the past they will sacrifice the future, both in terms of economy and identity. We can but hope that the Egyptian government stabilizes soon and that enough Egyptians can stand up and convince their leaders that immediate action is imperative if their heritage is to be saved.

Fig. 5: Even small tombs are being built in Dahshur in an effort to appropriate land. Photo courtesy M. Hanna.

# THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

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## El-Hibeh

*Carol Redmount*

El-Hibeh lies in northern middle Egypt, on the east bank of the Nile River. It is the remains of an ancient Egyptian provincial town mostly of the first millennium BCE, with a small limestone temple and an impressive town wall. The temple was built by the Libyan pharaoh Sheshonq I, first king of Dynasty 22, and evidently used through Roman times. A series of desert cemeteries, mostly ancient and badly looted, surround the tell to the north, east and south. Together, tell and desert cemeteries occupy approximately two square kilometers.

A multi-disciplinary team from the University of California, Berkeley has been investigating El Hibeh since 2001. We seek to understand El Hibeh in its many contexts—local, regional, national, political, historical, social, economic, urban, and so forth; to trace the development and interrelationships of the town and its hinterland through time and space; and to relate the textual and epigraphic materials from and about the site to the archaeological findings in as specific a manner as possible. Hibeh is especially important for the insights it can provide into the archaeological dark age of the Third Intermediate Period (1070–664 BCE).

In June 2011, I received a series of photographs via email from a member of one of the foreign institutes at Cairo. A group had gone to visit Hibeh, had been chased away by site guards (who at that point were evidently functional), but were so appalled by what they saw in their short visit that they tracked me down and sent me their site photos (Figs. 1a and b). The

site was pock-marked with looting pits as far as the eye could see; broken body parts from destroyed burials were scattered everywhere. In July and December of 2011 and January of 2012, I was sent more pictures of the plundering. These photographs documented massive looting everywhere, as well as the uncovering of previously unknown and clearly significant structures in various locations. As I reviewed these pictures I was able to identify new depredations; it was clear that the plundering was ongoing.

Given the scale of the destruction, we applied to the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) for a 2012 study season that also included mapping, assessing and, where necessary, mitigating the looting damage. I spoke again with colleagues in Egypt, who indicated that most of the looting had occurred immediately after the revolution when the police had completely withdrawn from their duties. Subsequent pillaging was the work, I was told, of a single man from the village north of the tell who shoveled holes at night, and whom the police were unable to catch. The implication was that he was doing only minor damage.

So we prepared for our field season. The day before we were to begin work, I received an official call saying that the head of the Beni Suef Antiquities Police had revoked our security clearances because it was too dangerous for us to work at the site. Further investigation elicited the information that an armed “mafia-like” gang, led by a “master criminal,” was looting the site on an industrial scale and threatening the MSA inspectors.





Figs. 1a and b: El Hibeh before and after photos inside the north gate, looking east.



## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



Figs. 2 and 3: El-Hibeh

We next traveled to our dig house, hoping at least to be permitted to work in our storehouse, which was off the site proper and easily protected. As negotiations got more protracted, I returned to Cairo to see if I could expedite matters. The fastest way to Cairo from our dig house was a road that ran directly past Hibeh. As we drove past the site in the afternoon (we still hadn't been allowed to set foot on it), we observed about ten men openly looting the site. When they saw us they took off on their motorcycles, but not before we were able to take pictures from our van. In one picture the face of the looter is clearly identifiable. Eventually we were given permission to move our study materials from the Hibeh storehouse to the MSA storehouse at Ihnasya el-Medinah. Although we had a three hour commute every day, we were able to do a solid month's work, and I remain grateful to the MSA for salvaging our field season. However, we continued to hit a brick wall about stopping the looting of the site and protecting it. In desperation, after being contacted by media personality, former member of Parliament, and Wafd party member Mohammed Sherdy, we decided to go public with Egyptian media. The Wafd newspaper

published two feature articles on the pillaging of Hibeh, and the issue was even debated in the Egyptian parliament. Shortly thereafter we established a Save El-Hibeh Egypt Facebook site which today has almost 1,800 members.

Finally, to our delight, we were permitted by the MSA to visit the site on March 18, 2012. The damage was far worse than even the pictures indicated. (Figs. 2 and 3) Every part of the tell and surrounding cemetery had been plundered, including all of our excavation areas. On March 23, we again visited the site as part of an official MSA inspection tour of looted sites in Middle Egypt. This visit resulted in the sending of an official report to the MSA headquarters in Cairo; as a result of this report a second, high-level MSA committee visited the site on April 17; unfortunately we were not invited to accompany this group. Our final return to the site was the last day of our field season, April 19. We returned our study materials to the Hibeh magazine, and reburied as many bodies—actually body parts—as possible. Hibeh remains unprotected, unfortunately. The looting continues in 2013. The loss to Egypt's cultural heritage is incalculable.

We continue to do what we can.







## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

### Antinoupolis

*Report compiled from correspondence with James Heidel and Dr. Rosario Pintaudi*



Figs. 1a and b: Extensive damage, looting, and digging was done by the villagers in 2012 to the North Cemetery, called "Mariam" by the villagers. At top is a photo from 2010. The area circled is shown in a detail photo from October 2012 at bottom. The columns have been overturned and many holes have been dug. Damage like this was done to the entire North Cemetery Area.



Antinoupolis (modern el Sheikh Abada ) is located about 25 miles south of Minya on the east bank of the Nile. Founded by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in honor of his beloved Antinous who had drowned near by, the city once boasted a rich array of magnificent buildings. The current ongoing archaeological expedition under the direction of Dr. Rosario Pintaudi from the Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli," the University of Florence, has been working to create a complete archaeological picture of the ancient city and its inhabitants from its Hadrianic foundation to its abandonment in the medieval period.

Unfortunately, looting since 2011 has devastated the area. Dr. Pintaudi recently reported "I know that many objects, glass, pottery, parchments and PAPYRI from Antinoupolis are on the black market in Minya or in Cairo...I sent a message with the documentation to the mailing list of our international association of papyrologists."

James Heidel, an architect and architectural historian working with Dr. Pintaudi provided some compilation photos of recent activity. He also reports that there is a big problem with the use, by local villagers, of bulldozers at the

## THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



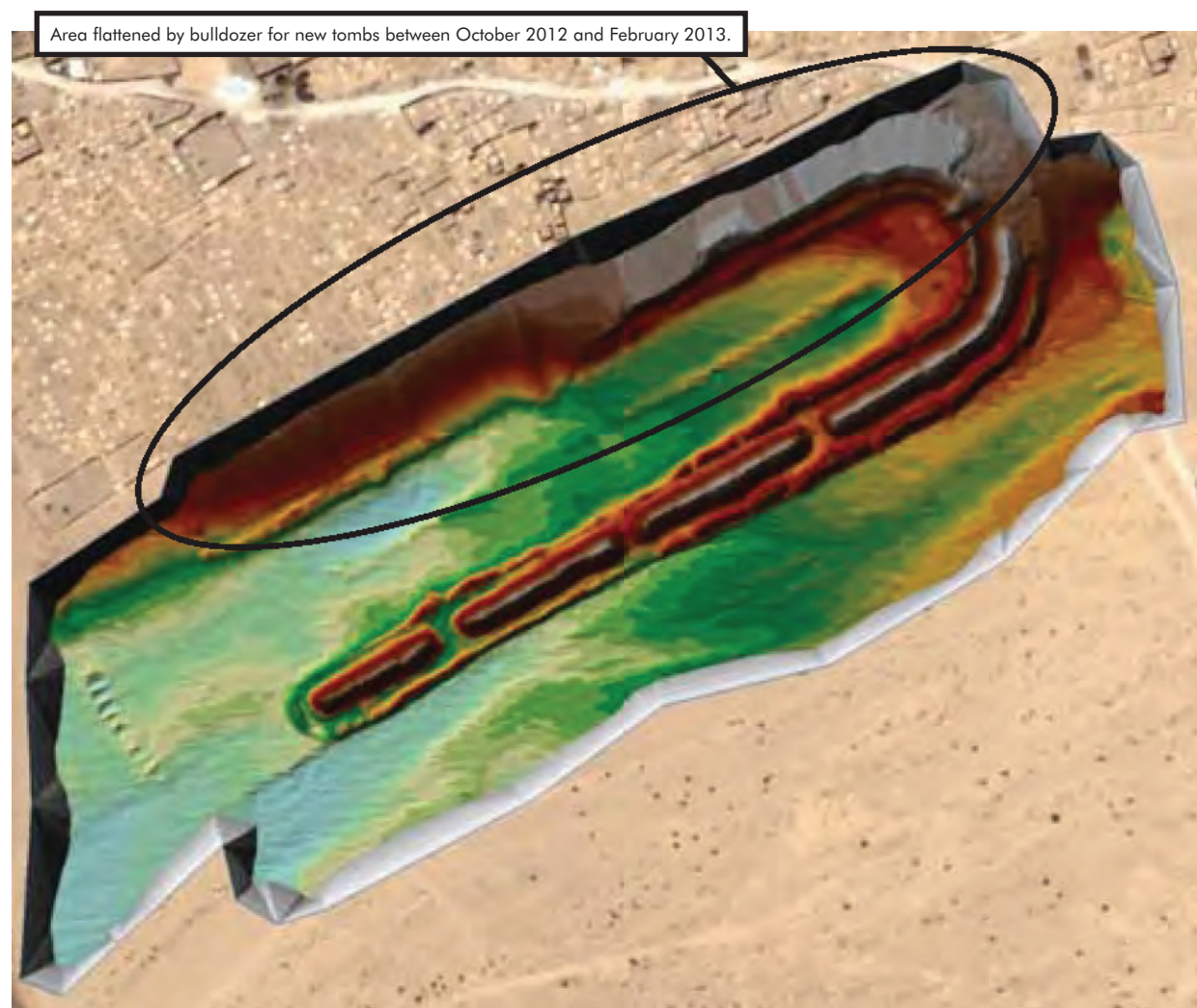
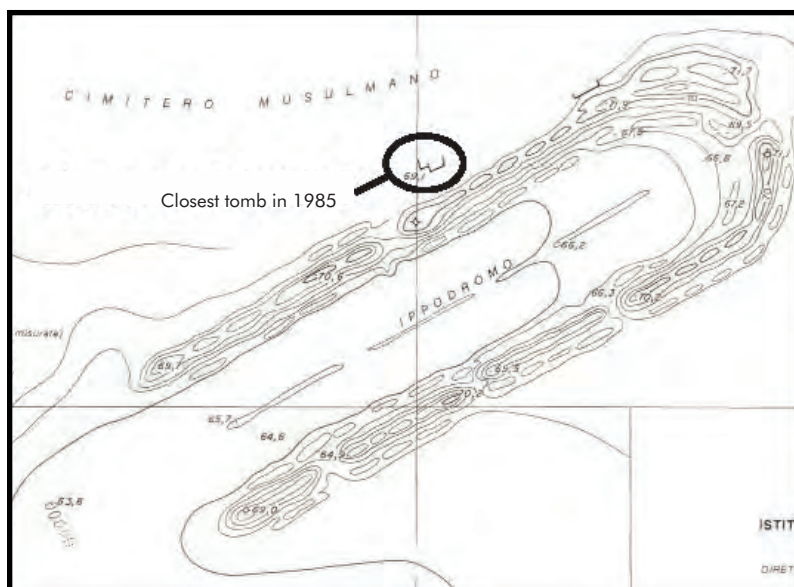
site. These were in daily use during the time the archaeologists were working in February 2013. These bulldozers are digging in many parts of the site looking for antiquities and have, in fact, destroyed part of an ancient Roman hippodrome. "Of the four hippodromes the Romans built in Egypt, this is the only one remaining, and between October 2012 and February 2013 half of it has been destroyed with a bulldozer," reports Heidel.



Figs. 2a and b (top): Granite column base of Roman Emperor Hadrian preserved in place until February 2012.

Fig. 2c (right): The same column base removed with a big hole dug underneath it and the column base dumped into the hole after destruction discovered October 2012.







# THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

## The Dakhla Oasis

*Roger Bagnell*

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The Dakhla Oasis has been relatively calm and secure, thanks in part to a better relationship between the police and the population than in most areas. We have not had any general problems with insecurity, and we were able to have a normal working season this year, as the year before. We did, however, observe one instance of attempted looting, a trench dug along the wall of one building at Amheida, to foundation level. It is not obvious what was being sought, but it is unlikely that anything

of consequence turned up (the digging was in a street where we had previously excavated). Undoubtedly there has been some rummaging around in the necropolis, far from the guards' house, but that seems neither severe nor new. So overall I would say that site guards are no more effective than they usually have been, and the brazenness of this one intervention is a matter of some concern, but compared to others we've been very fortunate.

The Dakhla Oasis, a general view.  
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