

13 May 2014

Cultural Property Advisory Committee  
Cultural Heritage Center  
SA-5, Fifth Floor  
Department of State  
Washington, DC 20522-0505

Dear Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our collective support for the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt that will be considered by CPAC at its upcoming public meeting on June 2, 2014. Our organizations represent the primary professional bodies for the fields of archaeology, anthropology, and Egyptology as well as many interested members of the public. Our collective membership of over 230,000 has a strong interest in the long-term research, preservation, presentation, and safeguarding of the heritage of Egypt.

Modern-day Egypt is host to some of the oldest and most significant archaeological remains in the world. The geographic diversity and temporal representation of the archaeological and historical material of Egypt covers fabled monuments, such as those related to the rich Pharaonic past and the Roman and Byzantine periods, as well as places and complexes of the Islamic, Ottoman, and Christian inhabitants, many still in use today. Whether woven into the urban fabric of the cities of Cairo or Alexandria, or situated in the rural areas of the Fayum, Sinai, and Upper Egypt, the cultural landscapes of Egypt represent a palimpsest of time. The proposed MoU imposes import restrictions on archaeological material from the Early Dynastic Period through the New Kingdom period as well as on the more recent Islamic material, ending with the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517.

Our call for action under this MoU recognizes the significant place of history from Egypt in our collective lives, from the plazas of Rome to the halls of U.S. institutions; from the covers of *National Geographic*, *Archaeology* magazine, and the *New York Times* to the stories told by National Public Radio and Fox News. The indelible position of Egypt in our understanding of the ancient history of writing and medicine, as well as the histories of museum practice, the preservation movement, and tourism development, notably in Cairo and at Abu Simbel, all offer sound evidence for the importance of protecting the Egyptian past. An MoU offers further opportunity to expand cultural relationships between the United States and Egypt. The MoU enables and encourages collaborative initiatives that aim to support research, to preserve archaeological and historical places, to promote educational exchange programs, and to quell activities that contribute to the illicit trafficking of Egyptian heritage.

Determination 1

Today the landscapes of Egypt are threatened due to agricultural activities, urban development, resource demand, and political instability, as well as the illegal excavation

of archaeological sites. The result is the loss of archaeological context and thus our ability to understand temporal and social relationships and political structures as they impacted daily life, birth, and death. Past lifeways are not only endangered, but also often become impossible to reconstruct.

The 2011 *Emergency Red List of Egyptian Cultural Objects at Risk* issued by the International Council of Museums (2011) identified at risk categories of Egyptian material covering the Pre-dynastic, Pharaonic, Nubian, Greco-Roman, Coptic Christian, and Islamic periods. Numerous individuals and agencies are chronicling the current state of looting in Egypt, including Sarah Parcak, who will testify before the panel on her use of satellite imaging technology to document the extent of pillaging activity. In her 2013 article, 'What Has Happened to Egyptian Heritage after the 2011 Unfinished Revolution' (*Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 1(4): 371-375) Egyptian archaeologist Monica Hanna provides detailed accounts of looting and destruction at Abusir, ancient Memphis, and the Coptic site of Ansina. The *Save El Hibeh* Facebook group ([www.facebook.com/groups/337119989673652/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/337119989673652/)), established by Carol Redmount of the University of California at Berkeley, provides daily updates on multiple incidents of looting and vandalism at sites throughout Egypt.

Statistics from the Egyptian government suggest that prior to the Arab uprising in 2011 incidents of recorded looting were at about 1200 cases/year. There are now an estimated 7000 cases of looting per year, and the true number is almost certainly higher. Current unrest and instability in the region and rising global demand for illicitly obtained Egyptian artifacts has resulted in increased destruction of the archaeological landscape.

#### Determination 2

Historically the government of Egypt has demonstrated its concern for culture with a series of legislative and policy initiatives to protect archaeological material from the prehistoric to the Islamic. Specifically Antiquities Laws no. 215 of 1951 and no. 117 of 1983 imposed penalties and fines to protect against the illegal excavation of sites and the illicit movement of antiquities. The current Constitution (2014) reaffirms the government's commitment to protect and preserve the Egyptian past. To this end, the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities and the Antiquities Police of the Ministry of Interior are all charged with increasing public awareness and implementing educational initiatives aimed at encouraging Egyptians to recognize the importance of heritage.

#### Determination 4

Scholarly and public interest in the civilizations and heritage of Egypt is among the most robust of any in the world. This multi-layered past within the living landscapes of today continues to capture the imagination of the public. It inspires American schoolchildren and represents life-long learning opportunities within the United States as well as in Egypt.

Cultural exchanges through the study of objects, monuments, and landscapes offer unprecedented opportunities for bridging boundaries and crossing borders (national, ethnic, economic, and more). In recent years, Egypt has facilitated loans of artifacts for

the benefit of the academic and general publics, and the approval of the MoU would enhance and facilitate the cultural exchange of people and objects.

#### Article 2: Future lens of cultural diplomacy

With this request for a MoU, the Egyptian government enters into the current dialogue regarding U.S. cultural policy and the framework for sustained cultural diplomacy. Egyptian archaeologists—along with their foreign and often American partners—are committed to a future of collaboration that embraces human dignity and civic engagement with cultural objects, monuments, and spaces.

In consideration of the above, our organizations respectfully ask that the committee recommend approval of the proposed MoU between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt concerning the imposition of import restrictions on the archaeological and artistic material for which protection is requested.

Sincerely yours,

#### **American Anthropological Association (AAA)**

Monica Heller, President

Founded in 1902, the American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization of anthropologists and others interested in promoting the science of anthropological disciplines. The purposes of the AAA are to advance anthropology as the science that studies humankind in all its aspects, through archeological, biological, ethnological, and linguistic research and to further the professional interests of American anthropologists, including the dissemination of anthropological knowledge and its use to solve human problems.

#### **The American Schools for Oriental Research (ASOR)**

Susan Ackerman, President

The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) supports and encourages the study of the cultures and history of the Near East, from the earliest times to the present. We were founded in 1900 by twenty-one institutions. Over a century later, ASOR has more than 90 consortium members, including universities, seminaries, museums, foundations, and libraries. In addition, we have more than 1,550 individual members. All are dedicated to initiating, encouraging, and supporting research into the cultures of the Near East from the earliest times and helping the public to understand the findings of that research.

#### **Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)**

Andrew M.T. Moore, President

Founded in 1879 and chartered by an act of Congress in 1906, the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) is the oldest and largest organization in the US devoted to

archaeology. With 110 societies throughout the country and more than 225,000 members, the AIA can fairly be said to represent a broad cross-section of Americans, from students to interested lay-people to professional archaeologists.

### **Society of American Archaeology (SAA)**

Jeff Altschul, President

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.