

**Testimony of Dr. Salima Ikram  
On Behalf of the Society for American Archaeology  
Before the Cultural Property Advisory Committee  
Regarding the Request by the Government of Egypt  
For a Bilateral Agreement for Import Restrictions  
Under the Cultural Property Implementation Act**

**May 14th 2014**

I, Salima Ikram, am testifying in support of the request by the Government of Egypt to enter into a bilateral agreement with the United States that would restrict the illegal importation of Egyptian antiquities into the USA.

I am a Professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo, Director of the North Kharga Oasis Survey Darb Ain Amur Investigation, Co-Director of several projects in the Egyptian Museum, Fellow of the Smithsonian Institution, National Geographic Grantee, former fellow of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World-NYU, member of the Society of Women Geographers and Explorer's Club, the American Institute of Archaeology, the American Research Center in Egypt (where I am active on several committees), the Egypt Explorations Society, and recipient of the Spanish Geographical Society's award for Excellence in Research. I have been a member of more than 20 excavation teams in Egypt, directed several projects, and have published extensively, both for scholarly and popular audiences.

CPAC has put forward four determinations that are to be evaluated in order for import restrictions to be imposed. I will respond to each below.

**1. Whether looting is occurring on a significant scale.**

There is little doubt that looting in Egypt is occurring on a large scale, although it is fair to say that looting has been occurring in Egypt since the time of the Pharaohs. However, since 2011, when security forces abandoned archaeological sites (and their other posts), looting and land grabbing has been going on at an unprecedented rate. Dr. Sarah Parcak has been able to document and graph the rise in looting and pinpoint it to various sites, although the satellite imagery best records open areas. Thus, tombs and constructed monuments that are being ravaged are not as closely observed. Walls of tombs and temples are being attacked in order to remove decorated blocks as has been attested in Saqqara, sites in the Delta, Middle Egypt, and Thebes. Temple blocks, particularly from Delta locations, such as Behbet el-Haggar, are being removed, and tombs throughout the delta and Nile Valley are also subject to such indignities—recently several funerary stelae from Kom Abu Billo were dug up and removed from the site, albeit many were recovered by the antiquities' police shortly thereafter. Desert and oases sites that are virtually impossible patrol are particularly prey to pillaging.

Even museums, such as the Mallawi Museum have been raided out of misplaced political fervor,

with many artefacts being destroyed and stolen during the process. Again, 70% of these were retrieved, although many were damaged.

In addition to Pharaonic sites, Coptic and Islamic sites have also suffered. Many mosques and mausolea, have had pieces of elaborately carved wood removed, inlays stolen, and even chunks of masonry removed, as is seen in many of the mosques in Islamic Cairo.

## **2. Whether there are any efforts inside the country being taken to try and stop the looting.**

Particularly since the looting of the Mallawi Museum in August 2013, the Ministry of State of Antiquities and the Security Forces have been making more of an effort to protect sites, stop looting, and retrieve stolen objects. Guards (paid the equivalent of \$40/month) have tried to protect sites and run off looters—successful when the looters are not armed with automatic weapons; some guards working at Dahshur and Giza have been killed in their valiant attempts to secure sites. On the whole, the Egyptian state has been more successful in hunting down thieves and looters and retrieving stolen objects than stopping looting. The press regularly reports the discovery of stolen objects, and this week (May 11 2014) an exhibition of the retrieved objects (some internationally), was launched at the museum with a view to stopping theft and encouraging people to return objects without reprisals.

It should be noted that since the explosion near the Islamic Museum, meant for the nearby Police station, that actually destroyed the fabric of the Museum and several objects, new strategies have been employed at the major museums in order to protect them. Thus, the Coptic Museum and the Cairo Museum have a complement of APC and tanks surrounding them, and barbed wire is used to keep out pedestrian, motorcycle, and bicycle traffic. Security measures at gates and access roads has also been increased.

At some sites, such as Tanis, the villagers were worried about looters and set up their own protection relay that was successful. In Luxor, some parts of the vast necropolis were patrolled by men who had excavated the sites and wanted to ensure their safety.

Corruption is, unfortunately, frequently manifest within the system, although the younger members of the Ministry in particular have demonstrated against it and have named individuals whom they believe to be corrupt. Many individuals in the Ministry have stood up and spoken out against corrupt officials.

## **3. Whether other countries are making an effort to stop looting in Egypt and that a market for Egyptian material exists in the U.S.**

Excavators are doing their best to ensure the safety of their sites and to carry out study seasons rather than excavation seasons in order to document their findings and provide the Ministry with complete photo-documentation of the artefacts that they have unearthed.

I was very actively involved with constructing the Red List, together with Egyptian and

European colleagues (Egyptologists as well as members of ICOM) in order to produce a tool to help educate border controls as to what types of objects might be being moved illegally across frontiers. As the exhibition of retrieved objects attests, more and more countries are becoming sensitized to what might be illegally acquired antiquities, and to returning them to their rightful owners.

#### **4. Whether Egypt is willing to permit US archaeologists to work in the country and bring students and whether the country is willing to make international loans.**

Egypt continues to issue permits to excavators from all over the world, although new permits have been limited for some time to areas that are demonstrably under threat (until now it was threat of population expansion or natural disasters), particularly in the Delta, whose archaeology was little known, where the water level is rising rapidly, and populations are growing and the potential of encroachment on archaeological sites is great.

Both trained archaeologists, and to a *much* lesser extent, students, have been allowed to work. Within the construct of a training dig for both Egyptians and others there is far greater flexibility.

International loans: these have been possible (for a price) and will probably become so again once the country has settled down. Currently, as the government is unstable and accusations are flying, there is a concern that permissions for loans, unless approved by a broad spectrum of politicians and not just the Ministry of Antiquities (MSA), will elicit criticism from the press and the populace, and that unfounded accusations of selling the country's heritage will be leveled against individuals in the Ministry, or at the Ministry as a whole. However, as the country settles down, it is more than probable that the loan system that existed previously will, with some slight modifications that ensure better checks and balances, will be reactivated and that museums will be able to borrow objects from Egypt. Currently the MSA is deliberating about the loan of 40 objects for a touring exhibition on religion starting in Berlin and going on to London.

#### **Conclusion**

Thus, I would like to conclude by stating that Egypt's antiquities from all periods are under threat by looters and pillagers. The government is trying to stop this trend but lacks sufficient manpower and machinery to do this successfully, and thus it is crucial for the US to support the proposed MOU. Egypt will, and should be urged to, continue its cooperation with foreign missions to excavate and document its sites, while training Egyptian personnel, thereby creating a new generation of well-trained, able Egyptian scholars who will be able to protect their national heritage and that of the world.