

CyberScribe 187 – March 2011

What a month for poor old Egypt...revolution...the ouster of a dictatorial President...the elevation of Zahi Hawass to a Ministerial post...the violation of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo...and great hazards to all those places and objects in Egypt that we love so well.

The CyberScribe is not going to make this column a rehash of all the myriad reports that came across his desk in the last few weeks. He thinks the readers have heard enough of them. Sorry to say that nearly all of them were wildly composed, totally irrelevant or misinformed, and senselessly inflammatory. The good news is that very little damage occurred, that the police and army, plus the antiquity guards behaved well, and Egypt is open for business again.

The truth was that the ‘ransacking’ of the Egyptian Museum was not as so often told. There were a few objects stolen and a few objects damaged, but given what might have happened, the situation remained under control and the damage was slight.

In order to report a synopsis of what seems to have actually happened, the CyberScribe is repeating a posting from a group calling itself ECHO. This report, which is lengthy and will be somewhat abridged, seems to be rational, well reasoned, and as far as can be seen from here, relates a very good version of what happened:

‘The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has now officially been disbanded; on January 30th 2011 Dr. Zahi Hawass was appointed Minister of Antiquities in the newly formed Ministry of State for Antiquities Affairs (MSAA). The exact structure and appointment of other officials within this new ministry are still to be announced. Just what shape this re-structuring program will take is uncertain at present and many people are still continuing to fulfill the duties they held in the old SCA. It is also uncertain if Dr. Hawass will remain as the minister in the governmental restructuring that is continuing to shape the new Egypt, one that is moving forward into an exciting new future.

‘A demonstration by employees of the old SCA was held outside their headquarters in Zamalak on the 10th February. Another of their demands was a step to modernize the structure of the SCA and the removal of the culture ministry's supervisor, who supervises the construction work of the National Museum of Civilization, the Grand Egyptian Museum and the rehabilitation project of historic Cairo. Their argument is that Egypt's tourism industry is a major source of foreign currency but it is unclear how exactly

the income is spent. These protests against the old system appear to be part of a wider move by Egyptians to air their opinions about the way their government has been run for the past three decades.

‘In a further response to these demonstrations, on the 23rd February Dr. Hawass released a statement revealing that he has found the funds to hire 900 new recruits, which will be composed of the best of the current group of job applicants. This first phase of recruitment will provide the newly hired archaeologists and conservators paid training within the Ministry for a period of five months. A second phase will provide the same paid training program for a further 500 recruits, and will be followed by a third phase in which 500 more graduates will be hired and trained.

‘The assessment of the damage to the objects in the Egyptian Museum following the 29th January break-in by looters is still continuing but preliminary reports are now emerging. Conservation teams are now busy repairing the damaged objects, a task that Zahi Hawass estimates will take only a few weeks. Hawass revealed on the 12th February that eighteen important objects were missing from the Egyptian Museum. Those included two gilded statues of King Tutankhamen as well as a statue of Queen Nefertiti. Investigations are continuing to try and find these missing pieces and bring the criminals responsible to justice.

1. Gilded wooden statue of King Tutankhamun being carried by the Goddess Menkaret
2. Gilded wooden statue of King Tutankhamun standing on a papyrus skiff harpooning. Only the torso and upper limbs of the king are missing
3. Limestone statue of King Akhenaten holding an offering table
4. Statue of Queen Nefertiti making offerings
5. Sandstone head of an Amarna princess
6. Stone statuette of a scribe with a duplex hairstyle from Amarna
7. Wooden shabti statuettes from Yuya (11 pieces)
8. Heart Scarab of Yuya

‘These further investigations of the grounds and the museum itself found several missing artifact had been thrown into trash cans and corners far from their original locations. The heart scarab of Yuya (8) was found in the gardens on the west side of the museum, near the new bookshop. Fragments belonging to the damaged New Kingdom wooden coffin, still situated on the second floor of the museum, were also found in this area. One of the eleven missing shabtis of Yuya (7) was discovered underneath a showcase and the figure of the goddess Menkaret carrying Tutankhamun (1) has also been recovered, but not that of the boy king himself. A teenage boy who had been

protesting in Tahrir Square found the statue of Akhenaten (3) near the southern wall of the museum, and took it home. Although the statue was missing its offering table, this had been found in the museum a few days before and the two pieces are now being reunited in the museum's conservation laboratories.

'Previous reports that the Memphis Museum had been looted now appear to have been incorrect. Although there have been claims and counter claims on the extent of looting in the Memphite pyramid fields, it appears that the tombs of Maya Tutankhamun's Treasurer, Maia Tutankhamun's Wet Nurse and Mereruka have not been damaged as previously reported by some news outlets. The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield and the International Military Cultural Resources Work Group reports that the Tomb of Maya, King Tutankhamun's Treasurer, has clear signs of vandalism in the form of broken locks and broken pieces of wood, but appears to be intact. That of Tia & Tia has the relief cupboards unlocked, but all appears to be safe. However, that looting occurred at both Abusir and Saqqara has now been confirmed.

'At Saqqara, the tomb of Hetepka was broken into, and the false door was stolen along with objects stored in the tomb. The Tomb of Kagameni had its security door opened by vandals but it is now welded shut, supposedly no damage had occurred. At Abusir, a portion of the false door from the tomb of Rahotep was stolen. Break-ins have also been confirmed at a number of storage magazines, including ones in Saqqara, such as the one near the pyramid of Teti, and the magazine of Cairo University. The extent of the illicit digging at Saqqara and Abusir has not been fully ascertained, but has been confirmed, with the guards saying that the looters only managed to dig 0.5 m deep and that the holes have now been filled back in.

'The Egyptian military caught and released thieves attempting to loot the site of Tell el Basta; the military also caught criminals trying to loot a tomb in Lisht. There have also been many reports of attacks on other archaeological sites in the form of illicit digging and the building of illegal houses. A report from the chief of the tourist police claims that looters have entered the storage magazine in Tuna el Gebel. This report indicated that two mummies dating to the Roman era were missing. In another report, it appears that De Morgan's Magazine at Dahshur was broken into on the night of the 11th February and again a few days later. This magazine contains large blocks and small artifacts from this important Old Kingdom site. After the first break-in Hawass expressed his concerns that Egypt was not safe from looters. An initial assessment reported only small amulets were taken, but a much fuller inventory now needs to be undertaken after the second break-in where these

criminals overpowered the guards to get to the antiquities. The entrance has now been walled up.

‘All of the Pharaonic, Coptic, Islamic and modern sites along with six of the antiquities museums, including the Cairo Museum reopened to the public on 20th February 2011 and flights are now returning to normal. According to the Tourism Ministry tourism generated \$10.76 billion in income last year.

‘If any Egyptian antiquities are offered for sale that have a dubious provenance it is the responsibility of the security forces, customs agents, art dealers, collectors and local populations everywhere in the world to do their utmost to recover these invaluable pieces, and report the sellers straight away to the proper authorities. The Director-General of the UNESCO Irina Bokova has called for increased vigilance from national and international authorities, art dealers and collectors following the theft of several important artifacts from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and other sites throughout the country. If you suspect that an antiquity is looted or you see any looting taking place you should contact the police, the Art Loss Register on [www.artloss.com](http://www.artloss.com), Interpol on [www.interpol.com](http://www.interpol.com), World Customs Organization (WCO), the International Centre for the Study and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) on [www.iccrom.org/](http://www.iccrom.org/) or the SCA (0020(2)7365645 or 0020(2)6859253), failing that you can contact Dr. Marina Apaydin, Deputy Director Management, UNESCO World Heritage Centre at [m.apaydin@unesco.org](mailto:m.apaydin@unesco.org), the secretary of the International Committee of Egyptology (CIPEG) in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) at [g.pieke@googlemail.com](mailto:g.pieke@googlemail.com), Saving Antiquities for Everyone (SAFE) on [cho@savingantiquities.org](mailto:cho@savingantiquities.org) or ECHO ([www.e-c-h-o.org](http://www.e-c-h-o.org)) on [egyptianheritage@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:egyptianheritage@yahoo.co.uk) and we will notify the correct legal authorities on your behalf.’

There was a very odd attempt to steal antiquities. Recently a report surfaced where a band of thieves tried to steal an immense unfinished statue of Ramesses II at Aswan. These goofy thieves were swiftly apprehended, but one wonders what they were really up to. Abbreviated from ‘Al-Ahram Weekly Online’ (<http://snipurl.com/25gjmh>), here is the story

‘Last night looters sneaked into the southern quarry of the upper Egyptian city of Aswan in an attempt to cut and remove the statue of King Ramses II. The statue is half buried in the sand as it was originally cut in red granite and left in situ. Following an immediate report from the quarry’s security guards,

archaeologists along with security personal headed directly to the site where they caught the thieves red handed.



'Zahi Hawass, minister of state for antiquities affairs, described the statue as beautifully carved although it does not bear any engravings. The statue is six meters high, 175 centimeters in width and eight centimeters thick. It depicts king Ramses II in the shape of the god Osiris.

'Mohamed El-Beyali, director general of Aswan and Nubia antiquities, told Ahram Online that the statue is in a very well preserved condition and is one of the quarry's landmarks. He added that it remains unknown why ancient Egyptians carved the statue and left it in the quarry. The quarry was used by ancient Egyptian to cut granite blocks and for the construction of temples and carving colossi.'

One of Zahi Hawass's main missions is to force or embarrass the Saint Louis Museum of Art to relinquish a mummy mask they purchased some years ago. This column has reported on the issue a number of times, but the museum has taken the battle to a new level recently.

They have sued to allow themselves to be declared the rightful owner...and to be let alone and be sheltered from further attacks from Egypt. Shorted somewhat, here is the story from the 'Saint Louis Post Dispatch newspaper (<http://snipurl.com/25gl23>):

'The mummy mask of the Lady Ka-nefer-nefer sits posted in the Egyptian display at the St. Louis Art Museum Tuesday. Administrators of the museum filed a federal lawsuit seeking to block U.S. Customs and Justice Department from seizing 3,200-year-old death mask that the Egyptian government claims was stolen after its discovery in 1952. The St. Louis Art Museum filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday asking a judge to order that the U.S. government has no claim on a 3,200-year-old mummy mask that officials in Egypt say was stolen from their country two decades ago.





'The Ka-Nefer-Nefer mask, with its inlaid glass eyes and shimmering plaster face, has been on display here since the museum purchased it in 1998 from a New York art dealer for \$499,000.

'According to the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in St. Louis, the government is now trying to seize the mask for return to Egypt. The suit asks for a judge to order the government to stop, contending that there is no proof the mask was stolen and that the statute of limitations has expired for any seizure under the Tariff Act of 1930. According to that act, the seizure of any smuggled or stolen property must be within five years of the time of the theft, or two years after the theft was discovered, the suit says.

'David Linenbroker, the museum's attorney, said authorities made it clear at a meeting hosted by the U.S. attorney's office Jan. 13 that the museum must hand over the mask or face seizure. "The museum talked about it

internally and with its board," Linenbroker said. "We think it's our responsibility and our right to defend our rightful ownership of the mask."

'Ka-Nefer-Nefer was an ancient noblewoman at the court of Ramses II. Her mummified body was discovered in 1952 by Egyptian archaeologist Mohammed Zakaria Goneim, and the mask was among the antiquities uncovered.

'The museum has insisted over the years that it researched the artifact's ownership history before acquiring it from Phoenix Ancient Art, in New York. The museum reached out to Interpol and the Art Loss Register, among other entities, it contends, and was given no indication of questions about how the mask arrived in the U.S. The museum's research showed the mask was part of the Kaloterna private collection during the 1960s when it was purchased in Switzerland by a Croatian collector, Zuzi Jelinek. Jelinek sold the mask to the New York art dealer in 1995.'

Speaking of mummies, it is getting hard and hard to see an actual mummy in museums. This is especially prevalent in England where there is a concerted effort to get museums to remove mummies from public view. A brief report tells us the current state of this campaign (from the 'Independent', <http://snipurl.com/25gnvy>):





The coffin of Horaawesheb, which contains a mummified female's body, is on show at the British Museum

‘Egyptian mummies used to be among the most popular displays in British museum collections. But their days as a visitor attraction may be numbered. Increasingly they are being secreted away by curators, hidden away from the public without consultation.

‘In the coming year, Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery will publish its first policy specifically on the use and display of human remains. It is clear from the draft that staff is increasingly sensitive about exhibits of ancient bodies and skeletons. Recommendations include erecting signs to "alert" visitors that such material is on display – and reconsidering whether to show it at all.

‘Already the museum has dramatically altered what is on display. It used to present its celebrated collection of Egyptian mummies in open sarcophagi,

but now keeps the lids semi-closed because, curators say, that is more respectful. 17 museums in Britain have issued specific policies on human remains, codes that were unheard of a decade ago. Some, like Manchester Museum, have shrouded Egyptian mummies in white sheets while keeping them on show, only unveiling them after public protest.

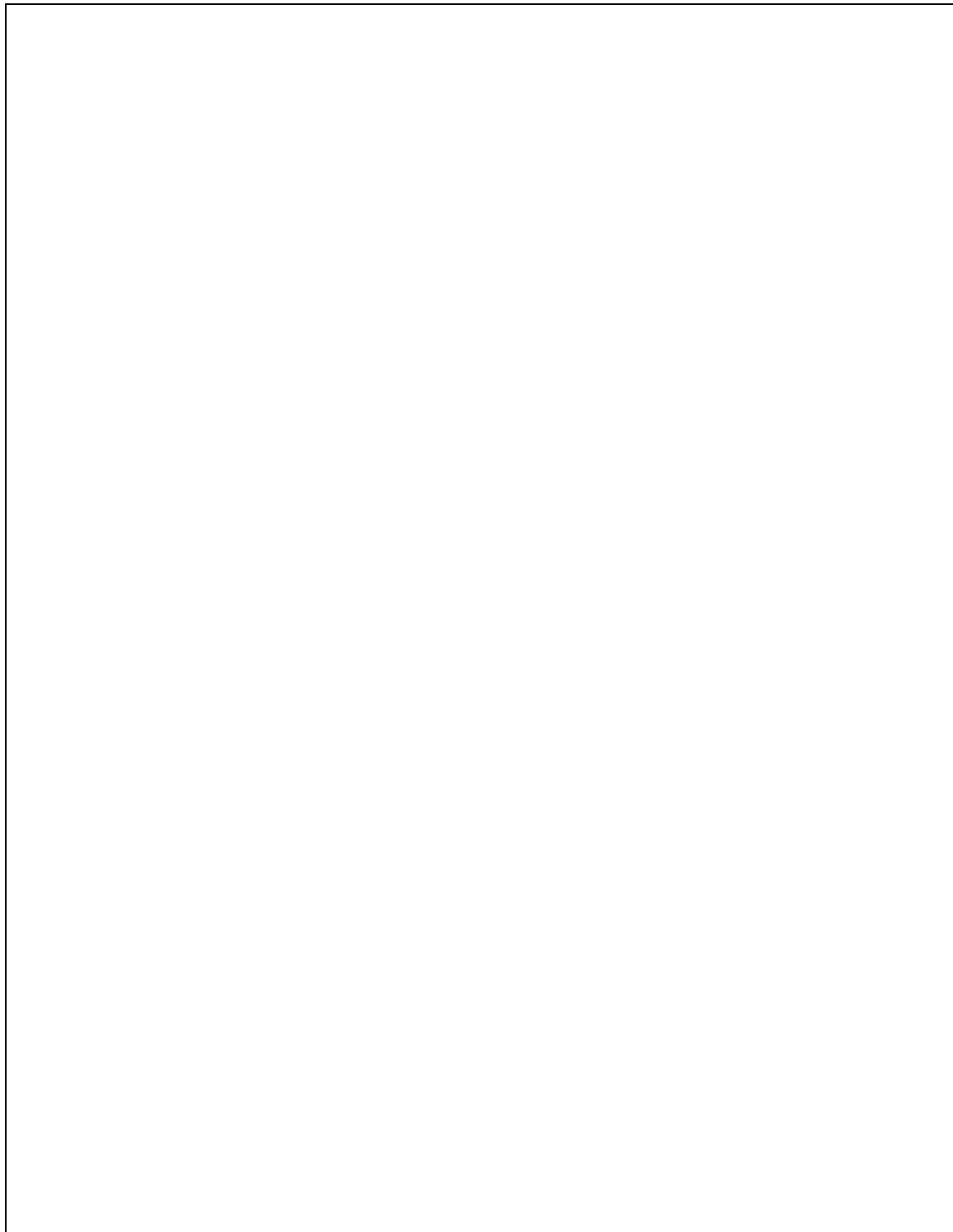
‘Others choose to show them away from the main galleries. The museum will normally not allow its holdings of human remains to be photographed or filmed for external media purposes.’

‘The question of how human remains are researched and displayed has become a lightning rod for a wider debate over the purpose of the museum. I have spoken to many campaigners who see the issue of repatriating or repositioning human remains – once considered scientific objects – as a way to signal a change of purpose for the institution. Removing them is a way of showing research is no longer a priority.’

‘So, if you think that displays of human remains still have something valuable to teach us make sure that next time you go to a museum you ask them where they keep their skeletons – and tell them, where appropriate, to take them out of the closet.’

The CyberScribe has decided to let the remainder of the column tend toward the lighter topics, so sit back and smile a bit. The first item relates to a silly theme that surfaced first years ago...the possibility that ancient Egyptians used kites to raise their obelisks.

The topic is current because the instigator of this silly notion is still telling her tale.



The CyberScribe told the story when it first appeared (in CyberScribe, Volume Six, Number Ten, March 12, 1999), where he noted:

‘Well, the CyberScribe tries to be fair; she did try her experiments in California and the results were as follows:

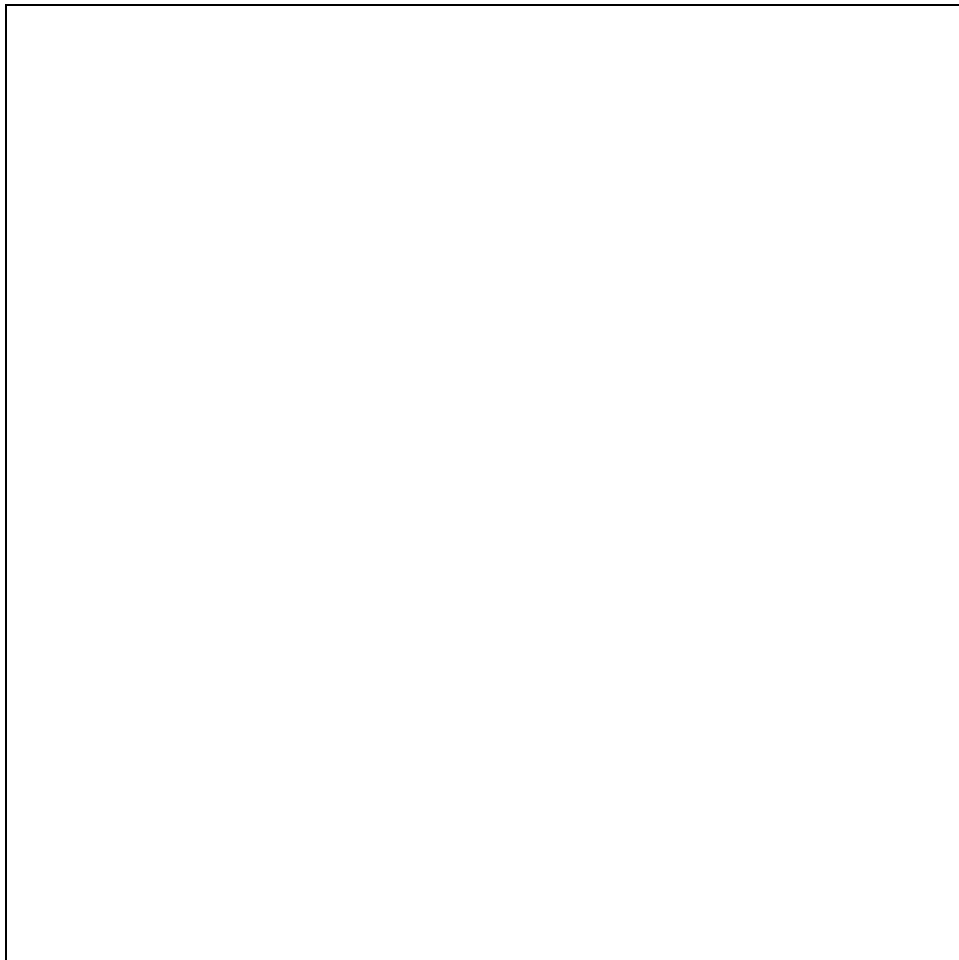
"I went to the park with Elizabeth and Sean and worked with a toy obelisk and kite. Just as NASA experiments with handheld models in the initial stages of space vehicle design, we took a toy obelisk out to the park for initial experimentation. The wind was lightly blowing, so we sent a children's kite up, and attached it to the little obelisk (about 12 in. high). When raising the obelisk, we noticed it was easier to control the direction of lift from the ground, rather than trying to control the direction of the kite."

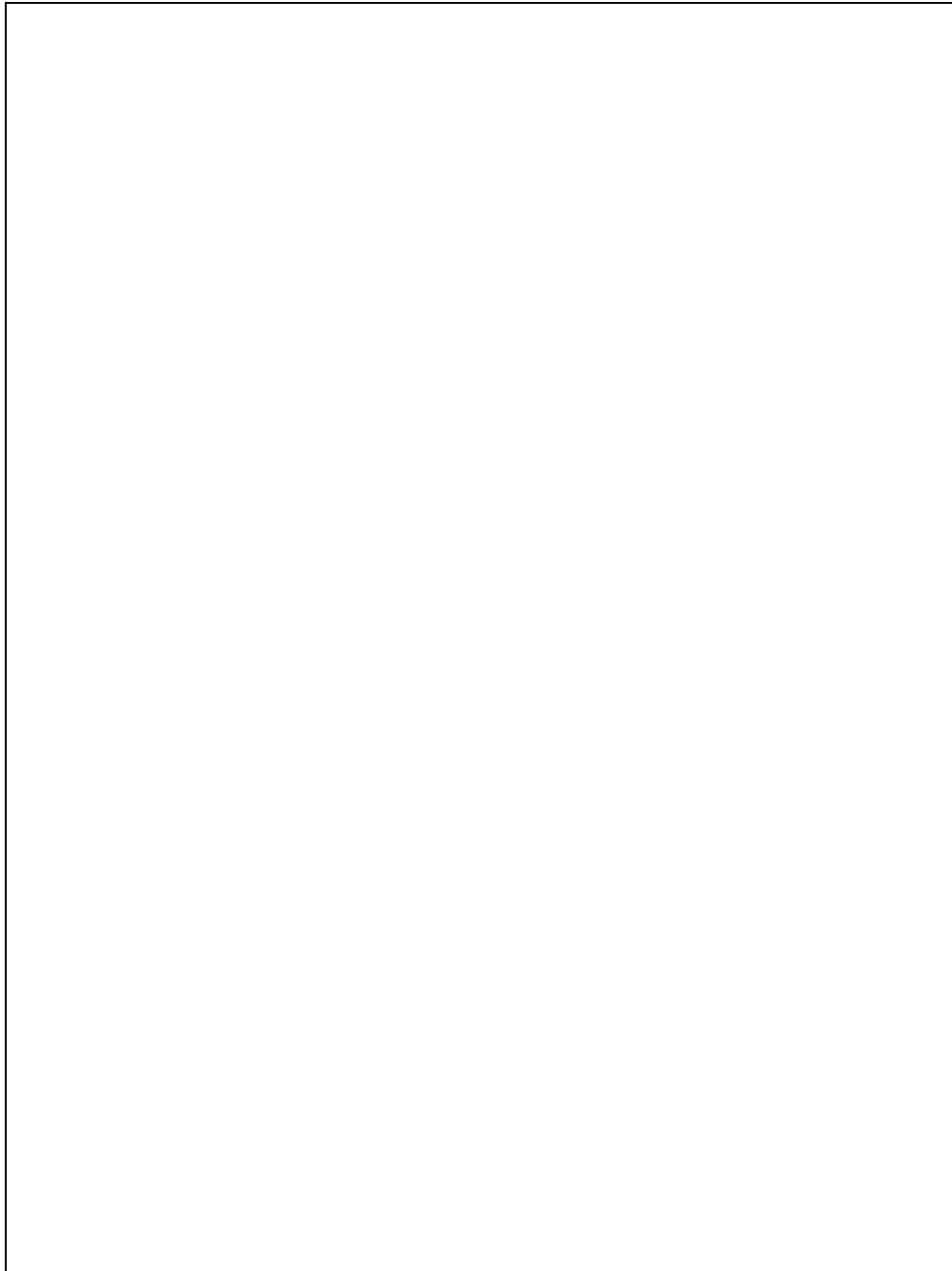
'The results of the first experiments? 'We spent about 4 hours in the park, checked the wind patterns using small kites, and got a great tan.'

'The team tried again using an eight foot long redwood log (about 400 pounds). The experiment was again a bit random and the results: lines snap easily, kites are hard to control... and they learned to stay away from trees. Ultimate result...three large kites dragged the log across the field... pretty much out of control.

'Well...their results can charitably be described as "equivocal" but the CyberScribe really wants to hear that they have lifted and/or dragged a weight in the range of the REAL obelisks. A quick check of references show that major obelisks range between about 10,000 to 1,500,000 lbs. (5-750 tons). The CyberScribe will admit to being really impressed when they tell me they have even raised one of the middle sized ones ... say 50,000 lbs. And the CyberScribe asks those of us who played with kites as a child (or more recently). Recall how suddenly and without warning kites often dive toward the ground? Well...would YOU want a job setting up obelisks when the stone might come dashing in from some odd angle and suddenly plummet to the ground?'

Next on the list is a craze sweeping Japan...mummy shaped sleeping bags. It seems that these are very popular and almost never obtainable from stores, even though they sell for about US\$75. They vary in quality and imagery, but here are a few views:





Third is a patented coffin that guarantees to automatically turn you into a mummy, and no...the CyberScribe will not tell you where to go on the Internet to order one of these silly and overpriced caskets. Note below that while they claim to have seriously researched their process, it has absolutely no relationship to what the Egyptians actually did. All they produce is a

tightly sealed coffin...to keep smells down, plus a tray of slaked lime to soak up the drippings produced by a decaying body. Not all that nice to contemplate, suggests the CyberScribe. Their comments and prices are below (abbreviated)::

'After several years of archeological researches and laboratory tests, we found a revolutionary formula . The thick coat of our special calcareous chemistry, based on Egyptian and Chinese Mummification covers the bottom of our caskets (+ - 2 inches) to absorb the humidity and acidity of the body resulting in an Auto-Mummification. The body stays several years in almost perfect condition.



'Of course, it's impossible to make an eternal intact conservation of the body for several reasons, but we can retard the process thanks to our "Auto-Mummification©" process that dry out the body by eliminating the emanation of acid inside the casket and keep the inside drier by absorbing water and acid. As you must know, acid and humidity reduce the conservation of the body.

'A gasket will help, but will not eliminate the acid. All our caskets have very strong gaskets, but the anti- acid chemical inside of our caskets will help a lot for a good body' conservation. Scientifically proved for more than 3000



years by Egyptians and Chinese. It's the reason why we can find mummies in those countries.

'Our caskets are built to obtain the best conservation possible like special seals and double bottom to absorb the humidity and release the dryness for guaranteed Auto-Mummification©.

'Mummies is a term that today is used to describe natural or artificially preserved bodies, though traditionally the word was used specifically to describe the bodies of ancient Egyptians where dehydration of the tissues was used for conservation of the body. Often, these early natural mummified bodies retained skin tissue and hair, along with a likeness of the person's appearance when alive 3000 years ago.

'As hydrated or slaked lime,  $\text{Ca(OH)}_2$  (mineral portlandite), it is used in mortar and plaster. Hydrated lime is very simple to make as lime is a basic anhydride and reacts vigorously with water. It is also used in water and several other treatments to reduce acidity, to harden, as a flocculent, and to remove phosphates and other impurities.

'Prices

16ga Stainless Steel 8 layers of 24 Kt Gold: \$28,500.00

16ga Stainless Steel 14kt Gold Plated: \$28,500.00 (Available in 18Kt or 24Kt)

16ga Stainless Steel in any Colors: \$24,750.00 (see color chart)

16ga Massive Bronze Gold Plated: \$34,500.00 (Available in 18Kt or 24Kt)

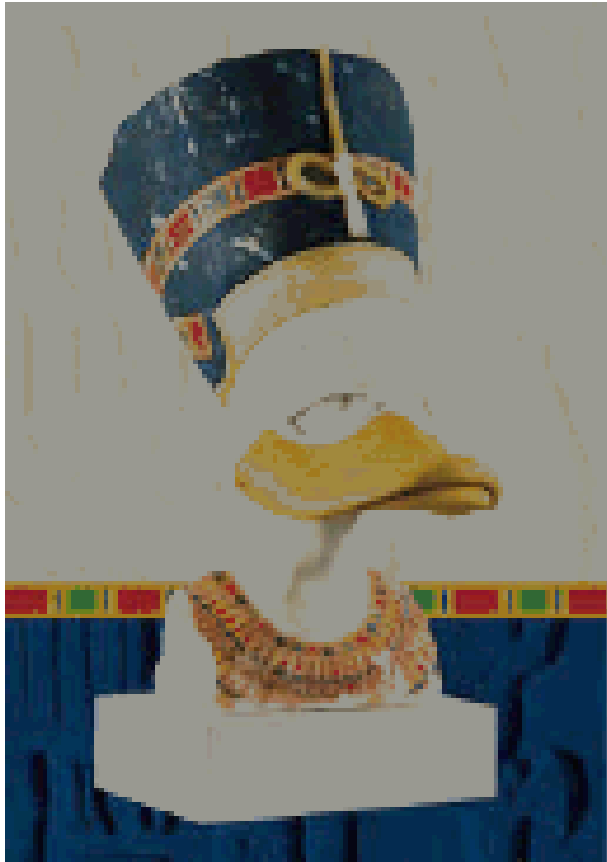
16ga Massive Bronze covered with Wonderful Swarovski Crystals:  
\$43,000.00

16ga Stainless Steel covered with Wonderful Swarovski Crystals:  
\$39,000.00'

But the CyberScribe saved the best for last. The prestigious Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim, Germany, has presented a wonderfully goofy exhibition built around artistic representations of famous...um...ducks. The article is in German (<http://snipurl.com/25gxh5>), but here is the CyberScribe's translation:

'The Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum, known for decades for its exhibitions on the great cultures of the world, is dedicated to a previously unknown culture, indeed a completely undiscovered duck's universe. The exhibition takes

visitors on an extraordinary journey. Duckfretete, Dötzi and Co. are the players that have crept almost unnoticed into the European culture.



‘Great art and great fun for the whole family. Admire the ducks in oil, as engraving or sculpture, in elaborate displays and walk-in scenarios! On its appearances throughout Europe, the stars of DUCKOMENTA have thrilled more than a million visitors. The exhibition includes about 300 works.



‘The DUCKOMENTA shows favorite comic book heroes as they have never seen before. As pioneers in exploring the universe, the Ducks appear boldly on world-famous works of art. They pose as "Mona Lisa" by Da Vinci, as "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" by Caspar David Friedrich, as "Goethe in the Campagna" or "Empress Sissi." But the Ducks win room in the permanent collections of the museum, where they take their place among the cultural, historical and natural history exhibits.’

Enough of this sort of ‘fowl’ nonsense, says the CyberScribe. See you here next month!