

CyberScribe 188 – April 2011

Egypt has become quieter for the moment, now that Mubarak has left, and before the elections. In this wild melee that was the revolution, Zahi Hawass was forced out...and many were gleefully dancing on his grave. The CyberScribe warned people that it would be a mistake to write him out of the script right away. He has been very wily and a strong fighter.

Apparently someone forgot the oak stake through his heart, or wherever, because the great man is back. He is once again the Minister of Antiquities. An article in 'Arts Beat' (<http://snipurl.com/27qyln>) was one of many sources that broke the news! Here is an abbreviated account of his return:

“Zahi Hawass, who resigned as Egypt’s minister of antiquities less than a month ago under criticism for his close ties to former President Hosni Mubarak, was reappointed to the post on Wednesday, Agence France-Presse reported, citing an Egyptian news report; Mr. Hawass, reached by phone, confirmed his reappointment.

“Mr. Hawass, a powerful figure in the world of Egyptology, was promoted to a cabinet position in the early days of the uprising, and drew the animosity of the revolutionaries by saying at the time that Mr. Mubarak should be allowed to hold power for another six months. He also said that Egypt’s museums and archeological sites were largely secure and that cases of looting were very limited. In the weeks that followed, that turned out not to be the case: several dozen objects were stolen from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo during a break-in on Jan. 28 — many have been recovered, though 37 are still missing — and hundreds more were taken from tombs and warehouses elsewhere in Egypt.

“After Mr. Mubarak resigned, Mr. Hawass, after posting on his blog for the first time a long list of sites that had been looted or damaged, announced that day that he had decided to resign because he could no longer protect Egypt’s antiquities.

“Mr. Hawass, who has never been accused of being humble, said on Wednesday that he did not ask to come back, but that there was no one else who could do the job. “I cannot live without antiquities, and antiquities cannot live without me,” he said.”

One large part of the reason for Hawass resigning was that the list of stolen objects keeps growing. After first saying that only a few things were gone, Hawass had to admit, day by day, that many items were missing or damaged.

At one point accusations flew saying that Hawass was the reason for the missing objects. Claims were made that he had stolen them. None of this is likely to have been true.

A brief note in Al Ahram Daily (<http://snipurl.com/27qymw>) listed a number, and there are complete lists circulating on the Internet:

“Five more artifacts looted from the collection from the Egyptian Museum have been recovered



“Today, with the help of Egypt’s armed forces and the tourism and antiquities police, five artifacts from 42 objects missing from the Egyptian Museum were recovered.

“The five items include four bronze objects depicting different ancient Egyptian deities, such as Osiris, the cat goddess Bastet, Apis Bull and Neith. All the returned objects are in good condition except the Apis Bull, which was broken into several pieces. With restoration, archaeologists hope, it can be restored to its original form.

“Egyptian Museum Director Tarek El-Awadi believes that the remaining 37 objects remain in Egypt and have not been smuggled out of the country.

When the museum recovers the last missing object, an exhibition relating the story of the January break-in during Egypt's revolution will be on display as well as all the retrieved objects.

“I am really very grateful as the police and armed forces are exerting all efforts to return Egypt's missing heritage,” said Mohamed Abdel Fatah, also of the museum, wishing that all the missing objects would be returned soon.”

Another item missing from the Egyptian Museum is some of its property...in particular, a piece that had been taken away and where the burned out government building now stands. The museum wants it back! The story in Al Ahram Daily (<http://snipurl.com/27qynq>) (abbreviated here) tells the story:



“When Cairo governorate announced yesterday that a professional committee is to be assigned to study the possibility of demolishing the National Democratic Party's (NDP) building and transforming the land into a park, archaeologists and museologists were furious. Although the land had originally been in the possession of the Egyptian museum, no one has asked them to contribute to the committee.

“It is about time that this land, which originally belonged to the Egyptian museum, was returned,” Tarek El-Awadi the director of the Egyptian museum told Ahram Online.

“He said that following the 1952 revolution the land was taken from the Egyptian Antiquities Authority and since that time has been used by the various ruling parties established by the regime, the last in the line being the NDP. The building was gutted by fire on the evening of the 28th of January, in the midst of fierce attacks by pro-regime thugs and security forces on the demonstrators in Tahrir Sq.

“El-Awadi told Ahram Online that they are calling on Prime Minister Ahmed Sharaf and the Army Supreme Council to return the land to its original owners, the Ministry of State for Antiquities Affairs.

“He denied that the land belongs to the Cairo governorate. The land was part of the museum’s safe zoning since its construction in 1901 and was the museum’s Nile port where ships transported monuments from their original location in Luxor and Aswan in Upper Egypt to the museum for display. He said that official ceremonies held to welcome the ancient Egyptian royal mummies were also organized there.

“El-Awadi suggests that after the demolition of the gutted NDP’s building, the land could be made into an open-air museum, showcasing some of the museum’s collection, which is now overflowing in its internal displays.

“It could be also a twin building to the museum connected by a bridge. This building, said El-Awadi, could be the location for the gold collection of the 19th dynasty king, Tutankhamun”

Other items missing in Egypt are the crowds of tourists. There are very few of them, which is probably no surprise. Few tourists are willing to Brave Egypt, even with the very substantial discounts and special deals being offered. The following article from the Washington Post (<http://snipurl.com/27qze2>) (abbreviated here) gives a feeling for the impact on the nation.

“Tourists are staying away from Egypt, two months after the start of a popular revolution that ousted long-time President Hosni Mubarak, dealing

another blow to a nation already staggered by inefficiency, corruption and poverty.

“Protesters compared Mubarak to the ancient Pharaohs. Their tombs, in time-worn and time-honored pyramids, rise majestically in Egypt’s desert, beckoning to millions of tourists who used to admire them. Now the sand-swept sites stand nearly empty. It was a pro-democracy revolution that overturned the government, but experience shows that any kind of turmoil frightens tourists away.



“The government has estimated that the unrest cost the nation about \$1.7 billion in the span of about two weeks, with more than half that figure stemming from tourism losses.

“The effects are dire. About two million Egyptians make their living from tourism, which amounts to 5 to 6 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product. Unemployment is already widespread, and underemployment, or jobs that pay very little, is even more common.



“Fueled by renewed national pride, Egyptians are visiting tourist sites once packed with sunburned European visitors. Children clamber up otherwise deserted pyramids. Their parents relax on the large stone building blocks below, enjoying the spring sunshine. But they don’t have the cash of their foreign counterparts, who fueled this crucial segment of the Egyptian economy.

“Young Egyptians use the moment to stage a colorful plea for tourists to come back. Dressed up as Pharaoh kings, they pose by the Nile and the pyramids.



““The tourist is our guest, be generous with them,” one of their signs reads. Another man holds up a sign declaring, “Egypt is a country of safety and security.”

“But there are precious few foreigners around to read them.”

As if there were not enough troubles, what has been described as a ‘small bomb’ went off very close to the pyramids at Giza. It seems to have been more of a silly accident than a terror attempt, but it will further alarm people.

The so-called ‘bomb’ seems to have been discarded artillery round. The CyberScribe is not sure what his readers might have done in this situation, but pounding on a large artillery shell with iron rods doesn’t seem like a very good idea. The details are sketchy, but the best source available at this writing, from the Associated Press (<http://snipurl.com/27qzfg>) stated:

“A small bomb exploded near Egypt's iconic pyramids on Wednesday, badly injuring three peddlers of tourist trinkets that police said were trying to open the casing of the old abandoned munitions.

“The bomb exploded some 500 feet (150 meters) from the pyramids outside Cairo after the peddlers saw the edge of the device sticking out of the sand and began hitting it with iron sticks under the impression there were

valuables inside, said security officials.

“Three men were seriously wounded, officials added, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press.

“It was not clear how a leftover piece of ordnance ended up in the desert near the pyramids, where no major battle has been fought since 1798, when Napoleon's army routed Egypt's Mamluk rulers in a pitched battle.

“Egypt was the site of titanic tank battles during World War II, but these were confined to the deserts around the northern coast and the later wars with neighboring Israel were focused around the Suez Canal and the Sinai Peninsula, far to the east.

“No extremist group has claimed the bomb, nor have any groups made public threats against the ancient site.

“The explosion may further rattle tourists, who have largely stayed away from the country since demonstrators overthrew President Hosni Mubarak in February.”

On a happier note, one of Chapter's friends and a member as well, Gayle Gibson, is in the news again. She presided at the public discussions of one the Royal Ontario Museum's mummies. The article (much abbreviated here) appeared in a publication called 'Unreported Heritage News' (<http://alturl.com/dhi9c>) and discussed a reused coffin and its unexpected occupant:



The coffin of Nakht is faded and looks quite plain. However high resolution photographs taken of the coffin show that originally it was well decorated. Also it appears to have been made out of imported wood.



The team was able to read the hieroglyphs beside the drawing on the bottom of the coffin. They were surprised to find that this is a depiction of the goddess Neith, a deity associated with weaving. This means that some of the art on Nakht's coffin was personalized for him. Photos courtesy Royal Ontario Museum

“About 3,200 years ago, at a time when Egypt was recovering from civil war, a boy named Nakht worked as a weaver for a funerary chapel. His diet was poor, he suffered from malaria and ultimately he died in his teenage years, likely not much older than 14. His occupation may have contributed to his poor health. Ancient records suggest that weavers were near the bottom of the social heap.

“So until recently Nakht appeared to be an open and shut archaeological case. “We thought we knew who he was,” said Gayle Gibson, an Egyptologist at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto Canada. But now new research suggests that Nakht`s story is quite a bit more complex. Recently a team from the museum, along with Anders Bettum, a doctoral student from the University of Oslo, took high resolution photos of the boy`s coffin. They also took the chance to re-examine its hieroglyphs and determine what kind of wood the faded box is made from.

“She told the audience that when their work was complete the team came to a surprising conclusion – that for a malnourished, un-mummified, teenager Nakht had a high-end coffin. Its quality is such that it seems unlikely that the boy could have paid for it with his own earnings. There is also no evidence that it was re-used or stolen from another tomb.

“It is a “very, very nice coffin and very personalized, with lots of images of him,” said Gibson. Among the badly faded drawings the team uncovered is a scarab beetle with sun disks, located near where his hands are crossed. They also found an image of the sky goddess Nut, stretching her wings to protect his genitals. There are even drawings showing Nakht himself, wearing robes and a collar.

““Even if we can just make out these drawings they’re very good quality,” said Gibson.

““There’s more. High resolution images of the coffin show that the color green was often used as a decoration, something surprising considering its cost. “Different colors of paint cost different amounts of money and green was one of the expensive ones,” said Gibson.

“So far the team has been unable to determine what kind of wood the coffin was made of, but they have ruled out sycamore and other domestic sources, meaning that it was likely imported.

““We’ve got a boy who is a weaver, who is suffering from all these diseases, who is (suffering) from malnutrition and yet he’s got a personalized, beautifully decorated coffin, made from imported wood,” said Gibson.

“Unfortunately the coffin contains no references to Nakht’s parents. It doesn’t even record his mother’s name. “It is quite unusual not having his mother’s name,” Gibson said. She doesn’t believe it likely that Nakht was directly related to the king – the son or grandson of the pharaoh would probably be better fed and certainly would have a better job than that of a weaver.

“Until new evidence emerges the team is left with a mystery. How did a malnourished teenager get a personalized, beautiful, coffin? One, which most people in ancient Egypt could not hope to afford? Did he have a link to the king or perhaps an uncle in the coffin business so to speak? On the other hand maybe we’re wrong about the stature of Egyptian weavers and some of them were well off.”

The next two items involve what seem to be mysteries. The first has to do with the decline and near disappearance of a common ancient Egyptian tree, the sycamore fig. One common and used for many carpentry needs, the tree is almost extinct in Egypt. Those NT-ARCE members who went on the trip a year ago saw them, most notably in Karnak Temple, but elsewhere they are rare. An article in ‘Alma Sryal Youm’ (<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/354295>) relates the problem and what is being done to save this very useful tree.



“The *ficus sycomorus*, or sycamore fig, is an ancient tree that has been cultivated in Egypt since the third millennium BC. This tree can grow to reach a height of 20-25 meters, a trunk girth of six meters, and possesses a dense crown of spreading branches that offer a delightful shade up to a few hundred square meters.

“One of the peculiarities of this tree is the fact that its fruit--rosy, plump figs arranged in clusters--grow directly on the trunk. This fig tree is native to Africa and also to be found in Lebanon, Cyprus, and in the Southern Arabian Peninsula.

“There are various reasons to explain why the ancient Egyptians felt such infatuation with this sycamore. First, they relished relaxing under the tree’s dense foliage for its shade, freshness and breeze and for its figs, which were deemed to reduce the level of sugar in the blood and have a savory taste. On the other hand, the tree’s bark and latex were used for many purposes, some medicinal, as the latex is efficient in treating skin diseases when rubbed on the epidermis. Finally, the hard wood of the sycamore was used for fuel, while the softest part was used for carvings and furniture making, and the leaves constituted a good fodder for domestic animals.

“The sycamore wood was used for the coffins and furniture of the dead included in their graves,” al-Ghadban explains. The ancient Egyptians would also place the sycamore’s fruits in their tombs, as an ex-voto to the dead.

“The sycamore however does not propagate itself naturally in Egypt any more, since the insect responsible for the pollination of the tree became extinct. “The wasp in charge of transporting the pollen from one tree to another is extinct,” says Irina Springuel, former professor of ecology at the University of South Valley in Aswan. Also making it difficult for the tree to proliferate is the fact that it does not create a proper seed, and the few that can be collected from the fruit have a mediocre viability.

“Springuel says “the only way to propagate the tree in Egypt today is by making cuttings, which is an artificial way of multiplying this tree.” She adds that only a few hundred individuals are still growing in Egypt today, but the tree’s original functions are still highly appreciated today: “This tree continues to be a symbol of ancient Egypt.” Considered “rare,” the sycamore tree that used to grow in every village in Egypt is now reduced to a few hundred in number. However the Ministry of Environment currently does not have a project in place to salvage it.”

The second odd story involves a project to explore and publish an underground tomb for what may turn out to be as many as eight million mummified dogs. The story was presented by the ‘Daily Mail’ (<http://snipurl.com/27qzl9>), and is presented here, abbreviated:

“A labyrinth of sacred tunnels packed with the mummified remains of millions of dogs has been excavated under the Egyptian desert. The catacombs are estimated to contain the remains up to eight million dogs, many of which would have been offered to the gods when they were just hours old. Others would have been treated as living representatives of the dog or jackal-headed god Anubis and would have lived out their lives in the nearby temple before being preserved and laid to rest in the network of tunnels.



Remains: One of eight million dogs archaeologists believe are buried in a labyrinth of sacred tunnels under the Egyptian desert

“The fascinating details come from Cardiff University scientists, who along with Egyptian colleagues are the first to examine the structure and contents of the complex underground network built 2,500 years ago under the Saqqara desert. The catacomb, which lies ten to 12 metres underground, consists of a long central corridor and a series of smaller passages that branch off it.

“Sampling of small areas and bone examination of their contents suggest that the entire network is home to eight million dogs, as well as a handful of cats and jackals.

With the need to mummify so many animals, perhaps thousands per year, it is likely the animals were bred in puppy farms dotted around the ancient capital of Memphis. Pilgrims, who were not necessarily particularly well-off, bought the dogs, then paid for them to be mummified, in the hope of currying favor with the canine-headed god, Anubis.

“Dr Paul Nicholson, of Cardiff University’s School of History, Archaeology and Religion, said: ‘These animals were not strictly “sacrificial”. ‘Rather, the dedication of an animal mummy was regarded as a pious act, with the animal acting as an intermediary between the donor and the gods.’

“While Dr Nicholson’s team are the first to examine the tunnels in detail, they are not the first to discover them, with geological work pointing to the tunnels being raided in the 1900s.



Professor Salima Ikram examines one set of remains. The entire network of catacombs is also home to a handful of cats and jackals



“Dr Nicholson told the Daily Mail: ‘There are newspaper reports of boatloads of cat mummies being brought into Liverpool for use as fertilizer and it is likely some of the dog mummies went the same way - although not necessarily to Liverpool.’ The dog catacomb is the larger of two in the area. The Saqqara desert also contains catacombs dedicated to bulls, cows, baboons, ibises, hawks and cats. It is thought the practice died out after the Romans conquered Egypt in 30BC.”

This is probably a minor note, but Chapter Member Judy Ford pointed out an error in a past CyberScribe column. The CyberScribe pointed out to her that he was infallible, but she insisted...and it turns out that an error did appear, though it was an error in the source document. In any case, the CyberScribe is pleased to present a correction.

“In a review of the book ‘Cleopatra – A Life’, the author was cited as Stanley Sheff...this was in error. Judy Ford said, in an e-mail to the CyberScribe:

“Stanley Sheff did not write "Cleopatra - A Life". The author was Stacy Schiff. Did Stanley write the review of Schiff's book? If so, Stanley has been prejudiced by Hollywood and a Roman who wrote Egypt's history. Schiff's book was well researched and written deserving of the best seller list. I hope you'll consider giving Schiff credit in the next Menhedj.

“As you can probably tell, I just finished "Cleopatra - A Life" and can't wait to read it again!”

If you happen to have \$230,000 lying about unneeded, please call the CyberScribe and let him take it off your hands. In the unlikely chance of that happening, perhaps you might wish to purchase the little decoration described below? (described in <http://snipurl.com/27qzm7>) :

“It’s called the “Queen of the Nile” and costs about US\$223,000 including import duties — to own it. What is this pricey bauble? A sculpture of a scene of Ancient Egypt from Lladró, a Spanish maker of porcelain figurines. The piece features lithe dancers and musicians entertaining Queen Nefertari, the royal wife of Ramses II, the pharaoh, and her entourage as they journey down the river in a boat.







“The 2006 “Queen of the Nile” by Juan Carlos Ferri Herrero is the largest and most expensive creation the Spanish firm has ever made, according to the company’s sales team in India. Lladró will produce only 100 of the pieces – so far, the company has sold 14 of them in India. (All the sales in India occurred before Egypt’s recent political upheaval.). The company did not respond to requests for information on how many other “Queen of the Nile” sculptures had sold in other parts of the world.



“Challenging dimensions: Artisans struggled for five years to balance the weight of the Queen’s parasol against the 160-centimeter-long boat. The parasol kept breaking, said Arjun Shivshankar, retail brand manager at the Lladro showroom in Bangalore.



‘Real hieroglyphics: When clients pay this kind of money, the company’s thinking went, they would notice if plain old squiggles were used instead of the real thing.

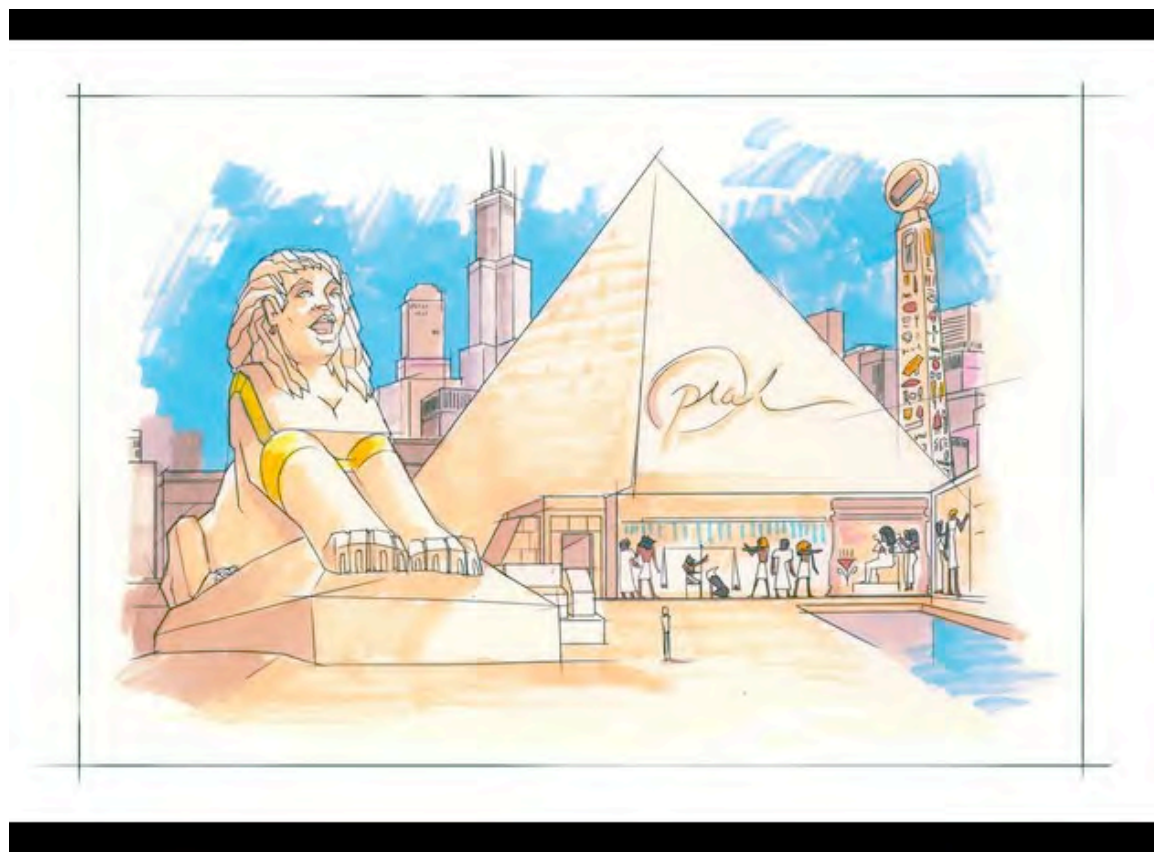
‘Vivid color: Lladró’s work is known for its reliance on natural colors. The Queen sculptures are heavy on the lapis lazuli – an azure blue — for this Egyptian mise-en-scène of 12 people and a pet panther. And then there’s ochre, a dark yellow meant to replicate the gold and copper jewelry that festoons the figures.

‘Elaborate headgear: In real life, the Queen was not one to bare her head when she was out, especially in the cruel Egyptian sun. Here, she is protected by an authentic royal vulture crown, while simultaneously donning the

headdress of the goddess Hathor, described in the catalogue as “a solar disc set between the horns of a cow.”

‘A long wait: Lladró cannot provide instant gratification. The piece is made entirely by hand. It takes approximately 400 hours to hand-paint the work and another 150 hours to assemble its numerous fragments, the company says. Each piece takes 45 days to be crafted, and another 45 days to ship from Spain.’

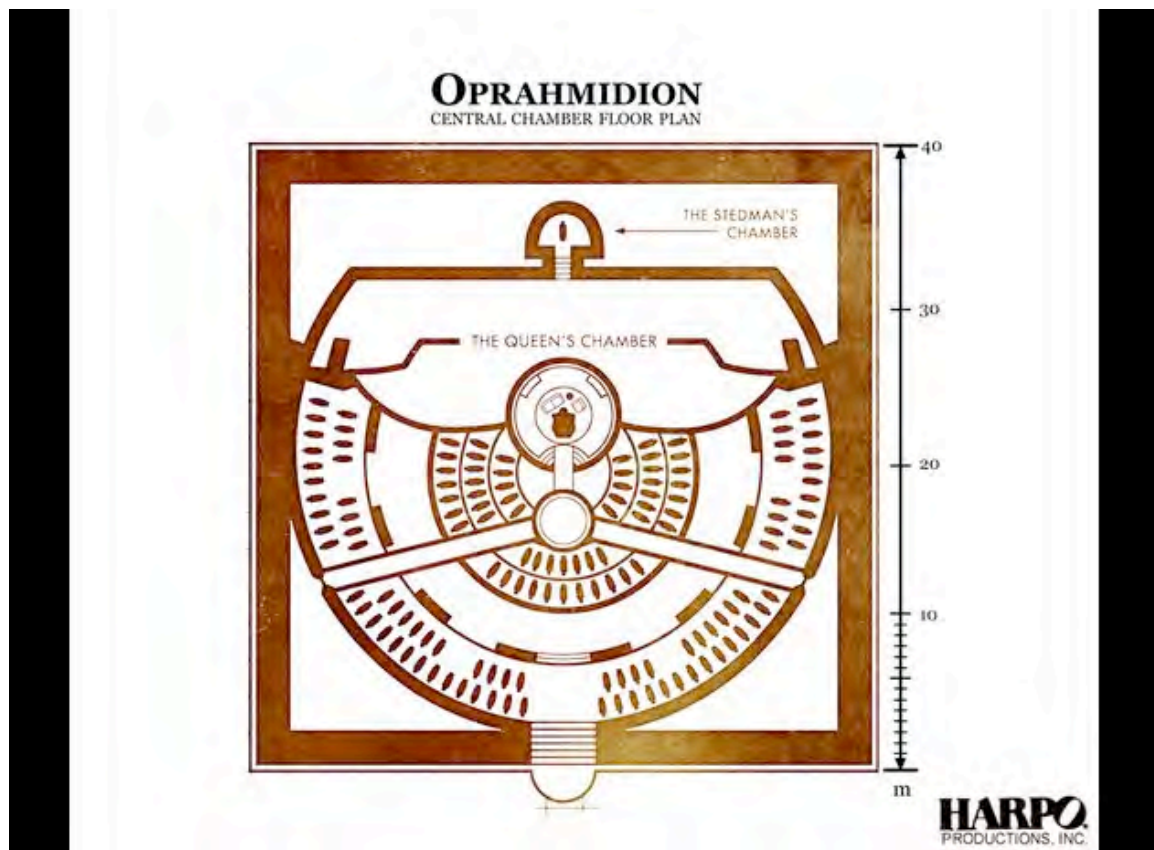
And lastly, a site (<http://snipurl.com/27qzn4>) invites 100 lucky women to share eternity with Oprah Winfrey in her own custom designed pyramid. The site is called ‘Unique Daily’ which ought to be a tipoff. There is a very well produced video to be seen there with the details, but the illustrations below will give some idea of what awaits the happy hundred women.



“Oprah’s biggest fans will be entombed alongside her in The Oprahmidion where they will bask in her wisdom for eternity.”



The burial chamber where the hundred women will lie in a semicircle around their goddess.



Floor map of the burial chamber



A sample of a Book of the Dead that will accompany the women into eternity.



And Oprah's funerary mask