

CYBERSCRIBE-190

Menhedj, Volume One, Number Twelve (June 2011)

This month's column embraces a variety of topics much wider and more significant than usual. The CyberScribe is astonished at the implications some raise.

With that sort of an opening line, what is that important? Well, Zahi Hawass is starting to flex his new muscles, and this time it is not anything that the foreign excavators can criticize. They can only look on with open mouths as the unthinkable occurs.

What? Hawass has started removing Egyptian Muslim cemeteries that have encroached on land belonging to the antiquities ministry. For years these people have boldly cover important sites, knowing that burials are hard to remove one completed. The article (somewhat abbreviated) was one written by Hawass (http://snipurl.com/~a_) and here it is:

"I will never forget what I saw when I went to Saqqara before I became Minister of Antiquities for the second time. During the Revolution, people built over five hundred tombs (a modern cemetery) above sites near the pyramids of Pepi I, Pepi II, and Djedkare Isesi. I found out that the people who live nearby also built a mosque on the causeway of the pyramid of Djedkare Isesi.



[A new cemetery built near the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. (Photo: Sandro Vannini)]

‘There was more destruction at Mit Rahina (ancient Memphis), where large cemeteries were built. Local people also built large cemeteries at Abusir, Lisht, the West Bank of Luxor, and many other sites all over Egypt. I was very upset by the attacks on the sites, and I could not sit by and watch them be destroyed like this.

‘When I was sworn in as Minister in front of H.E. Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi, he asked me to sit with him and explain all of the problems that Egypt’s antiquities were facing. I found out later that this great man, who truly loves the heritage of his country, appointed General Hussien Mahamoud - a member of the High Council of the Military - to serve as the contact person between the Military Council and the Ministry of State for Antiquities.

‘General Hussein is a kind man, and he came to meet with me so that I could tell him about these problems. I gave him a detailed map prepared by the MSA of all of the sites that were damaged by looters during the Revolution. I told General Hussein that we urgently needed to do cleanup on the West Bank of Luxor, and at Memphis, Saqqara and Abusir. This would, however, only be “phase one” in the protection of our monuments.

‘General Hussein presented a report to H.E. Hussein Tantawi, who gave an order that the police should start to remove all of the modern tombs. A call was made to me and I was told that the Minister of the Interior would oversee this work, with the support of the Army.



[A noble's tomb at Giza being used to stable a horse. (Photo: Sandro Vannini)]

'Today, MSA personnel, the police, and the army worked together to remove all of the new tombs that were built above the site of Mit Rahina. On Sunday, we will do this on the West Bank of Luxor and later, at Abusir and Lisht. After that, we plan to continue working to clean up all of the sites that were damaged by looters during and after the Revolution.'

Another story related a series of new and impressive finds at Mit Rahina, the site of Amenhotep III's great mortuary temple. The actual report (somewhat abbreviated) can be found at <http://snipurl.com/~ay>. Here we learn:

'During their excavation at the funerary temple of the 18th Dynasty king, Amenhotep III (c. 1390-1352 BC), at Kom el-Hettan on the west bank of Luxor, the mission of the Colossi of Memnon and Amenhotep III Temple Conservation Project unearthed an alabaster colossus of the great king. The team has also discovered the head of a deity, as well as restoring a stele and a head of the same king.



The face of a colossal alabaster statue of Amenhotep III recently found near the third pylon of his funerary temple at Kom el-Hettan. (Photo: MSA image bank.)

'The colossal statue shows Amenhotep III seated, and wearing the Nemes headdress, a pleated shendjyt kilt and a royal beard. It was found in the

passageway leading to the third pylon (gate) of the funerary temple, 200 m behind the Colossi of Memnon, which guarded the first pylon.

“The statue is the northern one of a pair of colossi that were once placed at the gate of the third pylon,” reported Hawass. It is likely that both statues collapsed during an earthquake that took place in antiquity, but parts of them were still visible in a layer of Nile alluvium. The back of one of the two statues’ thrones had already been discovered in a previous excavation and its fragmentary text published. The other parts will be gradually uncovered for conservation and the statue restored in its original location in the near future.

‘Dr. Hourig Sourouzian, the head of the mission, has also described the discovery as very important for the history of Egyptian art and sculpture, as well as for the story of the temple. The colossus is unique because it is exceptionally well carved in alabaster, a stone hewn in the quarries of Hatnub in Middle Egypt. This material, she explained, is rarely used for colossal statuary, and the pair of statues from Kom el-Hettan are the only preserved examples of their size, an estimated c. 18 m in height.



Head of a deity in granodiorite from the great court of Amenhotep III’s funerary temple at Kom el-Hettan. (Photo: MSA Image Bank.)

‘During clearance and mapping work on the central part of the temple’s great court, where more parts of the original pavement were uncovered, Dr. Sourouzian’s mission has further discovered the head of a deity carved in granodiorite. The head is 28.5 cm high and represents a male god wearing a striated wig. Part of his plaited divine beard is preserved under the chin.

‘Also discovered in the great court was a red quartzite stele of Amenhotep III, which Mohamed Abdel Fatah, Head of the Pharaonic Sector of the MSA, reports as having been restored by the mission. Dr. Sourouzian described how the stone conservators and specialists of the team gradually reconstructed the stele from 27 large pieces and several smaller ones, up to a height of 7.40 m (4/5 of its original height).



The re-erected stele from the great court of Amenhotep III’s funerary temple at Kom el-Hettan. (Photo: MSA Image Bank.)

‘The stele was originally 9 m tall and its restoration will be completed next season when its round top will be put back in place. This part of the stele bears two scenes representing Amenhotep III and his queen consort, Tiye, bringing offerings to the gods, Amun-Re and Sokar. The rest of the stele is decorated with 25 lines of sunken hieroglyphic inscriptions, which list the temples Amenhotep III dedicated to the great gods of Thebes.’

This next story concerns a place that the CyberScribe has never visited, and one suspects that few other had visited either. The report (somewhat abbreviated, http://snipurl.com/_es) gives an overview of recent work at the

site called Medinet Madi, the ruins of the only Middle Egyptian temple known...and the site of a cult worshipping the crocodile god. Author Rossella Loenzi tells us about the restorations, the crocodile nursery and much more:



Medinet Madi Lions and sphinxes line the processional way to the temple (Courtesy of Minister of State for Antiquities)

‘Founded during the reigns of Amenemhat III (about 1859-1813 B.C.) and Amenemhat IV (about 1814-1805 B.C.) of the 12th Dynasty, Medinet Madi contains the ruins of the only Middle Kingdom temple in Egypt.

‘Approached by a paved processional way lined by lions and sphinxes, the temple was dedicated to the cobra-headed goddess Renenutet, and the crocodile-headed god, Sobek of Scedet, patron god of the region. Now almost forgotten by tourists, the site was swarming with pilgrims in ancient times.

‘Discovered more than 10 years ago, the temple featured a unique barrel-vaulted structure which was used for the incubation of crocodile eggs. According to Bresciani, the structure was basically a nursery for sacred crocodiles. Her team found dozens of eggs in different stages of maturation

in a hole covered with a layer of sand. In the adjacent room, the archaeologist found a perfectly preserved pool.

"As they came out from the eggs, the crocodiles were kept in the pool," Bresciani wrote in the excavation report.

'According to Bresciani, the crocodiles were bred only to be killed. As they were embalmed, they were sold to pilgrims to the Sobek temple. Further evidence for the sacred crocodile business came from a nearby building, which contained another pool and other 60 crocodile eggs.

'Almost forgotten in modern times, with its monuments appearing and disappearing with the windblown desert sand, Medinet Madi is now at the center of a development project which aims to preserve the site and make it a more tourist-friendly visitor destination.'

It's no news that Egypt's tourist number has fallen off drastically during and after the revolution, and they are not climbing very rapidly even now. In an attempt to get more people to come back, Hawass has opened a series of important tombs to general access. These were very difficult to visit before, but they are expected to draw many visitors now. The tombs of Horemheb as a nonroyal person, Maya and a number of others can now be visited. The report (edited for length) appeared in the "Independent" news source (<http://snipurl.com/~a9>), and states:



A close-up of a drawing on a wall in the tomb of Tutankhamun's general, Horemheb, at the New Kingdom Cemetery in Saqqara, some 30km south of Cairo. After the pharaoh died, Horemheb became King, abandoned work on the Saqqara tomb, and chose a new tomb in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor



An archaeologist works at the tomb of Pay and his son Raia that was opened at the New Kingdom cemetery in South Saqqara

'Egypt has opened the tombs of leading retainers of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun at Saqqara, south of Cairo, in a desperate bid to lure back tourists who have avoided the country since the revolt in February that toppled President Hosni Mubarak.

'But it may some time before fascination with ancient Egypt will be enough to make tourists forget the recent television pictures they have seen of fighting in Tahrir Square. At Saqqara, dominated by the 4,500-year-old brick-step pyramid of Zoser, even the souvenir sellers who used to try to harass visitors into buying over-priced trinkets, guide books and photographs, have given up trying.

'Sabri Faraj, the chief inspector of the site overlooking the Nile Valley, said: "We used to get 3,000 visitors a day, but now the number is down about 250." Even the scrawny horses that used to bring visitors in carriages from tomb to tomb have been returned to their stables because there are so few customers,

'The collapse of the tourist trade is a disaster for Egypt because few countries are so dependent on the money spent by foreign visitors. The numbers visiting Egypt was down by 60 per cent in March compared to a year ago. Hotels are 80 per cent empty.

'Egyptians involved in the tourist business are near despair. Tamer Tewfiq, the owner of Top Dock Travels, says he was doing fine in January when "I received 400 to 500 tourists, but then nobody at all in February and March, and we are expecting only 100 a month for the next three months."

'Mr. Tewfiq says that the Nile cruises have mostly stopped and the rioting in Imbaba has destroyed any returning confidence. Tourists are going to Turkey instead and banks in Egypt have stopped giving loans to tourist businesses "because they are a high risk".'

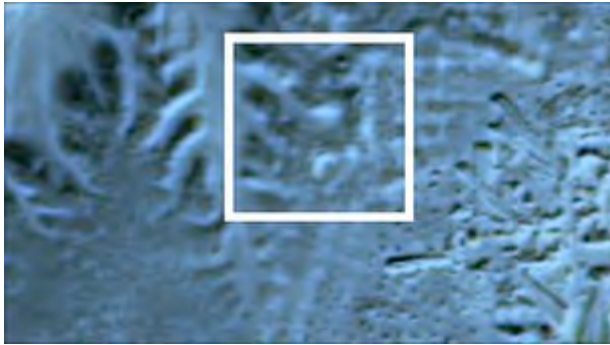
A long time member and friend of the North Texas Chapter, Sarah Parcak, is in the news once again. She and her remote sensing tools are making great discoveries from space. Her work has yielded stunning successes at a few sites. Unfortunately for her, the BBC, sponsor of her discoveries, broke the story before it had the blessings of the Antiquities people, notably Zahi Hawass. Feathers flew, but tempers were calmed and the work progresses.

The report appeared in a BBC outlet (http://snipurl.com/_jf) and well edited for space reasons, it gives us this interesting account of the current work. Writer Francis Cronin tells us:



The infrared image on the right reveals the ancient city streets of Tanis near modern-day San El Hagar

‘More than 1,000 tombs and 3,000 ancient settlements were also revealed by looking at infrared images which show up underground buildings. Initial excavations have already confirmed some of the findings, including two suspected pyramids. The work has been pioneered at the University of Alabama at Birmingham by US Egyptologist Dr. Sarah Parcak.



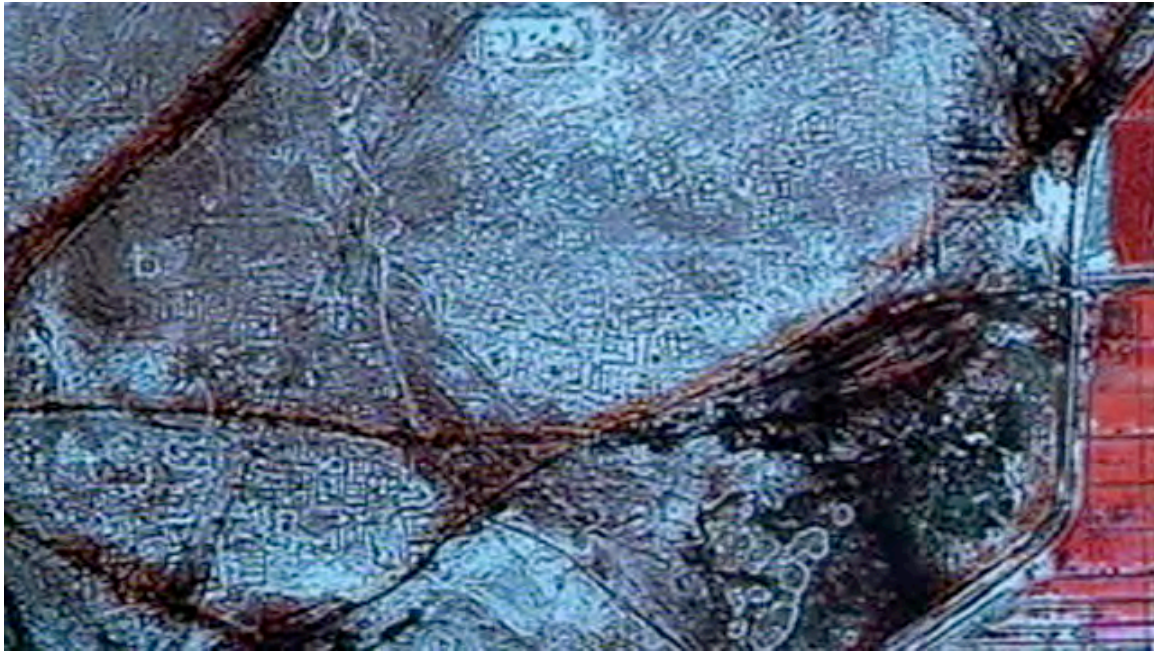
An infrared satellite image shows a buried pyramid, located in the center of the highlight box.

‘She says she was amazed at how much she and her team has found. "We were very intensely doing this research for over a year. I could see the data as it was emerging, but for me the "Aha!" moment was when I could step back and look at everything that we'd found and I couldn't believe we could locate so many sites all over Egypt. To excavate a pyramid is the dream of every archaeologist," she said.

‘The team analyzed images from satellites orbiting 700km above the earth, equipped with cameras so powerful they can pin-point objects less than 1m in diameter on the earth's surface. Infrared imaging was used to highlight different materials under the surface.

‘Ancient Egyptians built their houses and structures out of mud brick, which is much denser than the soil that surrounds it, so the shapes of houses, temples and tombs can be seen.

“These are just the sites [close to] the surface. There are many thousands of additional sites that the Nile has covered over with silt. This is just the beginning of this kind of work." BBC cameras followed Dr. Parcak on her "nervous" journey when she travelled to Egypt to see if excavations could back up what her technology could see under the surface.



The buried site of Tanis revealed by Parcak.

'In the BBC documentary Egypt's Lost Cities, they visit an area of Saqqara (Sakkara) where the authorities were not initially interested in her findings. But after being told by Dr. Parcak that she had seen two potential pyramids, they made test excavations, and they now believe it is one of the most important archaeological sites in Egypt.

'But Dr. Parcak said the most exciting moment was visiting the excavations at Tanis. "They'd excavated a 3,000-year-old house that the satellite imagery had shown and the outline of the structure matched the satellite imagery almost perfectly. That was real validation of the technology."

'She also hopes the new technology will help engage young people in science and will be a major help for archaeologists around the world.

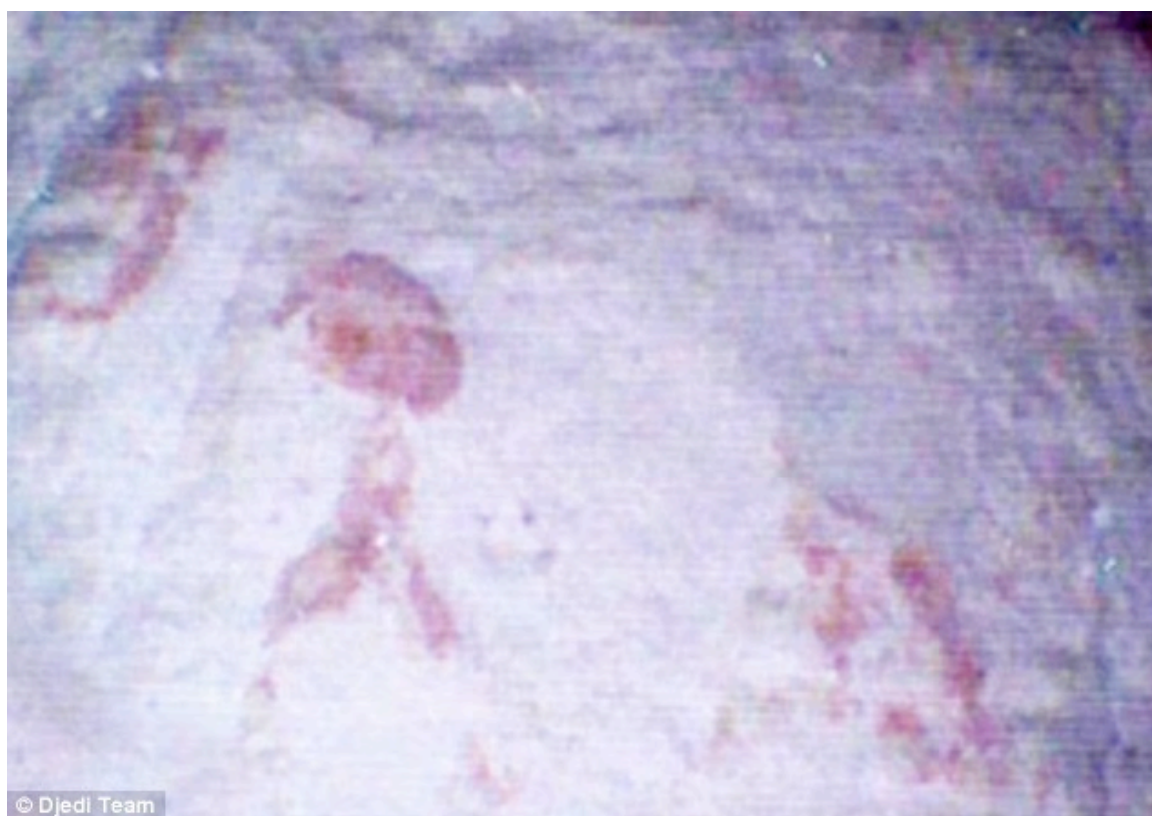
"It allows us to be more focused and selective in the work we do. Faced with a massive site, you don't know where to start. It's an important tool to focus where we're excavating. It gives us a much bigger perspective on archaeological sites. We have to think bigger and that's what the satellites allow us to do."

"Indiana Jones is old school, we've moved on from Indy, sorry Harrison Ford."

An old pyramid, the one built for Khufu at Giza, has revealed more information and created more mystery at the same time. A new small robot with new cameras and new technology has been used to examine and explore the mysterious passes leading from the burial chambers. This type of investigation had been done before, in part, but the new tools are much more sophisticated.

The story, with illustrations, appeared in the 'Daily News' (http://snipurl.com/_l7) and is presented to you with some abbreviation:

'Images captured by a new 'micro snake' camera travelling deep within the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt reveal small hieroglyphs written in red paint on the floor of a small, hidden chamber. Egyptologists believe that if deciphered the markings could unlock the secrets of why tunnels, doors and secret chambers were built within pyramids such as this one.



Mystery markings: A close up view of the red figures on the floor behind the first blocking stone in the tomb



Hidden depths: The Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt is the last of the seven wonders of the ancient world still standing. A new study has revealed hieroglyphics not seen by humans for 4,500 years

'Khufu had the Great Pyramid of Giza built as a monumental tomb, inside of which are tomb chambers, ante-rooms, chambers, ventilation shafts and access tunnels.

'There are three main chambers: The King's Chamber, the Queen's Chamber and the Grand Gallery. The King's Chamber has two shafts connected to outside, but two tunnels from the Queen's Chamber deep inside the widest part of the pyramid have two stone doors. Some experts now believe this may indicate a secret chamber, further still within the pyramid.



Inside the chamber: The limestone ceiling of the Queens Chamber inside the Great Pyramid can be seen, but what lies beyond has puzzled Egyptologists

‘In 1993 a robot discovered a small door set with metal pins, the first time any metal had been found inside the pyramid, igniting speculation that the pins were keys or door handles.

‘In 2002 a different robot filmed a small chamber blocked by a stone after managing to drill through the first stone block.

‘The latest robot, built by engineer Rob Richardson from the University of Leeds, has a bendy camera that can see around corners, reports the New Scientist.

‘The images revealed could be numbers or graffiti which were common in Giza at the time of the pyramid's construction. Egyptologists believe the marks could be the work of stonemasons or work gangs, and could denote names, numbers or dates.

‘The door which puzzles experts can be seen to be polished, thanks to the bendy camera, marking it out as an important part of the structure rather

than simply as something to stop debris entering the chamber, says camera designer Shuan Whitehead.'

Now for a very different story...an archaeologist tour guide, who often worked in Egypt, was arrested in Israel for selling artifacts...to whom...to his tour group members. He has spluttered a number of stories to try to convince people of his innocence, but the facts are very clear.

The 'Salt Lake City Tribune' has what seems to be the most balanced and complete telling of the story, written by Sheena McFarland (http://snipurl.com/_mb) and (abbreviated here) gives a window on this odd and sordid adventure:



Image made available by Israel's Antiquities Authority Wednesday shows stolen antiquities confiscated from a retired U.S. lecturer.

'Israeli authorities have arrested John Lund, a 70-year-old tour guide from Murray on suspicion of trafficking antiquities stolen from Israel. The antiquities authority says he had stolen ancient coins in his possession and checks totaling more than \$20,000 believed to be from the illegal sales of ancient coins, clay oil lamps, and glass and pottery vessels. Associated Press photo



John Lund brought ancient coins and oil lamps from Jordan and Bethlehem into Israel.

‘The retired university lecturer, author and tour guide lives in Murray and has guided 4,000 people through sites important to Mormon theology for more than 30 years. He was detained on May 14 as he attempted to leave Israel with the ornate oil lamps and 100 bronze coins. He did buy some antiquities from street vendors in Bethlehem, which is under Palestinian control. He said he was not aware he was only to buy from Israeli-authorized dealers and he did not know he needed to obtain an exit visa in order to transport the artifacts out of the country legally.

“Did I break the law? Yes. Did I break the law knowingly? Absolutely not,” he said Thursday. “They need to be clear with tourists with what is legal and not.”

‘Lund guided a group of about 90 people through Bethlehem, and several had run out of cash for souvenirs. He had them write him personal checks in \$200 amounts in exchange for extra cash Lund had brought in case such a situation occurred. He said he also facilitated the \$2,000 purchase of a silver Tyre shekel, also known as a Judas coin, for one of the tour participants.

‘During a meeting for the tour group at their hotel, agents from the Israel Antiquities Authority entered and confiscated a binder filled with coins — which he said he has for research into his upcoming book, *Bible Coins of Interest to Christians* — and several lamps that members of the tour group said they wanted to purchase. Other items from Lund’s hotel room were

confiscated, and he was taken to the authority's headquarters for three hours of "intense interrogation" where he was told he could not ask any questions. He was released but put under undercover surveillance for the rest of his trip, authority officials said.

'Lund was allowed to leave after posting a \$7,500 bond meant to guarantee he will return to stand trial, said Shai Bar Tura, deputy director of the authority's theft prevention unit. Bar Tura said formal charges are expected.

'Antiquities officials discovered Lund selling artifacts at a lecture he gave in a Jerusalem hotel, Bar Tura said. They seized the items, searched him and his hotel room, where they found hundreds of artifacts, Bar Tura said.

'Because all the items had been recovered and Lund was a tourist, "We thought it was appropriate to let him off with a warning," Bar Tura said. "But we kept our eyes open ... and sure enough, the guy kept on doing what he was told not to."

'Officials at the Israeli border with Egypt examined the bags of members of Lund's tour group and discovered 50 stolen items that they said Lund had sold to them, Bar Tura said.

'An arrest warrant was issued, and Lund was picked up at the airport trying to leave Israel. In his possession, officials found ancient coins and 70 checks written to him by tourists, Bar Tura said.

'Bar Tura said Lund could face up to three years in jail if convicted.'

This next item is one that has many sides, and all of them are bad to some degree. It involves the personal collection of Egyptian artifacts that Georg Steindorff was forced to sell to the Nazi's. Here is the entire brief story (http://snipurl.com/_mv).



Georg Steindorff

'The University of Leipzig is to lose an ancient Egyptian collection which it bought in 1936 from a Jewish professor, Georg Steindorff, a court ruled Thursday.

'A court in Berlin decided that the collection must be handed to the Jewish Claims Conference (JCC), as Steindorf had sold it for a value far below its actual worth.

'Leipzig university could produce no evidence to counter the charge that Steindorff had been forced to sell his collection under Nazi rule. It had taken the case to court in the hope of keeping the antique objects that the professor had collected on research trips.

'Steindorff, who held Leipzig's Egyptology chair, emigrated from Nazi Germany and died in the US in 1951.

'The JCC is an umbrella alliance of 24 international Jewish organizations seeking compensation for Holocaust victims and their descendants.'

And the story gets even more complex:

'Leipzig University has a small but important collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities which are used as teaching material. Part of it is material that was collected for that purpose by professor Georg Steindorff and had been

bought from him by the University in 1936. Steindorff was Jewish. A court in Berlin has now decided that the collection must be handed to the Jewish Claims Conference (JCC), considering that Steindorff had sold it under duress for a value far below its actual worth.

‘Leipzig university could produce no evidence to counter the charge that Steindorff had been forced to sell his collection under Nazi rule. It had taken the case to court in the hope of keeping the antique objects that the professor had collected on research trips. Steindorff, who held Leipzig's Egyptology chair, emigrated from Nazi Germany and died in the US in 1951.

‘So, now these well-provenanced objects will presumably be appearing on the market. What is interesting is that the wishes of Steindorff's family in the US have been disregarded as his legacy is split up and destroyed. Thomas Hemer, grandson of Georg Steindorff, wants the collection to stay in Leipzig.’

And finally there is a very interesting (and highly improbable) story that has appeared in that wonderfully responsible and reliable news source called ‘The Onion’ (http://snipurl.com/_n_). It seems that given the dilapidated condition of the major structures from ancient Egypt, the Jewish people have been ordered to come back and repair things. Read on:

‘Citing thousands of years of grueling wear and tear on its famed pyramids, the Egyptian government recalled the Jewish people yesterday. The Jews, though currently spread throughout the world in a global Diaspora, are in the process of returning to Egypt to repair damages the Pyramids have suffered over the last 4,000 years.



With such famous landmarks as the Sphinx and the Great Pyramids in horrible disrepair, Jews from around the world packed up their belongings and headed back to Egypt, where they will toil for centuries for the Pharaoh.

“They did a superb job the first time around, and we expect the same level of high-quality craftsmanship now,” said Egyptian Minister of Tourism Fekesh Sabah, a top assistant to the Pharaoh. “They are a highly skilled people.”

‘The Jews were urged to return by a forceful letter sent to every Jewish household in the world. The letter strongly suggested they return, if they knew what was good for them.

“The language of the letter seemed very sincere and forthright,” Detroit marketing analyst Roger Fine said. “It just came off like we really should go back.”

‘Fine is one of millions of Jews, or “Hebrewites,” who hastily quit his job, sold all his worldly possessions, and boarded one of the thousands of charter jets heading to Cairo International Airport.

‘Jews are massing in the Egyptian capital, where they are being sent out in labor teams of 600 to replace stones, repair crumbling walls and reinstall

statuary to the sun god Ra. They will do this not only for the rest of their lives, but also for the lives of their children and their children's children.

“This is very hard work,” said Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, an accountant from Cherry Hill, NJ. “I do not enjoy this at all.”

‘Added Rachel Cohen of Los Angeles: “My job as a record label publicist has very little to do with hauling enormous, 40-ton sandstone slabs through the desert.”

‘To repair the pyramids, the Jews will employ many of the same effective building techniques used during their first construction, including the lever and the pulley.

“We have found that utilizing these techniques makes lifting the rocks up the 75-degree incline that much easier,” Project Coordinator Nassar Achbad said. “Doing it the old way, by hand alone, it would take over 500 years to complete the work. Now, it won't take more than two or three centuries, if that.”



‘The Jews first built the pyramids between 2686 and 2181 B.C. under enslavement by numerous pharaohs. Only after Moses, a prophet of the lord Yahweh, rose up to lead them were they able to escape into the desert and relocate to the promised land of Israel. According to published reports, the

Jews spent 40 years in the desert subsisting on an unleavened bread product and water, which was found by smashing magical scepters into rocks.

‘Once again, the Jewish people are hoping for a prophet to rise up from among the people and lead them back to freedom. This prophet may be Florida lawyer Barry Stern, whose successful defense firm in Fort Lauderdale has freed many white and blue-collar workers from potential incarceration.

“The climate here is similar to Florida, a dry heat which is more bearable than the humidity of say, the Amazon rainforest. But I don’t enjoy being whipped by my overseers,” Stern said. “If this continues, litigation may be pending.”

‘Though they do not fear legal recourse, Egyptian officials are hopeful that the Jews won’t pull out in a similar manner as last time, visiting a host of deadly plagues on the Egyptian people. This culminated in the parting of the Red Sea, which drowned over half the Egyptian army.

‘Said Sabah: “I hope they don’t do that again.”’

And that’s more than enough. See you next month!