"APAS—Homs—Palmyre" at: http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/homs/palmyra
13. For a report about 12 Syrian museums affected, go to: http://apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/rapports-d-apsa.html.
14. Watch the video at: http://youtu.be/KoplM6y_w2Q.
15. For more details on the state of Bosra, go to: www.apsa2011.com/index.php/fr/provinces/dar-a/sites.
16. To see the list, go to: http://www.kmkg-mrah.be/sites/default/files/files/emergency_red_list_of_syrian_cultural_objects_at_risk_3.pdf.
17. For example, locals have protected the Meqam (Mausoleum) of Zekerya (Fig. 16), Meqam Bab al-Wali, and the sundial of the Great Umayyad Mosque (http://www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/aleppo/great-umayyad-mosque.html).
18. For video of the bombardment, go to: http://youtu.be/bUbC-cz2oydU and www.apsa2011.com/index.php/en/provinces/daraa/bosra-en.html.
19. For the video, go to: http://youtu.be/rGlgUU3E14Y

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RESPONSE

Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis: The View from Egypt

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Kila's article relating to cultural property crimes during armed conflict provides an overview of the major issues and highlights some of the problems in trying to be proactive when protecting heritage during such times. Discussions such as these are always useful, particularly at present, with an increase in armed conflict in many parts of the world.

Since January 25, 2011, Egypt has been experiencing civil unrest, and with it, some degree of armed conflict, particularly in 2013.[1] During this time there has been a certain amount of cultural property loss, primarily due to the fact that the police and security forces vanished from their posts throughout the country, including from antiquities' sites, which left them open to pillaging. Only small groups of site guards (*ghafirs*) steadfastly remained at their posts. Subsequently, some security forces have returned, but in fewer numbers, and lacking their previous position of power. This may be about to change as a result of the events of summer 2013. Due to their long initial absence, a vacuum was created, during which a more organized way of looting/theft could be, and was, established. The majority of the loss is a by-product of the civil unrest rather than being the direct result of armed conflict, and is an amplification of a tradition of antiquities' theft that has been present in Egypt since the time of the pharaohs.

Heritage loss in Egypt can be divided into three main categories. The most obvious one is land appropriation or land grabbing. This is when a person or a group of people illegally take over land belonging to the Ministry of Antiquities. The land can be taken over for agriculture or building projects. The people responsible for these takeovers include contractors who might appropriate significant amounts of land to divide up and resell for multiple purposes, or even villagers and townspeople who live in settlements abutting the archaeological areas. The latter group tends to acquire land at a much smaller scale than the former. Acquisition involves hastily constructing a wall around a piece of land, or quickly tilling the soil and planting or claiming to plant something there. The most effective ploy used to keep the newly acquired land, if immediate construction is untenable, is to use the area as a cemetery, or at least give the appearance that this is its new function (Fig. 1). For many of the people who acquire antiquities' land, the act merely seems like common sense. In their eyes, many of these areas are lying empty and unused, and they are actually providing a use for these wasted spaces that, it appears, the government has long ignored. This struggle for land is a long-standing one, with a constant tension between space needed by the living and space occupied by the remains of a

FIG. 1
New illegal graveyard (or "sudden cemetery") in Tarkhan, Egypt. (Photo by S. Ikram.)

dead culture, which often does not boast any obvious standing monuments or is not being actively excavated (for any number of archaeological or practical reasons). Of course, the appropriation of this land is a major tragedy for archaeology as the modifications to landscape, coupled with the loss of objects and buildings forever destroys our understanding of the site and the history of those who lived there. Additionally, during this time when law and order could not be enforced, urban land grabbing has occurred. Buildings that are over 100 years old count in theory as historic monuments even if they are unregistered with the antiquities authorities. Without due process they cannot be dismantled. However, without a strong central authority, many buildings in urban contexts have been hastily destroyed and new ones are quickly being put in their place. Although in time it is hoped that the due process of law will penalize their owners, the original monuments are lost forever, often with no documentation in the form of plans or photographs.

The antiquities' land appropriation system is also tied, to some extent, with looting. Often, the land that has been illegally acquired is investigated through ad hoc illicit excavations prior to construction or agricultural use of the space. Objects thus discovered are then disposed of through a variety of means.

Looting as an end in itself is also, of course, a phenomenon that has worsened dramatically in the absence of security forces on the ground (Figs. 2–4). Different scales and types of looting can be identified: professional organized looting as opposed to opportunistic robbers. In the former category, an individual with connections to facilitate the disposal of stolen antiquities controls the professional "mafia" of looters. His underlings acquire, transport, and see to the nitty-gritty of the operation. Often the "king-pin" will hire thieves on an ad hoc basis, or opportunistic robbers will go to him to sell artifacts as they do not have the connections to dispose of them. The latter category of opportunistic robbers is self-explanatory.

FIG. 2
Holes left by looters in Abusir, Egypt. (Photo by S. Ikram.)

FIG. 3
Piles of debris left by looters in Dahshur, Egypt. (Photo by S. Ikram.)

The organized looters can be divided into two broad categories: violent and relatively non-violent. The former group has come into being after January 2011, and is a direct result of the recent traffic in arms in Egypt; the latter category of looter is long established. The armed individuals are equipped with modern, highly efficient automatic weapons. The Ministry of Antiquities' site guards that remained on site when the better-equipped security forces (police, tourist police, antiquities' police, and, at some sites, secret police) had left, were armed only with sticks and occasionally small revolvers or antiquated rifles with no ammunition (unless they had managed to purchase some). Several of these guards have been killed in the line of duty. Prior to 2011, these guards were generally sufficient to intimidate prospective robbers as the guards were in positions of authority, and the fear of reprisal when caught was a sufficient deterrent to the thieves. However, an absence of a clear authority, coupled with weaponry, made looters feel relatively invincible, even those who were opportunistic and not part of a larger organization.

In the past three years, the "mafia" groups have targeted archaeological sites and, sometimes with the aid of a bulldozer, dug up monuments and artifacts, and taken them to sell.[2] Storage magazines have also been attacked, sometimes through the roof of the building, and attempts also made on museums.[3] There are reports of these groups using geo-sonar machines, and even being trained in their use. Quite possibly these people also obtain access to archaeological reports that help them pinpoint possible sites for looting. The objects acquired are then taken *en masse* to

FIG. 4
More piles of debris left by looters in Tarkhan, Egypt.
(Photo by S. Ikram.)

a safe place. In some instances, dealers come to view the material, choose what they want, and then the objects are removed and shipped abroad. In other cases, the material is illegally exported immediately; often this depends on the size of the objects in question. Ain Sukhna has been a popular port for shipping larger pieces, as it did not have a checkpoint until November 2012.

The less-violent groups are often not as well connected in terms of the disposal of goods, and, even now, have fewer weapons. Again, a "chief" commands a group of people who bring in objects to be sold to dealers who then pass them along until they leave the country. Many of the opportunistic looters deal with these groups, conscious only of a need to feed their families rather than the loss of heritage resulting from their actions.

In 2011, and for some time thereafter during the absence of security forces at sites, young boys in particular roamed archaeological sites, breaking into storage areas. When they only found pots or bones, they smashed them in anger, or in the mistaken idea that they contained gold (Fig. 5). Indeed, many of the opportunistic looters are not targeting antiquities in order to sell them—they are digging for gold, which they are convinced was buried by ancient Egyptians. Barring that, they are looking for the mythical Red Mercury, a substance that is in popular culture is thought to be stored in Egyptian tombs and gives the person who consumes it dominion over all creatures. Thus, these people have dug random holes all over sites, contributing, together with the more organized looters, to the creation of a pitted, lunar landscape that is even visible on Google Earth, thereby destroying stratigraphy, as well as de-contextualizing objects. The loss of information is enormous.

Thus we can see that both archaeological sites in the desert as well as in urban contexts, both moveable as well as immoveable cultural property, are under threat. Decorative elements from mosques and churches, for example, are being removed and sold. It seems that all aspects of Egyptian heritage are at risk today, and no area of the country is free from looting.

FIG. 5
Human remains and pottery scattered from a looted tomb in Abusir, Egypt. (Photo by S. Ikram.)

The increase in looting and the destruction of sites is influencing how archaeologists of all types work. Increasingly, each season is regarded as potentially being a final one, with backlog being processed and long-term artifact studies in particular being pushed toward completion, at least of data acquisition. Documentation is emphasized, and researchers are working closely with the Ministry of Antiquities to arrive at strategies for securing the sites and their artefacts.

Since 2012 in particular there have been consolidated attempts to protect sites, with security forces being more present and vigilant, though with limited success as resources are restricted. Even now, looting continues. In August 2013 the Mallawi Museum was attacked—it is still unclear if this was motivated by politics or greed—with guards and museum personnel dying in the process. Many objects were removed or, if too large to remove easily, were smashed. The Ministry of Antiquities offered an option of no reprisal if objects were returned, and fortunately, many have been returned and others are continuing to reappear, although more are still missing or irretrievably damaged.

Throughout this time, it is interesting to note that local people living near sites have reacted to the threat to their heritage in different ways. In most instances the local people (one group of stakeholders, if you will) have been directly involved in the acquisition of land or the looting. However, in some heartening (for archaeologists in particular) instances, such as at San el-Hagar (Tanis), the villagers created a cordon around the site to protect it. On Luxor's West Bank, groups of local villagers patrolled the sites, catching and turning in robbers or prospective thieves, and similar vigilance by local people has been reported from other sites. In 2011 the Cairo the Museum was encircled by a human shield to protect it from further attacks. This national museum, located at the edge of Tahrir Square, the major center of political activity, has, after the initial shocking looting, been well defended (at least 80 percent of the objects have been retrieved and are now back on display). At the time of writing, September 2013, the Cairo Museum is extremely well protected by tanks, armored personnel carriers, and 24-hour military guards.

People who do not live immediately next to archaeological sites, the urban Egyptians, have had differing responses. Some register sadness about the loss of heritage, but wish to focus more on the pressing concerns of survival of the living and the political situation. However, a significant number of people have become more sensitized and articulate about heritage. This is manifested by the huge amount of activity in social media, initially Facebook, and subsequently Twitter, that focuses on heritage and heritage protection. Young Egyptian archaeologists are also speaking up in the media against looting and urging the government to protect archaeological sites. Facebook groups have been founded both by Egyptians and by non-Egyptians and include professionals in the field as well as concerned citizens or aficionados of Egypt, ancient and modern. They are a constant presence and have an increasingly strong voice that is accessed by the media at times. These groups will probably have a significant impact in how heritage is perceived, and ultimately, protected. Their activities are also raising awareness and national pride rooted in the richness of Egypt's heritage amongst Egyptians who, prior to 2011, had given little thought to their past.

Of course, it is easy to point fingers and criticize the lack of protection of archaeological sites. However, the practicalities involved with this cannot be ignored. The majority of Egypt's archaeological sites are not small, contained spaces that are easily policed. Rather, they encompass large tracts of land: the distance from Giza to Dahshur is about 23 km, with the width of the site varying from five to 14 km, all of this in the desert. It is physically difficult to protect such a vast area, even with walls being constructed to separate the archaeological zone from the settlement, as is the case at Saqqara and parts of Giza. Sites in the oases of Kharga and Baharia as well as areas in the Western Desert are far in the desert and difficult to secure, as are many other cemetery sites located in the margins of the Nile Valley. Furthermore, the security officers attached to the Ministry of Antiquities are less well equipped with automatic weapons than the looters. Previously, with omnipresent security and the fear of reprisals, the destruction of heritage occurred, but was limited. Now, until the rule of law has been re-established, sufficient security personnel are freed from other duties and can be deployed at archaeological sites, and looters are publicly and actively punished, Egypt's heritage will continue to be lost. This is tragic for the whole world, but

most of all for the Egyptians as it affects their identity and economy. Help from the international community is best given by placing sanctions on antiquities' dealers, alerting customs officials and border guards to the traffic of objects, and cooperating with Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities in an effort to regain objects lost as a result of looting. We are hoping that as the government stabilizes in Egypt the sites can be secured and we can also move toward a better method of protecting Egypt's antiquities for the future.

Notes

1. All of this is ongoing with an overwhelming amount of documentation of political events; for references, readers should look at a diverse selection of archived online articles from different countries to get a sense of events (e.g., Al-Ahram, BBC, Al-Jazeera, *The New York Times*, CNN, *Le Monde*, *Spiegel* Online, etc.). For articles on Egyptian artifacts, Nevine el-Aref's pieces at Al-Ahram Online can be consulted, among others, including special reports on *National Geographic* Online.
2. Sa el-Hagar, Abusir, Dahshur, el-Hibeh, Abu Sir el-Meleq, and several sites in Middle Egypt have been thus targeted. New tombs were discovered by robbers in Aswan and due to their superior firepower, antiquities' officials could not enter the area—a situation that has since been rectified. For an overview of the situation, see the *American Research Center in Egypt Bulletin* 202 (2013).
3. This does not include the theft at the Cairo Museum in January 2011.

RESPONSE

What Has Happened to Egyptian Heritage after the 2011 Unfinished Revolution?

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After decades of dictatorship, Egypt entered a new political phase on January 25, 2011; the first 16 months of transition were managed directly by the armed forces, followed by a year of presidency in the hands of Muhammad Morsi, a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood. The two post-revolution periods were marked by civil unrest and a general lack of security, with the withdrawal of police from their posts. In particular, during the last 12 months, security forces have been conspicuously absent from the busy streets of Cairo and the provinces, not responding to ordinary crime, and leaving the country with a growing sense of insecurity. The abandonment of the police has obviously affected the numerous archaeological sites in the country and this vacuum has allowed for the systematic looting and destruction of many sites of historic and artistic interest. The first 16 months were marked with excessive looting and a lack of coordinated efforts to stop it. However, under the Morsi administration and its Islamist allies, the country has suffered from a systematic lack of interest towards the archaeological and cultural heritage of Egypt, the total lack of political will to protect and enhance the archaeological areas, and even an ideological tendency to de-legitimize the pre-Islamic past as an essential component of national identity.

Land Mafia and Tomb Robbers

One of the most striking heritage threats is the illegal occupation of archaeological areas. Construction contractors in particular have taken over large portions of land in different governorates, divided them, and then resold them to a third party. This type of activity is not an exclusive monopoly of these contractors, but to a lesser extent, by villagers and the poor. Land is occupied for the construction of homes and businesses, cemeteries, or for agricultural purposes. This phenomenon is not new, but it has not ever happened before with so much violence and on such a large scale. Prior to 2011, the greatest threat to archaeological sites consisted of government development plans: mega-state projects that rarely took into account the fact that the archaeological sites could be negatively affected. Illegal land occupation is also very lucrative; a site is usually thoroughly dug for all archaeological items, which are sold before building begins on the site.

The gangs who loot are mainly divided into two types: the first are organized mafias who come in large numbers and raid a site with their tools and machine guns; the second are less violent, local inhabitants who know the site well and dig there regularly as a communal activity. The first type is a relatively recent phenomenon, directly related to the smuggling of weapons from Libya to Egypt.