

ILLICIT TRADE OF ANTIQUITIES

SAVING THE CULTURAL HEITAGE OF EGYPT

Now a day's archeology and tourism are immensely intertwined. This goes for Egypt and for the rest of the world.

It is widely understood how this heritage contributes to the manufacture of knowledge itself, and can also contribute on a very large scale to the Egyptian economy.

One way that people can increase their understanding of other cultures and the history of other regions is through travel. Experiencing a landscape firsthand and interacting with its modern-day inhabitants can broaden the knowledge of a region's history. Travel can foster tolerance and encourage a higher level of interaction between people of different cultures.

For the travelers and visitors to be able to form educated opinions of our country, they need to understand the historical backgrounds of Egypt along with the contemporary cultures and the people who inhabit it.

The traditional concern of workers in the field of tourism as professional Tour Guides / Egyptologists, Tour managers and others have always been the material remains of ancient Egypt. Still they incorporate the study of modern environments, and modern peoples and cultures into their study of the past. Consequently they gain an appreciation of the ancient and modern cultures that they pass along to the visitors. Their role should extend to raise and spread respect of the material remains of the ancient civilization and how this respect can be properly used for the welfare of the worldwide heritage.

This cultural message can be transmitted through tourism. Egypt has always encouraged educational travel. But unfortunately most of the visitors act as if the educational travel is only about the traveler's self-enrichment. That is what made various Egyptian government and private institutes head towards carefully managed tourism that provides vital support for the preservation of cultural monuments and ecosystems and also brings economic benefits to local populations and governments.

One of the immediate concerns of Egypt and the rest of the world is the illicit trade of antiquities and the preservation of World Wide Heritage.

Also one of the most interesting themes of the 20th century, in relation to the protection of cultural heritage, was the restitution and repatriation of cultural objects, which were taken from their country of origin, by reason of theft and illicit exportation, or by reason of legal means, during periods of colonization, conquest or war.

This issue has been widely discussed in the Egyptian community and a lot of questions were raised concerning how Egypt can make up for its past

cultural losses especially that objects from its ancient civilization is scattered over 700 museums worldwide.

It has to be mentioned that a number of these objects have already been returned in response to popular demand, international initiatives and legal pressure.

Through our work in the field of tourism for the past 15 years, this question was raised a lot of times. Most of the tourists coming into Egypt were mainly stimulated to visit Egypt by a chance visit to a local museum that exhibited objects from ancient Egypt, or even reading a book written by a Western Egyptologist. Some of them asked this question out of curiosity, others out of defending the case of owning these monuments.

National scholars and figures have different point of views of this matter. Some believe that Egypt should ask for the return of these objects, while others believe that keeping these objects there can be widely invested for the welfare of the Egyptian culture.

Discussions between the leading national and international agencies and government bodies is continuously debating the strength of the legal and moral implications of this issue and whether there are sufficient grounds to justify the return of these objects to their country of origin.

Of course we have to admit that contemporary political and social issues are important motivating factors behind this subject.

All these rich debates and discussions encouraged us to carry out this research study of the socio-economic and political conditions that surrounded the spoiling of the Egyptian monuments and the future of these monuments.

We believe that the situation will remain superficial unless we make a genuine and concerted effort to comprehend how past events have contributed to the present condition.

We also have to create a national and international climate of opinion that will discourage the illicit collection of antiquities by emphasizing that the true scholarly value of an artifact is irreparably damaged by the loss of cultural information.

The local communities should be encouraged to preserve their archaeological heritage. Looting should be seen as uneconomic and destructive.

When we promote ethical standards and raise awareness about threats posed by looting along with international collaboration among a variety of types of organizations in both the public and private sectors, the world will be able to combat the illicit trade in cultural objects and support preservation of worldwide heritage.

And may be then Egypt can find a way to restore its looted objects and guarantee the future preservation of its heritage.

