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PRESS RELEASE

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From: Office of Dr. Zahi Hawass, Minister of Antiquities Affairs

Subject: Restoration continues at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

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I would like to begin by apologizing for not posting a statement yesterday; I gave several interviews from the conservation lab at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo in the morning, and had to attend a cabinet meeting in the afternoon that lasted most of the day.

The conservation lab team has divided the objects affected by the disturbances in the Museum two weeks ago into several groups depending on their nature and damage sustained. The first group contains pieces that are all in good condition and do not need any restoration work. Most, if not all, of these objects date to the Late Period. The second group contains objects that need minor restoration work. Some of the pieces in this group include statues of gods and goddess in good condition, and a faience vase with one piece broken off; this vase has already been repaired. The third group includes the pieces of the broken statue of Tutankhamun standing on a panther. This beautiful statue of gilded wood displays the standing king wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, holding a flail in his right hand, and a staff in his left. The statue seems to have been used to smash other showcases, and unfortunately the left arm, holding the staff, has been broken off. The panther is broken at the legs, and its tail and right ear have also been broken. Much of the gilding from the statue has also been broken off. I am happy to say, despite the extent of the damage, that this can be restored in a few days time. The fourth group contains the damaged mummy bands of Thuya. Thuya and her husband Yuya were the parents of Queen Tiye, and the great-grandparents of Tutankhamun. Thuya's mummy bands are gilded cartonnage, and thankfully, only one section was damaged. The upper part of one god was broken off the open work of the bands, but luckily no other damage was sustained. This object can be restored very quickly. The fifth group of objects includes statues and shabtis belonging to Yuya and Thuya and some dating to the Late Period. All of these objects are currently undergoing restoration. The final group includes the pieces belonging to a wooden boat model and pieces from the model troop of Nubian archers, both dating to the Middle Kingdom. These objects will also be able to undergo a full restoration.

I was able to visit the conservation lab at the Egyptian Museum yesterday with several members of the world wide press including, NBC News for the Today Show, ABC World News, Reuters, Associated Press, and journalists from Sweden, Japan, and Italy. I was pleased to show them the progress being made in the conservation lab, as well as the new showcases and the repaired New Kingdom coffin lid.

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I spoke with Dr. Tarek El Awady, director of the Egyptian Museum, Dr. Yasmin el Shazly, head of documentation at the Museum, and database team; I have asked them to do a final check of the objects in the museum and the conservation lab against the database and prepare a report for me on Sunday. This report will confirm whether or not any objects have been taken from the museum.

Yesterday was the first time, since this crisis began, that I was able to take the time to closely examine each item that was damaged during the museum's break in on Friday, 28 January, 2011. I also took time to speak to the commanders of the police and army stationed at the museum, and I asked them to update me on their investigations. I have heard so many differing stories about how the break in occurred, so I felt it was necessary to confirm the details with the police and army.

The information I have previously posted here on my website is very close to what the officers told me yesterday. At this point, the officers are not clear on exactly how many of the criminals actually entered into the museum, but ten people have been in custody since 28 January. One of these ten criminals was actually captured inside of the museum. This is the criminal I met when I arrived at the museum on the morning of Saturday, 29 January. In fact, he was still handcuffed to the iron bars of the exit doors to the new museum bookshop when I got there! This young criminal told me he had done nothing wrong; when I asked why he broke into the museum he began to cry and said, "They told me to." I hope he will give the officers a detailed report of what had happened inside the museum.

While at the museum, I went and stood under the window that had been broken by the criminals. The distance between the window in the roof and the floor is nearly 30 feet! It seems that one of the criminals fell from the roof and landed on a glass case, so it was no surprise when we found blood on the floor throughout the museum. This trail of blood was helpful for the investigation, as it clearly showed which galleries the criminal had entered.

I received a report from the chief of the tourist police that criminals had entered the storage magazine in Tuna el Gebel. This report indicated that two mummies, dating to the Roman Period, were missing. However, the curator has also sent me a report saying that nothing actually happened at the magazine. I hope to receive further information on this matter very soon.



Dr. Zahi standing in front of objects in the conservation lab in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
(Photo: Stephanie Sakoutis)



Restorator working on the statue of Tutankhamun standing on a panther.
(Photo: Stephanie Sakoutis)



Damaged Middle Kingdom wooden boat model. (Photo: Stephanie Sakoutis)