

Reports of looting at ancient sites and museums in Egypt continue to worry archeologists. Since February, looters have raided storage facilities at Saqqara and Giza, both near Cairo, Qantara East in Sinai, and Buto in the Nile Delta, according to the office of antiquities chief Zahi Hawass.

Hawass played down the damage, telling *ARTnews* that the stolen antiquities included few major pieces. "So far it seems that nothing of major importance has been lost," he said in an email. "The looting that took place during the revolution has finished now, and what we are concentrating on is the removal of the agriculture, houses, and cemeteries that were built on archeological sites."

Yet archeologists, mindful of the explosion of looting in Iraq in 2003, have expressed deep concern. Hawass's office first reported that only eight items had been stolen by thieves who broke into the Egyptian Museum, on Cairo's Tahrir Square, during the January uprising, but raised the figure to 63 after the media voiced skepticism about the first number. At least 16 pieces have been recovered, yet key objects remain missing, including a gilded statuette of the deity Menkaret carrying a figure of the mummified Tutankhamun. Looters breached security at a granite statue of Ramses II near Aswan and attempted to remove parts of it, Egyptian media reported. Blocks have been stolen from the tomb of Hetepka, a hairdresser to pharaohs, whose grave at Saqqara has been a target of looters before.

"Some reports suggest everything is fine, but then others come out that say looting is becoming more sophisticated," Andrew Vaughn, executive director of the American Schools of Oriental Research located at Boston University, told *ARTnews*. He also expressed concern about reports of damage to pre-Islamic sites by Islamic fundamentalists.

Satellite photographs have revealed looting damage at Abusir, near Cairo, and Abydos, in Upper Egypt, said Eric Cline of George Washington University.

# Surveying the Damage

Archeologists try to assess reports of looting during Egypt's revolution

BY ROGER ATWOOD



▲ Egyptian antiquities chief Zahi Hawass holds a statuette of Tutankhamun stolen from the Egyptian Museum during the revolution. It was found a few weeks later in a bag at a Cairo metro station.

Cline was scheduled to lead an inspection mission by U.S. archeologists in May, invited by Egyptian authorities.

"Looting seems to have started in the museum, then spread to random looting, and then become more targeted looting at sites. That's what happened in Iraq, so there is concern," Cline told *ARTnews*. The satellite photos from Abusir suggest that looters systematically dug holes into a long series of tombs, "one after the other," he said.

Hawass has long been the chief of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, green-lighting loans of Egyptian artifacts and exercising tight control over archeological excavations. He has appeared in countless television documentaries striding across the desert in his signature fedora, often with celebrities in tow, and in 2009 took President Obama on a tour of the pyramids.

Hawass's star has both risen and fallen dramatically this year. A few days before his resignation, President Hosni Mubarak promoted him from secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SAC) to minister of antiquities. Two weeks later, Hawass quit the post after museum staff demanded an end to what they termed corruption under his leadership. He was soon reappointed as the council's chief by the new government. Then a criminal court convicted him for ignoring the terms of a concession contract for a bookstore in the Egyptian Museum. With the case under appeal, Hawass has suggested that he was a victim of political persecution.

"The court case was against my position, that is, as secretary general of the SCA, and not against me as a person, so it will not affect me," he said. "It seems that such allegations can be brought against anyone who is in a position of defending Egypt at the moment." ■

Roger Atwood is a correspondent for *ARTnews*. A selection of his articles can be read at [rogeratwood.com](http://rogeratwood.com).