

## **Exploring Public Perceptions of Archaeological Heritage in Upper Egypt**

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### **Abstract**

Archaeological heritage is a very important part of the Egyptians tangible cultural heritage. Although the ancient monuments and archaeological sites are scattered all over Egypt, especially in Upper Egypt, there is no studies to explore how the Egyptians comprehend, interact, perceive, and relate to their archaeological heritage. Archaeologists throughout the world acknowledge their responsibility to engage the public in both appreciating and preserving the archaeological record. This engagement is crucial to the future of archaeology, particularly in today's economic environment where both research and heritage preservation values are constantly challenged in public and political spheres. This study aims to explore the perception of the citizens in Upper Egypt towards their archaeological heritage and whether they are interest or disinterest in preserving this heritage. Quantitative and analytical methodology is used to achieve the aim of this paper through a survey distributed in six Upper Egypt Governorates. The survey investigated the level of public interest and participation in archaeology as well as the perceived role of antiquities and monuments in the minds and beliefs of Egyptians in the contemporary society. Findings of this study revealed an overall high level of Egyptian public engagement with archaeological heritage and general support for archaeological heritage values and conservation.

**Keywords:** Perception - Upper Egypt -Archaeological Heritage.

### **Introduction**

Human behaviour is generally identified as the potential and expressed capacity for physical, mental, and social activity during the phases of human life (Sharma, 2012). Cultural heritage is often expressed as either intangible or tangible form of human behaviour as it is considered the legacy of a nation that is inherited from the past, maintained in the present, and bestowed for the benefit of the future generation (Macnulty & Koff 2014). Thanks to Khedive Ismail<sup>(1)</sup>, the study of ancient Egyptian antiquities on European lines was made possible in 1869.

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<sup>1</sup> Isma'il Pasha, known as Ismail the Magnificent, was the ruler of Egypt and Sudan from 1863 to 1879, when he was abdicated by the Ottoman Sultan.

Ismail preferred to begin with Upper Egyptian students, because most of the monuments of ancient Egyptian civilization had been uncovered in this region. Ismail realized the importance of teaching the public the neighbouring archaeological sites and the priceless value of this incomparable cultural heritage. Ten students joined “*Madraset el-Lisan Al-Masry Wa El-Habashi*”, where they learnt principles of Egyptology besides certain classical languages. (2002، سعيد). The number of joined students did not increase until 1875 when the first school was closed. (1966، سلامة)

The lack of awareness and ignorance of the public of this heritage was probably the main reason for the loss of valuable treasures through the last centuries, not to mention the decision of imperial power in Egypt to delay Egyptology education on its provenance land for almost five decades (Mohamed, 2010). Cromer admitted that Egyptians desired in learning <sup>(2)</sup> but British policies in Egypt did not allow them because they were afraid of awakening more national feelings by education, British used to decipher their policies with financial difficulties that prevailed Egypt. (1966، سلامة) Although ancient monuments and archaeological sites are scattered all over Egypt especially in Upper Egypt, the issue of how the Egyptians comprehend, interact, perceive, and relate to their archaeological heritage has not yet been explored. It is the aim of this study to explore the perception of the citizens in Upper Egypt towards their archaeological heritage and whether they are interest or disinterest in preserving this heritage. Quantitative and analytical methodology has been used to achieve the aim of this paper through a structured questionnaire distributed in six Upper Egypt Governorates. The importance of this paper is represented in evaluating the perceptions and attitudes of local people towards ancient Egyptian heritage. Hopefully, this evaluation will shed more light on the level of the locals' awareness with their valuable heritage and lead to better conservation of it.

### **The Significance of Public Opinion on Archaeology**

Archaeologists throughout the world acknowledge their responsibility to engage the public in both appreciating and preserving the archaeological record (see Mc Gimsey, 1972; Merriman, 2004; Okamura and Matsuda, 2011; Thomas and Lea, 2014; Skeates et. al, 2012). This engagement is crucial to the future of archaeology, particularly in today's economic environment where both research and heritage preservation values are constantly challenged in public and political spheres.

For a long time, the antiquity authority has not seen the public as a partner in a dialogue concerning the preservation of the cultural heritage and values inherent in the landscape (Burstrom, 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer was a British statesman, diplomat and colonial administrator. He was agent and consul-general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907. Cromer mentioned in his book *Modern Egypt* that Egyptians, who lived in villages used to request more schools in Upper Egypt. (1966، سلامة)

It is crucial that both authorities and archaeologists take public opinion into consideration in issues related to the archaeological record of their ancestors. If the public opinion does not estimate the cultural value of the archaeological remains of their past, the public support and funding directed towards the preservation of ancient monuments will be impossible.

Understanding how ‘the public’ see archaeology is therefore an essential part of public archaeology, a topic that deserves serious discussion and sustained research. Lipe considered public attitudes towards archaeology, (1974) over four decades ago, yet the nature of public appreciation and knowledge of archaeology and public attitude toward archaeological heritage preservation remains poorly understood. A limited number of surveys in North America (Pokotylo, 2002, 2007; Pokotylo and Mason, 1991; Pokotylo and Guppy, 1999; Ramos and Duganne, 2000), Europe (Bonachhi, 2014), and Australia (Balme and Wilson, 2004) only give an initial perspective of public opinion on archaeological heritage preservation and its role in contemporary society.

The study of public attitude towards cultural heritage in Egypt may effectively contribute to better conservation measures, a few number of studies<sup>(3)</sup> have begun to address this neglected issue. However, museum’s visit expresses some kind of interest in Egypt’s Archaeological Heritage. At the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, “*less than 5 per cent of visitors to the Cairo museum are Egyptians*” (Jameson 1997). The interest in Egyptian monuments and antiquities is still mainly given by foreigners. Given global recognition of the richness of the Egyptian archaeological record, as well as the need to preserve it, this proportion of Egyptian citizens’ engagement with their cultural and monumental heritage requires study.

## **Methodology**

Postgraduate students of Tourist Guidance Department, Minia University, have conducted a public opinion survey in April 2015.<sup>(4)</sup> The survey involved the distribution of questionnaire forms to approximately 1000 citizens, though unequally, in six governorates, where the students (who are the distributors) live. The six governorates of Upper Egypt are chosen because of the richness and accessibility of their archaeological sites for visitors. Non-random, but non-judgemental, sampling strategy was followed due to Egyptians’ reluctance and suspicion about survey participation.

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<sup>3</sup> Monica Hanna has been working on a project in al-Qurna, Luxor on the different narratives of the multiple worlds of the Theban Necropolis and its meanings to the various stakeholders

<sup>4</sup> ) The questionnaire was designed by Hend Mohamed ,distributed on people and collected by post graduate students in the Faculty of Tourism, Minia Univ.: Tareq Emad, Muhammed Youssef, Janet Sobhy, Muhammed Ashery,Taha Ibrahim Fathy, Loay Mahmoud, Muhammed Ramadan, Peter Helmy Aziz, Keroles Hanna, Ahmed maher Tony,Mabrok Gebaly,Islam Adel, Ahmed Ali, Mustafa Azzam, Ahmed Khalifa, Ahmed Murtada, Muhammed Nassary , Muhmed Kamel, Muhamed Nour, Muhamed Shazly, Ahmed Abdel Kareem, Bsem Bakry, Hussien Muhammed. The analysis made by Hend Mohamed& David Pokotylo.

Households/respondents were selected according to education level, age, career, religion, and income level). In addition, the distributor students' familiarity with the local site was taken into consideration in order to avoid people reluctance to participate in the survey. The questionnaires were hand-delivered to the citizens who are aged 18 years and above for completion, and the completed forms were collected 5 or 6 days later.

The main objectives of the survey are to investigate two main issues related to archaeological heritage in Egypt:

- Level of public interest and participation in archaeology.
- Perceived role of antiquities and monuments in the minds and beliefs of Egyptians in contemporary society.

The valid returned forms were 806. While certain regions refused to fill the questionnaire, other regions welcomed it. From Luxor, only 166 returned forms were valid, 58 from Qena, 91 from Suhag, 155 from Aswan, 55 from Asyut, and 310 from Minia governorate; the latter is the place of residence of most the distributor students. The sample covered educated and uneducated citizens, employees and unemployed, as well as old and young inhabitants. In case of illiterate respondents, the surveyor or another member of the respondent's family had to read and explain the questions and then write the answers according to the respondent's desire.

The questionnaire form included many variables that try to measure and evaluate the relation between the Egyptians and their cultural heritage. Variables are divided into two main sections in addition to personal information, including the name, age, gender, education level, and income level.

**Firstly:** A group of variables that may reflect the Egyptians' interest in archaeology. The main questions concerning this section are about visiting archaeological sites and museums, traveling to another governorate to visit archaeological sites, and last but not least watching TV programs or reading books about ancient Egyptian archaeology.

**Secondly:** A group of variables that indicate the image of antiquities or cultural heritage in the minds and beliefs of contemporary Egyptians. The main questions investigate their opinion about keeping Egyptian antiquities abroad or regaining them in addition to the useful side of cultural heritage, antiquities and archaeological sites, other than the attraction of tourists and the increase of hard currency.

## **Results and Discussion**

**The first section** of the survey examined people's level of interest and participation in activities that bring them into contact with archaeology (4 questions).

**1-1 Archaeological site-monument visitation (Table 1 and Fig.1)**

Fig.1



Table 1

	Those who Visit Archaeological sites				Total
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	
Luxor	24 2.6%	32 3.5%	73 8.0 %	37 4.1%	166 18.3%
Qena	13 1.4%	12 1.3%	27 3.0%	6 .7%	58 6.4%
Suhag	24 2.6%	26 2.9%	30 3.3%	11 1.2%	91 10.0%
Aswan	26 2.9%	38 4.2%	77 8.5%	14 1.5%	155 17.1%
Assiut	17 1.9%	6 .7%	27 3.0%	5 .6%	55 6.1%
Minia	58 6.4%	86 9.5%	139 15.3%	27 3.0%	310 34.1%
Total	17 6 19.4%	219 24.1%	409 45.0%	104 11.5%	908 100.0%

Overall, there is a high level of interest by local citizens of Upper Egypt in the archaeological site or monument visitation as 81.0 % of the respondents indicated some level of visitation and 12.3 % stated that they visit monuments ‘regularly’. The availability and accessibility of archaeological sites in governorates are influential factors in the result, Archaeological remains at Qena and Assiut are far from urban or rural sites. The inaccessibility of monuments in these two governorates is a main cause of the low level of monuments visitation. Moreover, the low level of income fairly justifies the poor percentage of visiting archaeological sites in these governorates. It has also been concluded that the inhabitants of the governorates and regions that used to host large numbers of tourists visit archaeological sites more than the governorates that do not attract tourism companies.

### 1-2 Travelling to another governorate to visit monuments

Fig. 2

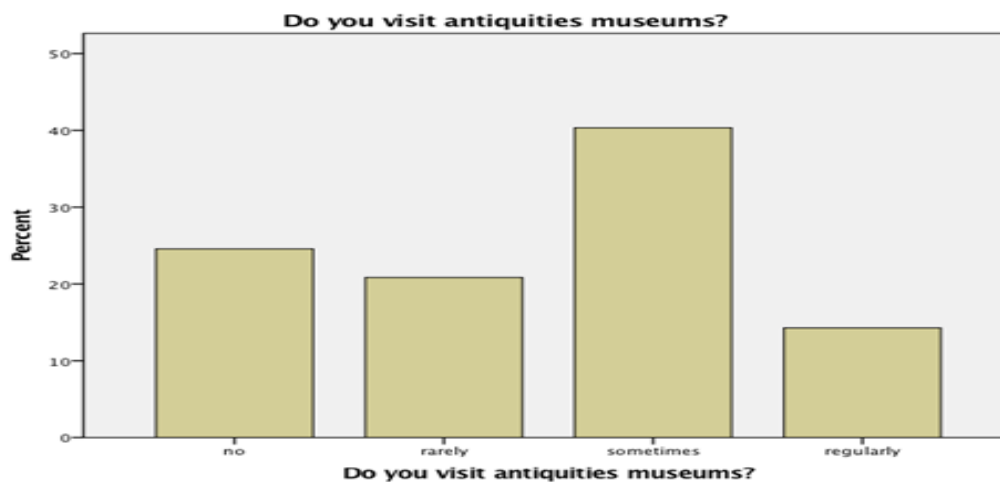


Of that group, occasional travel predominated (47.7% of respondents); 19.7% of respondents indicated ‘rarely’, and 28.0 % stated ‘sometimes’. Slightly less than one in ten (9.6%) indicated that they regularly traveled outside their home governorate (42.7%) to visit sites.

The only exception is Minia. When asked if they had traveled to other governorates to visit archaeological sites or monuments, a substantial number (47.7%) of respondents at Minia governorate answered ‘no’. Nevertheless, the majority (57.3%) of the respondents indicated some level of participation in travel.

1-3 Visitation of antiquities museums

Fig. 3



This group of questions indicated high level of museum visitation as 75.4. % of the respondents confirmed some degree of museum visitation and 14.3% stated that they ‘regularly’ visit museums. One may also conclude that the visitation of antiquities museums is slightly lower than the visitation of archaeological site. The number of provincial museums (from Aswan to Minia) is four museums.

Table. 2 Provincial museums visitors in Upper Egypt (Museums Sector, SCA <sup>(\*)</sup>)

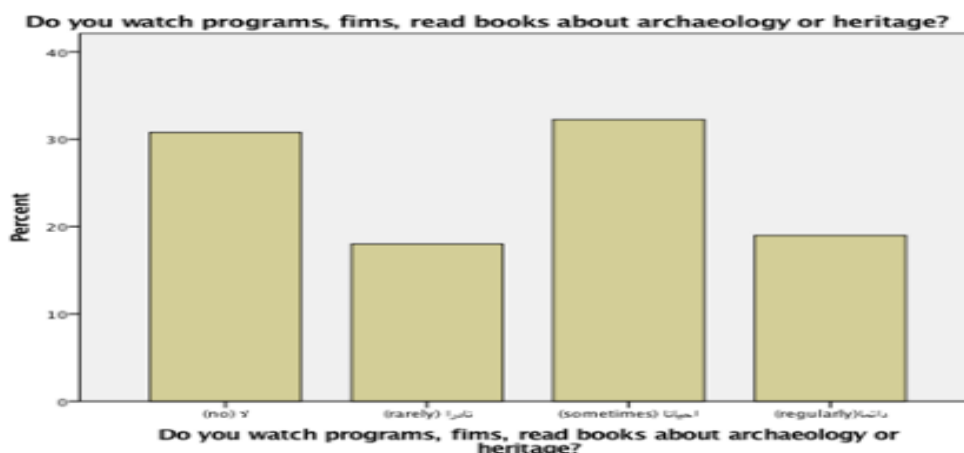
Museum	Egyptian visitors before 2011 Rev.	Egyptian visitors in 2011-2012	Egyptian visitors in 2015
Nubia	35091	57264	71036
Aswan	1084	1783	3231
Luxor	7516	9288	12549
Mummification	21023	14463	22522

Most of the provincial museums, which used to be virtually empty before 2011, have begun to revive, as visitors now come to visit them in growing numbers, although at a slow rate. This seems promising (Rashed, 2016). Table 2 shows a growth in the number of museums' visitors, with the exception of the Mummification Museum at Luxor city, which received before 2011 a large number of visitors. The 2011 Revolution in Egypt is a crucial momentum in the history of Egyptians’ attitude towards their cultural heritage. The excessive pillage of monuments and local museums which accompanied the chaotic state of the country during the revolution created a sympathetic feeling of the Egyptians toward their archaeological heritage.

<sup>5</sup> \*) Deep thanks to Ms Heba Sami who arranged getting statistics of museum visitors

### 1.4 Watching programs or reading books about ancient Egyptian archaeology

Fig. 4

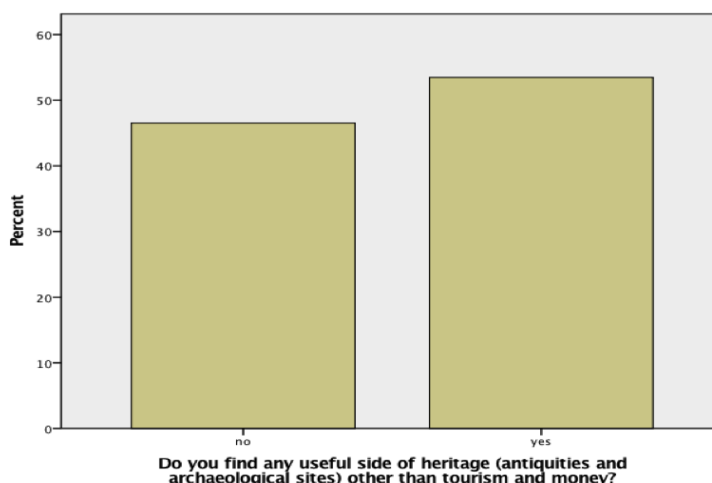


People are more likely to directly engage with archaeology through site or museum visits rather than through watching TV programs or reading books about ancient Egyptian monuments. Nearly one in three respondents (30.8%) has indicated that he or she does not watch TV programs or read books about Egyptian archaeology or heritage, however the majority (69.2%) of the respondents have shown some level of engagement with media programs and books about cultural heritage. The level of involvement in such activities is higher than site visitation. Nearly one in five respondents (19.0%) indicated that they ‘regularly’ watch TV programs or read books about archaeological heritage, while slightly over half the respondents stated that they engage with such activities at a lesser level (18.0% ‘rarely’ , 32.3% ‘sometimes’).

**The second section** investigates how antiquities were perceived in the minds and beliefs of the contemporary Egyptians and the relevance of archaeological heritage in contemporary Egyptian society (two questions).

**2-1** When asked if they see a “...useful side of heritage (antiquities and archaeological sites) other than attracting tourism and money”.

Fig. 5

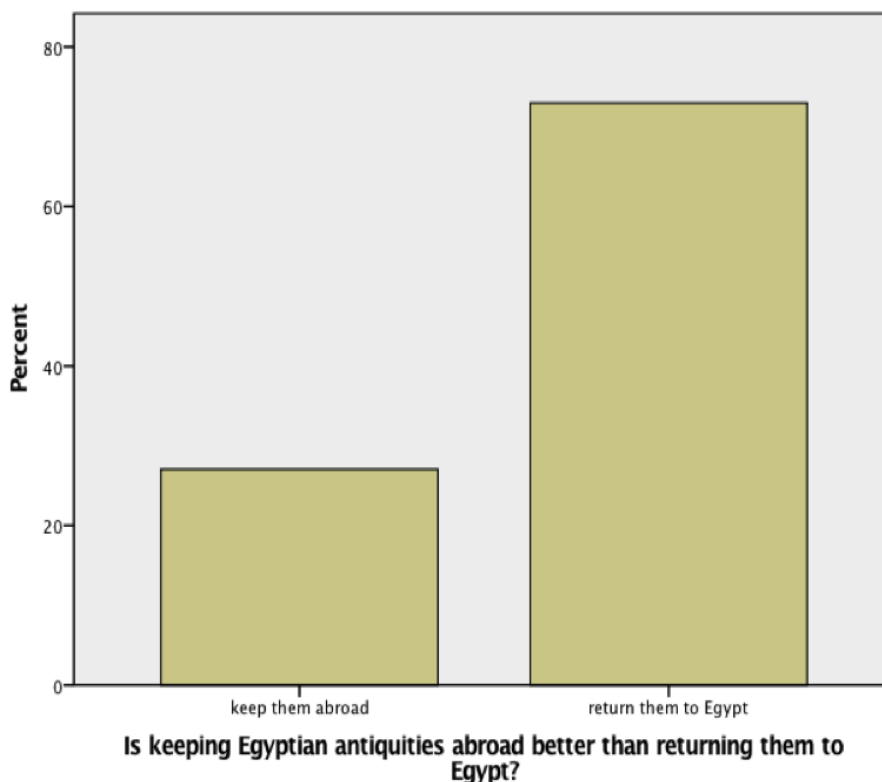




A slight majority (53.5%) answered ‘yes’ when asked if they see a “...useful side of heritage (antiquities and archaeological sites) other than attracting tourism and money”. The majority of the respondents see the cultural benefit of exchanging their own cultural heritage with other countries and feel proud of inheriting such an outstanding archaeological heritage.

## 2-2 Repatriation of Egyptian antiquities

Fig. 6



Responses to the statement “Is keeping Egyptian antiquities abroad in the world museums such as Rosetta Stone in the British Museum, the Zodiac in the Louvre, and Nefertiti's bust in Berlin Museum is better than returning them to Egypt?” indicated strong support for their return to Egypt.

The analysis of the questionnaire has shown that nearly 73.0% of the respondents prefer to regain the Egyptian antiquities kept abroad. While not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that the proportion of the respondents stating that antiquities should come back to Egypt is highest in the “Primary-Preparatory School level (81.4%) and nearly identical with the ‘illiterate’ respondents (81.0%). It then progressively decreases in the secondary schools, the university and finally the post-graduate education level (66.7%).

Table 3. Education level by responses to “Is keeping Egyptian antiquities abroad better than returning them to Egypt?”

Education level	Response		Total
	Keep abroad	Return to Egypt	
Illiterate	8 (19.0%)	34 (81.0%)	42 (100.0%)
Primary-Preparatory school	8 (18.6%)	35 (81.4%)	43 (100.0%)
Secondary school	49 (25.1%)	146 (74.9%)	195 (100.0%)
University	128 (28.4%)	323 (71.6%)	451 (100.0%)
Post-graduate university	25 (33.3%)	50 (66.7%)	75 (100.0%)
Total	218	588	806

This outcome can be explained in terms of the change in culture which accompanies higher education. The analysis implies that the examined group of students enrolled in higher education advocate the idea that chances of preserving ancient Egyptian antiquities abroad are better than keeping them in Egypt.

**Gender and public interest-relevance:**

There is a strong relationship between gender and perceived value of archaeological heritage beyond tourism and money. It seems, however, that there is no relationship between gender and site-monument visitation (females: 82.6%, males: 80.5%); antiquities museum visitation (females: 73.4%, males: 76.1 %); and preference to return the antiquities kept abroad to Egypt (females: 76.3%, males: 71.8% ).

**Education level and interest-relevance:**

There is a significant association between education level and site-monument and antiquities museum visitation. The higher the level of education, the higher the level of visitation is. There is no association between education level and repatriating antiquities to Egypt, but the proportion of the respondents stating that antiquities should be returned is higher in Primary-Preparatory School level (81.4%), which is the same as the (self-identified) ‘illiterate’ group (81.0%); then decreases through all higher education levels through to post-graduate level (66.7%)! This implies– that those who are more educated think that antiquities are better cared for abroad).

**Income level and interest-relevance:**

There is relationship between annual income level and site-monument or museum visitation and the preference of regaining antiquities to Egypt. Yet there is an association between the annual income level and the responses to “do you find any useful side of heritage (antiquities and archaeological sites) other than tourism and money?”

The majority with incomes less than 72000 EGP stated that they see other benefits of antiquities and sites beyond tourism and money. While 69.2% in highest income level (greater than 72000 EGP) do not see any other benefit beyond tourism and money.

The public behaviour during the distribution and collection of the questionnaire deserves a special attention, because many respondents suspected the motivation behind this study and thought that the forms are collected for governmental security reasons. Nearly 180 forms are anonymous, most of these 180 forms come from spots that are distinguished with rich archaeological sites<sup>(\*6)</sup> and famous for antiquities robberies.<sup>(\*7)</sup>

Impressions of the surveyors about the respondents varied from one region or site to another, it was either neutral, enthusiast, or uninterested. Some of the respondents, especially less educated or of secondary education stage, welcomed the questionnaire and tried to collect from books the answers of certain questions related to archaeological sites in their region. It was common impression among the forms' distributors, especially in El-Barsha (Minia) and Al-Qurna (Luxor), that the less the education level, the better the reception of the questionnaire is. A common feature between these two villages is that excavation works have been undertaken in them since a long time. For this questionnaire, the citizens of Al-Qurna donated with photocopying more copies of the questionnaire and distributed it among more people than the expected by the distributor. A century ago, the people of Al-Qurna donated £50 and subscribed, at Arthur Weigall's<sup>(\*8)</sup> invitation, to save some Theban tombs. When they were shown the conservation achieved with their money, they expressed themselves as being "*pleased with the delicate inscriptions in the tombs, but very awfully angry at the damage which the devils of ignorant people had made*".

The forms' distributors expressed their pride with their mission and suggested more communication with the public to spread archaeological knowledge. In their opinion, the engagement of the public will improve their attitude towards the preservation and protection of archaeological sites. They have also suggested that the teaching of archaeological curricula in governorate schools will definitely help keeping the cultural heritage of each governorate and preserve the remaining of Egypt's matchless heritage.

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<sup>6</sup> \*) Malawy- Minia- AlQurna- Abu Qurqas- Suhag-Samalut and Al-Barsha which is well known for its rock-cut tombs dating back to the Middle Kingdom (2040 BC – 1600 BC), many of which were excavated in the early 20th century.

<sup>7</sup> \*) For example, on February 19, a gang of armed men entered the archaeological site of Dayr al-Barsha to loot antiquities, the perpetrators were foiled in their attempt to enter newly discovered tomb. In an exchange of gunfire, Ashrawy, a security guard protecting the site, was killed. Two other guards were also injured, including Mustafa Ali who was gravely wounded and died several days later in a hospital, the armed men are still at large.

(اليوم السابع 29 فبراير 2016)

<sup>8</sup>\*) Arthur Weigall (1880 – 3 January 1934) was an English Egyptologist, stage designer, journalist and author, at the age of 25, Arthur Weigall was appointed to replace Howard Carter at Luxor, responsible for protecting and managing the antiquities of a region that extended from Nag Hammadi to the border with Sudan.

The inhabitants of many parts of Egypt still show their respect and appreciation of ancient Egyptian heritage. The people of El-Barsha,<sup>(\*)</sup> for example, asked the distributors for publishing archaeological brochures and arranging archaeological lectures in a simple language, illustrative pictures and magazines at an affordable price, besides more simple TV programs. In their view, this will maximize the citizens' knowledge of their archaeological record.

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial that archaeologists consider public opinion to enhance the preservation of the archaeological record. The public underestimation of the significance of the cultural heritage of the past generation would undoubtedly lead to the disinterest in the preservation of physical remains of that past and public support and funding may disappear. The engagement between the public and their archaeological heritage is of high importance to the future of archaeology, particularly in today's economic environment, where both research and heritage preservation values are constantly challenged in public and political spheres. However, public appreciation and knowledge of ancient archaeology, and public attitudes toward archaeological heritage preservation remains poor. The significance of this study lies in the fact that the level of public interest and participation in archaeology as well as the perceived role of antiquities and monuments in the minds and beliefs of Egyptians in the contemporary society has never been explored.

This study primarily depends on a survey conducted by postgraduate students in Tourist Guidance Department, Minia University, in 2015. The survey involved an unequal distribution of about 1000 questionnaire forms citizens in six governorates of Upper Egypt. The selected governorates are known for the variety and accessibility of their well-known archaeological sites to tourists and visitors. It can be concluded that the lack of public awareness and ignorance of the significance of the priceless archaeological record as a vital part of Egyptian cultural heritage was a main reason for the loss of valuable treasures over the last centuries. Yet the imperial decision to delay Egyptology education on its provenance land for five decades definitely casts its shadow. The absence or lack of public awareness explains why many respondents suspected the motivation behind the distribution of the questionnaire of this study. The study also indicates that the less the education level, the better reception for academic questionnaire related to cultural heritage is. The citizens of sites which have contained important archaeological record and have received excavation works highly appreciate their heritage of archaeology.

The study also indicates the high level of Egyptian public engagement with archaeological heritage. There is slight difference in site/museum visitation according to gender, income level, but education level differs greatly in site/museum visitation. Citizens in the selected six Upper Egyptian governorates have shown their support for archaeological heritage values and conservation.

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<sup>9</sup> \*) village in Minia Governorate, The Dayr al-Barsha Project (2002-present) is an international and interdisciplinary research endeavor directed by the Egyptology department at Leuven University, Belgium.

Likewise, there is a strong support of repatriation of antiquities abroad. Only a slight majority see archaeological heritage value beyond money and tourism. Hopefully, the evaluation of Egyptians' perceptions and attitudes towards archaeological and cultural heritage will improve the locals' awareness and conservation of this heritage.

### **Recommendations**

All stages of education in Egypt should contain curricula related to Egyptian cultural heritage. Teaching ancient Egyptian language in primary and secondary schools could enhance the public awareness of the importance of to Egypt's archaeological heritage. The study of masterpieces of Egyptian antiquities in Egypt and abroad in Egyptian schools should seriously be taken into consideration. Such measures the Egyptians would hopefully revive the Egyptians' passion for their past and heritage. Ignorance of our country does not suit us, nor does indifference to knowledge of the relics of our ancestors (Ali Mubarak, Al-Khutat Al-Tawfiqiya 1880s = Dykstra 1994).

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## استكشاف توجهات المصريين في صعيد مصر نحو التراث الأثري

### الملخص العربي

يعتبر التراث الأثري جزء هام من التراث الثقافي المادي للمصريين ودراسة سلوك المصريين وتوجهاتهم نحو هذا التراث الأثري هو موضوع لا تقل أهميته خاصة في ظل محاولة الحفاظ على هذا التراث فالوقوف على ماهية نظرة المصريين لتراثهم الأثري و ما له من أهمية في أذهانهم ربما يؤدي إلى رفع نسبة الاهتمام عن طريق علاج سلبيات تلك النظرة، و على الرغم من انتشار الآثار في جميع أنحاء مصر خاصة في الصعيد والمنتمية لكافة الحقب التاريخية، لا توجد دراسات كافية خاصة باستكشاف كيفية فهم المصريين لهذا التراث الأثري، وتفاعلهم معه و مدى ارتباطهم به وما يمثله هذا التراث في أذهان المصريين .

و في ظل الأوضاع والتحديات السياسية والاقتصادية الحالية تغيب قيم كثيرة عن أذهان المصريين منها أهمية الحفاظ على تراثهم الأثري، لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف توجه المصريين في صعيد مصر نحو تراثهم الأثري وما إذا كانوا مهتمين أو غير مهتمين بالحفاظ على هذا التراث. تم استخدام المنهج الكمي والتحليلي لتحقيق الهدف من هذه الدراسة من خلال استبيان تم توزيعه في ستة محافظات في صعيد مصر لقياس وتقدير حجم الدور المتصور للآثار في عقول ومعتقدات المصريين في المجتمع المعاصر. كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة عن ارتفاع مستوى اهتمام المصريين بتراثهم الأثري ووجود وعي عام في صعيد مصر لأهمية التراث الأثري و الحفاظ عليه.