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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD  
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE  
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**Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and/or on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

**Point 7 de l'Ordre du jour provisoire: Etat de conservation de biens inscrits sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial et/ou sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial en péril**

MISSION REPORT / RAPPORT DE MISSION

**Thebes and its Necropolis/Thèbes et sa nécropole (Egypt/Egypte) (C 87)**

**18 – 24 April 2008 / 18 - 24 avril 2008**

This mission report should be read in conjunction with Document:

Ce rapport de mission doit être lu conjointement avec le document suivant:

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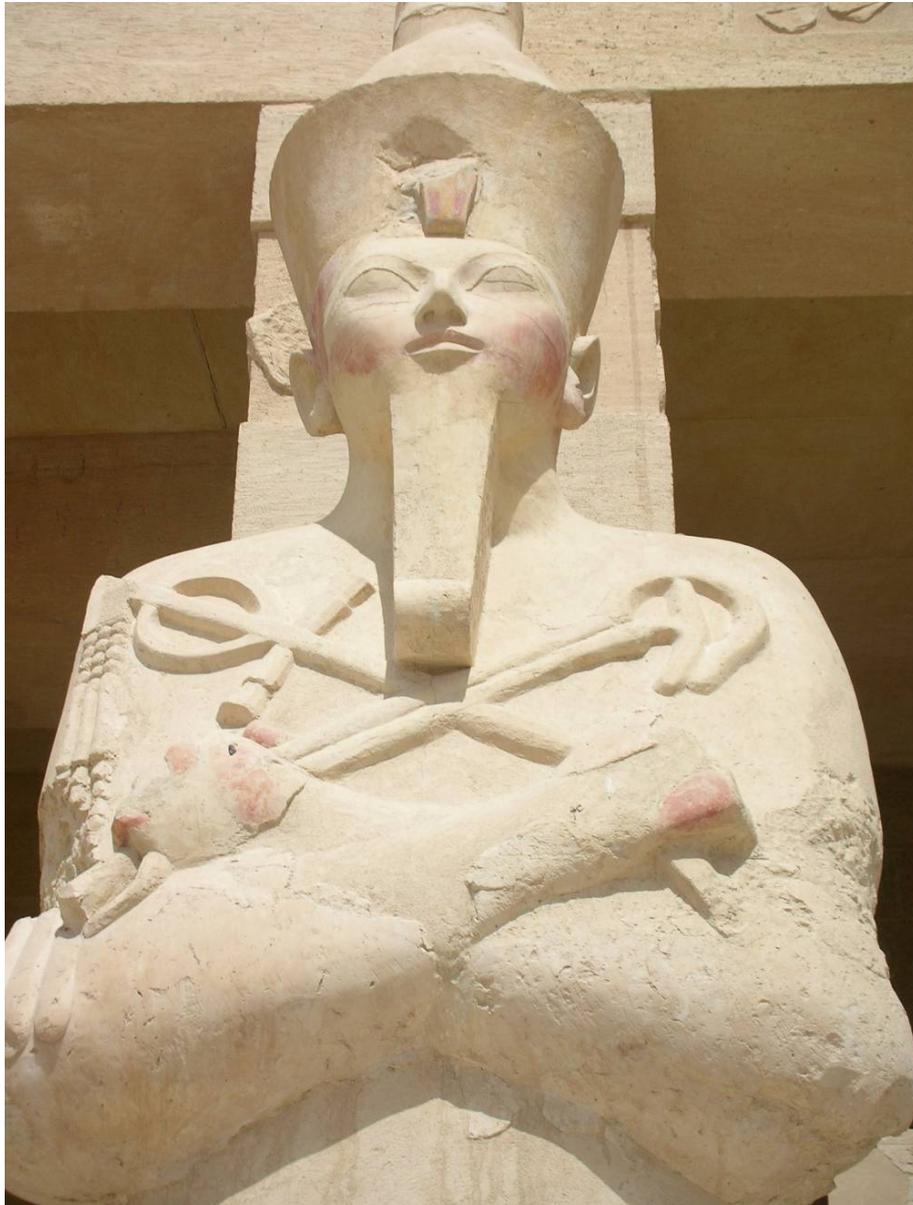
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**REPORT OF THE JOINT WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE/ICOMOS REACTIVE  
MONITORING MISSION TO THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE OF**

**THEBES AND ITS NECROPOLIS**

**(18 TO 24 APRIL 2008)**



*Dr Demetrios Michaelides, ICOMOS, Véronique Dauge, WHC*

**PURPOSE OF THE MISSION**

Following the Decision of the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session (Christchurch, 2007), a reactive monitoring mission to Egypt was organised in order to review the implementation of the previous decisions of the World Heritage Committee and assess the state of conservation of the property of Thebes and its Necropolis.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*Thebes and its Necropolis- Reactive monitoring mission, April 2008*

The mission wishes to express its gratitude to the Supreme Council of Antiquities, in particular its Secretary-General, Dr Zahi Hawass, Dr Sabry Abdelaziz Khater and Dr Gihane Zaki for their warm welcome and constant availability. In Luxor, Dr Mansour Boreik spared no efforts to assist the mission, as well as Dr Ibrahim Suleiman. Finally, the members of the mission are also grateful to Governor Samir Farag for receiving them.

## **I. BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION**

### **I.1 Inscription history**

The property of Thebes and its Necropolis was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979, at the third session of the Committee. The justification for inscription presented in the Nomination file was as follows:

*“The unique character of ancient Thebes and its necropolis is the fact that it was, in the second millennium B.C., the capital of the earliest known empire in the history of mankind, from Euphrates in the north, to the 5th Nile cataract in Sudan in the south, and at least to El Alamein in the west. This empire, immense for its time and administrative technology, gave rise to an economic and cultural wealth, the basis for the creation of architectural and artistic masterpieces, crowded with rare density in a comparatively restricted area. The monuments are, generally speaking, in an extraordinary state of preservation, and constitute, together with finds of papyri, stelae, statues etc. from Thebes, the greatest source of information on all aspects of Pharaonic civilization, its internal history and external relation. The texts and pictures contain a rich documentation - also on other peoples and cultures: Nubia, Punt (at Bab el Mandeb) and Libya in Africa, Syria-Palestine and the Hittites in Asia, as well as the Aegean world.*

*One or several monuments or categories of monuments meet each of the criteria for inclusion in the World Heritage List. As a whole they exhibit one of the most important phases in the development of architecture as cultural expression and signify notable landmarks in the history of world architecture.*

*The temples of Karnak and Luxor, as well as e.g. the paintings of the private tombs, undoubtedly represent unique artistic and aesthetic achievements, and the temple of Deir el Bahri is a masterpiece of the creative genius of Senmut, the most important man during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut. Pharaonic art and thought, as we find it in Thebes, has repeatedly influenced later generations in the world history.*

*As exponents of the capital of the earliest known empire they reflect as a whole an important socio-political stage in the development of human society and are thus associated with ideas of outstanding historical importance.”*

### **I.2 Inscription criteria**

The ICOMOS evaluation was the following:

*“The site of Thebes, which includes sites as prestigious as Luxor and Karnak, certainly merits recognition, and seems to be indisputable from the point of view of World Heritage.*

*ICOMOS recommends the inscription of this property on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (i), (iii) and (vi).*

*(i). Thebes, the city of the god Amun, is renowned for its temples whose imposing ruins are the glory of Karnak at Luxor. These truly colossal complexes which have been enlarged numerous times comprise some of the most fascinating realizations of Antiquity the "Hypostyle Hall" of Karnak begun by Seti and completed by Ramses II (measuring 102 meters in width and 53 meters in depth, covers a surface of 5,000 square meters; its roof is supported by 134 columns, those of the central nave measuring 20,40 meters with a diameter of 3,40 meters); the temple and the colonnade of Amenophis III at Luxor, one of the most refined masterpieces of Egyptian architecture (14th century B.C.). The Theban necropolis relinquish nothing in importance or beauty to these monuments: it suffices to note the tombs of the Valley of the Kings (1,500 B.C. to 1,000 B.C.) among which is that of Tutankhamun, the Valley of the Queens, where, among others, Nephertari, wife of Ramses II, and Tuy, his mother, are entombed; and finally at Deir-El-Bahari (western Thebes) the funerary temple of the queen Hatshepsut with its immense porticos, its superimposed terraces flanking the mountain and its frescoes which trace her voyage to the country of Punt.*

*(iii). The few examples which remain among these splendid monuments serve to attest to the antiquity, the unique and unequalled character of these monumental Theban ensembles.*

*(vi). The monumental and archaeological complex of Thebes with its temples, tombs, and royal palaces; its villages of artisans and artists; its inscriptions; its innumerable figurative representations, as valuable from an aesthetic as from a documentary point of view, constitute the material witness of the aggregate history of the Egyptian civilization from the Middle Kingdom to the beginning of the Christian era. Moreover, the texts and the paintings are the source of information concerning the people and cultures of neighbouring countries: Nubia, the country of Punt, Libya, as well as Syria and the Hittite and Aegean civilizations.’*

### **I.3 Examination of the State of Conservation by the World Heritage Committee and its Bureau**

Since the inscription of the property, the World Heritage Committee has examined and adopted decisions on its state of conservation in 1997, 1998, 2001, 2006 and 2007. Its related decisions addressed notably the issues of the lack of a management plan, the possible conflict between conservation requirements and safeguarding of socio-cultural character of the local community, notably the destruction of Gurnah foreseen for some decades and the displacement of its inhabitants, that finally took place in 2006, without the *geological, archaeological and geographical surveys and mapping, anthropological studies, assessment of the historical and cultural landscape qualities of the foothills and of the presence of Gurnah in the site* requested by the World Heritage Bureau in 1997 and 1998. The reports of 2006 and 2007 focused on the new developments taking place and the lack of a comprehensive management plan for the entire property (see below).

## **II. NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY**

### **II.1 Protected area legislation and institutional framework**

The property is protected under the Antiquities Protection Law No 117, issued in 1983.

The site is a three-part serial nomination consisting of the two temples on the East bank of the Nile, and a large archaeological area on the West Bank consisting of seven named temples or complexes.

The ownership of the property is national, regional and private.

### **II.2 Management structure**

While the whole area is managed by the Supreme Council of Luxor under the authority of the Governor, the regional office of the Supreme Council of Antiquities is the responsible governmental body for the management and conservation of the property.

### III. IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES / THREATS

#### III.1 Nature and extent of threats to the property, taking into consideration the values for which the property was inscribed and specific issues outlined by the World Heritage Committee

***Latest State of conservation report presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session (Christchurch, 2007) and Decision by the Committee:***

##### *Main threats identified in previous reports*

- a) Raise of the underground water level;
- b) Risks of flooding (Valleys of Kings and Queens);
- c) Absence of a defined protection perimeter for the property and of a buffer zone;
- d) Absence of a comprehensive Management Plan;
- e) Major infrastructure projects taking place or scheduled;
- f) Uncontrolled urban development;
- g) Housing and agricultural encroachment on the West Bank;
- h) Major infrastructure and development projects, in Karnak and Luxor;
- i) Demolitions in the village of Gurnah on the West Bank of the Nile.

##### *Current conservation issues*

Further to disturbing information received from various sources and an exchange of correspondence, the Egyptian authorities invited a World Heritage Centre mission to the property, in the days immediately preceding the 30th session of the World Heritage Committee (Vilnius, July 2006). As the report was not presented in the documents of the session, a summary is given hereafter.

This report first summarizes all perceived threats identified in recent communications from various sources and reported to the Committee in document *WHC-06/30.COM/7B*. It also contains recommendations concerning implementation of the "Master plan for Luxor City 2030" developed by the Governor further to a UNDP study in 2002-2003, that addresses development of the region in which the property is located and includes 32 short-term development projects, many already underway. The Master plan's objectives are focused on tourism development, meeting the social and economic needs of the population, and protecting antiquities.

The mission report also reviews systematically all issues raised, such as creating an open air plaza cum causeway from the first pylon of the temple of Karnak to the Nile; razing of all buildings and structures in the area (among which the French-Egyptian research centre and its annexes, the stadium, souvenir shops and dwellings, a public garden, ancient stones storage areas, the residential complex along the Nile known as the "French village"); lowering of the present cornice road and its displacement closer to the Nile; constructing a parking lot on the location of the present stadium; building shops along the south side of the plaza, along with a visitor centre.

The mission report noted that the overall aim of an open air plaza in front of the temple of **Karnak** was to correct the haphazard development of secondary facilities that have sprung up over time and to upgrade these through a harmonized design. It highlighted the need for the State Party to organize an international design competition for the entrance to Karnak Temple to encourage high-

quality design alternatives which support and promote a new vision on heritage management, and to respect existing archaeological and surviving evidence.

The mission also described reported projects in **Luxor** such as the excavation of the Alley of the Sphinxes in its totality, designed to make evident the past physical connection of the Luxor and Karnak Temples by exposure of the 3-km long ceremonial avenue, which linked them in antiquity. The report commented that while work in these areas has already demonstrated the good physical survival of the avenue, a part of this avenue is covered by the contemporary town and will require demolition of at least 300 residential houses.

Concerning the project to demolish most of the houses spread above ancient tombs in **Gurnah** (Qurna) and to displace its inhabitants to a newly built settlement, the report commented that the proposed new settlement will offer all basic facilities of water, drainage, primary health care and education, as well as a market, currently not available in Gurnah proper. The mission noted that the State Party stressed “the incompatibility and unsustainability of the situation in terms of living conditions of the communities in relation to World Heritage site management” and that “inhabitants would only move on a voluntary basis with adequate compensation”.

ICOMOS reviewed the mission report and made the following remarks:

- a) The information made available demonstrates that while the Master plan is very much about cleaning up, improving image and conditions for tourists, renewal, sanitization etc., it is not about protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the site. As a result, little attention has been given as to how best to maintain the complex set of historic layers which underlie the Thebes inscription on the List, and that indeed many significant parts of the site are being needlessly discarded.
- b) The demolition of some of the structures near Karnak, the later urban settlements between the two temples and of substantial parts of Gurnah are neither acceptable approaches within contemporary conservation theory (which demands that changes be limited to only those essential to meet critical functional needs, and here, only where this can be done without loss to heritage values), nor respectful of the property’s Outstanding Universal Value. Even if some of these places are not what would be described as “antiquities”, they should be protected as being indissociably connected to the development of the site, and therefore worthy of the strongest protection efforts. In particular, the loss of Gurnah, whose residents have provided the bulk of the excavation effort at Thebes from the 19th century forward, would involve loss of a place of great importance within the original nomination. Removal of the population of Gurnah, and reduction of the village to a few surviving designated (and empty) historic buildings is an act which goes against all the principles of conservation. ICOMOS would note that in 1998, and then in 2001, the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee had recommended the “launching of a co-operation programme encompassing geological, archaeological and geographical surveys and mapping, anthropological studies, assessment of the historical and cultural landscape qualities of the foothills and of the presence of Gurnah village in the site” and that the Bureau had also recommended “the postponement of any further transfer of the population of Gurnah until these investigations had taken place”.
- c) The demolition of structures along the proposed Avenue of Sphinxes linking the Luxor and Karnak temples is an effort to reconstruct past physical relations. However, the *Operational Guidelines* stress that “in relation to authenticity, the reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances”.

During its 30th session, the World Heritage Committee notably requested the State Party to provide the details of proposed re-settlement of villagers and of new developments, as well as their visual and environmental impacts, and to ensure that “all architectural designs for new facilities respect the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage property”.

The State Party submitted two documents on 26 January 2007, both printed power points presenting a “Comprehensive Development Plan for the City of Luxor – the City of Luxor Master Plan 2030”; and a “List of completed and on-going projects in the archaeological site of Luxor”, which describes only one sub-project: “Project to reduce the ground water level at the Temples of Karnak and Luxor.” These documents are heavily illustrated but contain little or no text which would justify the planned interventions. In the framework of the *Retrospective Inventory*, the State Party transmitted to the World Heritage Centre a topographical map and a cadastral map representing the five components of the property, thus answering to the request of the Committee. Some clarifications are still expected, before they are presented to the Committee in 2008. In addition, in April 2007, a “Pilot site management plan” for Madinat Habu (one of the temples part of the property, on the West Bank of the Nile) was received by the World Heritage Centre. At the time of preparing this document, the plan has not yet been examined by the Centre or by ICOMOS.

The World Heritage Centre mission to Cairo (29 April-4 May 2007) requested as an emergency by the Supreme Council of Antiquities was the opportunity to visit rapidly the property in order to assess the work carried out since 2006, that was not reflected in the documents provided by the State Party as mentioned above. The mission noticed the following:

- d) No account was taken of the main recommendations of the 2006 mission, nor of the previous recommendations of the World Heritage Bureau;
- e) A large number of the houses of Gurnah were destroyed without any historic or ethnographic survey and the inhabitants moved to a new village to the South;
- f) No consultation was made regarding the design of the Plaza between the entrance to the Temple of Karnak and the Nile and the new visitors centre and shopping mall were built following questionable architectural criteria;
- g) The project to destroy a portion of the city of Luxor in order to excavate the Alley of the Sphinxes and make it into a sunken pathway is still foreseen;
- h) The destruction of the “French village” close to the Nile is to take place in the coming weeks;
- i) A project to build a mooring for cruise boats and various infrastructures on the West Bank close to the new bridge is foreseen.

The mission had the opportunity to go through the new visitors centre at the entrance of the Valley of the Kings, funded by Japan. It is to note that its limited space, the design of the adjacent shops and the circulation scheme might cause problems when massive amounts of tourists enter at the same time. Another issue is the location of the parking lot at the entrance of the temple of Hatchepsut at Deir el-Bahari that seriously impairs the vision of the temple and should be moved to another location.

The mission expressed its concern regarding those issues, in particular the need to keep in mind, at all stages of planning and design, the Outstanding Universal Value of the property for which it was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to maintain the essential balance between the antiquities, the successive layers of history to date and the living communities.

Finally, the mission also visited the remains of the mud-brick village built by Hassan Fathi in the seventies, on the West Bank, in a dreadful state of decay. Those houses are an outstanding testimony of the architect's achievements and should be restored urgently before they collapse due to lack of maintenance. A pilot project could be launched to this end for the benefit of history of 20th century architecture and serve as a training exercise both for the inhabitants and young architects.

**Decision: 31 COM 7B.55**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-07/31.COM/7B.Add.2,
2. Recalling Decision **30 COM 7B.46**, adopted at its 30th session (Vilnius, 2006),
3. Takes note of the State Party for its efforts to put in place a Master plan to enhance the life of residents and the experience of tourists within the Luxor region;
4. Regrets that the State Party did not take into account the previous recommendations of the Bureau to carry out studies and impact assessments in Gurnah and those of the 2006 mission regarding notably the design of the Karnak plaza;
5. Encourages the State Party to revise its Master plan 2030 to directly integrate commitment to maintaining the Outstanding Universal Value of the property within all -projects, notably:
  - a) To call urgently for an international consultation for the plaza in front of the Karnak temple as well as for the Avenue of the Sphinxes;
  - b) to retain part or all of the urban settlement (including 300 residences) along the Avenue of the Sphinxes and eventually consider re-using the "French village" as a visitors or cultural centre;
  - c) to institute a moratorium on any further demolition at Gurnah and relocation of its population until such time as the studies and impact assessments initially requested are carried out;
  - d) to abandon the project of building a landing stage for tourism cruise boats on the Western Bank of the Nile close to the new bridge and to limit all such developments to the Eastern Bank;
  - e) to ensure that proper investigations are carried out in the West Bank before the dewatering trench delineation is finalized;
  - f) to provide relevant information on projects foreseen within the property;
6. Urges the State Party to prepare management plans for Karnak, Luxor and the West Bank and to set up a co-ordinated management instrument;
7. Requests that the State Party invites a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS mission to the property to review the implementation of the above recommendations;
8. Also requests the State Party to provide a progress report to the World Heritage Centre by **1 February 2008** for examination by the Committee at its 32nd session in 2008.

### III.2 Positive or negative developments in the conservation of the property since the last report to the World Heritage Committee

#### a) **General Comments (overall management issue)**

It should be stated forthright that practically none of the threats identified by earlier missions have been effectively dealt with – except in cases where large-scale demolition and new construction have turned a threat into a *fait accompli*. Also, that the impression is given that the values and the integrity of the site are being compromised in order to accommodate an ever increasing number of tourists. Most importantly, despite constant calls for it, the property still lacks a comprehensive Management Plan. Besides the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), a large number of foreign missions are actively excavating and/or working in the area, notably from France, Germany, Poland, the United States, etc. The Getty Conservation Institute has been preparing a Management plan for the Valley of the Queens, while the World Monuments Fund is doing a similar work in the Valley of the Kings and the SCA at Medinet Habou with the American Research Centre in Egypt. The mission was also informed of a possible loan of 15 million euro from Spain, but its purpose, modalities and amount have not been confirmed as yet. Parallel to these archaeological and conservation works, there are several major infrastructure projects, either scheduled or actually being implemented. All these activities, although affecting the site as a whole, seem to be working in isolation with hardly any coordination between them. In recent years, the Getty Conservation Institute organized two Coordination meetings, in order to discuss the situation on the West Bank. The SCA provided to the mission the report of the latest meeting, which took place in February 2008, thus providing a useful summary of the on-going activities and projects. Such coordination meetings are very important but, so far, they do not seem to have been very effective, and a lot more needs to be done in this respect however.

**Recommendation:** The excellent initiative of the Getty Conservation Institute should now be taken over by the SCA, which should continue to organize such meetings. It is the SCA that must undertake the coordination of all archaeological and infrastructure activities in the site of Thebes, as part of a comprehensive and coordinated Management Plan that includes both the East and the West Banks of the Nile.

The authorities put a generally detrimental emphasis on Pharaonic Egypt. This results in the neglect or, more often, the destruction of remains of all later periods, Ptolemaic, Roman, Early Christian etc, right up to 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century structures of historic and aesthetic value. The destruction is the result of an effort to expose the Pharaonic remains (as is the case with the Avenue of the Sphinxes and the villages of Gurnah – see below) or to highlight them (e.g. the plaza in front of the temple at Karnak – see below).

**Recommendation:** The desired Management Plan for both the East and West Banks should take into account and show equal respect to cultural and historic remains of all periods.

#### b) **Impact of tourism**

With regard to visitor impact on the site, given the considerable number of tourists, it is difficult to either manage their flow or control their activities. Generally speaking, the monuments are showing worrying signs of wear and tear. Grease-marks on walls and structures from continuous touching or even sitting on (Figs 1, 2), and worn-down flagstones (Fig. 3) of frequently visited sites, are the

most immediately obvious signs. At both Karnak and Luxor, tourists were invariably seen jumping over the fence or even climbing fenced-off statues (Figs 4, 5) and obelisks (Fig. 6) in order to be photographed. Given the size of the monuments and the large crowds packed in them, factors that reduce visual control, in all cases witnessed, the site-guards arrived at scene when it was too late.

In the Valley of the Kings, efforts have been made to manage the visitation of the tombs. According to locally obtained information, one ticket gives access to a choice of three out of the 14 tombs open to the public – an extra ticket is needed for the Tombs of Tutankhamen and Ramses. All the same, the Valley of the Kings is overcrowded with visitors, and at least those tombs that were visited, despite efforts at proper ventilation, were filled with stale, sometimes unpleasantly smelling air.

**Recommendation:** Within the framework of the Management Plan, better methods of controlling visitor flow should be devised. More effective (but unobtrusive) fences should be established around sensitive areas. The efficiency of guarding should be improved and reinforced – which does not necessarily imply an increase in the number of guards.

### **c) Conservation issues**

Given the clement (to archaeological remains) climate of Egypt, many of the monuments are well preserved and need little immediate conservation. Time, however, is taking its toll: for example, painted surfaces within “touching” range or left exposed to the elements are deteriorating and will not survive for much longer (Figs 7, 8, 9). Elsewhere, the masonry is showing deterioration and the stone blocks are cracking (Fig. 10).

**Recommendation:** Despite appearing to be a superhuman task, given the extent and richness of the site of Thebes, there is a need for a general assessment of the conservation issues that the property is facing. Conservation is being carried out, especially in front-line monuments like the Tomb of Nefertari. What is needed, however, is a general maintenance plan that will check on the condition of all buildings and artefacts. Such a survey and control of the situation must be part of the general Management Plan of the site.

### **d) General appearance of the site**

Overall, the monuments that are open to the public are well kept and clean. However, monuments away from the usual tourist routes are often in bad need of cleaning (Fig. 11), while even in the main monuments there are some old unsightly structures that need to be removed (Fig. 12).

**Recommendation:** The desired-for Management Plan should provide for the systematic cleaning of all the ancient monuments in the property, not only those commonly visited by tourists. More immediately, unnecessary, abandoned structures should be removed.

## **III.3 Information on any threat or damage to or loss of Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and/or authenticity for which the property was inscribed**

The Outstanding Universal Value of the Site as defined at the time of inscription under is under threat. The continuous, large-scale building or clearing projects are threatening both the integrity

and the authenticity of the site. The values expressed in criterion (vi), in particular, are seriously compromised. According to this: *“The monumental and archaeological complex of Thebes with its temples, tombs, constitute the material witness of the aggregate history of the Egyptian civilization from the Middle Kingdom to the beginning of the Christian era”*. As already stated and as it will be mentioned later (with regard to the exposure of the Avenue of the Sphinxes and the plaza in front of the temple at Karnak), most post-Pharaonic remains are being removed / destroyed in order to expose the earlier layers – and often without adequate excavation or recording methods. This leads to the loss of the complex set of historic layers which characterize the property and underlie its inscription to the World Heritage List.

The demolition and gradual eradication of the villages of Gurnah (see below) is another plan that is damaging the authenticity of the site and threatening part of the Outstanding Universal Value that led to the original inscription of the property as a World Heritage Site.

Moreover, the integrity of the property is threatened by gigantic development projects, such as the plaza and surrounding new structures at Karnak (for which, see below).

Another agent that is beginning to pose a threat to the property is the urban sprawl on the West Bank. So far, this is within tolerable limits, although the new bridge connecting the two banks is already having negative results. The construction of a new landing stage on the West Bank (see below) will be disastrous in this respect.

Concerning authenticity, the works carried out to restore the archaeological and architectural elements defining the Outstanding Universal Values are, on the whole, good and acceptable. However, a comprehensive strategic plan needs to be defined urgently. This should integrate archaeological research, restoration and conservation; and must be set up within a time frame providing for short, medium and long term action.

## **IV. ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE PROPERTY**

### **IV.1 Follow-up measures to previous decisions of the World Heritage Committee on the state of conservation of the property and measures which the State Party plans to take to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property**

On 25 January 2008, as requested by Decision 31 COM.55, the Permanent Delegation of Egypt to UNESCO transmitted to the World Heritage Centre a letter from the Supreme Council of Antiquities, reporting that:

*“(5a) With regards to Karnak and Luxor, I would like to explain the following to the UNESCO Committee that came to Egypt twice. In the initial stage of planning the development of the East Bank, particularly the area of Karnak, a committee of scholars who are experts in their fields, including foreigners, was organized. The creation of a plan for this area was based on the decisions of this committee. Why is there a need now for another international committee for Karnak as the previous one has already made decisions, and is composed of highly qualified individuals familiar with the site? I invite any committee to come see what has been accomplished so far.*

*A letter regarding the master plan of the area until 2030 has already been sent to Dr Samir Farag, head of the SCL in Luxor, and also to H.E. Farouk Hosni, Minister of Culture, so that it should be*

reviewed by a committee of experts, Egyptologists, and archaeologists, and then by an ICOMOS committee.

(5b) The SCA also does not agree to the landing stage for tourism cruise boats on the West Bank of the Nile close to the bridge and will limit all such developments to the East Bank, and we already sent the UNESCO decision concerning this matter to Dr Samir Farag.

(5c) We are working right now, with USAID, on an underwater project on the West Bank to involve salvage archaeology. The route of this project has already been studied. We have appointed a team that is trained in excavation techniques to follow the route of this project conducting salvage archaeology.”

## IV.2 Assessment by the mission on specific issues

### a) Rise of the underground water level:

The threat represented by the rising of the underground water table has been stressed since many years<sup>1</sup>. The underground drainage system installed on the site of Karnak through a grant from USAID, is now fully working under the supervision of the SCA. This is a very impressive plant which seems to be working efficiently and to be meticulously maintained.

It appears that a similar drainage system is about to be installed on the West Bank, also in the framework of a USAID programme. This will cover a much larger area containing many standing and underground monuments. Some plans were shown (see fig. 13), indicating the delineation of the dewatering trenches, and some explanations on how the drainage will be executed were given but the mission feels that the information at their disposal does not allow them to judge the effectiveness of this venture, nor its impact. Moreover, there seems to be no provision for the proper archaeological investigation of the area before the initiation of this project, only during the course of the project

**Recommendation:** The drainage system of the West Bank should be an integral part of a Management Plan of the entire area. Proper archaeological investigation must be carried out before the final plan is drawn and implemented, so that, if need be, the course of the drainage system can be adjusted so as not to damage antiquities that may come to light. The legend on Fig. 13: “Final Pipeline Alignment” is not a comforting sign.

### b) The plaza in front of the Karnak temple

What was a threat is now a fact (Figs 14, 15). Despite much and consistent advice to the contrary, all structures between the temple and the modern bank of the Nile have been demolished in order to create a vast esplanade (Fig. 16).

This was a regrettable decision: The much talked-about “French Village”, the historic French-Egyptian Research Centre and its annexes, together with structures of lesser importance have been destroyed in order to create the plaza. This is an immense change and largely unnecessary. It is certainly not historically correct since, in Pharaonic times, the bank of the Nile went right up to the façade of the temple complex (Fig. 17). Over the centuries, as the Nile gradually changed its course and moved further and further away from the temple façade, a succession of structures

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<sup>1</sup> Høybye, Jan Agerholm, Assessment of water related damages and adverse effects on historic monuments. Mission to the World Heritage Sites at Ancient Thebes and Abu Mena, Egypt (September 2002), 25 June 2003, 37 pp

were constructed in this “reclaimed” bank (for the extent of this zone, see fig. 16). The SCA states that the soundings undertaken in the area of the plaza during the works revealed no remains, save a *balaneion* (Hellenistic bath establishment - Fig. 18). It is, however, difficult to believe that the only remains brought to light, namely the *balaneion*, happen to be situated in the empty space between the plaza and the entrance to the temple complex.

The plaza itself, although new, is already showing signs of neglect, with rubbish accumulating here and there, as well as purposeful destruction (of the light fittings on the floor, visible on figs 14, 15). More worryingly, the materials seem to be inappropriate, as the flagstones with which the entire plaza is paved, are already chipping and cracking (Figs 19, 20). The stone-paved plaza the moment is barren and provides no shade (see figs 14, 15). It will be almost impossible to cross during the hot months of the year. Bushes and trees have been planted (Fig. 21) but the majority of the latter are palm trees that while beautiful and “authentic” provide very little shade.

The new parking lot and visitors’ centre are ample and lavish (Fig. 22). On the inside, the visitors’ centre is pleasant (Fig. 23), despite the transparent roof covering its central part, which will turn it into a hothouse unless considerable amounts of electricity are used for air conditioning. Well-chosen photographs on the walls and detailed models of the ancient site, as well as of the modern plaza (see figs 16, 22) make a positive impression. One wonders, however, how it will fare when masses of visitors will be passing through it in order to come out onto the plaza, acquire tickets and then proceed to the archaeological site. There are six narrow, slot-like ticket booths on the façade of the visitors’ centre facing the plaza. Their placing, three on either side of the exit from the visitors’ centre to the plaza (Fig. 24) do not seem convenient, and will certainly cause crowding and congestion.

The shops (Fig. 25) that have been constructed in the area before the visitors’ centre appear to have been designed for a cold climate, since, with their fronts and backs made of glass, they welcome the heat of the sun, rather than avoid it. The smaller shops seem to have a glass front with a door but little other means of ventilation (Figs 26, 27). Moreover, as indicated by the markings on the tarmac, the parking slots are not far from them and, unless the cars/coaches turn their engines and cooling systems off, the heat in the shops will be unbearable.

**Recommendation:** Excessive, expensive and destructive projects such as the plaza should be avoided at all costs in the future. If they are to happen, they should then be the result of an open competition. Proper archaeological investigation and thorough documentation must take place before such projects are implemented. Since, however, the plaza is now a reality, every care must be taken to keep it clean and in good repair, replacing damaged materials and fittings. Shade-providing trees must also be planted as soon as possible.

### ***c/ New entrance and parking space for the temple complex of Luxor***

This is another project that seems to have materialized without much previous consultation – a project that involved the demolition of many buildings and spoiled the character of this part of the town. More demolitions (Fig. 28: buildings at the end of the long wall) are apparently planned for the immediate future.

A new parking lot was certainly necessary but this was not the place for it. As it is, the coaches crowd right up to the perimeter of the ancient monuments, impeding their visibility and polluting them with exhaust fumes (Fig. 29). It is worth pointing out that a somewhat similar situation is found at Medinet Habu (Fig. 30), although there the parking lot is old and not part of a new project.

In Luxor, the public park adjacent to the new park lot is already a popular and clearly needed meeting place for the people of Luxor (Fig. 31). One wonders, however, why such heavy and costly benches, light fittings and rubbish canisters (see also fig. 28) have been chosen in a place where maintenance is not of the first order. They are already showing signs of misuse. Also, the planting of exotic palm trees (see fig. 31) rather than the indigenous African palms was not appropriate. Furthermore, given the climate, other indigenous trees that provide better shade should have also been planted.

**Recommendation:** The parking lot has to move away from the monument. Tourists can walk a little distance and they do not need to be brought right to the entrance of the monument. Further demolition of buildings should be reduced to a minimum.

#### ***d/ The Avenue of the Sphinxes***

This is yet another project that has continued despite insistent advice to the contrary. Many of the sphinxes that lie above ground are suffering from misuse and abuse (Figs 8, 32, 33) and they certainly need protection. Also, while in an abstract sense, the idea of exposing the impressively long, sphinx-lined avenue that joined the two temple complexes together in antiquity seems an attractive idea, this, however, is being carried out at an immense cost. A large part of the area has been cleared already, and only a relatively short stretch of the 3-km-long avenue remains to be brought to light. The exposure of this last stretch, however, will involve the demolition of one of the most interesting, residential quarters of the town, and will not spare a mosque (the minaret visible on fig. 28) and a large church, amongst other buildings of character and importance. Moreover, it will create a new conservation problem: the stone of many of the Sphinxes that have been lying exposed for a long time are in an advanced state of decay and need proper and immediate treatment (foreground of fig. 10, and figs 32, 33). The hundreds of more Sphinxes coming to light during the on-going works will increase this problem enormously, especially since many of them are already in bad need of conservation (Figs 34, 35).

A further problem is that the level of the Sphinx Avenue is considerably lower than the present-day one. Thus, where the avenue has been exposed, the result is not an imposing causeway (as it was in ancient times) but a deep ditch lined with more or less well preserved sphinxes. Where work has been completed, the sloping sides of the ditch have been covered with flat stones, making the whole thing look like a dried up ditch) (Figs 36, 37). To make matters worse, this ditch is flanked by the backs of tall and unsightly apartment blocks (Figs 37, 38). Apart from cutting the town in two, this ditch (given its length) will be almost impossible to keep free from rubbish dumping.

In order to reach the level of the Sphinx Avenue, all later deposits are being systematically removed. Although, the team working there assured the mission that proper excavation and recording was being carried out, this seems doubtful. It is inconceivable that such an enormous expanse of the avenue was thoroughly excavated and recorded in such a short period of time. Heavy machinery was obviously used, as betrayed by the levelling of the soil and the marks on some of the stone blocks. Such remains (mainly of the Roman period) that have been preserved lie all at the back of the Sphinxes, on either side of the avenue (figs 36, 37). It is difficult to believe that there was nothing in the area of the avenue, between the two rows of Sphinxes. Moreover, there is ample evidence of the destruction of all these later layers on the edges of the ditch where millions of sherds and building debris are piled up (Figs 37, 38).

Neither details of urban, functional or social agendas nor any long term plans for the alley seem to have been defined yet. Should the project be continued, a comprehensive urban, social and

environmental strategy is to be developed, in order for the alley to become a part of the living fabric of Luxor, for locals and visitors alike. There is a clear risk that this project could become another example of a living city being 'injured' in the name of archaeology.

**Recommendation:** It is, again, too late for most of the length of the avenue, which has been cleared of all later remains. All the same, further demolition of the town should be cancelled, in order to preserve one of the most interesting, albeit more recent, residential quarters of Luxor. All energy – but at a much slower pace – must concentrate on the proper investigation of the stretches already exposed, as well as the study and conservation of all the ancient remains brought to light. Given that the situation for the largest length of the avenue is not reversible and the ditch is there to stay, the comprehensive Management Plan, the need for which has been stressed many times, must include a constant maintenance and cleaning scheme for the ditch, otherwise it will soon become a rubbish dump.

#### **e) *New circulation scheme for the West Bank***

A plan for managing tourist coaches on the West Bank is apparently about to be implemented. This will seemingly involve one main road lying well away from the cliff face, where parking lots will be provided, and from where secondary roads will branch off to lead to the different monuments.

**Recommendation:** Although the mission feels that what was shown to it is not enough to enable it to express an opinion on this circulation scheme, the mission recommends that the effectiveness and the impact on the landscape and the antiquities of such a scheme should be carefully studied; it must also be integrated in a general Management Plan of the West Bank which should involve other infrastructure projects, such as the underground drainage system.

#### **f) *Gurnah***

The demolition of Gurnah (Figs 39, 40) is being systematically carried out despite persistent expert advice calling for the preservation of these traditional villages<sup>2</sup>. Another request that has been ignored is the carrying out of *geological, archaeological and geographical surveys and mapping, anthropological studies, assessment of the historical and cultural landscape qualities of the foothills and of the presence of Gurnah in the site*, requested by the World Heritage Bureau already in 1997 and 1998, before any further action is taken.

Admittedly, the living conditions in many of the houses are primitive to say the least, and their inhabitants deserve a better life. Also, it is clear that in some cases the inhabitants are damaging the ancient remains. All-out, mass demolition, however, is not the answer – especially when the houses of Gurnah have been part of the archaeological landscape ever since investigations in the West Bank began, and form an inseparable part of the values of the property.

The argument, expressed by local authorities, that the houses must be demolished in order to investigate the tombs lying underneath, is not convincing. Many of the houses of Gurnah are prime

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the requests by the World Heritage Bureau in 1997 and 1998. See the reports of 2006 and 2007. See also 2001: Braun, J. P., *La question des villages de Qurna installés sur les tombes des Nobles de la Nécropole de Thèbes (Egypte)*, ICOMOS, 2001 (22 pp).

examples of traditional Egyptian architecture. Destroying the houses and the historic landscape goes against fundamental principles of conservation. In any case, the tombs already excavated are perhaps more than the authorities can protect and preserve, and no urgency appears to excavate more – at least for the time being.

**Recommendation:** The demolition of Gurnah should be stopped. A proper Management Plan should integrate the remaining sections of the villages – not just single houses – into the archaeological park. The serious issue of relocating the population is something that should have been studied and analysed by experts in these matters. The need to excavate more tombs in the immediate future should be carefully studied and justified.

#### ***g) The Temple of Hatshepsut/ Deir el-Bahari***

This is, for many, the most imposing, standing monument on the West Bank. It was conceived as a structure to be seen from the distance by the approaching visitor; its monumentality growing as the visitor moved slowly towards it. Unfortunately, when the modern visitor comes around the hill and into the valley, instead of the open vista ending with the temple at the far end, what he/she sees are the coaches in the new parking area (Figs 41, 42), spoiling the view and destroying the architectural meaning of the whole setting. The new souvenir shops adjacent to the parking area are not in the way but they should not have been built there.

**Recommendation:** The parking area has to be moved out of the valley of the temple of Hatshepsut so that the original visual impact of the architecture in its setting is restored. The souvenir shops should also move with it. The enterprising visitor could then approach the temple on foot (as the ancients did); the less enterprising one, on horse/mule-back (as at Petra) or using small shuttles that will not park in front of the temple.

#### ***h) Hassan Fathi's New Gurnah***

Despite the fact that a large part of the mud-brick village built by Hassan Fathi in the 1940s and 1950s on the West Bank, has disappeared through neglect and demolition, what does survive remains an important reminder of one of Egypt's outstanding and avant-garde figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – one of the few architects from the Middle East to be famous in the West. Most of the surviving buildings (both houses and public spaces) are in a dreadful state of repair and will soon collapse (Fig. 43). Some of the buildings are still being inhabited; although in one sense they are being maintained, they are also suffering from misuse, additions that are too heavy for the supporting structures and repairs carried out haphazardly and with the wrong materials (Figs 44, 45). Elsewhere, tall modern buildings are encroaching, not to say drowning Fathi's, low mudbrick structures (Fig. 46). What is ironic is that these new buildings, unplastered as they are, expose their concrete components, and it is well-known that Hassan Fathi designed and built the village as a reaction to his realizing that the concrete-framed housing schemes imported from Europe were not working for rural societies.

**Recommendation:** It was understood by the mission that projects are being designed to restore what remains of Hassan Fathi's village. If this is so, the plans must be prepared and then examined by experts in mud brick structures, as soon as possible and prior to any intervention. Such projects should aim at reintegrating these structures into the fabric of the village and turning New Gurnah into a living village – at no case transforming it into a tourist village. The prompt advancement of such projects is particularly urgent due to the imminent collapse of a number of

structures. In the meantime, all haphazard additions of extra storeys must stop so as not to aggravate the situation.

### ***j) The landing stage for tourism cruise boats***

Presently, cruise boats (70-80 at one time) moor on the East Bank in the centre of the town of Luxor. Given the limited space, they moor next to each other, sometimes more than four abreast, and they are a source of constant noise and pollution, as well as being a fire hazard (apparently, fires spreading from one boat to the next are not infrequent) (Fig. 47 shows similar crowded mooring south of Luxor). There is no doubt that the need of a new landing stage away from the town centre is imperative. However, building it on the West Bank, as the current plans want, would be disastrous. Despite some degree of urban development, the West Bank is virgin ground compared to the East Bank. The plans are to build the landing stage away from the archaeological site, south of the newly constructed bridge (Fig. 48). In this way, it is argued, it will have minimal impact on the antiquities. This, however, is an argument that does not hold since the landing stage will be very big (500 hectares), and much like a marina, will need a lot of infrastructure and adjacent structures in order to be functional. It will encourage, moreover, the springing up of restaurants, souvenir shops and the like, all along the way to the antiquities. The sudden, rapid growth of the village of Al Dbaiia (Fig. 49), as a result of the new bridge that ends next to on the West Bank, should sound a warning bell.

**Recommendation:** The building of the landing stage on the West Bank is one of the few projects in the area, the implementation of which has not yet begun. It is fortunate that the Supreme Council of Antiquities has already taken a clear stance against this project: "*The SCA also does not agree to the landing stage for tourism cruise boats on the West Bank of the Nile close to the bridge and will limit all such developments to the East Bank, and we already sent the UNESCO decision concerning this matter to Dr Samir Farag*" (Letter from the SCA transmitted to the World Heritage Centre on 25 January 2008).

It is crucial that the landing stage and all other such development should be restricted to the East Bank (Fig. 50). The argument that there is not enough space for it on this, the East Bank, because, amongst other things, there are railway tracks that leave only a narrow strip of land between them and the bank, is not convincing enough. Given the absolute need to protect the West Bank from any further large-scale urban and other such development, there are certainly ways of circumventing such obstacles. Strict regulations should also be put in force to control the expansion of housing, tourist or agricultural facilities in the whole protected area.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

**IV.1 Recommendations** for any additional action to be taken by the State Party, including recommendations to the World Heritage Committee:

- The coordination of all activities in the archaeological site of Thebes and its Necropolis should be the responsibility of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, and should be part of a comprehensive and coordinated Management Plan that includes both the East and the West Banks of the Nile.
- The SCA should organize meetings on a regular basis, where all those, Egyptian and foreign, involved in archaeological as well as infrastructure and development projects will meet and discuss the development of their projects. This will also enable the Egyptian authorities to coordinate all such activities.
- The desired Management Plan for both the East and West Banks should take into account and show equal respect to cultural and historic remains of all periods, right up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as to the natural landscape.
- Such a Management Plan should include maintenance and cleaning regimes for the entire property. These would involve all the ancient remains (e.g. the decaying sphinxes near Karnak) and not only those that are on the usual tourist itineraries. Modern structures too (like the plaza in front of Karnak) must also be regularly cleaned and maintained, replacing damaged materials and fittings where necessary.
- Within the framework of the Management Plan, better methods of controlling visitor flow should be devised. Fences around sensitive areas should be established and the efficiency of guarding should be reinforced.
- Proper archaeological investigation and recording, as well as impact assessment studies, must always be carried out before finalizing and implementing large-scale projects such as the West Bank drainage system. All such projects should be an integral part of a Management plan of the entire area.
- Further demolition of the houses of Gurnah, of the urban fabric of Luxor and other characterful and historic buildings should stop. It is shocking to think what and how much has been bulldozed away in the very recent past
- Excessive, expensive and destructive projects such as the Karnak plaza should be avoided in the future.
- Large parking areas, such as the ones in front of the temple of Hatchepsut and the temple at Luxor, should be relocated (together with souvenir shops and other such) away from the monuments.
- Indigenous trees (not just palm trees) should be planted as soon as possible in areas where shade is badly needed, such as the immense and exposed stone-floored plaza at Karnak and the public park next to the entrance at Luxor.
- All plans relating to the building of a new landing stage on the West Bank should be abandoned immediately. All such development should be restricted to the East Bank.

## **IV.2 Conclusions**

The mission expresses its concern regarding the above issues, in particular the need to keep in mind, at all stages of planning and design, the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, for which it was inscribed on the World Heritage List, and to maintain the essential balance between the antiquities, the successive layers of history to date and the living communities. The recent changes mentioned throughout this report, especially those affecting criterion (vi) of the inscription (see III.3 above), are marring the property and pose a real threat to the authenticity and integrity of the site and its Outstanding Universal Value.

The mission also expresses its concern that despite consistent expert advice against the implementation of a series of projects deemed harmful to the antiquities and to Outstanding Universal Value of the site, most of these projects have proceeded and materialized ignoring all such advice.

The mission regrets that despite the repeated call for an integrated well-coordinated Management Plan that would encompass the whole property on both the East and West Banks, no such plan has as yet been drawn up. The result is a series of disjointed actions and projects, some successful, some disastrous, but all independent and unrelated to one another – and all certainly lacking a philosophy deriving from a single Management Plan that would aim not only to promote and preserve the antiquities and historicity of the property but also to preserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the property for which it was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

## **V. ANNEXES**

### **1 Programme of the mission**

18 April: Arrival in Cairo

19 April: Briefing of the mission members  
Departure for Luxor

20 April: Visit of sites on the West Bank:  
The new bridge south of Luxor, Hassan Fathi new Gurnah, Deir el-Bahari, Medinet Habou, Valley of the Kings, Deir el-Medineh  
Visit of the Karnak visitors' centre  
Visit of the Mummification museum

21 April: Meeting with the Governor of Luxor  
Visit of the Alley of the Sphinxes  
Visit of the temple of Karnak and of the new infrastructure  
Visit of the temple of Luxor

22 April: Return to Cairo  
Meeting at the Supreme Council of Antiquities

23 April: Visit of the site of the Pyramids at Giza  
Visit of Saqqara

24 April: Visit of Historic Cairo  
Departure

### **2 Persons met during the mission**

Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary-General, Supreme Council of Antiquities

Prof. Ali Radwan, Head of the Egyptian Delegation to the World Heritage Committee

Dr Samir Farag, Governor of Luxor

Dr Sabry Abdelaziz Khater, Head of Egyptology, SCA

Dr Gihane Zaki, SCA representative at UNESCO

Dr Mansoor Boreik, SCA representative in the Luxor area

Dr Ibrahim Suleiman, SCA Karnak

Gal Ali Hellal, head of the SCA projects in Karnak

Gal Mohamed Metwali, responsible of the West Bank projects, Luxor Governorate

Dr Kamal Wahid, SCA Giza

Mr Tarek Naga, Giza Plateau management and presentation plan

Eng. Essam Abdel Hady, Chairman, Misr Company for Sound & Light

Dr Chebaan Abdel Gawad, SCA Saqqara

Dr Abdallah Al Attar, advisor to the SCA, former head of the Coptic and Islamic Dept

Dr Farag Fadda, head of the Coptic and Islamic Dept, SCA

Dr Sylvie Denoix, Director of Studies, Institut français d'archéologie orientale

### 3 Illustrations

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Fig. 2: Tourists sitting on and damaging ancient structures in one of the main passages of the temple of Karnak

Fig. 3: Worn-down flagstones in a side temple bases in the Mortuary temple of Ramses III / Medinet Habu

Fig. 4: Tourist jumping over fence and climbing statue in order to be photographed, temple of Karnak

Fig. 5: Tourist jumping over fence and climbing statue in order to be photographed, temple of Karnak

Fig. 6: Tourist posing for a photograph in front of an obelisk in a fenced off area, temple of Karnak

Fig. 7: Faded and blackened painted decoration at the Mortuary temple of Ramses III / Medinet Habu

Fig. 8: Peeling and flaking painted decoration at the Mortuary temple of Ramses III / Medinet Habu

Fig. 9: Sparrows nesting in cartouche with painted decoration in the Mortuary temple of Ramses III / Medinet Habu

Fig. 10: Crumbling masonry in need of attention in the temple of Karnak

Fig. 11: Rubbish in a section of the Avenue of the sphinxes in the town of Luxor

Fig. 12: Old disused ticket booth at the entrance to the Mortuary temple of Ramses III / Medinet Habu

Fig. 13: Plan showing "Final Pipeline Alignment; Ground Water Control; 22 January 2008"

Fig. 14: The plaza looking towards the temple at Karnak

Fig. 15: The plaza looking towards the new embankment of the Nile at Karnak

Fig. 16: Maquette of the plaza exhibited in the newly constructed visitors centre at Karnak

Fig. 17: The mooring on the "original" bank of the Nile in front of the façade of the temple complex

Fig. 18: The *balaneion* (Hellenistic baths) in front of the entrance to the temple complex

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Fig. 48: The area of the West Bank designated for the new landing stage, seen from the new bridge

Fig. 49: The rapidly spreading village of Al Dbaia at the end of the New Bridge on the West Bank

Fig. 50: The section of the East Bank, south of the new bridge, where the new landing stage should be constructed

*(The photograph of the frontispiece is by Véronique Dauge; and the plan on fig. 13 was provided by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. All other photographs are by D. Michaelides).*