

Experts deny patching up Ramses III statue with black building cement

Author:

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CAIRO: Egyptian conservation officials have hit back at claims on social media that black building cement had been used to patch up a damaged statue of Pharaoh Ramses III.

A photo showing workers repairing the face of the ancient Egyptian king on a stone statue at his Habu mortuary temple near Luxor, went viral after being published on the internet, with some posters claiming that crude construction materials had been used to fill cracks.

But experts have slammed the criticism, saying the restoration work had been carried out according to internationally recognized scientific standards.

The Ramses III temple is one of the most important buildings in the Karnak antiquities complex and dates back to the 20th dynasty in Ancient Egypt.

Dr. Ghareeb Sonbol, head of the restoration and conservation department at the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities, said: "The photo on social media of (workers) repairing the face of Ramses III is true.

"But the restoration process was carried out completely scientifically according to international conventions of maintenance. The material used to restore the statue, which resembles cement, is used in the restoration of antiquities in a scientific way, not as some publishers had claimed that the image was black cement."

Sonbol said that the Egyptian antiquities have been in safe hands for the past 10 years, with Egypt leading numerous successful restoration projects.

Dr. Mustafa Al-Saghir, director-general of Karnak Antiquities, told Arab News that the material used for the repairs was a sandstone and limestone mix that was a close match to the original color of the statue's stone.

Workers were in the process of removing cement used for repair works in the 1920s and 1930s and replacing it with modern material that met international standards.

Officials came in for similar criticism last February with claims that concrete and iron had been used during restoration of the statue of Pharaoh Ramses II. But Ahmed Badr Al-Amari, vice director of Luxor Temple, said at the time that only authorized materials were used.

Ramses III was the most famous pharaoh of the 20th family dynasty in Ancient Egypt and also the last ruler of the modern state of Egypt (1183 BC – 1152 BC).

He was known by the Greeks as Rhampsinitus and followed his father Ramses II to embark on massive construction projects.

His temple was named after Habu city in Luxor. Some refer to Habu as a monk with the same name, who used the second courtyard of the temple as a church for Christians when Christianity came to Egypt.



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Ramses III's 3,000-year-old murder mystery 'solved' Parts of Ramses II statue found in southern Egypt

[Hounded by war planes, Syrians dig Idlib graves in advance](#)

Thu, 2019-06-13 23:18

MAARET AL-NUMAN/SYRIA: Sitting inside his bulldozer in embattled northwest Syria, civil defense worker Bassel Al-Rihani quietly maneuvers a giant shovel through red earth to dig a grave for whoever is killed next.

The Idlib region of some 3 million people has suffered increased regime and Russian airstrikes in recent weeks, with hundreds of civilians killed since

late April.

To keep up, civil defense workers known as the White Helmets are digging graves in advance, to ensure funerals are swift and the few who attend are not killed at the cemetery.

"We're digging graves, preparing them, we don't even know for who," said the gravedigger in the town of Maaret Al-Noman, which has been repeatedly hit by bombardment in recent weeks.

"We could be digging one for me, my brother, my father, my friend – God only knows," said the 25-year-old father of five.

Using a bulldozer allows him to finish a grave in less than 10 minutes, he explained, instead of toiling away for up to three hours at risk from jets in the sky.

SPEEDREAD

Idlib, one of the last regions in war-torn Syria to resist regime control, is supposed to be protected by a September buffer zone deal co-signed by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey.

"We get them ready so when there are war planes all over, we can bury people as fast as possible, because often cemeteries are targeted," Rihani said.

Idlib, one of the last regions in war-torn Syria to resist regime control, is supposed to be protected by a September buffer zone deal co-signed by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey.

But a spike in air raids, shelling, and rocket fire by the regime and Russia has since late April hit the region.

Idlib has been dominated since January by an alliance led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate.

The violence has killed more than 360 civilians, including 80 children, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says, and caused tens of thousands to flee their homes.

On Monday, Mohammad Turman, 21, buried his two-year-old daughter Fatima.

The young father was out buying vegetables when a regime air raid hit his family home in the village of Maar Shureen.

He rushed home and extracted Fatima from the rubble, but she died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Turman brought her home to clean her body, and allow the family to say a prayer.

"We buried her quickly. We weren't even able to say goodbye properly," he said. "There were very few of us. People were too scared of the planes."

Back in Maaret Al-Noman, Rihani said funerals today are much simpler and smaller than before the eight-year war.

Today, there is little money to spend on proper tombs and hardly anyone dares venture out to pay their respects.

"Before the war, half the town would turn up if someone was buried, but now it's just four to five relatives," the rescue worker said.

Victims are sometimes unrecognizable – burned, or torn to pieces – and often buried en masse, different generations of the same family together.

Rihani said he was once burying a close friend's nephew after he was killed in an airstrike, when someone ran up urging him to stop. The nephew's father had died of his wounds and should be buried with him, he was told.

"I'd been digging a single grave, but then I had to make it wider to fit both father and son," Rihani said.

Outside the village of Kafr Aweid last week, a dozen men gathered to bury their loved ones on the edge of a field of tall dry grass.

Residents were supposed to mark the holiday of Eid Al-Fitr, but instead airstrikes and shelling by regime forces had hit the town, killing 10 civilians.

By a deep burial pit, one man comforted another, his face contorted with emotion and his long robe streaked with dried blood.

Under a tree, one family cradled a small, blood-stained cardboard box.

Inside lay the scant remains of four-year-old Yamen, including the little boy's dust-covered head.

Yamen's grandfather sat legs sprawled on the ground, stooped over the precious package.

"Where is humanity? Have they no conscience?" he cried, gesturing toward the sky.

Nearby, men interred bodies wrapped in blankets, each grave sealed off with slim concrete blocks.

The large metal blade of a bulldozer then dropped mounds of fresh earth over their tombs, laying them to rest.



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Russia carries out air strikes against militants in Syria's Idlib
Syria uses familiar tactic in rebel Idlib: Bombing civilians

[Released Lebanese businessman Zakka: 'I was virtually sentenced by Iran's Revolutionary Guard'](#)

Thu, 2019-06-13 00:31

BEIRUT: Nizar Zakka, who has barely been out of Tehran's Evin Prison 24 hours after spending nearly four years in it, still feels the impact of what happened to him.

After his release, Zakka summarized what happened to him – his tears streamed down his face more than once during the interview.

Zakka said he visited Iran only four times previously on official invitations, and on a fifth after an invitation from the country's vice president to participate in a conference on informatics.

"Three days after my participation in the conference, I did not feel that I was an unwanted guest and had not received any remarks. On my way back to the airport, a car with people in civilian clothes intercepted us. They took me out of the car and spoke to me in English saying that no one would see me anymore," he told Arab News.

"They arrested me, and said that they would kill me. There was no explanation for what happened, and I was tortured. They asked me to say on camera that I was working with the Americans and I planned on overthrowing the regime in Iran. I was there because of an official invitation. So, I refused their request. I felt that if it was going to end in death, why not resist what was happening to me unjustly?

"They knew that I was innocent, but it seems that they wanted to send a message. The kidnappers were members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and they wanted to show that they could do what they wanted. I was an activist in the field of human rights and had free access to the internet, and expressed my opinion at a conference in Tehran. They exploited this as a weak link for international companies, to send them a message that they are forbidden to enter Iran. They succeeded, they stopped coming to Iran – they feared their safety."

Sham trial

Regarding the trial he was subjected to, he smiled. "It was only for show. I stood in front of the judge and they began to mock me. One of them said that I was detained for inciting the revolution in Ukraine. I laughed and told the judge they had the wrong file. The representative of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps read out the accusations, without asking me a single question, and that's how I was sentenced. The cell I stayed in had 50 detainees living in the worst conditions."

He said that in the cell, he knew Americans Ziyu Wang and Karen Godafari, former Iranian Vice President Hamid Mashaki, and Mahdi Rafsanjani, the son of former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani. He said that he also met "an Iraqi detainee and many Iranians, Kurds and Arabs. There were many Iranian diplomats, all accused of treachery because it is the easiest charge.

"Every person who was arrested was subjected to physical torture of all kinds, which later turned into a psychological torture. I slept every night hoping not to wake up the next day."

As for his contact with the outside world, Zakka said: "At first they allowed us to call family members, but only for 4 minutes that would go by without speaking, and later, when they transferred me to the public prison, those who ran it allowed us a 15-minute phone call. They dealt with us more compassionately than the Revolutionary Guard did.

I was physically and mentally tortured to a point where I wished for death.

Nizar Zakka, Lebanese businessman

"A year ago, I met with the director general of the Lebanese Directorate of General Security, but nothing happened. I lost hope. I was informed that Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil spoke about my release date during Ramadan. The month went by, then Eid came, and nothing happened. Two days ago, those who imprisoned me came to tell me that I would be released."

Zakka believes that the reason for his change of fortunes was the internal discussions in the Iranian regime over how to proceed with new Lebanese President Michel Aoun. "The Iranians wanted to present a gift to Aoun. It (his release) may have been a message to Lebanon, but perhaps there is something else. The Japanese prime minister (Shinzo Abe), who comes to Tehran, is the son of a foreign minister (Shintaro Abe) who played the biggest role in ending the war between Iran and Iraq."

Aoun has so far avoided visiting Iran, despite several calls for him to do so. Political sources in Beirut believe that Aoun "takes into account the international community opposing Iran, and the internal Lebanese position critical of its interference in Arab countries."

Celebrations

Zakka said that after announcing his release, he was accompanied by several Iranian civilians to the market and bought a cake to celebrate.

They also took him to the carpet market and asked him to choose the most expensive one. They chose one for \$10,000 as a gift, and officers from the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the prosecutor's office were asked to apologize to Zakka. A red carpet was also laid out at a private airport in Tehran as Zakka left Iran.

When asked if he had received calls from the US Embassy in Beirut after his release, Zakka said: "There are friends at the embassy who are calling to check."

When he was arrested, he was 48 years old. Today he is 52. "Four years of my life were lost," he lamented. "I watched my children grow up. I want to go to the US to see them. I miss them so much."



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Lebanese businessman Nizar Zakka arrives in Beirut after Iran release
Lebanese PM Hariri denounces Hezbollah criticism

[**Egypt tries to retrieve head of Tutankhamun from London auctioneers**](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-06-13 00:14

CAIRO: The Egyptian Foreign Ministry says its embassy in London addressed the British Foreign Office and Christie's auction house to stop the sale of the head of a statue of Tutankhamun, and return it to Egypt.

Christie's expects the head to reach upwards of £4 million at auction, scheduled for July 4.

The Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities has also addressed UNESCO to stop the

auction. Dr. Mustafa Waziri, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, told Arab News he wanted the auctioneers to prove the head had been removed from the country legally, which he doubted they could.

He added that the exit of the head, supposedly from the Karnak temple complex in Luxor, was shrouded in uncertainty.

“We will stop this auction and demand the return of this piece immediately,” he said. Christie’s, though, insists that the sale of the 3,000 year old head is legal.

The St. James-based auction house suggested that the head, along with a wooden sarcophagus and multiple other artifacts also going on sale, were previously owned by the Munich-based collector Heinz Herner, and before that by Austrian dealer Joseph Mesina, who obtained the head from the collection of Prince Wilhelm von Thurn und Taxis in the mid 1970s.

In January, Egypt took possession of a stone tablet belonging to the pharaoh Amenhotep I, which had been put up for sale at another London auction house after being illegally smuggled out of Egypt.

The Ministry of Antiquities said it had recovered the piece after searches on global auction sites on the internet brought the tablet to its attention.

Archaeologist Shaaban Abdul Jawad told Arab News the Egyptian state was taking a keen interest in the sale of potentially looted ancient Egyptian items, often tracking them to international auctions to return and preserve the nation’s cultural heritage.



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Egypt asks UK to halt auction of Tutankhamun sculpture
Egypt demands Christie's halt auction of King Tut statue

[Palestinian, Jordanian leaders reject Israeli court settler decision](#)

Wed, 2019-06-12 23:52

AMMAN: Palestinian and Jordanian officials have rejected a decision by the Supreme Court of Israel approving a controversial sale of three strategic locations inside Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem to a radical Jewish group.

Israel's top court accepted the 2004 sale of property by the Greek Orthodox Church to a pro-settlement organization in mainly Palestinian areas of annexed East Jerusalem.

In its ruling on Monday, the court rejected the church's appeal against a district court's 2017 approval of the same deal on grounds of corruption.

Three companies linked to a group named Ateret Cohanim secured the long-term lease of three buildings owned by the church – the Petra Hostel and the New Imperial Hotel, both located by the Jaffa Gate, and a residential building in the Muslim Quarter.

The deal made Ateret Cohanim the owner of the majority of the properties between the Jaffa Gate and Arab Market areas.

The church asserted that the deal was conducted illegally, and said in 2017, after Israel's Jerusalem District Court ruled against it, that the court had "disregarded the Patriarchate's clear and concrete legal evidence proving bad faith, bribery and conspiracy."

In a statement on Tuesday, Palestinian Greek Orthodox Archbishop Atallah Hanna described the Supreme Court's decision as "illegal and illegitimate," adding "the seizure of the historic Jaffa Gate properties by extremist settler organizations is a new catastrophe for the Christians in this holy city."

Jordan was right to decline an invitation to go to Israeli courts in order to overturn the enforced closure of Bab Al-Rahmah two months ago.

Wasfi Kailani, Director, Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock

The Higher Presidential Council for Church Affairs issued a statement noting its rejection of the decisions of the Israeli courts, which it called "instruments in the hands of the occupiers" aimed at perpetuating the occupation and empowering settlers. The statement called for the protection of existing tenants and for a "popular movement to face up to the policies aimed at removing Palestinians from their city."

Hanna Issa, the secretary-general of the Islamic-Christian Commission in Support of Jerusalem and Holy Sites, told Arab News that the Israeli court decisions were in violation of international humanitarian law, which considers East Jerusalem to be occupied territories.

"The Israeli high court has approved the decision of the central court, despite documented proof of forgeries and bribes that were used to reach the sale agreement. This is clearly an attempt to obliterate the Christian and Muslim Arab character of Jerusalem. Palestinians living in these buildings are protected tenants according to Jordanian law, which is applicable to Palestinians in Jerusalem."

Wasfi Kailani, director of the Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, told Arab News that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate is targeted more than other churches because it is the largest landowner in Palestine.

"What happened with the Greek Orthodox Church shows that the Islamic Awqaf Council and Jordanian government were right to decline an invitation to go to Israeli courts in order to overturn the enforced closure of Bab Al-Rahmah two months ago.

"All Israeli policies aimed at annexation of occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem, are in violation of international law; these practices are null and void and must be rescinded."



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Jerusalem Israeli court finalizes Jerusalem church land sale to settler group