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**Sent:** December-20-11 7:19 AM

**To:** [ifla-l@infoserv.inist.fr](mailto:ifla-l@infoserv.inist.fr)

**Subject:** [IFLA-L] Institut d'Egypte disaster update

Dear Colleagues,

You'll find here information about the evolution of the salvage of this collection received from Thomas Schuler for the Blue Shield. For my part I have received information the Library of Alexandria will collaborate at the restoration of the collection.

- *The Sheik of the Sharjah Emirate and the French Government offered their assistance in reconstructing the building.*
- *16 truck loads of (wet) books and manuscripts have been salvaged and moved to the National Library.*
- *The copy of "Description de l'Egypte" (one of eleven existing worldwide) is safe. Some volumes show damage to its covers, but can be restored.*

#### 1) What happened

*The area near Tahrir square had been for days a "battle zone". Ten people lost their lives there. Nearby is the Shura Council (Madschlis al-Schura), one of the two chambers of Egyptian Parliament. During the clashes a day earlier, parts of the parliament and a transportation authority office caught fire, but those blazes were put out quickly.*

*A video shows the institute fully ablaze, but no activities of a fire brigade:*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL2orNB44kY>

#### 2) The Institute

*Here you'll find a short guide to the facilities of the Institute (by John Dunne in 2006):*

<http://archivesmadeeasy.pbworks.com/w/page/24521801/Institut%20d%27Egypte>

*A picture of the bookshelves:*

[http://aegypten.orientimmuseum.de/wp-content/gallery/institut-dgypte/img\\_1123.jpg](http://aegypten.orientimmuseum.de/wp-content/gallery/institut-dgypte/img_1123.jpg)

*See also the report and other pictures by Daniel Haas after his visit in 2006:*

<http://aegypten.orientimmuseum.de/2011/kairo-institut-dgypte-stand-in-flammen/1061/>

*Some years ago, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) has been taking the initiative in reviving the Institut d'Egypte. In order to preserve its collection and make it accessible to the public, BA has suggested nine projects for its revival, among which is a project of digitizing its entire collection. This will be the first attempt to digitize and publish a collection of such rarity and value.*

<http://www.bibalex.org/isis/frontend/Projects/ProjectDetails.aspx?id=qBas9zSPSSP8LjhUkHb0g==>

*Mohammed al-Sharbouni, director of the institute:*

*"The burning of such a rich building means a large part of Egyptian history has ended." The building was managed by a local non-governmental organization.*

*Al-Sharbouni said most of the contents were destroyed in the fire that raged for more than 12 hours on Saturday. Firefighters flooded the building with water, adding to the damage. William Kopycki, a regional field director with the Washington D.C.-based library said the body of work that was destroyed was essential for researchers of Egyptian history, Arabic studies and Egyptology.*

*"It's a loss of a very important institute that many scholars have visited."*

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML\\_EGYPT\\_BURNED\\_ARCHIVES?SITE=FLDAY](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_EGYPT_BURNED_ARCHIVES?SITE=FLDAY)

### 3) Inventories

*The most accessible inventory at the moment for what was housed in the institute is in a 1920's book kept in the U.S. Library of Congress, according to William Kopycki, a regional field director with the Washington D.C.-based library. (AP)*

*John Dunn reports from his visit in May 2006: A card catalogue exists, but must be cross-indexed with a ledger system for the current numbers.*

### 4) Salvage Operations

*Protesters tell of saving books from Institut d'Egypte fire:*

*Protesters began salvage operations on Saturday, as fighting continued around them, removing books and manuscripts from the building and arranging them on the pavement outside. They made contact with officials at the Ministry of Culture, who arranged to collect the works and remove to the safety of the Dar al-Kutub building on the Corniche. The first to enter the building and save documents did so while the fire was still raging.*

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/557951>

*See also a new video, which shows nightly salvage operations, when the building was still fully ablaze:*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz4gsvGQB94>

### 5) The Building and its Repair

*There is conflicting information on the state of the building. But first have a look to a recent inside video:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPi-1MSdbbo>

*AP tells:*

*The two-story historic institute near Tahrir Square, is now in danger of collapsing after the roof caved in. What remains inside the historic building near the site of the clashes are piles of burned furniture, twisted metal and crumbled walls. A double human chain of protesters surrounded the building Monday.*

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML\\_EGYPT\\_BURNED\\_ARCHIVES?SITE=FLDAY](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_EGYPT_BURNED_ARCHIVES?SITE=FLDAY)

*Official sources tell:*

*After having inspected the building complex Mohsen Seyed Ali (head of the Islamic and Coptic antiquities at the Ministry of Antiquities and Chairman of the archaeological committee in charge) said that the building is in good condition, stressing that although affected by the large incident in the building, but all the walls of the building were not damaged by the fire. The building must be repaired in the fastest time. The restoration of the building will cost (initially estimated) 2 million pounds and take about one year.*

<http://www3.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=558354&SecID=94&IssueID=156>

*Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi, Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah promised full restoration of the building complex. He also would donate the Academy a number of manuscripts, maps, periodicals lost by the fire - stressing that this "is not a favor, but it is a part of giving back to the people of the UAE and Sharjah in particular Egypt, which took the initiative and contributed since 1954 to provide a helping hand to teach the children of the UAE, which has spilled over to join the Egyptian universities in Cairo and Ain Shams and Alexandria."*

*Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim, Minister of Antiquities stated that there is also an initiative of the French government to contribute to the restoration of the Academy and its contents, pointing out that he will tomorrow address the Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi, Ruler of Sharjah and the French government to coordinate with them on implementation mechanisms for the restoration Academy.*

<http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2011/December/20/4683858.aspx>

## 6) Description de l'Égypte

The first edition usually consists of nine volumes of text, one volume with description of the plates and ten volumes of plates. Two additional volumes in Mammut size (also called Elephant plates) contain plates from Antiquites and Etat Moderne and finally one volume of map plates (Atlas), making for twenty-three volumes in all.

The typographical quality of the texts, the beauty of engravings, and the unusual formats (the Mammutfolio is 1m x .81m) makes Description de l'Égypte an exceptional work.

(Source: wikipedia)

See also the special website: <http://description-egypte.org/>

At least 11 copies of the manuscript worldwide are preserved. Culture Minister Shaker Abdel Hamid said on Monday that Egypt has three first edition copies of Napoleon's "Description de l'Égypte": "There is one at the Dar al-Kotob, another at the Egyptian Geographic Society and a third incomplete copy at Assiut University."

<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/557796>

Abdul Hadi, who is a member of the committee tasked by Prime Minister Kamal Al Ganzori to transfer the contents of the complex to a safe location, said "the majority of the folders of the Description de l'Égypte are intact and the remaining folders were only burnt at the edge," and stressed that the priceless manuscript was not stolen. "I believe the majority of the manuscript is intact, it however, may need some restoration," he said. There are other folders on its way to us," he added.

[http://25online.tv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1391%3A2011-12-19-13-21-30&catid=2%3Anews-ticker&Itemid=39&lang=en](http://25online.tv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1391%3A2011-12-19-13-21-30&catid=2%3Anews-ticker&Itemid=39&lang=en)

## 7) Restoration of Books

See two impressive pictures:

- Some burned books:

[http://www.lepoint.fr/images/2011/12/18/institut-egypte-461584-jpg\\_311986.JPG](http://www.lepoint.fr/images/2011/12/18/institut-egypte-461584-jpg_311986.JPG)

- A mound of saved debris:

[http://productnews.link.net/general/News/18-12-2011/n/DSC01154.jpg1.jpg\\_L\\_20111218194528.jpg](http://productnews.link.net/general/News/18-12-2011/n/DSC01154.jpg1.jpg_L_20111218194528.jpg)

Zein Abdel-Hady, who runs the country's main library, is leading the effort to try and save what's left of the charred manuscripts.

"This is equal to the burning of Galileo's books," Abdel-Hady said, referring to the Italian scientist whose work proposing that the earth revolved around the sun was believed to have been burned in protest in the 17th century.

Below Abdel-Hady's office, dozens of people sifted through the mounds of debris brought to the library. A man in a surgical coat carried a pile of burned paper with his arms carefully spread, as if cradling a baby. The rescuers used newspapers to cover some partially burned books. Bulky machines vacuum-packed delicate paper.

At least 16 truckloads with around 50,000 manuscripts, some damaged beyond repair, have been moved from the sidewalks outside the U.S. Embassy and the American University in Cairo, both near the burned institute, to the main library, Abdel-Hady said. He told The Associated Press that there is no way of knowing what has been lost for good at this stage, but the material was worth tens of millions of dollars - and in many ways simply priceless. "I haven't slept for two days, and I cried a lot yesterday. I do not like to see a book burned," he said. "The whole of Egypt is crying."

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Lisa Anderson, president of the American University in Cairo (AUC) which has a campus near the institute, says the Dar al-Kutub, the National Library and Archives, is leading a rescue effort by scholars, library specialists, and archivists. AUC is providing student and faculty volunteers and supplies from its own rare books library. "It is impossible at this point to estimate what is lost, since some books and other materials were rescued by private individuals, and we do not know where they are," she says. "Presumably they will begin appearing, either delivered to the Dar al-Kutub or in the used books markets, over the next weeks and months."

*Anderson called the event "a terrible tragedy for the historiography of Egypt," adding that "the response of the scientific and scholarly community has been very heartening."*

*Bernard Valero, the French minister of foreign affairs spokesperson, called the destruction a "cultural catastrophe" and urged the Egyptian government to begin an exhaustive and transparent investigation, in order to find and punish those responsible. He added that France would consider any request from Egypt to help rehabilitate the gutted institute.*

*Egyptian media said that more than 35,000 manuscripts and books had been rescued from the flames, although their condition remains unclear. Anderson expressed hope for the collection, which she characterized as "a wonderful, somewhat eccentric, irreplaceable archive of mostly 19th century history and geography - books, manuscripts, and maps."*

<http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/12/egypt-institute-burns-scholars.html>

#### *7) Prevention of Illicit Traffic*

*William J. Kopycki, Field Director, Library of Congress - Cairo, Egypt, US Embassy has posted images of Library stamps from the Institut d'Egypte with the hopes that it would be useful should any of the Institut's holdings be spotted in the antiquarian bookmarket. This is merely a precaution and should not be construed as anything being reported missing.*

*Distributed on MELANET, the mailing list of the Middle East Librarians Association*

<http://ancientworldbloggers.blogspot.com/2011/12/library-stamps-from-institut-degypte.html>

Kind regards

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