

Antonio Lebolo

There are two important cities in central Egypt: Luxor located on the east bank of the Nile, and Thebes is on the west bank. Luxor was a city of the living; and was the political and religious capital of ancient Egypt and Thebes was a 'necropolis' or a city of the dead for those great leaders and pharaoh's that governed from Luxor. On the West Bank of the Nile were found the tombs and funerary temples of the greatest of pharaoh's of Egypt. It was here that the Egyptian kings and queens, nobles and government officials were mummified and buried with their massive wealth and possessions, most pre-dating the time of Christ by thousands of years. The famous Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens are part of this necropolis where some of the most elaborate tombs ever discovered are located, including that of Tutankhamen. It is here in the tombs of the nobles at Deir el-Bahari and Abu al Gurna that the mummies were excavated that ended up in the hands of Joseph Smith. This area known as the bend in the river was the hotspot and center of the collection of Egyptian antiquities in the early 1800's.

[map](#)

Antonio Lebolo was considered a French citizen, but actually lived in the Piedmont region of Northern Italy today, and was born in the city of Castellemonete at the base of the Italian Alps. Lebolo worked for Napoleon after the French Emperor took control of Northern Italy in 1796 in the area known as the Kingdom of Sardinia by the "Treaty of Paris". Lebolo employed by the French government worked as a 'gendarme' and 'carabinieri' in the Piedmont area in which he lived. Beginning in 1802 this region came back under the control of Italy, (1802-1821) and those who had sympathies with or worked for the French military, needed to silently disappear for safety. Many of the Italian French military personal followed Napoleon in his hopeful conquest of Egypt (1798-1801). Labolo and Bernardino Drovetti from the village of Barbania, a few kilometers from Castellamonte, followed Napoleon to Egypt for safety and employment. Drovetti continued his service in the Napoleonic military and was later appointed by Napoleon as the French Consulate General in Egypt to honor him because of his military valor in saving a member of Napoleon's family in battle. After the departure of Napoleon and the French forces from Egypt, Lebolo enamored with Egypt sought work in the popular collection of Egyptian antiquities seeking employment with his friend and fellow countryman and French Consul General of Egypt, Bernardino Drovetti.

Lebolo captivated with the breathtaking magnificence of Ancient Egyptian monuments petitioned Drovetti, the now the French Consulate General (Ambassador) to Egypt to amass a collection of Egyptian antiquities for Drovetti, that he (Drovetti) might sell to collectors and museums in Europe. With the French occupation of Egypt and the English competition and influence there, letters, newspaper articles, descriptions of antiquities and artwork spawned an interest in the monuments, mummies and history of Ancient Egypt around the world. This was true especially with the publication of the French book "*Description de l'Egypte*" depicting the monuments and antiquities seen during the occupation of Napoleon, and the first guidebook to Egypt ever published by Jean Jacques Rifaud entitled *Tableau de l'Egypte, de la Nubie*, in 1830. The Napoleonic fiasco in Egypt was in a sense, the modern discovery of ancient Egypt. The leaders of European

kingdoms, countries and collectors created a market for Egyptian antiquities of every sort. People were coming by the boatloads (no pun intended) to see the lost secrets and mysteries of Egypt. Egypt was on everyone's mind, and the subject of every vogue discussion, intellectual setting, and tea party. There was no limit to the imagination about the origins of this ancient culture that seemed impossible to have existed with a strange written language that was impossible to read. Even today the enamor of Egypt continues to make it one of the most visited tourist destinations of the world, with considerations and conferences boarding on the absurd, suggesting that the origin of the Egyptian monuments were brought by aliens from outer space.

This interest in antiquities set the worlds tongues a wagging and evoking visions of grandeur in the minds of self appointed explorers and entrepreneurs. Beginning about 1801, Egypt quickly became the center of intellectual excitement and discovery. Almost every major museum in the great cites of Europe wanted Egyptian artifacts and especially mummies, knowing that the hordes of people would pour in to see the horrifying remains of the ancient proprietors of the tombs, viewing sarcophagi, papyrus and any other ancient artifact from the sands of time found only in Egypt. This overwhelming demand and interest in Egypt began the process that produced modern archeology. This earliest form of Egyptian archeology, if that term might be used was little more than a battle for the authorized collection of antiquities, which at first was nothing short of grave robbing, and the antiquitous rape of the monuments and ancient culture of Egypt. In the middle of all this excitement and discovery was a little known man from northern Italy, Antonio Lebolo, one of the first authorized collectors of Egyptian antiquities. (for more information about Antonio Lebolo, see the Appendix: Antonio Lebolo: His Life and Contributions to Egyptology)

Muhammad Ali

With the political vacuum left in Egypt after the withdrawal of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Ottoman Empire sent the Turkish forces into Egypt to gain control again. With the Mamluk forces weakened by Napoleon the Albanian born Muhammad Ali a Turkish General gained a foothold in Egypt. With the Mamluk presence still a threat Ali, through stealth eliminated (killed) the Mamluk leaders on March 1, 1811 at a party at the Cairo Citadel honoring his son. This act alone began the transformation of Egypt into a regional power under his rule. Muhammad Ali recognizing the problems within the Ottoman Empire stayed in Egypt becoming the Viceroy or governor of Egypt. Muhammad Ali (the Pasha) recognized that laws change as often as do leaders do, instituted a system of 'law' that was to maintain political jurisdiction in his absence. Now in control of Egypt, permissions and authorities would have to be given by the Pasha himself.

To be recognized by the world and in particular accepted by European influences and money, the Albanian Turk began a "Public Relations" program which included giving away many of the monuments of Egypt to the different nations and governments of Europe. He also opened the political door for other countries to establish consulates, embassies and ambassadors, placing Egypt in a worldview that the ancient pharaoh's kings could not accomplish. Ali recognizing not only the money from tourism but also

more important, the influence and good will that could be generated because of the Egyptian frenzy that had taken Europe captive. Ali as part of his “PR” effort began to offer licenses to collect Egyptian antiquities and sell artifacts, while bequeathing statues and monuments himself. The “Great Race” and competition of the early 1800’s was the collection of Egyptian antiquities that raged between the French and English, between the collecting agents of Drovetti for the French and those working for Henry Salt, the English Consulate General. This race for antiquities spawned numerous confrontations, threats and physical struggles between the French and English agents. Each country had their lead collector, Antonio Lebolo working for Bernardino Drovetti, and Giovanni Battista Belzoni working for Henry Salt. There is an interesting twist in all of this: both Drovetti and Belzoni were countrymen born in northern Italy, one working for the French and the other England. It seems that much of Belzoni’s collection ended up in the French Louvre and museums and Drovetti and Lebolo’s collection became a major part of the British Museum. A large portion of the Drovetti collection is now housed in the Egyptian Museum of Torino. (For more information on the Lebolo collection see Appendix 1)