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Poor Egyptians dig up homes in search of antiquities

**BY BELTREW**

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THE TIMES Bel Trew, Matariya

An illicit trade in antiquities is booming in Egypt helped by a growing number of people illegally digging under their homes for treasure.

The authorities are struggling to stop the digs and have raised the maximum sentence for illegally selling antiquities from seven years in prison to life, but the collapse of the economy and the currency has encouraged the trade.

“In our business we deal in dollars most of the time so if you sell something for \$10 which was worth seven Egyptian pounds, it’s now worth 18,” one antiquities trader said. “That’s more than double. The business has become more profitable for many people.”

He has worked as a broker for 17 years, acquiring antiquities from looters and selling them to buyers in Europe and the US. He said that a new wave of opportunists had started digging under their homes. The busiest areas are two poor districts of Cairo that sit on top of the ancient city of Heliopolis, which was populated from the pre-dynastic period to the Middle Kingdom, up until 1800BC. “The devaluation could be the reason why many more people who live in areas like Matariya and Ain Shams districts have begun digging only recently,” he said.

Between 2011 and 2014 the country lost \$3 billion in artefacts taken from sites and museums, according to the International Coalition to Protect Egyptian Antiquities. Whole sites, including the 4,000-year-old Dahshur necropolis and Abusir cemetery, have been gutted.

Poor Egyptians are using desperate means to make money as inflation soars and energy and fuel subsidies are cut. Now that the value of the dollar has doubled many are trying to find ancient objects to sell internationally.

Read full article: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/poor-egyptians-dig-up-homes-in-search-of-antiquities-vmcv8mzdn>

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