

Groundwater threatens Egyptian treasures

1 January 2008

Encroaching groundwater threatens the foundations, columns and walls of Egyptian treasures in Cairo's Giza Plateau, scientists and engineers say.

Some flooding caused by farming, urban development and residential housing near the monuments already has begun, Kyodo News reported Monday.

Reda Mohamed el-Damak, director of the Center of Studies and Designs for Water Projects at Cairo University, told the Japanese news agency that groundwater poses a threat to the fabled Sphinx, carved from the bedrock of the Giza Plateau.

"It is not pure water, but rather sewage containing toxic waste and chemicals" that is causing structural damage, Damak said.

Damak leads a team of scientists trying to save relics from groundwater, which hydrologists said comes from the nearby el-Mansuriya Canal, a drainage channel located less than a mile from the Sphinx.

Hafez Abdel Azim Ahmed, director of the university's Archaeological and Environmental Engineering Center, said residents of Nazlet el-Samman at the foot of the pyramids throw garbage into el-Mansuriya Canal, "clogging up the drain and causing the water table to rise and spill over the Sphinx area."

He said one possible way of saving the treasures is draining the water into smaller wells to reduce the water table level.

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APA citation: Groundwater threatens Egyptian treasures (2008, January 1) retrieved 4 December 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-01-groundwater-threatens-egyptian-treasures.html>

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