



Association Internationale Nébi Daniel

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Dear Dr. Hawass,

As confirmed by M. Bilboul's letter of November 12th we wish to thank you for your reply of 10/11/2004. We are grateful for the inventory carried out by the Supreme Council and appreciate the amount of work it has entailed.

During our meeting of January in Cairo, you had indicated that Egyptian law stipulated that everything older than 100 years was classified as an antiquity. We respect the law.

As antiquities, Torah scrolls falling into this category are precious to Egypt and to our heritage and should be protected for the sake of Egypt's archaeological wealth. We are aware that uncontrolled environmental conditions (pollution, humidity, salinity, temperature variations) can cause irreparable damage to the scrolls and diminish their historical value.

With a view to preserving their historical and archeological value, we respectfully propose to fund a set of rooms in Alexandria or Cairo, or both, with temperature and hygrometry control under the auspices of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. This would ensure their lasting preservation. It would bear witness to the past relationship of our communities. Other communities in the world have undertaken such projects and expertise is readily available, under your control. The scope and size of the project is open, but the incremental tourist attraction value of the project is evident. Scholars would also be able to study the different scripts.

You have been able to determine that there are 70 scrolls in the Eliahou Hanabi Synagogue. This is of course highly disproportionate to the prayer usage of the 20 or so remaining community members. Synagogues with over 1000 members normally carry 5 scrolls on average. It appears from the inventory that part of the scrolls are of the 20th century, and are therefore not antiquities.

We are aware that decision N° 16/1987 of the Ministry of Culture applies to the building itself and not to contents that would fall outside the realm of the Council of Antiquities.

With regards to the sanctity of these scrolls, it is self-evident that our Torah, like the Koran, is meant to be read, and the work of the scribes respected and admired. We feel that this sanctity is best served by the preservation of antiquities under proper care and by the continuous usage of non-antiquities.

Therefore, with your Ministry's confirmation of the status of the scrolls that are not antiquities, and hopefully with your prior agreement, our suggestion would be to send these non-antique scrolls on long-term loans, to practicing communities of ex- Egyptian- Jews around the world. With the approval of our coreligionists in Cairo & Alexandria, we would ensure those scrolls bearing the names of donors would be used in the synagogues where their descendants pray. We would also ensure that recipient synagogues formally undertake to return them to Egypt if they were needed for prayer or special exhibitions. We hope for your approval with eventual comments.

Both preservation and usage are needed to safeguard and hallow these sacred books. Our council members are ready to come to Egypt to discuss this with you, or with any other interested or appropriate authority, at the earliest convenience.

*Yours Sincerely,
On behalf of the Council
Yves Fedida*