

Topics

Sprucing Up

Oh, Egypt!

While attention is focused this week on the Metropolitan Museum's opening of the Treasures of Tutankhamun — an event of as much interest to students of crowd phenomena as to Egyptologists — we offer a continuing report on Cleopatra's Needle, Central Park's resident 3,500-year-old Egyptian artifact that stands just behind the museum. It has been melting away since its arrival from Alexandria in 1883, but New York's polluted air is not entirely to blame.

The real story was told at this fall's meeting of the Geological Society of America by Notre Dame's Prof. Erhard Winkler, in an earth science whodunit called "The Complex History of Salt Weathering Observed on Cleopatra's Needle in New York City Central Park." According to Professor Winkler, Cleopatra's Needle is the victim of advanced salt decay; it isn't the dirt, it's the humidity — and the cold. After standing for its first 500 years, the obelisk lay prone on the silt of the Nile delta for another 500 years, soaking up salt.

Re-erected on the Mediterranean shore in 16 B.C., it continued to absorb salt from ocean spray, even as sand and rubble gradually reclaimed it. When it was excavated in 1880 and sent to New York, it immediately began to

flake. A sister obelisk, given to London at the same time, was treated with hot wax, preventing the access of moisture from the air. But in New York, the dampness continued to work on the entrapped salts, eating away the monument. Professor Winkler says chemical treatment would be pointless at this stage. A sorry tale — but there may be consolation in the thought that when Tut's relics are gone, Cleopatra's much-abused Needle will still be standing to remind us of how to treat such treasures from now on.



Dress Code

No longer, if Secretary Califano of Health, Education and Welfare has his way, can the Government be in the business of telling schools what rules they may impose on whether boys should cut their hair or girls should wear bras. Some schools retain codes of dress and appearance that doubtless impinge on the desires of their students, but that is a small imposition compared to Washington's meddling in such local matters. More than most institutions, our schools reflect the spirit of their communities. When this spirit jeopardizes crucial rights, such as the right of some children to learn regardless of their color, the Federal Government has properly intervened.

For some years now, however, there seems to have been no area so trivial that it cannot command the attention of some bureau in Washington. There is something to be said for communities setting their own standards of dress and appearance, even if foolish, without having to answer to H.E.W. So Mr. Califano's decision is welcome. The Federal Government can be a guardian of rights without becoming a busybody.

Red Jeans

Basically it was a problem of supply and demand: a lot of grumbling in East Germany, in factories and elsewhere, among the young people who lacked the means to buy the genuine American blue jean at the special hard-currency Intershops. The product turned out by East German manufacturers just didn't fill the bill. Accordingly, it was decided to stage an airlift: the Government ordered some 800,000 pairs of blue jeans from Levi Strauss at \$11.25 a pair. The first shipment was flown recently to East Berlin from the United States and the jeans were snapped up (one to a customer, *bitte*) for the equivalent, in unexchangeable East German marks, of \$74 a pair. Quite a sizable capitalist mark-up on a very proletarian product.