

# See the Pyramids Along the Nile



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## March 30

I wake up to a monsoon, 50-mile-an-hour winds and pouring rain. The telephone rings. It is George and Gaby, experienced travelers for over a quarter of a century.

“Have you seen the weather outside?”

“Looks pretty bad, huh?”

“Listen, you’ll never make it to New York in this weather. If it were us, we’d rent a car and drive to JFK. It will take you five hours in this rain. So you should leave no later than noon. Are you packed?”

Their advice is well intentioned. It is also sound, which is why I have no intention of following it. From my perspective, missing the plane is the best possible thing that could happen. Unfortunately, the cab arrives on time. The flight to JFK is uneventful. TWA Flight 888, non-stop to Cairo, is just ten minutes behind schedule. Over the loudspeaker the chief steward asks, “Will flight attendants please prepare for takeoff?” I imagine them flapping their arms behind the curtains that separate economy from the rest of the plane. There is no help for it. We are going to Egypt.

The flight is mostly at night, “our night,” though it will be 3:30pm when we arrive. Three films attempt to break the monotony. I sleep through the first one, catch 20 minutes of the second, and can’t keep my eyes off the third: Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, and Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*. I suspect this is someone’s idea of a joke. The pilot has just announced the temperature in Cairo. It is 103°.

As we walk toward passport control, we pass a long line of duty-free shops. This is the first airport I’ve ever been in where you can buy washing machines and refrigerators duty free. I can barely manage a couple of liters of vodka. How does a traveler manage a 500-pound fridge?

We navigate the bureaucracy of the airport with ease. Mohamed, our man in Cairo, knows the ropes, and with the exception of Nancy’s bag being lost, the entry is unmarred. This, however, is not a minor exception. Nancy has put years into selecting just the right travel ensemble. All of it is in that bag. It’s not so much that she won’t be able to replace it. It’s that I’ll have to live with her until she does.

The bus trip from the airport to the hotel is unsettling. For one thing a strange wind is blowing. It is called the khamseen, the Arabic word for “fifty.” The name comes from the number of days it takes the wind to wear itself out. It has whipped up the desert sand. Looking at the sky is like looking through a pane of glass smeared with motor oil. The sun is a hole punched in the glass. I feel as if I’m watching the beginning of *The Mummy’s Tomb* with Turhan Bey as High Priest of Karnak.

This morning – or was it yesterday morning – a friend called. When I told him I was leaving for Cairo in two hours, he said, “Good Lord! It’s just like New Delhi. You’ll be inundated by people.”

Now, riding through the outskirts of Cairo heading west in the general direction of the pyramids, I am struck by the crowds – there aren’t any. We pass the City of the Dead, a seven-mile-long cemetery that looks like a shantytown for corpses. The dead, in accordance with Muslim custom are below ground. Above them are masonry walls that form the tombs. These structures, varying from a few square yards to much larger plots, give the cemetery the look of a city that has shrunk along with the bodies beneath it. Here and there are signs of life. And, in fact, the guidebooks say the City of the Dead has a live population of 179,000, 20,000 of whom live inside its walls, the rest along the outer wall.

As we drive along the edge of Cairo, we pass tract after tract of apartment blocks. Depressing concrete and limestone affairs, they bear a remarkable similarity to the City of the Dead. Here and there a barren electric light bulb shines through an unglazed window. But mostly they are vacant.

What in the world is going on? 18 million people living in the world’s fifth largest city and acre after acre after acre of vacant rooms. The Pyramids of Giza, which we visit tomorrow, echo what I’ve seen so far. A tremendous amount of real estate housing a handful of people.

It is dusk. I see the Great Pyramid of Cheops from the terrace of my room. It is a huge triangle cut out of the night sky, turning the sky into a piece of fabric. That will be our first stop in the morning.



**Dr. Zahi Hawass**

Walking across the courtyard to dinner, I hear a strange sound, like the wind through a wire fence. When it grows louder, I realize it is the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer: La ullah ella allah. Mohammed rassol Allah. No God except Allah. Mohammed is His Prophet.

#### **April 1**

After breakfast we find ourselves in a bare room with a chandelier surrounded by what looks like a tufted duvet hanging from the ceiling. We are waiting for Dr. Zahi Hawass, the man in charge of the excavation site of the three 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty pyramids at Giza. A half hour late he is a short, sturdy man, with thin lips that stretch back over a

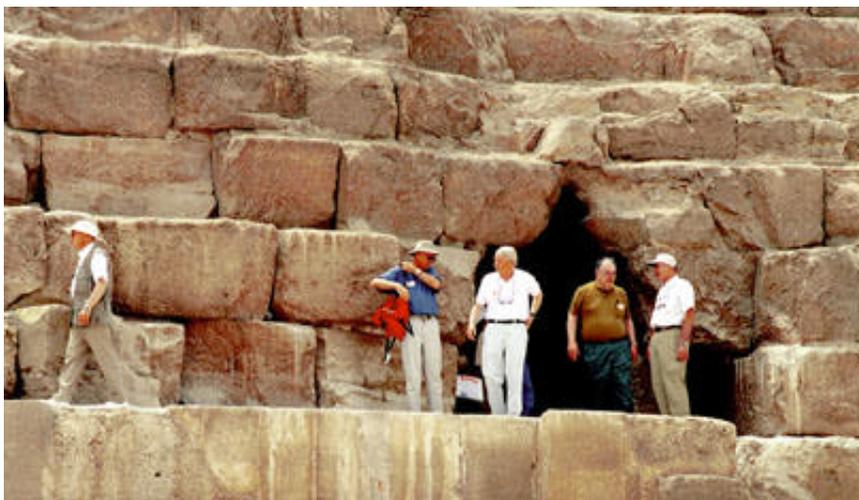
chiseled face like a rubber band. He has a barrel chest and gives the impression of someone rushing to his next appointment. His assistant, Tabriq, sits at the slide projector and Dr. Zahi goes straight to work. He shows us slides of the pyramids and then slides of pyramid look alikes—the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, the private home of a rich Egyptophile in Wisconsin, the Memphis pyramid, now home of something other than Elvis Presley. Conspicuously absent is the I. M. Pei pyramid in front of the Louvre.

After the lecture Dr. Zahi hawks his books. (Nancy and I buy all three.) He autographs them unasked. A *People* magazine with legs, he has shown us slides of himself with Princess Di, Queen Sophia, the Bush family, Hillary Clinton, Chelsea and Princess Juliana.



**Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops in Greek), last of the Seven Wonders of the World**

We have learned that Fox TV is here to photograph him, that he is somehow connected



with Maury Povich, that the *National Geographic* is on site at Bahariya even as he speaks. He has mentioned Charlton Heston, but in what capacity I'm not sure. It is not the NRA.

I have agreed to enter Cheops' tomb. I do so with

**Entrance to the Great Pyramid of Cheops**

trepidation. I am overweight, out of shape, and apprehensive. I am right to be apprehensive. We climb to within 30 feet of the top of the 449-foot-high construction. The journey starts with a 150-foot climb up a passageway that a midget would have trouble negotiating. I lean heavily on the banisters, my chest parallel to the wooden-slatted walkway.

At the top I can stand up. I see a huge high-vaulted gallery, 26 feet high. This is the heart of the pyramid. Another long climb, something like 75 steps, is mercifully accomplished upright. Next comes a square corridor that runs horizontally to Cheops' burial chamber, a remarkable 20 x 34 x 17-foot room with no adornment except for a granite sarcophagus at one end. The word "sarcophagus" means "flesh eater" and originally referred to burial in limestone coffins which, in fact, did consume the body. In this case, grave robbers did the work of the limestone. The sarcophagus is empty.



**Pyramid of Khafre (Chephren)**

Like the big bad wolf, I am huffing and puffing. Perspiration cascades out of me. It doesn't matter. The room is worth the effort. I see huge granite blocks, so closely nested that a credit card can't slip between them. The ceiling consists of granite monoliths. Invisible behind the monoliths are five empty chambers that relieve the tremendous downward pressure of the structure. In one wall a tiny ventilating shaft leads up to the top of the pyramid. If you bend down and make blinders of your hands, you can see light seeping in.

Climbing down the steps of the narrow, high-vaulted corridor, we backtrack along a horizontal square corridor, maybe four feet high, to arrive at a room called the Queen's Chamber. The passage is long. I move through it like a Russian dancer doing the kazatska. By the time I reach the Queen's Chamber I am exhausted. The room is empty. Its name doesn't relate to anything real. No queen was ever buried here. In fact, it is only

coincidentally a room. Slightly smaller than the King's Chamber, directly above, it was used as a means of hoisting Cheops' sarcophagus up to its final resting place.

Standing in this halfway house of Cheops' burial chamber, I am aware of the immensity of the structure around me. It is 755 feet square, was originally 485 feet high before the apex was removed, encompasses an overall volume of 88 million cubic feet. There is

argument over the number of blocks that make it up. Some say 2.5 million. Dr. Zahi says less than a million. Whatever the number, the sense of weight is palpable. I can feel the stress lines passing through me. My legs are trembling.



### **Pyramids of Giza: Khufu (Cheops), Khafre (Chephren) and Menkaure (Mycerinus)**



I run (or rather creep) the gauntlet back into the daylight. Outside and upright I am finished for the day. Unfortunately, the day has only just begun.

There are two other pyramids in this complex, one for Chephren, Cheops' father and one for Menkaure, Cheops' grandson, all 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty pharaohs. This complex of three huge pyramids for the pharaohs, three smaller ones for their wives, an attendant cemetery for their courtiers and assistants and, of course, the mind-boggling Sphinx make up a City of the Dead conceived by King Cheops and executed by the Prince and Vizier Hemon, whose own outsized mastaba

### **Great Pyramid of Cheops**

sits on the west side of the great pyramid. As Overseer of Works of the King, he undoubtedly brought the great pyramid to life.

Cheops' pyramid at Giza is the last surviving member of the ancient world's Seven Wonders. Completed in 2600BC, it deserves its status. But what about it is wonderful? For one thing there is the sheer organizational achievement of the thing: 10,000 workers, divided into two groups of 5,000 each; each group of 5,000 divided into five groups of 1,000; each group of 1,000 divided into five groups of 200; each group of 200 assigned its own special task. For another, there is the sheer presence of the thing. Hell, it's on a dollar bill. And then there is its durability, having survived for 4,500 years.

But there is something beyond management, magnitude, and quality control. Cheops' City of the Dead is the outward manifestation of a heliopolitan religion that combined two sets of beliefs: the sun worship of Heliopolis, an ancient town about 20 miles north of Memphis, and the cult of Osiris. In Egyptian prehistory the amalgamation of these two cults into a single sun-worshipping cult followed along political lines as city state-like

entities fought and merged until all of Lower (Northern) Egypt formed a single political unit much like Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was created out of distinct sovereignties: Venice, Rome, Tuscany, Umbria, Sicily.



### **140-foot Solar Boat from Old Kingdom**

The sun cult focused its worship on a sacred object, a ben-ben, or stone of pyramidal or conical shape placed atop a pillar. According to Cyril Aldred, in *The Egyptians*, the ben-ben may well have been a meteorite. The pyramids of the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty—the seventh wonder of the ancient world—may, in fact, be the physical extension of a religion that began with a piece of metal falling to earth. The sun cult believed that, and I quote Aldred, “. . . out of the waters of Chaos arose the primeval mound in the shape of the pyramidal stone, the ben-ben, or High Sand, in the sanctuary at Heliopolis. It was on the ben-ben that

the Creator first manifested himself, either in the form of a heron-like phoenix (the bird of light which dispelled the darkness over the waters) or as Atum, the demiurge in human form.” The pyramidal tomb, a replica of the ben-ben, becomes the platform from which the pharaohs return to the Creator. Cheops' City of the Dead—the architectural embodiment of a theology no less than are the great cathedrals of Europe—may well have been

inspired by a piece of falling sky.

Why does all this remind me of Stanley Kubrick's 2001?

In 1954 an Egyptian archeologist, Kamal el Mallak, discovered a "solar" boat near the base of Cheops' tomb. The object, made from cedar, sycamore, and jujube wood, may have carried Cheops to Giza where, through the medium of the Great Pyramid, he would rise to that great harbor in the sky to rejoin his kin and Creator. Now the boat is housed inside a well-lit cracker box structure built to accommodate its 46-meter length and six-



meter width against the south wall of the Great Pyramid.

The boat is a long and slender object with papyrus shaped prows rising fore and aft like the necks of a praying mantis. The insect motif is driven home by the six pairs of oars that extend from the sheltered cabin set amidships. Here is where Pharaoh's

### **140-foot Solar Boat from Old Kingdom**

body rode to his, I was about to say ' final resting place,' but that negates the object of the thing.

After we leave the solar boat, we visit the workers' village. We do so thanks to Dr. Zahi. The village is not open to the public, but Sonia, our Egyptologist and guide, seems to have an "in" with everybody. She has arranged a special tour. I am glad to do this. All



**Pyramid Workers' Village with Chephren in background**

morning my mind kept wandering to the people who made the gigantic theatricality of the pyramids possible. No wonder Hollywood has been drawn over and over again to the



Egyptian epic film. The culture was made for the big screen. We walk among the stone huts and ovens, the burial places and shops of the village, and everywhere we walk, the pyramid of Chephren looms over us in the back ground. It is as if the inhabitants of this place have been doomed to an eternity of domination.

### **Tourist Police and Chephren Overlooking Worker Village**

The 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty is the apogee of pyramid building. The first, or Step Pyramid at Saqqara, we have not yet seen. But later in the day we travel to Dahshur where we see the first



**Bent Pyramid of Snefru, South Dahshur**

attempt at a smooth-sided pyramid, the so-called Bent Pyramid of Snefru. This peculiar object starts at a 54-degree and 27-minute slope, but 160 feet up, it backs off to a 43-degree and 22-minute slope, hence the name. The first attempt was a failure. The angle was too steep to accommodate the weight. But Snefru lived a long time—from 2575BC to 2551BC—time enough to try it again. The second time he—more accurately his architect—got it right. The Red Pyramid is perfectly shaped, smooth sloped. Later his son, Cheops, outdid him with the great Giza pyramid. Cheops' son, Chephren, less ambitious, built a slightly smaller version of his father's. And Chephren's son, Menkaure, built the smallest of the big three. Leaving the relative sizes to one side, they had obviously gotten the technology down cold.



**Red Pyramid of Snefru, North Dahshur**



**Bent Pyramid, South Dahshur**

Despite the grandness of the Giza complex, I find myself drawn to Snefru's work rather than to his son's. The Bent Pyramid, its outer casing still largely intact, is a vivid example of what the end product must have looked like, a structure finished in a two foot thick limestone casing made of the finer grained stone of Tura hauled 200 miles when the Nile flooded. Once this finer grained outer shell was in place, it would have been an incredible sight to see the rays of the setting sun strike its slanting sides and literally set it afire. To the ancient Egyptian's imagination, the pharaoh entombed inside must surely be rising to rejoin Amun, the God of the Sun, along with the flames.

What attracts me most to the Red and Bent Pyramids of Dahshur is their setting. In the distance one can see the hulks of the Middle Kingdom's miserable attempts at mud-brick pyramids humiliated by the passage of time into crumbling towers surrounded by rubble.



**The Sphinx**

But here their bona fide sisters, the Red and the White, continue to resist the chiseling sand and the howling khamseen. Uncompromised by the encroachment of a Giza, or a Dahshur, they are seen pristinely, unextraneously.

I walk past the tourist police to return to the tour bus. They are sitting disconsolately, machine guns at their sides, their black uniforms and their berets, like their faces, turned ashen by the stinging sand. All of this desolation must get to them. Even the white camel mounts of the guards seem down at the mouth. How much “lone and level sands stretching far away” can one take?



I have saved the oddest for last. It is, of course, the Sphinx. This curious creature appears to have been a fluke, one of those serendipitous ideas that comes as an afterthought and steals the show. Apparently, it was created out of a rocky knoll left behind after the granite around it had been mined and moved to form part of Cheops’ tomb. Whatever its origin, it is the epitome of surrealism 4,400 years before that movement was given a name – the head of a king on the body of a lion, sitting at the front of a phalanx of pyramids, waiting. In “Poetry is a Destructive Force,” Wallace Stevens wrote:

### **The Sphinx and Cheops’ Tomb**

The lion sleeps in the sun.  
Its head is on its paws.  
It can kill a man.

The Sphinx must have been in the back of his mind. No wonder the Arabs shot at it with rifles. They weren’t vandalizing a monument. They wanted to reassure themselves that it couldn’t move, at least not in this world. In “The Second Coming,” Yeats asks, “What low, rough beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born again?”

The answer is in the desert.

**April 2**



Ramesses II ascended to the throne in 1279BC. He is remembered for many things – a great warrior, a great builder, but perhaps most impressive, a great progenitor. He is reputed to have fathered between 100 and 200 children, depending on which guidebook you read. It is fitting, then, that when we first see him, he is lying flat on his back. He is laid out in a wooden building, part of an open-air museum in the heart of what was once the great city of Memphis, now a small town of shopkeepers, artisans, and postcard sellers. The statue, 13 meters high, has Ramesses II wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. His left leg is forward, a sign that he was alive when the statue was made. Held to his massive head by straps is the short uncurled beard of the old dynasty pharaohs.

### **Colossus of Ramesses II, Memphis**

He is wearing a kilt held round him by a belt on which cartouches have been carved, each with one of his several names. There is a dagger in his belt.



**Colossus of Ramesses II – Originally Stood Outside the Temple of Ptah**



**Alabaster Sphinx**

The rest of the museum is open to the air, with another statue of Ramesses II, one which toured America four years ago, at the far end. A statue of the God Ptah, the god of craftsmen, is there as well, the god of the city of Memphis, the northern capital of Egypt and a thriving metropolis from the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty all the way through the Roman period to the time of the Arab conquest when its stones were pillaged to build Cairo. Memphis was left, as it is now, in the dust.

The colossal statue of Ramesses was found just a stone's throw away at Mit-Rahina, a modern village built atop the original site of the Temple of Ptah. The temple was not unimportant. Pharaohs were crowned there.

The recumbent Ramesses II stood outside it before an earthquake toppled him. An 18<sup>th</sup> century alabaster sphinx in the center of the courtyard stood at its entrance as well.

It is hard to imagine that these statues lay sideways in the soil of a palm grove for centuries before they were discovered. When you look at them today, their left sides, the ones in the dirt, are scabrous as if they were suffering from an inanimate form of leprosy. Precisely the same thing happened to Memphis. Once the pre-eminent city of Egypt for more than 3,000 years, it has disappeared beneath the corrosive waters of the Nile. A riverine version of Atlantis, it will never rise again.

I stand in the courtyard and look around. Across the way, workman clear a field, undoubtedly preparing it for excavation. If the economy of Egypt doesn't improve, it will take as long to uncover Egypt's ancient past as it did for that past to unfold. How many other Ramesses II are disintegrating beneath the town's sheltering palms?



**First Colonnade**

Our next visit takes us back 1,300 years to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty and Egypt's golden age, an age that lasted 500 years, the so-called Old Kingdom. Spanning the years from 2650BC to 2150BC, this was the age of the great building, Egypt's WPA. At Saqqara we see a host of the world's firsts: the first colonnade, one of the world's first massive stone structures (the Step Pyramid), the first protective cobra frieze. All of these are the result of a single person, Imhotep, chief architect to King Djoser, who is now entombed in the Step Pyramid.

Imhotep did not invent building in stone, but he was obviously the first person to attempt it massively. He is, in other words, the father of Christopher Wren, Frank Lloyd Wright, Corbusier, Frank Gehry, the architects of the great temples of Greece, the great cathedrals of Europe, the Hagia Sophia, Utzon of the Sydney Opera House. For all of them, it started here.



**Step Pyramid of King Djoser**



**First Frieze of Protective Cobra - Djoser**

One might argue that this ignores the step-pyramids of Caral, Peru, constructed around 2627BC. They, too, are massive objects, but their construction couldn't be more different. Thus, the Peruvian pyramids were built behind retaining walls filled in with river rocks carted to the site in reed bags that were thrown in along with the rocks. The bags, in fact, are what led to such accurate dating. Granite blocks weighing a couple of tons each were the provenance of the Egyptians and the perennial source of the question: *How did they do it?* Even so, it is remarkable that two highly developed cultures 10,000 miles apart were building step pyramids at roughly the same time. What was going on? Another meteorite? Are pyramids the default structures for cultures that want to build above a single story?

The colonnaded entrance to the Step Pyramid complex shows that columns must have begun as the decorated ends of stone walls. Here the stone walls project out at right angles into the interior space of a roofed structure. The projections create alcoves. The sacred statues that occupied those niches are, of course, long gone. The ends of the walls have been fasciculated, that is, made to look like bundles of bound reeds. Once the bundled end has been freed of its supporting wall, we will have the hypostyle Hall at Karnak, but that will take roughly another 1,000 years.



Earlier in the day, between the Djoser funeral complex and the open air museum, we visited the mastaba of Mereruka, a high priest in the court of Teti, founder of the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty (2345BC-2181BC). Mereruka supervised the construction of Teti's pyramid, now pretty much a pile of rubble, though the burial chamber is intact.

The tomb of Mereruka is a single storied mastaba, an Arabic word meaning "flat bench." Its walls are adorned with scenes of daily life. Strolling from one room to the next is like skimming through a 4,700-year-old almanac. The scenes are detailed, domestic. On one wall, fishermen are depicted scaling their catch. Below them are the varieties of fish they catch.

On another wall, tax collectors remonstrate with recalcitrant clients. On another, subjects bear offerings in the form of birds in cages and gazelles on a leash. There are dancing

### **Mereruka**

girls, judicial scenes, metalworkers, scenes of everyday life too mundane for the stele of the pharaohs, but far more interesting.



**Offering Bearers**



**Metalworkers**

In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jered Diamond notes that one of the great advantages of the fertile crescent over the whole of southern Africa was the presence of domesticatable animals—cattle, sheep, pigs, goats in the North, but virtually none in the South. It was useless to try to tame leopard, lion, gazelle, hippopotamus, crocodiles. What we take for granted today came by tedious experimentation in the ancient world. On the walls of Mereruka's mastaba is a scene of a farmer force feeding a hyena.

If the subject matter of the stelae is not fit for a king, the shape of the mastaba is. The Step Pyramid is, after all, six mastabas, one on top of the other and each smaller than the

one it is sitting on. Here in the funeral complex of Imhotep, we see a column just before it was a column and now a pyramid just before it was a pyramid.



**View of the Desert from the Step Pyramid**

The desert surrounding Saqqara is extraordinary. You can see in the far distance the Bent pyramid and the Red pyramid of Dahshur. In the middle distance are the mud-bricked failures of the Middle Kingdom. Behind are the 60-meter-high stacked mastabas that make up the Step Pyramid. Behind it, along the Avenue of the Tombs, is the pyramid of Teti that we entered earlier, climbing down 30 meters into its cool heart where an empty sarcophagus sits inside the central burial chamber, empty under a peaked roof adorned with stars to insure eternal life.

Less than a kilometer away are the palm-covered verges of Memphis and Mit-Rahina. But where the influence of the waters of the Nile comes to an end, everything is lifeless sand: to the east—where the sun rises—palms; to the west—where the sun sets— desert. I wonder how deeply all this is etched into the psyches of the Egyptians in the way that, say, unbridled individualism is a part of the American psyche. The novels of Naguib Mahfouz, for example, are written in the greenery of the east. There is death in them, of course, but there are no tombs. Tombs, after all, are what make death immortal. Mahfouz looks eastward. What about his countrymen? Do they look eastward as well? Do they let the dead past bury its dead? Is it just that pyramids are good business?

## April 3

For the past two days we have been accompanied everywhere we go by a young man called Omar. He wears a green, double-breasted suit. His jacket hangs loosely from his



**Omar**

shoulders. His name tag says *Tourist Police*. I thought it was a joke, like grammar police or bad-hair police, until I caught sight of the sawed-off machine gun that hangs from a shoulder holster inside his jacket. Every now and then he talks to someone on a walkie-talkie. At Saqqara, I ask Sonia to ask Omar why we need security. Sonia starts to answer, but I tell her I want to hear what he says. Sonia translates: “He says because we need security.”

Omar is a nice boy. But he makes me nervous. Whenever Omar comes near me, I tense up. For example, yesterday I wanted to walk along the west side of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. To get there I would have had to climb a hill and follow a rickety wire fence for a quarter of a mile. It would have been a lonely walk. No one else was nearby except a few camel drivers in the distance and a couple of men in uniform. As I started toward the pyramid, I glanced behind me. There was Omar coming up fast. For a brief instant I was read to be caught in a crossfire. As it turned out, he only wanted to give me another lesson in Cairene Arabic.

I like Sonia. She is a tough woman. I think of her

as the Madame Chiang Kai-shek of tour guides. Frankly, I’d be a lot happier if she were the one packing the heat. But for all her toughness, she does not understand the mentality of the angst-ridden traveler. Yesterday, I told her that Omar makes me nervous. Incredulous, she said, “You should feel safe with him here.” Like he’s going to lay down his life for a tourist. Not a chance. I suppose the theory is that Omar’s presence raises the ante for terrorists who will think twice before trying another massacre. I’m nervous not because he raises the ante, but that I’m in the game in the first place.

Yesterday Nancy and I bought a rug. It is a beautiful wool and silk rug made, as far as I can tell, by child labor. We bought it in the Oriental Rug School where children are taught to make such things. We are given a brief demonstration, and then it’s upstairs to the showroom for drinks and business. Here there are no children, only eager young men who flip through piles of rugs as if they were shuffling a deck of cards. We spend a lot of

money on our rug. We would have spent a lot more had it not been for Sonia. I am not unhappy about this. I view tourism as a way of redistributing the wealth. I also make no judgment about Egyptian children making the rug. In Kenya, on the Engaruka plain, I saw seven-year-old Maasai children lead herds of cattle out onto a lion-and-python-infested plain at sunup. When they return 12 hours later, God help them if they have lost a cow. Whether child labor is good or bad depends on the culture you find yourself in. In America it is bad. We can afford for it to be.



**Child Weavers at Oriental Rug School**

We are up at 4am in order to make our flight to Abu Simbel. The drive across Cairo takes three-quarters of an hour. Once again we pass acre upon acre of unfinished brick tenements. It is like a scene from *Blade Runner*. A concrete flight of stairs on a roof top continues on up into nowhere; a huge block of vacant flats and then, in the middle of it all, an electric light burning behind a closed shutter, laundry dangling on the line. It is like

coming upon a single farmhouse in the middle of an empty plain, only the plain is made of cement. I glimpse unpaved alley ways and the occasional parked car. Sonia says the unfinished state of things is a way of avoiding the property tax. Once a house is finished it is taxable. This is a public policy designed to make the new look decrepit and the old look new.



**Unfinished Building in Cairo**

As we drive deeper into Cairo, the city takes on a more familiar cosmopolitan air. There are handsome mosques, elegant high rises, wide streets that here, in the city center, are clean and well swept in contrast to the dishevelment of the suburbs. I see signs of globalization—Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, Radio Shack, Mobil Mart, Coca-Cola.

But still no people. It is early—6:30am. If this were Jakarta, they would be sleeping under cars, under park benches, in trees. I know there are 17 million people out there. But where are they all hiding?



**Cheops and Coca-Cola**

We are flying Scorpio Airlines. Our plane, a 50-seat turbo prop, takes off at 7:30am. Sonia is aboard but she is unarmed. Ahmed and Omar are nowhere to be seen. Before I was worried when they were around. Now I'm worried that they are not. People



**Abu Simbel from the Air**

like me should not be allowed to travel. I'd like to blame Nancy for all of this angst, but she still doesn't have her suitcase. I'll wait until it arrives.

Our plane, an ATR42 jointly made by France and Italy, flies at 19,000 feet for the first part of the trip then— because of bumpy air – at 25,000 feet. Our air-speed, 420 kilometers an hour, will get us to Abu Sim-bel in an hour and a half. At the outset we fly over



vast expanses of desert. The landscape is pitiless. I fall asleep imagining how long I would last if fate left me in that inferno. When I wake up, I look out to see, not sand, but water. Everywhere. It is Lake Nasser, one of the largest man-made lakes in the world created by the Aswan High Dam 31

### **Approach to Ramesses II Temple**

years ago. The plane banks. Off to the left the facade of Abu Simbel startles me. I didn't expect to see it without a struggle. From this distance the statues look like those jointed dolls, all arms and legs, that you see in the windows of art supply stores. If only their sculptors could see them now, sitting stiffly, hands on thighs, looking out over, of all things, an unending lake.

The juxtaposition of the statues and the water forces an equation—Abu Simbel is to Ramesses II as the Aswan High Dam is to Hosni Mubarak. Everyone in power worries about legacy. In America, ex-Presidents do it with libraries; 3,300 years ago, the currency of legacy was enormous self portraits in stone. Today, it is making the desert flower. Is this progress? Or necessity? The sheer pressure of population makes it impossible to think in terms of WPA projects designed to flabbergast the eye. Egypt has too many people. Today there are 64 million. By 2025 there will be 90 million. Mubarak cannot even begin to think about a Sydney Opera House in Cairo or a Mt. Rushmore in the Libyan mountains. He has no choice but to build a 150-mile-long concrete ditch in the desert that will water the plants in Toshka and feed the people.

Abu Simbel is more than an ancient monument. It is a litmus test. Do you see it as recalling a time of grandeur, of greatness, of spirituality made concrete in pink sandstone to which, at least in spirit, we must return as quickly as possible? Or do you see it as a signpost history has left in the dust, unable to circle back even if it wanted to?



**Entrance to Temple of Ramesses II**



**Nefertari beside Ramesses II**

As I approach the gigantic face of the temple, this time from the ground, the magnitude of the enterprise hits me. The statues are gigantic, 20 meters high and 4 meters from ear to ear. They are set in a facade that is 38 meters long and 31 meters high. Ramesses II is everywhere. On the facade, on the faces of the eight Osiris statues in the pronaos, in the seat of honor in the sanctuary, on the walls, slaying the Asiatic, the Nubian, counting genitals and severed hands to tally up the size of his victory. When a friend of mine came to Abu Simbel for the first time, she watched as an old man on crutches limped toward the temple—a lame Egyptian approaching the gods. She burst into tears.

Less than a month ago the Taliban in Afghanistan destroyed two 1,500-year-old statues of Buddha in what must be one of the most pig-headed acts of vandalism in the history of the world. This is not the first time such things have happened, of course. In 391AD the Christian patriarch, Theophilus, consummated the triumph of Christianity in Egypt by destroy-

ing the Serapeum of Alexandria, the great temple devoted to the universal cult of Serapis, introduced by the Ptolemies in 400 BC. *The Lord giveth and the lord taketh away* may have been said of God, but that particular shoe easily fits the booted foot of Man. Starting in 1963 over 900 workers from 20 nations under the direction of UNESCO carved Abu Simbel into 11,300 plus pieces of pink sandstone, each weighing 12 tons or more, and moved them 200 meters up onto higher ground. They built an artificial cliff to match the one they were leaving beneath the surface of the lake and, like a gigantic picture puzzle, they literally put Humpty-Dumpty together again. I am as much in awe of the act of generosity that saved Abu Simbel as I am of the temple itself.



**Approach to Temple of Nefertari**



**Nefertari Facade**



**Temple of Ramesses II with Nefertari**



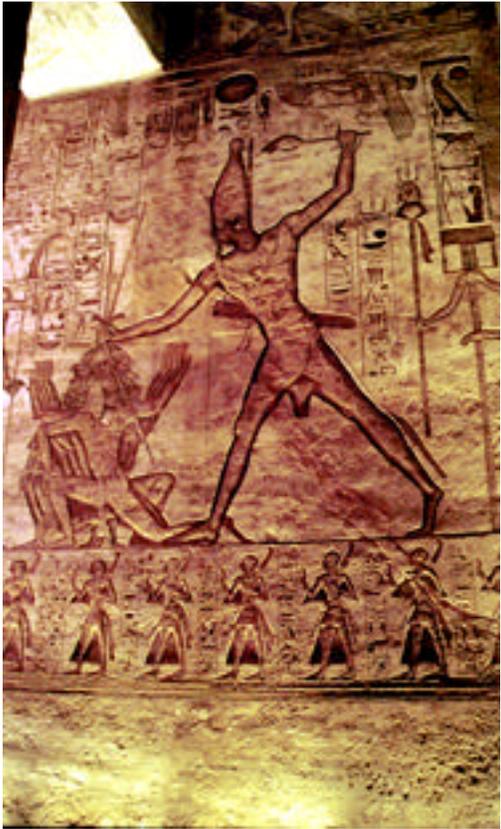
**Ptah of Memphis, Amun-Re of Thebes, Ramesses II deified, Re of Heliopolis**



**Nefertari Temple Entrance**



**Pronaos of Ramesses II Temple**



**Ramesses fighting the Hittites**



**Scene from the Battle of Kadesh**

#### **April 4**

Last night after dinner Nancy's bag showed up. It was missing for three days before it appeared in Cairo the day we left. Mohamed, our man in Cairo, managed to get it onto a flight to Aswan, only the flight was delayed by bad weather. I felt sorry for the bag when it was rolled on board the Sun Boat III at 9:30pm. It did not want to be here either.

How many different ways have people asked us for money? There are the vendors who give you their product for nothing and then ask for money as a gift. In the Oriental Rug School, the children, hard at work on their looms, would give me a knowing look and then furtively rub their thumbs and forefingers together.

This gesture was everywhere. Take the tourist policeman at the Red pyramid at Dahshur. I was alone looking at the pyramid's capstone when he came up, pointed to the stone, and then rubbed his fingers together. What service did he perform? He pointed out what I was already looking at. There was no way I wasn't going to respond to a guy with a rifle over his shoulder. Or take the workman in the Mereruka's mastaba. I am last in line following Sonia through the rooms. He appears from behind a doorway, motions me secretly to come in. He sticks a trowel in my hand, puts cement on it, and shows me a niche in a column. He motions for me to fill it in. When I do, he rubs his fingers together. I give him a buck. I think of him now as an Egyptian Tom Sawyer.

Perhaps the most inventive scheme of all happened today. We sailed in a felucca to



**Kitchener's Island and a felucca**



Kitchener's Island for a walk through the botanical gardens. As we approached the dock, children in miniature dories paddled out into mid-channel until they came amidships of the felucca. They took hold of the gunnel, and while we were sailing along, they sang "Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily. Life is but a dream." How could you not come across after that?

This morning we visit the Aswan High Dam, a Russian project begun in January 1961 as a gambit in the Cold War. The political drama behind the building of the dam is upstaged by the starkly outlined conflict it reveals between progress and preservation. Twice the dam saved Egypt; once from famine when there was no rain in Ethiopia for nine years and once from flood-waters out of the Sudan. Without the dam the lake would not have been able to absorb the flood-waters. That's on the plus side of the ledger. What about the debit side?

**Felucca's near Kitchener's Island**



**Aswan High Dam**

Declarations of the cost of the dam never seem to include the cost of moving the 14 temples that would have ended up under water had it not been for UNESCO's coordinated campaign. They don't include the Nubian villages now at the bottom of Lake Nasser. The cost never includes the loss of 100 feet of delta per year as a result of silt piling up behind the dam, silt that never made it downstream. Nor does it include the increase in the parasite schistosomiasis (bilharzia) due to stagnant waters, nor the decrease in varieties of fish in the delta area. All because of lack of silt. These are costs that never make it to the bottom line.

Is there an alternative to dams? Yes. Stop having children. Or at least stop having as many. In 1800 there were one billion people in the world. Last year there was six billion. In 50 years' time, maybe nine billion. That trajectory will never reverse until prosperity comes to everyone. At the rate at which the population of the world is rising, it had better come quickly.

We saw the most spectacular of the templetomies yesterday at Abu Simbel. Today we see another, the Temple of Isis. Originally on the island of Philae, it was moved to Agilkia where the rising and falling waters of the Nile are no longer able to bleach the colonnade leading to the temple proper. As at Abu Simbel the island was remodeled to resemble the original site.

Begun in the second century BC during the reign of the early Ptolomies, the Temple of Isis was added to for the next 400 years, ending up as a prime example of Graeco-Roman architecture, what with its sets of pylons and its colonnaded mammisi certifying the Ptolomies as god born.



**First Pylon of the Temple of Isis at Philae**



**Second Pylon of the Temple of Isis at Philae**

A mammisi was what, in the computer business, one calls a work-around. In 332BC Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. He stayed just long enough (seven months) to touch base with the religious establishment of the country. He went first to Memphis, Egypt's religious capital, and then to the desert oasis of Siwa where he declared himself pharaoh.

Shortly after Alexander left Egypt he died of a mysterious fever. (Could it have been AIDS?) His generals initiated the reign of the Ptolemies, which lasted from 303BC to 30BC. But to be a ruler of Egypt, one had to be certified divine. That is where the

mammisi comes in. Each time a temple was built a mammisi was constructed inside its courtyard declaring the patron of the temple to be of divine birth. That was the work-around, like putting a Grade A stamp on a side of beef.

The walls of the Temple of Isis are adorned with scenes from the life of Isis, the Egyptian Virgin Mary. Pictures of Isis suckling her son, Horus, on the inner walls of the temple, look like studies for the Madonna and Child. In 391AD Christianity became the official religion of Egypt and a Coptic Church was built on the site of the temple. In fact here in 394 AD the last hieroglyph was written, thereafter suppressed by the Christian Church. The language went into deep freeze until 1799 when Lt. Pierre Bouchard of the French expeditionary force under Napoleon found a black stele with inscriptions in three different writing systems sticking up out of the sands of Rosetta. He sent it to his superior, General Menou, who turned it over to the Commission des Arts et Sciences. They hung on to the stone, not knowing what they were hanging on to. It took Jean François Champollion, at the age of 32 to make that clear. In a letter dated September 22, 1822, to the secretary of the French Royal Academy, M. Dacier, he wrote that he had deciphered Lt. Bouchard's black stele and, along with it, all the hieroglyphic inscriptions in Egypt.

Repression of heliopolitanism by Christianity was not limited to hieroglyphic inscriptions. The walls of the Temple of Isis look as if they had been attacked by a swarm of demented woodpeckers. The intent was to obliterate every inch of pagan imagery. Fortunately, the job was too hard, and, unlike the Taliban, they were unable to do total damage.

Part of the Heliopolitan myth of creation is that Geb and Nut, Earth and Sky, gave birth to Isis and her brother Osiris and to Nephthys and her brother Seth. Seth killed Osiris out of jealousy and cut him into 14 parts. Why 14 parts? Perhaps one part for each cycle of the moon. Had Osiris been a woman, she would have been cut into 13 parts. Osiris' leg is buried on Bigge, a small island next to Philae. Isis is no longer around to keep track of him. Her eyes have been plucked out by the woodpeckers.



**Isis Defaced**

There is a tremendous burden placed upon a nation with a past, especially when that past is honored by the rest of the world. For Egypt the past is a form of enslavement, its chains

far too heavy to slough off. When Freud said the dead never die, he wasn't just talking



**Cracked Obelisk at Aswan**

about people. Compare Egypt, with its 3,300-year-old temples at Abu Simbel and the United States. What does the US have that's comparable? Mount Rushmore? The lack of historical baggage is part of America's optimism. Countries like Egypt have seen too much of the world to be unbridled in their optimism. They have been conquered and conquered and conquered. For the US, such a thing is unthinkable. Consequently, the US does not divide its time between the past and the present. Free from such encumbrances the US concentrates on the future. This is in keeping with a country devoted to science and technology, disciplines that have no respect for the past. For them the past is a time when things were essentially wrong, the present a time when things are essentially right. Countries like Egypt, on the other hand, understand that the present becomes the past.

After Agilkia we stop briefly to see the obelisk that wasn't. It would have weighed 1,668



**Nubian Dancer**

tons. It would have been the tallest obelisk in all of Egypt. It would have been—only the stone cracked, either because of poor quality or perhaps an earth tremor. The authorities have left it lying there as a study in unplanned obsolescence.

After dinner we are treated to a Nubian evening of music, singing, and dancing. The show, ostensibly put on for us, is really there for the crew who obviously believe in the Arabic expression, "He who has a beautiful woman or music is rich." Walid, the major domo, and Karem, the bartender, are like teenagers at a KISS concert. The music, in the form of drumming and a pipe player, is loud, rhythmic, and, when it comes to repetition, makes Philip Glass sound like a melodist. The highlight of the evening is a young man who dances like a whirling dervish. He is covered from head to

foot in skirts, hoops, scarves, boots, and a turban. The colors are bright red, green, blue, and yellow.



**Whirling Dancer**



The moment he steps onto the dance floor he starts spinning and never stops. He twirls his double skirt up and down as if he were making pizza out of cloth. He is like a cowboy doing rope tricks, a spinning top that sends us reeling while he stays sober as a judge. The staff appears to be jaded. When the twirler came on, they broke off into little groups and chatted with one another as if they were all standing around the office water cooler. This must be tourist stuff, the other the real thing.



When I got back to my room, someone had made a huge origami cobra out of a bath towel. It was sitting on my bed waiting for me. I knew there were snakes in the desert.

## April 5

This morning I wake up and open the curtains of my cabin. Unlike the previous days, when the view was of another ship cheek by jowl to ours, I can see across to the hills beyond. The temple of the wind—no one is buried there—sits atop the highest point. Off to the left is the Aga Khan's tomb.

Yesterday afternoon, as we came back from Kitchener's Island there was thunder in the distance and a few drops of rain, something unheard of in Aswan. Last night there was a sandstorm. This morning the air is sparkling, the feluccas so clearly etched by the light they look as if they had been drawn.

As I stand here looking out over the river, a song sung by Kay Starr keeps going through my mind.

See the pyramids along the Nile.  
See the sunrise on a tropic isle.  
Just remember, darling, all the while,  
You belong to me.

J. Alfred Prufrock measured out his life with coffee spoons. I measure mine in popular songs. Kay Starr's song was No. 1 on the hit parade in 1952.

The Nubian Museum building in Aswan is beautiful, its collection small but impressive. There are artifacts going back to 11,000BC, the Paleolithic Age, and extending up through the modern period. Today Nubia is only a five-letter word in a crossword puzzle.

As I walk through the museum trying to make sense of the A Group, the B Group, and the C Group I, II, and III, adjusting for the fact that scholars now believe the B Group was not, after all, a separate group, but rather a continuation of the A-Group, I realize that all of this is a mug's game. Either I am going to become a Nubian specialist, or else I'm going to let the museum roll off me like water off an umbrella.

Even so, the museum does leave an impression. The Nubians were a buffer between Egypt and the rest of lower Africa. They were useful in trade, occasionally were enemies—the Kush of Upper Nubia—but mostly they interacted peacefully. For example, the names of Upper Egyptian pharaohs, Cheops, Cephren, and Menkaure are found in various Nubian settlements. Today the Nubians appear to have assimilated easily into Egypt. I suspect that was the case during much of its early history.

Any map of the world fails to do justice to Egypt. It is a country 386,000 square miles in area, 96 percent of which is desert. Aside from a few oases here and there, Egyptians live along a strip of land roughly 12 miles wide and 750 miles long. It is like living beside a liquid highway. The best cartographic representation of Egypt I have ever seen is a chart mapping the density of electric light illumination at night. The picture must have been taken from a satellite. The brightest thing on earth between California and China is the narrow strip of the Nile from Cairo to Aswan. It is like the Earth's very own Milky Way.



**Temple of Sobek and Haroeris (Horus) at Kom Ombo**

As we sail from Aswan toward the Temple at Kom Ombo, there are signs of life along every square foot of the river's edge. The margin of life has been deposited here for hundreds of thousands of years, alluvial soil added like interest every time the Nile overflowed. No wonder the ancient Egyptians marked their calendars in terms of floodings.

The temple sits atop a hill overlooking the river. It is a commanding location. Its double sanctuary—devoted to Horus and Sobek, the light and the dark—is testimony to its location, the light of the Nile, the dark of the desert beyond.

I try to imagine what living along the Nile is like. It must be like living on a tightrope. I am surprised the Egyptians don't go stir crazy. What are your options? North and south. Here hell isn't straight down. It's east and west.

The town of Kom Ombo shows evidence of Paleolithic hunters. Then there is virtually no pre-dynastic history until Neolithic times, around 6000BC. In that 5,000-year gap, the only thing that appeared to change was the diet—from meat to cereal crops.

What happened? I'd guess there was a climate change, perhaps not a big one, but one big enough to rid Upper Egypt of hippos, crocodiles, and giraffe. If so, this climate change essentially chained Egyptians to the Nile just as surely as if it were a galleon and they its slaves. Starting with the Paleolithic period, then, it took 5,000 years to shift to grains and another 2,500 years before the glory of Imhotep and the Old Kingdom. What does that show? Art flourishes when the stomach is full.

I find it curious that Kom Ombo worships the crocodile, albeit as a god of the dark side. Sonia tells us the myth of a crocodile saving the first pharaoh, Menes, from drowning. Fat chance. Crocodiles are the meanest creatures on land. They are too stupid to be kind. I think of them as great white sharks with lungs. There is absolutely no way that a



**Mummified Crocodile**



**Lintel with original color**

crocodile would have given Menes a break. My guess is the Egyptians devoted Kom Ombo to Horus because they liked him and to Sobek to hedge their bets.

The walls of Kom Ombo, like the walls in every temple we have seen, are all the same color, desert ecru. Looking at them must be what it is like to be completely colorblind. Once they were painted all the colors of the rainbow, like the whirling dervish of last night. But the colors have worn away. Only occasionally do you get a hint of how lively these temples must have looked. Sonia says the Egyptians painted them shoddily on purpose. Since these temples were built by Egyptians for their conquerors, the Greeks and then the Romans, they used their cheesiest materials.

The walls of Kom Ombo are interesting. There is a crocodile-headed Sobek and reliefs of Horus being anointed by Hathor. There is a relief of Imhotep, deified because of his skill as a doctor. Next to him are illustrations of the tools used by

doctors, everything from saws for amputating limbs, to forceps, spatulas, and trepanning devices. Imhotep has been elevated in my mind to one of the world's great geniuses,

along with Leonardo da Vinci, Einstein, and Chomsky.

When we leave Kom Ombo, it is teatime. Most of us settle ourselves on the sundeck and watch the Nile go by. In mid-river, floating hotels like the one we are on race to the next port, in our case Edfu, a bustling town with one of the best preserved temples in Egypt. Crossing behind us three feluccas, lashed together, move fast before the wind. The helmsman is at the center, the other boatmen lounging at their tillers on either side. What looks like a rowboat outfitted with a blue plastic sheet makes headway close to shore. Two children on a donkey race him along a riverside path. Cows graze the fields beyond. A goat scampers up the embankment and disappears into a cluster of doum palms. In the distance a single white spire pierces the canopy of trees along the river's edge like a needle sticking up out of a blanket. To the west the sun rolls after us along the top of the hills. Tombs dating from 1200AD appear as mole holes in the hills above the river. They darken in the fading light as if something were pushing them deeper into the earth. Suddenly, the sun disappears behind the highest hill, and like someone switching off a light, the Nile is dark.



**Columns with original color barely showing**



**Wall carvings depicting surgical instruments**



Tonight we appear in the galabiyyas we have, with Sonia's help, bargained for at Philae and Kom Ombo. Mine is white, Nancy's black. Several of my companions have taken this evening very seriously. They could easily serve as extras in the performance of *Aida* that takes place every October at the pyramids at Giza. After dinner there is singing and dancing in the upper deck lounge. The staff provides the music, the singing, and the enthusiasm. Every so often they motion for one of us to join them. We do our best to move appropriately. I am satisfied just to be able to move.

Back in our cabins, Nancy, who normally takes ages to fall asleep, is gone as soon as her head hits the pillow. This, I think, is the solution to her wakefulness at night. From now on, we will don our galabiyyas just before bed and shimmy to the sounds of *Cecilia*.

### Life Along the Nile



Children along the Nile



**White Spire of Mosque above Nile Palms**

**April 6**



**Edfu Taxi**

Edfu, once the Greek town of Apollinopolis Magna, is a busy little place. We have been up since 6am and, after a quick breakfast, step into horse-drawn carriages that take us to the Temple of Horus a mile away. Our trip through the town is the closest we have gotten to daily Egyptian life. We pass tiny shops, most of them with their iron grillwork still shuttered. The streets are crisscrossed by men in dirty gray galabiyas wearing skull caps. The muezzin is sounding the first call to prayer. Outside a shop selling vegetables someone has spread a carpet on the sidewalk. Nine men in brown pants and white shirts, in three rows of three each—like a game of tic-tac-toe—are kneeling, their foreheads pressed firmly to the ground. I see a sign outside a mud-brick building whose faded pink exterior is into serious flaking. It says Reems Computer Center. The horse pulling us along is scrawny, the bones of its rear flanks sticking up like ridges of sand out of the desert. I am surprised at its strength, pulling us and the carriage easily through the streets. The driver talks constantly. He may be talking to the

other drivers passing by, but I can't be sure. Sometimes they respond. Sometimes they don't. He keeps repeating, "Mashi, mashi," which I recognize as meaning, "Enough, enough." What has he had enough of? Life? Tourists?



**Edfu Houses**

We stop in a little square from which scrawny horses and dilapidated carriages emerge spontaneously like matter in Fred Hoyle's steady-state universe. They bubble out of a side street and race toward the center of town, presumably to pick up the next batch of passengers who, it also seems, are spontaneously emerging from the floating hotels docked along Luxor's main drag.



**Edfu residents**

The carriages have fold-down tops, like the old manual convertible tops. The leather is black and the fittings are silver. They are of an ornate style all their own, something I would call Victorian Gypsy. Alongside the driver is a younger man, a friend, the driver tells me. His job is to polish the metalware. He lifts up the front seat to reveal a shallow hidden chest, in it rags and metal polish. He puts some on a silver rod and rubs. When he finishes, I rub my finger along the rail. It comes away blackened. He laughs.

David Roberts, the Edinburgh-born artist, was 42 years old when, in 1838, he first laid eyes on the Temple of Horus. Edfu, whose population must double whenever the floating hotels of the Nile dock, was sleepier then. There was less reason to visit. The temple was buried up to its capitols in sand, a double blessing since the sand preserved the temple and kept the crowds away. Now that the sand is gone, so is the town's quaintness. It is a beehive of industry designed to exchange services for tourist dollars.



**Twin Pylons of the Ptolemaic Temple of Horus, Edfu**



**Façade of the Great Hypostyle Hall, Temple of Horus**

In one of the sketches of the temple that made him famous, Roberts has drawn a weaver who had set up shop just underneath the portico to the right of the Pronaos. Several hovels of mud-brick and daub cap the Pronaos. Today we have to look up forty feet to see the point in air where the weaver's shop was. The hovels are, of course, gone from the Pronaos. Begun by Ptolemy III, Euergetes, in 287BC, the temple was finally completed in 57BC. The huge pylon is still in tact. Images of Horus smiting his enemies flank the entrance. The two hypostyles are perfect, the two vestibules as well.

In 1854 Auguste Mariette, a young French official of the Louvre, was sent to Egypt to collect Coptic manuscripts. While in Saqqara he thought he saw, half buried, a structure described by Strabo. He began to uncover the Serapeum, the temple to the Sacred Bull Apis. That point marks the beginning of the unveiling of ancient Egypt to the modern world. In 1860 Mariette began to recover from its sandy grave the Temple of Horus at Edfu, just two years after the Khedive Said had appointed him conservator of antiquities on Egyptian soil. Dr. Zahi walks in Mariette's footsteps.



The pièce de résistance of the temple is the shrine inside the sanctuary. It is made of granite, highly polished and its niche, now empty, once housed Horus in the form of a falcon. When Mariette uncovered the temple, he found the shrine lying outside and returned it to its original site. How did it get there? It must have weighed several tons. Why on earth would anyone want to remove it? Certainly not to loot it. That could have been done on the spot. Probably its displacement was part of the Theodosian decree in 394AD to erase the gods of Egypt by defacing their images. The bad news is that Theodosius was afraid of the past. The good news is that erasing stone images is not easy. Every defaced temple we have seen shows signs that the defacers gave up before the temples did.

One of the scenes in the temple that escaped obliteration was of Horus avenging the death of Osiris. Horus is depicted with a harpoon in his hand attacking Seth, who takes the shape of a hippopotamus. I am surprised at the aptness of the metaphor. The hippopotamus is Africa's number one man-killer.

### **Horus Attacking Seth (the hippopotamus)**

Of course Horus is never able to completely destroy Seth anymore than any of us is capable of being completely good. I take that to be one more parallel between heliopolitan theology and Christianity. Seth is evil and indestructible. So is Lucifer.

There are other parallels as well. Isis suckles Horus. The Madonna suckles the Child. The evil Seth kills his good brother, Osiris. Cain slays Abel. One wonders how much of this is coincidence and how much of it is oral history handed down from one century to the next, like folk songs.



**Euergetes II crowned by  
Nekhbet and Wadjet**

The Temple is jam-packed with people as we wander through it. Sonia, however, is an adept broken-field runner. We manage to see what needs to be seen and even get a sense of the serenity of the place. With the banners flying, the colors of the pylon, the hypostyles, the porticoes in full bloom, it must have been a spectacle, rising up out of the sand like a circus parade.

On the feast days, there must have been drumming, piping, and singing. I can even imagine vendors lining the roads to the temple, hawking their wares just as they do today. In the ancient world I can't imagine there was much one could do for fun outside the church. It made sense to paint the place in gaudy colors, hang out the flags, and, as the title of a Duke Ellington tune says, "Praise God and Dance."

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religion is such a solemn affair. Christianity emphasizes suffering. Islam emphasizes clean living. Judaism wants you to obey the rules. The impression I get from the temples we have seen so far is that the ancient

Egyptian religion emphasized spectacle. Going to a temple was like going to the movies. You came to be entertained.

The boat docks in the center of town. We walk from the pier up several flights of steps to a sign that says:

You are in Esna, the lan of  
fresh air all roun the year.

I wonder what the sign maker had against final d's.

We run a several-block-long gauntlet of shops and shopkeepers to reach the temple. Once there we climb down nine meters to Nile level.



**The Temple of Khnum at Esna (TA)**

The Temple at Esna is devoted to the Ram God, Khnum, who, at the dawn of time, fashioned mankind out of the clay of the Nile with a potter's wheel. The lyrics of a song I



**Wall carving with Khnum, the Ram God, at the far right (TK)**

learned as a kid keep going through my mind:

Adam was the first man who ever was invented.  
Lived all alone and never was contented.  
Made him out of mud in the days gone by.  
Hung him on the fence in the sun to dry.

The original temple was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty by Thutmose III, roughly around 1325BC. Then Esna was a town essential to the development of trade routes between Egypt and the Sudan. Around 200BC, as Esna's importance was revived, a second temple was built. We see the 18-columned hypostyle with its faint traces of color and its 48 panels depicting scenes of the pharaohs and their gods.

Our visit to Edfu this morning was instructive. A hypostyle is just one small part of a temple. There needs to be the pylons and a courtyard with its colonnaded porticoes. One may have a second hypostyle or even a third. Then there are the vestibules and, finally, the sanctuary. Where are all these here in Esna? Under the town that surrounds the temple 18 feet above our heads. The houses behind the temple—one of them is literally cracked down the middle—are unmovable since the government can't legally move people. Egypt has no law of eminent domain. Sonia tells us that they have managed to move 200 families in Luxor on the West Bank, and they may have to resort to force to remove the rest. Now, as I look away from the river and toward the center of Esna, I try to imagine a town built on top of a temple. It is a strange sensation knowing that beneath the town there is another world.



**Columns in the Temple of Khnum**

I once saw a movie based on a play by Tennessee Williams in which the pivotal event is of a man being pulled to pieces by beggar children on an island in the Mediterranean. The scene comes back in all its force as the vendors fall on me as I try to return to the boat. I go into one shop to buy some gifts for friends. I had paid \$2.50 for three small metal pyramids in Giza. One of my companions had gotten the same three for \$2.00. I thought maybe nine more would do the trick. I make up my mind to pay \$10.00. "How much?" I ask. "Thirty dollars," he says.

I know the rules. The vendor starts with an outrageous price. I come back with a bottom line. If he doesn't agree, I walk. Maybe it was the heat, or the fatigue of the past few days, or hearing, "Hello, Mister. Welcome to Miami," one time too many. Whatever the

reason, I don't have the energy to play the game. I shrug and leave the shop. When I look back, the shopkeeper is waving his arms frantically and yelling at the top of his voice, a hurt expression on his face. I go straight to the boat and sleep. As I think about the shopkeeper now, I feel guilty. I am not tough enough to travel.

## April 7

I get up at 4:30am, stumble onto a (Remon) tour bus for a shuttle trip to the Valley of the Nobles and at 6:30am am inside the tomb of Ramose, High Priest to Amenhotep IV and governor of Thebes. This gives new meaning to *Death on the Nile*.

I am impressed with the decoration on the walls, particularly the hair styles on the women—very intricate, very corn-rowish. But that's not what really impresses me. What



**Braided hair bas relief, Tomb of Ramose, vizier and governor of Thebes during ths reign of Amenhotep IV, Valley of the Nobles**

impresses me is the intrigue that begins with Ramose and Amenhotep IV. When his father died in 1353BC, after a prosperous 27-year reign, Amenhotep IV became pharaoh. He was still a teenager. Right off the bat he changes his name to Akhenaten—*He who is effective for Aten*—and declares that the multitude of Egyptian gods with their multitude of priests with vested interests in those gods are obsolete. Worse still, non-existent. There is only one god, Aten, the sun. As Wallace Stevens said, “The rest is rot.” Five years later Akhenaten moves lock, stock, and barrel to Tell el-Amarna, literally telling the priesthood in Thebes, present day Luxor, that they can go to hell. Ramose, forced to leave his own tomb half finished, had to follow him. It was like working for an oil company.

In correspondence from the new city—Akhenaten called it Akhetaten, the horizon of Aten—he declared that he was forced to move because “it” had become unbearable. He never specified what “it” was. What could possibly have happened? Egyptologists haven’t a clue. Once Akhenaten died, his successors expunged the record, leaving a huge hole in the historical account. I don’t think it is too hard to guess at the circumstances. Akhenaten was threatening the livelihood of the priesthood by changing the ground rules so they made life difficult for him. How, I wonder.

Here is one scenario favored by the British drama critic, Kenneth Tynan. He thought Akhenaten was almost certainly gay. The portraits depicting him as much a female as a male suggested this. Nefertiti was merely a trophy wife. Tynan thought Akhenaten left Thebes because the priesthood made his life miserable as much for his lifestyle and as for his monotheism. This is the Peyton Place theory of Thebes. There are other theories. Akhenaten had Froehlich’s Syndrome. He had Marfan’s Syndrome. He had neither of these. The distorted portraits are merely attempts to picture him as both male and female because the god Aten was androgynous.

Whatever the truth, Akhenaten’s break with the old guard gave rise to one of Egypt’s finest artistic moments, the New Kingdom. Impressive when you remember that Akhenaten was only a teenager when the revolution occurred. After his death in 1336BC and after a mysterious four-year gap during which the High Priest, Aye, ruled, Tutankhamun became Pharaoh. That was in 1332BC. He was ten years old. Tell el-Amarna was dismantled. The worship of Aten was scrubbed. The old gods were restored, and the court returned to Thebes. Ten years later, in 1322BC, King Tut was dead with a hole in the back of his head. Someone obviously did him in. I think it was the High Priest, Aye. But the real power behind the throne was General Horemheb. When Aye died four years later, Horemheb became king in what may have been the first military coup in the history of the world.

It was almost a year ago that the possibility of our hosting a trip to Egypt came up. Nancy was insistent we go in that non-insistent way of hers. I realize that I had lost the battle even before it had begun. Sitting on the sundeck of the Sun Boat III, I am trying to figure out why I am so apprehensive about travel. According to the socio-biologists, homo sapiens is divided into adventure seekers and risk avoiders. This division fits me nicely. I am without a doubt a risk avoider. If my anxiety is hard-wired, then, like being overweight, it is a cross I have to bear. I will definitely enjoy this trip once I am safely back home.

Walking toward the funeral temple of Queen Hatshepsut (1490-68BC), I can feel my apprehension rising. This is the place where, three-and-a-half years ago, six gunmen in tourist police uniforms came down out of the hills above the temple, shot and killed a ticket taker and a guard at the entrance, and, then, at their leisure and unopposed, walked up to the colonnades of the temple and shot to death 58 random tourists. Sonia tells me one tour guide saved himself and his charges by ordering them to jump off the side of the Hathor chapel. They hid behind the temple during the rampage.



**Temple of Hatshepsut in the Valley of the Kings (TA)**



Hatshepsut's temple is carved out of the limestone hills of Western Thebes. These hills, like gigantic shoulders, seem to shrug above the three porticoed tiers that make up the temple structure. Wallace Stevens wrote a poem, "Anecdote of the Jar," which begins:

I placed a jar in Tennessee  
And round it was upon a hill  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Rise up to it no longer wild.

These lines go through my head as I walk toward the symmetry of the temple. The geometrical regularity of the terraces, the porticoes, the columns impose themselves on the hills behind rather than the other way around. I can see the outlines of colossi in the limestone where, of course, there aren't any. As in Stevens' poem, the hills align themselves.

Atop the hills I glimpse the figure of someone in a galabiyya and turban. Then another and another. Someone asks Sonia about the neat

**Falcon statue at Hatshepsut's Temple (TA)**

square buildings spaced along the top of the limestone cliffs. She says, “Security.” Up the ramp that leads to the middle terrace, the only one open to the public, I pass workmen sitting on their haunches, chipping away at white limestone blocks in a desultory fashion. A few strokes and they pause to look around, chat with their neighbor, motion to a tourist to come in for a closer look—followed, no doubt, by a request for money. The sun is high overhead. Everything is in slow motion. The heat is enervating. It is hard for me to put one foot in front of the other, so I am not surprised that they aren’t pounding away like jackhammers. Slow though it may be, the work manages to get done. This temple, for example, has been under restoration for 40 years. Once, in reaction to the edict of the Emperor Diocletian forbidding the worship of Jesus, Christians retreated to its safety and lived inside its colonnades. A century of smoke had to be peeled from the ceilings of the porticoes. I look at the workmen again. They are huddled together, all work stopped. Suddenly a familiar sound. One of them reaches inside his galabiyya, extracts a cell phone, and answers it.



**Two of the remaining Osiride statues of the Queen on the uppermost portico (TA)**

These three valleys – of the Kings, the Queens, the Nobles – are a testament to the lengths human beings will go to stay alive. The modern day counterpart has got to be the science and practice of medicine. But, in ancient Egypt what they lacked in knowledge they made up for in mythology. The tombs are recipes for immortality. Do this and you will live forever. Far from an obsession with death, they represent an obsession with life, a response to what Henry James called, “the worm at the core of our happiness.”

It is no surprise to me that we find beautifully carved inscriptions, brightly painted walls, elaborate gods and goddesses, intricate symbology underneath the limestone mountains of West Thebes. We cannot control death. We can only control what we do about death. These artists and craftsman and planners and builders did what they could control, their jobs. Did they really believe that Osiris would rise again? Do we?



Dr. Sabry Abdel Aziz did us a great favor by allowing us to see the tomb of Seti I. Dr. Sabry is responsible for all antiquities between Luxor and Abu Simbel. He is also, like every other official we have met, a personal friend of Sonia's. Without her I doubt we would be sitting in the shade of this wooden porch listening to his views on the Valley and his job. For example, he does not believe what we are about to see this morning are tombs. Rather he sees them as museums preserving a 3,300-year-old culture. He tells us there are currently 50 countries and associations helping to reconstruct, maintain, and preserve the antiquities.

He is a handsome man, with chiseled features. He is wearing a light blue, short-sleeved shirt, Levis, and a taupe vest. His assistant tells me that the people who work for Dr. Sabry do not consider him a boss. He treats them like friends, and they reciprocate.

#### **Dr. Sabry Abdel Aziz (TA)**



**Details on the wall of Seti I's tomb, father of Ramesses II**

The guidebooks note that the tomb of Seti I, the father of Ramesses II, is not open to the public. Dr. Sabry takes us down himself, stopping here and there to illustrate a point. The sarcophagus is at the bottom of an incline that drops about 300 meters below ground. As we descend, we pass walls covered with drawings that to a large degree still retain their color. Dr. Sabry points out the places where Belzoni, who discovered the tomb in 1817, literally destroyed the color by trying to copy the drawings with hot wax. With a sad shake of his head, he points out two door jambs sawed off and sent back to the Louvre by Champollion. Dr. Sabry notes that one million Egyptian artifacts have been taken out of the country. He wants back only two: the head of Nefertiti and the Rosetta stone. I hope

he gets his wish.

At the bottom of Seti I's museum, beside sacred texts from the *Book of the Dead* inscribed on the walls and next to the



burial chamber itself, Dr. Sabry mentions the “I” word, Israel. The Sinai is just around the corner. Israel is an hour away by plane. Last night on the news we learned that Israel is pounding Palestinian positions in response to a Palestinian action in response to an Israeli response and so on and so on. Someone asks Dr. Sabry about the conflict. He speaks passionately, expressing the futility of hatred, the unconscionable cost of war. He is moved to talk about peace 300 meters below the ground in the burial chamber of the father of Ramesses II. The great thing about life is that, if you pay careful attention, it will astonish you.

In the Valley of the Queens we are given ten minutes with Nefertari. At Abu Simbel we saw the magnificent monument built for her by her husband, Ramesses II. Now we see her tomb. The colors are extraordinary. This, more than anything else, has given me a sense of what the real thing was like. The walls are a palette of earth colors, cleaned—something easily done, according to Dr. Sabry—to what must be close to their original intensity. Incredibly, the colors have lasted for 3,300 years. Standing here is like

**Detail from the Tomb of Seti I**



**Detail from the Tomb of Seti I, father of Ramesses II**

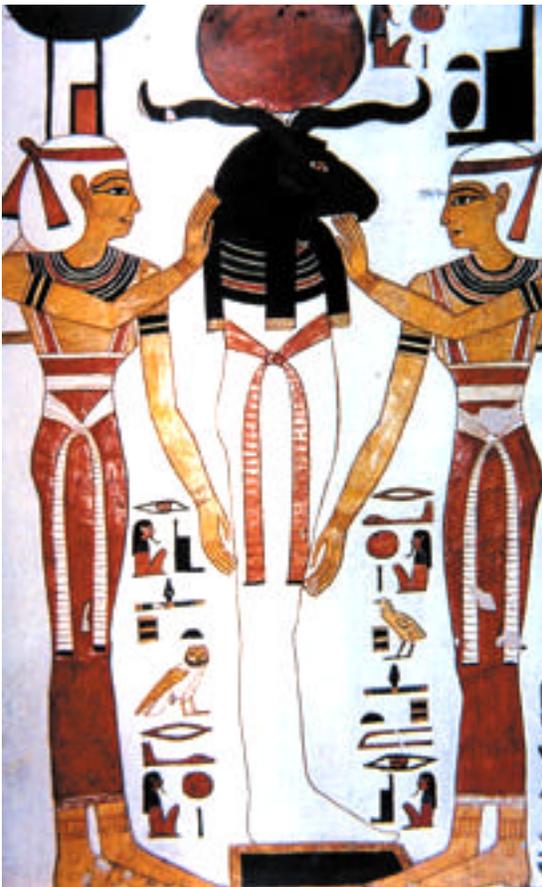


**Tomb of Seti I, Detail**

standing in the middle of a box of crayons. It makes you want to grab a handful and draw on the walls yourself. I hope Nefertari had a chance to see all this before she left. Even so, it must be hard to regard one's tomb, however attractive, in anything but a mournful light.



**View of the corridor of the Tomb of Nefertari**



**Nefertari's Tomb: mummy of the Re**



**Nefertari with two jugs of wine**



**Detail of the western wall along the staircase**

### **April 8**

The temple at Dendera is dedicated to Hathor, goddess of music, dancing, motherhood, childbirth. According to one version of the myth, Re awoke one morning inside the lotus and cried. His teardrops fell to the ground and from them grew a beautiful woman, Gold of the Gods, Hathor, wife of Horus, mother of Isis and Osiris.



**Temple of Hathor at Dendara—the hypostyle façade (TA)**

We dock at Qena at 10am after a leisurely morning. We gather in the lobby of the Sun Boat III and mill around. Even though we are early, we can't get off. Nancy says our police escort isn't ready. I look outside. Men in shirtsleeves have their backs to us. They are scanning the horizon. What I at first took to be fanny packs are holstered revolvers. The old paranoia returns. A headline forms in my imagination: *MIT Professor gunned down in second temple massacre.*

We are ushered across a dry, dusty park and into the bus. A van filled with police is in the lead. I feel like an extra in a Clint Eastwood movie. At the temple itself, security is no less in evidence. When I ask why so much security here, the reply is, "No more than elsewhere." It is just that here the tourist police are less discreet. The Irish have a saying: "If you are born to hang, you can go to sea in a basket." I hang on to that for dear life.

We shuffle in behind Sonia and enter one of the best preserved temples in Egypt. The approach from the entrance to the sanctuary slopes upward, as it should, past two hypostyles and a vestibule to the sanctuary itself. There are 18 columns in each hypostyle. In the first, the capitols are heads of Hathor with a shrine sitting on top of each head. In the second hypostyle, the capitols are a hodgepodge of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman layers. They take up a third of the columns' height. Like most political compromises, they are clumsy.



**Hathoric or sistraform columns, badly damaged by early Christians**

Begun in the reign of Ptolemy XII (80-51BC) and worked on until the reign of Nero (54-68AD), the most remarkable feature of Hathor's temple is its roof. It is intact and accessible. The stairway leading up is a winding one, purposely so to symbolize the circle of continuing life as the high priests carry her golden image up for a (perhaps tri-) annual sun fix. She makes the trip in her sacred barque. The incline of the stairway is gentle to make it easy on the priests, the only ones privileged to tote that barque. Afterwards



Hathor is carried back down to the sanctuary. The way down is a straight shot.

From the roof there is a splendid view of the Roman mammisi, the Coptic church built on the grounds, the ancient Egyptian mammisi, the sanatorium, and the sacred lake. If you turn your back to the ruins and look toward the desert, you see a new kind of colonnade. Electric power pylons stretch from Aswan to the delta, bringing electricity to Cairo.

Although the structure is well-preserved, the figures of the gods and goddesses have been given a good going over by Christian defacers. Hardly an image of Hathor remains, although there is an image of Cleopatra VII, *the* Cleopatra, which has withstood the ravagers. It stands on an outer wall along with an image of Ptolemy XV, known as Caesarion, her son by Caesar. Most of the wall etchings in this temple are pedestrian. Nothing very special with one exception. One of

### **Wall carving of Cleopatra VII at Dendera (TA)**

the chapels has, on the ceiling, a representation of the Goddess Nut, goddess of the sky, who swallows the sun at night and gives birth to it again by day. Nut encircles (ensquares?) the four corners of the ceiling like a python. In the center is an image of the sun, its rays streaming down toward the earth. The composition is superb. Whoever the artist was, he (or she) has made a masterpiece. Sonia adds the sundial ceiling at Dendera to Dr. Sabry's Nefertiti and the Rosetta Stone on his return-to-sender list.



**Sky Goddess Nut on the ceiling of the New Year Chapel – Temple of Hathor**



**Women doing laundry along the Nile between Dendera and Luxor**

We are back on the boat by noon. No gunfire. Just lunch followed by a very hot sun. I can't keep my eyes open. I fight the headache that is building up behind my eyes. I should go to my room and lie down. It is such a long way off. Maybe if I stay still for a while it will go away. I am beginning to accommodate the Egyptian way of life.

I try to remember the temples we have been to: Esna, Edfu, Philae, Dendera. They are all merging into one long composite building, one with seven hypostyles, five vestibules, four sanctuaries, three mammisi. On second thought, maybe I will lie down.

I am up at 6pm for an early dinner and then a trip to the Sound and Light Show at the Temple of Karnak. I am a drop in an ocean of people. Maybe 2,000 of us have been led, cattle-like, into holding pens. Suddenly, over the very high fidelity speakers, there is the sound of a gong. Voices with thick British accents speak in spectral tones. "Welcome travelers. Your travels have ended. You are now at the beginning of

time.” Uh oh, I think, steeling myself for a heavy dose of patronizing voice over.

A male voice tries hard to make me feel bad. He tells me how transitory the houses of the ancient Egyptians were, how they have long since moldered into dust, and how that is just what is going to happen to me. The female voice offers a gentle corrective, “And yet they were pleasant houses.” Like that’s going to make me feel better. Throughout all of this, lights are going on and off like this was California in the middle of an outage.

At one point I find myself in the hypostyle of the temple. The lights have gone out. Even so the temple is bathed in soft, white moonlight. There is an obelisk in the courtyard. From where I stand the huge, full moon balances itself on the point of the obelisk like a ball on the nose of a seal. The image is unforgettable. I think it is as appropriate to put Sound and Light on the Temple of Karnak as it is to put makeup on the Statue of Liberty. Even so, I am grateful for having been there. Otherwise I might never have seen that moon.



**Fishermen along the Nile between Dendera and Luxor**

This afternoon, leaving Dendera, we take our last trip on the Nile. The going is slow because we are sailing against the current. It is late afternoon when we arrive in Luxor. We dock among the 40 or so other floating hotels that have names like Nile Queen, M/S da Vinci, Cleopatra, Orchestra. These boats make up a city all to themselves, each boat a neighborhood. At any hour of the day or night, we are apt to find ourselves underway as our boat slips away from the dock so another one can moor closer in. Even if you are several boats from shore, they captains line them up so you can walk from one to another until you reach the riverbank.

Our captain is a natty dresser. He wears an elegant gray galabiyya with a brown and black checkered scarf around his neck. He has a turban and sandals. No socks. He is a small man, maybe five foot five, with a moustache and a limestone white smile. I am having a hard time visualizing him as a ship’s captain. He seems more like a prosperous

shopkeeper. Walid, our major domo, on the other hand, looks more the ship's captain part with his gold-buttoned, black uniformed jacket, gold threading on the sleeves and the epaulets. I wonder if it is a principle of Egyptian dress code in the tourist trade that the more public the job, the fancier the uniform.

I am sitting on the sun deck of the Sun Boat III. In a few minutes I'll go down to dinner, but for now, docked on the East bank, I look across the Nile to the West Bank. In the far distance at the foot of the limestone hills, I can see the Temple of Hatshepsut. Like a traditional Muslim woman, her face is hidden behind a chador of power lines.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with the Islamic conquest of Egypt, the antiquities of the ancient world began their thousand year eclipse until Mariette lifted the veil 1,300 years later. It is remarkable how beneficial neglect can be. Ancient Egypt was preserved because it was hidden by sand. Borobudur in central Java, the magnificent Buddhist temple shaped like a stupa, lay hidden under volcanic ash for over 800 years until the English Lieutenant Governor Thomas Raffles discovered it in 1814 and began its restoration. In Sicily, the Piazza Armerina, built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, one of the best preserved mosaic-clad villas in the world, was buried under a mudslide for a thousand years. Without their early burials, these buildings would surely have transmuted into the houses of the local population and been lost forever.

I am someone who believes that art for art's sake is enough of a justification. But for those hard noses who, to paraphrase Karl Marx, know the price of everything and the value of nothing, just think how much of the GNP of Egypt depends on the work of artists and artisans who have been gone for 5,000 years or, in the case of Italy, 500 years. Imagine that the United States was suddenly covered by a mountain of sand. What would the Auguste Mariette of the year 7000AD find that might keep the country going? Mt. Rushmore?

## **April 9**

This morning we visit the Temple of Luxor. The temple was built by Amenhotep III (1388-1348BC) in the city the Greeks called "Thebes of the Hundred Gates." Once the capital of the South, its slide into ignominy began in 663BC when the Assyrian King, Ashurbanipal, sacked it.



**Temple of Amun, Luxor**



**Ramesses II and Nefertari**

The temple entrance is flanked by two enormous statues of Ramesses II. In front of the colossi were two obelisks. One is still here. For the other you have to go to the Place de la Concorde. The oddity of this temple is its portico. Normally built on a line of sight with the entrance, the portico veers off at an angle. Had it followed a straight line, the chapel of Khonso would have had to have been destroyed. Out of the question. It would have been like razing the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Khonso, along with his parents, Amun and Mut, form a familiar temple triad of gods as well as another parallel with the Christian trinity. Their temples were sacrosanct.

Amenhotep III built the sanctuary, the peristyle court in front of it and the crooked colonnade in front of that. Ramesses II added the outer court and the pylons as well as his name on every major statue in the place, whether he built it or not.



**Foot of Ramesses II**



In 1881 Gaston Maspero first began the excavation of the temple. A hundred years later workmen excavating the Amenhotep III courtyard found 22 beautifully preserved statues buried in sand three feet below the courtyard floor. Several are now in the Luxor Museum in a new extension built to resemble a tomb, among them two of Horemheb, the general who most probably had Tutankhamun killed.

Beyond Amenhotep's courtyard is a chapel built by Alexander the Great to commemorate his elevation to pharaohhood, a status bestowed on him by the priest of Amun in the Oasis of Siwa. On the outer walls of this chapel are carvings of Alexander as pharaoh alongside carvings of the fertility god, Min. The fertility god is recognizable by his erect phallus, a fifth limb that is at least as long as his forearm. Why would such a god be called Min? Max is a better fit.

The bible describes Moses as having been educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians.

**Fertility God Min**

Imagine what Moses must have found: a panoply of gods, men with pendulous breasts as well as erect phalluses, women whose curved backs enclosed the sky, women with cows' horns, cows with ladies' heads, men with the heads of falcons, baboons, crocodiles, women with ibis heads, and all of this accompanied by architectural feats of incredible sophistication. Take the pylons, for example. These structures were not only magnificent facades that marked the outermost boundary of the temple. They were fulcrums for hauling the temple's enormous colossi and obelisks upright. How many ways to build gigantic stone structures in the middle of the desert with nothing more than rocks, ropes, and raw manpower will stay hidden forever? Had it not been for Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of Brunelleschi's winches and pulleys, devices he invented on the spot and for the specific purpose, we would never have known how Brunelleschi got the dome on top of the Duomo in Florence. Unfortunately, the tribe of Imhotep had no Leonardos to record their genius.



Karnak by day is like Karnak by night, only without the kitsch. The temple is the largest building complex devoted to theology in the world, outside of the Pentagon. Originally 600 acres, it is now reduced to 60. It was 2,000 years in the building, beginning at the end of the second millennium. Like most temples, this one started at the sanctuary and worked outward. Devoted to Amun, the temple reached its peak in the construction of the hypostyle hall with its 134 columns, 122 of them surrounding the 12 open papyrus columns that support the roof. At the top of the hall are claustra, windows formed by slotting stoneware to form openings through which sunlight can enter. The sunlight bathes the central aisle of the hall below. The flanking labyrinths of columns would have been swathed in a half light that made them seem like giants waiting for the sunrise.

### **Karnak's Great Hypostyle Hall with 134 columns**

The fun of being at Karnak is trying to reconstruct the building in your imagination. Close off the roof. Color the columns in white and green and black and red and brown and blue and turn on the sun, say, at 2pm, and imagine the slanting light cutting across the columns, bringing them to their full height, volume, and mass.

The adjective “massive” was made for ancient Egypt. The temples of Greece are graceful. The coliseum is mammoth, Notre Dame is Gothic, but there is nothing in the world that matches massive like ancient Egyptian architecture. When it comes to temples, nothing matches Karnak. If modern architecture is space and light and, thanks to Gehry, shape, ancient Egyptian architecture is mass. They had no flying buttresses to carry stress earthward. They couldn’t make holes in walls or else the walls would collapse. So no windows aside from the occasional claustra. What could they do? Make it big. Make it solid. Make it massive. There is, at Karnak, a lintel that has fallen on the ground,



probably because of an earthquake. The lintel weighs 440 tons. There isn’t a derrick on earth that can raise 440 tons. How did the Egyptians do it? I don’t know for sure. But my guess is if you can’t raise 440 tons, then you do the next best thing. You lower the ground. Thinking outside the box must have been second nature to them.

Although almost every pharaoh from Sesostri I on contributed to Karnak, it was Hatshepsut whose memory suffered most. Thutmose III was a great warrior and a great builder. He conducted 14 victorious campaigns across the Sinai, one for each of the parts of Osiris’ body. But when it came to his aunt and stepmother, he was unyielding. Hatshepsut had elbowed him aside when his father Thutmose II died. She made herself pharaoh and was quite a good one. At Karnak she is depicted as a man. But at Karnak, when it was Thutmose III’s turn, he did his level best to erase her from history. All her images have been defaced. Hell hath no fury like a pharaoh scorned.

### **Obelisk to Thutmose I, Hatshepsut’s father**

Karnak and Luxor were linked by a one-and-a-half-mile-long runway, a dromos built by Nectanebo I in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Nectanebo had successfully repelled a Persian advance in the delta. Trouble at home, the so-called “revolt of the satraps,” kept Artaxerxes out of Egypt for the next 15 years, giving Nectanebo the peace and quiet to build. And build he did—at Bubastis, Edfu, Karnak, Abydo, and Memphis. The dromos is just one of his major construction projects, lined from Luxor to Karnak with stone sphinxes designed to protect the sacred barques journeying between the two temples on the backs of the priests of Amun.

Thinking about these opulent festivals, I constantly come back to their cost. Running a temple the size of Karnak was a major enterprise.



### **Avenue of ram-headed sphinxes of the Great Temple of Amun in Karnak**

At the time of Ramesses III, for example, there were 80,000 individuals serving the temple. These people had to be clothed, fed, housed, sustained. Think of the administration required to keep 80,000 individuals going. Where did the money come from? After all, religion is not producing a marketable product, only a state of mind. So this entire enterprise had to exist, for the most part, on donations. In that respect far less than 7,500 miles separates Karnak from MIT.

The similarity between Karnak and MIT is striking. The product that each manufactures is knowledge. If you want it, you pay for it: in the form of tuition for MIT, offerings for Karnak. Neither is ever enough. The temples often resorted to thievery to make up their short falls. Thus, the high priests themselves were among the most notorious tomb robbers, taking a pharaoh's body "for safekeeping" and then stripping it of its gold and gems, after which the body mysteriously disappears. The high priests were their own worst cynics.

In the case of MIT, to make up its short fall, the high priests turn, thankfully not to theft, but to offerings. These are typically sought every five years in the form of a ritual called "The Campaign," at the successful end of which there is a festival where music is played; speeches are delivered; banners are flown; people dance.

### **April 10**

We fly to Cairo on Scorpio Airlines in one and a half hours. As the plane rises above Luxor there is a splendid view of the essence of Egypt. In the distance is Hatshepsut's temple. Just below us, the Nile. On either side of the Nile, a fertile swath as if the desert had been slashed and the wound bled green.

I am suddenly very tired. It must be the heat. As soon as the plane takes off, I fall asleep. The voice over the loudspeaker system telling me to put my seat in an upright position brings me back to consciousness. As the bus maneuvers out of the airport, I find myself suffering from a form of culture shock. I have spent the last eight days in BC, immersed in the massive world of ancient Egypt. Suddenly, the sunlight is bright the way it can only be in a city. There is a wide boulevard, and we are speeding along. Sonia tells us we are in a section of Cairo called Heliopolis, quite near ancient Heliopolis which is, of course, where the worship of Amun began. Now it is a tony section of town with smart boutiques at ground level, expensive high rises above them. Hosni Mubarak lives here. (The Egyptians have no counterpart to the White House.)

What kind of sense can one make of such an experience? The center of Amun Re of 5,000 years ago, he whose tears became Hathor, Gold of the Gods, transmutes into shops selling Gucci bags and Armani suits. Perhaps this, more than physical danger, is what upsets me most about travel. The world of travel is overwhelmingly surrealistic. It is so easy to lose one's bearings, like walking in the desert. Heliopolis is Hosni Mubarak. Just a blink of an eye ago it was Amun Re. One doesn't vote for Amun Re. One doesn't worship Hosni Mubarak.



**The Alabaster Mosque**

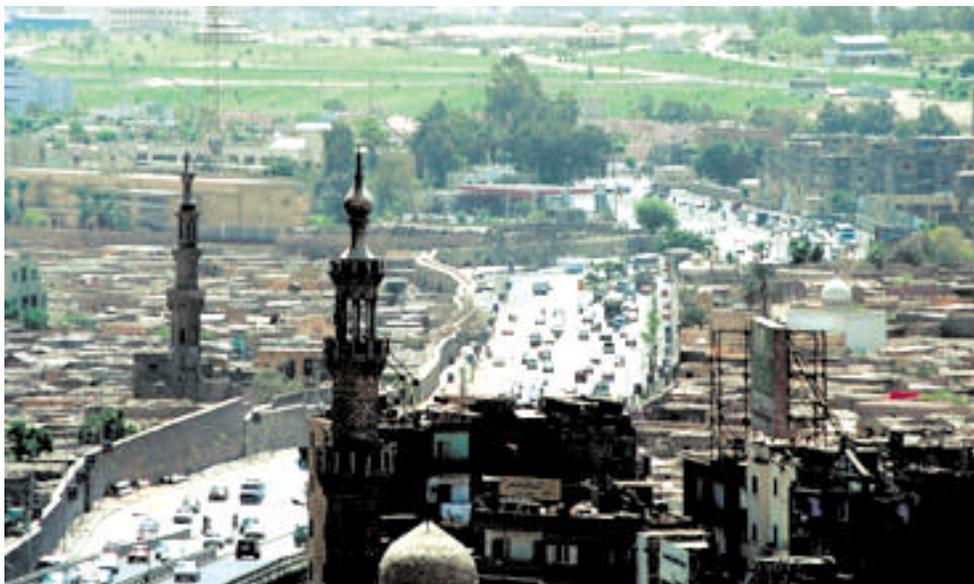
We are now in the land of AD where the numbers go forward instead of backward. We visit two mosques. The first is the Alabaster Mosque, so-called because of its vast alabaster courtyard and its elaborate alabaster façade. It was built between 1830-48AD by Mohammed Ali, an Albanian officer who was instrumental in ousting the French from Egypt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His tomb is located in one corner of the mosque. To see it, you look through an ornate scrim the way the women in a Mahfouz novel look out on Midaq Alley.

The mosque itself sits within the walls of a citadel, built in 1176 by Salah ad-Din, just three years after he had destroyed the Fatimid rule over Egypt. He wasted no time in getting the Citadel up and ready for the next onslaught: the crusaders. After Saladin's rule, the Mamelukes moved in. They came to Egypt to escape the Black Death and ruled successfully from 1250-1517, the so-called Golden Age of Medieval Egypt. After the Mamelukes came the Ottomans, and in 1798 Napoleon ousted the Ottomans only to be called home to deal with the British. As someone once said, history is just one thing after another.

Mohammed Ali moved in when Napoleon moved out. One of his first acts was to build his mosque in Saladin's citadel. He sent to Istanbul for an architect, the Greek Yussuf Bushnaq. He wanted something reminiscent of Hagia Sophia. What he got was a huge central hall topped by five lead-lined domes, its walls decorated with inlaid floral designs in mother of pearl. Unlike its counterparts in Christianity, there are no portraits of imams or statues of prophets along the walls. These are forbidden by Islamic law. The walls and the dome are pure design, an elaborate geometry that repeats itself over and over again like a Philip Glass opera.

Shortly after taking power, Mohammed Ali, in a gesture of friendship, invited the Mamelukes to a banquet in the Citadel. When the Mamelukes mounted their horses to leave, the gates suddenly closed, trapping them in a narrow passageway where Ali's men slaughtered them. It was decent of him to wait until after dinner.

One of the mosque's three doors leads to an alabaster courtyard with a large covered fountain used for purification rites. A second door leads to a piazza that overlooks Old Cairo. In the near distance you can see the ominous City of the Dead, enclosed in its mud-brick wall and implanted in the heart of Cairo like a vast footprint.



**City of the Dead**

From here the view of Cairo gives you a sense of the city. An old Cairo filled with back streets and narrow alleys, a modern Cairo with high rise buildings with neon signs that spell out Semiramis Hotel, Bank of Egypt, Coca Cola. Cairo is a city of 18 million. Cars fill the streets in endless streams. People slip and slide between cars and busses as they make their way from one sidewalk to the next. Cars come as close as they possibly can without actually touching. It's as if the automobiles are in some kind of mechanical dance. I haven't seen a single accident or even a near miss for that matter. The wonder of Cairo is that with all its apparent chaos and unplanned sprawl, it manages, even seems to thrive. There must be something of ancient Egypt still living.

### Panoramic View of Cairo from Semiramis Hotel



**Sultan Hassan pendentive**

The second mosque we visit is the Mosque of Sultan Hassan. It was constructed between 1356 and 1363 at a cost of 20,000 dirhams a day. Lord knows how much that might be in today's currency. (As of this writing a Moroccan dirham is worth about 9 cents.) According to the signpost on the outside, Hassan financed the building by expropriating the possessions of Black Death victims who left no heirs. For all his trouble, Hassan was not buried in his own mosque. He died outside of Egypt. That honor fell instead to his two sons.

When you look up at the dome of the mosque, the vaulted triangles that connect the walls to the lip of the dome are ornately decorated. Guides call these decorations

stalactites. Architects call them pendentives. They are necessary byproducts of plumping half a sphere on top of a square tower. The pendentives transmit the weight of the dome to the walls and then to the ground. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Emperor Justinian commissioned two architects, Anthemios of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, to create a new and interesting church. Their solution was Hagia Sophia, the first domed church in the world. It was started in 532AD and took five years to complete. Its pendentives hung virtually unadorned over the court below. Subsequent generations of builders began to decorate the triangular space. In San Marco in Venice the pendentives are lavish, but I haven't seen anything to touch those of Sultan Hassan's mosque. They hang over our heads like huge concave clusters of grapes.



**Sultan Hassan Mosque**



**Blind singer in Sultan Hassan Mosque**

There is a courtyard here as well, in alabaster, and a covered well. The domed cover of the well is decorated with a verse from the Koran written in cursive. Beyond, a three-story-high vault, arched and open at one end, houses the pulpit. Its three walls are also decorated with a verse from the Koran, but this in the more esoteric and stylized Kufic script.

The minarets of the Sultan Hassan Medersa, or theological seminary, are 260 feet high. These are the thin, graceful platforms from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. The muezzins are usually blind. The idea is that deprived of one sense they can focus on the perfect call. A nearly blind singer sits in the courtyard, a pair of thick glasses on his nose, his feet bare. He follows us into the chamber.

Sonia asks him to demonstrate, and in a clear, high, minor key, his hands clasped in front of his mouth, he makes the chamber ring. Sonia hands him money. So do others. He nods, looking at no one in particular, the way sightless people do. When we leave, he is back in his chair outside the vault, waiting for the next group.

We lunch in the Khal Al Khalili Restaurant with its Naguib Mahfouz coffeehouse in the front. It is in an alley of the bazaar much like Midaq Alley, one of Mahfouz's novels. I stand against the wall and watch the shopkeepers as the crowds stroll past. One man with



**Shop in the Khan Al Khalili Bazaar**

a huge belly and sinking jowls, his head hanging low over his chest and his hands behind his back, talks quietly to a thin-faced man seated in a chair tilted back against the shop wall. The large man is dressed in green linen pants with a matching shirt that comes down to just above his knees. His face is at rest as he talks, a spectacular display of economy of effort. Only his lips move and those barely. His eyes, his head, his body, everything else is still. He exudes an air that says it is a matter of no concern whether a customer comes to his shop or not. He knows Allah will provide.

This man is quite unlike the shopkeeper who reads Nancy's name tag as she walks by. He addresses her by name. "Come in and take a look, Nancy," he says. "Tell me where you are from." Nancy takes off her name tag and keeps walking. A small boy with a crumb stuck to his lip stops in front of me. His face takes on a mournful, soulful look, his eyes drooping, his mouth down at the edges. He points to his bare feet, then looks at me, his hand extended. The man in the chair listening to the shopkeeper suddenly stands up and smacks the boy on the head. The boy disappears into the crowd without so much as a glance at his assailant. A minute later he is back with the same soulful look, offering me something in his hands. He wants me to buy it. I have no idea what it is. A little girl selling metal butterflies materializes next to him. She whispers in his ear. Instantly the

soulful look is gone. He and the girl disappear up the alleyway. The man in the chair sits back down, and the conversation resumes while I continue to put faces to Mahfouz's characters.

This evening we have our reception with the MIT Club of Egypt. The president, Mohamed el-Husseiny, has managed to bring together 15 MIT alumni, many from the Aga Khan Program, some from Civil Engineering, others from EECS. There is wine, beer, and substantial hors d'oeuvres. No need to worry about dinner. A reception scheduled for an hour stretches to two and a half. One of the alumni, an architect, tells me of a recent study that determined that Cheops' pyramid was aligned along the north, south, east, and west axes to within 0.2 percent degree of accuracy. This was compared with the Charles De Gaulle tower built 15 years ago in Paris. The same alignment was intended. It managed to come within a 0.3 percent degree of accuracy.

The conversation switches to modern Egypt and what's wrong with it. My companion says it all comes down to management. Getting Egyptians to change is like pulling teeth. I tell him about the workmen I saw chipping limestone at Hatshepsut's tomb, how they worked slowly because of the heat of the day. He says, why not start earlier when the heat isn't fierce? But to impose such a change would involve an act of parliament. That, he says, is what is wrong with modern Egypt. I tell him about a study I had read about claiming that America's edge in the world economy was based not on resources or technological superiority, but on better management skills. "Exactly," he replies and shakes his head forlornly.

I make a speech congratulating ourselves on hosting an occasion that has managed to introduce 15 successful Egyptians to one another for the first time.

## **April 11**

This morning Dr. Tarek Swelim, art historian and lecturer, talks to us about Islam. He starts with a remarkable story. The Prophet Mohammed began his career as a mediator. Several tribes were at loggerheads over a thorny issue—which tribe would carry to the sacred Kaaba in Mecca a meteorite that had fallen in the desert. Mohammed convinced them to carry it together.

Think of it. Heliopolitanism, the religion of the ancient Egyptians, may have been jump started by a meteorite. And now the primacy of the Prophet Mohammed turns out to depend on a piece of metal that fell from the sky. Falling lumps of extraterrestrial slag appear to have had a profound effect on our planet. Look what happened to the dinosaurs. And suppose it turns out to be true that bacteria really did come to Earth embedded in meteorites from Mars. In fact, if this is true with respect to Earth, it is probably true with respect to every planet in the universe. I have come to regard meteorites as celestial Paul Revers.

Dr. Swelim says that once Muslims split into two sections, the Sunnis and the Shiites, they dispersed to different parts of the Middle East: the Sunnis to Egypt; the Shiites to North Africa, Persia, Arabia, Yemen, Oman. In Egypt a parade of conquerors followed them. First the Byzantines, then Ashurbanipal and the Persians. When Alexandria fell in 640AD, ancient Egypt was gone forever, given over to a series of -ad and -id regimes—the Omniads, the Tulunids, the Fatimids. Then the Golden Age of the Mamelukes , who Mohammed Ali did in, followed by the French and the Brits. In 1952, under Gamal Nasser, Egypt finally became independent. Modern Egyptians tend to look down on their Arab neighbors the way Boston Brahmins look down on the Irish. After so many centuries of near Eastern domination, I am not surprised.

Like the history of most countries, Egypt's has been one of haves and have-nots. Because the haves write the history books, they are the ones who have dignified themselves with names like pharaohs, kings, pashas, governors, dynasties, regimes, kingdoms. I try not to let them pull the wool over my eyes. I think of them as Robin Hoods in the bad sense of "hood." They steal from the poor and give to themselves.

We leave for the Cairo Museum at 9am. Now I know where all the people in Cairo are. By 9:30am there must be 3,000 visitors. Sonia decides to dodge the downstairs crowd and take us straight to the mummy room. 12 mummies are laid out like coffins in a funeral parlor. These are not amateur mummies. They include Seti I, father of Ramesses II, and Ramesses II himself.



**Mummy of Ramesses II**

Ramesses II is lying on his back, just as he was when we first saw him in the open air museum at Memphis. Only now he is a poor dehydrated version of his former self. His cheeks, black from the resin used as a disinfectant, are sunken. His arms are crossed over his chest, and the rest of him is swathed in linen. He is literally leathery skin and bones. He brings to mind those tablets I could buy when I was a kid. You drop one in water and a full-size crystal bubbles up. I imagine dropping him in water. His father lies a few feet away, and despite the gnarling of mummification, you can still see the family

resemblance.

Having seen Seti I's tomb at the Valley of the Kings, thanks to Dr. Sabry, I feel as if I am somehow connected to the shriveled creature in front of me. Not only do I know his lineage, but I have seen where he lay for several thousand years before coming to Cairo. It's as if another piece of a complicated puzzle has fallen into place. Even so, it's a drop in the bucket. The picture I am trying to construct of ancient Egypt has a thousand pieces



missing. It is a fragment of a fragment.

Mummification is gruesome. You suck the brain out of the head and throw it away. Then you take the vital organs

#### Four Canopic Jars



and place them in four Canopic jars. Their lids are generally carved into images—a falcon, a baboon, a crocodile, and the owner. What's in his jar? The heart? The lungs? The liver? You sew up the body and treat it with chemicals designed to extract the fluids, disinfect the body, and preserve the features. Finally you wrap it in linen and bury it. The idea is to keep it reasonably in tact for the next world. But what is it going to do in the next world without a brain? I envisage the ancient Egyptian resurrectees as zombies out of *Night of the Living Dead*, walking around stiff-legged with nothing to say.

What did the ancient Egyptians think the brain did? Hold up the skull? Well, in a word, yes. In the language of the Tohono O'odham Indians of the Sonoran desert (their name means "the desert people"),

Canopic Shrine

the word for the brain is *oag*, “bone marrow.” This is so in many cultures, including, most likely, the ancient Egyptians. One thinks with one’s heart because the heart feels pain. It was to the brain’s everlasting denigration that it had no nerve endings to feel with.

The big attraction in the Cairo Museum is Tutankhamun. The artifacts discovered in his grave cover a half acre or more of museum floor space. The tomb was discovered in November 1922 by Howard Carter and a 12-man excavation team. Two members of the team had MIT connections: a draughtsman who trained at the Institute (Lindsley Foote Hall, 1883-1969) and an architect who taught there (Walter Hauser, 1893-1959). Hall drew detailed sketches of the furniture; Hauser produced scale drawings of the tomb.

It is amazing how much stuff the tomb regurgitated, including four golden shrines, three nested coffins inside the smallest shrine, each shrine fitting inside the larger one so that the whole thing is a nest of Russian dolls. Turquoise statues called shawabits, one for each day of the year, were placed in the tomb to answer questions the dead pharaoh would need to ask once he awakens.



**Tutankhamun Funerary Mask**

The opulence of the tomb is unbelievable. The innermost coffin, the one in which the body lay, is made of 125 kilograms of gold. The funerary mask contains 25 kilograms of gold. The second coffin is inlaid with semi-precious stones, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and carnelians.

Sonia asks us to imagine what treasures were in the other tombs if Tutankhamun is so lavishly laid out. He was, after all, only a minor pharaoh. In fact, his chief claim to fame is the contents of his tomb. I suspect he was so lavishly laid out precisely because he was murdered. It was Horemheb bending over backwards to appear mortified, like a Mafia boss who sends the biggest wreath to the funeral of his victim.

After the museum we visit the Ben-Ezra Synagogue in the old city. The synagogue is a 12<sup>th</sup> century structure built on the site of the Church of St. Michael (8<sup>th</sup> century) which was supposedly built on the site of a synagogue

(605-562BC) that was built by Jews led back into Egypt by Jeremiah. A marble altar inside marks the spot where, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, Moses is said to have prayed. The synagogue is no longer used, reduced to the benign status of an antiquity. There is a working synagogue downtown. It is ringed by armed guards. If you want to pray, you apply to have it opened on Saturday. In present day Cairo in a population of 18 million,

there are 120 Jews.

Our next stop is the Coptic Church of St. Sergius. It was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and rebuilt in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. A crypt below until recently flooded with water is said to be the place where the Holy Family took shelter in their flight from Herod.

There is a strong aroma of “George Washington slept here-ism,” both in the synagogue and the church.



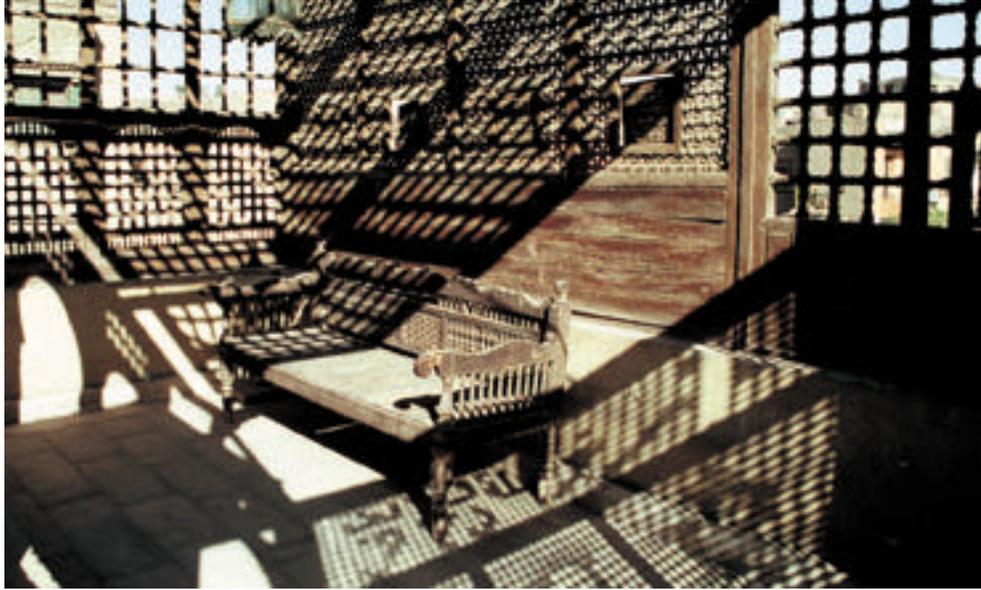
The final stop of the day is the Ahmed Ibn Tulun Mosque, noteworthy for its minaret accessed via an outdoor staircase. Ibn Tulun (835-84), founder of the Tulunid regime that marked the beginning of Islamic art and culture in Egypt, wanted a minaret like the one in his home town of Samarra.

Abutting the Ibn Tulun Mosque is the Gayer-Anderson Museum, made up of two residences—one 16th and the other 17th century—now connected by a bridge. Major John Gayer-Anderson, an English sub-functionary, lived there with a Nubian boy and, judging from the layout of the house, spent most of the years from 1935-42 going up and down stairs. They are nice enough houses, I suppose—a bit rabbit-warrenish. But if you like tiny studies, large marble-floored living rooms with built-in fountains, and hidden balconies where ladies can watch their men from behind ornate wooden scrims, this is the place for you. Lawrence of Arabia

### **Ahmed Ibn Tulun Mosque**

would have lived here had he been an esthete instead of a revolutionary.

Tonight is the farewell banquet hosted by the former Egyptian Ambassador to Germany at his private home. He has invited not only our group but a number of friends. There is a retired general who runs the Sound and Light Shows at Karnak and Abu Simbel. The



**Gayer-Anderson House**

head of Egyptian tourism is here; so, too, the managing director of Akorn tours, our company in Egypt, and his father. The manager of the Akorn office in Cairo is here, and our man in Cairo, Mohamed, along with the former chief of security for Anwar Sadat and the ubiquitous Dr. Zahi, several wives, a travel writer for a local Egyptian newspaper, and the Egyptian Ambassador to Mali along with his wife. It is a stellar cast—so stellar, in fact, I’m wondering what we’re doing here.

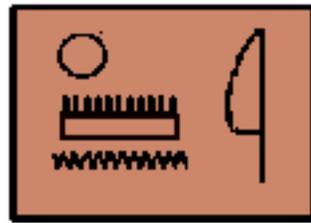
Everyone seems to have found someone to talk to. I talk with the Mali Ambassador’s wife in French, since that and Cairene Arabic are the only languages she knows. We are both relieved when the Ambassador’s wife announces that dinner is ready. Ambassador Said says a few words. I say a few words in reply, taking special pains to thank Sonia for being one of the best tour guides most of us have ever encountered. Then we get down to the business of eating. It is a splendid buffet. At 10 o’clock, we leave. I glance back over my shoulder. The men, visibly relaxed, are sitting in clusters on the balcony, smoking, drinking coffee, and deep into animated conversation. The women in similar clusters inside the large parquet-floored living room do the same. We have, I suspect, already faded from their memory, though the reverse is not true. Years from now, I will still see the crowded Cairo street from the balcony, the vacant apartment across the way being readied for the next tenant, the night sky blackened by the lights of the city, with only the sliver of a moon hanging above the city like the handle of a window shade.

### **Postscript**

We have one more day in Cairo, an accidental day due to a change in the TWA schedule. The group fragments. Some go to Alexandria. Others revisit the Cairo Museum. Still others try on other museums—the Museum of Modern Art, the Mohammed-Khalil collection. I am in this last group.

We take a taxi to the museum. Our driver, Abdul, is a thin man with a balding head. He cannot read a map and expects us to tell him where to go. We take him into back streets that, cleared, wouldn't accommodate a tour bus. There are cars parked on both sides. The street makes no concessions. It is two-way. A car comes in the opposite direction. Abdul reacts like a bull moose defending his territory. The other car finds an indentation in the row of parked cars and ducks in just in time to miss Abdul's onslaught.

Sonia pointed out to me that in hieroglyphics the name Amun is phonetically ambiguous. It could just as easily be pronounced Amen. I end this journal with those syllables on my lips.



Samuel Jay Keyser  
Nancy D. Kelly