



News & Notes

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MOMENTS OF EGYPT'S 63-CENTURY HISTORY RELIVED

View of the "unfinished" Pyramid completed by Snefru for his predecessor, at Meidum (Dynasty IV). Photo courtesy of University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

Bruce B. Williams, our James Henry Breasted research associate, will lead a group of Oriental Institute members through Egypt, March 6-23, 1980; and many of us wish that we could be with the tour! Why is the lure of Egypt so great for those who get to visit it, as well as for those who "armchair travel" at home? No other country seems to appeal so strongly to one's imagination. Herodotus did not curb his enthusiasm when he wrote: "Concerning Egypt itself I shall extend my remarks to a great length, because there is no country that possesses so many wonders."

"What a visitor will discover on a visit to Egypt is a country with a rich texture in which the constant fiber is the Nile, interwoven with Pharaonic, Christian, Islamic patterns and in colors that are African, Asian and European. Together, they create the tapestry that is Egypt." (From Fodor's 1979 Guide)

There would be no Egypt were it not for the Nile, the world's longest river which stretches more than 4,000 miles, flowing from south to north from its trickling beginnings near Lake Victoria in Uganda. It cuts into Egypt from south to north for a distance of almost 900 miles from the Sudan border to Cairo, where it divides into two main branches, each 150 miles long. At the apex of the delta which the Nile forms, cluster 9,000,000 inhabitants of Cairo, now the largest Arab city in the world. Of the 42,000,000

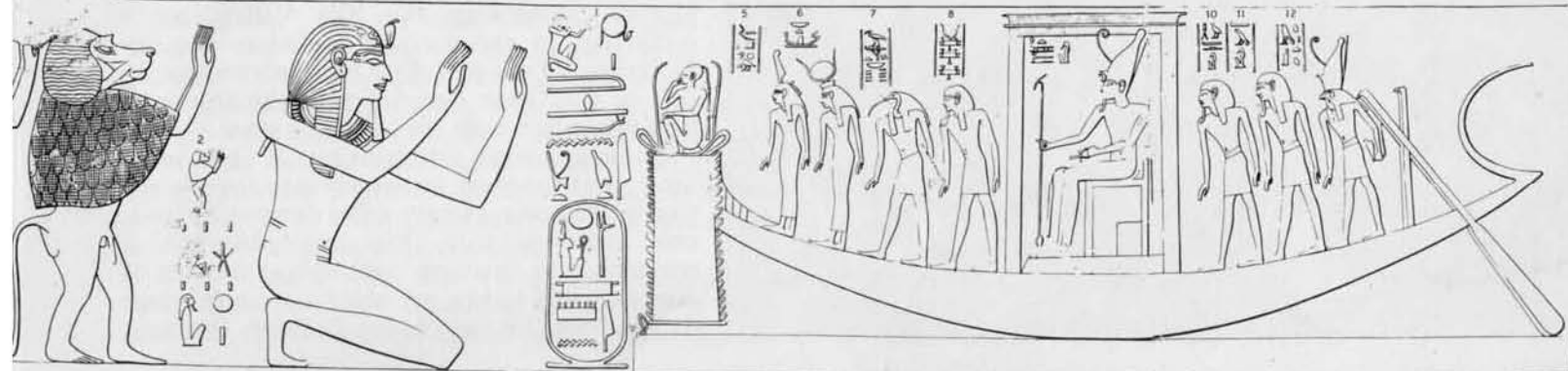
people who make up Egypt's population today, 95% live along the fertile banks of the Nile. The density, which averages almost 4,000 people per square mile in the cultivated areas, is one of the highest in the world and dramatically illustrates the meaning of the Nile to Egypt.

The Nile created Egypt and made it the most fertile country in North Africa. It was the Nile that molded the character of the people, stimulating the ancient Egyptians to great physical and intellectual feats far in advance of their contemporaries. It was the bountiful Nile that made them the most prosperous, the most famous and the most civilized among the nations of antiquity.

Over 4,000 years ago, the Pharaohs visited their temples and countryside by Nile boat. The delightful habit continues today for the visitor to enjoy the ever-changing panorama of the old and the new: The donkey trotting beside the jeep; the young Egyptians in Western clothes alongside the peasant women muffled in discreet black; the farmer toiling in the fields as his ancestors have done for millennia, while his neighbor uses a petrol pump and modern fertilizers.

It is the creative works of Egypt, rather than the picturesque modern scene, however, that continue to bring so many travellers to the Nile. Nowhere else

King adoring solar bark of Re with the gods (left to right) Maat, Hathor, Thoth, Wepwawet, Atum, Hu, Sia, and Horus. From the mortuary complex of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu (Dynasty XX).





Procession of offering bearers from the Theban tomb of Menna (Dynasty XVIII). (The last figures are taken from the register below.)

in the world has so much of the past survived. Bruce Williams does a quick deft sketch of Egyptian history through the centuries as follows:

“Dynasties of Pharaohs ruled the land from Egypt itself, from Asia, Kush and Libya. The Egyptians originated and elaborated one of the most uniquely concentrated civilizations on earth, and the foreign rulers, who took it over, fell under its spell and continued it for over a thousand years following the last native Egyptian Pharaoh.

After Alexander, Macedonians and Roman Emperors in turn ruled Egypt as Pharaohs with the help of Greek administrators and the bronze-clad might of the Macedonian phalanx and the Roman Legion. After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity in the fourth century A.D., Egypt fell to Byzantium and in Coptic-speaking Egypt, to the Christian religion. Local development of classical and Christian culture replaced the ancient culture of the Pharaohs. With the sudden arrival of the Arab general Amr Ibn el-Asi in the mid-seventh century, Egypt began a new transformation from an entirely Christian to a predominantly Muslim country and became, in the process, one of the greatest centers of Arab culture. After over eight centuries of Arab, Fatimid (rulers who originated in the area near the Atlas), and Mameluke rule, Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. In the nineteenth century, Egypt began a period of independent re-emergence under the Albanian soldier Mohammed Ali who revolutionized Egypt’s agriculture, took Syria for a time, and conquered Sudan deep into Africa (Samuel Baker, the explorer, actually governed the province of Equatoria for Egypt). His successors, though involved in building the Suez Canal, achieved less, and Egypt fell for a time under British rule, followed by the post-revolutionary developments more familiar to everyone.

Each of the cultural transformations of Egypt has left its own major record in the visible monuments, artistic and literary heritage of its age. The Pharaohs

Mereruka listening to his wife play the harp. Scene from his tomb in Sakkara (Dynasty VI). This tomb was recorded and published by The Oriental Institute.



and their subjects left us the staggering heritage of the Pyramids and enormous temples, tombs and city mounds which dot Egypt’s landscape from Aswan to the sea; and on a more human scale, an art and literature that still touch modern man across the vast cultural and chronological gulf. Christian Egypt left both the architectural heritage of the churches in the Roman fortress of Babylon in Old Cairo and the Christian art and literature, some of whose most interesting discoveries are only now appearing, and a Christian spiritual tradition that still lives. And Muslim Egypt is the living Egypt, from the great University of El-Azhar to the great architectural masterpieces, the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (eighth century) to the mighty citadel of Salah ed-Din to the exquisite domes over the tomb of Barquq (14th century) in the necropolis. One of the most impressive visible monuments is, of course, the high dam of Aswan.”



Karnak shrine of Sesostris I (Dynasty XII)

The first glimpse of Egypt for the traveller is Cairo with its graceful minarets of stately mosques: It is said that even if a Moslem prayed in a different mosque each day for a year, he would not enter all the mosques of Cairo! Allocation of time should be generous for Cairo’s Museum of Egyptian Antiquities which houses some of the oldest and most beautiful relics of civilization in the world and includes such varied materials as sculpture of all ages, a collection of mummies from a cache of New Kingdom pharaohs, and of course gold covered relics of Tutankhamen. Just nine miles west of Cairo are the three Pyramids of Giza, not only impressive but also the only remaining of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The Pyramids, standing on a plateau overlooking the Nile Valley, are a testimony to the ancients’ belief in the immortality of the soul. Five hundred feet southeast of the Great Pyramid rests the Sphinx, a recumbent lion with the head of a man.

There are many side trips out of Cairo to be taken, but the most important is to the ancient city of Memphis, twenty miles due south. Here, one visits Sakkara, the necropolis which contains over fourteen pyramids, hundreds of mastabas and tombs, art objects and engravings dating from the First to the Thirtieth Dynasty.



The oldest mummy and the oldest papyrus were found here. There is also the looming six-step pyramid built by Imhotep for Pharaoh Zoser about 2,770 B.C. The tomb of Ti, a young handsome nobleman, with its detailed charm and its exquisite carvings, is certainly the most beautiful in Sakkara and that of Mereruka is one of the most elaborate tombs in Egypt. Interesting too are the vast corridors of the Serapeum where the Apis bulls, worshipped during their lifetime, used to be laid to rest in splendor.

Every itinerary is determined by each visitor's available time, but there are certain sites which all archeologists agree must not be missed on the trip south up the Nile to Aswan, some 600 miles from Cairo. The temple of Seti I at Abydos, marks the traditional burial place of Osiris, on the edge of the desert: Many of its painted

reliefs are as brilliant as when they were new and they are among the greatest masterpieces of Egyptian art. The Ptolemaic temple of Hathor at Dendera is almost perfectly preserved and noted for its detailed architecture, chapels, passages and crypts. The temple of Esna, located in the center of town, is dedicated to the ram-headed god Khnum. Its hypostyle hall is the last large building to be erected in the traditional style. The Ptolemaic temple of Horus of Edfu is closely associated with Dendera and is the best preserved temple in Egypt. At Kom Ombo, there is the dual temple built during Ptolemaic and Roman times, one-half of which is dedicated to Horus, the falcon-headed god, and the other half to Sobek, the crocodile-headed god.

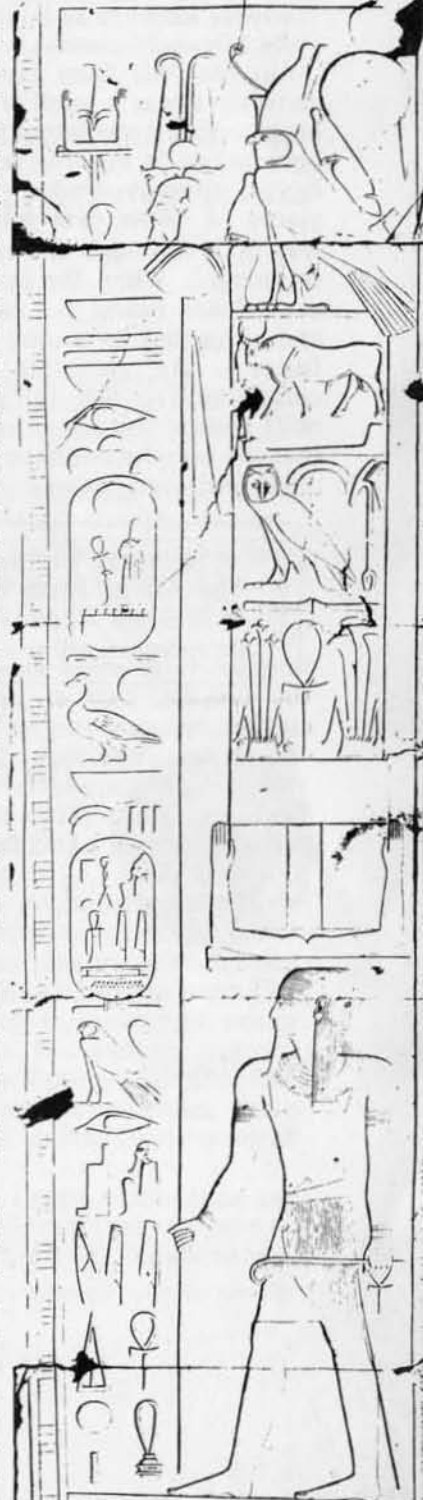
These sites are all in the general vicinity of Luxor, a modern thriving little town. The word "Luxor" is a corruption of the Arabic word "Al-Uksur" meaning "the palaces", and for some fifteen centuries that is what it was—a leading city of ancient Egypt full of palaces. The Greeks called it Thebes and told of its pink granite obelisks, capped with gold; temple doors, plated with electrum; richly painted columns and forecourts covered with sheets of silver. Within this area, there are a greater number of ancient monuments, temples, tombs, and tomb chapels than in any other comparable area in the world.

The original city has completely disappeared beneath the successive rebuilding of the modern town, but two of its temples—Luxor and Karnak—remain.

Once a thousand ram-headed sphinxes, each holding a replica of Pharaoh Amenophis III between the paws, linked together the temples of Luxor and Karnak by an avenue a mile and a half long. It is difficult to imagine exactly what the city of Thebes was like. It acted as a setting not only for the temples of Karnak and Luxor but for the other great mortuary temples whose remains still lie across the river in the western plain near the Valley of the Kings—where in more recent times, we have been particularly interested in tomb 240, the final resting place of Tutankhamen. Divided from the Valley of the Kings by a high ridge of cliffs lies Deir-el-Bahri, the magnificent temple of Queen Hatshepsut, one of the mightiest and wealthiest queens of all time. Then, of course, one cannot miss the Colossi of Memnon, the Ramesseum, and Medinet Habu.

Indispensable reading and photos for capturing the grandeur and glory of Thebes are in Charles F. Nims' Thebes of the Pharaohs (Paul Elek Productions Limited, London, 1965): His historical sketch is thorough yet succinct; the descriptions of the monuments are laced with facts, comments and anecdotes, which only a man with Dr. Nims' years of experience in the area, has been able to put together. The black-and-white photographs are astonishingly alive—be they portraits, monuments, temples or scenery; and the color plates are vivid and glowing. Comments Dr. Nims:

"When Homer sang of



Seti I holding his royal titles. From his temple at Abydos (Dynasty XIX). Above: "Horus, Victorious Bull, appearing in Thebes." Left: "Lion, Lord of the Two Lands, Lord of Action, Menmaatre, son of Re, Lord of Appearances, Seti beloved of Ptah, son of Horus, beloved of Osiris, given life like Re."

Hundred-gated Thebes, her magnificence was fading. Through most of the second millennium before our era Amon, her god, had dominated the religious scene of Egypt and her leaders held sway over the land and built the empire. Much booty from their conquests had been dedicated to the Theban gods, whose temples had grown in size and wealth almost beyond imagination. In the western cliffs and valleys her royalty and officials were buried in splendour. The objects interred with them, the decorations of their tombs and tomb chapels and the endowments for their services sought to assure that the life they had lived along the Nile would continue in the world of the dead."

Up the Nile from Luxor is Aswan, which in the early days was a small trading post. From this small beginning, it grew into a frontier town and eventually became one of the most important places in Pharaonic Egypt. Nearby Philae Island, one of the burial places of Osiris, was inundated when the old dam was built although the temples were not completely submerged. When the new high dam was built, however, Philae Island was caught between the two dams and subjected to strong currents which eroded the temples. An awesome engineering feat was accomplished to save the temples: A coffer dam was built around the island and the water pumped out so that the temples could be carefully dismantled, blocks numbered and moved piece by piece to another

island, completely safe from flooding, and there re-assembled.

Two other islands in the Nile at Aswan which are "musts" for visitors are Elephantine and Kitchener's. Elephantine Island has one of the best preserved Nilometers, as well as many temple remains, obelisks and statues. Kitchener's Island has the famous botanical gardens, plantings for which Kitchener ordered from India and from all over the Middle and Far East.

The building of the new high dam, about four miles upstream of the old town of Aswan, has formed Lake Nasser which stretches far back into the Sudan. The great temples of Abu Simbel, carved from the face of the hill above the former river level, had to be cut into blocks and moved to the crown of the hill. Not only had the great monument of Rameses II and the smaller one of his wife Nefertari to be moved, but the rock that framed them had to be recreated so that the reassembled monuments would appear in their natural setting.

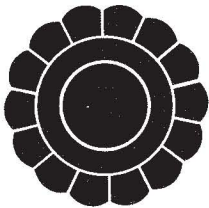
Lawrence of Arabia once said: "You can see more in Egypt in one year than anywhere else in ten." We challenge the Oriental Institute group to see more in Egypt in 17 days than anywhere else in 170 days!

—Elda Maynard

Next Members' Lecture. . . .

The Art of Islam by Esin Atil, of Freer Gallery of Art, on Wednesday, February 13, at 8:00 P.M. in Breasted Auditorium.

Refreshments will be served in the Museum after the lecture.



The Oriental Institute

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