

June 17, 2008

From the 5th to 13th of June, we took a break from our boat projects and flew to Egypt. Using the Internet, we were able to book with just two week's notice an Insight Vacation "Wonders of Egypt" tour. Upon our arrival in Cairo to our departure nine days later, the Egyptian Insight Vacation staff took care of every logistic detail. It was wonderful!

When we booked the tour we knew we were heading to Egypt during the hot season. Many days our visits to the historic sites started early so as to avoid the intense sun between noon and 5 pm. What we didn't know until our arrival in Egypt was that due to the heat, there would be less tourists. For us that was a blessing. Instead of between 35 to 40 people, our tour consisted of just 6 other Americans, 6 Australians, and 2 newlyweds from Singapore. As such, we were more like a caring family than a tour group.

The main historical sites in Egypt that we visited on our tour mainly centered around three periods in Egyptian history: the Old Kingdom (3100-2180 BC), the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC), and the Ptolemaic Period (332-30 BC). The main sites of the Old Kingdom consisted of the pyramids built near Cairo. The main sites of the New Kingdom and Ptolemaic Period consisted of the temples built along the Nile River between Luxor and Aswan.

We started our tour Friday, June 6, with a 4:30 am departure from our Cairo hotel to catch a flight to Luxor. At the Cairo airport we met our tour guide, Ahmed, who would be with us throughout our tour. During our seven days together, Ahmed made the historical sites come to life. He had the amazing ability of being able to give us just the right amount of information, simply stated, so we could absorb and learn from our experiences rather than providing us with too many minute unnecessary details. As a result, throughout the week we grew in our knowledge of Egyptology, a relatively exciting new science. To think that the history and knowledge of the ancient Egyptians had remained hidden for almost 2000 years until the hieroglyphics code found on the Rosetta stone was finally deciphered in 1822! Even today, our understanding of ancient Egypt is continually being redefined with new discoveries.

Luxor stood upon the ruins of ancient Thebes, the capital during the New Kingdom. During this period, Egypt became one of the most powerful countries in the ancient world, acquiring great amounts of wealth. Much of its wealth was channeled into massive building projects in and around Thebes, its capital, with each successive ruler wishing to leave his imprint. One of the greatest pharaohs during the New Kingdom was Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great. During his 67 year reign (the longest reign by far of any pharaoh in this period) he spent much on royal construction projects, definitely preserving his name for posterity.

In the morning we visited the huge, sprawling temple complex at Karnak dedicated to Amun-Ra, the king of the gods (basically the sun god). To the Egyptians, the sun was regarded as the source of all life, so when Thebes became the Egyptian capital, its local Theban deity Amun became linked with the ancient Egyptian sun god Ra, thus making Amun-Ra. This magnificent temple complex at Karnak covered 68 acres and was considered to be the largest temple in Egypt. It was 3000 years old and had been built over 1300 years with successive pharaohs adding to, changing, and embellishing its original temple. Then, for more than 1000 years it lay buried under sand until excavations began in the mid-1800's.

Next Page

Page 1

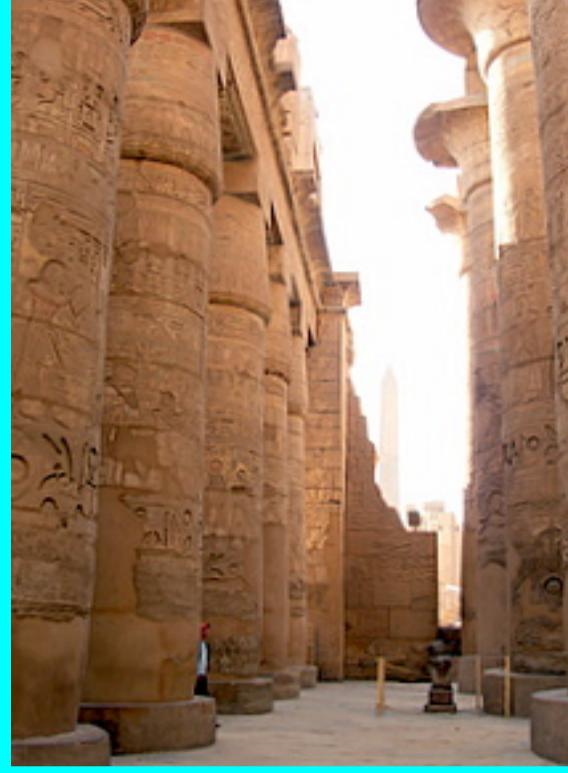
Much of the highlights to our visit of Karnak Temple reflected around Ramses the Great. His indelible mark could be seen throughout. We entered the temple along the avenue of ram-headed sphinxes. Each sphinx had the head of a ram (the symbol of the god Amun-Ra) and the body of a lion, and each was shown protecting the pharaoh Ramses II under its chin. The entrance into the temple was through the first pylon (an enormous gateway with towers), 49 feet in thickness, and one of nine pylons at the temple. Upon entering the first courtyard, the temple of Ramses III lay on one side and at the far end lay the Great Hypostyle Hall, built mostly by Ramses II and said to be the largest in the world. Next to the hall's entrance stood the statue of Ramses II made from one solid piece of rose granite from Aswan. It stood 50 feet high and weighed 37 tons. Ramses II was shown wearing the double crown of Egypt (the symbol for a united Lower and Upper Egypt) and standing in mummified form to protect his heart, which the ancient Egyptians felt contained the soul. At his feet was his favorite wife Nefertari.



[Next Page](#)

Page 2

The Great Hypostyle Hall was immense! Inside were 134 gigantic columns, each about 75 feet high, consisting of 12 open-bud papyrus columns and 122 smaller closed-bud columns, all created to mimic a primeval papyrus marsh. Originally the hall had been covered. Throughout, we saw Ramses II's cartouches (his signature) displayed. Each pharaoh always signed with two cartouches, one to represent his birth name and one his crowned name.



Once outside, we viewed the obelisks. Each obelisk, just like each statue, had come from one solid piece of granite from Aswan. Originally there were 13 obelisks, but 7 had been taken to Italy. The obelisk standing in St. Peter's Square actually came from this temple. The tops of all the obelisks were made in the shape of a pyramid and originally faced with silver and gold, mixed so as to catch the sun's rays. To the ancient Egyptians, an obelisk signified a place of worship. What a sight it must have been to have had the sun's first rays reflecting off the tops of all these obelisks, especially at this temple of Amun-Ra!



[Next Page](#)

Page 3

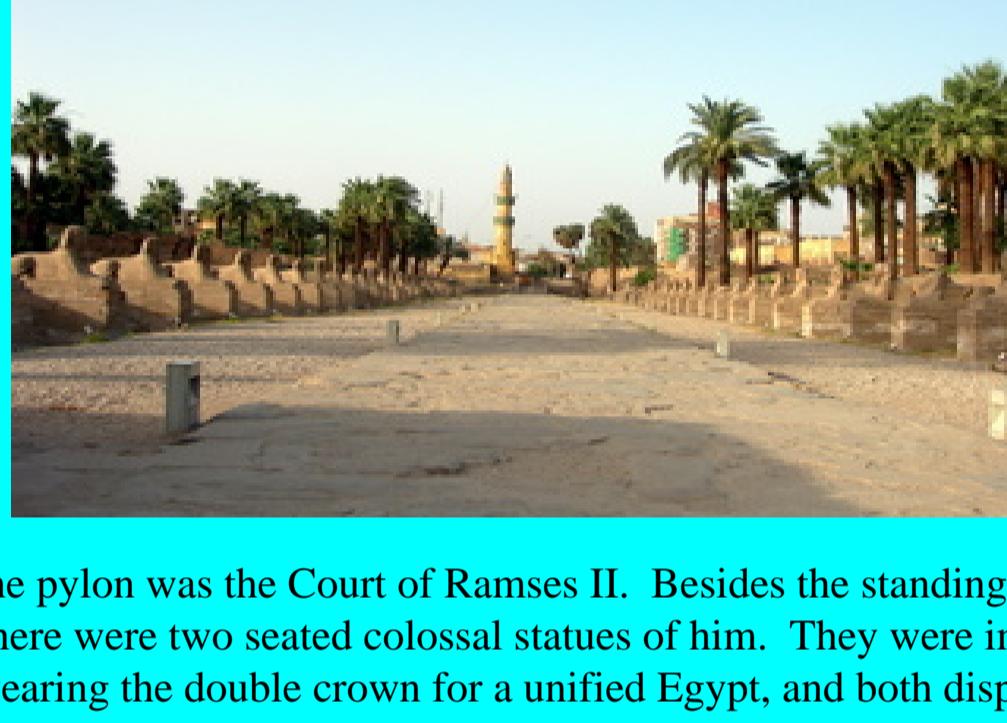
On our walk around the temple, we visited the sacred lake where the priests use to purify themselves before rituals. Looking at the temple from different angles, we were again struck by its sheer size. Except for the statues and obelisks, this entire temple had been completely made out of sandstone, including all the columns. Usually sandstone is not a long-lasting building material, but here in Egypt it never rains. The last rain was 10 years ago for 10 minutes, and so the sandstone has survived for 3000 years. After our visit to Karnak Temple, we boarded our cruise boat, the M/S Giselle, where we were to enjoy for the next 4 days a cruise up the Nile River from Luxor to Aswan, plus visits to the historic sites along the way.



[Next Page](#)

Page 4

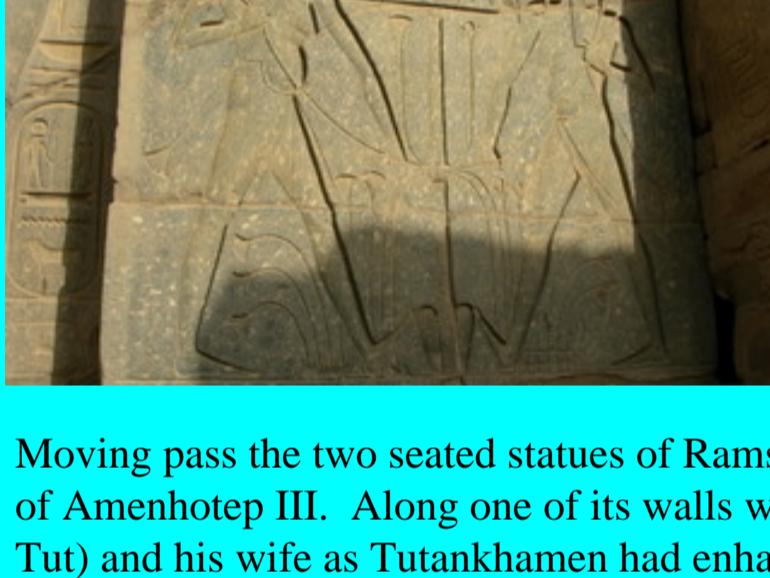
After lunch and a restful afternoon onboard our cruise boat, we reconvened at 5 pm to visit Luxor Temple. This temple had been begun by Amenhotep III in the 14th century BC and completed by Ramses II in the 13th century BC. Like Karnak Temple, it was dedicated mainly to Amun-Ra. The pylon forming the façade of the temple had been built by Ramses II, and in front were two colossal statues of him and one obelisk (the other had been given as a gift to France). Outside the entrance to the temple lay the Avenue of Sphinxes. In ancient times, this avenue joined Luxor Temple to Karnak Temple, 1.2 miles away. Processions between the two temples must have been impressive.



Just inside the pylon was the Court of Ramses II. Besides the standing statues of Ramses II, there were two seated colossal statues of him. They were impressive! Both were wearing the double crown for a unified Egypt, and both displayed the false beard, the symbol of royalty. Underneath each seated statue were two reliefs: the top relief showing the Nile god Hapi tying the knot between Lower and Upper Egypt (indicating the unification of Egypt) and the bottom relief showing Ramses' enemies (the Hittites and the North Africans) as his slaves. The significance of Ramses II being seated over both acknowledged that he was ruler over all; his feet on top of his enemies denoted he was stepping on them.



[Next Page](#)

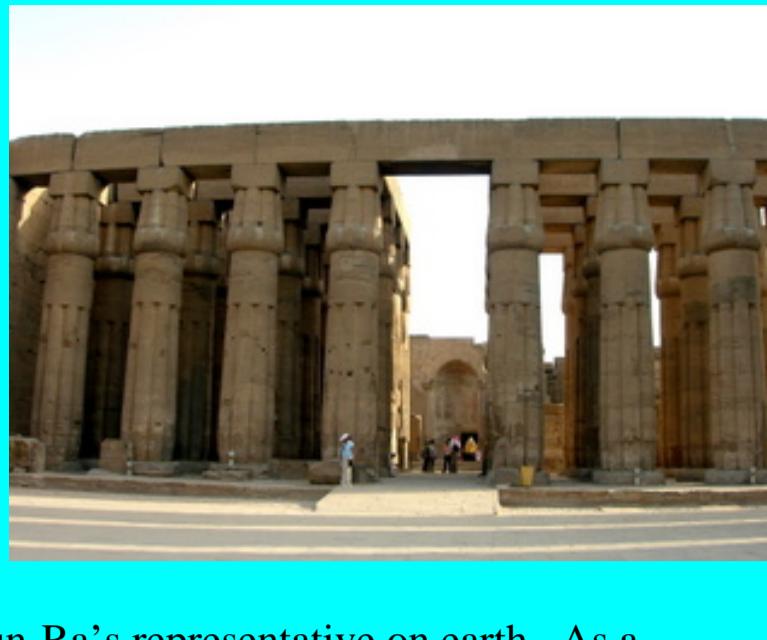


Moving pass the two seated statues of Ramses II, we walked through the Colonnade of Amenhotep III. Along one of its walls were statues of Tutankhamen (Boy King Tut) and his wife as Tutankhamen had enhanced these walls during his short reign. Beyond the colonnade was the Court of Amenhotep III. Upon entering, we were impressed with the double rows of tall papyrus columns that surrounded much of the court. It was interesting to hear that the University of Chicago, our older son's alma mater, had been instrumental in their restoration. From our guide, we also learned that the university had been involved in restoration work at Karnak Temple, at the Sphinx next to the pyramids, in the diggings at the Valley of the Kings, and had contributed new theories to the science of Egyptology. On the opposite end of the court was the hypostyle hall built by Amenhotep III with its 32 papyrus columns.



[Next Page](#)

Page 6



To ancient Egyptians, the pharaoh was Amun-Ra's representative on earth. As a result, it was important for each pharaoh to validate his claim to be the son of Amun-Ra. After passing through the hypostyle hall, we entered some smaller rooms, or sanctuaries. One of these sanctuaries had once housed the sacred barge of Amun-Ra.

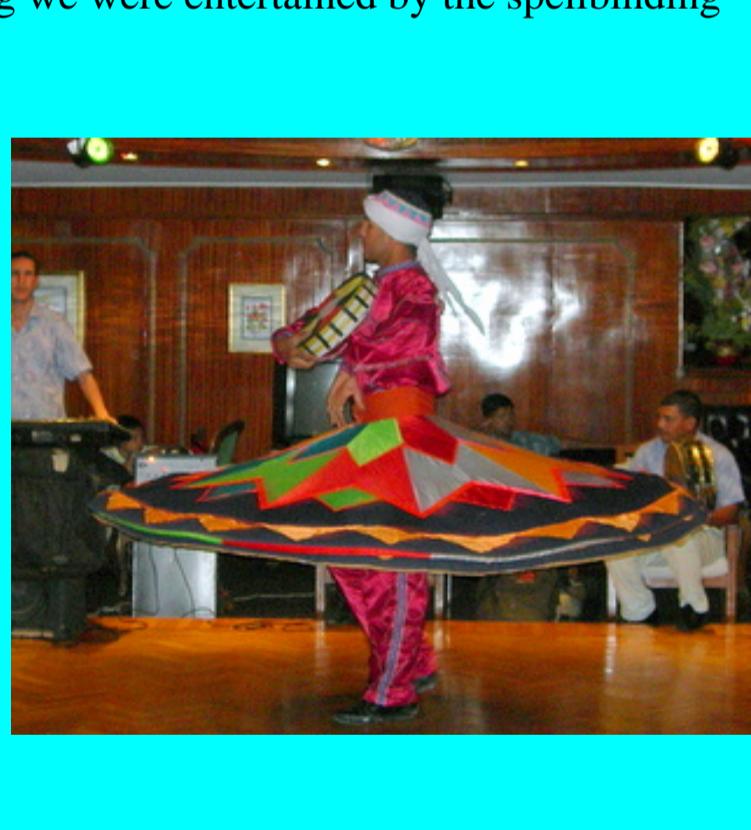
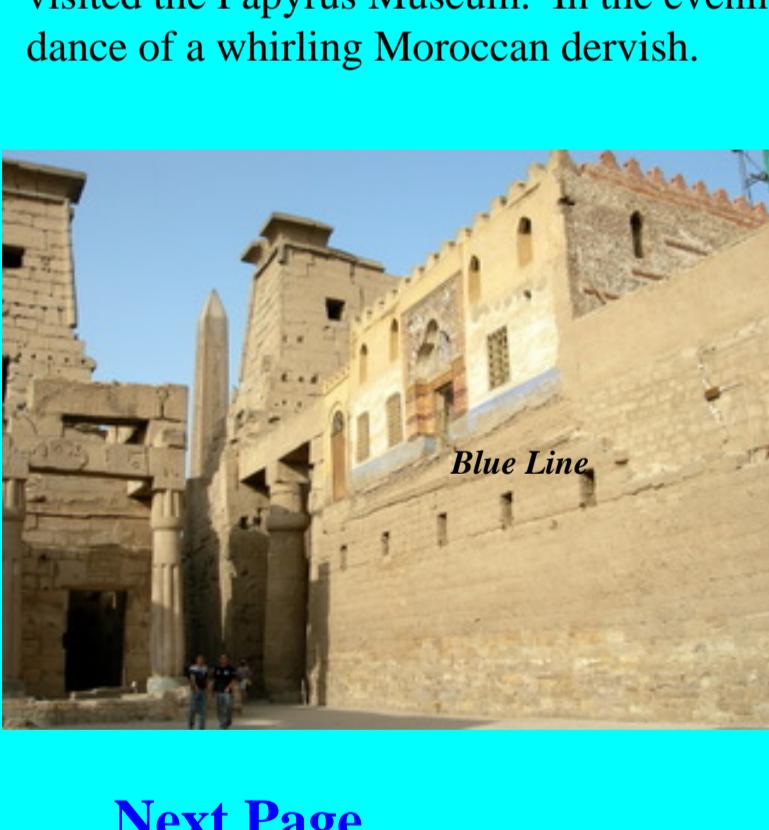
When Alexander the Great became ruler of Egypt in the 4th century BC after driving the Persians out of Egypt, he was recognized by the native Egyptians as a descendent of the pharaohs. To help validate his claim to be the son of Amun-Ra, he rebuilt this

sanctuary and redecorated one of its walls with raised reliefs of himself making offerings to Amun-Ra. Thereafter, all subsequent Ptolemaic monarchs used this same tactic of assimilation into the Egyptian culture. Hence, the time during the Ptolemaic Period was generally a peaceful one as the Ptolemies ruled like traditional pharaohs.



Over time, Luxor Temple became engulfed in sand and silt, and a village grew up over its grounds. In the late 1800's when the temple was rediscovered, excavation work could not begin until the village was relocated. Only the 13th century mosque was allowed to remain, thus providing us a picture today of the original height of the street level (blue line) before excavation.

On our way back to our cruise boat we visited the Papyrus Museum. In the evening we were entertained by the spellbinding dance of a whirling Moroccan dervish.



[Next Page](#)

The Nile River represented “life” to the ancient Egyptians. As the sun rose on its east bank and set on its west bank, so too lay the Egyptian temples along the Nile, with the cult temples (for living), like Karnak and Luxor, on the Nile’s East Bank and the mortuary temples (for afterlife) on the Nile’s West Bank. Saturday, we departed at 7 am from the boat to visit the mortuary temples and tombs on the West Bank. Our first stop was the Colossi of Memnon. These two impressive colossal statues, 60 feet high, were all that was left of the Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III.



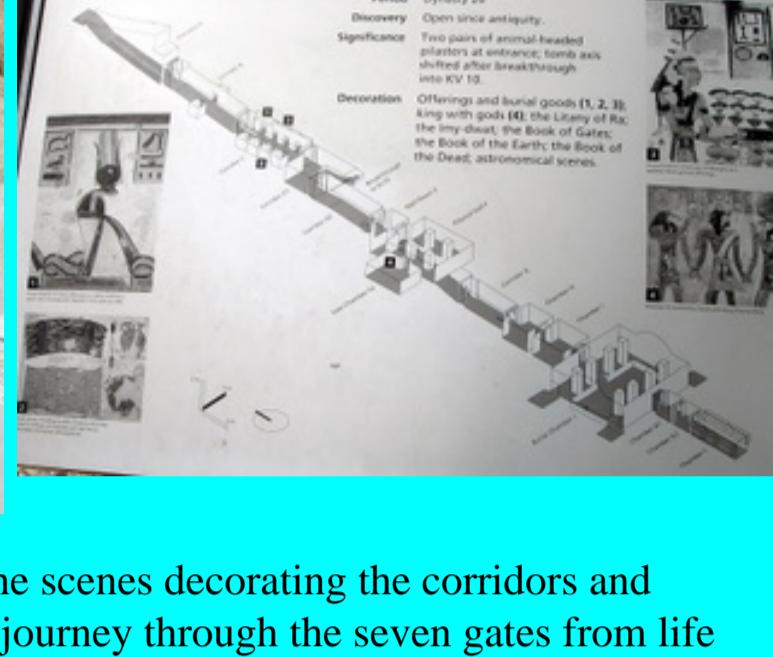
Afterwards, we visited the restored Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut with its three grand terraces. Unlike cult temples that were decorated with religious scenes, mortuary temples were decorated with scenes telling about the deceased person’s life. As it was important for each pharaoh to legitimize his claim to be the son of Amun-Ra, Queen Hatshepsut did this by portraying herself in statues as a male king with a false beard and by depicting her divine birth on a wall scene. She also dedicated part of her temple to her father, Tuthmosis I, as a way to legitimize her right to the throne even though she was a woman. In the Chapel of Anubis at her mortuary temple, we captured a scene of Tuthmosis I making offerings to Ra-Harakhty, the god of afterlife, most likely on Hatshepsut’s behalf.



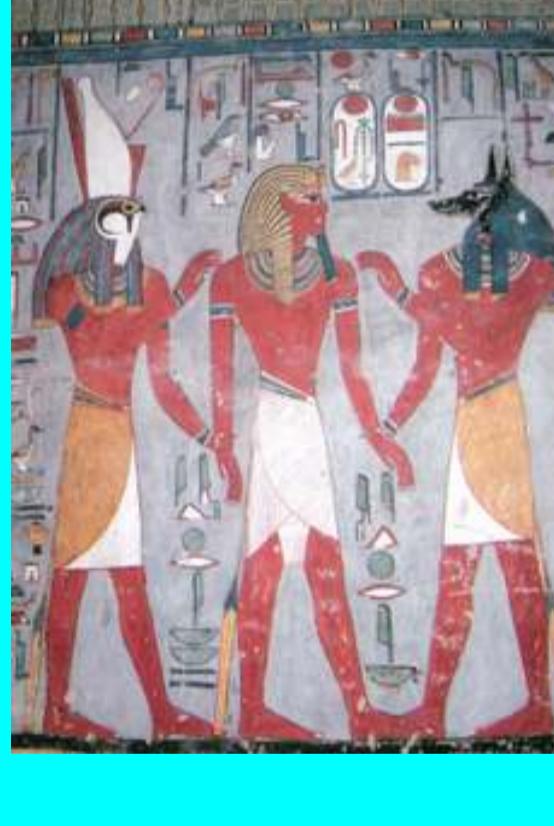
[Next Page](#)

Page 8

Next, we traveled to the Valley of the Kings, the necropolis of the New Kingdom pharaohs. In order to stop the thieves from breaking into the tombs, the New Kingdom pharaohs dug their tombs deep in the secluded Theban hills and away from their mortuary temples. In all, 62 tombs have been discovered in the Valley of the Kings, but only the tomb of Tutankhamen (King Tut) was found intact. All the others had been robbed of their possessions. Of the 62 tombs found, only 22 were open, and many of those were presently closed for restoration. During our stay, we visited three tombs: Ramses I, Ramses III, and Ramses IV.

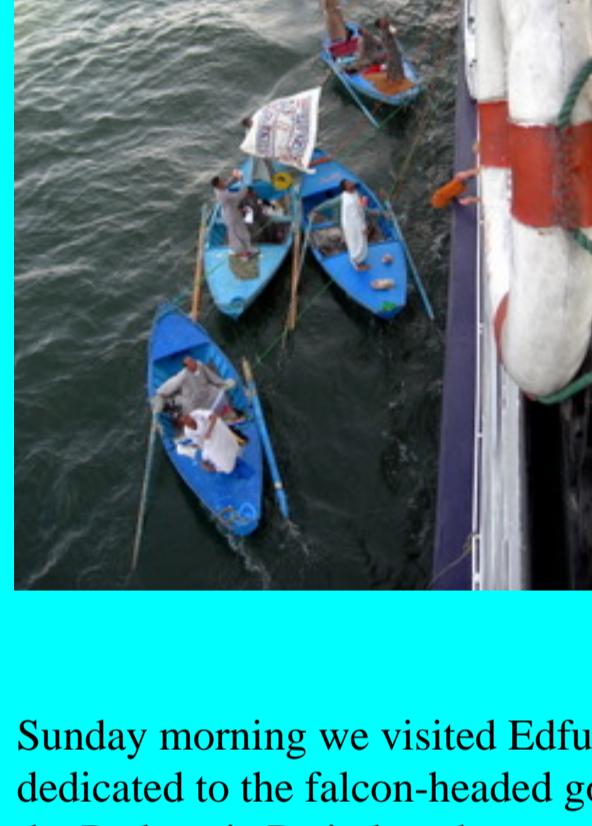


Although the tombs were empty, many of the scenes decorating the corridors and burial chambers to assist the pharaoh in his journey through the seven gates from life to eternal afterlife were still in reasonable shape, even after 3000 years. Some of the scenes we captured were: Anubis, god of mummification, preparing the mummy for its journey through the afterworld; writings from the Book of the Dead in the tomb of Ramses IV (basically, the Book of the Dead was a “symbolic biography” intended to show the person as good, even if not, in order to be granted eternal afterlife); a painting inside the tomb of Ramses I showing Horus, god of protection, and Anubis, god of mummification, escorting him on his journey; and an offering scene of Ramses I giving essence to Maat, goddess of justice. Before returning to the boat we visited an alabaster workshop.



[Next Page](#)

At noon we started our cruise up the Nile River. Today our sail took us from Luxor to Edfu via the Esna Lock. As we approached the lock, the vendors came out in their boats. From fifty feet down they conducted their business. It was definitely entertaining. If someone was interested in looking at or buying, the vendor would throw his merchandise fifty feet up in the air to the top deck. If a price was agreed on between buyer and seller, the money was then returned in the bag. If not, the merchandise was returned. Amazingly, nothing ever went into the water. We docked for the night in Edfu and enjoyed a special candlelight dinner onboard our cruise boat.

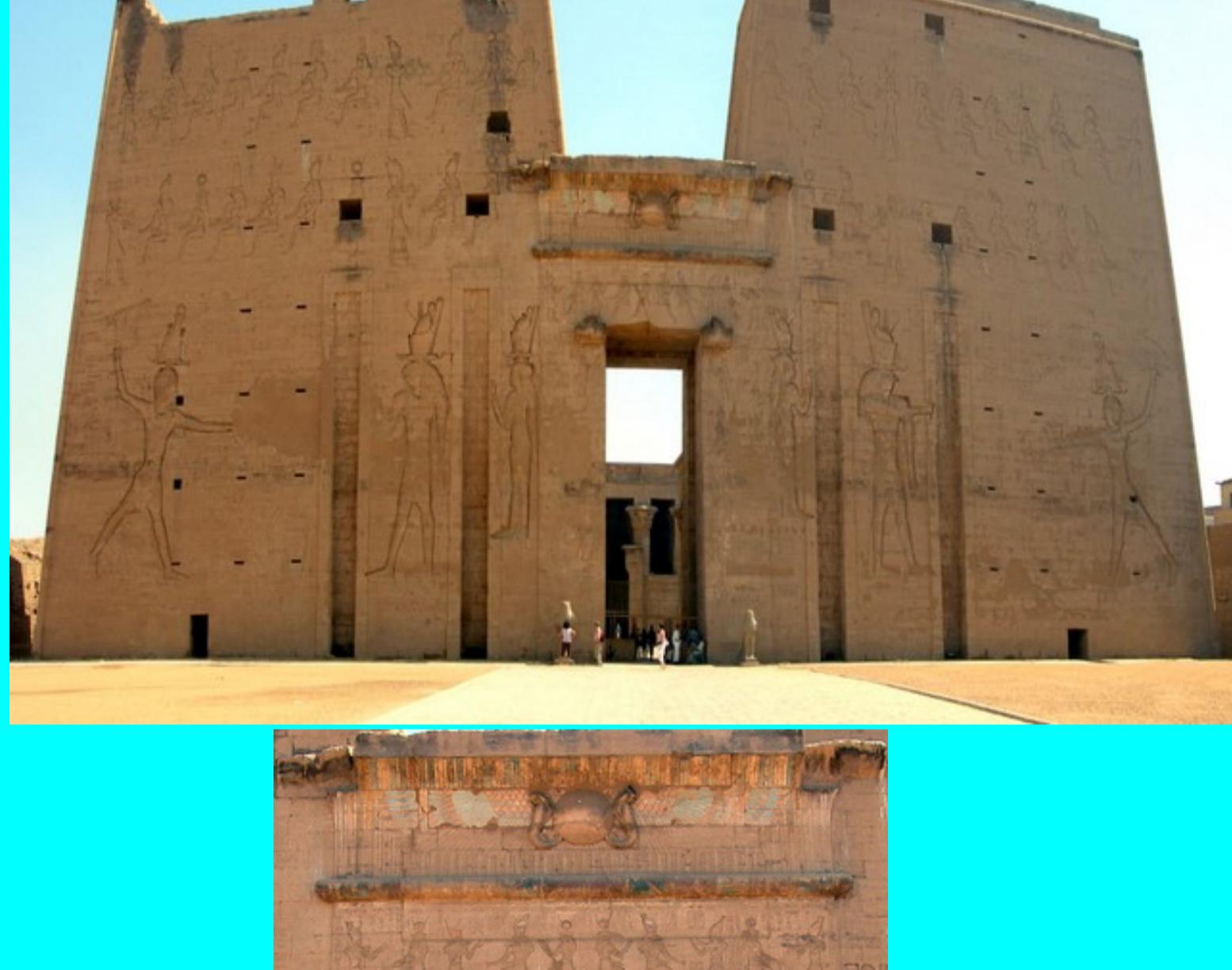


Sunday morning we visited Edfu Temple, the best preserved temple in Egypt, dedicated to the falcon-headed god Horus, the god of protection. It was built during the Ptolemaic Period, and so was 1000 years younger than either Karnak or Luxor Temple. It had been started by Ptolemy III in 237 BC and completed by Ptolemy XII in 57 BC. Due to its preservation, it gave us an excellent picture of the major components comprising all Egyptian temples -- the pylon, the open court, the hypostyle hall, and the inner sanctuaries -- even making more meaningful that which we had seen earlier at Karnak and Luxor Temples.

[Next Page](#)

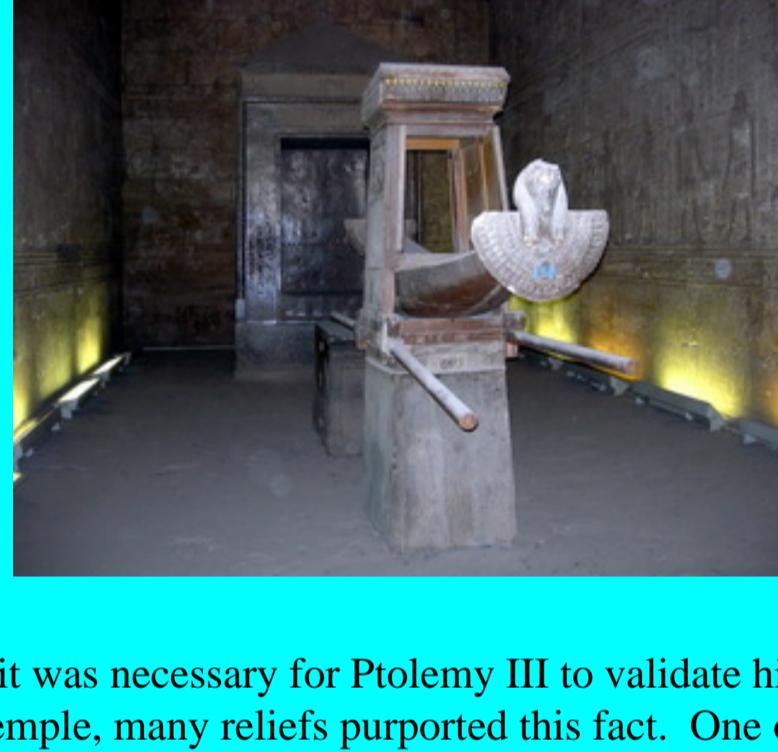
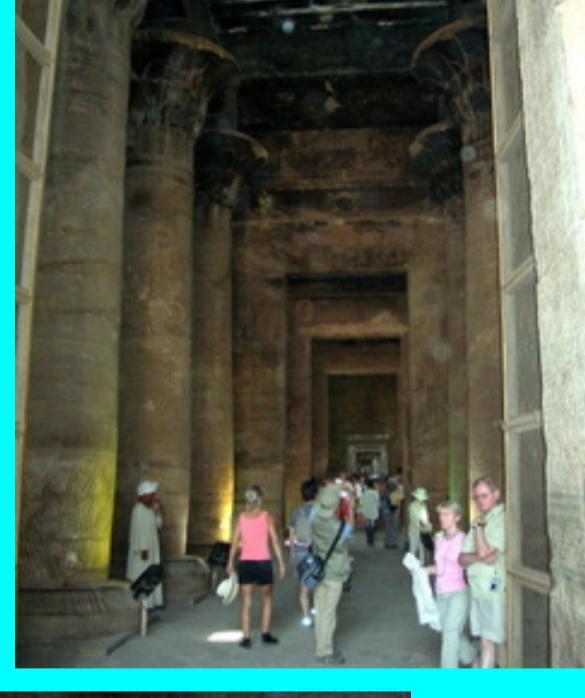
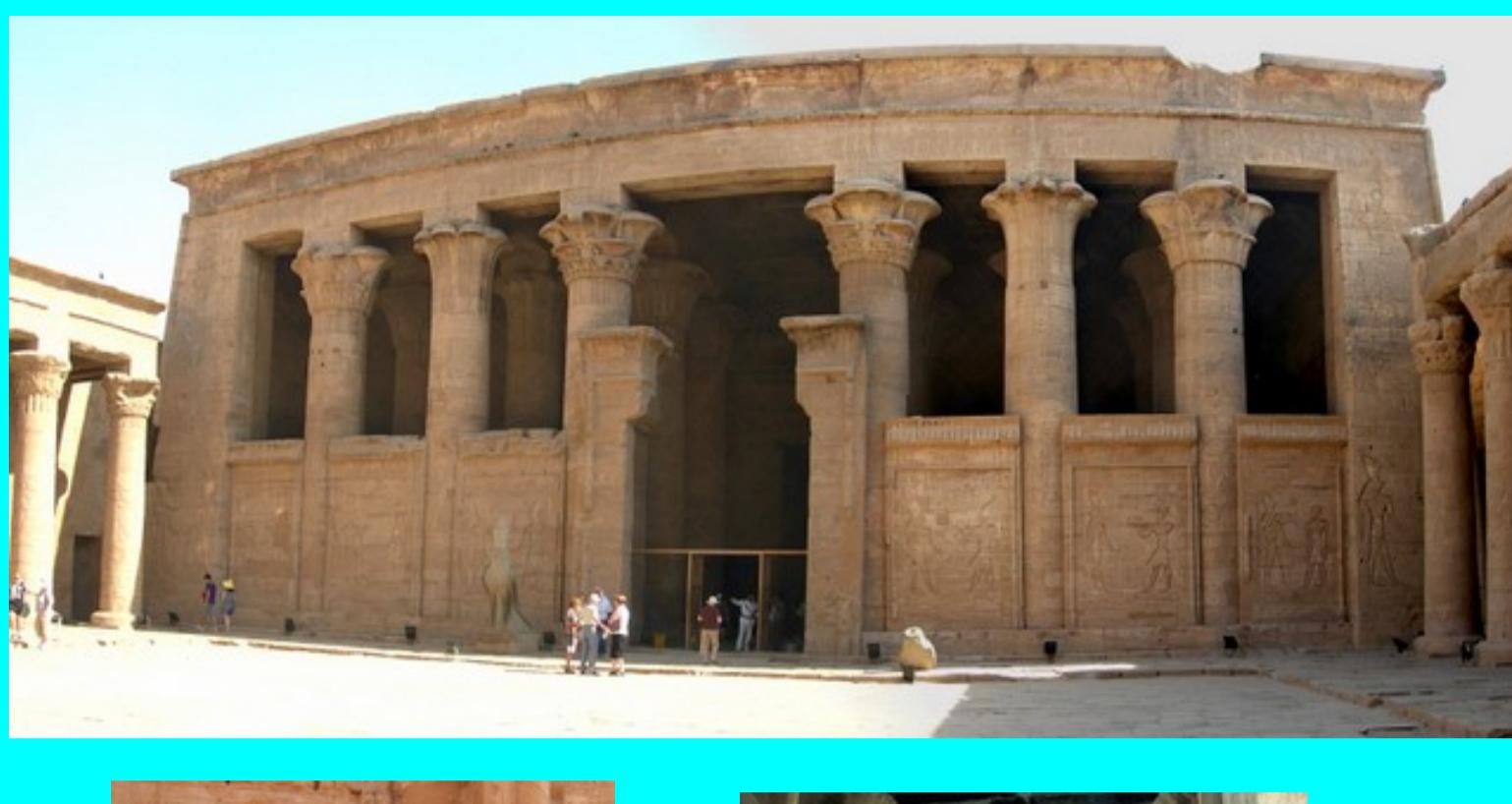
Page 10

At Edfu Temple, the first pylon (118 feet high) was decorated with scenes of Ptolemy XII defeating his enemies in front of Horus and Hathor. Above the pylon's entrance was the design of the winged solar disk (Horus) and the two cobras, typically shown above temple entrances to protect the temple from evil spirits and harm. Inside the first pylon was the open court, the only court into which commoners were ever allowed. At the opposite end of the court was the covered hypostyle hall. Only the pharaoh, high officials, and priests were ever allowed to enter this hall. The capitals on top of the hypostyle hall's columns were Greco-Roman in architecture, designed to represent alternately the lotus flower (symbol of Upper Egypt) and the papyrus (symbol of Lower Egypt). Standing guard at the entrance to the hypostyle hall stood the stately black granite statue of Horus wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Once through the hypostyle hall, we entered the inner sanctuaries. In the innermost sanctuary, directly in line with the entrance to the temple, was the "holy of holiest" shrine originally housing the statue of Horus, the temple god. Only the pharaoh and high priests were ever allowed to enter this area. Today a replica of Horus' sacred barge is presently in front of the shrine; the original one is in Germany.



[Next Page](#)

Page 11



Like all pharaohs, it was necessary for Ptolemy III to validate his claim to the throne. In Edfu Temple, many reliefs purported this fact. One of our favorite reliefs was the beautiful high relief of Ptolemy III being anointed with protective incense by the two gods, the cobra and the falcon (Horus). Interestingly, in this relief he's also portrayed in "ideal" athletic art profile, with his entire body in profile except for his broad shoulders and flat stomach. As we left the temple and looked out at the surrounding area, the orange buildings in the distance provided us a picture of the original height of the street level before excavation. This temple lay buried under sand and silt for almost 2000 years before being excavated.



[Next Page](#)

Page 12

Our cruise boat, M/S Giselle, was waiting for us along the riverside at Edfu when we returned. Once everyone was onboard, we set sail for Kom Ombo. Looking out pass the vegetation along the Nile River, we could see the beginnings of the Sahara Desert on the high side of the Nile. It was easy to see how the ancient Egyptians revered this river as most of Egypt is desert. Only 6% of the country is situated within the Nile Valley.



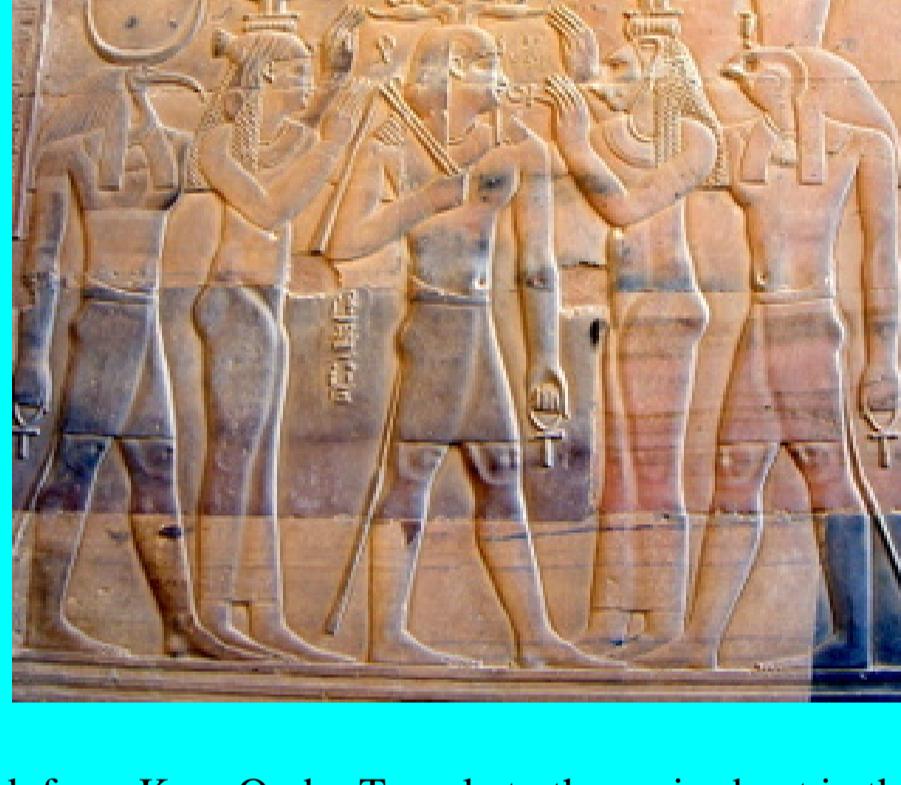
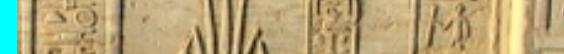
The Kom Ombo Temple was located right by the river dock in Kom Ombo. Like Edfu Temple, this temple was Greco-Roman in architecture and built by the Ptolemies. This temple was unusual as it was dedicated to two gods, Horus (god of protection) and Sobek (crocodile god of the Nile). As a result, it was split into two parts with two entrances and with each side housing its own god. The left side was dedicated to Horus; the right side was dedicated to Sobek. In ancient Egypt, cult temples were dedicated either to a god loved or a god feared. Along this part of the Nile, crocodiles were feared; people lost their lives to these reptiles. So, what better way to appease the crocodile than to elevate it to a god and then ask for its protection. Inside the hypostyle hall, painted parts of the original 2000 year old ceiling showing the vulture (a lesser god of protection) could still be seen.



[Next Page](#)

Page 13

This temple also contained some excellent high reliefs. One of our favorites was the high relief of Hapi, the god associated with the annual flooding of the Nile. Our guide Ahmed explained to us the importance of Hapi to the Egyptian people, because a good flood meant more fertile soil for crops. Therefore, the god, even though male, was always pictured with a full breast and a large belly to represent the fertility of the Nile. Another of our favorites was the high relief of the gods feeding the “key of life” to the pharaoh (a Ptolemy). The god furthest to the right of the pharaoh was Horus. He was always shown in reliefs with pharaohs as he was the pharaohs' main protector god.



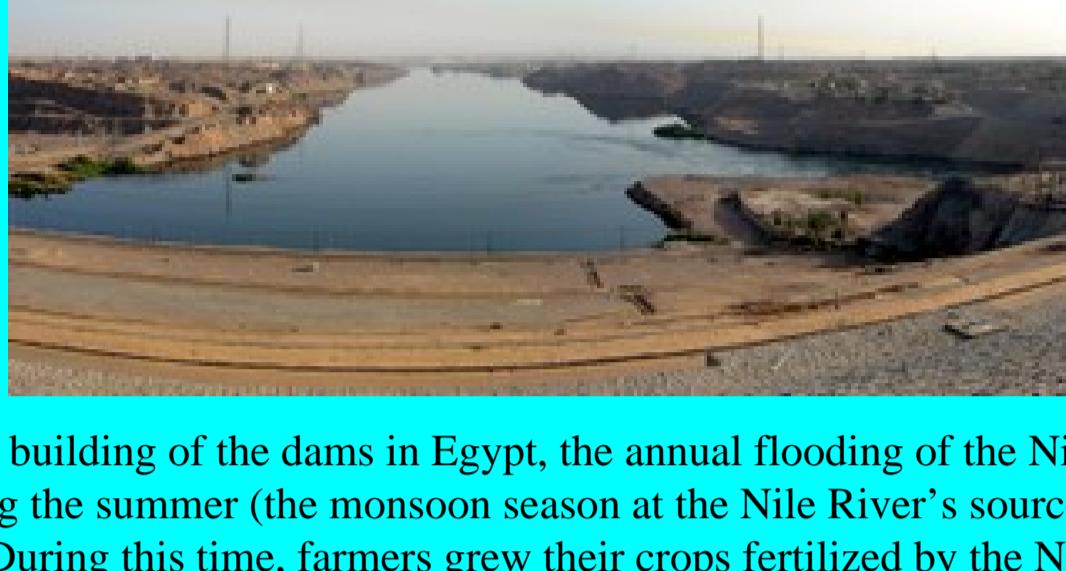
The walk back from Kom Ombo Temple to the cruise boat in the late afternoon was pleasant with the Nile River in the background. At the Kom Ombo wharf, our boat was one of three cruise boats. It was hard to imagine that during the peak of the tourist season, 35 cruise boats could easily have been crowding this wharf at any one time, and that 20,000 people probably passed through this site on any one day. Our guide Ahmed said that in the high season there were 310 cruise ships on the Nile River. We couldn't even begin to imagine! That evening we sailed on to Aswan from Kom Ombo, arriving there just before 10 pm. Especially memorable were the lights from the Aswan bridge as we passed underneath.

[**Next Page**](#)

Page 14

Monday we enjoyed the sights of Aswan, Egypt's most southern city. First, we visited Aswan's High Dam. Aswan Dam, the initial dam, had been built by the British and opened in 1902, but it was unable to restrain the Nile River's erratic flooding. Hence another dam, the High Dam, was built by Nasser in the 1960's with the help of the Soviet Union. When it opened in 1971, this dam provided enough hydroelectric power for Egypt's entire population of 20,000,000 people.

Unfortunately, since then, Egypt's population has quadrupled, and this is no longer the case.



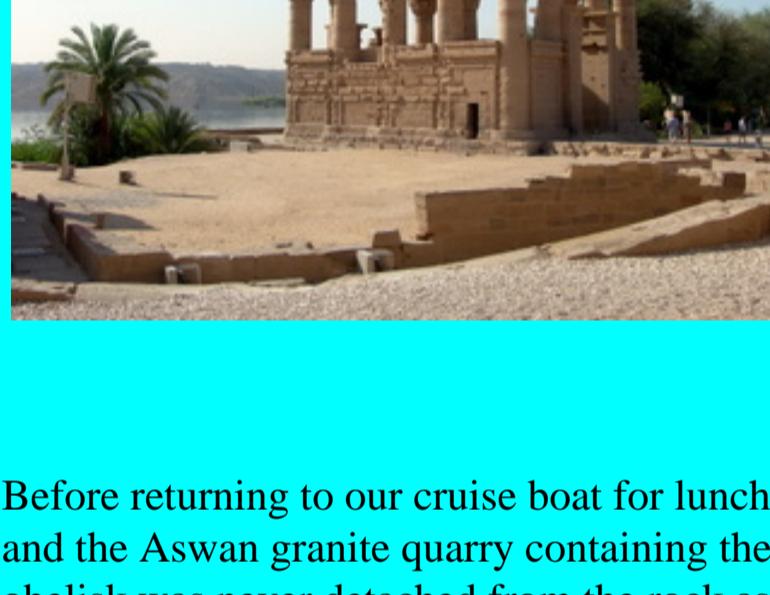
Prior to the building of the dams in Egypt, the annual flooding of the Nile took place during the summer (the monsoon season at the Nile River's source in Uganda). During this time, farmers grew their crops fertilized by the Nile River's rich silt deposits. With the building of the two dams, Egypt's cultivable land increased and crops were able to be grown three times a year instead of just once. But without the annual flooding, the farmers have had to resort to artificial fertilizers, causing some controversy among Egyptians.

The High Dam's opening also created Lake Nasser, the largest artificial lake in the world. Its formation caused the relocation of 800,000 Nubians, including 52 Nubian villages. Many of the Nubians resettled in Aswan. Since the time of the pharaohs, this African tribe had called the area south of Aswan their home until the construction of the High Dam. In addition, 14 Egyptian temples became submerged when the lake was filled. Starting in 1972, the international community, led by UNESCO, dismantled each of the 14 temples using cofferdams and then reassembled them elsewhere.

[Next Page](#)

Page 15

After the dam, we visited Philae Temple, the second largest temple to be relocated by the construction of the dam. Originally this temple had been situated on the sacred island of Philae before becoming submerged. It was moved to a nearby island, landscaped even to look like the original island. Before moving, this temple was dismantled into 9000 pieces, marked, and then reassembled at its new location. The entire project took 8 years to complete. As we approached the sacred island by boat, the profile of the temple with its majestic pylons was an impressive sight. Philae temple was Greco-Roman in architecture, took 120 years to build, and was dedicated to Isis, one of the important goddesses in Egyptian mythology as she was the goddess of magic and mother of Horus. During Roman times, a pavilion for Emperor Trajan was built at the water's edge when he was suffering from rheumatism, and during the 7th and 8th centuries, Arab soldiers used to sharpen their swords on the temple walls, leaving marks behind.



Before returning to our cruise boat for lunch, we visited an essence “perfume” factory and the Aswan granite quarry containing the Unfinished Obelisk. This particular obelisk was never detached from the rock as it was cracked in several spots. If used, it would have been 138 feet high and would have weighed 1,150 tons.



[Next Page](#)

Page 16

Later that afternoon we enjoyed a ride in a felucca, the traditional wooden sailing boat used along the protected waters of the Nile. We were very impressed with its sailing ability.



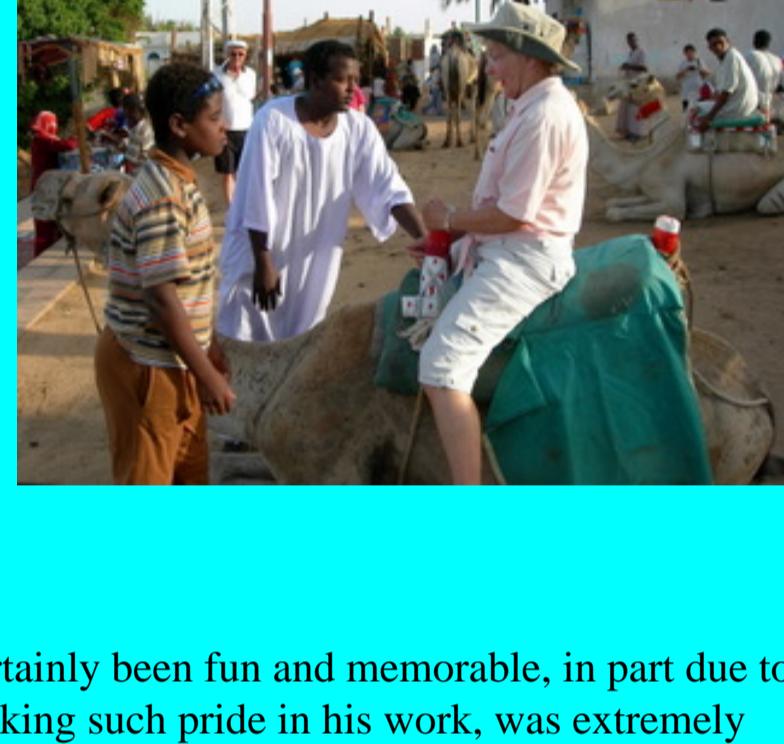
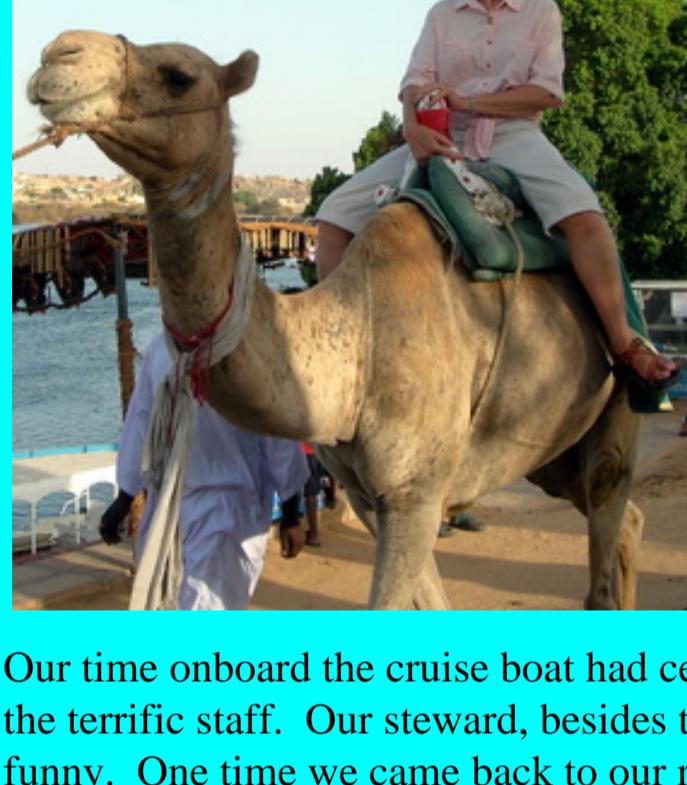
After that, we traveled via motorboat to a Nubian village. Here, we visited one of the village homes, and Mary took her first camel ride. Typical of most village houses along the Nile, these houses were made of mud bricks and straw roofs. The mud kept the houses cool, and only straw was needed as it never rained. During our visit inside the house, we were told that before the dam was built and there was just one harvest, Nubians use to dry and store their food for the year in these baskets hung from the ceiling.



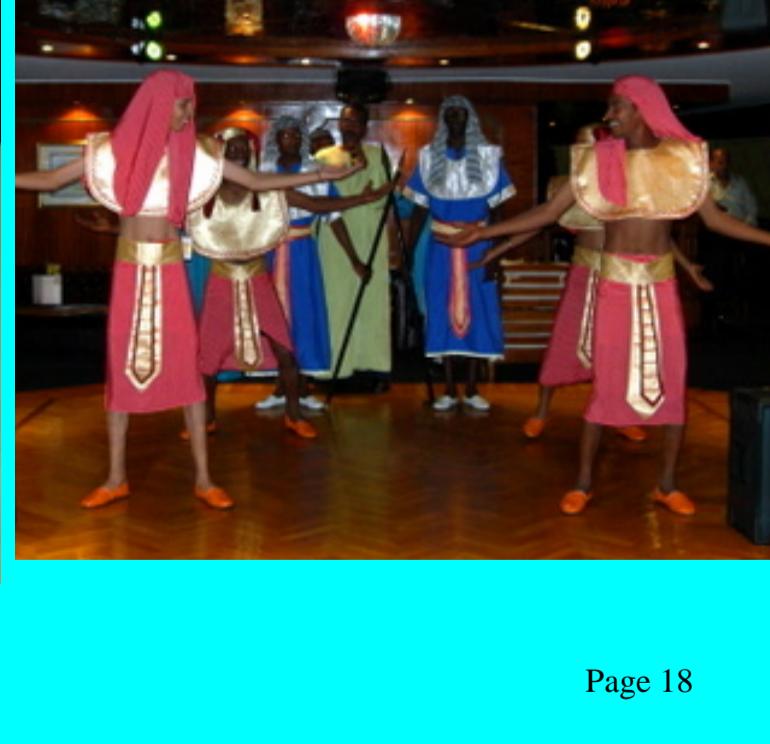
[Next Page](#)

Page 17

As for Mary's first camel ride, it was an experience. The saddle, although authentic, was not very sturdy, and there were no stirrups. This caused the rider to feel very insecure at times on top of the camel realizing how far away she was from the ground. To get off a camel, the art was to first lean back as the camel started down and then lean forward, definitely a learned skill!



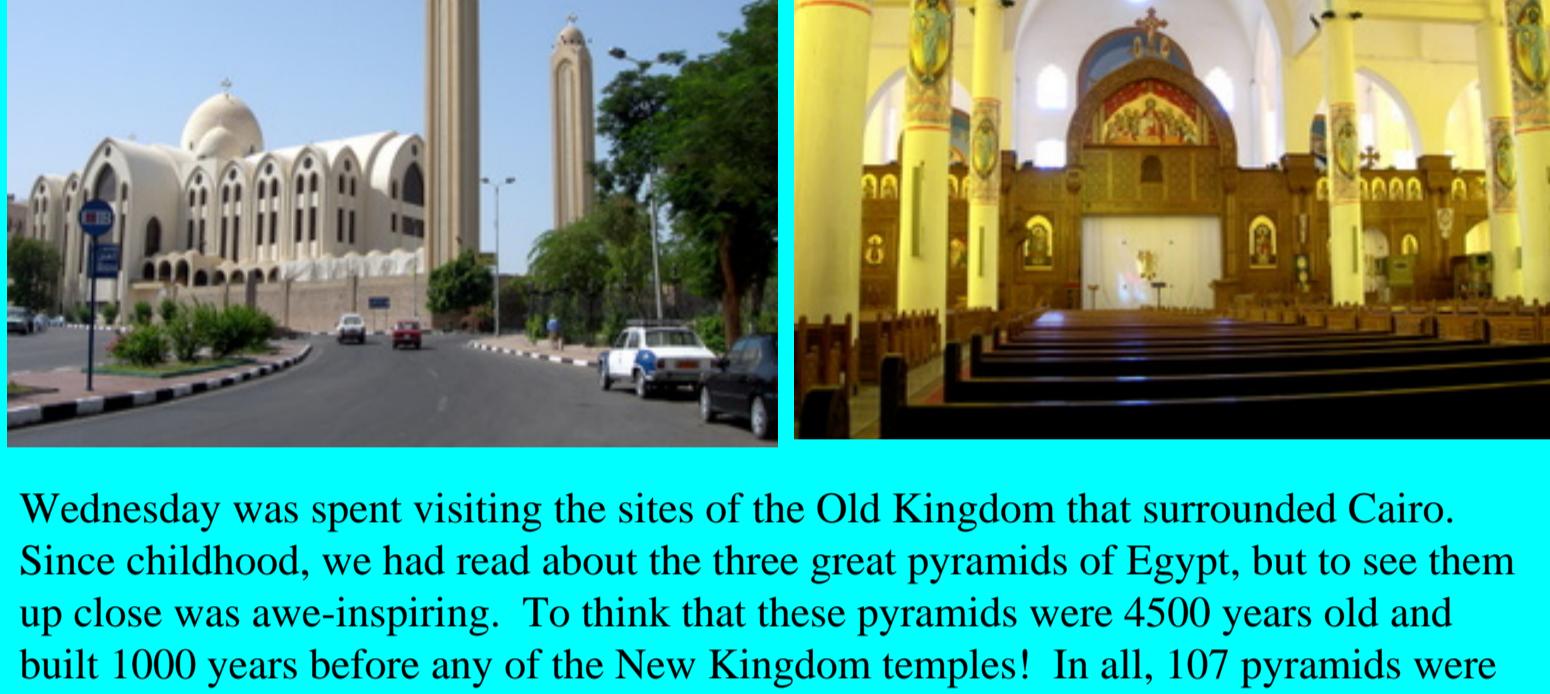
Our time onboard the cruise boat had certainly been fun and memorable, in part due to the terrific staff. Our steward, besides taking such pride in his work, was extremely funny. One time we came back to our room after dinner to see a cobra and crocodile sitting on our bed (using towels). One of the main chefs onboard was also a very talented food artist and his creations were magnificent. Monday night, our last evening, we were entertained by Nubian dancers.



[Next Page](#)

Page 18

Tuesday morning before flying back to Cairo, we visited the Coptic Orthodox Christian Church in Aswan, the second largest Coptic Church in Egypt and Africa. Its sanctuary had just been remodeled, and the woodwork was beautiful. Unique to the Coptic church are its 3 altars, each dedicated to a different saint. Normally one altar is dedicated to Apostle Mark who introduced Christianity into Egypt in the 1st century, and hence is considered the founder of the Coptic church; one is dedicated to the church's patron saint (in this church St. Michael); and one is usually dedicated to one of the evangelists, typically either St. Paul or St. Anthony. During our visit to Egypt, it's been amazing to see the parallels between the ancient Egyptian religion and Christianity, probably explaining the ease at which Egypt was converted to Christianity. A few examples are the Egyptians' key of life and their belief in an afterlife, plus the magical conception of Horus by Isis. Today, 10% of Egypt's population are Coptic Christians and 90% Sunni Muslims.



Wednesday was spent visiting the sites of the Old Kingdom that surrounded Cairo. Since childhood, we had read about the three great pyramids of Egypt, but to see them up close was awe-inspiring. To think that these pyramids were 4500 years old and built 1000 years before any of the New Kingdom temples! In all, 107 pyramids were built in Lower Egypt, but these three situated on the Giza plateau were the biggest and in the best condition. The oldest and largest was the Great Pyramid, the pyramid of Khufu (Cheops). It stood 480 feet high and contained over 2,000,000 blocks of sandstone, with the average weight per block being 3 tons. It took 32 years to build and involved around 30,000 workers.



[Next Page](#)

Page 19

Next to the Great Pyramid stood the Pyramid of Khephren (Khafre), his son. It was the second largest pyramid, standing 450 feet high. Today, though, it seemed larger due to the fact that it was on higher ground and its top had remained intact. Originally all the pyramids were encased with polished white limestone. Now, only the top of the Pyramid of Khephren retained the white limestone casing. At this pyramid, we were able to enter one of the narrow passageways leading inside to the burial chamber. All that remained in the chamber now was the pharaoh's granite sarcophagus. On the opposite end to the Great Pyramid stood the Pyramid of Menkaure, Khephren's successor. It was the smallest of the three pyramids and stood only 218 feet high.



The majestic Sphinx, guardian to the Pyramid of Khephren, stood $\frac{1}{4}$ mile away from the pyramid next to the temple used for preparing the pharaoh's body for burial. Just like the pyramids, the Sphinx, too, was awe-inspiring. It was 66 feet high, 40 feet wide, and 205 feet long, and was carved out of one solid piece of sandstone. The face of the Sphinx was said to be Khephren's.



[Next Page](#)

Page 20

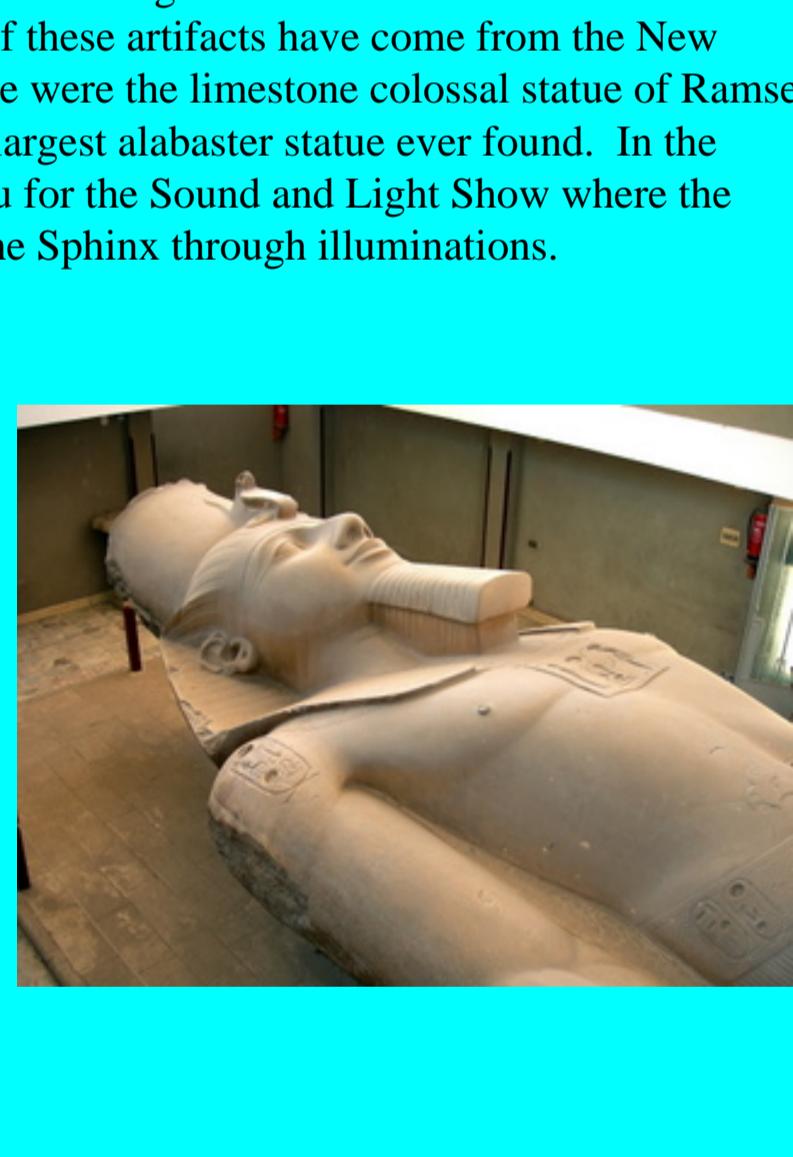
Before leaving the pyramids, Mary took her second camel ride, and this time she felt like she could ride forever on the back of a camel, just like Lawrence of Arabia. What a difference a solid saddle made, plus stirrups!



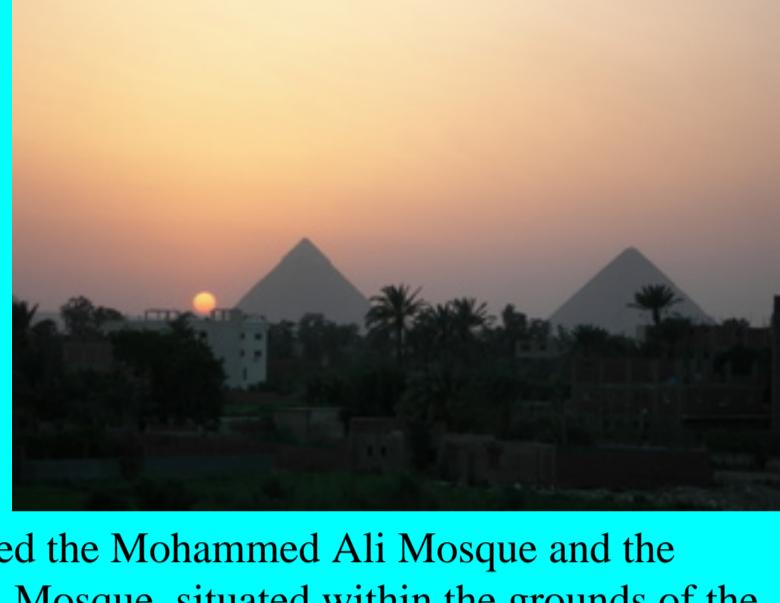
Next, we traveled to Saqqara to see the Step Pyramid of Zoser, the oldest pyramid in the world, dating from 2686 BC, 100 years before the Great Pyramid. It was fascinating to learn that this step pyramid was the prototype for the first smooth-sided pyramid that followed 65 years later.



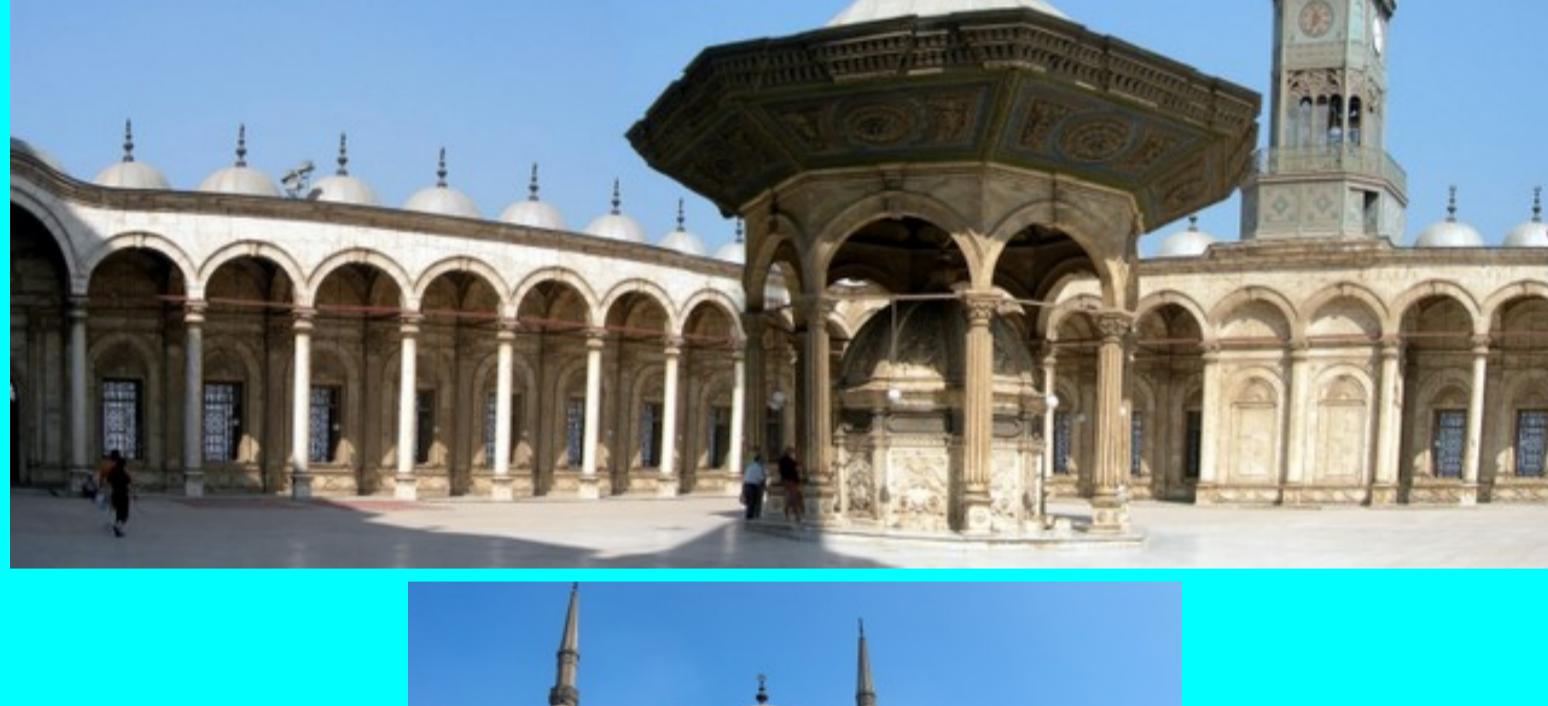
The ancient city of Memphis, the capital of the Old Kingdom, used to be located near Saqqara. Even after the Old Kingdom ended, Memphis continued to be an important city, even well into the Ptolemaic Period. Today, though, nothing remained; villages and cultivated fields have reclaimed the site that was once Memphis. In one of the villages, we visited the small museum containing the few artifacts that have been found in the Memphis area, and most of these artifacts have come from the New Kingdom period. Especially impressive were the limestone colossal statue of Ramses II and the Great Alabaster Sphinx, the largest alabaster statue ever found. In the evening we returned to the Giza plateau for the Sound and Light Show where the ancient history of Giza was retold by the Sphinx through illuminations.



[Next Page](#)



Thursday, our last day in Cairo, we visited the Mohammed Ali Mosque and the Egyptian Museum. The Mohammed Ali Mosque, situated within the grounds of the Citadel of Salah al-Din, was built in the 1800's and styled after Turkish mosques. It was built by Mohammed Ali, an Albanian mercenary who took control of Egypt in 1805, and during his rule began to transform Egypt into an industrialized nation. He was especially known for his reforms in education and agriculture. Today, this mosque was considered one of the most beautiful mosques in Cairo, with much of its exterior and interior walls covered in alabaster.



[Next Page](#)

Page 22

In the Egyptian Museum, some of the most notable artifacts came from the Tutankhamen (King Tut) collection containing 1700 objects, all from King Tut's tomb in the Valley of the Kings. What a find that must have been on November 4, 1922, by archeologist Carter! The treasures found were 3000 years old, and King Tut's gold burial mask was one of the collection's most valued pieces. This mask had been made in the exact likeness of King Tut so that his soul (Ba) could recognize his body in the afterlife and help the king to resurrect. As this mask was made after the king's death, his false beard was curved at the bottom rather than straight.



Also among his valued treasures were his four canopic jars, each complete with a Tutankhamen-head stopper. During the mummification process, which took 70 days, the internal organs of the body -- intestines, stomach, liver, and lungs -- were removed and put into canopic jars before drying out the body. These were then buried alongside the coffin in the tomb. The only organ to remain with the body was the heart, as the heart was said to contain the soul of the person and so needed to be weighed in the afterlife. Before leaving the museum, we visited the royal mummy room containing the mummy of Ramses II, the best preserved of all the mummies.

Friday afternoon, June 13, we flew back to Turkey from Egypt, marking the end to our unforgettable journey into Egypt's great historical past. What an amazing nine days it had been! It certainly exceeded all of our expectations.

Back to Index

Page 23