

## Trip log for Oriental Institute Egypt Tour Nov/Dec 2018

Sat 24 Nov: We departed from O'Hare about 8:30pm via Etihad for the 14-hour flight to Abu Dhabi; about a dozen of the 26 tour members were on the flight, several in business class with us (we had met many of them at the pre-party in Chicago back in September). Didn't sleep very well.

Sun 25 Nov: Arrived Abu Dhabi about 8pm local time. Connected to 3-hour flight to Cairo around 9:45, arriving midnight (8 hours time difference from Chicago). We were met by a representative of the local operator Egitalloyd, and transferred to the Mena House hotel in Giza; and got to our rooms around 2am.

Mon 26 Nov: The day was free; we had breakfast in the shadow of the Great Pyramid of Khufu, as Mena House is located just below Giza Plateau. Some members did individual touring; but we decided to just rest and recover, enjoying the grounds, and views from the hotel. (There was also a fascinating exhibit of old photographs from the hotel's founding.) The tour activities began with dinner at the hotel followed by orientation: with OI leader Emily Teeter, and Egitalloyd guide Sherif Samy and tour manager Hisham el Sebai.

Tue 27 Nov: Our first stop was truly unprecedented: Emily had worked with her Egyptian contacts, to get us a tour of the behind-the-scenes Conservation Department, of the still-under-construction Grand Egyptian Museum. It was truly breathtaking to get a close-up view of the conservators working on famous objects such as the funerary lion bed and chariot from the tomb of Tutankhamun. Very few people get such a privilege; this was perhaps the MOST distinctive event of the whole tour.

We then bused to Saqqara. We had lunch at the Palm Club there, and proceeded on to view several mastaba-style tombs of nobles, near the Saqqara pyramids: First, Mereruka (6<sup>th</sup> dynasty) —with many brightly painted scenes of daily life. Next, the extensive rock-cut Serapeum (from 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty to Greco-Roman period)—with huge sarcophagi of mummified Apis bulls; this complex was much larger and more impressive than we had expected. Then, the tomb of Mehu: recently opened, with many colorful wall paintings. These sites were new to us (on our 2009 trip, we'd instead visited the nearby Red Pyramid of Sneferu); and already provided further good reasons to re-visit Egypt.

One big change since 2009: In those earlier days, it had been forbidden to take photographs inside many of the monuments and museums—a bad idea seemingly due to the notorious director Zahi Hawass. This time in 2018, it was a great joy to finally be able to take photographs in most places. (These were allowed because the government has established steep photography fees at many sites, up to \$15 each. This put a little strain on our cash supply...but the change had come too recently for the OI to warn us of it. It was definitely still worth it.)

The final main site was the Djoser Step Pyramid complex. We'd seen this in 2009; it remains impressive as the first of the monumental-scale pyramids. A final brief stop was by a carpet school/shop. We finished up with dinner at a fish restaurant just outside the Mena House grounds.

Wed 28 Nov: We began with an introductory lecture by Emily on Egyptian monuments; and then took the short bus ride up to the foot of Khufu's pyramid. (We were kept on the bus for a long-winded, less-than-accurate introduction by the guide Sherif.) The majority of the group felt up to the rather uncomfortable climb inside the pyramid (photos not allowed); we'd done it before, in both 2000 and 2009, and were still able to do it this time—though we did end up with very tired legs! Next, in the nearby area, we visited the tomb of the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty vizier Khufu-khaf (new to us)—with well preserved reliefs. We then backtracked to the "Solar Boat" museum adjacent to the Great Pyramid. We ended the morning at the tomb of Seshem-nefer also in the area (briefly seeing also the shaft of the burial of Queen Khentkawes).

We then bused a short distance to a bluff with views overlooking the pyramids. Then continued to the area of the Sphinx; with lunch at Abu Shakra restaurant overlooking it. The tour continued with the mortuary temple of Khafre, and a somewhat closer view of the Sphinx (it's no longer possible to get directly next to the Sphinx.)

We returned to the hotel for a midafternoon rest. And then from 5 to 7 pm, we had a special private, after-hours tour of the old Egyptian Museum. Some of this was new to us: Already part of the Tutankhamun collection has been moved for eventual re-display at the new Grand Egyptian Museum. The resulting space is now an impressive installation of the material from the tombs of Yuya and Thuya (royal parents): this had been an intact discovery, very famous before the discovery of Tutankhamun—and now much more effectively exhibited. We had ample time to visit many other old-favorite exhibits; as well as the remaining part of the royal-mummy room, which was new to us.

The day concluded at the restaurant Andrea Matriouya, on a high bluff overlooking Giza.

Thur 29 Nov: After breakfast, we bused to the airport for an hour-long flight to Luxor at 11:30. We continued onward to the Hilton Luxor and lunch.

We then headed for Karnak: We were met by John Shearman of ARCE (American Research Center in Egypt), who began by showing us the pumping station, which has been very significant and effective, at lowering the water-table which has been endangering the monuments. Next he showed us the still-in-progress restoration work being done by ARCE on the Khonsu temple. Our remaining time was spent in a quick progress through much of the main Amun complex. (Alas, we never got to the "Botanical Garden" carvings.)

At 5:30 we bused over to Chicago House, the local headquarters for the Oriental Institute's Egyptological activities, such as the Epigraphic Survey. They provided a light reception, where we got to meet some of the staff (including Ariel Singer, a UC grad student we already knew). The director Ray Johnson gave us a short lecture on the OI's epigraphic-recording methods, the standard for the field.

On arriving back at the hotel, we had a severe problem with the room: a loud band playing just outside, and a too-cold room temperature with no heating to counteract it. We had to change rooms. It was a severe disappointment and discomfort that this "luxury" hotel had no bathtubs in the rooms, only showers. We regret that Emily likes this hotel; we had to send in to Hilton a very bad review of that aspect of our stay.)

Fri 30 Nov: Today we saw some of the sites on the West Bank at Luxor...We began with a boat ride across the river, where we were met by our bus to take us to the Valley of the Queens. We began with the tomb of Amunherkhepeshef, a son of Ramses III—with very colorful reliefs. Next was the tomb of Nefertari, with exceptionally vivid wall paintings (no photos, alas) restored by the Getty Institute. Back in 2009, this tomb had been restricted to rich donors. So it was new to us: and easily one of the high points of the trip (indeed, one of the main reasons we had decided in favor of this particular tour).

Next we bused over to Deir el Bahri, for the beautiful temple of Hatshepsut. We were met by Zbigniew Szafranski, the director of the Polish-run archeological work there. (An important side benefit of OI tours is the availability of many of the working archeologists at the sites. But in this case, it backfired badly: Szafranski is an ungifted and rather slow and vague public speaker; and additionally, he wouldn't stop speaking, using up almost all of our time at this wonderful site.) Finally we were able to re-visit some favorite areas, such as the reliefs of the expedition to Punt, and the small Hathor temple.

Finally we bused over to the Valley of the Kings: We began with the small, colorful tomb of Ramses IV, which was new to us. Next, we visited the celebrated tomb of Tutankhamun: There had been changes since 2009, apparently to help this small tomb accommodate larger crowds—now only one of the 3 rooms can be entered (still no photos). Lastly we visited the very large and elaborately decorated tomb of Ramses VI (and V).

We returned to the hotel for a late lunch; and in the evening, Emily gave a lecture on Luxor as the center of the cult of Amun. Dinner was at the Sofra Oriental Restaurant in downtown Luxor.

Sat 1 Dec: A second day at sites on the West Bank. We began with a brief visit to the Colossi of Memnon (ie Amenhotep III). Then we visited several private non-royal tombs: First Ramose, a vizier and mayor of Thebes in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty; extensive decorations illustrating court life—especially interesting as some parts involved the era of Akhenaten. Next the tomb of Sennefer, a mayor of Thebes—with celebrated “grape arbor” motif, and scenes with his wife Meryet. Finally the significant tomb of Rekhmire: a vizier, with the most extensive known scenes of the administrative work of officials. These were all new to us, and it was a high point to see Rekhmire, which we'd read so much about.

We had lunch at an open-air restaurant Al-Marsam in the Gurneh area. We moved on to Deir el Medina, the town of the tomb-workers In the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties. We visited several tombs from the area: First Sennedjem, with decorations from agricultural life, as well as from the Book of the Dead. Next Inherkhau, with somewhat similar decorations, including an Anubis theme. Finally Amunnakht, including representations of seated kings and queens. These were all new to us, and a big bonus; in 2009, we had concentrated on the archeological ruins of the town itself.

On the way back to the hotel, we stopped at an alabaster shop, where everything was impressively expensive. Dinner was on-your-own; Judy and I had a “date night” at the open-air grill restaurant at the hotel.

Sun 2 Dec: This was a day with longer bus travel. We first went to Abydos, for the temples of Ramses II and especially his predecessor Seti I. We had a brief and appropriate introduction, from archeologists working in the area—Peter Lacovara, Janet Richards, and Doha Fathy. The color of the walls reliefs has been well preserved; and the quality of the carving is regarded as some of the best from ancient Egypt. There are some scenes from the battle of Kadesh, but rather badly worn. (Kadesh being a language project of Steve's, in preparation for this trip.) Abydos was another major high point on the tour (and again, a big reason why we'd chosen this tour). As we headed south back towards Luxor, we had box lunches on the bus. The main site for the afternoon was the Ptolemaic-era Hathor temple at Dendera. Celebrated aspects include the chapel of Nut (and copy of the zodiac, whose original is now in Paris); and the carvings of Cleopatra VII and her son Caesarion (which our guide Sherif persistently and falsely claimed instead to be her brother).

Dinner was back at the hotel.

Mon 3 Dec: Now a third day at sites on the West Bank: We began with Medinet Habu, the memorial temple of Ramses III. This has been an Oriental Institute research site for many years: and we were given interesting (if occasionally slightly long-winded) introductions by several Chicago House staff, including Brett McClain (the assistant director), Margaret deJong (artist), Tina de Cerbo (graffiti specialist), and Frank Helmholtz (stone mason). A highlight was the new pavement being constructed all along the south side of the temple, to ease access to all areas; this was certainly new since our 2009 visit. Inside are reliefs of battle scenes and festivals.

We moved on to the Ramesseum, the memorial temple of Ramses II. There were some features new to us since 2009, such as re-erected statues and restored masonry. (Though we noted some scaffolding still at a place that had the scaffolding back in 2009!) There are battle-of-Kadesh inscription, but badly worn and not easily legible.

Then we bused a bit south to the dock, embarking and lunching on the boat for our Nile cruise, the Sonesta St George. This boat was perhaps twice as large as the boat we had in 2009—and much more comfortable: for example, it had bath tubs, not just showers! (It's true that this time we shared the boat with other groups; but this was not a problem—though it did force a certain amount of common scheduling for all the groups.)

Later in the afternoon, we returned to downtown Luxor, to the Luxor temple. We got to see it in slightly better light than in 2009—for example, the Kadesh inscriptions were at least moderately legible. Again we got introductions from Chicago House staff: artists Jay Heidel (with a bushy beard we hadn't seen on him before) and Krisztian Vertes. There has been further progress since 2009 on making the blockyard into a really explanatory open-air museum.

Tue 4 Dec: Our first real full day of leisure, cruising up the Nile as far as Esna. No real official sightseeing, though the process of going through the lock (and later docking) is always fascinating. (We'd had some worries about being able to get through the physical exertions of the trip, since we have both now turned 70. And there did turn out to be an issue there: the nature of the trip starts out with a lot of walking and climbing,

around pyramids and sites with bad footing. As a result our legs (especially knees) were very sore after the first few days. So we tried to take it easy—and certainly the easier days on the cruise helped us recover.)

In 2009 we'd managed after docking to get to the nearby temple of Esna during evening hours; but this time, the temple was closed at 5pm, so we couldn't get back. In the evening, Emily gave a lecture on the general subject of ancient Egyptian temples.

Wed 5 Dec: The first site for the day was the Ptolemaic temple of Horus at Edfu. Here a new twist was taking horse-drawn carriages from the dock to the site. (This caused some dispersal and re-assembly of the group; frankly in retrospect it doesn't seem to have been worth the trouble—though we fear a bus approach is no longer allowed?). The site is an ongoing Oriental Institute dig, but we were not sure we would get to see any of the staff there. So it was a wonderful bonus that the director, OI professor Nadine Moeller (who'd led our 2009 trip) had just flown in—to see some spectacular new items they had recently found. So she was able to give us an introduction to the dig, along with her co-director (and husband) Greg Marouard. The new finds are from the New Kingdom; earlier finds from the dig had gone back all the way to the Old Kingdom. So we saw the dig—they were just closing down for the season; and of course we also saw the very well preserved temple itself. This visit was a big bonus, and a major high point of the tour.

We returned to the boat for lunch, and further cruising; Emily gave a lecture on Egyptian art. Around sundown we docked at Kom Ombo, to see the Ptolemaic temple there—which is equally divided between the crocodile god Sobek, and Haroeris (Horus the Elder). Some of the carvings are related to ancient Egyptian medicine—and one of our tour members was a physician who had recently developed an interest in the ancient Egyptian literature on medicine! A new sight for us was the adjacent Crocodile Museum—with many crocodile mummies and other related displays.

Thur 6 Dec: On arrival at Aswan, we proceeded to the ancient granite quarries—including a huge unfinished obelisk of Hatshepsut, abandoned because of a crack that occurred during its preparation. Since 2009, they had added much better paths, especially boardwalks, throughout the site.

Then we bused out to the high dam area, to take a small boat out to the temple of Philae (one of the Nubian monuments rescued, from flooding caused by the dam, during the 1960s UNESCO salvage-archeology project). In 2009 we had only seen this temple by night; seeing it by day was overall much better, another high point of the trip. In particular we got better views of the Kiosk of Trajan (often called "Pharaoh's Bed" in early literature). (Judy did enjoy the interior lighting in 2009, which gave the walls a nice glow.) We enjoyed watching the birds along the shores of the small islands.

After lunch back on board the boat, we bused to the Nubian Museum. We had enjoyed this in 2009, and maybe even more so this time—when we'd had time to read much more background on the relationship of ancient Egypt with Nubia. We spent this night still aboard the boat.

Fri 7 Dec: We checked out from the boat this morning—sending our luggage ahead to the Old Cataract Hotel. Meantime we headed to the airport for the short flight south to

Abu Simbel—another major temple saved from flooding by the UNESCO project. Compared to our visit in 2009, this time (due to airplane schedules apparently) we had only about an hour and a half on the site; we would have liked a little more. Here of course the four colossal (65ft) statues of Ramses II on the outside are an unforgettable sight. But Steve also wanted time inside, for here is where the Kadesh inscriptions are most clearly readable. (So we skipped Sherif's introduction—and in doing so, missed the group picture for the tour; but we just couldn't face Sherif's distortions, and enjoyed our time inside.)

After flying back to Luxor, we were taken to the Old Cataract Hotel we lunched and checked in at (again they managed to give us a room without a bath tub—so, another pseudo-luxury hotel, grr). We had dinner at their old-fashioned British-style restaurant, the 1902 Room. The views from our balcony were breathtakingly beautiful and we enjoyed walking around inside the hotel and down to the Nile. This hotel was used in the famous *Death on the Nile* movie and the public rooms have been beautifully restored.

Sat 8 Dec: The tour leaders decided to have the morning at leisure. (Not a bad idea—but sad to miss the Kalabsha temple, another UNESCO-rescued Nubian site.) On the way to the airport, we stopped briefly to view the Aswan High Dam (with a distant exterior view of Kalabsha).

It was a fairly short flight back to Cairo—where we transferred to the Intercontinental Semiramis Hotel downtown, near Tahrir Square and the old Museum. We rested up during the afternoon; and awarded ourselves another “date night”: a dinner at The Grill, the fine-dining restaurant at the hotel.

Again we had some troubles with the hotel room; we didn't have to change—but did have to call guest services many times to get things fixed: such as heating, hair dryer, water, luggage rack; and repeated failures of the room keys. Weirdly enough, they wouldn't let us make charges to the room, eg for restaurant and laundry. Turns out they wanted a credit card on file as a deposit—a requirement that none of the earlier hotels had needed. Many other tour members seemed to have room problems here. But we did have a bathtub and a beautiful view of the Nile. While we were in the hotel, a huge gingerbread train engine was decorated in the lobby.

Sun 9 Dec: Our final day was devoted essentially to Old (but not ancient) Cairo: We began with the al Refai mosque. This included a condescending and excruciating lecture on Islam by the guide Sherif. We're sure he was sincere, but he badly underestimated the intelligence and preparedness of his audience—everybody already knew all that. Grr!

Then we bused to another old area, Fustat: First we saw the 7<sup>th</sup> century church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus (traditionally a Holy Family site). Next the Ben Ezra synagogue (9<sup>th</sup> century)—where the celebrated “geniza” documents had been found. Finally the Coptic Museum, with first-rate Coptic art and documents recording variations of New Testament books.

We had lunch at “Studio Masr”, near the citadel in Al Azhar Park overlooking the city. We continued to the Khan el Khalili market for shopping (but didn't buy anything).

Our farewell dinner was at the Pane Vino restaurant at the hotel; with the owner of Egitalloyd present. Toward the end, Judy and Steve were presented with a special cake, and a card from OI director Chris Woods, recognizing them as the champion OI travelers—having been on 7 OI trips (including the subsequent Sudan extension of this Egypt trip). Also in attendance at this dinner were several members for the Sudan tour, who had arrived by this time in Cairo.

Mon 10 Dec: Judy, Steve, Emily, Sherif (tour manager for Sudan), and the other early Sudan arrivals (mentioned above) checked out of the Semiramis; and flew down to Khartoum around 4pm.



Saqqara – the Step Pyramid



Giza



GEM under construction



Egyptian Museum



Tomb of Ramses IV



Tomb of Ramose





Abydos—the King List



Dendera



Boat across the Nile



Colossi



Medinet Habu



Ramesseum





Hatshepsut Temple



Edfu



Sonesta St. George



Philae



Sonesta St. George





Abu Simbel



Old Cataract Hotel



At the High Dam



Celebration in Cairo of 7<sup>th</sup> Ol trip