

2010 EGYPT

Sunday, January 24, 2010. I am off to Egypt for the fourth time! However, it has been more than 25 years since I was last here. When National Geographic offered a greatly reduced price last summer, I took advantage of it.

My seatmate to Rome was a pleasant man named Matt, who works for the Navy. As usual I hurried through dinner to try and get some sleep. However I was not too successful.

Monday, January 25, 2010. Finally with 2 1/2 hours before landing I decided to watch Brad Pitt in "Inglorious Bastards."¹ War movies are not my thing but so much has been said about this film I decided to try it. There were some gory parts where I shut my eyes, but I found myself enjoying the "bastards" whose purpose was to destroy Nazis. It had just reached its climax when we were told to stow our belongings for landing so I will have to hope it is on my return flight so I can see the end!

At Rome they met the plane with two wheelchairs. I waited to get off and found myself the third person needing a chair. They said it was just a short distance but their idea of short is not mine. Mine is shortness of breath. They finally told me to sit and wait and soon a girl appeared with another wheelchair to take me to the transit room. After examining my ticket they finally said they could take me to the lounge for my 3-hour layover. Here they advertised free WIFI² but it seemed to work only if I have a European cell phone number. Otherwise it is £.50! The price was reasonable enough but I still could not get the thing to accept me.

It was two and a half hours to Cairo on Alitalia with a tortellini lunch thrown in that was passable. I liked the Amaretti³ the best!

At Cairo I got my Visa and bags and then was wheeled out to find my courier. There were many holding signs but none had my name on it so I figured I had to get to the hotel on my own. A man had taken charge at this point and when I said the Four Seasons Hotel⁴ he told me there were two. My instructions said the "First Residence" and he did not seem to know what that meant. Then another man said he knew which it was and the name had been changed. The price was agreed at \$15 and off we went. At the hotel⁵ I found out it was the wrong one after all. However, a very nice lady helped me find another cab and told me it would be three or four dollars. The second try was right and there I finally met my escort. He apologized for missing me at the airport and said he was there! He also reimbursed me for my cab rides. Then I was checked into a lovely suite. With entrance hall, dressing room and huge bath it seems more than adequate. I lay down for a nap and shortly Scotti phoned. We decided to go to the hotel restaurant for dinner. This hotel is huge and rambling but we finally got to the restaurant. There were two and we picked the Thai. I had a delicious dinner in a nice Thai atmosphere complete with a stupa⁶. Then it was early to bed. I don't really know what time it is.

Tuesday, January 26. I woke at five and after my bath tried to figure out how to only take one bag to Alexandria, but the task was too much for me. I will just have to take it all. I went down through the marble corridors to find a sumptuous buffet breakfast. I began to meet the eleven taking the extension into Alexandria.

Magda George, our Egyptologist came and we boarded the bus for the train station and were boarded onto a comfortable train for the two and a half hour trip to Alexandria. They even washed the windows of the train! After we left the city the farmland began, acres and acres of planted ground showing us the breadbasket of Egypt.

Alexandria⁷ was overcast, cold and windy, but Magda hopes the weather will improve tomorrow. She explained that we would have a bodyguard on the bus at all times. Several years ago some German tourists were attacked in one of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Needless to say the tourist traffic stopped and it is one of Egypt's main sources of income. As a result they have

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inglourious_Basterds

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wi-Fi>

³ <http://www.joyofbaking.com/AmarettiCookies.html>

⁴ <http://www.fourseasons.com/cairofr/>

⁵ <http://press.fourseasons.com/cairo/p/>

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stupa>

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria>

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beefed up the tourist police so that you see them on every corner. We feel very secure that we will not be an international incident. Alexandria sprawls across more than 20 miles of Mediterranean shoreline. Lake Mariut in the Nile delta limits its expansion south.

Alexandria is named for Alexander the Great⁸ who conquered Egypt. He died in Babylon in 323 BC and his empire was divided between his generals. Ptolemy took Egypt and made Alexandria his capital. His dynasty ruled for 300 years, the last of the line being Cleopatra V11⁹, of Mark Anthony and Julius Caesar fame. After her death Alexandria became part of the Roman Empire.

Polish archaeologists started digging in 1960 where a dilapidated fort was torn down. The dig still continues. They have uncovered a Roman theater and nearby Odeon as well as classrooms from an ancient university. The remains of a brick Roman bath can be seen at a distance and Magda pointed out a column with just the tip sticking out of the earth.

French archaeologists have been working near where the Pharos¹⁰, the lighthouse, stood and have brought out of the sea some colossal stone statues and some sphinxes that were probably in Cleopatra's palace. These are on display near the amphitheater. Unfortunately the rest of their finds are on tour in Europe. Magda commented that Egypt sends our treasures all over the world for others to enjoy, but rarely does a traveling museum exhibit come to Egypt.

We then drove along the corniche road around a harbor where colorful fishing boats lay at anchor. At the end of the drive was an old fort which stands on the site where Pharos, the lighthouse stood. Pharos was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Sistratus of Cnidus designed this lighthouse. Construction began in 279 BC and continued for fourteen years. Four hundred fifty feet tall it could be seen many miles at sea. Magda thinks some sort of concave mirror provided the light. Its huge base was a cube 60 meters high with many storage rooms. Atop this was an octagon about 30 meters high and on top of it all the statue to Poseidon. An enormous earthquake and tsunami destroyed the lighthouse around 1100 AD and now it and Cleopatra's palace lie under water. In 1480 AD Sultan Quitbay built a fort on the site of Pharos.

I have now seen the site of all seven ancient wonders: The Tower of Babel, the Hanging gardens of Babylon, the Temple to Artemus at Ephesus, the Mausoleum of King Mausolos at Bodrum, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Statue to Zeus at Olympus, The pyramid at Giza and Pharos, the lighthouse. Only the pyramid survives. I doubt that many people can make the boast that they have been to visit all seven sites since two are in Iraq.

The surf was really pounding against the seawall. Also decorating the site were numerous cats. But it was so windy we did not tarry. Instead we climbed three flights of stairs to the Blue and White, Greek restaurant for a luncheon that started with many small dishes like tahini and garlic butter. The second course was calamari and in case we were still hungry, the third course was fish and rice. Desert was a fresh fruit cup.

Back on the bus we drove back the corniche until we came to the palatial home of King Farouk, the last king of Egypt¹¹. He was overthrown in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. His palace was surrounded with gardens that are now a public park.

We finally checked into the Four Seasons Alexandria. Again I had a small suite although the view is of ugly office buildings. I fell into bed and slept for 3 hours. Then I tried to wash my hair. The dryer didn't work so I called housekeeping and they brought me a new one. I couldn't make it work either so I thought it must be me. Then Scotti came and showed me that I was trying to plug it into the shaver plug. When plugged into the other nearby plug it worked fine.

The Alexandria trip is an extension of the main Egypt tour. There are eleven of us. Peter and Candy Flemister, from Chicago, Jeff and Lucia Hagander from Seattle, Washington, Colleen Clarke and Russell Rose, from Toronto, Ranny and Maudie Barton, from North Andover, MA, Scotti and Mac and myself. Everyone seems very nice and we are working well as a group.

Dinner was in the hotel dining room and it became a birthday party for Peter who received a mousse cake and "Happy Birthday" sung by all of us. I suppose the same thing will happen next week for me.

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleopatra_VII

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lighthouse_of_Alexandria

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farouk_of_Egypt

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Wednesday, January 27. We headed first to the Alexandria National Museum¹² for Magda wanted to get there before the crowds. This small museum is housed in what used to be the old Al-Saad Bassili Pasha Palace. A wealthy wool merchant built it in 1926. The collection is well displayed and Magda pointed out the highlights before leaving us to explore on our own. The main Gods of Alexandria were Isis¹³ and Osiris¹⁴ along with their son Horus. We were almost done with our tour before the museum became an anthill of people as tour bus after tour bus disgorged their load. A cruise ship is in so our day will be complicated trying to avoid them. We went on through heavy traffic to the Catacombs of Kom el Shoqafa¹⁵. These were discovered in 1900 when a donkey pulling a cart fell into a hole. Dating from Roman times the main tomb was reached by a spiral staircase 100 steps long. At the bottom we viewed the tri-clinium where families of the dead would come and picnic after visiting their ancestors. The main tomb was decorated with murals in the Roman style and surrounding it were many niches for other burials. Then it was time for lunch at the Santa Lucia Restaurant that appears to have been inspired by a church. It was also not full of tourists! A Greek resident of Alexandria opened it in 1932 and it is the longest continuous restaurant in Alexandria. A pepper steak and vegetables followed a Caesar salad. A chocolate delight was desert. I have been feeling stuffed for two days and have decided to skip dinner tonight and try and get rid of the bloated feeling. The highlight of the day was the Bibliotheca Alexandrina¹⁶. In ancient times, the Alexandria library was famous throughout the ancient world. Unfortunately a fire destroyed it at the time Julius Caesar conquered Egypt. Some future rulers restored it but it was never up to the standard of the first. About 2000 a worldwide effort was made to build another world-class library like the first. A Norwegian designed the building to look like the rising sun. Special windows like eyelids were designed so direct light never hits the precious books within. Countries around the world have donated books and other exhibits so the library is not just a library but also houses several museums. There are many computer terminals for people to read the available digitalized material. I was interested that one of their projects is to preserve every web page that has ever been created. And all of the library is free and can be accessed over the Internet at www.bibalex.org. During my free time I viewed a collection of old prints of Alexandria. We were back at the hotel by three and I promptly took a nap. Then I finished a book I have been reading and repacked. In the process I found the charger for my camera battery so I will be able to take some pictures, although Scotti's camera takes much better ones. I even explored the Internet at great expense (\$10 for one hour!) but it was nice to catch up on email and other news.

Thursday, January 28. We left at 9:00 for a long bus ride back to Cairo. After we cleared Alexandria we drove south along the road by huge Lake Mariut. Magda pointed out the bulrushes that grow in the lake and there was also papyrus. Beyond the lake we were in an agricultural area made possible by the large aquifer that lies under the Libyan Desert. All of this development has occurred in the last 30 years as Egypt reclaims land from the desert. We made a rest stop and paused to look at the small playground and zoo attached. I got a picture of the pigeon cotes that speckle the country. These elongated spheres make me believe the squab business is flourishing. Then we got to Wadi Natrum and found two Coptic monasteries. At El Sovrian, or St. Mary, Monastery, a bearded monk talked to us about the various frescos that decorated the walls. Some date from the fourth century. In a nearby room a diorama had been set up to give the visitor a look at how the monks used to live. There was also the cell where Saint Bishoy¹⁷ slept when he first came here and before they built a monastery in his name. Saint Bishoy saw Christ twice. The first time he was washing his feet and saw the mark of the nails. The second time he saw an old man who needed help and he carried him on his shoulders. Most of the icons were in

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria_National_Museum

¹³ http://www.goddessgift.com/goddess-myths/egyptian_goddess_Isis.htm

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osiris>

¹⁵ <http://www.ask-aladdin.com/catacomb.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.bibalex.org/English/index.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/bishoy.htm>

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deplorable condition but in a nearby room we were shown how the Dutch are restoring the wooden doors to the chancel. There was also an 11th century mural that had been restored. St. Mark came to Egypt and converted the population to Christianity. Egypt still has a 10% Coptic population.

Back on the bus, Magda passed out fig bars and tangerines as a welcome treat. Then we were in the desert and the scenery became monotonous. Like all Arab countries the countryside was also strewn with debris. I don't understand why they keep their homes and shops clean but don't care about the road. The plastic bag is the curse of the nation. I fell asleep waking only to have a view of the pyramids in the distance and then we were back at the Four Seasons Fourth Residence.

I signed up for an Indonesian massage. I was hoping for the wonderful massage I got on the National Geographic Endeavor. This was similar but not as good. She started by washing my feet. Then she worked on my legs, at times pausing to stretch the leg. Her pressure was a bit harder than I would have liked but sometimes you need the pressure to release the muscles. She also massaged my head which I usually don't allow for it means washing my hair to get the oils out. When all was done I was taken to a shower room with all the necessary shampoos and so forth. After using the hairdryer I was set to go.

For dinner we joined the Flemisters and walked two or three blocks to the Egyptian Fish restaurant "Asmak El Sherif." Here we were invited to select our fish from the display. Scotti and I decided to share a grouper. Then they started bringing the side dishes. First there was delicious chowder. Then came the tahini etc, even a dish of caviar. I had a wonderful pasta side with a white sauce and shrimp that was a meal itself. By the time the grouper arrived I could not eat it all.

Peter talked about his ancestry. His father was married four times and lived in Egypt. Peter was raised an only child and only recently found he has ten brothers and sisters all of whom had thought they were Egyptian. It was not the case for Peter's father is black and merely passed himself off as Egyptian. Peter has a lot of white blood in him. He says he descends from the Jesse Chisholm of Chisholm Trail fame¹⁸. Another ancestor, Lewis Flemister, was one of George Washington's personal bodyguards for seven years and was promoted to the rank of Captain during that time.

Friday, January 29. At nine we had a briefing and met the new people who have just arrived. The Trincherio family from Napa Valley is Sutter Home Wine. We also met Salwa Borhan the other Egyptologist. There was a bit of a flurry when the elevators didn't work but at last they got them going again and I was able to go back to my eleventh floor room and retrieve my cane.

We will have two buses, but they pointed out that we were still like one large family. We boarded Magda's bus (why change a good thing) and went to the Cairo Museum¹⁹. Built in 1902 it houses many treasures. A new museum is planned but there is no money to build it.

Magda started with the old Kingdom and we worked up to the treasures found in Tutankhamen's tomb²⁰. It is a huge display of gold starting with the three outer mausoleums that held the body. Beautiful jewel boxes, beds, jewelry, even small statuettes representing the servants that would help the young king in his afterlife. The traveling King Tut exhibits are just a small sampling of the treasures Howard Carter found when he discovered the tomb in 1922.

At last we did the mummy rooms where many pharaohs lie at rest. I am sure they never thought they would lie undressed for people to look at, in their afterlife, shorn of their jewels and mummy cases. It is remarkable to see the bodies for even after 4000 years the features are intact. I got very tired and was happy to catch the bus back to the hotel while Scotti and Mac went walking.

For dinner this evening, the tour went to La Pacha 1901²¹, one of the flowing restaurant barges tied up to the Nile bank. It was originally a paddleboat from the turn of the century. After cocktails in the bar we had a not so great meal. I had picked the beef since I had had fish the night before. It was overcooked and tasteless.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chisholm_Trail

¹⁹ <http://homepage.powerup.com.au/~ancient/museum.htm>

²⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tutankhamun>

²¹ <http://www.lepacha.com/>

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Saturday, January 30. Today we explored Islamic Cairo. Our first stop was the Ahmad Ibn Tulun Mosque²² that dates from the 9th Century. Ahmad Tulum was a merchant who came from Samaria and became ruler of Egypt. The mosque has several unique features. An outer wall created a buffer for the noises of the city and also provided a parking place for donkeys and camels. Inside the mosque had a spacious courtyard with a spiral minaret, so reminiscent of the ziggurats in Iraq from whence he came. There are 42 doors into the courtyard and 130 windows, each different from the other in their geometric design. The mosque was built of brick and covered with plaster so that the verses of the Qur'an could be inscribed on its walls.

We then drove to the huge Saladin Citadel²³ that covers a hill in Cairo. It was fortified in the 12th century to protect the city from the Crusaders.

In the Citadel we visited the Alabaster Mosque²⁴. Mohammed Ali built it in 1826. Ali came into power by inviting the ruling Mamelukes²⁵ to a party and assassinating them. His dynasty ruled Egypt until King Farouk was deposed. Aside from his murdering start, Ali was a good ruler building factories and bringing Egypt into a more modern age.

This mosque was much different from the old Tulun Mosque. Hundreds of hanging lamps lit the interior. A man was busy cleaning each globe and replacing the bulb as we watched. It must be an unending chore. From the terrace outside the mosque we viewed the Cairo skyline in the haze. It bristles with minarets.

We then walked through the famous Khan el Khalili²⁶ bazaar, one of the oldest in Egypt. All manner of goods can be bought here. Scotti bought a lovely galabia, the long dress the Egyptian women wear so she can go native.

I cut my walk short to go to the Naguid Mahfouf Restaurant. Had lunch with Ranny and Maudie, and Robin and Sherry De Mandel from California. Russell and Julia joined us. We have not seen much of them since they are on Salwa's bus.

I was ready to return to the hotel for my afternoon nap. This evening we decided to eat in the bar and I had a club sandwich. It was good to not have to face so much food!

Sunday, January 31. Today we did "new" Cairo although there was nothing new about the Coptic Museum²⁷ except for the building. Conceived of by Marcus Simaika Pasha (1864-1944), many wealthy families contributed parts of their houses to create a lovely building with ornately carved wooden ceilings and stained glass panels, providing a twentieth century museum for the ancient things on view here. Unfortunately the museum suffered a power failure shortly after we began our tour and so we toured in dim light. A couple of tourists had their pocket flashlights so Magda could show us the details. She also pointed out how lovely the stain glass was with the natural light from outside.

Magda pointed out the primitive Coptic period where the figures are not proportional and all have big eyes typical of the period. Later she showed us how the Corinthian capitals had been modified in Egypt to incorporate lotus flowers. Most impressive were the papyrus gospel scrolls, which date from 50 AD. These are not the gospels we think of for there was the gospel of Judas and other lesser prophets that are causing much discussion in the ecclesiastical world. The treasure of the museum is the earliest bound book in the world. Dating from the third century it is a book of psalms and the reason it survived was that it was used as a pillow and buried with a child. The grave was discovered in 1984. It was an enormous project to separate the pages, which had become stuck together. There was also a large collection of 17th and 18th century icons.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosque_of_Ibn_Tulun

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Citadel

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosque_of_Muhammad_Ali

²⁵ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O48-Mameluke.html>

²⁶ <http://www.toureygypt.net/khan.htm>

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coptic_Museum

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We walked from the museum to the Ben Ezra Synagogue²⁸. Moses is supposed to have prayed here before he led the Jews on their Exodus from Egypt. There are no documents to prove it but the site has long been considered holy. After the synagogue was torn down, a Byzantine church stood here. The present building dates from the 9th century and is a museum of how a synagogue looked in those days. The women were separated from the men and sat in the balcony. One thing discovered in the synagogue was a repository for old scrolls for nothing with the name of the Lord could be destroyed. The original cache was taken away from Egypt. A large part of it is in Philadelphia. However another cache has been discovered and these are being translated and will remain in Egypt.

Our third stop was at the Coptic Church of Abu Serga²⁹. This has been built over the cave where the holy family is supposed to have lived for two years in Egypt. Again there is no documentation that this was so. In fact in all the Egyptian literature no mention is made of the Hebrews at all with the exception of one tablet in the National museum that refers to them as a tribe. The purported "cave" was flooded for many years but has now been drained so we could have a glimpse down into it. The church was interesting. Twelve pillars representing the disciples stand in the nave. Eleven are marble but there is one granite one representing Judas. The original walls were frescoed but have now been replaced with icons. I was particularly impressed by the people showing their devotion and ignoring the tourists in the church.

The bus then took us to Mamluk, a jewelry store so everyone could get a Cartouche³⁰ pendant. It is the ultimate souvenir of Egypt. I got a cartouche ring on my first trip to Egypt so many years ago. However I was hardly inside the door before I spied a ring with Rameses 11 pictured on it. It was so reminiscent of the ring I bought on Corfu with the Olympic figures. Alas that ring has been lost. This ring will be a worthy substitute. I also found an interesting gold and lapis Ankh³¹ ring, the symbol of a long life.

Mary Ann and Jim Scheirer, from Princeton, NJ, Scotti and I decided to walk a few blocks to a coffee shop for a light lunch. Imagine our surprise to find a bodyguard falling into step with us. It seems that four people are a group and groups go with bodyguards. While we were there Sherry and Robin de Mandel joined us. Our bodyguard looked bored as he waited patiently while we ate and then escorted us back to the hotel.

This evening we were addressed by Dr. Abdel Halim Nour El Din³², the dean of the Faculty of Archaeology at Cairo University and Director of the calligraphy Center. The good doctor gave us a whole course in Egyptology in one hour.

Scotti had a headache and left us but Mac and I went to the mall attached to the hotel and found an Asian restaurant. We ordered the "caterpillar" for an hors oeuvre. It was sort of like Sushi. Then I had a really good Nasi Goreng³³.

Monday February 1. We were awakened at 5:30 AM for dinner and transfer to the airport for our charter flight to Luxor. The victorious soccer team was returning from the African Cup and obviously President Hosni Mubarak was planning to greet them. For miles the road was lined with soldiers and police, spaced perhaps 10 feet apart to watch for any signs of trouble. It looked like the whole army and police force had been called in.

The flight to Luxor took an hour and a half. Once there we were taken to the magnificent Karnak³⁴ temple. This is a huge complex for various Pharaohs kept adding to it. There is still a lot to be excavated.

I remember the Hypostyle hall from 30 years ago with the huge columns emulating a forest. Covered with hieroglyphics the temple was dedicated to Amon-Re³⁵, the king of the Egyptian deities.

²⁸ <http://www.ask-aladdin.com/benezra.html>

²⁹ <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/serga.htm>

³⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartouche>

³¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ankh>

³² <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dr-Abdel-Halim-Nur-el-din-std-dktwr-bd-llym-nwr-ldyn/58163312709>

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasi_goreng

³⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karnak>

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I had made the error of leaving my seat cane on the bus but Magda was wonderful and found me places to sit while she gave her talk. The biggest problem was that it became very hot and once again I had shortness of breath. Magda explained the hieroglyphics and we were impressed with some of the colors still extant.

However I was glad when we got on the bus to be taken to the Salacia³⁶. Our boat is chartered just for us and we do not fill it. She is not old but has been completely redone so everyone has a suite. Sometimes when they turned two staterooms into one, they ended up with two bathrooms. I only have one but I love my room in the very front of the ship. I have two huge side windows and a small one where I can look forward. There is much wood on the boat or at least paneling to look like wood. I hate to leave it.

We had a huge buffet lunch and then a few hours to unpack and rest before we started out to see the Museum of Luxor³⁷.

This small museum puts the one in Cairo to shame with its exhibits all temperature controlled and lit. Every piece is a masterpiece to quote Magda. I was particularly interested to see the mummy of Rameses 1. When the Michael Carlos Museum³⁸ at Emory bought a large Egyptian collection from the Canadian Niagara Museum there was a drive to collect 1 million dollars in a week. Atlanta raised the money and got the collection. Most of the pieces grace the Carlos Museum today but the mummy of Rameses 1 did not belong in Atlanta and was sent back to Egypt where it was met with a welcome fit for a king and brought to Luxor where it is beautifully displayed.

Scotti and Mac went back to Karnak for the Sound and Light performance but I stayed behind. Had cocktails with Ranny and Maudy and then went into dinner. Rose filled the empty seat at the table. There are 38 lovely people on the tour and one thorny Rose. An incessant talker, she rattles on about other places where she has been or how she enjoys such and such. In short she monopolizes the conversation. She also has poor table manners and keeps her elbows on the table as she gesticulates. Everyone on the tour tries to avoid her.

Tuesday, February 2. What better place to spend a birthday than the Valley of the Kings³⁹. We drove a bit to find a bridge over the Nile. It was lush farmland with sugar cane being the most popular crop.

We got to the Valley of the Kings with some five thousand of our closest friends. When I was last here, in 1982, I do not remember the crowds. Cameras are no longer allowed. There were many hawkers trying to sell us postcards and picture books. Magda managed to find a quiet place to explain each tomb for she is not allowed to guide inside. She told us what to look for at each one. The first tomb we saw was that of Rameses IX⁴⁰. He was the eight king of the Twentieth Dynasty. The walls of the tomb are covered with hieroglyphics of the Book of the Dead. There are 714 chapters to this book to tell what happens when the Pharaoh dies. They deal with the mummification process, then the procession to the tomb, how he is to deal with the twelve hours of darkness, where a magical spell is needed to go from one to the other. Judgment day is presided over by Osiris and 12 jurors. The Pharaoh must present 42 negatives that he did in his life. Then he makes 42 confessions of the good things he did. His heart goes through fire. A heavy heart goes to hell but a light heart rises to heaven.

We then went through King Tut's⁴¹ tomb. Tut is pronounced, "toot" by Magda. His tomb was hastily prepared for the Pharaoh died so young. Hence there is very little decoration except in the burial chamber. The rooms are not large and it is amazing that such a lot of treasure was buried with him that it occupies much of the Cairo museum. He is the only one of the Pharaohs still in his tomb. Magda commented that his face is not in such good condition but I didn't think any of the mummies looked so hot.

³⁵ <http://www.ancient-egypt-online.com/egypt-god-amon-re.html>

³⁶ <http://www.expeditionships.com/search/ship.asp?shipid=394&tripid=1929>

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luxor_Museum

³⁸ <http://www.carlos.emory.edu/>

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_of_the_Kings

⁴⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramesses_IX

⁴¹ <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/tut.htm>

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Rameses 111⁴² had a long tomb covered with hieroglyphics. Unfortunately flooding ruined the lowest portion and you can no longer get as far as the burial chamber. He ruled at the time of the Trojan Wars and the fall of Mycenae.

The last tomb we toured was the tomb of Tausert/Setnakht, a husband and wife who both ruled Egypt at different times. Tausert's⁴³ burial chamber was very colorful and feminine in contrast to the others. Beyond her chamber is her husband's with the stone casket still in place

Back on the bus we went to the funerary temple of Rameses 11⁴⁴, also known as Rameses the Great. In his long reign he expanded the Egyptian empire. He built many temples and monuments throughout the country. Here at the Ramesseum⁴⁵, an enormous statue of the pharaoh lies in pieces. Since less than 60% remains there has been no attempt to restore it. It was here that Shelley wrote "Ozymandius, King of Kings." Magda had a copy of the sonnet and Colleen was appointed to read the beautiful words.

Magda showed us the wall on which the Battle of Kedish was depicted. A huge statue of Rameses overlooks the battle with the Hittites near the river Orontes. Apparently the enemy fled and Rameses relaxed his guard only to be attacked. His spies had been wrong. He prayed to Re and managed to marshal forces that came to his aid. He negotiated a peace with the Hittites, and cemented the treaty by marrying two daughters of the Hittite queen. He had many wives and on another wall the sons are lined up, the daughters are on the obverse.

Another wall depicts the war of Darfur. Nearby there was a palace where Rameses could come and supervise the building of his funerary tomb. Very little remains.

We then drove to see the Colossi of Memnon⁴⁶, two huge statues in bad condition that marked the entrance to the funeral temple of Amenhotep 111. When I was last here, that was all there was to be seen but now a dig is going on bringing the temple back to life. Many things have been found but it is not open to the public.

Back on board the Salacia we had a barbecue lunch on the sundeck as we sailed from Luxor north to Qena. Scotti presented me with two Bastet⁴⁷ statues for my birthday. She was originally a lioness, an ancient solar or war goddess. In later dynasties the priests began to give her a more diminutive role. The Greeks called her the goddess of the moon. Cats were much revered in ancient Egypt and some were mummified and buried with their owners.

It was lovely on the river. Fishermen were pulling their nets. There were birds. One island had cows grazing on it. Children waved from the riverbanks. The lush countryside was in such stark contrast to the desert in the distance.

I bought a card so I could access the Internet. It is so expensive (\$12 a half hour) that I don't do much else except e-mail and will have a lot to catch up when I return home.

At dinner my birthday caught up with me. Scotti treated to wine. The maitre d' came out with a large birthday cake and invited me to dance around the room with it. Everyone joined in the long conga line that circled the room before I made the first cut in the cake. I received a card that said a collection had been made to buy me an obelisk from Karnak except Magda would have to approve before I could take it! Magda has made sure we know of all the treasures of Egypt that now are in the Louvre or the British Museum and it is clear that she thinks they should be returned to Egypt!

Wednesday, February 3, 2010. We had an early morning tour of the great temple of Dendera⁴⁸. Dedicated to Hathor, goddess of the sky and love, it was built by Cleopatra V11. Every year the statue was brought out of the temple and symbolically mated to Horus to insure a good harvest. At one time squatters lived in the temple and their oil lamps darkened the ceiling but cleaning is being done and the brilliant original colors are now to be seen. We started in the Hypostyle hall and then inspected some of the storerooms where the offerings for the God were put. The inner

⁴² <http://www.discoveringegypt.com/k-q7.htm>

⁴³ <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/tausert.htm>

⁴⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rameses_II

⁴⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramesseum>

⁴⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colossi_of_Memnon

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bastet_%28mythology%29

⁴⁸ <http://www.discoveringegypt.com/dendara1.htm>

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sanctum was where they kept the statue of the God. A spiral stair allowed us to climb to the roof, its shape resembling the soaring a falcon (Horus) would do. On the roof is a copy of the zodiac that the Louvre copied and sent to Egypt. The one in that museum is now cleaned and its original color can be seen but the copy is black as it was found. The stairway down was straight to remind us how the falcon swoops down on its prey. We went to the Mamesia or birthing temple before boarding the bus for the short ride back to the ship.

For some reason we had lunch on the sundeck as we cruised back to Luxor. It was very windy and so cold I wore my coat with the hood up. It was not enjoyable. There are a number of people sick with colds or stomach upsets on the tour. I hope this doesn't give us more. I noticed that a cannon had been mounted on the deck. I certainly hope we don't need to use it. Security is not as obvious here in Upper Egypt but it still is there.

It took seven hours to go back to Luxor and so the briefing was postponed for another night. Instead we were bused the four or five blocks to see the magnificent Luxor temple⁴⁹. It is lit so we could see very well in the dusk. Magda showed us the hieroglyphics that show how Rameses 11 dedicated the temple, whose large statues surround the inner court. While the temple was still partially buried a mosque was built on the site and it still stands perhaps 30 feet above the floor of the temple. We also had a close look at the two and a half mile avenue of sphinxes that connected this temple with Karnak.

After dinner we were entertained by a belly dancer. It was very touristy with members of the audience selected to dance with her. The second act was a "whirling dervish". I expected something like the dervishes of Turkey who would spin themselves into a trance. This was not like that although the man was a good entertainer as he spun in his multicolor skirt doing various tricks with scarves.

Thursday, February 4. I shouldn't have gone on the tour but I thought Cipro⁵⁰ would take care of things. It didn't.

We went to the West bank for the second time to see the Valley of the Queens. The first tomb was for one of Rameses 11's son. The son died before he knew much from the Book of the Dead so the paintings show Rameses introducing his son to the various Gods. The colors were vivid and the pictures clean so it was very enjoyable. We also investigated another tomb close by but it was not in as good shape.

Then we headed for Hatshepsut's funerary Temple, called Deir el-Bahri⁵¹. I had seen this huge complex before but today was not my day. I got as far as the entrance and decided I had better stay close to the rest room.

Many of the mummies were hidden near this tomb. They had an interesting film on how they identified Hatshepsut's mummy and I watched it perhaps a dozen times before the group returned. When the mummies were taken from the Valley of the Kings to be placed in the Cairo Museum, the people lined the river to watch the barge sail down the Nile.

I did not get out of the bus at Ramose's tomb even though I wanted to see it. Magda named her son Ramose because of the beauty of this tomb.

We then went to an alabaster factory and saw how they shape things from this pliable marble. I did not buy anything because the prices seemed very high and they did not want to make a price. It was a long drive back to the ship for Susan Mubarek was in town to dedicate a youth hostel in a nearby town. The roads were barricaded so that the trucks could not pass through. They might carry bombs or something. As a result there was a colossal traffic jam. We were almost an hour late getting back to the ship. We sailed immediately for Edfu.

Scotti arranged for some delicious mushroom soup to be brought to my stateroom and I spent a quiet afternoon. Then I fell and hit my arm. It was bleeding pretty badly so the hotel manager came and another man to treat and bandage it. Then dinner came. Then the men came to make up my room. It was like Grand Central Station.

⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luxor_Temple

⁵⁰ <http://www.cipro.com/scripts/index.php>

⁵¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_el-Bahri

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Friday, February 5. I felt much better but skipped the trip to Edfu⁵². This Ptolemaic Temple is devoted to Horus. I visited it on my trip to Egypt in 1988.

Finally, I got my hair washed in the teeny little shower. After lunch it was time for a nap and catching up my journal.

Kom Ombo⁵³ temple sits right on the shore of the Nile. Every ship on the river seemed to be there. We tied outboard of one and had to cross through her to get to the shore. Then it was about two flights of stairs up to the temple.

This temple has two entrances for it is dedicated to Horus, the falcon God and Sobec, the crocodile God. Each side is identical. Each has its own Hypostyle hall; each has its own inner sanctum for the God. Here they found evidence that the temple housed an oracle. It also was a temple to which people came with their medical problems and this was explained in detail in the hieroglyphics. Pictured were the various medical instruments similar to what is used today. Egyptian doctors were considered the best in the ancient world and were much sought after by other countries.⁵⁴ Magda did her best to find openings in the crowds of people but was not too successful. For once we found ourselves waiting at each interesting point until the group ahead got through.

At the end we viewed the cemetery. Here they found caskets for the mummified crocodiles! There is a crocodile museum at the site but it is not yet open to the public. It was cold and I was happy to get back on board.

Tonight they had Nubian dancers to entertain us. I expected see a number of folk dances for the sowing and gathering of the harvest. However, this show was more a matter of tourists dancing with the performers and I left and went to bed.

Saturday, February 6. I woke as we were coming into Aswan⁵⁵. It is the southernmost city in Egypt. It is also a major metropolis. When the Aswan High Dam⁵⁶ was finished in 1970, Lake Nasser flooded almost all of Nubia⁵⁷. Everyone had to be resettled in new villages north of the dam. The new villages were built on the same pattern as the old so the people found themselves with the same neighbors etc. Factories were built in Aswan to provide employment. The dam was a success in that it brought Egypt a ready supply of water and electricity, but it was an ecological disaster. Where before the annual flooding of the Nile made the fields fertile, now other fertilizers must be used.

There were many temples in ancient Nubia. The most famous ones were moved. Some went to foreign countries as a reward for the money sent to Egypt. Hence you can view the Temple of Dendur in the Metropolitan Museum in New York⁵⁸.

Our tour took us first to the Shellal granite quarry⁵⁹ and we climbed to the top to view the unfinished obelisk. Weighing many tons I marveled at how the ancient Egyptians planned to pry it from the rock using wooden pegs that swelled in their holes. Then it was to be barged to some unknown destination, perhaps to Queen Hatshepsut's temple in Luxor. The stone cracked so the project was abandoned. There is evidence that stone was quarried here back to the Paleolithic times. Magda told us that underwater archaeology is trying to find other stone projects that may be sunk in the Nile.

Running the gauntlet of shops back to the bus I decided to look for a Bastet for Elizabeth. I soon found myself in a little shop with no less than 6 cat carvings in my lap, sipping mint tea, while the shop owner tried to bargain with me to buy all six! He started with 850 Egyptian pounds (\$175) as a price and I started with \$5. It took a while but I ended up getting the basalt carving for £10. It was still far too much but the fun is in the dicker.

⁵² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edfu>

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kom_Ombo

⁵⁴ <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/islam22.html>

⁵⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aswan>

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aswan_Dam

⁵⁷ <http://www.ask-aladdin.com/nubia.htm>

⁵⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Dendur

⁵⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_quarries_of_ancient_Egypt

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We went from there to yet another bazaar to board our boat for Philae. Some of the vendors are very aggressive. We even had one on the boat itself, selling necklaces with beads made from camel bone.

Phillae Temple⁶⁰ is unique because it was the last place in Egypt where hieroglyphics were used. It is one of the places where Osiris is said to have been buried. The ancient gods were still being worshipped there until the 5th century AD, long after Egypt had been converted to Christianity. People would scratch the walls to get powder that they would drink hoping from miraculous cures. The temple sat on lower ground and after the first dam was built across the Nile in 1902, it was partially submerged. When High Aswan Dam was built it would have been completely flooded so piece by piece it was moved to its present island. It was built of sandstone so strong that the carvings remain sharp and clear today.

We returned to the ship to start packing and have lunch.

At four o'clock we walked along the quay to where two feluccas⁶¹ were waiting for us. These historic wooden boats are seen all over the Nile basin. Ray had tried to organize it so that the sailors among the group might have a boat of our own to sail but Magda thought otherwise. It was a good thing because when we each had a turn at the helm it proved very difficult. With the heavy rudder and a tiller like a telephone pole it was very difficult to steer. We laughed and laughed at how it took two or three of us to manage what the young captain managed to do as easily as if he was racing a yacht. We were amazed at how fast the heavy boat moved. It was also very sensitive as we tacked up wind. After each of us had our turn we handed it back over to the captain and enjoyed Magda's talking as we rounded Elephanta Island. There was once an old synagogue on Elephanta Island but it fell into ruins when the Jews left Egypt.

At one point we had pointed out the Aga Khan's⁶² residence and tomb. The present Khan rarely if ever comes here so the house is deserted. He is the Aga Khan's grandson and he uses his money to build hospitals and schools and is much admired.

Then the crew produced a tambourine drum and we were coaxed into singing a Nubian tune, much to the amusement of our bodyguard who sat so silently in the boat.

Back on board the Salacia I found I had no water. The other tourists have commented on this but I had not had trouble before. I called reception and eventually they managed to get hot water to my washbasin only, the shower was cold. I washed as well as I could but it just isn't the same as a shower would be. Once clean I decided to skip the Nubian Museum⁶³ with the group because I would get sweaty again. I dressed for dinner and went up to the lounge where I found Ranny and Maudie and Jill and we enjoyed cocktails until they opened the doors to the dining salon for our farewell dinner. Instead of baked Alaska, we started with "flaming salmon". Candles placed in orange rind containers like little jack o lanterns, lit the appetizer of smoked salmon. Soup, steak and an iced desert followed this.

Sunday, February 7. We left the ship and flew by chartered plane 45 minutes to see Abu Simbel⁶⁴. This legendary temple would have been submerged by Lake Nasser. To move it was particularly difficult since it had been carved out of a cliff. It is dedicated to Osiris and Isis although it is really a temple to show off the might of Rameses 11. The hypostyle hall was made of enormous statues of the Pharaoh. The walls are decorated with his conquests. We marveled at how they could have created it. We marveled at how it could be moved to higher ground. Cut in blocks we could see hardly a crack. To recreate the cliff, they constructed a concrete dome and then covered it with rock to simulate the original cliff. The temple is still oriented so that the rising sun illuminates the face of the God in the inner chamber on February 22 and October 22. Nearby was a smaller temple to Nefertari, his favorite queen⁶⁵. Her Hypostyle hall had large statues of Hathor. The temple was decorated with flowers and the colors were feminine.

⁶⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philae>

⁶¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felucca>

⁶² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aga_Khan

⁶³ <http://www.numibia.net/nubia/intro.htm>

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abu_Simbel_temples

⁶⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nefertari>

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Our walk then continued around the complex. It was rather hot and up hill. There was also nothing much to see. I was very tired by the time I had to run the gauntlet of shops and was happy to be back on the bus.

Then we flew 2 1/2 hours to Cairo. We didn't get there until 5:00 PM, just in time for commuting hour. The traffic jam got worse and worse. We found out that it was caused because the Czech Republic Head of state was moving about the city. Magda tried to keep our spirits up but it was over two hours before we arrived at the wonderful Mena House⁶⁶. It was a palace built as a rest house for the Khedive Ismail when he was hunting or visiting the pyramids. In 1869 it was expanded for Princess Eugenie when she came to Egypt for the opening of the Suez Canal. I remember staying in this exotic hotel when Mother and I were here in 1982.

However they had put us in an annex, with about the same amount of charm you would find in a timeshare. Not only that but it was a five minute walk to where we were to have breakfast. I could see the pyramids but they were a bit further away that the last time I was here. I was so disappointed.

I ordered a pasta dish from room service and some wine. It arrived so promptly that I had almost finished it before the bags arrived. I was so tired I just crawled into bed and went to sleep.

Monday, February 8, 2010. I woke at six and luxuriated in a bath and washing my hair. I never felt clean in the dinky shower on the Salacia. After dressing I stepped out of the hall before I remembered my cane. I also had lost my key! I walked all the way back to Reception and got a new key. Then I asked for a cart to take me to my room. The only one available was a small pickup they were using to collect baggage. At least it waited for me while I went back to my room to retrieve the cane. I got back to the Mena House just 10 minutes before the bus was scheduled to leave but Magda made sure I had time to bolt down a breakfast.

It is just a short ride to the pyramids⁶⁷. We arrived in a sandstorm. Dust and sand were flying about so you could hardly see the vendors trying to force souvenirs on you. One vendor insisted on putting a keffiyeh⁶⁸ on me, a headdress that the Arabs wear. I was tempted to keep it but the vendor's persistence turned me off. I had breathed quite a bit of sand by this time and climbed back on the bus. Having been here three times before, I can tell you they look just like their pictures!

Then we drove to the Solar Boat Museum⁶⁹. In 1954, the Egyptian archaeologist, Kamal el Malak, discovered this boat buried in a crypt at the foot of the great pyramid. It was in over a thousand pieces and it took 25 years to figure out how to put it back together. No calking or gypsum was used. Instead it was tied together with rope. Surprisingly the rope looked much like modern sisal rope although I did not recognize the intricate knots that were used. We climbed up to where we could look down on it. I could just imagine the Pharaoh's casket being brought here from Memphis. There are four other boats. Two for going up and down the Nile, two for the ascent and descent to heaven and one for the descent to the world of the dead. One of the others is being reassembled.

They thought out the museum very well until it came to the rest rooms. There was one stall for men and one for women. Needless to say the queue for the ladies was long until Magda came and took over so that we could use the men's side. Men who arrived later had to stand in line with the rest of us. It was good for them!

We then bused to where our camels awaited us. A good deal of sand was blowing around and I felt it added to the feeling of going into the desert even though the feeling wasn't pleasant. The ride took only ten minutes but that was enough.

I had taken my wallet in case I wanted to buy something and to tip the boy who led the camel and took our picture. It slipped out of my pocket. There wasn't much money in it but I did have my credit cards. After a few minutes of, Magda found it for me. I felt like such an idiot. I should have taken my whole fanny pack tied around my waist.

⁶⁶ http://www.oberoihotels.com/oberoi_menahouse/index.asp

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza

⁶⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keffiyeh>

⁶⁹ <http://egyptsites.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/the-solar-boat-museum/>

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When we got to the Sphinx⁷⁰. I had eaten enough sand for the day and did not get out of the bus. The statue was carved where it lies, with the head of the Pharaoh and the body of the lion. It is thought it was made to guard the approach to the pyramid.

We then went to papyrus shop where they showed us how they took the pulp from the plant and put it into a press to form this ancient paper. There were many beautiful pictures of Egyptian art on papyrus for us to buy but I have no more walls left!

Back at the Mena House we went in for yet another buffet. The deserts were the best part. Then I caught a golf cart back to my room. I skipped the Museum show and also the Sound and Light. I have breathed enough sand for today!

At 9:00 we met Ray and Lynn Lantz in the bar of the hotel before dining in the lovely Indian restaurant. Ray and Mac both ordered the hottest thing on the menu. I settled for a delicious lamb dish. It was all very enjoyable.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010. The air was very smoky today making it hard to breath but I did not want to miss the tour. Luckily the smoke abated as the day wore on.

We went first to the Red Pyramid⁷¹, the largest of three at the Dashur⁷² necropolis. This pyramid has only been open to the public for 3 years since it was near a military base. It is called the Red Pyramid because of the color the stones take, but it was not always red. Originally it was covered with limestone. This pyramid is almost 4000 years old and was built by Sneferu⁷³, the father of Khufu who built the great pyramid.

The sides of the pyramid are at a 43-degree angle and the stones to build it are noticeably smaller than in the great pyramid. The entrance is aligned with the star Sirius.

I walked partly around the pyramid to view the capstone, which has been placed on the ground. It is rare to find a capstone among the ancient pyramids. There were many security men around but no vendors, which was a pleasant change. One man on a camel invited me to have my picture taken with him but I had noticed he then demanded a tip from the other tourists so I declined.

Sneferu built three pyramids. In the distance we could see the Bent pyramid⁷⁴. It changes the angle about half way up so it appears bent. When they built it they found the structure could not bear the weight of the stone so they made it shorter.

We continued to Memphis, the ancient capital of Egypt⁷⁵. Here in an open-air museum,⁷⁶ we viewed the Rameses 11 stature that recently toured the US. There was also an alabaster sphinx. However the prize of the museum was a huge fallen statue of Rameses 11. It toppled in an earthquake. We could get close enough so we could see the sinews the sculptor carved in the legs and arms.

Our last stop was the Step Pyramid at Saqqara. It was built for the Pharaoh Djoser about 2630 BC. An imposing wall that looks as if it had been constructed yesterday encompassed this complex.

Unfortunately, President Vaclav Klaus, of the Czech Republic, was visiting at the same time so we had to take a long detour to get to the main courtyard of the tomb. There was evidence of archaeology being done among the other tombs in this huge necropolis, which contains graves from the earliest dynasty to Greco-Roman times. Walking in the sand was very difficult for it was like powder.

The Step Pyramid looks like someone built it out of blocks of sandstone. Magda explained that it started as a simple two-story affair but other levels were added by the architect, Imhotep, to create a stairway for Namur the first pharaoh of the first dynasty, to climb to heaven. The courtyard in front of it was used for the Hebsted Jubilee. Every three years the Pharaoh had to prove he could still run, fight a bull and do other tests to show he was still strong enough to rule.

⁷⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphinx>

⁷¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Pyramid

⁷² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dahshur>

⁷³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneferu>

⁷⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bent_Pyramid

⁷⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memphis,_Egypt

⁷⁶ <http://www.ask-aladdin.com/memphis.htm>

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Once he proved his might he then was taken to an adjoining courtyard surrounded with temples and crowned with both the crown of Upper and the crown of Lower Egypt. Several of the temples have been reconstructed and I admired the delicate fluted columns that adorned them. These columns were not free standing but part of the surrounding wall. This courtyard must have been filled with statuary and was very beautiful.

Then we had the inevitable rug stop. Most of the tour went on back to the Mena house but I elected to stay and see the show. First we were shown where the rug making school works. Boys and girls from the age of twelve are taught the weaving trade. Upstairs was the show room with many lovely rugs on display. We were offered refreshments but then instead of spreading rug after rug on the floor in front of us we were invited to walk around. Lynn Lent did buy a small rug but the rest of us just watched. Magda asked if we would like to stop and get sandwiches rather than go back to the hotel. It turned out to be a sort of 7-Eleven convenience store, attached to a gas station. I got a salmon and fish sandwich.

Then we went back to the hotel to pack and rest.

Scotti and Mac dressed up in the galabias they have bought. Mac was particularly fetching in his white robe and turban! The farewell dinner was elegant with cocktails in a separate room before going into the dining room. We had a delicious dinner complete with floorshow. The Whirling Dervish and Belly dancer were so much better than the ones we saw on the ship. I left early to try and get some rest before my early morning departure.

Wednesday, February 10. My wake-up call was at 3:30 AM. I was picked up at 4:30 and taken to the airport. There was no traffic at this hour. I had some difficulty with Air France. They wanted me to check my carryon bag! It had something to do with security in Paris. However, I held my ground and was allowed to proceed by wheelchair. They loaded me on the plane as if I was the catering truck.

The plane was very comfortable with reclining leather seats. I slept most of the three-hour 2000-mile flight to Paris. The new Charles de Gaulle seems to have cured its wheelchair problems and I was speedily wheeled to the lounge for my 4-hour layover. Then they proved even more efficient by getting me to the plane without clearing Delta's security check. There was much consternation when the wheelchair bus reached the plane and for a moment I thought they would not let me board. At last a security woman was sent out from the terminal to ask me if I had packed my bags myself, examine my passport and scan my ticket.

In Atlanta, they only sent 3 wheelchair pushers for eight wheelchairs so it took some time until they got to where you recheck your bags. Then two of the pushers announced it was time for them to go home and they left. The dispatcher kept saying someone will be here soon, but all I knew was that I had been up for twenty-four hours already and I wanted to go home. I got out of the wheelchair and got myself through security.

The limo was waiting and whisked me home. The final blow was to find no heat in my house so the cats and I curled up in the bedroom with my portable radiator to sleep!

One last comment. This is the first National Geographic Tour I have taken with no National Geographic representative along. There was also no one from Lindblad who handle National Geographic's tours. It worked because Magda was so superb as both escort and tour manager, but we couldn't help but wonder if Lindblad was in trouble financially.