

Sample pages to *A Search in Secret Egypt*

Sample pages from
A Search in Secret Egypt
by Paul Brunton

Edited by Timothy J. Smith and Kira Lallas

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A Search in Secret
Egypt

PAUL BRUNTON

INTRODUCTION TO A SEARCH IN SECRET EGYPT

This is an extraordinary book, and its title is particularly apt. The chapters contain many *searches* – amongst the ruins, amidst the cities, in ancient texts, and even within the mind of the author himself. The book also uncovers several remarkable *secrets*, explains some, debunks a few, and leaves a few still shrouded in their own mystery. But most of all, this book is *in Egypt*; Brunton's narrative is a mirror of Egypt's own complexly layered identity, a narrative by a man whose unique sensibilities allowed him to meet Egypt in its own distant past, and to make enquiries amongst its modern citizens.

Like the title, which is deceptively facile but ultimately accurate, the narrative appears to be an easy read, touching lightly on the many faces and ages of Egypt; however, with a little more attention, its secrets begin to emerge. This book is an inward journey of initiation, a self-discovery of the first great secret of humankind: *our home is not the body, but the soul*. This is a secret that we can experience directly for ourselves, an experience which will inevitably initiate a search for our own spiritual home, a search which will reveal many secrets before we are done. The awakening to our spirit-self is the true secret of this book, a secret that Paul Brunton experiences for himself in the course of his investigations.

While it is our long habit to believe that we are seated in our body and that our mind is contained therein, the events, interviews, and visions of the author say otherwise: we are creatures of the spirit, of the mind; and the body is our vessel, not our truth. That this reorientation was a long-held secret of the temple-priests of Ancient Egypt is something that Brunton encounters as he explores the temples, tombs, and hieroglyphic records of that bygone era. As he sifts through the myths and icons of that extraordinary time, he returns again and again to the myth of Osiris, and to the mystery that is the Sphinx itself. Osiris teaches us that we can leave the body and maintain our awareness, and thus gain power over the grave; the Sphinx teaches us that this initiation is just the beginning of the Great Mystery which only touches our temporal selves, a mystery requiring the patient guardianship of the Sphinx himself, as humankind slowly evolves towards spiritual maturity.

In order to clarify what the mind and body are capable of, and to distinguish various forms of yoga and magic from true spirituality, Brunton searches out – and finds – a variety of hypnotists, magicians, mystics, and even a bona-fide snake charmer! While the reader will very likely be startled by some of the unusual (or conservative) elements of this book, Brunton himself was not entirely enamored of the occult, any more than he was constrained by the academic; at the same time, he did not eschew their company. His main intent is to introduce us to the panorama of viewpoints that exist in Egypt, and that swirl around the central mystery of the mind-body relationship.

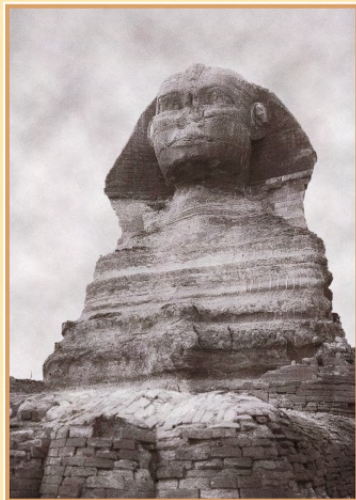
I first read this book some forty years ago; I had not really read it again, until the opportunity to produce this new edition presented itself. As I worked on this project, three aspects of this work impressed themselves upon me. First is the often-overlooked scholarship of Brunton. He presents us with the original hieroglyphic statements of Pharaonic Egypt, quotes from the records of its first Greek visitors, and includes a tidy “who’s who” of its subsequent rulers. He is also conversant with the efforts of the European Egyptologists including those active during his own lifetime, and, while accepting their views in the main, he also makes a few corrections to their works – corrections that have since been corroborated by modern research.

Second, is the extraordinary accomplishments of the Egyptians – especially their understanding of the mind-body relationship, and their ability to provide direct initiation into the deeper truths of the human condition. While various chapters explore occultism, magic, hypnotism, and religious meditation, Brunton returns again and again to his main theme – the mystery of Osiris and his own remarkable experience in the Great Pyramid. That mystery is the mystery of the our primal identity with spirit, not body; graced with a direct experience of this secret, our spiritual search can begin in earnest, for we have glimpsed our homeland; until then, our work is speculation at best, and directionless wanderings at worst. Thus the wisdom of ancient Egypt can give us the keys to the kingdom, if we are ready to receive them.

The third point is about Paul Brunton himself, and underlines his emphasis on the experiential focus of the ancient temple-wisdom. This book was not written on a laptop in some air-conditioned European apartment. It was written in the city markets, living mosques, sandy temples, and desert villages of the Nile. Even today, with all the enhancements available to the modern tourist, Brunton’s diligent explorations of the temples, towns, and tombs of Egypt would prove to be a yeoman’s task – to say nothing of seeking out the magicians, snake charmers, and mystics whose integrity disinclines them from public advertisement. Then there is the author’s aplomb as he jumps into scorpion-inhabited subterranean chambers, grasps live cobras, strolls through the darkness of haunted temples – to say nothing of his remarkable sojourn in the Great Pyramid. Here we meet a remarkable man indeed: a free-thinking scholar, an adventurous journalist, and most of all a man who garners spiritual insight from direct experience.

So I invite you to take notes – and to take note – as you read this book, and consider the means by which you too can begin your own search, whether it be in Egypt or elsewhere, for the secrets of the mind and the awakening of spirit.

The Desert Guardian



• Photograph by author

*Once more I regarded steadily
this grave stone guardian of ancient secrets,
whose figure is so emblematic
of the Silent Watchers of our world.*

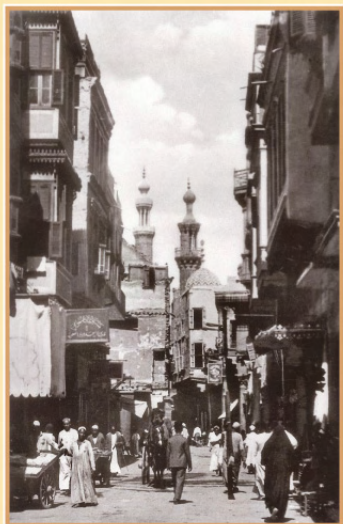
THE STARS WERE STILL THICK OVERHEAD, the crescent moon was still smiling gallantly upon us both, the Sphinx still rose transfigured and majestic in the silvery beams, when I turned my head away to the left, where, in my vision, I had watched the sea rise like a furious monster and devour the dry world.

A bat, mistaking my still body, perhaps, for part of the landscape, flapped its wings against my head and flew off, sending a slight shiver of repulsion down my spine. Apparently it had come up out of some opened subterranean mummy-tomb.

And I thought of the great ocean of sand which rolls across the three million square miles of the Sahara Desert every now and then, never breaking its flow until it reaches the long ridge of bare limestone hills which rise like rose-painted walls from the ground, hills which protect Egypt and guard the valley of the Nile for such a long distance. Nature, as of set purpose, seems to have thrust up the Libyan Hills to save Egypt from being overrun by the very desert which she has also made.

The danger is very real. About the period of early spring, each year, cyclonic winds of terrific force, the dreaded Khamseen, declare war against the northern portion of Africa and whistle furiously across the continent all the way from the Atlantic shores. As they move forward, like an invading army thirsting for loot and victory, the sand and dust move with them. The determined crowds of whirling sand grains spread themselves everywhere, covering the land with a golden shroud. Where no resistance is made to their encroachment, they bring desolation with the years, the sepulchral desolation of the grave, for they entomb huts, houses, monuments, temples and even whole cities. Thus the yellow sand holds imperious sway and rules the land with resistless sceptre. Such is the force of these Khamseens that the sky may be obscured completely and the sun disappear from view. The swirling clouds of sand, often as impossible to see through as a real London fog, are driven rapidly forward

With a Magician of Cairo



From author's collection

The life of Cairo is a life in two worlds. It is a strange life, this, where Orient and Occident, medieval and modern, meet and face each other under the irresistible pressure of our times.

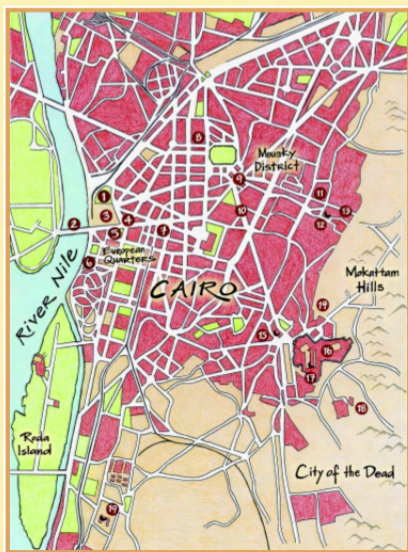
THE LIFE OF CAIRO is a life in two worlds. One moves into the ancient Arab world as soon as one begins to walk eastwards from its great central square, the Ataba el Khadra, and one returns to the modern European world as soon as one begins to walk westwards. It is a strange life, this, where Orient and Occident, medieval and modern, Eastern colour and squalor and Western greyness and cleanliness, meet and face each other under the irresistible pressure of our times.

And it was in Cairo that I discovered mediums and magicians, soothsayers and astrologers, sorcerers and fortune-tellers, fakirs and holy men in plenty. They were there in all of their fifty-seven varieties, despite the frowns and restrictions of a Government which had shown its displeasure by forbidding most of their activities by law and which does not hesitate to put this law into action quite frequently. I must confess that, despite my sympathy with some of the subjects concerned, the Government had every provocation in imposing these restrictions. Charlatans preyed upon the credulous, irresponsible babblers were listened to with awe, and self-deluded seers were accepted at their own valuation. The harm that was done by fortune-tellers whose prophecies were taken as guides of action will never be known to its full extent, but it was sufficiently known to force the Government's hand. There were, however, a few characters whose personalities interested me apart from their profession. There was a wizard who killed a hen before my eyes by his invocations and magic; there was a Sudanese black witch-doctor who accurately named India as being a country of great good fortune to me and then made some totally inaccurate predictions; there was a young Egyptian of Syrian Christian ancestry who firmly believed he was a reincarnation of the prophet



Sudanese witch-doctor
Photograph by author

Wonder-Working by Hypnotism



Map of Cairo during the time of the author's sojourn in its European quarter, circa 1930

- 1 Egyptian Museum 2 Qasr-el Nil Bridge 3 British soldiers' barracks 4 Square of Ismailia
- 5 Street leading to the British Garrison's barracks, near the hypnotist's home 6 British High Commissioner
- 7 Poultry Bazaar 8 Shepherds Hotel 9 Ataba el Khadra Square 10 Sharia Muhammad Ali Road
- 11 Khan Khallil Bazaar 12 El Azhar Mosque 13 El Azhar Mosque-University 14 Cemetery of Bab el Wazir
- 15 Sultan Hassan Mosque 16 Citadel 17 Muhammad Ali Mosque 18 Bekashin Infirmary 19 Fern Mosque

SOMETIMES ONE FINDS THINGS where they are least expected and it was during my sojourn in the European quarter of Cairo that I found there another strange manifestation of those forces which we call supernatural, but which science may one day explain so glibly that we shall no longer regard them as such.

I discovered a remarkable young couple who lived in a street which led directly to the barracks of the British Garrison. Cairo is such a cosmopolitan hive that a single block of apartments will frequently house half a dozen different nationalities. The French are quite prominent in this quarter and this young couple had lived in Egypt for many years. The husband's name was Monsieur Eduard Ades and his wife was known as Madame Marguerite. He was gifted with some amount of hypnotic power, she being an exceptionally fine subject for his experiments. After some years of practice and training, they had arrived at a certain degree of competence in their power of demonstrating the extraordinary possibilities which lie untapped within the minds and bodies of mankind. I tested them in various ways and, though most of our experiments were quite unsensational and of interest to scientific researchers alone, nevertheless there were two or three feats of a character sufficient to startle any hide-bound materialist who has never explored such possibilities.



Monsieur Eduard Ades and his wife, Madame Marguerite
From author's collection (1st edition)

*In the Name of Allah, the
Compassionate, the Merciful!*

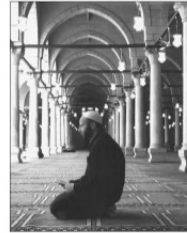


The mosques of Cairo imprisoned a heart-appealing beauty that caught me in turn helpless each time I lingered in them... Who could set eyes on the geometrical arabesques which adorned the stones of the main arch without feeling real pleasure?

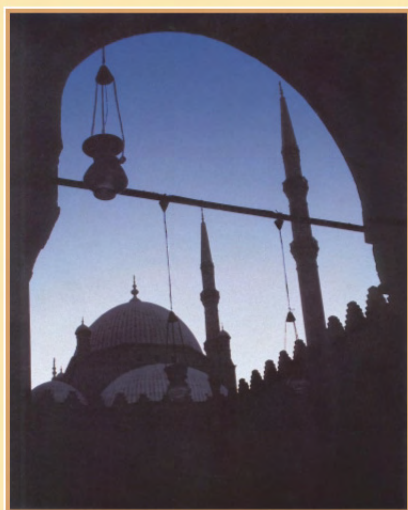
I FELL UPON MY KNEES behind one of the noble pillars of the mosque and let the wings of my heart flap their way silently upwards in reverent devotion to that Higher Power which the men around me called Allah, the Power to which I had never been able to assign any name but which I, too, had agreed to call Allah during my sojourn in Egypt. I knew that we all in this respect meant the same thing, the same Supreme Being Who holds us all in the hollow of His unseen hands, and I could very well accept Him by one name as by none.

I do not know how long a time passed before someone began to read from a ponderous ancient folio of the Quran, Allah's sacred writ for this land, in barely-heard chanted tones. And, as the pleasant Arabic murmurs fell from his lips, I looked up and glanced around at those others who had obeyed the Prophet's command to gather at the onset of dusk and remember for a few minutes the Divine Source to which we owe our very life and being. There was an old man beside me dressed in a long robe of blue-striped white silk. His skin was the colour of pale walnut and provided excellent background for a row of splendid white teeth. He touched the soft red carpet with his forehead the while he whispered his prayers; and constantly lifted himself up, again to repeat the prostration. Anon he placed his hands flat upon his thighs, continued his whispering, and, before long, bent his brow to the floor once more.

There was another old man who entered and invoked the mercy of Allah even as I gazed around and who was also soon swaying to and fro at his devotions. He



Obeding the Prophet's call



Sheikh el Maraghi: "All men are brothers in Islam, and both mosque and pilgrimage enable them to come together as such. Thus a king may walk beside a beggar, or pray beside him. Islam calls upon people to lay aside racial and other distinctions, while it makes religious unity and humane principles the tie that binds people together."

Top: The El Azhar Mosque and University • From author's collection
Bottom: On the streets of Cairo



across the Eastern world; to provide authentic interpretations of the holy Quran, and to keep the flame of Muslim culture ever burning.

When I was ushered into an audience hall and thus into the presence of His Eminence and after we had exchanged the usual greetings, I found time to study this grave-faced man of medium height who enjoys a unique prestige in the world of Muhammedans.

An Interview with the Spiritual Head of the Muhammedans

I WAS CURIOUS TO KNOW the authoritative answers to a number of questions upon Islam about which I had formed my own notions, based upon the rough guide of experience, but upon which I did not know the exact rulings of the Prophet and his book. So I took my way to His Eminence the Sheikh el Islam, the man who presides over the headquarters of the religion in Egypt under the rounded minarets and battlemented walls of El Azhar Mosque-University. His personal name is Sheikh Moustapha el Maraghi, and the institution of which he is Grand Rector is venerable with a thousand years of authority as the Muhammedan centre whose word on questions of faith and creed is final. He is a man of pontifical powers. It is true that Arabia holds the Holy Stone, the Kaaba of Mecca, the Sacred Place to which every devout Muslim hopes to make pilgrimage one day; nevertheless, it is Egypt which holds the Living Stone, the brain and nerve-centre of Islam. The Grand Rector is not only the chief dignitary of Islam in Egypt, but, because of the international character of El Azhar, an authority for other countries as well. At El Azhar, the pride of Muslims, the deeper aspects of the religion have been taught since its early days to those who wish to perfect themselves in its doctrines, and who wish to understand in complete detail the message of their revelator, Muhammed.

Sheikh Moustapha el Maraghi, spiritual head of Islam (ca 1930) • From author's collection (1st edition)



"The Quran, rightly read, encourages scientific researches into the knowledge of God and of the universe," said Sheikh el Maraghi to me during the interview recorded below. "There is no science which can be foreign to the Creator and His creation, and nothing in any which can be contrary to the precepts of Islam. And the question faces us of purifying our religion of superstitious and fantastic interpretations. These studies

Sheikh el Maraghi, formerly Grand Cadi of the Sudan, has considerable influence not only in religious circles but also among a section of prominent public men.

Under a white turban, I saw a pair of steady, piercing eyes; a straight, regular nose, a small grey moustache, a firm mouth, and a stubble of grey growth on the chin. The great institution over which His Eminence presided gave its instruction free to thousands of students, future upholders of Muhammed's doctrine, receiving its own funds from endowments and Government grants. The poorer students were fed and lodged free, or else received allowances of money. No longer could the old buildings house them all, so several branches had been built in other districts, and with these extensions had come a change in the teaching itself. Modern scientific studies had been introduced, well-equipped laboratories and amphitheatres for physics and chemistry provided, and up-to-date methods of teaching were now in practice. Yet, these reforms had been carefully introduced—so carefully that the ancient atmosphere was still retained, and both old and new educational methods dwelt side by side.

Once inside the walls, which enclose an array of colonnades and cloisters, of galleries and minarets, I saw black-bearded figures who sat and pored over their Arabic books. The echoes of the students' voices as they chanted their lessons, slightly swaying to and fro in rhythm with their sing-song, reached my ears. They squatted upon mats in small groups under the shade of cloistered roofs, while in their centre sat the teacher.



Inside the Prophet's Mosque, Medina

"Islam allows polygamy if the husband could treat his wives impartially and equally. The Holy Quran forbids polygamy if impartiality on the part of the husband is impossible of attainment. Allah, may He be exalted, said:

"And you have it not in your power to do justice between wives, even though you may wish (it)... (4:129)

"At any rate, Islam did not favour polygamy; never unconditionally allowed it. It only intended to prevent the lustful, who could not content themselves with one wife, from falling into the sin of adultery. These were allowed polygamy only if they could fulfil the condition of impartiality.

"The present practice among the greatest majority of Muslims is to have a single wife, except for a few who by force of physical or material circumstances have to marry more than one, in order either to guard themselves against adultery or to support poor women who have no one to provide for them."



An ancient Quran, formerly belonging to the late Sultan of Turkey
 • From author's collection (1st edition)

Before I left I was shown the priceless library, kept in rooms with exquisitely carved cedarwood ceilings. Ancient Qurans written on parchment, books with illuminated pages and gilded initials, manuscripts of great antiquity passed by the thousand before my gaze. Fifteen thousand of these manuscripts were kept here alone.

And with that my audience was closed. I had listened intently, for Sheikh el Maraghi's high prestige gave unique authority to every statement he made.

I had begun to understand more clearly why Muhammed's faith spread; why Islam quickly came to receive the reverence of wild desert Bedouins, no less than that of cultured city Persians, and of the host of tribes and peoples who dwelt in the Near and Middle East.

Muhammed, like Moses, but unlike Buddha, aimed chiefly at establishing a visible, tangible heaven on earth, with organizing a society of people who would go on with normal daily living but apply to it such rules as he, a messenger of God, had brought them. Buddha, and even Jesus, were preoccupied with giving voice to ascetic themes, to intuitions which concerned themselves with the secret recesses of the human spirit; Muhammed, like Jesus, passionately lived in God, but, whereas Jesus gave his passion to the finding of the inner kingdom, Muhammed gave his to founding an outer kingdom. We are not competent to set ourselves up in judgment, but simply to note these facts. Muhammed, Moses, Jesus and Buddha were truly all-inspired Ambassadors of God, but Muhammed's marked difference from most Orient-



"The word from a merciful Lord is 'Peace'" (Quran 36:58)

tal prophets was that he opposed the tendency to withdraw from the social and public duties of life which usually accompanies extreme religious devotion; he made it clear that monks and monasteries were undesirable in Islam; and he extended no approval to monkish doctrines involving the death of human affections.

It is a matter of regret that so little is known of the Islamic faith by the average Westerner; even that little is usually partly erroneous, if not wholly incorrect.

Muhammed taught men not to be ashamed to kneel and worship this Invisible King, to go down on their knees in the open street.

It is time we got rid of some of these misconceptions of this great man, Muhammed, and of his great religion, Islam, which becloud our minds. It is time that we understood why the magic of his name is such that millions, comprising nearly one-seventh of the human race, from the western shores of Africa to the eastern shores of China, call down daily blessings upon him. It is time we recognized the reality of the fervour of these men, the Muslims, and why the quickly uttered "Allah" of European pronunciation is a pitiful caricature of the fervent, long-drawn, heartfelt, two-syllabled "Al-lah" of the Oriental, who devoutly prolongs the second syllable.

Night had opened her eyes, twinkling with thousands of starry jewels as her adornment, when I stood again in the street outside El Azhar, gazing absent-mindedly at nothing in particular. The crescent moon shone through a mist surrounded by indigo-blue sky. Then, the strong tenor voice of the mosques' muezzin rang out upon the air, resonantly proclaiming, from his high turret, the oneness of God.

Now throughout this city of carved gateways, fretted geometrical arches and tiled courtyards, watched over by Allah and His Angels, men were falling on their knees, with faces turned towards Mecca and repeating those simple words:

"GOD IS MOST GREAT!"

CHAPTER XI

*The Innermost Rite
 of Egyptian Temples*

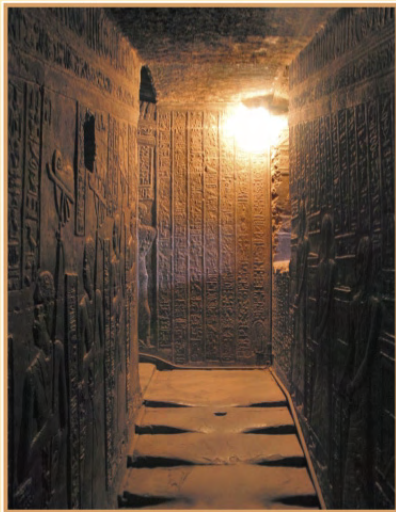
THE ANSWER WHICH I SOUGHT to the mystery of Osiris's legendary murder came to me at last, when I had travelled farther up the Nile and devoted myself to a study of the best-preserved large temple to be found in Egypt, that of the goddess Hathor at Denderah, which the soft warm sand had completely covered and preserved for much more than a thousand years. I had climbed up an extraordinarily narrow and worn stairway on the northern side. I stopped now and then to examine, by the light of my torch, the sculptured scenes which appeared on the walls all the length of this staircase.

They depicted the most important ritual-procession of the temple—that of the New Year—moving onwards with the Pharaoh himself at its head. Priests, hierophants of the Mysteries, and standard-bearers took their carved way upon these walls as they must have taken their living way up these steps. I stepped out of the gloom with them into the brilliant sunlight, and walked across gigantic roofing-stones to a small temple which stood, secluded and alone, in a corner of the roof-terrace. It was supported by Hathor-headed columns.

I penetrated inside, and recognized the place as a sanctuary where the Osirian Mysteries were performed as late as Ptolemaic times. Its walls were decorated with chiselled reliefs showing Osiris extended on a couch, surrounded by various attendants and incense braziers. Hieroglyphs and pictures told the whole story of Osiris's



The facade of Hathor's Temple at Denderah



I had climbed up an extraordinarily narrow and worn stairway on the northern side, examining the sculptured scenes which appeared before me, priests, hierophants of the Mysteries, and standard-bearers took their carved way upon these walls as they must have taken their living way up these steps.

Sample pages to *A Search in Secret Egypt*



Bas-relief at Denderah of Ra "bird-man" adoring the life-giving Sun

received a great benefit from the experience. The hieroglyphic texts speak of such a one as "twice-born," and he was permitted to add to his name the words "he who has renewed his life," so that on some tomb-inscriptions archaeologists still discover these phrases descriptive of the spiritual status of the defunct person.

What were the greatest secrets that the successful candidates learned in the Mysteries?

That depended on the degree through which they passed, but all their experiences could roughly be condensed into two results, which formed the core of the revelations they received.

In the earlier degrees, the candidates were made acquainted with the human soul, pictured as a little bird-man in the system of hieroglyphs, they solved the mystery of death. They learned that it was really disappearance from one state of being, only to reappear in another, that it affected the fleshy body, but did not destroy the mind and the self. They learned, too, that the soul not only survived the destruction of its mortal envelope but progressed onwards to higher spheres.

In the advanced degrees, they were made acquainted with the divine soul; they were brought into personal communion with the Creator; they stood face to face with the Divine. They were first instructed in the true explanation of the Fall of Man from his original spiritual state. They were told the inner history of Atlantis, a history so intimately associated with the history of the Fall. Then they were lifted up, sphere beyond sphere, until they found themselves in the same highly spiritual

this temple, which was dedicated to Egypt's goddess of beauty and love, to horn-head-dressed Hathor herself, should have been so little harmed by the hand of Nature—it is perhaps the best preserved of all the old temples to be seen today, and one of the few which have remained so perfect—and so much by the hand of man. Almost all of those gigantic female faces had been backed to pieces by fanatic fury, though their long ears and massive head-gears still remain. For Denderah was one

of the most gorgeous temples in all Egypt of those still used at the time the Edict of Theodosius, in A.D. 379, abolished the ancient worship and gave the final death-blow to the already dying religion.

His envoy, Cynegius, carried out his orders to the full. He shut up all the temples and places of initiation, and prohibited any celebration of the Mysteries and ancient rites. Christianity, or rather the Church, had finally triumphed. Then the intolerant mobs swarmed into Denderah; drove away the priests and trampled on the appurtenances of their rituals. They overthrew Hathor's statues, despoiled her gilded shrines and mutilated the most prominent features of her carved face wherever it could be conveniently reached.

In other places they did far worse, for they broke down the walls, demolished the columns, shattered the statted giants, and undid the work of thousands of years. Such are the varying fortunes of creeds, whose followers begin by suffering the horrors of martyrdom and persecution, and end by inflicting them upon others in their turn, and who must ravage the art of their predecessors in order to create an art of their own.

Proud, crowned Ptolemies once drove up to this temple in golden chariots, before a populace hushed with awe; so I reflected as I was about to enter. Crowds, too, once congregated in the deserted temple yard.

I placed myself at a point among the immensely girthed columns of the portico, where I could look up and inspect the beau-

Top: One of the beautiful blue ceilings of Denderah spangled with many stars and winged suns (in the Hypostyle Hall).
Bottom: Mired column in Denderah, lower rank is alternating Ankh and Was-Sceptres; upper rank shows Hathor, Isis, Sekhmet and a pair of Winged Serpents.



consciousness as Man had enjoyed at the beginning. Thus, while yet on their pilgrimage in time, they had gathered the spoils of eternity.



IT WILL NOT BE AMISS if at this point in my record of travel and impressions, I interpose some descriptive lines upon the various ancient institutions of the Mysteries from a pen other than my own—the pen of a man who lived in classic times and who had, himself, been initiated into the lesser degrees, at least. He was bound by oath not to reveal in detail what he had experienced, so we must not look for more than general explanations and elusive hints. The excerpt, which is the fullest known admission by an initiate, comes from Apuleius, an initiate of the first degree of the Mysteries of Isis; his autobiographical writings speak of one, "Lucius," and they show how the latter knocked at the temple door in his eagerness for the secret knowledge.

The Egyptian Mysteries were for long kept sealed to foreigners and it was only in late times that a few were admitted and initiated. Those who were so initiated almost always kept their vows of secrecy. The regulations covering entrance were strict and severe.

"And daily my desire to be admitted to the Mysteries increased ever more and more, and again and again I visited the high priest with the most urgent entreaty that he would at length initiate me into the secrets of the night that is holy to the goddess. But he, being a man of steadfast character and famous for all his observation of the strict laws of the faith, with kindly and gentle words, such as parents use to check the precocious desires of their children, put off my insistence and soothed the great trouble of my spirit by holding forth consolatory hope of greater bliss. For he said that the day of each man's initiation was fixed by the ordinance of the goddess, and that the priest destined for her service was likewise chosen by her providence.

"He bade me, like others, await all these ordinances with reverent patience, warning me that it was my duty to beware with all my soul of over-eagerness and petulance, to avoid both these faults, and neither to delay when summoned nor to hasten unbidden.

"For the gates of hell and the power of life are in the hands of the goddess, and the very act of dedication is regarded as a voluntary death and an imperilling of life, inasmuch as the goddess is wont to select those whose term of life is near its close and who stand on the threshold of the night, and



Isis at Horemheb



Upper register (left to right): Hathor, one of the Ptolemies and his hair approaching Isis and Horus with offerings in both hands; he is also at the far right. A different Ptolemy is shown in the central and right panels of the lower register. Wall relief, Hathor Temple, Denderah

tiful blue ceiling which was spangled with many stars and bore the zodiacal circle as an adornment. Then across into the second hall, where the glorious African blue no longer illumined the six colossal columns that stood within it, as it had illumined their more numerous brothers in the vestibule. I penetrated farther into the vast, gloomy temple, flashing the light of my torch here and there. Now the beam was focused upon mired figures cut deep into the sides of pillars and set within square frames or profuse hieroglyphic inscriptions, else separated by broad horizontal bands from each other, then it showed up the forms of Pharaohs and their deities on the walls, some on their thrones and some in procession. In a deeply carved relief, Ptolemy approached Isis and the young Horus, with offerings in both hands; a beautiful raised border surmounted the scene. Everywhere the faces had been scratched, partly erased or wholly mutilated. And everywhere Hathor recurs, the solid shafts of the stone pillars displaying her head, and the walls her entire form.

I sauntered slowly on, for the whole length of the principal hall—a good deal more than two hundred feet—in an atmosphere that was somewhat unpromising to study and reflection. For dust loaded the century-imprisoned air and a heavy odour assailed one's nostrils. High up in the blackened roof, and among the pillar heads, whirred and squeaked a legion of ugly winged monsters, which were furious at my unexpected entry at a season of the year when tourists never invaded their domain. They were bats.

Karnak Days



I went to the great gate that once led to the Temple of Mut, constructed by the second of the Ptolemies. Its lovely outline and embellished surfaces held my gaze again and again. Above its lintel the sculptured, winged sun played, according to ancient thought, a protective part in warding off the entry of evil influences.

AT LAST I HAD ENTERED THE REAL EGYPT, the old and fascinating Egypt, the country where Nile, temple, field, village and sky combined to create a vivid and seductive impression of the land where Pharaohs ruled in pomp and flagstones daily echoed to the chants of many priests. Here, at Luxor, 450 miles down the river from Cairo, one slipped back and fitted into the Past without effort and looked out upon a landscape which presented many of the ancient scenes. It is the South, or Upper Egypt as the geographers have immemorially called it, that has kept more of those scenes for modern observers.

Its classically famous capital, Thebes, Homer's "Hundred-gated city," has vanished, but it has left us Karnak; once the headquarters of the Egyptian priesthood.

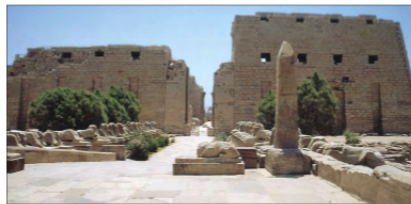
Today, Karnak is the pearl of this region. The fame of its widespread mass of now ruined but still stately temples has spread all over the world. It contains the largest temple still to be seen in Egypt, the Great Hall of Amun-Ra, to which, in olden days, all other temples in Egypt were tributary. So I made Karnak my place of pilgrimage for days on end, moving amid its mouldering ruins and broken pillars both by the bright light of the sun and by the dimmer light of the moon.

Karnak, which stands out of a forest of green palms to the north, lies two or three miles down the river from Luxor and a little more inland. One approached it along a dusty road, across a wide plain and under a sky of palest blue, past a Sheikh's white cupola'd tomb and a grove of tamarisk trees, until a huge sandstone pylon towered suddenly into view. Crested hosopos were everywhere in the fields, busily picking up sustenance from the stubbled ground. On the way one noticed, here and there and peeping out of the soil, odd, headless, half-shattered or overturned members of a double row of small, ram-headed sphinxes which were once set up all the way from Luxor to Karnak, but now mostly lie buried in the wayside fields. Hundreds must originally have been erected on both sides of the three-mile road.



Map of the author's daytime exploration of the Temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak

The magnificent twenty-yard-long entrance pylon made an attractive sight. In the pylon form, with its tall, sloping sides and curved, overhanging architrave, architecture found a handsome and powerful expression. On the front was the carved relief portrait of the Ptolemy who had built it, exhibiting him in the act of making a sacrificial offering before the Theban gods, while four vertical, socket-footed grooves, which run the whole height of the mighty portal, indicated where wooden flagstaves



The rows of ram-headed sphinxes leading up to the First Pylon, with its vertical grooves which were designed to secure tall flagstaves against its sloping walls

had once been fixed, to fly gay-coloured bunting on the days of temple festivals, and to ward off evil influences.

Passing inside, I found myself in the open court of the temple of hawk-headed Khonsu; that god who, in popular uninitiated parlance, was the son of Amun. The broken stumps of a double colonnade occupied the centre. The walls depicted a sacred procession of boats floating up the Nile to Luxor, and carrying the image of Amun-Ra. I penetrated into the ruined sanctuary where once was kept the sacred temple-boat of Khonsu. All the mummy that was practised within these walls meant much to the people, to the priests who sought power, and especially to the kings themselves. But it meant little to the initiated few who witnessed rite and ceremony as mere symbol and token, not as manifestations of reality.



Top: The outside wall of the open court of the Temple of Khonsu (looking west)
Bottom: The front of the Temple of Khonsu (looking east)

And, next, I discovered a series of interesting low-reliefs, each in a separate border, upon the east wall of an inner chamber adjoining the sanctuary. The thing that caught my eye in the first place was a carving of my friend of the long-drawn winter night's meditation—the Sphinx!

I at once realized that I had alighted upon something important, because one might go for days without detecting the Sphinx upon a wall or pillar carving.

The first panel showed the Pharaoh Rameses IV in the presence of the goddess Amunet, to whom he was offering a statuette. The latter had a flat base and supported two figures. In front squatted a child; none other than Horus, the son of Osiris. There was a large lock of hair on the side of his head; he was crowned with the symbolic sun and serpent; his left hand rested on his knee, but his right hand was raised to his face with its index finger pointing to his closed lips—thus enjoining silence.

The figure behind him was the Sphinx. Amunet held her right hand extended towards Rameses; she gripped a handled cross between her fingers, and pointed its end directly between the king's eyes.

What was the significance of this scene? The Egyptologist would, no doubt, offer a perfectly connected and obvious reading, and one which, on its own level, would be correct enough. He would tell you that the king was simply engaged in making sacrifices to the gods—nothing more. Often these wall-scenes are nothing but pictured histories or recitals of war triumphs. Obviously this scene was nothing of the kind, but indicative of some extremely sacrosanct rite; particularly as it appeared upon a wall near the sanctuary, the holy of holies of this temple.

Sample pages to *A Search in Secret Egypt*

awakening he would open his eyes to the rays of the sun in another place, whether he would be carried towards the end of this experience in spiritual illumination. After a lengthy initiation, begun at night and finished with the dawn of day, the newly-made initiate had stepped out of materialistic ignorance (darkness) into spiritual perception (light).

The secret rites of the Mysteries were practised in underground crypts, or in reserved chambers set close to the holy shrine, or in little temples built on the roofs; never elsewhere. All these places were forbidden territory to the populace, who dared not approach them under the direst penalties. The hierophants who had undertaken to initiate a candidate likewise undertook a heavy responsibility. His life or death was in their hands. For an unexpected intruder to interrupt the sacred rite of initiation meant his death, no less than an unexpected intrusion upon a delicate surgical operation, in our time, might mean the death of the unfortunate patient. And what, after all, was initiation but a kind of psychic surgical operation, a separation of the psychic from the physical part of man? Hence, all the initiatory chambers were placed out of reach and were always well guarded. Those which lay near the shrine of a great temple would have to be approached through complete blackness, for as one left the doorway the light receded, to disappear altogether when the threshold of the holy shrine was reached. Once the candidate was thoroughly entranced, his body was left in this protective darkness until the close of his initiation, when he was carried out to the light.

Those chambers which were underground vaults were used in the same manner, every light being extinguished after entrancement, so that the crypts became both symbolical and literal graves.



I DROPPED DOWN A HOLE and explored a dark vault where the priests had once practised their most secret rites, and then I emerged with relief into the friendly sunlight and fresh air.

I passed between the enormous portals of the fine temple of Anun-Ra in my onward journey through the dimmed glories of Karnak. These portals were fit for the passage of giants rather than of puny mortals. They towered up like precipices above my head. The Egyptian taste for exaggerated size sometimes rose to stunning dimensions, as in the case of the Great Pyramid near Cairo and the pylon walls under whose shadow I stood. They were almost fifty feet thick, thicker than any fortress walls need be. Well, indeed, was the profane outer world kept from polluting the sacred precincts of this temple, which the ancients proudly called "the throne of the world." Alas it was now but a broken throne, and when I emerged in the large forecourt, there I found a wide mass of mutilated masonry relieved from its desolation by some unfallen pillars. I walked slowly across this quadrangle, treading on rough earth and growing weeds, where once had been a beautiful mosaic pavement that extended for hundreds of feet in length.



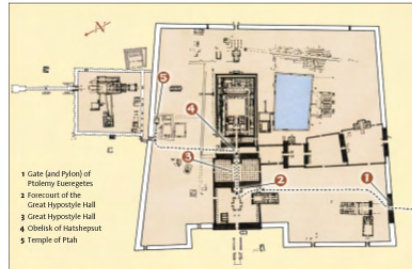
In the forecourt, looking towards the Column of Taharka and the great doorways of the Second Pylon (leading into the hypostyle Hall)

This space traversed, I arrived at a high doorway, covered with coloured half-reliefs and standing between the shattered remnants of another pylon, which was now but a tumbled mass of hot fallen stones and quite bereft of its former outline. Yet that doorway must once have risen a hundred feet above the ground. Gone were the seven steps which the builders had placed before the entrance, seven symbolical gradations of man's progress from the lower world of everyday existence to the highest sphere of spiritual attainment. For the Egyptians—as many of the ancients—understood well the mysterious numbering which underlies the whole constructed universe; they knew that the seventh day or grade brought Rest, the highest peace for man, no less than for other created beings and things. I had found this sevenfold numbering in all their temples throughout the land, while it had appeared in clear and startling expression within the Grand Gallery of the Great Pyramid. Therefore they had fittingly placed those steps, which time and man have all but torn from the ground, at the very entrance to the vestibule of Karnak's grandest and most impressive feature, the Great Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Anun-Ra.



Looking up at columns and window in transverse aisle of the Hypostyle Hall

I entered, and a bewildering perspective of sixteen serrated ranks of columns opened out before me. The sun's rays fell upon a scene without parallel in my memory. Nearly every one of the hundred and thirty upright pillars thrust a strong, horizontal shadow across the unpaved

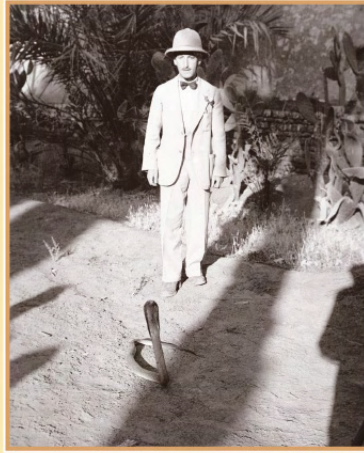


Above: Map detail, showing the author's nocturnal explorations of the Temple of Karnak
Opposite page: Map showing the author's various approaches to the Temple of Karnak from the town of Luxor

And presently the huge silvery pylon of Ptolemy stood at the end of my path, like a spectral sentinel of the great temple; its square top towered up into the indigo sky. It was not ready to receive me, however, for a barred grille had been placed across it. I woke the sleeping watchman who jumped, startled, out of his narrow cot, then stood rubbing his sleepy eyes in the bright glare of my electric torch. After he had unlocked the small modern gate, I paid him well for thus disturbing his rest, and he let me pass in to wander alone. I crossed the Forecourt and sat down for a few minutes among the mass of tumbled sandstone blocks which once formed the lofty pylon dividing the Forecourt from the Great Hypostyle Hall, and meditated on the fallen grandeur of this monument to Anun-Ra. Soon I was moving amid the stately columns and majestic ruins of the Great Hall itself. The moonlight dappled the shafts that rose up by my side and flung their deep black shadows on the ground, so that carved hieroglyphs appeared at one moment in gleaming relief, and the next as suddenly disappeared into the night. I switched off the light of my own torch, save where I was uncertain of my path, that it might not play the rival to the mellow illumination of the moon, which turned the entire temple into a place met with in dreams alone. The Obelisk of Queen Hatshepsut suddenly confronted me; it looked like a splendid silver needle.

And as I went slowly onwards through the faintly relieved darkness into the covered sanctuaries that lay beyond the impressive colonnades of the Hypostyle Hall, there came a dim sense that my solitude was no longer solitude. Yet these stupendous halls and smaller shrines had not been crowded with worshippers for fifteen hundred

I Become a Snake-Charming Dervish



From author's collection

I noticed a gradual but drastic change in my personal attitude towards the reptilian world. I had slowly but increasingly come to feel a peculiar admiration for the sleek and sinuous beauty of their bodies and the graceful air of their upreared necks, a strange fascination for their undeniable weirdness and uncanny mystery, and a subtle sense of pity for them.

regard the cobra—and especially the spectacle-hooded variety—as a divine creature and hesitate to kill it, although they will kill any other snake without regret. Some priests there actually keep fangless cobras in the temples, feed them on milk and sugar, and pamper them with ceremonial worship. Such snakes become quite tame and quickly emerge from their holes in the temple when a reed-pipe is played to them. When one of them dies it is wrapped up in a shroud and cremated, as if it were a human body.



Serpent worship in ancient India: these Dravidian votive stones (called Nāgakala) invoke the blessings and offer devotions to the race of sentient serpents, the Nāgas (image from the Ekambaranatha Temple, Kanchipuram, India)

Many a peasant, whether in the north, south, west, east or centre of India, finds much satisfaction in worshipping the image of a hooded cobra, or in placing food near the hole of a living one, for he regards such a creature as being the bodily vehicle of some higher power, some spirit to be revered and honoured. This notion has been handed down to him through the most ancient traditions of his land, and he accepts it without question, as he accepts so many other strange notions. No other species of snake receives his worship.

In the holy of holies of many a temple, shrouded in darkness or lit by the dimmest of lamps, and across whose threshold no man of alien faith may tread, the sculptured figure of the serpent twines itself around the base of the shrine or rears its hooded head. Turning to South Africa, Zulus who live far from towns and have not picked up the notions of civilizations, believe that in the special cases of snakes which find their way into houses and huts, the spirits of dead relatives have reincarnated. Therefore they do not attempt to kill them, but merely attempt to get them out of the house, usually by sending for the witch-doctor, who often combines snake-charming with his many other pursuits.

Several times when looking into a cobra's eyes, I thought of this weird Zulu belief. Despite their baffling and mysterious fixity, I received occasionally an uncanny and indescribable feeling that there was behind them an intelligence which was almost human.

Once, when I had slung a particularly thick and exceptionally large specimen of a snake around my neck for not more than a single minute, I had experienced a sudden slipping away of my mind from its earthly surroundings, and a bewildering psychic state supervened. I felt that I was losing my physical moorings and that the inner world of spirits was opening up. I seemed to depart from our whirling ball of land and water for some dark, ghostly, supra-mundane sphere whose atmosphere

I PLAYED A SORT OF OVERTURE to my real tuition in charming, by memorizing the "Rifa-ee" invocations and then handling various kinds of quite harmless snakes. Nevertheless, the latter were quite able and willing to bite me. The sensation of being bitten was exceedingly unpleasant, being something like having an angler's hook ripped through one's skin. However, the wounds were really superficial and free from any trace of venom. The next step was to handle poisonous snakes whose fangs had been extracted. These wretched reptiles, too, were fond of biting a mere novice like myself, until a time arrived when my incantations really seemed to work and when I developed so much confidence that I felt my own will being successfully imposed upon that of the snakes. This matter of courageous faith, concentrated thoughts and incessant will-power, I soon discovered to play quite an important part in rendering the creatures more tractable.

I continued my training by crossing the Nile, and going out into the desert with the Sheikh, hunting for venomous, full-fanged snakes. He captured a couple of them, one being a large cobra with a beautifully coloured green skin streaked with yellow, and the other a smaller thin reptile with a diamond-shaped head and a pattern of diamonds all along its back. We brought them back, safely covered up in his basket, triumphantly to Luxor.

We took up a position in an open part of the garden. Moussa suddenly raised the lid and dipped his hand into the basket, exclaiming:

"Now begins your first lesson. Hold this snake!"

The cobra was outstretched towards me, its head turning to and fro.

I was startled at this sudden command. Never before had I deliberately approached an unguarded snake at close range, much less even attempted to hold one. I hesitated.

"Have no fear!" the Sheikh said, reassuringly.

was definitely evil. I did not relish the idea of falling into such a condition and losing my "grip" on things with creeping death so close to my face; I let the snake fall gently to the ground. Immediately, my consciousness reverted to normal and was focused once more on the familiar physical world around me. This happened only once, but it was unforgettable.

Had I sensed the snake's own state of consciousness? Did it function in two worlds at the same time? And was one of them a nether world of horrors? Who can say?

On a jungle expedition in the south of India I had unexpectedly come upon a weird sight, nothing less than a meeting of cobras. A number of the beasts were gathered round in a circle, their bodies raised majestically into the air. What were these hooded heads discussing, I wondered; what mysterious secrets were they communicating to one another? But I must confess that I fled from the sight. One cobra was unpleasant enough in those days—a crowd was more than human feelings could endure.



Top: A row of decorative snakes, from Hatshepsut's temple, Deir el Bahri

Above: A pair of winged serpents bracketing the sun (detail Denderah Temple ceiling)

Left: Reconstructed gate near Philae; note serpents on upper registers of the door-frame, and the pair of winged serpents on the lintel

Among the carved and painted memorials of ancient Egypt the serpent meets the eye at every step. Upon the architrave of the giant entrance pylon to the Temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak there rises two magnificent stone cobras, poised pillars of gracefulness. Not far away the little Temple of Osiris is profusely sculptured with serried ranks of serpents. On the other side of the river, the walls of almost every royal tomb in the Valley of the Dead, where time-shrivelled mummies lie deep in the Theban hills, bear painted witness to the important place which the snake occupied in early Egyptian religion and thought. Many a representation of the public ceremonials of the temples through-



All along the gorge stretched the high silhouette of the ridge. The heights reflected the glaring white light, while the debris upon the ground reflected the intense heat; its complete isolation and utter lack of vegetation showed how suitable the place was for the hiding of the mummies of the kings of Egypt.

Youssef was called a boy in deference to conventional traveller's terminology, although he would never see forty again and although he possessed a wife and three children. He frequently reminded me of the existence of his family; in fact every time I pulled out my purse to settle our accounts. And when I playfully tried to put a stake around his neck, he indignantly complained that if the reptile bit him there would be no one "to give feed to my family!" Apparently, long habit of giving feed to donkeys had caused him to regard his own family as being much on the level with the donkeys in their demands for necessary sustenance. Anyway, he was well-mannered and possessed an excellent sense of humour; in short, I liked him.

He completed negotiations with the contractor and, terms being arranged, he returned in due course with a nice-looking, large-sized, well-saddled white donkey. I climbed on to the animal and it started off. All went well until we reached the riverbank, where we three were taken on to a boat and sailed for the western side of the



View of the Western bank of the Nile from Luxor

broad grey Nile. Having disembarked, I mounted again and set off on the seven-mile journey to the Valley.

It did not take more than a quarter of an hour's riding to discover, and to confirm, the fact that the beast belied its attractive looks. When at long last we had covered nearly half the distance I complained to Youssef that either his powers of selection were not up to the high standard which they doubtless usually maintained, or else that the contractor's herd must have been extremely meagre in quality if this animal represented his best specimen. I added that it was quite a lazy creature and I regretted to have to accuse it of being fonder of sleep than of moving. Youssef threw up his hands and turned the white of his eyes to the sky. "In sha Allah!" he exclaimed, astonished. "Who are we to dare to correct the Almighty's handiwork?"

I found his question unanswerable and thereafter relapsed into eternal silence on that particular subject. We left the maize-bearing fields behind; and took little more

I Meet an Adept

A LONG PINK AND BROWN RIDGE of hills lies against the sky some miles west of the Nile at Luxor, forming a barrier between the Libyan Desert and the cultivated river valley. Hidden among them is a dry sunburnt gorge where no vegetation grows or can grow; where the soil is either rocky stone or arid sand; and where the only living things are snakes and scorpions. Long

buried in this bare valley were the royal dead of vanished Thebes, for it is the famous Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. "Were," I wrote, because many of those mummified bodies have now been extracted from their gloomy caverns and exposed in the stuffy galleries of great museums for all the world to view. And if others still elude discovery, it is not because time and trouble and money are wanting.

There was much that I desired to study in the tombs themselves; in the uncovered temples that lie within a few miles or so of the Valley; in minute fragments of Thebes that now peep above the soil; and along the edges of the Western Desert itself. To make all these frequent and short expeditions from Luxor, there is no animal equal to a good donkey as a means of transport, because it knows how to pick its sure-footed way between boulders, over sharp stones and by the edge of precipices.

I had engaged a "boy" as general servant, and one of his first orders was to find a contractor who could supply me with a good beast for these short excursions.



The author and his transportation—not the donkey referred to in this chapter (and who was not immortalized on film) but his cousin, the horse. • From author's collection

than a glance at the twin Colossi of Memnon—a pair of giant statues whose perished faces are entirely featureless, whose deformed throne-seated bodies once rested on sentry-duty in front of the pylon of a vanished palace-temple built by Amenhotep III, and who rise fifty feet high above the wheat-field which has replaced the temple. Without noses, without eyes, without ears and without mouths, the Colossi sit as they have sat for centuries, lamenting perhaps, as the Roman visitor Petronius has scratched on the base, the injuries inflicted upon them by the Persian invader Cambyses. Once a stone causeway stretched back for more than a thousand feet behind them, with pairs of statues and sphinxes marking the sides. All this has gone too. We turned away from the fertile vegetation of the flat Nile land and struck off at a tangent to the river, travelling towards a point where the Theban hills met. We met the usual groups of white-robed men and black-robed women on the road.

We passed a typical village of mud huts, a few low, white-washed houses, a miniature minaret set on a tiny white cupola'd mosque and the inevitable grove of palm trees planted for the sake of their pleasant shade.

I halted near the village well to let the thirsty donkey and its human passenger have a drink. The animal dipped its nose into a strange trough—no less a thing than a broken stone sarcophagus that once may have harboured a Pharaoh!

We moved on and did not stop for the half-destroyed temples of el Qurna, nor the excavated mortuary tombs of the Theban nobles at Abd-el-Qurna, nor even the remarkable necropolis of Dira Abu el-Naga.

I wanted to make my way to the desolate little valley leading to the heights before the blazing sun was upon us. We had set out at dawn and it was not an hour too soon in this summer



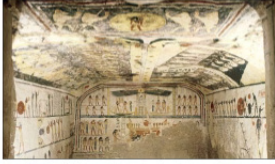
Above: The Northern of the two Colossi of Memnon (the one which 'sang' with a bell-like tone during the era of the Ptolemies) • Photograph by author
Below: The village of Karnak (circa 1930) • Photograph by author



Sample pages to *A Search in Secret Egypt*

I returned from these crowded underworlds and paradisaical overworlds to the entrance, scene after scene flickering past me in the lamplight like an unravelling cinema film. Once again the bright glare burst upon me suddenly.

These opened tombs provide a handy illustration of the foolishness of disregarding as baseless all ancient traditions. Diodorus, writing about 55 B.C., mentioned that the records of the Egyptian priests contained references to the fact that forty-seven Pharaohs were buried at Thebes. Modern Egyptologists did not disregard Diodorus's statement, but acted upon it in full faith, and this enabled them to make the discoveries in the Valley of the Kings, which in later years led to the grand climax of the finding of Tutankhamen's tomb of treasures.



The chief burial vault of Ramses IX's tomb; on the ceiling are two elongated figures of the Goddess Nut; on the rear wall the upper register shows Ramses IX in a baroque with divinities, while the lower register depicts Horus reviving the king as Osiris

But now I wanted to leave the Pharaohs who sought a spurious immortality in death through the means of embalming preparations and linen wrappings! It was late afternoon, the air was heavy with midsummer heat, my palate was parched, and I crossed the stony track in quest of Youssef and his treasured flask of life-sustaining tea. He had gone off somewhere in search of a scrap of shade. Look where I would, he was undiscoverable. Youssef had melted in the heat. But, finally, what my eyes

had failed to detect, my ears were able to report. For from the doorway of an out-of-the-way tomb of one of Egypt's renowned warrior-kings, I heard the sonorous refrain of loud and recurrent snoring. I hurried over to that tomb, and beheld a prostrate, white-robed man whose face seemed entrapped in some delicious dream.

It was Youssef!



THE DAYS SLIPPED PLEASURABLY BY while I slaked my unquenchable thirst for research into the secret thoughts and sacred expectations of the vanished Theban world. I became as familiar—and sometimes as friendly—with those calm, majestic figures of the gods, and those grave preoccupied faces of their mortal adorers, as I did with the living forms of the present-day inhabitants of Thebes' successor, Luxor. And I noted the psychic signs left in the atmosphere of some of these tombs which marked the mournful declension into sorcerous practices of a once great race.

It was on one of these studious expeditions that I encountered the man whose conversations I have hesitated to record in these chapters, because the implications of some of his statements were beyond my ability to verify by personal investigation and because these statements may either astonish our prosaic century or—more likely—bring down merited ridicule upon his incognito name, and consequently

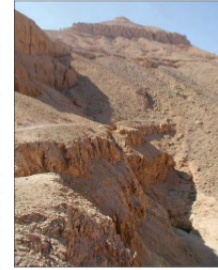


The funerary temple of Hatshepsut, at Deir el Bahri

upon myself for having deemed such fables worth reporting. However, I have played the pros and cons in the balance and the scale-pan of the pros has been weighted a trifle heavier than the other. Moreover, it was, and is, this man's wish that I publish these things, whose importance to our time he seemed to rate higher than my own blasé judgment could rate it.

I had put in a good day's research among the Tombs of the Kings, having started off soon after daybreak and continued till a late hour in the afternoon. To get home more quickly, I had taken the bridle-path which went over the Libyan Mountains and descended in the vicinity of the unique terraced cliff temple of Deir el Bahri, and thus avoided, at the price of a stiff mountain climb, the considerable detour made by the ancient road around those mountains.

Here the donkey which had proved so disappointing at first, but to which I had gradually become reconciled—and indeed almost affectionate—demonstrated its real worth in picking its sure-footed way up the steep precipice. Each hoof of the once-abused animal was planted efficiently amongst the slippery debris of loose stones and crumbling rock that formed our track; I made no attempt to guide the donkey; it was unnecessary because its unerring instinct knew better than I where to plant those hooves. It was really quite powerful and was much taller than those seen in England, being



The bridle path leading from the Valley of the Kings, over the Libyan Mountains and down into the west bank of the Nile; el Quina peak can be seen at the top