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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN CITIES

By Dr. Sherin Elkhawaga

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The ancient Egyptians had many great cities. Some of their remains are still present to keep us bewildered on how amazing the ancient Egyptian civilization was. Some cities however have now vanished, but still the presence of very fine monuments give us a clue of how wonderful these cities were.

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Many of the egyptian cities were developed when certain pyramids or other large building works were constructed. The capital moved from site to site depending on the Pharaoh. The first reason for this is the internal peace which existed in Egypt from the earliest times. A second reason directly related to the first – given urban mobility each successive pharaoh was free to spend his reigning life on earth preparing his tomb for the life after death in a different location to that of his predecessor.

Egyptian Pharaohs would move to other sites when resistance to change in current capital cities was too great to accomplish their goals.

Thebes, the city of the god Amon, was the capital of Egypt during the period of the Middle and New Kingdoms. With the temples and palaces at Karnak and Luxor, and the necropolises of the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, Thebes is a striking testimony to Egyptian civilization at its height.

This is the great, ancient city of Thebes, capital of the Egyptian empire for almost one thousand years, for Egyptian inhabitants it was Uaset, meaning "the chief town" and Niut, "the City" it was later on called Diospolis Magna. Its present name of Luxor comes from the Arab El Qousour, translation of the Latin "Castra" with which the ancient Romans indicated the city where they had installed two encampments.

Luxor and Karnak now occupy parts of its site. The city developed at a very early date from a number of small villages, particularly one around modern Luxor (then called Epet), but remained relatively obscure until the rise of the Theban family that established the XI dynasty (c.2134 B.C.). The city rapidly became prominent as the royal residence and as a seat of the worship of the god Amon. At Thebes, also, was the necropolis in the Valley of the Tombs where the kings and nobles were entombed in great splendor in crypts cut into the cliffs on the Nile's west bank. The city's greatest period was that of the empire, when it served as a reservoir for the immense wealth that poured in from

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the conquered countries. As the empire began to decay and the locus of power to shift to the Nile delta, Thebes went into decline.

Thebes was sacked by the Assyrians in 661 B.C., the army lead by Assarhaddon, Assurbanipal's army deported the townsmen before turning them into slaves and stripped the town of its statues and treasures. Lastly, it was completely razed to the ground in 84 B.C. by Ptolemy Lathyros to the extent that during the roman era it was a mass of ruins visited by wayfarers; the few remaining townsmen settled in what remained of the temples and the tombs were reduced to stables.

The Romans sacked it in 29 B.C., and by 20 B.C. there was only a few scattered villages seen. The temples and tombs that have survived, including the tombs of Tutankhamen and of Ramses II's sons, are among the most splendid in the world.

Temple of Amon Ra

In Luxor, all that remains of its glorious past is the temple that the ancient Egyptians built to the glory of Amon ra king of the gods, and which they called "Southern harem of Amon".

Brought back to light in 1883 by Gaston Maspéro, the temple is 260 metres long and its construction was basically commissioned by two Pharaohs, Amon-Ofis III who started it in the XIV century B.C. and Ramses II who completed it adding the porticoed courtyard with its axis moved eastwards, and no longer north-south as in the case of the rest of the temples.

The architect was probably amenophis, son of Hotep. The temple of Luxor was joined to that of karnak by a long stone-paved dromos, a drome and a processional avenue, flanked by sphinxes with rams heads that the XXX Dynasty replaced with sphynexes with human heads. The avenue ended at the entrance to the temple of Luxor, marked by the large pylon erected by Ramses II, which features a 65-metre front decorated with bas-reliefs illustrating scenes of the military campaigns of the Pharaoh against the Hittites.

In ancient time, the pylon was preceded by two obelisks, two seated colossi and two standing colossi. Today, only the left 25-metre high obelisk is still standing: the other was taken to Paris in 1833 and placed by the engineer Lebas in Place de la Concorde on the 25th October 1836. The two colossi in granite represent the Pharaoh seated on his throne, fifteen and a half metres in height on a base of about one metre. Of the other four statues in pink granite leaning against the pylon, one was to represent Queen Nefertari and another decrepit one to the right, his daughter Merit-Amon.

Having passed through the triumphal entrance, one enters the court of Ramses II, with its double row of columns with closed papyrus capital and statues of Osiris in the inter columns. To the north-west of the courtyard one can admire the temple-deposit of the sacred boats built by Thot-Mosis III and dedicated to the triad Amon, Mut and Khonsu.

Then follows a colonnade of two rows of bell-shaped columns 52 meters long that take us to the second sourtyard, or courtyard of Amon-Ofis II, surrounded on three sides by two rows of columns with closed papyruses, a real, highly evocative forest. From here, across a transversal hypostyle hall, one enters the last sanctuary, the most intimate and sacred part, which gave the temple its name of "Adytum of the south" theatre.

Egyptian radiologist, interested in egyptology.

A Look Into Egyptian Religion

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By Kadence Buchanan

By far, the ancient Egyptian culture represents one of the least understood and most interesting facets of beliefs throughout human history. In this article, we'll give you a basic idea of what modern day man knows about what the ancient Egyptians put their faith in.

Our understanding of Egyptian religion is far from complete. Many of the things that we know about their religion seem incomplete; we seem to have found alternate gods they've worshipped that served the same purposes, as well as conflicting stories about what they believed about how the world was formed. While our knowledge is somewhat lacking, we'll focus on what we do know.

Many researchers feel that one of the most basic forms of religious identity that the Egyptians performed was the worship of animals. The tribes of Egypt that existed pre-dynasty often worshipped different animals as gods that represented their feelings of which animal was in most relation to their way of life. Many of these gods were shown in pictures and writings to have an animal head on a human body, with an example being Ophois, the god of war, who had a wolf's head. Some gods were identified with multiple animals, as well, such as Thoth, who was associated with the ibis, the baboon, and the moon. The creationist beliefs of the Egyptians varied from tribe to tribe. Some felt that the god Khnum had built the world on a potter's wheel, while others felt that the existence of the universe was due to the spiritual thought of the god Ptah.

Organized religion found its way into Egypt at around 3200 BC, when Egypt became organized as a state. Many of the gods that the ruling class were in favor of received the most acclaim throughout the land, with the god Amon receiving much more acclaim than he had previously. The Egyptian religious experience was unique in that over time, the ruling class had the power to directly influence which gods received the most praise. As time changed, different gods came into the limelight. Any way you put it, we still don't have a concrete knowledge of the beliefs held by these ancient peoples. Hopefully, time and exploration can help us to clear up many of the difficult questions posed by Egyptian religion.

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