

The Egyptian Museum, Cairo

- a short introduction

In Cairo, one of the "must see" places is the Egyptian Museum in the middle of town. This museum is filled with so many objects and treasures from Ancient Egypt that it becomes a mixture between gigantic storage rooms and a unbelievable museum.

Standard tours offered give you normally a bit more than an hour visit which includes major parts of the museum and the treasures of TutAnchAmon.

With more than 120000 object in the collection we recommend a somehow different approach...



A couple that takes time to look around, here among the treasures of TutAnchAmon
[See larger photo](#)

In Egypt its more important to have time to see what you visit rather than trying to see everything. For the huge collection at the Egyptian Museum we often find following "technique" the best:

Visit the museum twice! The first time have a good Egyptologist guide for a round through the whole museum (*and make a note when you see something you want to look closer at later*). Then go and have a break, the garden café at Nile Hilton just some meters away is a good option here. Having relaxed and maybe looked in some of the books you purchased inside the museum bookshops, then go back to the museum without a guide. Use your time, you will not regret it!



The entrance to the Egyptian Museum
[See larger photo](#)

part 1. The Old Kingdom

Once upon a time - some 5000 years ago - Pharaoh Menes united Egypt and became the first ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt. His family established the first dynasty in Egypt and this and the following dynasty lasted together for about four hundred years. Today these two dynasties are called the **Early Dynastic period**.

In the 3rd Dynasty we meet a Pharaoh named Zoser and it is his architect Imhotep who is the person behind the construction and building of the first pyramid in Egypt.

From this first pyramid and until the end of the 6th dynasty, more and more pyramids are being built with the pyramid of Kufu (*4th Dynasty*) as the largest and most known. This period is named the **Old Kingdom**, or the **Pyramid Period** of Egypt.



One of the pyramidions found at the Egyptian Museum.
[See larger photo](#)

The last stone on the top of a pyramid was a mini-pyramid in granite, often covered with gold or electrum (*an alloy of gold and silver*). In the museum you will find

several pyramideons in the first large hall straight ahead when entering the museum.

For location, all major pyramids was built around the ancient capital Hwt-ka-Ptah (*Memphis*) just south of todays Cairo. You can find a bit more about this and two Old Kingdom tombs in the "[Pyramid areas of Cairo](#)".



By the feet of their forefathers
[See larger photo](#)

Turning left when entering the museum leads you into a corridor where more than 4000 year old statues and treasures from the pyramid period are found.

Some ask us where the sons of daughters of these great pyramids builders are. Then we have to remind that up to the revolution in 1952 Egypt had been ruled by other nations for a period of more than 2000 years. Just wait until these children whom today sit by the feet of their great forefathers grow up (-:



Someone listening to you
[See larger photo](#)

Hundred years ago a European art historian stood in front of a statue of Pharaoh Zoser in this museum. Looking Zoser in the eyes he said "Excuse me your Majesty, but Stone Age is something rather boring".

Other say the art is "stiff", "constructed" and so forth.

With all that in mind, take a close look at the face of this more than 4000 old statue. Boring, stiff, constructed? Guess he don't understand such sayings any more than we do.

Ancient Egyptian art is full of expressions, and most who take their time at this unique museum will come out feeling they have met persons who lived here by the Nile banks several thousand years ago. Some visitors have actually suggested to rename the museum to "The Egyptian Time machine"!



See the city from the top of a mosque
[See larger photo](#)

Here is a statue of a woman from the Old Kingdom making bread. As there were no slaves building the pyramids, bread was part of their payment. In fact it's recorded several strikes where the workers demand more bread, onions and beer for their work...

Just some few years ago the workers village by the pyramids was found. Remains here proves once and for all that the pyramids was not built by slaves but by professional workers and an added workforce from farmers and alike who could not work their land during the seasonal flooding of the Nile.



Old Kingdom filled relief
[See larger photo](#)

Fragment of a relief from Old Kingdom showing part of a man and under a dog hunting three foxes. Note how the dog bites the tail of the last fox.

What is special with this relief is that its not carved and painted as we are used to

from Ancient Egyptian relief's, but the forms are carved out in the stone and filled with different coloured "stuffing's".



Find markets where no tourist buses comes
[See larger photo](#)

Two painted limestone statues showing Nofret and her husband Rahotep who was High Priest during the 3rd Dynasty. Note his moustache, as this was not usual in Ancient Egypt.

As the size often showed importance, children were often showed far smaller and often only knee height of their parents. Here wife and husband are showed with the exact same height, showing the importance of women in pharaonic times.



Pharaoh Khafre with the god Horus
[See larger photo](#)

During Pharaoh Khafre the second largest pyramid of the Giza complex was built. Originally 145 meters (475ft) high and still today some of the limestone chising is left near the top. In the valley temple 23 diorite statues of Khafre was found, all broken apart from this one today in the Egyptian Museum.

Here we see the face of Khafre and behind him a falcon folding its wings on each side of his head. The falcon is the god Horus, son of Osiris and Isis.

After Osiris was killed by his brother Seth and became ruler in Am Duat (*the kingdom of the dead*), Horus became the new ruler of mankind. In difference to previous gods and goddesses Horus did not rule directly, but incarnated in a human being and ruled through this human who then became a half-god or a Per-o (*pharaoh*).

From the statue we can clearly see Horus whispering state secrets to Pharaoh Khafre.

part 2. The Middle & New Kingdom

When the pyramid times bluntly ended with the 6th Dynasty the country went into chaos and lots of small kingdoms.

The new unification came first after 130 years (*around year 2050 BC*) and then from the ruler of ancient Waset (*Luxor*). The country was once again one nation and the 11th Dynasty ruled the country from Waset.



Having time to look around, here among the treasures of TutAnchAmon.

[See larger photo](#)

During the 11th and 12th Dynasty the country remained united for nearly 300 year and this is the period today known as the **Middle Kingdom**.

In the 11th Dynasty Pharaoh Mentohotep builds a temple under a cliff on the west bank of Waset, the same place the famous terrace temple of Hatshepsut is built some hundred years later. The statue above is Mentohotep, and was found among the remains of his temple in Waset.



Sensuret I, here by 3 of him
[See larger photo](#)

In today's Lisht, close to Hwt-Ka-Ptah (*Memphis near Cairo*), 12 statues were found of Pharaoh Sensuret. The capital had been moved from Waset to Hwt-ka-Ptah when the 12th Dynasty was established.

Sensuret had one of the few pyramids that were built after the Old Kingdom ended. Apart from that, in legendary Yuno or Heliopolis where the sun god was born, the only remaining obelisk is the obelisk of Sensuret I.

All 12 statues of Sensuret are today exhibited in the Egyptian Museum, here by 3 of him.



Statue of two Niles
[See larger photo](#)

In this statue of two Niles we clearly see African element, just look at the rings around the necks. Plants and fish are described in front of each person. Found at Tanis in the Nile delta.

Since the sculpture above and to the head of Hatshepsut below, Egypt has been occupied by Hyksos coming from east. It should go more than 200 years before the two brothers Amose and Khamose from Waset managed to kick out Hyksos in year 1567 BC. Khamose was killed in a battle just before this and Amose founded the 18th Dynasty with Waset again as Egypt's capital. The glorious **New Kingdom** has started.

The father of Hatshepsut is ThothMoses I, and his grandfather is above mentioned Amose. ThothMoses I establish Egypt's imperium and is the first pharaoh buried in what later is to become known as the Valley of the Kings.



The look of Hatshepsut MaatKaRa Hatshepsut
[See larger photo](#)

Pharaoh MaatKaRe Hatshepsut is still ruling with a smile, but have a second look as its said she got the forerunner to Mona Lisa's mysterious smile...

Hatshepsut was not the only female pharaoh in Egypt, but she is today the most known together with Cleopatra VII.



MaatKaRe bringing offerings to Amun
[See larger photo](#)

Here is a statue of MaatKaRe Hatshepsut bringing offering to her father the sungod Amun. Many will let you know that since she wears the false beard she tried to behave as a man to be a pharaoh. What then about British male judges with long white wigs, do they try to become women? Fact is rather that she as all female and male pharaohs wore the ceremonial outfit of a pharaoh.

One truly beautiful statue is found showing her as a true woman; unfortunately this is in the Metropolitan Museum and not here in her homeland.



Senemut and NeferuRe
[See larger photo](#)

A statue easily forgotten among so many alternatives is the granite statue of Senemut and NeferuRe. Senemut was the vizier, architect - and some believe lover of MaatKaRe Hatshepsut. Here he is showed protecting MaatKaRa's daughter NeferuRe.

Much indicates that MaatKaRe planned for NeferuRe to take over the throne after her, but NeferuRe dies unfortunately in a young age.



Find markets where no tourist buses comes
[See larger photo](#)

This is one of the many lion sphinxes with face of Hatshepsut which guarded the road up to her terrace temple in Deir El Bahari in Luxor. All found were more or less broken, but this one is now put together so it can guard the Egyptian Museum.

The image section we have chosen here show very well the aesthetics in the lion form, just look at how the lion tale are rounded around her back foot.



Pharaoh Djoser with the god Horus
[See larger photo](#)

ThothMoses III, son of MaatKaRe Hatshepsut's half-brother ThothMoses II.

Many say that he hated Hatshepsut as she kept him away from the throne many years and tried to destroy the memory of her after her death. This is by far not a cemented fact, indications show sometimes the opposite. If so it was rather a strong section among the Amun priests who tried to remove her name and history all over.

This statue shows ThothMoses as a boy as he wears the hair lock children wore before they came to puberty. Look at the face, there is no wonder the art during the times of Hatshepsut and ThothMoses III got the name "classical period" in ancient Egyptian art.

part 3. The New Kingdom & TutAnchAmon

The New Kingdom grows into a real imperial power, and Hatshepsut's father is the first Egyptian we know who see the river Euphrates. He instantly names the river "the flood that runs the wrong direction". Of course, a flood should run from south to north as the Nile...

Hatshepsut did not expand the empire but kept the borders strong, but ThothMoses III followed the imperial tradition of his dynasty.

Then suddenly, for the first time in 1500 years, a revolution breaks loose.



EchnAton with his characteristic profile
[See larger photo](#)

Pharaoh Amenhotep III changes his name to EchnAton, and forbid every god apart from the sungod Aton. He destroys temples and kills priests in Waset before he moves north and establishes a new capital in middle Egypt.



The unusual body form of Pharaoh EchnAton
[See larger photo](#)

Apart from being a good poet (*his sun hymn is very much alike the later King Solomon biblical verses*) the whole art changes during his revolution.

Above we can see EchnAton in a typical "El Amarna Art" style. His face is long and narrow, his shoulders narrow and the hips are wide. Many see a feminine form in his body, but we don't know if this is a true art expression for a fruitful sun or if EchnAton actually had a body shape very much like this.

What we know is that his reign lasted less than twenty years, and the young Pharaoh TutAnchAmon who followed, was in a historical context a "near to nobody" before Howard Carter found his tomb in 1922 AD. What had happened was that TutAnchAmons tomb which in the first place was not a full royal tomb (*more a storage chamber*) had been covered with debris from when the full tomb of Ramses III son MernetPtah was made.

The combination of a less important Pharaoh and a hidden tomb under lots of debris made the day when Howard Carter first put up the announcement at [Old Winter Palace](#) that a new tomb was found.



The first box outside the coffins
[See larger photo](#)

Here we can see the outer of the gold laid boxes which contained TutAnchAmons coffins.



Part of TutAnchAmon's Hathor bed
[See larger photo](#)

Several beds were found in the tomb, and here we see part of one with the goddess Hathor, the goddess which was represented as a cow. Do have a look at the cows at the Egyptian country side, they must be the most beautiful cows in the world - maybe Hathor once put a Venus-spell on all of them?

Another bed is worth to mention, and this his camping bed. Yes it's absolutely a camping bed used when he was travelling or hunting. The very special part with this bed is that it had metal hinges so it could be folded so it took less space during transportation.



Two music instruments
[See larger photo](#)

Most have seen photos from the fantastic treasures from TutAnchAmons tomb; still some are highlighted more often than others. We want to look a bit at what is not always presented.

Above are two sistrums, rhythmical music instruments which made sound when shaking them.

We find sistrums in many an Egyptian relief's, and often in connection with the goddess Hathor. Her priestesses most often held a sistrum, and many sistrums also had the head of Hathor on top of the sistrum handle.



Senet games from the tomb
[See larger photo](#)

The Senet game must have been most loved among games in ancient Egypt. If we should compare it with anything today we must say that it got similarities with backgammon as ludo.

Two players could participate where each used different shaped pawns on a game board with 30 squares. The squares was lined in 3 rows, each with 10 squares.

If you sat in front of the game with the long side towards you, you started in upper left square and moved left. Then down to the middle row and there from right to left

and on the lowest row again from left to right in a snake like path.

The players used dices to get the numbers they should move each time. Well that will say, no dices but long sticks where one side was flat and the other rounded. Each side had a value and you counted the sticks accordingly. There is a game played by children in villages in Upper Egypt where sticks are thrown, and this is most likely remains of the old Senet game.

There are no rules written down for the game from ancient Egypt, but a few reconstructions has been done, one even was in sale as a board game. Quite addictive, so let's hope this reconstruction will come on the market again one day.

Note also the smaller boxes where the sticks and pawns are put in drawers, much as we have "traveller chess" and alike today.



Pharaoh Djoser with the god Horus
[See larger photo](#)

Here is shown part of one of the necklaces found in TutAnchAmon's tomb. It shows the vulture goddess Nekbeth which represent Upper Egypt and the snake goddess Buto who was the protective goddess for Lower Egypt. Together they represented the United Egypt.

All the kilos with gold found in the tomb of TutAnchAmon are easily quite impressive. But when you get to the museum, look for this necklace and see closely on how the snake body is coiled.

The workmanship needed to make such a piece of work will soon outdo any amount of gold needed, and that's the true treasure of TutAnchAmons tomb as we see it...

part 4. Greek / Roman Period & goodbye

Having walked around in a museum from the first pharaoh until the end of the Egyptian rule, one has not only passed 120000 object but also a period of two thousand years.



A small break for the guards...

[See larger photo](#)

As that is not enough, when the Greek and Roman Empire was here they basically adjusted to the rule: "When in Egypt, do as the Egyptians do". So they built Egyptian temples, and made their gods into Egyptian gods. The Roman god Mercure and the Greek Hermes both became the Egyptian god Thoth and so forth.

No wonder some of these visitors stopped up a bit when they had to choose among the latest fashion in mummifications and coffins.



A Greek checking out the latest coffin fashion

[See larger photo](#)

The Greek philosophers and thinkers had been to Egypt for study a long time. Solon the wisest of the wise in Athens came down to Yuno (*Heliopolis*) to learn, Plato did, Pythagoras and many more that we identify as the fundament of the Western Culture.

In year 332 BC the student of Aristotle's came to Egypt with his army and empire dreams. The oracle of the Amun temple in the Siwa Oasis pronounced him as pharaoh of Egypt, and the Greek period that should last for 300 years started and Alexandria was built including its famous light tower and library.

The last ruler of this period was Cleopatra VII, and we know her relation with Caesar and Antonius. When she and Antonius lost the battle against Octavius the Roman Empire took over the rule of Egypt.



Museum or maze?
[See larger photo](#)

Octavius became Emperor Augustus, and when he wanted to count the people in his empire a small child with the name of Jesus was born in a stable.

The child and its family then had to flee to Egypt to seek protection. They stayed here for several years and went nearly as far up the Nile as Luxor before they went back - and the rest is a story most will know.

The history of early Christianity is found all over Egypt and a own beautiful museum is dedicated this living heritage in Egypt (*the Coptic Museum*).



Hide and seek with mummies
[See larger photo](#)

There are many corners and hiding places in the museum. Above is a photo proving that some of the mummies have their own "hide and seek" games.

Look for them next time you are coming, they are most likely hiding another place.



Amenhotep II and Queen Tiy
[See larger photo](#)

Leaving the museum, don't forget to say goodbye to Amonhotep II, Queen Tiy and their daughter. They lived for about 3500 years ago in the New Kingdom, and since then they have been embedded in this colossal statue that now stand in the end of the great hall, right ahead when coming in to the museum.

If you had a first time visit to the museum, then you will understand why they will sit there waiting for you to come back for a new tour at this gigantic museum.

Egypt Museum

The world's great museums, you can count them on the fingers of one hand; and way up there, with the Louvre, the Met, and of course the British Museum, is that dusty, musty old collection of utterly astounding antiquities, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. No modern, well-lit, carefully laid-out exhibition this - it's a museum like they used to make them, with lots of exhibits in long galleries and precious little by way of explanation, but oh boy, what exhibits!

The museum's most famous possessions, of course, are the treasures found by Howard Carter in the tomb of Tutankhamun, the gilded statues, the thrones, the alabaster canopic jars, the exquisite gold jewellery, and the centrepiece, the emblem of the whole collection, that fabulous, jaw-dropping, solid gold, inlaid funeral mask, all eleven kilos of it. Tut's treasures alone need a good hour or two to take in, but even without them, this would still be, for all its higgledy-piggledy dusty old layout, one of the world's top museums, and a must-see by any standards.

Really you need a couple of visits at least to take it all in, but if you only have a day and you want to see the very top highlights, the first thing to do when you enter the museum is to go straight ahead, right through the atrium, until you get to the other end, where the Amarna gallery (room #3) is dedicated to the reign of one very special pharaoh, Tutankamun's father, the heretic king Akhenaten. A revolutionary who threw out Egypt's entire pantheon of gods and replaced them with worship of the sun disk alone, Akhenaten also brought in a whole new style of art, immediately recognizable, and completely different from everything that went before or since. The statues of him that stare down at you from both sides of the room are stylized and strange, with flared nostrils that would have done Kenneth Williams proud. But then all the art in this room is odd: elongated faces, pot bellies, family scenes (most untypical of Egyptian royalty) - scholars still dispute whether the wierd shape of Akhenaten's body, as depicted in the statues here, were due to some artistic quirk of his time, or a genuine deformity that really made him look like that.

On your way to the Amarna room, as you pass through the museum's central atrium, there are two more things to look out for. One is the Palette of Narmer, a flat tablet of beautifully carved smooth black stone commemorating the foundation of Egypt itself, formed from the two lands of Upper and Lower Egypt around 3000 BC. Also in the atrium area, and also on black basalt, if rather younger (dating only from around 1200 BC), Merneptah's victory stela celebrates that pharaoh's triumph against the mysterious "Sea Peoples", the most famous of whom were the Philistines, and in passing, mentions the crushing of one of the Philistines' most implacable foes, a people called Israel, who are not referred to on any other ancient Egyptian artefact whatsoever.

In the galleries on the west side things not to miss include the Meidum Geese in room #32, a fresco so fresh and realistic you might think it was modern, but actually this naturalistic depiction dates from the fourth dynasty, which makes it about four and a half thousand years old. In the same room, two statues of pharaoh Pepi I and his son, made

with the unusual technique of hammering sheets of copper onto wooden cores, are among the museum's most fascinating pieces of sculpture.

The museum's most interesting statue of all, however, does not depict royalty at all, but a priest called Ka-aper. Strikingly realistic, the wooden likeness in room #42, all of four foot high, could easily be of someone you'd meet on the streets of Cairo today. Indeed, the workers on the dig where it was found called it "Sheikh al-Balad" (chief of the village) because it looked so much like their own village headman.

A few rooms further along, in room #12, a relief shows the queen of Punt, a land with which Egypt traded for spices and incense. Nobody knows where Punt was, but Somalia or Eritrea is a likely guess. The queen herself is shown to be a most unusual shape, by Egyptian standards, particularly fat around the hips and thighs. Some have suggested the relief is a caricature, or even that she suffered from elephantiasis, but a more likely explanation is what is known as steatopygia, an accumulation of fat in those areas that is typical of southern African Khoisan peoples like the San Bushmen of Namibia. What it may mean therefore is that in 1470 BC or so, when the relief was made, the people who lived in Punt were Khoisan, related to the San of Namibia rather than to the people who live in East Africa today.

On the other side of the ground floor, in room #24, is the most engaging statue of an Egyptian deity, the pregnant hippopotamus goddess Taweret, an absolute icon of motherhood. Smooth and sleek, the basalt statue was found in a sealed shrine, which explains its amazing state of preservation.

The last highlight is hidden away in room #14 upstairs, and is something a little bit different: the Fayoum Portraits from the second or third centuries BC, which belong to the art of Greece and Rome rather than classical ancient Egypt. Painted in wax and tempera, these lifelike portraits were made during the lifetime of the deceased and placed over the face on the coffin after death. Utterly Mediterranean in appearance, they seem to capture the very personality of their sitters, and you can almost imagine talking to them, though they died over two millennia ago (and didn't speak English anyway).

Egypt, to most people, means the pyramids. But to me Egypt means crocodiles. I love the metaphysical extravagance of ancient Egyptians in turning even the nastiest thing into a god — and mummifying him. I love the way they made even the beast feared by everybody into something comfortable.

For Sobek the crocodile was (in some places) the father of the gods, the Mighty One, a fertility god, from whose sweat issued the Nile itself — the very lifeblood of Egypt. He was also, of course, prince of all the powers of darkness, but he was especially good to the dead, guiding them along the highways and byways of heaven on his hind legs, like an armour-plated nightclub bouncer. Really, you couldn't find yourself in a safer pair of hands.

When Augustus took Egypt from Cleopatra in 30BC, he minted silver coins bearing the legend "Aegypto Capta" and a grinning crocodile, the symbol *par excellence* of the Land of the Nile. On the classic tour, first time upriver, I'm having the whole of Egyptian history and culture chucked at me in 10 days flat. I'd quite like to fix up a meeting with the Nile crocodile, get eyeball to eyeball with the prince of darkness, but the official line is "not a hope" — he's all handbags and watchstraps now, gone for good.