



**TRAVELING
BEYOND**
Explorations with New Acropolis

TRAVELLING BEYOND: EGYPT

Explorations with New Acropolis India
Part 1 – Upper Egypt

By Sukesht Motwani

New Acropolis India's 'Travelling Beyond' initiative curated its inaugural exploration, a 10-day journey to Egypt in January 2024. Led by a senior instructor on Egyptian Symbolism and a very good local Egyptologist guide, the trip immersed its 32 participants in the culture, history, mythology, and philosophy of ancient Egypt. While the whole group sought to explore the beauty of Egypt's pyramids, temples, and the Nile, for many, including myself, who are deeply fascinated by Khem (the Ancient name for Egypt), it was with an equal measure of an inward journey of learning and contemplation catalyzed by the civilization's sacred expression via its great mythology, theology, knowledge of astronomy, and architecture.

Before the trip, Yaron, our National Director, had advised us... 'Don't go with an expectation of how Egypt will display its mystery or beauty to you, but go with the intention to offer yourself, to humbly offer your consciousness.'


Since the Mysterious Sphinx, Pyramids of Giza and Saqqara with all their enigma, deserve an entire piece in itself, I am dedicating this one only to some highlights amongst Temples of Upper Egypt.

The ancient name of the city of Luxor is 'Thebes'. Jorge Angel Livraga Rizzi, the founder of New Acropolis International (OINA) in his book 'Thebes' calls the city the material birth place of the archetype of all humanity/Heavenly Man.

Over thousands of years, the monuments here have retained that sense of the mysteries and the expression of harmony between this world of the 'living' and the other invisible world of the 'afterlife', in its sculptures, tomb paintings and carvings, depicting the eternal nature of the soul, and its journey in the Duat (the underworld/Afterlife).

...it was...an inward journey of learning and contemplation catalysed by the civilisation's sacred expression via its great mythology, theology, knowledge of astronomy and architecture.





'Don't go with an expectation of how Egypt will display its mystery or beauty to you, but go with the intention to offer yourself, to humbly offer your consciousness.'

The **West Bank of Luxor** is a haven of small villages, swaying palm trees and here the western horizon is dominated by the **El Qurn**, the pyramidal peak that rises above the tombs of ancient nobles cut into the hill side. Behind them, excavated into the dry river beds of the desert, is the mysterious **Valley of Kings** with about 63 tombs. The stunning artwork inside the descending staircases through moodily lit ancient carved corridors, leading to the burial chamber, truly disconnects one from phenomenal reality for a short while, giving you a glimpse of another reality that is said to be our true home. We saw the awe-inspiring artwork of the tomb of the Pharaoh Kings, Ramesses 3's tomb and Merenptah's massive cathedral like burial chamber.

Spanning over 200 acres, the Temple of Karnak is the largest religious complex ever constructed.

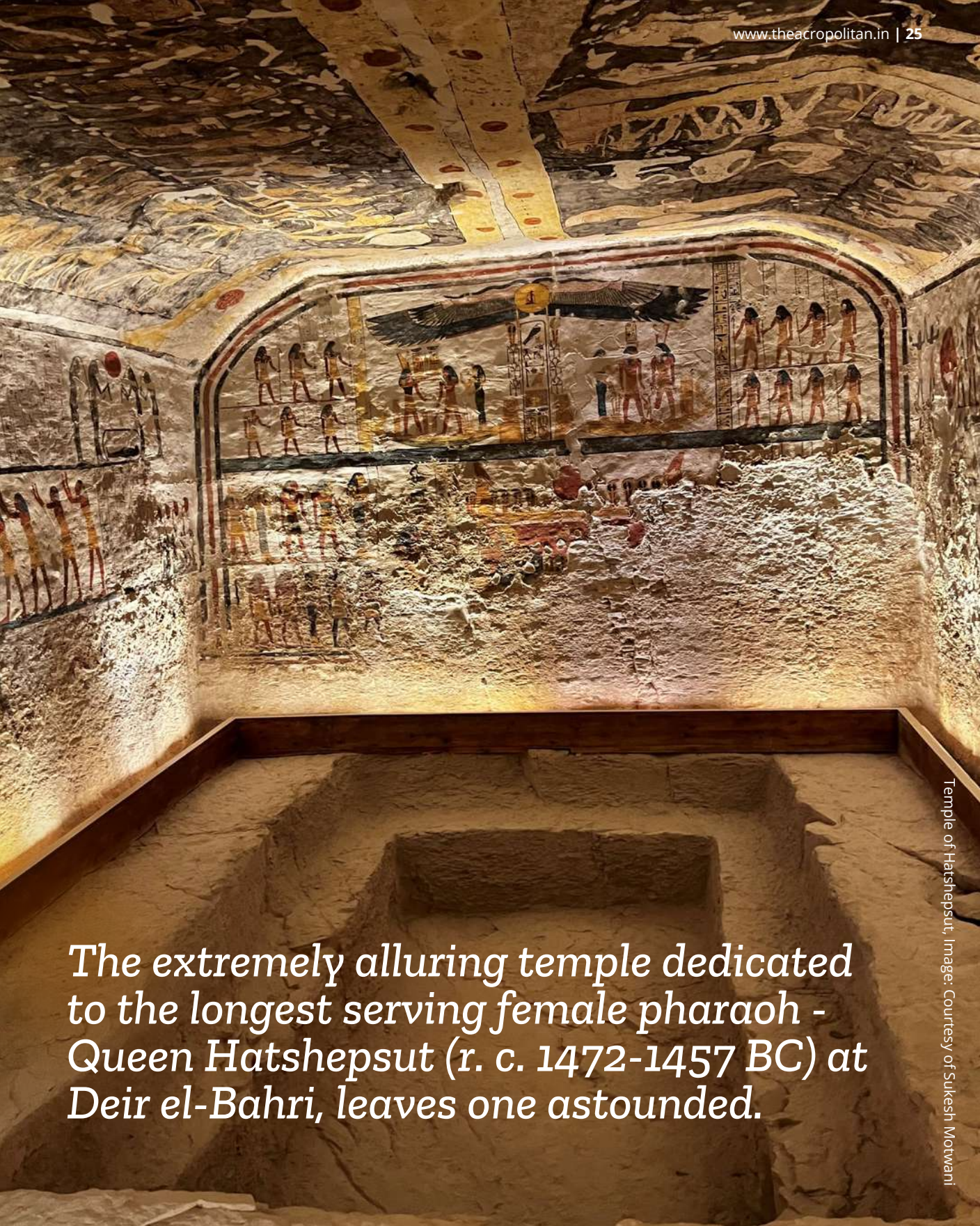
Imbued with enigmatic depth and whispers of a glorious past is the ancient village of **Deir el-Medina**, which stands in a small natural amphitheatre within walking distance of the Valley of the Kings. Here we explored the ruins of small houses, once occupied by the families of the artisans who cut and decorated the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Then the extremely alluring temple dedicated to the longest serving female pharaoh - Queen Hatshepsut (r. c. 1472-1457 BC) at **Deir el-Bahri**, leaves one astounded.

Spanning over 200 acres, the **Temple of Karnak** is the largest religious complex ever constructed. This took about 2,000 years to build, with contributions from several pharaohs. And also because of its long functionality, and the number of gods worshipped here, displays the long historical range of its changing ancient religious practices and beliefs.

At the heart of the **precinct of Amun-Ra**(1), stands the Hypostyle Hall, an incredible forest of 134 colossal stone columns, some reaching heights of almost 70 feet. When light strikes the column, surreal ancient carvings come to life. The tallest surviving obelisk dedicated to Queen Hatshepsut stands at a staggering height of about 29 metres.

1. The meaning of Amun translates to the Hidden one or the mysterious one. A combination of two deities Amun, the god of Air and Ra, the god of Sun, worshipped as the creator of all things.





The extremely alluring temple dedicated to the longest serving female pharaoh - Queen Hatshepsut (r. c. 1472-1457 BC) at Deir el-Bahri, leaves one astounded.

As a group, we were fortunate to be led by our guide to the **Sekhmet(1) Shrine** at a far corner in the complex, perceived by some to have very special energies. Our guide convinced the priest guard at the Sekhmet shrine, to allow us inside. The peculiar darkened atmosphere of the shrine, helps one quietly wade into inner silence, as one sits in admiration close to the mysterious Sekhmet statue rendered visible by light streaming through a zenithal opening in the ceiling.

Also worth speaking of is the architectural marvel of **Luxor Temple** with a stunning Great Colonnade, on a beautiful moonlit night. The entrance is flanked by the colossal seated statues of Ramses II. Despite their monumental size, these temples were designed with precise mathematical calculations and astounding astrological alignment with celestial bodies, especially the sun.

North of Luxor, we visited one of the most colorful temples in Egypt, **Temple of Hathor(2) at Dendera**. Inside, one is enraptured by the temple's masterpiece of ceiling which is said to be 2 milleniums old. Bright tones of blue spring from its surface. 24 stunning columns about 15 metres high. Gods sail in boats among the stars, or stand in adoration of human-headed birds. A Wedjat-eye(3), carved within a disc, symbolizes the moon and its phases.

The sky goddess Nut, her body stretched across a full strip of ceiling, swallows the sun at dusk. She will give birth to him at dawn, just as she does every day. There are signs of the zodiac. Planets. Colourful hieroglyphs. Together, these diverse images represent a complex astronomical scene, revealing Egyptians' detailed knowledge of the day and night sky.

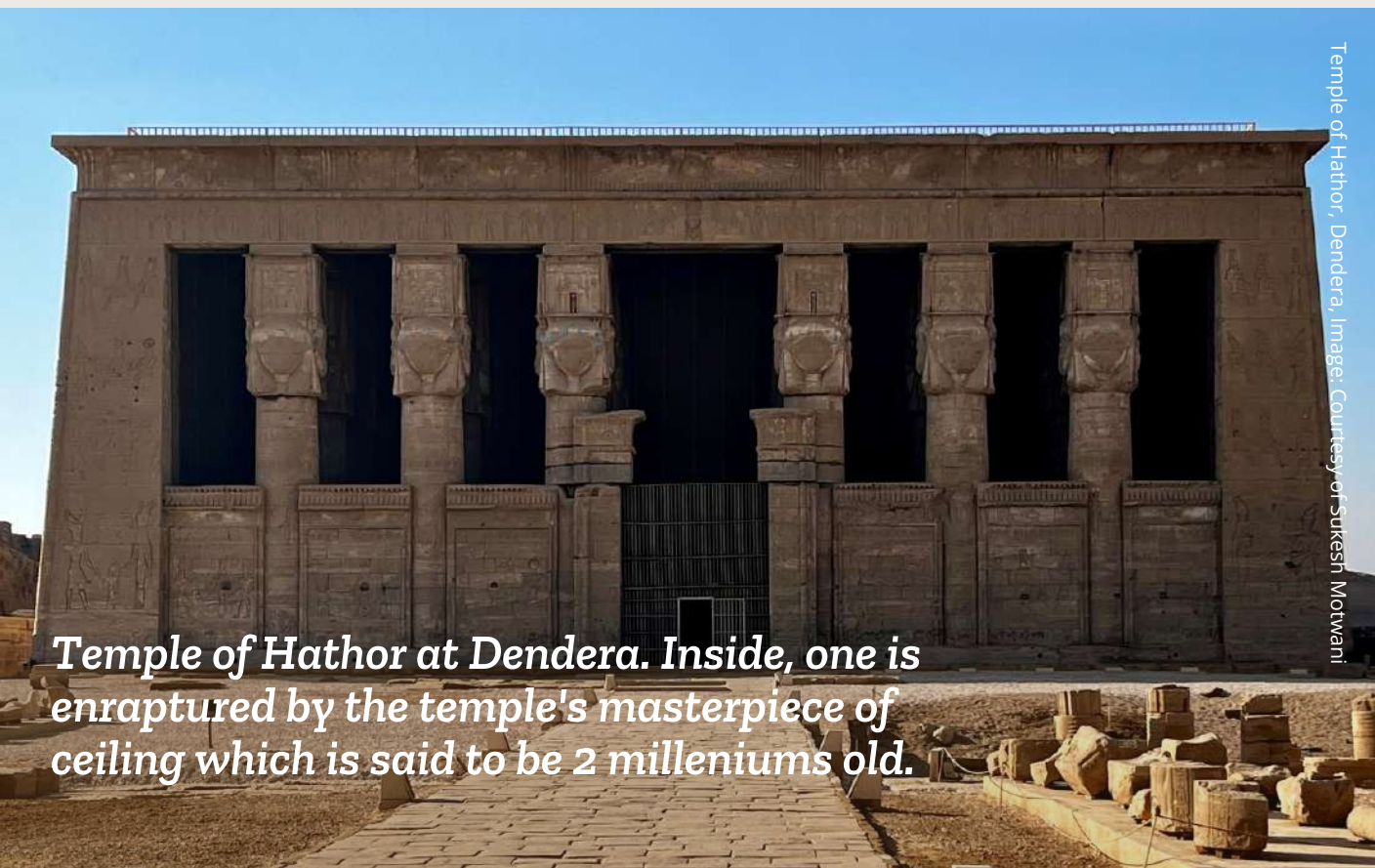
A 90-minute drive further north, beyond low beige hills dotting sandy plains, takes us to the little town of **Abydos** ...which, to me, seems to have a mystical aura, where the boundaries between the physical and spiritual blur. As we stare into the abyss below, we see **Osireion**, a vast cemetery, a grey stone slab structure, surrounded by a moat of green water. An eerie tomb considered to be the final resting place of Osiris – King of the Afterlife. God of Regeneration. According to a great Myth, Osiris was attacked by his brother Seth for the crown of Egypt, under an aru-tree and thrown into the water. All of it is said to have happened in Abydos.

We spent four nights on a luxurious cruise that sailed alongside the emerald banks of the Nile, and left me deeply affected by its serene waters, lush greenery, palm trees, water hyacinth, tall grasses etc offset by farms, or minarets, or an occasional ibis. The cruise took us to Edfu's surreal **Temple of Horus**, known for its fabulous

1. Sekhmet Goddess embodies the fierce and powerful aspects of the divine feminine as the lion-headed Goddess.
2. Hathor is a major goddess in ancient Egyptian pantheon. She was the female counterpart to God Horus and Sun God Ra, both who are connected with kingship. Thus she is the symbolic mother of their earthly representatives, the Pharaohs.
3. The healed eye of God Horus; associated with healing and wisdom.



Karnak Temple, Image: Courtesy of Sukesh Motwani



Temple of Hathor, Dendera, Image: Courtesy of Sukesh Motwani

Temple of Hathor at Dendera. Inside, one is enraptured by the temple's masterpiece of ceiling which is said to be 2 milleniums old.

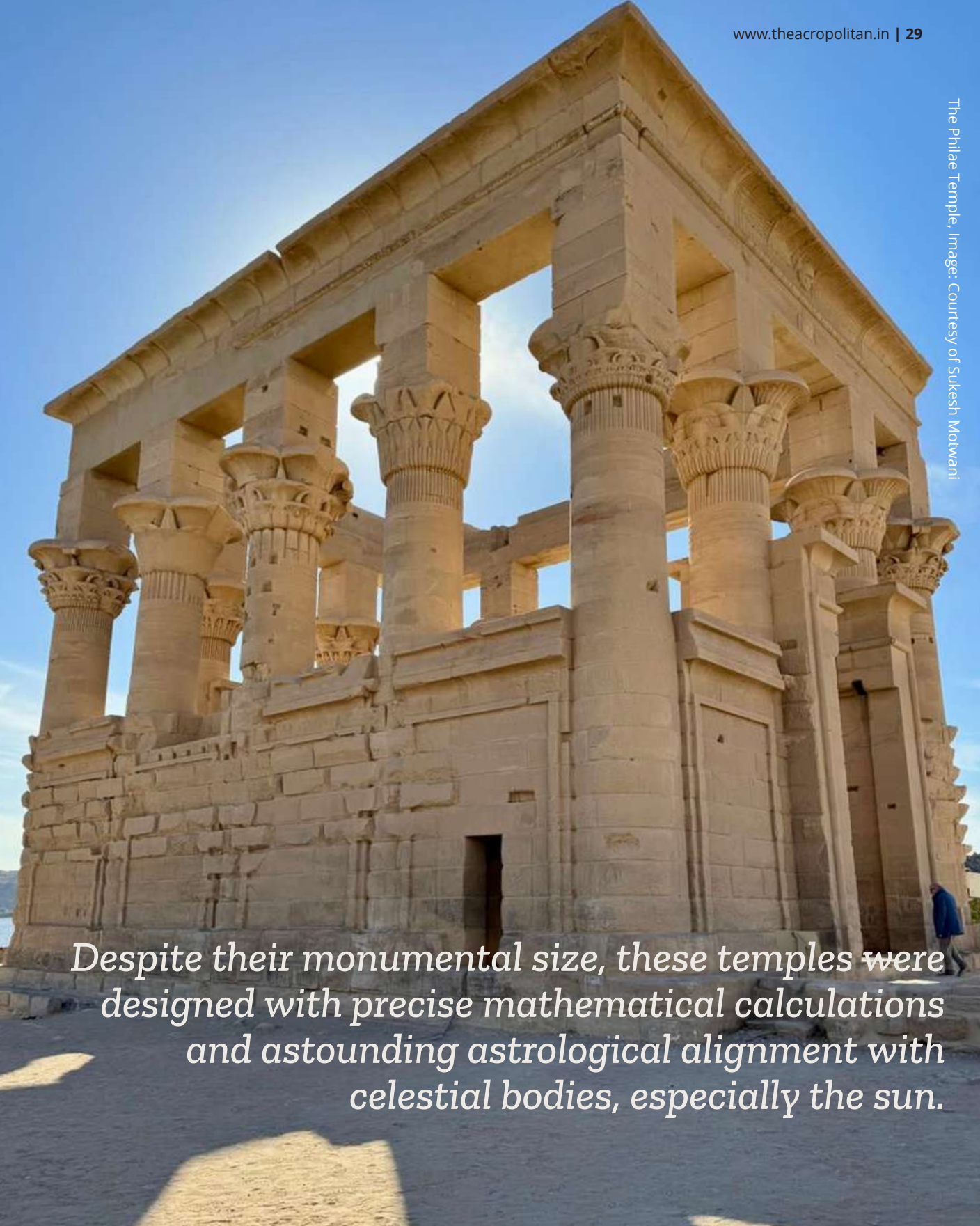
drawings depicting the myth of the battle of Horus and his uncle Seth, symbolising the eternal struggle between myth and chaos. Also ethereal is the manner in which the **Kom ombo Temple** is captured by our approaching cruise, wonderfully unravelling its beauty, on the western banks of the Nile.

We were fortunate to witness the dramatically beautiful **Abu Simbel** temple complex on the western bank of Lake Nasser, lit up by the first rays of sunrise that illuminated the colossal facades of the two rock cut temples. The ancients engineered the Great Temple such that twice a year, on February 22 and October 22, the sun's rays penetrate the temple to illuminate all the statues in the innermost

sanctuary, leaving only the statue of Ptah, the god of darkness, in shadow.

Finally our last day was spent on the **island of Philae**, built by the last dynasty of ancient Egypt, the Ptolemaic. Dedicated to Goddess Isis, Osiris and Horus. The temple walls contain scenes from Egyptian mythology of Goddess Isis bringing her dead husband Osiris back to life, giving birth to Horus, and mummifying Osiris after his death. Isis mourning for Osiris became a symbol of grief in Egypt, painted on tomb walls and coffins. She represented motherhood, magic and healing, and became a popular Goddess because of the universal relatability of her grief at her husband's death and her need to protect her son Horus from the enemy Seth.





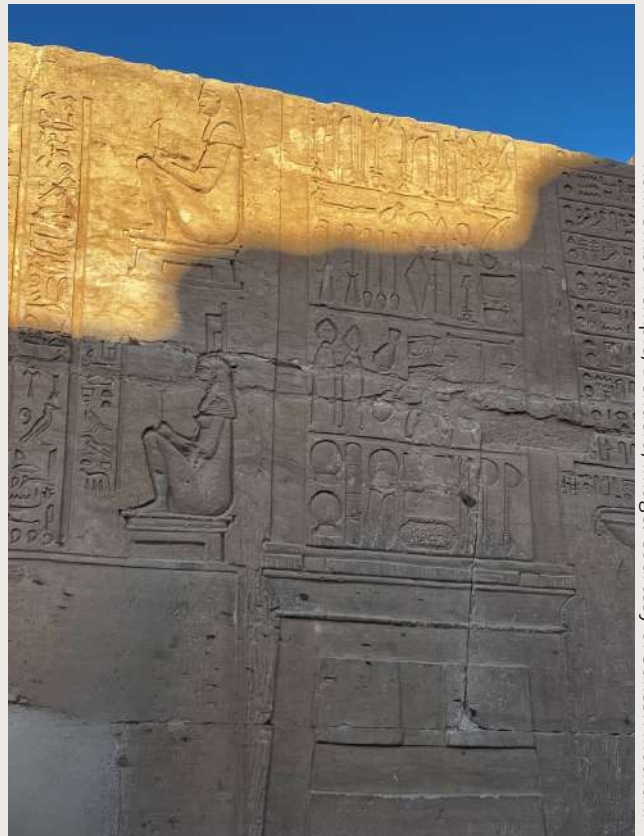
Despite their monumental size, these temples were designed with precise mathematical calculations and astounding astrological alignment with celestial bodies, especially the sun.

Every stone, hill, temple and town on the journey of Nile is said to have a sacred meaning, tied to the actions of Divine forces.

Reaching Egypt can be an opportunity to find escape from the flame of separateness. We realized why we can call our trip a pilgrimage, because we attempted to consciously elevate ourselves to find meaning. With keen preparation, attention and love for the philosophical path on which we attempt to walk, we humbly offered our presence, love and respect to the ancient land, and came away having being marked indelibly by experience. ☪☪



Abydos Temple of Seti I, Image: Courtesy of Suresh Motwani



Kom Ombo Temple, Dendera, Image: Courtesy of Suresh Motwani

Sources:

'Egyptian Mythology – A Traveller's Guide from Aswan to Alexandria' by Garry J. Shaw. Published by Thames&Hudson.

'Thebes' by Jorge A. Livraga (Founder of International Organization, New Acropolis)

<https://anthropologyreview.org/history/ancient-egypt/ancient-egyptian-temples/>