

A New Resting Place for Egypt's Pharaonic Mummies

By Peter Warg

Middle East Times correspondent

CAIRO - An international competition for the design of Egypt's most ambitious museum project since the construction of the Cairo antiquities museum at the turn of the century has been won by the Egyptian architect, Al Ghazzali Kassiba. His plan, which shows elements of Pharaonic inspiration, was chosen from 10 entries in the contest to design the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization which will be built on the site of the disused Gizira island international fairgrounds near the centre of Cairo.

Some 4,000 items have already been chosen for eventual display in the new museum, including the famed royal mummies, which for years were shown to the public in a rather unattractive morgue-like layout in the Cairo antiquities museum - until their exhibit room was ordered to be closed by the late President Anwar Sadat on the grounds that the display was demeaning to the ancient worthies.

It will tell the story of Egyptian contributions to the history and culture of mankind.

One of the elements of Dr. Kassiba's design that apparently weighed heavily in its favour was his unique idea for displaying the royal mummies, the mortal remains of some 20 of ancient Egypt's kings and queens. The royal array includes the mummified cadaver of Ramses II, one of Egypt's most illustrious Pharaohs. The problem of displaying them in a suitably dignified manner has long perplexed the Egyptian Antiquities Organization.

In the new museum plan, the mummies will, in effect, be reinterred, but at the same time remain available for viewing by the public. Dr. Kassiba came up with the notion of putting them in an underground excavation going into the earth at an angle beneath the central hall of the museum. The excavation is designed to reproduce the idea of the slowly descending tunnels of the

royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor. The ancient royals will be displayed behind glass in their new and presumably permanent, resting place.

The new museum will not replace the old antiquities museum which will remain in operation with such famous exhibits as the artefacts from King Tut's tomb. Officials stress that the planned structure is not an antiquities facility as such (though it will contain many) but a national museum created to provide an overview of the civilization that emerged along the banks of the Nile in all their aspects.

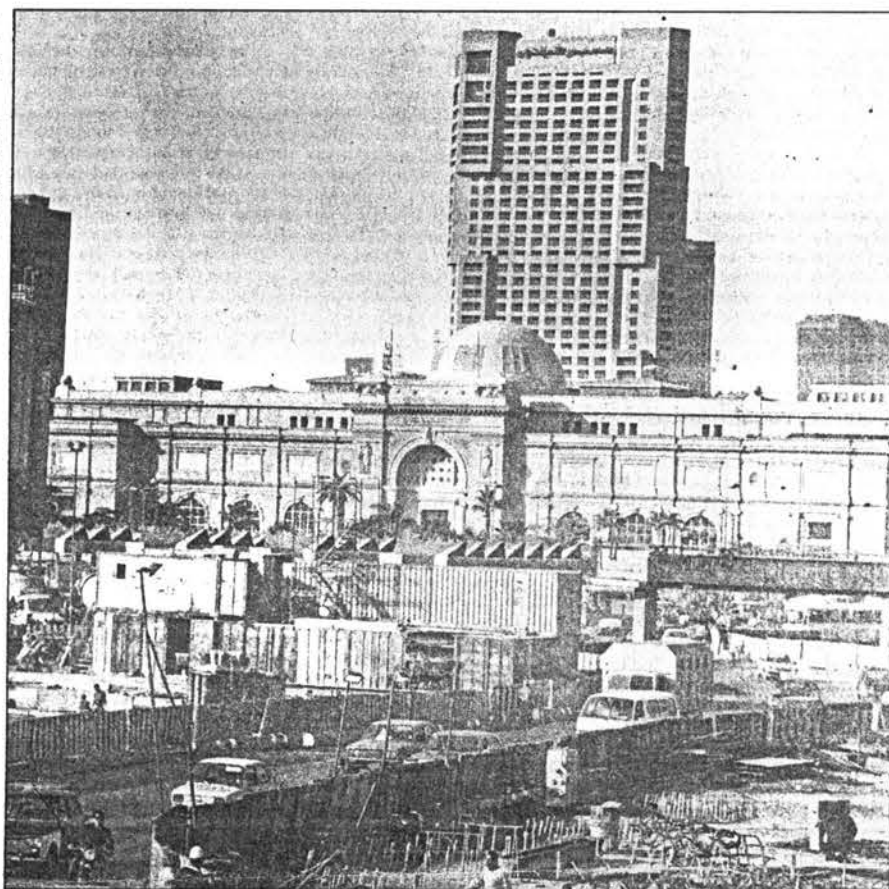
"It will tell the story of Egyptian civilization from prehistoric to modern times, showing the spirit and continuity of these civilizations and relecting the contributions of Egyptians to the history and culture of mankind as a whole," said Dr. Ahmed Kadry, the president of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization.

According to Dr. Kadry, the breakdown of museum floor space by historical periods will be as follows: 5 percent will be devoted to prehistoric Egypt, 40 percent for the Pharaonic period, another 5 percent for the Greco-Roman era, 8 percent for Coptic civilization and the remainder will be devoted to the Islamic and modern eras.

Throughout the building, there will be thematic exhibits illustrating many aspects of Egyptian civilizations, including architecture, agriculture, music, literature and the daily life of the people of different periods.

Spaciousness will be a feature of the new museum which is to be built amid 50,000 square metres of landscaped gardens, that will themselves contain durable Pharaonic items such as statues and obelisks. Interior exhibition floor space will be 17,892 square metres - almost double that of the old antiquities museum's 9,000 square metres. A service structure containing a cafeteria and lecture rooms will be separate from the main museum building, so that it can be used during the hours when the museum itself is closed.

The estimated cost of the new museum is in the neighbourhood of \$45 million and it is expected that the necessary funds will come from several sources. Allotments will be made from income derived from



After completion of Cairo's new antiquities museum in Gizira island, the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square will continue to house several important collections such as the artefacts from King Tut's tomb.

entry fees for present museum and archaeological sites. Another source of funding for the project is the travelling Egyptian antiquities exhibitions abroad, such as the 'Golden Pharaoh' exhibition that was recently sent to Japan or 'The Woman in Ancient Egypt' that has been touring West Germany.

Egypt has also signed an agreement with UNESCO to organize a fund-raising campaign among member countries and cultural organizations. The United Nations body is to make an international appeal along the lines of the 1960s campaign to save Upper Egypt's

Abu Simbel which was threatened with inundation by the huge artificial lake that was created by the construction of the Aswan High Dam.

UNESCO has already contributed \$500,000 to help defray the expenses of organizing the project, such as preparing exhibits or choosing objects for the museum.

When the new museum plan was first put forward during the time of President Sadat, it was announced that the museum would be called the 'Sadat Centre for Human Civilization.' But since the death of the former Egyptian ruler, this has been quietly discarded in favour of the

'National Museum of Egyptian Civilization.'

The museum will be the centrepiece of a large cultural complex planned for the site of the international fairgrounds, which have now moved to their new location in Nasr City. The complex will also contain an art exhibition hall and a planetarium which is already in place. There will also be a centre for the performing arts - which Egyptian officials call the new 'Cairo Opera House' - that will be largely financed by a grant from the Japanese government.

Sudan Making Headway In Battle to Feed the Nation, Replace Foreign Aid

By Jay Mallin

Washington Times News Service

KHARTOUM - A dramatic effort to boost this drought-stricken country's food production began in a quiet way recently when a ton-and-a-half of sorghum seed was loaded on a KLM plane for shipment to Mexico.

If the scheme works, by the end of the growing season late this year 120,000 hectares of Sudanese farmland that would have produced 135,000 tons of grain will be able to supply four times that amount. The difference will be enough to replace the equivalent of \$100-million worth of emergency food aid to Sudan.

At the centre of the plan is a 2½-year-old type of sorghum known as Hageen Dura Waahid, Hybrid Sorghum No. 1. According to Ahmed Abu Al Gasim Ahmed, director general of the National Seed Administration, it was developed in a joint project between Sudan and an agricultural research centre in India. Such centres brought about the green revolution in South Asia.

The main characteristic of Hageen Dura is that it can produce several times the seed of regular sorghum.

According to Eric Witt, a U.S. Agency for International Development official who has been closely involved with the hybrid, it was first tested two years ago when 93 kilograms of the seed was given to about 15 Sudanese farmers.

On irrigated land where sorghum normally yields 180 kilograms per hectare, farmers were suddenly about to produce 650-750 kilograms per hectare, a fourfold increase. Tests the next year throughout the country showed similarly dramatic increases under all kinds of conditions, with the hybrid producing more per acre in drought areas than the normal sorghum produces on good land irrigated by the Nile.

This year, according to Dr. Gasim, his seed administration will supply enough seed to plant 32,000 hectares with the hybrid plant.

But that is a fraction of the total area dedicated to sorghum production here. This is where the gamble involving flying seed to Mexico comes in.

Hageen Dura Waahid is bred from two other species of sorghum. The female parent of the hybrid is found only in Sudan, while the male is also found in Texas. The hybrid is produced by planting fields with an alternating design of four rows of

female plants next to two rows of males.

The KLM plane will carry enough of the seed for female plants to cover 400-800 hectares at a site near Sonora, Mexico, chosen for the breeding project. The Sudanese seed will be planted alongside seeds for male plants from farms in Mexico.

If everything goes according to nature, 1,000 tons of the hybrid seed will be produced by June and airlifted - at the expense of the U.S. government - back to Sudan in time for the planting season here.

Then, when harvesting ends in November, farmers working 120,000 hectares of Sudanese land should see their crop yields quadruple.

It's a gamble, subject to all the normal problems and a few peculiar to such a fast-paced scheme. The cost, said Mr. Witt, will be about \$7.5 million.

But if it works, the 400,000 tons of sorghum that Sudan would not otherwise have will be the equivalent of \$100-million worth of emergency food aid, he said. "It's a real long shot, but at least it's worth trying," Mr. Witt added.

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