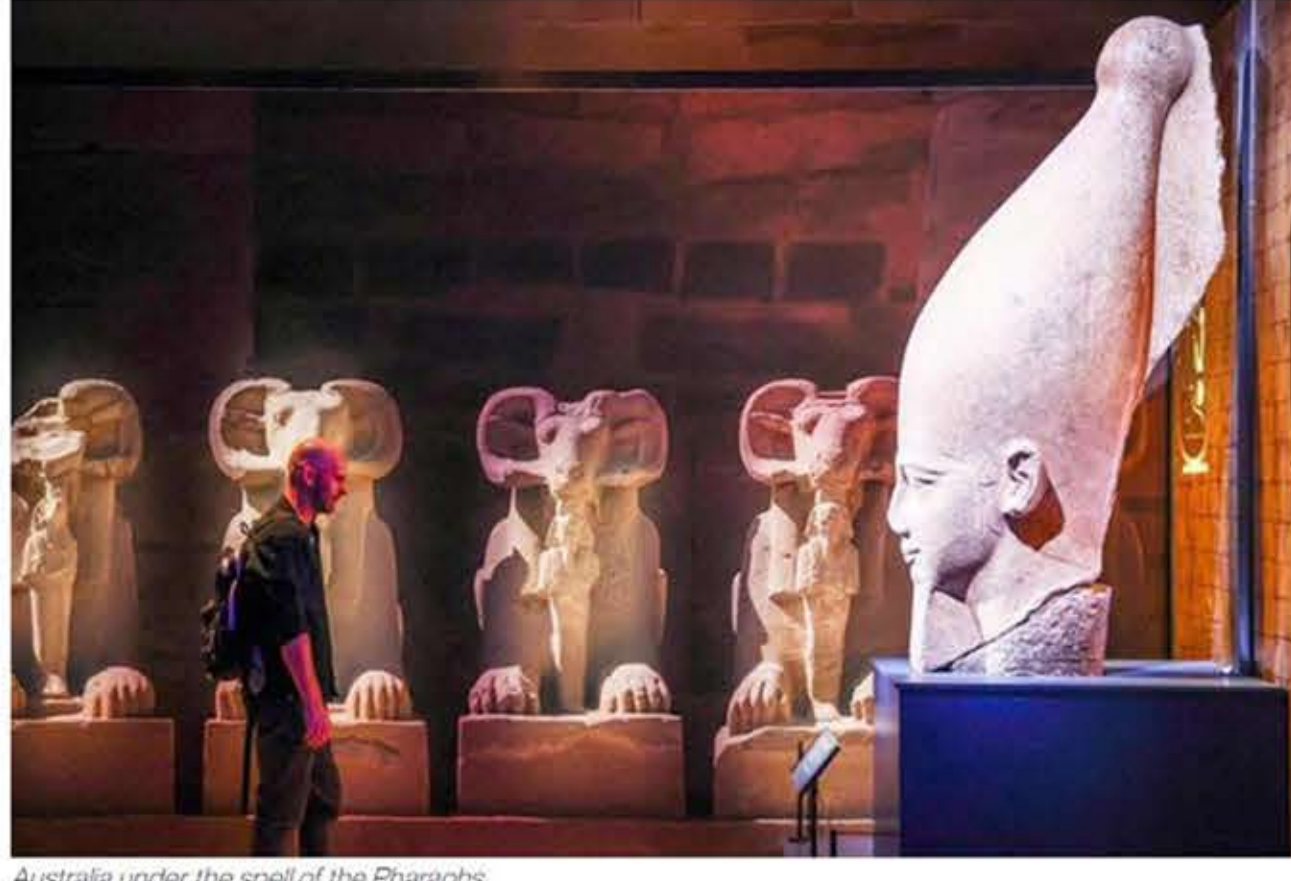


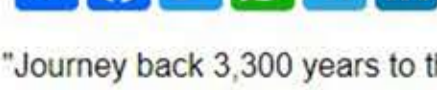
Australia under the spell of the Pharaohs

Nevine El-Aref, Tuesday 21 Nov 2023

The capital city of New South Wales is falling under the spell of the ancient Egyptians with the visit of the Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs exhibition, reports Nevine El-Aref



Australia under the spell of the Pharaohs



"Journey back 3,300 years to the vast expanse of the Sahara Desert, where you will immerse yourself in the pulse of ancient Egypt. Explore the captivating era of the nation's most renowned Pharaoh through a ground-breaking exhibition, Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs, marking its debut in Australia."

With these words, Sydney, the capital city of New South Wales in Australia, was conquered by the "Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs" exhibition, now on its fourth leg outside Egypt after two stops in the US and the French capital Paris that saw 817,000 visitors.

The features of king Ramses II can be seen everywhere in Sydney, including in restaurants and residential buildings, while the golden mask of the 21st Dynasty King Amenemope is decorating the streets and metro and bus stations.

The façade of the Australian Museum has been transformed into a Pharaonic gate decorated with enormous replica colossi of Ramses the Great. Images of the king's coffin and some of the exhibition's artefacts have appeared on the front pages of many Australian newspapers and magazines, some of which have devoted issues to the Great King's treasures, history, and the discovery of his mummy in the Luxor Cachette.

On the day of the exhibition's opening, strains of oriental music and the songs of the renowned Egyptian singer Um Kalthoum could be heard at the Australian Museum as it welcomed invitees to the opening ceremony. All November tickets have been sold out, and almost 110,000 tickets sold.

The groundbreaking exhibition offers a multisensory journey, granting visitors a unique perspective into the life and achievements of Ramses II throughout his 67-year reign as the second-longest reign of any Pharaoh in ancient Egyptian history.

Exclusively showcased in Sydney, the exhibition presents a collection of 182 priceless artefacts, encompassing Egyptian treasures and rare relics. Among these items are representations of the extraordinary Pharaoh himself, with many never having left Egypt before.

The wooden coffin of Ramses II, considered the most remarkable ever unearthed from ancient Egypt, is among the objects showcased in the exhibition. It has never ventured beyond Egypt's borders except for the exhibition's third leg in Paris before making its way to Sydney.

The exhibition also features a virtual reality experience that takes visitors on a whirlwind tour of two of Ramses' most impressive monuments: the Temples of Abu Simbel and that of his beloved wife queen Nefertari. Seated in dynamic motion chairs, attendees can soar through temples, navigate sandstorms, and encounter the mummy of Ramses II in this thrilling animated adventure.

Before going into the exhibition, visitors enter an immersive environment that begins with a four-minute introductory film on a 120-degree screen meant to take them on a journey back in time to admire the history of the great ancient Egyptian king.

In the centre of the screen, a digital clock counts backwards from the present. The years flash back past the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, past the time of Christ and the Roman and Greek Empires, to over 3,000 years ago, over 100 human generations, stopping abruptly at the year 1304 BCE.

The image then expands to fill the entire screen and transitions into stunning drone footage that soars over the Great Pyramid of Khufu and the Sphinx and zooms down into ancient Memphis. A new king has just ascended to the throne, one who will come to epitomise the power and wealth of ancient Egypt at its height, who secured peace with his neighbours, and is still considered the greatest of all the Pharaohs.

Historians report that when news of the 92-year-old king's death emerged, the Egyptians were devastated. Few could remember a time before he was Pharaoh. Even in the age of Cleopatra 1,000 years after the death of Ramses, Egyptians still held him above all other Pharaohs. His name and exploits have remained well-known throughout history and his fame extends far beyond Egypt, enshrined in books and films.

Animations in the exhibition show how Ramses II pushed back invasions by Nubians in the south, Libyans on the western border, pirates on the Mediterranean coast, and Hittites on the Syrian border of Egypt.

Kadesh, his most famous battle with the Hittites, was recorded for posterity on many of the statues and temples he erected. This war ended when Ramses negotiated and signed the world's first known peace treaty, cemented by his marriage to the daughter of the defeated Hittite king.

Successful trade agreements, abundant harvests, and an expanding economy ushered in a period of stability and prosperity that allowed Ramses to undertake an ambitious campaign of construction that continued throughout his reign.

The narrator of the film explains the history of the king, adding that in 1817 the Egyptologist Giovanni Belzoni uncovered the entrances to the spectacular Temples at Abu Simbel, built by Ramses to celebrate his queen Nefertari and enshrine himself as a god.

Footage takes the visitor high above and through the Temples among other remarkable edifices attributed to Ramses II such as the temples at Karnak, Abydos, and the Ramesseum, his mortuary temple.



ENTERING THE EXHIBITION: Visitors then enter the world of Ramses II himself, viewing the splendour that this great king owned as well as royal statues, sarcophagi, spectacular masks, magnificent jewellery, and ornate golden treasures that reveal the fabulous wealth of the Pharaohs, the astonishing skill of ancient Egyptian tomb builders, and the superb workmanship of Egyptian artists.

Recently discovered animal mummies, including those of cats, lion cubs, and a mongoose, from the Saqqara Necropolis are on view, as well as fabulous treasures discovered in the royal tombs at the Dahshur and Tanis archaeological sites. The exhibition also includes precious objects from several other periods of Egyptian history to showcase the opulence of Egypt's ancient civilisation and the beauty of its treasures. Many of these precious gold and silver objects come from intact royal tombs of the Middle Kingdom.

A projected interactive multimedia timeline includes descriptions of key moments in Ramses II's life illustrated with images that include artefacts from the exhibition. A large mural of the spectacular and unique Temples at Abu Simbel fills one wall. All the graphics emphasise the scale of the Pharaoh's accomplishments. Full-colour, fly-through animations on monitors recreate buildings as they appeared in antiquity. Artefacts include a column drum and a relief featuring figures of deities, both with cartouches of Ramses II, and a stela that shows one of the king's barques.

A limestone block depicts Ramses trampling on his enemies. In a semi-circular side room, the story of Ramses' military victories including the Battle of Kadesh unfolds in a dramatic multimedia presentation. A giant 3D relief map of Egypt and its neighbours is projected, and miniature figures, including military leaders from the different warring factions as well as Ramses and his sons, together with war chariots and archers move around the map as the story progresses.

Hundreds of arrows aimed at enemy forces by crack archers fly across the map's terrain with the use of projection mapping. Further projections show battalions of horse-drawn chariots race across the scene, heightening the drama and storytelling as the narrator recounts some of Ramses II's defining military campaigns, including one of the most famous battles in history.

Near the exit, visitors learn that after overseeing a period of peace, stability, and economic prosperity in Egypt, Ramses died at the age of 92 and was buried in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor.

Artefacts and panels showing the King's tomb and its builders are on show among those displaying the necropolis in Luxor where the tombs of Ramses II and his family are located, with the surviving funerary collection of the king also being on display.



IN AUSTRALIA: The exhibition is the Australian Museum's most prestigious cultural exhibition in over a decade, and one "where Sydneysiders, for the next six months, will enjoy an exclusive, extended period of gold-imbued awe and wonder," said CEO and Australian Museum Director Kim McKay.

She describes the exhibition as "epic and exquisite." Epic, because 3,000 years on from this sovereign's life and times, the 182 one-of-a-kind artefacts help tell the story of Ramses the Great, as he was known, including his stunning cedar sarcophagus. Exquisite, because so much of the exhibition is hewn from precious metals, predominantly gold.

"Ramses the Great was a phenomenon," said McKay and explained that he was a beloved father, incomparable warrior, a peacemaker and prolific builder whose legacy is both political and cultural. "Responsible for countless temples, pyramids and statues, the first ever peace treaty, and an enormous, influential family, the stories of Ramses have been retold through generations."

She pointed out that the museum has created an innovative experience that enables visitors to enjoy this with all their senses. "It marks a new chapter in the way we share culture with our visitors to the Australian museum, and we know you will experience the same awe and wonder we have felt in crafting this once-in-a-lifetime blockbuster experience," McKay concluded.

Former Egyptian minister of antiquities and curator of the exhibition Zahi Hawass emphasised how the exhibition unveils the world Ramses II and his role as Pharaoh.

"The contemporary world starkly contrasts with ancient Egypt, and through this exhibition visitors will delve into Ramses II's world, encountering a vastly different way of life," Hawass said. He added that the allure of ancient Egypt persists, captivating people worldwide, as attested by the ongoing excitement over new archaeological discoveries in Egypt.

Hawass said that the masterpieces of ancient Egyptian craftsmanship, including statues, jewellery, and carvings, were crafted with the intention of honouring and immortalising the Pharaohs. Many of these artefacts, still preserved today, effectively breathe life into the stories of these revered leaders.

"The exhibition features a selection of these exquisite items, offering a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of ancient Egypt in which the greatest of the Pharaohs, the king of kings, Ramses II lived," he said.

"Australian audiences have a rare opportunity to explore the unparalleled craftsmanship and refinement of objects and artworks spanning from the Bronze Age to the Classical Age."

New South Wales Minister for the Arts, Music, Night-time Economy, Jobs and Tourism John Graham expressed his gratitude for the presence of these invaluable and historic artefacts in Sydney. He noted that the rarity of exhibitions of such magnitude meant the time-consuming efforts of hundreds of individuals and years of negotiations.

Reflecting on the Australian Museum's award-winning renovations, he highlighted that the new spaces were purposefully designed for exhibitions like "Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs", showcasing these remarkable artefacts that have endured for 3,000 years.

Encouraging the public to seize this unique opportunity, Graham urged everyone to journey back in time by visiting the exhibition. He emphasised the exceptional chance to explore ancient Egypt's wonders without venturing beyond Sydney, underscoring the significance of this cultural experience.

Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) Mustafa Waziri said that all the tickets available for November have been sold out, and he expects that by the end of its six months in Sydney, the exhibition will reach one million visitors. He recalled other cities the exhibition has visited during the past two years, such as Paris, where it received 817,000 visitors during a five-month stay.

He describes Ramses II as "a man of war and peace" because he proved his bravery in the war against the Nubians in the south, the Libyans on the western border, and pirates in the Mediterranean. He signed the world's first peace treaty with the Hittites.

Waziri described Ramses II's reign as "a golden and flourishing moment," as he branded his reputation through immense construction work across Egypt. "The exhibition showcases the story of Egypt's greatest Pharaoh and those Pharaohs who came before and after him through demonstrating these treasure troves," Waziri said.

"It is an immense honour to create this magnificent touring exhibition," executive chairman and group CEO of Neon, the organiser of the exhibition, Ron Tan said.

He added that Sydney is the only city in the southern hemisphere to showcase this exhibition and thanked the Australian Museum for providing such a spectacular setting and the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities for their cooperation in bringing this exhibition to fruition.

*** A version of this article appears in print in the 23 November, 2023 edition of Al-Ahram Weekly**

Search Keywords:

- Egypt
- Pharaohs
- Australia
- Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs

Short link:

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/512637.aspx>