

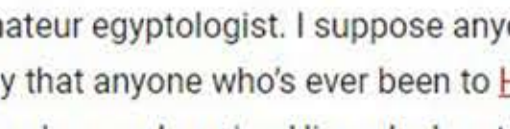


Photograph: Time Out | Comedian AJ Lamarque and Arts & Culture Editor Alannah Le Cross at 'Ramses & The Gold of the Pharaohs'

The must-see highlights at 'Ramses & The Gold of the Pharaohs'

Sydney's own Egyptology enthusiast AJ Lamarque is here to help you look clever at Sydney's exclusive exhibition

Edited by Alannah Le Cross Written by Alexander Lamarque Friday 17 November 2023



Sydney's exclusive exhibition of Ancient Egyptian artefacts has finally landed, and lovers of history and all that glitters are trying to remain cool. That overly-excited, Prince-doppelganger in the pictures (and in Time Out's First Look video of the exhibition) is me, AJ Lamarque: comedian, presenter and amateur egyptologist. I suppose anyone can call themselves an amateur egyptologist in the same way that anyone who's ever been to Holey Moley can call themselves an amateur golfer. But I did spend a year learning Hieroglyphs at UC Berkeley (instead of actually doing my course subjects) so I do have some credentials to back up my claim.

Like many people, I was enamoured by Ancient Egyptian culture from a young age, and that fascination has only grown as I've gotten older. The grandeur and mystery of this civilisation that spanned more than 3,000 years has captured the minds and imaginations of nearly every culture since its demise in the early BC. As soon as I heard that the Australian Museum had managed to secure this exhibition, I knew I had to get my nerd on.



Photograph: Alannah Le Cross | AJ Lamarque poses with bust at 'Ramses & The Gold of the Pharaohs'

Now, the fact that this exhibition even is in Australia is quite a big deal in itself. So, unless you venture to Egypt yourself, there's a very good chance that this may be the only time in our lifetimes to see these items in Australia.

With some 182 priceless artefacts on display, there's definitely a lot to check out. To help, I've picked out some highlights from the exhibition to give you the lowdown on the history behind them and what makes them so exciting. (You can also steal these notes so you can sound like a pro to your mates when you check out the exhibition too!)

Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs is at the Australian Museum until Sunday, May 19, 2024. Definitely don't miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to experience the magic of Ancient Egypt.

You can also catch me in person as I interview bioarchaeologist Professor Ronika Power as part of the Tomb Talks program. Learn more about it here.

3 incredible Ancient Egyptian artefacts you can see in Sydney

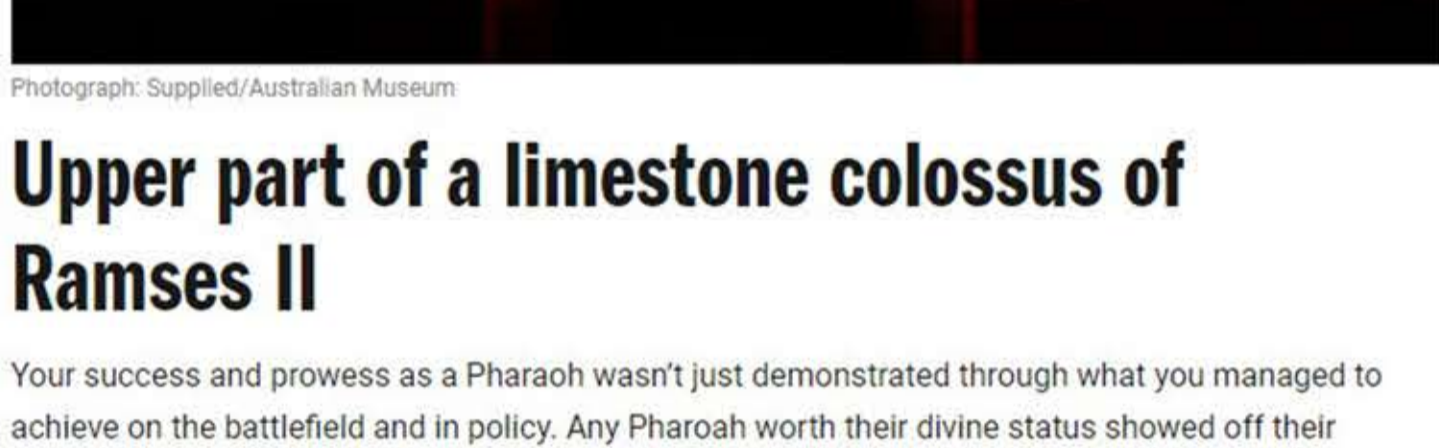


Photograph: Supplied/Australian Museum | The Coffin of Sennedjem

Coffin of Sennedjem

Whilst the rulers of Ancient Egypt got the premier treatment both in life and in death, the opulence and religious sacrament of funerary rites were also extended to the elite of Egyptian society. These upper class citizens included extended family, priests, scribes, and also artisans like Sennedjem, who lived in Deir el-Medina.

Sennedjem's wooden coffin is a masterpiece, adorned with vibrant scenes from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Despite what was inferred in the ever-popular 1999 movie, The Mummy, the Book of the Dead doesn't contain spells to bring people back to life. It's actually a series of ritual spells that helped the deceased find their way to the afterlife. Many of these paintings (which were also reflected on the walls of his tomb) depict Sennedjem's journey to the afterlife.



Photograph: Supplied/Australian Museum

Upper part of a limestone colossus of Ramses II

Your success and prowess as a Pharaoh wasn't just demonstrated through what you managed to achieve on the battlefield and in policy. Any Pharaoh worth their divine status showed off their power through architectural grandeur, and Ramses II took this to a whole new level.

He commissioned an incredible number of monuments across Egypt from Abu Simbel to the hall at Karnak, and the complex at Abydos. All these buildings were designed to intimidate foreign travellers and demonstrate the divinity of Rameses himself as a living god to his subjects. So, naturally, there were statues of Rameses everywhere (some spanning up to 20 metres high!).

One of these amazing statues from Egypt is on exhibit to show you the detail and precision in which these masterpieces were crafted. Weighing in at 725kg, this colossal limestone statue has stood the test of time as living testament to Rameses II's reign.



Photograph: Supplied/Australian Museum | Dr Mostafa Waziry from Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities with Ramses' coffin

The coffin of Ramses the Great

Ramses II, also known as Ramses the Great, was one of (if not the) most powerful and influential pharaohs in Egyptian history. With a 67-year-reign (from 1279 to 1213 BCE) during the New Kingdom period, he was known for his military conquests, extensive building projects, and diplomatic efforts to maintain peace with neighbouring civilisations.

When you think of the tombs of pharaohs, the first thing you think of is gold – and heaps of it. A worthy display of wealth and reverence to accompany the deceased pharaoh into the afterlife. And for one of Ancient Egypt's longest reigning and successful rulers, you would expect this tribute to be exceptional. But the coffin of Ramses the Great is much more humble, being constructed from high-quality imported cedar. So, what happened?

Initially found in the Royal Cache at Deir el-Bahari in 1881, this coffin style was believed to have been a protective measure for several pharaohs' burials. Potentially, the original was a decoy that grave robbers would be attracted to, leaving the royal's body protected somewhere more secure. However, recent analysis has unveiled a more complex story.

Much like all things Egyptology, most theories are only speculative. But one leading theory is that at the end of the New Kingdom, the city of Thebes (facing economic and political turmoil) gave orders to clear older tombs for raw materials. Disguised as "restoring" and "protecting" pharaohs' mummies from rampant theft, this was actually an inside job to recoup the wealth whilst still trying to honour the graves of past rulers.

The writing on the coffin is a cursive text called 'Hieratic'. Predominantly used by priests, this form of cursive writing was a simplified version of hieroglyphs, like an ancient short-hand. The texts on the coffin, called 'dockets', tell of the coffin's journey from its original resting place to the Royal Cache.

The coffin depicts Ramesses II in his regal attire, emphasising his identity as the king of Egypt. Moreover, modifications to the wooden uraeus (including an upright form of an Egyptian cobra on the crown) suggest an initial grandeur that was stripped along with the coffin's gold covering for Ramesses II's reburial. Egyptologists speculate that this coffin might have originally belonged to Horemheb, the last ruler of the 18th Dynasty, based on shared facial features, and later repurposed for the king. This captivating historical puzzle continues to reveal the intriguing stories of Egypt's past, where coffins held secrets as intriguing as the pharaohs they once cradled.