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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

A MOUNTAIN SPEAKS

BY PROFESSOR NAGUIB KANAWATI

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY REECE SCANNELL

FOREWORD

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By the Honourable Justice Michael Kirby CMG
Chancellor of Macquarie University

I have just returned from Egypt. Its memories are indelible. They flash across the mind in the midst of the most unlikely court room arguments about company law and the statute of limitations. I revisited that ancient land on my way home from a conference on informatics. From visions of the twenty-first century I was suddenly plunged back into an ancient civilization with its Pharaohs and Gods. Its riverside temples in lush green fields. And its brooding tombs in the dry valleys beyond.

Who can wander through the Temples of Karnak or Luxor without feeling a sense of awe at the monuments which these early men and women left to speak to our time? Who can look at the massive granite portraits of Ramses II without a passing thought about the transiency of human achievement? In the midst of a busy day in court, in the office, university or anywhere else, it is as well to remember that we are just the stuff of dreams. Our ancestors lived when Ramses lived and breathed and when the great stones were hauled to Giza. Think on that.

At the Residence of the Australian Ambassador in Cairo I picked up the tour book. Hidden away in it was the poem of Shelley which I had learned many years ago as a schoolboy. Perhaps most modern Australians do not learn such treasures any more. Shelley's haunting words accompanied me in the plane as I looked down at the thin strip of green which runs with the Nile through the oppressive desert. Truly Egypt still is the gift of the Nile.

"I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies
Who frown, and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things".

Australians of my generation will remember the sobering message with which the sonnet finishes. For on the pedestal of the trunkless granite appears a pathetic boast:

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings
Look on my works ye mighty and despair
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away".

In those lone and level sands something beside does remain. More remnants of the ancient civilization of Ancient Egypt. Let us never forget that our vaunted Space-age civilization can be traced, unbroken, back to the Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt.

The rediscovery of more elements of the mosaic of those times is an international responsibility. As I saw in the Valleys of the Kings and Queens, many nations are now excavating and recording the sites of Egypt. In the past, individual Australians working with overseas universities or

institutions, have taken part in these efforts. But it is only in the last decade that the Egyptian Antiquities Organization has granted a concession to an Australian University.

For ten years an annual expedition from Macquarie University has worked at the Mountain of El-Hawawish. This was the cemetery of the provincial Upper Egyptian Centre of Akhmim. It is an important site. Long neglected, it is now being completely excavated and recorded. There is no parallel to this achievement in any other province of Egypt. The magnitude of the project, the importance of the discoveries and the standard of the work done have achieved international attention and approbation.

We should record this process of the unveiling of our past. The magnificent photographs by Reece Scannell give the reader a glimpse of the daily life of the expedition, the surrounding scenery, and the arduous nature of the work. But they also give a glimpse of the excitement of the new discoveries. The reader can begin to imagine what it is to be with the first Australian archeological expedition to Egypt.

And imagination is what this project involves. It is what this book is about. We should look upon the temples, the portraits in stone and the artifacts not with despair (as Ozymandias demanded) but with wonder. It is hard for us even to begin to imagine the feeling of piety to those ancient Gods and devotion in those temples and other places. How can we speculate upon the daily lives of those times? By looking into the past, we look into ourselves. I am delighted with the publication of this book. And I am proud that Macquarie

University, a young institution in a far away country, is playing a notable part so rightly celebrated in these pages.

Sydney

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