

3 TRAVELOGUE - HOLY LAND

Egypt is well known for perfume. The photo below shows the group at another store called "Relax



Perfume Center, Perfumes and Handicraft Glass". And relax, indeed, was what we did as we were served drinks and made to listen to their Madison type sales talk about the 16 basic Essences of Flowers they extract, blend into 30 other exotic essences with such names as Key of Life, Ramses II, etc. I forget which blend is exported that eventually becomes Chanel#5 when mixed with alcohol. Anyway, everything there was impressive, and the \$35 per 120cc bottle of pure oily essence was a good buy, especially if a set of 4 is purchased that entitles one to a free fancy glass vial, all neatly packed in a wooden box.

Egypt is 15% Christian, or more specifically, Coptic. And this term does not mean a sect of Orthodox Christianity. It originally meant "Egyptian", at least that what the guide explained. So



after a fast meal at KFC, we proceeded to the Eastern side of Cairo where the population is predominantly Coptic, to visit the Hanging Church where the Holy Family lived when they went on exile. The name derives from fact that the nave used to be suspended over the road beneath, and indeed, there are plexiglass-covered openings on the floor that show older structures beneath. There is a narrow stairway leading downwards to a cave that is believed to be where the Holy family spent some time in hiding from Herod. Photo on left shows the unique blend of construction, started in the 4th

century all the way to a 1992 restoration after an earthquake. Within the immediate area of the church were other tourist sites, such as the Coptic museum, a synagogue, a Greek Orthodox Church, etc. I noted armed guards at many corners, and I was particularly fascinated by a heavily armored shield on wheels, and I took a quick snapshot of one, only to have the eagle-eyed guard with AK-47 notice and call out to me, so I walked up and showed him how I deleted the frame from my camera.

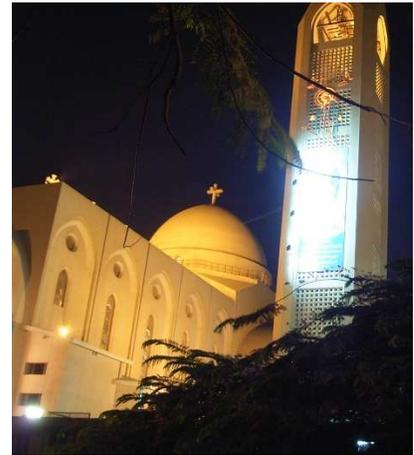
There were street vendors all around, and I saw many hawking "papyrus paintings" for 2 to a dollar! These looked very similar to the 12 buck versions at the tourist shop earlier that afternoon. But no, our tour directress Marilou said, these are not real papyrus, but banana parchment, despite the certification accompanying the paintings. I bought a few anyway.

This was a full day of touring, and the next stop was the famed Cairo Museum, where most of all the artifacts taken from the completely intact tomb of the boy king Tatanahmen were exhibited. Hashim said there were greater and more historic Pharaohs and kings but this guy Tut is better known since his tomb never got to be looted, as it was opened in the 1920's and all the artifacts were intact. As a matter of fact, this museum was completely devoted to him. We have seen ancient Egyptian exhibits in NYC, Louve, the British museum, but this one tops it all. Unfortunately, no cameras were allowed.

During the 6-day war in 1967, thousands of Egyptian soldiers lost their lives, and for a number of weeks, the Virgin Mary reportedly appeared on top of a Coptic Church.



This was our last visit for the day. We filed in silently, amidst the crowds of the faithful; no gawking tourists here, and the priest welcomed us and gave a short lecture in good English. On left shows the main altar that centered on a tapes-



try of the Virgin Mary, to which throngs of worshippers went forward to kiss, hence the plastic sheathing protecting it. On right was a much bigger church across the street that we didn't enter, but the night view, with all the lighting, was irresistible for a time-delay shot.

It already was dark, and was time for dinner at a Chinese restaurant. We piled into the bus, and from the east side of the city, started worming our way to wherever the restaurant was located. The driver drove on and on, 1 hour, then more. We got into really thick traffic, so the driver made a turn into some smaller street to beat the traffic, only to get to an intersection where all vehicles ran forward on both sides of the narrow road, resulting in a classic gridlock. There were throngs of people on the streets and sidewalks, and shops were open. Hashim explained that this was the start of Ramadan, and so most of the Moslem faithful did refrain from eating and drinking during the day by reversing their activities: sleep during the day, then go out and carouse around at night. He was quite philosophical, and lamented to Marilou the tour directress and Fr Robin our resident priest that fasting is a trial of spirit, body and mind for strength of character, and that all these people on the streets didn't have such strength. To me however, I saw a different type of character in the driver; he was good: squeezing the big bus through, shifting gears smoothly, and doing brinksmanship driving by rushing into an intersection and braking (and not jerkily) at the last moment to ward off the others who might want to go in first. Though the traditional \$5 per day per passenger tip to the guide and driver already was collected before hand and was part and parcel of our \$2300 per person total package, I decided to give a separate tip to the driver, and also to Hashim.

Finally, we were at the Chinese restaurant. And looming nearby were the pyramids! We must have traveled a round about way from the Coptic church. Earlier that morning, it took only a few minutes from the hotel. And true enough, after dinner, we were back in the hotel after a few minutes.

The hotel was first class, and it had internet access in the rooms. I had brought my laptop, and midnight last night I bought 24 hours worth of internet time, so I still had a few more hours to surf, which Lisa and I did. Tomorrow, we leave for an 8 hours drive through the Sinai Peninsula to St Catherines, at the base of Mt Sinai.

To be continued