

Chapter No. 10:

WE RETURN TO KHARTOUM IN SEPTEMBER 1963

We have said goodbyes to our friends and families in Starigrad but nobody of them knew about our exact intentions in the future. All what they knew about was that we have to return to Khartoum so that I complete my 3-year contract. Only Ljiljana's mother was fully acquainted with our problems and probable plans for our future. In this way possibly we may not see her for a very long time or even never again. This farewell was particularly distressing for the grandma "baka" Mara and two of us. Baka Mara kept her tears back as long she could giving us her blessings cum sincerest wishes to succeed on our ways.

I have arranged all the bookings for our return journey to Khartoum before I started my leave. Now I was anxious whether all would be going well. On Tuesday August 20, 1963 we returned to Zagreb as the train and the ferryboat were less congested on that day. We stayed in Buhas' flat in Zagreb for few days before starting returning trip to Khartoum on Friday 23rd night. The start was not too encouraging as we had to wait for a delayed train until 3:45 AM sitting on the open platform. All waiting rooms and the restaurant closed at midnight sharp. Despite this "sour" begin we reached Trieste early enough to have time for short window shopping before we boarded a bus of "ITALTOUR". This bus would take us to Venice our next programmed stop. I booked this tour from Trieste to Genoa in advance that included hotel accommodations at Venice, Florence and Genoa. In Genoa we would board a Greek liner to sail for Alexandria (Egypt) via Piraeus.



Ljiljana and Vesna enjoy a gondola ride in Venice Canale Grande

Hotel "Saturnia" in Venice was in an old palace with large rooms furnished in old fashioned way as certain toilette facilities like shower were outside the room. The hotel location was near the town centre what was good as we had a splendid view on the lagoon from our room. It was Sunday so we took a gondola to make a trip to Murano Island visiting the glass manufacture there. Vesna was attracted by a glass blower who formed a small horse out of a lump of hot red glass within a minute or so. The next moment blower dropped horse figurine crushing it in a bucket. Vesna almost got crying so we promised her to buy a ready made figure in a shop in the hope that they are closed on Sundays. Not to prevail there were open and Vesna got her "horse" at last. Ljiljana bought a nice necklace and ear-clips of deep red glass. We had time to amble through inner City viewing some of most prominent cultural object like St. Marco's Church, Dodge's Palace and the Dungeons cum "Ponte dei Sospiri". The dinner in hotel's restaurant tasted fine partly as we were hungry and the only guests served by an elderly maître d'hôtel himself. He offered red wine for

dinner so Ljiljana had to taste it first. She asked for some sugar when put a few small-spoons of into her wine. The old waiter watched astounded of incredulity what Ljiljana did to the wine but she drank out her glass bravely after. Her explanation for the sacrilege on the sugared red wine was that is good for her anemic blood. Malesh!

The next morning we boarded the bus for a long voyage along the coast with a stop at Ravenna. We went to see the Cathedral that is a counterpart of a though smaller in Poreč on Istra's west coast. I was in Poreč several times in connection with rescuing on the old Roman mosaics and structures. They were in jeopardy partly due to the rising sea level but also as ongoing new constructions endangered these sensitive cultural objects. Later that afternoon we arrived in Florence where our lodging was in a modern-day hotel with acceptable food to our taste. However windows of our room were on the main street with a lot of traffic that lasted almost until 2AM and to start again at 5AM. However its advantage was its central location particularly essential to carry out our sightseeing program that had to include some shopping as well.

Next morning we went to visit the cathedral "Il Duomo" ambling through its naves for some time. Vesna was mostly interested in the frescos and it was not an easy task explaining the presentation of various scenes from the Bible. Later we ascended into the cupola what was a rather tedious adventure climbing steep steps within the two roof shells. The space gets narrower as one comes closer to the outlook on the cupola's apex. The view there was a really splendid one – the old City of Florence at your feet! The descending was less strenuous but our knees were wobbling when came out on the Piazza. There my girls decided to have a drink and to wait for me to ascend the Campanile alone. Actually this was a needless effort as the view was almost the same as before although I got a fine view of the cupola from a higher spot. However in was not worth my extortion considering that much more walking has been planed for that day.



Ljiljana this took a picture of Zvonko and Vesna on St. Marco's Square in Venice



Here Ljiljana and Vesna sit at the edge of Dome to the Cathedral in Florence

After a short rest we continued to Piazza della Signoria to go into the Palazzo Sforza to look at the exhibited objects of arts in the very numerous rooms there. The grand statues in front of the Loggia di Lanzi attracted Vesna attention asking for more explanations that

we could offer. Later we decided that each of us looks at objects of personal interest so primarily Vesna focused on pictures or sculptures that showed horses in different poses and actions in battles. I did a stupid thing again going up very narrow stairs that wined spirally up a column that supports the campanile in the palace's tower. I felt a vertigoes coming to the top and looking down in an immense hall far below. There was a balustrade with a low handrail – obviously not meant for tourists coming here. Later on rejoined we sat in comfortable chairs scattered in each hall from where one could view large pictures hanging on walls at leisure and describing them to Vesna at less strain. We returned to the hotel tired for Ljiljana to prepare sandwiches helping ourselves with fruit juices and fruits bought on the market. After we had a good rest and some sleep that had boosted us for the afternoon stroll to new goals.

Afternoon was Ljiljana's time for window shopping that included few goldsmiths to get the promised present for her at last. On our way to the Ponte Vecchio where one finds the goldsmiths we passed the market and each of us fondled the snout of a bronze boar sculpture that should bring us luck and treasure. Beforehand I have ordered some money from London needed for the onward voyage in Egypt and later on. The temptations for Ljiljana were great crossing over Ponte Vecchio again to that she bravely did not succumb (mainly to financial reasons). We ascended a path up a hill with few nice gardens and came up to the Piazzale Michelangelo. From there one has a marvellous view over the whole City of Florence and Arno River down below. We viewed the famous mosaics, old sacral pictures and relics in the church San Miniato al Monte nearby. Despite Ljiljana's objections the majority decided to return by bus to the city and to dine in our hotel room. Back there we enjoyed on the fresh bread with ham and cheese, paprika and grapes we bought on the market. When Vesna fell asleep two of us got out for an evening stroll that ended in a cinema but the movie was not worth the cost for tickets.

The programmed a visit to the Palazzo Pitti on our second day in Florence. On the way there we went to the bank where the money transfer was waiting for us already. It seemed that the fondling of bronze boar's snout had helped so we crossed Ponte Vecchio without stopping. Ljiljana had made up her mind and would return later to purchase her ornament. In Palazzo Pitti we have looked around the Pitti's and Modern Galleries but the Royal halls and Treasury were closed due to lack of supervising staff. Vesna liked most the animal pictures in the Modern while she asked for many explanations about those mythological pictures exhibited in immense halls of Pitti Gallery. There were so many objects of arts everywhere that we gradually got rather tired.

We went on rushing through many halls stopping here and there as one of us found something of particular interest. The impressions were overwhelming say like miniatures, objects with inlays of wood or marble, fantastic sculptures of marble or bronze etc. My greatest impression caused a huge table carved out of one stone block with a perfectly polished surface and fine mosaic inlays. After three hours we gave up and went out for a stroll in Giardino Di Boboli that spreads behind Palazzo Pitti. We found a nice place to have a snack where we gorged on fine grapes bought at a stand to be found almost all over Florence by end of August. Later we returned to the hotel to relax for a while though Ljiljana could not wait too long and went alone to the jeweller's shop on Ponte Vecchio. In the meantime I went with Vesna to see Eddie Constantine's movie just to kill time. After we met again in the hotel and started packing our suitcase that we should be resenting with the progression of our journey.

Mornings of August 29th we boarded the bus on the last leg of our journey through Italy. It rained for a while crossing the Apennines but rain stopped at the first stop at Pisa. There

we could not resist ascending the slanting tower before it succumbs to its bad fate. The tower would overturn anytime in future prophesized the technical reports. Certain costly measures would be carried out to prevent its collapse. It was a most unusual experience taking care not to fall over the low handrail at one side or not to scratch one's own head against inner wall at the opposite side. As the halt-time was running out we rushed down to find the famous spot where taking the picture is a must. Later these pictures had caused some disbelief as Vesna and Ljiljana stooped over her "support" in a joint efforts a slanted tower of Pisa. Soon after Pisa the bus descended to the sea coast of Liguria so one got good sights as the weather improved.

The coast east of Genoa reminded us of the Istrian eastern one even if the travel lasted longer along long stretches of development and urbanization. We had a lunch break in a restaurant at Lerici from which veranda one had a good view at La Spezia large bay on other side. After lunch we continued on the coastal road by passing the well known tourist attractions at "Cinque Terre" looking at these natural beauties through bus' windows only. At Rapallo the bus captain suggested a coffee stop so one had a few minutes for a walk to view people promenading along the quay site in a holiday spirit say like in Opatija at home. There were a few swimmers and sailing boats out at sea that crisscrossed power boats now and then.

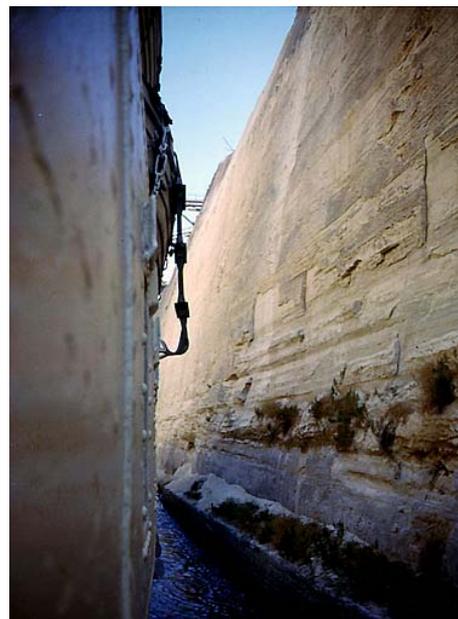
Soon the stewardess called us back and during the bus ascending she told us stories about the splendid life in Portofino that we should visit on our next journey. Soon after we reached the city boundaries of Genoa and the bus brought us straight to the hotel "Elisio" located on Castelletto hilly grounds. The noble looking turn-of-the century building had been renovated and modernized recently. We got a large room cum an entree and there was a wide balcony from that one had perfect view on the Downtown and Genoa's harbour close by too. Certainly we found in "Elisio" the best accommodation but the meals turned out to be the worse of all up to now what we would found out at the dinner later.

First we had a good shower and dressed nicely for the dinner under Vesna's protest as coming from her own cubicle separated by heavy curtains. After an obligatory TV watching time Vesna withdrew to her booth falling asleep fast. We decided to have a walk prior to going to bed as well. The evening was balm and strolling down in almost noiseless street pleasant until we came upon the main street with a lot of traffic and sounds of. We turned into a street with less commotion but soon entered into the red-lights district with its typical din that we bravely went through as fast as possible. We were really naive forgetting that Genoa is an important harbour of Mediterranean with all its problems and sins too. Luckily we came to the Railway Station close by and turned back along the quay walkway until we reached the noisy main street that we followed up to our quite abode for night.

Next morning we walked down the same street but everything was different and looking more business alike. After we have collected our sailing tickets and exchanged only the necessary money we found the funicular that took us up to Granarolo. From the top of that hill there we had a beautiful view over the whole Golf of Genoa as well as on many hills whose slopes had dense woods and green gardens that belonged to the housing estates spreading over them. Then we returned to the hotel using a bus in a long ride taking us up and down several more nearby hills. Ljiljana bought beforehand the standard ingredients so we had sandwiches, fine grapes and bananas for our typical "banquet" after that we had a short rest. Later we strolled down taking a more eastward route and passing buy a few parks came to the coast where continued walking up to the new Exposition grounds. The ladies objected to go further so we went back along the pleasant quay promenade that follows the inner harbour.

We came to that point where we turned back to our hotel last night and contemplated what to do next being rather tired and in low spirits after this long day. At a moment I thought that I lost the orientation when Ljiljana suggested turning right and by miracle got into the shopping centre that lifted both girls' spirit instantly. Now I have to watch them to do the window shopping only and that we should return to the hotel for dinner on time. Tomorrow we were supposed to board a Greek liner to sail for Alexandria in Egypt from where we were supposed to continue our journey to Khartoum. Thus ended our short stay in Genoa as where we should leave Europe probably for a long time or for good after all.

On next morning a taxi brought us to Genoa's harbour embarkation station where we saw a Greek liner on that we should sail to Alexandria around midday. The sight of it was not too encouraging but the real disappointment struck when the steward lead us to our cabin later. The cabin window opened on a large inner deck packed full benches of passengers and their luggage who have not booked a cabin on that voyage. I have booked a cabin for 3 persons on the outer deck side in Khartoum thus we did not want to accept this cabin that had 2x2 bunk beds. With all eloquence and forcefulness we have asked the steward to allot us to another cabin to comply with the original booking. After a while he returned apologizing not knowing that we are Europeans – that he did not say of course. As first he gave us another larger cabin with bunk beds and that had toilette facilities being on deck's outside until we reach Piraeus tomorrow. We would have our meals in a restaurant where he would see that we get better table for us only. Thus the problems were solved for the time being so he got a small baksheesh with promise for more if he keeps his words.



The Greek vessel passes through the Passage of Corinth (left) and the closeness of rock wall in that Passage

The Greek vessel left Genoa late morning and sailed down the Tyrrhenian Sea passing by Naples during afternoon. After dinner we recognized the flames of Stromboli volcano in the full night darkness. We got to our cabin enjoying a pleasant breeze coming from the sea through only oval cabin porthole. We slept when the ship got through Straight of Messina and continued navigating in the Ionian Sea. After the breakfast we went on the deck but a dull weather and overcast sky was not too inviting for any watching. The whole day and night dragged on until the vessel reached inner Greek waters early next morning. It sailed through the Gulf of Patras so we could see on the right outlook the Peloponnesus' green

coast. Morning hours pulled on as the vessel slowed down passing the narrows of Patras to enter into Gulf of Corinth later. When the ship got to the Channel of Corinth its speed dropped down almost to a creep as it squeezed between two almost vertical rock flanks some 80m high. One had cut this narrow channel out of the natural rocks to shorten the shipping route around Island of Peloponnesus.

This channel is so narrow that one could almost touch the rock face standing and bending over the railing. Of course nobody tried it! It took a few hours to get through the channel and when we finished our lunch the ship came out the channel early afternoon. We could both coast lines to be of barren rock and hardly anything green to be seen on the horizon. When the vessel passed Salamina it had cast its anchor in the harbour of Piraeus around 18 hours. After the dinner we went down on the quay where we got on a bus for a tour of Athens by night. There was nothing of in particular interest driving in full darkness until we reached the centre of Athens with more traffic and street life also. There were many lights of advertisements and billboards for various products, shops' windows ablaze and various entertainment or restaurant signs too. We returned to the ship at near 22 hours and to our dismay found out that a lot of unloading business with racket was going on just in front of our cabin. We made a quick decision and moved our belongings to the other ship's side where we found two cabins free ready to accept new passengers. We slept well the whole night enjoying the fresh breeze coming through an open porthole getting in from the sea.

Next morning we apologized to the steward for our last night doings but the promised baksheesh established the needed harmony in between us. That morning we booked a sightseeing tour to Athens and visited the Acropolis first. I thought that I had enough seen of it but our pretty tourist guide made the whole trip enjoyable. She was telling many stories from Greek mythology, about the origin of democracy, on developments of science and philosophy from Greek to modern times. Of course Vesna was just an ear asking for many questions and explanations too. Our guide really made the day for us particularly when we passed by the stadium, king's palace and through shopping streets. As there was not any time left for shopping we had to return straight to the ship getting there just on time for lunch. Ljiljana found a lady passenger and they quickly left to see whether there are any interesting shops nearby before the vessel's departure from Piraeus at 17 hours. She was back soon and in her trail came the smiling steward with good news regarding our cabin accommodations. Thus my girls got a cabin with a shower and toilettes for themselves and I had one for myself at a lower deck only. The rest of the voyage we spent in our cabins that represented a real luxury compared to the first part of the trip.

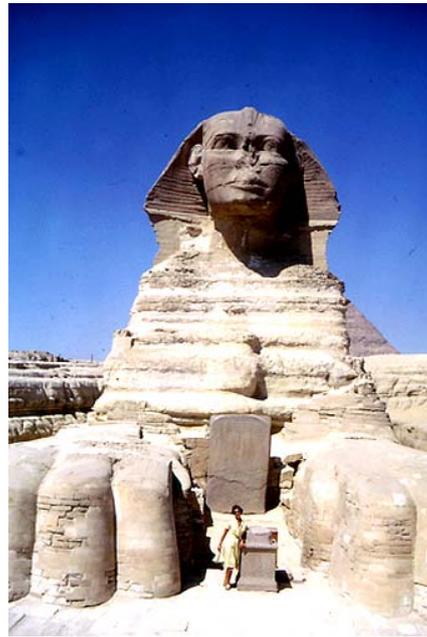
On September 4th the vessel sailed out of Piraeus at 17 hours and the next day was splendid for a sun basking with easy seas at light wind blowing from the stern almost whole day. On the 6th morning the ship entered the harbour of Alexandria around 07:30 apart from another 2 hours to check passports and other custom formalities so we could disembark around 10 after all. Our first encounter with Egypt was not too promising as it asked for a lot of patience in long waiting. After we got through the Customs' long queuing and perspiring heavily we found a taxi soon but had to put in our luggage by ourselves - otherwise we would wait there until noon. It did not take too long as we arrived to the hotel - an imposing building - there few porters waited as for the reception. I wanted to pay the taxi driver in Egyptian currency when he went out venting his rage expecting payment in foreign currency. After a while he accepted the fare that was well in excess of what the taximeter asked for.

The hotel was in order but I do not intent wasting any word on general cleanness in Egypt. Our room was huge and had a nice bathroom that we had used instantly having a good

shower after the 6 days on ship. We lunched in hotel's restaurant and everything seemed to be fine except the odours floating in from outside. Later I tried at the hotel's concierge to order railway tickets (with air-conditioned compartments) for Cairo but I was told that everything is booked out due to the tourist's season. We would not believe this as we met hardly any tourists up to now so we went to the booking office in the railway station. It was supposed to be nearby but it took me good 20 minutes walking in plain sun to reach the station. Of course we got our tickets there without any problem so being happy with the outcome we got onto a bus that drives the length of "La Corniche". This is the Seaside Avenue and promenade so it was an interesting trip that ended for us at the late king's palace "Montazah". We thought that there might be a swimming club yet the entrance charges to visit the palace and its gardens were exorbitant. Thus we decided to pay for to walk through the gardens only. The walk through in shadows of large trees was really pleasant but we still had on mind to have a swim somewhere. We left the park to search for a likely spot.



A visit at Botanic Gardens next to "La Corniche" of City of Alexandria



Ljiljana ponders about what the Sphinx has in mind with us on our first visit here

We walked on the promenade for some time passing several villas with gardens set along the coastline. Nonetheless we could not find any access to the beach for long. When we almost gave up finding a suitable place to access a beach Ljiljana came up to a girl and asked where we could have a swim. To our surprise the girl invited us to a residence she was came from making the day in Alexandria for three of us. Happy about our first day in Egypt we returned to the hotel and dined in its restaurant that seemed to us spotlessly clean compared to what we have seen on that day. Although not knowing yet what was expecting us during the following days. Unfortunately I had not received the data regarding our ongoing travel through Egypt and to the Sudan during our stay in Starigrad. Thus it was essential to control our expenditures until we meet the "Sudan Connection" as agreed with Abdel Halim prior to my departure from Khartoum. Believing in our good luck we took a taxi to the Alexandria Railway Station early next morning and got on the day-train to Cairo well in time.

After a few hours journey in a pleasantly cool wagon we arrived in Cairo around mid morning. A blast of hot air hit us as we got out on the platform covered with a layer of dust

and rubbish in any direction one looked. We got into a taxi and had to place in our four suitcases as the driver was not supposed to do it as the porter had left by now. We booked this hotel well in advance and found there a large room with a well equipped bathroom. After a minimum of our utensils had been unpacked each of us took a shower to refresh ourselves before going out. About this time the concierge phoned telling that a Sudanese gentleman is waiting for us in the lobby. This was the moment I was waiting for as it had to be the “Sudan Connection” that found us after all. The Sudanese gentleman introduced himself to be a relative of our friend Abdel Halim. He suggested we go over to a buffet where we would meet his friend who would take care of us that afternoon. Few cups of lemonade helped waiting for another handsome Sudanese with his Canadian wife (a UN official in Cairo).



Vesna is happy to have a horse ride in the front of Pyramids



Ljiljana and with newly acquired Sudanese friends in Cairo who took care about us here

Contacts were quickly established and soon three of us got into our host's American car with a functioning cooler. I was somehow disappointed with what I saw on the way through city main streets of dull grey colour with dust and dirt everywhere. The number of people along way was astounding crowding in large cluster most of them in shabbily dressed. I could not understand Ljiljana's earlier enthusiastic description of Cairo probably she had seen in by night only. It was getting dark and with dust in the air one could not see much as we passed by City's huge cemetery that poorest people used as for an accommodation during nights not disturbing buried ones there at all. Our host invited us to visit the Citadel where we attended the “Lights & Sounds” performance showing quite impressive scenes although we could not understand any word of the story told in Arabic. We were getting quite hungry forgetting the Sudanese's custom to dine rather late after we left the hotel with just a breakfast we took in the train.

On our way back we came to the better lit City's avenues though the cleanliness had not improved much. Obviously the Egyptians were quite different from the Sudanese who take more care about that aspect. At point our driver was lucky when something hit car's front screen - probably it was a watermelon husk or another fruit splattering all over it. Quickly we turned onto Gezira Island that is a strictly restricted area “For Members Only”. Here are many sports grounds and restaurants belonging to quite a number of Clubs. First we went up to the 120m high TV tower for a longing respite at last. From the top platform one can view all over the Cairo City - that night sight was certainly much better than the day one. Vesna really enjoyed that event thoroughly apparently not being tired at all. Later we had the dinner in a restaurant at the lower platform where the food was not up to a first class but we had devoured it starving as we were. When we came back to the hotel it was one hour past midnight so Vesna dropped into bed felt asleep instantly.

Next morning we had an appointment at 9 hours with Halim friend's wife but she turned up late. We started at 10 in our hostess's car to visit the Pyramids of Giza at nearby Cairo's southern suburb that took about 3/4 hours drive. Vesna agreed to skip the Zoo provided she could have horse ride instead at the platform in front of the Sphinx monument where horses were waiting for potential riders. Vesna chose a horse and fast mounted it on her own whereas Bakri, hostess' son, had to be helped by the groom who led the horse after. Not waiting Vesna rode off for some distance not waiting for Bakri. In the meantime we had time to look at the magnificent Great Pyramid of Cheops and the second one of Chephren not too far away. We stood in front of the Sphinx under scorching sun in a slight breeze of seething hot air.



Zvonko's ominous camel ride in front of the Pyramids

On ladies' request I had to dress myself like a Bedouin by putting on a wide cloak and a headdress and mount a camel for photo taking. I complied dutifully so when the camel got up I had to hold fast not to slip out of the saddle. Later this procedure had some grave consequences though. We returned back to the City but could not refuse to visit our host's flat where she served a lunch that took quite some time. We were back at the hotel after 4 PM that was later then envisaged as we were invited by the doctor in whose house we had the swimming party in Alexandria. Ljiljana and Vesna were still sleeping when I decided to make a stroll in streets near the hotel.

During the following two hours I have made my worst experiences of Cairo and the whole voyage. I could not stop at any window because the shop-attendant wanted me to come inside pulling me or coming after me until I stopped at another shop. Another group of impudent youngsters pestered in asking for money until I mentioned to call the police aloud after that they dispersed instantly. But not for too long another boy appeared from nowhere and the whole game started again. The worst were the ones who pulled on your shirt trying to fix a kind of badge for say blind or illegitimate children or crippled one what so ever. The begging palaver could last for many minutes but I was not going to pay a single penny. The dispute ended after I shouted at the impostor a few harsh words in Croatian and Arabic. I did not dare to photograph this destitution as it would cause more troubles and begging for baksheesh. I returned tired and disillusioned to the hotel at the time as the dusk was descending in these dusty and dirty streets.

I found there my girls waiting anxiously about my absence as they could not find shoes for Vesna in any nearby shop. I told them about my awful experiences but it was time to get ready to follow the invitation. Vesna came with us as it was not likely that we would finish in a night club later. Our host from Alexandria took us to an Italian restaurant where we

enjoyed the perfect dinner. Later we visited the doctor's flat where we had more drinks and ice creams that made Vesna happy also she could watch TV. We kept on discussing a few themes on political, economic or ethnological subjects and on prevailing social contrasts and differences between a wealthy minority and an extremely poor majority in Egypt. All of them were interesting though it was necessary to return to the hotel as tomorrow was our last day in Cairo. At wee hours of that night I woke up having a sensation that something creeps in my hair. Like a stroke of lightning I knew precisely that it must be a louse. I woke up Ljiljana and asked for hair shampoo that she found incompressible for what I need it. I washed my hair thoroughly several times to make sure that no lice stayed on my head. I hate these bugs everlastingly since my post-war ordeals.

Our last day in Cairo was to be the most turbulent one. I got up earlier than the girls to confirm railway tickets for the onward voyage. Within the next 2 hours I got a number of misleading information that I did not get during the past 5 years in all. Finally I found the office of the Sudan Railways in a narrow cul-de-sac lane some 300m from the hotel only. My ladies were nervously waiting for my return as they wanted to look for Vesna's shoes first. It was decided that we would meet in the nearby Egyptian museum later. There I have spent about two hours viewing fantastic and interesting archaeological and ancient cultural exhibits even a few dozens of mummies that were not worse the extra fee after all. At 13 hours I left the museum intending to return to the hotel since the girls did not show up. Just a few moments later they got out of a taxi explaining that the driver could not find the Egyptian museum. Malesh! Instead they have seen the palace of ex-king Farouk but did not get shoes for Vesna. We walked over to the hotel to lunch when our Sudanese friend phoned that he would pick up us earlier at 16 instead 17 hours. He would like us to visit another Sudanese family in Maadi suburb. We should pack our luggage and let it to be brought to the caretaker's office top. We would collect it prior going to the Railway Station to get on the train to Luxor early that evening.



The two Colossi's at the Nile River left bank on the way to the Death Valleys of Thebes at morning



Zvonko and Vesna pose before the colossi of the Temple of Luxor

We had an hour to rest only but were getting quite nervous as we started late at 16:45 to Cairo's posh suburb Maadi. The Sudanese family leaved in a formerly British house that reminded us on Khartoum concerning it general setup. The teatime passed in pleasant conversation but the time went fast so out of precaution we returned to the hotel sooner to be on the train at 18:45. To our great dismay the luggage was not brought down from our room so we rushed up to it. Ljiljana carried two suitcases to the lift and I run with other two down one stair flight reaching the entrance almost at the same time. Speedily we had put suitcases in friend's car when four porters including the liftboy appeared to ask baksheesh though they did not give us any help Ljiljana. By Jove, I snubbed at them angrily "Imshy" (= blast off!) and squeezed into the car to drove of right away to the nearby Railway station.

After some confusion I found the office to get there our reservation for the sleeping-wagon compartments that I booked that morning. Our good friend solved all problems quickly and we got into our cubicles 5 minutes before the train left for Luxor. We just waved goodbyes to a real friend in need and diverted our views from a few scenes of extreme dearth and misery spread out on the platform.

The night travel was pleasant in a train with air-cooled wagons made in Hungary so we took our dinner in the restaurant car soon after we left Cairo. We had two compartments for ourselves sleeping well until next morning arriving at Luxor around 7 AM. A bus waited for us and took us to the hotel "Luxor" about 1km away. There we had a huge room with the view on the Nile as well as the mountain range of the Valley of Queens and the Kings more to north hidden in a heat haze. We chose a room without air-coolers but instead with large ceiling fans above each bed equipped with mosquito nets. After the breakfast we ventured out of the hotel and found a 2-horse cart with a Nubian coachman with whom we agreed on a fixed price to take us to and from Karnack.



Ljiljana views the surrounding from the Temple's roof at Karnack

The ride in a two-horse drawn cart was pleasant seating in shadow of its canopy despite the very hot air indeed. We were impressed with the sight of Karnack awaking in minds pictures from our school history books. We entered the complex through Alley of Sphinxes continuing straight forward to the Great Temple of Amun. The temple's hallways with its tall columns and massive roof beams are so immense that we nearly lost each other by strolling around pillars being attracted by the mysterious ornaments and inscriptions. We zigzagged through corridors and halls trying to stay in shadows where it was just a little less hot. When we arrived at the northern end of a tall massive wall we turned left to walk through the Temple of Ramses III. At last we came out on the place of Temple of Khonsu quite tired and dehydrated by the midday sun in September. We found our coachman waiting for us under a palm tree so we gladly accepted his offer to bring us back to the hotel fast. The Nubian had a pleasing nature and liked to talk to us telling many interesting stories and data about ancient Egyptians that surprised us in fact. During the afternoon we wanted to rest during the "white hours" so the Nubian suggested that he could take us to the other side of the Nile early next morning. After an obligatory bargaining on the fee it was agreed that we should be ready soon after breakfast say around 8 AM.

After a good lunch in hotel's cool restaurant we chatted for a while with few tourists about our origin and future plans. There was an elderly American lady who pranced about her air-conditioned room and how many dollars she exchanged to pay for bits and pieces

bought as presents or souvenirs. Shortly after we politely apologized and retired to our room that had ceiling fans only but wide windows and a balcony. We kept windows and door wide open having a sight onto the Death Valleys of Thebes Necropolis that baked by sun. Later we went down to have a proper British like five o'clock tee in a shadowy atrium of the hotel. Prior to the dinner we enjoyed from our balcony a perfect sunset blurred by mist of dust. Gradually the sun disappeared behind the Western Desert ragged hills on a background of varying hued crimson sky.



The access way to Karnack temples' area and the colonnade of a temple at the sunset (right)

We got up at 6 AM next day and found the Nubian waiting for us already. Thus we left at once to get on a ferry earlier of the anticipated time. Arriving on Nile's left bank the horse-cart stopped shortly near the huge stonework of Colossi of Memnon first. After having a quick view of Ramses III temple ruins our coachman continued northwards bypassing the Necropolis of Thebes aka Ramesseum. We did not stop as there one could see walls and scattered stone blocks all over a large area but shadow nowhere. Then the cart turned to left on an ascending path leading towards Valleys of the Queens and Tombs of Nobles. At the later place a waiting guide took us in an underground tomb. The Seti III nobleman's tomb enthralled us with its black and white graffiti as well with paintings that danced likely in guide's torch-light. Pleased with the baksheesh he promised to show us a few more tombs that were normally not visited by tourists.

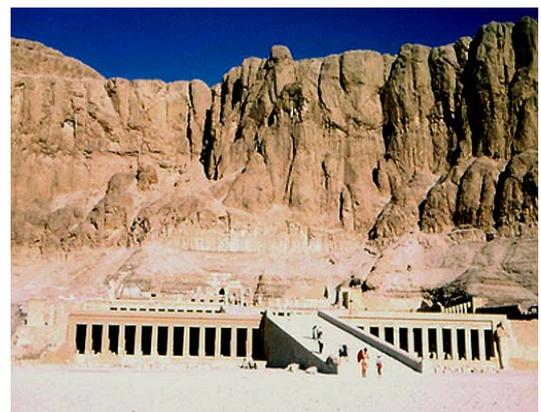


The wall frescos in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti III (left) and Ljiljana conceals her view of a mummy

Nubian coachman followed him as we went down in few more tombs but none of them was as impressive as Seti's one. As we came out of the last one guide disappeared for moment to return holding a real mummy missing its lower leg parts only. A few photos were taken that stirred up minds of our relatives later. At the end of our journey we visited

Temple of Hatshepsut partly under restoration where we spent quite some time marvelling on murals and paintings as well. This was our last halt at these ancient locations as it was time to return long way to the ferry under searing midday sun in the desert. Safely back at the hotel we thanked the Nubian for his perfect guidance telling us about so many facts and added a fine sum to the agreed fee too.

We spent the afternoon the same way as the day before and packed our luggage soon after dinner to be ready for an early morning departure. Next morning a bus brought to Luxor station where we got on the train to El Shallal that is the southernmost station of the Egyptian Railways. On a plateau above The Nile River the railway line passes mostly though desolated and stony regions of Eastern desert. Coming closer to the construction site of Aswan High Dam the surrounding became even bleaker of barren rocks. From the train nearing El Shallal station one could see the Philae Island at close and Elephantine one further down in the Nile riverbed. There was quite a commotion when passengers got off the train but luckily we found few porters soon. They took care of our luggage and lead us to a waiting bus that was going down to docklands of the Sudan Nile shipping line. Outside of the railway station on an open plateau hundreds of people moved around in a cloud of dust in a heat radiating from rocks all over in background. Trucks and heavy earthmoving machines run to and from stirring more dirt making the surroundings to be seen like in dusty haze.



The general view down to the Pharaoh's Queen Hatshepsut temple at left and the approach to the temple at right

The bus ride was short but the long queuing line made us anxious about how long it would take us going through the passport formalities before we could get on board of the ship. The white ship stood anchored not so far away of the custom office but the queue length was formidably long to reach it. Luckily a Sudanese officer spotted us coming to the queue and signalled our porters that we should jump the queue. We knew instantly that we are onto the Sudan where ladies had the advantage to jump waiting ones in a queue. Thus we got on board of a white ship sailing under the Sudanese flag. A tall and handsome steward greeted us politely and led us to the top deck where we have booked two adjacent cabins portside. The top deck had a dozen twin-bed cabins for the first class passengers in front of which was the commanding bridge and captain's quarters. A strong canvas canopy stretched over the whole deck including the open platform arrear and walkways on both sides. Our cabins were minute enough to contain beds, a wardrobe, a toilette table cum a chair and a washbasin. Passengers had to share two toilettes and showers placed at each side of cabins.

The middle deck for the 2nd class passengers contained more cabins and its own open-deck restaurant. The lowest main deck was mainly an open platform to be used by natives

travelling shorter distances. Attached to the portside was a wide pontoon almost as long as the ship itself that part of had a tent-shade where natives hustled and bustled between many bags of different sizes also baskets some of them containing poultry even a few live small animals. We had to cross this pontoon when boarding but it was not as full as now shortly before the ship lifted anchors. About that time when we heard a louder throbbing of engines just as finished organizing in our cabins. We rushed out to observe the departure from El Shallal as a cloud of black smoke gushed out from the funnel drifting slowly over the dockside amalgamated with desert's filthy haze afar. When the ship reached river's main stream we had a clear view of the construction site for the Aswan Dam located at the first cataract only few kilometres far. On Thursday September 12, 1963 we left Egypt on a ship steering upstream at a steady low speed keeping it almost constant until to its final destination of Wadi Halfa Port in the Sudan.



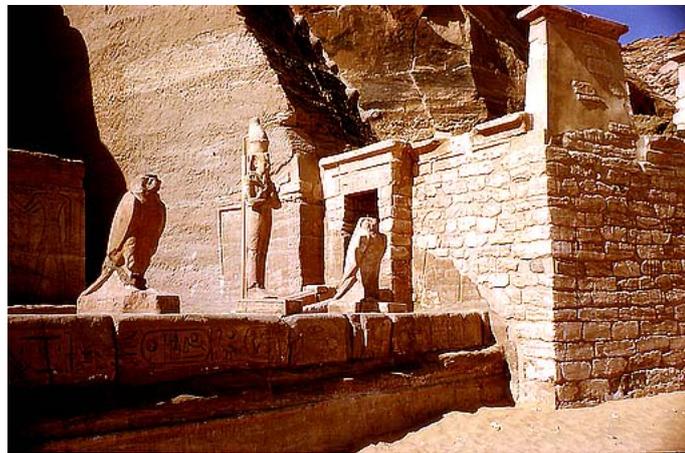
The "cruiser" ship on the Nile River similar to the one we were on travelling south

Shortly after the departure we were invited to lunch on the rear open deck and the meal was almost like as the one would get at the "Grand Hotel" in Khartoum. Yet it was hotter here under the canopy of open deck than in hotel's air-cooled restaurant. Though ship was underway midstream of a wide river the hot air was so very dry causing a fast dehydration and mucous skin irritations. Fortunately there was a regular supply of waters or teas and we put ointment on lips and nostrils quite often. The landscape on both river banks was monotonously dreary and dull with a rather thin green belt of grass or low bushes close to the banks only. The steamer stopped at a number of landings closer to larger settlements located on hilly grounds mostly along the right bank. At these landings there was always a lot of commotion when passengers disembarked from the main deck or the pontoon. At each stop hubbubs and ruckuses became louder than the engines' throbbing. We got out of our cots just to watch the human turmoil that included seemingly never ending freight activities.

The first day dragged on uneventful through sunset and dinner under candle lights after that we retreated to our cabins leaving doors open to get more air. During that night I heard Ljiljana's shouting followed by somebody hastening along the walkway so I had to get up to look what's all about. Still drowsy Ljiljana explained that somebody entered through the door but run away without saying anything. I tried to appease her that it might have been a drunken passenger but she preferred to keep her door closed after. Next morning at the breakfast we met that American lady from the hotel "Luxor". She complained bitterly about the heat on board and that the air-conditioner in her hotel suit stopped working at midnight that was very disappointing. She inquired whether she could exchange Egyptian pounds into Sudanese ones at Wadi Halfa what I doubted as almost for certain. I knew

that the Bank of Sudan would accept strong currencies only but in Wadi Halfa she would not have that chance at all.

The day dragged on with less stops as passed close by a few archaeological site like the Temple of El Maharraqa and Nubian best preserved avenue of sphinxes El Sibû. Near midday the ship entered the big bends named El Malki, El Rîqa and Tunquâla to reach the Temples of Abu Simbel late afternoon. Here the ship stopped so interested passengers could descend into few waiting boats to be taken to the shore inspecting temples at close. Both facades were in deep shade already so we decided to stay on board and took a few photos standing at the railing. The following night passed uneventful but it was a little bit cooler as the Nile stream run here between rocky banks and below the desert planes. The next morning after breakfast the ship moored at the dockside of Wadi Halfa at Nile's right bank that was on the Sudanese territory. Here all passengers had to disembark so many porters with handcarts were waiting to take our luggage to the near Railway Station. Soon there we found the two compartments in a sleeping wagon of the train that would take us to Khartoum our final destination on this long journey.

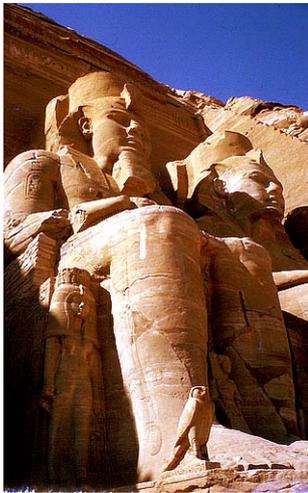


A typical sailing boat on the Nile (left) and Pharaoh's miniature between two sacred birds figures

The sleeping compartments were even smaller than those on ship's ones what did not surprise us as these were old fashioned wagons from colonial times. The steam engine pulled out of the station shortly before midday and soon after we were called to get our seats in the restaurant wagon. The meals were about the same as on the ship but the heat was up despite small fans rotating furiously in all cubicles. This transverse of the Nubian Desert by train might be stopped for good when the Lake Nasser feels up that would flood upstream vast areas around the Nile. Presently it was mainly used to move the Sudanese Nubians to be transferred to their new habitat at Wad Medani in Blue Nile Province. There the Nubians were supposed to work on newly planted cotton farms. The steam locomotive stopped at each of the 12 stations spread at a distance of say 30 miles to take water and coal.

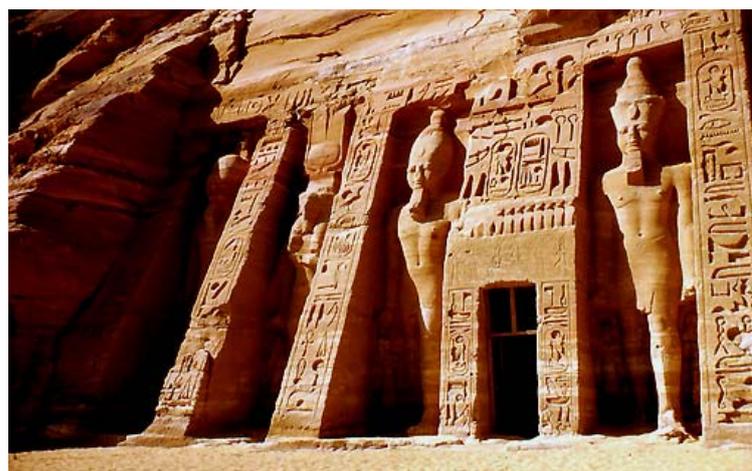
After the dinner time the air cooled down significantly that promised that we would sleep better during the night despite interval stops. During day light the voyage through a desert was nothing less than boring so we spent the time in reading or me making notes. When the darkness took over the landscape got a magic attribute under the moonlight making sand dunes sparkling mysteriously. The next morning on Sunday, September 15, we reached major railway junction of Atbara where the Port Sudan railway line joins from the North one. The town of Atbara is situated on the Nile and from here the railway line sets out southwards to Khartoum along the Nile right bank almost all the way through. The train

left Atbara about mid morning continuing its steady path through a desert like scenery. At Shendi stop we got the lunch and returned to our wagon in a hopeless heat that fans could not disperse at all. The clouded sky did not bring any help as the railway line moved more into the desert at about the 6th cataract.



The Pharaoh's huge sculptures at close (left) and the side wing of the Abu Simbel Temple (right)

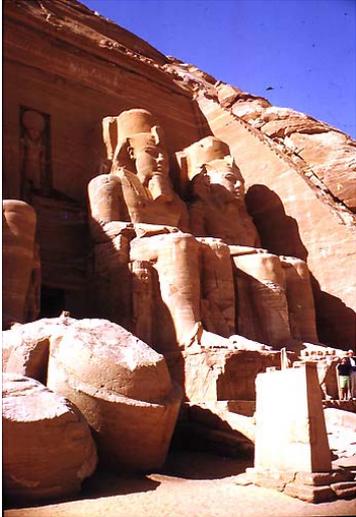
Suddenly we noticed the ominous grey-brown wall nearing from the East. Then like a thunder out of blue sky a proper haboob struck the slowly moving train. Some minutes later the train had to stop due to the wind pressure and the thick impenetrable mist fully saturated with buoyant sand. Windows had to be closed making breathing more difficult as the heat increased in the compartment becoming even worse when fans stopped entirely. Power was switched off suddenly so everyone perspired intensely cursing the fine dust that inevitably filled all skin pores. We soaked the bed sheets in a washbasin filled with water and wrapped ourselves in from head to toe lying in bed. The breathing became easier in that more humid environment lasting as long until sheets dried out. Then we repeated the procedure hoping that haboob would be gone soon before water tape dries out also that the train would continue his way to Khartoum some 30km away only.



The front view of the temple at Abu Simbel at its original site

About two hours later the spook was gone and the train got on moving slowly at first because rails were covered by sand. Soon after that the fans started operating again. We started to dress ourselves as to be ready for the arrival to the Khartoum Railway Station after all. With about 3 hours delay the train passed over the Blue Nile Bridge and about

quarter an hour later entered into the station. There we were expected on the platform already and waved vigorously to draw the attention of our friends. Finally we got off the train cheerfully to be back to Khartoum as to “our home” how Vesna called our dwelling here. Maurice and all Diklićs were waiting for us and they drove us to Hai el Matar blocks and helped to our flat there.



The two large Pharaoh's sculptures at the front of Abu Simbel Temple dwarfing visitors below right



Children at Atbara Railway Station talk to the passengers at window

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