

PYRAMIDS AREA

„My interest in the pyramids actually started when I realized how weird it is, though we see them all the time without really being conscious of them, to have these huge minimalist structures overlooking a city as labyrinthine and complex as Cairo. And also how strange it is to have these icons so physically close to the city but in touristic representations banished from the present time and place, shown mostly with the endless desert as their background and referring only to ancient Egyptian civilization.“

Maha Maamoun, Egyptian artist

Excerpt from an interview with Bassam El Baroni for the 9th Sharjah Biennial

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The Pyramids of Giza, seen from the western side of the plateau, looking towards the city





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Standing in front of the Pyramid of Khufu and the Pyramid of Khafre, looking towards the city centre of Cairo





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Standing on the foot of the Pyramid of Khufu, looking down to the living area next to it, Nazlet al-Samman



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INTRODUCTION

The Pyramids Area

At first glance, dealing with the Pyramids Area in an urban research about the city of Cairo might seem a bit strange. Because the pyramids of Giza are standing in the middle of the desert, far away from the bustling city and any human civilisation. Aren't they?

Bustling city next to pyramids

Many of us might share the image described above. But the reality in the year 2010 looks very different: The Giza Plateau has become part of the city and is located only ten kilometres from the city centre of fast growing Cairo. Except for a narrow desert corridor, the three pyramids are surrounded by streets, hotels and housing areas.

Nazlet al-Samman

Nazlet al-Samman is the part closest to the plateau. Most of its inhabitants are living there for generations and are earning their daily life from tourism, offering different services to the thousands of tourists visiting the famous pyramids each year. But now their living area as well as their business is under threat: there are plans to relocate all the inhabitants in order to dig for an ancient temple. Is

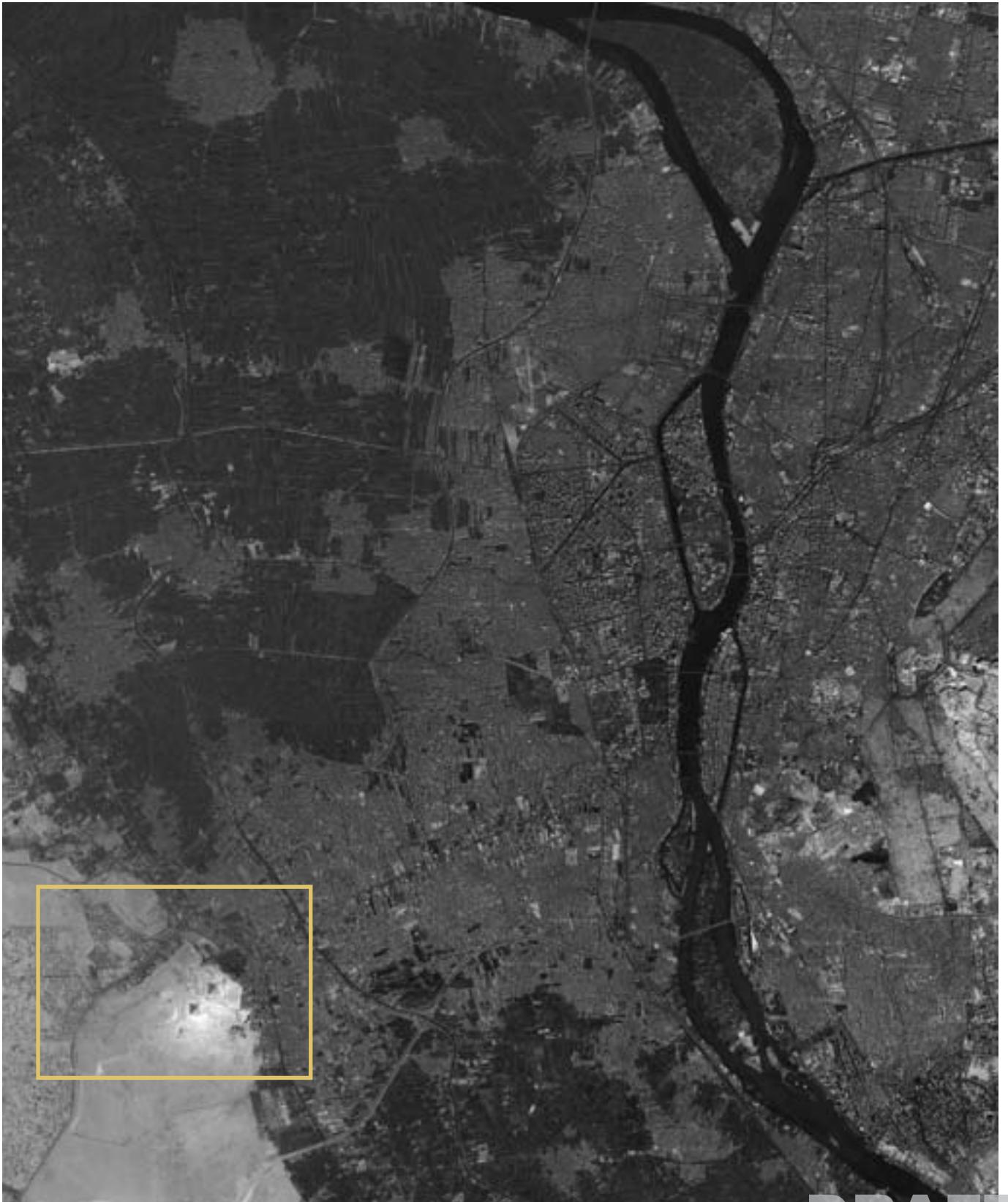
this reason enough to move a whole village? And is this really about archaeology or is it about serving an elite who'd like to stay in a five star hotel with view on the pyramids? Or is it an instrument to keep the city away from the last piece of desert in order to nourish a stereotype image?

Pyramids as a symbol

The pyramids are not just three huge stone blocks and leftovers of ancient history. They have become an important economic source and a meaningful symbol of a whole nation. Having been added to the Unesco World Heritage List, they even became a place of worldwide interest.

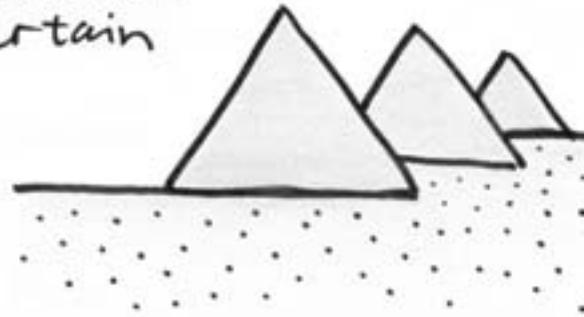
The past's influence on the present

With this book we try to explain the historical background of these developments and their impacts on today's city. We'd like to show how history, Egyptology, tourism and informality can come together and challenge each other. This work might not explain why we expect the pyramids to be in the middle of the desert. But it can make us thinking about the complex system of which the pyramids became an irreplaceable part.



MYSTICAL IMAGE
fascination

ANCIENT
MONUMENT
4500 years old
extremely big
construction
uncertain



PYRAMIDS
in the desert

HISTORY
Land of the Bible
imperialism
Egyptology
Pharaohs
temples etc.
excavations

topography



PAST





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Photography of the Pyramids Area, between 1904 and 1930, by Lehnert & Landrock



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Photography of Al-Haram Street in 1896, published in „The Photographic Memory of Cairo“





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Artistic view (photochrome) of the Pyramids Area, around 1900, published in „In the Land of the Pharaohs“ by Lehnert & Landrock



THE PYRAMIDS' RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY

The proximity of the desert to the fertile land and the meaning of the pyramids over time

Confronted with many cultures

The Pyramids Area has a long history and has seen many emperors and rulers since the building of the three pyramids around 4500 years ago. All of them have influenced the pyramid's meaning of today and the idea of Egypt we have. But not only did the significance of the stone monuments change over time but also their relation to the city and the built structure around them.

Growing city structure

For many hundred years the area around the Giza Plateau got flooded by the Nile and was fertile agricultural land. Only the plateau stayed dry and consisted of desert sand. When the city of Cairo grew, more and more of the green was used as building land and so the city started to get closer and closer to the pyramids until it finally surrounded them.

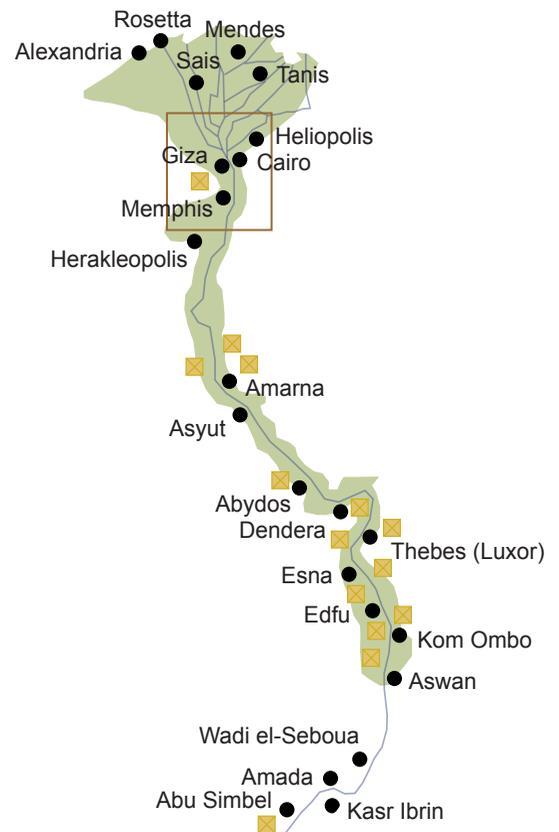
PYRAMIDS NEAR THE ANCIENT TOWNS

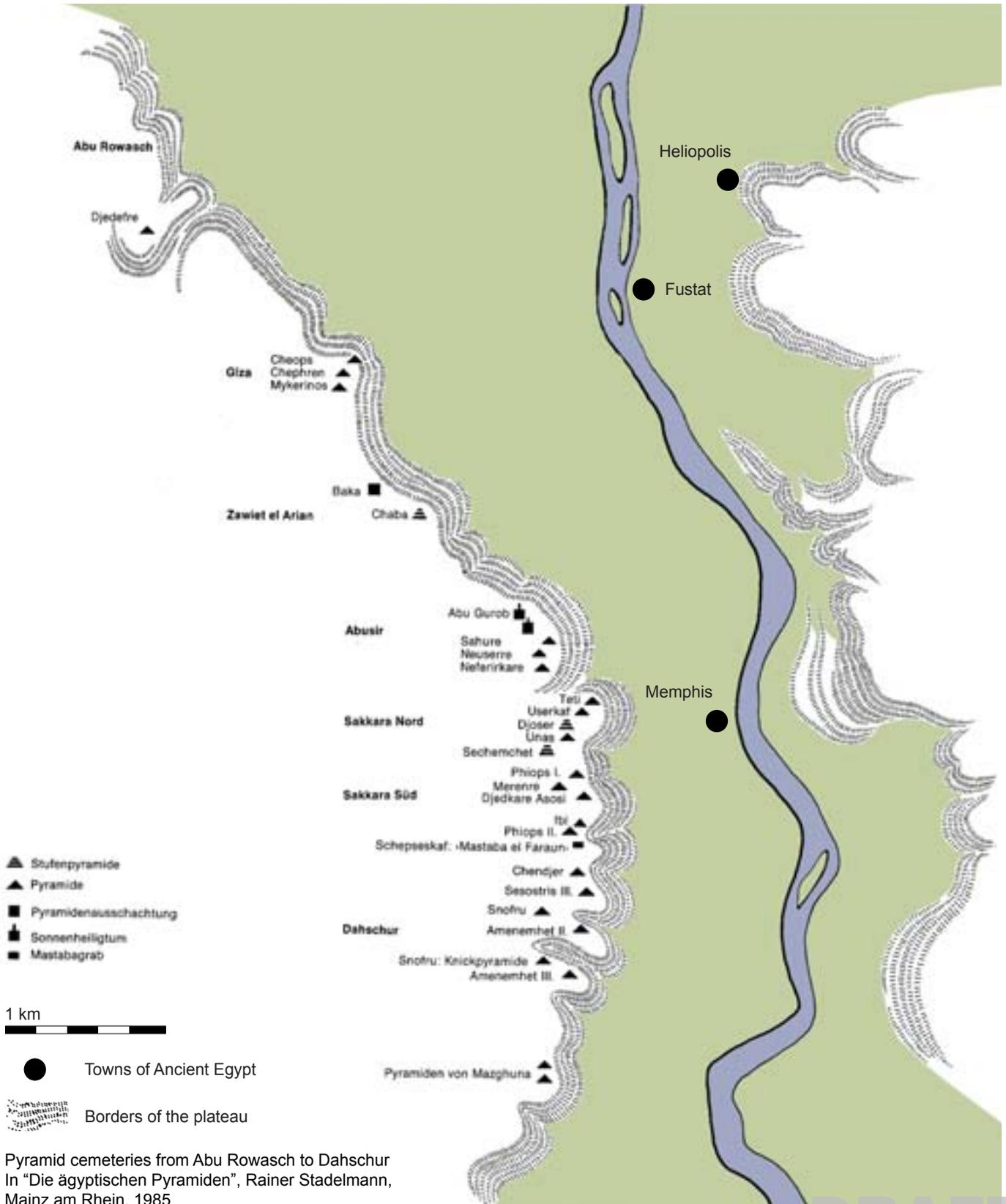
The Pharaonic Nile Valley

The Pyramids of Giza are the largest and best-preserved ones but by far not the only ones. Today we know about eighty pyramids from ancient Egypt.

The kings of the First Dynasty had their tombs (mastabas) in the south of the divided kingdom, in Abydos. Probably for the political balance the later Pharaohs of the First Dynasty let build two tombs, one in Upper- and one in Lower-Egypt. Nebka (2609–2609 BC), the first king of the Third Dynasty in the Old Kingdom (2640–2134 BC) moved the royal residence to Memphis, on the border between Upper- and Lower-Egypt, and initiated the centrally reigned state. Now the kings didn't need two tombs anymore. Nebka's son Djoser (2609–2590 BC) was the first king who used stone instead of mud bricks for his mausoleum. He had the step pyramid at Sakkara built. Huni (2583–2575 BC), the last Pharaoh of the Third Dynasty, was the first to build a pyramid with a quadratic outline and a flat surface. In the Fourth Dynasty followed the Pyramids of Giza for the Pharaohs Khufu (Cheops, 2551–2528 BC), Khafre (Chafren, 2528–2494 BC) and Menkaure (Mykerinos, 2490–2471 BC).

The construction of pyramids was continued until the New Kingdom (1552–1070 BC). The following kings had their tombs built in the natural mountain pyramid at Thebes (Luxor) in the Valley of the Kings.





PYRAMIDS CLOSE TO ANCIENT SETTLEMENTS

Ancient Egypt (from 2550 BC)

Workers' settlements with up to 20'000 inhabitants

Many of the builders of the pyramids were living in settlements nearby. After the pyramids were finished, there was no reason to stay there any longer, so most of the people left the settlements.

There also used to be a royal palace next to the plateau. As the Nile used to flood a vast area around it, this land was fertile and could be used for agriculture.

Topography

The height difference of the plateau (in Giza 40-80 m) always was a natural border. It forms the border between the green and the desert but also between the city fabric and the area of the pyramids.

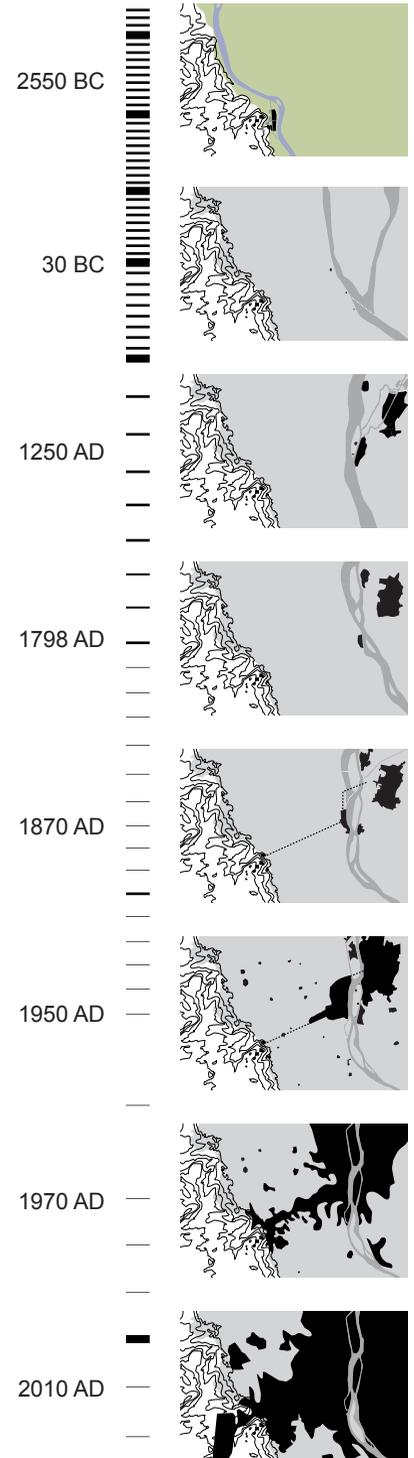
Connection between life and death

To each pyramid belonged a valley temple, which was situated on the base of the plateau, in the green, and a mortuary temple, which was located next to the pyramid. Life took place on the fertile land whereas the place for the dead was the desert. But these two places always were connected to each other by the built structure of the two temples and the alley in between.

As life on earth was supposed to be short, the ancient Egyptians built their houses of mud, whereas the tombs were made of stone as they believed in an eternal life after death.

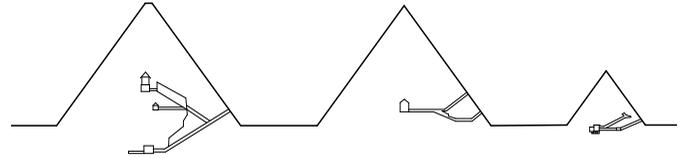


2550 BC:
Workers' villages and
royal palace next to
the pyramids.

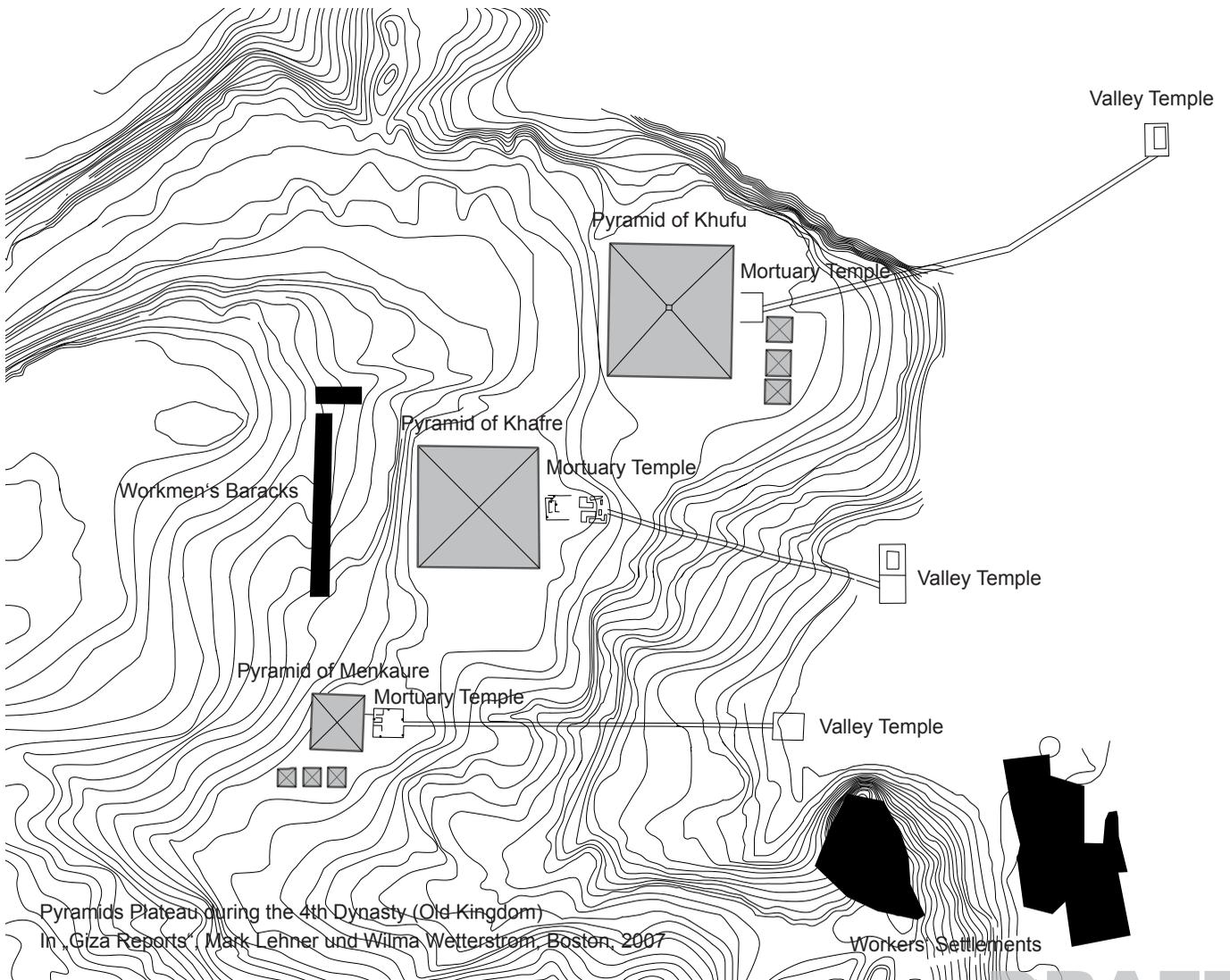


The builders of the pyramids

The estimated number of workmen who have built the Pyramids of Giza varies because of different theories about the method of construction. The number ranges from 7000 up to 30'000 workers who were involved at the same time. Most of the modern Egyptologists believe in a ramp system for the method of construction and estimate that about 20'000 workers have been on duty. They suppose that the workers have not been permanent slaves of the Pharaohs. During the four months of the annual flood, the farmers couldn't work on their fields and could be engaged to build the pyramids. Some even assume that there have been volunteers, working for generous compensations and for the benefit of the Pharaoh and the country. The construction of the Pyramid of Khufu took about twenty years.



Pyramid of Khufu	Pyramid of Khafre	Pyramid of Menkaure
2550 BC	2520 BC	2490 BC
Height: 147 m	Height: 144 m	Height: 65 m



Pyramids Plateau during the 4th Dynasty (Old Kingdom)
 In „Giza Reports“, Mark Lehner und Wilma Wetterstrom, Boston, 2007

EARLY INTEREST IN PYRAMIDS

Roman Period (from 30 BC)

Almost no settlements near pyramids

During the Roman period there could almost no settlements be found next to the Giza Plateau. As the Nile moved eastwards, the few settlements might have been next to the waterside.

First known tourism

The Romans occupied Egypt in 30 BC, and for two centuries after that they made Egypt safe for Roman travellers. Tourism amongst the elite class already became widespread during this era. As in Greek times, Alexandria was still famous for its pleasure resorts, but the Romans also visited the Giza Pyramids and Memphis, and travelled down the Nile to Thebes.

First removals of artifacts

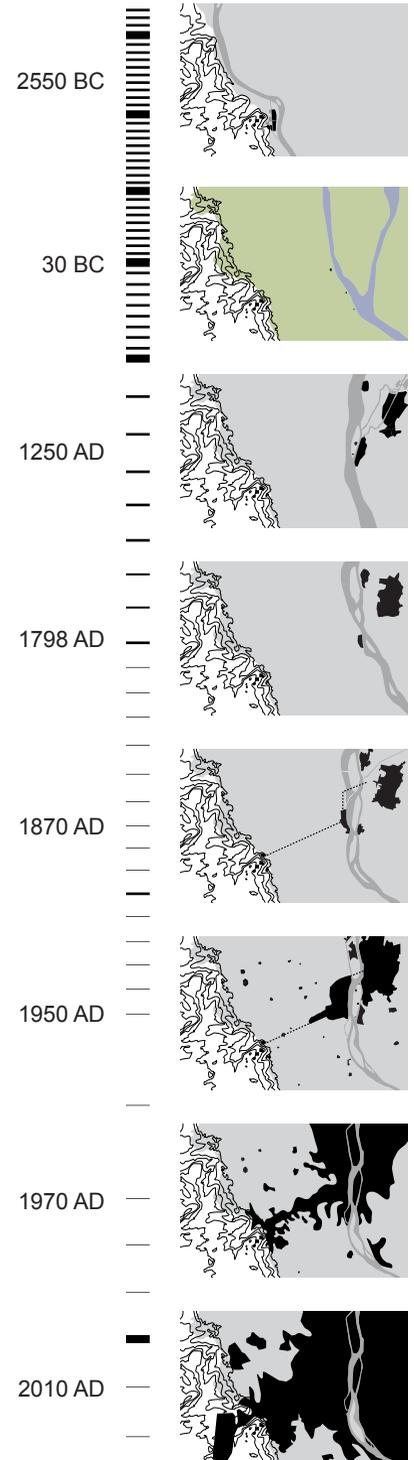
The Greeks and the Romans were also the first Europeans to move Egyptian monuments to their own cities and to use them as a decoration. The fact that in Rome can be found thirteen Egyptian obelisks, vastly more than in any other European city, is entirely due to the fact that the Romans started to collect them 1800 years before the other northern European collectors.

Change of use

In the sixth century Coptic Christians made chapels out of the ancient temples and put mud over the inscriptions, what helped to preserve them.



30 BC:
Almost no settlements
are existing in the
place of future Cairo.





Obelisk „Vaticano“, Piazza San Pietro, Rome

Originally raised in the Forum Iulium in Alexandria around 30–28 BC.
Brought to Rome by Caligula in 37 for the spina of the Vatican Circus.
Relocated by Pope Sixtus V in 1586.
First monumental obelisk raised in the modern period.
Only obelisk in Rome that has not toppled since Roman times.



Obelisk „Flaminio“, Piazza del Popolo, Rome

Originally from Heliopolis.
Brought to Rome by Augustus in 10 BC and erected on the spina of the Circus Maximus.
Found with the Lateranense obelisk in 1587 in two pieces and erected by Pope Sixtus V in 1589.
Sculptures with lion fountains were added to the base in 1818.



Obelisk „Lateranense“, Piazza di San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome

Originally from the temple of Amun in Karnak.
Brought to Alexandria by Constantius II, and then brought to Rome in 357 to decorate the spina of the Circus Maximus.
Found in three pieces in 1587 and erected by Pope Sixtus V near the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano in 1588.
Tallest obelisk in Rome (32 m) and largest standing Egyptian obelisk.



Obelisk „Macuteo“, Piazza della Rotonda, Rome

Originally one of a pair at the Temple of Ra in Heliopolis.
Moved to the Temple of Isis near Santa Maria sopra Minerva.
Found in 1373 near San Macuto and erected east of Santa Maria in Aracoeli on the Capitoline.
Moved to the front of the Pantheon by Pope Clement XI in 1711 over a fountain by Filippo Barigioni.

DISMANTLING THE PYRAMIDS

Mamluk and Ottoman period (from 1250 BC)

Pyramids as a result of magical power

Early Muslims were interested in the pharaonic ruins, seeing them as the remains of an ancient race of giants or magicians.

Portraying and visiting monuments

The medieval Arab historian and traveller Ibn Khaldoun had complained that treasure hunting in Egypt was so widespread that it had become a taxed industry. Arab historians used to portray the monuments of the Nile Valley and some medieval Muslims toured the Egyptian monuments, visiting the ruins of Memphis, Saqqara's step pyramid, the Sphinx of Giza, the mastabas in the Dakhla oasis, Philae, Aswan, Dendera, and Luxor. Some people, Christians as well as Muslims, even came to pray at the pharaonic monuments.

Leaving graffiti marks

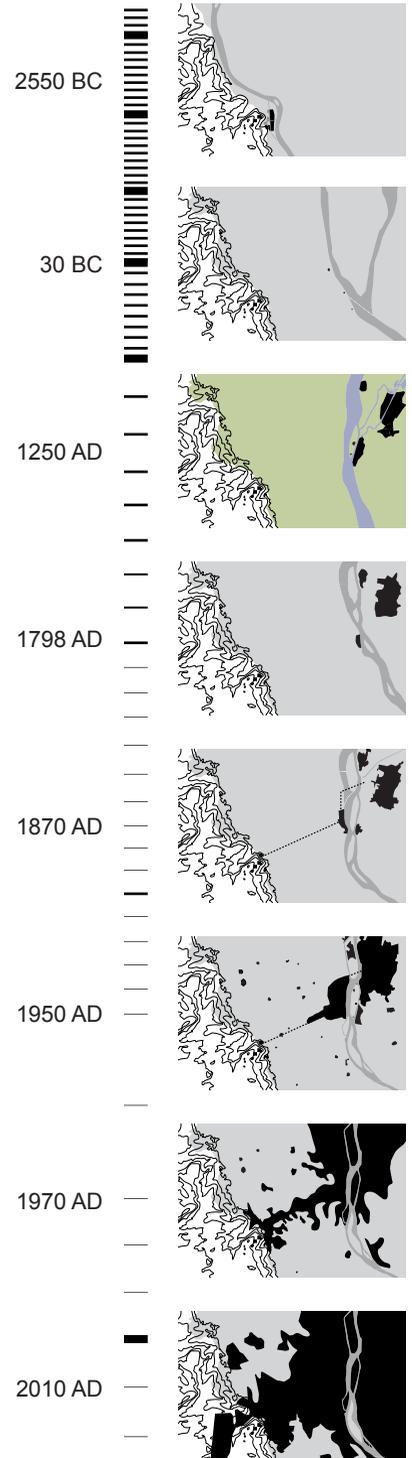
Like Roman tourists before them and Europeans after them, medieval Muslim tourists left their in the form of Arabic graffiti on the monuments. And they also damaged monuments and tombs searching for treasure.

Rejection of the pharaonic past

The pharaoh of the Qur'an is a symbol of despotism, tyranny, and idolatry. It says that the pharaoh oppressed the prophets of the one true God and was subsequently humbled by Him. For these reasons parts of the Muslims despised the pharaonic monuments and some even tried to destroy them.



1250:
Almost no city structure on the western side of the Nile.





The scar of Menkaure's Pyramid

Caused by the Memluks in the late 12th century.
Al-Malek al-Aziz Othman ben Yusuf, Saladin's son, attempted to demolish the pyramids, starting with Menkaure's Pyramid.
After eight months he gave up, as progress was extremely slow.



The missing nose of the Sphinx

Caused by the Memluks in 1378.
Muhammad Sa'im al-Dahr, a Sufi fanatic, destroyed the nose of the Sphinx because he found some Egyptian peasants making offerings to the Sphinx.



Missing covering of the pyramids

Caused by the Ottomans in the 15th century.
The Ottoman Turks removed the fine quality limestone covering of the pyramids to build houses and mosques in Cairo.



Destroyed base of Menkaure's Pyramid

Caused by Muhammad Ali Pash in the 19th century.
Muhammad Ali Pasha used some of the pink granite blocks of Menkaure's Pyramid to construct an arsenal in Alexandria.

FASCINATING EGYPT

Napoleon and the imperialism (from 1798)

The time of imperialism

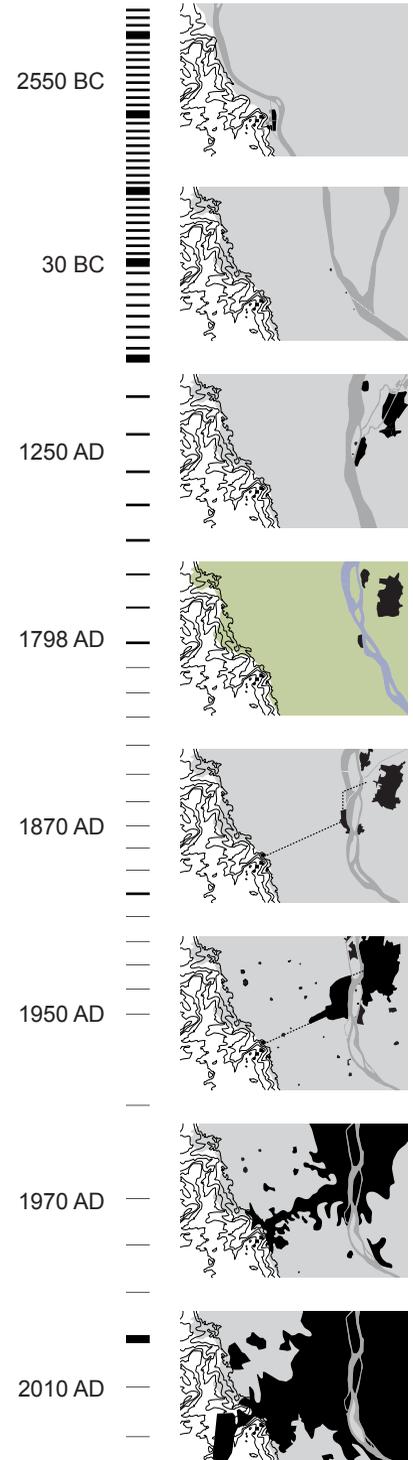
With Napoleon's invasion in Egypt the time of the imperialism started. From 1801 on, Egypt reverted back to the Ottoman rule, but with a strong European presence.

Fascination with the exotic

With Napoleon the scientific interest in the pyramids aroused. Egyptology got established and boosted the European's fascination with the ancient country and its monuments.

Treasures in exchange for political favours

With the imperialism a period of intensive European treasure hunting started. There was an intimate relationship between politics and treasure hunting in those days. Several historians have argued that Muhammad Ali Pasha, then ruler of Egypt, hasn't been interested in the monuments himself, but he recognised that they meant a lot to the foreigners. As he wanted to preserve good relations with the European politicians, he allocated various treasures and issued digging rights as gifts.



1798:
Most part of the city is
located on the east of
the Nile.



The Rosetta Stone

In 1799 a French engineer by the name of Lieutenant Pierre François Xavier Bouchard found the Rosetta stone. The stone consisted of the remnants of an ancient political decree repeated in three languages: hieroglyphs, Demotic (a cursive form of hieroglyphs), and Greek. It would later be the key to deciphering hieroglyphs and would profoundly transform modern understanding of ancient Egypt.



Excavation of the Sphinx

For many centuries the Sphinx was buried in the sand and protected by it. The Sphinx has been freed from sand several times in history. The first one to do this in the modern age was Giovanni Battista Caviglia who's work lasted from 1816 to 1818.



Napoleon's battle next to the pyramids

„Soldats! Vous êtes venus dans ces contrées pour les arracher à la barbarie, porter la civilisation dans l'Orient, et soustraire cette belle partie du monde au joug de l'Angleterre. Nous allons combattre. Songez que du haut de ces monuments quarante siècles vous contemplent.“

These were Napoleon's words before the battle in 1798 against the Memluks, who were destructively beaten. They can be translated like that:

„Soldiers! You came to these regions to tear them off barbarism, to carry civilisation to the Orient, and to withdraw this beautiful part of the world from the yoke of England. We will fight. Remember that from the top of these monuments forty centuries are looking down on you.“

BRINGING THE WORLD TO THE PYRAMIDS

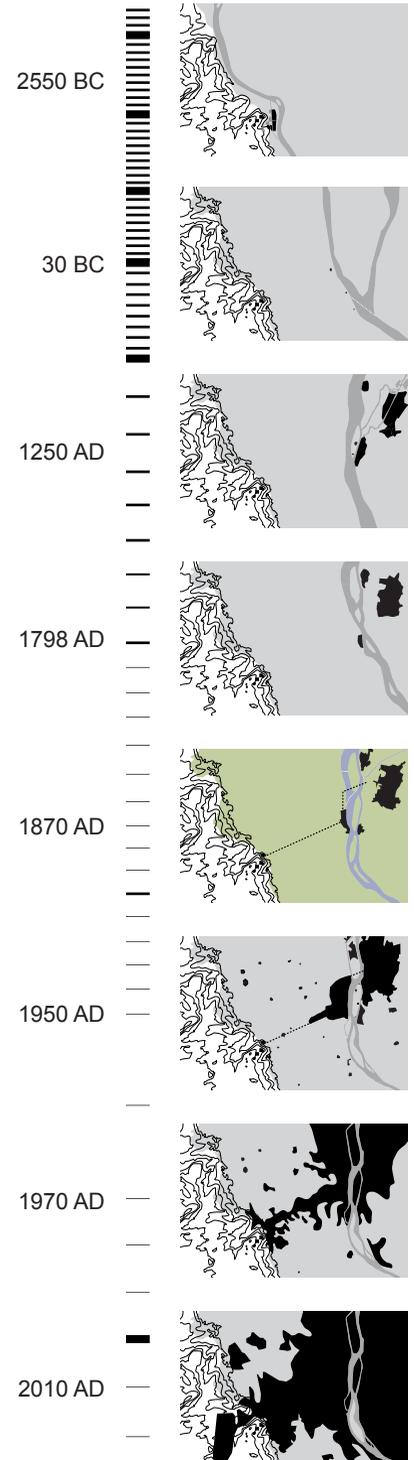
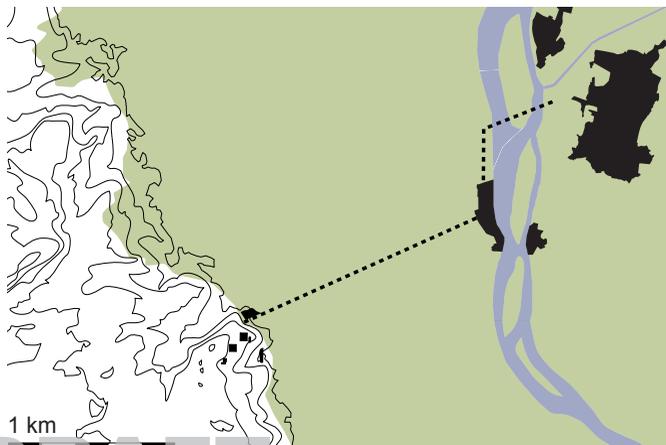
Modern Egypt (from 1882)

Bringing the city to the pyramids

First infrastructures for early tourist have already been constructed next to the pyramids at the end of the 19th century. Thanks to the newly built Al-Haram Street the trip to the plateau got more comfortable. Europeans from the elite class or from royal families started to visit the pyramids.

Growth on the west side of the Nile starts

Now that it was easy to cross the Nile, thanks to the Kasr el-Nil Bridge, the city of Giza started to grow.



1870:
The building of the Kasr el-Nil Bridge enables the growth on the western side of the Nile.



Beginning of international mass tourism

Western tourists visiting the pyramids, around 1869.



The axis to the pyramids

In 1869 the construction of the Al-Haram Street has been finished. It connects the city centre with the Giza Plateau in a long, straight line.



Connection over the Nile

In 1871 the Kasr el-Nil Bridge has been opened, right in time for the Suez Canal celebrations. The bridge played an important role, enabling the city fabric on the western side of the Nile to grow rapidly.



The Mena House Oberoi

In 1889 the Mena House Oberoi, the first luxury hotel next to the pyramids, opens its doors for tourists. It was built twenty years before as a palace for Ismail Pasha and with the conversion to a hotel it has been extended with a swimming-pool and the golf-course which is still in use today. During World War I the hotel had temporarily been turned into a residence for Australian soldiers. After the two World Wars the touristic infrastructure has been extended again.

RAPID GROWTH OF PYRAMIDS AREA

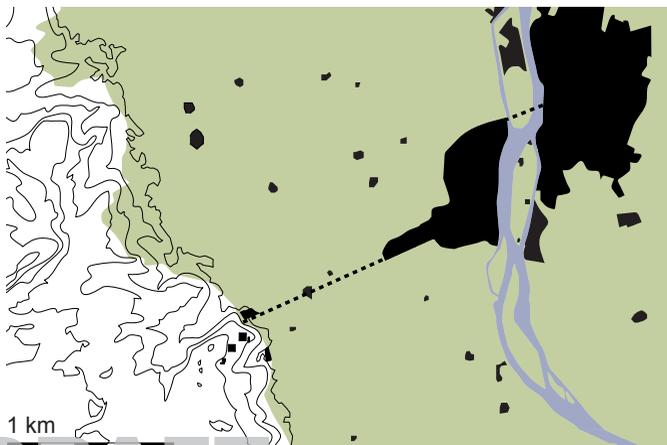
Area becomes popular among tourists (from 1950)

Growth along axis

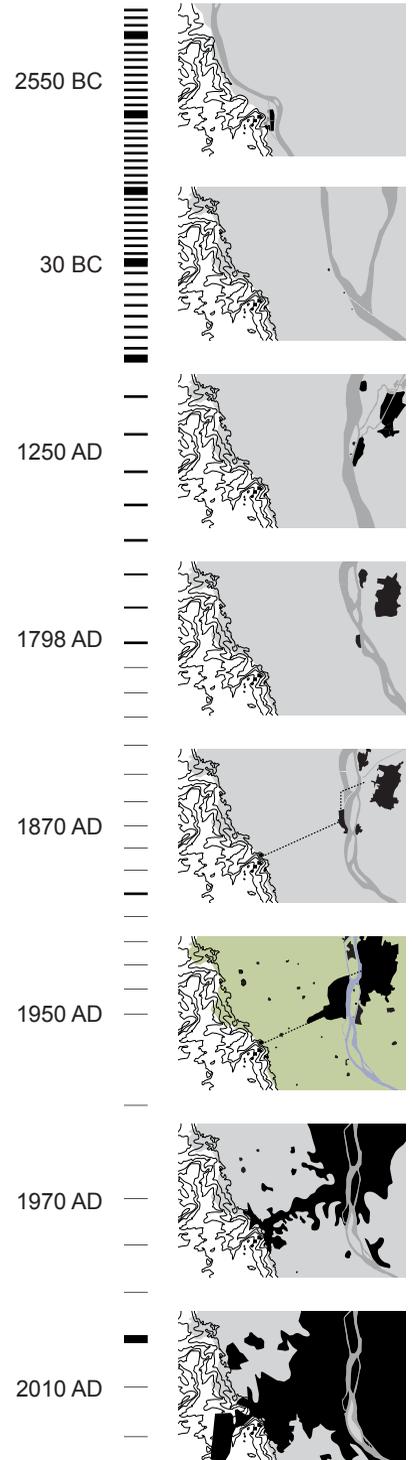
The rapid extension of the city in the west takes mainly place along the Al-Haram Street, the connection to the pyramids. First hotels, casinos and nightclubs are established along this axis. The pyramids are becoming a popular sight for tourists.

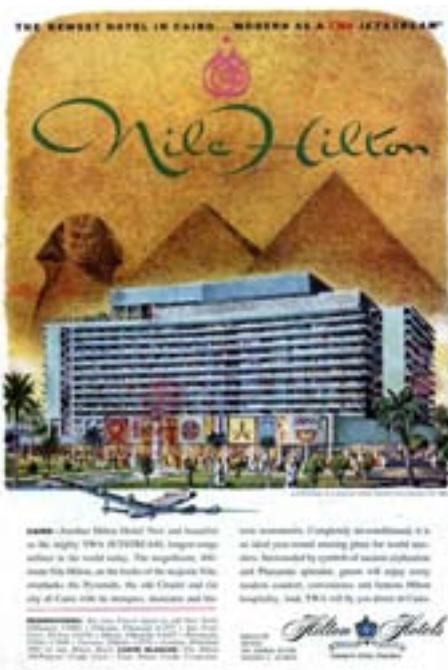
Many core villages established

But the city is not only growing along Al-Haram Street. Numerous core villages constructed all over the place between the Nile and the plateau.



1950:
The biggest growth can be seen in the west, in direction of the pyramids.





Advertisement for the Nile Hilton, 1959

The pyramids no longer are just a monument, but they start getting used as a symbol in advertisements.

At this time the pyramids could still be seen from the city centre.

CORRIDOR COMPLETED

Pyramids Area as leisure place (from 1970)

Settlements next to Giza Plateau

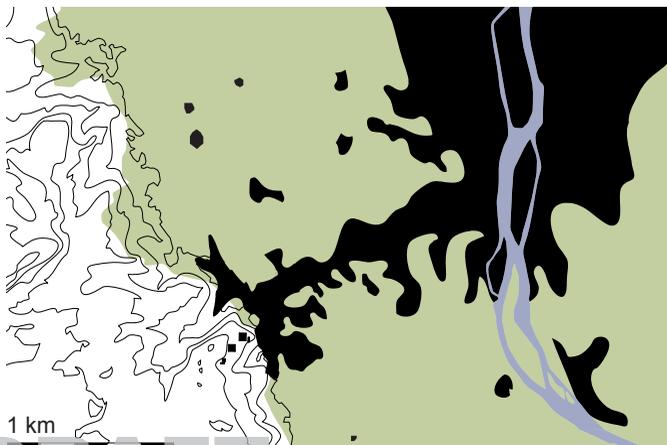
The city fabric has grown all the way from the city centre to the pyramids. The former core villages start growing together and being swallowed by the city. For the first time, big housing areas can be found next to the Giza Plateau.

Transformation of agricultural land

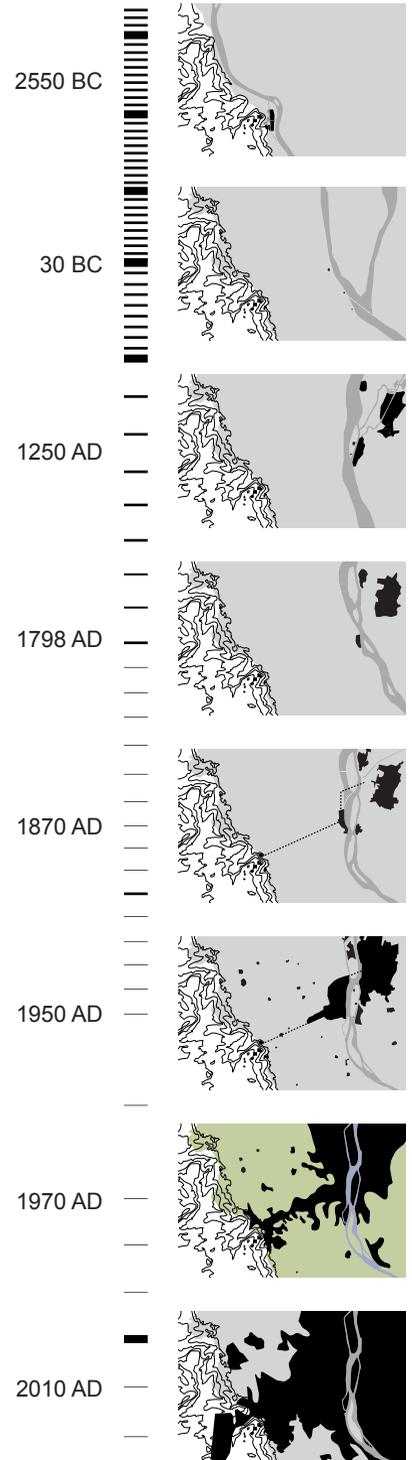
The main part of the new settlements is established on agricultural land, which no longer gets flooded because of the Aswan High Dam.

The Infitah

With Sadat's presidency from 1970 to 1981, Egypt gets economically liberalised. This change of the political direction opens the doors for mass tourism.



1970:
The structure is mainly growing along Al-Haram street.





Infrastructure for tourists

The growing number of tourists asks for many new infrastructure. This is mainly installed along Al-Haram Street.



The Giza Plateau as a leisure place

Before the construction of the fence around the Giza Plateau and the charge of an admission fee, the Egyptians used to go there to spend their leisure time. Scene from the film „Soft Hands“, by Mahmoud Zoul-Faqqar, 1963.



The Aswan High Dam

In 1970 the construction of the Aswan High Dam has been completed. With the control over the amount of water running down the river, the Nile Valley doesn't get flooded anymore.

CITY AROUND THE PYRAMIDS

An area serving the tourists (2010)

City fabric all around the plateau

The dense city fabric of fast growing Cairo can be found all around the Giza Plateau. An exception forms the southern part, where a narrow desert corridor is left.

Control of access

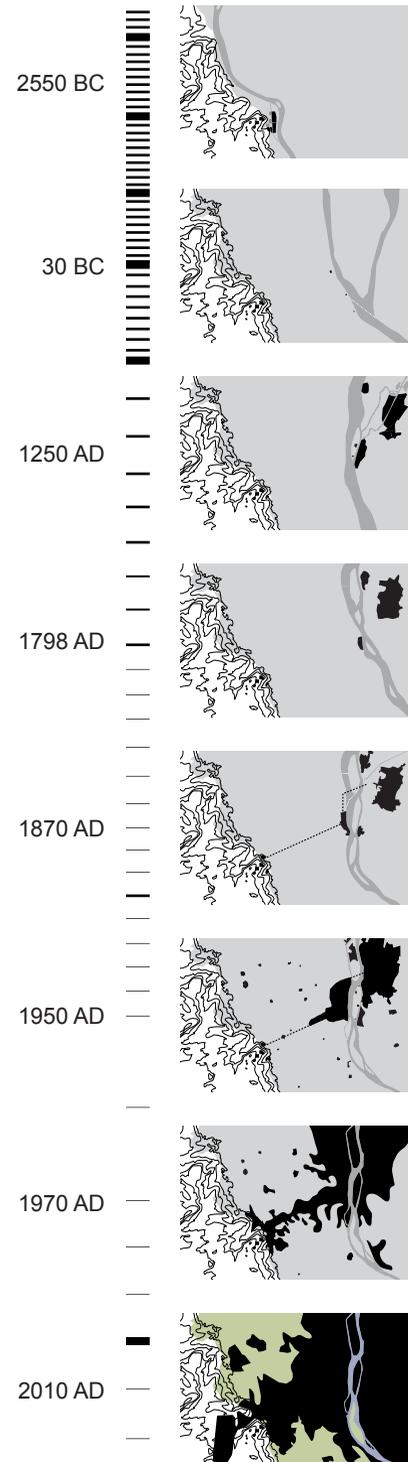
Since 2002, the plateau is surrounded by a wall, through which the access to the pyramids can be controlled. As an admission fee is charged, the place no longer serves as a public leisure space.

Living from tourism

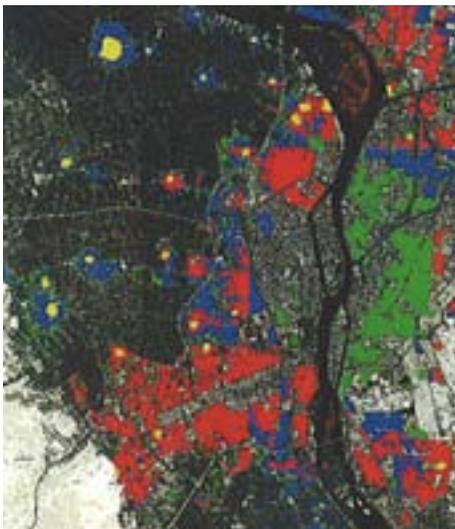
Many of the people living next to the plateau, especially the inhabitants of Nazlet al-Samman in the east, rely on the closeness to the pyramids, as they earn their living from providing services to the numerous tourists who frequent this area.



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2010:
The Pyramids Plateau
is almost surrounded
by the city fabric.



Informal housing areas

A big part of today's settlements in the Pyramids Area are informal, because they are built on agricultural land. Most of them were established in the 80ies.

- 1950, core villages
- 1977, informal residential
- 1993, informal residential
- 2000, informal residential

SUMMARY

Continous struggle for closeness

The history of the Pyramids Area shows that the Pyramids of Giza have never been surrounded by desert only. Whereas at the beginning the plateau has been encircled by fertile green land, this has been transformed into city fabric over the centuries. And even at the very beginning some settlements were situated next to the pyramids. The struggle for the proximity to these monuments is already lasting 4500 years! It's not an entirely new phenomenon. The tension between the pyramids and the city, between the desert and the fertile land always existed. They've always kind of belonged together and can't be separated. The idea of two completely separate worlds is a constructed one which never existed in reality.

Topography as a border?

The only thing which constantly existed is the natural border formed by the topography, the height difference between the city and the Giza Plateau. But even this border is blurry and hasn't always been respected in the same way. There was a time when some houses were built on top of the plateau.

An invented image

The image of the three pyramids standing in the middle of the desert only exists in the minds of the western tourists. The history of Europe and the imperialism has a big impact on the idea of Egypt which the tourists share. The image created by Egyptologists is a mystical, exotic one and almost hasn't changed during the last two centuries.

The pyramids as a commodity

Although that this idea doesn't coincide with reality, there's an interest to keep it alive. The Pyramids of Giza are one of the most popular sight today and they bring millions of tourists to Cairo each year. Thanks to the uncertainties which exist in terms of the history of the pyramids (e.g. it's still not clear how they've been constructed) everyone uses the past as one benefits most from it. The pyramids have become an economic, political and social instrument and are often reduced to a commodity.

An example of how history is being used to each one's own advantage

Being asked about the past of Nazlet al-Samman, the area adjoining the plateau in the east, and about who has right to this land, Egyptologists and villagers argue very different. But the picture, in which they think to find their arguments, is exactly the same: The Pyramids Area being flooded by the Nile about hundred years ago.

Dr. Zahi Hawass, an archaeologists, says:

“As you can see, back then [1940ies] the area was almost empty. The whole area in front of the pyramids was flooded with water, and there were very few houses. And even if you see the whole right side, when you go to town, of the Pyramids Road, no houses existed then. And you can see the pyramids from downtown Cairo. Now, the village has expanded to be like 200'000 people – actually almost 200'000 families.”

On the other hand, a man whose family had lived in the village of Nazlet al-Samman for, he said, generations, stated: “You see? They [the Egyptologists] say that we have built our village over an archaeological site. But look at this old photo: where the village is today, there was nothing but a lake before. Did the ancient Egyptians build their cities in the water? Of course not! Our village is built on empty land; the antiquities area is elsewhere.”

Quoted in: L. L. Wynn, „Pyramids & Nightclubs“, 2007



„Village arabe et pyramides“, photochrome, around 1890, Graphische Sammlung Zentralbibliothek Zürich

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PYRAMIDS

The pyramids as a monument, symbol and commodity

Symbol of a nation

Until today, pharaonic images have worked their way into many symbols of Egyptian identity. They can be found on the Egyptian currency, in the logo of the official newspaper “al-Ahram” (“The Pyramids”) as well as in many others.

Fluid identity

But the pyramids are not the only marker of identity, as identity is always fluid, relational, and situational. The final product is never stable but constantly being defined and constructed.

Egypt mainly refers to its pharaonic past to distinct itself from other Arab countries. E.g. when it is confronted with the masses of rich Gulf tourists visiting Cairo, with whom the Egyptians don't have a very amicable relationship.

On the other hand, when Egypt positions itself politically vis-à-vis the United States or Israel, Egyptians are more likely to feel their Arab-ness.

Omnipresent symbol

Whether Egyptians individually or as a group identify with the pharaonic past or reject it in favour

of other markers of identity, they cannot escape its powerful presence. Today, the pyramids are a globally used icon and one comes across them all around the world. One doesn't have to make a trip to Egypt to know them.

Worldwide dispersal

During a long time in history, artifacts belonging to the pyramids got spread all over the world by tourists, Egyptologists and politicians who brought them to foreign countries. This process can be compared to the virtual dispersal of the pyramids symbol today. As it's no longer allowed to carry ancient artifacts away, these souvenirs got replaced by cheap plaster pyramids which also end up all around the world.

Stage setting

The Egyptians themselves might not be as fascinated by the pharaonic past as the Europeans, but they sort of “consume” the pyramids as well, although rather as a romantic background in a film or as the impressive stage of a famous pop singer.



PYRAMIDS AS A SYMBOL

The importance of symbols during Nationalism

With the rise of nationalism in the 20ies, the pyramids became for the first time an important symbol in Egypt.

Multipurpose of a symbol

The case of Sadat and his assassination shows that symbols and references to the past are multivalent. Sadat used to refer to himself as „The last Pharaoh“, putting himself at the end of a list of great rulers and kings. When Sadat got murdered, his assassins, too, portrayed Sadat as a Pharaoh, as for them the pharaonic past represented an area of tyranny and idolatry.



Pharaonic symbols on Egyptian currency

Side showing the pharaonic symbols: English-language script.
Side showing the mosques: Arabic script.



Pyramid logo of the official newspaper "al-Ahram"

The biggest newspaper of Egypt bears the name „al-Ahram“ what means “The Pyramids”.



Pyramid tomb marker in Nasr City

Monument in memory of those killed in the 1973 war.

THE SEVEN ANCIENT WORLD WONDERS

Popular sights from the past

Over 2000 years ago, the pyramids were already referred to as an important landmark and a must-see. In the 4th century BC Hellenistic travelers started to list what they saw. The list which has been developed that way was meant to be the Ancient World's counterpart of a travel guidebook. Each person had his own version of the list, but the best known and earliest surviving was from a poem by Antipater of Sidon from around 140 BC. He named seven sites on his list, the ones which we call the „Seven Wonders of the Ancient World“ today.

The only wonder left

The Great Pyramid of Giza is the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and the only one that still exists today. The other two pyramids were not mentioned by the Hellenistic travelers.

Today, all the three pyramids are listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site, what means that the UNESCO regards them as a place of special cultural or physical significance.

Great Pyramid of Giza (Pyramid of Khufu)

2550 BC, Egypt, still in existence



Hanging Gardens of Babylon

600 BC, Iraq
Destroyed by an earthquake in the 1st century BC.



Temple of Artemis at Ephesus

550 BC, Greece
Burnt down by Herostratus, rebuilt twice.
Finally destroyed by John Chrysostom in 401.



Statue of Zeus at Olympia

435 BC, Greece
Destroyed by a fire in the 5th or 6th century.



Mausoleum of Halicarnassus

351 BC, Turkey
Destroyed by a flood.
Rebuilt and finally destroyed by an earthquake in 1494.



Colossus of Rhodes

292-280 BC, Greece
Destroyed by an earthquake in 226 BC.



Lighthouse of Alexandria

280 BC, Egypt
Destroyed by an earthquake in 1480.



THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SIGHTS

Mass tourism

Today the pyramids still belong to the must-sees. But as travelling has become much easier and as many westerners can afford it, there are not only six other landmarks competing with the pyramids but many others. The list of the world's most visited places is long and contains not only landmarks but also cultural places such as museums or wonders of nature.

Eiffel Tower, Paris, France

6.9 mio. visitors per year.
Built in 1889 AD.



Colosseum, Rome, Italy

3.9 mio. visitors per year.
Finished in 70 AD.



Pyramids of Giza

3.0 mio. visitors per year.
Constructed between 2550
and 2490 BC.



Taj Mahal, Agra, India

2.4 mio. visitors per year.
Finished in 1630 AD.



The Great Wall of China

1.3 mio. visitors per year
Finished partly in 220 BC,
continued from 1368 to
1644 AD.



WESTERN TOURISM

Mystical image

“Imagine two Egypts. The first is a mystical, antique land. A vast shimmering desert is bisected by a narrow strip of lush green running from south to north. Along the fringes of the fertile Nile Valley lie the ruins of ancient civilizations, more than five millennia old, whose pyramids and temples and tombs have been preserved through the centuries by the sand and the dry desert climate. Secret passages have been found in the pyramids, low crawling passageways that open out onto hidden inner chambers with empty sarcophagi. Ancient avenues are guarded by sphinxes and obelisks, sunbeams frozen in the stone. Towering granite statues of long-dead kings and queens preside over vast, echoing halls of temples in the south. You can walk through these ruins, dwarfed by huge columns carved with lotus flowers, your heels echoing on the stone floor, and imagine that they were the palaces of a long-extinct race of magician-giants. These ancients had sophisticated astronomical knowledge and built their monuments to align with the sun and the stars on solstices and equinoxes.”

L. L. Wynn, „Pyramids & Nightclubs“, 2007

Being mainly interested into ancient Egypt, the European tourists have an exotic idea of Egypt. Compared to the Arab tourists they don't know much about the contemporary Cairo.

Short visit

Most western tourist don't fly to Egypt just to see Cairo or the three Pyramids of Giza. They rather do a trip through the Nile Valley, during which they spend only 3–4 days in Cairo. They come to Egypt because they're interested into the historical sites. For most of them that's a once in a life time experience. Maybe they come a second time. But usually they spend their holidays each year in another place of the world.

Day 13: Alexandria

Roman Catacombs of Kom Ash-Shuqqafa
Pillar of Pompey
Roman Amphitheater
Ottoman Fortress of Qaitbey
Bibliotheca Alexandria

Day 1, 2 and 3: Cairo

Khan al-Khalili Market
Egyptian Museum
Citadel Fustat
Mohammed Ali Mosque
Sultan Hassan Mosque
Step Pyramids at Saqqara
Pyramids of Giza with Sphinx

Day 6: Nile Cruise

Kom Ombo, Edfu, Luxor

Day 4: Abu Simbel

Temples of Ramses II and Nefertari

Day 12: Cairo

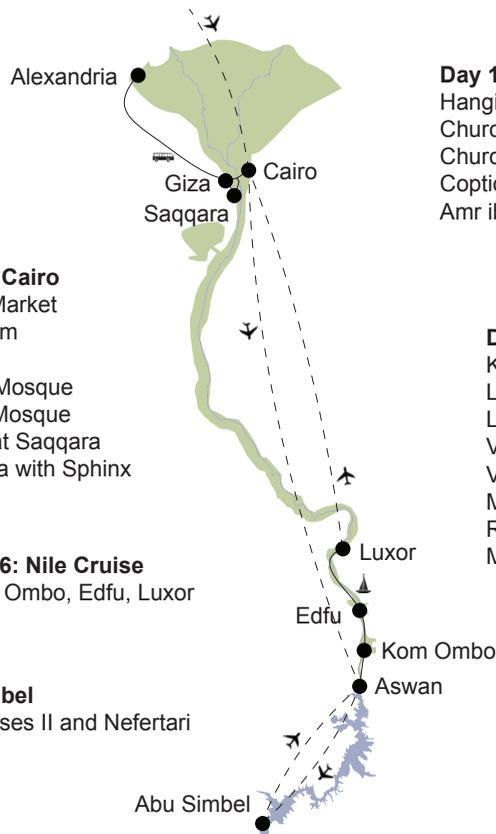
Hanging Church
Church of St. Sergius
Church of St. George
Coptic Museum
Amr ibn al-As Mosque

Day 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11: Luxor

Karnack Temple
Luxor Museum
Luxor Temple
Valley of the Kings
Valley of the Queens
Mummy Museum
Ramesseum
Medinet Habu

Day 4 and 5: Aswan

Sailing on Nile
High Dam
Unfinished Obelisk
Temple of Philae
Nubian Museum



A typical 14-day Group Tour
in the Nile Valley,
offered by „Nile Valley Tours“

Costs: 1800-2500 \$ (3-5 stars hotels)

ARAB TOURISM

Contemporary image

“The other Egypt is vividly alive, and its pharaonic ruins are mere background for more modern dramas. The pyramids, on the outskirts of Cairo, are the set for romantic trysts in numerous Egyptian films where lovers steal kisses on the tumble of lower blocks. In this Egypt, Cairo is the center of the Arab world, and it's like Hollywood and New York all rolled into one big, dusty, overcrowded city of more than fifteen million. [...] This Egypt is a political powerhouse, with an outspoken foreign minister (now head of the Arab League) who mediates regional conflicts, and a popular singer who achieved instant stardom all over the Arab world with his hit single, “I Hate Israel”. This Egypt brings to mind visions of glamorous belly dancers who whirl in sequined costumes that glitter like the surface of the Nile at night as it reflects the colored lights of the city.”

L. L. Wynn, „Pyramids & Nightclubs“, 2007

If they do go to see the pyramids, then it's not about the ancient monuments but rather about having a spectacular background for a show. As Arab tourists speak the same language as the Egyptians and because Egypt long had had the most widely read, viewed, and listened-to news media in the Arab world, they have a much more contemporary image of Egypt than the European tourists.



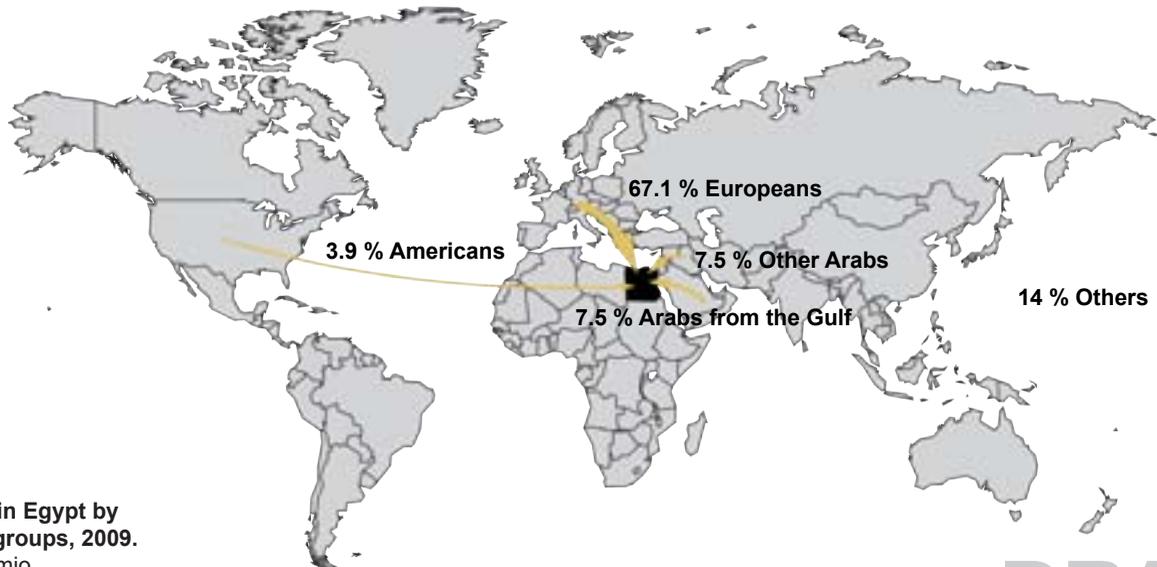
American pop singer Mariah Carey giving a concert in front of the pyramids, May 2010.

Extended stay

Most Arab tourists, of which 50 % are coming from the Gulf countries, spend a big part of their summer holidays in places like Cairo. They own apartments in downtown or rent furnished flats and return every year. Not only for vacation but also for other reasons such as medical treatments, business or sports are they going to Cairo. They enjoy spending time in a country with a more liberal atmosphere and they hope to be able to go to concert by a famous singer or to do something similar.



Scene from the film „All is Lost“, by Ali Abdel Khalek, 2003



Tourists in Egypt by country groups, 2009. Total: 12 mio.




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DRAFT

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Vast land in the north of the Giza Plateau

شوق
LED ENGINEERING CO. S.A.S
صيانة وتفتيش الحدائق





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High-income housing area in the west of the plateau



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Le
MERIDIEN
PYRAMIDS

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Luxury hotel in the north-east of the Pyramids Area





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Al-Haram Street, the main axis leading to the pyramids



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Mansoria Road, the border of the living area Nazlet al-Samman in the east of the plateau



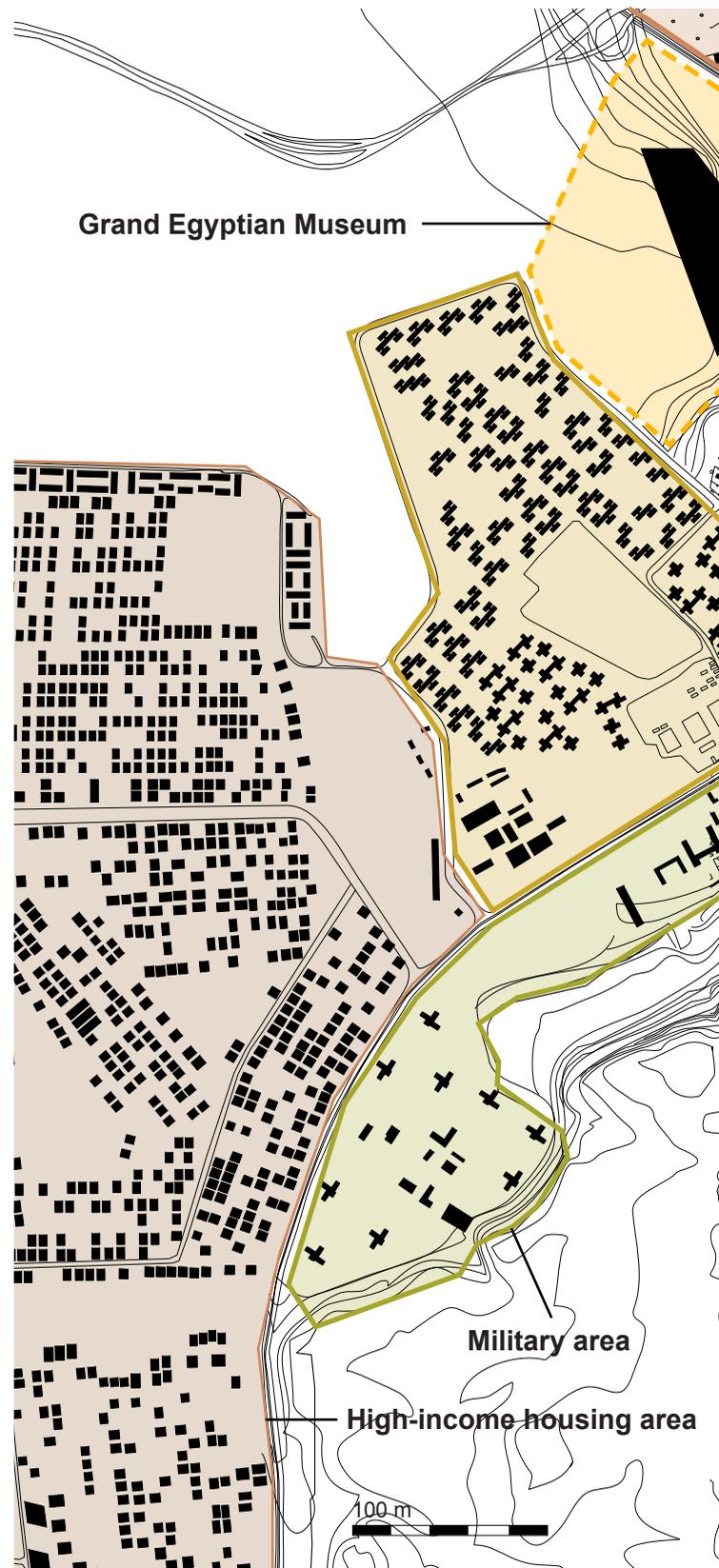
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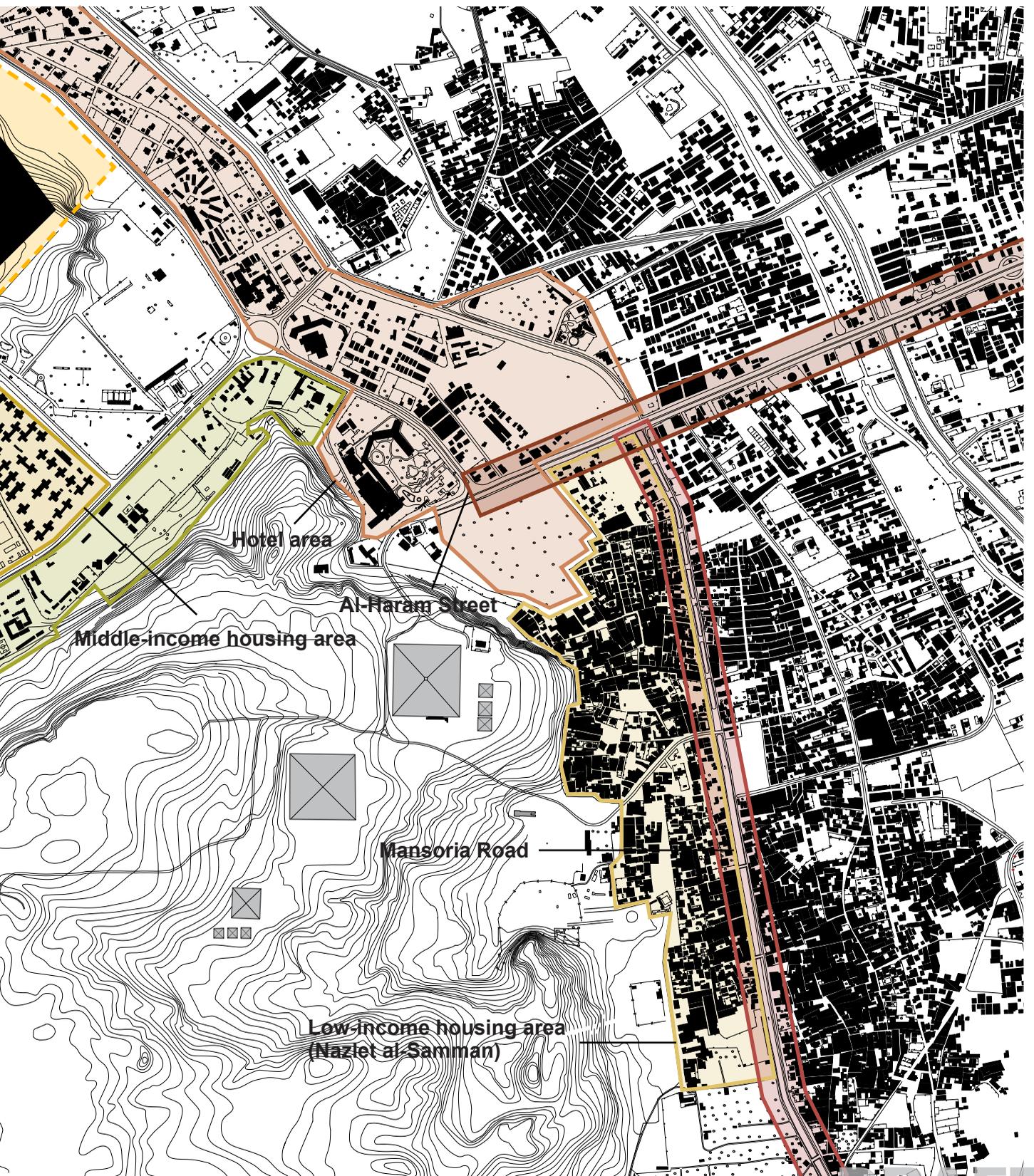
SURROUNDING CITY FABRIC

An overview of the areas which surround the plateau

Unknown dimension of the city

Most tourists who visit the pyramids are driven straight up to the plateau. If they do get a glimpse of the surroundings, they'll see the eastern part of them, because both entrances to the plateau are located there. That's why many people are not aware of the fact that the pyramids are almost completely surrounded by city fabric. Only the very few ones who walk to the top of the plateau get a chance to see that.





HOUSING AREAS

High-income housing area

Probably built during the last 5 years, more houses under construction.

Built on desert land.

Some new hotels are planned in this area as well.





Middle-income housing area

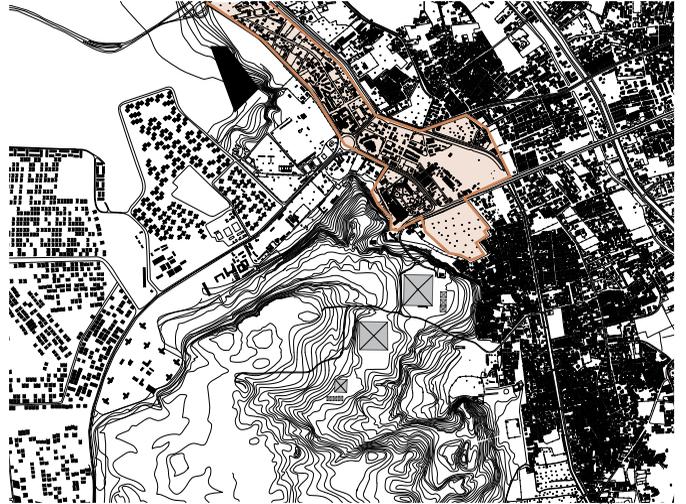
Probably built about 10-20 years ago.
Built on desert land.

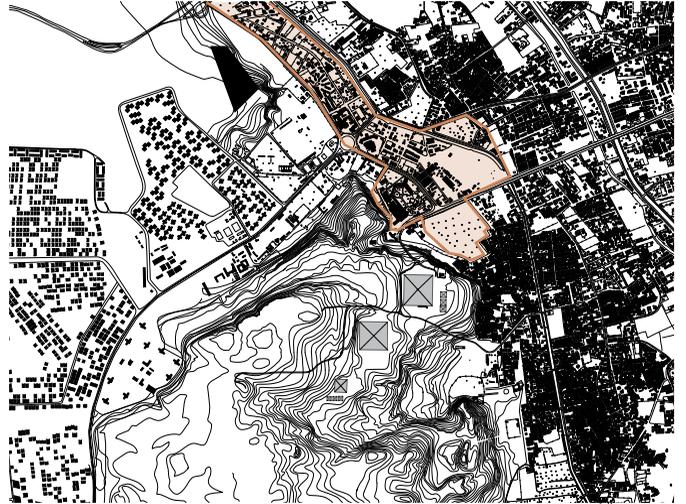


TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Hotel area

Mainly luxury hotels.
Big infrastructures like golf-courses, swimming pools and gardens complement the complexes.
Big-scale projects, use a big piece of land.
Guarded by the police.





Additional services

Services such as gas stations, banks and travel agencies can be found next to the hotels.



FORBIDDEN TERRITORY

Military area

Recruiting centre, sports facilities.
Surrounded by walls and fences, no public access.
Guarded by the police.



MAIN AXIS

Al-Haram Street

Main access street leading to the pyramids from the city centre.
Used to be a popular place for hotels, nightclubs and casinos.
Today not that attractive anymore.
Dominated by the traffic. Two bus lines and several mini-busses run along Al-Haram Street.



TOURIST AXIS

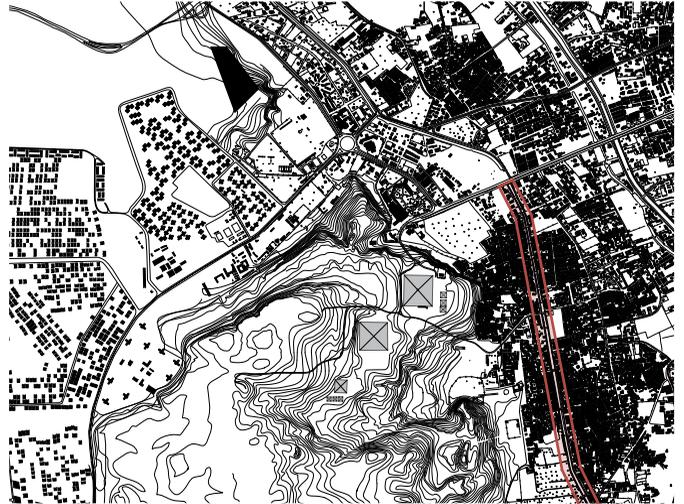
Mansoria Road

The upper part is dominated by touristic infrastructures, mainly bazaars, a few travel agencies and a few hotels.

The street leads to the entrance of the Sphinx.

Mansoria Road is built on the former Mansoria Canal.

It forms the eastern border of the area of Nazlet al-Samman.



TOURIST SERVICES AND HOUSING

Low-income housing area

The inhabitants of Nazlet al-Samman offer different services such as horse and camel riding to tourists. Stables and bazaars can be found in the middle of the low-income housing area. An exception form the few villas from rich inhabitants which can be found next to Mansoria Road.



NAZLET AL-SAMMAN

Influences of the past and the present on a contemporary village and its inhabitants

Living from tourism

The quarter of Nazlet al-Samman is located on the east of the pyramids, right at the edge of the plateau. The north-western part of Nazlet al-Samman is called Sen al-Agouz. Most of the inhabitants are earning their money from a business related to tourism. They either offer horse or camel rides or they run bazaars with typical Egyptian souvenirs. They depend on the closeness to the plateau as their place of work.

Proximity endangered

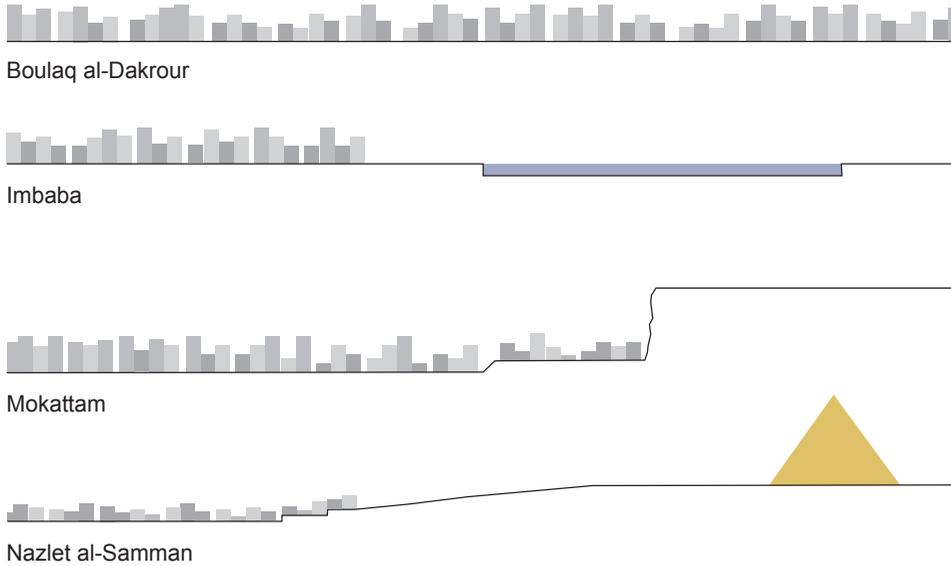
But the recent plans of the government and the UNESCO have put this dependency under threat. As Nazlet al-Samman is situated very close to

the plateau, it belongs to a hard-fought territory. Many other stakeholders are also interested in this attractive area. Big plans exist to change the place into a mono-functional area serving mainly the tourists and the interests of the investors.

Relocation

To realise these ambitious plans it would be necessary to relocate the people who are living there. But as some of the designated relocation areas are quite far from the plateau and the inhabitants' place of work, this is very problematic. To be able to continue their businesses, at least the stables and the bazaars need to be next to the pyramids. But none of the plans seems to care about the locals' needs.





A comparison of different low-income housing areas in Cairo, respecting their formal aspects of identity.

Nazlet al-Samman possesses the strongest symbol of identity: the Pyramids of Giza. But as these are internationally known and economically very important for Cairo, the area faces several challenges.



This picture could be taken in any low-income housing area in Cairo.



With the Pyramids in the background, the area of Nazlet al-Samman becomes distinctive.

TOURISTIC BUSINESS: HOTELS, ADMISSION FEES, BUS TOURS

Means of transportation

Most tourists arrive at the pyramids by tour bus (in groups) or by taxi (individual travellers). They mostly don't spend a lot of time in the area as their time in Cairo is limited to a couple of days.

Entrances

There are two main entrances to the plateau: One in the north, next to the Pyramid of Khufu, and one in the east, next to the Sphinx. Only people using the latter one get a glimpse of the area of Nazlet al-Samman.



Admission fees

A few minutes after the area opens in the morning it's already getting very crowded with tourists.

To enter the area international visitors (most of them from European countries) pay LE 80. Students get a discount of 50 % and visitors from Arabic countries only have to pay LE 2. Beside the Europeans there are many Egyptian school classes visiting the pyramids.

To enter a pyramid, another ticket is needed. For the Pyramid of Khufu it costs LE 200 and tickets are limited to 150 per day. The tickets for the Pyramids of Khafre and the Pyramid of Menkaure cost LE 40 each.



Luxury hotels

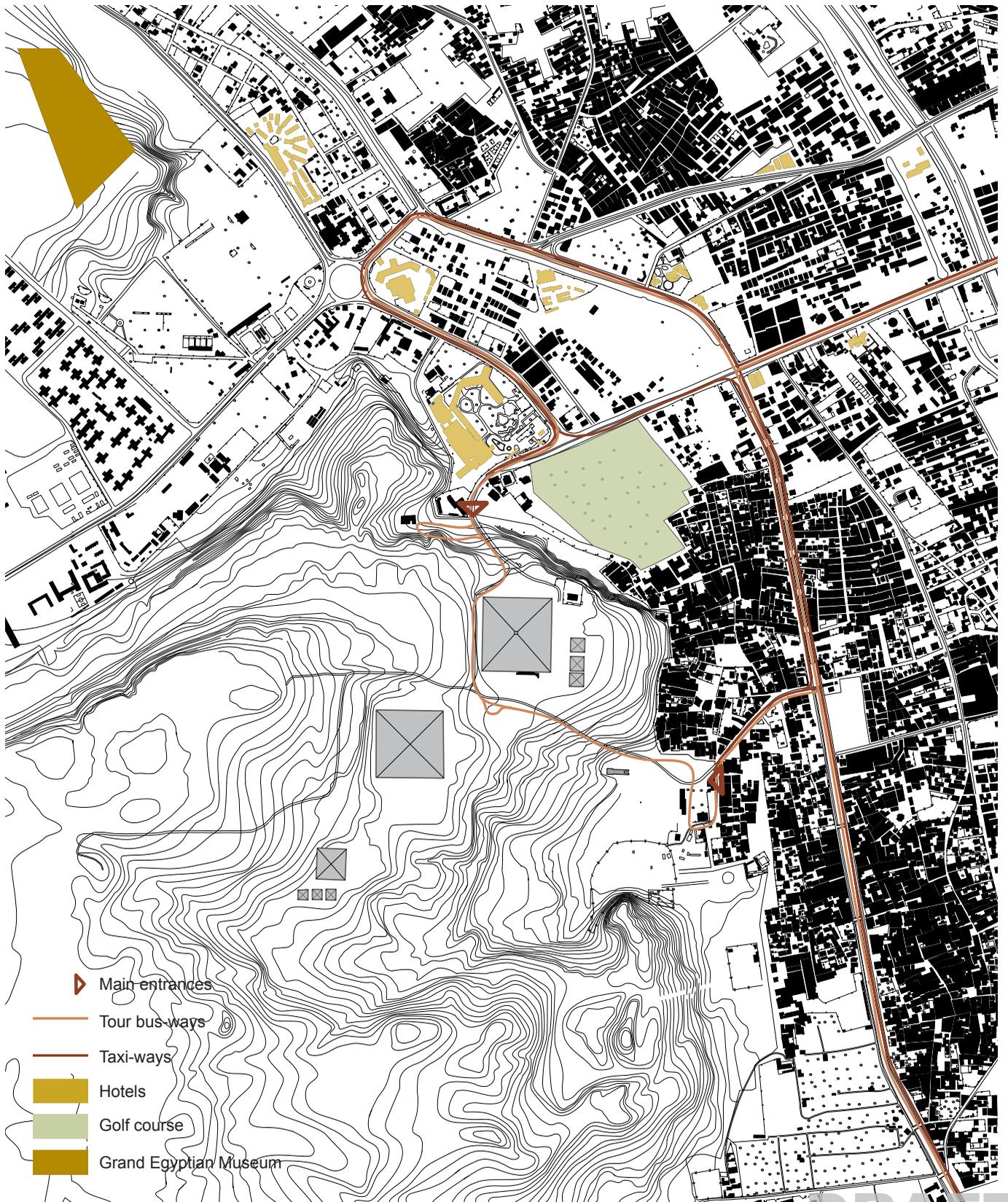
At the northern side of the pyramids are many 5 to 4 stars hotels located. The Mena House, the oldest and the most luxury hotel in the area, offers room whose prices range from LE 1160.- for a single room without pyramids view up to LE 8625.- for the presidential suite.

Along the Al-Haram Street are a few 3 stars hotels located.



Mena House Golf Course

The Mena House Golf Course opened in 1889 with the conversion of Ismail Pasha's palace to a hotel. The golf course occupies 4680 m² and is situated very close to the pyramids. The players are club-members, hotel guests or other tourist groups.



TOURISTIC BUSINESS: HORSE AND CAMEL RIDING, BAZAARS

Family businesses

Most businesses, no matter if offering camel rides or selling souvenirs, are run by big families. Normally the patriarch is responsible for the distribution of the earnings within the family.

Nasty tour guides

One of the reasons to go to Nazlet al-Samman is, that the inhabitants offer camel and horse rides. But as there's fierce competition, some guides are very intrusive and many tourists complain about harassment.

Souvenirs

Another reason are the numerous bazaars which sell Egyptian souvenirs. The goods which are sold are not produced in the area, but in other places of Egypt. And some probably are made in China.



Horse and camel riding

The riding of camels and horses for fun and to get around the pyramids more easily is neither a very recent invention nor a service just for tourists. In the 50ies and 60ies it was very popular among upper-class Egyptians.

Today it's a big income source for the people living in Nazlet al-Samman.

The prices vary a lot, only one stable, which is governmentally controlled, offers fixed prices (LE 50 per hour). Not all the tour guides offer tours within the wall, as they need to pay to get a concession.



Stables

Most of the stables in Nazlet al-Samman are concentrated in the southern part. The stable owners pay for a license to enter the walled area with tourists (costs: about LE 250 per year). This amount can be earned with one horse in less than a day. One horse or camel does in average three tours a day what brings in at least LE 250. The expenses for a horse or camel are no more than LE 10 per day.

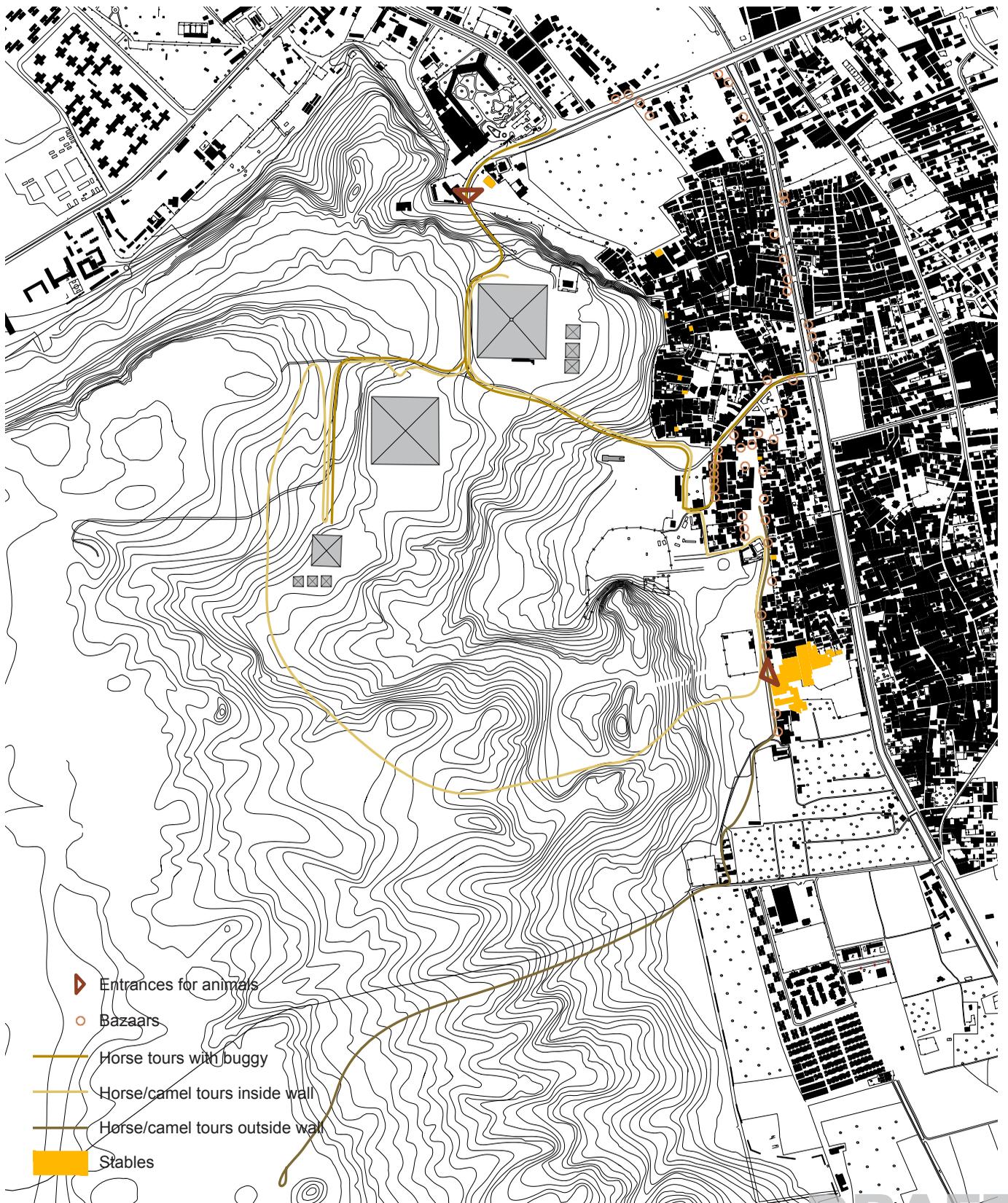
Some tour guides don't own horses by themselves, so they pay the owners who rent them out.



Bazaars

The bazaars are another large income source of the area. Products like papyrus, perfumes and other souvenirs are sold. A horse or camel ride often ends in one of the bazaars. The people who bring the tourists to the shops get commissions if something is bought.

The locations of the bazaars show the areas in Nazlet al-Samman which are frequented by tourists.



HOUSING:

DIFFERENT SCALES AND QUALITY STANDARDS

Unsafe and partly abandoned homes

In Sen al-Agouz, the north-western part of Nazlet al-Samman, many houses are in very bad conditions. Some of them have been left as their structure had become unsafe. As it's not allowed to build new houses in this area, people often don't have another choice than leaving.

Mainly low-income housing

The biggest part of Nazlet al-Samman consists of low-income housing. This area is mixed with other functions like the bazaars and stables, but also shops for locals.

Rare villas

At the eastern edge of Nazlet al-Samman, along the Mansoria Road, can be found a couple of villas. They belong to the few patriarchs of big families who got rich thanks to the tourist business. The villas are the only free-standing houses in the area, surrounded by a little open space.



High density, 1-2 storeys

Typical structure for the north-western part next to the wall. Many housing units are built next to each other and can't be separated from each other in the figure-ground plan. Most houses are in bad condition, some of them have collapsed and have been abandoned. They now start to disappear beyond sand and garbage.

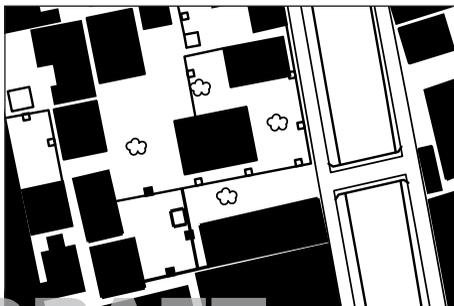
20 m



High density, 2-5 storeys

Most common structure in Nazlet al-Samman. Several housing units are built next to each other or separated by very narrow streets, which are only about 3 m wide. It's very common to add more storeys when needed, e.g. when a son gets married. These blocks offer mainly low-income housing, but their structure is much better of the ones next to the wall.

20 m



Medium density, 3-4 storeys

Villas are not very typical for this area, but they do exist and can mainly be seen along Mansoria Road.

They are the only free-standing houses in Nazlet al-Samman. That's why they look rather small on the figure-ground plan, although that they are the most spacious living units.

Most of them are surrounded by walls and some are guarded by dogs.

20 m



HOUSING: MULTI-FUNCTIONAL HOMES



Stores for daily needs and work shops

Most tourists never go into the narrow streets where the stores for daily needs and the workshops are located. There are many of these stores, being most busy in the evenings. There are no big supermarkets in Nazlet al-Samman. Fruit and vegetables are sold in the streets, on horse wagons.



Holding animals for food

Many families use their ground floors or the roof tops to hold some animals like goats, sheep or geese.



Horse stables

Some horse stables are also located next to the owners homes. Often they are located in the courtyard. Some people only hold the horses for their own use next to their homes, whereas the horses for business are hold in another stable.



Bazaars for tourists

In contrast to the shops for daily life, the bazaars only serve the tourists. That's why they are located along the most frequented, big streets. Often the shop owner and his family live right above the bazaar.



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The main access point to the area Nazlet al-Samman, seen from Mansoria Road





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Public space, frequented only by locals





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© ETH Studio Basel
Typical street with small shops





أنا نبيع الفواكه
مباشرة
دولة فاكس
وه تمويل مكالاتنا
كارت منزل

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© ETH Studio Basel

Mobile fruit and veg stall, a common way of selling goods for daily life





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Narrow street close to the border of the plateau



WHO'S ALLOWED TO BE NEXT TO THE PYRAMIDS?

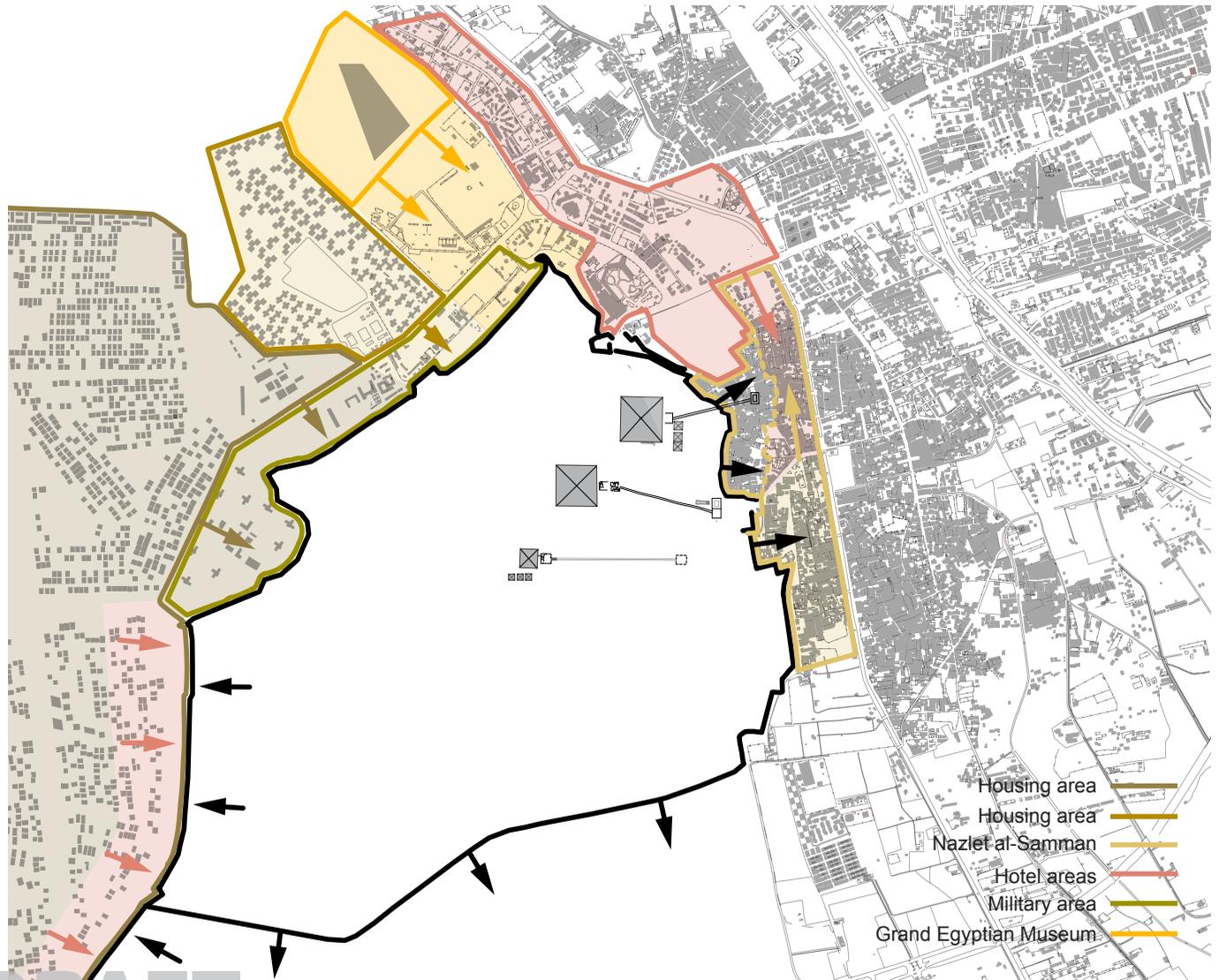
A power game between many different stakeholders

Precise plans and abstract visions

As the areas of Nazlet al-Samman and Sen al-Agouz are facing some changes, a big power game has started between the different stakeholders. There exist numerous plans for the future, but their realisation is not sure yet. Whereas some plans already are quite precise, others are just abstract visions yet. The ones with big impacts on the environment and big investments will be much harder to realise than the cheaper ones with smaller impacts.

Catalytic effects

Some of the projects exist already for a couple of years, but their realisation turned out to be difficult. Now they become concrete again because another happening makes the realisation easier.





Government

In the end it's the government who decides, beside the investors, which projects will be realised or rejected. The Egyptian government supports the wall around the plateau, the excavation of the temple, the construction of the Sphinx Open Museum and the 2050 Plan.



Investors

Many of the investors for the ambitious and expensive projects are foreigners. Being in possession of the money without which most projects couldn't be realised, they have a lot of power.

UNESCO

With the admission of the Giza Plateau to the World Heritage List, the UNESCO gained influence in the area.

The excavation of the ancient valley temple, and with it the relocation of the inhabitants of Sen al-Agouz, is very likely to happen. The necessary money has already been spoken by the government and president Mubarak himself backs this plan. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations established on 16 November 1945. Its stated purpose is to contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and the human rights along with fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the UN Charter. It is the heir of the League of Nations' International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation.



Tourists

As a whole economy is depending on them, the government will try to meet their demand for infrastructures like hotels, shops and other attractions.

Inhabitants

The inhabitants are not integrated in the whole process. They're not well organised and there are no NGOs supporting them. The relocation of the inhabitants of Sen al-Agouz is very likely to happen.

Nazlet al-Samman:

But some of the big families have earned a lot of money with their touristic businesses. They are quite strong and politically well connected. These people will try to prevent some of the projects which would force them to move away.



EXCLUSION BY THE WALL

A visible sign of the struggle for the closeness to the pyramids

Some facts about the wall/fence around the plateau

Date of construction: 2002

Surrounded area: 12 km² (Giza Plateau: 3 km²)

Length: 14 km

Height: 6 m (3 m wall plus 3 m fence)

Unannounced construction

When the wall around the Giza Plateau was constructed in 2002, many people were completely surprised, as this intervention has never been communicated in the media. As the initiator and investor of this activity is unknown, it gave reason for many rumours.

Officially mentioned reasons for the wall

Protection against theft.

Protection of the historic site against tourists.

Protection against terrorists.

Possible other reasons

As these reasons do not really make sense, there's a lot of speculation about the real reasons going on. These could be the control of who's working on the plateau in combination with additional earnings. Only licensed tour guides are permitted on the plateau. To get a license one needs a university degree in Egyptology or archaeology, in addition to a guide license, for which one must pay and pass a state-administered exam.

Some people are even suggesting that the government wants to do secret excavations so it can decide by itself which part of the history it's going to reveal or not.

Definitely the fence also helps to keep the city and the built environment away from the plateau in order to preserve the mystical image of the pyramids, standing in the desert, which the tourists expect to find here.

The two unfinished pieces in the southeast and southwest give reason to think about what the plan for the future is and if the building of the wall will be continued. Speculations suggest that the wall might be extended to the pyramids of Saqqara, which are located about 15 kilometres to the south.

Controlled entrances

There are two main entrances, one in the north, near the Khufu pyramid and one in the east, near the Sphinx. There's another entrance in the southeast for people who do horse or camel riding. All the entrances are controlled by the police.

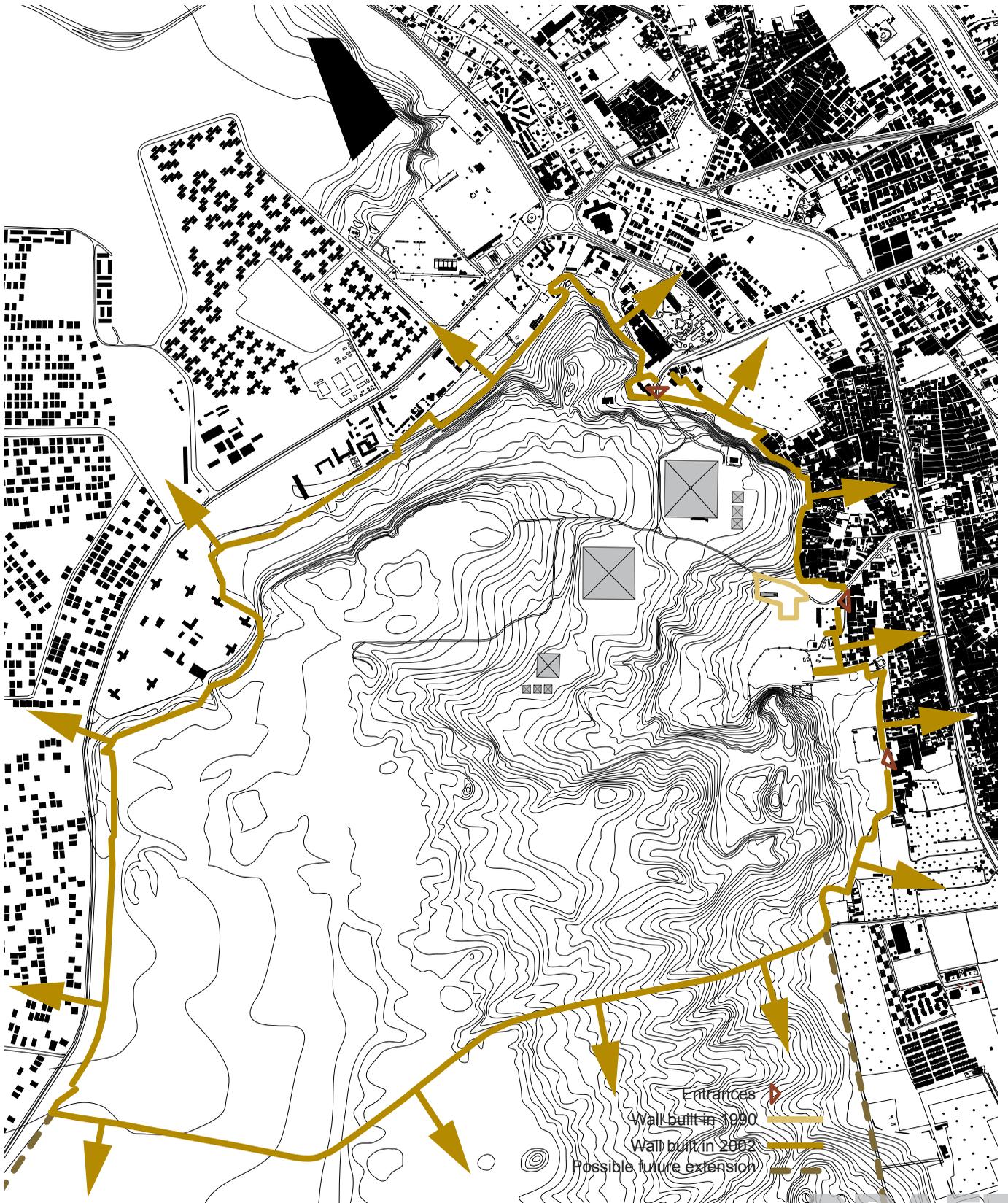
Exclusion of the locals

As one has to pay an admission fee to go on the Giza Plateau and see the pyramids, the plateau is no longer serving as a public recreation area for the locals. Furthermore, Egyptians are not allowed to go to the plateau on public holidays.



Scene from the film „Soft Hands“, by Mahmoud Zoul-Faqqar, 1963.

The pyramids site was a popular place amongst locals to spend their leisure time, have picnics and meet friends or relatives.





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Wall around the plateau, in the southern part of Nazlet al-Samman





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Controlled entrance to the plateau, video surveillance





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Houses next to the wall in the northern area of Nazlet al-Samman (Sen al-Agouz), partly abandoned



SUBSTANTIAL INTERVENTIONS AND BIG DREAMS

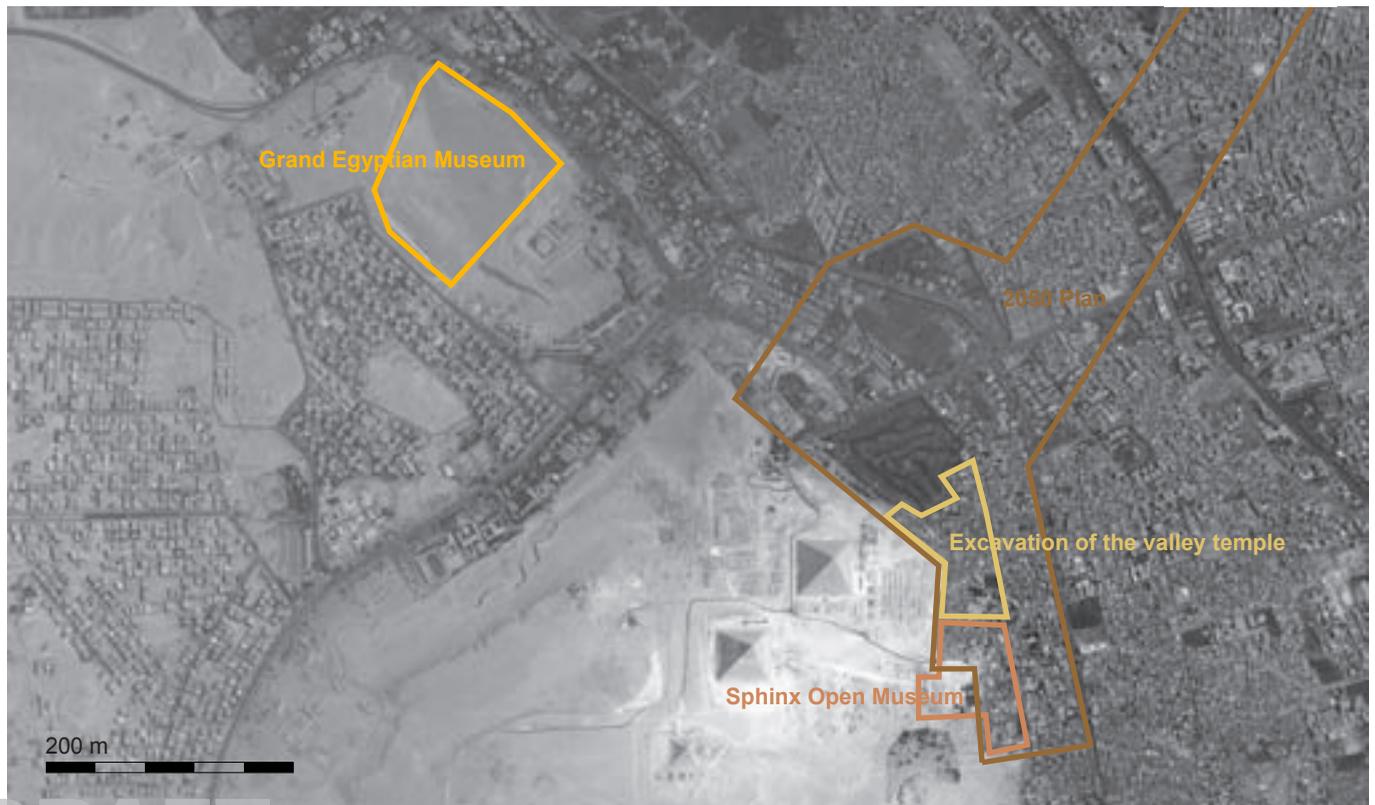
Projects for the Pyramids Area

Large-scale projects

There are many big projects planned for the area of Nazlet al-Samman. Most of them have very big scales and would need a lot of space. That means that in almost every case something else, mostly living areas, would need to be moved to be able to realise the ambitious plans.

Ignorance of important facts

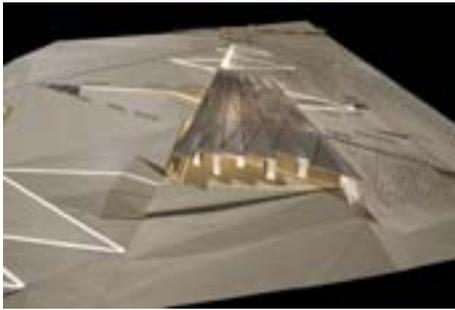
What all of the plans don't consider is that the inhabitants living next to the pyramids need to be there. Their jobs rely on the proximity to the plateau and also do the tourists need them. Because they enjoy the horse and camel riding and don't wanna walk instead.





Excavation of the valley temple

Search for a temple beyond the area of Sen al-Agouz.
Money already spoken by the government.
Initiated by the UNESCO, planned for 2020.



Grand Egyptian Museum

New museum as an extension of the existing museum in downtown.
Initiated by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, opening planned for 2014.
Design by heneghan peng architects, Dublin.



Sphinx Open Museum

New museum next to the Sphinx.
Initiated by the General Organisation for Physical Planning, opening planned for 2030.



2050 Plan

Part of a modernisation plan for the whole city of Cairo.
A new axis, the Khufu Avenue, should lead from Mohandessin to the pyramids, where new hotel areas should be found.
Initiated by the General Organisation for Physical Planning, planned for 2050.

THREATEN BY ARCHAEOLOGY

Excavation of the valley temple

Living area on top of valley temple

According to Egyptologists Sen al-Agouz is built on top of major Old Kingdom archaeological sites, including the Valley Temple of Khufu. Egyptologists have long wanted to excavate this site, and several generations of directors of the Giza Plateau have lobbied the government to have the villagers relocated to different land.

Instruments to drive inhabitants away

In an effort to eventually drive villagers out of their homes, a complicated law was enacted that divides up the village into different zones, according to their suspected archaeological value. It prohibits villagers who live in the archaeologically most valuable zone not only from building new homes but even from making the slightest repair to existing homes. Most part of Sen al-Agouz belongs to that zone. The idea is that, as the inhabitant's houses gradually

fall apart over time, they would abandon them for better properties elsewhere, and the land would be reclaimed for archaeology.

This actually works quite well. In the western part of Sen al-Agouz, next to the wall, a few houses have already been abandoned because they collapsed.

Furthermore, this zone also has been declared „unsafe“ by the government. With this definition, the inhabitants can be forced to leave their houses.

Relocation

In the meantime, precise plans by the Ministry for Housing and Urban Development for the relocation of the inhabitants exist. This should take place within multiple phases. According to these plans, some people will have to move up to 2 km away, which will bring different problems, because the stables must also be moved.



Political influence

On the other hand, many people refuse to move. Because some earned a lot of money with tourist businesses, they are quite influential. Some of them even are represented in the government. The excavation of the valley temple might be rather easy to realise, but the projects for the other parts of Nazlet al-Samman might face more resistance.

Luxor as a role model

The plans for the excavation of the valley temple exist already for about thirty years. Because the inhabitants of the affected families refused to move to another area, nothing happened. In the meantime Luxor realised a similar project. Villagers who were living on an ancient site were relocated, excavations took place and many new touristic infrastructures were erected. This process became a role model for the government of Cairo.



THE VISIT TO THE PYRAMIDS BECOMES VIRTUAL

Grand Egyptian Museum

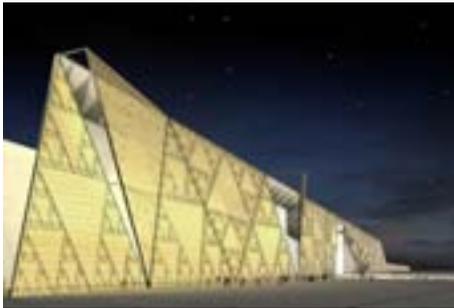
History

The Egyptian Museum has been moved several times since its foundation in Boulaq al-Dakrou in 1858. Parts of its collection will be moved again in a couple of years, when the new museum at the border of the city, next to the pyramids, will be opened.

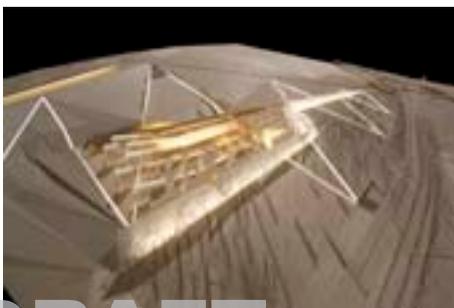
Pyramids Area: from 2014 on

In 2002 the Egyptian Ministry of Culture announced an international competition for the Grand Egyptian Museum next to the Pyramids Plateau. 1557 projects by architects of 83 different countries have been submitted. The selected

project by heneghan peng architects from Dublin has 24'000 m² permanent exhibition space, conference centre, educational facilities, restaurants, shops, gardens. It's an extension of the existing museum in downtown and it will include the Tutankhamun collection and the Solar Boat which is now exposed right next to the Pyramid of Khufu. It's going to contain about 150'000 artifacts. Besides that it's said that it should become the first virtual museum in the world and that it shall form a connection between the contemporary city and the ancient pyramids. The estimated year of completion is 2014.



Visualisations of the future museum.
By heneghan peng architects, Dublin.



Downtown Cairo, about 1914

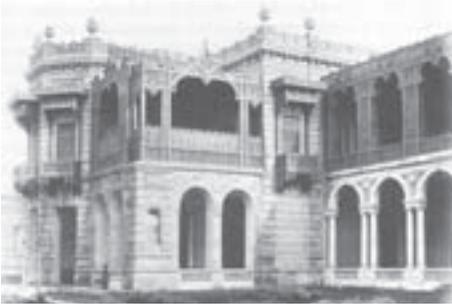
In „Whose Pharaohs?“, Donald Malcolm Reid, California, 1997



Boulaq: 1858-1889

François Mariette, a French egyptologist modelled the premises for the Egyptian Museum in Boulaq. It was always meant to be temporary. In October 1863 Ismail opened the museum. Now ancient Egypt has been brought to the Egyptian people. But the main visitors were the Europeans.

Several times in summer the museum got flooded and so the exposed pieces were unsafe. Also in case of fire they wouldn't have been protected.



Giza: 1890-1902

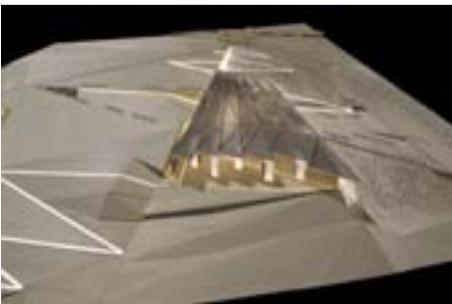
As there was no money for a new museum it was moved temporarily to a palace in Giza where it was at least safe from flooding and the danger of fire wasn't that big. The Palace had far more display space. In January 1890 the Giza Museum was inaugurated.



Tahrir Square: 1902-today

Five years later, in 1895, a jury selected the design for the new Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square. The five final projects were all from French architects, in a classical style with references to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Museum in Berlin or Leo von Klenze's Glyptothek in Munich. In 1898 the constructions started and in 1902 the new museum was finished.

Planned for 35'000 exhibits, today it possesses 150'000 artifacts. Professional storage and conservation are not warranted anymore.



Pyramids Area: from 2014 on

The Grand Egyptian Museum shall be an extension of the existing one in downtown, where there's not enough space for all the artifacts anymore. But there are some rumours that the new museum will not just be an extension, but a replacement of the museum at Tahrir Square. The site of the museum is huge: it contains 460'000 m² and the budget is told to be 350 mio. US-dollars.

CONTROLLING THE AREA NEXT TO THE PYRAMIDS

Sphinx Open Museum

All along the plateau

There's not much known about the planned open-air museum next to the Sphinx. The area belonging to the museum is supposed to be huge and to run all along the edge of the plateau. This can be understood as an attempt to control the area next to the pyramids and to keep the undesirables away.



NEW AXIS FROM DOWNTOWN TO THE PYRAMIDS

2050 Plan

Modernisation of Cairo

The Cairo 2050 Plan is a design concerning the whole city. It suggests many renewals like new housing blocks, hotel areas and public spaces. It would completely change the look of the Pyramids Area. A new, 600 m wide axis would connect the city centre (Mohandessin) directly with the Pyramids of Giza. The street would follow the line in which the pyramids are standing. This means that the new axis would not respect any of the things being in its place at the moment.

Political product

The realisation of the 2050 plan would have huge impacts on many areas and would cost a lot. That's why it's not realistic that it's going to be realised. Only parts of it might be implemented. The plan rather has to be seen as a vision, giving the citizens something to dream about. It probably is just a political product for the presidential elections in 2011.



Khufu Avenue, leading straight to the pyramids.

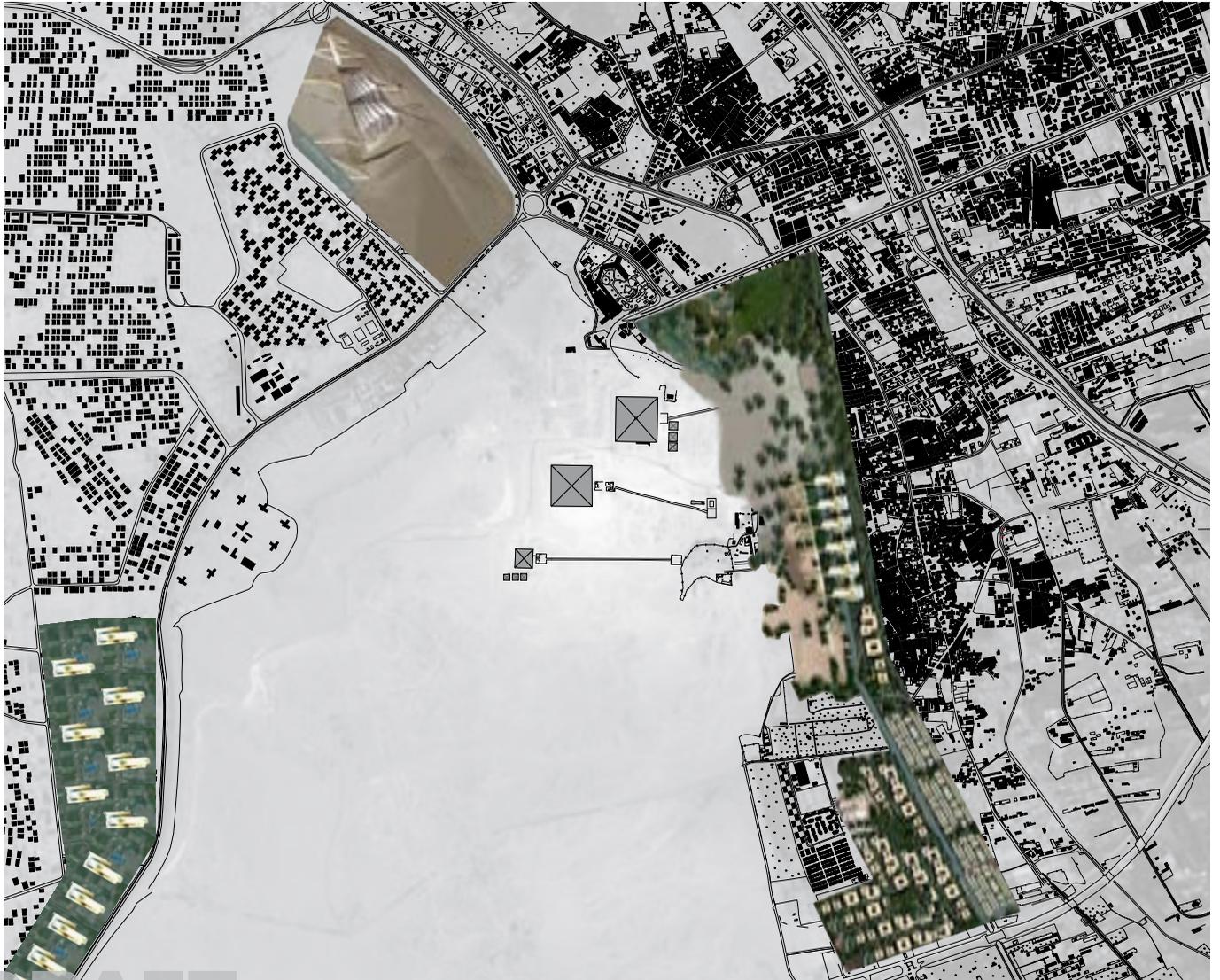


New hotels in the place of the village Nazlet al-Samman.

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Mono-functional hotel area

If the fact that the inhabitants of Nazlet al-Samman are needed next to the pyramids won't be recognised, it could happen that big-scale projects of international investors dominate the Pyramids Area completely in ten to twenty years. This would be a big loss for the area and the tourists visiting the pyramids won't have any chance to get a contemporary image of the place. Maybe they even won't have to leave the hotel compounds to see the pyramids. The area around the plateau is reserved for private properties and their guests. Nothing of the village of Nazlet al-Samman will be left and all its inhabitants will have to leave. Some new housing blocks can be found in the southeast.



Multi-functional area for tourists and locals

Nazlet al-Samman is becoming an attractive area, for tourists as well as for locals. Houses with unsafe structures are getting replaced by new ones, the ones in good conditions remain unchanged. The bazaars and the stables still exist, but besides there are new infrastructures for tourists like small hotels, restaurants and shops. These can be found all over the area. They have different price ranges and some of them will also be frequented by locals. This enables the tourists to experience exotic Cairo and to get a contemporary image of the city at the same time. Housing, hotel and entertainment areas are not separated from each other. Everyone's allowed to be next to the pyramids.



CONCLUSION

Incomprehensible monuments

Although that we're living in an age where science tries to explain and find reasons for everything, the Pyramids of Giza still riddle. They go beyond our comprehension and kept parts of their mystery until today.

Struggle for proximity

What has changed is the relation of the pyramids to their surroundings. The struggle for the proximity to the ancient monuments is almost as old as the pyramids themselves, but never has the encircling city structure been as dense as today.

Signs of the struggle

Confronted with the fast growing city, the government as well as other stakeholders try to keep the urban fabric away from the plateau, using different instruments: One of them is the wall around the plateau, which is already realised, another one is the planned relocation of the people living next to the hard-fought territory. Archaeology, too, serves as a mean to preclude undesirables from the access to the plateau and to have them removed.

Who's allowed to be there?

But this is not only about the struggle for the closeness to the pyramids. It's very much about economical profit, too. Whereas the locals should get relocated, more powerful people such as investors and hotel owners might be allowed to be next to the pyramids.

Influence on Cairo

Such decisions have to be made looking at the city of Cairo as a whole, as they will influence more than just the surroundings of the pyramids. If the Pyramids Area offers all the demanded infrastructures to tourists, will the travellers still go to downtown Cairo? Is there still a reason to go to the city centre, when even the Egyptian Museum is located outside?

Mystical image

The image of the three pyramids standing in the middle of the desert has become very important and is needed for the functioning of tourism. Also tourists ask for some infrastructure which has to be provided for their satisfaction.



Share the economical profit

Fact is that the city has already come very close to the plateau. This process doesn't have to be reverted. More important seems that the rare resource of land lying next to the pyramids has to be treated very thoughtful. Not all the hotels need to be in walking distance of the pyramids. But as well as it makes sense that some of them are close, it's also necessary that the people who provide services like horse and camel riding to the tourists can live next to the touristic site. Important is that different groups can profit of the touristic business and that there will be an attractive mixture of functions.

It's about the present

The focus has to shift from the past to the present. Until today, many of the stakeholders have mainly been focusing on the distant past while completely ignoring the more recent past and the present. As the leftovers of the past, like a hidden valley temple, have influences on the contemporary city and its inhabitants, one has to look at both together.

Contemporary image

Also the tourists should be able to get an impression of contemporary Cairo. But by banishing the locals

from their territory and replacing their houses by hotels and public spaces that imitate a European image, this isn't enabled.

Artifacts everywhere

Dr. Mamdouh el-Khattab, an elderly man from a prominent family of Nazlet al-Samman, expressed his resentment about the one-sided focus on the past like that:

“[Even if archaeologist were to find some remains of the Valley Temple,] would it be enough to eliminate the whole village of five thousand houses? About twenty or more thousand people living in this area, eliminated for the sake of the Valley Temple or Mortuary Temple? If that is the case here in Nazlet al-Samman [...], what is the case in Islamic Cairo, in which you will find shops and houses inside the monuments themselves? So we have to eliminate all of Cairo! Believe me, I'm not exaggerating: even under the house of the President [Mubarak], there will be antiquities, because Heliopolis was an ancient site. [...] So what will be the archaeologists' answer for this? Eliminate all of Egypt and we will go to Libya and live there and leave it all to the archaeologists?”

Quoted in: L. L. Wynn, „Pyramids & Nightclubs“, 2007



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16.11.2010

Photographs

All the photographs that are not listed have been taken by
Stefan Kindschi and Daniela Meyer, ETH Studio Basel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Khaled M. Abdelhalim
Abdel Rahman Akram
Taha Belal
Muhammed Farag Aly
Roisin Heneghan
Amr Lashin
Maha Maamoun
Omar Nagati
Antoine Shahir
Dr. Dina K. Shehayeb

We thank all the persons mentioned above for their time and effort, with which they've supported our work. Their help was a substantial aspect for the success of this book.