

VISITING THE PYRAMIDS WITH BENNU



SUSO MONFORTE

ILLUSTRATIONS VICO CÓCERES

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THE AUTHOR

SUSO MONFORTE

Suso Monforte is the father of two children aged 6 and 10 years old. He is a member of the Parents' Association at Herrero Infant and Primary School, a state school in Castellón de la Plana.

Suso is an advocate of free, high-quality, state education, where parents can voice their opinions, make decisions and collaborate. Suso actively participates in order to achieve an education where the knowledge acquired goes beyond that received in the classroom. The street, museums, markets and nature are also educational spaces.

This is the first book he has written for our publishing house. It brings together the history of Ancient Egypt and the country's modern day situation, all in the company of two children, Miguel and Bennu.

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THE ILLUSTRATOR

VICO CÓCERES

Vico Cóceres is a young Argentinian illustrator, aged 24, who has a well-defined, carefree style which suits that of our project perfectly. Her work has been published in several newspapers and magazines in Latin America.

This is the first book that Vico has illustrated for our publishing house. She has produced illustrations which are full of life, very modern and refreshing. We are sure that we will continue to collaborate with her in the future.

In addition to being an illustrator, Vico also produces cartoon strips. She is currently working as a freelance illustrator.

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THE PUBLISHER

EDITORIAL WEEBLE

Editorial Weeble is an educational project that actively encourages collaboration in order to promote education in an attractive and modern way.

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Regards, the Editorial Weeble Team

VISITING THE PYRAMIDS WITH BENNU



Miguel y Bennu in Egypt

Last summer I went on holiday to Egypt with my little brother, Pablo, and my parents...

Oh, sorry, I almost forgot, I haven't introduced myself. Hi, my name is Miguel, I am ten years old and I really like travelling.

I come from Castellón de la Plana, a beautiful city on the Mediterranean coast.

Well, going back to the story that I was telling you, one day, whilst we were visiting one of the many pyramids in Egypt, I met Bennu.

Who is Bennu, you ask? Bennu is a nine-year-old girl who lives in the city of Giza, which is in the north of the country, who was also on holiday with her family.

Both her and her parents and her older brother, Astennu, were born in the city of Aswan, which is in southern Egypt, but they have been living in Giza for almost six years because her parents couldn't find work and they had to move.

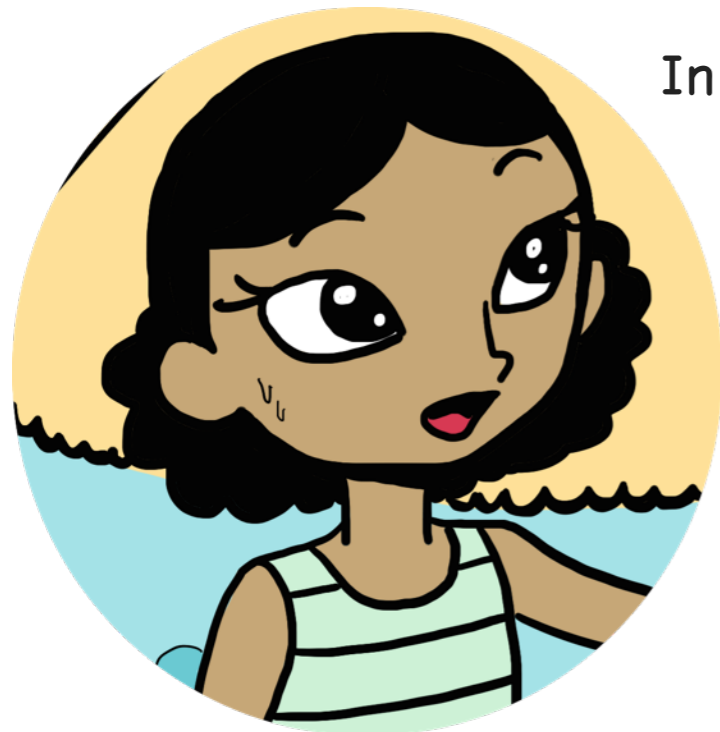


Miguel y Bennu in Egypt

Bennu's father, who is an architect, had taught Bennu many things about the pyramids of her country since she was little, so I learnt a lot from her during our stay.

Her father told me that his children's names have special meanings.

- Listen Miguel, this is what my children's names mean: Bennu means eagle in Egyptian, Kemet is the name of the country in Ancient Egyptian, and Astennu is the name of the God of the Moon.



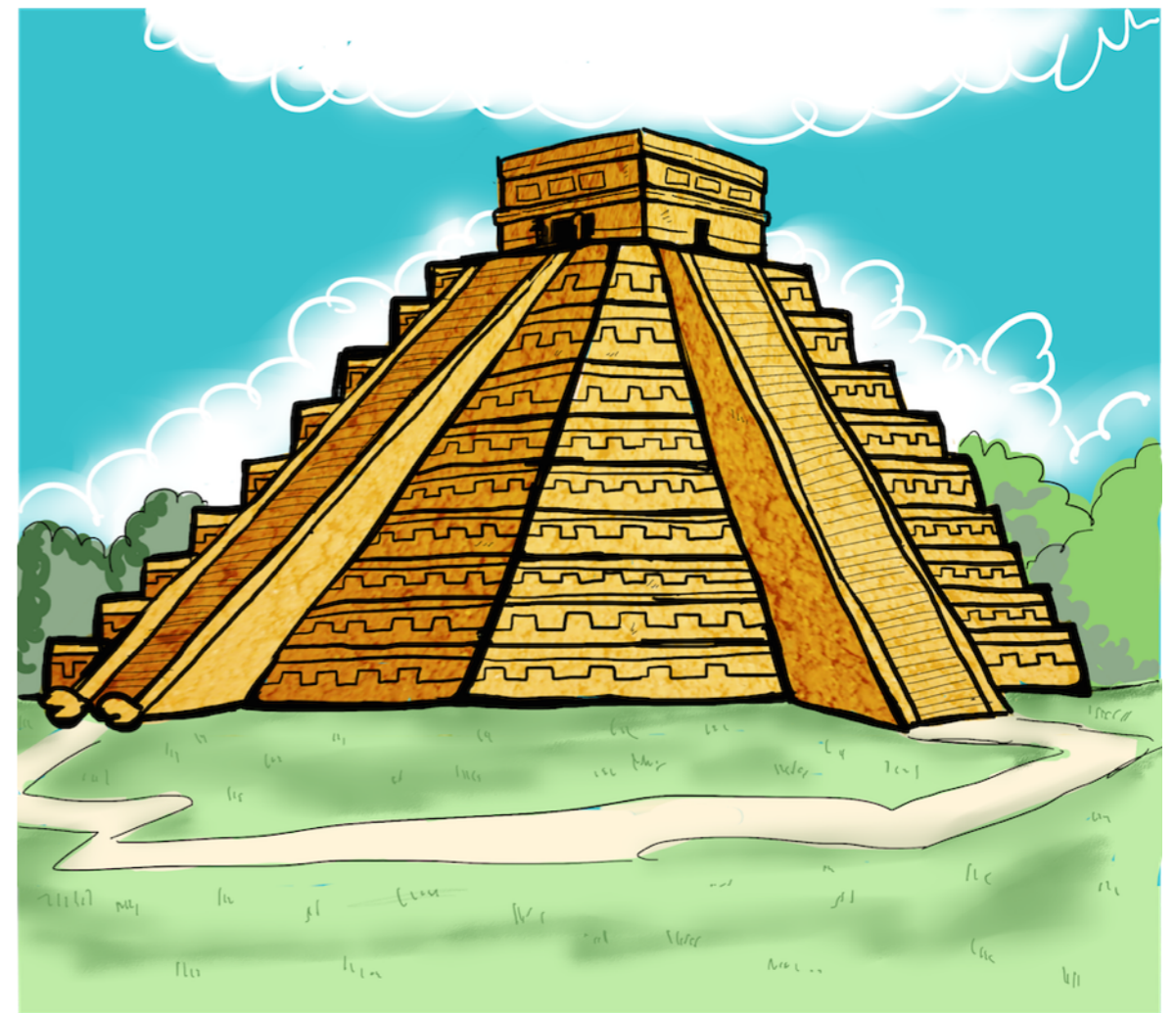
In this story, I will try to tell you everything I remember about the huge amount of things that Bennu taught me about the Egyptian pyramids, their history and her beautiful country.

From the very first day that we met, Bennu was desperate to tell me things about the pyramids.

- Miguel, firstly, you need to know the shape of the pyramids. For architects, a pyramid is a very large construction with a square base and four triangular sides – Bennu told me.

Bennu also explained, and you may find this a little strange, that the Ancient Egyptians were not the only people who built pyramids.

- A few other ancient cultures, such as those of Persia and India, also built pyramids. Other cultures even built pyramids to use them as religious temples, such as those of the Incas, the Mayans and the Aztecs (from Central and South America). Additionally, pyramids have also been built in Japan, which are now beneath the water, in China, Greece, France, and even on the island of Tenerife, in Spain, which are known as the Pyramids of Güímar.

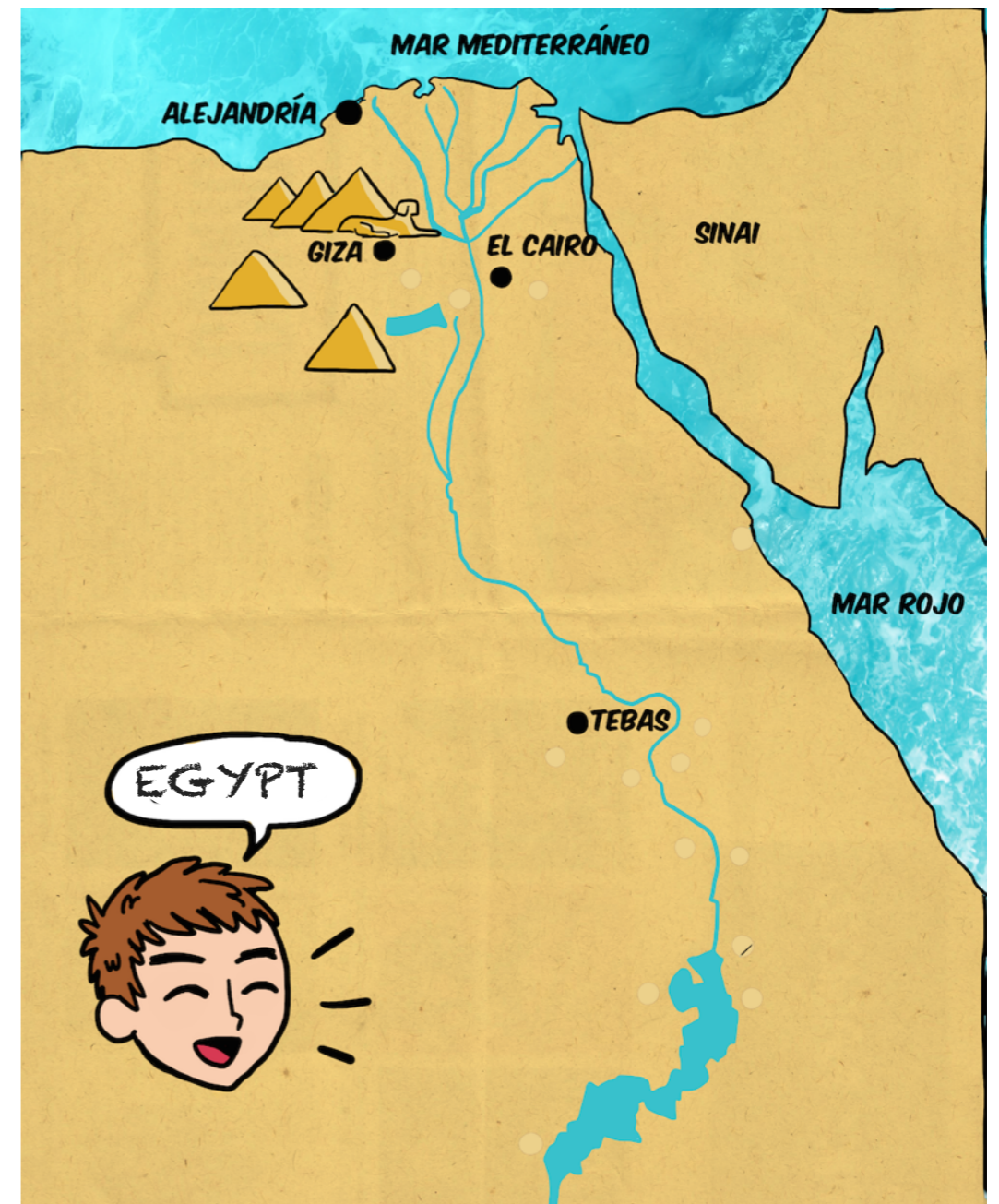


Pyramid of Kukulcán

Bennu told me that in modern-day Egypt, more than 130 well-preserved pyramids have been found and that there are many more buried beneath the desert sand which are yet to be discovered. During the time of the Ancient Egyptians, there were many more, but they have been eroded and collapsed due to the effect of the wind and the water from the River Nile when it overflows.

So now you know, if you want to find pyramids, you have to go to Egypt, there are lots of buried ones!

I will tell you about the day when Bennu's family and mine visited several pyramids together. It was a truly exhausting day, but it was also a lot of fun. What's more, I learnt loads of things. Let's see if I can remember all of them.



Firstly, we saw the Step Pyramid of Pharaoh Djoser at Saqqara which was built in the year 2700BC, more than 4700 years ago!

- Miguel, this is the oldest Egyptian pyramid. Do you like it? - Bennu asked me.
- Yes, but it is very different to those that I have seen in photos - I answered.



The construction of this pyramid was overseen by an architect called Imhotep. I will tell you more about him later.

- Well, now we are going to see another pyramid, the construction of which was ordered by Pharaoh Snefru. It has a rhomboidal or "bent" shape. Can you see that it is different to the previous one? After building this pyramid, the architects changed the way of constructing them. They would no longer be stepped but "bent".

Before lunch we still had time to visit the most famous pyramids of Egypt, those which you might have heard about at some point.

- These are the famous pyramids which appear in all of the photos of Egypt: the



pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure. These pyramids were built in the year 2500BC, more than 4500 years ago. As you can see, they have smooth faces since they have neither steps nor the bent shape of the others that we have seen.

- Did you know that the Pyramid of Khufu is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World? - Bennu asked me.

- Yes, I had read that in a book. They are truly amazing, it doesn't surprise me that people take so many photos of them.

It was lunchtime, so we all went to eat something together.

It was very hot at that time of day. Bennu and I were keen to find somewhere in the shade to rest, drink and have something to eat. Whilst we ate some mashi (peppers, aubergines and vine leaves stuffed with meat and rice) and a couscous salad (tabbouleh), Bennu continued to explain things to do with the history of her country and she told us about Imhotep, a very important person for the Egyptians.



- Imhotep was a famous doctor and architect who was born in Memphis, Egypt, in the year 2667BC. It is believed that he was the architect of the Step Pyramid of Pharaoh Djoser at Saqqara, the first one that we saw, and the person who oversaw the construction work. Do you remember the pyramid, Miguel?

- Yes, of course I remember, Bennu - I answered quickly as I continued to eat.

- Well, curiously Miguel, it is thought that the Edwin Smith Papyrus, which is the world's oldest known surgical treatise, was inspired by Imhotep's medical knowledge. This document contains treatments for war wounds and very detailed descriptions of the human body.
- Is it possible to see this papyrus, Bennu? - I asked.
- Of course, Miguel, but not here - Bennu replied. The papyrus is displayed at the New York Academy of Medicine and is named after the Egyptologist who found it.
- What is an Egyptologist, Bennu? - I asked slowly, because the word was difficult to pronounce.
- Miguel, an Egyptologist is an archaeologist who focuses on the study of the history of ancient Egypt.



Bennu carried on telling me things as we continued with the visits. It was as if she knew the entire history of her country. We were so lucky!

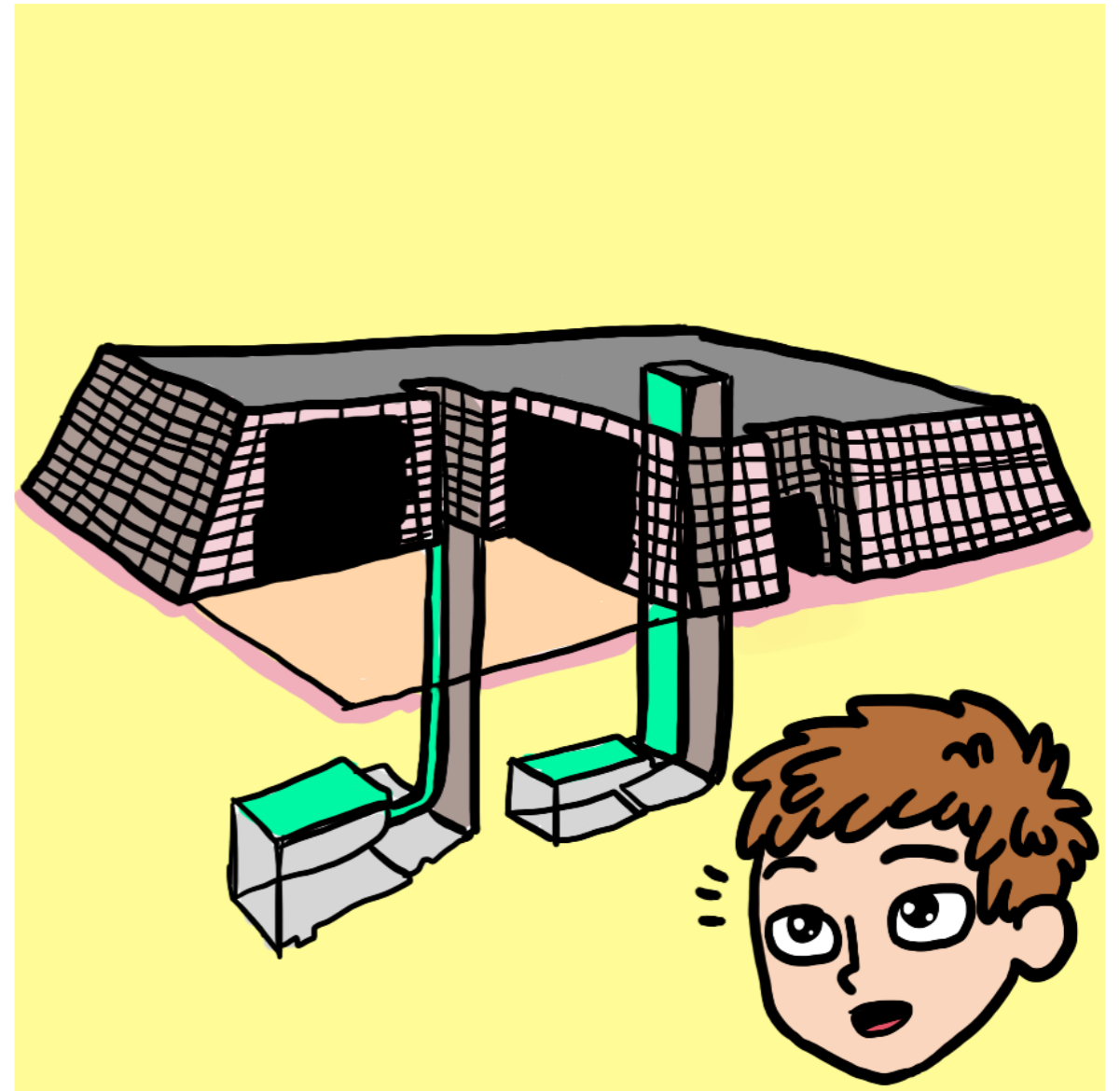
- As I was telling you before, Miguel – Bennu continued – in addition to being a doctor and an architect, Imhotep was also a priest and an astronomer. He was also an adviser and counsellor to Pharaoh Djoser. Imhotep's reputation grew and lived on long after his death. Some thousand years after his death, the priests made him a God. A new God, son of Ptah (the father) and of Nut (the mother), who was worshipped as the God of Scribes, Wisdom and Medicine.
- Wow, how lucky he was to be made a God, Bennu!

The idea of being made a God seemed a bit strange to me, but we were talking about the customs of Ancient Egypt, thousands of years ago. As such I did not think any more of it.



After lunch it was still really hot and we were a little bit tired, but Bennu convinced us all not to waste any time and, with the same enthusiasm that she had shown right from the start, she took us to visit an ancient tomb which they call a mastaba, whilst she explained why the Egyptians built pyramids. After all, we were visiting a lot of different pyramids and I didn't know what they were built for.

- Look, the pyramids were tombs where pharaohs, queens and people from the pharaoh's court were buried. Before building pyramids, the Egyptians buried their kings in the mastabas that we have just seen. Do you remember that they are rectangular buildings which are much smaller than pyramids?
- Yes.



- Well, over time, the pharaohs decided to build larger buildings to be buried in and remembered throughout history. The Egyptians thought that the bigger the pyramid was, the more powerful the pharaoh who ordered it to be built and was buried there was.

It was clear that Bennu was enjoying herself because her eyes were bright and she was constantly moving her hands as she continued to explain everything that she knew. Now it was time to learn about the Egyptians' religion, which was closely linked to their tombs.



- In the religion of the Ancient Egyptians there were many Gods and Goddesses who, as time passed, changed their names and roles. One of the most important Gods was Ra, the God of the Sun, the supreme creator. Other important Gods were Isis, Goddess of Life, Maternity and Fertility, and Osiris, God of Death and Resurrection.

- The Egyptians believed that the pharaoh rose from the dead and went up to the sky to live eternally as a star, alongside the other Gods – Bennu went on. That is the reason why the pyramids were so tall, in order to help the pharaoh in his journey to the sky.
- Did you know that the pyramids have an entrance to enable the burial of the pharaoh to be carried out and an exit door, higher up, facing north, from where, according to their religion, the resurrected pharaoh travelled to the sky?

As with other religions, such as Christianity, the Ancient Egyptians believed that after

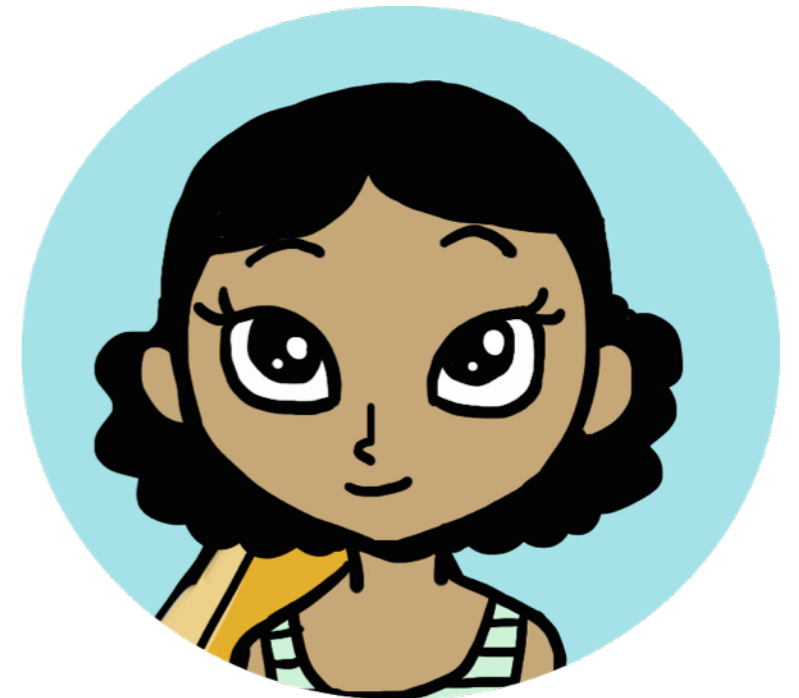


death the soul lived on and went to heaven. Unlike current religions, they believed that it was necessary to preserve the body in perfect condition after death. As such, before placing the lifeless bodies inside the pyramids, they embalmed them, transforming them into what we now call mummies. For this reason, some pharaoh mummies remain in perfect condition, even today.

Just before our afternoon snack there was still time to visit a museum which displayed drawings and maps that explained how the pyramids were built, and just as she had done all day long Bennu continued to tell us everything that she knew.

The truth is that I was more interested in having a snack than visiting the museum, but Bennu told us that it was small and that it would only take us fifteen minutes to visit it. Once inside we found out that the pyramids of Egypt are made from large blocks of stone that were brought from quarries, which is the name for the mines from which stone is extracted. These blocks were then dragged and lifted into position. If there was no stone close to where the pyramid was being built, it was transported by boat from other quarries via the longest river in Egypt, the Nile.

One secret that Bennu revealed to us, and which you can tell your friends, is that the pyramids were not built by slaves, as it is sometimes said in films and comics. They were built by thousands of labourers whose job was to build tombs for the pharaohs. They were managed by the engineers and architects of that time. These labourers lived in camps close to the construction until the work was finished.



Occasionally, the people from the towns and cities also helped the labourers for a few hours a day because they felt obliged to as a result of their customs and beliefs. In Ancient Egypt there were not many slaves, and those that existed carried out domestic, agricultural or military tasks.



This final visit lasted fifteen minutes, Bennu was right. However, by now we were very tired after a long day, so we went to have some delicious Egyptian pastries, which were a bit too sweet for me. One was more than enough. The Ancient Egyptians were very good pastry chefs and knew how to keep bees in order to make honey and use it in their food.

Then it was time for dinner. Bennu had to go home and we couldn't spend any more time together. As the following day was to be the last of our trip to Egypt, sadly we had to say goodbye. We exchanged addresses and email addresses so that we could write to each other, hoping that one day we would meet again.

- Well, Bennu, thank you for coming with us and for all of your explanations, it has been fantastic - I told her.



- You're welcome, Miguel, I have loved being able to tell you all things about my country and am happy that you have been able to learn something about it.

- I promise you that I have learnt lots of things - I replied.

- Goodbye, Bennu.

- Goodbye, Miguel, see you on your next trip.

It has been a year since our trip and I am at home looking at photos of those days in Egypt. I remember Bennu and I also remember that at the beginning of the year two children from Egypt started at our school. What a coincidence! They said that they had come to live here with their family because life in Egypt was becoming increasingly difficult and their parents were worried about their future.

This worried me... I wonder how Bennu is. I am going to write to her right this minute and I'll tell you another day.

THE END



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