

SUDAN: UNESCO SITE REMAINS DESERTED



The small, steep pyramids that rise up from the hills of the northern Sudan desert look like those in Egypt, but unlike the famous Giza pyramids, the Sudan's Meroë pyramids site is largely deserted.

The Meroë pyramids, that are approximately 200 km (125 miles) north-east of Sudan's capital, Khartoum, are **seldom visited in spite of the fact that they are a UNESCO World-Heritage site just like those found in Egypt**. Sanctions that were imposed against President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir's government over Sudan's long-running internal conflicts hinder the country's access to donations and foreign aid, and also hamper its tourism industry.

The Meroë pyramids site, is known as the Island of Meroë due to the fact that there was an ancient, long dried river that used to flow around it, had been the permanent royal residence of the kings of the Kush kingdom, who are known as the Black-Pharaohs.

The Meroë pyramids, range from six meters (20 ft.) to thirty meters (100 ft.) tall, were constructed between 720 and 300 BC. Their entrances generally face east to welcome the rising sun.

The pyramids have decorative elements from the cultures of Pharaonic Egypt, Rome and Greece, and according to UNESCO, this makes them invaluable relics. Nevertheless, Dr Abdel Rahman Ali Mohammed, Director of the National Museum of Sudan, said that excessively zealous archaeologists in the 19th century tore the golden-tips of some pyramids and completely destroyed some of the other pyramids.

The tourism industry of Sudan has been devastated by the tough economic and trade sanctions imposed over its internal conflicts, particularly in Darfur. Al-Bashir's government came to power through a bloodless military coup in 1989, and has been struggling to care of its antiquities.

Qatar has pledged USD 135 million to support and renovate Sudan's antiquities in the past few years. But Dr. Abdel-Rahman Omar said that Sudan is still receiving only around 15,000 tourists per year.

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