

MPM

a bulletin on the doings and undoings of
Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels
Issue 48
Winter 2005/2006
Kristen Whitbread, Editor

The Amelia Peabody Books
By Elizabeth Peters
In chronological order:
Crocodile on the Sandbank
Curse of the Pharaohs
The Mummy Case
Lion in the Valley
Deeds of the Disturber
The Last Camel Died at Noon
The Snake, the Crocodile, and the Dog
The Hippopotamus Pool
Seeing a Large Cat
The Ape Who Guards the Balance
The Falcon at the Portal
He Shall Thunder in the Sky
Lord of the Silent
The Golden One
Children of the Storm
Guardian of the Horizon
Serpent on the Crown
Tomb of the Golden Bird

also look for:

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MPM: Mertz ● Peters ● Michaels

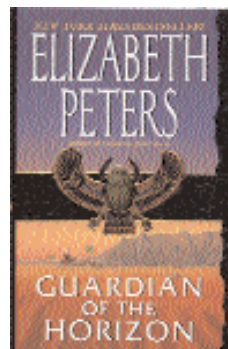
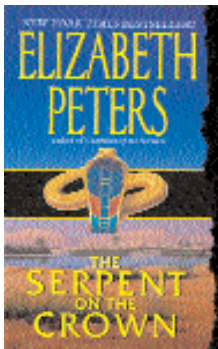
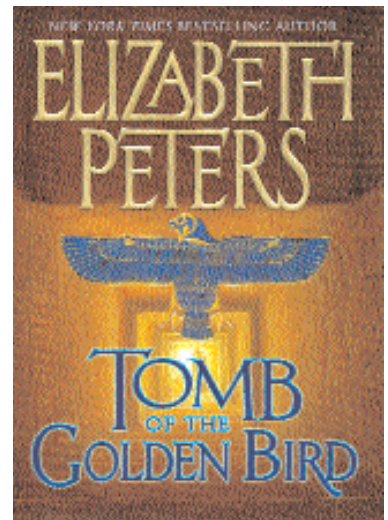
The official Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels website

by Margie Knauff & Lisa Speckhardt

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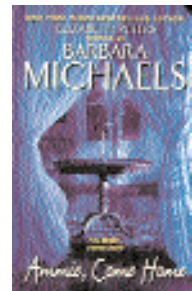
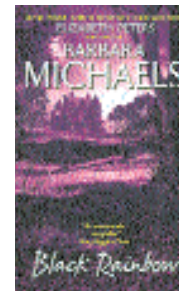
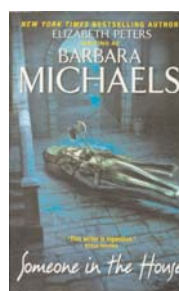
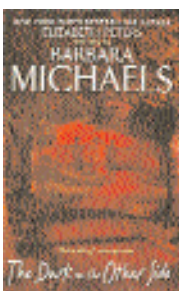
The Tomb of the Golden Bird

	April 2006	hardcover	William Morrow
The Serpent on the Crown	March 2006	paperback	Avon Suspense
Guardian of the Horizon	March 2005	paperback	Avon Suspense



HarperTorch Reissues Barbara Michaels:

The Dark on the other Side, Prince of Darkness, The Sea King's Daughter, Someone in the House, Wings of the Falcon, Black Rainbow, Ammie Come Home



The popular view of Egyptian civilization as dignified and austere is incorrect. It comes from the massive temples, the grisly mummies, the crumbled and ruined tombs. Yet the temples were once bright with paint and aglitter with gold; the mummies were men, women and children who enjoyed life so much that they went to unusual extremes in the hope of perpetuating it; the tombs were Houses of Eternity, equipped with "every good and pure thing" for the enjoyment of life everlasting. We are not insulting the Egyptians or falsifying their view of the world, if we catch a glimpse of them telling bawdy stories about the gods, getting drunk, writing sentimental poems to their sweethearts, or lecturing their bored children. If we laugh at them just a little, it will not diminish them; and if we fail to see that we are also laughing at ourselves, we are missing the best part of the joke.

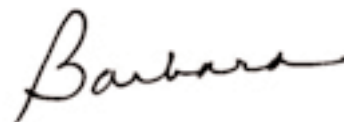
Barbara Mertz Red Land, Black Land

MPM

Egypt is going to be "hot" this year. Of all the traveling exhibitions that will be touring the states, the hottest will be "Tutankhamon and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," which has already brought over 937,000 visitors to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2006 it will be in Ft. Lauderdale, Chicago and Philadelphia. Ticket prices are exorbitant, but it's worth it, especially if you haven't had the good fortune to see the objects in the Cairo Museum.

I would like to claim that I anticipated the show and planned to take advantage of the publicity by making the discovery of Tutankhamon's tomb the subject of the latest Amelia-Emerson opus. In fact, I didn't know about the exhibition when I worked out the timeline for the books. Years ago I more or less promised some of my Dear Readers that I would allow the Emerson clan to participate in the discovery, but I did so with some trepidation, wondering how on earth I would involve them in events which have been described over and over in excruciating detail. It is against my principles to falsify facts. An undeniable fact is that Tutankhamon's fabulously rich burial was found by Howard Carter on behalf of his patron, Lord Carnarvon. I couldn't just eliminate Carter and give the credit to Amelia and Emerson. Nor could I allow the "greatest Egyptologist of this or any age" to be outsmarted by his former protégé. Excuse me for boasting, but I'm rather proud of how I figured it out. I consulted dozens of books and articles, checking and rechecking Carter's schedule during those remarkable months; it's as accurate as I could make it--and the Emersons are there, "helping" Carter every step of the way. The title was irresistible. "Tomb of the Golden Bird" was the name used by Egyptian workers who were fascinated by Carter's pet canary.

Another difficulty was that the discovery itself wasn't enough to carry an entire plot. Informed readers know what was going to happen, so the suspense was, shall we say, not very suspenseful. I needed a subplot. I developed it by whining at friends and relations, throwing out ideas and demanding suggestions. Thanks, Joan. Thanks, Dennis. Thanks, Ben and Olivia and Becca and Jenny. (My two youngest grandchildren have other interests. I plan to consult them in due time.)



Children ask better questions than do adults. "May I have a cookie?" "Why is the sky blue?" and "What does a cow say?" are far more likely to elicit a cheerful response than "Where's your manuscript?" "Why haven't you called?" and "Who's your lawyer?"

Fran Lebowitz, *Metropolitan Life*

Carol An Zaroni: I was surprised and disheartened to read in **Guardian of the Horizon** of Ramses' passion and love for Daria. It seems to have stained his perfect, romantic, passionate love for Nefret. Please tell me I am wrong!

MPM I hate to disillusion a nice lady like you, but I'm afraid that most twenty year old males would have behaved as Ramses did, especially if they believed the object of their love was unattainable. I wanted him to be a fallible human being, not a cardboard hero. Since he is an honorable young man he tried to do the "right thing" by Daria, instead of admitting he was motivated by his hormones instead of his heart.

James Devaney: [In **Serpent on the Crown**] a character is described as wearing a pith helmet, among other clothing. I respectfully submit that no European then, or probably now, would wear a pith helmet after dark. It is protection from the sun, after all.

[Also] David uses the term "gung-ho." that expression, from the Chinese "work together," was popularized by the U.S. Marines during World War II, and it is unlikely that David would use it.

MPM Obviously David and Ramses were in China at some time - maybe we'll find that journal one day. As for the pith helmet, I've been known to wear one at night because of the wind, which blows lighter headgear off and away. Anyhow, it's cool!

Mary Wenger: In the first several chapters of *The Curse of the Pharaohs*, I assumed that this was the inspiration for the film **The Mummy Returns** (O'Connell, Evelyn, etc.). Any relationship?

KDW Plagiarized - just kidding! Seriously, it may well have been a nod of the cap to Barbara - too many similarities to be pure coincidence - we enjoyed the movie immensely.

MPM The script writers dipped into the same pool of ideas about Egypt that I did. If they picked up a few ideas from me, I'm flattered.

Eve Kummert: Will there ever be another "Amelia Tour" to Egypt?

MPM I would love to do another Amelia Tour, but I'm so busy these days I haven't been able to think about it. It will be announced, if it occurs.

Kristin McCollum: Do you have a specific tour [company which serves Egypt] that you could recommend?

MPM My favorite tour group is Museum Tours, run by Bill and Nancy Petty. They are pricey but they do a great job. Check their website: www.museumtours.com, or call 1(888)932-2230 for a brochure.

Deborah Yaffe: I know you have the Emerson/Tregarth genealogy set in your mind, but I'd like to weigh in with my guess that Sir Edward Washington is the missing link: he's John's grandfather and the product of a liaison between a young Sethos and the daughter of the Earl of Radcliffe. He would have been handsome enough to seduce her and wouldn't he see it as revenge? If she wanted to withhold her father's inheritance from Emerson, perhaps she wanted to give it to Sethos if she wasn't aware of who he was. (Is this too rampageous?) John resembles Sir Edward in being slight of build with fair hair, and he can certainly raise one eyebrow with the best of them. Also, "Sir" Edward has always sounded a little fishy, and so perhaps it's a precedent for "Sir" John.

MPM I enjoyed your guess about the Emerson-Tregarth connection. What an imagination!

I'm back, in one piece and semi-functioning, from another trip to Egypt. This time I was accompanied by the usual suspects, Joel Cole and Dennis Forbes, and--a first--my pal, the famous mystery writer Joan Hess. As I reminded Joan from time to time, it was her idea.

There's no way of making travel by air comfortable these days, but we did the best we could, breaking the trip into several sections by way of London and an overnight stop in Cairo, before heading for Luxor, where Dennis and Joel were waiting for us. The Winter Palace ritual then ensued: gin and tonic (or the beverage of your choice) on the balcony watching the setting sun reflected in the river.

Joan was too wiped out to proceed, but I was pretty wired, so the boys and I went to Chicago House for drinks (yes, more drinks) and dinner. They are all old friends, so it was great to be welcomed by Ray Johnson, the mudir and the rest of the crew, plus several visitors, also old friends. Chicago House, the Oriental Institute's Epigraphic Survey in Egypt, has long been an institution in Luxor. It's an impressive arrangement, a fenced compound with beautiful gardens and a number of buildings, including living quarters, labs, library, and so on. The cats of Luxor figured out long ago that this was the best place for them; the grounds teem with felines and sometimes a dog. Several of the staff take care of these creatures, feeding them, and of late making sure they are spayed and neutered. It's a drop in the bucket insofar as the feral population is concerned, but a very worthy cause, to which I always contribute.

Next morning we were up early (though not very bright) and headed for the West Bank. We took the coward's way out by hiring a car to drive us across the river by way of the new bridge, instead of hopping into a boat as we had done before. That process is somewhat trying. It's a long haul from the hotel, down the stairs to the quay, along the quay over coils of rope, patches of oil, etc. to the boat, where one crosses a shaky-looking gangplank without handrails. (However, there are always hands, of friends and crew, reaching out to steady a lady. *This one* grabs at all the hands.) For those with short legs and bad knees, getting down into the boat isn't fun either. Then on the other side there's another gangplank....

Our first trip to the West Bank was designed to give Joan an overall view of the sights. We stopped at the Colossi of Memnon (she was not impressed) and then went on to Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramses III, where the OI has been working for years at a smaller temple within the precincts, this one built by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. In addition to excavating under the floors and replacing the old stones with new ones, they have restored many of the painted reliefs, cleaning off the grime of centuries; then the reliefs and inscriptions are copied by the meticulous Chicago House method, and eventually published. Recording is an act of preservation in a sense; it is impossible to prevent the slow destruction of every monument and one day the records made by institutions like Chicago House will be the only reminder of lost treasures.

We got Joan as far as the Thutmose III temple the day we visited Medinet Habu; then she and I retired to a favorite restaurant outside the entrance, leaving Dennis to prowl with his new digital camera. I suspect he has

photographed every block of stone and every statue a dozen times, but the new camera could not be resisted. By the time he joined us we had already ordered lunch and eaten most of it. It's always the same: chicken, rice, and stewed vegetables--usually tomatoes and potatoes. They put something else in the latter, I've never been able to figure out what, but the result is delectable.

Since Joan's walking ability is limited and mine isn't all that great, we drove round the West Bank sites that same afternoon, so that she could see Deir el Bahri, the village of Gurneh and the Ramesseum (Ramses II). Then back to the



The evening ritual heals the weary travellers.



Dennis attempts to catch up lunch with Joan and MPM!

hotel for...yes, gin and tonic and sunset, with the voices of the muezzins blending in the call to prayer.



Relaxing amid the "tropical" ambience of the Old Winter Palace

Next day was Karnak. First to the Open Air Museum, where my favorite things are Hatshepsut's Chapelle Rouge and the lovely little shrine of Senusert III. Then to the Hypostyle Hall with its mammoth columns (Joan WAS impressed) and by slow stages to the Pepsi Palace, Dennis's name for the refreshment kiosk in the temple. We got back to the hotel about 3:30, ready for a rest and--right, sunset.

Friday we hung around Luxor, bought silver chains at Abouti's in the little shopping area next to the hotel, and then headed for a shop recommended by a pal at Chicago House. "Mr. Francis" is an institution in Luxor; he's been around for years and has a collection of old photographs and postcards that would drive a historian wild. He also knows stories about practically every archaeologist who's ever worked there. Joan thought this method of shopping was pretty cool -sitting in a comfortable chair sipping mint tea while people bring things for you to look at.

After purchasing some odds and ends we walked to the Luxor Museum. It's very well designed, and contains some of the most beautiful statues ever found in Egypt. We finished the day at Chicago House for dinner.

Saturday we got a special tour of Luxor Temple from Ray Johnson himself. Because of the Aswan dam the water level at various monuments has been rising, weakening the foundations and impregnating fallen blocks with salt. The Chicago House crew has raised literally hundreds of these fragments, putting them on platforms and matching them together. We saw the blockyard, as it is called, and walked from one end of the temple to the others; it's one of the most beautiful and harmonious in Egypt and Ray knows every foot of it. We also had tea ("cool" said Joan) with Dany Roy, the stone mason who works with Chicago House--another behind the scenes privilege which being snobs we much enjoy.

Finally on Sunday the 22nd we saw what we had come for--the new tomb. We'd been warned to stay away until then, since they hoped to have something to show us. Now officially tomb 63 in the Valley of the Kings, it had actually been spotted the previous spring, though at that time nobody was really sure what they had found. Otto Shaden and his crew had been working on Tomb 10 for years; at the very end of their season they came across a cutting in the rock, below the entrance to no. 10; but since there was no time to dig it out they had to fill the excavation in and leave it for the whole summer. Suspense was high. We arrived in time to see the cutting uncovered, and work continuing. It was "cool" to be allowed behind the yellow tape, to be seated under a canvas canopy and served



The Hypostyle Hall: A mammoth reason to be IMPRESSED!



KV 63 - The Shaft is opened!



*A "cool" behind-the-scenes experience at KV 63
clockwise from top: Otto Schaden and crew, Joan Hess,
George Johnson (photographer), and MPM*

mint tea while we chatted with the excavators and watched the workmen come up the steps with baskets of rubble to be sifted.

It was several more days before the excavators determined that they had found a shaft, not a staircase entrance; in the meantime, Dr. Zahi Hawass had made his official visit and declare that indeed it was a tomb, the first to be found in the Valley since that of Tutankhamon, no. 62. After his visit the area was closed to visitors, even important ones like us, but we were allowed to sit right on the edge, next to the tape (it looked like a crime scene) and watch.

Being sophisticates, we didn't bother with the other tombs, most of which I had seen. Joan hadn't, so we shoved her into the tomb of Ramses VI, just to give her the idea. The approach to the Valley is an experience for a newcomer; one follows a roundabout path, past dozens of little souvenir stands, to the spot where one can board an electric tram that goes part of the way. The booths sell everything from water and soda to (generally awful) copies of statues and ushebtis to scarves and gallabeeyahs and hideous gold sequined belly dancing costumes.

After a few more temples and a lot of shopping, and dinner on a friend's dahabeeyah, as it sailed serenely along in the sunset, we made one more visit to the West Bank and the new tomb. The excavators had determined there was a blocked doorway, presumably leading to a chamber, at the bottom of the shaft, but they hadn't yet cleared it. We sulked away.

Saturday Joan and I were off to Aswan to join a Lake Nasser cruise arranged by Dr. Marjorie Fisher, a friend of mine, who had offered us a free trip in exchange for an on-board lecture. Irresistible! We decided to drive to Aswan, which meant joining a convoy of busses, cars, taxis, and trucks filled with armed soldiers. The Egyptians don't want any harm to come to tourists--but it's darned inconvenient, and in the opinion of some, counter-productive. The drive takes about three hours, with one rest stop.



The Kasr Ibrim from the outside...

At the temple of Kalabsha we joined our boat, the Kasr Ibrim. It is the sister ship of the Empress Eugenie, on which I had sailed on my first Lake Nasser cruise; both are absolutely gorgeous and as well staffed as a fine hotel. Our rooms were very comfortable, with water supplied for drinking and brushing of teeth, and a little balcony outside. The saloon (bar), dining room, and upper deck, where we dined several times, are beautiful and the food, alas for my waistline, is superb. Also providing entertainment (lectures) for the guests on the cruise were my buddies Ray Johnson (Chicago House), Peter Lacovara (Emory University) and my favorite shopping companion, Salima Ikram (American University in Cairo.)

Lake Nasser, or the Nubian Sea, now covers much of what was once Lower Nubia. Some of the finer temples were moved before the waters rose; others were given to countries that had contributed to the rescue effort (the Met in New York has the little temple of whatever.) The cruise ships stop at these relocated temples. Joan and I didn't. She was wearing out and I had seen them before. But of course we had to see Abu Simbel, the rock-cut temple of Ramses II--an incredible job of salvage, for it was carved into pieces and rebuilt atop the cliff. We sailed slowly up to it, seeing it as it was



...and on the inside!

meant to be seen, from the water. A never to be forgotten sight.

However, it is necessary to get up to the top of the cliff in order to view the temple at close range. Here's where the fun began. (I speak ironically.) The old approach, up a steep but short path, has been replaced by a very elegant and totally exhausting flight of eighty-five steps (yes, we counted them) and a long walk through a tourist area with shops and a refreshment place, and on and on and on. Joan and I would never have made it but for our gallant escorts; Ray, Peter and Salima, stuck with us and waited for us while we stopped to pant. It was worth it, though. Abu Simbel is not to be missed. That night as we dined on the upper deck of the Kasr Ibrim we were able to see the temple illuminated. A pretty cool deal, all round.

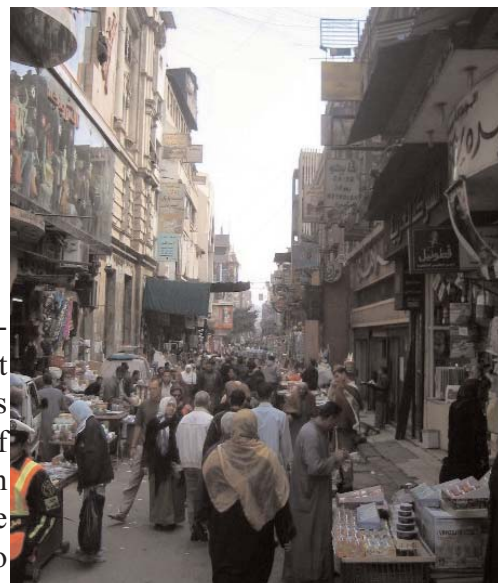
At the risk of sounding like a whiner, I should warn impaired visitors (a category of which I am increasingly one) that Egypt isn't well equipped for the physically handicapped. I would advise the visitor who finds walking difficult to take a folding stool and hire someone to carry it. In the temples one can usually find a handy rock but that gets hard on the derriere after a while. The museums are singularly lacking in seats--a disadvantage not only for the handicapped but for those who like to sit and stare appreciatively at various works of art. I complained (politely) about this to one of the guards at the Luxor Museum, suggesting that he tell Dr. Hawass to do something about it. I guess the very idea of his venturing to address Hawass, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, was too funny for words. I heard him chortling as he repeated my "joke" to a friend.

Next day we caught a flight to Cairo, where we found that Dennis and Joel had already arrived at the Nile



Scenes from the Khan el Khalili... (courtesy of Chuck Roberts)

Hilton. Another friend, Chuck Roberts, had gotten in the night before. We all got dolled up for a reception at the U.S. Embassy. I must admit the reception wasn't for us, it was for the guests of the cruise, who included the Librarian of Congress.



...the Khan el Khalili sparkles

Chuck (who owns several of the best bookstores in the U.S.) hadn't been to Egypt before, but he is an adventurous soul and was perfectly happy wandering the streets of Cairo. I went to the Cairo Museum with Joan and him next day, walked them around the Tutankhamon material, and paid a visit to



...the palette of a Cairo fruit vendor

Salima's animal mummy room. Joan had been in Egypt for almost three weeks and hadn't yet seen the pyramids, so on Friday Chuck escorted her to Giza.

I was sorry to have missed it when I heard that Joan found herself, against her will and to her great surprise, sitting on a camel. Chuck said he had never seen an expression of more abject terror on a human face.



Joan Hess discovers there are some things one is REQUIRED to do while in Egypt...regardless of whether or not one WANTS to do them...

I spent the remaining time socializing and shopping with Salima and Roxie Walker, who is a physical anthropologist, animal lover, and shopper of incredible stamina. She invited me to go to Sakkara one day to see her mummies, which turned out to be mostly bones. Vasco Dobrev, who is in charge of the excavations, turned out to be another old acquaintance. He trotted us around and showed us what he was doing--it was fascinating stuff, but too technical for this newsletter. Finally we went to the lab tomb to see Roxie's bones. And I got to hold a femur. "If you want to," said she doubtfully. Well, really, who wouldn't? Especially when an expert like Roxie is telling you about the man it belonged to--middle-aged, unusually strong and well muscled. It brought the past to life, literally.

Next morning we parted, on three different flights (all too early). Joan and I arrived in Frederick at eight pm local time, which was three am our time. Kristen had filled the fridge with food, including Joan's travelling staple, egg-salad. The dog greeted us enthusiastically and the cats all turned up within ten minutes of our arrival, indicating not so much pleasure as annoyance at my absence. As someone has probably said, there are two wonderful things about travelling abroad. One is being there, and the other is being home again.

PS An update on the KV tomb--it turned out not to be a tomb, but a cache of what seems to be embalming materials--natron, cloth, broken pottery--like the residue from Tutankhamon's burial found in 1903. Such materials were sacred and couldn't be just thrown away. It was a disappointment for the excavators, but the mystery still remains--from which burials did this detritus come? And where are they??? Stay tuned; the Valley of the Kings has more to offer. And do check Joan's website, maggody.com, for her version of the trip. It probably won't agree with mine!