



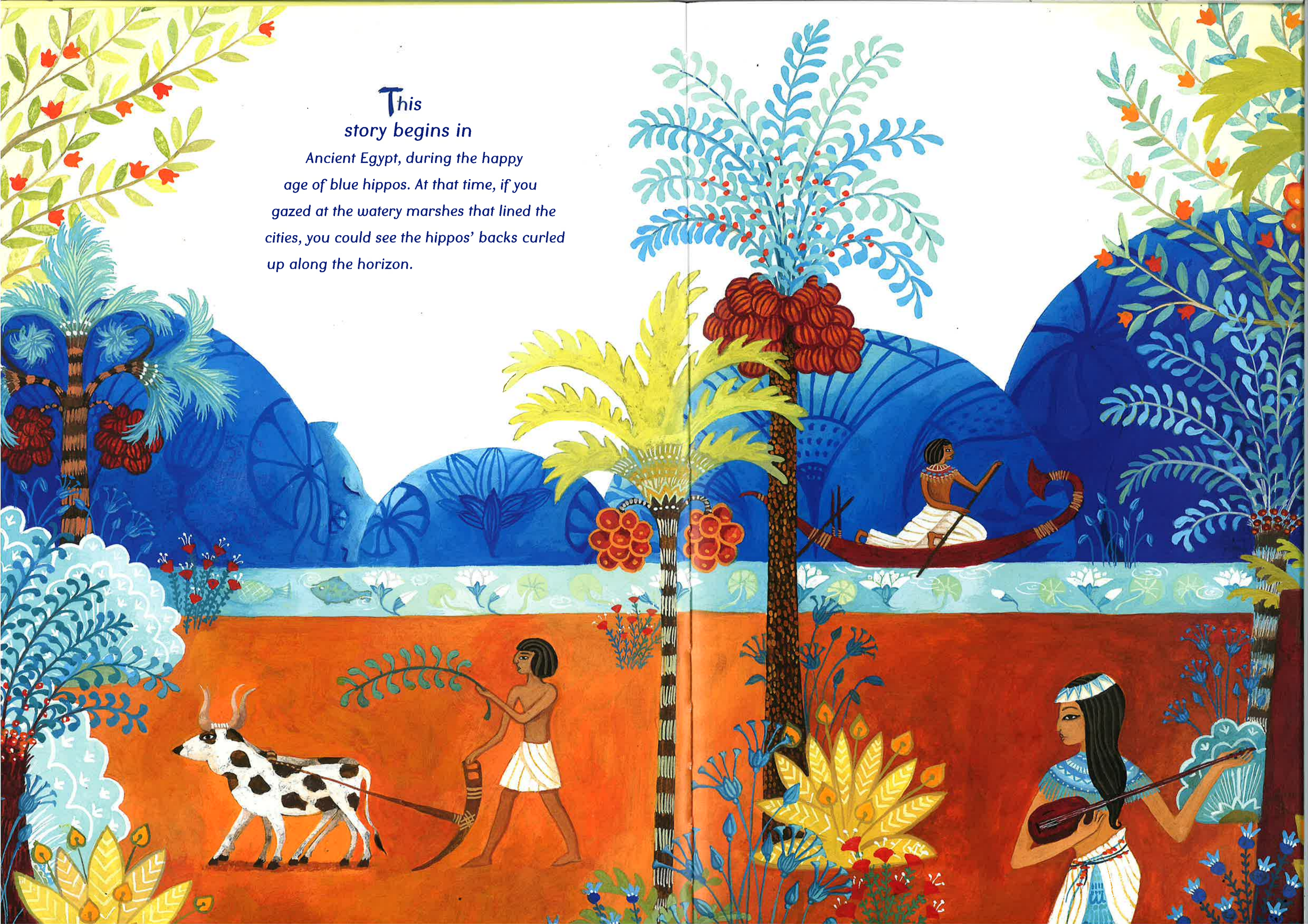
The Little Hippo


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A Children's Book
Inspired by Egyptian Art



*This
story begins in
Ancient Egypt, during the happy
age of blue hippos. At that time, if you
gazed at the watery marshes that lined the
cities, you could see the hippos' backs
curled up along the horizon.*





As the good masters
of the river Nile, the blue hippos basked in
its tranquil waters. All around them bloomed flowers,
and as time went by the river's many plants left a mark on
their sunbathed skin. Fish would brush against them, butterflies
would land on them, and birds pecked without fear at
these strange turquoise creatures.



One day the youngest amongst them—the one they called Little Hippo—became the friend of Antef, a tall old man with white hair. Every night, side by side, Antef and Little Hippo would admire the setting sun.

“The sun dies each day to be reborn each morning,” the old man would say. “Soon I too will fall asleep just like him. Then a long journey will begin.”

When Antef left for this unknown kingdom, and when he was laid below the ground, Little Hippo lay down beside him and fell into a deep slumber. Time went by: days, months, centuries ...



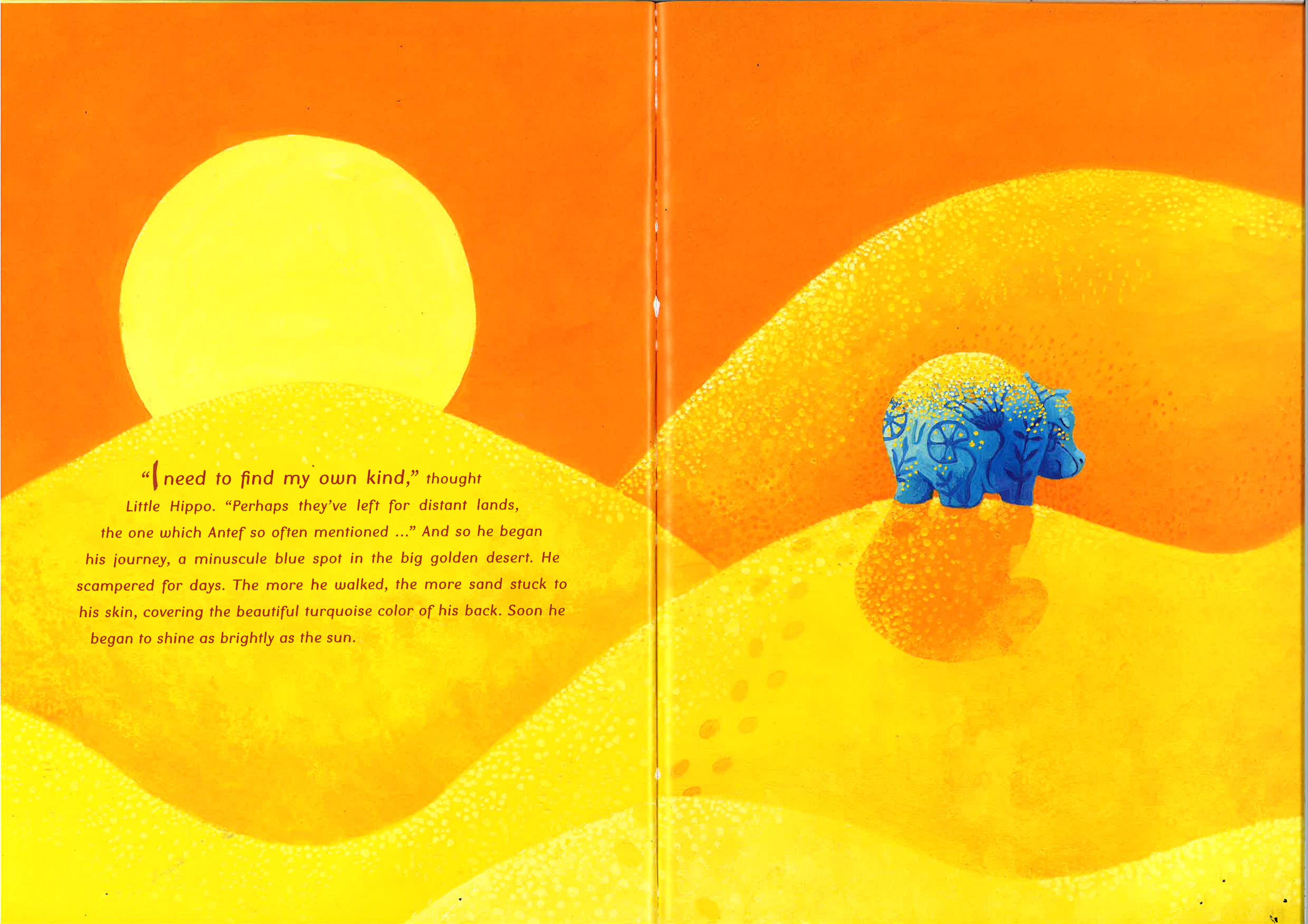


Hidden deep inside their tomb, Antef and Little Hippo seemed to be forgotten. Then one bright morning, at the first light of dawn, shovels began to dig through the earth. Hands began to search slowly through everything. One by one, the diggers removed a multitude of objects, each one more precious than the other. All this commotion woke up Little Hippo, who became frightened and hid beneath a stone. It was only then that he noticed his size: instead of growing all these years, he had been getting smaller and smaller ...



As soon as he got a chance, Little Hippo slipped out into the open. Nothing looked the same outside. The city had vanished into thin air, and in the river the blue hippos had disappeared. Where were his brothers, his friends, his parents? There was not even a single flower growing anywhere, not a single bird flying in the sky. Wind and time had taken them all.





“I need to find my own kind,” thought Little Hippo. “Perhaps they’ve left for distant lands, the one which Antef so often mentioned ...” And so he began his journey, a minuscule blue spot in the big golden desert. He scampered for days. The more he walked, the more sand stuck to his skin, covering the beautiful turquoise color of his back. Soon he began to shine as brightly as the sun.





*Little by little, underneath his feet,
clay began to replace the warm sand of the
desert. Houses lined the road here and there.
And when the wind blew clay dust onto his
body, Little Hippo took the appearance of
a setting sun.*



*In the distance, a forest appeared.
Little Hippo was so happy to see the trees and
plants again. He rolled around in the leaves
and ate them with delight. When he came
out, he was as green as a prairie.*

Little Hippo kept walking and walking ... for what seemed like an eternity. At last he saw tall silhouettes on the horizon. A thick fog floated in the air, heavy with dust and smoke. Exhausted, Little Hippo lay down and fell asleep. When he woke up, he looked just like a gray mouse! Little Hippo sighed. He had been travelling for so long, he would never find his long lost ancestors.



When he caught sight of water flowing gently in a meandering river, he slipped into it and began to cry. But all of a sudden, as the current washed over his small round back, he saw them ...

His parents! His brothers! His friends! They were all waiting for him in a pyramid made of glass. Filled with joy, Little Hippo ran up to join them with all the strength that his little legs would allow.





Vases,
Egyptian
earthenware
16th dynasty

Statuettes of
hippopotami
11th dynasty

Ever since that day, Little Hippo has slept blissfully beside his family and friends. Meanwhile, around the earth, all hippos bathe tirelessly in the hope that one day they'll recover the beautiful turquoise color they

HIPPOPOTAMUS

found in a tomb
in Egypt at Dra Aboul el-Naga



Egyptian earthenware
Made during the 11th dynasty
(circa 2040-1640 b.c.)
height: 5 in. (12.7 cm)

A HIPPOPOTAMUS

What does the "Little Hippo" represent?

For ancient Egyptians, the universe began with a boundless ocean called the Noun. It is from the Noun that everything else was born. The sun came out of a lotus flower on the first morning, and then the gods and the rest of creation appeared. Living in the marshes and covered with aquatic plants, the hippopotamus "Little Hippo" represents the first ocean of the world where everything started. He has even taken a watery blue color, which also recalls the Nile, a river that was very fertile during ancient times.



Antef leaves for an unknown kingdom? Where does he go?

The white-haired old man leaves for a long journey on the day of his death, a journey to be with the gods. Ancient Egyptians believed that as the sun is reborn every morning after the night, life is reborn out of the realm of death. In an Egyptian tomb, vases, statues, and offerings just like Little Hippo are placed next to the sarcophagus (or coffin) to accompany the deceased after his rebirth.

Where were the blue hippos found?

They were found in tombs from Egypt's Middle Kingdom (circa 2000 b.c.). Decorated with aquatic plants, these earthenware hippopotamuses recall the Noun, the ocean where everything was born. They announced that the dead were coming back to life. Mummies also had special jewelry that symbolized rebirth.



Where are the blue hippos now?

About fifty of them are scattered in big museums around the world, from Cairo to New York, from Paris to Berlin. You'll even find one in the British Museum in London. No two hippos look alike: the designs on their bodies vary (plants, birds, butterflies), as does their size (from 9 to 23 cm). But whether blue or turquoise, nearly every one of them has a beautiful lotus flower blooming on its big round bottom.



Who uncovered all these treasures from Ancient Egypt?

Archeologists! Thanks to their fabulous work, we have come to know this rich and mysterious civilization. As they discovered tombs from the Valley of the Kings and the pyramids, and as they deciphered ancient Egyptian writings (or hieroglyphs), these scientists revealed thousands of years of ancient history. Today they continue their digging in Egypt and elsewhere to uncover other treasures that still sleep below the earth.

From pyramid to pyramid ...

Most Egyptian pyramids were tombs for pharaohs (kings) and their loved ones. Pharaoh Cheops' pyramid, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is more than 4500 years old! The glass pyramid from Little Hippo's journey is much younger. It was designed by architect Ieoh Ming Pei, and it has been used since 1989 as the entrance hall to Paris' Louvre museum. If you visit the Louvre, you can see several blue hippos from Little Hippo's family.