

**THE HERITAGE OF ANCIENT EGYPT
IN THE CULTURE OF ISLAMIC AND MODERN EGYPT**

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Abstracts:

Fayza Haikal (American University in Cairo)

"Tradition and religion: transmission of culture versus similarity of beliefs"

In this presentation I shall focus essentially on the ancient Egyptian conception of the world with its visible and invisible components. This dichotomy that exists in gods and men as well, is at the root of the deeply embedded belief in the interaction between the living and the dead. Today, while certain aspects of this duality are supported by Islam and still believed in respectfully, others, when still surviving, have lead to what is now often considered as mere superstitions. Examples to illustrate these different aspects will be presented.

Hosna Abdel-Samie Mahmoud (Ain Shams University)

"The representations of fire: from icon to symbol"

Resemblance and associations are affinities crystallized the concept of sign; icons, synecdoche, symbols, etc., as a production of the semiotic matrix. Each time we interpret the sign, the signifier re-engenders the signified in an eternal process of replication. It is as eternal as fire. Contemplating fire signification: the iconic and the symbolic signifiers, in particular, is this essay's core interest.

Meaning arises from the multiple associations specially when strongly reinforced by various forms of iconicity. Before we can interpret fire iconic and symbolic representations, it must be contextualized as one of the natural elements used in mythical, religious rituals, alchemist and gnostic, iconic and esthetic symbolic forms of representations.

Meditating fire representations in animated forms brings us to be in touch with iconic signs, such as an upward pointing triangle in colors of red or orange, or as flames on altars, or as a ritual dagger, or as flames burning offerings, or as tongs of fire, or as inferno lake of fire, or as kindled flames at the head of a dead body in coffin texts, or as stick – and – groove script, or as sun disc and sun rays in temples, or as lightning and smoke engravings, or as fire bush and fire pillar in biblical scripts, or in animal forms depicted as a scarab, or as a cobra, or as a dragon, or as a phoenix or as a salamander.

Contemplating the abstracted images of fire, we find that both the iconic and the symbolic illustrate the interaction of manifold opposing phases of energy and force of arbitrariness and motivation, nature and culture, time and place, life and death, encompassing incarnations of divinity or sacredness against the negative (the unpredictable, the nonlinear which violates the intentions of the order and control of the authority), purity versus corruption, regeneration/sterility, chaos/logic, ambiguity and illusion / illumination, redemption / condemnation, the devouring ferocity of zeal, jealousy, lust, anger, hostility, grievance, venom / the spirituality, wisdom,

inspiration, creativity, and transformation restoring the wholeness of individuality and keeping universe from falling apart.

Positive and negative powers of fire are reflected in the symbolic representations of fire symbolism in Classical Arabic poetry; e.g. images of war weapons and horses also in praise and love poetry (images of the patronage and the beloved one) imbued with a sense of purification, destruction, illumination and regeneration. Images and poetic scenes of the desert journey are imbued with the sense of illusion; its ordeals are similar to walking on fire to assure self determination and reach illumination. As for fire images in satire poetry, we perceive in lust and frenzy the devouring uncontrolled destructive furnace. Fire images in wine poetry have symbolic, illuminative and transformative joyful characteristics of God loving presence, in our lives; in the creation of the cosmos and of the psyche.

Iman Abdulfatah (New York University) – **Jiří Janák** – **Mohamed Megahed** – **Hana Vymazalová** (Charles University in Prague)
“Healing water”

The healing water played an important role in magical protection and healing within the ancient Egyptian tradition and it can be – in another form – found in Egypt even today. This paper tries to trace some connections between the magic bowls used in the Egyptian countryside until today, and ancient magical practices of transforming water into a healing liquid.

Samah A. Mahmoud – **Heba I. M. Mahran** (Minia University)
“The Iconography of Caricature Scenes in Egypt (From Ancient Egypt to Modern Times)”

Humor and Satire have been an important component of the Egyptian personality since the early days of Egyptian civilization up till modern times. Some remarkable remains indicate that the Egyptian were the first to understand and make use of such sarcastic drawings although they might be considered as serious people, only busy with conducting architectural projects for their masters such as building pyramids and temples. Surprisingly humor was visualized in Egyptian art since the archaic period; it began with mockery from the enemies of the order in the Narmer Palette, which dates back to the First Dynasty. This included foreigners as well when the fat wife of the chief of punt was mocked at in the reliefs of the famous Eighteenth Dynasty temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahari. Satire and irony were not restricted to enemies and foreigners but several Late New Kingdom sketches on ostraca and papyri represented animals performing human activities particularly connected with elites, perhaps as a sign of disapproval of the latter's lifestyle.

In later periods of Egypt's history, caricatures have been used to draw attention to the problems of everyday life and to make fun of contemporary manners and customs in the hope of reform. A fact that has been indicated by a collection of Coptic and Islamic comic scenes either drawn on monastery's wall or applied on luster painted pottery, ceramics, glass and manuscript.

All the caricatures, which have been known along Egypt's history often used animals and birds instead of men to express their ideas. Sometimes, a combination of human and animal elements has been used.

This paper provides a descriptive study, examines the origin of Egyptian humor and satire in visual arts within socio-political context starting from ancient Egypt until the Islamic era. Links with contemporary comic scenes will be made.

Ahmad Zakaria (Ain Shams University)

“The influence of the archaeological excavations on the national identity”

I would like to make it clear that I’m not a specialist in Archeology or History and civilization of Ancient Egypt, I’m a specialist in Modern and Contemporary History, to be specific the 19th century. That century, during which The Egyptian National Identity was formed and crystallized.

Before that, Egypt was only a part of the Islamic world in the reign of the Ottoman Empire, therefore its identity was Islamic. Which started by the time of the Islamic-Arab conquest in the 7th century.

As a result of many factors such as Archeological Excavation, and the appearance of Egyptology writing of the History Of Ancient Egypt started.

In the second half of the 19th century the Egyptians realized the existence of their ancient history which they had no knowledge about before the 7th century. They started to read, translate and write about it by the hands of Refaa El Tahtawy and the students of the Alsun school, which accentuated the National Identity on pharaonic basis.

Also there is an important factor that helped crystallizing this National Identity in the form of trials to resist the dominance of the European mission of Archeology on the movement of excavations, societies, institutions and museums which is concerned with Egyptology in Cairo and Alexandria. From here the development of the National Egyptian movement to resist the Western Imperialism was connected to the call to Egyptianize these institutions by joining the Egyptian Archeologists there and later on replacing the Europeans. Which confirmed The Egyptian National Identity.

Hana Navrátilová (Oxford) – **František Ondráš** (Charles University in Prague)

“An amateur Orientalist? Václav Zelenka”

Václav Zelenka, also known as Václav Jaroslav Zelenka (1892-1979) is not usually found in lists of Czech scholars specialising in Oriental studies, and consequently he cannot be found in concise histories of the subject. Zelenka’s Oriental travels – as well as his publishing – concentrated in the 1930s and 1940s, though he started his first travels in 1921 with trips to the Balkans, focusing on the European Muslim communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Later, his travels led to the Levant, to Egypt, and as far as to Zanzibar. His publications included Czech-Arab dictionaries, the first ones within Czech Oriental studies dedicated to colloquial Arabic, as well as travelogues. However, he authored no major travelogue, which would have had a wide reception outside his social circles, let alone his country as his publications seem to be limited to one language, and he was not even mediating knowledge about other authors and major Orientalists to his public, or at least does not appear to have done so.

And yet he supported, if not created, an interest in travelling and in the Islamic world. His attempts on dictionaries were seen as amateurish, although this was not entirely true, as no one in his country attempted to focus specifically on that part of

Arabic before. His study of colloquial Arabic could be considered as a small, though far from insignificant, breakthrough, although it was not accepted as such in its time.

Martina Hainová (Charles University in Prague)

“The quest of the Egyptian national identity at the novel *Abath al-Aqdar* by N. Mahfouz”

The paper deals with the work that was an attempt to reflect the situation in Egypt in the period before the outbreak of the Second World War as well as to revive the national interest in Egyptian history, to increase self-confidence and show the continuity of Egyptian history when the nation suffered from the loss of identity due to the British rule. Mahfouz shows in his novel the strength of the nation and its roots while using a legend as a backdrop. He calls for unity, which is the only effective weapon against the dangers coming from outside. He juxtaposes two worlds which are divided by almost four millennia, but the people are still one and the same. We can find a critical picture of the pharaoh, who is trying to beat the Fate, he thinks to be equal with the gods. We are also witnessing the transformation that is reflected in questions on the government, the ruler and his people, services, war, national pride... Mahfouz's debut with its artistic value does not stand at the peak of his creativity, but its influence is indelibly written in the history of Egyptian literature.

Gabriela Šifaldová (Charles University in Prague)

“The ancient Egyptian idea of desert in modern Arabic literature”

This paper compares and contrasts the image of the Arabian desert, the Argentine pampas and Ancient Egyptian “Black lands” from a literary point of view. The purpose is to find their hidden poetry and mysticism. Those natural environments are a huge resource for cultural and literary creation in these areas and the comparison is based on similar patterns of coexistence between man and nature. Ibrahim Al-Koni, a well well-known Libyan writer, was brought up on the tradition of the Tuareg and is considered to be one of the founders of desert literature. He keeps on searching for absent symbolic values in the desert and for lost laws that were written by predecessors but disappeared with time. He combines elements of Ancient Egypt, mythological symbols and existential questions with magical realism and explores the intersection of religion in his novels.

František Ondráš (Charles University in Prague)

“The Contemporary Literary (Re)reflection of the Ancient Egypt”

The world of ancient Egyptian civilization in the modern Egyptian/Arabic prose can be seen in two ways. The first shows a symbolic escape not only from the presence, but as well from the complicated relationships burdened with difficult political and economic developments. The second is a return to the natural world, identical with the cultural and spiritual life of Egyptians. In this context, we can speak about the narrative return to the “golden age” of the Egyptian history, its narrative (re)reflection includes everything relates to non-idyllic author's present-day events.

Each narrative text shows a specific model of the world, which is completely individual and belongs to the time in which the author lived and lives, or a method the author has been adopted it in his prose writings. Places typical for the ancient Egyptian civilization present inexhaustible possibilities of their use at the hermeneutic textual interpretation.

In the north-eastern corner of Egypt lies Siwa, an oasis with a proud ancient history: Alexander the Great was anointed a divine pharaoh at its temple and Siwa's inhabitants resisted the Arab invasion. They still retain a sense of independence from Cairo. Baha' Taher based the protagonist of his latest novel *Wahat al-Ghuroub* [Sunset Oasis], Mahmoud, on a military ruler of Siwa whose banishment to the rebellious outpost by the British authorities was surely "a punishment not a promotion". In 1897, this Egyptian police chief dynamited part of the ancient Ammon-Ra temple complex whose oracle Alexander the Great consulted. The novel probes the possible motivations behind this bizarre act of vandalism.

"I imagined he destroyed the temple," says Taher, "because he had taken part in the Orabi revolution against British occupation." This was a failed nationalist uprising in 1881 that led to the Anglo-Egyptian war and colonial rule. For Mahmoud, who shatters the glorious past to open people's eyes to the present, it is a bitter irony that "our ancestors were great men, but their grandchildren are fit only for occupation".

Sunset Oasis has a complex narrative structure, with each chapter taking the form of a first person interior monologue delivered by one of the characters. This mosaic-style narrative reveals the intricate political and personal power plays between the characters. One chapter is narrated by Alexander the Great, who went to Siwa to consult the oracle of the god Amun (Zeus), and was hailed as Amun's son. The priest told him the gods had chosen him as Pharaoh of all Egypt. Alexander looks back self-critically over his military conquests, and says he learned from the Egyptian priests that fear, not wisdom, is the basis of rule. "Amun inducted me into the ranks of the immortal gods and I believed in that, so I behaved as a god and tried to recreate the world and mankind."

Egypt's ancient past also mingles with political realities in Baha Taher's novel *Qalat Doha* [As Doha Said]. Doha, the bewitching woman with whom the first-person narrator falls hopelessly in love, claims to have identified with the goddess Aset, or Isis, since childhood. Doha is beautiful, sophisticated, mysteriously well connected – and married. Her husband, who had had a powerful position in government before the 1952 revolution has lost his job and his land and has turned to gambling. When Doha is hospitalised, the narrator discovers she is suffering from alcohol poisoning.